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"Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music" By Sandra P. Rosenblum

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Sandra P. Rosenblum. *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. xv, 516pp. ISBN 0-253-34314-3

That a hot hostility exists between pianists and fortepianists became evident to me only last year when I taught for the first time a keyboard literature course for piano performance majors at the master's level. It is in such an environment — where the work of the Badura-Skodas, William S. Newman, Frederick Neumann, and others have barely penetrated — that Sandra Rosenblum's *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* might be successful in effecting some positive change; she is an active pianist who plays both modern and original instruments, and in the course of her monograph, remarks on the details of performances by both fortepianists and pianists. Yet, Rosenblum's book is thoroughly musicological; she seems to have read everything, digested it, and recycled it into clear expository prose. With eighty-six pages of notes and four-hundred pages of text, careful and thorough documentation marks this study. Thus, this is a book for two audiences: performers and scholars.

From the views of both communities, Rosenblum's approach can only be described as exhaustive. She has consulted the appropriate treatises, studied the autographs, early copies, and editions, as well as the best of the critical texts of both solo and ensemble works, observed and commented upon present-day practices, played replicas and originals of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pianos, and has placed all this into historical and musical contexts. The book concentrates on Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Clementi, and the English Pianoforte School; Beethoven receives the most extensive coverage. When necessary, examples from outside the piano repertoire are cited. Documentation is combined with, but carefully delineated from, Ms. Rosenblum's own preferences, and she wisely avoids the vitriolic controversies that have marked some of the issues. In short, this is a virtuoso performance: a *compleat* introduction, but hardly a "*plaine*" and "*easie*" one.

The first chapter — "The Background for the Study" — attempts to do too much with difficult and elusive concepts in too little space. Ideas such as the relationship of music and rhetoric, *Emfindsamkeit*, and *Sturm und Drang* are concepts yet to be defined to the satisfaction of many students of the period. For example, when she writes that Mozart's Sonata for Piano K. 309, "composed in Mannheim in 1778, mirrors a predilection for dynamic nuance, contrasts, and crescendos characteristic

of the 'Mannheim School'" (p. 14), we are dealing with two questions: whether K. 309 was written in Mannheim and if these characteristics were stimulated from the 1770s style at the Elector's court. The answers are possibly not and certainly no. The so-called "Mannheim" style, as defined by Riemann, had peaked a generation earlier with Johann Stamitz and was only to be found in his late symphonies. This style was derived from the Italian overture; Stamitz's contribution was one of refinement.

The author's approach is refreshing in a discipline in which few are inclined to suggest what can be definitely known: "the goal of historically founded performance practices is to reveal each composition to its fullest in a manner at once consonant with the composer's expectations (as best we can discern them) and satisfying to the performer and the audience" (p. 1). There are no tricks of argumentation throughout the book. Neither is Ms. Rosenblum a strict partisan regarding the instrument: "So much attention to the early piano or 'fortepiano' is not intended to imply any limitation of performance to an "authentic" instrument, nor does playing such an instrument of itself guarantee a fine performance" (pp. 1-2).

The second chapter — "The Fortepiano Circa 1780-1820" — represents the tightest and clearest available exposition of this topic. The author goes beyond discussing the so-called English and Viennese actions to cover the various mutations of sound, tone, touch, and range. For the latter, she considers the question of note restoration: that is, should analogous passages, seemingly changed to accommodate the eighteenth-century keyboard, be returned to their "intended shape" when played on the modern piano? Citing Czerny and Schindler, who argued against restorations in Beethoven, the author too believes that such passages should remain as notated by the composer.

