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Recording, Ideology and Critical Approaches to Interpretation

Ian Pace

Paper given at CHARM, Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey, September 11 2008.

In this paper, I look to draw both upon experience as an active performer and also as a scholar of historical performance practice (including the documentary evidence provided by recordings) to present what I believe to be a relatively original model of the relationship of the performer to the recorded tradition, with some examples taken from 19th- and 20th-century piano repertoire.

I would like to begin by considering existing models of the relationship of the performer to recordings, as commonly articulated by a wider range of musicians or critics. Whilst inevitably simplifying and caricaturing somewhat, I would suggest that there are two dominant paradigms in this respect. Where I refer to 'performer' here, it should be taken as read that this could also apply to 'performers' in the plural.

1. The 'integrative' approach. According to the narrative provided by this model, the performer listens to a range of different recordings and performances, absorbing some of the best elements of those whilst rejecting the less desirable, to which they add a degree of individuation in order to develop their own 'personal style'. By this model, interpretive development is presented for the most part in terms of linear progress.

2. The 'independent' approach. Here the performer avoids listening to other recordings and performances of the pieces which they are preparing, in order not to be unduly 'influenced' by them. As such, they attempt to build an interpretation 'from scratch', so to speak, trying to shut out outside influences and focus primarily on what can be gleaned from the text and a certain innate 'musicality'.

3. The 'historicist' approach. Here the performer studies in detail performance practices from one or other era (often those existing at the time the work was written), often with the aid of academic scholarship into such matters, and attempts in large measure to reconstruct, to the best of their knowledge, how it might have sounded at that time.

Incidentally, the first two models in particular can equally be applied to composition, in terms of the relationship of the composer to existing bodies of work of whatever type.

As I say, all of these models are something of a caricature, not least (3), to which I doubt many historically-influenced performers since the 1970s would pledge uncritical allegiance. Nonetheless, I do believe they all have some validity as archetypes. And whilst all have undoubted merits – I would certainly not wish to wholeheartedly reject any of these models out of hand – they also have their limitations. Furthermore, I do not believe they can sufficiently account for the actual work done by many performers. The 'integrative' approach in particular does not really allow for the possibility of an interpretation that constitutes a marked *break*

with extant traditions, as opposed to a process of development and essential continuity.

Before offering my alternative model, I would first like to consider a dimension to the listening experience that is especially affected by recordings, which hypothetically I would say has likely brought about very significant changes in attitude for performers since recording became widespread. A recording obviously has the potential, frequently realised, to reach a much wider audience than could be sat in any single concert hall, or even the collected audiences for a performer on tour. And of course the *identical* performance presented on a recording can be listened to repeatedly (the experience of listening may be different upon reiterated listenings, but the sonic object being listened to does not change in its immanent properties). Now I believe this produces a degree of familiarity with certain performance practices and interpretive traits which can become 'naturalised', thus attaining the status of ideology. The very fact that one has heard certain approaches repeatedly can make them seem intuitively 'right' or inevitable. One might think that the possibility of hearing a wide range of different recordings might mitigate against this possibility and illuminate the very particularity of certain approaches – by virtue of their being others against which to contrast them – but in my experience of listening to many recordings this is often far from the case. Rather, I have found that (with some exceptions), the more 'standard' the repertoire is in terms of frequency of recording (and performance) – especially as far as the piano repertoire is concerned – the more 'standardised' interpretative practices can become. I am aware that this conclusion could not be asserted in a general sense without a massive study of almost all extant recordings of reasonably standard repertoire, at least a lifetime's work, or at least a synthesis of all existing scholarship in this respect, a project that is well beyond the scope of this paper; I am simply citing my own provisional conclusions on the basis of a certain amount of fairly wide-ranging study of recordings, and suggesting that we should consider the possibility that this phenomenon may be more widespread.

