

These opposing ideas of muteness may be irreconcilable. Oriented respectively toward the art forms of ballet and opera, which began to diverge radically around 1830, they are also divided by history, one looking back to arguments over speech and melody as old as the previous century's *querelle des bouffons*, the other facing forward toward static images of disturbed, beautiful, visionary women that perhaps culminate in Charcot's photographed hysterics. Already in Auber's *Fenella*, one can feel the tension between two views of how the body can communicate: approximation of speech versus the abstract beauty of pure dance maps on to an opposition between an understanding of the female body as capable of willed, articulate expression and a preference for the yielding body, a body that allows itself to be spoken *through*. But for *Fenella* there is also a third term, music that resembles neither speech nor dance: those floods of frenetic eighth- and sixteenth-notes that fill in the gaps between the more pictorial episodes of her pantomimes, usually moving so quickly and relentlessly that they could not possibly be danced or mimed.

In a technique now rendered familiar both by certain passages of scenic music in Wagner and by countless Hollywood film scores, these long stretches of agitated music are built on a single short motive repeated or sequenced, often colored by melodic suspensions and underpinned by a motor rhythm. Stylistic models for this perpetual-motion idiom are not difficult to uncover: one obvious antecedent lies in what Sala has called the "rhetoric of repetition" and "open, sequential structure" that govern music for *mélodrame*.⁴⁵ But the roots of the style stretch back further, to Cherubini's hyperactive orchestral accompaniments (for example, for the avalanche scene in *Lodoiska* [1791]) and perhaps even to the language of the program symphony. The cascading scales of the battle scene in Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* (1814) make another unlikely but revealing cousin to *Fenella's* music. This frenetic style is one of

Auber's stylistic "fingerprints," and not only in *La Muette*; it is almost a topos of transition in his other operas, often appearing as a sort of "filler" material linking the slow and fast sections of an aria or duet, with or without corresponding physical motion. But in *Fenella's* scenes, such transitional music is elevated to the status of central event, rendered expressive simply by force of will. Hence Auber's music for *Fenella* is supremely antirhetorical, dispensing with the pauses, quasi-conversational periodic structures, and patterns of melody and repetition that normally make music persuasive. At its most animated (as in the opening phrases of the Act I narration), *Fenella's* music instead resembles nothing but a flurry of physical energy: conversational and oratorical models are replaced by an approximation of sheer bodily motion.

Such music by nature relies on repetition and tends to stretch over long temporal spans. One conveniently compact example of the way such a pattern of sequencing melodic cells collapses emotional expression and physical energy occurs in the extended "dialogue" for *Fenella* and *Elvire* in Act IV. In this case, the sequence is triggered by a single movement: as the first two-measure motive is heard, the directions above the score specify that *Fenella* "moves away angrily" (Example 5, mm.4–5). But the two sequentially ascending repetitions of the motive that follow no longer mime physical movement, instead painting an outburst of jealousy indicated in the stage directions as "so this is the woman you preferred to me, and you want me to save your life?" (mm.6–7, 8–9). The earthbound energy of the initial motive, reinterpreted to convey an emotional state, works as reverse sublimation, as if to suggest that for Auber—or at least for *Fenella*—the emotional and the abstract proceed from, and remain rooted in, the bodily, in the imitation of concrete gestures.

In the opera's final scene—as *Fenella* prepares to throw herself into the mouth of *Vesuvius*—such agitated chains of eighth- and sixteenth-notes take over, to the exclusion of any other musical style or affect, as

Example 5. Elvire begs Fenella to protect her from the mob; Fenella's jealous reaction (Choeur et Cavatine, Act IV).

Elle jette un regard sur Elvire, court vers elle, entr'ouvre son manteau, lui arrache le voile et couvre son visage.

4 *s'éloigne d'elle avec colère, et semble dire: voilà donc celle que tu m'as préférée, et tu veux*

7 *que je t'épargne!*

9

if the “Easy Transitions” that were intended to join up the fixed attitudes in eighteenth-century theatrical practice had run wild, crowding out the frozen, painterly poses. Fenella’s music here abandons the musical and gestural codes of melodrama because she is no longer pausing to strike poses, represent emotions, or, in fact, to signify or narrate in any way at all. She has become pure movement and pure pain. Example 6, drawn from the last few minutes of a long finale constructed around such short-breathed motives, shows the technique in its most

Example 6. Fenella revives from a faint and throws herself into the abyss.

Vns.

5 *Elle aperçoit Alphonse auprès d'Elvire.*

8 *Allegro* *Elle se relève, jette*

13 *sur Alphonse un dernier regard de regret et de tendresse, et s'élance rapidement vers l'escalier qui est au*

18 *fond du théâtre.* *Surpris de ce brusque départ, Alphonse et Elvire se retournent*

(continued)

