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## The agency of dead musicians

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**The agency of dead musicians**

Contemporary Social Science

Special Issue on Social Death

Lisa McCormick  
Department of Sociology  
University of Edinburgh  
Chrystal Macmillan Building  
15a George Square  
Edinburgh EH8 9LD

[lisa.mccormick@ed.ac.uk](mailto:lisa.mccormick@ed.ac.uk)

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**ABSTRACT:** A longstanding theme in the sociology of the arts is the sacralization of art in modern society, but an underexplored aspect of this process is how death shapes artistic creation and appreciation. This paper approaches this issue through an examination of the cult of the dead composer in classical music. After considering the cultural logic and effect of musical sainthood, I discuss how composers are venerated; commemorative rites, such as anniversary programming, provide a phenomenological connection between the living and the dead, while physical remains and relic-like objects carry messages from beyond the grave that can be usurped or amplified by political projects. By comparing the fetishization of the dead diva with the composer cult, I explain why performers who continue to be admired posthumously still do not achieve the same exalted status as composers.

**KEYWORDS:** sociology of music; musicians; commemoration; relics; death; agency

I was first introduced to the concept of sainthood at age eight in religion class at a Catholic primary school in Western Canada. Our teacher offered an age-appropriate explanation: saints are special people remembered long after their death for doing extraordinary things who are now in Heaven with God because of their good works. I considered this for a moment, and raised my hand when she asked for examples. “J.S. Bach!” I declared, confident I had found someone who fit all the criteria. This composer commanded total respect from my music teachers; my cello lessons on his compositions took on a reverential tone because, they told me, I was finally playing “real music”. For years I was teased for this innocent mistake, and not only because I had failed to understand why a Lutheran was ineligible for this distinction.

In retrospect and from a sociological perspective, it is unsurprising that a child would assume that Bach was a saint. The sacralization of art in modern society is a standard theme in the sociology of the arts; nowhere is this more obvious than in Bourdieu’s (1984, [1983] 1993) now-orthodox perspective which analyzes the “consecration” of artists in the field of cultural production and the “charismatic ideology” which shrouds the social determinants of good taste. However, the established approaches for emphasizing the religious dimension of artistic creation and appreciation have distracted from the importance of death in shaping these cultural processes. In this paper, I aim to address this oversight in two ways: by examining the cult of the dead composer and by unearthing the role of (im)mortality in the sociology of the arts.

My initial task is to establish that classical music is dominated by the dead, which will not come as news to either musicologists or classical music devotees. Neither would opera fans raise an eyebrow, death being a central theme in many of the most celebrated operas (e.g, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca* or anything by Wagner). However, the omnipresence of death in classical music culture makes it that much more surprising that it

has never been adequately theorized. I will treat posthumous influence as a form of musical agency; drawing from Heinich (1996), I first discuss the “Beethoven effect” and the social process through which composers are raised to musical sainthood. In the next section, I explore the commemorative rituals through which living musicians connect with the dead and explain the appeal of anniversary programming using Schütz’s (1951) phenomenology. While sound is of primary importance in musical culture, material objects also play an important role in composer cults; in the following section, Chopin’s heart serves as the main example of how political events further infuse musical relics with meaning. To conclude, I compare the fetishization of dead divas to composer cults in order to explain why only composers achieve immortality.

### **The ghosts of composers past**

Classical music has been criticized for being locked in a “museum culture” (Boulez, 1986; Burkholder, 1983), and it is easy to understand why. The design of instruments and performance venues has changed little in over one hundred years. Advanced musical training takes place in aptly-named conservatories where teachers proudly trace their pedagogical lineages through several generations of bygone masters. But the most striking respect in which the present musical culture is haunted by the past is the prominence of dead composers. As Nettl (1995) observed, the rhetoric used in music schools would leave an outsider at a loss in distinguishing the quick from the dead; students speak of “going to hear Beethoven” in the same way they describe going to hear a friend perform a recital. At lessons and in rehearsals, aspiring musicians are trained to submit to the authority of the score and to strive for “authenticity”. These maxims are dogmatic among specialists in historically-informed performance, but they are not exclusive to them. Living musicians pursue the

intentions of dead composers, often zealously, and sometimes at the expense of contemporary aesthetic standards. If believing in the composer's better judgment were not already enough to sustain it, the ethics of this approach to interpretation have also been defended by declaring the performance intentions of dead composers a special case of "our obligation to comply, where we can, with the wishes and intentions of the dead" which "has its source in our duty to refrain from injuring the interests of others" (Kivy, 1993, p. 114).

