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## Tempo Rubato

### The Uses of *Rubato* in Music, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries

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Sandra P. Rosenblum

*Tempo rubato* (It., "stolen time") may be most aptly defined as a disregard of certain notated properties of rhythm and tempo for the sake of expressive performance. Like a few other musical terms, this one has been applied to widely divergent—almost opposing—usages and is presently the subject of sufficient confusion to warrant an ordered presentation. The phrase *rubare il tempo* originated with Tosi in 1723.<sup>1</sup> Since then *rubato* has been used for two basic types of rhythmic flexibility: that of a solo melody to move in subtly redistributed or inflected note values against a steady pulse in the accompaniment, and flexibility of the entire musical texture to accelerate, to slow down, or to slightly lengthen a single note, chord, or rest. In most cases *rubato* implies a rhythmic elasticity that will soon return to the original beat or tempo.

#### Eighteenth Century

The underlying concept of *tempo rubato* held by musicians in the 18th century was that of a soloist displacing the written notes in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno Osservazioni sopra il canto Figurato* (Bologna: dalla Volpe, 1723), 99.

beat by altering their rhythmic values—lengthening some and shortening others in an improvisatory manner—while the generally homophonic accompaniment maintained a steady beat in a constant tempo. Zacconi's singing "dopo il tatto" or "behind the tactus," described already in 1596, falls into this category of *tempo rubato*. While the conductor maintained a strict tactus or beat, singers could hold a structural note longer than its written value for the affect and return to the tactus by hastening the subsequent ornamental notes.<sup>2</sup> Tosi's shifting, or "stealing the Time exactly on the true Motion of the Bass,"<sup>3</sup> could be so subtle and irrational as to virtually preclude notation; thus, he and Galliard, his English translator, were disinclined to leave any examples. Tosi wrote of making "Restitution with Ingenuity"<sup>4</sup> and Galliard added that "Experience and Taste" would teach when the melody "returns to its Exactness, to be guided by the Bass."<sup>5</sup>

This "contrametric" or "melodic" *rubato* shifted freely around or against the beat and was frequently used as an expressive nuance in the "Pathetick and Tender."<sup>6</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz's advice to those who accompany instrumental soloists supports Tosi's concept.

If the accompanist is not secure in the tempo, if he allows himself to be beguiled into dragging in the tempo rubato, or when the player of the principal part retards several notes in order to give some grace to the execution, or if he allows himself to rush the tempo when the note following a rest is anticipated, then he not only startles the soloist, but arouses his mistrust and makes him

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<sup>2</sup>Ludovico Zacconi, *Prattica di musica*, Part I, 1592 (facs. Bologna: Forni, 1967) folio 21v. Robert Greenlee suggests that the speed of the ornamental notes becomes gradually faster and notates them thus:  (Unpublished paper, "Singing *Dopo il Tatto*: Zacconi's Tempo Rubato and *Sprezzatura*," read at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Pittsburgh in November 1992.)

<sup>3</sup>Tosi, 99; trans. and ed. [Johann Ernst] Galliard, *Observations on the Florid Song; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers* (London: Wilcox, 1742); 2d ed., 1743 (rep., London: Reeves, 1926), 129.

<sup>4</sup>Tosi, 99; Galliard, 156.

<sup>5</sup>Galliard, 156fn.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

afraid to undertake anything else with boldness or freedom.<sup>7</sup>

In a similar statement Leopold Mozart wrote that the effect that the soloist wanted to create would be "demolished" if the accompanist did not maintain an even tempo.<sup>8</sup>

According to Ernst Wilhelm Wolf<sup>9</sup> and Carl Philip Emanuel Bach<sup>10</sup> (edition of 1787), contrametric *rubato* could include the adding of improvised flourishes, often with uneven numbers of notes. Bach redefined *rubato* as the presence of

more, sometimes fewer notes than the [usual] division of the measure allows. In this manner one can distort . . . a part of the measure, a whole measure, or several measures. The most difficult and most essential thing is this: that all notes of the same value must be played exactly equally. When the execution is such that one hand appears to play against the meter while the other strikes all the beats precisely, then one has done everything that is necessary. . . . Whoever has mastered the performance of this tempo, is not always bound by the indicated numbers, 5, 7, 11, and so on. He sometimes plays more, sometimes fewer notes, according to his mood. . . [author's translation].

Equal performance of the groups of eleven sixteenth notes in Figure 1 would give the impression of one hand playing "against the meter" while the other hand stays with it. (Note the precise spacing of the first edition.)

Contemporary with Bach, the violinist Franz Benda—whose *rubato* was praised by Reichardt as "an extremely meaningful laxity in the tempo of the

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<sup>7</sup>Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, 1752; *On Playing the Flute*, trans. and ed. Edward Reilly (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 252-53.

<sup>8</sup>Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, 1756; 3rd ed., 1787, facs., ed. Jung (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1983), 266-68.

<sup>9</sup>Ernst Wilhelm Wolf, *Anleitung, Eine Sonatine, Vier affectvolle Sonaten und Eine dreyzehnmahl variirtes Thema* (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1785). Trans. Christopher Hogwood, "A Supplement to C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch*: E.W. Wolf's *Anleitung* of 1785," in *C.P.E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen L. Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 151-52.

