



Franz von Stuck and Beethoven – Music of the Art Nouveau in Munich

The painter, sculptor and illustrator Franz von Stuck (1863-1928), from Tettenweis in Lower Bavaria, was one of the most important and most versatile figures of the art nouveau period in Germany. Through his work and his influence as professor at the Munich Academy of Art he made a lasting impression on art around 1900 and together with Franz von Lenbach (1836-1904) and Friedrich August von Kaulbach (1850-1920) was one of the predominant “Art Lords” in the Bavarian capital.

Stuck’s artistic and commercial success was most clearly manifested in the construction of his prestigious villa, which he himself designed and furnished. It was conceived as a total work of art which would provide an appropriate setting for the presentation of the artist himself as well as of his works. In this almost regal ambience, the artist and his elegant wife Mary (1865-1929) presented themselves to a genteel public as hosts of stylish and elegant social events during which art and life were to form a perfect alliance.

Such a prestigious total concept necessarily included the cultivation of music, in accordance with the self-conception of the upper classes in Wilhelmine Germany. And although it appears that music was in fact rarely played at events in the villa, Franz von Stuck took particular care with the furnishing of the music room in his house. Moreover his wife, who had trained as a singer, took part successfully in amateur performances within Munich society, and the couple cultivated the acquaintance of various dancers who were well-known in Munich, such as Isadora Duncan (1877-1927). All this indicates that the von Stucks were particularly interested in developing a profile as music lovers.

Music also played an important role in Franz von Stuck’s art. Many of his pictures and sculptures feature fauns and centaurs gleefully making music, or groups of high-spirited young girls dancing outdoors.



„Spazierritt“ by Franz von Stuck  
Oil on canvas, 1903  
(Schweinfurt, Museum Georg Schäfer)



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On the other hand he only rarely busied himself with the portrait of a composer. Apart from two portrayals of Richard Wagner (1813-1883) he concentrated his attention entirely on Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). On his own admission he was a fervent admirer of the master composer from Bonn and painted and sculpted his likeness many times over the years.



Beethoven relief by Franz von Stuck  
Bronze, 1900/1902  
(Private property, Frankfurt a.M.)

The Munich artist may have derived his preoccupation with Beethoven from the widespread late-romantic enthusiasm for the composer which was prevalent around 1900. It inspired painters and sculptors in different European countries to a great variety of works and found its expression in such impressive works such as Max Klinger's (1857-1920) Beethoven monument in Leipzig, Gustav Klimt's (1862-1918) Beethoven frieze in Vienna, or the numerous Beethoven busts of the Parisian sculptor Émile Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929).

Franz von Stuck produced several paintings and reliefs, which had the particular quality of a powerful and heroic depiction of Beethoven, without losing a similarity with the life mask of the Bonn master musician. This combination of a concentration on the original model, together with a new interpretation, meant that Stuck's portrayals of the composer complied exactly with public demand. This would certainly explain their enormous popularity, which was in no way confined to the "Art Lord's" native Bavaria.

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