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The Aesthetics of Singing in Romantic Piano Playing

Strategies and Transfer Techniques

Jeanne Roudet, in collaboration with Edoardo Torbianelli

1. The Illusion of the Voice

From the first origins of the instrument to the present day, reference to the voice as a model of expression at the piano has informed both practice and critical discourse. The model has accompanied the evolution of pianistic playing, piano repertoire as well as piano workmanship since 1711, when Maffei published his famous article in which he praised the expressive possibilities of the new instrument.¹ Several centuries later, piano teachers still reach for the metaphor, the meaning of which has become problematic and the effectiveness of which controversial. This is why this essay aims to reconstruct the meaning of the metaphor, and to revitalise its effectiveness in contemporary practice.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, references to the voice took on a new dimension due to the change in aesthetics that inaugurated modernity by establishing artistic activity as an expression of the artist's inner life. From then on, the arts chose to look at the world as it was perceived through the artist's subjectivity. This reversal of the gaze established music as a model for the other arts – a model that represented the spirituality of the moral world of which the blueprint was the inner voice. The philosophy of language was at the heart of this paradigm shift. Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* is its key text; in it the philosopher liberates the voice of the words that prevent him from finding the primitive *energy* of primeval language dictated by feeling: "Birds whistle, man alone sings. And one cannot hear either singing or a symphony without immediately acknowledging the presence of another intelligent being".² This language is

Part 4 of this article presents the results of a collaboration with Edoardo Torbianelli, author of section 4.2.

¹ Scipione Maffei, "Nuova invenzione d'un gravecembalo col piano e forte; aggiunte alcune considerazioni sopra gli strumenti musicali", in: *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia* 5 (1711), 144–159.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, chap. XVI. Translated in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder: On the Origin of Language: Two Essays*, Translated by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1966 repr. 1986, 64.

music on this side of and beyond constructed languages: “its language, though inarticulate, is lively, ardent, passionate; and it has a hundred times the vigor of speech itself”.³

Romantic theory unfolding in Germany in the following decades started from this revolution. For Wackenroder, Tieck, Novalis, and Schlegel, art was the expression of man’s highest spirituality; the romantic author was a musician. And when, in 1795, Goethe wrote that a story needs to be music,⁴ he did so because music was the model allowing the poetic imagination to liberate itself from any obstacle.

In accordance with this reversal of values that swept aside classical rationalism, the passionate voice that expresses man’s immateriality can be both vocal and instrumental, as music says “more” than words by virtue of its very imprecision. A certain value comparable to the timbre of a voice was assigned to an instrumentalist’s sound as the expression of the artist’s uniqueness.

It was the same aesthetic thinking that, some time later, caused numerous comments on Chopin’s tone. The words written to the pianist by the marquis de Custine provide an excellent example: “It is not the piano you play; it is the soul”.⁵

However, while the particular genius of the musician is transmitted through the sound he produces, the driving force of both the development and the aesthetics of the piano is its expected ability to mimic what actually is not its own. The piano stands out as an instrument of illusion, and it is necessary to linger on this identity, which may seem paradoxical, for a while. Among the first pedagogues of the piano, H el ene de Montgeroult offered a precise description of the concept of illusion:

The great artists in the arts of draughtsmanship are all aware of the felicitous results that can be achieved through these calculated deceptions that change the proportions and the forms of objects, with a view to making them appear what they need to be. Why should we, in the beautiful art of music, give up the illusions with which genius artists have known how to make the other arts grow? Why should we constrain ourselves at the piano to make ourselves to say poorly what little a piano’s mechanism allows it to say,

3 Ibid., chap. XIV. Translated in: *On the Origin of Language*, 57.

4 See Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, in: *Die Horen*, T ubingen: Cotta 1795, vol. 3, part 9 (= 9. St uck), 51.

5 Letter written on 27 April 1841. See Fr ed eric Chopin, *Correspondance*, recueillie, r vis ee, annot ee et traduite par Bronislas Edouard Sydow en collaboration avec Suzanne et Denise Chainaye, Paris: Richard-Masse 1981, vol. 3, 46.

without seeking to initiate it into the secrets of art by the illusions belonging to it, and without seeking to extend the realm of expression and of dramatic effect?⁶

The evolution of this concept, too, marked a break with the classical aesthetic that used artifice in order to reveal the essence of things. While classical illusion – the illusion of *trompe-l'oeil* is emblematic – wished to be true to reality in order to objectify the world, romantic illusion took on a subjective dimension. In appealing to the imagination, it opened up new horizons for the dialogue between the artist and his audience and was therefore a matter of shared sensitivity.

The flight the piano took is characteristic for this paradigm shift in aesthetics, and its art shaped itself step by step, pointing to the illusion of song as the perfection towards which the pianist must tend in order to meet the listener's imagination and sensitivity. Many sources witness to this phenomenon. In March 1837, when the duel between Liszt and Thalberg reached its climax, the former gave a concert at the Opéra, home of the voice. In order to make the perfection of Liszt's piano playing absolutely clear, Ernest Legouvé used the most effective argument to convince his readers – i. e. the comparison with the greatest singers of the moment – and he evoked Malibran and Lablache: “In the fifth bar, the battle was half won: under Liszt's fingers, the piano resounded like Lablache's voice.”⁷

2. Identifying a Vocal Model: Vowel Fluidity vs. Consonantal Articulation

The new aesthetic values outlined above manifested themselves in their most ideal form in the Italian school of singing,⁸ in which vowel fluidity is contrary to the consonantal articulation of the verbal.

In Italian, pronunciation is governed by the modulated emission of vowels whereas in French – the language of the dominant culture of the 18th century – the pronunciation is governed by the articulation of consonants. Thus, Rousseau's major contribution to the *Querelle des Bouffons* was decisive for the adoption of the Italian technique, which, little by little, made its mark on the French music scene and became part of how singers and instrumentalists were taught at the Paris Conservatoire.

⁶ Translated from Hélène de Montgeroult, *Cours complet pour l'enseignement du forte-piano, Conduisant progressivement des premiers éléments aux plus grandes difficultés*, Paris: Janet et Cotele 1820, preface, I–II. All translations are by Marleen Cré unless stated otherwise.

⁷ Translated from *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 26 March 1837, 104.

⁸ A correct understanding of the term “vocality” is essential for our argument. See Paul Zumthor's definition in his *La lettre et la voix. De la “littérature” médiévale*, Paris: Seuil 1987, 21.

The same duality also showed itself a century later, still in France, in a technical and aesthetic evolution that would lead to *verismo* and Wagnerism. Without a doubt, it is not a coincidence that this 'heroic' aesthetics crystallised in the country of classical tragedy, as it placed the verbal text and the actor in the foreground, to the detriment of song, and again favoured *logos* over *melos*.

Ever since Nourrit left the Opera, it has become a master in a new art, which has placed the recitative over singing, and has forced singing to turn itself into a recitative. There have been wonders of performance such as breadth and such as power, striking vocal effects, a severe and slow manner of scanning the text [...]; there have been admirable parts of roles, but there have not been nuanced and colourful roles any more. Everything has been sacrificed to the new method: the scores, whose movement is lost immediately; the voices, which are weighted down by forcing themselves. Where can a tenor who is able to vocalise be found? We ought to have shared Nourrit's legacy.⁹

The contrast between both schools is clear:

His voice was found to lack strength and magnitude; this might be the case. Like Leporello, whom one had not taught how to read by moonlight, one had not taught him to sing under conditions in which every voice tires and quickly uses itself up; but his was enough for all situations, all emotions and all styles. It was supple, agile and penetrating. [...] He was a colourist, if one would permit me to apply the word to the art of singing, and, with this admirable sentiment of a natural harmony between the voice and the situation, and between the voice and the musical idea, between the voice and the nature of the accompaniment, he gave to his roles a colour that was the mark of his creation, and that gave to the pieces themselves the sign of life.¹⁰

Nourrit left the Opéra in 1836 when Duprez made his entrance there. Both received their formation in the Italian technique, but, beyond Nourrit's acknowledged vocal defects, he represented the vocal heritage of the 18th century, whereas Duprez, on the contrary, represented the progressive trend. If Duprez' art was still very different from today's practice, he made a significant first step, a notable modification of vocal technique, a result of the search for power and energy in declamation that Wagner would again take responsibility for while rethinking the Greek myth of the intimate union between text and music.