<sup>10</sup>Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre art das Clavier zu spielen*, 3d ed. (Leipzig: Schwickert, 1787), Part 1, 99-100.



notes"<sup>11</sup>—identified some examples of the improvisatory embellishments for which he was so admired to be played in *tempo rubato* (Fig. 2). Benda's playing was singled out by Heinrich Christoph Koch, in 1808, who summed up this Italianate *rubato* as performance of a "cantabile passage of a solo part, in which the player intentionally digressed from the assumed movement of the tempo and from the usual distribution of note values, and executed the melodic line as if without any fixed division of time, while the accompaniment played on absolutely strictly in tempo."<sup>12</sup>

Fig. 1. C. P. E. Bach, *Sechs Sonaten . . . mit veränderten Reprisen*, Wq. 50/4/i (as in 1st ed., Winter), mm. 112-14. By permission of the Music Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.



Fig. 2. Benda, Sonata for Violin and Thoroughbass in A Major. From Ernest Ferand, *Improvisation in Nine Centuries of Western Music*, 142, 137. By permission of Laaber Verlag.  
a. i, mm. 55-56



<sup>11</sup>Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Briefe eines aufmerksamen Reisenden die Musik betreffend*, 2 vols. (Vol. I, Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1774; Vol. II, Frankfurt und Breslau, 1776) I, 162.

<sup>12</sup>Heinrich Christoph Koch, "Über den technischen Ausdruck: Tempo rubato," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 10/33 (11 May 1808), col. 518.

b. iii, m. 97

[Presto scherzando]

[Vn. plain]

Vn. embellished]

In 1777 Mozart had amazed "everyone" that he could always keep "strict time. What these people cannot grasp is that in tempo rubato, in an Adagio, the left hand should go on playing in strict time. With them the left hand always follows suit" (letter from Augspurg)<sup>13</sup>. A letter from father to son in 1778 similarly condemned Reicha's and Becke's fault of "dragging the time, of holding back the whole orchestra by a nod and then returning to the original tempo." <sup>14</sup> Mozart left some written-out approximations of *tempo rubato*, although he could hardly have expressed in notation the rich rhythmic subtlety of his combined south German and Italian musical heritage (Fig. 3).

In contrast with the freely-shifting *rubato*, a more controlled form of contrametric *rubato*—created by uniform shifting of notes back or forward, was discussed in the second half of the 18th century. The German translator of Tosi's instructions for singers, Johann Friedrich Agricola, interpreted "stealing the time" as shown in Figure 4.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Emily Anderson, trans. and ed., *The Letters of Mozart and his Family*, 2d ed., ed. King and Carolan, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1966), 340.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 455.

<sup>15</sup>Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Anleitung zur Singkunst* (Berlin: Winter, 1757); facs., ed. Jacobi (Celle: Moeck, 1966), 219-20.

**Fig. 3.** Mozart, Rondo K. 511 (as in aut. facs.). By permission of C. F. Peters.

a. mm. 5-7.

[Andante]

cre - - - scen- - do *p*

b. mm. 85-87.

[Andante]

cre - scen- do *p*  
for.  
for.

**Fig. 4.** Agricola, *Anleitung zur Singkunst*, 219. Cited from Sandra Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*. By permission of Indiana University Press.

a. *tr tr tr*  
b. displaced:  
c. or:



But only the name was new; this rhythmic pattern (in Fig. 4) had been notated in a 14th-century madrigal, "Nascoso el viso," by Johannes de Florentia.<sup>16</sup> Figure 4 portrays not what Tosi described nor what Benda realized, but represents instead a rigidly stylized adaptation of rhythmic displacement. Yet F.W. Marpurg (1755), J.A. Hiller (1780), J.S. Petri (1782), J.B. Lasser (1798), D.G. Türk, the French violinist Pierre Baillot (1834), and others recognized this as *tempo rubato*.<sup>17</sup> Türk also included the variation in Figure 5.

Fig. 5. Türk, *Klavierschule*, 374.



Compared to the flexibility of the vocally derived Italian style, this *rubato* is a simplification—even if rendered more freely; yet many composers left written-out examples (e.g., Fig. 3 above; Clementi, Sonata Op. 8/1/i/13-20; Beethoven, Sonata Op. 106/iii/117-124), of which one well-known is that in Figure 6.

Ironically, it may have been the frequently described systematization that allowed, toward the end of the century, inclusion under the rubric *tempo rubato* of practices that merely dislocate the expected metrical accents:

<sup>16</sup>Johannes Wolf, *Geschichte der Mensural-Notation von 1250-1460* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1904), Pt. II, 94.