The chapter on dynamics and accentuation deals with another controversial issue: repeats within forms and inner repeats in the minuet and scherzo. In both cases, keyboardists have been wont not to repeat. In the case of sonata form movements, there has been more willingness to take the first repeat than the second. However, despite Alfred Brendel's claim that repeats are not necessary and can even be detrimental in Schubert (*New York Review of Books*, February 2, pp. 32-36 March 16, pp. 42-43, and April 27, 1989, pp. 58-59), there can be little question that the drawing of a double bar is an act on the part of the composer as deliberate as any other indication on the page. One suspects that in the minuet and scherzo, repeats are eschewed because of

their less weighty character and the insecurity of performers about how to maintain interest. Rosenblum offers specific examples as possible solutions for these dilemmas. Also of interest is the extended treatment given to various aspects of accentuation, especially Beethoven's use of metrical accents and how some of these may have been interpreted as dots or strokes: "knowing this, the performer should be alert to the possibility that dots distributed regularly on beats or half beats in passage work may be a substitute for strokes intended as accents" (p. 97).

Some forty pages are devoted to the problems of pedalling. Often players have been unwilling to accept damper-pedal indications in Beethoven and his contemporaries. This has resulted in changes in pedalling instructions to force examples such as the first movement of the "Moonlight" Sonata, opus 27/2, and the finale of the "Waldstein," opus 53, to sound as "Classic" piano music should, i.e., with clarity of articulation and purity of harmony. Instead, Beethoven here brushed aside both ideals and the result seems to be almost "impressionistic." Opus 27/2, where the entire first movement is to be played without dampers, the author finds problematic: "I have not yet been convinced by any performance of this movement (including my own attempts) on contemporary fortepianos or replicas with the dampers continually raised" (p. 137). This stimulates a discussion that is required reading for every pianist who wishes to play this warhorse in an out-of-the-ordinary way.

The next pair of chapters on "Articulation and Touch" and "Historical Technique and Fingering" continues the many strengths I have already noted. A composer's notation of slurs and their varying interpretations in the copies and prints can prove to be the most frustrating of editorial decisions. To cite but one example treated by Ms. Rosenblum, mm. 12-13 of Haydn's Sonata, Hoboken XVI:22/1:

Example 1. Hoboken: 22/1, mm. 12-13

Autograph/Päsler(Breitkopf & Härtel)/Feder(Henle)



Christa Landon



My own solution



Both Georg Feder's Henle and Päsler's old Breitkopf & Härtel edition follow the autograph exactly, as does Rosenblum's example; Christa Landon, in the *Wiener Urtext Ausgabe*, turns the first four sixteenths into the articulation of the following beat; i.e., sixteenth-note pairs. Rosenblum's explanation is that "Haydn presumably meant four-note slurs to avoid an obvious two-note grouping with its attendant accent on the third note, as found on beats 2 and 4" (p. 162). While I cannot dispute this interpretation, there is another instance where one would be more likely to take Christa Landon's interpretation of this sort of problem. In Hoboken XVI:49/1, the autograph indicates that the third quarter of m. 4 should have one slur:


Example 2. Hoboken XVI:49/1, mm. 1-5

Autograph/ (1st Edition) Feder



Christa Landon



Despite what occurs in the previous measures of the first edition, did Haydn mean to lessen the emphasis in m. 4? Perhaps he was just being careless. But, with two occurrences in Hoboken XVI:22/1, an interpretation like Hoboken XVI:49/1 seems less likely. Another alternative is to perform these as , reading the slur as belonging only to the two middle sixteenths. Such situations are editorial judgments; performers are often surprised to learn that autographs and other authentic sources present ambiguous texts.

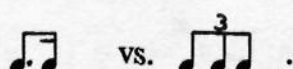
"Historical Technique and Fingering" is one of the more specialized chapters, dealing with the actual realization of certain types of slurring and articulation. The emphasis is on fortepiano technique in contrast to the clavichord and harpsichord. The positioning of arm and hand, different types of touch, and difficult problems of technique are treated with special reference to Beethoven and Clementi.

Though we can be grateful for the devotion of much space to aspects other than ornamentation, the topic is treated extensively. It is difficult to understand how it came to be that ornamentation and embellishment have been for many the *alpha* and *omega* of performance practice. By definition, these are small adornments in the totality of the composition. Granted, if done to excess and in poor taste, they can affect the piece negatively. But it is not excess and taste that concerns pianists; rather, how the ornaments are to be correctly realized and the embellishments effectively added? Rosenblum's chapter fills a need by providing for the performer both guidelines and possibilities.

