

Performers and musical texts – a controversial relationship

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Abstract: The present study departs from the debates caused by the idea of performers’ faithfulness to composers’ intentions in the context of Western-European type academic music. In the musicological research of the past three decades there appeared significant changes in approaching the relationship between performers and musical texts, which I set out to comment from a performer’s perspective. I wish to outline a few answers to questions posed by the desideratum of faithful interpretation in the performing act of composers’ intentions:

- are musical texts faithful mirrors of the works conceived by composers? To what extent can performers know composers’ intentions from reading musical texts?
- what is the degree of freedom that performers can assume in interpreting musical texts noted by composers? To what extent are the two requirements of the performing act – respecting composers’ intentions and being creative – compatible?
- what does performers’ creativity consist of and how is it manifested?

Departing from the premise that the analysis of the relation between composition and research in performing a musical work can supply us with some answers to these questions, I set out to prove that:

- performers can be creative without encroaching on composers’ copyright;
- the analysis of musical texts opens a wide field for performers, in which their creativity can be manifested by knowing and observing the laws governing the make-up of the performed work.

Keywords: performer, musical text, composer, faithfulness, *Werktreue*, creativity, research, analysis.

1. Introduction

I started to work on this text while the 1st stage of the 18th edition of the Chopin Competition in Warsaw was taking place, one of the most prestigious and difficult piano competitions, which can propel young performers on the great concert stages of the world, in case they win a prize. A competition that around 400 pianists had signed up for, who then passed through two stages of preselection, so that (only!) 85 competitors entered the competition proper. Among these there were also winners of other same-league contests, such as those in Hamamatsu, Cleveland, Sydney or Tel Aviv. The 85 virtuoso youngsters only performed pieces by Chopin – a nocturne or a slow study, two

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fast studies and a more complex piece, a ballad or a scherzo or Fantasy op. 49, respectively. Therefore, during the first days of the competition, roughly the same pieces could be listened to tens of times live on the YouTube channel of the Chopin Institute. My daily obligations did not allow me to fully watch the stage but all competitors whom I managed to listen to had irreproachable pianistic technique and rigorously observed a pre-set scenario, mainly based on the indications from the last edition of Chopin's works, published under the aegis of the Chopin Institute in Warsaw. Most of them did convincing, sensitive but very similar performances, so that, upon listening to them, I gradually felt overcome by a sensation of monotony, of repletion even.

I tried to imagine what I would do if I were a member of the jury, how I could select the 40 or 45 competitors who should pass onto the second stage. Could I choose the best? And through what should they differentiate themselves from the others, who are very good in their turn? Maybe more than ever I realised the lack of meaning of such a hierarchy at this level and, most of all, the huge pressure that the competition industry exercises on young performers, thus removing them from the very essence of the performing act, which should be pure joy, the joy of discovering and sharing the beauty of music, of experiencing it at maximum intensity together with the public, without the obsession of assessment and hierarchy. And, especially, without the obligation of strictly observing the performing parameters agreed upon and imposed by the (almost always the same) professors, who float through the juries of the great competitions.

As previously mentioned, the competitors' performances were very similar. There were small differences in tempo from one competitor to the next, certain more subtle dynamic inflexions or, rarely, bolder agogics. Some stood out through more expressive mimics, not always concurring with the character of the music; in others, the tension of the competition, their concentration on the perfection of the execution was also reflected in their body language. I thought that, should I be in the jury of such a competition, I would select the competitors who can detach themselves from the pressure of the competition and can play with the spontaneity of a concert. This does not mean that performers are completely relaxed in a concert; the stage is a place, where feeling comfortable means something completely different than in daily life. But in a concert, performers dare more, because they know they are not graded and do not have to fit previously established patterns. But is that really the case? Do not audiences also have previously established patterns, do they not assess them in their turn along criteria maybe just as strict as a jury's? And, thus, we arrive at the other pressure factor, to which contemporary performers are subjected – comparisons with the reference performances imposed by the recordings industry and spread *en masse* through the internet nowadays. If the jury evaluates them departing from certain references, based mainly on the idea

of faithfulness towards the musical text and on certain performing traditions rooted in specialty education, audiences judge them according to references formed by listening to great artists' recordings. This situation is essentially due to the fact that current musical life – I am referring here to the area of academic music – is based on reproduction, not on creativity. The great majority of the works being played on concert stages around the world belongs to the past. In the past people went to concerts to listen to new works. Nowadays they go to listen to the same works, preferably composed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Their attention has moved from WHAT is being played to HOW it is being played. And, paradoxically, the public of academic music concerts does not wish to listen to something new, not even in what regards this HOW. Therefore, contemporary performers are in a kind of trap, caught in this net of rules and exigences, both from those who decide on their professional itinerary – professors, juries, agents – and from the audience, with their preconceptions. We should not wonder, therefore, that in recent years rebellious gestures of performers have appeared, who retract from performing traditions and try to come up with new readings of the musical text, who no longer fit the rules imposed by all these factors. Interesting opinions have also appeared in the area of musicology, of the research of the musical performance phenomenon, which promote an entirely different approach of the relationship between performers and musical texts. The radicalism of some opinions can be measured against the uniformisation produced on a global scale by the above-mentioned pressure factors. We come across expressions such as “performance police”, “standardising neoliberalism” or “conceptual imperialism”, all linked to the notion of musical work and to **the desideratum of performers' faithfulness to composers' intentions**. In order to understand how it has come to this, it is necessary to peek at an essential aspect of the history of performance, i.e. the way in which the relationship between performers and musical texts has evolved.