Exploring romantic vocality, then, requires both singers and instrumentalists to take into consideration the enduring coexistence of these two types of aesthetics in composition and performance. At the intersection of these two schools we find Manuel Garcia, son of the great Rossinian tenor, and author of the most important treatise on singing in the 19th century. He was a renowned

⁹ Translated from Edouard Thierry, *Les Chroniqueurs parisiens*, 9 September 1858, in: Etienne Boutet de Mouvel, *Adolphe Nourrit*, Paris: Plon 1903, 44.

¹⁰ Translated from Thierry, *ibid.*, 42–43.

teacher in Paris, and published a first version of his treatise in 1840, and the definitive French version of it in 1847.¹¹ Afterwards, he left the Conservatoire in order to teach at the *Royal Academy of Music* in London from 1848 to 1895.

In his treatise, Garcia drew up a typology of vocal writing and corresponding voices. This new typology featured the new trend that would develop to the detriment of others:

Dramatic songs are nearly always monosyllabic; they exclude nearly all vocalisation. This genre, made for passionate feelings, doubtless resorts to musical emphasis, but its principal effect rests on dramatic emphasis. Consequently, the singer must make everything converge upon this goal. Syllabication, grammatical quantity, well-graded strength of the voice, the timbres, bold emphases, sighs, expressive and unexpected transitions, and finally some appoggiaturas and the carrying of the voice ('ports de voix'): such are the elements the singer resorts to.

Diction should not just be accurate, but noble, elevated; affected, trivial and exaggerated forms suit parody only, and *buffi caricati*. In order to excel in the dramatic style, a soul of fire is needed, a gigantic force: the actor should continuously dominate the singer (M. Duprez, Madame Schroeder-Devrient). But one should take care to tackle this genre with moderation and reserve only, as it quickly exhausts the resources of the voice. Only the singer whose constitution is consolidated, but who, through a long practice of his art, has lost the freshness, youth and flexibility of the voice, should approach it. The use of this genre is reserved for the second period of the singer's talent.¹²

Garcia's teaching allows us to identify the first seed of the new school of singing that wants to give the voice greater declamatory power, greater projection, greater strength, and, consequently, greater volume in the higher register. The first seed of this new school can be found in the technique of the *voix sombrée* taught by Garcia. This colouring is achieved by fixing the larynx in a low position and gives greater volume to the voice.¹³ The projection of sound uses more air, and the contraction of the larynx produces marked articulation of which the *coup de glotte* (stroke of the glottis) is the physiological consequence. Used as one colour among others and with moderation, as Garcia advocated it, this technique brings a felicitous diversity to the singer's palette of sound colours. Used continually,

¹¹ *Ecole de Garcia. Traité complet de l'art du chant par Manuel Garcia fils*, Paris: l'Auteur 1840; *Ecole de Garcia. Traité complet de l'art du chant, Première partie, Deuxième édition, Seconde partie, Première édition par Manuel Garcia, professeur de chant au conservatoire royal de musique*, Paris: l'Auteur 1847, (2nd part: pp. 83–107). Reproduced in facsimile in *Chant: Les grandes méthodes romantiques de chant; vol. 4: Garcia (fils)–Cinti-Damoreau-Concone*, realised by Jeanne Roudet, *Méthodes et traités. Série II: France 1800–1860*, Courlay: Fuzeau 2005.

¹² Translated from Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847 (see n. 11), 2nd part, 70.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1st part, 4, and 2nd part, 54.

the technique inevitably exhausts the muscles and causes damage, which too many present-day singers are victims to.¹⁴

In spite of the evolution it shows with respect to the 18th-century Italian tradition, Garcia's treatise represents the peak of *bel canto* singing and allows us to measure the continuity of the essential principles of this art right up to the turn of the 20th century.

3. Pianistic Genealogies

Among teachers, Friedrich Wieck provides a valuable testimonial because he taught the piano – as such he was his daughter Clara's only teacher – and he also taught singing. Advertised as didactic and polemical, his atypical book *Clavier und Gesang (Keyboard and Singing)*¹⁵ sketches the affinities and contrasts between singers and pianists in terms of their proximity to the old or the new vocal school, and it clearly witnesses to the fracture in taste which divides composers and performers into two trends. Through the teaching of Johann Aloys Miksch (1765–1845), Wieck reclaims the legacy of Antonio Bernacchi's Bologna school, and thus the most authentic *bel canto* tradition. At length he discusses the composers he loves: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, but also the Spohr who wrote *Jessonda* and Meyerbeer except when they lose sight of the “art of singing well”¹⁶ and become overly fond of instrumental effects. He admires the *Somnambula* and *La fille du régiment*, of which the writing is truly ideal for the voice, as he does Weber's “wonderful vocal instinct”¹⁷ in *Oberon*. However, as he also writes, Wagner is unsingable and Berlioz crushes the singer under heavy orchestral weight in his *Benvenuto Cellini*. The performers most often quoted and mentioned in his book are Jenny Lind and Chopin. Liszt is not named, but he is described in an unflattering way, equivalent to the much talked-about and ostentatious ‘Parisian’ pianist whom Wieck depicts as a caricature.

Upstream from the fracture in taste described by Wieck in the middle of the 19th century, *bel canto* reigned supreme, and the pianists benefitted from the example of the great castrato singers, who guaranteed the continuity of the practice.

14 The issues of vocal technique and aesthetics mentioned in this essay have been discussed with Ulrich Messthaler, whose research on and experiments of *bel canto* inform our research.

15 Friedrich Wieck, *Clavier und Gesang*, Leipzig: Whistling 1853.

16 *Ibid.*, chap. V, 25.

17 *Ibid.*, chap. V, 26: “einen wunderbaren Gesanginstinkt beurkundete in vielen Liedern, Cavatinen, Arien, etc [...]”.

Dussek performed with Luigi Marchesi when he arrived in London in 1789 and at the end of a highly productive decade, he played in Prague, where he inspired Tomaschek to write a most enlightened review:

It was truly something charming, when Dussek, with his graceful appearance, coaxed from his instrument sweet and at the same time clear and pithy sounds with his wonderful touch. His fingers are similar to an association of ten singers, who through their shared technique perfectly perform whatever their controller wants them to. I have never seen a Prague audience in such rapture as during Dussek's radiant piano playing. His truly declamatory performance, especially when playing cantabile phrases, remains the ideal for any achievement in any art, which no other pianist after him has achieved since.¹⁸

This 1802 testimonial clearly spells out the essential precepts of the Italian school of singing transferred to the piano. Afterwards, Dussek settled in France in the service of Prince Talleyrand, and gave his last concert with the castrato Girolamo Crescentini in 1812. The two artists performed for Emperor Napoleon I, who declared a particular admiration for the unique art of the singer. Some thirty years later, the memory of this last stage in Dussek's career inspired a valuable comparison with the young Chopin, recently settled in Paris:

As for his performance, in the concerts [Dussek] gave during the final two years of his life – at the urgent request of his friends, and almost against his wishes – he showed [...] let's say, everything that great skill, wise playing, and perfect taste can bring about by way of impression when these qualities attain perfection. The singular grace with which he sang on his instrument has never found its equal in any other pianist. One pianist only, young, with a brilliant future ahead of him, and who one hears too little, reminds us of him a lot; with a little more simplicity, he would remind us of him completely.¹⁹

Pianists themselves paid tribute to singers, and point out detailed models in their writings. Piano handbooks are sources of the utmost importance in which to observe transfer strategies put in place by pianists. Montgeroult's *Cours de piano* is certainly the text in which this transfer is explained most explicitly, and its lasting influence merits to be re-evaluated today.

“[H. de Montgeroult] studied, in particular, how to phrase like the great Italian singers: Marchesi, Crescentini, etc.” wrote Baron de Trémont,²⁰ and, in her book, the pianist refers to Marchesi's ornamentation:

¹⁸ Translated from *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, 20 November 1802, quoted from Howard Allen Crow, *A Biography and Thematic Catalog of the Works of J. L. Dussek (1760–1812)*, PhD dissertation, University of Southern California 1964, 130.

¹⁹ Translated from [Charles Chaulieu], “J. L. Dussek”, in: *Le pianiste* 10 (August 1834), 151.

