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# **RETHINKING ROMANTICISM – Version 11/11/03**

## **Lecture given at King's College, London, 12/11/03**

### **Ian Pace**

*[This is a lecture, a version of which I gave on numerous occasions between 1999 and 2004, and then occasionally thereafter (most recently in Santiago in August 2012). Much of my thinking has developed considerably during the interim period, especially in light of my continuing research into nineteenth-century performance practice, but the basic arguments presented here are ones to which I would continue in essence to adhere]*

The title of this lecture is 'Rethinking Romanticism'. I wish to examine the body of piano music from Beethoven to Bartok, the core of the standard repertoire after Mozart, and at the heart of most pianists' repertoire. Most importantly, I want to speak about the whole notion of a 'romantic' *style* of performance, which by its very nomenclature would obviously seem to be the appropriate style for much of this body of music. When the period performance movement was in its infancy, a classic dichotomy was created between a so-called 'authentic' style on one hand, and a 'romantic' style on the other, for performing music of the Renaissance and Baroque, later of the Classical Period. As period performers have made inroads into the music of Beethoven, Berlioz, Weber, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Verdi, Wagner, Brahms, and recently into Mahler, Elgar and others as well, then the somewhat cavalier use of the term 'romantic style' becomes rather more problematic. Not so long ago, I read a review of the wonderfully transparent, variegated and life-affirming recordings of Brahms's Four Symphonies by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra under Sir Charles Mackerras. The reviewer expressed incredulity that one might play 'un-romanticised' Brahms. In terms of the era for which the 'romantic style' becomes the historically appropriate idiom, it would seem as if the boundaries are being continually pushed to a later and later date. Some mainstream performers (certainly orchestral and chamber musicians) stand aghast as they see whole swathes of their repertoire being gobbled up by period performers, wondering whether to 'adapt or die'. They clutch onto the repertoire that they can still claim 'as their own', that which they 'have been right about all along'.

Now, with regard to the viability or value of attempting to play music in a stylistic manner in accordance with that of the time when it was written, some of the aesthetic and ethical issues involved are intricate and have been dealt with at length elsewhere. I wish to address these questions in a different way to that which is customary: to look at common interpretative practice and conventions as are usually contained within the notion of the 'romantic style', and suggest how there is clear evidence that these diverge from the conventions imagined by the composer. As an approach, that is nothing particularly new, but my motivations are not to blindly condemn such conventions in favour of more 'authentic' ones. Instead, I wish to suggest the *boundaries* of the 'romantic style', the unspoken assumptions and ideologies that underlie it, and the way such aspects reflect a particular construction of musical history and tradition. From this, it should be clear how there is a much greater range of pluralities of approach and ideology available to performers.

What I have to say focuses upon the piano, though there are numerous implications for music written for other instruments as well. Obviously the piano is my own instrument, and my repertoire is centred upon the piano literature of the post-war years, though I play and regularly perform much of the standard repertoire from Beethoven up to those times as well (personally, I now have little desire to play or listen to Haydn, Mozart, or earlier composers on a modern instrument). Many approach contemporary music with the purported aim to play it in a most 'musical' way, which I believe to be essentially a cipher for an approach to new music that assimilates it within the parameters of the 'romantic style' (I recall not so long ago hearing Fanny Waterman praise one Leeds competitor's performance of a contemporary work with the epithet 'he made it sound like a real piece of music'). I would prefer to turn this idea on its head: when approaching a piece of older music, one of the first questions one might ask instead is 'what is it about this music that still makes it relevant and immediate today, after all that has occurred musically in the interim period (including that in non-'classical' genres)?' Put another way, this question might be phrased as 'how is this music still contemporary?'

Now pianists seem for the most part to have remained aloof from the many performance issues that string and wind players have in recent times found impossible to ignore. Approaches to the core piano repertoire I defined earlier seem to have changed little, or only marginally, over a period of several decades. It is extremely rare that internationally renowned pianists would consider performing the music they play on the instruments that the composers knew; many would scorn such instruments and their performers as mere eccentrics. In the few cases where I have known of mainstream performers play on older pianos, another questionable standard comes into play. The very fact of playing on an older instrument is seen as the maximum concession to be made towards a 'historically aware' approach; frequently a pianist will play on an Erard piano and deliver a practically identical interpretation to that which they would give on a modern Steinway, rarely exploiting the particular characteristics and possibilities of the older instrument. I have seen this very fact used as a term of praise by critics. Performances and recordings of the piano music of Schumann, Liszt or Brahms on period instruments, or with any real rethinking of the stylistic idioms that are inherited by contemporary performance ideology, are extremely few and far between, and treated with great suspicion by the majority of pianists and critics.

There are various explanations I would offer for this phenomenon. One obvious one is the stylistic hegemony and inertia that is engendered by the mass of recordings that exists of the standard literature; another is the intense competition amongst pianists, even established ones, terrified that any supposed idiosyncracies might attract the wrath of critics and contemporaries and harm career prospects. As with American TV channels, one might observe that a larger range of products on offer leads to *less* rather than more choice and diversity.

Approaches to teaching and pedagogy enacted at many of the prestigious conservatoires of the world are often notable for their irrationality, false mysticisms and dictatorial attitudes on the parts of teachers, especially those who grew up in an atmosphere of late feudalism in some Eastern European countries, or in similarly blindly deferential cultures in the West and East as well. A teacher's instructions are to be followed, unquestioningly, not because of any compelling rationale behind what

they have to offer, but purely on account of their reputation and status and place in the 'Great Tradition'. When one hears such platitudes as 'I studied with so-and-so who studied with so-and-so who studied with so-and-so who studied with Chopin', one would do well to recall a game of Chinese Whispers!

One of the most pervasive and seductive myths is that of the individualistic interpreter, the ideology of a thousand PR agencies. While a fine idea in theory, in practice I believe this to be one of the greatest fallacies of all. A certain sort of pseudo-individualistic image is sustained by hype which is sophisticated in its technique but crude in its message. Each performer is reduced to some sort of one-dimensional caricature or 'character', a notion particularly beloved of the Anglo-Saxon world, where the sorts of stereotypes, flattened-out personalities, to be found in the novels of Dickens or the operas of Britten seem much easier to deal with than the real complexity and richness of genuine human beings.

