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"A History of Pianoforte Pedaling." By David Rowland

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David Rowland. *A History of Pianoforte Pedalling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. xi, 194p.


To his students Chopin reiterated that "the correct employment of [the damper pedal] remains a study for life" (p. 125); and in 1925 J. Alfred Johnstone observed that "In spite of the importance of the pedal and its right use . . . there is no branch of piano technique so little understood or so much neglected by both teacher and pupil."¹ Yet to this day major obstacles—among them incompleteness of pedal indications, the relative lack of care in placing them by engravers, changes in the piano, and undifferentiated additions by editors—have made this aspect of performance practice an elusive one for interested performers, teachers, scholars, and amateur players. David Rowland has risen to this formidable challenge with a valuable monograph that examines the evidence from "the different schools of pianoforte playing" to the "first maturity" of pedaling "in the middle of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (p. 2). Rowland studied tutors, documentary accounts in a broad range of journals, letters, newspapers, and the pedal indications in an enormous amount of repertoire, including that of composers whose piano music has long been ignored. His patience was rewarded with the discovery of important new pieces of pedaling history.

Throughout this investigation the perspective relates to the contemporary instruments. The story opens with the transition from harpsichord and clavi-chord to piano and a sketch of the known players. By drawing on a spate of recent articles, Rowland supports a relatively fresh point of view that Cristofori's invention actually became well known during his lifetime and was carried on by builders in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The second chapter describes the uses of stops, levers, and pedals on harpsichords and early pianos, providing readers with the necessary historical background to hear the earliest uses of stops and levers on the piano as registers, applied for lengthy stretches, sometimes for a recognizable formal section of a piece such as a phrase, a rondo theme, or a closing section.

Chapters 3 and 4 report the early uses of tone-modifying devices as described in documentary accounts and in tutors of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Two interesting aspects are the differences in usage in Paris, London, and Vienna—the main centers of piano playing—and significant progress away from long swaths with mixed harmonies to shorter, better defined effects during the 1790s. In 1804 Adam described some of the newer

¹ J. Alfred Johnstone, *How to Use the Pedal in Piano Playing* (London: Ashdown, 1925), 3.

principles (quoted in full in the Appendix, p. 171), according to which the damper pedal was used with “consonant” chords to enrich the sound or to extend the life of long melody or bass notes; but it was generally changed with each change of harmony. Rowland points out that while Adam spoke for harmonic clarity, he offered examples that contain moderate amounts of harmonic blurring, principally of tonic and dominant chords in quiet passages that are mixed in order to sustain a low bass note. Indeed, there is enough other evidence for Rowland to conclude that some playing with mixed harmonies must have been popular. (I have observed indications for it in the music of the conservative Hummel.) The influence of Adam’s *Méthode* on later writers—especially Pollini and Starke—is not mentioned, nor is Francesco Pollini’s *Metodo per Clavicembalo* of 1812, one of the scarce Italian tutors, in which are added uses of the damper pedal for accentuation of “*sforzato*” chords (as in the last movement of Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata) and for notes with accent signs.

Chapter 5 reviews the early indications for tone-modifying devices in musical scores. Rowland claims the “earliest” to be a “*con sordini*” in a sonata by Louis Jadin of ca. 1787 (p. 53); but this was probably preceded by “*avec la grande [damper] pédale*” and “*sans pédale*” in some compositions by Madame Brillon de Jouy that are tentatively dated “ca. 1775-1785?”² Generous examples of early pedalings indicate how, in just the 1790s, composers in Paris and London changed from the rather clumsy verbal instructions such as “*prenez la pédale qui ôte les étouffoirs*,” which could only be used where the pedal extended at least through several measures if not through an entire section, to the more compact *Ped.* and , which allowed an increase in number, specificity, and hence sophistication of directions (e.g., Steibelt, Concerto Op. 33, 1798). In spite of the less than interesting quality of much of his music, Steibelt’s crucial role in this development is carefully traced here for the first time along with the contributions of Boieldieu, Cramer, Dussek, and Clementi.

