

The Sound of Finnish Angels

Musical Signification in
Five Instrumental Compositions
by Einojuhani Rautavaara

Wojciech Stępień

Interplay: Music in Interdisciplinary Dialogue No. 9

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For my parents



PLATE 1: Einojuhani Rautavaara on the balcony of his home in Helsinki.
Photographed by Wojciech Stępień, summer 2008.

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Preface

Many musicologists and music theorists investigating the music of Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928) explore it through detailed analysis only on the syntactic level, leaving the semantic content aside. Such an approach, which risks creating an incomplete image of Rautavaara's music, needs to be complemented by an understanding of its wider cultural context. The present study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on five instrumental compositions whose titles refer to angels: the orchestral overture *Angels and Visitations* (1978), the Double Bass Concerto *Angel of Dusk* (1980), *Playgrounds for Angels* for brass ensemble (1981), the Seventh Symphony *Angel of Light* (1994), and "Archangel Michael Fighting the Antichrist" from the piano suite *Icons* (1955) and the later orchestral adaptation in *Before the Icons* (2006). The aim is to explore the link between musical phenomena and their extramusical references both in the case of the individual works and in the composer's general aesthetics. Rautavaara is an erudite composer whose interests extend beyond music to philosophy, psychology, literature, the visual arts, and spirituality. He is a talented writer of books, poems, and opera librettos, as well as an amateur painter. Such extramusical interests also characterize his music. They leave their traces in his program notes, commentaries, titles, and writings, which together provide a rich source of knowledge about his aesthetics and philosophy. As a result, much of his music can be read semantically, in some cases in the sense of the mildly programmatic tendency of contemporary music, in others as an example of musical ekphrasis.

Not all of Rautavaara's compositions have obvious extramusical connections; notable exceptions are his dodecaphonic works from his first serial period (1957-1965). The group of instrumental compositions referring to angels, however, provides an excellent case for an investigation of how the semantic content of the work titles plays itself out in the compositional technique, from smallest details such as the use of motifs and scales through the structure of particular movements to the layout and characteristics of whole compositions. Moreover, as Rautavaara in his instrumental works tends to incorporate aspects that relate to the vocal style of his operas and songs, many non-vocal parameters must be examined for their potential to represent, or correspond to, narration in stage drama.

In order to prepare the ground for the examination of Rautavaara's musical reflection on angels, the study begins with an overview of angelic representations in the history of Western music. Rautavaara uses some of the same methods of representation in his compositions depicting angelic beings, thereby making his music a continuation of traditional approaches. Other musical techniques, unique to Rautavaara's angelic series, create something like his private musical signature. This is particularly evident in cases where similar or identical musical ideas seem to inform related titles. On examining the composer's aesthetic, many of these ideas can be shown to belong to a philosophical outlook that he also discusses in his writings. Although Rautavaara's thoughts about his works are not central to this study, they are taken into consideration insofar as they provide an important context for the music. The focus, however, is on the way in which the titles invite listeners to consider the spirituality of the music. The angel is an important symbol for the composer, which he interprets in religious, poetic, and aesthetic dimensions. An investigation of Rautavaara's instrumental music referring to angels thus opens a window toward the essence of his extramusical attitude. In a wider context, it is thus hoped that this book may provide a helpful tool for the semantic analysis also of the composer's other instrumental works.

Acknowledgments

“No man is an Island.”

John Donne

Paraphrasing Donne, one might say that no scholar is an island. My research is not solely the product of my own scientific and artistic discoveries: I feel humble and thankful for the input of others. Considerably portions of this study represent my reactions to the reflections and observations of other scholars, whose books I read, with whom I had discussions, and whom I sought to emulate. It is therefore impossible to express my gratitude fully to all the people without whom my dissertation and the revised version of it in this book would never have come into existence.

