

Bartering Love in Arcadia - Rousseau and music

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In the next hour or so I will try to give an introduction to the place of music in Rousseau's thought. To demonstrate what I'm talking about, we have asked Carrie Becker and Rasmus Gravers Knive to perform excerpts from his opera or vaudeville *Le devin du village*, and at the end we will even give you the opportunity to sing one of his songs.

But we start in *Emile*:

This is too much about music. Teach it as you wish, provided that it is never anything but play¹.

With these words Rousseau closes the paragraph on the music education of Emile, and they are highly characteristic of the surprisingly small importance that Rousseau attaches to music in his program for the ideal education. Surprising from an author for whom music was so much more than play. In his late autobiographical text *Rousseau juge de Jean- Jacques* he wrote that 'Jean-Jacques was born for music',² and it was a lifelong passion and occupation with him. In his youth Madame de Warens sent him to several kinds of music tuition, but his training was rather haphazard, and, according to his *Confessions*, the slow learner Rousseau never quite mastered sight-singing. In his wandering years he acted as a singing master and composer-conductor with pretty disastrous results. But no defeat could shake his passion for music. He suffered severe humiliation when the leading French composer of the day, Jean-Philippe Rameau, censored his first ballet, *Les Muses galante*, as consisting of 50 % plagiarism and 50 % incompetence, but his first major theoretical work, a new system of musical notation based on numbers instead of notes, was received with polite interest by the French Academy, including Rameau. Rousseau wrote more than 350 articles on music for the *Encyclopédie*, which, when published independently, became the most influential dictionary of music for the next hundred years. His opera *Le Devin du village* of 1752 was a huge and instant success and it was performed regularly at the Paris Opera far into the next century. He actually earned his livelihood by copying music, an occupation which, he claimed, gave him the income and thus the freedom to pursue his artistic and philosophical authorship and write what he wanted to. To him, copying was more than just mechanical

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Emile or On Education, Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Allan Bloom*, Basic Books 1979, p. 150

² Rousseau: *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Bibl. de la Pleiyade, Paris 1959, Vol. 1, p. 872, my translation.

transcription; it was a fine craft, not only in its calligraphic aspect. As orchestral scores at this time often only contained the main musical lines and indications of supporting parts (e.g. doublings in strings and wood wind), preparing the actual instrumental parts for performance involved much independent musical judgment.

Music was in many ways central to his everyday life. And the plagued and paranoid old Rousseau found relief and comfort in composing small songs and duets to texts by a variety of poets, from popular contemporary poetry to Shakespeare. These were published posthumously as *Les consolations de misères de ma vie – Consolations for the miseries of my life*, and proved very popular both in France and not least in Germany, where Goethe was an enthusiastic admirer. He had his own copy, and had singers perform from it again and again. 'One is never satiated', he wrote, 'and by all the simplicity I admire the great variety and the pure feeling, where all is in its place.'³

We will hear one of these, set to one of Rousseau's own texts, the *Air de trois notes*, a song with three notes, meaning literally that the melody is constructed out of only three different pitches, an example of the simplicity and restriction of musical means that was Rousseau's aesthetic ideal.⁴ Rasmus Gravers Knive sings. Enjoy!

(performance of *Air de trois Notes*)

Que le jour me dure!
Passé loin de toi,
Toute la nature
n'est plus rien pour moi.
Le plus vert bocage,
quand tu n'y viens pas,
n'est qu'un lieu sauvage,
pour moi, sans appas.

Without you how long
Hours and days become for me!
Empty and desolate and fearful
Is everything I gaze upon.
The grove of our love,
Which saw me so happy,
Is mute and dreary to me,
For you are not there.

Hélas! si je passe
Un jour sans te voir,
Je cherche ta trace

I go there and search
For the trace of your steps
At the lovely beech,

³ See Albert Jansen: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau als Musiker*, Berlin 1884, p. 436

⁴ Rousseau's central maxim in music aesthetics was that melody is THE essential musical parameter whereas harmony is an artificial construction, a civilized aberration from music's true nature. In his articles about melody and the term *prima intentione* in the *Dictionnaire* he set forth his ideal of artistic creation: A melody should be formed in one stroke in the artist's imagination, complete and with all its parts, the way Pallas Athena sprang fully armed from Jupiter's brain. Here Rousseau laid the foundations of the later Romantic aesthetic of genius and helped to create the myth of how the romantic artist creates his works. In his conception of true, natural art construction is ruled out. And yet, in the *Air de trois Notes* we find Rousseau deliberately constructing a melody by applying a rational selection and variation procedure to the pitches of the major scale. It is a piece of artificial simplicity.