And I would offer one possible explanation for this in terms of the very 'naturalisation' of interpretive practices I mentioned. Very broad and deeply important performance decisions, such as those of tempo and tempo modification, can be especially significant in this respect. If a work is taken at a palpably faster or slower tempo to that with which listeners familiar with the music will likely have heard previously, its very *discrepancy* from received practice may be the most striking aspect upon first listening; that essential 'strangeness' (or perhaps 'otherness') can occupy a major part of the listener's attention, somewhat standing in the way of deeper appreciation of the various qualities this approach might entail. Put simply, it might initially seem 'too fast' or 'too slow' because of its disjunct relationship with habituated listening. Of course there are many listeners who find a strikingly new approach exciting and as such wish to explore further, but I believe it would be unrealistic to expect this of all or even the majority, who perhaps wish for a more consoling experience when listening to a piece of music. The same goes for what is now a relatively archaic practice, that of incorporating a ritardando in the lead-up to the recapitulation in a sonata form movement. When this practice was standard, it may not even have been perceived as a type of 'intervention' (in the sense of a significant modification of what otherwise would be a tempo with a degree of steadiness), and when such a work was performed without such a ritardando, it might

seem hurried, might not be seen as allowing the music to 'breathe', and so on and so forth.

I realise a lot of what I am saying constitutes speculative mass psychology; with that in mind I just want to emphasise again that I am offering up this as a *possible* model of the listening experience, which may be fruitful to consider in the context of existing or future empirical research. I will give some examples in a moment, but I would like you to consider the difficulties this phenomenon, if true, presents for historically-informed performers whose approaches do constitute with existing contemporary practices. A performer or group of performers may, for reasons based upon historical research, choose to perform something at a tempo that lies well outside of familiar practices. Now they would justify this on historical grounds, an argument that does not seem to impress Richard Taruskin amongst others. He argues in various essays that an appeal to history is practically irrelevant if the musical results are not convincing for the listener. But I would argue that what the listener finds convincing – or even moving, stimulating, and the like – is itself at least in part the product of acculturation and habituation. And some practices which do not win wide audience approval at the outset later themselves become standardised – today perhaps the very presence of a ritardando leading into the recapitulation might itself be perceived as 'strange' relative to more recent practices. The same model can be applied to most other types of performance practice and interpretive attributes, though of course these have varying degrees of likely impact upon the perceived totality of the interpretation.

I certainly would not claim, as a listener, to be immune to this process. The first time I heard the now-notorious recording of the Bach's Third Brandenburg Concerto by Musica Antiqua Köln directed by Reinhard Goebel, certain defences went up rather instinctively at what then seemed insanely quick tempi (and I am not, nor was then, averse to extreme interpretations) as well as a type of 'objectivism' which appeared to erase a wide range of 'expressive' possibilities. Today it is one of my all-time favourite recordings, and I would interpret both those attributes of the performance quite differently. Indeed it forced me to question some unconsciously absorbed notions of what constituted 'expression' in performance. As a small parenthesis, without wanting to get too sidetracked, I would just like to caution against deducing from that experience that I have become some card-carrying 'objectivist'; in fact the limitations of that type of approach and its compositional parallels, and its links with early 20th-century aesthetics that are not wholly separable from reactionary social and political movements, are more apparent to me than ever before.

So, to return to the issue, how do shifts in performance traditions come to be? There are various possible explanations for this. One might be a certain restlessness generated by over-familiarity with pieces (as opposed necessarily to familiarity with performance traditions, though this of course is another possibility), leading to a certain yearning simply for something new, but in the context of known works so as to provide some reasonably accessible point of entry for the listener. In a cruder form, it can also be about a taste for novelty, for that which is simply 'new' for its own sake. In a way, sheer novelty, whilst in a literal sense amounting to continuous breaks with existing practice, can itself become a normative *process*; this is to shift the realms of the normative from that to be found within collections of discrete musical objects to that of the very rate of change between temporally successive objects. Whilst

believing that this may indeed be an aspect of elements of a 'post-modern performance age', I do not really wish to pursue this path now. Suffice to say that 'difference for difference's sake' is itself little more than a fetish, and certainly not an approach I would wish to endorse in performance, composition or any other artistic activity.

