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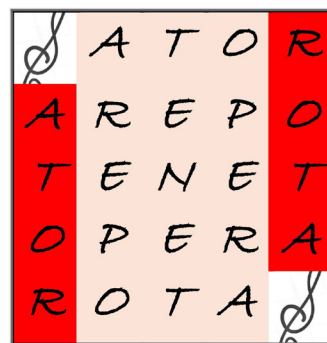


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Gnesin Russian Academy of Music

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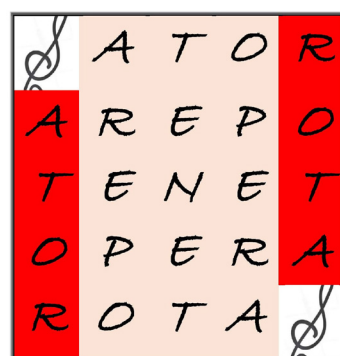


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Российская академия музыки
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Современные проблемы музыкознания

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Contemporary Musicology is an open-access peer-reviewed scholarly online journal.

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The Journal publishes research studies in the field of music history and theory, music performance, as well as the methodology of music studies in interdisciplinary contexts. The Journal's scope corresponds to the subject categorie of 5.10.3. *Types of Art (Musical Art) (Art History)*.

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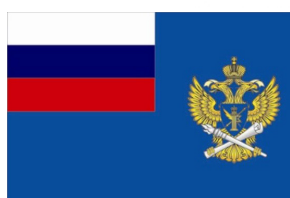
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Журнал «Современные проблемы музыкознания» — сетевое периодическое рецензируемое научное издание открытого доступа.

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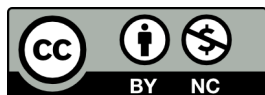


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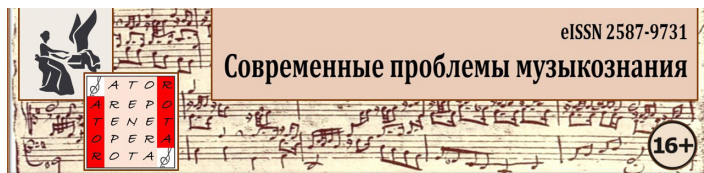
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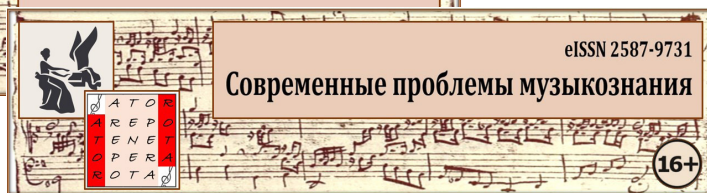
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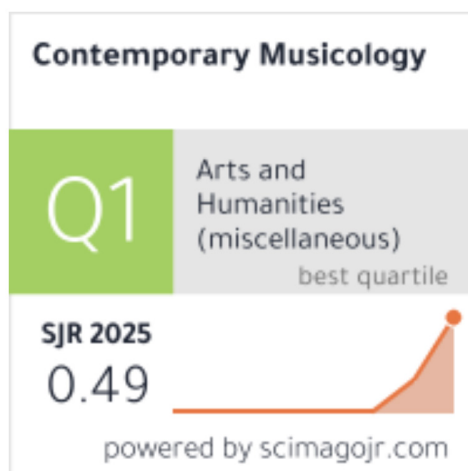
The journal *Contemporary Musicology* has been ranked in the first quartile (Q1) of the SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2025), a global ranking of scholarly journals. This achievement has been made possible through our collaborative work, above all the high quality of articles contributed by authors from many countries, as well as the professionalism of our reviewers and members of the Editorial Board. Scholarly collaboration, the free exchange of ideas, and discussion of current issues in musicology remain the highest priorities of our journal. The Editorial Team extends its sincere congratulations to all scholars whose contributions have made this achievement possible and looks forward to continuing productive academic exchange.

Irina Susidko

Дорогие друзья!

Журнал «Современные проблемы музыкознания» в мировом рейтинге научных изданий SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2025) вошел в первый квартиль (Q1). Это стало возможным благодаря нашей совместной работе, прежде всего высокому качеству статей, написанных авторами из разных стран, а также профессиональной работе рецензентов и членов редакционной коллегии. Научное сотрудничество, свободный обмен мнениями, обсуждение актуальных проблем музыковедения остаются главным приоритетом для нашего издания. Редакция журнала поздравляет всех ученых, внесших вклад в достижение высокого результата, и надеется на продолжение продуктивной творческой работы.

Ирина Петровна Сусидко



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Fiametta's Four Dead Men. Drawing by A. M. Lyubimov.
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Shostakovich and Bach: On the fugue subjects of omnitonal macrocycles

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Abstract. Opus 87 was composed by Shostakovich in the mid-twentieth century under the profound impression of Bach's music. On the one hand, it demonstrates an aspiration to strictly adhere to the traditions and norms of the Baroque—primarily Bachian—fugue; on the other hand, it reveals that the intention to “do as Bach did” is usually realized in a fundamentally non-Bachian manner.

While the fugues in the two volumes of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* are constructed in different ways, those in Shostakovich's Op. 87 are built according to a single compositional type, even though the fugue subjects across all three macrocycles are highly varied. The reasons for this should be sought in the specific features of musical language and compositional technique. This paper offers a comparative study of the fugue subjects in all three macrocycles. The analysis reveals notable discrepancies across several parameters. The first group of differences concerns the temporal sphere: in Shostakovich's fugues, the subjects are associated with relatively rigid meters—simple and non-traditional odd (asymmetric) time signatures ($\frac{7}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{5}{8}$), whereas Bach's fugues lean toward compound meters (with common time C predominating). Among melodic transformations, Shostakovich prioritizes tempororhythmic ones: strict and free augmentation/diminution, including proportional canons. In terms of pitch ranges (ambitus) and modal structures, Shostakovich's subjects exhibit greater diversity than those of Bach. The interaction of harmony and syntax in Shostakovich's subjects frequently causes them to terminate on a weak beat, thereby rendering the issue of tonal answer irrelevant. Most importantly, the conclusion of a fugue subject on a strong or weak metric position can indicate opposing concepts of the subject, the fugue, and the overall artistic meaning of the musical form. The convincingly self-contained subject of a Bach fugue remains resistant to transformation and, after various trials, can be reaffirmed in its primary form. Conversely, the subject of a Shostakovich fugue, being open to the vicissitudes of the context, often undergoes significant eventual modifications.

Keywords: Dmitri Shostakovich, Johann Sebastian Bach, Op. 87, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (WTC), 24 Preludes and Fugues, compositional type of fugue, fugue subject, transformations of the fugue subject

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== Памяти Д. Д. Шостаковича ==

Научная статья

**Шостакович и Бах:
о темах фуг всетональных макроциклов**

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Аннотация. Опус 87 создан Шостаковичем в середине XX столетия под ярчайшим впечатлением от музыки Баха и, с одной стороны, демонстрирует стремление максимально соблюсти традиции и нормы барочной — прежде всего баховской — фуги, с другой же стороны, обнаруживает, что намерение «делать, как Бах» обычно реализуется отнюдь не по-баховски. В двух томах ХТК Баха фуги строятся различно, а в ор. 87 Шостаковича — однотипно, причем темы фуг во всех трех макроциклах весьма разнообразны. Причины такого положения нужно искать в конкретных особенностях музыкального языка и композиторской техники. Предлагаемая работа посвящена сравнительному исследованию тем фуг во всех трех макроциклах. Анализ показал заметные расхождения по ряду параметров. Первые связаны с временной сферой: в фугах Шостаковича темы настроены на относительно жесткие тактовые размеры — простые и нетрадиционные нечетные ($\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, $\frac{7}{4}$), а в фугах Баха —

на сложные (преобладает размер **с**). Среди мелодических преобразований у Шостаковича лидируют темпоритмические — строгое и свободное увеличение/уменьшение, включая пропорциональные каноны. В отношении диапазонов (амбитусов) и ладозвукорядных (модальных) структур темы Шостаковича разнообразнее баховских. Взаимодействие гармонии и синтаксиса в темах Шостаковича нередко приводит к окончанию их на слабом времени, вследствие чего становится неактуальна проблема тонального ответа. Главное: завершение темы фуги на сильной или слабой метрической позиции может быть признаком противоположных концепций темы, фуги и вообще художественного смысла музыкальной формы. Убедительно замкнутая тема баховской фуги устойчива к преобразованиям и после всяческих испытаний может быть утверждена в своем основном виде. Тема же фуги Шостаковича, открытая превратностям контекста, нередко претерпевает в итоге значимые изменения.

Ключевые слова: Д. Шостакович, И. С. Бах, ор. 87, Хорошо темперированный клавир (ХТК), 24 прелюдии и фуги, композиционный тип фуги, тема фуги, преобразования темы в фуге

Благодарности. Настоящая статья, как и легшая в ее основу лекция на VI Международной конференции «Техника музыкальной композиции: теория и практика», посвященной памяти Д. Д. Шостаковича (Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных, 2025), состоялись благодаря неуголимой любознательности и неусыпной дружеской опеке Аллы Ирменовны Янкус. Ей, в прошлом моей ученице, а ныне коллеге и соратнику, — первейшая моя благодарность. Благодарю также от всей души Марию Львовну Монич — тоже в прошлом мою ученицу, а ныне надежную помощницу в работе, деликатную и чуткую собеседницу, в обсуждениях с которой так хорошо обдумывается и оттачивается мысль, внимательную и дотошную читательницу новых текстов. Сердечно благодарю Петра Рейновича Лаула — музыканта от Господа Бога, выдающегося пианиста, внука моего Учителя А. Н. Должанского — за предоставленную возможность разбираться в его бумагах, связанных с диссертацией и предполагавшейся брошюрой о фугах Баха. За безотказную и оперативную помощь в оформлении нотных примеров, порой очень сложном для меня, от всей души благодарю Петра Юрьевича Трубинова, знатока и замечательного мастера нотного и книжного набора, и Яну Валерьевну Горбатовскую, бывшую мою студентку и давно уже незаменимую помощницу.

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Introduction

To begin, I will quote my own article, “On the Evolution of the Artistic Meaning of Polyphonic Composition”:

While Bach’s fugues are distinguished by the typological richness of both their material and compositional structures, Shostakovich’s fugues, which continue the Bachian tradition, are characterized by the typological diversity of their material and the uniformity of their compositional structures. Although the similarities and differences in the material of the fugues are easily explained as a consequence of the evolution of musical language, such an explanation is insufficient for the variety or uniformity of their compositional frameworks. Apparently, the reasons for such a sharp divergence are of a different, functional nature [1, p. 34].

This article was published forty years ago and reprinted twenty years later in the author’s two-volume collection. At that time, such a vision of the relationship between the fugues of Shostakovich and Bach seemed both valid and satisfactory. However, the publication of Shostakovich’s Op. 87 by DSCH Publishers (2015), based on a meticulous analysis of the autographs, compels us to revisit the issues of the composer’s musical language and compositional technique. Furthermore, Alexander N. Dolzhansky’s study on the subjects of Bach’s instrumental fugues has only recently become widely available.¹ Apparently, it is time to re-examine the similarities and differences in the material of Shostakovich’s and Bach’s fugues from a new perspective. This is the precise focus of the present paper.

The following conventional abbreviations are used in this article:

1) Each fugue is identified by two parameters: *the key* (in Latin letters, with major keys capitalized and minor keys in lowercase) and *the macrocycle* (for Bach, the volume number of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (hereafter *WTC*) is indicated by a Roman numeral; for Shostakovich, by the opus number). For example, C_I denotes the *C major* fugue from Volume I of the *WTC*; fis_{II} denotes the *F-sharp minor* fugue from Volume II; and h_{87} denotes the *B minor* fugue from Op. 87. [In the fugue designations adopted in this study, H/h refer to *B major/B minor*, whereas B/b refer to *B-flat major/B-flat minor*, in accordance with German, French, or Italian pitch nomenclature. Elsewhere, key names are given in English notation].

¹ Dolzhansky, A. N. (1942). *O nekotorykh kompozitsionnykh osobennostyakh instrumental’nykh fug Bakha* [On some compositional features of Bach’s instrumental fugues] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Leningradskaya gos. konservatoriya [Leningrad State Conservatory]. (In Russ.).

