

Musicology and German National Identity

A Review of the Issues in Scholarship on the Late Eighteenth Century

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of German national identity as it has been used by musicologists and offers an alternative, fuller understanding of that concept by placing it in its late eighteenth-century context. This is done by discussing the protean nature of identity and the importance of the German conception of it in the eighteenth century, explicating the literature in musicology on the development of this identity in music, and pulling from other academic work specifically on the neglected period. The goal of this work is to showcase the multifaceted understandings of identity and how this approach is to the benefit of musicology.

Article

In the foreword to Richard Leppert and Susan McClary's ground-breaking book *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, Janet Wolff gives a striking interpretation of the state of musicology and its history. Her short summary of the history of musicology as a discipline ties the themes of all the essays together as it attacks the assumption upon which most academic writing on music has been grounded: autonomy. By this, I am referring to the belief that "Art—at least Great Art—transcends the social, the political, and the everyday."¹ According to Wolff, the belief that Art is "aesthetically autonomous" is a historical construction that became a useful selling point for artists in the nineteenth century. This process was part of a larger shift towards elitism that included a preference for male novelists over female, professional artists over amateurs, and a clear distinction between what was popular and what was "Great."² Published in 1987, Wolff's sociological deconstruction of the historiography of musicology argues not just for the inclusion of social context in the analysis of Art but shows how social values about Art have dominated, and ultimately constrained, the academic field of musicology.

Wolff paints a damning picture, but not an irreparable one. She herself says that "the idea of aesthetic autonomy ... is beginning to disintegrate. We should not exaggerate the extent

¹ Janet Wolff, "The ideology of autonomous art," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, eds. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

to which this socio-critical work has gained acceptance and incorporation within the mainstream of art history and literary criticism.”³ As a sociologist, part of her method in this chapter is comparing musicology to other disciplines that study “Great Art.” It is a compelling comparison that allows her to attach a caveat to this statement: “The striking exception to all of this, until recently, has been music.”⁴ Here, the core of her criticism comes through. Wolff declares that “there is nothing preventing anyone from learning about harmony and composition,” and argues that the reticence of academics from other fields towards the technical aspect of musicology should not prevent them from offering the necessary perspective of their field on the history of music.⁵ Her conclusion is that this barrier must be breached. For Wolff, “the sociology of music may benefit from what we have learned from developments in other areas of cultural studies.”⁶ To her, the interdisciplinary approach to understanding music is necessary in order to develop the discipline of musicology further and to gain a fuller picture of the development of music. While Wolff’s insights are specific to sociology and cultural studies, it has become very clear throughout my reading that a similar shift needs to be made with musicology, history, and historiography.

The assumption that music stands outside the social context in which it was developed has been challenged since the release of Leppert and McClary’s book but is still pervasive in musicology. Several academic works have been published in an attempt to connect this supposedly autonomous “Great Art” to society as a whole. One of the most important is Nicholas Till’s *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue, and Beauty in Mozart’s Operas*.⁷ Till’s method is an uneven one, but the intent is clear. He contends that music cannot be understood separately from society. Only through considering all of the social, political, and economic ways the Enlightenment influenced Mozart’s work along with elements from his personal life can his operas be fully understood.⁸

One concept that has emerged again and again in the work that has attempted to place music in its sociocultural context is that of national identity. Specifically, scholars have addressed the question of German identity and its development as connected to music. This is unsurprising as the question of how to define and apply “nation” and “national identity” has been debated by cultural historians for two centuries. What is curious about these new, expansive works is not their specific understanding of nation or national identity, but a complete lack of one. Rather than clearly defining these concepts, the norm has been to assume that the reader knows what the concepts mean and how they are being used in the analysis. The danger of this is that it perpetuates a misunderstanding of these concepts and fails to acknowledge their protean natures. Instead of a rigorous commentary on the meaning of national identity and how it has changed over time, scholars in musicology have tended to use a vague, modern understanding of the topic. Hence, the literature on German

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue, and Beauty in Mozart’s Operas* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), xi.

⁸ Ibid., xi.

identity in music has been adversely affected by a lack of engagement with a time when nationalism was still a debated concept and German identity was just emerging.