After describing the conservatism of Wölfl and Gelinek in Vienna, and acknowledging that Beethoven’s pedaling “clearly has much more in common with the Paris and London schools” (p. 78), Rowland relates the direction at the beginning of the “Moonlight” Sonata (*Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordini*) to other extended pedalings that mix harmonies. Thus he interprets Beethoven to have meant that the dampers remain raised throughout the movement. No doubt pianists will debate this issue until the unlikely event that defining evidence is found. However,

² Bruce Gustafson, “The Music of Madame Brillon,” *Notes*, Vol. 43/3 (March 1987), 527-9; and a private communication from the author.

in the same year in which Beethoven composed that Sonata, his Piano Concertos Opp. 15 and 19 and The Quintet for Piano and Woodwinds Op. 16 were published, in all of which he had notated a variety of effects more advanced than continuous raised dampers. Further, all the attempts of which I am aware—including several by myself—to play this movement on period pianos (originals and replicas) with the dampers raised throughout have either been grievously muddled or have made it necessary to play at a tempo far below an *Alla breve* Adagio sostenuto in order to allow some necessary decay of thick, dissonant sounds. Czerny, who frequently remarked about Beethoven's pedalings, particularly long ones, wrote only that "the prescribed pedal must be re-employed at each note in the bass."³

Simply put, this movement is the first that Beethoven had written without any marked contrast in texture or character; therefore he wanted to *avoid* contrast between damped and undamped sound, which was at that time the usual pedaling practice. Continuous undamped sound with very quick damping where harmonies changed was a new application that could not be left to chance; but *senza sordino* and *con sordino*, his manner of marking the movements of the knee lever on his Walter piano, prohibited notating each individual change. Thus he decided upon a general indication at the start. And because Beethoven is not given his due in this study, it must be said that a large majority of his pedal directions were notated specifically to create *unusual, unsuspected* effects that were probably beyond conventional practice, for that was left largely to the discretion of the performer.

This lengthy chapter concludes with consideration of "variable 'authentic' pedaling," which refers to composers' additions or revisions of pedaling for later editions and tangentially to revisions that performers must make because of developments in piano-building. Clementi added pedaling to some of his sonatas as well as to other works. I would argue that almost always his purpose was to enrich the sonority by collecting the notes of an arpeggio or repeated chord, by holding a long bass octave or note, by blending sounds in disparate registers, by mixing harmonies—most often tonic and dominant—or just by adding the sympathetic vibrations of the other strings. There is scant evidence for Rowland's sweeping conclusion that Clementi's "later editions represent a transition from the finger-legato of the eighteenth century to a legato produced by the sustaining pedal" (p. 80). Of the extremely small number of his pedal marks that produce a legato unattainable by the fingers, almost all are in passages containing unconnectable octave configurations (e.g., *Appendix to the Fifth Edition of the Introduction*

³ Carl Czerny, *On the Proper Performance of All Beethoven's Works for the Piano*, ed. Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna: Universal, 1970), 39.


... [original edition], Air with Variations in E-flat major, Var. 7 (p. 91, mm. 17-20); three slurred octaves separated by fourths in an unpublished autograph revision of Sonata Op. 13/4/ii, m. 12). But Clementi's pedalings were very seldom necessary for a linear legato, which his careful slurring and fingerings in the *Appendix* and *Gradus* show was still a finger-legato.

Having traced the development of early pedaling by schools, Rowland tries to discover how individual "first-generation" pianist-composers, writing before the advent of indications, might have used tone-modifying devices. He starts with a specific clue, Mozart's enthusiastic endorsement of the knee lever on Stein's pianos, and goes through Mozart's music like a detective, searching for unusual textures suggestive of raised dampers. In the end he becomes convinced that Mozart's use of raised dampers was well ahead of most of his contemporaries and that he might have "considered" using the raised dampers to enrich the tone even where simple harmonic accompaniments lie within the grasp of the hand.

Almost too late and certainly too little, at the end of a fascinating section concerned with Mozart's pedal board and the damper knee lever (p. 94), Rowland touches on one of the most generally neglected issues related to undamped sound in Mozart's music and, I would add, much of Haydn's and early Beethoven's as well: this is the contemporary aesthetic of music as a language [*Sprache*] of the feelings, which requires careful shaping of the lines as indicated by written articulation and dynamics marks or by unwritten common practice. This alone would have limited and defined to a considerable degree the extent to which raised dampers were used.

Short sections on the use of stops and levers in the music of J.C. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, and Haydn raise interesting questions, some, of course, unanswerable. In his discussion of J.C. Bach's Sonatas for Piano forte or Harpsichord Op. 5, which would have been played on a Zumpe square piano equipped only with hand stops, Rowland presents three helpful examples of "places where an ill-informed pianist might assume" the use of raised dampers (p. 94). One more example has carefully placed, short (predominantly two-note) slurs over much of the left-hand accompaniment and also the word "legati." But Rowland's speculation that these might be signals for raised dampers is misleading in my opinion. The short slurs ask for finger-legato. Their effect would be covered by the accumulated, somewhat dissonant sounds created here if the dampers were raised, since the pianist does not have a hand free to lower them by disengaging the stop. The "legati" reminds the performer to observe the unusually fastidious left-hand slurring or perhaps even to play *legatissimo*, holding the stepwise bass notes somewhat longer than their written values. Relative to the discussion of Haydn's music,

the date for "the earliest reference" to a piano at Esterházy is 1773 for a concert honoring a royal guest, not 1781 as cited. According to Eva Badura-Skoda, existing evidence suggests that there might even have been pianos there in the 1760s.⁴