2) Since this study analyzes exclusively fugue subjects, abbreviated designations are used instead of full phrasings (e.g., “the subject of such-and-such a fugue”)—for instance, “the such-and-such subject.” Subjects of double or triple fugues are indicated by a superscript index to the left of the key signature. For example, subject E_{II} refers to the subject of the *E major* fugue from *WTC II*; subject Fis_{87} refers to the subject of the *F-sharp major* fugue from Op. 87; subject $^1fis_{II}$ denotes the first subject of the *F-sharp minor* fugue from *WTC II*; and the subject $^2e_{87}$ denotes the second subject of the *E minor* fugue from Op. 87.

Preliminary Reflections

Discussing the fugues and their subjects in Dmitri Shostakovich’s *24 Preludes and Fugues* without comparing them to the fugues and subjects of Johann Sebastian Bach’s *WTC* would be counterproductive. This is not only because Bach’s fugues existed in the auditory consciousness of humanity for more than three centuries and involuntarily enter into a dialogue with any polyphonic material—all the more so since the two volumes of the *WTC* serve as an unquestionable benchmark for fugal writing. Crucially, Shostakovich composed his Op. 87 following the 1950 Leipzig bicentennial celebrations, under the direct and vivid impression of Bach’s music and the profound impact of his mastery. Shostakovich’s friend, Isaak D. Glikman, wrote:

In the summer of 1950, Dmitri Dmitrievich and I met frequently in Komarovo, where he was renting a *dacha*, so there was no need for correspondence. At that time, he was deeply impressed by the Bach celebrations he had recently attended in Leipzig. Shostakovich spoke to me tirelessly and with passionate affection about Bach, describing him as an extraordinary man, a phenomenal craftsman—precisely a craftsman—and a composer of genius. ... Thus, it was during this summer of 1950 that Dmitri Dmitrievich conceived the idea for the *24 Preludes and Fugues*.²

The rigor with which traditional relationships between the pieces within the minicycle (*prelude and fugue*) and the structural rules of the fugue are either observed or violated in this work demonstrates the composer’s awareness of historically established norms and his desire to adhere to them as closely as possible—without, of course, abandoning his own artistic principles.

The first thing that strikes about the fugues of Opus 87 is that they are all built according to a single compositional plan.

² Glikman, I. D. (Ed.). (1993). *Pis'ma k drugu: Pis'ma D. D. Shostakovicha k I. D. Glikmanu* [*Letters to a Friend: Letters from D. D. Shostakovich to I. D. Glikman*]. DSCH [Moscow] – Kompozitor Publ. [St. Petersburg]. (In Russ.).

In all twenty-four fugues, the compositional scheme—which is quite simple and traditional—remains practically identical: a strict exposition where the regular countersubjects form, together with the subject, a ‘primary thematic complex’; a developmental section featuring tonal expansion governed by a uniform principle (beginning with ‘closely related keys of different modes, followed by distant ones’); mandatory episodes that are also regular, featuring recurring vocal material, among which a central role is occupied by a climactic developmental episode just prior to the final section; and this final section itself, which invariably contains strettos and, as a rule, opens with one. In the two double fugues (No. 4 in *E minor* and No. 24 in *D minor*), this exact same principle is implemented on a more monumental scale.

This self-restriction was, apparently, natural for Shostakovich; however, it is difficult to find another cycle, even one with a significantly smaller number of fugues, that completely lacks the idea of innovating and complexifying polyphonic technique. Shostakovich’s Op. 87 is a kind of *Art of Fugue*, where it is not the subject that remains constant, but the construction itself. In this regard, the preludes, characterized by a diversity of compositional designs, stand in contrast to the fugues [2, p. 253].

The described fugal scheme is so natural and logical that it appears entirely conventional and traditional. If one disregards the details that testify to a high level of compositional mastery (the accumulation and retention of sets of regular countersubjects, the polyphonic density of the episodes, the construction of diverse strettos, expansive tonal motion, and a structurally justified climax), the layout corresponds to a typical *fugue d’école* [3]. However, if these details are taken into account, along with the compelling intonational connection of the countersubjects and episodes to the subject, as well as its diverse structural and melodic development, the result is an ideal strict fugue—a crafted, masterly fugue, or a *fuga ricercata* according to Marpurg:

Die eigentliche Fuge ist in Ansehung der Durcharbeitung des Fugensatzes zweyerley, strenge oder frey. a) Eine strenge Fuge, fuga obligata, heißt diejenige, wo in dem ganzen Stücke mit nichts anderm als dem Hauptsatze gearbeitet wird, d.i. wo derselbe nach der ersten Durchführung, wo nicht allezeit ganz, doch zum Theil, so zu sagen Satz auf Satz zum Vorschein kömmt, und wo folglich aus dem Hauptsatze oder der bey der ersten Wiederhohlung desselben dem Gefährten entgegen gesetzten Harmonie alle übrigen Gegenharmonien und Zwischensätze vermittelst der Zergliederung, Vergrößerung, Verkleinerung, der unterschiednen Bewegung u. d. g. hergenommen, diese aber vermittelst der Nachahmung in einer bündigen und gründlichen Harmonie unter sich verknüpft werden. Wenn eine solche strenge

Fuge weitläufig ausgearbeitet wird, und noch allerhand andere Kunststücke, wozu die vielerley übrigen Gattungen der Nachahmung, des doppelten Contrapuncts, des Canons und der Tonwechselung Gelegenheit geben, damit vergesellschaftet werden: so nennet man ein solches Stück alsdenn mit einem italienischen Nahmen ein *Ricercare* oder eine *Ricercata*, eine Kunstfuge, eine Meisterfuge. So sind die meisten Fugen vom seel. Herrn Capellmeister Bach beschaffen.³

If Marpurg viewed such a fugue, fully elaborated in all its components, as ideal, then for him, the ideal architect of fugues was Johann Sebastian Bach, with his exceptionally rich fugual legacy. The precious core of this legacy is formed by the two volumes of the *WTC*, which have brought light and joy to humanity—the first for over three centuries, and the second lagging behind it by only two decades.

Remarkably, however, the fugual model just described occupies neither a defining nor a significant place within the *WTC*. To demonstrate this convincingly, let us consider a few facts.

A *simple exposition* is found in fewer than half of the fugues in the *WTC* (nine fugues in Volume I and ten in Volume II).⁴ In the remaining fugues (which include two double fugues and one triple fugue, bringing the total number of expositions to twenty-eight rather than twenty-four), the expositions are expanded by one or more additional entries, or by a counterexposition. Thus, within the *WTC*, a simple exposition does not constitute the norm.

Regular countersubjects also appear by no means in every fugue by Bach and, naturally, not necessarily in large numbers. As analytical experience shows, it is sufficient for a Bach subject to have stable support from a single counterpoint, whether it be a regular countersubject or a *risposta* subject in a stretto (see [4]). The same applies to *episodes*: their number, size, placement, similarity, or regular retention vary widely. Consequently, the number and regular retention of countersubjects and episodes do not constitute the norm for a fugue.

Shostakovich, indeed, exhibits an undeniable tendency to retain all regular countersubjects accumulated within the exposition (and in Fugue No. 13 in *F-sharp*

³ [Marpurg, F. W.] (1753). *Abhandlung von der Fuge...* (Vol. 1). A. Haude und J. C. Spener, p. 19–20.

⁴ In the *WTC*, simple expositions are found in the following fugues: *C_I*, *c_I*, *d_I*, *e_I*, *fis_I*, *G_I*, *g_I*, *a_I*, *b_I*, *C_{II}*, *D_{II}*, *Es_{II}*, *dis_{II}*, *E_{II}*, *e_{II}*, *f_{II}*, *G_{II}*, *a_{II}*, *b_{II}*.

major, even this maximum is exceeded), as well as a uniform, systematic development of the material from the very first two-voice episode following the answer.⁵

The remaining section of a fugue in the WTC may contain only a single entry in a related key of a different mode (as in the fugues c_I , Fis_I and H_I) or dispense with such entries altogether (as in the fugues d_I and fis_I , d_{II} , Es_{II} , etc.). On the other hand, it can be constructed on various transformations of the subject, sometimes even in combination with a regular countersubject (as in the fugues G_I and b_{II}), or on its stretto development (as in the fugues C_I , F_I and a_I , D_{II} and Es_{II}), and so forth. Thus, the methods of thematic development in the free section of a fugue and its compositional type are unregulated; traditions, however, remain a separate and multifaceted issue.

As for the ternary model (exposition–development–final section) characteristic of Shostakovich's fugues, it aligns poorly with Baroque compositional and overall aesthetic ideals and stereotypes⁶; in any case, it contradicts the binary nature of such highly representative Bach fugues as C_I and d_I , c_{II} , D_{II} , d_{II} , Es_{II} etc.⁷

In terms of the number of voices, Op. 87 follows the model of the WTC, featuring one two-voice and one five-voice fugue, while the rest are equally divided between three-voice and four-voice ones. Regular countersubjects and episodes are retained until the final section with a changing amount of voices in vertical permutations. For instance, in the four-voice fugue in *A-flat major*, two quadruple invertible counterpoints are formed: one within the subject entries⁸ and another within the episodes.⁹ Strettos may be based on various parameters and incorporate different tempo-rhythmic

⁵ It is for this very reason that Alexander N. Dolzhansky introduced the concept of the *core thematic structure* [5, p. 217], while Larisa L. Gerver had to decipher the numerical configurations within the manuscripts of Op. 87 [6, p. 287; 7, pp. 71–79].

⁶ This point was raised half a century ago by Yakov I. Milstein and Alexander G. Chugaev [8, p. 16; 9, p. 7], and at the beginning of the present century by Anatoly P. Milka [10, pp. 197–202].

⁷ It is also noteworthy that in these fugues, the second half (the second part) opens with entries in the tonic key.

⁸ Subject and three regular countersubjects (bars 15–18 and 25–28).

⁹ Cf. bars 19–20 and bars 29–30. In the next fugue—the one in *F minor*—two four-voice complexes are likewise formed: the subject with three countersubjects, and a four-voice episode. However, the most complex permutations of both complexes (the entry in B Aeolian from bar 114, and the initial phase of the fifth episode from bar 122) turn out to be four- and five-pairs of voices permutations: ✕, ✕

and intonational transformations. Contrary motion appears to play a rather modest role in Op. 87: it is employed systematically only in the two-voice Fugue No. 9 in *E major*.¹⁰ In any case, alterations in polyphonic technique are primarily tied to thematic development and can transpire within the development section without altering the overall structural blueprint of the fugue.

The compositional model of Shostakovich's fugue represents a *generalization and a synthesis of various fugal blueprints*: primarily those of Bach, both recently absorbed and long familiar, as well as those assimilated during his student years. As a student, Mitya Shostakovich studied with immense fervor; in fact, he virtually begged for lessons in counterpoint and fugue, never allowing his pedagogue, Nikolai A. Sokolov, to shirk his teaching duties. Furthermore, Shostakovich possessed an exhaustive memory for a vast amount of music spanning different historical eras. Underlying this model is intensive intellectual labor—the cognitive processing of immensely diverse, long-accumulated data alongside a wealth of fresh musical impressions.

While a simple exposition is sufficient to satisfy tradition, a subject requires substantial intonational and structural resources to generate a set of regular countersubjects, and even greater ones for subsequent melodic alterations and stretto entries. Unlike in Bach's music, a stretto for Shostakovich's subject represents discomfort, and often sheer stress. The fact that the model under discussion formed the basis of all the fugues in the macrocycle turned it into a norm, a frame of reference. However, an established norm is usually perceived as something dully conventional, as merely a starting point. It can be hypothesized that the composer's ultimate goal was not to achieve diversity or originality in more or less complex structural solutions and contrapuntal devices, but rather to find precisely such a structural model that would prove suitable for all types of thematic development, regardless of the character and structure of the subjects.

Analyzing the composer's appointment diaries, Olga V. Dombrovskaya writes: "It is precisely the invariance of techniques and the strict adherence to once-and-for-all chosen methods of notation—uniformity in formulations and stable abbreviations—that often helps in complex cases" [11, p. 68]. It seems that such

¹⁰ Here, a pair of entries in the free section in *B major* and *E major* (bars 21–26) transforms both the subject and the countersubject in inversion; similarly, in the first three-bar unit of the third episode, the material from the second episode is in mirror inversion—cf. bars 17–20 and bars 37–39.

a commitment to maintaining a discovered principle manifested itself in the uniform composition of Shostakovich's fugues, all the more so since he had already tested some of its significant components in his early fugues. This can be explained from the perspective of energy conservation and comfortable working conditions. However, another aspect is discernible here—one that is deeper and far more subtle.