Nationalism has primarily been recognized as a concept that was influential in the nineteenth century because of its association with the establishment of nation-states. Musicologists certainly have known this, so they have restricted their work on German identity in music to the impact of nationalism in this time period. The issue with this is that it ignores a body of evidence that suggests that a unique German identity emerged during the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century, long before the establishment of Germany. This narrow understanding of national identity, one that associates it with a specific nation-state, ignores the history of the concept and the changing German understanding of it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although historians and musicologists have studied the development of German identity in music, many have consistently glossed over the important contributions made to its formation in the late eighteenth century. This is likely due to an essentialist understanding of identity which believes that nationalism must be a component of national identity. This error can be rectified by applying more multifaceted definitions of nation and identity to an analysis of the German national singspiel program and the works that came out of it. This article demonstrates that a richer and more nuanced understanding of the development of “nation” and “identity” has the potential to enhance our understanding of the development of German national identity in music.

First, it must be acknowledged that discussions surrounding German identity from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century can be difficult due to identifying which “Germans” are being discussed. Before the twentieth century, most musicologists have used “German” to speak of the people in Vienna and the greater Habsburg Empire, Austrian Empire, and later Austro-Hungarian Empire. This is usually because studies surrounding nationalism and national identity have focused on the multitude of cultures and identities in this territory. Conversations around German identity in Germany are usually restricted to the emergence of Leipzig as a musical center and popularly coalesce around the Nazis’ use of music to promote their vision of “Germans.” In this article, I focus on Germans in Vienna and the Habsburg Empire. Vienna was the epicenter for music and musicians, so the German identity discussed will be of those in the Empire in the late eighteenth century.

Defining National Identity

Why is it so important to distinguish national identity from nationalism? What can be gained from treating these concepts as social constructions, and understanding them in their historical context? Providing definitions for concepts like “nation,” “nationalism,” and “identity” allow a scholar to acknowledge that they have meant different things to different people in different times and places. Definitions acknowledge the power of the concepts that, in their different forms and perceptions, have had a profound impact on society. German national identity was not chosen randomly as a way of connecting music to society. The musicologists who examine music and its social contexts have repeatedly seen German national identity grow and change as an impactful idea through music. However, that *change* is not accounted for in their work.

In his foundational work, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson defines “nation” as a concept and explores the ways national identity is created and then connected to the emergence of nation-states. Anderson believed that nation “is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁹ One of his primary issues in defining “nation” comes from what he describes as a central paradox: “the objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.”¹⁰ His identification of nations as modern comes from his discussion of them within the context of nation-states, but the tendency to historicize “national identity” by nationalists is key.

One of the primary ways in which nation-states declared themselves to be separate from others in the nineteenth century was to connect to some constructed history that would justify their identity. For example, German historicism was “integral to German self-definition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”¹¹ What a “nation” was supposed to be was kept purposely vague because it was more malleable, and therefore powerful, when asserting the existence of one in the past as it was not restricted to the borders of a nation-state. When nationalism is clearly treated as a modern concept, as demonstrated by the restriction of scholarship on German identity in music almost entirely to the period after 1800, it has prevented any rigorous analysis of national identity before the emergence of nationalism. This understanding does not appreciate the longevity of the existence of national identity, or help us understand how that identity emerged and changed over time.

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* is itself a construct by scholars and it is certainly ironic to use an English dictionary to help understand German identity, yet it offers information that has no German counterpart. Accordingly, while definitions from the *OED* will be used, they will be informed by discussions from historians on the development of German identity. The Brothers Grimm do have their *Deutsches Wörterbuch (DWB)*—a compilation that has a definition for *Deutschtum* (German-ness) and has often been called the German equivalent for the *OED*. However, the concepts I wish to discuss using the *OED* have not been updated to current academic standards in the *DWB*, so I will consequently stick to the *OED*.

The earliest definition for identity in the *OED* is from 1545. Identity is defined as “the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness.”¹² Under this entry is Friedrich Schelling’s metaphysical doctrine of absolute identity. This alone shows that while this particular understanding of identity can be traced to the sixteenth century, Schelling’s identity philosophy emerged as an important contribution in the early 1800s. German people in the Habsburg Empire would have been generally familiar with the

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ Maike Oergel, *Culture and Identity: Historicity in German Literature and Thought* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2008), 6.

