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A Critical Reflection on the Impact of String Instruments in Piano Performance: Insights from the Pianist's Perspective[1]

Uma Reflexão Crítica sobre o Impacto dos Instrumentos de Corda na Performance de Piano: Perspectivas do Pianista

Oscar Caravaca González
Arts College, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China
oscarcaravacagonzalez@gmail.com

Abstract: This article critically examines a keyboard performer's viewpoint, focusing on interpreting the score through a lens informed by historical evidence and the insights of string instrumentalists. The author uses Franz Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 1 Op. 90 as an exploratory platform, examining diverse aspects to inspire pianists to extend beyond the conventional boundaries of their instrument. Transcribing solo piano works into various instrumental templates encourages pianists to explore unfamiliar domains, drawing on historical insights from string players and unexpected discoveries in string ensemble rehearsals to collectively enrich and reinvigorate creativity in solo piano interpretation. The germ for stimulating such artistic endeavor is rooted in the ground-breaking ideas of Alfred Brendel, whose influential work has significantly sparked the author's creativity and added depth to this cross-disciplinary endeavor. Throughout, this exploration illuminates the intricate dynamic interplay between the composer's authority, the performer's creative freedom, and the enduring influence of tradition, where such an interaction may provide a fertile ground for open-minded interpretations, particularly in "opening new ears" on how contemporary musicians approach scores from the canonical repertoire in present time.

Keywords: strings to piano. historical informed practices. cross-disciplinary exploration. performer's creative space.

1 This article originates from chapter two of my doctoral thesis titled "Wanderings Beyond Schubert: Unveiling the Performer's Narrative Voice," submitted to the Royal Academy of Music, London in 2023.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma análise crítica do ponto de vista de um teclista, incidindo sobre a interpretação da pauta através de um olhar informado por factos históricos e pela visão dos instrumentistas de cordas. O autor usa o *Impromptu* nº 1 Op. 90 de Franz Schubert como uma plataforma experimental, examinando diversos aspetos de modo a inspirar os pianistas a ultrapassarem os limites convencionais do seu instrumento. Ao transcrever obras para piano solo em vários modelos instrumentais, encoraja os pianistas a explorar domínios desconhecidos, recorrendo a conhecimentos históricos de instrumentistas de cordas e a descobertas inesperadas em ensaios de conjuntos de cordas para enriquecer coletivamente e revitalizar a criatividade na interpretação para piano solo. O princípio para o estímulo deste esforço artístico radica nas ideias inovadoras de Alfred Brendel, cujo influente trabalho estimulou significativamente a criatividade do autor e acrescentou profundidade a este esforço interdisciplinar. Ao longo de todo o processo, esta pesquisa ilumina a intrincada interação dinâmica entre a autoridade do compositor, a liberdade criativa do intérprete e a influência perene da tradição, em que tal interação pode criar um terreno fértil para interpretações inovadoras, particularmente no «desenvolvimento de novas sensibilidades musicais» sobre a forma como os músicos contemporâneos abordam as pautas do repertório canónico na atualidade.

Palavras-chave: das cordas ao piano. práticas historicamente informadas. exploração interdisciplinar. espaço criativo do intérprete.

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Introduction

This article is divided into two main sections, each offering complementary perspectives on my approach to exploring the potential impact of a string perspective on piano playing. The first section, "Alfred Brendel's Influence," provides the framework for examining how Brendel's perspective on a performer's role has shaped my strategies. This section serves as an introductory framework for the subsequent content, delineating the background that has motivated me to engage in critical reflection within my practice. Particularly, it bridges historically informed perspectives with a spectrum of creative approaches in performance, delving into the genesis of my inspiration when transcribing solo piano pieces into a string format.

In the second section, titled "From Strings to Piano Performance: Exploring Various Frictional Aspects Through String Players' Insights and Historical Evidence," the document shifts its focus towards the practical implications of these ideas. Within this section, I recount my critical reflection and experiences that emerged during a strings rehearsal when performing my own transcription of Schubert's *Impromptu* No.1. Throughout the rehearsal process, the imaginative ideas and particular performative viewpoints exhibited by the string players prompted deep reflection, sparking inquiries into certain aspects of my action-making as a performer. This section delves into various implications, covering aspects such as phrasing and textures' interplay, along with an exposition of multiple plausible viewpoints in performance, serving as an illustrative example of how cross-disciplinary insights can significantly enhance one's approach to solo piano works.

Alfred Brendel's Influence

In my academic journey, Alfred Brendel's insights, both through his written reflections and recordings, have played an instrumental role in shaping my artistic development, offering both

inspiration and guidance. In particular, his three-fold perspective on the performer as a "curator" of a museum, an "executor" of a will, and an "obstetrician" has prompted me to reevaluate my role as both an interpreter and communicator. This has led to a deeper contemplation of balancing the demands of interpreting the score with other elements that contribute to its creative delivery during performance. In Brendel's own words:

> The job of the curator is a 'historical' one; he compares the text of the work with the original sources and familiarizes himself with the textual conventions and performing habits of the period. In doing so, he will discover that it is not enough to "observe the letter"—as he will see if he should look, for example, at the Mozart piano concertos, the solo parts of which have hardly any dynamic markings but contain fermatas and uncompleted passages that have to be filled in by the player. At this point the curator hands over to the executor, who realises that it is his own breath which revives the breath of the composer, and who is aware that emotions and ears, instruments and concert halls have changed since the composer's day. The executor must not only have the ability to project the music of the past into the present, but also a faculty for reopening the gates of the past, for making what was new in its time seem new once again...
>
> If fortune smiles, the "moral" function of the executor will be complemented by the "magical" function of the obstetrician. It is he who protects the performance from the cold touch of finality, who leads the music back to its origin: the work, so it seems, is brought to life by the hands of the player. The immediacy of such a feat renders pointless any discussion about the merits and demerits of tradition. From a carefully nurtured foundation springs spontaneity (Brendel, 2001, pp. 302-303).

