

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gluck's Orchestra, or The Future of Timbre

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Abstract

Gluck has long been celebrated for his operatic reforms. This article examines the role of the orchestra in Gluck's reformed style. I trace how Gluck's audiences learned new audile techniques in order to understand the role of his instrumental accompaniment. This form of listening posed challenges: some eighteenth-century listeners struggled to understand the role of the orchestra. The 'naturalness' so prized in the reformed style was achieved, I argue, by having the orchestra take on a larger role, but one that was rhetorically sublimated to the text. This is naturalised today: from Wagnerian music dramas to contemporary films, orchestral accompaniment often serves as a sonic commentary. The tensions in Gluck's reception, then, point to a seismic shift in the history of listening, showing how audiences came to understand the orchestra as a subtext. Gluck's orchestra offers broader lessons for musicology today, in particular for the burgeoning subfield of timbre studies: the form of 'orchestral listening' required for Gluck's operas is a form of timbral listening *avant la lettre*. While timbre is often invoked in order to escape musicology's traditional disciplinary ideologies, the story of Gluckian operatic drama points to the ways that orchestral listening emerged only through acts of disciplining and restraint.

Keywords: Timbre; Orchestration; Musical subtext; History of listening

'Et l'orchestre! tout cela était dans l'orchestre.'

Hector Berlioz describing *Iphigénie en Tauride* to his sister Nanci¹

Prelude: a remarkable performance

E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story 'Ritter Gluck', written and set in 1809, opens at a Berlin café where the narrator has sat down within earshot of a few mediocre musicians: 'an out of tune harp, a pair of un-tuned violins, a short-winded flautist, and a practical-joking bassoonist'.² They torture an aria and then a waltz while the narrator cringes at their terrible voice leading. A nearby stranger, delighted to find that the narrator is an *Oktavenjäger*

¹ Letter of 13 December 1821, Hugh Macdonald and François Lesure, eds., *Correspondance générale*, vol. 1, 1855–1859 (Paris, 1989), 37.

² 'eine verstimmte Harfe, ein paar nicht gestimmte Violinen, eine lungensüchtige Flöte, und ein spasmaticher Fagott', E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Ritter Gluck', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 11/20 (1809), 305–19, at 305. (I preserve historical spellings in my quotations in this article.) In 1814, the story was republished as the second story in Hoffmann's *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (Bamberg, 1814–15); here, Hoffmann added the subtitle 'Eine

(octave hunter) and music appreciator, strikes up a conversation. The narrator explains to his companion that he had some rudimentary education in piano and figured bass and had learned that ‘nothing creates such a bad effect’ as parallel octaves. ‘Really?’ the stranger responds, and then convinces the motley quintet to perform the overture to Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774). As the musicians play, the stranger enters a trance:

With half-closed eyes and his crossed arms propped on the table, he listened to the Andante, his left foot moving gently to indicate the entrances of the voices; now he raised his head – quickly he cast his eyes around – his left hand, with fingers spread, rested on the table as if he were playing a full chord on the keyboard, the right hand he lifted in the air: he was a Kapellmeister who was giving the orchestra a new tempo – the right hand fell and the Allegro began! ... he breathed deeply into his chest and drops appeared on his forehead; he gave the entrance of the Tutti and other main passages; his right hand never missed the beat, while with his left hand he held a cloth and ran it over his face.³

Hoffmann’s description of the performance casts it as magical sonic metamorphosis of the quintet from wonky chamber ensemble to full orchestra. In a proto-cinematic fashion, we might hear a new, imaginary orchestral soundtrack impinging on the diegesis. The description continues:

How he enlivened the skeleton of the overture – given by that pair of violins – with flesh and colour. I heard the soft, melting lament with which the flute ascends when the storm of violins and basses has died out and the thunder of timpani is silent. I heard the softly pulsing tones of the violoncello and the bassoon, which fill the heart with inexpressible melancholy: the tutti returns like a giant, and the noble and grand unison marches on, the musty lament dying beneath its crushing footsteps ...⁴

From the perspective of instrumental timbre, this is an especially fascinating passage. Hoffmann’s literary staging of this scene mirrors the remarkable performance: just as the narrator hears cellos and basses that are not there, the reader is likewise invited to imagine the original overture. For those of us familiar with this overture, it could conjure either a hazy memory of the piece or a vivid recollection of this passage, perhaps even triggering a mental replay of a favourite recording. For those unfamiliar, a more fictive sonic experience emerges, whereby we make our own decisions – in varying detail – about what storms, thunder, softly pulsing tones and mustiness might sound like. We

Erinnerung aus dem Jahre 1809’. The translation is my own, using as reference R. Murray Schafer’s translation in E. T. A. Hoffmann and *Music* (Toronto, 1975), 31–9.

³ ‘Mit halbgeschlossenen Augen, die verschränkten Arme auf den Tisch gestützt, hörte er das Andante an; den linken Fuss leise bewegend bezeichnete er das Eintreten der Stimmen: jetzt erhob er den Kopf – schnell warf er den Blick umher – die linke Hand, mit auseinandergespreizten Fingern, ruhte auf dem Tische, als greife er einen vollen Accord auf dem Flügel, die rechte Hand hob er in die Höhe: er war ein Kapellmeister, der dem Orchester das Eintreten des andern Tempo’s angiebt – die rechte Hand fällt und das Allegro beginnt! ... tief aus der Brust zieht er den Athem, Tropfen stehen auf der Stirn; er deutet das Eintreten des Tutti und andere Hauptstellen an; seine rechte Hand verlässt den Takt nicht, mit der linken holt er sein Tuch hervor und fährt damit über das Gesicht’, Hoffmann, ‘Ritter Gluck’, 308.

⁴ ‘So belebte er das Skelett, welche jene paar Violinen von der Ouvertüre gaben, mit Fleisch und Farben. Ich hörte die sanfte, schmelzende Klage, womit die Flöte emporsteigt, wenn der Sturm der Violinen und Basse ausgeht hat und der Donner der Pauken schweigt; ich hörte die leise anschlagenden Töne der Violoncelle, des Fagotts, die das Herz mit unnennbarer Wehmuth erfüllen: das Tutti kehrt wieder, wie ein Riese hehr und gross schreibt das Unisono fort, die dumpfe Klage er stirbt unter seinen zermalmenden Tritten ...’, Hoffmann, ‘Ritter Gluck’, 308–9.

might note that the imagined version of the overture is more instrumentally colourful than the sonic reality faced by the two protagonists, inverting the usual association of music's formal properties with ideality and timbral elements with sensuous immediacy. Even from the silence of the printed page, Hoffmann's passage points to the capaciousness of timbre. It demonstrates how talk of sound can so easily blend the invocation of specific details with generalisations, the real with the imaginary. In what follows, I think about what forms the study of timbre has taken and what it might become, while simultaneously following a few threads from Hoffmann's story backwards into the eighteenth century, with hopes of finding some of timbre's future lingering around its origins.

The discipline of timbre

I described timbre as capacious, but perhaps I should have said 'greedy'. No longer that shy secondary parameter languishing on the margins of scholarly research, timbre has assumed a comfortable place in musical studies. In its voracity, it encompasses explorations of individual instruments, the analyses of specific works, and the soundworlds of particular composers and whole genres. Under the banner of timbre, one can study issues of notation, recording technology, the politics of identity, questions of cognition and perception, philosophies of listening and the history of acoustics.⁵

While this represents major disciplinary development – maybe even an emblem of twenty-first-century musicology – one must be careful not to exaggerate the newness of such work: thinkers ranging from Theodor Adorno to Carol Krumhansl have long recognised the beguiling nature of timbre.⁶ What we are now facing is an acceleration and expansion of timbre-focused scholarship. With conferences and the publication of books, edited volumes and special issues devoted to timbre, it is no surprise that scholars have begun to speak of *timbre studies* as an emerging, discrete subfield.⁷ But what are the most important characteristics of this subfield? A cursory review of the scholarship that one might file under this subheading is not bound by musical genre, limited by geography or time period, or unified by vocabulary, let alone by methodology. Indeed, one could argue that the concept of 'timbre studies' recapitulates the thorniness of its subject. In Cornelia Fales's seminal essay, 'The Paradox of Timbre', she observed that 'not only

⁵ See, for example, Isabella van Elferen's special issue on timbre in *Contemporary Music Review* 36/6 (2017); Robert Fink, Melinda Latour and Zachary Wallmark, eds, *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music* (New York, 2018); Nina Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC, 2018); and Emily I. Dolan and Alexander Rehding, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre* (New York: 2021), which won the Ruth A. Solie Award. The community around timbre has also grown through a series of international interdisciplinary conferences: in 2017, Charalampos Saitis, Kai Siedenburg, Stefan Weinzierl and Hans-Joachim Maempel co-organised the Berlin Interdisciplinary Workshop on Timbre (<http://www.timbre2017.tu-berlin.de>); in 2018, Stephen McAdams organised 'Timbre is a Many-Splendored Thing' at McGill University; and in 2020, Asterios Zacharakis, Saitis and Siedenburg co-organised 'Timbre 2020', which was held virtually, but originally planned for Thessaloniki, Greece.

⁶ In 1966, Adorno gave a series of lectures entitled, 'Funktion der Farbe in der Musik' published in *Darmstadt-Dokumente I: Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich, 1999), 263–312. Carol Krumhansl, 'Why is musical timbre so hard to understand?' in *Structure and Perception of Electroacoustic Sound and Music*, ed. Soren Nielzen and Olle Olsson (Amsterdam, 1989), 43–53. Other significant work on timbre in the 1980s grew out of research carried out at IRCAM. A seminar in April 1985 led to the publication of the edited collection *Le timbre: métaphore pour la composition*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Barrière (Paris, 1991). In the 1980s and 1990s, *Contemporary Music Review* had two special issues focused on timbre: 'Music and Psychology: A Mutual Regard' (1987) and 'Timbre in Contemporary Electro-Acoustic Music' 10/2 (1994). The latter grew out of the Third Science and Music Conference held at City University, London, in April 1993.

⁷ See, for example, David Blake, 'Timbre', in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory*, ed. Alexander Rehding and Steven Rings (New York, 2018), 136–59.

does timbre carry the most information about a source and its location ... but of all parameters of music, it also carries the most information about the environment through which the sound has travelled.⁸ Timbre is simultaneously discrete and diffuse. To name timbre is at once to point towards particular, and formerly neglected, features of musical works, but it can also subsume all aspects of sounding and listening. At times it seems that timbre is not a subfield but the totality – and maybe the future – of music studies.

Emerging from all this wide-ranging scholarship is a collection of commonly invoked beliefs about and attitudes towards timbre. An incomplete portion of this list goes something like this:

- Timbre is understudied/neglected.
- Timbre is poorly understood.
- Timbre is hard to define.
- Timbre is defined negatively/badly.
- Timbre lacks a systematic vocabulary/evades description/our language perpetually falls short of capturing timbre.
- Timbre lacks a theory: there are no rules of timbre.⁹

These persistent difficulties define the scope of timbre studies, laying out a programme for future scholarship: timbre needs attention, theory and better vocabulary.¹⁰ But this list, even as it might be seen to inaugurate the field, already demands reconsideration. Music studies are surely reaching the point at which scholars can stop bemoaning the lack of attention to timbre. This is not to say that our timbral work is done, but rather that it is time to formulate a new challenge: while understudied, work on timbre needed little justification beyond its claim to shed light, at long last, on something neglected. As the literature grows increasingly robust, so does the burden to consider the larger goals of such work. After all, timbre is ubiquitous and inevitable: an analyst would surely find timbre when confronting music.