<sup>17</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1755), 40, Tab. II, Figs. 46, 48 (for use of *tempo rubato* see Register); Johann Adam Hiller, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange* (Leipzig: Junius, 1780), 88-89, 129; Johann Samuel Petri, *Anleitung zur Praktischen Musik*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1782), 164; Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Clavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende*, 1789; facs., ed. Jacobi (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962), 374-375; Johann Baptist Lasser, *Vollständige Anleitung zur Singkunst*, 1798; 2d ed. (identical to the 1st; Munich: Hübschmann, 1805), 154, 158; Pierre Baillot, *L'Art du violon*, 1834; German ed., *Die Kunst des Violinspiels* (Leipzig: Schubert [1840]), 182.



**Fig. 6.** Beethoven, Violin Concerto, op. 61/ii, mm. 61-65.

inversion of the normal accents by means of dynamic signs, long notes, or rests (e.g., 4/4  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{4}$ );<sup>18</sup> placement of a motivic group in binary meter into a setting in triple meter or vice-versa;<sup>19</sup> imitation of a melody in a different part of the beat or meter;<sup>20</sup> and in vocal music, the setting of accented syllables on strong beats with short notes and unaccented syllables on weak beats with long notes.<sup>21</sup> Including the inversion of accents by means of dynamics as a form of *rubato* may well have been a degenerative offshoot of the earlier practice of playing melody notes in uniform syncopation against the meter (Fig. 4). J.A.P. Schulz questioned the inversion of the normal scansion of texts in an article that sparked a public controversy between himself and Carl von Dittersdorf.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Türk, 375; Koch, *op. cit.*, col. 515; Pietro Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica* (Milan: Fontana, 1826), n.p.

<sup>19</sup>Koch, col. 517; Lichtenthal, *op. cit.*, n.p.

<sup>20</sup>Koch, col. 516.

<sup>21</sup>Türk, *op. cit.*, 375. See also Friedrich Reichardt's discussion of an aria by Reinhardt Kaiser [sic] in *Cramer's Magazin der Musik* 1 (15 January 1783), 41-42.

<sup>22</sup>Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, "Verrückung," in Johann George Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, 2nd ed., 1792-1794; facs. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967-1970) vol. 4, 653-655. Carl von Dittersdorf's article appeared in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 1/13

## Nineteenth Century.

Use of freely shifting contrametric *rubato* continued into at least the first half of the 19th century. Louis Adam described it without its name in his influential *Méthode de piano de Conservatoire*.<sup>23</sup> In a section on orchestral playing in Ludwig Spohr's *Violinschule*, published in 1832, the reader is advised that when a soloist plays in *tempo rubato* "the accompaniment must continue its even, measured course;"<sup>24</sup> and the well-known critic Henry Chorley described soprano Giuditta Pasta's admirable sense "for the measurement and proportion of time." This included "metronomic correctness" balanced by an "artful licence in giving and taking."<sup>25</sup>

Descriptions of Chopin's playing by his students, colleagues, and contemporary critics leave no doubt that beyond the use of *agogic rubato* (described below)—some of it directly related to the rhythms of the mazurka—part of the uniqueness of his playing was his contrametric *rubato* in the Italian vocal tradition.<sup>26</sup> He often played with the melody subtly lingering or passionately anticipating the beat while the accompaniment stayed at least relatively, if not strictly, in time. He would have heard this

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(26 Dec. 1798), cols. 201-205. Schulz responded in *AMZ* of 2/15 (8 Jan. 1800), cols. 257-265, and 2/ 16 (15 Jan. 1800), cols. 273-280.

<sup>23</sup>Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* (Paris: Magasin de Musique du Conservatoire Royal, [1804]), 160.

<sup>24</sup>Louis Spohr, *Violinschule* (Vienna: Haslinger, 1832), 249.

<sup>25</sup>Henry F. Chorley, *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections*, 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), I, 129-130. On p. 127 Chorley mentioned Pasta's *tempo rubato* as a "gift" of "measurement of time." Pasta was one of a group of singers, including also Cinti-Damoreau, Malibran, Lablache, and Rubini, who most impressed Chopin when he arrived in Paris (e.g., letter of 12 December 1831 to Titus Wojciechowski, in *Chopin's Letters*, collected by Henryk Opieski, trans. and ed. Voynich [New York: Dover, 1988], 156-157).

<sup>26</sup>Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils*, 3d ed.; trans. Shohet, Osostowicz, Howat; ed., Howat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 119; Eigeldinger, "Chopin et l'héritage baroque," *Schweizer Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* 2 (1974), 51-74, especially pp. 68-74; Lucian Kamiński, "Zum 'Tempo rubato'," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1918-1919), 108-125, especially pp. 108-109, 120-125; Marian Sobieski and Jadwiga Sobieska, "Das Tempo Rubato bei Chopin und in der polnischen Volksmusik," *The Book of the First International Musicological Congress Devoted to the Works of Frederick Chopin*, 1960, ed. Zofia Lissa (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1963), 247-54.