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the Department of Musicology at the University of Helsinki and its Head, Professor Eero Tarasti. Thanks to his invitation to the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Seminar in Music Semiotics in 2005, I was able to travel to Finland for the first time and had the chance to present my early ideas on Rautavaara's music; thanks to his open-mindedness, I felt encouraged to embark on my own intellectual journey into the work of Rautavaara. Without Professor Tarasti's help with many practical aspects during my stay in Helsinki I could never completed this study. Also, I do not know how my book could have gotten anywhere without the support of Susanna Välimäki. Her kind advice and detailed comments were the first significant opinions I received about my work. Furthermore, I had great pleasure in discussing my ideas with Professor Anne Sivuoja-Gunaratnam from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, who turned my attention toward many unfamiliar aspects of Rautavaara's music as well as to bibliographic sources I might not have discovered without her. I owe the idea to undertake studies in Helsinki to the encouragement of Dr. Danuta Mirka from the University of Southampton. She was the first person with whom I discussed my project, and it was she who advised me to study with Professor Tarasti. During the writing of the book she often appeared to me like a “guardian angel” since she helped in many places with the sometimes difficult methodological problems and analyses.

Finally, I was very fortunate to meet Dr. Siglind Bruhn from the University of Michigan, first in her capacity as my external doctoral examiner and opponent during my defense in Helsinki, and subsequently as my wonderfully helpful editor for the *Interplay* series published at Pendragon

Press. She encouraged me to publish a revised version of my dissertation as a book and advised me throughout the editorial process. Without her positive attitude toward my work I would never have undertaken the thorough revision of my original study. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert J. Kessler, Managing Director of Pendragon Press, who agreed to publish a text by a young scholar from a foreign country, and Dr. h.c. Claire Brook for polishing my language.

My research would have been impossible without the financial aid of several Finnish and Polish foundations and institutions. I am grateful to the Niilo Helander Foundation, the Pro Musica Foundation, CIMO (the Centre for International Mobility), The Cultural Department of Katowice, The University of Helsinki, and the Academy of Music in Katowice. Two Finnish institutions in particular, Fennica Gehrman and the Finnish Music Information Centre, kindly allowed me access to Rautavaara's scores, books, and recordings. Excerpts from Rautavaara's works are reprinted by kind permission of Fennica Gehrman Oy, Helsinki ©Warner/Chappel Music Finland Oy.

Among the many people who further helped me in matters both big and small I wish to mention Professor Eugeniusz Knapik, Dr. Marcin Trzęsiok, Agata Knapik-Mikołajczak, Stanisław Bromboszcz from the Academy of Music in Katowice; Irma Vierimaa and Paul Forsell from the University of Helsinki; Dr. Edward Venn from Lancaster University; Professor Richard Littlefield from Central Michigan University, as well as Pekka Hako, Kalevi Aho, Samuli Tiikkaja, Laura Gutman-Hanhivaara, Ari Nieminen, Kristiina Vuorela, Agnieszka Terho, Filip Sikorski, and Otto Lehto.

My greatest debt is to the composer himself. I am immensely grateful to have been allowed to meet with Einojuhani Rautavaara in his home in Helsinki and to have the opportunity to interview him on several occasions. Each time, it was a wonderful experience to sit on the sofa in his living room and listen to a composer whose music I love. Although his health is frail and he is still very active as a composer, he always found time for me. He gave me wonderful insights into his compositions both during our personal encounter and in e-mail correspondence. His wife Sini also supported me with books, scores, and addresses. Without the help of this extraordinary couple my work would be a dry collection of thoughts.

My special thanks go to my parents Weronika and Jan Stępień who brought me up, allowed me to study music and make many mistakes, who were my support, and who gave me strength. Finally my warmest gratitude goes to my wife Dorota and our daughter Weronisia for their faith in me and my work, and their "angelic" patience for their husband and father who was not always an "angel" during the long process of writing this book.