²⁰ Translated from Trémont, Louis Girod de Vienney, baron de, *Collection de lettres autographes de personnes célèbres des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, Paris, département des manuscrits de la

Marchesi is the singer most famous for the extent and the variety of his taste. He himself noted the four different ways in which he sang the scene found below. The accompaniments have been reduced for the left hand only, so that the student can study the variants of the singing voice in this piece with the right hand. Here the student will see that the singer's talent made the success of this scene, which in itself is but an empty canvas, and he will be able to get some idea of how to place the *appoggiaturas*.²¹

A great rival to Liszt in Paris in the 1830s, Thalberg reclaimed Montgeroult's teaching. The opening lines of the preface to his *Art du chant appliqué au piano* pay tribute to the pianist without naming her.

The art of singing well, said a famous woman, is the same whatever instrument it is applied to. In fact, one does not have to make any concessions or sacrifices to the particular mechanism of every instrument. It is up to the performer to bend the mechanism to the will of art. As the piano is, rationally speaking, unable to translate singing into what it has as its greatest perfection, i. e. the ability to lengthen sounds, it is necessary, by dint of skill and art, to destroy this imperfection, and to arrive not only at producing the illusion of sustained and lengthened sounds, but also the illusion of swelled sounds. Feelings make people ingenious, and the need to express the feelings one experiences manages to create resources that escape the mechanic.²²

Thus, the issue of the vocal model that pianists refer to is essential in order to identify and define the parameters of playing that bring together some and oppose others. The school of Chopin is faithful to classic *bel canto* which privileges *melos*, while the school of Liszt, more dramatic and theatrical, embraces heroic vocality that is closer to *logos*. Several critics emphasise the proximity of the new musical aesthetics to the theatre and contemporary novels, thus placing the “Hugos and Dumas of piano music”²³ opposite Chopin's and Dussek's *cantabile*. Jan Kleczynski uses the same opposition to characterise Chopin's style:

What is striking in Chopin's playing is the purity of style and its perfect simplicity, a certain restraint, a profound dignity that never leaves him. Even when he expresses the strongest feelings, this man has never given himself to us completely. In his tactfulness, he kept part of his soul to himself. [...] Those who seek Hugo-style drama in the Mazurkas are mistaken. [...] Chopin never loses the feeling of balance. Always refined, he knows that passion should never descend to the prose of realism. He suffers, there are

BnF, vol. 4, article “Montgeroult”, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107231264> (28 October 2020).

²¹ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 1, 234.

²² Translated from Sigismond Thalberg, *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, op. 70, Paris: Heugel 1853–1863, preface.

²³ Translated from [Charles Chaulieu], article “J. L. Dussek”, in: *Le pianiste* 10 (August 1834), 149.

flushes of folly, but never are there any unhealthy convulsions, which present-day composers bring into their realistic productions, sometimes in the wrong way.²⁴

Elsewhere, it is, more simply, the generic comparison with the novel that describes the line of fracture between Liszt and Chopin. This line of fracture brings us back to Wieck, whose teaching, as his daughter Clara's, defined a German piano school that called itself "classical". At the turn of the century, it built up two battlements against the assaults of modernity. On the one hand, the Leipzig Conservatoire, founded in 1846, not long before his death, by Mendelssohn (1809–1847), who entrusted Moscheles (1794–1870) with the task of perpetuating the good school of piano playing they both pledged themselves to; on the other, the Frankfurt Conservatoire, where Clara Schumann taught (1819–1896) from its foundation until her death.

4. A Reconstruction of the Vocal Model and Techniques of Transfer to the Piano

4.1. *Ease of emission, control and continuity of sound*

All methods of singing start by the patient study of the *messa di voce* in order to make the voice more supple and to make the voice come out without tiring the larynx. This practice, avoiding any strain on the muscles, renders the organ highly flexible and gives it a maximum range to produce sounds which we no longer hear today, but which have been captured in a number of historical recordings.

According to the evidence, Chopin's hand presented these qualities to the highest degree:

A hand of a born pianist, not very large, but extraordinarily flexible, which allows him to break the stretched-out harmonies and spread-out arpeggios that he introduced into piano playing with an audacity never practiced before – and this without any apparent effort. Furthermore, beneficial natural ease and absence of any constraint were the distinctive qualities of his technique. Also, the sound he knew how to coax from his instrument was always a full sound, especially in the *cantabile*.²⁵

Piano methods advocated a beautiful production of sound and they recommended *legato*. In the context of the search for *cantabile* shared by keyboardists in the eighteenth century – with particular emphasis in France – two great early pianists

²⁴ Translated from Jan Kleczynski, *Frédéric Chopin: De l'interprétation de ses œuvres*, Ulan Press 2012, (1st edition: Warsaw 1879; translated into French 1880), 9 and 14–15.

²⁵ Translated from Karol Mikuli, "Vorwort", in: *Frédéric Chopin, Pianoforte Werke*, Leipzig: Kistner 1880.

and pedagogues initiated the passage from one model to another: the fluidity of the singing voice replaced the imitation of the articulation of the speech. With the new rule enacted in their methods, Clementi and Adam undermined 18th-century conventions. Thus, the ideal of the continuity and fluidity of singing according to the Italian technique determined the expressive range of the pianist and transformed progressively but profoundly the conventions of musical notation and reading.

When the composer leaves LEGATO, and STACCATO to the performer's taste, the best rule is chiefly to stick to LEGATO, reserving STACCATO to give SPIRIT occasionally to certain passages, and to set off the HIGHER BEAUTIES of LEGATO.²⁶

Sometimes the composer indicates the musical phrase that needs to be slurred, but when he leaves the choice of legato or staccato to the performer's taste, it would be best to stick with legato and to reserve staccato to bring out certain passages, and to make listeners hear the benefits of the legato by a contrast brought about artfully.²⁷

Montgeroult is more explicit when talking about the transfer of singers' technique to the piano. She talks about a pressure of touch that suggests a particular physical sensation, i. e. the sensation of the pressure of breathing, and the muscular tonus and elasticity of the larynx.

The smallness of sound comes from the keys not being felt but being hit. The fingers, then, are deprived of a sense that truly acts on the key. Thus, the large volume of sound depends on the art with which one knows how to sustain the note, by the right fingering, either by strongly pressing the key after it has resonated in order to prolong its resonance, or by stretching oneself softly on a succession of notes without leaving them. This process is one of the secrets of a great performance, and it is true to say that the Piano played like this absolutely changes in quality and in effect.²⁸

Thalberg took over the terms and images used by Montgeroult as he does those referring to a very precise aesthetic lexis:²⁹

²⁶ Muzio Clementi, *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Piano-Forte*, London: Clementi, Banger, Hyde, Collard & Davis 1801, 9.

²⁷ Translated from Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire, adoptée pour servir à l'enseignement dans cet établissement*, Paris: Imprimerie du Conservatoire de Musique, year XIII [1804], 151.

²⁸ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 1, "Du Doigté", VII. Also see Friedrich Wieck, *Clavier und Gesang*, Leipzig: Whistling 1853, 68.

²⁹ The use of the word "energy" is not neutral, and its recurring presence in the methods is significant. According to Michel Delon's study, the concept "simultaneously refers to the creative activity and the effectiveness of the created object, and to both the emotion found at the origin of the work of art and the emotion communicated by it". See Michel Delon, *L'idée d'énergie au tournant des Lumières*, Paris: PUF 1988 (coll. "Littératures modernes"), 105.

In wide, noble and dramatic songs, one needs to “sing from the chest” [...] without ever hitting the keys, but by striking them from very close-by, pushing them down, pressing them with vigour, energy and warmth. In simple, soft and graceful songs, one needs to knead the keyboard, in a way, to walk it with a boneless hand and velvet fingers. The keys, in this case, must be felt rather than hit.³⁰

The school of Chopin continues the same school of touch until the end of the century:

The fingers should sink into the keyboard, somewhat engulfing themselves in the depths of the piano, in *fortes* as well as in *pianos*, drawing from the instrument a lasting melancholy sonority – even from an instrument little prone to singing, provided one does not let the keys rise again too rapidly –, thus highlighting a melody that aims at imitating the singing of Italian singers, as Chopin himself put it.³¹

4.2. *Legatissimo*

Legatissimo probably constitutes one of the practices of piano technique of the period under scrutiny that has been forgotten in recent times. The quotations above assume the use of *legatissimo*, bequeathed to pianists by the harpsichordists. Montgeroult advocates its use in order to increase sound volume and in order to “improve its quality by all the difference there is between a sound achieved by a single action of the hammer and a sound made longer by the vibration and the pressure of the key”.³²

Complementary to the suggestion of vocalicity, which is achieved by a masterly management of dynamics, accents and temporal spacing between the notes of a melody, the aesthetical search of the pianists who, at the beginning of the 19th century, thoroughly investigated the possibilities of their instrument, did indeed, as has been pointed out above, lead to significant observations about the illusion of vocalicity, as well as about the significance of polyphony and of fullness of sound – observations which would influence piano teaching for many decades to come.