In conversations about Shostakovich, Dolzhansky repeatedly recalled how, when questioned about the unusual tonal plan of the first movement of the Tenth Symphony, the composer replied that he had wanted to write a classical sonata form—an explanation that many considered paradoxical. In his article *From observations on Shostakovich's Style*, Dolzhansky convincingly demonstrated that this intention was realized through the resources of the composer's own modal-tonal system [12, pp. 77–83]. It appears that the fugues of Op. 87 were likewise crafted according to certain generalized Bachian “blueprints” that crystallized in Shostakovich's mind during the Leipzig celebrations. Listeners—primarily professional musicians, it would seem—still tend to react strongly to those aspects in which Shostakovich deviates from classical models, whereas in reality, he was likely adhering to them precisely to the extent that his personal style and musical language permitted.

It is equally important that by October 1950, when Shostakovich began working on the collection, only three fugues were listed among his published works: the *E minor Prelude*, Op. 34; the second movement of the Piano Quintet; and the finale of the oratorio *The Song of the Forests*. This circumstance is highlighted by Dolzhansky:

The two volumes of the *WTC* contain approximately one-tenth of the fugues composed by Bach over his entire lifetime. By contrast, Shostakovich's collection includes roughly *ten times more* fugues than are found in all his previous works combined. The very same creative task, which for Bach was natural—albeit complex and difficult—proved to be an absolute exception for Shostakovich [5, p. 206].

This objectively true comparison is not entirely free from a psychologically subtle substitution: it contrasts Shostakovich's experience at the moment of creating Op. 87 with Bach's entire artistic legacy. For the sake of fairness, it must be acknowledged, first, that by the time he was working on the first volume of the *WTC* (1722), the thirty-seven-year-old Bach had composed far more than three fugues,¹¹ and second, that the total number of fugues in Shostakovich's output (roughly double the number found in Op. 87) in no way diminishes the ratios presented by Dolzhansky.

¹¹ Judging by modern catalogs, Shostakovich had also composed a greater number of fugues by the time he began work on the cycle.

Initially, the composer intended merely to test himself by undertaking a specific technical challenge. He had already undertaken similar work in 1934, following the completion of a collection of preludes in all keys.

However, the problems surrounding the staging of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and its aftermath completely removed this undertaking from the composer's agenda. Now, however, filled with creative enthusiasm, he very quickly realized that he had set for himself not a narrow technical exercise, but a highly serious artistic task, and he worked on Op. 87 virtually without interruption. Brief trips and the parallel composition of the *Ten Poems for A Cappella Choir* did not significantly affect the pace of his writing.¹² The entire collection was completed in just four and a half months.¹³

Tonal Arcs

The macrocycles and their components reveal both similarities and differences, primarily the most convincingly “tangible” ones: tonal relationships.

The Preludes in C major and F-sharp major. First and foremost, the preludes—and, broadly speaking, the minicycles that open each half of Op. 87—echo the character and mood of the preludes and fugues from Volume I of the *WTC* in the same keys. The *C major* cycles of both Shostakovich and Bach are imbued with a sense of the beginning of something new and radiant: a bright day, a good deed, or a benevolent stage in life (*Example 1 a, b*).¹⁴

¹² Elizabeth Wilson [13, pp. 255–256] writes about the parallel work on the Tenth Symphony. The dating of the composition of the Tenth Symphony is discussed in this edition on the basis of a number of studies [13, p. 261–262].

¹³ Work on the cycle began on October 10, 1950, with the composition of the *Prelude in C major* [2, p. 217]. Shostakovich reported the completion of the collection on February 25, 1951, in a letter to Isaak D. Glikman (Glikman, 1993, p. 92).

¹⁴ Examples from Op. 87 are cited from: D. D. Shostakovich. (2015). *New Collected Works. Vol. 113: 24 Preludes and Fugues*. DSCH. Examples from the *WTC* are cited from: Joh. Seb. Bach. (n.d.). *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*. (E.-G. Heinemann, Ed., Vol. I) G. Henle Verlag; Joh. Seb. Bach. (n.d.). *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*. (O. von Irmer, Ed., Vol. II) G. Henle Verlag.



Example 1. Dmitri Shostakovich. Prelude C_{87} , bars 1–7 (a);
Johann Sebastian Bach, Prelude C_7 , bars 1–2 (b)

A similar atmosphere characterizes the *F-sharp major* preludes (Example 2 a, b); however, they are also linked by a more specific, genre-based kinship: these are the most clearly defined pastorales within the monumental polyphonic collections of Shostakovich and Bach.¹⁵

The “Irregular” subjects in *F-sharp minor*. Tonal similarity or contrast also links the subjects of certain fugues. For instance, the only subjects that depart from historically established norms are found in the *F-sharp minor* cycles of Op. 87 and Volume II of the *WTC* (Example 3 a, b; in Bach’s case—Example 3 b—it is the second subject of a triple fugue).¹⁶ In both instances, the subjects begin on the mediant rather than the tonic or the dominant.

¹⁵ Levon O. Hakobian also mentions the pastoral traits in the *F-sharp major* Prelude [14, p. 301]. Beyond the undeniably perceptible character of the music, both preludes exhibit a certain proximity to the pastorales of the Baroque era. As Yuri S. Bocharov writes, the imagery of the pastorale “was primarily linked to Christmas themes ... The ‘genre style’ of the pastorale is characterized by a leisurely tempo, the rhythm of a siciliana, $6/8$ or $12/8$ time signatures, the melodic movement of the upper voices in parallel thirds, and ‘bagpipe-like’ drone basses. The mode is, as a rule, major; the preferred (though not mandatory) keys are *F major*, *G major*, and *C major*” [15, p. 129].

¹⁶ The first section of the *fis_{II}* fugue concludes with a cadence in *A major*, which prompts and justifies the non-standard beginning of the second subject.

Moderato con moto ♩ = 66

a

b

Example 2. Dmitri Shostakovich. Prelude Fis_{87} , bars 1–3 (*a*);
Johann Sebastian Bach. Prelude Fis_I , bars 1–3 (*b*)

Andante

a

b (20)

Example 3. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject fis_{87} (*a*);
Johann Sebastian Bach. 2nd Subject fis_{II} (*b*)

The subjects in G major. Shostakovich's *G major* subject evokes strong associations with the subjects of both *G major* fugues from the *WTC* (Example 4 a, b, c).



Example 4. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject G_{87} (a);
Johann Sebastian Bach. Subjects G_I (b) and G_{II} (c)

In this case, however, the similarity is not limited merely to the two subjects from the *WTC*. This lineage also encompasses the subjects of the *G major* Invention and Sinfonia, the third Duet from *Clavier-Übung III* (BWV 804), the gigue from the Fifth French Suite (BWV 816), the Fifth Keyboard Partita (BWV 829), and the First Cello Suite (BWV 1007), as well as the *Allegro* from the Keyboard Toccata (BWV 916), and so forth. Most of these subjects (and the fugues based on them) are, as a rule, in triple meter and are saturated with various configurations of circular motion.¹⁷ The explanation here is simple: they are all modeled after the chorale *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr'*—the Lutheran Gloria (see Example 5).

The third edition of the Schmieder catalogue (BWV³) lists ten organ settings of this chorale (excluding early versions): three settings in the *Great Eighteen Chorale Preludes* from the Leipzig autograph manuscript (BWV 662–664) and three in *Clavier-Übung III* (BWV 675–677) form multi-key cycles (*A–G–A major* and *F–G–A major*, respectively); all the remaining ones (BWV 711, 715–717, as well as the *Variations on Allein Gott...* BWV 771, which might have been composed by Andreas Nikolaus Vetter rather than Bach) are in *G major*.¹⁸

¹⁷ These features appear to be inherent to *G major* and find reflection in the music of non-German authors as well. This point is noted, for instance, by Alla I. Yankus [16, p. 495].

¹⁸ See Blanken, Ch., Wolff, Ch., & Peter Wollny, P. (Eds.). (2022). *BWV3—Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von Johann Sebastian Bach. Dritte, erweiterte Neuauflage*. Breitkopf & Härtel, p. XLIV, pp. 451, 453, 461, 463, 486.



Example 5. Das Gloria in excelsis (*Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*)

These examples demonstrate the genesis and context of Bach's *G major* subjects; however, the G_{87} subject (*Example 4a*) most likely had no such predecessors. From Bach's G_I subject, it inherited the key, time signature, tempo, and character of movement, while also taking up an unexpected intonational idea and developing it in a characteristically individual manner.

In the G_I subject, reaching the melodic apex is linked to the chaining of two sevenths with a tendency to resolve to the first and third scale degrees—that is, to the tonic third, since both sevenths belong to a single dominant harmony. The G_{87} subject is likewise based on the interlocking of two sevenths, but within the parameters of the fourth-seventh construction so favored by the composer.

Consequently, in Bach's subject, first, the positions of the tonic regularly appearing in the odd-numbered (accented) bars are so weightily established that the final fifth scale degree of the subject is confidently perceived as the fifth of the tonic.¹⁹ Second, in the G_I subject, two consecutive bars open with the same motion outlining the tonic third, which makes it necessary to omit one of these bars in strettos.²⁰

The G_{87} subject, by contrast, is modulating (the only such subject in the macrocycle) and is constructed from a symmetrical interlocking of two sevenths. Each seventh—effectively the core of a melodic phase—opens its respective half of the subject with its own structural setting: the first is the tonic setting (the first and seventh scale degrees in *G major*), while the second is the “peri-tonic” setting (the seventh and sixth scale degrees in *D major*).²¹

¹⁹ In the d_I and As_I subjects, the clear sequence of the tonic and subdominant scale degrees prompts the perception of the final fifth scale degree as the dominant, although it does not contradict hearing it as the fifth of the tonic harmony.

²⁰ In the strettos of this fugue, the coordinates of entry are an octave displacement (the upper octave in the first stretto, and the lower octave in the second) and a distance of one bar; if the subject is stated in its entirety in both voices, parallel octaves will emerge in bar 3 of the stretto.

²¹ Regarding the first seventh, Dolzhansky writes: “The strong resolution on the seventh scale degree imparts an unusual stability to this degree, giving it the significance of an ‘upper tonic’ ” [5, p. 25].

The first seventh is formed by a scale passage—the longest stepwise run among the subjects of the Op. 87 fugues. The second seventh is taken in a single leap, which is also the widest skip among the subjects of the collection, occurring elsewhere only in the *B-flat major* subject. Following such differently constructed openings, the deployment phases are likewise organized in opposite manners: the scale-core is accompanied by uniformly narrowing, multidirectional leaps, whereas the leap-core is followed almost exclusively by a stepwise, winding, and sequential motion. Both deployments form similar zigzags, and both melodic phases cadence on the third scale degrees of their respective—tonic and dominant—keys.

Consequently, the syntactic structure of the subject can be viewed as either a simple periodic structure or a pair of periodic structures—yet, in any event, these periodic structures are of a contrasting nature.

*Melodic Similarity and Contrast.
Antagonistic Subjects*

The subjects of the fugues in the second minicycles: a₈₇ and c_I. The second minicycles (*prelude and fugue*) in both Op. 87 and the *WTC* essentially fulfill the same overarching function: each cycle declares the modal-tonal organization of its respective macrocycle. In the *WTC*, the parallel key to the opening major one shifts the focus toward the modal mastery of the pitches within the chromatic scale.²² In Op. 87, the relative key (especially following the preludes of Chopin and Scriabin, not to mention Shostakovich's own Op. 34) signals the comprehensive encompassing of the major-minor system along the circle of fifths (see *Examples 6 a, b*).

The opposing orientation of the related rhythmic structures in the *c_I* and *a₈₇* subjects (see the rhythmic diagram in *Example 6c*) is perceived as a demonstration of a fundamental otherness. In Bach's work, the structure of summation rushes forward toward the accent—it is an anapest extended by an iamb; in Shostakovich's work, it begins directly with the accent—it is a dactyl supported by a trochee.