2. The avatars of musical texts – from sketches to icons

2.1. Musical notation – content and limits

Musical notation is defined as follows in *Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române*: “in a wide sense, a writing system for music featuring the totality of graphic signs allowing players a faithful realisation of composers' intentions; in a restricted sense, a system of writing musical sounds, which determines their position on the pitch scale” (***, *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* [The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language]). We also come across the same definition in *Dicționarul de termeni muzicali* [Musical Terms Dictionary] (***, 1984, p. 326). The wide-sense definition refers to both strata of musical notation – the descriptive and the prescriptive one – including the

idea of performers' faithful realisation of composers' intentions, which presupposes that some signs indicate the way in which the sounds inscribed in a score have to be executed. The restricted sense of the definition refers only to a facet of the descriptive stratum, the pitch of the sounds, without including their duration.

Initially, music was improvised and transmitted orally, each musician taking it over, adding or modifying as (s)he pleased the sonic material (s)he had heard. The troubadours were composers, poets and performers, modifying themselves with each new presentation the pieces they had created. Musical notation appeared from the necessity of offering a reference point to people performing in ensembles and out of didactic reasons. Only the main directions of the unravelling musical discourse were indicated, as details were added during the presentation of the piece in public, there practically not being a border between creative and performing acts. An example to this end is *basso continuo*, a fundamental practice of Baroque music, which allowed performers great freedom in relation to noted texts, permitting, even imposing creative participation.

Music was learned around a maestro, as apprentices copied notes, thus acquiring the rules of composition. Oftentimes, copyists modified an initial text, adding ornaments or modifying some melodic lines, so that there were differences between concomitantly circulating manuscripts. This practice was still habitual in Bach's time. But even the composers themselves used to send different versions to different publishing houses. Chopin's case, who published his works at the same time in Paris, London and Leipzig, is well-known. Often the three versions were not identical, this being the explanation out of which we notice differences between newer editions of Chopin's works, although all are based on primary sources.

The model of the composer, who presents her/himself the music (s)he composed can also be found in traditional music nowadays, while it mostly functioned in Western European academic music until the 18th century. It is perpetuated in the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century by virtuoso composers but then this phenomenon becomes increasingly rare, such cases being altogether exceptional in the landscape of academic music nowadays. The divorce of the two essential elements of music – composition and performance – is produced gradually, beginning with the second half of the 18th century, once a new character, the dilettante, asserts her/himself in musical life, who only executed music created by someone else. (S)he needed indications to know how (s)he should perform it. For a complete musician, a composer and performer, a score was just a reference, a sketch serving as a foundation for a performance, in which (s)he continued the creative process. This explains the fact that scores from the pre-classical period did not have performance indications. The prescriptive stratum of the

text was not necessary. And the practice of improvisation was also omnipresent in the performance of noted music. But a musician who was not a composer but only a player needed a notation with as many details as possible, in which every element of the discourse should be stipulated. We can observe this thing in Mozart's piano concerts. In the ones written to be performed by himself the score of the piano was noted summarily, in some bars there being marked just a sound, off of which a passage had to be improvised; cadences are not included in the score, while indications regarding performance, the prescriptive component of the text, lack altogether. However, in the concerts written for his pupils, the piano score is written in profuse detail with multiple indications regarding dynamics and articulation. For these concerts Mozart also writes the cadences, sometimes even several variants.

In this period the idea of performers' obligation to observe a composer's indications starts to assert itself. The fragment from a letter addressed by Mozart to his father on 14 November 1777 is well-known, in it the composer relating how he teaches one of his sonatas to one his pupils. "We shall have to work more on the *Andante*, for it is full of expression and must be played carefully and in good taste in the *forte* and *piano* parts, **according to indication.**" (Mozart, 1968, p. 35) (The emphasis in bold belongs to me.) In this quote we have one of the first formulations of what we nowadays call faithfulness to a musical text. Behind this desideratum lies the idea that a musical text would be a faithful mirror of the composer's intentions, which should be strictly observed. But one asks the question: to what extent can musical notation register **all** the nuances of the musical work imagined by the composer? To what extent can it lay on paper **everything** (s)he thought and imagined, in other words, does musical notation give composers the possibility of being faithful to themselves? In a discussion with professor Ioan Haplea, a reputed ethnomusicologist, he remarked the fact that "Music loses information through notation. As the sonic flow is noted through disparate signs, performers are called upon to fill that void through imagination".