With the recognition that there is now a substantial body of scholarship on timbre, something else becomes apparent: for all of the bemoaning the lack of a systemic vocabulary or rigorous theorisation, scholars still manage to talk a lot about it, and productively too. It seems that the challenges timbre poses are often a boon: it frequently demands specificity, scientific precision and inventive analysis. It seemingly resists abstraction and begs for critical reflection. Much of this critical tussling seems to promise an encounter with music's fundamental material reality. It is this tantalising possibility that has led Nina Eidsheim and Isabella van Elferen almost inexorably towards sound as vibration,

⁸ Cornelia Fales, 'The Paradox of Timbre'. *Ethnomusicology* 46/1 (2002), 56–95, at 57.

⁹ A complete gathering of scholarship that does this is impossible. Examples abound: the introduction to *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone* opens with the observation 'It remains a truism that "we" don't have the analytical tools to describe and interpret timbre in the way that traditional music theory allows musicologists to analyze relations of pitches and rhythms' (2). The website for the 2018 Conference 'Timbre is a Many-Splendored Thing' begins 'Timbre is a powerful structuring and emotional force in all genres of music, be they acoustic or electro-acoustic. It is also one of the least understood and theorized elements of music', <https://www.mcgill.ca/timbre2018/> (accessed 5 November 2018); Isabella van Elferen begins her essay, 'Timbrality: The Vibrant Aesthetics of Tone Color', in *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre: 'Timbre is one of the most important and one of the most elusive aspects of musical aesthetics'* (69–92, at 69).

¹⁰ Lists help mark disciplinary evolution. Jonathan Sterne outlined his now famous 'audiovisual litany' – underexamined beliefs about the differences between hearing and vision – in the introduction to *The Audible Past*. See Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC, 2003), 14–16.

towards a sonic ‘ground zero’.¹¹ Eidsheim has suggested that to approach sound as vibration is to ‘let go of the safety net of assumed certainty that is offered by reliance on musical parameters and concepts’.¹² In other words, timbre promises a place seemingly free from the ideological baggage that clings to more traditional forms of music theory.¹³ This freefall is exhilarating: in forcing analysts to forego or revise the field’s traditional analytical techniques, timbre unsettles networks of disciplinary assumptions and predictions that have served to bolster some musics and people and exclude others. It is hardly a coincidence that talk of timbre often accompanies turns to questions of race and performing bodies, as well as musics outside the Western art music canon.¹⁴ Far from being undertheorised, the very concept of timbre itself attracts an endless range of theorisation and deconstruction, with repeated attempts at definition and redefinition.

Thinking about timbre often involves reflection on what it means to talk about timbre, just as this essay is doing right now. But while much work on timbre embraces timbre’s all-embracingness, engaging in an addictive, reiterative teasing out of timbre’s nuances, other scholars have tried to do away with timbre entirely.¹⁵ Michel Chion found the term unsatisfactory: for him, timbre is an inadequate, catch-all term that merely ‘allows us to identify a sound as emanating from a specific instrument’.¹⁶ He argued that the typical description of sound as being divided into ‘pitch, intensity, duration, and timbre’ is comparable to describing a person ‘by height, weight, age, and general physiognomy (including his or her particular characteristics)’.¹⁷ To speak of timbre is to speak of conventions: Chion asked, ‘What does the expression “a trombone’s timbre” mean when one strikes the instrument rather than blowing through it?’¹⁸ For Chion, the way forward was to cease using the term as a referent to sound sources and instead to focus on ‘sonic materials, morphological criteria, acoustic forms, textures, and profiles’, that is, to speak with precision about all the things that are gathered, higgledy-piggledy, under the umbrella of ‘timbre’.¹⁹ For Chion, timbre falls short of itself: it fails to capture the rich reality of sound. Such dismissals have a century-long history. In his 1885 translation of Helmholtz’s *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen*, Alexander Ellis refused to use the term timbre, declaring

¹¹ Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham, NC, 2015), 10. Isabella van Elferen, *Timbre: Paradox, Materialism, Vibrational Aesthetics* (New York, 2021). In *Sensing Sound*, Eidsheim advocates for an understanding of music as ‘intermaterial vibration’, while Van Elferen draws on Michel Chion’s notion of ‘verberation’.

¹² Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 10.

¹³ Nicholas Mathew has recently argued that this emphasis on ‘vibration’ as a kind of ideology-free space in various corners of music studies is an aesthetic turned into an ontology, and has its roots in avant-garde and experimental music practices. See Mathew, ‘Listening(s) Past: History and the Mediatic Musicology’, *Representations* 154 (2021), 143–55, at 151.

¹⁴ Timbre plays a crucial role in Suzanne Cusick’s now-classic essay on Jessye Norman’s performance of Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und Leben* (‘Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance’, *repercussions* 3/1 (1994), 77–110, esp. 104–8. Nina Eidsheim’s work on race and vocality is also a powerful example of this kind of scholarship. In addition to her recent book, *The Race of Sound*, see her ‘Marian Anderson and “Sonic Blackness” in American Opera’, *American Quarterly* 63/3 (2011), 641–71; (with Schuyler Dunlap), ‘“Where Were You When You Found Out Singer Bobby Caldwell Was White?”: Racialized Timbre as Narrative Arc’, *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre*, 677–99.

¹⁵ See in particular Naomi Waltham-Smith, ‘Deconstruction and Timbre’; Isabella van Elferen, ‘Timbrality: The Vibrant Aesthetics of Tone Color’; and Daniel Villegas Vélez, ‘The Matter of Timbre: Listening, Genealogy, Sound’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre*.

¹⁶ Michel Chion, James A. Steintrager (trans.), ‘Dissolution of the Notion of Timbre’, *Differences* 22/2–3 (2011), 235–9; originally published as ‘Dissolution de la notion du timbre’, *Analyse musicale* 3 (1986), 7–8.

¹⁷ Chion, ‘Dissolution of the Notion of Timbre’, 237.

¹⁸ Chion, ‘Dissolution of the Notion of Timbre’, 238.

¹⁹ Chion, ‘Dissolution of the Notion of Timbre’, 239.

it – in all of its etymological sloppiness – ‘not worth preserving’.²⁰ But timbre is obstinate, and has survived these attacks.

Another approach has been to retain the word but refine and narrow its use, as Kai Siedenburg and Stephen McAdams have recently advocated.²¹ They argue that we should recognise that timbre is a perceptual attribute and should not be merged with ‘sound events’. Like Chion, they emphasise the meaninglessness of talking about the timbre of an instrument: what does it mean, they ask, to speak of ‘the timbre of a bassoon’ when there is in fact ‘no single timbre that *fully* characterizes’ it?²² Again, such arguments have historical precursors: the Romantic philosopher Wilhelm Wackenroder, in an essay on tone, critiqued the numerous eighteenth-century analogies made between tones and colours. In particular he took aim at the notion that single tones could be paired with different hues to create a kind of visual ‘colour music’. Instead, he pushed for a different way of thinking about the relationship between sound and colour: ‘each individual tone of a particular instrument is like the nuance of a colour’.²³ Anticipating Siedenburg and McAdams – but without invoking the term ‘timbre’ – Wackenroder argued that each tone of an instrument had its own specific qualities.

But Wackenroder continued: ‘and just as each colour has a main colour, so too each instrument has only one, completely characteristic tone that it best expresses’.²⁴ In other words, he recognised both the fine-grained individuality of single tones and the coarser commonality of a particular instrument’s gambit. Beyond the conventional, Wackenroder drew on what we might call the *cumulative imaginary* of timbre, that is, the collective memory of particular sounds and shared ideas about sonic character. This might resonate with Van Elferen’s notion of the ‘paradox 0’ of timbre: namely, that it is both real and ideal, a ‘material sound source’ and an ‘immaterial percept’.²⁵ In this gap, Van Elferen finds a host of ontological difficulties: in her words, timbre is ‘ever-present but ever-evolving, frustratingly opaque and fascinatingly excessive ... Timbre does not just entangle and invert the relations between index and icon, but it also implicates listening subjectivities in the entwinement of its ongoing sonic and sensory becoming’.²⁶ Timbre leads Van Elferen to the precipice of the Burkean sublime. As elegant as her analysis is, it risks missing two seemingly mundane points. Wackenroder’s expansive conception of tone colour resists any material/immaterial binary. Rather, in his formulation, timbre exists along a spectrum of specificity: from that of a timbre of a single tone, to the timbre of a particular instrument, to that of a species of instrument, and finally to the timbre of instrument families. This is to say, one might discover ‘an unknowable void’ between timbre’s reality and ideality, but one could also find a socially conditioned process of generalisation.²⁷ And these timbral generalisations are ubiquitous, meaningful, and fuel the broader discourse about music, from orchestration treatises to romantic fiction.

²⁰ Hermann von Helmholtz, *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik* (Braunschweig, 1863), trans. A. Ellis as *On the Sensations of Tone* (London, 1885), 24n.

²¹ Kai Siedenburg and Stephen McAdams, ‘Four Distinctions for the Auditory “Wastebasket” of Timbre’, *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017), art. 1747.

²² Siedenburg and McAdams, ‘Four Distinctions for the Auditory “Wastebasket” of Timbre’, 3.

²³ ‘Jeder einzelne Ton eines besondern Instrumentes ist wie die Nuance einer Farbe’, Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, ‘Die Töne’, in W. H. Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe* (Heidelberg, 1967), 246.

²⁴ ‘und so wie jede Farbe eine Hauptfarbe hat, so hat auch jedes Instrument einen einzigen, ganz eigentümlichen Ton, der es am meisten und besten ausdrückt’, Wackenroder and Tieck, ‘Die Töne’, 246.

²⁵ Van Elferen, *Timbre*, 135.

²⁶ Van Elferen, *Timbre*, 93.

²⁷ Van Elferen, *Timbre*, 131.

Second, there is an important historical point that neither Chion's nor Van Elferen's analyses take into account: generalisability and conventionality are the *preconditions of the modern concept of timbre*. That is to say, the very concept of timbre first entered musical discourse as a way to talk about sound in general, distinct from the specific sonic experience of a particular and singular performance. When Rousseau defined timbre in the *Encyclopédie*, he drew on this power of generality, describing timbre as sound's 'harshness or softness, its dullness or brightness. Soft sounds, like those of a flute, ordinarily have little harshness; bright sounds are often harsh, like those of the *vielle* or the oboe.'²⁸ Though it is easy to decry 'inadequate' and imprecise language when discussing timbre, the ability to communicate about timbre in loose and evocative ways is one source of its power. Timbre enters discourse as a name for the immediacies of sonic experience, and the very process of naming it allows us to speak, perhaps paradoxically, in generalities about those immediacies.

The future of timbre studies would surely do well to preserve the complexity of the very term 'timbre': its messiness cannot be rationalised away. And if part of the thrill of turning to timbre has been its liberatory potential – its ability to wrest scholarly attention away from the traditional analytical methods and their disciplining powers – then we should recognise that the eagerness to be careful and precise about what timbre might mean is itself also a disciplining move.

