



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Author(s): Arthur Ware Locke and E. T. A. Hoffmann

Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan., 1917), pp. 123-133

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738009>

Accessed: 27/08/2013 13:06

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BEETHOVEN'S INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Translated from E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Kreiseriana*
with an introductory note

By ARTHUR WARE LOCKE.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

E. T. A. HOFFMANN is an important figure in the background of musical history of whom we have gradually lost sight in spite of his significant relationship to the course of musical events and to those greater creative personalities by whom he was overshadowed. Hoffmann is known today chiefly for the part he took in the German literary movement of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He also has a small place in the history of musical composition as the composer of the opera *Undine*, which had a successful run in Berlin in 1816. But his importance in the history of music does not come from the value of his numerous musical compositions which, curiously enough, coming from such a professedly radical romanticist in matters of music, follow the conservative methods of Spontini rather than the more progressive romantic style of Weber. Hoffmann did, however, exert a powerful influence on composers, critics, and the musical public through his literary writings in which he emphasized what at that time had little recognition in musical criticism, the romantic interpretation of music.

Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann was born at Königsberg in 1776, six years after Beethoven was born, and died in Berlin in 1822, five years before Beethoven's death. He changed the Wilhelm in his name to Amadeus as a testimony to his enthusiasm for the works of Mozart. Trained to be a lawyer but possessing unusual gifts for both music and drawing, his life was one long vacillation between the sober career of a *Kammer-Gerichts-Rath* and the bohemian existence of a romantic artist. During the last years of his life in Berlin this romantic dualism of his nature expressed itself in days spent over ledgers and police records which he kept with exemplary conscientiousness and nights spent in the most fantastic revelries at Luther and Wegener's *Weinhaus*.

In 1803, Hoffmann was serving as a district attorney at Warsaw, which had been ceded to Prussia in 1795. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, "—a gay world, full of magic visions, shimmers and flickers about me—it seems as if something great must soon come of it—some kind of an artistic creation must appear out of the chaos!—whether it will be a book—an opera—a painting—*quod diis placebit*. . ." and in his diary he writes, "Was I born to be a painter or a musician? I must put the question to the president of the senate or the prime minister; they would know!" As a matter of fact, at this time in Warsaw Hoffmann seemed to be making a highly successful combined use of his varied talents. Besides satisfactorily and faithfully performing his official legal duties, he conducted orchestral concerts in a newly opened concert-hall which he had helped to plan and on the interior decoration of which he had demonstrated his skill as a painter. His friend Hitzig wrote of his success as a conductor:

His tempi were fiery and fast but without exaggeration, and people used to say afterward that if he had been able to show what he could do with a good orchestra, it would not have been easy to find a conductor to surpass him in the interpretation of Mozart. He had already at that time brought out a Beethoven symphony (*Eroica*?) for which he was filled with admiration.

Partly as a result of some caricatures which he had drawn of his superiors, Hoffmann lost his government position and took up music as a profession. It was in 1809 and 1810 while he was eking out a bare existence as musical director at the theatre at Bamberg that the first of his *Kreisleriana* papers appeared in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* at Leipzig. These with other fantastical musical essays were published in book form at Bamberg in 1814, and it is from this time that Hoffmann's literary career really dates. His fame as a teller of weird stories spread through numerous translations into other countries, particularly into France. Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, and George Sand extolled him, and his praises were sung in verse by Alfred de Musset in *Namouna* in 1833. Carlyle helped to introduce him to English readers by translating *Der goldne Topf*. In some ways the weird fancifulness of his style may be compared to the style of Edgar Allan Poe, though W. C. Brownell in his *American Prose Writers* considers Hoffmann more human than Poe. Scott in an essay *On the Supernatural in Fictitious Compositions*¹ spoke

¹The Foreign Quarterly Review, No. 1. July, 1827.

of Hoffmann's stories as the feverish dreams of a diseased brain, comparing them to the visions which are produced by the immoderate use of opium and concluding that they were the result of the condition of Hoffmann's broken-down physique. But Scott lacked the sense for the weird and the supernatural which was such a characteristic element in the romantic imagination. Hoffmann's use of the supernatural was, like Coleridge's, the result of the exaltation of the imagination over the intellect and falls directly in line with his romantic interpretation of music as shown in the essay on *Beethoven's Instrumental Music*.