Helsinki – Katowice, Christmas 2010

Introduction

The music of Einojuhani Rautavaara has recently received much attention, most particularly in the wake of the composer's international breakthrough in the middle of the 1990s. The interest of music scholars at home and abroad prompted Rautavaara to reconsider his so-called "withdrawal decision" of 1978, in which he had pledged not to give any interviews about his music.¹ However, his growing fame resulted in a change of attitude toward public attention. Since then, Rautavaara has regularly agreed interviews as well as radio and TV talks. With the assistance of his wife, he has even published his private recollections, which appeared in 2001 under the title *Säveltäjä ja Muusa*.² Rautavaara was not the only relatively unknown composer to attract the attention of the international musical audience: John Tavener from England, Arvo Pärt from Estonia and Henryk Mikołaj Górecki from Poland all came to prominence at this time. It is interesting how similar the aesthetics of these composers are, with their music rapidly coming to be called spiritual, although the claims for spirituality to be found in popular music journals and magazines have not received any systematic research.

This study of Rautavaara's instrumental compositions concerning angels is based on various existing approaches to his music. The most important of these theories are those of Anne Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, Kalevi Aho, and Samuli Tiikkaja. Probably the most revealing studies, which provide the basic assumptions underpinning my work, have been those of Sivuoja-Gunaratnam in her doctoral dissertation³ and in various articles. Although her focus was primarily on the composer's earliest period and his dodecaphonic technique, her study draws attention to the most important problems raised by the composer's techniques, and in particular the omnipresent

¹ Kalevi Aho, "Einojuhani Rautavaara – Avant-Gardist, Mystic and Upholder of Values," *Highlights* 5 (1998): 3.

² Einojuhani Rautavaara, Sini Rautavaara, *Säveltäjä ja Muusa* [Composer and Muse] (Juva: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 2001).

³ Anne Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, *Narrating with Twelve Tones: Einojuhani Rautavaara's First Serial Period (ca. 1957-1965)* (Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1997).

intertextuality.⁴ In her articles on Rautavaara's operas, Sivuoja-Gunaratnam turns her attention to those elements of the plot that are based on the same symbols, and notes the connections between female characters, birdsong, and angels. She draws on the psychocritical theory of Charles Mauron in order to analyze Rautavaara's output, and positions his intertextual references, interpreted as variations on the same theme, in the context of Claude Lévi-Strauss's notion of *bricolage*. She also examines the temporal dimensions of Rautavaara's operas, noting how time is presented in a nonchronological order, preferring instead a psychological order characterized by a dream-like aesthetic. Furthermore she makes an important observation regarding Rautavaara's hierarchic use of instruments and their connections with the characters of his operas; this will become one of the key issues of this book.

The most significant sources relating to Rautavaara's aesthetic and outlook can be found in his autobiography *Omakeuva* (Autobiography) (1989), Hako's popular book about the composer *Unien lahja. Einojuhani Rautavaaran maailma*,⁵ and a chapter about Rautavaara's operas in *Finnish Opera*.⁶ In *Unien lahja*, which is based on interviews with the composer Hako discusses a number of interesting ideas such as the composer's attitude towards being a musical medium, his childhood interests and obsessions that later become an important source of inspiration, and his meta-artistic attitude to be at once a composer, writer, and painter. All of these areas form starting points for the fourth chapter on aesthetics.

The analyses of Rautavaara's music in the second part of this book draw on Tiikkaja's study of the Seventh Symphony *Angel of Light*,⁷ Donald Gregory Lovejoy's analysis of the Organ Concerto *Annunciations* (2000),⁸ and Klavier Luut's study of *Playgrounds for Angels*.⁹ The analysis of the orchestral *Angels and Visitations* is indebted to important insights offered by

⁴ See also Samuli Tiikkaja, "Einojuhani Rautavaara – Postmodern Intertextualist or Supermodern Intratextualist? On Auto-Quotations in Rautavaara's Oeuvre," *Musiikki 2* (2004): 39-60.

