

Notes on Notes: The Musicology of Performance

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Traditional musicology *versus* performance

- Composer-centred, work-focused, score-based
- Music as literature, not performing art
- Performers expected to reproduce musical works as originally conceived by composers

‘a thorough knowledge of all laws of composition ... will enable the performer to recreate the composition’

Heinrich Schenker, *The Art of Performance*, 1911



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The AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music

The AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) was established on 1 April 2004, supported by a 5-year grant of just under £1m from the [Arts and Humanities Research Council](#).

A partnership of [Royal Holloway, University of London](#) (host institution) with [King's College, London](#) and the [University of Sheffield](#), CHARM's aim was to promote the musicological study of recordings, drawing on a wide range of approaches ranging from computational analysis to business history; [click here](#) for further details.

Its activities included a major [discographical project](#), [residential symposia and other events](#), and [research projects](#).

Through this website you can discover more about these activities, access our [online discography](#) and [library of ex-copyright recordings](#), see details about our [publications](#), or find information about [early recording history](#) and [methods for analysing recordings](#).

CHARM researchers won a further five years of funding from 2009 under the AHRC's Phase 2 Research Centres scheme, but with a new research programme focussing on the musicological study of live performance. This changed focus is reflected in the successor centre's name: the [AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice \(CMPCP\)](#). The new Centre will begin on 1 October 2009.



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AHRC RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AS CREATIVE PRACTICE

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CMPCP – main research questions

- In what ways are performers creative?
- How does their creative activity vary across different cultures, idioms and conditions?
- How do musical performances take shape over time, through the exercise of individual and collective creativity?



research



Musicology of performance



Performance of musicology



practice

Sources of information about performing

- 1) surviving instruments
- 2) iconographical material
- 3) historical records of various kinds (e.g. household accounts, box office ledgers, contracts etc.)
- 4) literary sources such as critical writings, letters and diaries
- 5) practical treatises and instruction books
- 6) theoretical treatises
- 7) scores, including autograph and scribal manuscripts, original and subsequent impressions of first editions, and later editions
- 8) audio and video recordings

Information about:

- 1) notation
- 2) articulation
- 3) melodic inflection
- 4) accentuation
- 5) tempo and rhythmic alteration
- 6) other aspects of technique, related to physical structure of instruments and matters of instrumental and vocal production
- 7) ornamentation and extemporised embellishment
- 8) improvisation more generally, including continuo accompaniment

Other issues (including 'conditions and practices' – Lawson and Stowell 1999)

- 1) pitch, tuning and temperament
- 2) performance format (e.g. solo versus ensemble)
- 3) venues and programming
- 4) listening habits
- 5) economics
- 6) patronage
- 7) teaching institutions and the practices of individual teachers
- 8) music publishing
- 9) other forms of publishing
- 10) performance domains (e.g. private versus public)
- 11) relationship between 'popular' and 'art' music

Positivist [performance practice] scholarship is interested in letter, not spirit..., the goal being avowedly to determine 'What was done', not 'What is to be done', let alone 'How to do it'. Direct application to actual performance is not the primary aim of such studies. They are not 'utilitarian' but 'pure research'.

Taruskin 1988: 201

pure research
versus
applied research

Case study

The music of Chopin in
performance: recreating
an aesthetic in sound



Key questions

- 1 How did Chopin play his music?
- 2 How has Chopin's music been played and edited by others since it was composed?
- 3 How might [as opposed to 'should'] we play Chopin today?

Chopin in performance: sources of information

- 1) surviving instruments
- 2) iconographical material
- 3) historical records of various kinds (e.g. concert programmes)
- 4) literary sources such as critical writings, letters and diaries
- 5) practical/theoretical treatise (unfinished)
- 7) scores, including autograph and scribal manuscripts, original and subsequent impressions of first editions, and later editions
- 8) audio and video recordings (c.1900 – present)

	Érard	Pleyel
Action	Rapid repetition of key ‘Clean’ articulation Intended to maximise brilliance	Evenness, facility Delicate, sensitive, responsive depression of key Close in touch to Viennese pianos
Sonority	Full Resonant Rich Robust	Nuanced Soft, velvety Veiled Intimate
Use	Concert hall	Salon

from Thierry Maniguet, ‘Érard et Pleyel, deux visions d’un même art?’ (Paris, 2006)

Chopin's performance style: contemporary critics

- facility, fluency, elegance, grace, light rapidity, lucidity (Fétis, Escudier, Hallé)
- supple, mellow touch (Marmontel)
- lack of ... sonorous power, 'draws little sound from the instrument' (Hiller, Fétis)
- 'perfect freedom', abandon, naturalness, ad libitum playing, 'misty fluidity' (Hallé, Moscheles, Marmontel)
- modulations in sound, nuances, contrasts, 'diverse shadings' (Marmontel, Moscheles, Escudier)
- breathing – 'his *piano* breathes forth' (Moscheles)

George Sand, *Impressions et souvenirs* (1841)

Chopin talks little and rarely of his art; but, when he does talk about it, it is with an admirable clearness and a soundness of judgement and of intentions... He promises us, however, to write a method in which he will discuss not only the skills of the profession, but also the doctrine. Will he keep his word?