The developing use of the damper pedal in the 19th century, based on documentary evidence (much of which is from the second half of the century) and on the less than refined notation of the pedalings themselves, forms the substance of Chapters 7 and 8. Some significant contributions to the history of syncopated pedaling appear here, perhaps the most important being Charles Chaulieu's article, "Des pédales du piano" in *Le pianiste* No. 9 of July 1834 (not 1833-34 as in the Bibliography), in which Rowland recognized a none-too-clear description of the technique. It is "the raising and putting down the foot again immediately" so "that the confusion ceases while the action of the pedal appears uninterrupted. . . . [It] could be called Breathing, in comparison with the action of the singer's lungs" (p. 114). Rowland also deduced from Chaulieu's description of Dussek's pedaling that he might well have been using syncopated pedaling! How much more precise information we would have today if Chaulieu's suggestion of using one sign, , for a rapid release/depress movement of the pedal had been adopted.

Equally interesting is Lavignac's description of the "rapid movements of half pedaling" by "great pianists," including Thalberg. Earlier Rowland had described two types of half pedaling: the first, putting the pedal only part-way down so that some damper felt remains in contact with the strings; the second, releasing the pedal and depressing it again very quickly so that not all the sound is damped. Here, in a piece of misinformation, he alleges that "partial depression of the pedal . . . is a difficult technique to control," and "that it has been dismissed by many as too unreliable to be practical" (pp. 110-11). In my experience a skilled piano technician should be able to adjust a good instrument so that the player can produce that type of half pedaling quite consistently. Almost all professional pianists use it and many teachers introduce their students to it.

Although evidence for syncopated pedaling accumulated from the 1830s on, Louis Köhler's *Systematische Lehrmethode* of 1857-58 seems to have been the first tutor to give a precise description. Matthay's statement of 1913

⁴ Eva Badura-Skoda, "Prolegomena to a History of the Viennese Fortepiano," *Israel Studies in Musicology*, II (1980), 87. See also A. Peter Brown, *Joseph Haydn's Keyboard Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 140, for further support for a date in the early 1770s.

(originally written in London—not in Boston as stated on p. 119) that “even the most . . . antediluvian of teachers have now . . . some hazy sort of notion . . . of ‘syncopated’ pedaling” leads Rowland to comment on the apparent reluctance of some pianists to adopt it. Here we find his only mention of “the more articulated style [of pedaling] that inevitably results from pedaling on the beat (often referred to as ‘rhythmic’ pedaling)” (p. 119). Although Rowland included that reference mainly to disparage Moscheles’s “somewhat antiquated” direction to use rhythmic pedaling in his Study Op.70, No. 9, it should be recognized that that was the first technique developed for raising and lowering the dampers in succession and is by no means of secondary importance in the history of pedaling.

Adam’s description of rhythmic pedaling is in the Appendix (p. 171): when the harmony changes, “it is necessary to damp the preceding chord and re-take the pedal on the following chord, . . .” Since some early pianos did not damp well and since the technique of “changing” a damper-raising mechanism was new, damping one harmony before playing the next must have seemed the natural way to avoid mixing them. In terms of the music, the interstices of unpedaled sound often support two basic tenets of Classical performance style: the fundamental significance of metrical structure and the refined style of articulation, in which short slurs provided expressive direction for the lines. Without some exploration of these factors, however brief, Rowland’s allusion to rhythmic pedaling unfortunately remains in a vacuum.

Of the Romantic composers, Chopin’s pedaling receives the most attention, including mention of his detailed changes in his autographs and in editions used by his students. To some suggestions by Jean Kleczynski, Rowland adds the Preludes in E minor and B minor, Op. 28/4 and 6, as candidates for performance with only the few pedalings notated. The Prelude in B minor sounded elegant on the three different Pleyel’s on which I have played it that way, especially since the left-hand melody is colored by the distinctive timbres of the registers through which it moves. However, my recent playing of the E-minor Prelude on both a contemporary Pleyel and an Erard as well as on a modern piano made me wonder whether Rowland has ever played the piece on such instruments, for he wrote that “the natural restraint of the piece could be enhanced with a finger-legato rather than the more clumsy sustaining pedal” (p. 128). (Considering the effects we are told that Chopin achieved with that pedal, and that I have heard modern players produce on mid-19th-century Pleyels, can it be called “clumsy”?) My effort was slightly more successful on the Erard, with its repetition action, than on the Pleyel without it; but to my ear the continuous repetition of three-note chords without pedal was just too percussive and the only finger-legato in the left hand is between the chord changes. However, removing the weight

of the dampers from the strings with just half pedal affords a noticeably gentler attack and the light sustain created fills in quietly between the repeated chords.