Additionally, following my in-person dialogues with Brendel since 2018, I had the opportunity to discuss about his perspective on interpreting Schubert's works, particularly his approach to Schubert's *Fantasie* in C major, Op. 15 (D 760). Among other issues, he expressed a preference for the expressive potential of the modern grand piano over historical instruments. Noteworthy, one statement from our conversation, left a profound impact on my ongoing research agenda:

> The instrument for the Wanderer Fantasy needed to be created. Don't assume that the composer necessarily composes for the sound of their private piano. Most great piano composers were also instrumental, vocal, and ensemble composers—except Chopin. Therefore, many musical trends and instruments, including orchestral tuttis and choral sounds, found their way into their piano compositions. To me, it is more intriguing to be aware of these latent elements than to confine oneself to the limitations of contemporary period instruments. Often, it becomes necessary for the performer to turn the piano into an orchestra or turn oneself into a singer.[2]

Reflecting on Brendel's insights regarding the three-fold capacities of the performer, as well as his perspective on that the composer does not necessarily composes for the sound of their private piano, I have been inspired to explore new avenues of inquiry. This led me to transcribe various Schubert's piano works into arrangements for ensemble, which presented new perspectives in rethinking the piano score, such as enlarging the score's textures, as well as reissuing slurs to fit string instruments bows.[3]

In light of the role of a "curator," as Brendel referred to it, I also reviewed multiple Urtext editions of the *Impromptus* to develop

2 Such a statement is based on Brendel's response during our conversation. The following video showcases the conversation excerpt (see video).

3 The following video portrays my initial forays into transcribing piano works for an ensemble in 2019 (see video).

my own comparative edition.[4] Furthermore, the suggestion made by Brendel to understand Schubert as a vocal composer also motivated me to explore how various singing techniques, especially in terms of phrasing and acting, may influence my performance, in particular, when discovering Johann Michael Vogl's theatrical approach and his contributions by means of voluntary ornamentation and *tempo* modifications.[5]

During this multifaceted process of transcribing piano scores for strings, I also encountered other writings from scholars who shared a parallel viewpoint with Brendel. Interestingly, Peter Gammond, aligning with Brendel's perspective, emphasizing that Schubert's piano compositions often hinted at being preliminary sketches for something else and that the piano is "a natural tool on which he (*Schubert*) worked but not an ultimate means of expression except where it most expressively works as an accompaniment (Gammond, 2018, Kindle Location 1791). Upon considering Brendel and Gammond observations, an interest arose on me regarding how performers could approach rethinking the piano score from a more open-minded perspective, prompting me to contemplate the potential influence of integrating insights from various disciplines to encourage more inclusive interpretations beyond literal notation. Consequently, I embarked on the journey of assembling a string quintet able to rehearse my own transcription of Schubert's *Impromptu* No.1, aiming to explore and uncover the serendipitous discoveries that may emerge during the rehearsal process.

In this context, Brendel's statement regarding the "obstetrician" and the importance of adapting our performance to the reception of today's audiences, "for making what was new in its time seem new once again" (Brendel, 2001, p. 303), drew my attention to several implications regarding what it may mean to me to view the score from a contemporary perspective. I am specifically referring to the extent of agency that performers may wield as co-creators. Drawing inspiration from this notion, I was interested

4 See my comparative Urtext edition integrated as an annex in my doctoral thesis "Wanderings Beyond Schubert: Unveiling the Performer's Narrative Voice," submitted to the Royal Academy of Music, London in 2023.

5 For a further contextualisation about Vogl's interpretive style, see Matson (2009) and Taseel (1997, pp. 702-14).

in further understanding the various liberties that contemporary musicians employ when juxtaposed with their nineteenth-century counterparts, considering that during that historical period, performers frequently undertook the adaptation of piano scores to align with their own sensibilities, as well as to cater to the evolving tastes and emotions of audiences. This notion inspired my research pursuits into the extent of agency that performers may wield when contributing to the alteration of the text's literacy.[6]

In connection to how performers in the late nineteenth-century recomposed works to suit their artistic preferences, interestingly, we can see how Brendel's recordings have explored the issue of performers deviating from Schubert's explicit score indications as a means of experimentation and innovation, for example by avoiding certain repeat marks in Schubert's Piano Sonatas. Nevertheless, it can be noted that such involvement was driven by his consistent personal rationale rather than arbitrary assumptions. As far as stylistic boundaries are concerned, it seemed clear to me that in his thoughts it was relevant "to employ your feelings but always, hopefully, with the awareness that the composer is first and that he usually knows better."[7] In this regard, he appears to acknowledge the composer's writing superiority over the performer's own originality, so the performer must acquire an understanding of the composer's idiosyncrasies, and then develop the ability to adapt it to his voice by engaging with what he calls the executor and the obstetrician's labors.