Pianists generally have less contact with other instrumentalists, or experience of orchestral and chamber music-making, than do performers on other instruments; therefore it is easier for them to remain at a safe distance from the varieties of new musical thinking that many of these other instrumentalists are encountering.

Another inhibiting factor upon pianists perhaps stems from the sentimental and nostalgic affectations of many critics and pianophiles, harkening back to some hopelessly idealized and rose-tinted notion of the past which really only exists in their own imaginations. The particular inflexible aesthetic demands that they place upon pianists to create an atmosphere of extreme rarefaction says much about their eagerness to demonstrate their own self-styled discernments and refinements, that which separates them from the great unwashed. The flowery, unthinking, cliché-ridden, almost masturbatory vernacular with which they construe their prose surely has an effect upon the interpretative approaches of pianists eager to earn the sorts of epithets that are common parlance amongst such types.

Most bizarrely of all, it might seem, I would suggest that another constraining factor upon performance aesthetics stemmed from the Cold War! The ubiquitous influence and prestige of Russian schools of piano playing, in the West as well as in Eastern Europe, is in my opinion related to aspects of the cultural Cold War. We know, thanks to recent research on the subject, how the CIA indirectly funded artistic movements perceived to be a weapon in the fight for Western cultural supremacy. In the same era, the victory of Van Cliburn in the first Moscow piano competition in 1958, was an important propaganda weapon for the West (he received a ticker-tape parade for his homecoming of the type usually reserved for returning soldiers). Van Cliburn studied at the Juilliard School under the Russian teacher Rosina Lhevinne; the status she and others in that particular 'tradition' achieved was in my view related to the notion that it was no possible to beat the Russians at their own game. To venture into more far-flung speculation, it is not inconceivable that the elaborate mystique round and fascination about some long-established Eastern European musical traditions may be related to a subconscious nostalgia for these countries' feudal, pre-communist times (or as I might put it, pre-state capitalist times).

The scope of this lecture does not allow the time for detailed and exhaustive proofs of these and other theses. Many of them stem as much from a combination of

observation and free thinking as from abstract rationale; nonetheless, I hope I will be able to convince you of the validity of some of my arguments.

The heart of my central thesis is as follows: since around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been an ever-increasing chasm between the worlds of composition and performance, to the extent that probably the majority of instrumentalists have little or no first-hand experience of living compositional traditions, in the sense of having worked directly with composers. At the same time, the demands of the mass-market recording industry have brought about a shift in the perceived societal role for so-called 'serious' music, which has progressively become more and more subsumed by the demands of the entertainment industry, however much high-gloss packaging might be used to suggest otherwise. Paradoxically, the need to sustain the illusion of something that stands outside of crude commercialist concerns makes musical recordings all the more dependent upon the totally commercialised strategies of image and packaging. Performance aesthetics have, albeit perhaps subconsciously, adapted to this role, aiming to best tailor the music being played to the requirements of entertainment and titillation, and thus entailing a large degree of simplification of the actual music being played, so as not to create any sort of problematic with the outward appearance being cultivated. The lack of any sort of accountability on the performers parts, to living composers (which can affect one's attitude to music of any period) helps to facilitate the widespread adoption of such aesthetics.

So my contention is that the mainstream 'romantic style', in the sense that the term is generally understood by both its proponents and detractors, is actually a *contemporary* style which is somehow divorced from the particularities it is meant to serve, for the most part, and is the produce of recent social and historical forces upon the world of music-making. This is a key point, I believe, that overrides the red herring of 'authenticity'; rather than judging music-making on the basis of historical verisimilitude, we would do better, in my opinion, to observe and pass judgment on the basis of the social function that various approaches are harnessed into support of.

I am not proposing that this 'romantic style' is something to be completely jettisoned, by any means, nor advocating the sole legitimacy of any one stylistic approach. What I wish to question is the all-pervasiveness of this style, focussing upon its particularities and all the hidden assumptions and received musical ideals that are contained therein. I have in other recent lectures and writings been adopting a similar approach to the performance of contemporary music, sensing that, as I mentioned earlier, the increasing application of this style to new work represents in part a disillusionment with the ideals of modernism.

From the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the piano grew immeasurably as an instrument, with a large number of piano manufacturers active by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, two tendencies or 'schools' of piano design prevailed. One was the Central European school of pianos, that of Walter, Streicher, Graf, Fritz and later Bösendorfer, characterized by clarity of sound, relative lightness of touch and key dip, and very rapid and clear damping (more rapid than is the case on most modern instruments). As opposed to this was the Anglo-French school of Erard, Broadwood, Pleyel and others, whose instruments had a deeper and richer sound, more sustaining power, a heavier action, and slower damping, sometimes creating a continuous haze or halo of sound. The pianos of both schools had distinct

timbral regions in different registers, in a part a function of the striking points of the hammers upon the strings, so that the sounds of the top, middle and bottom registers of the instruments were quite distinct.

Both of these schools developed their pianos in various directions, and there were many offshoots; in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Steinway began to manufacture pianos, essentially drawing upon the Anglo-French ideals, but modifying and altering them along the course of their history. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Bösendorfer stopped making its older models of pianos, the Central European school of pianos were to most extents and purposes over – pianos were no longer made with Viennese actions, most piano makers aimed for the ideal of timbral equality between registers pioneered by Steinway; cross-stringing in the bass was almost universally adopted for greater power and resonance. Bechsteins and Bluthners, and ever the modern Bösendorfer, retain a few characteristics common to the older Central European pianos, but they still have much more in common with the ubiquitous Steinways. Some would see this historical evolution as an inexorable fact of progress; I prefer to view it as a type of standardization as a result of monopoly capitalism, Steinway holding a similar position in the piano business to that of Microsoft in the software business. Modern-day Yamahas, Kawais and other pianos essentially adopt the Steinway model, as do most other types; Bösendorfer has maintained its own particularities most of the time, though even they at one point tried to make their instruments conform more closely to the Steinway model.

With the progress of the two schools of pianos came the evolution of different schools of piano playing. Put crudely, the Central European school of playing emphasised clarity and variety of articulation and counterpoint, whilst the Anglo-French school stressed the long line and the legato, with much more extravagant use of the pedal. Of course both schools extended well beyond their national boundaries. What I would suggest is that with the demise of the Central European school of piano manufacture, there was a corresponding demise of that parallel school of piano playing and technique. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a pianist like Artur Schnabel maintained some of the older ideals, but such things are to be found much more rarely amongst mainstream players nowadays. Within the ambit of the Central European style of playing falls, I believe, the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms (as well as Haydn and Mozart). Chopin was unique amongst the most prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century composers in expressing a clear preference for the Anglo-French instruments, while Liszt seemed interested in both schools.