As we come closer to nowadays, musical notation becomes increasingly florid, as composers try to register with maximum precision, through signs and words, the continuity of this flow, so that the prescriptive stratum of a musical text is ever denser, more florid. Enescu's writing is an example to this end. He tries to register and note very precisely a free discourse, often having an improvisational character specific to Eastern European music, using a notation system configured in the Western European space. In Fig. 1, extracted from *Sonata for piano in F sharp, op. 24, no. 1* one can notice the huge volume of information regarding dynamics, agogics, articulation featured in only twelve bars.

Fig. 1 George Enescu, *Piano Sonata in F sharp, op. 24, no. 1*, 1st movement, p. 6

The performer is being offered an increasing amount of information and is being allowed an ever more restricted space, in which (s)he can configure options, based on the conception according to which (s)he is only a mediator between the composer and the public, her/his role being only that of conveying to the audience the message encrypted in the signs of the score. This idea, out of which the obsession of faithfulness towards the musical text emanates, reaches a peak at the middle of the 20th century.

2.2. Musical works and the performers' role

Nowadays there is consensus among musicians – theoreticians and performers – on the fact that a text is not the same as the musical work, the latter being a complex phenomenon, which includes both the composer and the performer. Faithfulness towards the text has been replaced with **faithfulness towards the musical work**, *Werktreue*, a concept, which has generated new polemics. Lydia Goehr considers that the root of the concept of musical work are in Beethoven's creation and that they asserted themselves beginning with

the year 1800. In her and other musicologists' opinion, this concept transforms musical works in sacred monuments, which must be venerated and reproduced with maximum faithfulness. And the great mistake of contemporary musicians, be they practitioners or theoreticians, would consist in the fact that they also apply this concept to works composed before 1800. In reality, the idea of the uniqueness of the work, out of which the one of *Werktreue* also derives, appeared earlier, already in the 18th century. Mozart's letter, quoted above, is an argument to this end. But, definitely, the concept becomes dominant in Romanticism and is tied to the cult of the genius and of the original work, of the masterpiece. In this context, performers are wholly subordinated to composers, becoming secondary characters, an aspect also reflected in the treatises of music history, that are in fact treatises about compositions and composers, in which performers are practically inexistent. Modern musicology tries to modify this paradigm, introducing performers in the equation as a central element of music, which presupposes a repositioning towards the musical work, both the performer's and the musicologist's. This repositioning sometimes takes radical forms. In the book entitled *The imaginary museum of musical works*, Lydia Goehr states that the collocation *musical work* and everything that derives from it are a form of "conceptual imperialism": "[...] the view of the musical world the romantic aesthetic originally provided has continued, since 1800, to be the dominant view. This view is so entrenched in contemporary thought that its constitutive concepts are taken for granted. We have before us in fact a clear case of *conceptual imperialism*" (Goehr, 1992, p. 244).

But equally radical was also some 20th century musicians' attitude, who openly expressed their contempt towards performers. Schoenberg's statement is famous in this sense: "the performer is totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print"¹. I confess that I am downright shocked every time I read these lines. I find it hard to understand how it is possible that a composer think in this way, to elude an essential facet of the artistic act, which is communication, in the case of music, through live sounds. Nicholas Cook expresses his doubt about the seriousness of this statement but underlines the fact that the idea circulated in the era, also being present in the writings of other musicians, like Heinrich Shenker or Rudolph Kolish, a violinist together with whom Theodor Adorno intended to write a treatise about performance (Cook, 2013, p. 8).

¹ The statement is related by Dika Newlin, one of Schoenberg's last pupils, in her book: Dika Newlin, D. (1980). *Schoenberg Remembered: Diaries and Recollections (1938-76)*. New York: Pedragon Press, p. 164 (*Apud* Cook, 2013, p. 8).

It is very likely that Schoenberg and his contemporaries' idea appeared as a reaction to some performers' certain interventions in published musical texts, certain diversions from the letter of the score, still very fashionable in the performing practice from the first decades of the 20th century, which Schoenberg and his colleagues perceived as a veritable attempt on the composer's copyright. In this period, such statements, maybe not as firm, also appear under Debussy's, Ravel's or Stravinsky's signatures. That is why what is truly surprising is the fact that, upon listening to historical recordings, in which composers perform their own works, we ascertain that they themselves diverge from what they noted in scores. Numerous recordings of Scriabin, Prokofiev, Bartók, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, accessible on the YouTube channel, are telling examples to this end.

