

10. SUMMARY OF SOME ASPECTS OF PIANO INTERPRETATION IN SCHUBERT SONATAS, ACCORDING TO MUSICAL NOTATION

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Abstract: *In order to be able to reveal the constructive value and expressive force of Schubert's piano sonatas, one needs first of all a good edition that rends as precisely as possible the author's original text, as well the pianist's skill to bring score to life, therefore managing to transpose in his interpretation the composer's creative intentions, that are set by using the musical notation. We wish to highlight below some aspects of Schubert's musical notation regarding dynamics and sonority, sound emitting manners (legato and staccato) and pedalling.*

Key words: *Franz Schubert, piano sonatas, musical notatio*

1. Introduction

For an accurate appreciation of the value of Schubert piano sonatas, the way in which they are interpreted is also very important, as the pianist's vision of the piece may either harm or highlight the composer's creative genius. Here is the opinion expressed by musicologist Ernest Porter: „Although this neglect and misunderstanding of his works may have been partly due to prejudice it was also quite probably due to performance, for the pianist who played a Schubert sonata as he would one by Beethoven must have given a very misleading interpretation.”³¹ The latest research made by musicologists have shown that there are very large differences between the ways in which the two composers used to approach piano, between each one's technique, touch and manner to produce sound. For the benefit of an appropriate interpretation, the pianist needs to be aware of all these aspects and be familiar with Schubert thinking and specific style.

In sonatas, Schubert's vision of the piano is different from Beethoven's or Weber's: to him this instrument plays an intimate role, through which he succeeds in conveying his deepest feelings and thoughts. When speaking about the relationship existing between Schubert and Beethoven, Alfred Brendel shows admiration for „the fact that he managed, as a young composer, in creating his very personal style compared to this giant neighbour”³², a style that is characterised by a great freedom of expression and writing, by a marked lyrical note and by a large use of the piano technical and timbre resources.

In order to be able to reveal the constructive value and expressive force of Schubert's piano sonatas, one needs first of all a good edition that rends as precisely as possible the author's original text, as well the pianist's skill to bring score to life, therefore managing to transpose in his interpretation the composer's creative intentions, that are set by using the musical notation. We wish to highlight below some aspects of Schubert's musical notation regarding *dynamics and sonority*,

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³¹ Ernest G. Porter, *Schubert's Piano Works*, London, Dobson Books Ltd, 1980, p. 6

³² „le fait qu'il soit parvenu, jeune compositeur, à créer son propre style à coté de ce voisin gigantesque” – Alfred Brendel, *Le Voile de l'Ordre. Entretiens avec Martin Meyer*, Christian Bourgois editeur, 2002, p. 156

sound emitting manners (*legato and staccato*) and pedalling.

2. Schubert's dynamics and sonority

The testimonies given by Schubert's friends help us to understand the composer's pianist conception of sound ideal better. They used to note: „A beautiful touch, a quiet hand, clear, neat playing”³³, „sometimes delicate and sometimes full of fire and energy.”³⁴ „He still belonged to the old school of good pianoforte players, whose fingers had not yet begun to attack the poor keys like birds of prey.”³⁵ Even if his sonatas include many scales and arpeggios, Schubert was not that composer to embrace the interpretation of virtuosity passages as a mere technical exercise, but longed after ones full of expression and sensitivity: „I hate that damn knocking that we find in the interpretation of some admirable pianists that brings no satisfaction for mind or soul” (quote from a letter of 25th of July 1825³⁶).