*rubato* in opera performances in Warsaw and also at the Conservatory, where an Italian, Carlo Soliva, directed the voice department.<sup>27</sup>

There is musical evidence that Chopin may have intended such a realization when he wrote "rubato" in some of his early works. The word appears in the Mazurka Op. 6/2 at measure 65 (Fig. 7b). An early holograph version of this piece contains a measure with similar texture in which the four melody notes are written as four quarter notes within the 3/4 meter (Fig. 7a). This contrametric pattern is common in Polish folk music<sup>28</sup> and it, or a freer version, works well at *rubato* in the completed mazurka. Since Chopin marked the melody *portato* there, he coupled changes in touch and rhythm to vary the final appearance of the main theme. In the finale of his Concerto No. 2 the term *rubato* appears twice, but only in the piano part. In both places the pianist plays a mazurka-like melody doubled at the octave while the orchestra provides only basic rhythm and harmony. *Rubato* invites a rhythmically freer melodic line against the steady accompaniment.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Chopin never wrote *a tempo* following *rubato*. Written-out stylized *rubato* appears in Chopin's Nocturne Op. 48/1 and in Liszt's *Canzone napolitana*.

Fig. 7. Chopin, Mazurka, op. 6/2.

a. As in aut. of early version, mm. 31-32. By permission of Stiftelsen Musikkulturens Främjande.



<sup>27</sup>Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 119; Sobieski and Sobieska, *op. cit.* 250.

<sup>28</sup>Sobieski and Sobieska, *ibid.*, 252, 253.

<sup>29</sup>Paul Egert describes how the opening measures of Chopin's Mazurka Op. 67/3 might be played in this manner (*Friedrich Chopin* [Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1936], 15).



b. As in 1st ed., M. Schlesinger, mm. 65-66. By permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.



The use of contrametric *rubato* notwithstanding, during the 19th century *tempo rubato* became identified primarily with tempo flexibility, mainly the accelerating or slowing down of all the parts together. This centuries-old practice has varied in degree of use in different musical styles. An exceptionally early appearance occurs in the 9th-century Codex of St. Gall, in which the letters *c* for *celeriter* (quickly), *t* for *trahere* (to drag out) or *tenere* (to hold), and *x* for *expectare* (to retard) were among those written to direct the rhythmic performance of either a single neume or of those under a line that continues from the letter.<sup>30</sup>

In *Le nuove musiche*, first published in 1601, Giulio Caccini wrote of "una certa nobile sprezzatura di canto" ("a certain noble negligence of song") that included, in addition to some usually unallowed ornamental dissonance against the bass, a flexibility of tempo related to the meaning and accentuation of the text, thus similar to the flexibility in speech.<sup>31</sup> His model madrigal, "Deh dove son fuggiti," included in the preface, may be performed "not submitting to strict time," and it contains the specific directions "senza misura quasi favellando in armonia con la suddetta sprezzatura" ("Without measured rhythm, as if speaking in tones with the

<sup>30</sup>Gustave Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (New York: Norton, 1940), 140.

<sup>31</sup>Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*, 1601; facs., (New York: Broude, 1973) Ailettoni, n.p.; trans. and ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock (Madison: A-R Editions, 1970), "To the Readers," 44-45, fn. 10. In the preface to his *Nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle*, published in 1614, Caccini wrote further that *sprezzatura* referred specifically to "faults" in the "tempo" [i.e., tempo flexibility] as well as in the use of the cited dissonance (trans. and ed., H. Wiley Hitchcock [Madison: A-R Editions, 1978], "To Discriminating Readers," n.p.).



above-mentioned negligence,") and "con misura più larga."<sup>32</sup> Girolamo Frescobaldi recommended flexibility of tempo in playing his *Toccate e partite d' intavolatura*,<sup>33</sup> and Thomas Mace suggested that "Masters" may "take Liberty, . . . to Break Time; sometimes Faster, and sometimes Slower, as we perceive, the Nature of the Thing Requires."<sup>34</sup> In the Classic period Türk referred to "quickening and slowing" of the tempo as "extraordinary means" for heightening the expression,<sup>35</sup> quite separate from his stylized contrametric *rubato*.

Tempo flexibility using ritards and accelerandos is now known as "structural" or "agogic" *rubato* although in the nineteenth century it was simply *tempo rubato* or *rubato*. The term agogic [Agogik as coined by Hugo Riemann] was derived from *agōgē* or "ἄγωγή," which in ancient Greek could mean "tempo" or the "sequence [course] of a melody."<sup>36</sup> In modern musical usage "agogic" is primarily concerned with variation in the length of beats or with tempo flexibility.

An early definition that recognized the validity of agogic *rubato* appeared in Thomas Busby's *Complete Dictionary of Music*, ca. 1801: "An expression applied to a time alternately accelerated and retarded for the purpose of enforcing the expression."<sup>37</sup> The next year Türk recognized the new usage in the second edition of his *Klavierschule*.<sup>38</sup> However, from Mozart's letter cited above it would seem that with the weakening of the tradition of contrametric *rubato* some musicians may already have associated *ritardando* or *stringendo* with *rubato*. Beethoven left no evidence that he used the

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<sup>32</sup>Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*, 54-55. For further explanation see the rich historical background provided in Hitchcock's edition.

<sup>33</sup>Girolamo Frescobaldi, *Toccate e partite d'intavolatura di cimbalo*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Borboni, 1615-16) "Al Lettore" (Preface). Preface enlarged in 1616.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument* (London: For the author, 1676), 81.