So I wish to run quickly through a list of composers, in each case looking at particular assumptions made about the performance of their work, and suggesting alternatives, as well as using their work to illustrate more general points.

I could very easily speak for the whole of this lecture, and more, on questions involved in the performance of Beethoven's piano music. There are at least three excellent books in English on the subject (William S. Newman, *Beethoven on Beethoven: playing his piano music his way*, Sandra Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classical Piano Music*, and George Barth, *The Pianist as Orator*), which give a reasonably thorough examination of many of the basic issues, though undoubtedly underscored by assumptions of their own. Newman demonstrates persuasively that Beethoven preferred Central European pianos, particularly those of

Streicher, throughout his life, even though at various stages he possessed a Broadwood and an Erard. Certainly Beethoven's writing for the piano was a revolution in many ways; he pioneered a much more extensive use of the pedal than Haydn or Mozart and some of his music does exploit the expressive possibilities inherent in longer lines and greater sustaining power (as for example in the slow movement of the *Pathétique Sonata*). Nonetheless, his preferences do seem to be clear.

One thing that other period-aware instrumentalists of Beethoven seem relatively sure of is that his music was generally played at faster tempi in his than is usually the case now. After concerts that Beethoven was unable to attend, or during his deafness, the first question he would ask a friend who heard the performance was 'Were the tempos right' (experience has shown me that this priority is shared by many living composers!) Now Beethoven only left metronome marks for one sonata, the *Hammerklavier*. However, three different individuals, all of who knew or worked with Beethoven, left detailed metronome markings for every sonata – Haslinger, Moscheles and Czerny, in some cases more than one set of markings (these are all collated in Rosenblum's book). The sources don't always agree, and were collected a while after Beethoven's death, but overwhelmingly they are quicker than the tempi we have come to expect. So I do think that at the very least it is worth reconsidering the tempi that we have come to expect, notwithstanding the fact that the heavier tone and action of today's pianos make such tempi considerably more difficult to realize (though not impossible, I believe). These can reveal a more daemonic and untethered side of Beethoven's personality that refuses to be sanitized.

I want to play you the opening of Beethoven's Sonata in F, Op. 10 No. 2, to demonstrate a few points. Here it is in the manner to which we have become accustomed:

[play opening]

Now here it is in a different way:

[play again – not slurring ornamental figures onto main notes]

Now the triplet semiquaver figure contains a slur, but only over the three notes there, not onto the following crotchet. Commonly a pianist will play this with that slur extended across the bar line, believing that is the true meaning of Beethoven's notation. However, in bars 16-18, he does notate the slur in precisely that manner, distinct from the opening. By keeping the differentiation as marked, one emphasizes the sense of the barline, giving a different type of rhythmic profile to the music. Beethoven was a master of either emphasizing or offsetting barlines, and these notational practices can be found throughout his piano music.

[play beginning of last movement of *Pathétique Sonata*]

Sometimes he articulates themes differently upon different appearances:

[play Ab entry of first subject at end of last movement of *Pathétique Sonata*]

However, such things are frequently obliterated nowadays in subconscious attempts to iron out Beethoven's quirks. Another common practice I to elongate the last in a series of staccatos, when it lands on a downbeat. To return to Op. 10 No. 2:

[play bars 55-60, elongating at beginning of bars 56, 57]

Now I would suggest that instead of elongating these notes, one might accentuate them instead:

[play bars 55-60 again, accentuating instead of elongating]

At the end of the exposition, Beethoven writes:

[play bars 65-66]

The last of these is a crotchet, the preceding ones are quavers followed by rests. However, immediately afterwards, he writes the same figuration, down a minor third, but with the last beat as a quaver.

[play bars 67-68]

This becomes a motif extended through the development section, in the same form. I believe that Beethoven intended this distinction. The use of accentuation as opposed to elongation for musical shape, to mark a 'point of arrival', may seem somewhat harsh and pointed to our ears, unused to hearing it in that form, but again I believe it is one of the many fascinating complexities in Beethoven's work which makes it so interesting and stimulating. These questions recur in many pieces:

[play arpeggiated figures in last movement of 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano concerto. Beginning of Op. 31 No. 1]

This different practice gives the music an altogether more rhythmic and folk-like quality, emphasizing the beat and the barline.

Throughout Beethoven's music and that of the Central European composers who followed him, one finds meticulously detailed small-scale articulative units, and sometimes longer slurs in contrast, based upon a mode of melodic rhetoric which can suggest speech as much as song. Indeed the interplay between the two is one of the many beguiling aspects of the music. In our quests for the eternal 'singing line', it is easy to iron these things out and deliver the music in a manner which seems to me so clearly at cross purposes with the composers' intentions.

Schubert is a composer whose life and work raise questions about the extent to which underlying interpretative aims stem from particular biographical perceptions. The mythology around the figure of Schubert is extensive and well developed: the 'poor, neglected, struggling artist', tragic figure of musical folklore. These myths have been questioned in a searching manner by Christopher Gibb in his recent writings on the composer. I fear that such notions lead to a rather one-dimensional idea of Schubert's 'character' which subsumes all other interpretative possibilities in its wake. Let us look at the last movement of his Sonata in D D850, a strange movement which struck



Schumann by its 'naïvete'. It is not uncommon to hear it played in this sort of fashion:

[play last movement of D850 with long line and pedal]

Now Schubert is very precise in his articulative markings here, as elsewhere in the sonata (not least in the wondrous folk-instrument evocations of the second movement). I would suggest that the score indicates something closer to the following:

[play again without pedal and with clear articulations]

Like Beethoven, Schubert seems to make a distinction in types of slurs, either onto the main note or not, in the two statements of the opening melody (though I accept this may be result of questionable editing). Whatever, the first type of interpretation seems to overlay upon the music an all-purpose pathos, in line with the perceptions about the composer's character, which is in clear contravention of the score. It is as if there were basically one long slur over the whole page. This can be an interesting perspective, but surely it is a very particular one.