When he used to devise the works intended for piano, he would be concerned with creating an ideal sonority: „I would make sure that, the very moment my fingers touched the keys, they would start «singing», and if this is true, then it fills me with a great joy.” (quote from a letter of 25th of July 1825³⁷). When we search for that Schubert specific sonority, we need to get familiar with the piano construction and technique that was being used at the time so that we could adjust it to modern instruments. Schubert had access to the piano of 5 and ½ or 6 octaves with full sonority in medium register and with weaker extremes. The fuller sonority in the piano medium register being used at Schubert's time might have made the composer confer a solo role upon the middle voice in the second movement of the *Piano Sonata in A minor D 784* (b. 29-34): Ex. 1, *D 784*, p. 84, b. 29-34

The image shows a musical score for the second movement of Schubert's Piano Sonata in A minor, D 784, measures 29-34. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a right-hand accompaniment with ascending lines and a left-hand bass line. Dynamics include *f*, *p*, *decresc.*, and *pp*. A note in the right hand is marked "Idea melodica initiala".

For old pianos, the ascending direction of the right-hand accompaniment is associated with a dynamic decrease, achieved with minimal effort on interpreter's side due to the low sonority of the higher register. For modern pianos, both the dynamics and balance between voices needs recreating thanks to the differentiation of touch and arm weight. In his piano sonatas, Franz Schubert used an extremely diversified dynamic range: *pianississimo-fortississimo*. The use of Schubert specific sonority is closely connected with the achievement of delicate dynamic nuances, these ones causing problems for the pianist due to the dynamic range descending towards to *pianississimo* and even further by adding the *diminuendo*, as we may note it in the second movement of the *Piano Sonata in A-flat major D 557*: Ex. 2, *D 557*, second movement, p. 73, b. 65-70

³³ Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoires by his Friends*, London, The Macmillan Company, 1958, p. 146

³⁴ *Idem*, p.176

³⁵ *Idem*, p.146

³⁶ Dumitru Bughici, *Suita și sonata*, București, Editura Muzicală, 1965, p. 144

³⁷ Valentina Konen, *Schubert*, București, Editura muzicală, 1961, p. 149

One special feature of Schubert writing consists of the use of the *pianissimo* - *pianississimo* low dynamics over a large area, therefore creating tense atmosphere. Such an example is represented by the secondary thematic group (the first component – m. 27-46) in the first part of the Sonata in *G major op. 78 D 894*. The extended area where the *pianissimo* nuance (twenty bars) is carried out requires unitary thinking and low sonority with small crescendos and diminuendos that follow the melody outline. In the main theme of the same sonata, the *pianississimo* exposure of α motive (b.1-2) in the rhythmical-melodical varied stance (m. 10-15) may harm the low sonority due to the chordal structure of the musical speech. This section makes the pianist use a dynamical dosage thanks to the soft pedal and a careful use of the sustain pedal so as not to load harmonies; the accompaniment needs to follow a dynamic plan that is slightly low compared to the one of the melody line: Ex. 3, *D 894*, first movement, p. 164, b. 10-12

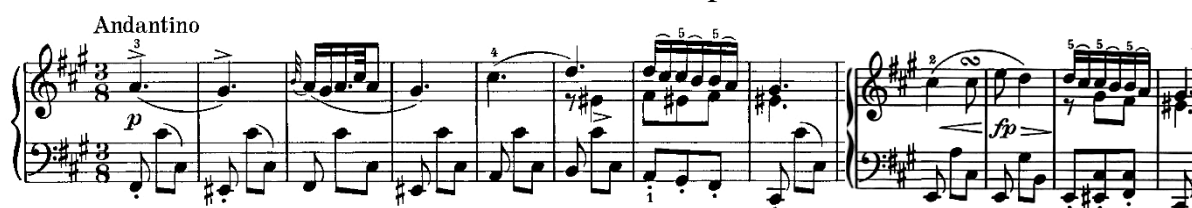
Schubert often uses *forte-piano* dynamic contrasts that need to be adjusted to the dynamic nuances dominating the section in which they are scored. Therefore, due to the dominant use of low dynamic nuances in C couplet (m. 255-311) in the fourth movement of Sonata in *A minor op.42 D 845*, *piano* and *pianissimo*, the *forte-piano* dynamic contrasts shall be thought of more as a small impulse that shall give colour to the musical speech: Ex.4, *D 845*, fourth movement, p. 116, b. 303-310