The full title of the two volumes published in Bamberg in 1814 is: *Fantasiestücke in Callot's¹ Manier. Blätter aus dem Tagebuche eines reisenden Enthusiasten. Mit einer Vorrede von Jean Paul*. Among the contents is a ghost story about Gluck containing a description of the overture to *Iphigenia in Aulis* and a fantastic dream picture of a performance of Mozart's *Don Juan*. There are six essays under the general title *Kreisleriana* of which *Beethoven's Instrumental Musik* is No. 4. The name *Kreisleriana* comes from the weird figure of the Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler around whom the subject matter centers. It is not known why Hoffmann chose the name Kreisler. The description of his character—a struggling musician at odds with the world, ranting against the philistinism of musical society and rhapsodizing about his art—is obviously autobiographical.²

The essay on *Beethoven's Instrumental Music* is important as a contemporary criticism of Beethoven and as a demonstration of the growing tendency in music towards the romantic as opposed to the classic point-of-view. As an appreciation of the *Fifth Symphony* this essay is very remarkable when contrasted with the contemporary criticism which considered the *Third* and *Fifth Symphonies* as a falling off from the *First* and the *Second*. Philip Spitta has said:

Hidden in the *Kreisleriana* there is a power of extraordinary force which has permeated all the writing about music during the century. The pictures of the three great Austrian instrumental composers which Hoffmann has drawn and placed next to one another are conceived with such deep-seeing musical insight and portrayed with such successful

¹Jacques Callot, celebrated French etcher, engraver, and caricaturist (1592-1635).

²Sir George Grove in his Dictionary in an article on Jacob Böhrner gives this man the credit of being the original from whom Hoffmann drew the portrait of Kreisler. Dr. Edgar Istel in the recent Reclam edition of the *Kreisleriana* does not mention Böhrner. It is more likely that the character is drawn principally from Hoffmann's own experiences.

poetic power that they are as effective to-day as when Hoffmann sketched them.¹

Hoffmann's appreciation of the imaginative qualities in music made a strong appeal to those composers who were striving not so much to get away from classical forms as to make music more personal and more poetically suggestive. In 1820, Beethoven sent Hoffmann his greeting in these words:

I am aware that you interest yourself in my work. Allow me to say that it pleases me very much coming from a man gifted with such exceptional talents as you: I wish you all that is beautiful and good.

Schumann in his youth immersed himself in the imaginative, eccentric world of Jean Paul and Hoffmann, who, indeed, got many of his ideas from Jean Paul. Just as the *Papillons* is a reflection of Schumann's enthusiasm for Jean Paul's novel *Die Flegeljahre*, the *Kreisleriana* and the titles of some of Schumann's other pieces such as *Nachtstücke* and *Fantasiestücke* testify to his reading of Hoffmann's writings. The general character of Schumann's *Kreisleriana* suggests admirably the rhapsodic outpourings of the Kapellmeister Kreisler of Hoffmann's sketches.

Hoffmann was one of the earliest writers to influence Wagner. As early as 1827, Hoffmann's stories with their background of Dresden life fascinated Wagner, and they continued to attract him all through his life because they took him back to the time when he was a struggling artist among the familiar scenes of city life which Hoffmann described. As remarkable as was Wagner's appreciation of Beethoven's genius, Ernest Newman in his recent book on *Wagner as Man and Artist* reluctantly admits that Wagner was stimulated in his worship of Beethoven by Hoffmann. It can be shown that Hoffmann also anticipated many other of Wagner's ideas on art.

The essay on *Beethoven's Instrumental Music* is a revision of an article by Hoffmann in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (xii. Jahrgang, No. 40, July 4, 1810) on the Beethoven *Fifth Symphony* and the *Trios*, Op. 70, which had been published the year before by Breitkopf and Härtel. The essay as it now stands was first published in 1813 in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* in Leipzig and afterwards reprinted in the *Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier* when the collected *Kreisleriana* and other essays were published together for the first time.

¹Deutsche Rundschau, Dec., 1892, *Über Robert Schumanns Schrift*.