¹² “identity, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed April 11, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/Entry/91004?redirectedFrom=identity#eid>.

concepts of individual and collective identity, but important developments for our modern understanding were still to come.

The concept of “nation,” on the other hand, has been around for even longer. The first mention of it surfaces around 1330, but the entry pointedly comments on the changing understanding through time from early examples of race and common descent to territory, political unity, and independence. It states that nation is “[a] large aggregate of communities and individuals united by factors such as common descent, language, culture, history, or occupation of the same territory, so as to form a distinct people.”¹³ This definition emphasizes the physical aspect of nation compared to Anderson’s definition, which stresses how the historical and cultural elements of national identity are constructed. The *OED* definition, however, really highlights the importance of the changing meaning of “nation.” Both emphasize that “nation” refers to the group that feel some sense of community with each other. Both therefore distinguish the concept of national identity from nationalism, stressing that this group of community identity can exist prior to the establishment of their unique territory.

In his discussion of the word “nation,” Pieter M. Judson says that “the term ‘nation’ meant many things in 1789, but few of these approached the mass-oriented ethnic, linguistic, religious, or territorial understanding of the term that had become standard by 1914.”¹⁴ Judson takes a political approach to understanding the historical perspective on German identity when he argues that “as a form of identity that was often situationally defined, when it was considered at all, Germanness rarely referred to qualities or interests that transcended a local perspective.”¹⁵ Judson sees late eighteenth-century and even early nineteenth-century German identity as reflective of a scattered nation that was hardly unified in an understanding of its essence across territories. Thus, while the concept of German national identity existed, there was not a single or uniform understanding of what its characteristics were. For Judson, it lacked unity.

Nationalism was first used as a term in 1798 in the English language, but did appear earlier in German in 1774. It is defined in the *OED* as “advocacy of or support for the interests of one’s own nation, esp. to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations. Also: advocacy of or support for national independence or self-determination.”¹⁶ Most historians stress the importance of this ideology in the nineteenth century, but when it is being used in broad strokes, scholars may often use a modern understanding of the concept instead of engaging with the changing meaning of it in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Christian Jansen looks at nation and nationalism “as modern phenomena whose roots,

¹³ “nation, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/Entry/125285?rskey=SdHqov&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

¹⁴ Pieter M. Judson, “Changing Meanings of ‘German’ in Habsburg Central Europe,” in *The Germans and the East*, eds. Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A.J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶ “nationalism, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

however, can be traced back to pre-modern times.”¹⁷ For Jansen, the historiography acknowledges that “modern nationalism emerged between 1740 and 1830,” which is earlier than the traditional date of 1800.¹⁸ However, he also says that “when recent research shifts the beginnings of nationalism to an earlier date, it also prolongs the incubation period during which nationalist *topoi* and patterns of argumentation, as well as a nationalist culture, are argued to have developed.”¹⁹ This is the clincher. This is what historiography on the topic of German identity in music has missed. When a scholar refuses to engage with the changing understandings of concepts and ideologies in the time period they are studying, they lose the full picture of what it is they are discussing. They miss the opportunity to present a richer and more complex account. The major *OED* definition is followed by the caveat that, “whereas *patriotism* usually refers to a general sentiment, *nationalism* now usually refers to a specific ideology, esp. one expressed through political activism. In earlier use, however, the two appear to have been more or less interchangeable.”²⁰ This again proves the need to use concepts carefully and with full recognition of what they mean to the people of the specific time and place being studied.

It is not that all literature on German musicology does not acknowledge that the meaning of German national identity changes, or even that applying a modern understanding of national identity to the past is ahistorical. It is the complete lack of discussion in the literature of the meaning of these concepts and how people at the time would have understood them that is problematic. This is a trend across much of the historiography on German national identity in music.

German National Identity in Musicology

Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter’s book *Music & German National Identity* is the most complete monograph on this topic. Their introduction, “Germans as the ‘People of Music,’” is intended to act as a brief overview of the increasing importance of music to the development of German identity over the centuries. Applegate and Potter assert that “most historians would agree that the eighteenth century marked the beginning of an emerging consciousness of German identity among speakers of German, as well as accompanying forms of cultural and political activism aimed at defining a putative national culture and debating the cultural future of central Europe.”²¹ They clearly connect nationalism to German national identity, which is absolutely correct in the time period that they claim historians say it emerged. However, the research they are citing was published in 1988 and 1991, and is dated when compared to the beliefs of current major scholars like Judson and Jansen. The authors do not attempt to pull apart the conflation of German national identity

¹⁷ Christian Jansen, “The Formation of German Nationalism, 1740-1850,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 234.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “nationalism, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Emphasis in the original.