During a scholarly discussion about Brendel's decision to exclude repetitions in Schubert's Sonatas published by The New York Review of Books (1989), he defended his approach against Walter Frisch's critique on how he is "off of the mark" (Frisch, 1989), arguing that a faithful musical performance sometimes requires critical consideration and deviation from the written text. In his reply to Frisch, Brendel provided examples of repeat marks that he believed should be approached critically, noting that playing the complete score was not always prioritized in the nineteenth

6 For further contextualisation about the role of the performer in nineteenth century, refer to Doğantan-Dack (2012, p. 8).

7 This assertion is rooted in a discussion I engaged in with Brendel in 2018. For additional contextualisation, please refer to the following video excerpt (see Video).

century. For instance, he referred to various examples rooted in that century, outlining how Clara Schumann avoided playing certain pieces in "Carnaval" due to personal reasons that directly alluded to Robert and the family, while pianists such as Anton Rubinstein played Beethoven's "Opus 27/2, 31/2, 53, 57" in recitals also without repeats. Primarily, it appears that Brendel's reasoning for avoiding certain repetitions was based on structural understanding and psychological characterization. In particular, he remarked that in Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-flat major, D 960, the generosity of the exposition, the literal recapitulation, the lyrical character of all the themes, and the balance of the movements are more relevant factors than the advisability of its exposition repeat. Thus, the transitional measures explicitly written by Schubert leading to the exposition repeat, in his view, upset the magnificent coherence of the movement, whose motivic material seems unconnected to the new syncopated, jerky rhythm onward. According to him, it appears that Schubert was comparatively more old-fashioned than Beethoven, the latter being able to transcend conventions and directly enter the development section without repeating the exposition, as exemplified in Beethoven's Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, Op. 57 (Brendel, 1989).

In this context, however, Brendel recognized and compared his departure from the literal notation, referencing the open-minded approach of performers in the nineteenth century to interpreting the score. He remarked that "the late nineteenth-century appears to have crammed as many different dishes as possible into the musical menu, and down the listener's throat" (Brendel, 1989). However, in my view, focusing solely on the avoidance of specific repetitions from the score for asserting flexibility in notation in line with certain creative attitudes rooted in that century might overlook other prevailing trends of that historical period.

Frisch's label of Brendel's pursuit as showing "scrupulous fidelity to Schubert's compositional intentions" (Frisch, 1989), in my view, may have some resemblance to the authority that Carl Reinecke took in the nineteenth century, as he was labeled as the "keeper" of the Mozart tradition, which was in danger of disappearing (Peres Da Costa, 2019, p. 136). Nevertheless, within the context of viewing the performer as that authority expected to

remain faithful to the composer's "intentions," a notable disparity becomes apparent when comparing the degree of interpretive liberties taken by Brendel and Reinecke. Building upon Peres Da Costa's observations (2019, pp. 132-133), particularly regarding Reinecke's own liberties in performing Mozart, the various techniques displayed included: adding notes to create more complex chordal textures, ornamenting Mozart's original writing with more elaborate figures, playing in a generally *inégale* style, over-dotting certain rhythmic figures, using agogic accents (lengthening single notes to give special emphasis), modifying the *tempo* to suit the character of the music, employing predominantly arpeggiated style with varying types and combinations of arpeggiation, and pondering a *quasi*-improvised approach. Furthermore, it appears a frequent occurrence for Reinecke to double the melody notes at the upper octave and the bass notes at the lower octave, which resulted in the creation of *quasi*-orchestral effects (Peres Da Costa, 2019, pp. 139-40). Peres Da Costa suggests that Reinecke's unique arpeggiated style and departures from traditional rhythmic and *tempo* conventions were not criticized by critics in his lifetime, indicating that these practices, originating from late eighteenth-century or earlier traditions, were regarded as crucial to artistic piano performance during the nineteenth century (2019, p. 137).[8]

After our initial meeting in 2018, I had the chance to visit Brendel in January 2023, during which he offered feedback on my performance of the *Impromptus* Op. 90. In this encounter, I specially perceived how Brendel's teaching strongly aligned with his written observations on the role of the pianist as an orchestra conductor and the importance of cultivating an ensemble awareness in performance. In this light, we can see how Brendel's essays also highlight the correlation between *tempo* portrayal and the conductor's role, shedding light on how this figure shapes the performer's perception of motion and inner pulse. In particular, he

8 For a comprehensive overview about arpeggiation and asynchrony between hands in historical piano playing, additionally refer to Peres Da Costa (2012).

delved into the various levels of *tempo* flexibility that an exceptional conductor must consider while leading an orchestra. In Brendel's own words:

> Watching singers and conductors is, for the pianist, the most important source of learning. While the singer reminds us of the need to sing as well as to speak, the conductor offers us the orchestra as a model of balance, colour and rhythm. (The image of the pianist as a ten-fingered orchestra seems to originate with Hans von Bülow.) Our tempo modifications should be 'conducted' as long as the piece doesn't demand an improvisatory approach. In our mind, we conduct ourselves! (Brendel, 2013, p. 32).