Dans mon désespoir...
Quand je l'ai perdue,
Je reste à pleurer,
Mon âme éperdue
Est près d'expirer.

Our familiar lea.
I call you, who are mine,
I imagine that you are near,
I sink down and weep,
For you are not there.

Le coeur me palpite
Quand j'entends ta voix,
Tout mon sang s'agite
Dès que je te vois;
Ouvres-tu la bouche,
Les cieux vont s'ouvrir...
Si ta main me touche,
Je me sens frémir.

If I then hear from far away
The sound of your voice,
Oh how within my bosom
My heart turns into song.
I tremble when your
Delicate hand touches me,
When by your lips
My spirit is drawn from me.

The *Air de trois Notes* was highly popular, and the text was composed by many major and minor composers, including Rossini. The young Beethoven set it to music in 1793. Here is his version.

(performance of Ludwig van Beethoven: *Que le jour me dure*, WoO 116)

The small place allotted to music in Rousseau's ideas of education is also surprising considering his admiration for Plato's *Republic* which he called 'the most beautiful educational treatise ever written'⁵. In this work Plato set great store by the appliance of music in the formation of the characters of children and young people. He claimed that

'musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful, or of him who is ill-educated ungraceful.'⁶

Plato and the tradition from Antiquity held that music is metaphysically linked to the cosmos and to the individual soul, and that it therefore has an intrinsic ethical influence on man's character. But his high regard of Plato notwithstanding, Rousseau had a totally different view of the origins and function of music.

⁵ *Emile*, as above note 1, p. 40

⁶ Plato: *Republic* 402 D-E

In his main article on *Musique in the Dictionnaire* Rousseau speaks of an episode where a member of the French Academy had found what was believed to be the original notation of the melody for an ode by the Antique Greek poet Pindar. The French scholar had it transcribed into contemporary musical notation and assembled a circle of illustrious French intellectuals to hear it performed. And there they sat eagerly expecting to experience the fabled ethical impact of the old music. But, to their extreme disappointment, they didn't feel a thing.

Rousseau found the matter ridiculous. To him music was not a metaphysical entity but a product of human culture. And its effect was bound to the culture of its origin, so expecting to be influenced by music from a distant culture you did not substantially know was plain silly.

He not only refuted the ancient ideas of music's metaphysical superstructure but also the efforts of his own age to explain music in terms of its physical substructure. In his treatise on harmony of 1722, Rameau, hailed by the encyclopaedists as The Newton of Music, claimed to demonstrate the natural, universal laws of music through a rational and scientific study of the tones and overtones produced by a vibrating body. He argued that harmony was naturally given in the overtone series. This parameter of music was therefore primary in both the composition and the expression of music, whereas melody was secondary, being derived from the harmonic principles. 'Melody', he asserted in a later pamphlet, 'is born from harmony and plays a subordinate role in music, it serves the all too slight, inane entertainment. Melody only reaches the ear canals whereas the beautiful sequence of chords speaks directly to the soul.'⁷

Rousseau claimed the exact opposite. According to him, too, music should speak to the soul, but it can only do so by melody, whereas harmony is an un-natural – that is culturally and historically produced – convention which is unintelligible to natural man.

Instead of founding music in physics and science, Rousseau in his *Essay on the Origin of Language and Music*⁸ – which was first intended to form a part of the *Discourse on Inequality* – presented ideas about an original, close connection and common origin of language and music. The lone man in the state of nature had no need of language. When the creator by tipping the axis of the earth imbalanced the climate, he forced men to live together in society in order to secure their livelihood. This in itself did not necessitate language proper – you can, Rousseau claimed, unite to dig a well using only gesture and body language. True language arose only when the young men and women met at the finished well to draw water and fell in love. The expression of their feelings called for words. These words were musical in their accent and intonation, music and language were one and both had their *raison d'être* in the communication of feelings and passions. (Here we have the explanation why music does not come substantially into Rousseau's ideal education. Music is emphatically bound to the expression of adult passion which he makes a point of keeping from the boy and adolescent as long as possible. Therefore music for children must be only play.)

⁷ See Peter Gülke: *Rousseau und die Musik oder von der Zuständigkeit des Dilettanten*, Heinrichshofen's Verlag, Wilhelmshaven, 1984, p. 62

⁸ Rousseau: *Essai sur l'origine des langues où il est parl'e de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale*. For references see Michael O'Dea: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Music, Illusion and Desire*, Macmillan Press LTD, 1995, p. 53ff

The emergence of music and language took place in a mild climatic zone where food and necessary shelter were easy to come by. When men moved to more northern and harsh climates, they had to work harder for their existence, which led to the suppression of feeling and the development of rationality and rational language. The first words in the original language were 'aimez-moi' – love me, but in the rational northern language they were 'aidez-moi' – help me, which in modern France had been perverted to 'donnez de l'argent' – give me money.