<sup>35</sup>Türk, 370-374.

<sup>36</sup>Henry George Lidell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1843; 9th ed., rev. and enl., Jones and McKenzie, 1940 (repr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 18. See also Hugo Riemann, *Musikalische Dynamik und Agogik* (Hamburg: Rahter, 1884).

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Busby, *A Complete Dictionary of Music* (London: Phillips, [ca. 1801], n.p.

<sup>38</sup>Türk, *Klavierschule*, 2d ed. (Leipzig und Halle: Schwickert; Hemmerde und Schwetschke, 1802), 421.

term, but he made clear reference to its practice in his later works with the inscription on the song "Nord oder Süd" (WoO 148) in 1817; here he wrote that the metronome indication was "applicable to only the first measures, for feeling also has its tempo . . ." <sup>39</sup> In a description of Beethoven's orchestral conducting, probably as it was during approximately the first decade of the 19th century, Ignaz von Seyfried detailed his "exactness with respect to expression," including "an effective *tempo rubato* . . ." <sup>40</sup>

In his *Ausführliche theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-forte-spiel* Johann Nepomuk Hummel indicated where tempo flexibility (as well as actual tempo change) might be applied in the first and second movements of his popular Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 85; <sup>41</sup> yet he cautioned against "capricious stretching [of the tempo] (*tempo rubato*) introduced at every instant to the point of boredom." <sup>42</sup> Carl Czerny not only provided musical examples with detailed suggestions for slackening and hastening the tempo (Fig. 8), but also listed some of the emotions expressed in music that would be heightened by agogic *rubato*. <sup>43</sup> Some 19th-century definitions, including Busby's and J.A. Fuller-Maitland's in the first edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music*, <sup>44</sup> either implied or stated the need for compensatory restitution of time; others ignored the issue.

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<sup>39</sup>Thayer's *Life of Beethoven*, rev. and ed. Elliott Forbes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 687-688. Again without reference to "*tempo rubato*," the necessity of tempo modification for the expression of feelings had been voiced in 1782 by Carl Ludwig Junker, *Einige der vornehmsten Pflichten eines Capellmeisters oder Musikdirektors* (Winterthur: Steiner, 1782), 27-28, fn., 36-37.

<sup>40</sup>Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried, *Ludwig von Beethoven's Studien*, 1832; 2d ed., rev. and enl., Pierson (Leipzig: Schuberth, 1853), Anhang, 18.

<sup>41</sup>Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *Ausführliche theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-forte-spiel*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Haslinger, 1828), vol. 3, 419-427.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 3, 417.

<sup>43</sup>Carl Czerny, *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School*, Op. 500, 3 vols., 1839. Trans. J.A. Hamilton (London: Cocks, [1839]), vol. 3, 31-38. Figure 8 is followed in Czerny's text by a discussion of each of the four treatments of the passage. He concludes that the "strict time" of the first way would not express the "soft, tender, and extremely timid" character and the fourth way would be "too languishing."

<sup>44</sup>Sir George Grove, ed., *Grove's Dictionary of Music* (London: Macmillan, 1883), vol. 3, 188.

**Fig. 8.** Czerny, *Piano Forte School*, op. 500, vol. 3, p. 32. By permission of the Music Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

§7. There are an infinity of cases, in which a passage or a piece may be played with several kinds of expression in respect to the degree of movement, without any of those modifications appearing absolutely incorrect or contradictory. Thus, for example, the following passage of melody may be executed in four different ways, as indicated below it.

*Andante.*

4 different ways of performance.

1	in Time	.....	.....	.....
2	in Time	.....	poco ritenuto	smorz.
3	in Time	.....	poco accelerando	rallentando.
4	in Time	.....	molto ritardando	perdendo.

Schubert and Mendelssohn still maintained classicistic approaches to tempo. According to his close friend Leopold von Sonnleithner, Schubert played and wanted his music performed in a "strict and even" tempo unless he had specifically indicated otherwise.<sup>45</sup> Mendelssohn and his followers favored fluent movement for slow tempos and quite rapid movement for fast tempos, with only occasional inflections.<sup>46</sup> He criticized the *rubato* of Dorothea von Ertmann,<sup>47</sup> whose handling of rhythmic flexibility in the performance of

<sup>45</sup> Otto Erich Deutsch, ed., *Schubert: Memoirs by His Friends*, trans. Ley and Nowell (London: Black, 1958), 116. See also William S. Newman, "Freedom of Tempo in Schubert's Instrumental Music," *Musical Quarterly* 61/4 (Oct. 1975), 528-45.

<sup>46</sup> Adam Carse, *The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz* (Cambridge, England: Heffer, 1948), 351-52.

<sup>47</sup> Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1830-1847*, ed. Paul Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Carl Mendelssohn-Bartholdy; the first "moderately priced" ed. in 1 vol. (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1870), 154 (letter to his family from Milan, 14 July 1831).



Beethoven's sonatas was much admired by the composer.<sup>48</sup> And in a letter of 23 May 1834, after writing that in seeking emotional expression Chopin and [Ferdinand] Hiller often "lose sight of time," he added "I, on the other hand, [do so] perhaps too little."<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, more numerous indications for agogic *rubato* appeared in the music of Clara Wieck Schumann and Robert Schumann.