The subjects are polar opposites in every respect. Bach's subject is born within an compound time **C**, inside its multilevel expanses a rhythmic core of the subject  condenses from sub-motivic structures, out of which the overall structure is fluidly formed as a summation of a higher order. Implied two-voice texture is created by the tonic, figured with neighboring-tone figurations, and the metrically

²² By comparison, only fifteen keys were in common use during the High Baroque period, as seen, for example, in Bach's *Inventions* and *Sinfonias*.



Example 6. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject a_{87} (a), Johann Sebastian Bach. Subject c_I (b) and two metric interpretations of the rhythmic formula of the fugue subject common to these subjects (c)

anchored linear framework (hereafter abbreviated as MALF) from the sixth to the third scale degree. Shostakovich's subject, by contrast, is initially constrained by the rigid conditions of a simple time $\frac{2}{4}$ and a four-bar phrase structure, into which it simply cannot fit. It also features implied two-voice texture, but both voices move—seemingly in parallel (akin to the deployment in the Cis_I subject)—yet, in reality, with “stumbles,” with the result that the subject's final cadence falls an octave below the register established at its opening.

It is noteworthy that the a_{87} fugue is the only one among the three completed in 1934 that Shostakovich used more than a decade and a half later. Although the author was thoroughly dissatisfied with the fugues written at that time, as previously mentioned, he slightly revised the *A minor* fugue almost immediately for a subsequent operatic project that ultimately remained unrealized.²³ It was in this revised form (albeit arranged for piano) that he included it in Op. 87.

The subjects of the fugues in parallel keys from the fifth pairs of minicycles: E_{87} and e_I . The tonal plans of the macrocycles are based on different intervallic steps from one pair of minicycles to the next (an ascending semitone in the *WTC* versus an ascending fifth in Op. 87) and on different tonal relationships

²³ This is described by Olga G. Digonskaya [17, p. 49].

between the major and minor cycles at adjacent odd and even positions (parallel keys in the *WTC* versus relative keys in Op. 87). Consequently, tonal correspondences arise only between the minicycles—specifically, the major cycle and its parallel minor in the *WTC*—in every third pair (a whole step higher): C/c_{WTC} , D/d_{WTC} , E/e_{WTC} , $F\text{-sharp}/f\text{-sharp}_{WTC}$, $A\text{-flat}/a\text{-flat}_{WTC}$, and $B\text{-flat}/b\text{-flat}_{WTC}$.

The fugues of the fifth pair of cycles under the adjacent numbers IX–X, sharing a common tonal center of *E* (*major* and *minor*), are in parallel keys—that is, in different modes; their comparison is prompted by the fact that both are two-voice fugues, each being unique within its respective omnitonal macrocycle (*Examples 7 a, b*).



Example 7. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject of E_{87} (a);
Johann Sebastian Bach. Subject e_I (b)

Both subjects exhibit an implied two-voice texture: a recurring sustained tone (not figured, as in the c_I subject, but pulsating) and a metrically anchored linear framework (MALF), with their relationship reversed in the two subjects. In Shostakovich's work, the sustained voice is the lower one, from which the upper voice ascends; in Bach's subject, the stationary voice is the upper one, from which the lower voice descends. In Shostakovich's subject, all statements of the tonic fall on accented and relatively accented (odd-numbered) beats, whereas in Bach's subject, they occur on the weakest (even-numbered) beats. In Shostakovich's subject, the upper voice ascends along diatonic steps, while in Bach's work, the lower voice descends along chromatic steps, with both managing to take an identical number of steps (except that the *E major* line lags slightly just before reaching the peak).

Subjects of the Same Type

Cantus Firmus-type subjects: Fis_{87} and E_{II} . Dolzhansky noted that in Shostakovich's Collection, "there are no cantus firmus-type subjects" [5, p. 215], an assertion that requires no explanation today. Nine years later (on the eve of the reissue of Dolzhansky's book), Vsevolod V. Zaderatsky observed that the subject of Fis_{87} "resembles the subject of the *E major* fugue from Volume II of Bach's *WTC* in its 'ascetic' sound and laconic expression" [18, p. 194]. Laconism, restraint, and the absence of details are qualities frequently inherent in cantus firmus-type melodies; in the *WTC*, such subjects include cis_I , E_{II} , H_{II} , as well as f_I , despite the chromatic filling of almost the entire lower (fifth) modal segment.²⁴ In Shostakovich's Collection, the only *cantus firmus*-type subject is Fis_{87} .

Subjects of Fis_{87} and E_{II} (Examples 8 a, b) not only fit within a major tetrachord but also share intonational similarities. In both subjects, the fourth degree is reached via an ascending leap from the second degree, so that the subsequent descent to the third degree transforms the entire turn—at least for an ear attuned to the major-minor system—into an neighboring-tone figure around the tonic. Furthermore, in Shostakovich's subject, this is the longest held note, which enhances its melodic significance.



Example 8. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject Fis_{87} (a);
Johann Sebastian Bach. Subject E_{II} (b)

For Bach, however, such an interpretation of the *E-major* subject was hardly the only one. Most likely, he adopted the subject from J. C. F. Fischer's *Ariadne Musica*, but he could (and indeed must) have been familiar with its other settings, such as those by J. J. Froberger and J. A. Reincken. The very sequence of the initial ascending steps

²⁴ The upper tetrachord is the conventional zone for scale chromaticization. It accommodates the unstable sixth and seventh degrees, and altering their pitch yields and changing their height leads to mode variations. It is likely in this connection that the effect of detailed musical expression arises. The Subject of f_I , however, seems to be the only one in Bach's instrumental fugal heritage where the lower—and *primary*—segment of the modal scale undergoes chromatic elaboration, which is perceived as an essential characteristic of the thematic material.

(a trichord within a fourth) corresponds to the *initia* of three of the eight Gregorian modes, aimed at establishing the achieved pitch as a *repercussio* and a melodic apex.²⁵ This is precisely what occurs in the fugue (bars 23–26), where the subject is embellished in a pair of strettos—first in the upper voices and then in the lower ones. In *Example 9*, this is indicated by horizontal brackets, resembling a ornamented chorale: the leap of a third is filled in, and the rhythm becomes irregular.

Naturally, connections extend from the *E_{II}* subject to the *cis_I* subject owing both to their shared chorale-like nature and the narrowness of their ranges. The *C-sharp minor* subject, even more compressed, densely minor, and intensely framed by an ascending *saltus duriusculus* with downward-pulling semitone intonations, contrasts sharply with the diatonically placid *E major* subject. While the *C-sharp minor* fugue, with its epic sweep of 115 bars, forms a kind of instrumental passion, the *E major* fugue, with its forceful and, one might say, swift unfolding of stretto events,²⁶ is structured as a compact *Credo* and spans 43 bars, corresponding to the gematria of this word.²⁷

Unsurprisingly, the *Fis₈₇* fugue, despite the cantabile quality and naive simplicity of its major subject, shares common features with both aforementioned Bach fugues. Like the *C-sharp minor* fugue, it is cast on an exceptionally grand scale (163 bars),

²⁵ *Liber Usualis: Missæ et Officii pro Dominicis et Festis duplicibus cum cantu gregoriano* (No. 567). (1904). S. Sedis Apostolicæ et S. Rit. Congregationis Typographi, pp. 59–60, 62. The *initia* of the plagal second mode (*c–d–f*; with *f* as the *repercussio*), the authentic third mode, and the plagal eighth mode (*g–a–c*; with *c* as the *repercussio*) are also based on a trichord within a fourth (*Liber Usualis*, 1904, pp. 59–60, 62).

²⁶ In the *E_{II}*, only the exposition (bars 1–9) is free of strettos; conversely, the entire remaining section (bars 9–43) can be viewed as a smaller-scale stretto fugue embedded within a larger one. The expository section of this smaller fugue forms a chain of strettos structured according to the plan of a strict counterexposition (bars 9–16); the final section of the fugue (bars 35–43) is also built on this same material, expanding powerfully. For a more detailed discussion of fugues constructed on the “nesting doll” (matryoshka) principle, and specifically regarding the *E_{II}* fugue, see [19].

²⁷ On musical symbolism, gematria, numerical alphabets, etc., see, for example, [20, pp. 329–400]. It is possible that during his work on Book I of the *WTC*, Bach was not as deeply and seriously interested in the problems of musical symbolism and gematric calculations as he was in later years. Nevertheless, the length of the *cis_I* fugue (115 bars) almost coincides with the gematria of the word *Kruzifix* (crucifix/depiction of the cross): based on the natural Latin numerical alphabet, the gematria of *Kruzifix* totals 117.



Example 9. Johann Sebastian Bach. Fugue *EII*, bars 23–26: Strettos

features five voices, and rich in regular countersubjects.²⁸ Its thematic development, however, resonates more closely with the diverse stretto transformations of the *E-major* fugue, including rhythmic ones (such as the diminution of the subject set against its original form functioning as a *cantus firmus*), as well as doublings.²⁹ The *Fis*₈₇ fugue culminates in a 57-bar final section containing three double stretto entries of the subject in its original and diminished forms. These are framed within an arch of two entries that are texturally the most prominent, rhythmically the most supple, and yet the most secretively hushed: the first in doubling and with deceleration, and the second—at the fugue’s conclusion—supported by a stretto.

Chorale-like and song-like subjects: *C*₈₇ and *1fis*_{II}. This time, the comparison of the subjects is related neither to the keys of the fugues, nor to their

²⁸ The two regular countersubjects in the middle and, partly, the final (up to bar 94) sections of the *cis*_I fugue contrast so sharply with the subject that they are often mistaken for a second and third subject (although they possess neither individual expositions nor a combined one). In the *Fis*₈₇ fugue, the five regular countersubjects—which are non-contrasting, particularly under the conditions of a simple time $\frac{3}{4}$ and a relatively narrow range of rhythmic values—are grouped into two sets: either the first three (the third being a rhythmically sharpened and extended variant of the subject) or all of them excluding the third.

²⁹ Tempo-rhythmic transformations of the subject are very rare in Bach’s works, whereas Shostakovich employs them more frequently than others and in various situations, including strettos—primarily within proportional canons (the fugues in *B major*, *F-sharp major*, *D-flat major*, and *C minor*), adding to them various specific technical tasks, such as textural ones (in the *D-flat major* fugue) or large-scale syntactic ones (in the *A-flat major* fugue). Strettos that contrast the subject in diminution against its rectus form functioning as a *cantus firmus* reveal a specific expressive and semantic affinity between the *Fis*₈₇ and *EII* fugues.

positions within the macro-cycles, nor to any intonational similarity or contrast between the C_{87} and $1^{st}fis_{II}$ subjects themselves (*Example 10 a, b*).³⁰ Instead, a parameter emerges in the foreground that is extremely indicative for comparing the musical material of Shostakovich and Bach: the behavior of the modal degrees:

*Example 10. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject C_{87} (a);
Johann Sebastian Bach. 1st Subject fis_{II} (b)*

Both subjects exhibit an underlying three-voice texture; the primary melodic events are linked to the MALF and unfold within the central zone of the scale, framed by the first and eighth degrees. Moreover, both components of the subjects (their tonics as well as the MALF) function in an opposite manner.

Shostakovich's subject begins with an upbeat motion from the tonic to the fifth degree, which is sustained for a bar and a half; this motive is immediately repeated, with the fifth degree being embellished. Next, the upper tonic is introduced, from which the melody likewise steps toward the dominant; however, by this point, the subject is already geared toward motion—the modal framework begins its descent and, after another touch of the tonic, will reach a cadence on the degree. All four appearances of the tonic are metrorhythmically identical, yet functionally pairwise opposite: the lower tonic instigates the upward motion toward the embellishment, whereas the upper tonic restrains and curtails it.

Bach's subject opens with a descent through the tones of the triad from the fifth to the first degree; both fall on the weakest beats of the bar, with the MALF originating

³⁰ The time signatures $\frac{4}{4}$ (in the *E minor*, *B minor*, and *C minor* fugues) were replaced with $\mathbf{c}$, while $\frac{3}{2}$ (in the *C major*, *A major*, and *F major* fugues) was replaced with $\mathbf{\text{C}}$. The rejection of the author's original signatures, $\mathbf{c}$ and $\mathbf{\text{C}}$ in the otherwise remarkable and meticulously revised New Collected Works appears fundamentally incorrect: these signatures provide undeniable evidence of the profound connection between Op. 87, Shostakovich's Leipzig impressions, and his creative enthusiasm.

from the former, and the dialogue of tonics from the latter. The MALF moves broadly and freely from the sixth to the first degree, embellishing each degree alternately with stepwise motion and leaps: stepwise, through the figured resolution of syncopated suspensions, and with leaps, by springing from the tonic alternately from below and from above. Each touch of the tonic engenders a new phase of melodic development.