What is required, however, is more than welcoming timbral messiness and exercising disciplinary caution: to embrace timbre's history must also mean taking seriously the ways in which timbre has been brushed aside, considered secondary, and even irrelevant. This means moving beyond the almost gleeful unmasking and rediscovery that permeates a study such as my own work, *The Orchestral Revolution*. In that book, timbre lurked everywhere: in the birth of aesthetic discourse about music, in the orchestra, in the ears of Joseph Haydn's London audiences.²⁹ Timbre appeared to be waiting patiently to be re-discovered, to be revealed in all its splendour. But what if timbre was doing just fine in the shadows? What if, in fact, that shadowy position bestows it with particular abilities?

To think about timbre in a historically nuanced way is to confront its occasional absence as a directly nameable concept. In what follows, I think about the timbral lessons offered by Gluck in the eighteenth century, exploring the ways in which his audiences had to learn new audile techniques to understand the relationship between the sung drama and the instrumental accompaniment of his operas. But neither Gluck nor his critics invoked the term 'timbre' (or anything similar) and indeed, would likely have been puzzled by any attempt to isolate timbre as a distinct parameter.

The birth of orchestral listening

Let's return to Hoffmann and 'Ritter Gluck'. The story, one of Hoffmann's earliest, helped establish his writing career. In early 1809, he had sent it to Johann Friedrich Rochlitz, then editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, claiming it to be 'based on a real occurrence in Berlin' and hoping that it might be considered for publication.³⁰ Eric Schneemann has tied the story's composition to performances of Gluck's music in German translation in 1808 (*Orfeo ed Euridice*) and 1809 (*Iphigénie en Aulide*) in French-occupied Berlin.³¹ The

²⁸ 'cette qualité du son par laquelle il est aigre ou doux, sourd ou éclatant. Les sons doux ont ordinairement peu d'éclat comme de la flûte; les sons éclatants sont sujets à l'aigreur, comme les sons de la vielle ou du haut-bois', Rousseau, 'Tymbre', in Denis Diderot and Jean Rond D'Alembert, eds, *Encyclopédie*, vol. XVI (1761), 775.

²⁹ Emily I. Dolan, *The Orchestral Revolution: Haydn and the Technologies of Timbre* (Cambridge, 2013).

³⁰ *Selected Letters of E. T. A. Hoffmann*, trans. Johanna C. Sahlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 144.

³¹ See Eric Schneemann, 'The Berlin Premiere of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* in 1809: An Opera to Restore the Monarchy and the Nation', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 14/2 (2021), 140–56.

brief tale has many of the hallmarks of Hoffmann's style: it is at once a fantastical story and a critique of musical culture, replete with scintillating descriptions of actual music making. After the two protagonists listen to the magical performance of Gluck's overture, they continue to talk about musical life until the stranger suddenly leaves, overwhelmed by his own descriptions of his hallucinatory musical experiences. Several months pass and the narrator once again encounters the stranger, who takes him to his richly appointed apartment and performs the overture to Gluck's *Armide* from a blank score. The performance is exquisite:

And now he played the majestic *Tempo di Marcia* with which the overture begins, splendidly and masterfully, with full, resonant chords, almost completely faithful to the original – but the *allegro* was only braided with Gluck's main idea. He brought in so many new, ingenious twists that my astonishment grew more and more. His modulations were exceptionally striking without becoming garish; and he knew how to join up the simple principal ideas with tuneful melismas, which were given new, rejuvenated forms each time they appeared. His face glowed; his eyebrows drew together as if an uncontrollable passion wanted to break free from him. Then his eyes swam with tears of deep melancholy. From time to time, when both his hands were occupied with the embellishments, he sang the theme with a pleasant tenor voice. He also knew how to use it to imitate, in a very special way, the muffled tones of the timpani.³²

Afterwards the narrator, transfixed and trembling, asks who this magnificent stranger is; after changing into lavish court dress, he solemnly gives his impossible reply: 'Ich bin der Ritter Gluck!'³³

The combination of the story's brevity and its baffling plot calls out for scholarly intervention. Unsurprisingly, 'Ritter Gluck' has been analysed and interpreted to wildly different ends:³⁴ Hoffmann's Gluck has been seen as a madman, a crazed ghost, a sign of excess, a manifestation of Hoffmann's own compositional anxieties and a reincarnation of Rameau's nephew.³⁵ Certainly the question of madness is hard to escape: after hearing

³² 'und nun spielte er herrlich und meisterhaft, mit vollgriffigen Accorden, das majestätische Tempo di Marcia, womit die Ouvertüre anhebt, fast ganz dem Original getreu: aber das Allegro war nur mit Glucks Hauptgedanken durchflochten. Er brachte so viele neue, geniale Wendungen hinein, dass mein Erstaunen immer wuchs. Vorzüglich waren seine Modulationen frappant, ohne grell zu werden, und er wusste den einfachen Hauptgedanken so viele melodiose Melismen anzureihen, dass jene immer in neuer, verjüngter Gestalt wiederzukehren schienen. Sein Gesicht glühte; bald zogen sich die Augenbrauen zusammen und ein lang verhaltener Zorn wollte gewaltig losbrechen, bald schwamm das Auge in Thränen tiefer Wehmuth. Zuweilen sang er, wenn beyde Hände in künstlichen Melismen arbeiteten, das Thema mit einer angenehmen Tenorstimme; dann wusste er, auf ganz besondere Weise, mit der Stimme den dumpfen Ton der anschlagenden Pauke nachzuahmen', Hoffmann, 'Ritter Gluck', 317–18.

³³ Hoffmann, 'Ritter Gluck', 319.

³⁴ Ricarda Schmidt, 'Heroes and Villains in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Ritter Gluck"', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 84/3 (2002), 49–66. Schmidt is one of the few scholars to have drawn a connection between Gluck's portrait and Hoffmann's description of Gluck in the story.

³⁵ See, for example, Ulrich Weisstein, 'Le Neveu de Gluck?: E. T. A. Hoffmanns "Errerung Aus Dem Jahre 1809" im Spiegel von Diderots Dialog', in *Europa Provincia Mundi: Essays in Comparative Literature and European Studies Offered to Hugo Dyerinck*, ed. Joep Leersen and Karl Ulrich Syndram (Amsterdam, 1991), 495–518; Günter Oesterle, 'Dissonanz und Effekt in der Romantischer Kunst: E. T. A. Hoffmanns "Ritter Gluck"', *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Jahrbuch* I (1992), 58–79; John Neubauer, 'Mimeticism and Intertextuality in "Ritter Gluck"', in *Narrative Ironies*, ed. A. Prier and Gerald Gillespie (Amsterdam, 1997), 239–51; Christa Karoli, 'Ritter Gluck: Hoffmanns erstes Fantasiestück', *Mitteilungen der E. T. A. Hoffmann Gesellschaft* 14/1 (1968), 1–17. Alexander Rehding makes a marvellous analogy between Gluck and Elvis in *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 2009), 111.

that the narrator had given up composing music after a few feeble attempts, the stranger chides him and launches into a lengthy, rambling description of the allure of melody and the intoxication of music. ‘Many are those who dream away the dream of this dream-world – dissolving into dreams’, the stranger proclaims, continuing:

but only a few, awakened from dreams, ascend and stride through the realm of dreams – they come to the truth – the highest moment is here: contact with the eternal, the unspeakable! – Behold the sun; she is the triad from which the chords, like stars, shoot down and spin threads of fire around you.³⁶

The stranger’s poetic declarations share the same synaesthetic blending of music, landscape, nature and fiery light that characterises the climactic moments in many of Hoffmann’s stories. We might turn to the final appearance of the mysterious Professor X at the end of ‘Automata’: ‘in every direction crystal tones came scintillating out of the dark bushes and trees, and, streaming through the air like flame, united in a wondrous concert, penetrating the inmost heart’.³⁷ Or the moment in ‘The Golden Pot’ when the student Anselmus peers into a strange gemstone:

O wonder! The stone emitted a cluster of rays; and the rays wove themselves together into a clear gleaming crystal mirror; in which, with many windings ... the three gold-green snakes were dancing and bounding. And when their tapering forms, glittering with a thousand sparkles, touched each other, there issued from them glorious tones, as of crystal bells.³⁸

Such passages helped to shape the soundscape of the romantic imagination, teetering on the precipice between exalted inspiration and a chasm of insanity.³⁹

And yet, for all the romantic inventiveness of ‘Ritter Gluck’, perhaps the most striking aspect of the story is neither the fantastical imagery nor the mad ravings, but rather its cogent realism. Indeed, a reader familiar with eighteenth-century portraiture might have guessed the stranger’s identity long before the uncanny revelation that concludes the story: his appearance during the café performance – gazing upwards, left hand spread on imaginary keys, right hand raised – mirrors the famous portrait of Gluck painted by Joseph Duplessis in 1775, depicting Gluck in a moment of inspiration at his clavichord (Figure 1). Friedrich Reichardt, Hoffmann’s friend and teacher, and a great supporter of Gluck, owned a copy of this portrait, which he had requested after he visited Gluck at his country house in Perchtoldsdorf. The stranger’s performance from an empty score

³⁶ ‘aber nur wenige, erweckt aus dem Traume, steigen empor und schreiten durch das Reich der Träume – sie kommen zur Wahrheit – der höchste Moment ist da: die Berührung mit dem Ewigen, Unaussprechlichen! – Schaut die Sonne an; sie ist der Dreyklang, aus dem die Accorde, Sternen gleich, herabschiessen und euch mit Feuerfaden umspinnen’, Hoffmann, ‘Ritter Gluck’, 311.

³⁷ ‘überall flimmerten krystalline Klänge aus den dunklen Büschen und Bäumen empor uns strömten vereinigt im wundervollen Konzert wie Feuerflammen durch die Luft ins Innerste des Gemüts eindringend’, E. T. A. Hoffmann, ‘Die Automate’, in *Die Serapions-Brüder*, ed. Wulf Segebrecht (Frankfurt, 2001), 396–426, at 425.

³⁸ ‘Der Student Anselmus schaute hin und o Wunder! Der Stein warf wie aus einem brennenden Fokus Strahlen rings herum, und die Strahlen verspannen sich zum hellen leuchtenden Krystallspiegel, in dem in mancherlei Windungen bald einander fliehend, bald sich in einander schlingend die drei goldgrünen Schlänglein tanzten und hüpfen, und wenn die schlanken in tausend Funken blitzenden Leiber sich berührten, da erklangen herrliche Akkorde wie Krystallglocken’, Hoffmann, ‘Der Goldene Topf’, in *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier: Blätter aus dem Tagebuche eines reisenden Enthusiasten*, Werke in Einzelausgaben (Berlin, 1976), 229–321, at 255–6.

³⁹ On the romantic values surrounding ethereal sounds, see Dolan, ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Ethereal Technologies of “Nature Music”’, *Eighteenth-Century Music* 5/1 (2008), 7–26; and Dolan and Patteson, ‘Ethereal Timbres’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre*, 183–204.



Figure 1. Portrait of Gluck, by Joseph-Siffrède Duplessis (1775). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, (© KHM-Museumsverband).