Equally controversial are under- and overdotting. Underdotting centers on the performance of dotted rhythms in the context of a predominantly triplet surface motion. One editor may believe that the dotted notation receives a three-way division

$$\text{dotted quarter} = \text{quarter} \text{ triplet eighth} \text{ eighth},$$

another that the distinction must be maintained



Perhaps the oddest of situations is to be found in the Henle edition of Schubert's *Klaviersonaten*. Volumes one and two were prepared by Paul Mies with the distinction preserved as:



This policy is countered in the preface to volume three, with the new editor Paul Badura-Skoda remarking that Schubert notated this rhythm as



and that it should be performed as such. However, this third volume is engraved in the same way as volumes one and two. Yet, one can cite instances in Schubert where either or both interpretations are plausible, e.g., the first and last movements of the "Great" C Major Symphony, D. 944. The mere mention of double dotting causes storm clouds to descend over the musicological community. Ms. Rosenblum provides the theoretical basis, cites some possible examples, and wisely remains detached from the tempest.

The ninth and tenth chapters treat tempo and flexibility of both tempo and rhythm. Careful consideration is given to every important issue from the proportional relationships as outlined by theorists to the ever-present controversy over Beethoven's metronome indications. Two main points are made: 1) that the later nineteenth century tended toward tempo exaggeration, as deliberate tempos became slower and lively ones faster, destroying line in the former and clarity in the latter, and 2) that Beethoven's unusually fast tempos might be more easily negotiated on the lighter action of original instruments. Another issue is the relationship of many Classic tempos to Baroque dances. Students are often either unfamiliar with the dances and their character or, because of arbitrary historical boundaries, fail to recognize the continuity of dance styles in Baroque and Classical music. To cite but one example from outside the keyboard repertoire, the "Marcia funebre" from the "Eroica" Symphony can be taken so slowly that one could not possibly ambulate to its beat. In the tenth chapter smaller dimension matters of tempo are considered: rhetorical and agogic accentuation, treatment of the fermata, "contrametric rubato" (alteration in one hand while the other remains steady), and "agogic" rubato (tempo flexibility). Again,

examples are discussed to give the performer an idea where these ornamental alterations might be used.

In a final brief essay (9 pages), Ms. Rosenblum considers Beethoven's Bagatelle Opus 126, no. 5. In addition to covering points from previous chapters, the variants among sources are presented. This might stimulate performers to consult an editor's report for passages that prove problematic. Though I understand the practical reasons for the selection of a short example for this performance-practice lesson, it seems that a sonata movement might have provided a stronger ending to a volume that deals so effectively with a multitude of issues.

The book itself is a handsome product and should stand up to the years of use it deserves. However, the citations are relegated to the end of the book. With eighty-six pages of notes, this means that twenty percent of the material, which is often a valuable commentary on the main text, can only be read by constantly flipping back and forth. As an avid reader of notes, I found my thought interrupted every time I wanted to know what was missing when one of those 1489 tiny numbers appeared. While any solution to this problem may cost more, for publishers who specialize in scholarly books, these essential commentaries and citations — the very indicators of scholarship — should be made easier to consult.

Although I have only touched on a few of the many issues covered, this is among the most important and accomplished studies on eighteenth-century performance. Its comprehensiveness, clarity, and scholarship make it indispensable. Sandra Rosenblum's book, together with Paul and Eva Badura-Skoda's *Interpreting Mozart on the Keyboard* (1957), Frederick Neumann's *Ornamentation and Improvisation in Mozart* (1986), and William S. Newman's *Beethoven on Beethoven* (1988), forms a powerful quartet of tools for performing Classic music. Now that the essential resources are available, the most difficult task remains: to find accomplished performers willing to take advantage of them.

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