Rousseau, of course, did not offer this tale as a scientific description of the history of language. It functions like the myths in Plato's dialogues as a vehicle for reflecting on problems and principles, in this case the ideal connection between music, language, and passion, which to Rousseau has been severed by civilization. No modern language has the musical accent or the potential for expression of feeling which was inherent in original language. There can be no music in the French language, he argued provocatively in his *Lettre sur la musique française* of 1753. For French is the ultimate northern, harsh, rational, and unmusical language, and has an intonation and accent which cannot carry musical expression. Italian is also perverted by civilization, but stemming from a warmer climate it still retains some of the original intonation and expressiveness and is therefore much more suited to music.

Rousseau had been excited by Italian music while acting as secretary to the French ambassador in Venice, and when an Italian opera troupe performed in Paris in 1752 his enthusiasm along with that of the majority of Parisian opera goers rose to unprecedented heights. He was especially impressed by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's comic intermezzo *La serva padrona*, which with its simple, popular action, clear-cut melodies, fresh and springy rhythm, and slight harmonies and orchestration was in stark contrast to the established French opera-ballets with symbolical plots derived from mythology, of which Rameau was the undisputed master.

Rousseau felt inspired to try his hand at producing a French parallel to the Italian opera buffa. That resulted in his hit opera *Le devin du village*. He wrote it, he claimed, solely for his own pleasure, and would have preferred to have it performed only to himself. Nonetheless, he was quite pleased to have the piece accepted at the Paris opera, but even before it had been performed there, the king, Louis the 15th, commanded a performance before the court at Fontainebleau. The King, who was generally considered unmusical, was so taken with the first aria that he was heard humming it to himself for many days after 'in the falsest voice of his realm' as one of the singers wrote to Rousseau.

Please welcome Carrie Becker, who will provide you with a taste of this aria.

(performance)

J'ai perdu tout mon bonheur
J'ai perdu mon serviteur;
Colin me délaisse.

Lost is all my peace of mind,
Since my Colin proves unkind,
Alas! He's gone forever.

Hélas! il a pu changer!
Je voudrais n'y plus songer
J'y songe sans cesse.

Ah! Since he has learn'd to rove,
Fain would I forget my Love;
Ah me! Ah me! Vain is my endeavor.

Rousseau at the premiere of his opera at Fontainebleau is a scene of which a film should be made. Shortly before, all his silk shirts had been stolen, and in adherence to his principles of simple living he had decided never again to acquire fine linen but to restrict himself to wearing coarse flax. So, according to his *Confessions*, he turned up at the castle unshaved, with his wig in disorder, and wearing old and worn clothes, and was seated in a box in front of the illustrious audience, and had the pleasure of not only seeing a performance of his piece with the finest musicians and singers of France, which moved him deeply, but also to observe the audience, and especially the female part, countesses and duchesses in all their finery, sobbing their way through the opera.

'I heard around me women, who seemed to me as beautiful as angels, whispering and saying to each other in a low tone, 'Charming, delightful! Every note speaks to the heart.' The pleasure of affecting so many amiable persons moved me to tears, which I was unable to restrain during the first duet, when I observed that I was not the only one who wept.'⁹

The story of *Le devin du village* is more than simple. The young shepherdess Colette is betrayed by her lover Colin who has been lured and enamoured by the rich lady of the manor. Colette complains to the wise village soothsayer, who explains that even though Colin is unfaithful he is still in love with Colette; he has just been led astray by his vanity and can be brought back to Colette's feet. His advice is

Pour vous faire aimer d'avantage,
Feignez d'aimer un peu moins.
L'amour croît, s'il s'inquiète;
Il s'endort, s'il est content
La bergère un peu coquette
Rend le berger plus constant.

To make yourself more loved, pretend to love a little less, a coquettish shepherdess makes the shepherd more constant.

