

P E T E R L A N G

Listening Well

On Beethoven, Berlioz,
and Other Music Criticism
in Paris, Boston, and New York,
1764–1890

ORA FRISHBERG SALOMAN

The twelve essays in *Listening Well* illuminate aesthetic, educative, and evaluative strategies utilized by writers in Paris, Boston, and New York to guide listeners in confronting the challenges of musical modernity between 1764 and 1890. They interpret criticism from treatises, journals, and newspapers for its importance in cultural history and consider the reception of major works by Beethoven and by Berlioz. The essays explore contrasting responses to new operas and symphonies by composers, librettists, authors, critics, and conductors as well as by writers including Chabanon, Lacépède, Berlioz, Urhan, D'Ortigue, Dwight, Fuller, Watson, and Hassard. Readers interested in perceptions of Classicism and Romanticism in music as they relate to French, German, and American literature and criticism will discover how audiences on both sides of the Atlantic were encouraged to listen attentively to the new and controversial in music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

"*Listening Well* is a rich collection of linked essays on the challenges and rewards of such great musical works as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Ora Frishberg Saloman's book brings up a host of crucial issues including how instrumental music differs from verbal expression and how music functions in opera. *Listening Well* reminds us of a time—two times, actually: France, 1760–1850, and America, 1840–1890—when public intellectuals took music seriously."

Ralph P. Locke, *Professor of Musicology, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, and Author of Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians and Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*

"*Listening Well* brings together a lifetime body of scholarly insight on topics that deal with musical aesthetics and reception history ranging from Paris to Boston and New York, and from Beethoven to Berlioz. Ora Frishberg Saloman's essays are an important contribution to our understanding of musical life in the nineteenth century in France and America, and, even more, teach us how our musical culture was formed on both continents."

David B. Levy, *Professor of Music, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Author of Beethoven: The Ninth Symphony*

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To Ed

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Preface

The twelve essays selected for this collection consider aesthetic, educative, and evaluative strategies utilized by writers on both sides of the Atlantic to enhance the listening experiences of audiences as they confronted the challenges of musical modernity during the latter eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. They offer insights into the principles and practices of music criticism appearing in contemporaneous newspapers, journals, and treatises and conceived broadly as guidance to listeners of widely diverse backgrounds in Paris, Boston, and New York. They also reflect significant concerns to foster aesthetic sensitivity as well as musical comprehension.

The book is divided into two distinct sections. Part One contains seven chapters exploring aspects of French musical thought in Paris between 1764 and 1838. The first three chapters treat relationships between music and text. They show that although opera was the preferred genre in that cosmopolitan capital, a progressive aesthete and proficient violinist, M.-P.-G. de Chabanon, advanced recognition of independent processes in instrumental music. The early chapters also reveal ways in which prominent authors including B. G. de Lacépède encouraged the cultivation of musical taste for its own sake against a background of pragmatic government controls in place before the French Revolution of 1789 and continuing well beyond it.¹ The next four chapters examine varying perceptions of the modern in music during the 1820s and 1830s in Paris. Composers, performers, and librettists as well as critics including Castil-Blaze, Hector Berlioz, Chrétien Urhan, and Joseph d'Ortigue advocated markedly differing views of Romanticism as they contributed to the French reception history of major works by Ludwig van Beethoven and by Berlioz, respectively.

Part Two comprises five chapters that explore approaches to listening in two cities in the New World from 1841 to 1890. Those focusing on Boston trace the impact particularly of German critical, literary, philosophical, biographical, and musical thought on formative American perceptions of Beethoven and the symphonic genre as part of that city's abiding interest in orchestral music. Those treating New York, a hospitable environment for multiple theatrical and musical enterprises, illuminate problems of concert life as well as the reception of music by Beethoven and then by Berlioz in early performances. All five highlight instrumental or syntactical features communicated to interested listeners by amateur and professional writers on music including Margaret Fuller, William W. Story, John S. Dwight, Charles

Bailey Seymour, Henry Cood Watson, and John R. G. Hassard. They also consider the experienced leadership of immigrant conductors including English-born George C. Loder and German-born Carl Bergmann, Theodore Thomas, and Leopold Damrosch.