Given that composer's performance intentions carry such weight, it is not surprising that conservatories, chamber ensembles, and symphony orchestras often invite contemporary composers to participate in the final stages of preparing their music for performance. Kanno (2012) argues that even in this situation, the norm of the deceased composer prevails. The partitioning of creativity in Western classical music is so institutionalized that performers approach pieces "as if the composer is dead", discerning what they can from a score handed to them as a *fait accompli*. The "last-minute rehearsal" with contemporary composers, an all-too-common scenario in the professional world, provides only enough time to uncover unintentional divergences from their intentions; furthermore, resolving them interactively would demand a different kind of creativity than the one cultivated in conservatories which depends on the composer's deceased status.

Concertgoers are so accustomed to hearing centuries-old music that they are often startled when someone sitting in the concert hall is acknowledged as the composer of a piece on that evening's program. But it was not always so. Weber (1984, p. 175) has traced the "epochal change in the balance between the past and the present in Western musical life" that occurred between 1700 and 1870. Traditionally, the majority of music performed was by living musicians who were also composers, and turnover in the repertoire was so regular that a composer's works were rarely heard after his death. Exceptions only began to appear in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; Lully's operas were regularly heard at the Académie royale de musique (Paris

Opera) for almost a century after his death in 1687 (Rosow, 1989), and Handel's music grew in popularity in England, Europe, and America after he died in 1759 (Harris, 1992). The watershed came after the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when concerts were devoted to the symphonic and chamber works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven: "essayists began calling this music 'Classical,' conservatories made it into a curriculum, and critics defined it as the highest musical authority" (William Weber, 1984, p. 175). These gradually became the norm, and by the 1870s, concert programs were dominated by the works of deceased masters.

Elsewhere, Weber (1994) provides statistical evidence gleaned from concert programs to show increasing preference for the music of the past. The most striking example is the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna. Between 1815 and 1825, 77% of the works performed were by living composers; this proportion diminished to 53% between 1838 and 1848, and then to 18% in the ten seasons after 1849. A similar trend is found in solo recitals and professional orchestras across Europe. Weber (1994:5) argues that the "rise of the masters to musical sainthood" should be understood as an early form of mass culture fed by the commercial interests of the emerging music industry.

The respect for the deceased masters was exported beyond Europe by elites and itinerant musicians, but as Dimaggio (1982) has shown, the orchestral canon did not take root in the United States until the 1900s because it was not commercially viable; crucial for its establishment was the development of the non-profit organizational form which could insulate orchestras from commercial pressures. According to Dimaggio, organizations like the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which dedicated themselves to performing "the classics", provide the necessary social foundation for aesthetic classification; they facilitate the process of "sacralization" through which selected cultural objects come to be considered as superior to others and cordoned off from those deemed mundane or vulgar.

In addition to transforming audiences' tastes, the growing preoccupation with the musical past also affected composers; they were no longer writing "for the moment" and whatever the occasion demanded, "but rather in competition with the musical giants for the past for posterity" (Harris, 1992, p. 208-9). Straus (1991) argues that this "anxiety of influence" arises from how composition is taught; studying the works of deceased masters, composers come to revere these great figures but also to be intimidated by them. Because a dialogue with the past cannot be avoided, composers must choose between incorporating and revising traditional materials in their music.

Few deceased masters cast as long a shadow as Beethoven. His posthumous influence has been summarized by Ross (2014, p. 44):

The professional orchestra arose, in large measure, as a vehicle for the incessant performance of Beethoven's symphonies. The art of conducting emerged in its wake. The modern piano bears the imprint of his demand for a more resonant and flexible instrument. Recording technology evolved with Beethoven in mind: the first commercial 33<sup>1/3</sup> rpm LP, in 1931, contained the Fifth Symphony and the duration of first-generation compact disks was fixed at seventy-five minutes so that the Ninth Symphony could unfurl without interruption.

And the list goes on. However, the form of posthumous musical agency that has most interested musicologists is Beethoven's effect on later generations of composers. Burnham (1995, p. xiii) confirms that his middle period style has "epitomized musical vitality" for nearly two centuries because it became "the paradigm for Western compositional logic and of all the positive virtues that music can embody for humanity". For example, Fisk (1994, p.