And so follows the scène à faire of the opera: The conscious-stricken Colin meets Colette who pretends not to see him. 'Are you angry, Colette? It's me, Colin, please look at me!' And she looks

⁹Jean -Jacques Rousseau: *The Confessions*, with an introduction by Derek Matravers, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1996, Book VIII, p. 367f

coldly at him and says: 'Colin loved me and was faithful. I look at you and no longer see Colin'. He protests his devotion, but she tells him that she has found a new and more faithful admirer. He refuses to believe her, but she is like 'Your efforts are in vain – no Colin, I do not love you anymore.' Then he is like 'You clearly want to see me die – I will leave the village for good.' And he turns and goes slowly away from her. She cries out after him 'Colin!' and he quickly turns: 'Quois – what?' 'Are you leaving?' 'Well, would you have me stay and torture myself seeing you with a new lover?' They then embark on a duet where they contemplate the joys of being a pair, the pain of being separated, and that whatever may be in store for them afterwards, nothing could be preferable to having each other. He prefers her to all goods in the universe, and she loves him more than all the splendours of the court. And then she relents: 'Oh my flighty shepherd! Must I love you in spite of myself?' And they swear each other eternal devotion. Love shall be their law.

Please get out your Kleenex, as we prepare to perform this moving scene.

(Performance)

It should be obvious that the music is as simple and artless as the action. And this of course was Rousseau's intention. In characteristic self-deprecation he at one point remarked (to the leading German author of Singspiels Christian Felix Weisse) that it was only a bagatelle made to see what beasts the French were to appreciate such a piece of rubbish.¹⁰ But at other times he was very proud of it and felt that it demonstrated the productiveness of his ideas on music. In *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* he asserted that 'no one feels its beauties as I do.' But these beauties were not produced by art and science (meaning compositional technique and skill), but by taste and sensibility. 'Nothing,' he said, 'goes beyond the elementary principles of composition Not only is there no music student who wouldn't be able to do as well after three months, but it's doubtful if any learned composer could resign himself to be so simple.'¹¹

Rousseau was not a trained or skilled composer. The opera and his other surviving works all contain passages of awkward declamation and rhythm, inelegant bass leading, and unconvincing harmonic progressions. But he had a good musical instinct, and his scant and unsystematic training meant that he was unfettered by convention and therefore at some points was able to produce melodies of moving freshness and rhythmic freedom, of which a composer better rooted in the trade would not have been capable. This was confirmed by the famous composer Gluck who saw a performance of the piece together with another leading composer of the day, Antonio Salieri, and allegedly said to him: 'We would have done it differently. And we would have been wrong.'¹²

But why did it have such a great impact? To us today the music doesn't sound so much differently from other music of the period, and it can be a bit hard to understand that the audience could be

¹⁰ Daniel Heartz: *Music in European Capitals: the gallant style, 1720-1780*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003, p. 713

¹¹ *Premier Dialogue*, p. 40, as Footnote 2 above

¹² See Peter Gülke: opus cit (footnote 7) p. 78

moved to such a degree. With the musicologist Peter Gülke¹³ we may ask what potential for experience was ready to be stimulated by Rousseau's music. We may also wonder why nobility and wealthy city dwellers found pleasure in a piece which scourges their culture and way of life as the cause of evil? Possibly this was just taken as an additional excitation to sentiment. Public tears and extrovert sentimentality in the theatre and otherwise were the fashion. But we must look beyond that.

It is interesting to compare *Le devin* to Rameau's opera *La Guirlande* written the year before in 1751, which was also a success, though not as spectacular as that of *Le devin*. In outline the plots of the two pieces are identical. A shepherdess loses her loving shepherd to another woman and wins him back. But in Rameau this is accomplished through the divine intervention of Cupid, whereas in Rousseau the village soothsayer acts as a human therapist in helping the young people to untangle their true emotions. *La Guirlande* is set in classical Arcadia, the traditional cloud-cuckoo land of pastoral bliss. *Le Devin* is set in a realistic village in the France of the author's own time. *La Guirlande* has no social criticism, whereas it is central to *Le devin* that Colin is lead astray by the appearance of the rich lady of the manor. *Le devin* is an artistic representation of Rousseau's anthropology, a parable of the critique of civilization we find in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. Here we read:

Richness of apparel may proclaim the man of fortune, and elegance the man of taste; but true health and manliness are known by different signs. It is under the homespun of the labourer, and not beneath the gilt and tinsel of the courtier, that we should look for strength and vigour of body.

External ornaments are no less foreign to virtue, which is the strength and activity of the mind. The honest man is an athlete, who loves to wrestle stark naked; he scorns all those vile trappings, which prevent the exertion of his strength, and were, for the most part, invented only to conceal some deformity.¹⁴

And this exactly what *Le Devin* is about.

During the prelude to the last duet we heard, Colin is supposed to lie down at the feet of Colette. She points to his hat, which is beset with a golden ribbon that the rich lady has given to him. He looks at it in contempt and flings it away. He then takes Colette's peasant's cap from her and places it on his own head with great pleasure.