Reminiscent performing practices, like the arpeggiation of chords, voice shifting, adding melodic notes, double dotted rhythms, as well as very varied agogics not indicated in the score are frequent in these recordings. British musician Stuart Scott, a researcher of Scriabin's music, remarks: "[...] They recognized that Scriabin, unlike other concert pianists, was not interpreting the printed notes, but recreating his music as he played. In this way the listener was involved directly in the creation of the new music" (Scott, 2010). Therefore, when they were interpreting their own works, composers did not worry about faithfulness towards the noted text, which they generally required from performers, also continuing the creative process during the interpretative act. This practice of diverging from noted scores was also frequent among non-composing performers of that period. However, it has disappeared under the pressure of the desideratum of faithfulness toward musical works, towards noted texts (Scott, 2010).

3. The creative and researching performer

Composers' recordings bring contemporary performers, who wish to faithfully convey their intentions, in a state of total confusion. Which intentions, the noted ones or those resulting from recordings? What is the degree of freedom that performers can assume in relation to noted texts? We thus arrive at the essential question: **can performers be creative or must they only be players, who stifle any creative impulse?** Are they artists or merely artisans? And if they are creative, how is their creativity manifested? In *Dicționarul de Estetică Generală*, published in 1972 by Editura Politică, artistic interpretation is defined thus:

“Artistic interpretation: creative act through which the content and expression of a dramatic, choreographic, musical work or of a script is revealed. A. i. achieves a creative act through performers' original thinking and sensibility, making sensible for the public even that which

only **exists in texts**, scripts or scores in a virtual state. Sometimes passage to a living reality is thus ensured for works, which cannot acquire this quality unless through the act of interpretation. Exercised upon works created in time, a. i. can provide them with **actuality, in which both performers' personality and vision will be reflected.**" (***, *Dicționar de Estetică Generală* [Dictionary of General Aesthetics], 1972, p. 180)

The bold emphases belong to me. According to this definition, performers are creative. They make perceptible for the public realities, which are in a virtual state in scores. Audiences do not listen to scores but to that which performers offer them after reading and transposing them into sound. So, their creative acts depart from sonic realities imagined and noted by someone else. In Western European musical tradition, they do not simply interpret but interpret *something*. Therefore, in a first stage, they must permeate this *something* and try to understand it, familiarise themselves with it. In other words, they have to decode a message from the signs fixed in a score. This decoding process is generally associated with the analysis of musical texts, which is true but not totally or not in the usual understanding of the term. Because performers' analysis is different from musicologists', being carried out both at a rational and intuitive level through practice – through sensory perception and action, i.e. through studying an instrument/the voice/in an ensemble. The performers' analysis targets both structural and psychological, emotional aspects of a musical work and analytical processes are thus carried out all through the elaboration of a performance.

In the suggestively entitled book *SHUT UP 'N' PLAY*, Swedish researcher Stefan Östersjö uses the collocation *thinking-through-practice*, thus stating the research component included in musical interpretation (Östersjö, 2008). My professor from the National University of Music Bucharest, pianist Gabriel Amiraș, used to tell us that instrument study was laboratory work. And the great musician Robert Levin, during one of his master classes held at the Mozarteum University from Salzburg, told a student: "Use your imagination, be more demanding, and more searching!" We could say that performers do experimental research, which feeds the imagination necessary in order to fill the gaps in musical notation, as professor Haplea was mentioning. Performers build, through a continuous experiment, a sonic universe, which they firstly imagined from reading and analysing the score, but which then passes through multiple transformations in contact with their instrument/voice/ensemble, i.e. their tool or object through which they model this imagined sonic world. They try to subject this object/tool to the image they formed after analysing the musical text and their contact with this sonic object inspires them, enriches their perception and modifies their initial picture of the musical work. In the case of great performers, research and creativity are perfectly combined, as

András Schiff states: “musicology, fantasy and taste go hand in hand” (2020, p. 26). And Daniel Barenboim opines that “there can be no delimitation between thought and emotion, between reason and intuition in music – all these are combined in one unit” (2015, p. 253).

3.1. Score analysis – benefits and dangers

Much has been written recently about the role of score analysis in musical interpretation. Opinions are divided in this matter also. John Rink quotes Eugene Narmour, who claims that “Performers can never plumb the aesthetic depth of a great work without an intense scrutiny of its parametric elements.” (1988, p. 340) On the other hand, Alfred Brendel states that “[...] analysis should be the outcome of an intimate familiarity with the piece rather than an input of established concepts” (1976, p. 249). I believe that the analysis done by performers is itself this familiarisation that Brendel speaks about, because in it are combined thought and emotion. Analysing a musical work, performers approach it like a natural phenomenon, which allows itself to be understood. It is no longer for them an inexplicable miracle or an icon, which they worship. They decompose it and then recombine it. They reconstruct a process transited by a living being, a genius but a human, nonetheless. The work no longer has that supernatural aura, which overcomes them and prevents them from permeating its turns. It becomes familiar to them. In Daniel Barenboim’s opinion analysis in itself is a creative process: “What matters for a musician in the process of recreation is being capable of «re-composing» a composition, undoing it to bits and assembling it back together. This is always a creative process, a process that can help her/him permeate the composer’s world.” (2015, p. 252)