In addition to reflecting on the expressive nature of his recordings, conversing with Brendel deepened my understanding of his sensitivity to historical conventions and provided further insight into his aesthetic preferences regarding the boundaries of applying voluntary embellishments beyond the composer's original letter. A noteworthy observation within this perspective was the recognition that, as he listened to my performance, he found that arpeggiation and asynchrony between hands, reminiscent of Reinecke's input, had the potential to obscure rather than enhance the beauty of my playing. However, concerning these expressive devices, upon reviewing his writings, it becomes evident that he has also contemplated their usage in specific contexts, particularly when striving to recreate orchestral imagery on the piano:

> Bass entries may be anticipated. Cellos and double basses need time in which to unfold their sound. Pizzicato chords may be slightly broken; they are plucked away from the keys. Muted string passages of course require soft pedaling (Brendel L, 2001, p. 284).

Initially, Brendel's recordings served as a role model, but paradoxically, deepen in his reflections also led me to classify knowledge into unexpected areas of influence. Such a trajectory

also led to a declassification of sorts, sparking increased creativity and self-questioning assumed beliefs as to how I approached my practice since then. Numerous conflicting issues have emerged during the process of comprehending Brendel's perspective on be loyal to the composer's letter. On one hand, he emphasizes the importance of avoiding repetition in Schubert sonatas, justifying this creative stance by comparing it to the creative efforts of performers in the nineteenth century. However, on the other hand, it remains unclear to me where the delicate balance lies in his rejection of other practices that were quite common during that century, such as Reinecke's approach involving arpeggiation and asynchrony, which critics of the time deemed as indispensable for any artistic approach.

In particular, reinterpreting Brendel's notion of the performer's role as an "obstetrician" guided me to reflect upon the distinctions between the context in which the music originated and those of the present day as I connected this issue with the following citation from Caspar Friedrich:

> Look with your own eye, and as the objects appear to you, so should you reproduce them; the effect that they have on you should be given back in your painting!... To each person nature makes itself manifest in a different way, for that reason no one can make his theories and rules valid for another as immutable laws. No one can be a yardstick for another, only for himself and souls congenial to his own (Friedrich apud Hinzm, 1984, p. 83).

Drawing from this citation, two key concerns help me reimagine my role as an "obstetrician." Firstly, the significance of personal experience and individuality in art; secondly, the futility of trying to apply universal rules or standards to the creative process. Brendel's words on the obstetrician's role connect to the former insight, as his words put it, "the immediacy of such a feat render pointless any discussion about the merits and demerits of tradition" (Brendel, 2001, p. 303). Friedrich's emphasis on "looking with your own

eye" ignited my belief that every artist should keenly observe the world around them, paint it through their unique perspective, and capture the profound influence it has on their own self. In a similar vein, as Ian Bostridge eloquently expressed, we may contemplate what the composition might mean for us today, and how it can unexpectedly relate to our modern concerns (Bostridge, 2017, p. 218).

I believe that my endeavor as an obstetrician bridges temporal and cultural gaps, emphasizing the significance of embracing unforeseen connections along with recognizing "that the great masterworks of the past must not be treated as dead museum pieces but rather as living,[9] passionate works of art, as described in the First Rule of every treatise of the period" (BILSON, 1997, p. 721).

In the following section, I draw inspiration from the aforementioned insights, aiming to enrich my artistic perspective and broaden my awareness of new possibilities in my solo piano performances. These insights stem from my experience as an observer during ensemble rehearsals, where I approach each session with an open-minded attitude. My objective was to uncover how these discoveries can enhance my approach to interpreting the score, while also considering their potential impact on the emotional depth I wish to convey through the music. Moreover, I will delve into the ways in which these insights have been complemented by critical reflections on my performance decisions motivating me to delve deeper into the historical context of the music, along with seeking a profound understanding of the artistic choices I make in shaping my performances.

From Strings to Piano Performance: Exploring Various Frictional Aspects Through String Players' Insights and Historical Evidence

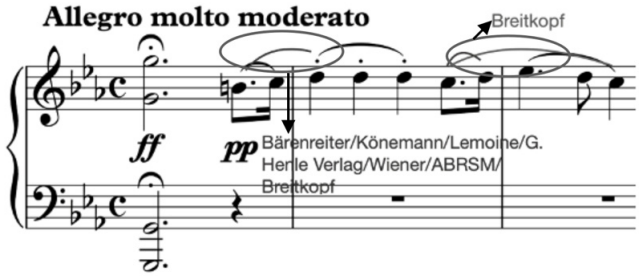
In my undertake to transcribe Schubert's *Impromptus* for a string quintet, I organized a rehearsal with performers well-versed

9 In a similar vein, I recall Mendelssohn's commentary on this matter, particularly how he highlighted the synergies between contemporary and historical musical practices as how he "looked upon early music not as a body of historical artefacts to be painstakingly preserved in their original state but as a repository of living art that each generation could—indeed should—reinterpret in its own stylistic idiom" (MENDELSSOHN apud HAYNES, 2007, p. 27).

in a range of nineteenth-century practices. Along with written reflections, the several video clips included in this section showcase fragments from the rehearsal, capturing the serendipitous discoveries that emerged as each string player personalized the various score textures to their liking. Additionally, I also include some reflections from my discussions with Roy Howat, a pianist and scholar, but also an experienced violinist and editor, who has written extensively scholarly essays on Schubert's works.