This volume presents one new essay published for the first time (Chapter 4) with eleven others that have been updated and lightly revised since their original publication. The Acknowledgments section includes permissions to reprint material initially appearing between 1988 and 2008. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Some of the essays have been deemed pioneering studies in the vanguard of continuing interest in the reception history of works by major composers.² Locating music within shifting performance circumstances illuminates its vital role in cultural history whether at its original impact or at a later stage in its reception.³ Chapters 5, 6, and 7 underscore Parisian responses to a relatively early presentation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in 1838 and to the premiere of Berlioz's first produced opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*, later in that year. By then, French public taste for Beethoven's symphonies had increased substantially and Berlioz had begun to issue his critical articles about them in *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*. In that momentous year John S. Dwight, the young Bostonian writer, discovered the existence of a literature of music in English, a factor that encouraged his own early critical efforts described in Chapter 9. Another notable juxtaposition occurred in 1846: Chapters 8, 11, and 12 signal closely spaced opportunities for audiences in New York to greet the first complete performance in America of an original composition by Berlioz, the overture *Les Francs-juges*, followed in two months by the nation's premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony after six others by that composer had been introduced and repeated. These striking coincidences resulted from the interplay between the programming choices of informed musical leaders, changing performance standards, and critical observations that encouraged audiences to listen attentively to the new and the controversial in music.

NOTES

¹ See Malcolm Boyd, ed., *Music and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), xvi–xvii, 80–86.

- ² Nicholas Temperley, emeritus professor of musicology, University of Illinois, underscored the importance of this area of scholarship in 1990 when he graciously commented on the work comprising Chapter 9: “For instance a whole new world of interest has been opened up in recent years by the study of reception history. Ora Frishberg Saloman’s essay on American criticism of Beethoven is an excellent example.” See Temperley, “Introduction: The Great Musical Divide: Channel or Ocean?,” *American Music* 8, no. 1 (1990): 4.
- ³ For a valuable review of theories of reception in relation to the study of music see Mark Everist, “Reception Theories, Canonic Discourses, and Musical Value” in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 378–402.

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PART ONE

PARIS

Chabanon and Chastellux on Music and Language, 1764–73

The relationship of music to language was a central critical issue in the operatic debates of eighteenth-century France. Two of the most active musical aestheticians contributing to the controversies spanning the years between the death of Jean-Philippe Rameau in 1764 and the significant visit of Christoph Willibald Gluck to Paris in 1773 were Michel-Paul-Guy de Chabanon (1730–92)¹ and François-Jean de Chastellux (1734–88).²

At the culmination of his career, Chabanon took note of Chastellux's work, which he generally praised, in his treatise entitled *De la Musique considérée en elle-même et dans ses rapports avec la parole, les langues, la poésie et le théâtre*³ [On Music Considered Independently and in its Relations with Speech, Languages, Poetry and Theater]. In its second part, devoted to the diverse relations between music and text, Chabanon described the structural characteristics of *airs* and then took issue with a central principle established years earlier by Chastellux:

Sur ces formes de l'air qui se soumettent à l'unité du caractère & de la mesure, un homme de beaucoup d'esprit, que je lis avec autant de plaisir que j'en trouve à le louer (1), asseoit le principe de l'unité dans les paroles. Il demande que l'idée soit une, ainsi que la forme du vers. Peut-être à ce principe ingénieusement établi, peut on opposer la loi des contrastes, si nécessaire à la Musique, & qui seule la fait vivre. (1) M. Le Marq. de Chastellux⁴

About these forms of the *air* that comply with unity of character and of meter, a highly intelligent man, whose work I read with as much pleasure as I find praiseworthy in it (1), sets forth the principle of unity in the text. He requests that the idea, as well as the form of the verse, be one. Perhaps to this ingeniously established principle one can oppose the law of contrasts, which is so necessary to music and which alone makes it live. (1) The Marquis de Chastellux

Chabanon explained further that necessary musical, rather than verbal, considerations required changes in areas including dynamics, articulation,

key, and rhythm. How, then, could a single poetic unity be allied to diverse musical ideas? Did not the need for contrast in music operate independently of the sense of the words? On this issue, it appeared that Chastellux wished to restrict the *air* to a linguistically conceived rule of unity while Chabanon asserted the priority of independent musical processes and prerogatives. Responding to Chastellux's view, Chabanon declared that "la règle stricte de l'unité dans les paroles de l'air, n'est donc pas aussi absolue qu'on le pense." [The strict law of unity in the words of the *air* is not, therefore, as absolute as one might think.]