Training the fingers in order to achieve full control over the length of a sound so that all possible nuances of *staccato* and *legato* can be played was part of the conventional education of a pianist (or any keyboard player) during the 18th and the 19th centuries. Thus, the ability to sustain the sound with the finger

³⁰ Translated from Sigismond Thalberg, *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, op. 70, Paris: Heugel, 24 fascicles (1853–1863), Préface.

³¹ Translated from Cecylia Dzialynska, 1892, in: Frédéric Chopin, *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano, textes réunis et présentés par Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger*, Paris: Flammarion 1993 (coll. “Harmoniques”), 124–125.

³² Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 1, “Du Doigté”, VII.



Ex. 1a-b: Ignaz Moscheles, *Études*, op. 70, Leipzig: Probst 1827, 6.

for a much longer duration than the length with which the sound was noted in the score, in order to support the harmonies in the broken chords, fitted in this context as a long-standing common practice.³³ Moreover, as a long-established and essential aspect of harpsichord technique, this practice implied the crucial ability to distinguish the notes to be held (because they belong to the harmony) from those whose length is not longer than its value in notation (because they are dissonant) by a nearly spontaneous reflex which has its origin in the knowledge of harmony and composition.

Now, several sources identify this degree of ‘holding the sound’ as something that does not exclusively belong to the playing of harmonies in arpeggios (which are intended as an accompaniment or the support of a melody), but is also intended to be used when playing melodies, and when the design of the melody touches notes that form a harmony.

Example 1a–b, taken from the preface to Ignaz Moscheles’ *24 Études* op. 70 clearly shows how this was applied.

Hélène de Montgeroult, too, clearly refers to this practice in her *Cours complet*, in a passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter (see p. 195, before fn. 33). In vol. 2 of her *Cours complet*, the explanation at the top of *Étude* 49 is even clearer, as it comes with a visible example (Ex. 2).

33 Cf. Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende*, Leipzig and Halle: Schwickert, Hemmerde und Schwetsche 1789, 355. Also see Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du conservatoire*, Paris: Imprimerie du Conservatoire 1804, 152–153; François-Joseph Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles, *Méthode des méthodes de piano ou Traité de l’art de jouer de cet instrument*, op. 98, Paris: Schlesinger 1840, 9.



Ex. 2: Hélène de Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820, vol. 2, examples for the explanations to Étude n. 49, 136.

Experience only, if the example of the teacher is lacking, will teach the pianist the use and the usefulness of these notes that are held. He will know which ones establish the harmony, and how one should seek to prolong their vibration [...]. It is self-evident that, while playing following the first way of writing, the passages will have much more effect. Or rather, it is in this way that all the groups of four semiquavers need to be played, and the passages that are susceptible to this way of playing.³⁴

In this sense, all the indications about the practice of *legatissimo* (both in accompaniments as in mixed passages of melody and harmony) occurring at the top of some of the études in the *Cours complet* are extremely valuable, because, with utter precision and an abundance of detail, they illustrate the aspect of control and of the coordination of hand and finger movements (calling on the need for reduction and economy of movement in particular) in order to arrive at the desired effect.

The following note introduces Étude 93 (Ex. 3), and clearly explains the requirement to hold the thumb and the low notes in absolute continuity, thus over the length of each group of four semiquavers, while at the same time requiring the necessary fusion of the harmony notes:

³⁴ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 2, Étude n. 49, 136.

N^o 60 = ♩

ALLEGRO
Grandioso.

il canto più forte'

tr.

p Bassa sempre legata.

Ex. 3: Hélène de Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820, vol. 3, Étude n. 93, 103.

In order to perform the bass of this piece, it is necessary for the thumb and the little finger invariably to be attached to the key, and they serve to balance the hand, while the other notes of the group of four semiquavers will melt into the harmony.³⁵

The continuity and the fusion of the accompaniment figure is not only the result of the holding of the sounds, but also of a skilful dosage of the touch, which avoids the perception of an attack (a strong start) at the beginning of every subsequent note. The necessity of this is explained even more clearly in the annotation of Étude n. 110:

[...] that the bass will be made softer and faded in such a way that one can hear even better the full harmony of the chord, instead of the sounds that make it up.³⁶

Montgeroult repeatedly points out the importance of the closeness of the fingers to the keyboard, of the fluidity with which they move, and of the elimination of unnecessary movement. The explanation given about Étude n. 45 offers a detailed example of this, and illustrates the technique of the positioning of the hand that, so to speak, knows how to think in harmonies (i.e. harmonic positions and chord positions).

One should carefully avoid having one's fingers in the air. On the contrary, the hand should place itself in the different positions it is made to adopt as if it had to stay there. The type of fixedness that it will acquire, even when travelling around the keyboard, will be the result of a good fingering. Thus, at his discretion, the student will be able to make the notes that form the harmony of each line vibrate, which will increase the sound quali-

35 Translated from Montgeroult, *ibid.*, vol. 3, Étude n. 93, 103.

36 Translated from Montgeroult, *ibid.*, vol. 3, Étude n. 110, 182.



Ex. 4: Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata in C major, op. 53, bars 24–31.

ty of the instrument considerably, and will make the performance of the music, as well as the music itself, more valuable.³⁷

The requirement of *legatissimo* will easily be understood from the notation when one is aware of how this subject is dealt with in the didactic sources. However, in some cases the exact notation of *legatissimo* coincides with suggestive rather than explicit notations, which demand the performer's special attention.

The first movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Sonata op. 53 seems a most interesting case because it illustrates how the soundscape of this work changes depending on whether this particular holding of the sound is realised or not (Ex. 4). In his *Klavierschule*, op. 500, Carl Czerny gives examples of situations in which *legatissimo* has to be applied (Ex. 5). The parallel with the figuration in the Beethoven sonata is clear. In addition, *legatissimo*, practically inevitable in all the arpeggios of bars 113 and following (Ex. 6), is clearly revealed in the notation of bars 114, 118, 122 etc., which forces Beethoven to use slurs out of the pure necessity to indicate the sustained holding of the chord at the end of the arpeggio, while these slurs are completely unnecessary in the notation of arpeggios that do not end in a long *tenuto* chord.

4.3. Breathing

Garcia teaches the Italian technique of the deep and the half-breath.

Like the rests that separate phrases and segments of phrases are more drawn out than rests that separate motifs, it is the long rests one has to choose to take a deep breath. The

³⁷ Translated from Montgeroult, *ibid.*, vol. 2, Étude n. 45, 121.

Bei geschwinden gebrochenen *Accorden*, die nicht als brillante Passage, sondern nur als Verstärkung der Harmonie = Fülle anzusehen sind, gilt dasselbe. Z.B.:



Ex. 5: Carl Czerny, *Vollständige theoretisch-praktische Pianoforteschool*, op. 500, Wien: Diabelli 1839, Dritter Theil, Von dem Vortrage, 15.

The image shows a musical score for a section of a sonata. It consists of two systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The music is in C major and 2/4 time. The right hand features a melodic line with frequent, short rests, which are described as 'half-breaths'. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment. The dynamic is marked 'f' (forte). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 6: Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata in C major, op. 53, bars 111–120.

small space of rests that separate motifs only allows very short breaths, and that is why they are called *mezzi respiri*, half-breaths.³⁸

The core idea to be grasped by the present-day musician formed by modern *sofège* is that notation does not dictate breathing. One breathes during the rests “which are concentrated in both words and melody” and one introduces them “even when the composer did not write them”.³⁹ Thus breathing articulates the meaning, but it also has the function of giving life to the singing by intensifying the emotional content of the text and the feelings of the character. In the same vein “it will be allowed, in certain cases, to enhance the effect of a phrase, to unite its constituent parts by omitting the pauses that separate them”,⁴⁰ see Ex. 7.