BEETHOVEN'S INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

FROM

E. T. A. HOFFMANN'S "KREISLERIANA"

When we speak of music as an independent art, we should properly refer only to instrumental music which, scorning the assistance and association of another art, namely poetry, expresses that peculiar property which can be found in music only. It is the most romantic of all the arts, one might almost say the only really romantic art, for its sole object is the expression of the infinite. The lyre of Orpheus opens the doors of Orkus. Music discloses to man an unknown kingdom, a world having nothing in common with the external sensual world which surrounds him and in which he leaves behind him all definite feelings in order to abandon himself to an inexpressible longing.

Have you even suspected this peculiar power of music, you pitiable instrumental composers who have taken such anxious pains to portray definite emotions, yes, even actual occurrences? How could you possibly conceive of using plastically that art which is just the opposite of sculpture? Your sunrises, your thunderstorms, your *Batailles des trois Empereurs*, etc., were nothing but ridiculous aberrations and have been deservedly punished by absolute oblivion.

In song, where the words of the poem indicate definite effects, the magic power of music operates like that wonderful elixir of the sages, a few drops of which make every drink more exquisite and more delicious. The passions which are portrayed in opera—love, hate, anger, doubt—are clothed by music in the purple glow of romanticism, and the very experiences of life lead us out of life into the realm of the infinite.

The ever-increasing magic power of music rends asunder the bonds of the other arts.

That inspired composers have raised instrumental music to its present height is certainly not due to the improvement in the medium of expression, the perfecting of the instruments or the greater virtuosity of the performers, but comes rather from the deeper spiritual recognition of the peculiar nature of music.

Mozart and Haydn, the creators of the instrumental music of to-day, show us the art for the first time in its full glory; the one who has looked on it with an all-embracing love and penetrated its innermost being is—Beethoven! The instrumental compositions of all three masters breathe the same romantic spirit, which lies in a similar deep understanding of the essential property of the art; there is nevertheless a decided difference in the character of their compositions. The expression of a child-like joyous spirit predominates in those of Haydn. His symphonies lead us through boundless green woods, among a merry gay crowd of happy people. Young men and maidens pass by dancing; laughing children peeping from behind trees and rose-bushes playfully throw flowers at one another. A life full of love, of felicity, eternally young, as before the fall; no suffering, no sorrow, only a sweet melancholy longing for the beloved form that floats in the distance in the glow of the sunset, neither approaching nor vanishing, and as long as it is there

night will not come for it is itself the evening glow which shines over mountain and wood.

Mozart leads us into the depths of the spirit world. We are seized by a sort of gentle fear which is really only the presentiment of the infinite. Love and melancholy sound in the pure spirit voices; night vanishes in a bright purple glow and with inexpressible longing we follow the forms which, with friendly gestures, invite us into their ranks as they fly through the clouds in the never-ending dance of the spheres. (Mozart's Symphony in E flat Major known as "The Swan Song.")

In the same way Beethoven's instrumental music discloses to us the realm of the tragic and the illimitable. Glowing beams pierce the deep night of this realm and we are conscious of gigantic shadows which, alternately increasing and decreasing, close in on us nearer and nearer, destroying us but not destroying the pain of endless longing in which is engulfed and lost every passion aroused by the exulting sounds. And only through this very pain in which love, hope, and joy, consumed but not destroyed, burst forth from our hearts in the deep-voiced harmony of all the passions, do we go on living and become hypnotised seers of visions!

An appreciation of romantic qualities in art is uncommon; romantic talent is still rarer. Consequently there are few indeed who are able to play on that lyre the tones of which unfold the wonderful region of romanticism.

Haydn conceives romantically that which is distinctly human in the life of man; he is, in so far, more comprehensible to the majority.

Mozart grasps more the superhuman, the miraculous, which dwells in the imagination.