²¹ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, “Germans as the ‘People of Music’: Genealogy of an Identity,” in *Music & German National Identity*, eds. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3.

and nationalism. This becomes even clearer later in their narrative about the emergence of German national identity.

Even though Applegate and Potter acknowledge that “musical life in the eighteenth century was not, however, wholly without national significance,” they stress that “the one nationalizing milieu that existed in central Europe was that of literary culture.”²² The group that they focus on, then, were writers such as Johann Matheson and Friedrich Nicolai who were exploring the new concept of nationalism that was part of the greater debate referred to by Jansen during this period. Applegate and Potter do admit that “early music periodicals began to suggest the importance of at least opera to national culture” but do not offer any further insights or analysis.²³ They also suggest that this may be the result of the influence of the Enlightenment in this connection between literary culture spilling over into musical matters, but once again, do not probe further.²⁴ Instead, they transition to focusing on the nineteenth century where nationalism and national identity are neatly tied together. As they are the editors framing the seminal collection of essays on German national identity, it is frustrating that they refuse to engage significantly with this earlier period.

Despite Applegate and Potter’s conflation of concepts, they do have remarkable insights on the development of German identity. They argue that “when musicologists place Finnish, Czech, Russian, or Spanish musical compositions under the heading of ‘musical nationalism,’ they implicitly compare them against a universally accepted German music and presume that other nations tried to distinguish themselves by deviating from the German standard.”²⁵ This insight reveals how looking at the emergence of other national identities and studying their derivative from the “norm” demonstrates that German identity was already well established and recognized. This is one of the most astute observations that they make and can be applied to works that focus on another identity in a German context to learn more about German identity’s development.

The first chapter after Applegate and Potter’s essay is Bernd Sponheuer’s “Reconstructing Ideal Types of the ‘German’ in Music,” and it improves on the introduction in its handling of “nation” in eighteenth-century German national identity in music. First, Sponheuer spends a significant amount of time on eighteenth-century developments and acknowledges that “one has to be careful not to rely on hindsight in reconstructing the intellectual and cultural milieu.”²⁶ This is a big step away from Applegate and Potter’s overview; however that is about as far as Sponheuer goes in discussing eighteenth-century context. He does not clarify that this refers to concepts and, while identifying the German nation-state as a modern construction, obscures the geography of the German groups he is analyzing. Sponheuer’s use of “nation” to refer to the “nation-state” of Germany is also troublesome

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁵ Ibid., 1.

²⁶ Bernd Sponheuer, “Reconstructing Ideal Types of the ‘German’ in Music,” in *Music & German National Identity*, eds. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 43.

when trying to identify his use of national identity in the eighteenth-century context he is discussing.

To his credit, Sponheuer identifies two early types of German national identity as expressed through music that originate in the eighteenth century. He identifies one that “responded to the specific historical situation of the eighteenth century” and another that “represented the genesis of both the exclusivist and the universalist ideal types.”²⁷ That he has taken the time to locate the origins of different German national identities in music is more than most others can say. In particular, his discussion of the “German *Sonderweg* [that] arose in the eighteenth century” is powerful because while it is no longer in favor as a theory by historians, it solidified in the nineteenth century and was used prolifically in the twentieth century.²⁸ He also highlights the importance of Germans defining their identity against a “foreign” one. As he states, “Eighteenth century writers ... reinterpreted Germany’s historical and cultural backwardness, especially evident in its dependence on Italian musical culture, as a superior trait.”²⁹ This relationship with Italian musical culture is an important one and his work is elevated by his identification and appreciation of it. Still, his muddling of time and geography concerning “Germany” shows an inconsistency in how he applies his insights to his argument. Sponheuer, despite making important steps towards appreciating the historical context of key concepts, falls into the musicological trend of not fully embracing etymology, and the clarity of his argument suffers for it.