At best, I would suggest that shifts in performance traditions and their reception can be a result of a more rational consideration of aesthetic, historical and other issues on the part of a significant body of listeners. To return to the 'historicist' example with respect to tempo, this could take the form of listeners feeling that a certain approach should at least be considered and pursued seriously on the grounds that it apparently does concur either with the composer's wishes, as far as they can be ascertained, or the practices common at the time of composition and first performances. It is in this context that the relatively recent phenomenon of the 'performance note' has grown up; a programme note describing, sometimes in some detail with reference to historical sources, the reasons for opting for a particular approach to performance practice and interpretation. The listener can then offset their more intuitive reactions to the performance with these other considerations, possibly enabling a greater degree of open-mindedness. Now of course there are many objections to this very approach, voiced most loudly by Richard Taruskin, questioning whether such an approach is meaningful because of the impossibility of erasing all that has been acquired in the intervening period, claiming that many approaches in this respect are selective in their use of historical evidence, mostly in favour of that which best accords with what he delineates as a 'modernist' aesthetic, and even asking whether, because of the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of historical evidence, whether the whole enterprise of historical performance scholarship can reveal anything at all? Taruskin usually falls back on the argument of simple listener reaction which I have already discussed; as far as his other points are concerned, whilst certainly positing a historical dimension to listening, I would argue against this being so all-encompassing as his arguments would imply – there are sonic attributes of the music in question that produce some reactions for reasons over and above historical and cultural conditioning. In terms of the point about the 'modernist' aesthetic, I do think he has a point in some respects, but rarely allows for the possibility that what he delineates as 'modern' might itself have roots going significantly further back in history (some of Taruskin's more recent writings do seem to imply this, possibly against some of his intentions). In terms of the problematic nature of historical evidence, of which practically every scholar is well aware, Taruskin's point amounts to little more than first-year historiography.

So, if one has an interest in considering a work in terms of what can be ascertained of its historical conditions of performance, whilst aware of the fact that it is being surveyed from a different era, then the historicist approach, and the performance note can facilitate this and help one to arrive at a judgement of whether this approach can indeed be considered historical, over and above intuitive responses to the performance. This is something of which I believe many listeners are capable, and which can be a fruitful endeavour, despite its being at odds with an 'irrationalist' streak in commonplace aesthetics of listening.

And I would just like now to give you a couple of examples of other ways in which a critical sensibility might be brought to bear upon listening for different reasons. The

first of these is a relatively little-known work, the *Capriccio über Volksliederthemen*, by Bernd Alois Zimmermann. Zimmermann wrote this work in 1946, just one year after the end of the war; he had been drafted into the Wehrmacht in 1940, in which he served in Poland, France and the Soviet Union until 1942, when he was released on account of illness. To the best of my knowledge, not a great deal is known at present about the nature of his experiences as a soldier, but he was fighting in the Soviet Union in September 1941, at the very height of Operation Barbarossa. And having lived through the Third Reich as a musician, he could hardly have failed to be unaware of the political connotations that *Volksmusik* had come to acquire. He was apparently inspired by the folksong cycle *Das Goldringelein* by Alfons Scharrenbroich, but Scharrenbroich was a full member of the Nazi party from 1933, who wrote a *Messe der Soldaten* before being killed in the war in 1943. Anyhow, the first example you have gives page 1 of this piece. I want to play you the recording by Tiny Wurz, who met the composer in 1946 and played the premiere of the work in Bergheim in July of that year. Her interpretation was much praised by Zimmermann, though this recording was made in 2005, almost 60 years later, and her approach may have changed.

[Play example]

I myself recorded this piece, in what was perhaps a rather eccentric manner, in 2002 – unfortunately I realised today that all my copies of the CD are in my office, so instead I will play something approaching how I recorded the *Vivace molto*.

[Play *Vivace molto*]

Please let me say emphatically that I am in no sense trying to argue the superiority of one or other approach; rather to consider their different possible social meanings. Wurz offsets the staccatos by pedalling through alternate bars, and tends to downplay the barlines. I at the time of recording opted for a more staccato approach with stronger accents and more emphasis on the bass in the second line. In part this was to heighten the contrast with the legato passage that follows, but equally it stemmed from a perception of a certain possible domineering and didactic quality to the presentation of the folk tune, informed by awareness of the historical context in which it was written, which I did not wish to downplay. And I do believe both approaches you have heard have quite different connotations in terms of what German folktunes might signify both in the 1940s and today.