With unparalleled precision, Montgeroult describes how the pianist can imitate the pneumatic aspect of singing. This aspect of the imitation is essential because the listener’s sense of hearing focuses on the sound, a sign which incarnates the

³⁸ Translated from Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l’art du chant*, Paris: l’Auteur 1847, 2nd part, 18–19. Like the writers of a large number of methods at the time, Garcia uses the terminology of Reicha’s *Traité de mélodie*.

³⁹ Translated from Garcia, *ibid.*, 2nd part, 18.

⁴⁰ Translated from Garcia, *ibid.*, 2nd part, 19.

ri-ve-der le pa-trie a-re - - ne nel pe-ri-glio
 a-re - - ne nel pe-ri-glio

Ex. 7: Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847, 2nd part, 19: Rossini, *L'italiana in Algeri*.

presence of the body from which it emanates. In accordance with its complexity, the illusion requires the coming together of several parameters of playing:

Breathing takes a more or less extended time in every bar. As a result, an orchestra, exact in its pacing, follows the metre rigorously. A singer, however, freely develops the course of the phrase, and it is only at the very end that he has to find himself in step with the orchestra again.

When we apply this process to piano playing, we will see that the right hand, which plays the singing part, can be compared to the singer, and the left hand to the accompanying orchestra [...]. The students [...] will attempt to imitate the accents they will draw from their throats using the right hand for several bars, and at the same time they will play an accompaniment of struck chords with the left hand. In order for this imitation to be faithful, it is necessary to change the fingering appropriate for each passage, in the sense that the whole hand moves after every note on which a singer would take a breath. [...]. It will be necessary to simulate and take a hold on the imperfection resulting from the intervals of lost time in every bar in which the singer needs to breathe. The hand, before placing itself in its new position, will let the same amount of time pass [...].⁴¹

Chopin summarises the process in a laconic formula: “The wrist: breathing in the voice”.⁴² Emilie von Gretsck, Chopin’s pupil from 1842 to 1844, is more explicit:

In order to conform to the principle that consists in the imitation of the great singers at the piano, Chopin drew forth from the instrument the secret of the expression of breathing. In every instance that would require the singer to breathe in, the pianist who is no

⁴¹ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), preface, I–II.

⁴² Translated from Frédéric Chopin, *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano, textes réunis et présentés par Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger*, Paris: Flammarion 2010 (coll. “Harmoniques”), 76.

longer an amateur [...] should make sure to lift the wrist so as to let it fall on the singing note with the greatest suppleness imaginable. To achieve this suppleness is one of the most difficult things I know. But when one succeeds in doing it, one laughs with joy when hearing the beautiful sound quality, and Chopin cries out: “That’s it! Perfect! Thank you!”⁴³

4.4. *Fingering*

For a considerable part, the vocal model is responsible for research on fingering. As the previous quotations have shown, Montgeroult directly links fingering to the pianist’s breathing. She also associates it with the sound quality and the *legato*:

All our fingerings are calculated to correct the greatest shortcomings of the instrument: the hammering, the dryness, the narrowness of sound – shortcomings which generally make the piano little suited to express the feelings of the soul and the sublime effects of music.⁴⁴

The methods of piano playing show a similar interest in fingering because the expansion of *legato* causes a radical evolution. Dussek’s method, published in London in 1796 and translated into French the following year,⁴⁵ allows us to understand what is happening. Talking about practising scales, the pianist defines rules showing the waning of enjambment fingerings and the subsequent waxing of the shift of the thumb:

[...] the moving of only the thumb is enough to bring about the necessary change of position in the other fingers, as the thumb glides underneath them with ease, and without changing the position of the hand itself.⁴⁶

Dussek’s teaching is organised systematically by distinguishing between melodic situations that make it necessary to resort either to extension or to contraction/elision, i. e. to the spreading or the closing of the fingers. The school of Hummel, matching Dussek’s entirely, defines general situations, among which we find

⁴³ Translated from Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, New updated edition Paris: Fayard 2006, 69.

⁴⁴ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), “Du doigté”, VII.

⁴⁵ Jan Ladislav Dussek, *Instructions on the Art of playing the Piano Forte or Harpsichord [...] to which are added Opus 32 expressly composed by I. Pleyel, Six Progressive Sonatines with Violin Accomp. ad libitum*, London & Edinburgh: Corri, Dussek & Co. 1796; Ignace Pleyel and Jean-Louis Dussek, *Méthode pour le pianoforte*, Paris: Pleyel 1797.

⁴⁶ Translated from Pleyel and Dussek, *ibid.*, 18.

those of “Spannungen” (extension), “Auslassen” (elision), “Fortrücken mit einzelner Fingerordnung” (moving away with similar ordering of fingers) etc.⁴⁷

In a well-known passage about the physiological inequality of the fingers,⁴⁸ Chopin acknowledges Hummel’s science of fingering. The same school guides Montgeroult when she links the choice of fingering to accentuation and the colour of the passage:

Students have already noticed that piano music can be played with all the variety of nuance which the voice and bowed string instruments are susceptible of and that in this way they should know when to make the passages flow or when to play them detached according to what their style or their character demands. [...] Good fingering is one of the most powerful means to give these passages their proper colour when they are divided into slurred and detached notes. The fingering must be defined in such a way as there might possibly be a change in fingers when playing the first slurred note.⁴⁹

Contrary to this, the introduction of the *guide-main* advocated by the school of Kalkbrenner seems to want to reduce this physiological inequality. One does read, however, in a text by Herz, a fervent follower of the Dactylion, that “equal sounds in music do not really exist”.⁵⁰ This remark invites us to reconsider those judgements that have systematically denigrated second-rate pianists and have relegated their machines to exercise the fingers to the rank of uninteresting curiosities.

Preceding the rational thought that pervades Hummel’s teaching methods, Louis Adam’s *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire*⁵¹ suggested virtuosic passages, namely short excerpts from various authors (Ex. 8). The choice of virtuosic passages is witness to an advanced organisation of technique, and to concerns about fingering that favours the expressive unfolding of parts and the highlighting of counterpoint.

Substitution takes on a major importance not only as it functions as a link in position changes of the hand, but also because it enables the prolonged resonance of the note on which it is practised (Ex. 9–10). Substitution is widely practised by Thalberg, who makes it a distinct trademark of his piano playing.

Substitution is the art of replacing one finger by another without allowing the key to lift. [...] It is by substitution that THALBERG gives his melodies this character of wideness that distinguishes him from other pianists. The linking of sounds even happens with the

⁴⁷ Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *Ausführlich theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-forte Spiel*, Vienna: Haslinger 1828, VII–VIII.

⁴⁸ Cf. Chopin, *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*, 2010, 74.

⁴⁹ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 1, 200.

⁵⁰ Translated from Henri Herz, *Méthode complète de piano*, Paris: Meissonnier 1839, 20.

⁵¹ Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire, adoptée pour servir à l'enseignement dans cet établissement*, Paris: Imprimerie du Conservatoire de Musique, year 13 [1804], 128.

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Passages de differens auteurs pour le doigter.

Presto.

DUSSEK.
Œuvre 4.
N^o 1.

Allegro. 32

Œuvre 35
N^o 2.

Allegro.

N^o 3.

N^o 4.

Ex. 8: Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* [1804], 128.



Ex. 9: Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *Ausführlich theoretisch-praktische Anweisung zum Piano-forte Spiel*, 1828, 336.



Ex. 10: Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* [1804], 43.

Ex. 11: Frédéric Chopin, *Nocturne*, op. 9, n. 2, bars 25–30.

softest ones, without the loss of power [...] substitution has the effect of sustaining the vibration of the string [...] ⁵²

The expressive guiding of sounds is determined by the control of their duration, but also by their quality, which allows variation of melodic inflections. The timbres (dark and light) and colours (bright and matte) of the Italian school of singing inspire pianists as essential processes of expression in which the vocal expression is independent of the literal meaning of the text.

Timbres are such essential elements of discourse that they are the true condition of sincere feeling. They are neglected at their peril: without them one inevitably falls into falsehood. It is timbres that reveal the intimate feeling that words do not always express sufficiently, and that words, at times, contradict. Only the pieces that paint indecision, a troubled mind, irony, grief that is misunderstood, include the mixture and the instability of timbres. In addition, each of these needs to be expressed by the kind of disorder that is its own, and whenever the idea is precise, the timbre safeguards its unity. [...]