Another manifestation of agogic *rubato* in the 19th century was the lengthening of a single note, chord, or rest beyond its written value for emphasis, either with or without the shortening of an adjacent note or notes. Earlier C.P.E. Bach, Marpurg, Türk, and others had suggested this—relating it to rhetoric rather than to *rubato*—to heighten the affect, as a speaker places emphasis upon a word.<sup>50</sup> It was also part of the stylized mazurka, (such as Chopin's), in which a minute hesitation after the second beat often emphasized the entrance of the third, creating at the same time a slightly longer measure. For Adolf Kullak, among all applications of a *rallentando*, the single tone held back "is probably the most important." It becomes "more suggestive, more pregnant; . . . [and] symbolizes the intensity, the impressiveness, the warmth of declamation."<sup>51</sup> Ignace Paderewski contrasted metrical accents with these "emotional" or rhetorical accents.<sup>52</sup> Such subtle agogic inflections can, of course, be effected within both contrametric and agogic *rubato* by the soloist or by the ensemble respectively.

Agogic *rubato* became part of the romantic expressivity and showmanship of the traveling virtuosos of the 19th century, among whom Liszt was

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<sup>48</sup>Anton F. Schindler, *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven*, 1840; trans. and ed. Ignaz Moscheles, *The Life of Beethoven*, 2 vols. (London: Colburn, 1841), vol. 2, 106-107, fn. †. Thayer's *Life of Beethoven*, 412-413, 668-669.

<sup>49</sup>Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1830-1847*, 296 (letter to his mother from Paris).

<sup>50</sup>C.P.E. Bach, op. cit., I, 129; Tab. VI, Fig. XIII (in Mitchell's English translation the crosses are misplaced); II, 254. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst*, 4 vols., 1760-64; facs. (Hildeheim: Olms, 1974) vol. 2, pp. 309-10. Türk, op. cit., 1st ed., 338-39. See also Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 366-67.

<sup>51</sup>Adolf Kullak, *The Aesthetics of Piano Playing*, 1861; trans. Th. Baker from 3d German ed. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1893), 282.

<sup>52</sup>[Ignace Jan] "Paderewski On Tempo Rubato," Chap. 28 in Henry T. Finck, *Success in Music and How It Is Won* (New York: Scribner, 1909) 459. See also Finck's observations on Paderewski's rhetorical pauses, *ibid.*, 316.



apparently the most remarkable pianist. The extent of his *rubato* can be gauged not only by the frequency with which he wrote such directions as *ritardando*, *accelerando*, *stringendo*, and *espressivo* in his music (no doubt he played with more flexibility than he indicated), and by the many descriptions of his playing and teaching,<sup>53</sup> but also by his experimentation with new signs to indicate tempo flexibility. In the *Douze Grandes Études* of 1839 he designated a single line for *rallentando*, double lines closed at the ends for *accelerando* (Fig. 9), and short double lines over a chord or rest for a "hold of smaller value than the ♯." He made only occasional use of these signs in later music but those shown here give an indication of the detail of his *rubato*. In some of his later orchestral works, such as the "Faust" Symphony (completed in 1857), Liszt again indicated agogic *rubato*, this time by placing R\_\_\_\_\_A\_\_\_\_\_R\_\_\_\_\_A\_\_\_\_\_ (for *ritard* and *accelerando*) in rapid succession above and below the system in the score (e.g., i/503-518).

Fig. 9. Liszt, *Grande Étude* no. 5, mm. 14-15.



<sup>53</sup>E.g., Robert Schumann, *Schumann on Music*, trans. and ed. Henry Pleasants (New York: Dover, 1988), 155, 157-8; Auguste Boissier, "A Diary of Franz Liszt as Teacher, 1831-32," trans. and ed., Mach, in *The Liszt Studies, Selections* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1973), xii, xiv, xv-xvi. Liszt also wrote about *Tempo rubato* in a letter to Siegmund Lebert dated 10 Jan. 1870. See *Franz Liszt, Letters*, 2 vols., ed. La Mara, trans. Bache (New York: Scribner, 1894), vol. 2, p. 194.)

From about the 1840s to the 1870s, Wagner's style of conducting was a dominant force throughout Europe. Based on the needs of his own music, he believed that flexibility of tempo was a *sine qua non* for appropriate interpretation of most music from Beethoven on. "*The right comprehension of the MELOS [melody in all its aspects] is the sole guide to the right tempo.*"<sup>54</sup> Wagner had a virtual school of followers, including the conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow, and his free tempo practices remained part of the general fabric of musical performance well into the twentieth century.