⁵ Pekka Hako, *Unien lahja. Einojuhani Rautavaaran maailma* [The gift of dreams. The world of Einojuhani Rautavaara] (Helsinki: Alatus, 2000).

⁶ Pekka Hako, *Finnish Opera* (Helsinki: FIMIC, 2002), 96-109 (chapter "Rautavaara").

⁷ Samuli Tiikkaja, "Einojuhani Rautavaaran seitsemäs sinfonia Angel of light: materiaali- ja muotoanalyysi," M.A. thesis, University of Helsinki, 2000.

⁸ Donald Gregory Lovejoy, "Annunciations: The Wind Music of Einojuhani Rautavaara," dissertation, University of Washington, 2000.

⁹ Klavier Luut, "Einojuhani Rautavaaran vaskipuhallinmusiikin tausta ja analyysi," M.A. thesis, University of Helsinki, 2008.

Aho,¹⁰ while in the analysis of the last component in the piano suite *Icons*, “Archangel Michael Fighting the Antichrist,” there contains occasional references to Eila Tarasti’s ideas.¹¹

Although the issue of spirituality in Rautavaara’s music has not to date been the main subject of a monograph, two important works in this area are Siglind Bruhn’s chapter about Rautavaara’s opera *Thomas*,¹² and Tarja von Creutlein’s interesting dissertation on Rautavaara’s choral work *Vigilia* and its correspondences with Orthodox services and religious practices.¹³ Hako offers some thoughts about the composer’s interests in psychology;¹⁴ further ideas can be found in Tiikkaja’s master’s thesis.¹⁵

The significance of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetry for Rautavaara’s music is investigated by Kaisu Nikula¹⁶ and also to a lesser extent in the doctoral dissertation of Fredrick Lokken,¹⁷ although neither offers comparisons of the similarities between Rilke and Rautavaara’s artistic aesthetic. It is essential to understand the signification of angels in Rautavaara’s compositional aesthetic, and this will be the subject of the final chapter of this study.

Surprisingly, the topic of “angels” in music has not to date been the subject of any comprehensive study, and therefore this book collects and synthesizes many theories from various sources to demonstrate how the tradition of angelic music was shaped before and during Rautavaara’s time. There is only one interesting book concerning the musicological study of angels by Michael Poizat¹⁸ which considers the angelic as an attribute of

¹⁰ Kalevi Aho, *Einojuhani Rautavaara as Symphonist* (Helsinki: Sibelius-Akatemia/Edition PAN, 1988).

¹¹ Eila Tarasti, “Icons in Einojuhani Rautavaara’s *Icons*, Suite for Piano,” *Musical Semiotics Revisited* (Imatra/Helsinki: International Semiotics Institute, 2003): 549-562.

¹² Siglind Bruhn, *Saints in the Limelight: Representations of the Religious Quest on the Post-1945 Operatic Stage* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003).

¹³ Tarja von Creutlein, *Einojuhani Rautavaaran ’Vigilia Pyhän Johannes Kastajan muistolle’ ortodoksisen kirkkomusiikin kontekstissa* (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopisto, 2006).

¹⁴ Pekka Hako, “Music Has a Will of Its Own,” *Nordic Sounds* 3 (1998): 18-21.

¹⁵ Tiikkaja provided the first account of Rautavaara’s obsession with mandalas – those symbols of spiritual perfection that will be the object of investigation in the third part of this study.

¹⁶ Kaisu Nikula, *Zur Umsetzung deutscher Lyrik in finnische Musik am Beispiel Rainer Maria Rilke und Einojuhani Rautavaara* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän Yliopisto, 2005).

¹⁷ Fredrick Lokken, “The Music for Unaccompanied Mixed Chorus of Einojuhani Rautavaara,” dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1999, 185-200.