The danger signalled by the coryphaei in the field of interpretation studies would be found in the prescriptive effect of musical text analysis, which would lead to the idea of a single “correct” interpretation, an idea that Brendel actually also rejects in his statement. They consider that an analysis of a musical text should be a modality of asking yourself questions, of bringing possibilities to light, not of offering solutions. The British pianist and musicologist of Turkish origin Mine Doğan-Dack, one of the most radical voices of the new wave of musicology, gives a very tough verdict against the idea according to which the mode in which a musical piece must be interpreted results from the musical text itself, from the pitch and duration of sounds, i.e. from the intervallic and harmonic relations and from rhythmic structures, a very widely spread concept in the 20th century. For instance, Heinrich Schenker claimed that: “Performance directions are fundamentally superfluous, since the composition itself expresses everything that is necessary.” (Doğan-Dack, 2015) Doğan-Dack also quotes Russian pianist and composer Samuel Feinberg, who stated: “This musical notation in itself tells a pianist so much

that if he is capable of assimilating it, then all the composer's other indications regarding performance become self-evident... This means that interpretation [depends]... only on the notes themselves, which any true performer can read, hear, and make perfect sense of." (Doğantan-Dack, 2015) In the British musicologist's conception and in that of other equally radical musicologists like Nicholas Cook or Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, promoters of freeing performers from the slings of the concept of faithfulness to a composer's intentions, this type of analysis with a prescriptive goal, which would lead to the existence of a single correct interpretation, would lie at the base of the crisis, which academic music currently crosses, being the main cause of strangling performers' creativity, of equalising and standardising interpretations. I would like to dwell on this idea in what follows. Let us see whether careful study of all parameters of a musical text does lead to a single possible interpretation, reducing performers' creativity to annihilation.

3.2. The relation between elements of musical discourse and means of expression

The means of expression are grouped in pairs – tempo and agogics, dynamics and timbre, phrasing and articulation – and constitute the variable elements of a musical text. In what follows, I will attempt to emphasise the way in which these elements can be deduced from the invariable parameters of a musical text – melody, rhythm, harmony, texture – and what the degree of precision of such deductions and the margin of freedom, respectively, is, which they allow performers.

Let us take, for instance, tempo. A first element that can guide us, for instance, is metre. A 2/2 time signature presupposes a slower tempo than 2/4, as the duration of the time unit is greater. For example, a courante in the Italian style in the 3/4 time signature will have a faster tempo than one in the French style in the 3/2 time signature. On the other hand, the 2/2 time signature will generate a more alert rhythm than the 4/4 time signature, since, although it also contains four crotchets, it has a single accent. This principle is also applied to the relation between the 6/8 versus the 3/8 time signatures. A musical discourse in 6/8 will have more fluence than one in 3/8, on the other hand the 3/8 time signature will generate a more alert tempo than the 4/4 one. And examples can continue. Another important element is rhythmic structure. If this is very complex and agglomerated, the tempo must be such that it allows its perception entirely. A simple rhythmic structure or with large values will allow a swifter tempo. Of course, other factors enter the discussion, such as tonality, harmonic rhythm, the registres in which the discourse is carried out and, especially, the density of the texture. A dense texture, polyphonic or chordal, requires a slower tempo, so that hearing can perceive the complexity of information. Another element of writing, which orients us in choosing

tempo, is harmonic rhythm – the frequency with which harmony changes. A discourse in which changes appear at great distances will require a swifter tempo than one in which the change in harmony is very frequent. We can deduce, as a general principle, that **tempo depends upon the density of information** contained by the musical text within its sections.

The profile of melodic lines is also a hint regarding tempo. Continuous and sinuous lines, of vocal origin, with a lyrical character, will require a calmer tempo, while zig-zag lines or lines interrupted by frequent pauses suggest a more lively tempo. Dynamics also represent a factor, which influences tempo. Ample sonorities require more time in order for the details they incorporate to be perceptible. Daniel Barenboim remarks: “When there are great dynamic contrasts, as it is in fact recommended in music, tempo is also influenced.” (2015, p. 246) He also opines that “[...] tempo is only a part of a whole. It relates to the whole, it is not an independent, objective force” (Barenboim, 2015, p. 246).

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B Flat Major, KV 333. The score is in 4/4 time and marked 'Allegro'. It consists of three systems of music. The first system starts with the tempo marking 'Allegro' and the text 'Entstanden in Linz, Ende 1783**'. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system shows a more complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand.