– which has an unsettling effect in the story – likewise echoes accounts of Gluck performing music from memory. Famously, Charles Burney visited Gluck in 1772, where Gluck good-humouredly performed large chunks of *Alceste*, *Paride ed Elena* and *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Burney reported:

This last [i.e., *Iphigénie*], though he had not as yet committed a note of it to paper, was so well digested in his head, and his retention so wonderful, that he sang it nearly from the beginning to the end, with as much readiness as if he had had a fair score before him.⁴⁰

Even more compelling is Reichardt's own description of his visit to Gluck, which he published four years after Hoffmann's story, also in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. His

⁴⁰ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces* (London, 1775), 265.

account, written in the third person, describes being entertained by Gluck at the keyboard; it echoes Hoffmann's scene, right down to the verbal imitations of instruments:

As soon as coffee was taken and a short walk was made, Gluck actually sat down at the piano and sang several of those original compositions, with a weak, hoarse voice and palsied tongue, accompanying himself with single chords – to the great delight of Reichardt, who received permission from the master to write down an ode from his dictation. Several times during the songs from *Hermannsschlacht* Gluck imitated the sounds of horns and the cries of the swordsmen from behind their shields; once he interrupted himself to say that he must invent his own instrument for the song.⁴¹

Given the similarities in their descriptions and given that Hoffmann must have seen Reichardt's copy of the portrait, it seems impossible that Reichardt had not described this evening to Hoffmann. (Of course, it is equally possible that Reichardt's own narration of the event was also coloured by Hoffmann's rendering of Gluck in his story.) Indeed, this realism supports a more sober interpretation of the story: Ricarda Schmidt's sensitive analysis of the tale stresses the ways in which Hoffmann engaged with the musical criticism of his time. In particular, she argues that the initial exchange between the narrator and Gluck – the exchange about parallel octaves – was a reference to Johann Nikolaus Forkel's feisty criticisms of Gluck's music that had circulated since the late 1770s.⁴² Forkel had published a withering critique of Gluck in his *Musikalische-kritische Bibliothek* in 1778, as part of a larger review of Friedrich Justus Riedel's 1775 *Ueber die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck*. Riedel's publication included both the earliest known biography of Gluck, as well as translations of some of the prolific French-language writing growing out of the so-called wars of the Gluckists and the Piccinnists.⁴³

German studies scholar Francien Markx has delved even more deeply into the story's realism.⁴⁴ She notes, for example, that the opening setting of 'Ritter Gluck' – the Berlin café with the bawdy musicians – takes direct aim at Forkel's biting remark that Gluck's music 'resembl[ed] the musical style of our tavern-virtuosos', a style that was at once 'simple enough, but at the same time quite disgusting'.⁴⁵ Markx's reading focuses on the distinction between Forkel's insistence on 'compliance with "objective" compositional rules' and a form of emotional evaluation that originated in the listener's heart. Forkel, in her reading, ignored the *meaning* of the music in favour of a pedantic obsession with compositional correctness.⁴⁶ But Forkel and Hoffmann are divided by more than their

⁴¹ 'Sobald der Kaffee genommen, und ein kleiner Spaziergang gemacht worden war, setzte sich Gluck auch wirklich an den Flügel, und sang mit schwacher und rauher Stimme und gelähmter Zunge, such mit einzelnen Accorden begleitend, mehrere jener originellen Compositionen zu Reichardts grossem Entzücken, der von dem Meister auch die Erlaubnis erhielt, eine Ode nach seinem Vortrage aufzuschreiben. Zwischen den Gesängen aus der Hermannsschlacht ahmte Gluck mehrmalen den Hörnerklang und den Ruf der Fechtenden hinter ihren Schilden nach; einmal unterbrach er sich auch, um zu sagen, dass er zu dem Gesange noch erst ein eignes Instrument erfinden müsse', 'Bruchstücke aus Reichardts Autobiographie', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 15 (1813), 665–74, at 670.

⁴² Schmidt, 'Heroes and Villains in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Ritter Gluck"', 63.

⁴³ Friedrich Justus Riedel, *Ueber die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck* (Vienna, 1775). On the *querelle*, see Mark Darlow, *Dissonance in the Republic of Letters: The Querelle des Gluckistes et des Piccinnistes* (London, 2013).

⁴⁴ Francien Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera* (Leiden, 2016), 89ff.

⁴⁵ 'Kurz, die Gluckische Gattung von edler Einfalt, gleicht dem Styl unserer Schenken-Virtuosos, der zwar Einfalt genug, aber auch zugleich viel eckelhaftes in sich hat', Johann Nikolaus Forkel, 'Ueber die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck, verschiedene Schriften gesammelt und herausgegeben von Friedrich Just. Riedel', *Musikalisch-Kritische Bibliothek* I (1788), 53–210, at 127, quoted in Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann*, 89.

⁴⁶ Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann*, 92.

different tastes or their understanding of compositional rules. Forkel's criticisms and Hoffmann's fictionalised rebuttal highlight different ways of listening, ways that go beyond opposing rational and emotional approaches to music, and hinge on the basic perception of musical sound, especially orchestral sound. Hoffmann's story is a belated contribution to eighteenth-century debates about Gluck and the role of the orchestra in his operas. To delve into these debates with an ear to the orchestra is to begin to understand how certain forms of what we might call 'orchestral listening' came into being.

What is 'orchestral listening'? I mean a form of listening that understands the orchestra as, among other things, providing essential information about the staged drama. We could also call this timbral listening *avant la lettre*, even though the notion of 'timbral listening' is one not often invoked in analyses of eighteenth-century European music. Indeed, it is all too easy to imagine that timbral listening emerges only elsewhere: in the music of Tuva, in popular musics, in urban soundscapes, in late twentieth-century art music, or in contemporary ASMR, and that the term implies a kind of listening entirely different from the listening demanded by Enlightenment-era art music.⁴⁷ But there are many ways of attending to timbre, and some of those ways have become so naturalised as to no longer register as timbral listening. I argue that Gluckian orchestral listening is one such listening practice.⁴⁸

Orchestral listening was what Forkel emphatically did not do. This does not mean that Forkel ignored Gluck's instrumentation. Rather, Forkel was explicitly unimpressed with Gluck's handling of his instruments, which he illustrated with special attention to the overture to *Iphigénie en Aulide*. The unison (Example 1) that had cried out so majestically for Hoffmann's narrator was too insignificant a moment for Forkel to warrant such grand sonic treatment:

We find nothing praiseworthy in bringing in the instruments suddenly on one note and then having them rise to the octave above this note. A passage in which all the instruments sound in unison must have a certain degree of importance; its content must be so constructed that it merits performance by all instruments in unison, and to be given significance by the intrinsic splendour and power. If it has no particularly important and interesting content, if its content is not so focused and concentrated that it communicates to us a wholly significant musical thought in a short space, then it is inappropriate to give it to all instruments in unison, thereby endowing it with an unearned splendour ... In Herr Gluck's *all'unisono* passage, however, we find neither magnificence nor any other possible form of beauty to justify it and merit it being given the marked prominence of performance by all voices in unison.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See, for example, Theodore Levin and Valentina Süzükei, 'Listening the Tuvan Way', from *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond* (Bloomington, 2019), 45–72; Kaija Saariaho, 'Timbre and Harmony: Interpolations of Timbral Structures', *Contemporary Music Review* 2/1 (1987), 93–133; Cornelia Fales, 'Hearing Timbre: Perceptual Learning among Early Bay Area Ravers', in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone*, 21–42; Giulia Accornero, 'What Does ASMR Sound Like? Composing the Proxemic Intimate Zone in Contemporary Music', *Contemporary Music Review* 41/4 (2022), 337–57.

⁴⁸ In making an argument about Gluck and orchestral listening, I am not attempting to 'reclaim' timbre and timbral listening for Western art music. Gluck offers insight into the origin for one particular audile technique, one that is historically and culturally bounded no more and no less than the myriad other forms of timbral listening that accompany other musics.

⁴⁹ 'da wir aber dort noch nichts von der Melodiengattung und vom Styl des Herrn Ritters insbesondere anmerkt haben, so verdient hier die eigene Art und Weise, Instrumente auf Eine Note zu stürzen, und sie dann bis zur Octave dieser Note zu erheben, ausgezeichnet zu werden. Ein Satz, der von allen Instrumenten im Einklang gemacht werden soll, muß eine gewisse Art von Bedeutung haben; er muß seinem Inhalt nach so beschaffen seyn, daß er verdient, von allen Instrumenten im Einklang vorgetragen, und durch die daher entstehende Pracht und Stärke wichtig gemacht zu werden. Hat er keinen besonders wichtigen und interessanten Inhalt,

Grave

Example 1. Overture to *Iphigénie en Aulide*, bb. 19–24.

Forkel did not actually accuse Gluck of breaking the rules of voice leading: rather, his criticism had much more to do with the appropriateness of the grand unison. Unlike later criticisms of orchestration that focused more explicitly on questions of noise or instrumental abuse (that is, misusing the characters of instruments), this was not Forkel's primary concern. Rather, he listened for worthy 'musical thoughts' that could then be made important and highlighted through their instrumental treatment. In other words, for Forkel, the splendour and significance must lie somewhere in the music that is independent of the orchestra; orchestral sound itself does not produce its own dramatic logic. Forkel's emphasis on the importance of abstract musical logic here is not surprising, and indeed

... ist er in seiner Modulation nicht so zusammengedrängt, und concentirt, daß er uns ganze bedeutende musikalische Phrase in einem kurzen Satze darstellt, so ist es eben so ungereimt, ihn von allen Instrumenten im Einklang vortragen zu lassen, und ihm dadurch einen unverdienten Glanz beizulegen ... In dem *all'Unisono* des Herrn von Gluck aber finden wir weder Pracht noch irgend eine andere Gattung von Schönheit, wodurch es gerechtfertigt werden, und verdienen könnte, auszeichnend wichtig von allen Stimmen im Einklang vorgetragen zu werden', Forkel, 'Ueber die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck', *Musikalisch-Kritische Bibliothek* I, 131–2, quoted and translated in Patricia Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait in Letters and Documents* (Oxford, 1995), 53–173, at 117.

echoes his arguments about J. S. Bach's lessons in structure and counterpoint he learned from arranging Vivaldi's concertos.⁵⁰

Within Hoffmann's story, by contrast, the truest form of the music involves the full orchestra: the little café ensemble that performs cannot offer more than a 'pale sketch' and its sounds are to be understood as striving for full orchestral power. As noted above, for Hoffmann, the idealisation of music does not imply a separation or abstraction from the specificities of the instruments that produce it, but rather demands the imaginative restoration of the original orchestration.

Hoffmann's story points to the ways in which the orchestra was not simply an integral part of the basic identity of Gluck's music, but also performed an essential dramatic role. The overture to *Iphigénie en Aulide*, with its atmosphere of 'painful, gnawing heart-sorrow', has long been celebrated for foreshadowing the drama to follow. But this dramatic role goes deeper and Gluck's music requires that we not only attend to instrumental colour, but also connect the sounds of the orchestra to the singing characters' inner emotional worlds. This is hardly unusual to us today: from Wagnerian music dramas to contemporary film, orchestral accompaniments often serve as sonic subtexts, providing additional layers of information about the characters we see.