¹⁸ Michael Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, A. Denner, trans. (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

voice and timbre. The author significantly ascribes the term angelic to both vocal and instrumental music, paying particular attention to the brass as the most spiritual of instruments. There are important passages about angels in Jamie James's book¹⁹ which is used in order to explain the significance of angels in works by St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Arnold Schoenberg. Angels do not receive much attention in the mythical contexts provided by Victoria Adamenko,²⁰ appearing only in the discussion of George Crumb's *Black Angels*. In order to describe angelic conceptions in music, the first part of this study draws on monographs and studies about the following composers and their compositions: Hildegard von Bingen by Błażej Matusiak, Johann Sebastian Bach by Albert Schweitzer, Alban Berg by Anthony Pople, Paul Hindemith and Olivier Messiaen by Bruhn.

A study about angels in music must begin by explaining the concept of angels in various religious and cultural contexts. This is done by drawing on various sources. Among them are different encyclopedias and dictionaries devoted to particular religions but also one very important collection of essays about angels which can be considered the summation of angelic knowledge: *Księga o Aniołach*.²¹

Rautavaara has provided an abundance of commentaries on his music, to be found in CD booklets, program notes, interviews, prefaces, and also in articles in music magazines. It also was a great honor for me to be allowed to interview the composer on several occasions. His own reflections on his music suggested new and interesting paths in this research that were developed in both the aesthetic and interpretative chapters. Together with minor articles in newspapers and musical magazines (particularly the *Finnish Music Quarterly*, *Faber Music News*, *Highlights*, *Gramophone*, *Fanfare*, *Tempo*, *Choir & Organ* and others) these are the most important sources of information about the composer's aesthetic and offer significant interpretative codes with which to explain the angelic figure in his music in the last chapter.

This study is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to methodological considerations, demonstrating various approaches to angels in music and Rautavaara's aesthetic in order to provide a background for the study. The second part analyzes Rautavaara's five instrumental compositions

¹⁹ Jamie James, *The Music of the Spheres: Music, Science, and the Natural Order of the Universe* (London: Abacus, 1995).

²⁰ Victoria Adamenko, *Neo-Mythologism in Music. From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2007).

²¹ Oleschko, ed., *Księga o Aniołach* [A book about angels] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2003).

referring to angels, and the final part summarizes the most important analytical observations and interprets them in their wider cultural, extramusical, and semantic contexts. Chapter 1 is devoted to the hotly-disputed question of semantic categories in music and traced the history of semantic attitudes from the Ancient Greek theory of ethos through to contemporary hermeneutic theories. It discusses the problem of representation in music by presenting various theories of representation which are the methodological tools for an investigation of Rautavaara's compositions: affects, actors and musical persona, mythical models, the uncanny, topics, and musical ekphrasis.

Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the signification of angels, firstly in various religions and secondly in music. Descriptions of angels in sacred texts and scriptures are studied in order to provide both a background and a set of interpretative codes with which to better understand the religious and spiritual symbol of the angel in music. Chapter 2 therefore presents the most important conceptions of angels in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for the symbol of Rautavaara's angel relates to the poetry of Rilke in which the two last mentioned conceptions of angels are present. It discusses angels of the New Age movement in order to examine Rautavaara's works in the context of the socialcultural-religious movement that was born in the 1970s and '80s when the compositions about angels were composed.

Brief demonstrations of various approaches to angels in music in Chapter 3 provide an important means of understanding how and by which tools music throughout history has tried to portray angels, and the consequences of this for the interpretation of Rautavaara's music. The question is whether the composer reinterpreted previous angelic theories for his music or whether he constructed his own approach to angels. In order to answer this question and provide a modern conclusion to the historical survey of musical angels this chapter focuses on those twentieth-century composers who have written instrumental compositions either before or contemporaneously with Rautavaara's five works, and who created their own personal musical approach to angels. Moreover the music of Berg and Hindemith had a strong influence on Rautavaara's style and probably the Finnish composer unconsciously adopted some ideas from their compositions with titles concerning angels. The conclusion to this chapter critiques the popularity of angels in pop music and their destructive influence on the understanding of the religious dimension of angels, and tries to refute the popular tendency that treats Rautavaara's compositions as part of the music of the New Age Movement.