397) uses the opening of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 to demonstrate the "inner life of old music" that grows from ambiguity; Beethoven's development of musical materials sets up expectations for both the "naïve" and the "experienced" ear, some of which are "met, others denied, still other changed and redirected", but all of them "engag[ing] the ear and the mind" with the "purpose of speaking to the heart" (p. 401).

Chopin is conventionally identified as one of the few canonical composers to have escaped Beethoven's influence by focusing on genres that Beethoven never explored, such as nocturnes and mazurkas. But even this exception has been eroded such that Chopin is brought into Beethoven's orbit. For example, Petty (1999, p. 284) argues that the B-flat minor piano sonata, a genre too closely associated with Beethoven to ignore him, is "fertile ground for considering what it meant to Chopin to be an artist living in a world haunted by the ghost of Beethoven"; his analysis presents the famous Funeral March movement as a death scene where Chopin both puts Beethoven to rest symbolically and draws himself "toward the past, one including Beethoven" (p. 298).

I would call this the "Beethoven effect", a musical parallel to what Heinich (1996) terms the "Van Gogh effect" in visual art. Heinich accomplishes an "anthropology of admiration" by tracing the posthumous cultural construction of Van Gogh. Having died in relative obscurity, he might well have been forgotten or simply branded as a deviant because of his mental illness. But he escaped both oblivion and stigmatization, becoming instead an object of devotion, and this destiny has done more effect than simply securing his place in art history; Van Gogh's legend became the archetypal model of the artist, in the sense both of an example to be imitated and of a patterned configuration of values (Heinich, 1996, p. 141). It ushered in a new order; in the place of traditional standards of artistic excellence, abnormality became highly valued, incomprehension became a recurring motif, and consecration became displaced into posterity. The "Van Gogh effect" has not only been transferred to future

generations of artists; it is also applied to those who predated him through a retrospective reinterpretation of art history.

Van Gogh's posthumous transformation occurred in six stages: "his work was made into an enigma, his life into a legend, his fate into a scandal, his paintings were put up for sale and exhibited, and the places he went, as well as the objects he touched, were made into relics" (1996:140). The crucial element in his rise to sainthood is self-sacrifice. In biographical narratives, Van Gogh is shown to have suffered for his art; he ruined his physical and mental health, eventually making the ultimate sacrifice by taking his own life. This final gesture secured the cultural logic of martyrdom; the failure of Van Gogh's contemporaries to recognize his greatness became an injustice for which "society" in general is blamed. Heinich suggests that pilgrimages to art museums where Van Gogh's paintings are venerated can be understood as a form of atonement to restore the asymmetry produced by the irreversibility of death.

The Beethoven legend also features suffering. His major affliction was deafness, but his manuscripts, which are littered with corrections and scribbled out passages, also provide evidence that he struggled with composing and was rarely satisfied with his work. The incomprehension motif is established through anecdotes portraying him as underappreciated in his lifetime, despite his champions' best efforts. In one famous episode from 1802, Beethoven snarls "I do not play for such swine" having grown frustrated with the inattentive audience at a salon performance (quoted in DeNora, 2006, p. 111). His posthumous critical reception, however, praised his originality, excused his uncouth behavior, and transformed him into "a secular god, his shadow falling on those who came after him, and even on those who came before him" (Ross, 2014, p. 44).

The popular conceptions of other musical masters are mostly variations on this theme. But rather than demonstrate how the facts of various composers' lives are made to fit this

model, the next section will explore how the veneration of musical saints has become embedded in musical life.

### **Gone but never forgotten: Commemorative musical rites**

A range of actors participate in the posthumous cultural construction of the composer. The Polish pedagogue Jerzy Żurawlew established the Fryderyk Chopin International Piano Competition because he was concerned with the composer's legacy and believed that a competition could reinforce the continuity of tradition that had begun to splinter amongst the pupils of Chopin's pupils (Ekiert, 2010, p. 7). Handel serves as an even better example: John Mainwaring, an English clergyman, published a full-length biography and criticism of his music the year after Handel died (the first publication of this kind about a composer); professional and amateur ensembles, including The Academy of Ancient Music, the Concerts of Ancient Music, the Three Choirs Festival and the Handel and Haydn Society, regularly performed his music; and publishers produced and distributed special editions of his works (Harris, 1992). In 1784, the directors of the Concerts of Ancient Music also organized a commemoration, the date chosen (erroneously) to celebrate the centennial of Handel's birth on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. This "novel festival", which consisted of five concerts held in Westminster Abbey and a West End entertainment palace, was of an unprecedented scale, "captur[ing] public attention all around the Western world" (William Weber, 1989).

