

The Beethoven-Wagner Connection, or, What did the Frenchmen have in mind?

A micropaper (reconstructed from lost files)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: this brief essay is reconstructed more or less from memory because the original, posted to the AMS List several years ago, cannot be found. The text of this micropaper is unimportant; the examples are important.

We cannot dwell on each phrase of the Gloria [of the *Missa Solemnis*]; but we shall mention, in passing, in the *Gratias agimus tibi*, the emergence of a melodic design later to be cherished by Richard Wagner, principally in the *Meistersinger* and the *Walküre*.

Vincent d'Indy, *Beethoven: A Critical Biography*, 1911
(as cited in Scherman and Biancolli, *The Beethoven Companion*)

Guiraud: You say that the cor anglais solo in the third act of *Tristan* is a classical aria, an "exercise"? It doesn't in any way suggest *Beethoven* [emphasis added].

Debussy: Because you don't hear the harmony beneath it...

Claude Debussy in conversation with his teacher Ernest Guiraud, 1889 or 1890 (as transcribed by Maurice Emmanuel and cited in Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, vol. 1)

It may not have been very gracious of these composers to have neglected to cite chapter and verse, but later generations may regard this failure as a challenge. D'Indy's allusion to *Meistersinger* finds a ready answer. Here are the parallel instances:

Missa solemnis, Gloria, mm. 131-136

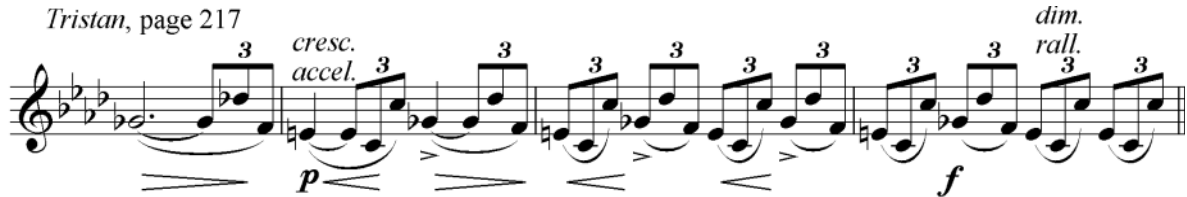


Meistersinger, p. 218



I do not, at present, identify any correlation between the *Missa solemnis* and *Die Walküre*.

The Debussy citation is more difficult, but I believe I know what he refers to. The English horn solo at the beginning of Act III of *Tristan und Isolde* contains this Neapolitan melodic turn:



Debussy was probably thinking of this passage from Beethoven's third "Razumovsky" quartet:



Especially to be noted is the absolute-pitch correlation, which happens frequently in Debussy. See Chapter 2 of my book, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on His Music* (2004), in which Debussy's penchant for recycling his own and others' music is discussed extensively with regard to absolute-pitch values; also my article "Debussy's Absolute Pitch and Choice of Keys," forthcoming.

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