Chapter 4 moves away from these various approaches to angels in music in order to discuss Rautavaara's aesthetic, paying special attention to his mystical attitudes. The role of the composer as a musical medium is

discussed by tracing the spiritual message of his music that is communicated by means of obsessive myths, dreams, visions, and through his breaking of temporal and chronological time in his operas. This helps to demonstrate the composer's attitude towards spirituality and his status as a metareligious composer, writing the same work throughout his whole life.

The introduction to Chapter 5 observes how the figure of the angel can be found not only in Rautavaara's instrumental works but also in his vocal music, and particularly with characters in his operas. The composer uses similar techniques in his instrumental compositions as he does when writing for the characters in his operas. The subsequent analyses of the five instrumental compositions referring to angels together with the unwritten work *Monologue with Angels* show how the composer uses similar musical elements in all of the works to portray the figure of the angel. The analyses are not detailed since the intention is to determine common elements in form, instrumentation, and choice of musical material. While important scales, rows, and harmonic strategies are discussed, major segments of the analyses are limited to offering general overviews of the works. Specific attention is paid to instrumental interactions in the orchestra, and in particular to the roles of soloist and accompanists.

If the first part of the study outlines the theoretical, methodological and aesthetic background necessary for understanding both angels in music and the composer's aesthetic, and the second is analytical, the third part can be perceived as a synthesis of the two, insofar as the analyses are read through interpretative codes derived from the first part of this study. To achieve this synthesis, the most important angelic features in Rautavaara's instrumental compositions are categorized in terms of various distinctive features: *disturbance technique*; *musica automata/senza espressivo*; signification of instruments; musical brightness and light; and mandala form. In Chapter 6 these features are discussed in the context of musical mythologems, for angels can be treated as the composer's personal myth. In particular, binary oppositions and repetitiveness are connected with Algirdas Julius Greimas's theory of mythical actants in order to create the textural dichotomy of hero contra opponent. The third part of the study also examines the role of musical brightness both in the musical material and in the titles of Rautavaara's compositions. This examination demonstrates not only the mythical attitude that informs Rautavaara's works but also how the figure of the angel is made to correspond with particular instruments, timbres, and other musical materials.

The aim of Chapter 7 is to point out the extramusical associations of the common musical elements in the compositions referring to angels in the light of Bruhn's theory of musical ekphrasis. Here the composer's commentaries

quoted in the fifth chapter are treated as sources for the interpretation of his figure of the angel. The focus is on those associations between Rautavaara's music and Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. Attention is paid to the role of these poems in Rautavaara's work, their philosophical message, and their signification of the figure of the angel. In other words, the poem is treated as an interpretative code in order to understand Rautavaara's angels. Moreover the chapter develops codes in reference to Carl Gustav Jung's theory of archetypes. Surprisingly these two codes are related to each other, and reveal the basic attitude of Rautavaara's figure of the angel to be its terrifying aspect. This aspect is investigated using Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny with reference to those musical elements that are characteristic of the compositions described in Chapter 6. The conclusion of that chapter touches on Rautavaara's amateur painting *Angel of Dusk* and its connection to the title of the Double Bass Concerto *Angel of Dusk* and the interrelations between them.

PART I:
THEORETICAL
BACKGROUNDS

Chapter 1: Musical Syntax or Semantics?

The essential hermeneutic problem about music is usually put by saying that music is all syntax and no semantics, or that music lacks denotative or referential power, or, to revert to Hanslick's much quoted aphorism, that "[...] sounding forms in motion are the one and only content of music."¹

The first stage of this study will be to discuss the problem of musical syntax and semantics, since the methodological tools employed are based on theories of musical representation. The controversy starts in the nineteenth century when the first studies about music aesthetics are written and musicologists consider the problem of musical symbolization. Their essential question is: does music refer to, represent, or express something beyond the music itself, or does music have only a purely musical meaning?