It is ironic that such a grand commemorative spectacle would be put on for Handel who was never in danger of being forgotten. But he is the exception; the reputations of most musical masters had to be resurrected after a period of obscurity. The first composer to be "rediscovered" is J. S. Bach, and it is a fellow composer, Mendelssohn, who is credited with reviving interest in his music by conducting a performance of the *Saint Matthew Passion*.<sup>i</sup>

From then on, composers were frequently advocates for their predecessors: “Berlioz studied and edited the music of Gluck; Vaughan-Williams participated in editing the complete works of Purcell; Saint-Saëns edited the complete works of Rameau; and Webern edited the complete works of Isaac” (Harris, 1992, p. 210). Later generations of conductors also followed Mendelssohn’s example by championing previously-neglected composers; for example, Bernstein endeavored to be seen as the one who “put Mahler on the map” by producing several recordings of his works, giving lectures and writing essays in praise of Mahler’s compositional style, and placing Mahler’s symphonies at the core of his programmes (Schiff, 2001).

What is striking about the Bach and the Mahler revivals is how they coincide with anniversaries; Mendelssohn conducted the Bach *Passion* on what he believed was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its first performance, while Mahler’s symphonies achieved mainstream status on the centenary of his birth. Commemorative programming has since become a mainstay in musical life. The idea of the “The Bach Year”, when the anniversary of composer’s birth or death is marked by an outpouring of musicological scholarship and special performances of his work, has been extended to all members of the “classical canon” and beyond. For example, 2013 was the centenary of Benjamin Britten’s birth<sup>ii</sup> as well as Wagner and Verdi’s bicentennials, which provided an excuse (if one was needed) for opera houses everywhere to stage productions of their operas; 2014 was the year to honour Gluck and Richard Strauss while in 2015, Nielsen, Sibelius and Scriabin had their turn being feted. In years not coinciding with births and deaths, outstanding compositional achievements are commemorated; Carnegie Hall marked the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Terry Riley’s “In C” in 2008, while few orchestras missed the opportunity to perform Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* in 2013 to mark its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Concertgoers can now easily predict whose music will

dominate each new season; those seeking a more diverse musical diet must resort to promoting overlooked anniversaries or inventing new milestones (Service, 2015).

It is tempting to attribute the rise of commemorative programming to marketing forces. But while the publishing and recording industry certainly benefit from the boost in sales, it is doubtful that “anniversarizing” would have flourished to this extent if musicians and audiences did not also find it meaningful. A key to understanding the appeal of commemorative programming can be found in Schütz’s (1951) phenomenological analysis of music-making, a theory developed to refute Halbwachs’ (1980) theory of collective memory among musicians which emphasized notation (a visual symbolic system) in the transmission of musical thought. To displace the centrality of the text, he proposed the idea of the “mutual tuning-in relationship”, a social interaction so fundamental that it forms the precondition for the communicative process. For Schütz (1951, p. 79), marching, dancing and making love together were all examples of intersubjectivity, but he chose music-making to analyze how “the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ are experienced by both participants as a ‘We’ in vivid presence”.

Schütz (1951, p. 93) argued that the “tuning in” required to make music had the effect of synchronizing “inner time” so that participants in a musical performance were “living together through the same flux” and “growing older together” for the duration of the musical process. These participants included the musicians who coordinated their thoughts and actions to play a piece of music, as well as the listeners who attended to these sounds, an orientation that he insisted did not depend on specialized knowledge. Another participant was the composer of the piece of music. Schütz considered both musicians and listeners as “beholders” of music who could “tune in” with the composer, even if this person was dead:

Although separated by hundreds of years, the [beholder] participates with quasi simultaneity in the [composer]’s stream of consciousness by performing with him step

by step the ongoing articulation of his musical thought. The beholder, thus, is united with the composer by a time dimension common to both, which is nothing other than a derived form of the vivid present shared by the partners in a genuine face-to-face relation. (Schütz, 1951, p. 90)

What makes it possible for “beholders of music” to achieve intersubjectivity with each other and with absent or dead composers is the “polythetical structure” of music. Schütz insists that a similar connection cannot be achieved with deceased mathematicians or authors because mathematical formulas, like sentences, can be grasped “in a single glance” once the series of mental operations that constructed its content have been performed. In contrast, musical meaning resists such reduction. This is a difficult distinction to defend, not least because it does not reflect the compositional process of most composers; it can also be misread as a theory that reduces the performer to a mere vessel connecting the listener to the composer. Schütz, as a phenomenologist, was less concerned with these musicological issues; he sought to emphasize the temporal and intensely collaborative nature of musical *experience*. The study, rehearsal, and performance of music involves unfolding its content in time “step by step”, and by experiencing its reconstitution, the “quasi simultaneity” of the beholder’s stream of consciousness with that of the composer’s is re-established (Schütz, 1951, p. 91).