Schubert, also like Beethoven, made extensive use of sforzandi, not least in a later section of this movement, which are difficult to realize on a modern piano whose greater sustaining power can turn a sforzando into a bluge or boom rather than an accent. A fundamental question for all pianists playing Schubert's music to consider is how these nodal points and emphases can somehow be translated, if playing on a modern instrument, rather than just overlooked and smoothed over (which is very common indeed).

Few would dispute the claim that Schubert was one of the great melodists of all time; the tenderness and generosity of his melodic writing is to be found throughout the piano music. However, the contemporary quest for a long line and singing tone at all costs, particularly amongst pianists from Eastern European schools, tends to necessitate the foregrounding of one voice (usually the top one) above all other parts, to maximise its durability, creating such a 'singing tone' and 'melting legato', but overriding more contrapuntal concerns. Here is the beginning of the Sonata in Bb D960:

[play beginning of Bb Sonata D960, emphasizing top part]

The heavenly voice of the tragic individual whose humanity rises above his torments. But there's more than one voice here:

[play again with different balance of voices]

I find the quavers in the bass, with their incessant repetitions, add a dark undertone to the music, leading towards the sinister low trill. And as for the melody in chords in the right hand, mightn't it be less a singular voice with accompaniment than something more akin to a barrel-organ or other mechanical device? Also, that level of melodic sustaining in my first rendition would be impossible to realize on any of the pianos that Schubert played on. Schubert follows this passage with a true singular

voice combined with an accompaniment figure – the contrast can be all the more striking.

[play bars 19-26]

A number of Schubert and Schumann's songs contain a style of piano writing that involves repeated chords, sometimes quite energetically. Similar patterns might be found in lots of popular idioms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Frequently these will now be played quite slowly, expansively, sustained, sometimes with tenutos at the beginning of groups:

[play beginning of *Auf der Bruck, An die Musik*, second of *Frauenliebe and Leben*]

Now, based on considering the sounds of the instruments of the time, I wonder if actually some of these examples actually were conceived more similarly to a contemporary pop song than we might think:

[play drier, less pedal, quicker, stronger accents]

I would speculate (a subject for future research!) that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of popular idioms and a greater degree of international presence for them, there might have been, even subconsciously, a palpable development on the part of 'classical' performers to eschew those aspects of performing style that might resemble those of the non-classical world (the racial divide may have been a motivation here). In a sense this was a way of constructing the whole notion of 'classical' music, the exclusive property of a particular race and class. In jazz and rock pianists, you frequently find small-scale articulations, strong accentuation, drier unpedalled playing, unselfconscious use of martellato playing, and much more, all aspects I believe existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century amongst the 'classical' tradition as well.

With Schumann's large and eclectic body of piano music, matters become even more complicated, not least on account of Schumann's own revisions to his work in later life and the questionable editions produced by Clara. These have a tendency to iron out some of the more daring and strange elements in the music, as if to downplay anything that might be associated with the composer's erratic state of mental health. Certainly, as with Beethoven, we have reasonably clear evidence of quite extreme tempi, and arching contrasts between lyrical and impetuous material, particularly in such works as *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana* and the *Humoreske*. Schumann also played with, by all accounts, extensive use of the pedal, and probably a reasonable degree of metrical freedom. Yet his notation preserves the small-unit articulation to be found in Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, and once more the flexible use of slurring, sometimes onto a main note, sometimes not. Here is the second section of the *Humoreske*, as often played in accordance with the demands of the 'singing line':

[Play second section of *Humoreske* in that manner]

Now, to me, Schumann's detailed articulations suggest a different sort of music:

[Play again with articulations]

This gives a wholly different type of rhythmic profile and impetus. The slurs in the bass, starting on each quaver and going onto the two semiquavers, rather than the other way round, serve to emphasize the beat and add rhythmic energy, as continued in the following section:

[Play beginning of following page]

In the first of these examples, the bass line is then able to enter into a contrapuntal relationship with the treble.

The use of slurs separated from the note they lead to adds terrific energy to the third movement of the *Kreisleriana* (as well as making it considerably harder to play):

[Play beginning of third movement of *Kreisleriana* with separated slurs]

Compare that with this more common approach:

[Play beginning slurring onto the main notes]

In the second movement, Schumann enacts a conscious disjunction between melodic contour and dynamic envelope; unfortunately ironed out in Clara's edition:

[Play beginning of second movement with crescendo rather than hairpin]

The melodic contour goes up and down, while the dynamic is a crescendo – Clara changed this into a hairpin. Now some conventional 'musical' wisdom would have this as a hairpin, in which the dynamics serve merely to underline the melodies' contoural properties. However, I do believe that Schumann consciously conceived this more complex interrelationship, in which the different parameters do more than merely emphasize one another.

Various schools of analytical thought (not least those of Heinrich Schenker!) impose a particular ideology upon parametric interrelationships in this manner, whereby dynamics and articulation are supposed to be used to underline deep melodic, harmonic, rhythmic or metrical features, regardless of whether the score might explicitly state something differently. Wilhelm Furtwangler, under the influence of Schenker, suggested that if Beethoven's music had been left without dynamics or articulation, a fine musician would be able to fill all the details in and they would be identical with those that Beethoven wrote. I think this is nonsense, and tells us more about both Furtwangler and Schenker's need to impose an 'organicist', post-Wagnerian, ideology of performance upon the music, dissolving many dialectical properties in favour of the creation of something whose internal 'harmony' most readily accords with a mythical notion of some idealized organic German musical past.

More broadly, a 'musical' interpretation can often mean an eschewal of a composer's more interesting markings and the consequent musical complexities in favour of an approach which just over-emphasizes, 'spells out', what is implicit anyhow. As so many contemporary composers have discovered, notation can be as much a defence mechanism against 'natural' or 'musical' interpretation as anything else. In some of

the recent music of Mauricio Kagel, articulation is continuously 'out of phase' with melody, harmony and dynamics to create a type of estrangement or defamiliarization: Kagel has often had to work hard to persuade musicians to take his markings seriously in this respect, rather than simply producing a 'musical' and 'characterful' interpretation which will render the music as something more easily digestible, also making the performers the darlings of critics.

Schumann's endlessly resourceful exploitation of the piano's sonorous possibilities includes dryness as much as sonorousness. Yet in an era that sees 'depth of sound' as a universal ideal, the former of these qualities is something one infrequently hears. Interestingly, the only time I have heard the beginning of the *Kreisleriana* played with the indicated staccatos in the bass is in the recordings of Vladimir Horowitz.