This symbolic condemnation of high culture is even more outspoken in the finale.

¹³ Gülke, opus cit. p. 73

¹⁴ Rousseau: *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences, First part*, http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=638&chapter=71081&layout=html&Itemid=27

Allons danser sous les ormeaux,
A la ville on fait bien plus de fracas;
Mais sont-ils aussi gais dans leurs ébats?

....

Tous leurs concerts valent-ils nos musettes?

In these the last words of the opera Colette invites everybody to dance under the elms, to sing and make merry. In the city they make more noise, but are they ever as happy and gay in their entertainments as the people in the village? What are all their fine concerts against our bagpipes? The village people live happier lives. Unfettered by convention, artifice and riches they can follow the natural human laws of love and emotion. And simple music – symbolized by the primitive bagpipe as opposed to the technically complex instruments of the city concerts – is the means for direct communication and social interaction among these natural human beings.

The point is made again and again:

A la ville on est plus aimable,
Au village on sait mieux aimer.

In the city people are more amiable, in the village they know how to love better.

Ici de la simple nature
L'Amour suit la naïveté;
En d'autres lieux, de la parure
Il cherche l'éclat emprunté.

Here love follows the naïveté of simple natures,
At the other place it seeks the splendour of borrowed finery.

The city dwellers may be more elegant and even friendlier (aimable), the natural people of the village are naïve and unpolished but capable of true and deeper emotion. No borrowed plumes in appearance, no pretence in emotion here.

And yet, to maintain her deep and true love the soothsayer advises Colette to feign not to love Colin. Again in the last song he sings:

Souvent par la coquetterie
Un coeur volage est retenu.

A flighty heart is retained by coquetry. That is the core of the soothsayer's wisdom: To retain true emotion, the unspoiled villagers must resort to the civilized and bourgeois un-virtues of pretence and coldness. And here we are at the stumbling block of Rousseau's anthropology: his exceedingly traditional view on the relationship between the sexes.

In the *Letter to d'Alambert on the theatre* we have his thoughts on the subject at its most harsh, but it is also expounded in the description of the courtship and marriage of Emile and Sophie.¹⁵

To Rousseau the sex drive is a dangerous and disruptive thing which both men and women have in excess. If not kept in check, it is subversive to the very core of social order. The male instincts are aroused by the woman, and therefore it is her task to control them along with her own. This she must do by, on the one hand, avoiding to arouse the male unnecessarily, that is, she must exhibit *la pudeur*, modesty in action and dress and not make a spectacle of herself, least of all on the stage as an actress. Any woman who shows herself off, dishonours herself, he says. The woman's place is in the home. Here, on the other hand, she must follow the natural rules of courtship and mating, which Rousseau observes in a couple of pigeons on his window sill. They consist of a ritual game of attack and defence. The man must attack the woman (not in a violent way and only with her consent, he is careful to underscore) and she must pretend to defend herself before she relents in order to heighten the intensity of the male emotions and to bind them to her person.

In general Rousseau insists on transparency as his ideal of the human character. Again from the *First Discourse*:

Before art had moulded our behaviour, and taught our passions to speak an artificial language, our morals were rude but natural; and the different ways in which we behaved proclaimed at the first glance the difference of our dispositions. Human nature was not at bottom better than now; but men found their security in the ease with which they could see through one another.¹⁶

See through one another! Everywhere in Rousseau's writings we find this ideal of clarity and transparency, that nothing should hide the true emotions. But not when it comes to love and mating. Here hiding emotions and thus lack of transparency is an essential and natural prerequisite.

In his disputes with Rameau, Rousseau maintained that music, despite that it indisputably has a natural, physical substratum, is and can only be understood as a product of human culture. In the discourse on inequality, as demonstrated by the scholar Michael O'Dea¹⁷, he went further and asserted that a whole series of attributes that had traditionally been regarded as natural to the human species were in fact socially and culturally produced. Solitary man in the state of nature has

¹⁵ See Michael O'Dea: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Music, Illusion and Desire*, Macmillan Press LTD, 1995, p. 82ff

¹⁶ Rousseau: *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences*, First part, as above, note 14

¹⁷ Michael O'Dea, as above, note 15, p. 79f

no morals, but what sets him apart from the animals is his perfectibility, that elusive characteristic, which allows the development of human morals in the broad sense, including all patterns of social interaction, politics, science, the arts, and music, once he comes into significant and prolonged contact with other human beings.