Fig. 2 W. A. Mozart, *Piano Sonata in B Flat Major, KV 333*, 1st movement, mm. 1-10

Let us take as an example the first theme from the 1st movement of Mozart's *Sonata in B Flat Major, KV 333* (Fig. 2). Even if we do not see the composer's indication, we can deduce that, given the 4/4 time signature, the vocal-type melodic line with a lyrical character, the slow harmonic rhythm – a

fitting harmony – and the airy texture with the accompaniment in values of equal quavers, the ideal tempo would be a fluent but not too fast one, so according to Mozart's indication, *Allegro*, without nuancing of the *assai* or *vivace* type, which would indicate a very fast tempo.

Of course, within this indication there are variations, depending on the character, which we wish to imprint – lyrical or more recitative, dialogue or playful, all these nuances being able to be, in their turn, deduced from the text, which, we can see, opens a semantic field, in which performers' creative individuality can be expressed.

As regards dynamics, we observe that we have no indications from the composer. We know that in this period pieces usually began in *forte*, if no other sonority was indicated. But any dynamic indication has a high degree of relativity. How *forte*, what kind of *forte*? Given the singable character of these theme, even in case it is thought out as more recitative, the choice of the general nuance should rather go towards a *poco forte*. But its intensity will vary from one bar to the next, depending on the harmonic relations.

The harmonic structure of the first phrase is I-II-V-I. The phrasal accent can be either in the second or the third bar. I would choose the second bar, because the second scale step appears to me more tense than the dominant in this case (also bringing a darker nuance through the minor chord). The melodic drawing also pleads in favour of this choice. But an increase in intensity in the third bar on the harmony of the dominant is also possible, without being wrong. Therefore, within this *poco forte cantabile* dynamic fluctuations take place, ampler or more reduced according to performers' vision.

Another important aspect is that of microdynamics, which we can deduce from the harmonic relations and from articulation. With the exception of bars 6, 8 and 10, all the others begin with a sigh motif, with a time lag on the first beat, i.e. with an expressive, not only metric accent. In these sigh motifs the first sound can be prolonged a little, while the second will be lighter and shorter. The legato arches presuppose a *descrescendo*, a fact mentioned in 18th century treatises. The hierarchy of these accents and *descrescendi* depends, however, on the above-mentioned harmonic relations, on the harmony that we consider to be the most tense. Therefore, here is a very complex spectre of factors, which decide the dynamic profile of phrases but which are, however, relative, offering again quite a large space of options for performers.

The rhythmic structure of phrases and the melodic drawing also offer us clues regarding dynamics. Musical rhetoric teaches us that long sounds have greater weight than short ones, so differences in intensity appear depending on the duration of sounds. We observe that in the second phrase – from bar five – a rhythmic diminution is taking place (also joined by an acceleration of the harmonic rhythm), a more dynamic discourse, which, through an energetic ascent in semiquavers, reaches the highest point of the melodic line in the 8th

bar. As such, the necessity of a *crescendo* appears natural, which prepares the climax of the theme in the 9th bar on the harmony of the dominant.

Of course, a talented performer also reaches these decisions intuitively but score analysis, this awareness of the connexions between the elements of musical discourse and the means of expression that a performer has at her/his disposal offers them certain security, which they absolutely need in the interpretative act. A performer also needs rational arguments. I am convinced that this type of analysis – I would call it “by connexion” – and the certainty resulting from here, confers to performers additional expressiveness, as such more force of impact on listeners.

To what extent the conception of an interpretative strategy departing from such connexions presupposes a limitation of performers’ creativity is difficult to stipulate. I think it depends in great measure on the performer, on their imagination, on the culture and temperament. What I can say, however, from my own experience is that when I started to become aware of the way in which the elements of writing are reflected on the means of expression, I felt increasingly free, both as a performer and as a teacher. An act of creation presupposes not only inspiration but also lucidity, order, structure. And it presupposes observing certain rules regarding the semantics and grammar specific to every language. When you have assimilated them, they become a mother tongue, in which you can express yourself freely. I consider that the danger signalled by the above-mentioned researchers originates in a system of learning, in truth prescriptive and restrictive, but not out of excessive respect for a composer’s work and intentions but from not understanding some rules of expression and, implicitly, the necessity of observing them. Pupils are in the situation of an actor who would receive indications how to interpret a role in a foreign language they do not know. Of course, the actor will not dare to stray from these indications, because (s)he does not know what (s)he is saying. In order to feel free and creative, (s)he should know the language in which (s)he plays her/his role, to understand the sense of the phrases (s)he is uttering.

In 1842 Carl Czerny published a work entitled *Die Kunst des Vortrags der älteren und neueren Klavierkompositionen oder Die Fortschritte bis zur neuesten Zeit* (The art of interpreting older and newer piano compositions or progress until the present time). The second and third chapters of the work are dedicated to Beethoven’s works (Czerny, 1963)² and constitute a document of inestimable value, given that the author was Beethoven’s pupil, worked most of his works with him and listened to him countless times. In the conclusions of this volume, Czerny states:

² The volume features the second and third chapters from *Die Kunst des Vortrags der älteren und neueren Klavierkompositionen oder Die Fortschritte bis zur neuesten Zeit*, Diabelli u. Comp. Vienna, 1842, reedited and commented by Paul Badura-Skoda.