Sponheuer sees a continuity in German national identity in music in which “an underlying dichotomy persists, best expressed by Hanslick’s ‘being beautiful’ versus ‘having profound meaning.’”³⁰ This insight, while lacking a rigorous understanding of the German “nation” in the eighteenth century, does express the importance of looking at the end of this century for answers concerning German identity in music. This is particularly stirring as the other major work on German identity in music uses Eduard Hanslick as a primary source and focuses on him to understand German identity in his lifetime. It also fails to engage with German national identity in the eighteenth century.

Defining Deutschtum was written by David Lee Brodbeck and published in 2014. In his book, he aims “to reveal the very great extent to which contemporary political ideology and political developments on the ground were tied to questions of German identity in late-nineteenth-century Austria, and to show how, in turn, these questions were implicated in the musical culture and above all articulated by Vienna’s music critics.”³¹ Brodbeck is interested in liberal German identity, so is it fair to criticize him for not including eighteenth-century material? The German national identity that Brodbeck focuses on encourages “the idea of collective patriotism.” Though at the same time, “there was no doubt in Hanslick’s mind about what lay in the center and what in the periphery.”³² The

²⁷ Ibid., 44.

²⁸ Ibid., 42.

²⁹ Ibid., 44.

³⁰ Ibid., 56.

³¹ David Lee Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum: Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xiii-xiv.

³² Ibid., 4.

patriotism he refers to is the early nationalism cited in the *OED* definition, though he does not engage with this. The hierarchy of nations is also alluded to, which is central to German liberalism. The essence of the identity that Brodbeck is analyzing is that:

Deutschtum (Germanness) and bourgeois cultural values were treated as though they were one and the same: to be liberal was to be German; to be German was to be liberal. The idea of race or what would later be called ethnicity had little to do with this particular construction of social identity. Indeed, liberal nationalists—as [Johann Nepomuk] Berger’s imperative suggests—tended to treat national and class identities not as fixed categories, but as contingent ones, insofar as one could theoretically remedy inadequacies in either through education and acculturation.³³

German national identity in this form is not a fixed to a single group, but rather, people can become German. Culture has far more to do with German national identity than ethnicity. This idea has its roots in the Enlightenment, which empowered the bourgeoisie and, as Kant said, “is man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage.”³⁴ This age encouraged religious toleration, cultural inclusion, and emphasized the power of individual reason. It was also central, as will be expanded upon later, to the early formation of German national identity as alluded to by Sponheuer. Despite the German liberal identity being central to his work, Brodbeck fails to explore the late eighteenth-century origins of this identity.

Brodbeck does a masterful job exploring the development of German national identity as it relates to music, musicians, and music critics. His summary of the political scene in Vienna in the mid-nineteenth century and the effects that other national groups growing in Austro-Hungary had on German national identity are explored from social and political angles. The rise in nationalism from groups like the Czechs and the gains they made in the Viennese parliament ultimately led to “a new kind of exclusionary process, whereby *Deutschtum* came to be defined in racial rather than cultural terms.”³⁵ Brodbeck clearly understands how German national identity developed throughout the nineteenth century in Austria-Hungary and knows how different identities relate to one another and affect each other’s developments. What weakens his study is a tentativeness regarding where German liberal identity came from. While he recognizes in his reference to German patriotism that German nationalism has not yet solidified into a unified concept, he is reluctant to dive into the complexities surrounding national identity and nationalism. This shows a lack of comfort with the state of flux these concepts were in after the Enlightenment and results in a lack of clarity. Like Applegate and Potter in *Music & German National Identity*, his lack of engagement with his topic’s origins limits the impact of his research.

One of the few musicologists actually to engage with the historical construction of concepts is Philip V. Bohlman. Bohlman writes not on German identity but Jewish identity in music. Of course, aspects of German identity can always be drawn from the creation of another

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?,” trans. Mary C. Smith, *Sources of Medieval History*, Columbia University, accessed April 16, 2019, <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>.

³⁵ Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 11.

national identity because, as Applegate and Potter assert, German identity in music is the norm from which all others differentiate. In a section entitled “Inventing Music and Culture,” Bohlman states that “I intentionally call into question the nature of what we assume Jewish music to be; clearly, I wish to challenge assumptions about the history that produced such a concept, hence the metaphysical relation of Jewish music to that history.”³⁶ He acknowledges the constructed nature of the associations made between music and identities. For him, part of communicating his method is also exploring the conceptions of music, identity, and history and how they relate. This is quite different from the previous two works that focus on solely German national identity without interrogating their concepts so deeply.