In the exchange with Howat, he interestingly remarked that in Schubert's piano writing: slurs may pose a complex scenario, "sometimes slurs meant bowing and sometimes they meant phrasing ... or even both;"[10] which inspired me to explore further, leading to new questions and discoveries. In this context, we discussed the placement of slurs over the barline. For instance, in mm.1-2 from *Impromptu* No.1, certain editions exemplify this decision-making. This is how it appears in Urtext editions by Bärenreiter, Könemann, Lemoine, G. Henle Verlag, Wiener and ABRSM. Conversely, in the Tobias Haslinger's edition, the slurs do not exceed the bar line. See Figure 1, which consider as the base Haslinger edition, along with highlighting in brown colour the different rationales from other Urtext editions.

Figure 1 – mm. 1-3 from Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 1, Op. 90



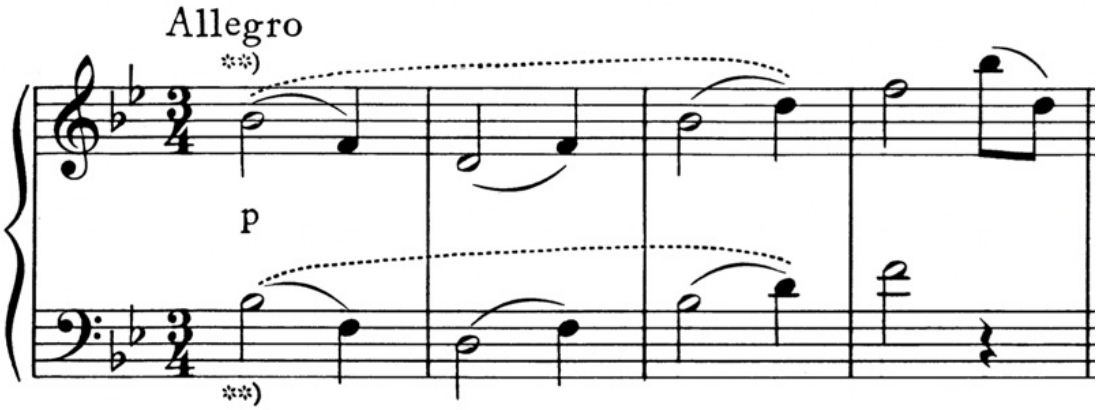
Source: Transcribed by the author.
Image description: A comparative Urtext edition excerpt to exemplify the above description.

Howat's observations suggested that such placement over the barline may be more advantageous for the piano than for string instruments, as maintaining the same bowing gesture across the

10 Based on a private discussion with the author.

barline may result in a loss of articulation in the first note of the measure. Other concerns revolved around how string bowing might affect the pronunciation of the silence between slurs, and how much of it should be audible, which inspired me to ponder a particular phonetic in my playing. Such an idea also raised the issue of whether certain piano slurs, when related to bow strokes and interpreted with a string instrument, may prompt me to reconsider my accustomed approach.[11] In some instances, by conceiving the phrase through a string awareness, I was able to establish the sense of a more connected line, which reduced the need to make audible fragmentation and a "breathing" between slurs. In this regard, as an example, Howat suggested a closer examination to Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 17, K 570, specifically focusing on instances where the texture construction resembles that of a string ensemble:

Figure 2 - Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 17 in B-flat major, K.570, mm.1-4.



Source: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1986. Plate BA 4601.
Image description: Score excerpt to exemplify the above description.

Particularly in this piece, Howat's showcased an example performing with the violin, he cautiously mentioned that the use of changing bows did not necessarily imply an audible pause or

11 During our discussion, Howat shared with me his edition of Fauré's Sonata No. 1, Op. 13 for Violin and Piano in A Major. In the preface, he notes that comparing the general score with the separate parts might reveal that the slurs from the individual scores differ from those in the general version. He emphasised that the combination of slurs is also problematic for composers such as Fauré, who was both a pianist and a violinist. The practice of re-bowing string phrasing was a common one, which was generally accepted by composers when logical and musical reasoning prompted the proposed changes. See Gabriel Fauré, *Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano in A Major, Op. 13*, ed. Roy Howat (Frankfurt: Edition Peters)

noticeable gap between each slur, but rather, that the contour of the musical phrase remained discernible.

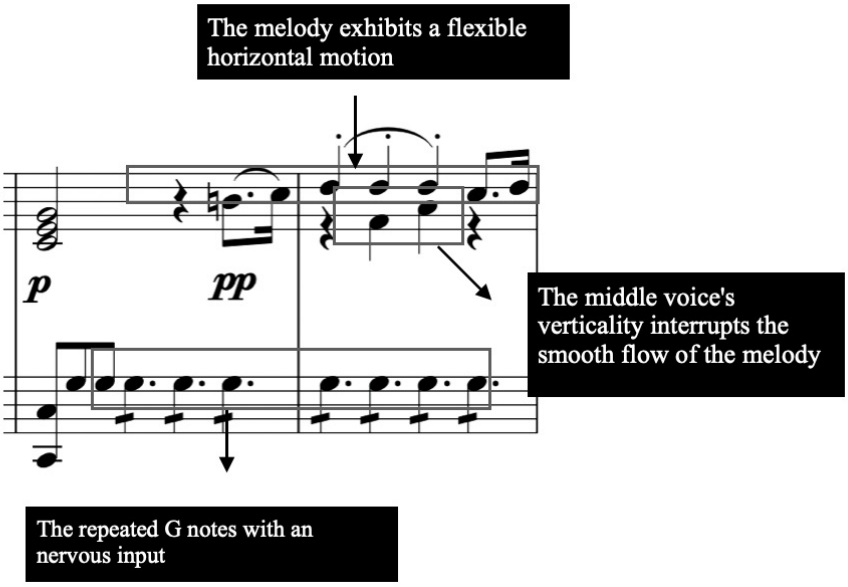
Another unexpected issue that arose concerning my understanding of bowing and its impact on piano performance practice was the idea of specific upward and downward wrist movements. When bowing, we may articulate notes that have more or less weight, sometimes with a tendency to feel those metric support points as the heavy and light beats. This inspired me to reflect on how much metric organization and plasticity of the bow gesture might influence a type of gestural choreography. Although the result was somewhat "sophisticated" and occasionally unnatural, particularly with regards to the downward gesture of the bow, I found that this heightened awareness was beneficial for certain passages, as it facilitated a type of motor memory associated with metrical organization.