“If several good actors interpret the same role (for instance Hamlet) they will differ in several details. One will emphasise sadness, another irony, a third one madness a. s. o. And yet, each one of these representations can be satisfying, if it is correct in what is essential. With regard to the interpretation of classical works also, in this case Beethoven’s, some things depend on a performer’s individuality (on condition that they master a certain degree of virtuosity, for a fumbler cannot aspire to a spiritual interpretation). As such, one will insist on humour, another on seriousness, a third one on sensibility, a fourth one on bravery etc. but the one who can combine them all is definitely the most valuable.” (Czerny, 1963, p. 120)³

After which Czerny stipulates that there are, however, three mandatory conditions, that all other details depend on: an adequate tempo, observing Beethoven’s indications (especially from his last works) and perfect mastery of piano technique. “By observing these requirements, performers can be certain that they will not lose anything from the spirit of Beethoven’s music.” (Czerny, 1963, p. 120)⁴ We observe on the one hand that Czerny understands the fact that a musical work can have multiple senses and interpretations, on the other hand, the idea of faithfulness towards the composer’s intentions is stated pithily. In fact, the whole volume was born out of Czerny’s wish to convey Beethoven’s intentions to posterity, considering himself entitled to assume this responsibility. But for him observing Beethoven’s indications is the *sine que non* condition of understanding and conveying the **spirit** of his **music**.

4. “The radical interpretation”, repositioning towards musical texts

As I have mentioned, in recent years a paradigm change is observed in musicological research, from an approach centred on musical works on that which emphasises the phenomenon on musical performance. The dominant concept in the area of contemporary academic music, according to which performers are only mediators between composers and audiences, found in total subordination towards composers, is vehemently fought by an

³ “Wenn mehrere gute Schauspieler eine und dieselbe Rolle darstellen (z: B: den Hamlet) so wird meistens Jeder in der Auffassung derselben von dem Andern in manchen Einzelheiten abweichen. Der Eine wird Schwermuth, der Andre die Ironie, der Dritte den verstellten Wahnsinn, u:s:w: vorzüglich hervorheben. Und doch kann jede dieser Darstellungen in ihrer Art vollkommen befriedigend sein, wenn nur die Hauptsich richtig ist. Auch beim Vortrag klassischer Compositionen, und vorzüglich Beethoven’schen, hängt Manches von der Individualität des Spielers ab. (Wobei wir bei Allen einen gewissen Grad von Virtuosität vorsetzen: denn der Stümper kann an keine geistige Auffassung denken). Demnach kann Einer den Humor, der Andre den Ernst, der Dritte das Gefühl, der Vierte die Bravour etc: vorzüglich verherrschen lassen, - aber wer Alles zu vereignigen weiss, ist allerdingt der Beste.”

⁴ “Mit der Anwendung dieser drei notwendigen Eigenschaften kann man sicher sein, den Geist Beethovens nirgends zu verfehlen.”

increasingly numerous group of researchers. Nicholas Cook considers that at present music is treated as “intellectual property”, which has to be “delivered safely from composers to audiences”, an idea, which would be linked to a capitalist mentality, in the sense of investment, which has to generate profit. Through the proliferation of recordings, music becomes a product consumed under the conditions of private comfort, loses its social, processual, active participatory, performative character. The accent falls on the way in which texts are reproduced, not on musical phenomena per se (Cook, 2001). The remedy proposed by Mine Doğantan-Dack is what she calls “radical performance”, which would free performers and would give them the possibility of expressing their creativity, thus moving interest from product (musical works) to process (performance).

In her attempt to prove that a musical work can also have meaning even if the composer’s indications are not observed, Mine Doğantan-Dack recorded *Rachmaninoff’s Musical Moment op. 16 no. 5*, a lyrical, meditative piece, having the tempo indication *Adagio sostenuto* in a fast tempo, in which, as the author remarks, other performance parameters also change, the piece thus acquiring a restless, exalted character, one totally different from the one it has in the composer’s interpretation⁵. What the British researcher wishes to prove is the fact that reading the score can and must lead to a multitude of possible variants, not only to an “official” one imposed by the “performance police” (Leech-Wilkinson, 2012). She states:

“I have attempted to come up with a reading that makes musical sense *as an example of classical music*, while radically departing from the established tradition of performing this piece (Audio example: performance of Rachmaninoff’s *Musical Moment Op. 16 No. 5*). The fact that it still works as a persuasive piece of classical music is sufficient to reveal the ‘untruth’ of the traditional discourse that stipulates a one-to-one correspondence between notated symbols and their performance interpretation and expression.” (Doğantan-Dack, 2015, p. 37)

