



# The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius

By Peter Kivy

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The concept of genius intrigues us. Artistic geniuses have something other people don't have. In some cases that something seems to be a remarkable kind of inspiration that permits the artist to exceed his own abilities. It is as if the artist is suddenly possessed, as if some outside force flows through them at the moment of creation. In other cases genius seems best explained as a natural gift. The artist is the possessor of an extra talent that enables the production of masterpiece after masterpiece. This book explores the concept of artistic genius and how it came to be symbolised by three great composers of the modern era: Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven.

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Plato characterized genius as inspiration derived from a greater-than-human spirit. In the third century C.E., Longinus characterized genius as the possession of an extraordinary talent to create and, so doing, break the established rules of artistic creation. Another definition covers the workaholic or journeyman who explores an art exhaustively. Mozart was considered informed by divine inspiration. Although their contemporaries scorned their music, Handel and Beethoven were eventually said to possess the talent and ingenuity to move music forward. Bach typified the journeyman composer, who developed themes in every way he could. With its extensive discussions of Plato's and Longinus' definitions and of Schopenhauer's and Kant's expansions on the possessor of genius, its refutation of Tia DeNora's proposal that Beethoven's genius was constructed, and its rebuttal of Christine Battersby's assertion that females can't be geniuses, Kivy's book is more about philosophy than about music. Those interested in its subject will appreciate Kivy's argumentation for the classic definitions of genius and about how Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven endure as musical geniuses. *Alan Hirsch*

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#### From the Publisher

Yale Series in the Philosophy and Theory of Art.

#### About the Author

Peter Kivy is professor of philosophy at Rutgers University and the author of more than a dozen books on aesthetics and musical aesthetics.

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