Regarding the rehearsal for the string quintet, exploring the individualized textures as manifested by each player proved instrumental in facilitating my comprehension of the multi-dimensional means of specific passages in the score. Several critical moments were identified: the first starting in m. 83 of *Impromptu* No.1, marking the gradual transition from the pastoral style to both the ombra and supernatural threats.[12] This shift continues its emotional impact through m. 95, where the melodic line, accompanied by recurring Gs in the left hand, was shaped by the rehearsal insights, creating a haunting ambiance reminiscent of the supernatural elements found in songs like *Erlkönig.*[13] Three layers come into play here providing a sense of horizontality and verticality: a repetitive G note in the bass register, a middle voice acting as a counterpoint, and a melodic line outlining the main theme. The following figure highlights the expressive inputs suggested for each texture.

12 The labeling of these styles is based on my narrative perspective in *Impromptu* No.1. For more context, please refer to my doctoral thesis "Wanderings Beyond Schubert: Unveiling the Performer's Narrative Voice," submitted to the Royal Academy of Music, London in 2023.

13 For additional context regarding the portrayal of supernatural presence in music, refer to McClelland (2014).

Figure 3 - mm. 95-96 from *Impromptu* No. 1



Source: Transcribed by the author.
Image description: Score excerpt outlining various expressive insights for different textures.

In my view, examining these measures through the lens of *Erlkönig*, it inspired me to conceptualize its emotional impact drawing parallels between the middle voice as a supernatural force that disrupts the upper line, infusing a vertical input that aims to interrupt its horizontality. The triplet figuration in the bass looked suggestive to me as the movement of the horse as the father rides hurriedly, while the singing melody may represent the cries of the boy, and the middle texture could be attributed to the *Erlkönig*'s seductive call.

In addition to the aforementioned observation, this has also inspired other creative perspectives, drawing inspiration from the repetition of the G note in the left hand. These reiterated patterns, in my imagery, bear a resemblance to a dual psychological perspective, akin to the well-known characterization by the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson in "Jekyll and Hyde double life." [14] In Stevenson's literary work, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde serve as the quintessential example of dual identities, with Dr. Jekyll representing the respectable man and Mr. Hyde embodying the darker, unrestrained side of human nature. In a similar vein, when examining

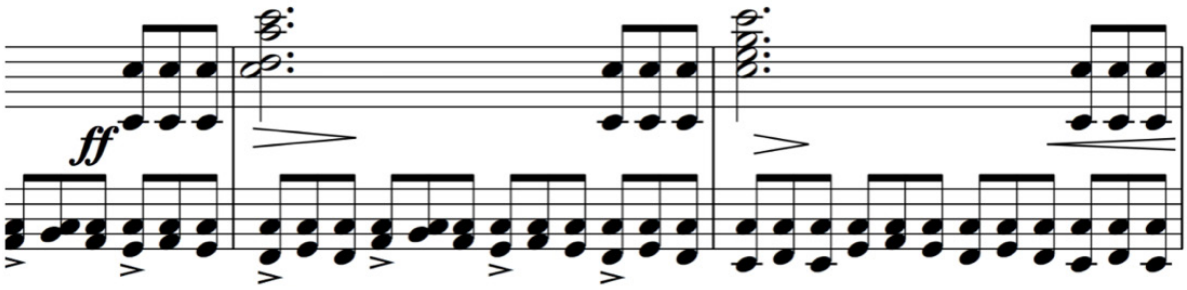
14 See bibliographical entrance Stevenson (2012).

the recurring musical notes in the left hand, they may assume a dual role of both "concluding and initiating" a new path simultaneously. Consequently, starting from this juncture, the repeated G notes in the left hand in m. 95 can, metaphorically speaking, may adopt the symbolic guise of Mr. Hyde, symbolizing the darker and malevolent aspect of the onward character in the music.[15]

The accompanying video of the string quintet rehearsal captures various instances of musical interplay among different layers. The insights shared by ensemble members have greatly influenced my interpretation, drawing from the described imagery above and thus establishing a clear hierarchy between the horizontal and vertical elements within the score. These valuable insights have provided me with new avenues on how to address the agogics of this passage when performing it on the piano (see video).