In the fuller dynamics, the *forte-piano* contrast is many times joined by an accent: Ex. 5, *D 537*, first movement, p. 3, b. 34-38

The *forte* with accent in bar 36 shall be carried out without any high-pitched sonority, with a strong attack by the fingers on the key basis, followed by a relaxing of the arm and a delicate touch of the fingers in *piano*. The musicologists that analysed the piano sonatas noted there are differences between drafts and finished form in the first editions. Un encounter such an example in the second movement of the Sonata in A major D 959 (b. 5-6 and 23-24) where we find it impossible, from the pianist point of view, to achieve a *crescendo* on C and *decrescendo* on D. In the final form, Schubert gives up the dynamic fluctuations in bars 5-6 and adds a *E sharp* at the right-hand alto, whereas in bars 23-24 he enriches the melody line with new sounds accompanied by a turn that makes dynamic nuancing impossible: Ex. 6, Schubert the first draft³⁸, D 959, second movement, b. 1-8 and b. 23-26



Ex. 7, Urtext, D 959, second movement, p. 235, b. 1-8 and m. 23-26



3. Accents, sforzando, forzando

The writing of the piano sonatas is very loaded with accents, *sforzando* or *forzando*, that require a different interpretation according to the dynamics they are rendered in. In the first movement of the Sonata in E-flat major op. 122 D 568, the accents can be performed in *pianississimo* by softly placing the fingers through a controlled weight of the arm: Ex. 8, D 568, first movement, p. 21, b. 99-104



To be able to achieve the chords in *fortissimo* in association with accents in the first movement of the Sonata in B major op. 147 D 575, the pianist needs to show a special interest for obtaining intonation clarity and round, elastic sonority, that is achieved through a strong attack by the fingers on the key basis by using the arms' weight: Ex. 9, D 575, first movement, p. 44, b. 8-14

³⁸ David Montgomery, *Franz Schubert's music in performance: compositional ideals, notational intent, historical realities, pedagogical foundations*, Pendragon Press, 2003, p. 9



Franz Schubert uses *sforzando* only in the low dynamic nuances, whereas *forzando* is used whatever the dynamics:

Ex. 10, *D 568*, second movement,
p. 30, b. 27



Ex. 11, *D 958*, second movement,
p. 204, b. 32



Ex. 12, *D 568*, second movement
p. 31, b. 121



Ex. 13, *D 894*, first movement,
p. 167, b. 54



4. Sound-emitting means: legato and staccato

Legato

In order to score legato, Schubert uses both the spring- shaped line and the word *ligato* (*Sonata in A minor op. 42 D 845*, last movement): Ex. 14, *D 845*, last movement, p. 111, b. 1-7



In order to confer a flow upon the chorus (b. 1-46), the interpreter shall play the entire section in one single breath in legato attack manner. Considering Schubert' indication *ligato* in bar 43 in the second movement of the *Sonata in A minor op. 164 D 537*, legato in bar 46 between the right-hand sounds A and G indicates an expressive highlight of the first beat: Ex. 15, *D 537*, second movement, p. 9 b. 43-47



In piano sonatas, Schubert's melody receives a special different expression through romanticism specific large breath deployments and through intense

chromaticism; in this respect, the secondary theme in the last movement of the Sonata in *A minor op. 143 D 784* may be an example.