How were these opposed aesthetic principles, which Chabanon described in 1785, manifested in the early writings of the two authors and how did their basic approaches to music and to language contribute to operatic thought in Paris? Following brief biographical accounts, their ideas will be examined in writings dating from 1764 to 1773 to establish that the terms 'unity' and 'contrast' represented a complex network of issues on which they disagreed including, most importantly, the relative balance of poetic and musical elements in opera.

As prominent men of letters whose literary accomplishments earned them membership in the Académie française, Chabanon and Chastellux were also connoisseurs whose views on contemporaneous musical problems became well known. That both, and particularly Chabanon, evinced interest in instrumental music marks them as members of a very small and progressive minority of French critics.

Their treatises linked music to other arts and to the classical tradition of learning, two hallmarks of French writings that were intended to bestow on musical activity greater intellectual legitimacy in Parisian society.⁵ In his insightful study of musical taste in eighteenth-century France, William Weber described two types of connoisseurs who were *gens de lettres*: aestheticians and general writers. He based their differences on status, aims, and publication outlets. Chabanon and Chastellux are indisputably members of the first group who wielded considerable authority in matters of musical taste in a society dominated by literary values. Chabanon, in particular, also helped to impart to the French musical milieu a "sense of its own history" through the recognition of major composers and works in a vital musical heritage.

Although Chabanon moved easily among other esteemed men of letters, he also enjoyed access to distinguished musical circles as a result of his exceptional participation in practical musical activities. He utilized this unusual advantage for the benefit of both groups. In several important respects, Chabanon's accomplishments also fit Weber's profile for general writers on music: he "knew more about music" than did most other French aestheticians of the

era, addressed the general public through eminent journals including the *Mercur de France* as well as erudite outlets such as the *Journal des Savants*, and contributed to the lyric as well as to the dramatic theater.⁶

Chabanon's stature and experience as a respected amateur violinist and composer of diverse works, including sonatas for keyboard with accompanying violin,⁷ are pertinent for their relationship to his aesthetic outlook. Chabanon's rigorous Jesuit education had been supplemented by early childhood lessons on the violin, for which he displayed unusual ability by his own estimate, and he responded with youthful enthusiasm to his first hearing of concert music as performed by the preeminent French violinist, Jean-Marie Leclair l'aîné.⁸ As he grew older, he performed frequently at private social gatherings in chamber music and orchestral groups.

Throughout the years in which Chabanon wrote the learned treatises on antiquity that gained him admission to the Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres, he also participated in the lively operatic discussions of the era and played the violin regularly in various ensembles including the Concert des Amateurs directed initially by the prominent French composer, François-Joseph Gossec. That experience set him apart from other French aestheticians, who were characteristically little concerned with instrumental music, and it enabled him to learn the new symphonic repertory performed in the flourishing concert life of Paris. He played and listened to symphonies and overtures by Gossec and by other composers of diverse nationalities. That he was respected for his abilities as a proficient instrumentalist is evident from comments including Jean-Benjamin de La Borde's extravagant assertion that Chabanon was an "excellent musicien; il joue parfaitement du violon"⁹[excellent musician; he plays the violin perfectly] or the succinct listing in the *Tablettes de renommée des musiciens*, "excellent violon" [excellent violinist].¹⁰

Two powerful mentors to the young man were Jean-Philippe Rameau, to whom he had a close personal attachment,¹¹ and François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, whose friendship and literary guidance he enjoyed particularly during several extended visits to the author's chateau at Ferney. There they exchanged ideas about the writing of dramas and opera librettos as well as joined in occasional performances of Voltaire's plays.¹² Chabanon recalled gratefully the time spent and lessons learned in the company of the esteemed writer.

