

## Introduction: Musical Responses to Goethe's *Faust*

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The figure of Johann Faust has mythical proportions, and it has entered public consciousness in so many shapes and medial incarnations that any engagement with it can only ever be approximate (to appropriate the title and tenor of a representative volume that attempts just that).<sup>1</sup> From chapbook to puppet play, from drama to film, from poetry to opera, from prose fiction to the visual arts, the quantity and diversity of artistic interpretations is impressive, encompassing of all walks of life. It has also been continuous; for the last five hundred years, almost every decade has seen Faust resurrected, reinvented, reimagined, restaged, translated, or rewritten. Recent new productions of the entire two parts of Goethe's *Faust* (Peter Stein in 2000 and Nicolas Stemmann in 2011) and attempts to bring Faust to new audiences by turning him into a rock opera (Rudolf Volz, first performed 1997), but also the continuing presence of Faust in everyday culture, witnessed by Faust beers, shoes named after his antagonist, and such like, are testimony to an enduring appeal that transcends genres, cultural spheres, and generations.

Since the publication of the first part of Goethe's drama in 1808, any engagement with the Faust character, any new version or interpretation of the subject matter in general, cannot but implicitly or explicitly refer to Goethe as a touch-stone. Even by ignoring this seminal version or by drawing on alternative sources, artists and authors articulate their view of the relevance or authority of Goethe's play, the form he imposed on the material or the stature he ascribed to his protagonist as the embodiment of the modern human condition. Musical rendition is only one form of engagement, but one that seems to have been particularly productive, appealing, and multifarious since Goethe's *Faust*. Faust lives on in individual songs, song cycles, incidental music for stage productions, symphonic poems, operas, and other musical genres. Goethe's play provided particularly rich material for musical engagement because of its many songs and choruses, and its rich potential to use musical backdrops, rhythmical chanting, melodious incantation, and other sound effects. In line with contemporary theatre practice, Goethe himself envisaged and promoted productions of his work with appropriate music, or the composition of an opera based on his version — and some attempts were indeed made during his lifetime, most notably by Prince Antoni Radziwill in the early 1820s, but without lasting impact. This might be one of the reasons why posterity felt particularly inspired to take up this legacy as

<sup>1</sup> *Faust. Annäherung an einen Mythos*, ed. by Frank Möbus, Friederike Schmidt-Möbus, and Gerd Unverfehrt, Göttingen, 1995.

a challenge. Other reasons might lie in the great and international reputation of Goethe's play as opposed to other, earlier versions of the same subject matter. Goethe's *Faust* stimulated, provoked, fomented responses from composers not only because of his eminence as Germany's foremost literary beacon, but also because he hit the nerve of his time in so many ways with his monumental drama.

Musical versions of the Faust myth bring the subject matter to new and wider audiences, but they also must adhere to a distinct set of conventions and requirements. In their multimediality (text, music, and often the visual dimension of performance or production), they offer specific interpretations which appeal to the senses normally (visual and auditive) and to the emotions in ways that a reading text and even a stage production of the drama cannot achieve. Musical versions necessitate selection and condensation; they require choices in relation to the musical expression a composer aspires to, in relation to instrumentation, form, genre, and style. All of these choices generate meaning and impact which differs from that of the original; many of these choices are the product of a composer's specific situation, his or her circumstances, environment, and inclination. It is not only the objective requirements that render any musical rendition of any excerpt or aspect of Goethe's piece an interpretation of Goethe's text; the musical choices themselves represent manifestations of a composer's understanding of and reaction to the text. New versions of the text itself (for example, in Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*) add yet another dimension to the process of interaction with the original.

The five articles assembled here represent studies of only a tiny selection of musical engagements with Goethe's *Faust*. They cover a period from the late eighteenth century to 1938. They deal with some classics of European musical history as well as lesser-known works. And they investigate a variety of aspects arising from the phenomenon that the musical pieces are based on; they react to and thus reinvent a pre-existing foil. Peter Höyng traces the inception of Beethoven's *Floßlied* to the intellectual environment in late Enlightenment Bonn, but he also attempts an explanation for the odd inclusion of the piece in the composer's cycle of six songs op. 75 of 1810 and for the absence of any other Faust compositions in Beethoven's *oeuvre*. Francis Lamport discusses the structure and relation to the original of Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethes Faust*. Violaine Anger argues that Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*, with its specific musical language, offers answers to tensions which had remained unresolved in Goethe's *Faust*. Briony Cox-Williams, by concentrating on such aspects of the musical language as vocal register, offers a gendered reading of Lili Boulanger's *Faust et Hélène*. Paul Higgins, finally, argues that Benjamin Britten's completion of Schubert's song *Gretchen am Spinnrade* represents a musical acknowledgement of Schubert's engagement with Goethe. Britten's version aimed at remaining faithful to the spirit of the predecessor's musical intent while using the opportunity afforded by Schubert's apnoea after verse five to propose a gentle and congenial change of tone. The five contributions differ in aim, methodology, and their authors' disciplinary background (literary scholars and musicologists), but they all reflect and thus form components of an ongoing debate on Goethe's musical legacy and the specific potential of musical genres and musical geniuses in reimagining and recreating a Faust inspired by Goethe.

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