Staccato

Franz Schubert used two types of signs to score *staccato*: $\overset{\cdot}{\uparrow}$ and \uparrow , a second sign being the moment when the composer wished a combination between *staccato* and *accent*:

$\overset{\cdot}{\uparrow}$ - Ex. 16, *D 894*,
first movement,
p. 165, b. 27-28



\uparrow - Ex. 17, *D 894*,
first movement,
p. 167, b. 56



In the first movement of the Sonata in *A major D 959*, Schubert's view is very clear when it comes to using the two types of signs: for the same thematic material, the composer uses $\overset{\cdot}{\uparrow}$ in *forte* as he also wishes to highlight the staccato notes so as to stress the determined nature of the sonata beginning, whereas in *pianissimo* he uses \uparrow so as not to load the low sonority:

Ex. 18, *D 959*, first movement
p. 224, b. 1-3



Ex. 19, *D 959*, first movement
p. 234, b. 331-333



Legato and staccato

In the second movement of Sonata in *A minor op. 164 D 537*, Schubert combines the two attack manners: *legato* and *staccato*: Ex. 20, *D 537*, second movement, p. 8, b. 1-16



Considering the *piano* nuance and songlike nature, the pianist needs to opt for a delicate interpretation, full of poetry, being concerned with the achievement of an expressive *legato* of the right-hand octaves in connection with the left-hand supple staccatos.

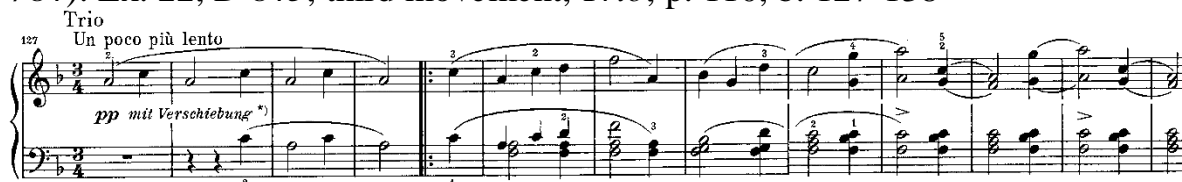
5. Pedalling

Even if the composer did not own a modern Viennese piano of the same type as the ones that Graf or Streicher made, he was aware of the expressive power pedals had. The piano sonatas contain rare indications for pedal or soft pedal, but this does not mean that Schubert wished that these should be the only cases they

can be used. At Schubert pedals are used so that a timber effect or special atmosphere can be created, and not merely as support for achieving the fingers' *legato*. In the second movement of the Sonata in *B-flat major D 960*, Schubert marks the *col pedale* indication; pianists need to be very careful to the way in which they use the pedal lest they should load the general atmosphere. To avoid agglomerating the *pianissimo* sonority and keep the contrast between *legato* and *pizzicato*, the *col pedale* indication needs to be used only for the inner voices that take the lead of the theme: Ex. 21, *D 960*, second movement, p. 268, b. 1-5



The soft pedal helps the pianist get a lower sonority, as well as a special quality of the sound. To indicate the use of soft pedal when he wishes to employ low nuances of *pianissimo* or *pianississimo*, Schubert marks *mit Verschiebung*³⁹ (in *Trio* in the third movement of the Sonata in *A minor op.42 D 845* - *pp mit Verschiebung*) or *sordini* (in the second movement of the Sonata in *A minor op.143 D 784*): Ex. 22, *D 845*, third movement, *Trio*, p. 110, b. 127-138



Ex. 23, *D 784*, second movement, p. 83, b. 1-8



Even if in sonata *D 784* the composer marks only *sordini*, for an expressive legato the contribution made by the sostenuto pedal is absolutely required. The pedalling of the beginning of sonata in *B major op. posth. 147 D 575* needs to consider both the harmony and the *staccatos* in the low nuances, when the pedal needs to be lifted for their clarity. It is an option that stresses even more the dynamic contrasts: *forte-piano* and *forte-pianissimo*; in the latter case the soft pedal must bring its contribution as well to a delicate sonority: Ex. 24, *D 575*, first movement, p. 44, b. 1-5



³⁹ „the *una corda* pedal” (soft pedal) - David Montgomery, *op.cit.*, p. 6

5. Conclusions

In summary, by showing an insight into Schubert's view of some aspects of the musical notation that was previously looked into, the pianists succeed in highlighting and conveying the composer's creative vision even better, thanks to the interpretation chosen.

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