[Play beginning of *Kreisleriana*]

The music then becomes much more war and immediate to my ears, without the false aura and comfortable distance provided by the more 'sonorous' approach:

[Play beginning more sustained and with pedal]

A fair number of string players nowadays will at least acknowledge that continuous use of vibrato may not necessarily be an appropriate mode of performance for all music (in fact it was believed to have originated as a general ideal around the 1930s, and was earlier warned against by Joachim). A deep, rich, full-bodied sound with vibrato is one particular timbre; slowly but surely more and more string players are realizing that the creation of a wide range of sounds, including the thinner and dryer, is a worthwhile musical ideal; as opposed to the cultivation of one singular 'personal sound' to be applied across all repertoire. I see the use of the pedal on the piano as being in part analogous to vibrato on a string instrument. Still most pianists play with the sustaining pedal in use practically all the time, to add depth of sonority and 'colour' and prevent against a thinner sound, also avoiding the possibility of blurring of sonorities which can be brought about by holding the pedal across harmonic changes (including in places where composers' pedal markings might suggest precisely that).

Schumann's *Arabeske Op. 18* is a beautiful and fleeting piece, written in part under pressure from Clara to create something more easily accessible than his complex and enigmatic earlier piano works. Nonetheless, Schumann was still able to write a work of great depth. His metronome mark for the opening 'Leicht und zart' is a quick crotchet = 152 (Clara was able, after Schumann's death, to modify this to 126 in her edition, perhaps one of her various attempts to 'domesticate' his music all the more). In a selection of recordings, Emil Gilels plays at a tempo of approximately crotchet = 88, beside which Vladimir Horowitz's 96-100 (in his 1934 recording) sounds relatively rapid, and Wilhelm Kempff's 100-104 even more so. Maurizio Pollini's tempo shifts a little more frequently (see below) but occupies a median position amongst these others, as do Maria Joao Pires and Yuri Egorov. Jorg Demus is marginally quicker than any of these with a median tempo of around 112, also the median tempo for Horowitz's 1962 recording (created over four different days in the recording studio!). By the time of Horowitz's 1968 recording, the tempo has been reduced again to an average of about 106. Not one of these performers come close to

even Clara's tempo of 126, let alone Robert's of 152. To attain the latter tempo would be very difficult on any modern piano without sounding highly rushed because of the thick sound (similar considerations apply to the beginning of the Phantasie Op. 17, where almost universally pianists either start slower than Schumann's  $\text{minim} = 80$ , or otherwise put the brakes on pretty quickly, for fear of the central register brilliant left-hand semiquavers turning into mud).

Then we can also consider the question of tempo flexibility: Schumann indicates two clear *ritardandos* in bars 17-20 and 21-24. This would seem at the very least to imply that these *ritardandos* should assume quite a prominent position. One way of achieving this would be by maintaining a relatively steady tempo in the other bars, then these *rits* will highlight structural points. Gilels and the 1934 Horowitz make *rits* at the end of each group of either four or eight bars, then when the marked *rits* appear, they sound little different from what has preceded them. In Horowitz's 1962 recording, the same four or eight bar *rits* apply, but the second marked *rit* is slightly more extended, whereas in 1968 he keeps the tempo throughout very steady and makes the smallest of *rits* at the second marking –these are the closest one gets throughout these recordings to a more precise observation of Schumann's tempo indications. The other players maintain a more steady tempo at the outset, (give or take a few places where they hold back (rarely pushing forward) to underline certain melodic or harmonic high points, a little more so in Pollini's recording than in the others) but continue this throughout the marked *ritardandos*, almost as if no marking were there. Kempff is most bizarre; other than two cadential *ritards* just before each double bar, the one *rit* that really draws attention to itself is that which he makes in bars 30-32, as if Schumann's markings had been cancelled from their original positions and transplanted to here.

Also, one should look at the bass line throughout this first section. Schumann's slurs and articulation markings are highly subtle, beginning with two sighing D-C slurs, then a more extended four-note slur over G-F-E-D. In the second phrase the slurring is different, one two-note sigh then a six note slur over a corresponding line. Then in answer to both of these, Schumann begins with the two-note sigh followed by six staccato notes which contrast with the legato writing of the other parts. Almost without exception all these pianists play this music with the top line well in the foreground and the other lines clearly receded; is it not at least something to consider that Schumann had in mind a type of counterpoint between bass and treble (these types of relationships recur in other parts of his work, such as the opening of the *Humoreske*)?

One would never know there were any slurs/phrases at all in this bass from Gilels performance, though he puts the slightest of emphases on the staccato notes (still pedalled, and barely noticeable). Not even this differentiation can be perceived in Horowitz's 1934 performance. Kempff is more subtle in his pedalling of the staccatos, so they do not sustain through to each other, though hardly any sort of real staccato; the previous slurs are equally unapparent in his recording. Pires is a little like Gilels in this respect. In Pollini's recording we get a hint of a counterpoint between bass and treble, with very slight stresses on the beginning of some of the left-hand slurs, though the staccatos are little more apparent than in the other performances. No such considerations seem to concern Egorov, whose performance is squarely in the 'melody and accompaniment' category. Demus (who elsewhere in

his complete set of Schumann piano music does make valiant attempts to render Schumann's specific articulation and phrasing as something meaningful) makes the bass a little more prominent, but as with Gilels, one would hardly know that Schumann's notation consisted of anything other than a long slurs right the way through, with perhaps the tiniest of stresses on the staccatos. However, in Horowitz's 1962 recording, the final sixteen bars of the first section, one starts to glimpse something of the type of counterpoint that Schumann may have envisaged. In 1968, the only thing in the bass that really stands out is the way that Horowitz plays the staccatos somewhat *tenuto* and prominently.