To give another, much more well-known example, let me play you snippets from two different recordings of Orff's *Carmina Burana*. The first is from Eugen Jochum with the choir and symphony orchestra of Bayerischer Rundfunk, made in 1953.

[Play beginnings of 'Chramer, gip die varwe mir' and 'Veni, veni, venias' in Jochum recording. Tracks 8 and 22]

Now here are the same passages in the recording from 1960 by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra and Rutgers University Choir, which is much more typical of the recorded tradition of this work.

[Play Ormandy recording – tracks 8 and 21]

These two recordings to me sound extremely different. Jochum and his musicians uses a smaller and more 'trained'-sounding choir, less emphatic accents, a dynamic range that is less centered on the extremes, and attempts to find expressive subtleties within micro-levels. Ormandy is grander, more massive, arguably more immediate, but also more didactic. As with many performances, the work is couched in larger-than-life terms, often on the verge of hysteria, in a way I find compelling but also disturbing. Footage of Nazi propaganda rallies demonstrate amply how similar aesthetic techniques were used to whip up a frenzy in a crowd – and Orff would surely have been well aware of this – to such an extent that I personally cannot listen to 'Ego sum abbas', for example, with its hysterical baritone and shouting chorus in response without imagining that type of spectacle.

I cannot speak for the intentions of the various musicians in performing the music in their ways, but will draw attention to their different backgrounds: Ormandy as a Hungarian Jew who lived in the United States from 1921 onwards, Jochum as a German who continued to live and work throughout the Third Reich, being named by Hitler as Staatskapellmeister of Hamburg in 1936 (though never a party member), and who conducted concerts for the 'Kraft durch Freude' movement and wrote an article on the 'Deutsche Geiste' in 1938, and toured Wehrmacht-occupied areas with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra after 1941. Now this might lead on to imagine that *Jochum* would be the conductor likely to give the interpretation closest to the aesthetics of Nazi propaganda; I'd like to suggest that, on the other hand, were he to have done so in the post-war era, it would have been interpreted quite differently to when done in such a manner by Ormandy, who could not be linked to the collective guilt around that era. Jochum's approach was endorsed strongly by Orff, who supervised the recording – scholarship by Michael Kater has demonstrated how eager Orff was to rehabilitate his reputation after the war, and this could have influenced matters as well. Also, the programme note by Richard Osborne for the re-release of Jochum's recording of *Carmina* says that 'Its unlooked-for status as the best-known new composition to emerge from Nazi Germany has also helped compromise its reputation, not least because, in the wrong hands, it can sound obsessive rather than vital, militaristic rather than folksy. Jochum's performances could never be so accused'. This to me supplies a similar function to the other type of performance note, trying to direct the listener towards particular modes of interpretation in a conscious fashion. Once again, I am not necessarily looking to imply a value judgement between the two approaches – if anything, I still perhaps find Ormandy more compelling – but to suggest possible paradigms for listening that go beyond simply the intuitive, through considering the range of their social meanings. And furthermore, how there may be value in interposing an ethical dimension to listening over and above what appeals to desire, the visceral, the primal. I would actually go further and suggest that an aesthetic view which exclusively privileges the latter qualities renders one relatively helpless to resist propaganda of all types, whether from demagogues or advertisers (and in this context it is no coincidence that Orff's work has proved extremely amenable to advertisers).

We might conceive of the history of performance in terms rather like Thomas Kuhn's 'paradigm shifts', though there are obvious difference in the very aims of science and musical performance, and the type of relativism that some identify in Kuhn's work (though repudiated by Kuhn himself) has much more serious implications in the

former discipline. In no sense should one infer from what I have said earlier that one set of performance attributes simply 'supersede' one another, thus implying a simple linear progress, but different eras bring about different requirements, desires, perceptions.