The representatives of this orientation in contemporary musicology, most of them researchers-performers, propose a new approach of musical texts, similar to what happens in theatre. They consider that scores should be treated as scripts, as frameworks, which would only serve as starting points for the creation of a performance. This approach seems on first sight a return to the attitude towards text from before the period in which the concept of musical work asserted itself, that in which scores neither featured performance indications, nor were pitch and duration references stipulated absolutely, performers being thus co-creators of musical discourses. Of course, the social

⁵ The recording done by Mine Doğantan-Dack is accessible on the site: <https://challengingperformance.com/interviews-recordings/mine-dog%cc%86antan-dack/>

and cultural context was very different. Let us not forget that musicians were composers and performers at the same time and scores did not feature indications regarding performance, so one could not ignore or deny them. Yet performance was still subjected to certain quite strict rules, as can be deduced from the treatises of the 17th and especially 18th centuries.

In recent decades the trend of historically informed performance has reconsidered and promoted interpretative practices like the improvisation of ornaments and cadences, varied repetitions, the diversity of articulations. The key to the success of this current, which gradually becomes the new mainstream, likely consists exactly in this freedom of expression it offers to performers, who can thus manifest their creativity, at the same time serving the spirit of the music they perform. This trend has led to very different performances of works from past eras, practically conferring them a new life and through the use of historical instruments it has instilled a welcome timbral variety in the standardised sonority of present-day recordings. Although, according to some opinions, this trend has stated a new domination, that of theoreticians, therefore a new system of restrictions, which would limit freedom of expression, in reality the performances full of fantasy and colour that it has generated completely contradict such opinions.

5. Conclusions

Certainly, the world of academic music crosses a period of crisis and the new research regarding performance also constitutes a reflection of this crisis. I believe that the real problem is not in performers' relationship with musical texts in general but, on the one hand, in the quality and attractiveness of contemporary works, on the other hand in the way in which professional performers are educated. The fact that it is always the same pieces, preferably from past eras, that are listened to in concert halls or in the intimacy of one's home says something about the crisis of contemporary musical works. What is the cause of this refuge in a past to which the trend of historically informed performance confers new life? Why do we not wish to preponderantly listen to the music of our days? The standardisation of performances cannot be avoided when millions of children and students learn to play the same pieces, which audiences always wish to listen to. A certain degree of uniformisation is inevitable. It could (partially) be avoided through another way of training future professional musicians, not through rebellious gestures of the "radical performance" type.

What the researchers of the phenomenon of musical performance propose, I am especially referring to the idea of radical performance, reminds me one of my student's lines, whom I had asked why he was playing *subito piano* in a Mozart sonata when *forte* was noted in the score. His answer was: *for it to be more interesting!* Creativity in performing

Western European type academic music should be cultivated through education, not by encouraging arbitrary interventions in the prescriptive stratum of musical texts. It should be based on knowing the laws according to which musical pieces from different eras are built. I completely agree with those who claim that any performer should at least have minimum knowledge of composition, irrespective of whether he is talented in this field or not. More emphasis should be placed on improvisation and on a certain type of analysis of musical texts, in which one should insist on the connection between sign and sound, between structural elements and expression. The rift created in time between theory and practice and which has increasingly deepened in young musicians' education has led to the centring of instrumental and vocal training on HOW one plays, without real preoccupation for WHAT is being played. Young musicians should be educated to become aware of the way in which the work they are learning is built and the way in which its meanings are modified depending on the modifications in performance parameters. The development of their imagination and artistic sensibility through connexions with other artistic field should be targeted. In the last ten years I taught a course entitled Repertory Analysis, in which I have had these objectives in mind. But I have come up against students' inertia, who come after twelve years, in which they have become accustomed to mechanically studying a very restricted repertory, which they "polish" for months or years for exams or contests, without knowing exactly what they are actually after.

For any professional performer the fact that interpretative acts are creative is obvious but in Western European musical tradition they inevitably reference pre-existing musical texts, so they suffer certain restrictions. Understanding these restrictions must be based on profound knowledge of musical texts and the laws governing them. The radical performances that some researchers, like Mine Doğantan-Dack propose, who approach texts as scripts, risk to become paraphrases, arrangements or reminiscences, as Liszt would name them. They raise an ethical issue: do performers have the right to ignore composers' indications or even knowingly act against them?

My intention is not to provide a definitive answer to this question. However, I would like to mention an aspect less discussed in specialty literature, i.e. the fact that when a performer decides to permeate the universe of a musical work and to share their vision on it with an audience, they do it out of very special, I would say even obsessive, attachment for that work. The way in which this process of assimilating and rendering the musical work will be carried out will agree with the performer's personality, with their sensibility and musical culture and general knowledge and will create a version different from that of other performers. To what extent it

agrees with what the composer thought and noted is very difficult to appreciate. But one thing is certain: musical works live through all these performances, which always invest new meanings in it, and through those listening to it, who in their turn each interpret it differently.

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