The format that Bohlman uses in this chapter allows him to begin his argumentation by noting that “with the onset of the modern era, new historical processes were rapidly unleashed as the Jewish community entered into a struggle for control over the signs of power and identity.”³⁷ He identifies how important historicism became to Jewish identity in music during the age of modernism. Bohlman clearly recognizes the importance of knowing how his subjects understand the concepts he is analyzing in their music. This elevates his argument as he is able to trace how the construction of Jewish identity changes while not being taken in by the new identity’s historicism of itself.

Bohlman drives home the importance of exploring both the history of the concepts he is using and explaining how he intends to use them in his discussion of the concept of “invention.” He states, “I am interested not so much in what Jewish music has been assumed to be, but rather with how such assumptions acquire an ontology of their own,” and so takes the concept further.³⁸ He explores the etymology of the concept and breaks it down to explain how he intends to apply it in this chapter. His clarification of how he understands “invention” enhances his work and makes it a more thorough investigation of the development of Jewish identity in music than either of the works on German national identity. It is this method that should be used by all musicologists who are interested in studying concepts that not only have had major impacts on music but also have an important history of their own. This should be applied to work that focuses on the creation of German national identity in music in the eighteenth century.

Germanness and the Eighteenth Century

The first step in rectifying the gap in the scholarship in musicology on the development of a German national identity in music is to turn to work that focuses just on the eighteenth century. If scholars pull from sources that look at the relationship between music and society in the late eighteenth century, they will be able to show a fuller picture. In contrast to scholarship that focuses on society and music in the eighteenth century, musicological work on identity draws heavily on sources from the literary culture. For example, in Brodbeck’s analysis of how the political landscape was affecting *Deutschtum* in music, he relies on the critic culture of the nineteenth century. This would explain much of his

³⁶ Philip V. Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

wariness towards the eighteenth century, as music criticism in this period was not yet so widespread. Critics also had yet to take on a major role in the music scene as the culture of music performance was still dominated by a tradition of private performance for selected audiences. The market to sell music publicly had not yet taken off and the patronage system was still the most prominent way to make money as a composer, though that was changing by the time of Mozart. What this means is that musicologists who focus their work on the development of German national identity must turn to a different set of sources than they are used to working with if they are to adequately engage with the period.

In her dissertation “The national singspiel in Vienna from 1778 to 1785,” Elizabeth Manning discusses Mozart’s work *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) in the context of a program instituted by Emperor Joseph II. Manning’s work is very unusual in that it dates from 1975 and its primary purpose is to put music in its social and political context. This was an unusual practice at the time as Janet Wolff previously highlighted. What is so important about this work is the way in which it uses the influence of a political figure to discuss a vested interest in the late eighteenth century in developing a German national identity in music. Manning argues that Joseph II “desire[d] to improve the destiny of his subjects thereby making them conscious of their German nationality. The establishment of [a] national theatre in Vienna in 1776 is directly linked with both these aspirations, but it is unlikely that such an event could have occurred had the Emperor not taken a personal interest in theatre and music.”³⁹ Manning points to the influence and the strategy of a political leader in moving forward the development of a German national identity in music. The music created for the national theatre fulfilled the specific vision of Joseph II.

This argument is very different from Sponheuer’s analysis of the eighteenth-century roots of German national identity. Sponheuer turns to literary figures, much in the same way that Brodbeck looks at critics, for his sources on early German national identity. While literary culture is incredibly important, especially since an enlightened despot like Joseph II read and liked the ideas published by that literary culture during the late Enlightenment, Sponheuer never turns to politics or politically created musical institutions for answers about identity. Manning, on the other hand, fails to explain why Joseph II is so invested in creating a German national identity in music; she just says that he is. If the evidence of Manning could be combined with the interests of Sponheuer, we would be much closer to a complete understanding of the origins, nature, and implications of German identity in the late eighteenth century.

After Manning’s dissertation came Nicholas Till’s *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, which, in 1992, was an important book in musicology that directly challenged autonomous understandings of music. Till saw *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) as the first truly German work because he believed:

³⁹ Elizabeth Manning, “The national singspiel in Vienna from 1778 to 1785” (PhD diss., Durham University, 1975), 25.