Voltaire's correspondence reveals his increasingly cordial encouragement of the young colleague's career and his interest in having Chabanon assist him with the advancement of his own operatic projects. When Chabanon sent his valuable eulogy on the death of Rameau, Voltaire praised it: "Si on

était sûr, Monsieur, d'avoir après sa mort des panégyristes tels que vous, il y aurait bien du plaisir à mourir. Vous faites de toute façon honneur aux beaux arts. Je vois une belle âme dans tout ce que vous faites."¹³ [If one were certain, Sir, of having eulogists such as you after death, it would be quite a pleasure to die. You do honor, in any case, to the fine arts. I perceive a beautiful soul in everything that you do.] In fact, their close relations and active communication began with this letter, in which Voltaire signaled his desire for friendship with Chabanon.

Voltaire did not hesitate to give the young man literary advice about the writing of plays but in musical matters, he deferred to Chabanon's judgment and responded to his suggestions while professing his own lack of musical background. For example, when questioning Chabanon about de La Borde's music for his opera libretto, *Pandore*, Voltaire wrote: "Confiez moi ce que vous en pensez; on dit qu'en général la musique n'est pas assez forte. Je ne m'y connais point, et vous êtes passé maître."¹⁴ [Tell me confidentially what you think of it; they say that in general the music is not strong enough. I do not know at all about it, and you are a past master.]

Comparatively little is known about the life of François-Jean de Chastellux, who was the scion of a noble and distinguished family from the region of Bourgogne. He achieved prominence as a military officer. Chastellux also wrote poetry and plays, and his comedies achieved public success, according to de La Borde.¹⁵ The author won renown, as well as commendation from Voltaire, for his *De la Félicité publique* [On Public Happiness] (1772), an essay tracing political thought and institutions since antiquity.¹⁶

Chastellux is still remembered beyond the world of music for his *Voyages dans l'Amérique septentrionale* [Travel in North America] (1786), in which he described his observations of American life experienced while serving in the American Revolutionary War as major-general in General Rochambeau's army. It was the Marquis de Chastellux's earlier *Essai sur l'union de la poésie et de la musique*¹⁷ [Essay on the Unity of Poetry and of Music] of 1765, written after a trip to Italy, as well as his translation, with notes, of Count Francesco Algarotti's *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (1755) as *Essai sur l'opéra*¹⁸ [Essay on Opera] appearing in 1773 that created marked musical interest during his years in Paris.

Characteristic of the basic difference between the two authors is Chabanon's continuing effort in varied writings to define music in contrast to Chastellux's comparative lack of interest in this subject. Although Chabanon retained a traditional preference for melody as the central feature of music, his early recognition of the importance of Rameau's theoretical system founded in nature and justified by practice¹⁹ caused him to seek an under-

standing of the crucial relationship of harmony to melody. In contrast, Chastellux limited his general declaration to the observation that the domain of music was the expression of the passions.²⁰ Their varied approaches to music and to language in opera can be elucidated through the treatment of the terms *chant*, *motif*, and *air*.

Chabanon asserted that music was essentially the art of *chant*, or melody. It differed from painting in that its goal, especially in instrumental music, was not the depiction of literal images. Between 1764 and 1773, Chabanon considered that beautiful melody provided pleasure by communicating directly to the senses character, sentiment, or the imitation of an object. By character, he meant the expression of an interior sentiment discernible to the senses and by which human beings would be moved. All music, whether vocal or instrumental, must touch the heart.²¹ Only in his later writings on music of 1779 as well as 1785 did Chabanon unequivocally separate music from the doctrine of the imitation of nature.