This sparkle or this dull colour of sounds can indistinctly modify the light and the dark timbre, and can offer the student a host of resources that allow him aptly to vary the expression of the voice. [...]

The choice of timbre will never depend on the literal meaning of the words, but on the soul's movements, which dictate the words. ⁵³

⁵² Translated from Gatién Marcaillou, *École moderne du pianiste. Traité théorique, analytique et pratique pour servir d'introduction aux compositions de Thalberg et de son école*, Paris: Bureau central de Musique 1849, 6.

⁵³ Translated from Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847, 2nd part, 54–55.

Pianists produce similar expressive effects, and the means used to do so derive from the composer's as well as from the instrumentalist's art. Among the many varied solutions, the usage of special fingering establishes a clear correspondence with the vocal timbres described by Garcia and their possible colouring. They derive from a deep understanding of the physiology of the hand, following the example of accomplished singers who draw upon the greater part of the physiology of the voice. This is why types of colouring suggested by pianists like Chopin are similar to interpretations recommended and noted by Garcia in his treatise. In his Nocturne op. 9, n. 2 (Ex. 11) Chopin indicated a special fingering which suggests a particular tone colour in the treble of the keyboard that one might qualify as diaphanous. As for Garcia, he associated tenderness with the light timbre of the voice, as exemplified in Paolino's aria in Cimarosa's *Matrimonio segreto*.⁵⁴ At the end of his treatise, Garcia's additional indications for the performance of this aria (Ex. 12) demonstrate how the singer has to modulate his voice in order to express the delicate and subtle variations of Paolino's tender feelings. Likewise, the sensitive performer of the Nocturne op. 9, n. 2 must imagine the subtle variations in sound and touch which Chopin did not indicate any more than Cimarosa, but which he suggested through his fingering indications.

4.5. *Dynamic inflections, accents and nuance*

In the same way, pianists borrow from singers inflections of sound at various levels. The exercises in Garcia's, Czerny's or Kalkbrenner's methods show a perfect similarity of how the subject is treated in both singing and piano methods (Ex. 13–15).

Piano playing, however, introduces an additional complexity. Arriving at realising the singing voice as well as its accompaniment on the same instrument depends on a particular alchemy of sound.

When the singing voice consists of a small number of notes per bar, in a movement that is not lively, it cannot but be given the nuances of *forte* and *piano* that need to colour it, for in order to produce the desired effect, the instrument should sustain the sounds. The accompaniment, then, has to come and help, and should complete whatever the singing voice fails to do by well-placed inflections.⁵⁵ (Ex. 16)

The pages that Garcia devotes to vocalisation⁵⁶ give a first overview of the resources the voice has to generate the largest possible variation in sound production, which decides the way in which the sound originates, lives and dies away.

54 Ibid., 2nd part, 56–57.

55 Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), Étude n. 69, vol. 2, 213.

56 Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847 (see n. 11), 1st part, chapter 9.

Tendresse.

PAOLINO. piano. *mezzo respiro.* *piano.* *dolce legato assai.* **Mystère.** *quittez légèrement.*

Pria che spunti in ciel l'au-ro-ra in ciel l'au-ro-ra che-ti a ten - - - to passo cheti

TEXTE

Pria che punti in ciel l'au-ro-ra in ciel l'au-ro-ra che-ti cheti a ten - - - to pas-so che-ti

Ex. 12: Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847, 2nd part, 89: Aria di Cimarosa, *Matrimonio segreto*, second stave.

N° 69.

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27^{me} Etude des deux mains

Qui doivent chacune faire une partie de chant et d'accompagnement.

OBSERVATIONS.

La même main devant à la fois chanter et accompagner son chant, il en résulte deux difficultés: l'une que le chant soit lié et saillant comme si la main avait à l'exécuter seul; et l'autre que l'accompagnement soit également lié, et aussi distinct que s'il était joué par une autre main. Outre ce double soin, les deux parties de chaque main doivent concourir à l'expression générale du morceau. Le chant se composant d'un petit nombre de notes par mesure, dans un mouvement qui n'est pas vif, il ne peut fournir à lui seul les nuances de Forte et de Piano qui doivent le colorer: car, pour produire l'effet désiré, il faudrait que l'instrument soutint les sons. L'accompagnement doit alors venir à son aide, et par des inflexions bien amenées, compléter les nuances que la première partie laisse à faire. L'élève jugera combien il faut, à la fois, d'indépendance et d'accord entre les doigts d'une même main, pour obtenir ce résultat.

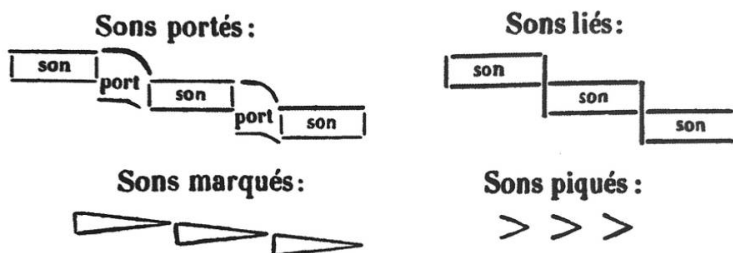
Il est à observer que dans ce genre de musique, les nuances ne doivent être que du Piano au Mezzo Forte. (Voyez les exercices 25^e, 26^e et 27^e de la 10^{me} suite.)

N° 72 = ●

SENZA
lentezza
e legato.

Ex. 16: Hélène de Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820, vol. 2, Étude n. 69, 213.

S'il était possible de représenter aux yeux les différentes manières d'exécuter un trait, nous le ferions ainsi :



Ex. 17: Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847, 1st part, 31.

knowledge of the shortcomings inherent in the instrument that one wants to make to speak.⁵⁷

The enormous variation in the production of sound is obtained by the appropriateness of the gesture to the effect one seeks. The image of the finger that *caresses* the key is often associated with pianists and singers and it reveals the affinities that exist between them.

No-one plays the legato style the way Mr J. B. Cramer does. He draws from the instrument sustained sounds that are linked the one to the other, without attacking the notes forcibly. On the contrary, he seems to caress the keys. His way of playing with nuance is admirable, as is his expression. One has to hear him play an Adagio in order to understand the beautiful effect of the legato style well, just as one has to hear his famous Études in order to judge his perfect and accurate performance. Mr Chopin, too, excels in this genre by the grace and the delicateness of his way of playing the piano.⁵⁸

Antoine de Kontski describes its effect with greater precision (see also Ex. 18):

Notes marked *Carezzando* apparently lose a quarter of their value. In this time one will graciously lift the hand and the forearm in order to lead them to the following keys. But the sound does not stop, as it is sustained by the pedal until it has reached its full value, similar to the sound of the glass harmonica or the flageolet sound on a violin. As the flexible part of the finger attacks the piano key, which is also flexible, this double flexibility causes the sound itself to become soft and flexible, and consequently to lose all the hardness and dryness it normally has when one hits the key with the fingertip. [...] Thus, it is up to the artist to animate this instrument, which is so dry. It is the artist who has to make this instrument capable of singing by touching it in such a way as to make it do what he wants it to, i.e. by making it sing, weep, rumble, etc. etc. All of this, then, lies in the way one holds the instrument, and the instrument will obey immediately, thanks to the combination of the pedal, the touch, and above all the sensitivity of the person who plays.⁵⁹

Kontski defines the use of the pedal in order to produce an effect “similar to the sound of the glass harmonica or the flageolet sound on a violin”,⁶⁰ which is reminiscent of how Garcia explained this in the same way: “Detached sounds need to be formed, pure and velvety, like those of the harmonica. They lend themselves

⁵⁷ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), preface, II.

⁵⁸ Translated from T. Latour, *Nouvelle méthode de Piano Forte*, 1841, 52. The statement on the title page, “Ci-Devant Pianiste de Sa Majesté Brittanique” (Previously the Pianist of His Majesty the British King) refers in all likelihood to Francis Tatton Latour, associate of Dussek at the firm *Chappell*.

⁵⁹ Translated from Antoine de Kontski, *L'indispensable du pianiste, exercices quotidiens pour piano*, op. 100, Paris: l'Auteur 1846; bilingual edition (German and French), revised and with additions: Berlin [ca. 1851], 15–17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

Andante.

Schreibart. *con tristezza.* u.s.w.

Notation. etc.

Spielart. *con tristezza.* Ped * Ped * Ped * Ped * Ped * Ped * u.s.w.