Of course these are only a fraction of the available recordings, but still represent a supposedly diverse range of players. The last thing I want to do is conclude that we should disparage these recordings, which have a great deal to offer. What is undeniable, I think, is the degree of stylistic homogeneity and shared norms amongst all the players, give or take minor differences. And to some extent this is the responsibility of the instruments as much as the players; the modern instruments they all play would make either Clara or Robert's metronome markings sound very hurried, at least it would take tremendous resources of voicing, finely-tuned degrees of legato, pedalling and shaping to try and overcome this. The timbrally equalized registers cause performers to play out of the treble line so as facilitate matters when endeavouring not to get overwhelmed by the active writing in the middle parts. Two note slurs are very difficult to execute on modern pianos without sounding choppy; a larger stress on the first D in the bass produces a Daaaaaaa sound rather than a Dumm, making a quieter C sound like a subito piano rather than a natural phrase ending, and the contrast with the staccatos might seem excessively dry if executed faithfully (similarly, I have never once heard a pianist attempt to render the staccato followed by three note slur that forms such a striking re-colouration of the left-hand passagework in bars 41-44 and corresponding passages of the first movement of the Phantasie, answered by a warmer legato in the succeeding four bars). Accepting everything else, though, is it not odd that almost none of these pianists seems to have considered how the particular ritardandos that Schumann marks (and this is a practice he maintains in numerous other pieces) might have a special significance? I wonder very much if they have, and also wonder if 'interpretation' for many can be a matter of disregarding a lot of the composer's markings and replacing them with another set of parameters of one's own; a viable approach in many ways, for sure, but by no means not the only one.

Let me (in 'Building a Library' style!) return to Horowitz, who as I have said perhaps comes closest to realizing some, if not all, of Schumann's markings. Now listen to the following review of one of his performances in the 1970s of this work, from the *Boston Globe*:

“impossibly sectionalised, lurching, fragmented...changes of pace, rhythm and colour mark not only formal divisions and individual phrases but also nothing in particular – one had the feeling listening to this grotesque performance that if it were possible to fragment the sound of a single note on the piano once it had been struck and pedalled, Horowitz would want to.”

I think the vituperative nature of this review of a performance that presumably had some things in common with Horowitz's other conceptions of the work says a lot

about the likely reaction to those performers, even one so renowned as Horowitz at that time, who try to articulate some of the stranger and more complex aspects of a well-known piece of music.

Brahms is another composer about whom there are many simplistic perceptions with regard to 'character' – what Malcolm Macdonald has called the problem of the 'bearded Brahms'. A wonderful recording I have of *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, with the Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique under Sir John Eliot Gardiner, reproduces one of the classic pictures of the elderly Brahms with a long beard, on its cover, despite the fact that Brahms wrote the piece when he was in his thirties and did not yet have the beard at that time. This and some other performances and recordings have been penetrating in their approach, I think, but with regard to the piano music, it is still usually played in a very ponderous, thick, always legato, manner, which is seen as corresponding with perceptions of Brahms's character and possible asexuality. This is true of some approaches to other of his works as well: who would know from the usual tempi adopted for the *Clarinet Quintet* that the opening movement is marked 'Allegro' rather than 'Molto Moderato'? But of course this is Brahms in his 'autumnal years', and so it must be made to sound like an old man's music (whatever that might be).

Now, from his correspondence and accounts of his playing, there is reasonably clear evidence that Brahms wished to return to a pre-Beethovenian convention with respect to his short slurs. By this convention, the last note of a slur should be shortened, creating a perceptible gap between the end of one slur and the beginning of the next. This is how the conventionally hear the opening of the Intermezzo Op. 118 No. 2:

[Play Brahms Intermezzo with 'long line', and slowly]

Now the opening phrase slurs just the first two quavers, and not onto the minim. The following phrase also contains a series of short slurs, but with a longer slur over the top of them. I believe this indicates that for this phrase the slurs should be connected rather than separated. I believe this indicates that for this phrase the slurs should be connected rather than separated. Taken in combination, this opposition transforms the line into antecedent and consequent. Played somewhat faster so as not to draw out the gaps between slurs, to let them become air in the texture rather than stopping points, the music becomes more like a classical Minuet.

[Play again in the different manner]

Now we also have many accounts of Brahms's own playing: one thing upon which they all seem to concur is his use of a large degree of expressive freedom and rubato, perhaps spreading more chords than are indicated as such (though some sources disagree on this point) and perhaps, I would venture, using some of the desynchronization of hands and voices that was common in the period. I'd like to play you a longer section to demonstrate how this attributes might be applied:

[Play all of first section]

A music of vivid contrasts, I believe.

I would suggest that the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms is not 'unpianistic' or 'un-idiomatically written for the instrument' in comparison, say, with that of Chopin or Liszt, as is commonly held to be the case. On the contrary, this former group of composers was equally resourceful and colourful in their use of the piano. The fact that the performance practices of our time stem from the alternate Anglo-French tradition leads to a great deal of that music from Central Europe being played in a manner which can sound lumpish and unidiomatic. The sonorous range achieved by Brahms in the *Paganini* and *Handel Variations* (the latter stemming in part from his study of Baroque keyboard traditions) is remarkable.

The use of a melody in the tenor line with an echo above in the top, in one of the *Paganini Variations*, suggests a bizarre hybrid of a musical box and an organ, and looks forward to Messiaen's use of 'added resonance' (perhaps the fact that both composers had the sound in mind of one of their own instruments, the organ, is not irrelevant here).

[Play beginning of Variation 11 of *Paganini Variations*]

In Chopin's piano music, which time hardly permits me to address adequately at the moment, one encounters a very different style, one which would seem more familiar to us. Chopin most certainly valued highly the sustained legato melodic line, reflecting his love of the *bel canto* style of Bellini and others (though I wonder if this style was necessarily the same as *bel canto* as we understand it nowadays?) However, he equally emphasized the importance of Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* to his own keyboard writing, and I think this aspect of Chopin's writing is often overlooked. There are certainly places in Chopin's music where a conventional type of 'melody and accompaniment' playing is appropriate, but elsewhere, an approach which sings out the melody and downplays all the other parts again serves to smooth over some of the wonderful intricacies in the music. In the *Polonaise Fantasy*, here are two types of approach:

[Play *Polonaise Fantasy*, after introduction, first emphasizing melody, then with greater equilibrium between parts]

Sometimes this type of writing can become somewhat muddy when the latter approach is applied. A question I often wonder is whether Chopin actually made use of slight desynchronization between parts to elucidate contrapuntal clarity (a device later used extensively by Rachmaninoff and Scriabin), to remove the necessity over-privileging of one voice. Perhaps the greater registral differentiation and thinness of tone of Chopin's preferred Pleyel and Broadwood pianos made this less necessary. Such an approach can also enable a more fluid, less punctuated and beat/bar line dominated texture (in contradistinction to the music of the Central European tradition) in other pieces, offsetting rather than emphasizing the pulse.