Brahms treated tempo with more restraint than Wagner, but he also applied some agogic *rubato* when performing. His conducting score of *Ein deutsches Requiem* contains many handwritten signs for pushing or holding back the tempo and, in a letter of 20 [?] January 1886 to his close friend Joseph Joachim, Brahms discussed the similar tempo modifications he had entered into the score of the Fourth Symphony.<sup>55</sup> However, the gulf between the performance styles of Wagner and Brahms was large and Brahms's tempos were described as "painfully dry, inflexible, and wooden" by Wagner, who would have preferred to hear Brahms's technique "anointed with a little oil of Liszt's school."<sup>56</sup> According to Louis Köhler, himself a respected pianist and teacher, the virtuosic imitators of Liszt used a "senseless accelerando and ritardando" and "constant rubato, which leaves one uncertain whether it is the player or the hearer whose head is turned."<sup>57</sup>

At the same time an increasing number of indications for tempo flexibility were being written into scores. In Mahler's music, for example, there are numerous groups of one to four measures with directions such as "Pesante .....a tempo" or "Rubato.....accelerando.....a tempo." Yet it is interesting to find the following "Note for the conductor" on the opening page of his

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<sup>54</sup>Richard Wagner, *On Conducting*, 1869; trans. Edward Dannreuther (London: Reeves, 1887), 18. Much of this volume is about tempo modification.

<sup>55</sup>The author wishes to thank Max Rudolf for providing this information in a private communication. See also Max Rudolf, *The Grammar of Conducting*, 2d ed. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1985), 358-359.

<sup>56</sup>Wagner, *On Conducting*, 83.

<sup>57</sup>As quoted from *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 70/14 (3 April 1874), p. 137, by Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists from Mozart to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 170.

Third Symphony, composed in 1895: "The opening tempo is, for the most part, to be retained throughout the whole movement, and the strictest continuity of tempo is to be maintained in spite of momentary changes in beat or modifications."

### Twentieth Century.

Although *rubato* now generally signified the agogic type, most writers applied the term to only one or two of its several historical kinds. There was also a continuing argument about the necessity for time restitution. Frederick Niecks, one of Chopin's biographers, described agogic *rubato* as well as "time with displaced accents."<sup>58</sup> Franklin Taylor, an important British pianist and teacher, defined *tempo rubato* only as the subtly shifting contrametric type, although he described *ritardando*, *accelerando*, and prolonging of a single note elsewhere in his book.<sup>59</sup> Ralph Dunstan wrote of the smaller nuance, the agogic accent.<sup>60</sup> Adolph Christiani was among the few who described well the attributes of both contrametric and agogic styles.<sup>61</sup>

Paderewski called *rubato* "a more or less important slackening or quickening" of the tempo<sup>62</sup> for excessive use of which he was later criticized.<sup>63</sup> Both he and Henry Finck, music critic of the *New York Evening Post*, scoffed at the notion that time stolen must be restored by accelerating the

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<sup>58</sup>Frederick Niecks, *A Concise Dictionary of Musical Terms*, 2nd ed. (London: Augener, [1884]), 237.

<sup>59</sup>Franklin Taylor, *Technique and Expression in Pianoforte Playing* (London, 1898), 72-73.

<sup>60</sup>Ralph Dunstan, *A Cyclopaedic Dictionary of Music* (London: Curwen, 1908), 363.

<sup>61</sup>Adolph F. Christiani, *The Principles of Expression in Pianoforte Playing* (New York: Harper, 1886), 299-301; also 264-295 for large sections on the application of *accelerando* and *ritardando* from Czerny's *Complete . . . Pianoforte School*, vol. 3.

<sup>62</sup>Paderewski, in Finck, *Success in Music*, 459.

<sup>63</sup>Ignace Jan Paderewski and Mary Lawton, *The Paderewski Memoirs* (New York: Scribners, 1938), 330. His recorded performances of Chopin's Nocturne Op. 15/2, rec. 1911, and song, "The Maiden's Wish," Op. 74/1, transcribed by Liszt, rec. 1912, have been reissued on Opal CD 9839, "Pupils of Leschetizky."



remainder of the measure or phrase,<sup>64</sup> although this idea was still advocated by *Grove's Dictionary of Music* (cited above), Theodore Baker,<sup>65</sup> Tobias Matthay,<sup>66</sup> a teacher with world-wide influence, and Constantin von Sternberg,<sup>67</sup> a former student of Liszt, among others. But in 1928 John McEwen published a monograph titled *Tempo Rubato*, in which he demonstrated—by analysing graphically some Duo-Art piano rolls made by Vladimir de Pachmann, Teresa Carreño, Ferruccio Busoni, and others—that they (and the implication is other musicians as well) practiced mainly agogic *rubato* and did not compensate for time stolen.<sup>68</sup> It was the style of the times.

Many performers added unmarked agogic *rubato* in fairly large dollops into the 1930s. In addition to Paderewski (cited above), Conrad Ansorge,<sup>69</sup> a pupil of Liszt, and Sergei Rachmaninoff<sup>70</sup> left recordings that demonstrate the degree of exaggeration to which some performers carried this liberty. Composers adding agogic *rubato* beyond their own indications can be heard in recordings of Elgar's orchestral works<sup>71</sup> and of Scriabin's piano works<sup>72</sup> conducted and played, respectively, by the composers.

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<sup>64</sup>Paderewski, in Finck, *Success in Music*, 459; Finck, op. cit., 429-430; also Henry T. Finck, *Musical Progress* (Philadelphia: Presser, 1923), 89-91.