While any musical performance has the potential to become an act of communion in this phenomenological sense, commemorative programming organizes and elevates these experiences to a ritual status, thereby shaping the “topography of the past” (Zerubavel, 2003) that relates the special dead to each other and to the present musical community. The now-expected surge in popularity following a composer’s death might be fueled by marketing but commemorations held long after the fact sustain a cultural dialogue about the meaning of that

composer in contemporary musical life. In the next section, I will discuss how material memorials provide another opportunity for the living to connect with a world that has been lost by tuning into a message from “beyond the grave”.

### **Sacred sites and musical relics**

According to the church historian Angenendt (2010), the dead lost their agency and their legal status during the Enlightenment. Medieval Christians had shared with archaic religions the belief that the dead were not truly dead and that a life-force remained in the corpse that must be maintained for the afterlife. While the theological leaders in the Protestant Reformation had discouraged the veneration of relics, it was medical science that eventually dealt the more serious blow to this tradition; when people became persuaded that the dead body was not just lifeless but poisonous, a religious form that had continued through human history came to an abrupt end. With the church reforms of Emperor Joseph II in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the only relics that remained were those that satisfied a specified standard of evidence.

Beyond the religious sphere, “relic-like” behavior has persisted into the modern era, especially in societies with a Catholic or Orthodox Christian heritage. The “political religions” of Soviet communism and German National Socialism provide the most striking examples of how these early Christian cultural scripts for remembering the revered dead were transposed into the political realm (Maier, 2006). In the former case, Bolsheviks had deliberately undermined religious belief, and attacked the Orthodox Church, by opening graves and destroying shrines; but when Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin died, political leaders reverted to the very cultic rituals they had denigrated by embalming his body and laying it to rest in a mausoleum for public veneration. In the latter case, the celebrated dead were the

sixteen putschists killed at the Munich *Feldherrnhalle* on 9 November 1923. At the memorial erected on the site, SS guards kept constant vigil and passers-by were expected to raise their arm in a Nazi salute; on the anniversary of the Putsch in 1935, the bodies of the martyrs were exhumed and placed in bronze sarcophagi to lie in state before being taken to the Temple of Honor where they would become the Eternal Guard (Baird, 1990, p. 59).

The diversity of cultic practices in modern Europe and beyond inspired a reconceptualization of the relic. For Walsham (2010), relics are much more than material objects that are tied to an individual and the time or events with which he or she is associated; because the item is thought to capture the essence of the dead person, relics are ontologically distinguishable from representations or images that would merely symbolize the divine presence. Accordingly, relics can be understood to function as “material manifestations of the act of remembrance. They sublimate, crystallize, and perpetuate memory in the guise of physical remains, linking the past and present in a concrete and palpable way...A kind of umbilical cord that connects the living and the celebrated dead, they carry messages from beyond the grave and provide a mnemonic ligature to a world that has been lost” (Walsham, 2010, p. 13). Nor does this function depend on the object’s uniqueness; relics and replicas do not always exist in a hostile oppositional relationship.

In the realm of classical music, a category of objects amenable to “relichood” (Gillingham, 2010) are sculptures bearing the likeness of revered composers. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, replicas of Beethoven’s death mask became a standard “part of the décor of the middle-class drawing room” (Ariès, 1981, p. 262); nowadays they are more likely to be found in museums, tucked away in a glass case along with some of the great man’s personal possessions. However, miniature busts continue to be a popular decoration in domestic and educational environments. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these were manufactured in a range of materials, from pottery and stoneware to porcelain and “Parian-ware”; they remain a



standard item in music gift shops today, though they are more likely to be made out of plastic or vinyl (Hunter, 2014). While death masks connect the living with the dead by preserving imprints of the revered musician's body, the pint-sized bust of Bach perched on the local music teacher's upright piano links the past to the present in a different way; these "bite-sized" monuments reduce the monumentality of deceased master composers to more manageable scale by offering living performers a simpler, if sometimes caricatured, version of their personality and their role in music history (Hunter, 2014).