If adherents to the notion of absolute music were able to return to ancient times, their views would probably be met with perplexity, for no ancient philosopher argued that music was absolute and expressed only itself. Music of those times is treated as syncretic art, very often connected with ritual and spiritual practices, and the idea of music for and of itself is unknown. Music is recognized as an important educational tool and has a special role in maintaining the law of the country; the best example of this can be found in Plato's dialogue *The Republic*. According to Plato, rhythms, scales, and musical instruments are symbols of the psyche and have a profound impact on the human soul. The ancient Greeks believe that music can mimic the state of the human soul; some melodies are desirable and of great value in moral education, whereas others are forbidden, since they are too emotional and have an orgiastic character. In fact, music is divided into the moral dichotomy of good or bad, and this affects musical thought for the subsequent millennium. As James writes, "In *The Republic* Socrates tells us that the Mixolydian and the Hyperlydian modes are dirgelike and ought to

¹ Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 2-3.

be done away with, for they are useless ‘even to women’. The Ionian and certain Lydian modes, on the other hand, are relaxing and convivial [...]. That leaves the Dorian and Phrygian modes, which he allows: the former because it emboldens warriors and helps them accept and cope with setbacks, the latter because it has potent persuasive powers to induce temperance, moderation, and law-abidingness.”² The particular focus of Plato’s philosophy of music is the essential role given to rhythm, which he feels should mimic the manner of a nobleman’s speech. Centuries later, and in accordance with this idea, the rhythms of Gregorian chant are strictly based on those of sacred texts, making it non-metric in comparison with the greater metricality and dance-like nature of secular music. The influence of the theory of Greek ethos can also be observed in the practice of avoiding the tritone—the *diabolus in musica*—in medieval polyphony. The mathematical proportions of the tritone are compared to the perfect fifth and hence the former is regarded as a false fifth—a “musical devil.”

Analogies between music and speech are made throughout the ages, but this tendency increases thanks to Renaissance madrigals, which also informs the development of the Baroque theory of affects. Such music is recognized as a mysterious form of speech subject to the art of rhetoric, first intended for a small group of musical connoisseurs (so-called *musica reservata*) but rapidly understood by everyone. It is not an accident that the group that develops this kind of musical speech is the Florentine Camerata, which venerates the traditions of the ancient Greeks. The genesis of opera is directly linked with the attempt to imitate ancient drama with music in which the idea of catharsis is restored.³ For this reason, the style initiated by the Camerata is an imitation of Greek monody, which very quickly evolves from simple *recitativo* to *rappresentativo*, the aim of which is to represent various kinds of affects. By the end of the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert claim that music is a kind of speech, a language that expresses the various sensations of the human soul. They claim also that not only vocal music but also instrumental music can represent various feelings, ideas, and visual sensations.

The individualism of the Romantic era brings to an end the socially-understood concept of musical speech, for every composer starts to create his or her own unique theory of music, approached in completely different and sometimes oppositional ways. As Alfred Einstein suggests, the lack of a

² James, 57.

³ Girolamo Mei discovers the Hellenic *Hymns of Mesomedes*; Vincenzo Galilei edits them in his treatise *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna* (1581) in which he tries to rediscover the musical practice of the ancient Greeks.