<sup>65</sup>Theodore Baker, *A Dictionary of Musical Terms*, 22nd ed. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1897), 169.

<sup>66</sup>Tobias Matthay, *Musical Interpretation* (London: Williams, 1913), 63.

<sup>67</sup>Constantin von Sternberg, *Tempo Rubato and Other Essays* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1920), 3-12.

<sup>68</sup>John B. McEwen, *Tempo Rubato or Time-Variation in Musical Performance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), especially 13-21. Although the reliability of piano rolls is a complex issue, those made with the Welte, Duo-Art, and Ampico systems had the capability of recording the tempo and agogics of a performance as played. Some editing of dynamics and pedaling was possible during the process of manufacturing the rolls.

<sup>69</sup>On Opal 825 Ansorge plays one piece each by Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and Schumann, all recorded in 1928 for Parlaphone.

<sup>70</sup>As heard on a Klavier CD, KCD-11008, reissued from a Mason-Hamlin Ampico reproducing piano.

<sup>71</sup>Robert Philip, "The Recordings of Edward Elgar (1857-1934)," *Early Music* 13/4 (Nov. 1984): 481-89; especially 485-87.

<sup>72</sup>The *Welte Legacy of Piano Treasures*, Album 681, recorded in 1905.



A pianistic practice prominent at the turn of the century, playing the melody note slightly after the accompaniment—especially on the downbeat ("splitting the hands"), may represent a degeneration of the true contrametric separation of melody and accompaniment.<sup>73</sup> Arpeggiating or breaking chords, another mannerism of late romantic pianism heard in early piano rolls and recordings, was often used in "affective" performance in the belief that it made the sound fuller and more sensuous. Josef Hofmann's *rubato* was actually more tempered and sensitive than that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries. Yet, in a 1913 performance of Chopin's *Polonaise-Fantaisie* in which he only occasionally split accompaniment and melody notes, he made extensive use of broken chords and all forms of agogic *rubato*.<sup>74</sup> This included holding the first of a pair of equal notes long enough so that the figure becomes a dotted one.

Béla Bartók's heading at the start of his *Elegy No. 2* for Piano, "Molto adagio, sempre rubato (quasi improvisando) ♩ = 76-80," is not unique in his *oeuvre*; rather, *rubato* appears frequently in headings or later in the scores. He performed his works with marked tempo changes as well as considerable agogic *rubato*.<sup>75</sup> In addition, through his ongoing ethnomusicological study of Hungarian and other eastern European folk music he had soaked up the rather free, speechlike rhythm in which the older types of melodies were often sung and, as heir to this folksong tradition, he could approach the shorter values of a *rubato* melody with remarkable flexibility.<sup>76</sup>

In part because of the strict adherence to the score desired by a number of 20th-century composers, including Igor Stravinsky,<sup>77</sup> and in part because of the influence of the more objective conducting style of Arturo Toscanini and his followers, the 1930s and 40s saw a reaction against exaggerated use

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<sup>73</sup>Extreme use of this mannerism by Vladimir de Pachmann is documented in Chopin's Nocturnes Opp. 9/2 and 27/2 and Mazurka Op. 24/4, recorded in 1915, 1916, and 1925 respectively and available on Opal CD 9840.

<sup>74</sup>The *Welte Legacy of Piano Treasures*, Album 683.

<sup>75</sup>*Centenary Edition of Bartók's Records*, 2 vols., Hungaroton LPX 12326-33, 12334-38. Vol. I, Bartók at the Piano, 1920-1945; vol. 2, *Bartók Plays and Talks*, 1912-1944.

<sup>76</sup>In this regard see page 30 of the booklet by László Somfai that comes with the Centenary Edition of Bartók's Records. Vol. I, side 6 of the records contains examples of Bartók accompanying a folk singer in which the singer uses contrametric *rubato*.

<sup>77</sup>E.g., Igor Stravinsky, *The Poetics of Music*, bilingual ed., trans. Knodel and Dahl (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), Sixth Lesson, esp. 163-165.

of agogic *rubato* and the pseudo-*rubato* practice by pianists of splitting the hands. With a few notable exceptions, such as the piano playing of Vladimir Horowitz, performance style in western Europe and the U.S. moved toward moderation and more evenly paced tempos. Since the 1950s and the growth of interest in historically oriented performance, adherence to the score has led some performers to neglect the unwritten breathing and subtle agogic elasticity that music must have. The 1980s seem to have brought an awareness of the need for better balance between literal observance of the score and consideration of period and composers' styles in determining the use of *rubato* by sensitive performers. Comparison of Peter Serkin's recording of Chopin's *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, made in 1980,<sup>78</sup> with that of Hofmann demonstrates the change. Meanwhile, freely shifting contrametric *rubato* survives in the performance of certain types of early jazz (mainly dixieland, swing, and ragtime), in which the soloist may linger behind or anticipate the regular beat of the accompaniment.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>RCA ATC1-4035

<sup>79</sup>Information kindly provided by colleagues Ross Adams and Keith Daniel.