As the motion progresses, the span of the leaps diminishes, but the primary significance lies elsewhere. The time interval between the appearances of the tonic, which consistently fall on the weakest beats, also progressively decreases: from the first statement in the lower register to the second in the upper register, there are four quarter notes; from the second to the, back in the lower register, there are three; and to the final appearance of the subject, there are two. This almost imperceptible yet subliminally felt regular compression initially finds a partial outlet in the truncations and modulatory turns of the subject (in bars 12–14, an entry in *A major* and an incomplete turn to *C-sharp minor*), followed by a simplified and shortened entry modulating from *C-sharp minor* to *F-sharp minor* (bars 14–16). However, in bar 20, the second subject appears (see *Example 3 b* above)—energetic, straightforward, brief, and incomplete. Like a powerful uncoiling spring, it is presented in stretto by overlapping voices, and moves unhindered—continuing a sequence—from the exposition into the remaining section (*f-sharp–b–e–A*), where it finally arrives at a cadence (bars 23–25), combines with the first subject (bars 28–31), and prepares the entry of the subject (bar 36).

Profound Intonational Connections

Between the subjects of Op. 87 and the *WTC*, which possess completely different signs of the genre and character traits — to say nothing of their time signatures—one can detect a hidden similarity and even an affinity. This kind of closeness is generated by purely internal, strictly structural impulses that shape not the melody itself in all its living concreteness, but rather the general directions of its movement—its *melotype*, so to speak.

Subjects of g₈₇ and D_I (Example 11 a, b)

The first half of Shostakovich's elegiac, somewhat waltzing *G minor* subject—a brief, steep ascent followed by a long, decelerated return—strikingly coincides almost exactly with Bach's subject from the *D_I*. Its swift, tirata-like ascent and hovering descent constitute, in the words of Wanda Landowska, "... it is a gorgeous and dazzling *ouverture à la française*. In playing it one must exaggerate the sharpness



Example 11 a–b. Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject g_{87} (a);
Johann Sebastian Bach. Subject D_I (b)

of its dotted rhythm according to the French tradition of that period” [21, p. 184]. Heinrich Bessler, discussing the similarity between the *D-major* fugue and a French overture, notes the special role of the initial *tirata*, which imparts a “ricercar-like” character to the subject:

... im Wohltemperierten Klavier folgt beispielsweise die D-dur-Fuge (BWV 850) dem Vorbild der französischen Ouvertüre. Ihr Hauptrhythmus in punktierten Achteln wird durch eine Zweiunddreißigstel-Spielfigur kontrastierend ergänzt, so daß man von einem „Ricercarthema mit Charakter“ sprechen darf [22, p. 17].

The shared components of the initial fragments in both subjects constitute their most intonationally active elements. In Bach’s subject, it is precisely the *tirata* that undergoes development within the episodes: here, a tense non-polyphonic dialogue repeatedly emerges between the full *tirata* and its second half in augmentation, with alternating invertible counterpoint and the “unison” support of the inner voices. Conversely, in Shostakovich’s subject, it is the initial embellishment of the tonic that provokes imitative responses among the voices as early as the exposition (see bar 15); indeed, all thematic development within the fugue seems geared toward building a full-voice stretto, which ultimately remains unfulfilled.

Subjects of H_I , E_I and F_{87} (Example 12 a, b, c)

A combination of two fourths, either straight or jaggedly broken, underlies the subjects of F_{87} , B_{87} and f_{87} . In Bach’s subject, similar structures—moving stepwise but retaining the metric positions of the structural pitches— occur both in the initial fragments and in the continuations. Moreover, sequences of quartal steps are often designed to highlight these pitches, as in the subjects of C_I , A_I and g_{II} . In the H_I subject cited here, the run across the structural pitches starts from the end

of the motive, which will be altered in the answer.³¹ In the E_I subject, the continuation consists of filling in and concluding a sequence of fourths.



Example 12. Johann Sebastian Bach. Subjects H_I (a) and E_I (b);
Dmitri Shostakovich. Beginning of Fugue F_{87} (c)

Subjects of D_{87} , C_{II} and dis_{II} (Example 13 a, b, c)

Underlying many subjects of the WTC is the tonic fifth paired with an upper neighbor sixth degree. In fact, the traditional requirement to begin a fugue subject on either the first or the fifth degree, combined with the necessity of clearly establishing the principal key, ensures the presence of the tonic fifth and its neighboring-tone elaboration across numerous fugue subjects—arranged in a wide variety of orders and combinations.

The cited example convincingly demonstrates, we believe, just how broad the spectrum of tempo, genre, and emotional interpretations of this specific melodic idea can be. This is only natural: the Baroque norm was sustained through the techniques of economical melodic voice-leading:

Bach achieves the highest degree of certainty and logical coherence right at the very beginning of the subject by immediately establishing the *tonality*, followed by the mode.

³¹ As a reminder: although the B major subject (WTC , Book I) does not strictly require a tonal answer, Bach nevertheless constructed one. He accomplished this by isolating the second through fifth notes as a “dominant motive” and lowering them by a second. Notably, an identical tonal answer is employed in the *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E-flat major*, BWV 998 (BWV3, p. 567), which features a subject with the exact same contour but moving in uniform eighth notes and concluding on the first beat of the second bar.



Example 13. Johann Sebastian Bach. Subjects C_{II} (a) and dis_I (c);
Dmitri Shostakovich. Subject D_{87} (b)

Consequently (one might say, *for this very purpose*), the vast majority of the subjects under consideration (approximately two-thirds) begin on the tonic, which immediately sets the tonal center. ...

Therefore, if a subject begins on the dominant, then for the sake of tonal clarity in the subsequent motion, it becomes necessary to demonstrate that this is precisely the dominant and not the tonic. Bach accomplishes this immediately through various means. The most effective pitch for this purpose following the initial dominant is the fourth degree. ... Another method involves touching upon the sixth degree in minor keys. ... The same (touching upon the sixth degree) is also possible in major keys, but it is insufficient, ... Therefore, in major keys, Bach immediately touches upon both the sixth and the fourth degrees in *all such instances without exception*³² (my italics in the quote replace uppercase text in the original print.—K. Yu.).

Zaderatsky writes on the same subject, though from the perspective of expressive effect and specifically in relation to Shostakovich's fugue subjects:

A favorite intonation that frequently underlines Shostakovich's lyrical melodies is a fifth-motion from the dominant to the tonic (or vice versa), provided that the dominant is melodically encircled by the sixth modal degree as a neighboring tone. Such a melodic turn sounds tense and mournful in minor keys, whereas in major keys, it generates a clear, bright, and tranquil image. This characteristic motive can be found in Shostakovich's thematic material not only within the preludes and fugues but also across many other works [18, p. 187].

³² Dolzhansky, A. N. (1942), pp. 23–24.

Resume

The strikingly vivid, as well as hidden structural and intonation-melodic connections, similarities and contrasts between the themes of Op. 87 and the two volumes of the *WTC* discussed here primarily attract the attention of listeners, performers, and scholars. However, despite the compelling and undeniable historical, stylistic, and linguistic differences between Shostakovich's and Bach's fugues, such an investigation provides no answer regarding at least one—albeit narrow but concrete, strictly technical—domain wherein these distinctions are generated. This situation can be attributed, first, to the fact that the fugue subjects in all three macro-cycles belong to a single, centuries-old tradition of fugal composition. Second, a significant role in this context is likely played by the conventional analytical frameworks attuned to the tonal-harmonic perception and comprehension of eighteenth- to twentieth-century music.

It appears necessary to direct this search into a different channel—one that is culturally, historically, and aurally broader, as well as less predictable. The second part of this study will focus primarily on the modal properties of the fugue subjects—naturally, first and foremost, those of Shostakovich, given that the modal component is significantly more pronounced in his polyphony than in that of Bach.

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**Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg's piano "duel"
as perceived by their contemporaries:
A study based on nineteenth-century
French periodicals**



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Abstract. The article examines various aspects of the rivalry between two of the greatest pianists of the first half of the 19th century, Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg. The virtuosos' conflict was triggered by Liszt's notorious article directed against Thalberg and his admirers. Many of Liszt's own followers, who were disappointed by his actions, also sided with Thalberg. Parisian reviewers enthusiastically compared the pianists' artistic qualities, often to Liszt's disadvantage. The piano "duel" between the two virtuosos became the central event of the 1837 Parisian concert season, attracting the close attention of the European aristocracy, the creative elite, and the press. Both pianists were declared winners, as documented in numerous contemporary accounts. Every review published before and after the "duel" contrasted Liszt's passionate, impetuous, and electrifying performance with the lyrical cantabile style of Thalberg's playing. At the same time, their artistic talent and technical perfection were unanimously acknowledged to be equal. However, 20th-century musical historiography reinterpreted this episode in Liszt's favour, for many years displacing Thalberg from the focus of musicological discourse and thereby distorting the understanding of a crucial stage in the development of piano art in Western Europe and Russia. The digital availability of numerous historical sources (newspapers, journals, eyewitness letters) allowed for a more detailed examination of the artistic individuality of both virtuosos, leading to the conclusion that Thalberg's pianism was closer to the aesthetic ideals of his era and significantly influenced the further development of piano performance.

Keywords: Franz Liszt, Sigismond Thalberg, piano art, Parisian audience, performance style, criticism, the press

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*История музыки
в письмах и документах*

Научная статья

**Фортепианная «дуэль» Ф. Листа и С. Тальберга
в контексте восприятия современниками:
по материалам французских периодических
изданий XIX века**

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются различные аспекты соперничества двух крупнейших пианистов первой половины XIX века — Ференца Листа и Сигизмунда Тальберга. Борьба виртуозов была спровоцирована одиозной статьей Листа, направленной против Тальберга и его поклонников; к последним примкнули и многие почитатели самого Листа, разочарованные его поступком. Парижские рецензенты увлеченно сравнивали исполнительские достоинства пианистов — чаще не в пользу Листа. Фортепианная «дуэль» двух виртуозов стала главным событием парижского концертного сезона

1837 года и привлекла пристальное внимание европейской аристократии, творческой элиты и прессы. Оба пианиста были объявлены победителями, что зафиксировано в многочисленных исторических свидетельствах. В каждой рецензии, опубликованной до и после «дуэли», страстное, порывистое, электризирующее исполнение Листа противопоставлялось проникновенному кантиленному мелодизму игры Тальберга. При этом масштаб их дарования и техническое совершенство единодушно признавались равновеликими. Однако музыкальная историография XX столетия пересмотрела оценку этого эпизода в пользу Листа, надолго вытеснив фигуру Тальберга из фокуса искусствоведческого дискурса и тем самым исказив представления о важнейшем этапе развития фортепианного искусства в Западной Европе и России. Электронная доступность большого числа исторических источников (газет, журналов, писем очевидцев) позволила более детально рассмотреть артистическую индивидуальность обоих виртуозов и прийти к выводу, что пианизм Тальберга оказался ближе к эстетическим идеалам своей эпохи и существенно повлиял на дальнейшее развитие фортепианного исполнительства.

Ключевые слова: Франц Лист, Сигизмунд Тальберг, фортепианное искусство, парижская публика, исполнительский стиль, критика, пресса

Благодарности: Авторы выражают искреннюю благодарность сотрудникам библиотек, оцифровавшим периодические и другие издания XIX века, а также самим библиотекам (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek и др.) и электронным ресурсам, предоставившим к этим изданиям открытый доступ.

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Introduction

The history of musical art has preserved numerous instances of performance “duels” between the greatest virtuosos of their respective eras. In the early 18th century, George Frideric Handel and Domenico Scarlatti competed in Rome, embodying the contrast between the ecclesiastical and the elegant courtly styles. The 1781 confrontation between Muzio Clementi and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Vienna revealed the competitive ambitions of the English and Viennese keyboard schools. The competition between Ludwig van Beethoven and Joseph Wölfl in the Viennese salon of Baron Wetzlar von Plankenstern (1799) juxtaposed an elemental, rebellious spirit with filigree classical virtuosity. The 1816 concert duel between Niccolò Paganini and Charles Philippe Lafont in Milan demonstrated the clash between the brilliant Italian violin school and the aristocratically elegant French tradition (cf. [1, p. 21]). Each of these “musical combats” was not merely a conflict of personal ambitions, but a manifestation of the stylistic and philosophical contradictions of its time. Within this lineage, a unique role belongs to the famous “duel” between Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg.