So, let me know give you my own personal model, deriving in part from the above. I have spent much time listening to early and not-so-early recordings, especially though not exclusively of pianists, and have over time derived an approach in part in conjunction with my academic work on performance. This is to attempt to identify areas of commonality across a range of performances, to try and perceive the very *limits* or boundaries of existing traditions as a consequence of this, and thus to gain some notion of what else lies *outside* of those boundaries, so as to gain a better idea of latent but unexplored performance and interpretive possibilities. This does not take the form of didactic negation i.e. simply doing something because it is at odds with all that has gone before, more, at least hopefully, in the spirit of wider pluralism. In turn, that should not be mistaken for value-free relativism: there are some boundaries that exist around extant traditions for good reason, and little to be achieved simply by overstepping them. But conversely it is a big mistake to assume that the 'already-heard' broadly encompasses the full range of possibilities that might reasonably be undertaken, with only individuation of smaller details remaining for performers to be able to do, far from it.

Let me demonstrate this process with reference to three examples, from works of Schumann, Liszt and Brahms, all composers who, as well as being personal favourites, are amongst those I have been involved with as a scholar, especially the latter two. The first example is from Schumann's *Arabeske* Op. 18. This 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 (which also caused his publishers grief). 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 Youri 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!) and those of Grigory Sokolov and Claudio Arrau. The fastest of all is Vladimir Sofronitsky, at a tempo of 120, in his 1952 recording, and a very similar interpretation in a recording from 1959 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 except Sofronitsky 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 minim = 80, or otherwise put the brakes on pretty quickly, for fear of the central register brilliant left-hand semiquavers turning into mud).

[Play Gilels, then Kempff, then Pollini]

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. In Kempff's recording, 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. Sofronitsky ignores the marked rits, but makes a cadential rit at the double bar, then starts the next section under tempo and continues to ignore rits. Arrau makes only a token gesture of a vague rit, the second time through, just a little different from other rits. Sokolov is the one player that reasonably observes Schumann's rits.

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, as is Arrau. 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. Again we can return to Sokolov for the one recording that does make a serious attempt to bring out the staccatos, though he only gives a vague hint of the other slurs.

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 faciltate 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 Daaaaaaaa 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?

Let me (in 'Building a Library' style!) return to Horowitz, who as I have said perhaps comes closest, with the possible exception of Sokolov, 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.

At the very least, I think it is worth attempting an interpretation that adheres to Schumann's tempo, rits and articulation, which might be something like this:

[Play]

My second example comes from the Liszt Sonata in B minor.
The only detailed source that is known to exist on Liszt's teaching of this work is contained in the *Liszt-Pädagogium*. This in itself amounts to no more than a page and a half of information including musical examples. I wish to concentrate on a single, but to my mind vitally important, point that Liszt made in his comments on August Stradal's performance, specifically to do with the first bar (see the example you have). Liszt said that the staccato notes sound should like 'damped timpani strokes' (*dumpfer Paukenschlag*), achieved by playing the keys right towards the back, so as to create a smaller lever and thus give a dark colour to the tone[1]. The *Allegro energico* is to be played proudly and very rhythmically, but not too fast, at minim = 72[2]. Liszt also draws a comparison with Beethoven's *Coriolanus* Overture, in which terse staccato chords in the orchestra alternate with sustained unisons.

I would suggest that the contrasts between the 'damped timpani strokes' and the succeeding expansive melodic lines provide for one of the most fundamental determinants for the drama of the whole piece. And how one plays this very opening affects perceptions in this respect in a profound manner.

Listening to a diverse selection of recordings, the most common approach here taken is that indicated by Arthur Friedheim in his edition of the score[3], in which he indicates to use a short pedal on each of the staccato G's, and even suggests playing the lower two as grace notes to the highest note. Gordon Rumson suggests that 'This recognizes the acoustic phenomenon that pizzicato strings appear to be slightly before the beat'[4]. It does if one believes that pizzicato strings are the sound to be aimed for; I would agree more with Hamilton who argues that the 'damped timpani strokes' are a quite different sound to pizzicato strings[5]. Anyhow, recordings[6] by Leon Fleischer (1959), Claudio Arrau (1970), Martha Argerich (1971), Alfred Brendel (1981), Maurizio Pollini (1989), all adhere to this practice, as to a slightly lesser extent does György Cziffra (1968). Arturo Pizarro (1999) plays the opening G's more sustained than the others, sustaining them for almost a whole crotchet beat, but less so that Ernst Levy (1956), who takes a considerably slower tempo than the others and sustains the