The advantage of these relic-like objects is that they are both portable and replicable, whereas gravesites are fixed in space. For early medieval Christians, the resting places of saints became holy because their bodies were believed to hold a sacred power (Angenendt, 2010). Laqueur (2011, p. 810) argues that this belief anchored a new and consequential necro-geography; beginning in the fifth century, the "ordinary dead" wanted to rest in or near a church where the body of the "special dead" (a saint) was enshrined, "protecting all the other bodies" in the vicinity "with its aura". This spatial arrangement of dead bodies would not be challenged until the emergence of the modern cemetery which became a "place unto itself" (Laqueur, 2011). But even without the connection to the church, these burial grounds would come to house their own "special dead", including revered musicians.

For example, Beethoven was interred in the cemetery at Währing and Schubert, who had been a torchbearer at Beethoven's funeral, expressed his wish the night before he died to be buried next to Beethoven.<sup>iii</sup> Even after their remains were moved to the Zentralfriedhof in 1880, Währing was a pilgrimage site (B, 1892). However, the musical pilgrim seeking Mozart's place of rest in the churchyard of St. Marx nearby would search in vain; he was buried in a mass grave, and the memorials erected after his death could indicate only the general area where his remains are likely to be. While most graveside visits are done to offer a private tribute to the celebrated dead, Van Cliburn's musical pilgrimage was a newsworthy

event. After the Texan pianist won the 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the height of the cold war, he made a point of visiting Tchaikovsky's grave while on the winner's concert tour of the Soviet Union. But this was only the first stop on the pilgrimage; upon returning to the United States, he visited Sergei Rachmaninov's grave in New York to plant a Russian lilac next to it using soil taken from Tchaikovsky's grave ("All-American Virtuoso," 1958).

Revered musicians' remains have also been used as instruments of legitimation in political projects, especially in socialist countries. Bohuslav Martinů, the exiled Czech composer who died in Switzerland in 1959, was reinterred twenty years later in his birthplace, the village of Polička, despite having indicated that he did not want to return to Czechoslovakia while it remained Communist and despite the regime's initial hostility towards him; his gradual rehabilitation as an anti-fascist (if not Communist) composer culminated in the reburial ceremony where he was hailed by the Minister of Culture as "a jewel of Czech national culture" and "an inseparable part of our cultural heritage" (Beckerman, 2007, p. 1). Similarly, Béla Bartók left Hungary in 1940 as a protest against the influence of German fascism in his homeland and died in New York in 1945. Although he was known as a composer of "difficult" music, the return of his remains to Communist Hungary after 43 years set off a "publicity extravaganza" in the Hungarian media that successfully transformed him into a national hero for party hardliners and oppositional intellectuals alike, and his lavish state funeral "mobilized the uncoerced participation of many thousands of otherwise politically disenchanted people" (Gal, 1991, p. 440).

The Polish government's repatriation of the famous pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski in 1992 provides an example of a reburial in a post-socialist society. When Paderewski died in the United States in 1941, President Roosevelt issued a directive for him to be buried temporarily in Arlington National Cemetery with the expectation that his

remains would be returned to Poland after the war. After the installation of the communist regime, Poland twice requested for the body to be returned, once in 1947, and again in 1963; President Kennedy responded the second time by declaring that he would remain in the United States until Poland was free, a wish Paderewski had indicated in his will. While his body eventually went home, Paderewski's heart remains in Doylestown, Pennsylvania at the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa.<sup>iv</sup> In the case of Paderewski's fellow countryman, Fryderyk Chopin, it was not his corpse that traveled back to Poland but his heart. In reviewing Pettyn's (2011) chronicle of Chopin's heart, we can observe how a composer's remains come to be seen as national treasures in the first place.<sup>v</sup>

On his deathbed, Chopin expressed his last wishes to those who had gathered around him. He provided specific instructions about what music should be played at his funeral, including Mozart's Requiem and the funeral march from his own sonata in B-flat minor. He also requested that an autopsy be performed after his death because he feared being buried alive (Eisler, 2003).<sup>vi</sup> And he asked his sister, Louise, to take his heart to Warsaw: "I know that Paskévitch would not permit you to transport my body to Warsaw, so take at least my heart" (Musielak, 2003, p. 83, n. 31, author's translation).