Beethoven's music stirs the mists of fear, of horror, of terror, of grief, and awakens that endless longing which is the very essence of romanticism. He is consequently a purely romantic composer, and is it not possible that for this very reason he is less successful in vocal music which does not surrender itself to the characterization of indefinite emotions but portrays effects specified by the words rather than those indefinite emotions experienced in the realm of the infinite?¹

¹Cf. Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik*: "The ample heritage and promise of both of these masters (Haydn and Mozart) was taken up by Beethoven; he matured the Symphonic art-work to so engrossing a breadth of form, and filled that form with so manifold and enthralling a melodic content, that we stand today before the Beethovenian Symphony as before the landmark of an entirely new period in the history of universal Art; for through it there came into the world a phenomenon not even remotely approached by anything the art of any age or any people has to show us.

In this Symphony instruments speak a language whereof the world at no previous time had any knowledge; for here with a hitherto unknown persistence, the purely musical Expression enchains the hearer in an inconceivably varied mist of nuances; rouses his inmost being, to a degree unreachable by any other art; and in all its changefulness reveals an ordering principle so free and bold, that we can but deem it more forcible than any logic, yet without the laws of logic entering into it in the slightest—nay rather, the reasoning march of Thought, with its track of causes and effects, here finds no sort of foothold. So that this Symphony must positively appear to us a revelation from another world; and in truth it opens out a scheme (*Zusammenhang*) of the world's phenomena quite different from the ordinary logical scheme, and whereof one foremost thing is undeniable—that it thrusts home with the most overwhelming conviction, and guides our Feeling with such a sureness that the logic-mongering Reason is completely routed and disarmed thereby."

Translation by W. A. Ellis. *Wagner's Prose Works*. Vol. III. pp. 317-318.

Beethoven's mighty genius oppresses the musical rabble; he excites himself in vain before them. But the wiseacres, looking around with serious countenances, assure us, and one can believe them as men of great understanding and deep insight, that the worthy B. does not lack a most abundant and lively imagination; but he does not know how to curb it. There can be no discussion of the choice and the formation of his ideas, but he scatters the good old rules in disorder whenever it happens to please him in the momentary excitement of his creative imagination.

But what if the inner, underlying organic structure of these Beethoven compositions has escaped your superficial glance? What if the trouble is with you, that you do not understand the master's speech, intelligible to those to whom it is dedicated? What if the gates to that innermost shrine remain closed to you?—In truth, quite on a level with Haydn and Mozart as a conscious artist, the Master, separating his Ego from the inner realm of sound, takes command of it as an absolute monarch. Aesthetic mechanics have often lamented the absolute lack of underlying unity and structure in Shakespeare, while the deeper glance could see the beautiful tree with leaves, blossoms, and fruit growing from one germinating seed; so it is that only through a very deep study of Beethoven's instrumental music is that conscious thoughtfulness of composition (*Besonnenheit*) disclosed which always accompanies true genius and is nourished by a study of art.

What instrumental work of Beethoven testifies to this to a higher degree than the immeasurably noble and profound Symphony in C minor? How this marvellous composition carries the hearer irresistibly with it in its ever-mounting climax into the spirit kingdom of the infinite! What could be simpler than the main motive of the first allegro composed of a mere rhythmic figure which, beginning in unison, does not even indicate the key to the listener. The character of anxious, restless longing which this portion carries with it only brings out more clearly the melodiousness of the second theme!—It appears as if the breast, burdened and oppressed by the premonition of tragedy, of threatening annihilation, in gasping tones was struggling with all its strength for air; but soon a friendly form draws near and lightens the gruesome night. (The lovely theme in G major which is first taken up by the horn in E flat Major.)¹—How simple—let us repeat once more—is the theme which the master has made the basis of the whole work, but how marvelously all the subordinate themes and bridge passages relate themselves rhythmically to it, so that they continually serve to disclose more and more the character of the allegro indicated by the leading motive. All the themes are short, nearly all consisting of only two or three measures, and besides that they are allotted with increasing variety first to the wind and then to the stringed instruments. One would think that something disjointed and confused would result from such elements; but, on the contrary, this very organization of the whole work as well as the constant reappearances of the motives and harmonic effects, following closely on one another, intensify to the highest degree that feeling of inexpressible longing. Aside from the fact that the contrapuntal treatment testifies to a thorough study of the art, the connecting links,