Exécution. etc.

Ist der mit *Carezando* bezeichnete Gesang in doppelten Noten, wie im nachstehenden Beispiel, geschrieben, so muss man dieselbe Bewegung der Hand und des Arms, wie bei den einfachen Noten, beibehalten.

Si le Chant marqué de Carezando est écrit en doubles notes comme dans l'exemple ci-après, il faut conserver le mouvement de la main et du bras, comme dans celui de notes simples.

Schreibart. *dolcissimo.* ppp u.s.w.

Notation. etc.

Spielart. *dolcissimo.* Ped * Ped * Ped * Ped * Ped * Ped * u.s.w.

Exécution. etc.

Ex. 18: Antoine de Kontski, *L'indispensable du pianiste, exercices quotidiens pour piano*, 1846, 17.

especially to the expression of moving and graceful feelings.”⁶¹ This “caressing” touch, related to the refined *détaché* of *portato* playing is served by the particular use of the repetition of the second finger. The practice is confirmed by Zimmerman in a comparable expressive context: “Often these kinds of notes are played with a single finger. In a way, this is the imitation of a voice that is oppressed.”⁶²

Portato playing described everywhere as especially expressive, finds itself associated with the difference between the hands. This evokes the independence

61 Translated from Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847 (see note 12), 2nd part, 29.

62 Translated from Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmermann, *Encyclopédie du Pianiste Compositeur, dédiée à J. Cramer*, Paris: chez l'auteur et chez Troupenas 1840, 1st part, 41.

On ne doit *nullement piquer la touche*, mais seulement lever le doigt; cette manière de détacher ajoute beaucoup à l'expression du chant, et se fait quelquefois avec un petit retard de la note qu'on veut exprimer ainsi.

Exemple.



Ex. 19: Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire*, [1804], 156.

LES HUGUENOTS. (MEYERBEER)
(Duo du 4^e Acte.)

Que jamais je n'arrive au ré-veil.

Ex. 20: Jean Baptiste Faure, *La voix et le chant, traité pratique*, 1886, 171.

of the singing voice, and, at the piano, helps to highlight the soloist part, avoiding the monotony of a too close concordance with the accompaniment (Ex. 19).

Other colour effects are accompanied by a difference in rhythm, which is not necessarily present in the notation, such as the presence of a series of accents on notes of a similar length, a notation phenomenon which is, almost without exception, attributable to the widespread practice of the expressive effect in declamation called *stentato*, described by Jean Baptiste Faure in his method *La voix et le chant* (see also Ex. 20):

About *stentato* (from the Italian *stentato*, a stento, with effort, extending with effort)

[...] *Stentato*, in fact, indicates a movement of delay in the phrase, but while *ritardando* operates by the will of the singer or the instrumentalist, in *stentato* the performer seems to want to escape a mysterious constraint, and does not want to give in to the superior force of a sentiment that imposes this delay upon him. The notes are heavily marked and

Ex. 21: Frédéric Chopin, *Nocturne*, op. 9, n. 1, 83–85.

Ex. 22: Frédéric Chopin, *Sonata* in B minor, op. 58, 1st movement, bars 28–29.

even over-articulated, without ceasing to be linked to one another in the most rigorous way. [...] *Stentato* is inseparable from slurred and sustained singing, without which it would lose much of its power [...] ⁶³

Without a doubt, Chopin signals a *stentato* effect in bar 83 of the *Nocturne* op. 9, n. 1, or in bar 30 of the first movement of the *Sonata* in B minor, op. 58 (Ex. 21–22).

In addition, the indication *accelerando-ritenuto* placed over bar 83 of Chopin's *Nocturne* op. 9, n. 1 (Ex. 21) fully confirms the intention of rhythmical rupture, suggesting the simpler form of the “agogic curve” typical of *rubato*.

Instead, an articulation markedly less *legato* is implied by the accent signalled by the ^-sign, as is demonstrated by Alexis de Garaudé's explanation:

⁶³ Translated from Jean Baptiste Faure, *La voix et le chant, traité pratique*, Paris: Heugel 1886, 171.

This way of attacking the sound with force is somewhat similar to the effect one seeks to produce with the voice when one wants to make the echo of a vaulted ceiling resonate. In Italian music, one frequently uses this vibration, which has as its effect to give the voice all the sound quality of which it is capable, and to accentuate the musical phrase.⁶⁴

This type of accent seems to have been cultivated in the new martial and heroic style in particular. An interesting example of its application and practice can specifically be found in the singing method of Gilbert Duprez, champion of the new aesthetic trend (Ex. 23). Its correspondence to the sign frequently used by Liszt in his notation is obvious. In Liszt's *Grande Fantaisie (Réminiscences de Don Juan)* (Ex. 24) the *vibrato* accent alternates with the *tenuto* indication and the indication of the declamatory accent, showing a coherent motivation to use differentiated signs.

The semantic meaning of the word *vibration* used here does not have anything to do with the current and modern use of the word *vibrato*, either in its meaning of *tremolo* or of 'undulation'. Nevertheless, *vibrato* (in the modern sense) can also be enumerated among the instances of *accent*, applied and performed with coherence, elegance, variation and intelligence, avoiding monotonous mechanics.

The art of *bel canto* cultivated a large variety of effects of projection and sound resonance. The similarity of Duprez' exercise and Lisztian notation allows us to recognise coherence in notation and securely to identify the means of expression no longer used today. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the signs of musical notation do not have a single unambiguous meaning, and that it is essential to understand them in context (i. e. period, style, exact musical circumstances). The comparison of the descriptions of the signs used by Garaudé and Garcia is not without its problems for present-day readers (see also Ex. 25–26):

Swelled sounds with inflexions or echoed notes, repeated sounds. (*Flautati*)

They consist of a non-discontinued series of small swelled sounds of different proportions, and also multiplied to the extent that the reach of [the singer's] breathing allows.

These inflexions can be placed in different ways: they can be of equal length and duration (1). They can follow a growing and diminishing progression, etc. The great singers use them in the most natural way in the following arrangement: first, they produce a sustained swelled sound with a third of the air breathed in. Then this sound is followed by one that is less loud and less stretched out. After this comes a long succession of echoes, increasingly weakened and closer together, of which the last one barely reaches the ear. The throat needs to tighten and expand with suppleness at each inflection (2).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Translated from Alexis de Garaudé, *Méthode complète de chant ou théorie pratique de cet art, Mise à la portée de tous les professeurs, même Instrumentistes [...]* Seconde Edition considérablement augmentée et améliorée, op. 40, Paris: l'Auteur, ca. 1841, 39.

⁶⁵ Translated from Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847 (see n. 11), 1st part, 61.

TROISIÈME MORCEAU D'EXPRESSION

Martial. Style de force et vibré. Il faut chanter ce morceau sur le plein de la voix en général, et dans quelques passages adoucir affectueusement.

Metr. 100. **Allegro moderato.** *Vibrato*

CANTO.

PIANO.

marcato *Rall* *col canto* *p*

H. 5087. (1)

Ex. 23: Gilbert Duprez, *L'art du chant*, Paris: Heugel 1846, 56.



Ex. 24: Franz Liszt, *Grande fantaisie (réminiscences) de Don Juan*, Grave.

4.6. Rhythmical Inflections: Rubato and Agogic

Garcia testifies to the identical practice of singers and instrumentalists:

Two artists of a very different kind, Garcia (my father) and Paganini, excelled at the use of the *tempo rubato* applied by phrase. When the orchestra held the metre with regularity, they, for their part, abandoned themselves to their inspiration and rejoined the bass only when the chord changed or else at the end of the same phrase. But this practice demands an exquisite sense of *rhythm* and unflappable aplomb.⁶⁶



Descriptions of how pianists practise this are many. Hélène de Montgeroult's are very detailed as well:

Thus, it is necessary for the right hand to anticipate from one bar to the next in order not to hurry the passages contained within one bar. And this is when it is necessary to remember the absolute necessity of having such independence of both hands that the left hand rigorously keeps the time, whereas the right hand, like the singer, leisurely goes through the melody, without hurrying it to make it finish in accordance with the metre, and imitating the accents and nuance that the voice gives it to the greatest possible degree. This way only, the pianist may hope to come close to the fullness of expression and the style that distinguishes great singers.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Translated from Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847 (see n. 11), 2nd part, 25.