[Play chordal passage from *Ballade No. 1* with bass slightly out of synchronization]

Through the many accounts of Chopin as performer and teacher, one piece of information is agreed upon by almost all sources, specifically that Chopin continued to insist that *rubato* should apply only to the melody, while the accompaniment would stay steady. This would itself create a type of desynchronization between the hands,



and require a different style of rubato from that we commonly know, one more akin to that of many early 20<sup>th</sup> century pianists, whereby when time is added to one note, it is subtracted from others to keep the basic underlying pulse relatively steady.

[Play beginning of Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 in Eb, and beginning of Ballade No. 1]

Liszt remains a fascinating figure in so many ways. Besides his well-known transcendental virtuosity, voluminous output of both original works and transcriptions for the piano, his music also interests me because it seems to contain elements of both Central European and Anglo-French pianistic traditions, as we might expect from such a worldly and cosmopolitan individual. Since the wide espousal of Liszt's piano music by Russian pianists (whose school of playing I would most certainly see in a lineage from the Anglo-French traditions), it is commonly played only within the parameters of the latter of these traditions, which can represent a rather partial approach. As well as the richest and deepest of sonorities, looking forward to Debussy and Messiaen, and timeless cantabiles, Liszt could equally well exploit a sinister dryness. This becomes a relevant issue right from the outset of the *Sonata in B minor*. The opening staccatos, a recurrent motif from beginning to end of the work, are almost always played in a relatively sustained manner:

[Play beginning of *Sonata in B minor* this way]

The first G's lead, in terms of pitch, towards the long sustained G's within which we hear the descending Phrygian scale. An 'organic' player would make articulation work in harmony with pitch, but Liszt's comment that they should sound like 'damped timpani strokes' suggests a different relationship:

[Play with staccatos more detached]

The contrast between the menacing staccatos and the expansive lines elsewhere forms an integral part of the dram of the music:

[Play dry chords followed by melody in section before beginning of slow movement]

Right up until the end:

[Play end]

The low B is a tonic resolution of course, but its articulation serves a different function, to puncture the heavenly image perhaps. When the whole piece has a resonant aura imposed upon it, such contrasts are downplayed and muted, and the music becomes more of an 'easy listen'. Questions of accentuation versus elongation can radically change the character of the *Mephisto Waltz No. 3*:

[Play repeated bits before melody in the two ways]

Indeed Liszt's pedalling and phrasing instructions in this strange piece suggest that the Mephistopheles in question might not be the charming and loveable creature as he is often portrayed in music, perhaps with three-pronged fork and pointed tail. The

extent to which one emphasizes the barlines in this piece can have a decisive effect upon the ultimate result.

So, moving into the twentieth century, the growth of the CD industry has had another effect, almost contrary to that I spoke of earlier. A wide range of recordings of performers from the earlier years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, previously the preserve of a few extremely specialized collectors, is now freely available, including a number of recordings and piano rolls made by composers of their own music. It has thus become possible to study more closely the styles, idioms and aesthetics of performance from this period.

My own study of recordings and writings in this respect has led me to the conclusions I mentioned above, that the 'romantic style' that we understand nowadays is something quite different from the styles cultivated by those who could genuinely claim to be part of a Romantic or Late Romantic era. Overall, I would argue that 'romantic' playing of today entails an extremely partial and selective adoption of elements of the styles of earlier players, stratified, fetishized so as to become amenable to the musical and societal demands I mentioned before.

The piano music of Debussy represents one people of the keyboard literature (the other being that of Beethoven) that I treasure above all others. I also have little hesitation in placing Debussy squarely within a Romantic lineage – the influence of Chopin, Liszt and Wagner, though of course highly modified and combined with other influences that accorded with Debussy's personal requirements, is profound. But the light, 'characterful' miniaturist, tastefully applying colour for colour's sake, that I often hear in performances in this country in particular, bears little resemblance to the visionary and infinite music that I perceive. Indeed it was this tradition of 'Debussy-lite', void of any deeper emotional content, more like a minor composer such as Jean Francaix, that for quite some time prevented me from appreciating Debussy's true genius. Debussy's writing is certainly not 'heavy' in the way that one might speak of Wagner, but that is a quite different thing from lacking depth and substance.

By most accounts, Debussy was open to differing interpretative approaches to his music. One quality that is clear from his recordings and piano rolls is the use of extra spread chords and hand desynchronizations, in common with many pianists of his time, even apparently in such a warhorse as *Clair de Lune* (though I have not to date heard his recording of this work). Debates will rage forever as to the validity of 'impressionistic' or 'objective' approaches to the music. We do know that Debussy favoured the pianos of Bechstein and Blüthner, rather than the lighter-toned Erard preferred by Ravel.

The question of how melodic shape and articulation might have some degree of disjunction, as I mentioned in connection in Schumann, is prominent in the prelude *Bruyères*. In the following descending phrase, it might seem that one would wish to emphasize the implied appoggiaturas on the second and third beats with a slight tenuto or accent, according to received principles of musical diction.

[Play bars 8-9 with tenutos on second and third beats]

But actually Debussy supplies a tenuto marking on the second note of the phrase, the G.

[Play with tenuto there]

Similarly, the second phrase of the piece might, through the harmonic processes, suggest a mild crescendo to the chord at the end, but actually Debussy marks a diminuendo.

[Play Bars 3-5]

An altogether more melancholy type of phrasing, dynamic envelope and harmony, creating a certain tension between one another, is also a feature of early twentieth century Russian players.

Tempo is a key issue in Debussy. The difference in the sense of magnitude provided by slower or quicker tempos in such pieces as *Canope* or *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* is striking.

[Play the beginning of *Canope* in two different tempos]

Debussy's music often situates itself upon a potent expressive junction, where his sonorities do assemble themselves into lines and groups but also have sufficient resonating space to maintain a degree of autonomy. In many ways the issues of tempo for Debussy's music parallel those in the work of Messiaen, as for example in the *Vingt Regards*, where numerous of the tempi in the slower movements can make all the difference between a music which is otherworldly and spiritual and something more light and transient. This is not just about tempo, but also pauses; given sufficient time to resonate, the conclusions of *Jardins sur la Pluie* or *Les collines d'Anacapri* can be shatteringly ecstatic in the manner of Messiaen's *Par lui tout a été fait*.