common musical language means that composers start to write commentaries and program notes in order to explain verbally what they wish to express in music.⁴ The Romantic interest in poetry and other art forms creates the movement of programmatic music that, as a non-autonomous art form, can be comprehensible in a wider cultural context. Surprisingly, some composers from the nineteenth century begin to develop a contrary tendency in musical aesthetics, one that considers music as an autonomous and absolute art. In their opinion music is the most symbolic art for it has no semantic connotations and does not represent anything in the natural world. For this reason, it is treated as the most ambiguous art and the most spiritual. Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophical ideas dominate nineteenth-century music and have a great impact on subsequent generations of twentieth-century composers. The idea of absolute music is proclaimed by the most famous aesthetician, Eduard Hanslick, an admirer and supporter of Johannes Brahms's works. In his writings he returned to the concept of classical beauty and shared the formalist view established by Kantian philosophy.⁵ Hanslick claims that music has no particular extramusical signification; rather, "[...] sounding forms in motion are the one and only content of music."⁶ In fact, this tendency to accept only musical syntax as a source of musical meaning influences the study of music from previous epochs, classicism in particular, and is extended to twentieth-century and contemporary musical movements. It seems that the problem of absolute music and programmatic music is still present today, and concerns the primacy of musical syntax over musical semantics. It may be said that there are two schools: formalists who follow Hanslick's categories of musical beauty and referentialists for whom music can be investigated in the light of wider cultural practices. The opposition is also easy to recognize in the work of music analysts: those belonging to the first school prioritize musical structures and the relationships between sounds, grouping events according to linguistic, psychological, and mathematical theories (Heinrich Schenker, Eugene Narmour, Fred Lehdahl, Ray Jackendoff); the second, "hermeneutic" school tries to find musical signification by drawing on biographical, historical, philosophical, and other extramusical data in order to support interpretations (Hermann Kretzschmar, Arnold Schering, Scott Burnham, Tibor Kneif, Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht,

⁴ Alfred Einstein, *Die Romantik in der Musik* (Vienna: Berglandverlag, 1950), 28.

⁵ See Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, 3-4.

⁶ Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1854), 32.

Constantin Floros, Lawrence Kramer).⁷ According to Raymond Monelle, some scholars dispute the idea that “[...] music cannot refer to anything because its reference can only be known from a verbal text of title.”⁸ Even in the mainstream of semiotic approaches to music, musicologists engage with the notion of musical referentialism, which has been aptly summarized by Tarasti thus: “[...] during its various stylistic periods, music has always been more or less related to extramusical reality, and has been semantic by its very nature of transmitting messages.”⁹ This book adopts the point of view conveyed in Susanna Välimäki’s convincing argument that:

We have no reason to consider music as more abstract, more without content, and less representative than some other art forms. For all sign systems are naturally abstract, and no sign system can exist without representation. Needless to say, musical representation differs from literary or visual representation because it is musical, i.e., because the medium is different. But even if we experience music as more abstract, we cannot conclude that music is less representative. On the contrary, it thus seems to represent “non-representativeness” most successfully.¹⁰

Stefan Jarociński raised essential questions about signification in music and distinguished between two problems: music in itself (*en soi*) and music in the perception of listeners (*pour nous*).¹¹ It seems that the problematic issues of musical syntax and semantics are not mutually exclusive but rather complement each other like two sides of a coin. Although some musicologists believe that music is referential, they find its referential aspect in expressions of feelings rather than in representations of visual forms and objects.¹²

⁷ Hermann Kretzschmar was the pioneering scholar of hermeneutics who wanted to revive the eighteenth-century doctrine of affections. Arnold Schering used “poetic ideas” for his study of Ludwig van Beethoven.

⁸ Raymond Monelle, *Musical Topics: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 20.

⁹ Eero Tarasti, “Music Models through Ages: A Semiotic Interpretation,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 17/1 (1986): 26.

¹⁰ Susanna Välimäki, *Subject Strategies in Music. A Psychoanalytic Approach to Musical Signification* (Imatra/Helsinki: International Semiotic Institute, 2005), 42.

¹¹ See Stefan Jarociński, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (London, UK: Eulenberg, 1976).

¹² Kendall Walton, “Listening with Imagination: Is Music Representational?,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52/1 (1994): 47-61 and Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolic of Reason, Rite and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 204-245.