Die Zauberflöte is a quintessentially Viennese work: magical, street-wise, spectacular and farcical. In the folk theatre of the Viennese suburbs (attended by all classes of society), Mozart at last found the indigenous German art, rooted in community and tradition, which he had always sought, and which enabled him to write the German opera that had always eluded him (*Die Zauberflöte* was Mozart's greatest work, Beethoven asserted, because it was the only work in which he showed himself as a "German Master").⁴⁰

Till's aim is to connect the Enlightenment and its ideas to as much of Mozart's work as possible, but the best argument that comes out of his book is that Mozart achieved something in his music and characters in *Die Zauberflöte* that reflected a German national identity. That Beethoven thought the themes expressed in this singspiel made him a specifically "German Master" shows that there is something that originated in Mozart's work that went on to be seen as an expression of German national identity in music.

This connection between Mozart and Beethoven, the national singspiel, Enlightenment understandings of identity, and early nationalism all comes together in the literature written by musicologist Martin Nedbal. In 2009, he published a dissertation entitled "Morals across the Footlights: Viennese Singspiel, National Identity, and the Aesthetics of Morality, c. 1770-1820," which was later made into the book, *Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven*, published in 2017. The titles alone are stirring when considering the question of German national identity and its treatment as it was taken out of the second title. Nedbal examines the "musico-dramatic features" present in Viennese singspiel in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries "in tandem with archival documents and published writings by eighteenth-century German theater aestheticians, censors, and critics (including Johann Christoph Gottsched, Joseph von Sonnenfels, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Friedrich Schiller) who claimed that the Germans and their culture should be (or already were) morally superior to other nations and their cultures."⁴¹ Nedbal takes the material that Manning and Till discuss but puts them in many sociopolitical contexts. His method is a multi-faceted one that allows for many different perspectives, but does it contend with the different understandings of national identity and nationalism in this period?

Nedbal begins his dissertation by addressing the topic of nationalism in German music and how other scholars have dealt with it in the eighteenth century. He criticizes Richard Taruskin's oversimplified construction of "a rigid dichotomy that postulates a neat distinction between earlier and later versions of German nationalism—i.e., between a nonaggressive, civic, cosmopolitan patriotism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the later nineteenth-century chauvinist, exclusive nationalism."⁴² Nedbal asserts that the cosmopolitanism of the earlier period had exclusionary features that would

⁴⁰ Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 272.

⁴¹ Martin Nedbal, "Morals across the Footlights: Viennese Singspiel, National Identity, and the Aesthetics of Morality, c. 1770-1820," (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2009), iv, <http://hdl.handle.net/1802/10986>.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1.

also show up in nineteenth-century nationalism, so to treat them as mutually exclusive is incorrect. This culminates in his statement that “other scholars have more recently called for a reconsideration of eighteenth-century German culture and politics and of the Enlightenment period in general as marked by great heterogeneity and as combining both universalist and exclusivist tendencies.”⁴³ This is as close as Nedbal gets to exploring the history of the idea of national identity apart from nationalism in this period.

In his dissertation, despite its thoroughness in other areas, Nedbal fails to really engage with what he means in his use of the concept of “nationalism” in the context of the eighteenth century. He rectifies this in his 2017 book in a section dedicated to it in the preface. That he put this information outside the main body of text shows the continuous devaluation in musicology of clarifying concepts:

This eighteenth-century German nationalism is quite different from its nineteenth-century continuation, however. Scholars often refer to nineteenth-century German forms of national consciousness as “political nationalism” and distinguish it from the so-called cultural nationalism of the eighteenth-century; instead of militaristic, political, and chauvinistic rhetoric that became prominent in the discussions of the German national identity in the nineteenth century, eighteenth-century conceptualizations mainly focused on aesthetics and morality.⁴⁴

This “cultural nationalism” seems to fall in between the definitions of “nation” and “nationalism” that were discussed earlier. The scholar he cites from for his use of “cultural nationalism” is Michael J. Sosulski. This nationalism is still exclusionary, but it also fits within the *ancien régime* of the Habsburg Empire. The term almost acts as a placeholder in the text for a discussion of the state of these concepts. While it is not his intention to discuss how the meaning of terms changes over time, this “cultural nationalism” implies that everyone in this period understood the concept this one way.