Chopin, *Esquisses pour une méthode de piano*,
ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger (Paris, 1993)

- Chopin: radical simplification of technique
- Technique 'in the service of musical expression'
- Chopin: self-taught as a pianist
- 'Healthy pragmatism', 'without being taken down the false paths of the schools or systems then in force'
- 'Listening control', in order to obtain and 'shade (*bien nuancer*)' 'the most beautiful quality of sound that is possible'
- Legato and cantabile playing, based on *bel canto* singing
- Flexibility, suppleness, no constraints

- 'All of Chopin's thinking about technique stems from the suitability of the structure of keyboard and the shape of the fingers as of the hand.'
- Combination of black and white keys supports and facilitates legato
- Scale of B major (not flat, uncontroled C major) serves as referential collection
- Paradigmatic position of right hand: E–F#–G#–A#–B
- In this position, the long fingers play the black keys, the hand is balanced and the equal depression of the five fingers/keys facilitated.
- Hand is gently rounded and supple, in contrast to stiffness engendered by extending the fingers

Fingering:

- Each finger has a unique conformation, a 'special touch'
- Exploit natural strengths and compensate for innate weaknesses of each finger
- Chopin: 'there as many different sounds as there are fingers'
- Third finger as midpoint of the hand and a pivotal point of support (*point d'appui*)
- Index finger also a *point d'appui*

- Chopin: 'Le poignet [:] la respiration dans la voix.'
- Emilie von Gretsches (letter of 29 April 1844):

Today Chopin showed me another new, simple way of obtaining a marvellous result. I had felt in what respect my playing was lacking, but without knowing the solution. True to his principle of imitating great singers in one's playing, Chopin drew from the instrument the secret of how to express breathing. At every point where a singer would take a breath,⁷⁹ the accomplished pianist [. . .] should take care to raise the wrist so as to let it fall again on the singing note with the greatest suppleness imaginable. To attain this *souplesse* is the most difficult task I know. But once you succeed in doing it, then you laugh with joy at the beautiful sound, and Chopin exclaims, 'C'est cela, parfait! merci!'

Gretsches/Grewingk, pp. 9–10

From Eigeldinger, *Chopin Pianist and Teacher*, p. 45

Physical approach / musical conception

Body $\longleftrightarrow$ **Mind/‘ear’**

Chopin on music and language

- ‘thought expressed through sounds’
- ‘the expression of our perceptions through sounds’
- ‘the manifestation of our feelings [*sentiment*] through sounds’
- ‘the indefinite (indeterminate) language [*parole*] of humans is sound’
- ‘the indefinite language [*langue*] – music’
- ‘[W]e use sounds to make music just as we use words to make a language.’

Chopin insisted above all on the importance of correct phrasing. Wrong phrasing would provoke the apt analogy that it seemed to him as if someone were reciting a laboriously memorized speech in an unfamiliar language, not merely failing to observe the right quantity of syllables, but perhaps even making full stops in the middle of words. Similarly, by his illiterate phrasing the pseudo-musician reveals that music is not his mother tongue but something foreign and unintelligible to him; and so, like that orator, he must relinquish all hope of his speech having any effect on the listener.

Carl Mikuli, 1879

The Chopin sources

‘Autograph’ manuscripts

- sketches
- rejected drafts (complete or incomplete)
- manuscripts provided to publishers to prepare editions (*Stichvorlagen*)
- presentation manuscripts (e.g. in albums)
- compositional variants

First editions – including proofsheets, first impressions and subsequent impressions

- French
- German/Austrian
- English
- other (Polish, Italian, etc.)

Glosses in students’ scores

- corrections of mistakes in printed sources
- fingerings, pedallings etc. for the individual student
- compositional revisions and other variants