The heart was preserved in alcohol and encased in an urn which Louise smuggled into Poland by hiding it under her cloak. Initially, the clergy at the Church of the Holy Cross (Kościół Świętego Krzyża) in Warsaw refused to place the urn in the upper church because Chopin was not a saint; it was stored in the catacombs for thirty years before the Parish priest agreed to have it deposited in the first pillar on the left from the nave's side. The placement of the urn was done in secret in order to avoid drawing the attention of tsarist authorities, but its location was subsequently marked with a plaque proclaiming "here lies the heart of Frederic Chopin" along with an elaborate memorial stone bearing an inscription from the Gospel of St. Matthew (6:21): "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also".

The Holy Cross memorial remained the only public monument to Chopin until a statue was unveiled in Warsaw's Royal Baths Park (Łazienki Królewskie) in 1926. It did not stand for long. When the Nazis occupied Warsaw in 1939, they destroyed the statue, and in a futile attempt to suppress nationalist sentiments, the public performance of Chopin's music was banned. The heart was nearly lost during the turmoil of the Warsaw uprising of 1944; when the violence began to approach the vicinity of the church, Schulze, a German chaplain, convinced the Holy Cross clergy to let him take it to a safe place, which is how it wound up in the care of Heinz Reinfarth, an SS officer who professed to be an admirer of Chopin's music. After the uprising was suppressed, the commander of operations in the region, Erich von dem Bach, attempted to stage an elaborate return of the urn to Polish hands for propaganda purposes but a technical malfunction prevented the film crew from documenting the exchange. The Holy Cross priests, suspicious of this seemingly noble gesture, secretly took the urn thirty kilometers west to Milanówek for safekeeping, first at a private residence, and then on the piano in the Archbishop's private chapel. The heart was finally returned to Warsaw in 1945, on the anniversary of Chopin's death. It was taken by car on a route that had been decorated with flags; eye witness accounts describe crowds of people waiting at the capital in silence, uncovering their heads at the sight of the car, some stepping forward to toss a bouquet of flowers on the vehicle carrying the precious cargo as it passed by.

### **Concluding thoughts: the object of devotion**

Every musical genre has its own pantheon of departed greats, some of whom are raised to musical sainthood. After John Lennon, a founding member of the Beatles, was shot, biographies that portrayed him as anything other than a prophetic figure, social activist or happy househusband were soundly denounced as blasphemous (Sherwood, 2006); Jim

Morrison's grave at Père Lachaise cemetery and Elvis Presley's Graceland remain popular pilgrimage sites (Margry, 2008). However, classical music is exceptional in the degree to which deceased musicians maintain a presence in musical life, which is why it provides an ideal case for exploring the agency of the dead in the developed Western world. Composers are not the only "special dead" worthy of commemoration in the world of classical music; performers often receive posthumous adulation as well. But this is better understood as an extension of the celebrity they experienced in their lifetime rather than as another manifestation of the "Beethoven effect" described earlier. To clarify this difference, I will briefly examine the fetishization of the dead diva.

In his ethnography of Argentinian opera fanatics, Benzecry (2011p. 115) describes how even deceased vocalists are the object of an admiration so intense that it takes on a "quasi-religious character". The most "literal" example he offers is the memorial service for Victoria de los Ángeles, a Spanish-American soprano, that was held a year after her death. The Catholic ceremony, which was attended by more than three hundred people, concluded with a recording of the deceased singer performing Gounod's "Ave Maria" which brought applause and shouts of "Bravo."

Benzecry also recounts the stubborn efforts of one group of fans to have a commemorative plaque for Claudia Muzio placed in the Teatro Colón more than three decades after her death. While many such plaques can be found at the Colón, and at every major performance venue for that matter, this small memorial suddenly became a big deal when the house director threatened to remove "Divina" (divine) from the inscription. The timing could not have been worse; the director revealed this intention shortly before Joan Sutherland was scheduled to give her debut at the Colón singing the part of Violetta in *La Traviata*, a role that was known to be Muzio's favourite. After Sutherland's "stormy" debut,<sup>vii</sup> the director gave into their demands, believing that the group of "Muzio fanatics"

had booed the visiting diva. For the plaque's unveiling, the group arranged for the director's predecessor to deliver a lecture about Muzio and play some of her recordings so that they could "hear her voice one more time at the Colón" (Benzecry, 2011, p. 119).