¹G Major entrance of the Second Theme in the development section.—*Tr.*

the constant allusions to the main theme, demonstrate how the great Master had conceived the whole and planned it with all its emotional forces in mind. Does not the lovely theme of the Andante con moto in A flat sound like a pure spirit voice which fills our souls with hope and comfort?—But here also that terrible phantom which alarmed and possessed our souls in the Allegro instantly steps forth to threaten us from the thunderclouds into which it had disappeared, and the friendly forms which surrounded us flee quickly before the lightning. What shall I say of the Minuet?¹ Notice the originality of the modulations, the cadences on the dominant major chord which the bass takes up as the tonic of the continuing theme in minor—and the extension of the theme itself with the looping on of extra measures. Do you not feel again that restless, nameless longing, that premonition of the wonderful spirit-world in which the Master holds sway? But like dazzling sunlight the splendid theme of the last movement bursts forth in the exulting chorus of the full orchestra.—What wonderful contrapuntal interweavings bind the whole together. It is possible that it may all sound simply like an inspired rhapsody to many, but surely the heart of every sensitive listener will be moved deeply and spiritually by a feeling which is none other than that nameless premonitory longing; and up to the last chord, yes, even in the moment after it is finished, he will not be able to detach himself from that wonderful imaginary world where he has been held captive by this tonal expression of sorrow and joy. In regard to the structure of the themes, their development and instrumentation, and the way they are related to one another, everything is worked out from a central point-of-view; but it is especially the inner relationship of the themes with one another which produces that unity which alone is able to hold the listener in one mood. This relationship is often quite obvious to the listener when he hears it in the combination of two themes or discovers in different themes a common bass, but a more subtle relationship, not demonstrated in this way, shows itself merely in the spiritual connection of one theme with another, and it is exactly this subtle relationship of the themes which dominates both allegros and the Minuet—and proclaims the self-conscious genius of the Master.

How deeply, O! exalted Master! have your noble piano compositions penetrated into my soul; how hollow and meaningless in comparison all music seems which does not emanate from you, or from the contemplative Mozart, or that powerful genius, Sebastian Bach. With what joy I received your Opus 70, the two noble trios, for I knew so well that after a little practice I could play them to myself so beautifully. And it has been such a pleasure to me this evening that now, like one who wanders through the sinuous mazes of a fantastic park, among all kinds of rare trees, plants, and wonderful flowers, always tempted to wander further, I am unable to tear myself away from the marvelous variety and interweaving figures of your trios. The pure siren voices of your gaily varied and beautiful themes always tempt me on further and further. The talented lady who to-day played the first trio so beautifully just to please me, the Kapellmeister Kreisler, and before whose piano I am now sitting and writing, brought it home to me most clearly that

¹The scherzo movement had no title in the original score.—*Tr.*

we should honor only that which is inspired and that everything else comes from evil.

Just now I have been playing over from memory some of the striking modulatory passages from the two trios. It is true that the piano (Flügel-Pianoforte)¹ as an instrument is more adaptable to harmonic than to melodic uses. The most delicate expression of which the instrument is capable cannot give to the melody that mobile life in thousands and thousands of shadings which the bow of the violinist or the breath of the wind-instrument player is capable of giving. The player struggles in vain against that unconquerable difficulty set in his path by a mechanism which is based on the principle of making a string vibrate and sound as the result of percussion. On the other hand there is no instrument (with the exception of the much more limited harp) which has control to such a degree as the piano, with its completely grasped chords, of the kingdom of harmony, the treasures of which it discloses to the connoisseur in the most wonderful forms and images. When the imagination of the master has conceived the complete tone-picture with its many groups of figures, its bright lights and deep shadows, he can bring it to life on the piano with the result that it emerges from the world of his imagination all brightly coloured. The many-voiced score of this truly musical wonder-book, which portrays in its pictures all the wonders of the art of music even to the magic chorus of the varied instruments, comes to life under the hands of a virtuoso, and an effective polyphonic orchestral transcription played in the right way may well be compared to the artistic engraving of a great painting. Consequently the piano is exceptionally adapted for improvising, for transcribing orchestral scores, for unaccompanied sonatas, chord playing, etc.; and also for trios, quartets, quintets, etc., with the addition of the usual stringed instruments—compositions which really belong to the sphere of piano composition because, if composed in the right way, i. e. in four or five voices, they are based on harmonic development which naturally excludes the solo treatment of separate instruments in virtuoso passages.