In many ways, I am on familiar ground in opera studies: a number of scholars have attended to the changing role of the orchestra in Enlightenment-era operas. David Charlton has written on the 'envoicing' of instruments on the Parisian stage, which allowed, in his words, 'the metaphorical attribution of human qualities to the orchestra'.⁵¹ James Johnson has traced the emergence of new, emotionally charged listening habits – closely tied to the music of Gluck – whereby 'orchestral harmonies' were heard as 'legitimately expressive'.⁵² And Gary Tomlinson has argued that the formation of new operatic subjectivities in this period made possible the 'new representational power' of the orchestra.⁵³

My argument is not that Gluck singlehandedly revolutionised operatic accompaniment: he is but one protagonist in a story that fills the eighteenth century. But attending closely not only to the enthusiasms but also to the criticisms induced by Gluck's music lays bare something of the process of how the orchestra became a dramatic tool. For many of Gluck's contemporaries, hearing the power of the orchestra as an expressive tool for the revelation of internal emotional states was neither obvious nor straightforward. Rather, orchestral listening was a skill that was learned – and sometimes resisted.

Gluck's instrumental mindset

In Gluck's reception, from the eighteenth century and onward, we find an illusory schism between Gluck the operatic reformer and Gluck the orchestral innovator. Gluck's masterful treatment of the orchestra – and of instruments more generally – is something that has been noted and often celebrated since the eighteenth century. Stories about

⁵⁰ See Forkel, *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig, 1802), in particular chapter 5, in which he describes Bach's broader development as a composer. Forkel argues that part of the benefit of studying and arranging Vivaldi was also that it 'taught [Bach] to think musically' precisely because it could no longer 'expect his thoughts to come from his fingers'. ('Die Umänderung der für die Violine eingerichteten, dem Clavier aber nicht angemessenen Gedanken und Passagen, lehrte ihn auch musikalisch denken, so daß er nach vollbrachter Arbeit seine Gedanken nicht mehr von seinen Fingern zu erwarten brauche, sondern sie schon aus eigener Fantasie nehmen konnte', p. 24).

⁵¹ David Charlton, 'Envoicing the Orchestra: Enlightenment Metaphors in Theory and Practice', *French Opera, 1730-1830: Meaning and Media* (Aldershot, 2000), section V, 1-32, at 18.

⁵² James Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1995), 82.

⁵³ Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, 1999), 52.

instruments have long played an important role in his biography. Indeed, there is a striking tendency towards what we might call 'pan-instrumentalism' in accounts of Gluck. That is, rather than stressing Gluck's virtuosity on one or two instruments, writers emphasise Gluck's knowledge and mastery of a wide range of instruments, even unusual ones. (These stories of Gluck echo other tales of multi-handed instrumental proficiency that was characteristic of Bohemia.⁵⁴) Carpani, in *Le Haydine*, tells of Sammartini's 'practical knowledge of all of the instruments', which Gluck learned when he studied with Sammartini in Milan.⁵⁵ When in London in 1746, Gluck gave concerts on 'twenty-six drinking glasses', an instrument that was advertised as being 'of his own invention' and upon which he could perform 'whatever may be done on a violin or harpsichord'.⁵⁶ The painter Johann Christian von Mannlich recorded a number of instrumental-focused stories of Gluck, which Gluck reportedly narrated to him when they met in Paris in 1774. For example, he recounts one of Gluck's earliest musical excursions, in which the young composer set out for Vienna with a small amount of money and a Jew's harp. Gluck, the story goes, made his way through the countryside, playing tunes in exchange for bread, cheese and eggs, which he then exchanged for accommodation; using this musically driven micro-economy, he blissfully made his way to Vienna.⁵⁷ (The story is confusing and ultimately improbable: for starters, it is thought that Gluck first set out for Prague, not Vienna.⁵⁸) Mannlich later describes the rehearsals for *Iphigénie en Aulide*, during which Gluck 'ran about like one possessed, from one end of the orchestra to the other'. This frantic engagement with the orchestra terrified the musicians but also turned comical: 'Gluck was downstage, in the thick of things, listening to each instrument, when the basses made a mistake. He turned his head so rapidly in their direction that his old round wig could not follow the swift movement; it froze and fell to the ground.'⁵⁹ Mannlich's Gluck is as fiery and possessed by orchestral sound as the Gluck of Hoffmann's imagination. In 1766, a well-known article in the *Wienerisches Diarium* – likely by Dittersdorf – described Gluck as 'a man truly created for the orchestra'.⁶⁰

Starting in the late eighteenth century, writers on music often invoked Gluck and his treatment of the orchestra when criticising newer composers: Gluck's operas served as models of orchestral elegance to be emulated; they stood in contrast to newer operas that overused wind instruments and special sonic effects. The composer Johann Wessely, for example, published a lengthy article in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* bemoaning the misguided approaches to instrumental writing that he saw proliferating in contemporary composition:

⁵⁴ See Mannlich, 'Histoire de ma vie', MS in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Codex Gallicus 616–19; excerpted and trans. in Henriette Weiss von Trostburg, 'Mémoires sur la musique à Paris à la fin du règne de Louis XV', *La revue musicale* 15 (1934), 260–1; quoted in Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 2. Charles Burney also marvelled at the musicality of Bohemians. See Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, 5.

⁵⁵ 'il Sammartini aveva pratica cognizione di tutti gli strumenti', Giuseppe Carpani, *Le Haydine, ovvero lettere su la vita e le opere del celebre maestro Giuseppe Haydn* (Milan, 1812), 59. It is unclear the extent to which Gluck studied with Sammartini.

⁵⁶ These concerts were advertised in the *General Advertiser* (31 March 1746, fol. 2, and 23 April 1746, fol. 1)

⁵⁷ Mannlich, 'Histoire de ma vie', quoted in Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 3.

⁵⁸ See Patricia Howard, 'The Wandering Minstrel: An Eighteenth-Century Fiction?' *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 13/1 (2000), 41–52.

⁵⁹ Mannlich, 'Histoire de ma vie', quoted in Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 111.

⁶⁰ 'Von dem wienerischen Geschmack in der Musik', *Wienerisches Diarium* (18 October 1766), quoted in Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 76. On the article's authorship, see Daniel Heartz, 'Ditters, Gluck und der Artikel "Von dem wienerischen Geschmack in der Musik" (1766)', *Gluck-Studien* 1 (1989), 78–80.

In the work of our new masters all the recitatives, even in insignificant moments, are accompanied by wind instruments of all kinds. Only Gluck alone has, by and large, been able to remain unsullied by this musical extravagance. He who first showed us the higher effects of theatre music and also knew how to find a middle road in this. A pair of oboes, a flute, yes, sometimes even only a horn, accompanied the most important places and nevertheless produced the most powerful effect.⁶¹

Hoffmann himself would make similar arguments about the undeniable power of the orchestra and its need for proper deployment. In the more sober realm of straightforward music criticism, his language even began to echo Forkel's:

Who would disagree that in our wealth of instruments, in their combined effects, there lies a powerful, irresistible magic, and that the adornment of that glittering wealth becomes no genre of music better than that of heroic and tragic opera? It moved the immortal Gluck to enlarge the orchestra with instruments that at that time had never been heard in the theatre. But this composer's music also shows that richer instrumentation can be effective only when it renders more prominent the genuinely vigorous, inner harmonic structure, and when the use of various instruments according to their individual qualities proceeds from the deepest dramatic motives.⁶²

Praise of Gluck's orchestra continued through the nineteenth century. Berlioz's orchestration treatise (1844) is peppered with examples drawn from Gluck's scores: he turned to Gluck's operas to illuminate tremolos, uses of mutes, grace notes, the power of the viola and the oboe, and effective uses of the piccolo and even the cymbal. 'Sublime' is often Berlioz's adjective of choice.

Gluck also played a central role in Berlioz's short story 'Euphonia', which was set in the year 2344 and described events in the eponymous musically organised German town and inspired, in part, by Berlioz's 1843 visit to the Leipzig Conservatory and his experience of its novel pedagogical programmes.⁶³ The great annual event in Euphonia is the Gluck Festival, which involved performances of his operas and culminated in the crowning of Gluck's statue. Though descriptions of fantastical twenty-fourth-century instrumentation involving hundreds of impeccably trained musicians are peppered throughout the story, Berlioz does not invoke Gluck's music for its spectacular orchestration or instrumental effects. Rather, it represents elegance and restraint. Part of the action of the story centres on a talented singer, Nadira, who arrives in the city to beg for a special place in the Gluck Festival; she is initially turned down because of her overly ornamented singing style ('Madam ... in the Gluck Festival, florid singing is not allowed')⁶⁴. After hearing a performance of Gluck's *Alceste* – a favourite work of Berlioz – Nadira is moved to tear

⁶¹ 'In dem Werken unsrer neuern Meister hingegen sind öfters, bey den unbedeutendsten Gelegenheiten, ganze Recitative von Blasinstrumenten aller Art begleitet. Nur Gluck allein hat sich grösstentheils von dieser musikalischen Verschwendung rein zu erhalten gewusst. Er der uns zuerst die höhern Wirkungen der theatralischen Musik zeigte, hat auch hierin eine weise Mittelstrasse zu finden gewusst. Ein Paar Hoboen, eine Flöte, ja zuweilen sogar nur ein Horn, begleiten die wichtigsten Stellen, und bringen demungeachtet die mächtigste Wirkung hervor', Johann Wessely, 'Kritische Bemerkungen über verschiedene Theile der Tonkunst: Über den Missbrauch der Blasinstrumente', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 2 (1799), 193–7, at 195.

⁶² E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Briefe über Tonkunst in Berlin', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 17 (11 January 1815), 17–27, at 24; this is a slightly modified version of Charlton's translation in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Musical Writings*, 394.

⁶³ On the structures of the Leipzig Conservatory, see Joshua Navon, 'The Making of Modern Musical Expertise: German Conservatories and Music Education, 1843–1933' (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2019).

⁶⁴ Hector Berlioz, *Evenings with the Orchestra*, trans. Jacques Barzun (Chicago, 1999), 278.

off the gems adorning her hair, trample them, and sing Alceste's celebrated aria 'Ah, divinités implacables!' Ornamentation – both physical and musical – gives way to natural, passionate and beautiful expression. It is at once a performance of the noble power of simplicity, which Nadira has finally understood, and a call for forgiveness for her previous offences of musical excess. Indeed, we might imagine Gluck as one of those implacable gods to whom Nadira directs her prayer: she calls for the death of her own excess.

Lingering on this story risks perpetuating an overemphasis on Berlioz's reception and perception of Gluck that Mark Everist has recently sought to correct.⁶⁵ But I dwell on 'Euphonia' here because, when contrasted with Berlioz's orchestration treatise, it highlights two sides of Gluck and his legacy that have grown farther and farther apart in accounts of the composer: Gluck the celebrated orchestral revolutionary, who (tastefully) expanded the role of the orchestra in opera, and Gluck the operatic reformer, who banished artifice from opera and restored the importance of the poetry, making drama more natural, closer to human speech, unfettered by unnecessary machines (this paradoxical blending of expansion and restraint is the essence of the imaginary city of 'Euphonia', with its massive musical forces that nevertheless perform with the utmost taste). Here, I would like to look more closely at the delicate relationship between revolution and reform.⁶⁶

The familiar story of reform

Nadira's trampling of her jewellery harkens back to the language with which Gluck and Calzabigi described their operatic reforms. For them, reform involved a return to simplicity, reduction and putting things into their proper place. In the celebrated preface to *Alceste*, Gluck and Calzabigi stated their intention to 'restrict music to its true office of serving Poetry for expression and for situations of the story without interrupting the Action or cooling it down with useless, superfluous ornaments'. Gone are 'tedious [orchestral] ritornell[i]', pauses on 'favourable vowels' for the purpose of showing off vocal nimbleness, and unnecessary repetitions designed for the singer 'to show that he can capriciously vary a passage in many Guises'.⁶⁷ Gluck and Calzabigi discipline both singer and accompaniment.