The piano competition between Liszt and Thalberg, held in Paris on March 31, 1837, was widely covered in various monographs dedicated to the Hungarian pianist and composer (see for example [2, p. 237; 3, p. 174; 4, pp. 86–90; 5, pp. 131–142]). As Rosalda Agresta, the author of the latest and currently only monograph on Thalberg, points out, “Toutes les biographies de Liszt y font naturellement allusion et le ‘duel’ lui-même est devenu l’un des épisodes les plus fameux de l’histoire du piano au XIXe siècle” [1, p. 21]. Discussing the assessments of the outcome of this “duel,” she also points out that in Western European literature, different opinions have emerged on this matter:

... si des auteurs ont proclamé Liszt vainqueur, certains ont fait preuve de plus de circonspection et ont conclu à une partie nulle; d’autres encore, se référant à l’analyse des goûts du public parisien, identifié Thalberg comme le véritable vainqueur [1, pp. 21–22].

A different situation has developed in Russian literature about Liszt. The hypnotic charm of the famous composer and pianist was so great that nearly all biographers portrayed him as the undisputed victor. Although historical evidence offered no grounds for such a definitive conclusion, many authors disregarded these testimonies, dismissing them as “nonsensical,”¹ as merely reflecting the tastes of “Parisian high society,”² or, at best, “insignificant.”³

The sympathies of many Russian musicians and composers also lay with Liszt. César Cui, having heard Thalberg perform in St. Petersburg in 1839 and Liszt three years later, became an unconditional admirer of the latter. Cui’s views were shared by Vladimir V. Stasov, Alexander N. Serov, Mily A. Balakirev, and Anton G. Rubinstein. According to Ivan S. Kuligovsky, they favored the Hungarian pianist due to “Liszt’s deep connection with Russian culture” and his relentless promotion of works by the composers of the Balakirev Circle [6, p. 106].

Clearly, their judgments also influenced Russian researchers. As a result, Thalberg’s figure and legacy were overshadowed, and perceptions of his historical role in the development of piano art became distorted. The purpose of this study is to reconstruct a multifaceted picture of how contemporaries perceived the performances of Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg, to identify the key differences in their performance styles, and to analyze the artistic and aesthetic significance of the 1837 piano “duel.”

Historical Background

Since the early 1830s, Liszt had been renowned in Paris as the greatest pianist of the era (*Illustration 1*). Characterizing his playing, reviewers in Parisian newspapers spared no eloquence, awarding him the palm, even in comparison

¹ Alexandrova, V. N., & Meilikh, E. I. (1963). *Liszt 1811–1886: Kratkii ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* [Liszt 1811–1886: A brief sketch of his life and work]. Muzyka. (In Russ.), p. 57.

² Andrei E. Budyakovsky acknowledged that the sympathies of the Parisian public lay with Thalberg, yet implied that this was true only for high society, which remained detached from the “most advanced and progressive part of Parisian society.” See Budyakovskii, A. E. (1986). *Pianisticheskaya deyatel’nost’ Lista* [Liszt’s pianistic activity]. Muzyka. (In Russ.), p. 19.

³ Milshtein, Ya. I. (1956). Liszt (Vol. 1). Muzgiz. (In Russ.), p. 132.



*Illustration 1. Lehmann, H. (1839). Portrait of Franz Liszt [Painting].
Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France. Retrieved April 24, 2026, from
<https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/en/node/152744#infos-principales>*

to Frédéric Chopin, Ferdinand Hiller, and Henri Bertini.⁴ However, critics were far from unanimous. The influential music theorist, historian, and critic François-Joseph Fétis, while paying due tribute to Liszt's talent and diligence, periodically a lack of self-control in performance:

Nous avons exprimé à plusieurs reprises notre opinion sur la nature du talent de M. Listz; depuis il ne c'est pas modifié, et notre manière de voir est demeurée la même. Il serait de tous les exécutants le plus extraordinaire s'il savait mieux être maître de lui; mais il lui arrive souvent de se laisser emporter plus loin qu'il ne le voudrait, et son jeu manque alors de couleur au lieu d'être pittoresque comme il pourrait le croire. Dans quelques passages du beau morceau de Weber qu'il a exécuté, il a fait preuve du talent le plus élevé; mais il n'a pas tenu constamment notre enthousiasme au même degré...⁵

In 1835, when Liszt was only twenty-four years old, his first biography was published in the *Gazette musicale de Paris*. It was penned by Joseph d'Ortigue, a talented publicist and passionate Liszt's admirer. Although written in an enthusiastic and poetic style, the essay portrayed the musician in an exceptionally favorable light. Nonetheless, even d'Ortigue could not ignore the artist's performance flaws, noting an exaggerated emotionality that had provoked accusations of "charlatanism," and a rhythmic freedom that the critic deemed unacceptable in the works of Beethoven. The author referred to the first issue as a "un beau défaut puisqu'il naît d'une grande chaleur d'âme et d'une disposition à relever par une exécution véhémence une composition souvent froide," while explaining the second by the fact that Liszt "il se livre trop à son impétuosité."⁶

The image of the passionate, impulsive piano virtuoso was further enhanced by his spiritual connection to Beethoven, whose works the musician inspiringly performed and arranged. His journalistic writings also played a significant role in shaping his reputation. Shortly before the appearance of d'Ortigue's biographical sketch,

⁴ Guémer, A. (1834, January 5). Exécution musicale: Liszt, Ferd. Hiller, Chopin et Bertini. *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 1(1), p. 5.

⁵ Fétis, F.-J. (1833, March 16). Concert donné au bénéfice des indigens du 2 arrondissement, par MM. Liszt et Garcia fils. *Revue musicale*, 13(7), p. 55.

⁶ d'Ortigue, J. (1835, June 14). Études biographiques. I. Franz Listz. *Gazette musicale de Paris*, (24), p. 203.

the article *De la situation des artistes*, penned by Liszt himself, was published in the pages of the same periodical. In this essay, Liszt addressed the burning issues of social injustice and the condescending attitude of bourgeois society toward creative artists. Furthermore, the pianist maintained warm friendships with leading literary figures of the era, including Alphonse de Lamartine, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, and George Sand. The soulful and passionate execution of Beethoven's music, his integration into literary circles, and his own journalistic writings lent Liszt a romantic aura that completely harmonized with the "impetuosity" of his pianism. Despite isolated critical remarks, Liszt's authority in France remained unassailable.

In January 1836, Sigismond Thalberg (1812–1871) performed for the first time in Paris—a Viennese pianist completely unknown to the Parisian public (*Illustration 2*). A near contemporary of Liszt, Thalberg was born in Geneva as the illegitimate son of the Austrian Prince Franz Joseph von Dietrichstein and Baroness Wetzlar von Plankenstern. At the age of ten, his mother brought him to Vienna, where the young man received a brilliant musical education and acquired worldly sophistication. In addition to his mother, his mentors were Heinrich August Mittag (1795–1867), an excellent pianist and bassoonist in the Austrian Emperor's Court Orchestra, and Simon Sechter (1788–1867), a composer and music theorist; furthermore, he is believed to have taken piano lessons from Ignaz Moscheles, Carl Czerny, and Johann Baptist Cramer [7]. From the age of thirteen, Thalberg began performing in the aristocratic salons of the Austrian capital. Over the subsequent decade, he earned a reputation as a respectable gentleman and a gifted artist who conducted himself with modesty yet with great dignity. It was precisely in this status that he arrived in Paris at the end of 1835.

Thalberg's concert took place at the Paris Conservatoire and was widely covered by music reviewers from various newspapers and journals. The performance was attended by Hector Berlioz, a close friend of Liszt who had already written a number of enthusiastic articles about him. Nevertheless, in his review, Berlioz characterized Thalberg's playing as an inexplicable, supernatural phenomenon:

M. Thalberg, dès les premières mesures, s'est montré un des trois ou quatre grands pianistes de l'Europe; après quelques développements, il s'est emparé complètement de l'assemblée et l'a promenée haletante,



Illustration 2. Sigismond Thalberg à 24 ans [d'après la lithogr. de Grevedon]:
[estampe], by P. L. H. Grevedon, 1880–1914, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Retrieved April 24, 2026, from

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/services/engine/search/sru?operation=searchRetrieve&version=1.2&query=%28dc.title%20all%20%22Sigismund%20Thalberg%20%20d%27apr%C3%A8s%20la%20lithogr%22%29&keywords=Sigismund%20Thalberg%20%20d%27apr%C3%A8s%20la%20lithogr&suggest=1>

de merveilles en merveilles, jusqu'au dernier accord où cet immense enthousiasme, si péniblement contenu, a enfin éclaté. La salle en tremblait. Je n'ai jamais vu que Listz produire un effet pareil. Ces deux talents, cependant, n'ont point ensemble de rapports sur lesquels il soit possible d'établir une comparaison sérieuse.⁷

Reviews by other critics were similar in style and content; however, it was Berlioz's commentary that contained the pivotal argument regarding the inappropriateness of comparing the performance manners of Liszt and Thalberg. Yet, the counterposition of the two virtuosos, which originated with this concert, became an indispensable feature of every musical review in the Parisian press. Whenever an article was dedicated to one pianist, the other was almost invariably mentioned or implied. Critics frequently evaluated Thalberg alongside other contemporaries. For instance, an anonymous author in *Le Ménestrel* noted:

Moscheles, Kalkbrenner, Chopin, Listz, Hertz, sont et seront toujours pour moi de grands artistes, qui, chacun en leur genre, ont imprimé à leur art un mouvement de progrès incontestable. ... mais M. Thalberg est le créateur d'un nouvel art que je ne saurais comparer à rien de ce qui existait avant lui.⁸

In the very same publication, Thalberg was hailed as "le premier pianiste du monde.

Liszt was staying in Geneva when Thalberg made his debut on the Parisian stage. Rumors reached him regarding a new virtuoso who had caused a sensation in the capital of piano music of that era. The artist's anxiety was heightened by the fact that among the reviews of his colleague, there were no negative or ambiguous accounts; Thalberg was admired even by the most devoted followers of Liszt's own style. In May 1836, Liszt returned to the French capital, intending to hear his unexpected rival perform, but by that time, Thalberg had already departed.

Liszt gave two concerts for a select audience at the Salle Erard, including in the program, alongside his own pieces, Beethoven's *Große Sonate für das Hammer-Klavier*, Op. 106. By positioning himself as a champion of Beethoven's music and contrasting his "serious" repertoire with Thalberg's opera transcriptions, the pianist issued a kind of artistic challenge to his rival. He adhered to this strategy even after the "duel," incorporating not only large-scale but also lesser-known works by the Viennese master into his concert programs. However,

⁷ Berlioz, H. (1836, January 31). Premier concert du Conservatoire. *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, (5), pp. 38–39.

⁸ M. Thalberg. (1836, March 13). *Le Ménestrel: Journal de musique*, (15), p. 1.

Thalberg was not to be outdone: from 1837 onward, he regularly performed both Beethoven's piano sonatas and his own transcriptions of the composer's symphonies.