Nedbal’s work focuses on nationalist thinkers in the eighteenth century such as Gottsched, Sonnenfels, Lessing, and Schiller.⁴⁵ They were a minority and espoused one particular construction of German national identity. Nedbal primarily engages with this group as his focus and does not speak of other understandings of nation and national identity in this period as they relate to music. The point of his work is to highlight the cultural nationalism that has been often overlooked when examining singspiel. When applying Nedbal’s work to the greater scope of the development of German national identity in music, the other perspectives on German national identity from the time must also be weighed alongside it, whether or not they had a significant impact. Only then can the changing nature of “nation,” “national identity,” and “nationalism” be expressed as they relate to music.

Conclusion

⁴³ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁴ Martin Nedbal, *Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 10.

⁴⁵ Nedbal, “Morals across the Footlights,” iv.

After considering the current scholarship on the issue of German national identity in the late eighteenth century in music, it is clear that there is a need for a more nuanced approach. I would call on all scholars to consider more deeply the implications of national identity as a concept and appreciate more both the turbulence of its definition and the importance of etymology in this field. Clarity is essential in moving musicology even further as a discipline.

Wolff was right to believe that “the sociology of music may benefit from what we have learned from developments in other areas of cultural studies.”⁴⁶ In fact, she should have taken that statement even further. Music and musicology could only be helped from the informed inclusion of expertise from other fields. This has happened more and more in recent scholarship; however, studies like those Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter and David Lee Brodbeck, which are built around national identity, fail to fully interrogate the meaning and contextual importance of that concept. They are absolutely correct to focus on that subject matter; the array of essays in *Music & German National Identity* span from topics such as “*Einheit-Freiheit-Vaterland: Intimations of Utopia in Robert Schumann’s Late Choral Music*” to “*American Jazz in the German Cold War,*” which display how broadly national identity can be studied in German music. Applegate and Potter consistently demonstrate in the work they curated for that collection that they have an excellent understanding of the important role German national identity has played in the development of music, particularly in the nineteenth century. The issue is with their reticence regarding the concept’s origins and their tendency to shy away from its context in the eighteenth century. A more rigorous look at its beginnings would undoubtedly elevate the entire work.

Nicholas Till and Elizabeth Manning demonstrate this fearlessness regarding the context of the eighteenth century but fail to fully engage with concepts like German national identity. They are more interested in discussing the institutions and political and social situations that were present in Vienna in that time, rather than asking why that was the case. Till spends a bit more time musing over possibilities, though he has the unfortunate habit of framing these statements as facts without much justification. An example of this is when Till implies in his writing that Mozart actually believed in Rosicrucian Christianity rather than just invoking elements of it in his work. He states plainly that “Rosicrucian Christians such as Mozart seem to have come to believe that redemption was both a cosmic event embracing all time and history” despite no evidence that Mozart truly believed that.⁴⁷

An ideal approach would be a marriage between the content of Martin Nedbal’s work to Philip V. Bohlman’s method. Bohlman appreciates the importance of understanding the historical context of concepts and uses this to great effect in *Jewish Music and Modernity*. He is also unafraid to examine the origins of the national identity he discusses as proven when he argues that “inventing Jewish music depended on the conscious extension of music in nineteenth-century Europe back to that in Eretz Yisrael prior to the destruction of the

⁴⁶ Wolff, “The ideology of autonomous art,” 12.

⁴⁷ Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 307.

temples, and if at all possible to the music of the First Temple.”⁴⁸ Bohlman appreciates the importance of not just the timeline of musical developments but the timeline of how words and concepts were understood by the people making those developments. He digs into the purpose. Nedbal focuses on the right period and asks the right questions, but his hyper-focus on one group’s understanding of the concept of German national identity creates a skewed picture of the state of that identity in the late eighteenth century. Future works should be able to balance several perspectives on the issue, or at least acknowledge them, even if they focus on one in particular.

It is by looking and learning from the current scholarship in musicology on German national identity that future studies should shape themselves. They should be conscious of the importance of historical context and the meaning of concepts but also be bold in the questions they ask and in the material they cover. The web that is German national identity and how it ties to music in the late eighteenth century is a difficult one to unpick, but it is through methodical unravelling and sensitivity that the truth will be revealed.

⁴⁸ Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity*, 79.