Among other findings, another crucial observation was made when the string ensemble collectively decided to introduce a sense of inequality into the triplet figures in mm. 111-113 and 114-116 of Schubert's writing. This portrayal represented a type of asynchrony between the right and left hand of the piano writing, aligning with the nuances previously advocated by pianists like Reinecke.

Figure 4 - mm.111-113 from Schubert's *Impromptu* No.1



Source: Transcribed by the author.
Image description: Score excerpt to exemplify the above description.

To heighten the passage's emotional impact and establish parallels with the arousal of extreme emotions and its relation to the tragic quality, they drew on traits commonly found in gothic art, as well as how historical singers such as Vogl were often suggesting

15 In this context, I drew inspiration from the dual life of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, as referenced in the analysis of Beethoven's First Movement of Sonata Op. 2, No. 1 in Brendel (2001, p. 59).

deviation from the literary notation to engage further with a particular effect in the music. As noted by Marjorie Hirsch, such qualities involving haunting atmospheres may sympathize with "disequilibrium and irregularity; rapid, frenzied movement; excess and exaggeration; interruption, fragmentation, disjointedness; a sense of having been conceived in the heat of the moment" (Hirsch, 2016, p. 162). In light of such a characterization, the players' diverse ideas on incorporating irregular variations in the triplet figuration from the melodic line prompted me to reconsider and integrate these alternative perspectives into my playing. The subsequent video exemplifies a practical instance that serves to elucidate this insight (see video).

During the rehearsal, another significant revelation was their natural interpretation of bow slurring, which resulted in some friction between their approach and my own perception as a pianist. For instance, while I have traditionally aimed to gradually release the dynamic of the slur towards its conclusion, becoming lighter and softer, considering what often historical keyboard treatises advice to do,[16] it seems that this viewpoint differed from that of the ensemble. In this context, the more I immersed myself with the string particularities and their singing style, I also realized that the articulation and separation between the slurs tended to go unnoticed, in line with what Howat had also revealed in our discussions. It was particularly intriguing when I asked the ensemble: Why do you strive to connect the slurs instead of incorporating a *diminuendo* at the end of each one? They answered that throughout the nineteenth century, it was believed that "for singers and string players, a slur is never equal to a *diminuendo*" (see video). Such a compelling response motivated me to conduct further research on the issue, considering historical evidence, to continuously broaden the scope of my decision-making.

As I initiated a further commitment to seek answers to such inquiries, when looking back to various historical sources from the nineteenth century, I encountered a disparity in the notational

16 For further contextualisation on interpreting slurs following historical treatises, refer to the commentaries of Bilson in his lecture "Knowing the Score" in Bilson (2005, min. 13:56).

conventions and semiotic implications of the various types of piano slurs. This inconsistency points towards a multifaceted evolution of both musical notation and performance practices during this era. Throughout the eighteenth century, it was generally accepted in various keyboard treatises that slurred pairs of notes of the same value should be performed by strengthening the impulse of the first note and shortening the second one (sometimes reducing it half its value) while performing it more delicately. Accordingly, the notation of slurs corresponded with the expected capability of bowing. In this context, Heinrich Christoph Koch remarked a nuanced understanding of various interpretive inconsistencies that arise from the use of slurs between two notes, particularly regarding the release of the second note:

> This soft slurring of the appoggiatura to its following main note is called the *Abzug*, on the execution of which the opinion of musicians is still divided. Some hold namely that, for example, on the keyboard the finger or on the violin the bow should be gently lifted after the main note; others, however, regard this as unnecessary, so long as a rest does not follow the main note (Koch apud Brown, 1999, p. 231).

Towards the nineteenth century, other problematic issues arose when slurs were intended to group more than two notes. When the extension approached the limits of what a bow stroke could encompass, it became difficult to determine whether slurs were conceived to create a momentary *legato* effect or simply to indicate directionality and structural phrasing. Some sources appear to consider the writing of consecutive slurs as a passage of continuous *legato* to achieve an effect in which the lines meet and do not separate at their intersection. As Brown points out:

> Where eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century composers wrote a succession of shorter slurs it may not be the case that there was an intention to signify expressive accent at the beginning followed by *diminuendo* and

> shortening of the last note for each slurred group, particularly if the slurs are over a series of whole bars or half-bars (Brown, 1999, p. 235).

In addition, the softening implied in paired slurs, which was common practice during the eighteenth century, could be subject to exemptions as in the case of Beethoven's works. Brown remarks that "even within shorter slurs, accentuation, or dynamic nuance (other than the conventional *diminuendo*[17]) seems often to have been envisaged, though not always indicated" (Brown, 1999, pp. 236-237).

Composers' increasing use of longer slurs during the nineteenth century often left performers with insufficient guidance on interpreting subtle nuances, necessitating their creative input in shaping those refinements within the boundaries of the slurs. It is worth noting that during the latter half of the nineteenth century, several editors intensified this controversy, as they believed that the traditional terms used for writing for the *fortepiano* suggested a certain inadequacy.[18] This belief led to the proliferation of a wide range of performative editions aimed at offering additional insights into how to visually outline implicit musical meaning. This trend can be observed in the works of figures such as Sigmund Lebert, Hugo Riemann, and Karl Klindworh. For instance, Lebert wrote in the preface to his edition of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 16 in C major, K. 545:

> The signs of phrasing and articulation, not necessary to correctly indicate the structure of a composition, are carefully amplified in this edition. The utter inadequacy of such notation in the manuscripts of Mozart's time was a deplorable practice of the period. This was undoubtedly due to the instrumental limitations (LEBERT, 1893, pp. 2-11).