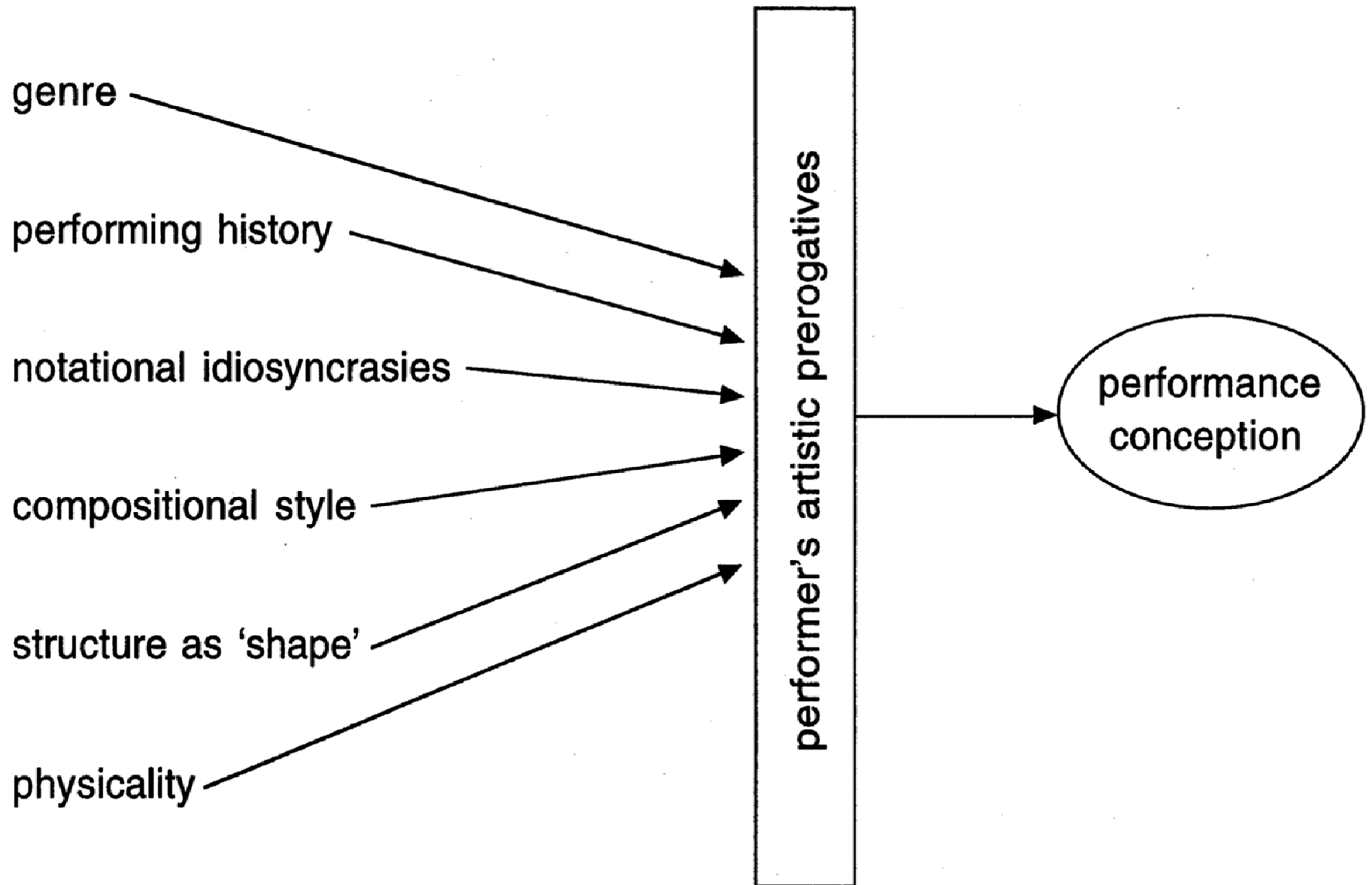
Select recordings of the Prelude in E minor Op. 28 No. 4 (see Rink 2001)

	<u>Pianist</u>	<u>Recording date</u>	<u>Issue number</u>	<u>Duration</u>
1	Lily Kraus	1937	Parlophone R20451	2' 08"
2	Vladimir Ashkenazy	1992	Decca 436 821-2	1' 52"
3	Vladimir Ashkenazy	c.1976–8	Decca 417 476-2	2' 00"
4	Alexander Brailowsky	1952	RCA GL85268	1' 50"
5	Stefan Askenase	1953	DGM 19002	1' 55"
6	Benno Moiseiwitsch	1949	Gramophone C3905	2' 00"
7	Cyprien Katsaris	1992	Sony SK53355	2' 06"
8	Billy Mayerl	1937	Columbia DX082	1' 21"
9	Shura Cherkassky	1975	Decca 433 653-2	1' 47"
10	Alfred Cortot	1926	EMI CDZ 767360 2	1' 58"
11	Alfred Cortot	1934	EMI CDH 761050 2	1' 48"
12	Alfred Cortot	1942	EMI CDZ 7673642	1' 36"
13	Raoul Koczalski	c. 1938	Archiphon ARC-119/20	1' 18"
14	Martha Argerich	1973	BBC Radio 3 (4 September)	2' 06"

Conclusions

- The score is not 'the music', nor is 'the music' fully represented by the score.
- Not all editions of a piece are the same.
- Multiple interpretations of the contents of a source may be legitimate, even if only one can be adopted in performance.
- The study of musical performance needs to move beyond the notion of 'interpretation' – of scores, of works, of composers' intentions – towards an understanding of performance as a *creative practice*.

'Refraction' in performance (from Rink, 2004)



research



Musicology of performance



Performance of musicology



practice

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