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[1] Ramann – *Pädagogium* (1986 edition), Vol. 5, p. 3.
[2] Written as crotchet = 72 in the *Pädagogium*, though as Hamilton points out (*Liszt: Sonata*, pp. 76-77), this is clearly a misprint.
[3] See Gordon Rumson – 'Arthur Friedheim's Edition of the Liszt B Minor Sonata', *Liszt Society Journal* Vol. 26 (2001), pp. 17-59, for details of Friedheim's markings. However, one should also note that Bernard Stavenhagen recalled Friedheim playing the opening four pages of the sonata 'totally without pedal – what a sound!' (Elgin Strub-Ronayne, "Bernhard Stavenhagen; Pianist, conductor, composer and Liszt's last pupil." *EPTA Piano Journal*, No 40, Vol. 14, p. 13, cited in Rumson p. 22).
[4] Rumson – 'Friedheim', p. 52.
[5] Hamilton – *Liszt: Sonata*, p. 34.
[6] The catalogue details are as follows: Anda - Testament SBT – 1067;Argerich – Philips 456 703-2; Arrau – Philips 456 709-2; Brendel - Philips 410 040-2; Cziffra = EMI 7243 5 74512 2 2; Fleischer – Philips 456 775-2; Horowitz – Philips 456 884-2; Howard - Hyperion CDA 66429; Levy - Marston 52007-2; Pollini - DG 427 322-2.

octaves almost right the way through the space separating them from each other, with only a tiny hiatus in between. To find something that sounds like 'damped timpani strokes' we have to listen to either Vladimir Horowitz (1932), Géza Anda (1954) or Leslie Howard (1990). In each of these we hear them played short, ghostly and terse, as is the outcome of following Liszt's wishes, assuming the *Pädagogium* to be accurate. Howard takes the opening considerably quicker than most of the others (Levy goes to the other extreme), creating a sense of urgency rather than brooding[7].

[Play Brendel, Pollini, Horowitz]

But I believe the importance of this approach to extend well beyond the opening bars. The G octave on the third beat of bar 8, also marked with a wedge (as opposed to the simple staccato dots in bar 10, the beginning of bar 11 and bars 12-13) is a continuation of this strand and should in my opinion be played equally short. Then the wedged notes in the first appearance of the third theme, in bar 14, are similar, as are the clipped ends of slurs in bars 18ff. If one conceives of Liszt's articulation as primarily serving to underline and enhance that which is implicit in the pitches and rhythms, then it makes sense to play the opening G's more sustained, so that they lead towards the sustained G of bars 2-3. But this 'organic' approach to articulation, commonly applied, reflects a certain set of priorities I do not believe to be particularly appropriate for Liszt, or for that matter to Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann, let alone later composers. With Beethoven in particular, articulation became used to colour musical material in a variety of ways, leading to distinct articulations of the same phrases upon different appearances[8]. With Liszt, articulation, touch and colour achieve an expressive role in their own right that has a degree of autonomy from the other parameters involved, sometimes used in this manner to express the grotesque.

Throughout the whole of the *Sonata*, sustained legato melodic lines are countered by their opposite, sinister staccato utterances, creating an extended conflict between the two types of material. In the tempestuous writing towards the end of the first movement, Liszt makes a clear distinction between wedged-staccato crotchets and quavers, usually obliterated by the use of much pedal on the latter. Such a contrast continues through the succeeding bars, with harsh, high, whip-like wedged quavers, brought somewhat back down to ground with more solid wedged crotchets upon the return to G minor. This culminates in a ferocious confrontation between the earlier *Grandioso* theme, here configured extremely differently in a staccato rendition (*pesante* but still staccato, using the pedal only selectively can avoid this sounding grandiose, which would have been easier to achieve on the non-cross-stringed pianos of Liszt's time), and an impassioned recitative line that follows, but is answered once more by the ominous low chords

The 'slow movement' provides some repose from all this, using sustained sonorities continuously, rightly through to the final return of the 'damped timpani strokes' (bar 453). But the high degree of edgy staccato writing in the fugue counteracts this, once again acting as a textural/articulative counterpart, only here the contrast is more on the