Similarly, in the same vein as the above statement, Klindworth referred to his rethinking of the original slurs in his editions as

17 This refers to the conventional *diminuendo* implied in parried slurs, which was common practice during the eighteenth century.

18 Maurice Ravel, in his role as an editor for Mendelssohn's piano works, proposed several recommendations in this context. He contended that the piano slur is frequently employed with imprecision by composers, potentially leading to ambiguity and necessitating refinement to enhance musical comprehension. This suggestion by Ravel is printed as an appendix in Orenstein (1975).

"to preserve the pianist from the error of rendering the melody according to the strict rules of pianoforte playing," in which he proposed to reorganise the slurs to reflect how a good violinist would do it by "connecting phrase to phrase, so that the melody might appeal to our hearts in a broad and unbroken stream" (Klindworth apud Brown, 1999, pp. 238-9).

In this controversial panorama, a particular instance from Malcolm Bilson's lecture, *Knowing the Score* (Bilson, 2005, min. 51:40), invited me to reflect further on the issue of slurring. It was the moment when Bilson displayed various mainstream recordings from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 26 in A-flat major and highlighted how these recordings often displayed a unifying connection between the slurs, while neglecting to consider a tapering approach for smaller slurs, thereby failing to mark the silence at their intersections. After listening to various mainstream recordings presented by Bilson, one audience member asserted a contrary viewpoint regarding Bilson's observation that these recordings did not portray a well-defined tapering of each slur. The audience member, particularly regarding one of the recordings, further asserted that, while perceiving *legato* as involving the continuity of a long line, he was able to discern the nuances of the slurs: "I hear a difference in articulation within the measure ... between the measures." But then Bilson replied that "but there's no silence, and the silence is what makes something expressive."

Bilson posited that when comparing the sonic nuances of period instruments with modern ones, the mechanisms of modern pianos, which are crafter to sustain tone qualities, make it more challenging to discern the subtleties of slurs, particularly when it involves dampening weak beats, lightening the touch, and fading to silence at the end. Bilson remarked that it was impossible to perform such a delicate upbeat on the modern piano in the same way that it could be done on a period instrument, as "the damper comes down while the note is developing and therefore it cuts the sound off and it sounds chopped." According to Bilson, such an approach may distance us from the distinctive qualities

of Beethoven's music. Following this, Bilson wondered about interpreting such a repertoire on the grand piano without being able to shape the sound subtleties in the way historical keyboards do, asking, "at what point is the essence of this piece lost, are these still opus 26?" (Bilson, 2005, min. 53:14-55:30).

Concluding my reflections, I would like to pose an open inquiry in response to Bilson's question, which presents a counterargument regarding whether the specific sonic attributes of historical pianos offer greater advantages compared to the capabilities of the modern grand piano when performing such repertoire. Is it conceivable that the pursuit of sonic refinement in historical keyboards might inadvertently lead to timbral inconsistencies, thereby posing challenges in achieving the desired directionality and sustained tonal quality? This, in turn, prompts us to consider whether the quest for refined tone quality in historical pianos could potentially hinder the attainment of certain characteristics. In doing so, can we argue that historical pianos may fall short in engaging with what Bilson refers to as the "essence" of such music, considering the demands articulated by composers, editors, and pedagogues who advocate drawing inspiration from the bowing techniques of string instruments and adapting to the evolving notational changes introduced by composers of this era?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interplay of knowledge between the realms of string instruments and piano practice has yielded profound insights in my interpretation. However, several unresolved inquiries persist regarding the feasibility of performer actions. These inquiries encompass the choice between historical keyboard instruments and modern grand pianos, the specific roles that performers should adopt, and the degree to which they may deviate from the original musical notation.

It is important to acknowledge that attempts to definitively address these inquiries may ultimately prove futile, given that

opinions on plausibility inherently remain subjective and in dynamic change. Nonetheless, it becomes increasingly evident to me that advocating unwavering fidelity to a composer's written "intentions", while considering the "text" as the exclusive means of engaging with such endeavor, represents an overly simplistic approach. This viewpoint overlooks the abundant historical expressive resources of the composer's era, as some performers creatively incorporated new ideas, greatly enhancing our understanding of the art of interpretation. In this context, it is notable that the vast array of resources available in the realm of performance becomes particularly illuminating. This illumination not only refers to the practice of being creative in avoiding repetitions in certain works, as advocated by Brendel, but also stems from engaging with the extensive resources for performance promoted by pianists like Reinecke. In this context, my role as an "obstetrician" has undeniably evolved through the course of my explorations, resonating with Mendelssohn's insightful perspective about looking and historical perspective "not as a body of historical artifacts to be painstakingly preserved in their original state but as a repository of living art that each generation could—indeed should—reinterpret in its stylistic idiom."

Overall, my intention with this document was to inspire the potential reader to explore new horizons and stimulate their creative space. continuous exploration and the deliberate transgression of conventional boundaries assume paramount significance among performers, stimulating the incorporation of a wide spectrum of diverse artistic influences, all of which may have enduring implications for opening new ears to both contemporary and future performer-scholars.

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