In one work of the early period, Chabanon enunciated a position that he palpably acknowledged was unusual and would be greeted by surprise. It is a significant idea that he developed and expanded in his treatises of 1779 and 1785. Chabanon asserted that music was independent of verbal language and was not governed by its rhetorical laws of accent or versification. It was a special universal "language in itself, apart from all the others" that existed independent of them. Its tones were subject only to harmonic and melodic laws. In refuting a contrary view expressed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Chabanon established a fundamental tenet of his musical aesthetics.²²

The laws of *chant* differed from those governing speech. Musical expression resulted from the interaction of entirely musical factors. Just as Chabanon argued against the dependence of melody on the inflections of speech, he also minimized the conventional distinctions made between vocal and instrumental melody in order to stress the unity of the musical art. He believed that in the blending of music and words, music secretly governed and he gave a specific example:

*Dans l'alliance de la musique & des paroles, Monsieur, la musique joue le rôle de ces favoris que tout le monde traite de sujets, mais qui en secret gouvernent leur maître. C'est par une suite de cet asservissement de la langue, que dans un air on répète si souvent les mêmes paroles. Je sais que la raison réclame contre cet usage qu'elle nomme abus, mais la musique le justifie. Comme il est de l'essence de ses procédés de revenir sur les mêmes phrases de chant, de les faire entendre plusieurs fois dans le même mode, & dans des modes différens, les mêmes paroles se trouvent naturellement ramenées par le même chant; & l'oreille, une fois séduite par le charme des sons, rend moins scrupuleux sur les privilèges de la langue & sur ceux de la raison.*²³

In the alliance of music and words, Sir, music plays the role of these favorites whom everyone treats as subjects, but who secretly govern their master. It is as a result of this subjugation of language that in an *air* one repeats the same words so often. I know that reason protests against this custom that it names an abuse, but music justifies it. As it is essential to its procedures to hark back to the same phrases of melody [and] to have them heard several times in the same key and in different keys, the same words are found naturally brought back by the same melody; and the ear, once captivated by the charm of the sounds, becomes less scrupulous about the privileges of language and about those of reason.

Chabanon believed that the frequent repetition of words in music with text and the varying pronunciation of syllables according to musical requirements showed that in the relations between music and language, music was privileged.

Chabanon thought that *chant*, whether vocal or instrumental melody, must have a *motif*, a main musical subject that was capable of generating other fresh and well developed ideas. In vocal music with text, he acknowledged that words gave the *motif* that energized the music but their connection was sometimes subtle, as he asserted in defending the music of serious and grand character in contemporary French *opéra-comique*.²⁴ Yet this aesthete also devoted early and considerable attention in the *Éloge* to the importance of the *motif* as it was used in purely instrumental music. It was highly challenging to compose, Chabanon explained, because the absence of text forced the musician to invent and combine entirely musical ideas. The originality of *motifs* formed the sole basis of the instrumental composition, whose intent was not to paint images.

Chabanon believed that instrumental music, whether a symphony or an overture, should have a distinctive character imparted from the outset by the *motif*. At this time in his career, he had not yet formulated his theory of the four fundamental character types, as he would describe it in his *Observations sur la musique et principalement sur la métaphysique de l'art* [Observations on Music and principally on the Metaphysics of the Art] of 1779,²⁵ but the essence of that idea can be traced to this early emphasis on the importance of the *motif* as the first musical idea establishing the character of the piece.²⁶ He considered Rameau to be the creator of significant new operatic instrumental music and praised particularly his overtures and *divertissements* for their ingenious motivic variety, connection to the character of the opera, and imaginative orchestral scoring. Symphonies were more complex in their construction and should not be compared to overtures; in this genre and as instrumentalist and auditor he praised, among others, the works of Gossec.

Unlike Chastellux, Chabanon was little concerned in this period with the description of the *air* as a specific entity. Early writings on poetry and the

theater reveal a relatively flexible attitude toward the bending of conventional rules, an approach that also influenced his musical views in this connection.²⁷ Particularly in tragic operatic situations whose music and text were to convey affliction or despair, Chabanon deemed inappropriate the regular structures of sustained *airs*;²⁸ in such cases, musical changes and the use of accompanied recitative could better enhance the drama. He emphasized, in general, that music evoked the varied sentiments of the text in opera through changes in rhythm, key, dynamics, articulation, and other intrinsically musical procedures involving contrast and variety.