I have a strong aversion for all the usual piano concerti. (Those of Mozart and Beethoven are not so much concerti as symphonies with piano obbligato.) In such works the virtuosity of the solo player in passage playing and in melodic expression is supposed to be brought out; but the best player with the most beautiful instrument strives in vain for that which the violinist, for example, achieves with ease. Each solo passage sounds dry and lifeless after the sonorous tuttis of the violins and wind-instruments; and one is amazed at the finger agility, etc., without having one's feelings at all stirred.

How wonderfully the Master understood the characteristic spirit of the instrument and consequently handled it in its most appropriate manner!

At the bottom of each movement there lies an effective singable theme, simple but fruitful of all the various contrapuntal developments, such as diminution, etc. All the other secondary themes and figures are organically related to this principal idea so that all the material

¹The newly invented "Hammerklavier."—*Tr.*

divided among the different instruments is combined and ordered in the most complete unity. Such is the structure of the whole; but in this artistic structure the most wonderful pictures, in which joy and sorrow, melancholy and ecstasy, appear side by side, change in restless succession. Strange shapes begin a merry dance, now dissolving in a blur of light, now sparkling and flashing as they separate, chasing and following one another in kaleidoscopic groups; and in the midst of this unlocked spirit-world the ravished soul listens to the unknown language and understands all those mysterious premonitions by which it is possessed.

Only that composer penetrates truly into the secrets of harmony who is able to stir the soul of man through harmony; to him, the mathematical proportions which to the grammarian without genius are only dry arithmetical problems, are magic combinations from which he can build a world of visions.

In spite of the geniality which predominates in the first trio, not excepting the emotional *Largo*, Beethoven's genius, as a whole, remains serious and religious in spirit. It seems as if the Master thought that one could not speak of deeply-hidden things in common words but only in sublime and noble language, even when the spirit, closely penetrating into these things, feels itself exalted with joy and happiness; the dance of the priests of Isis must take the form of an exultant hymn.

Instrumental music must avoid all senseless joking and triviality, especially where it is intended to be taken as absolute music and not to serve some definite dramatic purpose. It explores the depths of the soul for the presentiments of a joy which, nobler and more beautiful than anything experienced in this narrow world, comes to us from the unknown land; it inflames in our breasts an inner, rapturous life, a more intense expression than is possible through words, which are appropriate only to our limited earthly feelings. This seriousness of all Beethoven's instrumental and piano music proscribes all those breakneck passages for both hands up and down the piano, the curious leaps, the laughable capriccios, the skyscraper notes with five and six ledger line foundations, with which the latest piano compositions are filled. If it is a question of mere finger facility, the Master's piano compositions are not difficult, for such scales, trill figures, etc., as are found in them should be in the fingers of every practiced pianist; and yet the performance of these compositions is certainly difficult. Many a so-called virtuoso condemns the Master's piano compositions adding to the criticism, "Difficult," the reproach, "and most ineffective!"—The difficulty lies in this, that the proper, unforced, performance of a Beethoven work requires nothing less than that one shall thoroughly understand it, shall penetrate into its deepest being, that the performer conscious of his own consecration to his purpose must dare boldly to enter into the circle of mystical visions which its powerful magic calls forth. He who does not feel this consecration, who only considers this sacred music as an entertainment, as something to pass the time when there is nothing else to do, as a mere temporary sensuous pleasure for dull ears, or for the benefit of showing himself off—he should leave this music alone. Such a one sympathizes with that criticism: "And most ineffective!" The genuine

artist throws himself into the work, which he first comprehends from the point-of-view of the composer, and then interprets. He scorns the exploitation of his personality in any way whatever, and all his poetic imagination and intellectual understanding are bent towards the object of calling forth into active life, with all the brilliant colors at his command, the noble and enchanting images and visions which the Master with magic power has shut up in his work, that they may surround mankind in bright, sparkling rings and, enflaming his fancy and his innermost feelings, carry him in wild flights into the distant spirit kingdom of sound.