But strangely enough, when it comes to the patterns of mating and courtship Rousseau sees them as unchangeable, natural laws that must be obeyed. And this cannot just be explained by a trivial 'such were the general views at the time', for the encyclopaedists had much more modern views, and d'Alambert wrote a letter to Rousseau in which he insisted that the behavioural characteristics of the sexes were indeed brought forth by culture.

Now you can take – and with Rousseau you can hardly avoid – the ad hominem route and say that his traditional, conservative views on sex stem from his private, psychological constitution. His mother complex, masochism, immaturity, and obvious fears of the sexual go a long way in explaining that he had a bias and a blind spot in this domain. But it is more interesting to see his views in a social and historical context.

Theodor W. Adorno¹⁸ has described how the emerging capitalist society with the ideals of free individuals and free enterprise unleashed dynamic forces that were so strong that the same society which unleashed them had to curtail them in order not to be consumed by them.

Rousseau unleashed human emotions, or maybe he even created them, for it is an open question, to what extent they actually existed before Rousseau and his age brought them to the fore. He underscored emotion and love, not only sexual love, but family love, the love between mother and child (including his truly revolutionary promotion of breast feeding) as the basis and point of human relations. And this became the foundation of the domestic structure of bourgeois society centred in the nuclear family. But when linked to the sexual drive all this free emotion threatened to undermine the very structures it was producing, and it therefore had to be restrained by *la pudeur* and female coquetry.

That Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* actually won the prize shows that its critique of civilization expressed notions, which must have been held consciously or unconsciously by many contemporaries. The overwhelming success of *Le devin du village* may stem from the fact that it was – to speak with Hegel – *ihre Zeit in Vaudeville gefasst* – a popular, plain and moving parable of some of the most pertinent themes of its time. In it we see the domestic bourgeois individual in statu nascendi.

Colin sings:

Dans ma cabane obscure
Toujours soucis nouveaux;
Vent, soleil ou froidure,
Toujours peine et travaux.
Colette, ma bergère,

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno: *Über Statik und Dynamik als soziologische Kategorien*, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8

Si tu viens l'habiter,
Colin, dans sa chaumière,
N'a rien à regretter.
Des champs, de la prairie,
Retournant chaque soir,
Chaque soir plus chérie,
Je viendrai te revoir

In my dark cabin there are always new worries, wind, sun, frost, always pains and work, but if you, Colette, will live with me under my thatched roof, I will have no regrets, and every day I will return from the fields and it will be dearer to me.

In this, his last song, Colin invites Colette to live with him in his dark, thatched cabin and endure the hardships of country life with him. And both agree that love is more worth than the comforts of civilization. They live by a protestant work ethic (and he goes to work while she stays at home) and their frugal existence is made meaningful through their mutual devotion and love – the love we now know will only endure if Colette (as Sophie to Emile) is not only coquettish towards Colin but at times even rejecting and cold. At the heart and hearth of the ideal bourgeois family we find a mixture of sentimentality and coldness, the *bürgerliche Kälte* (on which I believe professor Gruschka is a greater authority than I am¹⁹). Rousseau's Arcadia is pervaded by the bourgeois exchange principle: everything is bartered, and the value of even the innermost human feelings, of love, is determined by the ratio between supply and demand.

But we must have some more music. The success of *Le devin* also meant that it was quickly parodied. Already in 1753 a Paris theatre presented the parody *Bastien et Bastienne*, in which Rousseau's graceful shepherds were turned into very rustic peasants, with the authoress Madame Favart appearing in the title role in clogs. The text was set to popular melodies of the day – Rousseau's *J'ai perdu tout mon bonheur*, that we heard earlier, became *J'ai perdu mon ami*, sung to the well-known tune *J'ai perdu mon âne*, I've lost my donkey. This was pure fun, and not a scrap of Rousseau's social criticism was left in. This parody was translated into German and composed by the 12-year old Mozart in 1768. Now we will hear an aria from the scene we heard in Rousseau's original where Bastienne complains of Bastien's infidelity and accuses him of being *ein Flattergeist*, a flighty heart.

Carrie Becker sings Bastienne's aria *Er war mir sonst treu und ergeben* from Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne*.

(performance)

¹⁹ See Andreas Gruschka: *Bürgerliche Kälte und Pädagogik. Moral in Gesellschaft und Erziehung*, Wetzlar 1994.