Example 2. Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Act I scene I, bb. 24–6: simplicity at its most powerful.

When talking about Gluck's operatic reforms, we often hold up Orfeo's celebrated entrance – his three plaintive cries of *Euridice!* – as encapsulating the essence of the

⁶⁵ See Mark Everist, *Genealogies of Music and Memory: Gluck in the 19th-Century Parisian Imagination* (New York, 2021), in which he argues compellingly for the outsized position of Berlioz in our understanding of nineteenth-century Gluck reception.

⁶⁶ On the limits of Gluck's reforms, see Patricia Howard's now classic *Gluck and the Birth of Modern Opera* (London, 1963); on the concept of 'reform' itself – not a term used in the eighteenth century – see Margaret R. Butler, *Musical Theater in Eighteenth-Century Parma: Entertainment, Sovereignty, Reform* (Rochester, 2019).

⁶⁷ 'Pensai di ristringer la Musica al suo vero ufficio di servire alla Poesia per l'espressione, e per le situazioni della Favola, senza interromper l'Azione, o raffreddarla con degl' inutili superflui ornamenti', 'l'aria dove forse non finisce il senso, per dar comodo al Cantante di far vedere, che può variare in tante Guise capricciosamente un passaggio', *Alceste* (Vienna, 1769), 2.

Example 3. Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Act I scene 1, bb. 18–26: the full picture.

simplicity and directness that Gluck and Calzabigi prized. Orfeo does not express his grief about the loss of his wife by singing an aria that describes his inner tempests; rather, his exclamations are the very manifestation of barely articulate grief (Example 2). As Taruskin elegantly put it, ‘It is hard to conceive of anything more elemental, more drastically “reduced to essentials”’.⁶⁸ And yet, the scene is hardly simple, natural or ‘reduced’, for how many of us have grieved to the accompaniment of a four-part chorus, a pair of cornettos, three trombones, three strings and continuo (Example 3)? As Taruskin goes on to note, the power of Orfeo’s exclamations stems as much from their directness as it does from the awe and drama of the larger musical context: the sorrowful orchestra and chorus create a mass of sound in which these bare, exposed tones can assume meaning.

The preface to *Alceste* is not, of course, the only statement from this period on the relationship between music and staged drama. The rise of pantomime ballet (*ballet d’action*) in Vienna, driven by the choreographer Franz Hilverding (1710–68) and his student Gasparo Angiolini (1731–1803) shared many of the dramatic goals of reform opera. Ballet, Angiolini

⁶⁸ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York, 2009), 455.

argued, had ‘degenerated’ into an art of ‘performing entrechat and leaps, of jumping or running in time to the music’. In short, it was nothing less than ‘wretched buffoonery’.⁶⁹ In place of this purely physical display devoid of emotional content, *ballet d’action* emphasised drama; its roots, Angiolini argued, went back to ancient Greece and Rome. These principles undergirded Angiolini and Gluck’s highly influential and best-known ballet, *Don Juan, ou Le festin de Pierre*, which premiered in Vienna in October 1761 at the Burgtheater. This work is most often invoked for its later influence on Don Juan-themed operas: the ballet’s reimagining of Don Juan as a tragic – rather than a slapstick – character set the stage for Mozart and Da Ponte’s *dramma giocoso*, as well as a host of other Don Juan operas in the 1770s and 1780s.⁷⁰ Towards the very end of the accompanying programme, Angiolini described Gluck’s role in the ballet:

M. Gluck composed the music. He grasped perfectly the horror (*le terrible*) of the action. He has endeavoured to express the passions that are there, and the terror that reigns in the catastrophe. Music is essential to Pantomimes: it is what speaks, we only make the gestures, similar to the ancient actors of Tragedies and Comedies who caused the verses to be declaimed, but themselves were limited to the part of gesticulation. It would be almost impossible for us to be heard without the music, and the more appropriate it is to what we want to express, the more intelligible we become.⁷¹

In their 1765 collaboration *Semiramis*, Angiolini again concluded his programme by turning to the roles of music and Gluck. ‘If I succeed’, he wrote, ‘I must share the honour of success with him.’ Music, he argued, was the poetry of Pantomime ballet, and ballet could no sooner do without music than an actor could do without words: ‘we place the steps, the gestures, the attitudes, the expressions of the roles we play on the music that is heard in the orchestra’.⁷²

Though *ballet d’action* and reform opera largely share the same dramatic goals, the role of music in each appears oppositional: in opera, it is reduced, cut down to size, to make way for the sung drama; in ballet, music is the essential vehicle that takes on the role of the voice and lends coherence to the whole.⁷³ This difference is largely one of rhetoric. The ideal of natural and direct operatic expression that Gluck and Calzabigi articulate

⁶⁹ ‘la Danse a dégénéré de nos jours au point de ne plus la regarder depuis long-tems que comme l’art de faire des entrechats’, Gasparo Angiolini, *Dissertation sur les ballets pantomimes des anciens, pour servir de programme au ballet pantomime tragique de Semiramis* (Vienna, 1765). For an extended discussion of Angiolini and *Don Juan*, see Bruce Alan Brown, ‘Angiolini, Gluck, and Viennese Ballet-Pantomime’, in his *Gluck and the French Theatre in Vienna* (Oxford, 1991), 282–357.

⁷⁰ The most thorough discussion of the influence of Gluck’s ballet remains Charles C. Russell, ‘The Libertine Reformed: “Don Juan” by Gluck and Angiolini’, *Music & Letters* 65/1 (1984), 17–27.

⁷¹ ‘M. Gluck en a composé la Musique. Il a saisi parfaitement le terrible de l’Action. Il a tâché d’exprimer les passions qui y jouent, & l’épouvante qui regne dans la catastrophe. La Musique est essentielle aux Pantomimes: c’est elle qui parle, nous ne faisons que les gestes; semblables aux anciens Acteurs des Tragédies & des Comédies qui faisoient déclamer les vers de la Pièce, & se bornoient eux mêmes à la partie de la gesticulation. Il nous seroit presque impossible de nous faire entendre sans la Musique, & plus elle est appropriée à ce que nous voulons exprimer, plus nous nous rendons intelligibles’, Angiolini, *Le festin de Pierre, ballet pantomime* (Vienna, 1761), [14–15].

⁷² ‘nous mettons les pas, les gestes, les attitudes, les expressions aux Rôles que nous jouons, sur la musique qui se fait entendre dans l’Orchestre’.

⁷³ On Angiolini’s ballets and the idea of pantomime, see also Ellen Lockhart, ‘Attentive Statues’, in *Animation, Plasticity, and Music in Italy, 1770–1830* (Berkeley, 2017), 19ff. On pantomime in French contexts, see Hedy Law, *Music, Pantomime and Freedom in Enlightenment France* (Rochester, 2020), especially chapter 3 (‘Things that Move’), which explores the place of pantomime in Gluck’s French operas.

is achieved precisely by having the accompaniment assume a larger, indeed essential, role in shaping the expressive content. But the rhetorical difference also points to particular ways of listening.

Hearing orchestral worlds

Listeners in Gluck's time commented on the essential role of orchestral accompaniment in his operas. The novelist and jurist Joseph von Sonnenfels – most often invoked in musico-logical contexts as a patron of Mozart – published extensively on the Viennese stage and moral and national issues surrounding it. When he heard *Alceste*, he wrote rapturously about the work: it was full of a kind of Germanic masculine power that had real moral power, far superior to Italian opera, which had 'music only for the ear, not for the heart'.⁷⁴ Listening to the opera, von Sonnenfels found himself 'in the land of miracles':⁷⁵

Alceste provided this skilful man a wide avenue on which to show the fertility of his thought. It was difficult to escape from monotony and repetition with such material, in which the tragic and the melancholy are equally widespread. Gluck overcame these difficulties with many glories. His choruses are always significantly different, his recitative is eloquent, and the accompaniment is not a bare harmony, or a futile filling-up of in-between spaces, but an essential part of the expression, and often so integrally expressive, that it makes the whole content comprehensible, rendering the words almost unnecessary.⁷⁶

This is quite a radical reaction to have to *Alceste*: Sonnenfels locates the power of *Alceste* not just in the reformed singing style and its beautiful simplicity – of which he approves – but also in the power of the chorus and especially in the accompaniment. That the words should seem 'almost unnecessary' seemingly runs counter to the basic principles of Gluck and Calzabigi's reforms. And yet, it underscores what we saw in Orfeo's sorrowful cries: it is crucial for Gluck that the orchestra take on, in Sonnenfels words, 'the essential part of the expression'. The simplicity and directness of operatic reform *required* a concomitant expansion of the role of the orchestra.⁷⁷

Hearing this form of distributed passion did not necessarily come naturally but was a skill that was learned and which happened through a process of transition. Here we return to the issues with which Forkel grappled: the frictions created by this style has not always been visible in narratives of the changing landscape of operatic accompaniment. In both Tomlinson and Johnson's accounts, this shift to more emotionally charged

⁷⁴ 'nur eine Musik für das Ohr, keine für das Herz haben', Joseph von Sonnenfels, Letter of 5 January 1768, *Briefe über die Wienerische Schaubühne* (Vienna, 1768), 36. Sonnenfels praised the music above the libretto, which had various Italianate shortcomings. See Martin Nedbal, 'Cultivating the court and the nation in Gluck's *La rencontre imprévue*', in his *Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven* (London, 2017), 21–48.

⁷⁵ 'Ich befinde mich in dem Lande der Wunderwerke', Von Sonnenfels, Letter of 27 December 1767, *Briefe über die Wienerische Schaubühne*, 17.

⁷⁶ 'Alceste war für diesen geschickten Mann eine weiträumige Bahn, die Fruchtbarkeit seiner Gedanken zu zeigen. Es war schwer bey einem Stoffe, über den durchaus, Traurigkeit und Schwermuth gleich verbreitet ist, der Einförmigkeit, und Weiderholung zu entkommen. Gluck hat diese Schwierigkeit mit vielen Ruhme überwunden. Seine Chöre sind immer wesentlich unterschieden: seine Recitative sprechend, und das Akompaniment nicht eine blossе Anstimmung, oder eine müßige Ausfüllung des Zwischenraums, sondern ein wesentlicher Theil des Ausdrucks, und oft selbst so sehr Ausdruck, daß sie den ganzen Inhalt faßlich, und die Worte beynahe entbehrlich machen', Sonnenfels, 5 January 1768, *Briefe über die Wienerische Schaubühne*, 38–9.

⁷⁷ On the persistence of both machines and the marvellous in Gluck's operas, see Tili Boon Cuillé, 'Marvelous Machines: Revitalizing Enlightenment Opera', *Opera Quarterly* 27/1 (2011), 66–93.

accompaniment happens more or less seamlessly. Late eighteenth-century accounts suggest this listening required practice.