Berlioz wrote a separate article on Liszt's May performances. Its core premise was that this time, a "new" Liszt had appeared before the public—one who had matured significantly as a performer and had surpassed his former self: "...à tous ceux qui ne l'ont pas entendu en dernier lieu, on peut dire hardiment: Vous ne connaissez pas Liszt."⁹ Berlioz modestly added that it was not his place to pass judgment on the technical perfection of the playing, since he himself "...n'ayant jamais pu parvenir à faire seulement de la main droite la gamme d'ut sur le piano."¹⁰ Concluding the article, he hailed Liszt as the "le pianiste de l'avenir." While this statement has been cited in dozens of monographs, it has only rarely been quoted in its entirety. Berlioz was deeply moved by the magnificent, profound interpretation of Beethoven's sonata—"ce poème sublime qui, pour la presque totalité des pianistes, n'était jusqu'à ce jour que l'énigme du Sphinx":

Nouvel Œdipe, Liszt l'a expliquée, de manière à ce que l'auteur, s'il a pu l'entendre, a dû frémir de joie et d'orgueil dans sa tombe. Pas une note n'a été omise, pas une note n'a été ajoutée (je suivais des yeux la partition), pas une altération n'a été apportée au mouvement qui ne fût indiquée dans le texte, pas une inflexion, pas une idée n'a été affaiblie ou détournée de son vrai sens. Dans l'adagio surtout, dans la reproduction de cette hymne inouïe que le génie de Beethoven semble s'être chantée à lui-même en planant solitaire dans l'immensité, il s'est constamment maintenu au niveau de la pensée de l'auteur. On ne peut rien dire de plus, je le sais, mais on ne doit rien dire de moins, parce que c'est vrai. C'est l'idéal de l'exécution d'une œuvre réputée inexécutable. Liszt, en reproduisant ainsi une œuvre encore incomprise, a prouvé qu'il était le pianiste de l'avenir. Honneur à lui!¹¹

While sincerely admiring the performance of Beethoven's sonata, Berlioz neither compared nor contrasted Liszt with Thalberg, and he certainly did not associate the "future versus past" dichotomy with their respective performance styles. At the same time, the greater part of the article was dedicated to analyzing Liszt's artistic temperament: it was as if the author were attempting to justify the flaws in his playing to potential opponents as a result of "inspiration fébrile" and "trembler de l'émotion passionnée qu'il se propose d'exciter chez autrui."¹²

⁹ Berlioz, H. (1836, June 12). Liszt. *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, (24), p. 198

¹⁰ Berlioz, 1836, p. 199.

¹¹ Berlioz, 1836, pp. 199–200.

¹² Berlioz, 1836, p. 199.

Liszt's Article and Its Aftermath

After these concerts, Liszt left Paris and returned only in December 1836, on the eve of the winter concert season. This season featured the most prominent pianists of the era. Thalberg arrived in Paris in early February 1837 and attended at least one of Liszt's four chamber concerts, which were organized jointly with the violinist Chrétien Urhan and the cellist Alexandre Batta.¹³ The programs of these evenings consisted primarily of Beethoven's instrumental works, drawing the most discerning audience.

For his part, Liszt also attended one of his rival's performances, which took place on February 19 at the studio of Pierre Zimmermann, a professor at the Paris Conservatoire. According to Liszt's recollections, he was in the hall alongside Chopin and remarked to him that Thalberg was "un grand seigneur manqué qui fait un artiste encore plus manqué."¹⁴ This phrase may appear relatively mild against the backdrop of other descriptions that Liszt bestowed upon his colleague in almost every letter to Marie d'Agoult¹⁵ throughout February 1837.

This skeptical attitude toward his rival is clearly reflected in the tone and content of Liszt's article¹⁶ published on January 8, 1837, in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*. The text was formally presented as a review of Thalberg's *Grande fantaisie*,

¹³ In one of his letters to Marie d'Agoult, Liszt described his rival's reaction to his performance: "Thalberg a été stupéfait d'étonnement. Il a dit tout haut, devant plusieurs personnes qui se trouvaient là, qu'il n'a jamais rien entendu de pareil. Il a ajouté même 'qu'il serait incapable de jouer quatre lignes de mon morceau.' Si je ne me trompe il doit être assez attristé. Toutefois, je ne veux pas donner carrière à mes suppositions à cet égard." Liszt, F., & d'Agoult, M. (1933). *Correspondance de Liszt et de la comtesse d'Agoult* (M. D. Ollivier, Ed.; Vol. 1). B. Grasset, p. 180.

¹⁴ Liszt & d'Agoult, 1933, p. 190.

¹⁵ In his private correspondence, Liszt was even more categorical. For instance, on February 13, he wrote: "Thalberg est un jeune homme très faible et très influençable. Ses amis sont fort médiocres; tant pis pour lui" (Liszt & d'Agoult, 1933, p. 187). In a subsequent letter, Liszt remarked: "Je viens d'entendre Thalberg: en vérité, c'est une mystification complète. De toutes les choses déclarées supérieures, c'est assurément la plus médiocre que je sache" (Liszt & d'Agoult, 1933, p. 190). In his final letter of February, he concluded: "Le concert de Thalberg est remis, dit-on! Mon Dieu, que cela est bête. Cet imbécile commence à m'ennuyer violemment. Mais il faudra bien que la partie finisse un beau soir" (Liszt & d'Agoult, 1933, p. 196).

¹⁶ Some researchers believe that the article was written by Countess d'Agoult [5, p. 131] or with her participation [1, p. 23].

Op. 22, and Caprices Op. 15 and Op. 19. While conceding that “M. Thalberg est un pianiste fort remarquable,” Liszt nonetheless implied that the true reason for his success lay in his “d’une parenté indirecte avec une noble famille” and his privileged status as the “pianiste de S. M. l’empereur d’Autriche.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Liszt caustically compared his opponent to “fous de cour” who, unlike Thalberg, “Jadis au moins les fous de cour réussissaient parfois à distraire de majestueux ennuis.”¹⁸

The central focus of Liszt’s article was his critique of Thalberg’s *Grande fantaisie*. The author characterized it as “... non-seulement c’est là une des œuvres les plus prétentieusement vides et médiocres que nous sachions, mais encore c’est là une chose souverainement monotone.”¹⁹ Indeed, the *Fantaisie*, Op. 22 was not Thalberg’s finest composition. At that time, the virtuoso more frequently performed his *Fantaisie* on themes from Rossini’s opera *Mosè in Egitto* (Op. 33). Built upon the melody of Moses’s prayer, *Dal tuo stellato soglio*, this piece appeared remarkably innovative both in its structure (the author abandoned the traditional brilliant finale) and its textural solutions. It marked the first implementation of the thumb technique, where the thumbs alternately carried the melody in the middle voice, enveloped by arpeggio passages in the upper and lower registers. Whether intentionally or not, Liszt failed to mention this composition. It should also be noted that, by that time, Liszt himself had composed only a few early works—specifically, the *Grande fantaisie de bravoure sur la clochette de Paganini* (1834)²⁰ and fantasies on themes from Halévy’s *La Juive* (1835) and Pacini’s *Niobe* (1836).²¹

Perhaps Liszt’s primary error was his sharp attack on the audience that had welcomed Thalberg. As previously noted, this audience included even Liszt’s own adherents, Berlioz among them. One of the article’s passages was particularly caustic in mocking the tastes of the French public and all those who sympathized with Thalberg:

¹⁷ Liszt, F. (1837, January 8). M. Thalberg. Grande Fantaisie, Oeuvre 22. 1er et 2e Caprices, Oeuvres 15 et 19 (Revue critique). *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 4(2), p. 18.

¹⁸ Liszt, 1837, p. 18.

¹⁹ Liszt, 1837, p. 19.

²⁰ In 1851, Liszt revised this fantasy into the étude *La Campanella*, which was included as No. 3 in the cycle *Grandes études de Paganini* (S. 141). Searle, H. (1954). *The Music of Liszt*. Williams & Norgate, p. 165.

²¹ On the genre of the piano fantasy in the oeuvre of Liszt and Thalberg, see [8].

Le goût, ou, pour dire plus exactement, la prédilection exclusive du public pour les choses médiocres, nous sont connus d'ancienne date, il est vrai; toutefois nous avons pensé bien à tort, jusqu'ici, qu'à défaut d'art il se faisait au moins besoin d'un certain amusement, et que des productions appartenant directement et absolument au genre ennuyeux ne trouvaient jamais grâce auprès d'un auditoire français. Nous confessons humblement nous être trompés.²²

Thus, even before the “duel” took place, Liszt had alienated a significant portion of the Parisian audience. His disparaging remarks about Thalberg were deemed ethically unacceptable, and his criticism of his rival prompted reviewers to scrutinize the originality of the author's own compositions more closely. Although the juxtaposition of the two artists in Parisian reviews had already set the stage for their rivalry, it was precisely this tendentious article that provoked the future “duel.” While Thalberg refrained from responding publicly to these attacks, Liszt continued publishing articles until July 1837 in which he condemned the poor taste of his contemporaries.²³ Nonetheless, the venues for Liszt's numerous concerts invariably remained full. This circumstance indicates that, contrary to the pianist's reproaches, the Parisian public continued to appreciate both his talent and the music of Beethoven that he performed.

Since Liszt's attacks had long remained unanswered, Fétis apparently deemed it necessary to intervene on Thalberg's behalf. In April of the same year, he published an extensive article titled “Liszt and Thalberg.” As an erudite music historian, Fétis began with an overview of piano art, in which he distinguished two traditions: the *cantabile* tradition, represented by Chopin, and the *brilliant* tradition, which viewed the piano as “une arène pour l'adresse et la dextérité”²⁴ Liszt, for whom no technical limitations existed, indisputably belonged to the latter. Thalberg, conversely, was a pioneering pianist who had managed “de réunir en un seul système les avantages des deux écoles chantante et brillante du piano.”²⁵

²² Liszt, 1837, p. 18.

²³ Liszt's third and final article from the series of open letters to George Sand, later compiled under the collective title *Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique*, was published on July 16, 1837, after Thalberg had already departed from Paris. See: Liszt, F. (1837, July 16). Lettre d'un voyageur à M. George Sand. *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, (29), pp. 339–343.

²⁴ Fétis, F.-J. (1837, April 23). MM. Thalberg et Liszt. *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, (17), p. 141.

²⁵ Fétis, 1837, p. 140.

Fétis emphasized that he considered Liszt to be “le plus fort des pianists pour l’exécution de quelque difficulté donnée que ce soit” and repeated Berlioz’s observation regarding the error of comparing Liszt’s and Thalberg’s styles: “Personne que je sache ne songea à établir de parallèle entre le talent de ces deux artistes, et certes il n’y en avait point à faire, car ils suivent des voies absolument différentes.”²⁶ Caustically criticizing the pianist’s journalistic immoderation and dismissing his review as “d’inévitables effets des faiblesses humaines,” Fétis concluded his response by addressing Liszt directly:

Vous êtes un grand artiste; votre talent est immense, votre habileté à vaincre les difficultés de tout genre, incomparable; vous avez poussé aussi loin qu’il était possible l’exécution dans le système que vous avez trouvé établi par d’autres; mais vous êtes resté dans ce système, en le modifiant seulement par les détails. Aucune pensée nouvelle n’a donné à ces merveilles de votre jeu un caractère de création et de propriété. Ce n’est pas à dire que quelque heureuse idée ne viendra un jour illuminer votre esprit sur un emploi nouveau de vos rares facultés; mais enfin jusqu’à ce jour il n’en est point ainsi. Vous êtes l’homme transcendant de l’école qui finit et qui n’a plus rien à faire, mais vous n’êtes pas celui d’une école nouvelle. Thalberg est cet homme: voilà toute la différence entre vous deux.²⁷

However, Fétis’s article was published after the “duel,” which took place on March 31, 1837. The chronology of the events preceding the confrontation deserves closer examination. On March 12, Thalberg gave a concert at the Paris Conservatoire, in a hall with a capacity of about four hundred people. The pianist performed his most spectacular works: the *Grande fantaisie sur l’air “God Save the King”* (Op. 27), the *Fantaisie* (Op. 22), and the *Fantaisie sur des motifs de “Moïse” de Rossini* (Op. 33). Liszt, on the other hand, rented the hall of the Paris Opéra, which accommodated nearly two thousand listeners. On March 19, he included the most successful works from his repertoire in the concert program: his own *Réminiscences de “Niobe” de Pacini* (Fantasia on Themes from Pacini’s *Niobe*) and Carl Maria von Weber’s *Konzertstück*. As before, both performances drew a widespread response from the press.

²⁶ Fétis, 1837, p. 141.

²⁷ Fétis, 1837, p. 142.

The Duel: Accounts of Eyewitnesses

Although Fétis argued that comparing Liszt and Thalberg as both pianists and composers was inappropriate, comparisons came naturally: every review of a concert by one artist either mentioned or implied the other. During the opening months of 1837, each artist had already gathered a group of adherents who published articles and exchanged opinions in Parisian salons. One such center of social life belonged to Princess Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso (1808–1871). A close friend of Liszt and one of the most charming socialites in Paris at the time, she was an ardent Italian patriot who maintained friendships with Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini, supporting them in their struggle for the independence and unification of their homeland.²⁸ In late March, the Princess organized a three-day series of charity evenings at her mansion to raise funds for Italian political refugees. It was during the final concert of this series that the famous “duel” between Thalberg and Liszt took place.