Er war mir sonst treu und ergeben,
 Mich liebte Bastien allein,
 Mein Herze nur war sein Bestreben,
 Nur ich, sonst niemand nahm ihn ein.
 Das schönste Bild gefiel ihm nicht,
 Auf mich nur war sein Blick gericht,
 Ich konnt vor andern allen
 Ihm reizen, ihm gefallen.
 Auch Damen wurden nicht geschätzt,
 Die oft sein Blick in Glut gesetzt.
 Wenn sie Geschenke gaben,
 Mußt ich dieselben haben;
 Mich liebte er, nur mich allein.
 Doch nun will er sich andern weihn,
 Vergebens die sonst süßen Triebe
 Und wird ein Flattergeist.

He used to be true and faithful,
 Bastien loved only me,
 He only strove for my heart,
 Only I enchanted him.
 The most beautiful sight gave him no pleasure,
 His gaze was only at me,
 More than anybody
 I could charm him, please him.
 And the fine ladies who had often set
 his gaze on fire were not appreciated.
 If they gave him gifts,
 He made sure I had the same.
 He love me, only me,
 But now he will devote himself to another,
 All my sweet efforts are in vain,
 he becomes a flighty heart.

This, of course, is also very simple music as could be expected from a boy of 12. But it is also much better music than Rousseau's. The form is clearer, the melody more concise, the rhythm more springy, and the simple harmonies are joined in a much more convincing and dynamic way. Rousseau, had he known of it, would probably have been quite ready to admit the difference between Mozart's genius and his own modest gifts of composition. But Mozart's music challenges Rousseau's notions of simplicity in art. The effect of Mozart's aria stems from the boy's astounding command of the compositional craftsmanship. This craftsmanship he later developed to compose music which in respect to the communication of emotion in many ways lives up to Rousseau's ideals. But it also goes against them in that it is highly complex – Mozart's mature works may sound straightforward but they employ orchestration, harmony, and polyphony in very advanced ways, which Rousseau actually condemned when he insisted that music have only one melody at a time and only the slightest use of harmony and instrumental colour, in order to portray true emotion.

Even in Rousseau, emotion is not simple. In the central scene of *Le devin*, Colette has to express one feeling, coldness, in order to obtain the object of her true feelings of love. And this Rousseau expects her to do also in their future married life. That is a complex psychological situation, but Rousseau can only let Colette express one single emotion at a time. I find Rousseau's simplistic piece corny today - throw in a few jokes and some canned laughter and expressions of commiseration, and you have a perfect episode of the popular American sit-com *Friends*, - the young people there behave exactly like Colin and Colette. But it was corny even in its own day. Shakespeare had played through all its major themes, including the critique of civilization, in a much more profound way in his pastoral comedy *As you like it* a hundred and fifty years before. *Le devin* can move and entertain but only in a rather superficial way. A true portrayal of its conflict cannot be realized with Rousseau's consciously limited means, and even less on the bagpipe that Colette praises. Mozart in his mature operas excelled in portraying humans in the grip of contradictory feelings, but this he could only do by applying the entire gamut of the musical

means at his disposal. He wrote complex music not out of that vanity and lust for glory of which Rousseau accused the artists, but because he needed it to express complex emotions. Just to express and clarify the feelings of Colin and Colette, you actually need the civilization Rousseau condemned. The forms, harmonies and instruments of his score are already parts of that, - a violin is a refined instrument that is dependent on the development of the arts and sciences. It is arbitrary to call a halt to their development in 1752. In this Rousseau was rather like the American sect of the Amish who stopped time in 1693. To ban the achievements that made Mozart possible implies a ban on thinking, a *sacrificium intellectus*, which we cannot accept. I really don't want to live without Mozart's advanced portrayals of emotion, and I wouldn't sacrifice Bach's polyphonic and harmonically complex expression of human joy and suffering.

But let us look at Rousseau's restrictions on music from another angle. As the musicologist Peter Gülke²⁰ has maintained, his restrictions on women in society – petty bourgeois though they may be – had their utopian side: they were made because Rousseau naively hoped that the original traits of natural humanity, that he felt women still kept, could be preserved from being corrupted by civilization.

Music in Rousseau's time was in a state of emancipation. Socially it had until then been in the service of power, of church and state, and theoretically it had been locked in metaphysical speculation. Rousseau saw a possibility that, delivered from these chains, music could be free and human as a means of immediate communication from human heart to human heart. But he also saw it threatened by new bonds. Theoretically its freedom was threatened by Rameau's natural science (and here he was prophetic, if you look at how the Antique ideas of the metaphysical link between music and the soul today have been replaced by notions of a purely mechanical relationship between music and the chemical reactions in the human brain). Socially music was threatened by industrialization (and here of course he was also prophetic if we think of the culture industry). Already in Rousseau's day the new bourgeois public sphere consumed music in quantities which called for a kind of mass production. We need only to think of the German composer Georg Philipp Telemann who wrote more than 3500 pieces, great and small, all expressly meant to accommodate popular taste, not only sacrificing the artifice and complexity of his friend Johann Sebastian Bach but also watering down music's potential for expression. The sad irony is that Telemann's easy listening music is very like the music Rousseau composed, being emphatically un-learned, simple, fresh, and superficially emotional. The duet you have heard today could be mistaken for Telemann, except for the fact that the latter was the better craftsman.