Treatment of "later developments" is slim. ". . . all the fundamental elements of a modern pedalling technique were in existence by the middle of the century," . . . "the piano as we know it today had essentially reached the end of its development," and "pedalling problems for the mid-nineteenth-century pianist were therefore very similar to those faced by the present-day performer" (p. 130). Rowland ignores the more powerful but much less clear bass sounds brought about by the overstringing of grand pianos during the second half of the century, to name just the most obvious change that has effected the way we pedal all earlier music and even that of Brahms, who used straight-strung pianos until his death, or of Liszt, who favored straight-strung Erards during the decades in which he composed the majority of his piano music. Since Rowland elected to end his study in the early 20th century, Debussy, Ravel, and their "school" are brushed over in a paragraph and changes in piano sound since the 1920s and in uses of the damper pedal since World War II are not included.

In a surprising turn Rowland reveals that he considers it "illogical" and "misleading" to use "rests in passages where the sustaining pedal remains depressed" (P. 132). Haven't we all heard the sound change, even more effectively on early instruments than on modern ones, as we listen *through* pedaled rests? Didn't Beethoven specifically notate this effect with the rests in small values to tell us to hold the pedal to the very end of measures 62 and 63 in the Andante con moto of his Piano Concerto No. 4?

The final chapter is reserved for "Other pedals from c. 1800." The survey of soft pedals—lute, moderator, and *una corda*—is treated by school with much interesting material from tutors and scores. The slow acceptance of the sostenuto pedal is discussed briefly. A valuable Appendix contains English translations not available elsewhere of the chapters on pedaling from the tutors of Milchmeyer, Adam, and Steibelt.

The effective presentation of this book is enhanced by the large number of musical examples that are produced directly from original editions, always an advantage when performance practices are discussed. Unfortunately, in the Bibliography only initials are given for forenames, which often increases the time required to locate a reference in a computer search. And in this age of computer-typesetting, publishers of scholarly books ought to return the Notes to their rightful place with the text, especially when, as here, some quotations are given without authors' names.

A number of inaccuracies (excluding obvious typographical errors) in the text might be corrected in a second printing. On p. 32 the quotation from Burney somehow became garbled; the word "accompanied" in line 3 should be eliminated and the following inserted there: ". . . I could not persuade Madame B. to play the piano forte . . ." On p. 76 in the text, Clementi's Op. 38 is not a sonata but a group of waltzes, as labeled in Example 40. At the bottom of p. 162, "the other with the lid down" should read "with the lid open" (*aufgemachtem*). On p. 129 in Ex. 66 the pedal release sign mentioned in the text is missing from the end of m. 4. On p. 180, note 14, and in the Bibliography, N. Streicher is given as author of *Kurze Bemerkungen über das Spielen . . . der Fortepiano*; however, it was her husband Andreas who wrote this interesting small volume. Also in the Bibliography, the date for Czerny's *Vollständige . . . Pianoforteschule*, both German and English editions should be just 1839. Omitted from the Bibliography is this writer's volume, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* (Bloomington, 1988), in which 40 pages are devoted to "Use of the Pedals." Finally, missing from the Index are Streicher (quoted on p. 31), *tremolando* (pp. 36, 57), half pedaling (pp. 110-11), and Mezzo (pp. 140-41).

Rowland's achievement is the piecing together of a large body of evidence, much new or previously unexplored, about the historical uses of stops, levers, and pedals, during which it becomes clear that the well-known schools of piano playing differed in their "pedaling" practices just as they did in other aspects of their playing. Although he only infrequently interposes suggestions for pedaling where none appear, or for realization of early pedal markings on the modern piano, the material presented should help players confront these issues regardless of their loyalties to early or contemporary instruments. Rightfully, Rowland suggests that "the modern performer should . . . be acquainted with the individual habits of a composer before making decisions about appropriate pedalings in his music" (52). Now anyone who wants it, can find here historical background and a framework for considering pedaling in the works of specific composers. It remains to be seen whether or not performers will adopt more individualized treatment of pedaling for composers and styles of music.