With Ravel and to some extent Debussy, fundamental questions of rubato come to the fore which are also a clear indication of the manner by which the pianistic styles of late Romantics differ substantially from the 'romanticism' of today. I would like to demonstrate this with the famous eighteenth variation from Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. From listening to the recording of Rachmaninoff's own performance of this work, I'll offer you what I think is a reasonable imitation of how he plays it.

[Play opening of eighteenth variation, up to the orchestral tutti]

Certain characteristics are very clear, I think. Most importantly, Rachmaninoff's tenuto at the beginning of the melody is compensated for by a shortening of some of the other note values (which of course could be done in a variety of different ways). Thus he is able to be flexible with the melody but essentially preserve the underlying pulse, creating that balance between the subjective and the objective that so many composers and performers have striven hard for. Also, rather than simply accentuating the upper voice, Rachmaninoff continually slightly displaces the bass and treble (particularly at the beginning of bars) and sometimes also desynchronises

parts within a hand, so as to enable each part to maintain some presence of its own and clarify the dense counterpoint that is a feature of so much of his writing. Much more commonly today one hears the ‘competition style’ manner of playing this variation, with the top part emphasised almost to the exclusion of the others, no flexibility between hands, the pulse pulled about rather than weaved around. These are some of the factors that lead many to dismiss Rachmaninoff’s music as sentimental and lightweight, though ideal for glorifying the young performer.

Rachmaninoff’s performing style seems similar in many respects to that of Scriabin, on the basis of the few recordings that exist. Once again, the question of the singular singing line is all-important; its wholesale adoption creates a particular type of transparency, but can rather obliterate the darker, almost tortuous contrapuntal writing contained in the music.

[Play Scriabin Sonata No. 10, opening, first with one voice always to the fore, then with a more egalitarian use of voicing]

It is, I believe, this type of contrapuntal approach which both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff inherited and developed from Chopin (who in turn looked back to Bach), that prevents their music from lapsing into superficiality and sentimentality.

Compared to Debussy, Ravel was known as a ‘literalist’ and possibly an anti-romantic (*Gaspard* notwithstanding), who was heard to say ‘Don’t interpret my music’! Yet the recorded evidence suggests that both he and his favoured interpreters made use of similar stylistic tolls of their time. Ravel’s tempi were often fast, faster than usually played (as for example in *Jeux d’Eau* and *Ondine*), his pulses were steady, but he would also stagger parts for elucidatory purposes (Marguerite Long’s striking recording of the G Major Concerto, in the slow movement, uses such devices in a captivating manner). This all-prominent feature of the pianistic style of the time is now often dismissed as a mere mannerism or archaicism, but I believe it serves a fundamental contrapuntal purpose, in a manner slightly analogous to the staggering of vocal parts in some late Medieval and Renaissance polyphony.

*Ondine* also presents interesting questions of voicing. The ideals of the ‘singing line’ would suggest that the melody from the outset should be foregrounded against the shimmer of the right hand.

[Play in this manner]

But Ravel indicated to performers that this voice should be half-subsumed within the surrounding material, which quite clearly contradicts this other approach.

[Play balancing the parts]

A young pianist who plays the piece in this manner to a teacher or at a debut recital will of course instantly be castigated for their ‘inability to make the piano sing’.

The piano music of Schoenberg and Webern has never really entered the standard repertory of the ‘romantic’ pianist, yet there is every reason to believe that the types of interpretative approach desired by these composers stands at the pinnacle of the

true romantic tradition, in a way which is pointedly not the case in the post-war music of Boulez, Stockhausen, Nono and others. Schoenberg undoubtedly saw all of his work as a continuation and extension of ‘traditions’ rather than a break with them (that would be truer of Stravinsky). There is every reason to believe that Schoenberg favoured an approach using a large degree of agogic freedom and metrical flexibility, combined with a characteristically Central European close attention to small-scale articulative detail (clearly indicated in the *Suite Op. 25* or the *Klavierstück Op. 33b*); perhaps the idiom of Brahms is the closest to this. The publication of Webern’s annotated score of the *Variations*, with markings supplied by the composer for the pianist Peter Städlen, show beyond any doubt the extent to which Webern desired a high degree of hyper-expressive rhetorical and metrical freedom, far exceeding the freedoms most performers of today would allow for any music (though happily consensuses in this respect do seem to be shifting).

In the recordings left by Prokofieff, various things can be discerned which are at odds with contemporary practice: a certain amount of tempo flexibility in the *Piano Concerto No. 3*, a fluid lyricism of line, and a fair degree of expressive freedoms. The playing is rarely metronomic but generally preserves the underlying pulse. There are various ways in which Prokofieff’s approaches resemble those of Rachmaninoff.

In the recordings of Bartók, one also finds a relatively high degree of liberties taken through expressive rubatos, though in Bartók’s case he is quite happy to elongate a beat (or sometimes shorten one by pushing ahead) without necessarily needing to compensate elsewhere. His approaches to rhythm were rarely rigid or metrical and he cultivated a particular form of unevenness during passagework to stress harmonic and melodic features. Every score of Bartók’s contains a high degree of notated articulation; my own teacher György Sándor, who studied with Bartók, pointed out that Bartók once told him that exactitude in executing the notated articulations wasn’t always absolutely necessary; he had notated them that way to ensure that the player would at least introduce a degree of varied articulation. Interestingly, Sándor also once said with regard to Bartók’s piano music ‘forget about the ethnic elements, play it like it were Chopin or Liszt’.

Now with the stylistic approaches of Sándor, or those of Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels, who worked with Prokofieff, also those of Walter Gieseking and Artur Schnabel, we begin to move closer to the post-war romantic style, much more so than in the playing of the early Horowitz, or Marguerite Long or Alfred Cortot, whose playing stands closer to the earlier forms of romanticism in various different ways. I would conclude that with the music of the Second Viennese School, and that of Prokofieff and Bartók, the stylistic practices in performance of the time becomes closest to the ‘romantic style’ of today. Yet these are hardly the composers one usually associates with such an approach!

To sum up, then, there are many ways that I have only touched upon, by which the performance practices of most of the standard repertoire differs substantially from the mainstreams of performance today, to the extent of fundamentally affecting the ways in which we perceive the music itself. Overall, I feel the progress has been in the direction of simplification for the purposes of the mass market, obfuscating the riches and complexities (and darker elements) of so much music of the past. For this reason, I feel the time is right for a wholesale reassessment of the ways in which pianists

approach the standard literature. Then many might be shocked to find just how 'modern' so much of that music still remains.

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