Over and above these ancillary episodes, Benzecry (2011, p. 126) argues that what draws fans to performances in the opera house is a "quest for transcendence" that can be accomplished through several styles of engagement. The one labeled "nostalgic" entails a past-centric orientation calibrated so that present opera experiences never measure up. What is striking about this category is that it is not generational; the nostalgic defends the belief in the superiority of the past not with personal memories but with "technological evidence" (Benzecry, 2011, p. 136). In other words, recordings make it possible for opera goers under 30 to debate whether Maria Callas or Renata Tebaldi *is* (not *was*) the better soprano even though these fans are too young to have heard either singer perform when they were in their prime. In Benzecry's view, the nostalgic style of engagement contradicts Benjamin's (1969) expectation that the "aura" of the work of art would wither in the age of mechanical reproduction; with opera, "mechanical reproduction disenchant the present in such a way that the production of a unique and authentic experience (the meaning of aura) rests on the nostalgia for the live recordings of the past" (Benzecry, 2011, p. 138).

Taken together, the nostalgic orientation of opera fanatics and the commemorative rites they arrange for dead divas show that recordings can also function as relics by providing (as mentioned earlier) a "kind of umbilical cord that connects the living and the celebrated dead" (Walsham, 2010, p. 13). According to Sterne (2003, p. 291), sound recording technology emerged as part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture of preservation: "recording was the product of a culture that had learned to can and embalm, to preserve the bodies of the dead so that they could continue to perform a social function after life". In addition to preserving musical performances, recording technology also enables public and private acts of devotion

by affording an “acousmatic situation” wherein the departed musician’s sound is heard but its cause remains unseen. This enables a different mode of listening in which “sound is revealed in all its dimensions”; attention can be drawn “to sound traits normally hidden from us by the simultaneous sight of the causes—hidden because this sight reinforces the perception of certain elements of the sound and obscures others” (Chion, 1994, p. 32).

Once it was possible for celebrated musicians to be heard in this way long after they died, performers were no longer spared from the “anxiety of influence”. For example, once Ernest Lough’s recording came to be seen as definitive, young singers shied away from Mendelssohn’s “Oh for the Wings of a Dove”; cellists adding the Elgar concerto to their repertoire do so under the shadow of Jacqueline Du Pré’s recording with the famously exaggerated slide at the end of the opening phrase. Finalists in international music competitions are not only compared with the other competitors and the most esteemed concert artists of their time; jurors and audience members routinely compare them with their favorite recordings which can date as far back as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But eligibility for musical sainthood involves more than being remembered and admired after death; when it comes to the works required for this exalted status, composers have the advantage over performers. As Lang and Lang (1988) argue in their study of posthumous artistic reputation, survival in the collective memory depends on the availability of tangible objects, which is why artists who leave behind intact and durable original oeuvres are more likely to be remembered. Musicians who were mainly performers leave behind the instruments they have played (unless they are singers), and, if they lived in the right century, recordings, which document what they have *done* musically – the remarkable interpretations and technical mastery that garnered the praise of contemporaries. Musicians who were mainly composers leave behind scores, which may or may not have been lauded in their

lifetime. What is more important is that these scores are thought to document their musical *intentions*, which performers feel morally obligated to honor.

The ambiguity of the score is commonly thought to weaken the composer's position because they must trust others to decipher their intentions and present their works in a compelling way. But this view is shortsighted. The necessarily cryptic nature of notation also allows for the composer's work to be made into an enigma, which is how the "Beethoven effect" is initiated. It also grants composers a form of posthumous agency, in that their inscriptions spur subsequent generations on an endless search for what the composer "really" wanted. While not all dead composers become saints, and the hierarchy of saints varies by region and over time, there is no question that composers serve as the central totemic figures in the elementary forms of musical life.



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<sup>i</sup> Musicologists offer a more complex version of this narrative. See Grove Music Online, s.v., “Bach Revival” by Nicholas Temperley/Peter Wollny. Accessed 31 March 2015.

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<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.britten100.org/home> (accessed 31 March 2015).

<sup>iii</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Schubert, Franz” by Robert Winter.

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<sup>iv</sup> Wigler, Stephen. 1992. “Pianist’s body returns to Poland but heart stays behind.” in *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 21, p. B4. See also Kozinn, Allan. 1992. “Paderewski to Go Home, 51 Years After his Death.” in *The New York Times*, June 25, p. C16.

<sup>v</sup> See also Ross, Alex. “Chopin’s Heart”, *The New Yorker*. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/chopins-heart>. Accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>vi</sup> Unfortunately, the autopsy report has been lost, leaving the exact cause of death a mystery.

<sup>vii</sup> Figueroa, Oscar. (1969) “Argentina Whistles for Sutherland.” *Opera Magazine*, p. 57.