Chant, *motif*, and *air* were more interlocked in the musical thought of François-Jean de Chastellux. Although he acknowledged the interest of purely instrumental music, he concerned himself particularly with interactions between words and music. In the preface to his *Essai sur l'union de la poésie et de la musique*, he revealed both his thesis and his bias in the statement that musicians were not adequately informed about poetry, poets did not know enough about music, and neither group in France knew the Italian language sufficiently well.²⁹

Chastellux reflected in his dramaturgical outlook doctrines earlier espoused by French Encyclopedists and by the Italian writers Francesco Algarotti and Raniero Calzabigi according to which a shift in the balance of operatic elements would restore poetry to a more prominent position. Appealing throughout his essay for greater unity between poetry and music in opera, he acknowledged that music was primary in the choruses, dances, and the expression of the passions but focused his main suggestions on ways in which poets could shape their material for effective musical setting.

Chastellux recommended that French opera undergo reform by following the lauded model of Italian opera. His concept of *chant*, melody, comprised the periodic and well proportioned vocal expression of direct sentiments. He considered the superiority of the Italian aria to reside in its foundation on one simple musical idea, or *motif*, based in turn on a single poetic thought. This section of his work is interesting as an early discussion of the instrumental motive and its repetition as the basis of early dances, overtures, and sonatas. However, Chastellux then proceeds to describe the skill of Italian poets, particularly Pietro Metastasio, in arranging their verses to accommodate the transference of the *motif* to operatic use.³⁰

Whether he criticized defects in *tragédie lyrique* or the newer *opéra-comique*, Chastellux maintained that French librettists furnished too many words, ideas, and images for clear musical setting in vocal genres like the *airs* and *ariettes*. He advised another approach: "le charme de la Musique consistant principalement dans la simplicité du motif, il faut que le Poète fournisse

aux Musiciens des paroles qui présentent des idées simples & identiques.”³¹ [the charm of music consisting mainly in the simplicity of the musical idea, it is essential that the poet provide to musicians words that present simple and identical ideas.]

Italian poets had promoted unity of expression through regular, rounded verses. Chastellux could justify the frequently criticized repetition of words in music by lauding that unity achieved through the simplicity of the poetic idea at the basis of the Italian aria, whereas Chabanon cited the practice as evidence that music had its own procedures to which language was subservient in operatic *airs*. From Chastellux’s perspective, Italian arias, rather than French *airs*, achieved a unity of words and music through the expression of a single poetic thought generating periodic phrasing and musical structure.

According to Chastellux, the poet was to enable the composer to express sentiments by providing simple declamation for the development of character and situations, more exaggerated declamation for the depiction of troubled dramatic situations through accompanied recitative, and beautiful and touching images for the periodic *air*. He criticized the construction, poor placement, and excessive quantity of *airs* in French opera, advising poets to give to composers situations that would be interesting, touching, and well paced. *Airs* should normally occur at the conclusion of carefully organized scenes, Chastellux counseled, but he allowed an exception for special emotional situations that might benefit from greater musical interest in the middle of scenes. He also acknowledged, as did Chabanon, that great sorrow could not be expressed adequately through the periodic regularity of sustained *airs*. Unexpected transitions could better convey extremes of feeling in the dramatic as in the lyric theater.³²

In the preface and notes to Algarotti’s *Saggio* (1755) accompanying his translation of 1773, Chastellux again recommended the correction of abuses in French as in Italian opera. He suggested that in the relationship between poetry and music, defects in one could not be covered by excellence in the other and both required closer coordination with each other. Chastellux modified slightly his previous attacks against French lyric tragedy by acknowledging the positive poetic contributions of the librettist, Philippe Quinault.³³

Chastellux weighed Algarotti’s views in the text against material that he drew from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Dictionnaire de musique* of 1768, although he occasionally argued against Rousseau’s position. For example, in agreeing with Algarotti about the desirability of linking interesting overtures to the operatic subject, he also noted that Italian music did not always merit Rousseau’s exaggerated praise.³⁴ Chastellux remained consistent with his previous