[7] For a comparison of a much wider range of recordings of the work, see Philip Kennicott – 'Liszt's B minor Sonata on record', in *International Piano Quarterly*, Winter 199, pp. 40-58.
[8] See Charles Rosen – 'Phrasing', in *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 13-42, for more on this subject.

macroscopic level. And so it continues, up to the wrenched *sf* that cuts short the final appearance of the 'Grandioso' theme. The final note in the piece is not indicated with a wedge; nor are the preceding B major chords in bars 748-749, suggesting some sort of reconciliation between the two broad types of material defined by articulation. But the last note is a single quaver; even if pedalled, it should still presumably be quite short. Liszt does not seem to want to suggest final closure at the end of this piece, rather to leave matters open, looking 'beyond'.

[Play end]

My last example comes from Brahms's *Klavierstück* Op. 118 No. 2, which is also in the examples you have. One thing about which I have become convinced through my own research into Brahms performance, drawing upon a wider variety of his letters, memoirs by others, markings in scores by conductors and others who worked with him, is the importance of how one executes the two-note slurs in his work. Without going into detail on the sources for this information, it is very clear that he wished for a return to earlier notational conventions in this respect, whereby the second note in such a slur is shortened, thus leaving gap between it and that which follows. Two-note slurs recur throughout Brahms's output, and appear right from the beginning of Op. 118 No. 2. Now, for various reasons I do believe that Brahms intended those such slurs grouped under longer slurs to be played continuously, and that convention would modify the basic meaning of the symbol. As such, the opening slurs in this piece would be played in the earlier convention, whereas the answering phrase in bars 2-4 played continuously. That is of course a very particular choice, but one scholar, Lisa Kinzer, who did a comprehensive study of recordings of this work as her doctoral thesis, found only four out of 48 cases where the short slur principle was enacted (those by Paul Badura-Skoda, Jörg Demus, Leonard Hokanson and Carl Seeman). All of the others adhered to the type of convention that can be found in this recording by Mikhail Rudy:

[Play beginning of Rudy recording]

And this issue arises in many other of Brahms's piano music. There are a small number of conductors and chamber musicians who have started to adopt this principle, but very few pianists, despite a fair amount of information on Brahms's slurs having been known amongst Brahms scholars for some time (for example through the biography by Florence May). I began by performing the short slurs in such a manner, but maintaining the usual type of tempo, but found this unconvincing:

[Play with shorter slurs at slower tempo]

So I found it worthwhile to play the work at a somewhat quicker tempo, more in the manner of a minuet, in order that the gaps serve to refresh rather than break up the line.

[Play like this]

Now I am not trying to make any claim for this interpretation being 'right' as opposed to others being 'wrong', though being informed by historical data, it is not purely arbitrary. But I would suggest, as with all of these other examples, that there remains

much else that can be done, and which may be fruitful, in terms of performance practice and interpretation. And to do this convincingly requires a certain act of faith on the part of both performers and listeners, in which a critical attitude needs to be taken towards that which has become naturalised and which as such, as I said before, may simply have attained the status of ideology.

Abstract

A common narrative presented by performers is that by which they listen to a range of recorded performances, absorb the best elements from them, and develop outwards from here in a linear fashion in constructing their own interpretation. Drawing upon my own experiences as a pianist, I offer here an alternative model. This entails absorption of recordings and performance styles as a means of identifying their commonalities and limits, and examining these with a degree of detachment so as to conceive of the range of interpretive possibilities lying outside of this existing field. I argue that in many cases, especially with relatively standard repertoire, the existence of a wide range of recordings, far from necessarily encompassing an extremely broad range of musical possibilities, actually can serve to solidify and consolidate certain very particular practices, sometimes to the point of inertia; through the very familiarity of the reiteration of performance practices on recordings engenders, they become 'naturalised' from the perspective of listeners, and thus enter the realms of ideology. With musical examples both from recordings and given by myself at the piano, from works of Schumann, Liszt and Brahms, I argue not so much for a didactic negation of empirically observable practices so much as an appreciation of the very scope for manoeuvre that continues to exist for performers. I will also briefly touch upon the notion that certain approaches and attitudes to performance are intertwined with particular social expectations of music.