Rousseau could not foresee Mozart. The only way he could secure the freedom and humanity of music was to impose restrictions on that complexity which he saw only in terms of the corrupting effects of civilization. This involved an intellectual sacrifice that we are not prepared to pay, but the critical potential of his ideals of simplicity are worth keeping in mind.

²⁰ Gülke, as above, note 7, p. 174

We can end here by returning to the first song we heard, the *Air de trois notes*. The text describes the feelings of a lover separated from his beloved. Beethoven later treated the theme in both literally and musically much more reflected and elaborate form in his song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* of 1816. These songs have much more than three notes, but they have very simple melodies and accompaniments and in many ways speak the musical language of Rousseau. They are the songs he would have written, had he been able. In this cycle the lover has sent his distant beloved songs that describe his feelings for her. They are, he says, artless songs directly from his heart, expressing only longing. And in the last song he imagines that she sings them and thereby overcomes their separation, because *ein liebend Herz erreicht, was ein liebend Herz geweiht*, a loving heart shall attain what a loving heart has hallowed. This Rousseauian theme of communication from heart to heart through artless music was central to Beethoven. As motto for his enormous *Missa solemnis* he wrote: *Vom Herzen, möge es wieder zu Herzen gehen*, from the heart, may it again go to the heart. And at the point of *An die ferne geliebte* where the lover imagines how the beloved sings his songs, Beethoven with the slightest means created music of such emotional intensity that you actually for the moment believe that it is true, that you can achieve that communion with another soul through music.

And then he ruins it. He repeats the last words *Und ein liebend Herz erreicht, was ein liebend Herz geweiht* in a raging finale that rises to almost operatic intensity with an insistent tone, which makes you doubt the truth of the matter, and doubt that Beethoven even believes it himself. He tries to impose the ideal community through artistic violence, just as he later did in the finale of his 9th symphony with its overwhelming but unconvincing call to joy and brotherhood.

The point is that this could not have occurred within Rousseau's musical restrictions. The ideals of simplicity, transparency, and naturalness imply that things, from songs to states, must be gentle, small, and clear, and they do not allow for the violence or delusions of grandeur of Beethoven's finale or Napoleon's conquests. Had Beethoven and the French revolutionaries who carried Rousseau's mark on their shields paid more than lip service and truly adhered to those principles, humanity would have been spared not only Beethoven's occasional overreaching but also much bloodshed and suffering.

We will conclude the session with a spot of community singing. Please join us in the first song from *Les consolations de misères de ma vie*, printed on the last page of the program, a simple song celebrating freedom and simple living. I will sing the first stanza and then I invite you sing the whole song with us. I thank you.

Air Antique

Sur des Paroles de Desportes

O bien heureux qui peut passer sa vie
Entre les siens franc de haine et d'envie
Parmi les champs, les rochers et les bois.
Loin du tumult et du bruit populaire.
Et qui ne vend sa liberté pour plaire
Aux passions de Princes et des Rois.

Il n'a souci d'une chose incertaine;
Il ne se pait d'une espérance vaine;
Nulle faveuer ne le va décevant.
De cent fureurs il n'a l'ame embrasée
Et ne maudit sa jeunesse abusée,
Quand il ne trouve à la fin que du vent.

L'ambition son courage n'attise;
D'un fond trompeur son ame il ne deguise;
Il ne se plait à violer sa foi.
Des grands Seigneurs l'oreille il n'importune;
Mais en vivant content de sa fortune,
Il est sa cour, sa faveur et son Roi.

Si je ne loge en ces maisons dorées,
Au front superbe, aux voutes peinturées
D'azur, d'email et de mille couleurs,
Mon oeil se pait des trésors de la plaine
Riche d'oeillet, de thim, de marjolaine,
Et du beau teint des pritanières fleurs.

Ainsi vivant rien n'est qui ne m'agrée;
J'ai des oiseaux la musique sacrée,
Quand au matin ils benissent les Cieux,
Et le doux son des bruyantes fontaines,
Qui vont coulent de ces roches houtaines,
Pour arouser nos prés délicieux.