Discussions around Gluck's orchestra began in the context of his 'reform' operas in Vienna, but a similar discourse continued in the Parisian reception of Gluck's music during the 1770s, as audiences grappled with Gluck's operas. François Arnaud – once described as a 'violent Gluckist' – published regularly on Gluck's music, often drawing attention to his use of the orchestra.⁷⁸ In his 'Lettre de M. l'Abbé Arnaud à Madame D'Augny' of 1774, written after the premiere of *Iphigénie en Aulide*:

Listen to the overture; observe how, having bound the opening of it to the subject, not by vague connections but by the very structure, the composer suddenly brings in all the instruments on the same note; how, after having climbed in unison to the octave above this note, the instruments separate and converge, each one independent of the rest, in order to prepare the mind for a great event.⁷⁹

This is, of course, the very same passage that had vexed Forkel and delighted Hoffmann. Given that it was challenging, perhaps we can read Arnaud's letter as genuinely seeking to show D'Augny *how* to listen to the Gluckian orchestra. He goes on to describe Agamemnon's pained entrance:

What is sublime, what can only belong to a profound sensitivity, roused and set in motion by genius, is the manner in which the composer announces and expresses the cries that Nature provokes in the depths of Agamemnon's heart. This plaintive voice in the oboes, the sombre answer from the basses, the chromatic progression in the vocal line and the instruments that accompany at distant intervals – murmuring, harmonious infilling, which bridging the plaintive monosyllables of the oboes and basses, harmonizes and unites the orchestral strands, without undermining the effect of the dialogue. These are beauties that would cover a multitude of failings.⁸⁰

This pedagogical imperative is even more apparent in Arnaud's later, well-known essay, 'La soirée perdue à l'Opéra', in which he placed himself at a performance of Gluck's

⁷⁸ 'La Harpe's *Literary Correspondence*', *The Monthly Review* 36/Appendix (December 1801), 473–482, at 479.

⁷⁹ 'Prétez l'oreille à l'ouverture, voyez comment, après en avoir lié le début au sujet, non par des rapports vagues, mais par les formes mêmes, le Musicien précipite tout-à-coup tous les instrumens sur une même note; comment, après s'être élevés ensemble & à l'unisson jusqu'à l'octave de cette note, ces instrumens se divisent & concourent, chacun de son côté, à préparer l'ame à un grand événement', François Arnaud, 'Lettre de M. l'Abbé Arnaud à Madame D'Augny', *Gazette de littérature, des sciences et des arts* 30 (23 April 1774), 3–7, at 3. Arnaud's writings on Gluck were reprinted in the 1781 compilation *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution opérée dans la musique* and again in *Oeuvres Complètes de L'Abbé Arnaud* (Paris, 1808). The compilation's assembly was attributed to Arnaud's collaborator Gaspar Michel Leblond by Fétis in the nineteenth century. On the role of the media in the debates between the Gluckists and the Piccinnists, see Beverly Jerold, *Disinformation in Mass Media: Gluck, Piccinni, and the Journal de Paris* (New York, 2021).

⁸⁰ 'Mais ce qui est sublime, & qui ne peut appartenir qu'à une profonde sensibilité réveillée & mise en mouvement par le génie, c'est la manière dont le Musicien annonce & exprime les cris que la nature élève au fond du cœur d'Agamemnon. Cette voix gémissante des hautbois, la sombre réponse des basses, la progression chromatique du chant & des instrumens qui l'accompagnent de loin en loin, ce murmure harmonieux & intermédiaire, qui remplissant l'intervalle des accens plaintifs & monosyllabiques des hautbois & des basses, accorde & réunit toutes les parties de l'orchestre sans nuire à l'effet du dialogue. Ce sont-là des beautés dont une seule suffiroit pour couvrir un millier de défauts', Arnaud, 'Lettre de M. l'Abbé Arnaud à Madame D'Augny', 3–4.

Alceste, defending Gluck's works against those who pestered him and prevented him from attending to the drama.

How come the *Iphigénie* and *Orphée* did not lead you to listen more attentively to the orchestra? Such indifference is only pardonable in all your other operas where, a very small number excepted, the instruments accompany the voice as a valet accompanies his master, not as the arms, hands, eyes, facial and body movements, accompany the language of feeling and passion.⁸¹

Arnaud offers a glimpse of the practice required to learn to hear the orchestra properly and to connect the sounds of the orchestra to the inner world of the singing body.

There is surely no more paradigmatic example of the new power of the orchestra than Orestes's aria 'Le calme rentre dans mon coeur', from the second act of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779). Here, famously, Orestes sings of restored peace, while the orchestra mutters the truth of a deeper, subconscious unsettledness over past murder: Orestes is revealed to be an unreliable narrator (Example 4). The conflicted messaging has been a source of hermeneutic delight since the eighteenth century. Arnaud, writing anonymously in 1779, praised how the 'violas ... paint the muffled and menacing voice of remorse, while the violins express a deep agitation, mixed with sighs and sobs'.⁸² In 1821, Berlioz wrote in raptures to his sister Nanci about the power of the orchestra: 'If you heard how it depicts every situation, especially when Orestes seems to be calm; well, the violins hold a note that suggests repose, very softly; but underneath you can hear the basses muttering like the remorse which, despite his apparent calm, is still to be heard in the parricide's heart.'⁸³ Donald Grout claimed this was 'perhaps the first occurrence in opera of this device of using the orchestra to reveal the inward truth of a situation', while Tomlinson heard in this aria 'one of the early intimations in opera of the advent of a new subjectivity'.⁸⁴ There are anecdotes in which Gluck exasperatedly explains to a rehearsing orchestra or an inept listener that Orestes is lying – and such confusion seems perhaps plausible – but more striking is the ease with which many listeners understood the text–music relationships in this aria.⁸⁵ The contradiction is not befuddling but clarifying; the aria makes clear the different roles of the voice and the orchestra. One is external, one is internal; each occupies their own domain.

But not all of Gluck's psychologically nuanced arias were so celebrated, or even recognised as such. 'Io non chiedo, eterni Dei' from the first act of *Alceste* produced confusion in the eighteenth century. Admetus, the king, is at death's door and the people of Thessaly are distraught, for both the king and their uncertain future; a plan is made to approach the oracle at the Temple of Apollo to bring gifts and to make a sacrifice. In Scene 2, *Alceste*

⁸¹ 'Comment se peut-il qu'*Iphigénie* & qu'*Orphée* ne vous aient pas accoutumés à écouter plus attentivement l'Orchestre? Cette indifférence n'est pardonnable que dans tous vos autres Opéras, où, à l'exception d'un très-petit nombre de morceaux, les Instrumens accompagnent la voix, comme un valet accompagne son maître, & non comme les bras, les mains, les yeux, les mouvements du visage & de tout le corps, accompagnent le langage du sentiment & de la passion', Arnaud, *La soirée perdue à l'Opéra* (Avignon, 1776), 16.

⁸² 'Son chant est accompagné par des alto-violes, qui peignent la voix sourde & menaçante des remords, pendant que les violons expriment une agitation profonde, mêlée de soupirs & de sanglots', Arnaud, 'Académie royale de musique', *Mercur de France* (15 June 1779), 172–80, at 177.

⁸³ Berlioz, Letter of 13 December 1821, in Macdonald and Lesure, eds., *Correspondance générale*, vol. 1, 37.

⁸⁴ Donald Grout, *Short History of Opera* (New York, 1965), 242; Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, 59. See also discussions in Thomas Betzwieser, 'Verisimilitude', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (New York, 2014), 296–317; Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 88–9; and Nina Penner, *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater* (Bloomington, 2020), 97–8.

⁸⁵ See La comtesse de Genlis, *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour*, 2 vols (Paris, 1818), 2: 13; and César Gardeton, *Bibliographie musicale de la France et de l'étranger* (Paris, 1822), 305.

Andante

The musical score is for the opening of the aria 'Le calme rentre dans mon coeur' from *Iphigénie en Tauride*. It is marked 'Andante' and is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Oreste (voice), and Violoncello/Double Bass. The violins play a melody of eighth notes, the viola plays a continuous sixteenth-note pattern, and the voice enters in the fourth bar. Dynamics range from piano (p) to fortissimo (ff).

Example 4. Opening ten bars of Gluck 'Le calme rentre dans mon coeur', from *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Act II (1779).

emerges from the palace, equally troubled, to address the people and to offer her solidarity, with the hope that the vision of a grieving kingdom might placate the 'wrath of the gods'. 'Io non chiedo, eterni Dei' invokes a wide range of emotions – a hope for divine pity, feelings of terror and maternal love. Gluck's setting of the aria emphasises this emotional range, through a kaleidoscope of rapidly changing textures: the aria begins with a plaintive oboe soaring over sweet, pizzicato violins, cellos, basses and pulsing violas, conjuring up an image of the total serenity that Alceste knows to be impossible; her hope for a ray of pity is accompanied by legato strings and bassoon, an altogether earthier orchestral texture. This gives way in turn to a more agitated texture with driving quavers in the strings before Alceste's children interrupt her to remind her of the gods' mercifulness – accompanied by two cors anglais, bassoon and *divisi* violas – once again infusing everything with greater sweetness; the more agitated texture returns with Alceste's fears for her children. As Examples 5a and 5b show, each of these shifts involves changes to the orchestration, tempo and metre, and some of these sections are as short as eight bars. In the first seventy bars of this aria, there are five different textures and tempos.

This analysis is mundane: it is, after all, simply a description of the unfolding of textures and how they correspond to the text. This mundanity is partly an effect of the close correlation between the voice and the accompaniment. But it is as 'psychological' as Orestes's famed aria: the difference is that Alceste is telling a troubled truth, and the musical setting conforms to each nuance of the many emotions she experiences over the course of the aria. For listeners accustomed to hearing the orchestra sonify characters' internal emotional states, it is straightforward to understand this aria as amplifying and dramatising Alceste's inner turmoil, so much so that explaining it seems nearly absurd.

Or maybe it is not absurd. In 1777, Rousseau reluctantly sketched out a critique of *Alceste*, at Gluck's insistence ('M. Gluck so strongly pressed me that I could not refuse him this kindness, although as fatiguing for me as it is useless for him'⁸⁶). Rousseau, though he did say a number of positive things, was overall quite critical, and his criticisms largely focused on two things: Gluck's use of the orchestra and the question of musical and dramatic coherence.⁸⁷

In recitatives, Rousseau advocated for as unremarkable an accompaniment as possible at times:

⁸⁶ Translated as 'Fragments of Observations on M. le Chevalier Gluck's Italian "Alceste"', in *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*, trans. John T. Scott (Hanover, 1998), 486–505, at 491.

⁸⁷ On Gluck and Rousseau's relationship, see Nathan Martin, 'Iphigénie à Paris: Gluck and the *Philosophes*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 81/4 (2012), 860–76.

Thus, I believe that the other instruments ought not meddle in it at all, even if this were only to allow the ears of the listeners as well as the Orchestra to rest – something which should be completely forgotten, and whose well-handled reentries thereby produce a great effect, whereas, when the instrumental part reigns the whole length of the piece, beginning by pleasing, it ends by overwhelming.⁸⁸

Rousseau's strong call here for instrumental restraint might seem surprising: in his *Dictionnaire de musique*, Rousseau wrote warmly of the power of the *récitatif obligé* and the mutual support of the orchestra and singer. 'The agitated actor, transported with a passion which does not allow him to go through his speech, is interrupted, breaks off, makes a stop, during which time the orchestra speaks for him. And these silences, thus filled, affect the audience infinitely more than if the actor himself spoke all that the music makes understood.'⁸⁹ In the context of the recitative, Rousseau celebrated both the flexibility and the communicative power of the orchestra. But in his review of *Alceste*, Rousseau craved a more subdued orchestra, and he went on to point out additional moments where he believed it would have been better to have the orchestra provide a stable, unifying accompaniment that did not draw attention to itself.