⁶⁷ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 1, 234: "17^e et dernière Suite d'exercices: exercices sur les appoggiatures".

De la VIBRATION DE LA VOIX.

Cet effet peut se produire de deux manières: 1^o par un son filé très court, qui s'indique ordinairement par une enfléchure posée sur la Note; exemple  2^o par l'inflexion suivante 

Cette manière d'attaquer le son avec force a quelque ressemblance avec l'effet qu'on cherche à produire avec sa voix lorsqu'on veut faire résonner l'écho d'une voûte. Dans la musique Italienne, on emploie fréquemment cette vibration, dont l'effet est de donner à la voix toute la sonorité dont elle est susceptible, et d'accentuer la phrase musicale. Il ne faut cependant pas en abuser, comme font quelques chanteurs. Dans le chant, on doit principalement en faire usage sur les Syllabes où est situé l'accent de chaque mot, sur les appoggiatures ou petites Notes, et sur les tems forts de la mesure, dont le caractère demande un coloris plus prononcé.



Ex. 25: Alexis de Garaudé, *Méthode complète de chant ou théorie pratique de cet art*, ca.1841, 39.

(1) Quelques auteurs appellent cela faire vibrer la voix (*vibrar la voce*). M. Ca-truffo, dans sa méthode de vocalisation, indique cet effet au moyen des syncopes.



(2) Velluti s'exprime ainsi : *L'eco si fa flautato e per riuscirlo si ingrandisce tutto l'arco di dentro.*



Les sons à échos s'exécutent du faible au fort :

Ex. 26: Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847, 1st part, 61.

Even if it cannot be noted down, *rubato* can be suggested by the presence of syncopation, of complicated rhythmical divisions in the melody that have been placed there to draw the listener's attention, like in Dussek's Sonata "L'invocation", op. 77 (Ex. 27). But the drawn-out notation of the required effect complicates the reading of the score. This is why this notation was criticised, and Chopin, whose proximity to Dussek has been pointed out, did not escape being reproached for it.

His *Nocturnes* are charming, and they contain both the qualities and defects of this young and learned composer. Why are ideas that are so fresh and so elegant impeded

Ex. 27: Jan Ladislav Dussek, Sonata “L’invocation”, op. 77, *Adagio non troppo ma solenne*, bars 32–48.

and blemished [...] by some kind of affectation to note down the music almost in the way in which it needs to be performed – (we say *almost* because *completely* is impossible) [...] Dussek – who greatly loved *rubato*, even though he never wrote the word in his music – Dussek had tried to render it visible by way of syncopation, but even when one faithfully performed this syncopation, one did not even come close to his mellow and delicious way of playing. He gave up the idea himself and was happy just to write *espressivo*. Happy are those who heard him perform his music! Happier even are those who could imitate him!⁶⁸

The use of these rhythmic changes cannot be separated from the issue of genre. The knowledge of similar performance styles has been diluted through the years and present-day pianists as well as singers have to reconstruct them through an informed reading of the score.

Different composition styles require as many different styles of execution. In 1723, Tosi acknowledged three types of style [...]. Hence it is the nature of the composition that needs to determine the choice of style. If one keeps in mind the different characters presented by the melody and the various ways of performing it, three principal styles from which all the others derive can be found, i. e.:

⁶⁸ [Charles Chaulieu], article “J. L. Dussek”, in: *Le pianiste* 5 (March 1834), 78.

The plain style, *canto spianato*
 The florid style, *canto fiorito*
 The dramatic style, *canto declamato*.⁶⁹

According to Montgeroult, the practice of the plain style shows the distance between musical notation and the expert reading of a score:

Here the singing phrase must always dominate the accompaniment: that is why, even when we indicate *pianissimo*, the pupil will feel that this nuance will be but relative, and that the singing voice should always be more or less articulated by a touch that presses the note after it has resonated, whereas the bass line will be softened and melted together in such a way that one hears even more the complete harmony of the chord than the individual sounds that make it up. The artist gifted with deep emotions will judge that in spite of the number of nuances we have indicated, there are others still that will be inspired by the moment. We have not noted all the appoggiaturas that this type of singing is susceptible to, because time makes turns of phrasing grow old, as more than singing itself they are subject to the rules of fashion. When one gets into the character of this piece, which is indicated by the long development of phrasing, the artist will feel that the appoggiaturas must be of the wide and noble style, and that their performance must reflect both these qualities, that is: the ornamentation made up of slurred notes will flow without haste, and will be inspired only by the need to fill the moment of silence left on the Piano by the overlong duration of a sound that cannot be held.

The exact metre of the left hand must be rigorously maintained, whatever change is caused in the right hand by the expression of the singing voice and the development of the appoggiaturas introduced into it. The accompaniment will be played as slurred as possible, and nearly always *piano*.⁷⁰

Tempo fluctuations correspond to a common practice dictated by the notion that, in music, temporality unfolds as in a narrative. Just as verbal declamation is enlivened by the expression of the text, musical narration contains *peripeteia*, the emotional content of which is most naturally made clear to the audience by tempo changes.

Wilhelm von Lenz, a diplomat and an amateur pianist, visited Liszt and afterwards Chopin, with whom he also took lessons in Paris. Of op. 9, n. 2, doubtless the Chopin *Nocturne* most frequently performed, Lenz described a performance quite distinct from *rubato* and agogic changes:

Chopin wanted “that one practises first the accompaniment only, divided between both hands in such a way that each of the chords following onto each fundamental note [at 12/8: 2nd and 3rd beat, 5th and 6th, 8th and 9th, 11th – 12th] sound like a choir of guitars. When one has managed – with both hands – to render the accompaniment in this way, with full and round sonority, yet *piano*, but in a rigorous tempo, *allegretto* of absolute

⁶⁹ Translated from Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 1847 (see n. 11), 2nd part, 62.

⁷⁰ Translated from Montgeroult, *Cours complet*, 1820 (see n. 6), vol. 3, Étude n. 110, 182.

regularity and without falling into a movement of triplets, one can leave the accompaniment performed like this to the left hand only, and invite the first tenor to sing his part with the right hand. The second variation should be an *andante*, and the third a poignant *adagio*, and the theme – like the second variation – should be sung at the top of one’s voice, expressive without being over-sentimental. As for the style, the Pasta and the great school of Italian singing should be taken as a model, and one should strengthen the poignancy as the variations unfold.”⁷¹

This art of the narrative can also be found in the methods, for instance in Hummel’s annotations for the first solo of his *Concerto* in A minor, op. 85, or in Czerny’s careful didactic examples.⁷²

5. Summing up

The imitation of singing deeply influenced the practice of piano playing and its evolution from the 18th to the 20th century. However, this statement is often accompanied by the belief that the possibility to reconstruct this aspect of piano playing is irrevocably lost. This paper has attempted to show that this reconstruction is complex, although not impossible. By necessity, it starts with the explication of the aesthetic meaning of the metaphor that powerfully anchored performers and gave their practice a very precise direction (“1. The illusion of voice”). Next, the difficulty of the reconstruction lies in the necessity of the double reconstruction of the school of the *bel canto* on the one hand and the school of the singing piano on the other (“2. Identifying the vocal model”). Their rediscovery invites research shared between experts in both disciplines, and reactivates the narrow collaboration on a common ideal of sound (“3. Pianistic genealogies”). The fourth section of this paper, written in collaboration with Edoardo Torbianelli, presents the initial results of the dialogue between treatises and compositions (“4. A reconstruction of the vocal model and techniques of transfer to the piano”).

Our research has made long-lost sound images re-emerge – images as they have been described in treatises on vocal and instrumental performance and have been implemented by composers. Because these sound images are, by necessity, contained in the scores, we have attempted to learn again how to read them, and how to perform them at the piano. In this way, our work highlights

⁷¹ Translated from Wilhelm von Lenz, quoted from Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, Paris: Fayard 2006, New updated edition, 111.

⁷² Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *Ausführlich theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-forte Spiel*, Vienna: Haslinger 1828, 429–433; Carl Czerny, *Vollständige theoretisch-praktische Pianoforteschool* op. 500, Vienna: Diabelli 1839, Part 3, “Von den Veränderungen des Zeitmasses”, 24–30.

the insufficiency of a purely intuitive reading of the score. It is hoped this paper will open new perspectives for the creative interpretation of 19th-century works, continuous with philological ventures that have transformed the reception of works from earlier periods.

Translation by Marleen Cré