The aria *io non chiedo eterni Dei* seems very beautiful to me; I would have only desired that the expressions in it did not have to be varied by different metres. Two, when they are necessary, can form agreeable contrasts; but three, this is too many, and this breaks the unity. Oppositions are much more beautiful and produce a greater effect when they are done without changing the metre and through combinations of value and quantity alone. The reason why it is better to make a contrast in the same movement than to change it is that artfulness must be hidden as much as possible in order to produce illusion and interest, and that as soon as one changes movement, the artfulness is detected and makes itself perceived ... But where in this aria is the unity of design, of portraiture, of character? This is not at all, it seems to me, an aria, but a succession of several arias. No common design can be shown in this piece that connects it and makes it a unified whole.⁹⁰

Forkel too singled this aria out as exemplary of Gluck's faults. It wasn't all terrible for him: like Rousseau, he liked the beginning, but was also nonplussed by the constant changing of textures and tempos. He complained:

There are several arias, constructed especially in accordance with the composer's declared aims, where the expression is natural and good, for example ... 'Io non chiedo'. The accompaniment is also well thought out, especially at the beginning. The oboe leads with the main melody, against which the violins play pizzicato, two solo violas have weaving quavers, and the bassoon and horns sustain long notes, to be joined by the oboe after the voice enters. Metre, speed and accompaniment are subsequently varied several times, following closely the meaning of the words, which always go straight on without repetition. But no sooner does one begin to enjoy one passage when it is superseded by another, so that at the end little

⁸⁸ Rousseau, 'Fragments of Observations on M. le Chevalier Gluck's Italian "Alceste"', 496.

⁸⁹ 'L'Acteur agité, transporté d'une passion qui ne lui permet pas de tout dire, s'interrompt, s'arrête, fait des réticences, durant lesquelles l'Orchestre parle pour lui; & ces silences, ainsi remplis, affectent infiniment plus l'Auditeur que si l'Acteur disoit lui-même tout ce que la Musique fait entendre', Rousseau, 'Récitatif obligé', from *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris, 1768), 411–12.

⁹⁰ Rousseau, 'Récitatif obligé', 501–2.

or no impression is left. The latter is to be feared for many of the other arias in this opera.⁹¹

It is possible to hear the orchestra as a supple, real-time reflection of a character's changing emotional state only if one is entrained into a particular listening regime; otherwise, one might well hear accompaniment that is impatient and unfocused. Of course, there is a chance that maybe listeners today would still agree with Rousseau and Forkel and find this aria disjointed. To hear the ways in which 'Io non chiedo' is challenging is to recapture the experimental and risky nature of Gluck's 'reformed' operatic style.

And perhaps this is one reason Gluck has never been untouchable or completely above reproach. For all of Hoffmann's enthusiasm for Gluck, he would later reflect with some sardonic grimace on Gluck's desire – as reported by Reichardt – to construct a new wind instrument for his never-realised opera *Die Hermannsschlacht*. Hoffmann saw this as evidence of Gluck's potential descent into orchestral excess, had he lived longer ('In view of this intention, his death was probably well timed').⁹² Berlioz made substantial changes to Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* when he presented it in 1859. And famously Wagner was disappointed with his first real encounter with Gluck in performance, when he attended a performance of *Iphigénie en Tauride* as a teenager. He expected dramatic fire, but instead spent the performance 'waiting for an effect that never came'.⁹³ For the nineteenth century, Gluck was an unfinished project, an ongoing experiment occasionally overshadowed by his own legacy.⁹⁴

Looking away from the orchestra, or a final glance

I maintain that this is a story about timbre, even though I did not use the word timbre directly to talk about Gluck's music – and of course neither did the actors discussed here. But the timbral lessons offered by this moment in operatic history are multiple. One lesson is about the power of suppressing orchestral sound: Gluck's dramatic use of the orchestra is innovative, but remarkable less for the particular deployment of accompanimental forces than for what it reveals about the changing audile habits of the period. If there is a tension introduced by operatic reform between the 'natural expression' of the voice and text on the one hand, and the greater and more involved use of the orchestra as a dramatic vehicle on the other, it is resolved through listening practices, in learning to hear the orchestra as a subtext. This is to sublimate music into the words: music gives the

⁹¹ 'Einige Arien sind, zumal nach den vom m. V. einmal angenommenen Grundsätzen, von natürlichem und gutem Ausdrucke, z. B. [...] Io non chido, etc. Auch ihre Begleitung ist wohl ausgesonnen, zumal im Anfange. Die Hoboe führt die Hauptmelodie; die Violinen spielen pizzicato dagegen, die zwei besondern Bratschen haben geschleiste Noten in Achteln; der Fagott und die Waldhörner halten lange Noten aus, welches die Hoboe nach eingetretener Singstimme auch thut. Hernach ändert sich, Takt, Bewegung und Begleitung mehr als einmal, nach Anleitung der immer ohne Wiederholung gerade fortgehenden Worte. Aber kaum fängt man einen Satz recht zu geniessen an, so wird er schon durch einen andern abgelöst: so daß am Ende wenig oder kein Eindruck zurück bleibt. Dies letztere ist bey vielen folgenden Arien dieser Oper auch zu befürchten', Forkel, 'Alceste: Tragedia messa in Musica dal Signore Cavaliere Christoforo Gluck', *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 14 (1771), 3–19; translation based on Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 86.

⁹² Hoffmann, 'Casual Reflections on the Appearance of this Journal', *Allgemeine Zeitung für Musik und Musikliteratur* (October 1820), quoted and translated in Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 428.

⁹³ Richard Wagner, *My Life*, trans. Andrew Gray (New York, 1992), quoted in Rehding, *Monumental Music*, 109.

⁹⁴ On some of the criticisms Gluck faced in his lifetime, see Annalise Smith, 'Genre, Identity, and Institutional Authority at the Paris Opéra in the "Age of Gluck", 1770–1781' (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2020), in particular the final section of chapter 5 ('The Limits of Gluck', 289ff).

illusion of being subservient to the words while simultaneously functioning as an expressive force that imbues the text with its dramatic meaning.⁹⁵

This notion of a conceptually sublimated orchestra resonates with Brian Kane's arguments about the central importance of 'musical phantasmagoria' explored in *Sound Unseen*. For Kane, the modern practice of acousmatic listening has its roots in a series of customs – bodily techniques and architectural interventions – that directed the eyes away from the material source of sound. Romantic musical transcendence, he argues, is tied to various forms of *technê*.⁹⁶ Gluckian orchestral listening pushes this argument beyond the visual: in discussions of Gluck's orchestra, its visibility or invisibility are never at stake or up for discussion. Listeners need not avert their eyes; instead, listeners must all become Orestes, lying to themselves and pretending not to hear the orchestra. Timbre's status as something to be overlooked, sublimated and even taken for granted is not a product of twentieth-century musicology, or even a victim of nineteenth-century idealism. It is not a shortcoming, but rather a source of its dramatic power and even an essential feature of its modernity.

Second, it is important to stress that this not merely a story about the orchestra or just about timbre. Indeed, in our last example from *Alceste*, we might argue that orchestral timbre is just one element here. Equally important to the perception that this aria was disjointed were the changing metres and tempos as much as the orchestration. But this inseparability is precisely the point: this is a story about text–music relationships, the power of melody, texture, the history of listening, developing notions of vocal subjectivities, and the broader politics of opera. Timbre is infused into this story, even as it is not named – or better yet, precisely because it cannot be named or clearly defined as a discrete parameter.

This returns me to my initial anxieties about timbre and discipline. I maintain that timbre studies would do well to resist itself; if it were to succeed in defining timbre and systematising its analysis, its subject would be radically impoverished. But there is a deeper and more important point: Gluck and Calzabigi's rhetoric of reform should itself be understood as a form of timbral discipline. Listening to orchestral accompaniment as subtext is to assign it to, and contain it in, a particular register. It might also appear that my anxieties are ultimately misplaced: timbre has undergone a constant process of disciplining from its very inception. Discipline made the idea of timbre possible in the first place. Its status as a potential parameter begins to emerge when Sonnenfels, Arnaud and others point to the orchestra, give it a dramatic role, and tell their readers how to listen to it.

This centrality of 'timbral discipline' – ultimately a shorthand for a host of listening and discursive practices – also points to the limits of what it could mean to understand timbre as a kind of musical ground zero or an escape from various ideological concerns. In this study, there is little purpose in reducing Gluckian orchestral practices to vibration or sonic energies. To do so would run roughshod over a complex and delicate network of relationships between people, institutions, instruments and performance practices – relationships that would no longer be visible at any atomistic level of analysis. Timbre will surely continue to invite virtuoso philosophical analysis and ontological critiques, but fundamentally, timbre is always social and always historically conditioned.

⁹⁵ In writing about later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century opera – Verdi, Puccini and Schoenberg – composer and conductor René Leibowitz articulated a similar argument, namely that we comprehend the orchestra in a way that is 'less conscious'. René Leibowitz, 'Un protagoniste invisible: l'orchestre', in *Les fantômes de l'opéra* (Paris, 1972), 142.

⁹⁶ See Brian Kane, 'Acousmatic Phantasmagoria and the Problem of Techê', in *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York, 2014), 97–118.



Figure 2. Left: Raphael, *The Ecstasy of St Cecilia, between Saint Paul, John the Baptist, and Mary Magdalene* (c. 1514–17), Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna (Inv. N. 577). Right: Guido Reni, *Saint Cecilia* (1606), Norton Simon Museum, F1973.23.P.

Above I said that Gluckian orchestral practice is not concerned with the actual visibility or invisibility of instruments in performance. But perhaps that wasn't entirely honest. I want to return to the portrait of Gluck at the clavichord that so captivated E. T. A. Hoffmann. It is easy to imagine why it made such an impression: Gluck's beatific pose invokes many Renaissance images of St Cecilia, in which she plays music while looking neither to her instrument, a score, nor a human audience, but upwards to heaven, such as in Raphael's celebrated altarpiece or Guido Reni's portrait (Figure 2). Lydia Goehr has written about Raphael's painting, and its many broken instruments strewn upon the ground: 'To give music a proper place in the passage toward sainthood', Goehr writes, 'it must be converted as Cecilia is converted, rendered a medium suitable for transmitting only the pure and heavenly harmony.'⁹⁷ Such images depict the very process of transcendence by showing that music is, in Goehr's words, 'beyond its instruments'. Does Gluck also hear heavenly harmony in his portrait? The opening café scene in Hoffmann's story – the fantastical transformation of the scrappy quintet – offers a possible answer. Perhaps Gluck is listening to neither the clavichord nor angels; rather, he hears the sound of an orchestra. But he is not beyond his instruments; instead, Gluck is just arriving at the beginning of a new listening regime, one in which the orchestra is simultaneously present and absent, real and imagined.

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⁹⁷ Lydia Goehr, "All Art Constantly Aspires to the Condition of Music" – Except the Art of Music: Reviewing the Contest of the Sister Arts', in *The Insistence of Art: Aesthetic Philosophy After Early Modernity*, ed. Paul A. Kottmann (New York, 2017), 140–69, at 152.

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