Initially, Franz Liszt, Sigismond Thalberg, Frédéric Chopin, Henri Herz, Carl Czerny, and Johann Peter Pixis were announced as participants; it was intended that each would present their own variations on a theme from Bellini’s opera *I Puritani*. However, this portion of the program was canceled, leaving Liszt and Thalberg as the sole participants of the evening.²⁹ The Princess succeeded in selling tickets for 40 francs—an exceptionally high price, affordable only to the highest aristocracy.³⁰ That evening, Thalberg performed his *Grande fantaisie sur des motifs de l’opéra “Moïse” de G. Rossini*, Op. 33, while Liszt played his *Grande fantaisie sur des motifs de l’opéra “Niobe” de Pacini*, S. 419. In the opinion of the assembled audience, neither pianist gained the upper hand, and both were declared victors.

²⁸ For further details on the personality of Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, see [2, pp. 238–239].

²⁹ The collaborative efforts of the six musicians, however, were not in vain: in 1839, their variations were published under the title *Hexaméron, morceau de concert: Grandes Variations de bravoure sur la marche des Puritains de Bellini / composées par MM. Liszt, Thalberg, Pixis, Henri Herz, Czerny et Chopin*. Wien: Tobias Haslinger, 1839. (S. 392).

³⁰ For comparison: in those years, the monthly wage of a male worker in Paris ranged from 30 to 60 francs, while a ticket for a performance at the Opéra cost between 3 and 10 francs. See Zhestkova, O. V. (2017). *Frantsuzskaya bol’shaya opera kak khudozhestvenno-esteticheskoe i sotsial’no-politicheskoe yavlenie (1820–1830-e gody)* [French grand opera as an artistic, aesthetic, social, and political phenomenon (1820–1830s)] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Kazan State Conservatory, p. 70.

This “duel” became, perhaps, the most thoroughly documented piano competition of the nineteenth century. All eyewitnesses unanimously recognized both participants as outstanding masters and virtuosos who, however, represented entirely different artistic traditions. Below are two of the most representative accounts from the Parisian press: the first belongs to Jules Janin, a correspondent for the *Journal des Débats*, and the second to the critic and playwright Ernest Legouvé:

Jamais Liszt n’a été plus retenu, plus sage, plus énergique, plus passionné; jamais Thalberg n’avait chanté avec plus d’entraînement et de tendresse: chacun d’eux s’est tenu prudemment dans son domaine harmonique, mais aussi chacun d’eux a usé de toutes ses ressources. C’était une joute admirable. Le silence le plus profond entourait cette noble arène. Et enfin Liszt et Thalberg ont été proclamés tous les deux, deux vainqueurs par cette brillante et intelligente assemblée. Il est de fait qu’une pareille lutte ne pouvait avoir lieu qu’en présence d’un pareil aréopage. Ainsi donc deux vainqueurs et pas un vaincu...³¹

I had the rare good fortune to hear these two great artists on the same day, in the same salon, at an interval of a quarter of an hour, at a concert given by the Princess Belgiojoso for the Poles. There was then revealed to me palpably, clearly, the characteristic difference in their talent. Liszt was incontestably the more artistic, the more vibrant, the more electric. He had tones of a delicacy that made one think of the almost inaudible tinkling of tiny spangles or the faint explosion of sparks of fire. Never have fingers bounded so lightly over the piano. But at the same time his nervousness caused him to produce sometimes effects a trifle hard, a trifle harsh. ... Thalberg never pounded. What constituted his superiority, what made the pleasure of hearing him play a luxury to the ear, was pure tone. I have never heard such another, so full, so round, so soft, so velvety, so sweet, and still so strong! How shall I say it? The voice of Alboni. At this concert in hearing Liszt I felt myself in an atmosphere charged with electricity and quivering with lightning. In hearing Thalberg I seemed to be floating in a sea of purest light. The contrast between their characters was not less than between their talent.³²

Beyond these commentaries, there were hundreds of others; it is unnecessary to cite every statement, given that the central conclusion remained the same:

³¹ Janin, J. (1837, April 3). Feuilleton du Journal des Débats. *Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires*, p. 1.

³² As cited in Huneker, J. (1911). *Franz Liszt*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, pp. 286–287.

despite the disparity in their temperaments and performance styles, both virtuosos were equally deserving of the title of victor. The remaining nuances in the reviews merely reflected the authors' aesthetic preferences and the extent of their literary talent. Nevertheless, examining this vast body of source material is of paramount importance, as it allows us to trace the most persistent characteristics of nineteenth-century performance practice. While both virtuosos possessed flawless piano technique, eyewitnesses consistently noted a distinctly cantabile quality in Thalberg's playing, whereas Liszt captivated audiences with his expressive power and unparalleled dramatic intensity.

Thalberg's "novelty" lay in his ability to project the melody through a turbulent flow of arpeggios and figurations. He was not the pioneer of the "singing tone," a technique mastered by Johann Baptist Cramer, John Field, and Frédéric Chopin, and achieved through legato, precise fingering, and phrasing. Rather, judging by the dynamic markings in his own compositions, Thalberg emphasized the main melody using *bien marcato*. Furthermore, he was not the inventor of the so-called "three-hand technique,"³³ as noted by Fétis (1837) in the aforementioned article "MM. Thalberg et Liszt." Overall, following the pianist's first Parisian concert, critics focused on the general impression of his unconventional tone—often compared to the human voice—rather than on specific technical devices. As Blanchard (1836) remarked, "...qu'on oublie la sécheresse de cet instrument mécanique et qu'on est tout surpris de l'entendre filer des sons, chanter, pleurer comme Grisi, Malibran-de-Bériot ou Rubini ... Nul n'a jamais chanté sur le piano comme Thalberg."³⁴ In Legouvé's (1837) previously cited commentary, Thalberg's tone was similarly compared to the voice of the opera singer (contralto) Marietta Alboni.

The ability to "sing on the piano," to which Thalberg later dedicated his didactic work,³⁵ became the defining characteristic of his artistic individuality. It was achieved not only through finger dexterity and masterful pedaling,

³³ The creator of this textural model is considered to be the English virtuoso harpist Elias Parish Alvars (1808–1849), whose performing activity was aimed at establishing the harp as a solo concert instrument. Thalberg, impressed by Parish Alvars's innovative findings, adapted and developed them in his piano compositions. Evidence of the creative ties between the musicians is the Fantasia, Op. 35 (1838), dedicated by Parish Alvars to Thalberg.

³⁴ Blanchard, H. (1836, May 8). Thalberg. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (19), p. 153.

³⁵ Thalberg, S. (1853). *L'art du chant appliqué au piano: Op. 70*. Heugel & Cie, Préface.

as noted by many of his contemporaries, but also through the richness and density of the multi-layered texture in his own fantasies. Cantabile operatic themes were never lost within the dense layers of piano figurations cascading across the entire range of the instrument.³⁶ Like human voices, they could resonate in any register, not in opposition to the passages, but as if emerging from their very depths. In characterizing Thalberg's "vocal tone," critics consistently employed such epithets as "full," "bright," "mellow," "powerful," and "sonorous." Consequently, the pianist's performing style was inextricably associated with opera and operatic singing.

The connection to opera was evidenced not only by the vocal themes underlying his piano fantasies but also by his profound practical interest in the art of singing. For several years, Thalberg took singing lessons from Manuel García Jr., who taught at the Paris Conservatoire.³⁷ In his treatise, being conscious of the metaphorical nature of the title itself—*L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, Op. 70—the pianist clearly articulated the true artist's objective:

Comme le piano ne peut, rationnellement parlant, traduire le chant dans ce qu'il a de plus parfait, c'est-à-dire la faculté de prolonger les sons, il faut à force d'adresse et d'art détruire cette imperfection, et arriver non-seulement à produire l'illusion des sons soutenus et prolongés, mais encore celle des sons enflés.³⁸

Furthermore, Thalberg urged pianists to learn a sense of melodic line and dynamic balance from vocalists: "La partie chantante devra *toujours* être clairement et distinctement articulée, et ressortir aussi tranchée qu'une belle voix humaine sur un accompagnement d'orchestre très doux."³⁹ Such instructions encapsulated the core principles of the pianistic aesthetics of Thalberg. The concept of a "qu'une belle voix humaine sur un accompagnement d'orchestre très doux" is embodied in each of his compositions, although this by no means implied that all music should be treated as an aria with accompaniment. The pianist recommended varying the types of touch depending on the character of the melody:

³⁶ An analysis of Thalberg's performing style, based on his *Fantasy for Piano on Favorite Themes from Meyerbeer's Opera 'Robert le Diable'*, is presented in article [9].

³⁷ Hominick, I. G. (1991). *Sigismund Thalberg (1811–1871), forgotten piano virtuoso: His career and musical contributions* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Ohio State University, p. 45. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10accession_num=osu1487687959965789

³⁸ Thalberg, 1853, Préface.

³⁹ Thalberg, 1853, Préface.

broad, dramatic themes should be “chanter de poitrine” (that is, played with a full, strong, and “chaleur” tone, but never by roughly striking the keys), whereas simple, tender, and graceful melodies should be performed as if with “avec une main désossée et des doigts de velours.”⁴⁰

Liszt’s artistic persona was grounded in entirely different aesthetic principles. While reviews of Thalberg mentioned technical perfection as a quality subordinate to the primary artistic objective—namely, the vocality of melodic delivery—accounts of Liszt emphasized vividness, agility, and the deft overcoming of performance difficulties as the virtuoso’s main virtues. Judging by eyewitness reports, Liszt did not possess a beautiful or deep tone. Henry Chorley, a fervent admirer of Liszt, could not ignore this shortcoming: “In uniform richness and sweetness of tone he may have been surpassed.”⁴¹ An anonymous critic for the English newspaper *Norwich Mercury* similarly noted that Liszt’s tone “is inferior to Thalberg’s, whose means are all adapted to the one end of making the most of his instrument.”⁴²

The fundamental difference between the performing styles of Thalberg and Liszt can be illustrated by comparing their respective fantasies on themes from Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*. As early as 1834, a Viennese correspondent for the Parisian *Gazette musicale* wrote about Thalberg’s astonishing manner of imitating the human voice: “Lorsqu’il joue au piano le thème: *la Ci darem la mano*, on ne peut s’empêcher de croire entendre chanter le même air; les sons enflés, la passion intime et l’esprit des paroles, la résistance apparente de Zerline, sa défaite prochaine, le piano exprime tout cela comme le ferait la voix la plus.”⁴³

In contrast, in Liszt’s interpretation of his *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, contemporaries were struck by the pianist’s ability to embody the characters in such a way that the theatrical images seemed to come alive before the audience. The German diplomat Kurd von Schlözer, upon hearing Liszt play in 1841, noted: “Everything he did on the keys was mirrored in his features, flashed in his eyes and electrified by all his movements; especially in the duet between the Don and Zerlina,

⁴⁰ Thalberg, 1853, Préface.

⁴¹ Chorley delicately placed this comment in a footnote. Chorley, H. (1844). *Music and Manners in France and Germany* (Vol. 3), p. 45.

⁴² The concerts. (1840, September 26). *The Norwich Mercury*, p. 2.

⁴³ A. X. (1834, October 26). Correspondance particulière. *Gazette musicale de Paris*, (43), p. 347.

in which at one moment he looked timid and the next leapt from his seat into the air for joy” (as cited in [10, p. 29]). To some, it appeared that Liszt conveyed the dramatic intent even more expressively than in the operatic original: “Non, jamais vous n’avez entendu chanter avec plus d’âme et de tendresse le motif du duo: *là ci darem la mano*, avec plus de folie et de gaieté, celui de l’air: *fin ch’han d’al vino!*”⁴⁴ Paul Smith remarked in 1844.

While Thalberg created the illusion of a “dramatic voice” through his playing, Liszt transformed himself into the operatic characters. Many observers noted the significant role of facial expressions, gestures, and stage presence in his performances. This trait characterized not only his execution of operatic fantasies and transcriptions but also his overall stage manner. Heinrich Heine described Liszt as a “volcanic, fiery” artist, emphasizing the immense, overwhelming power of his visual impact:

... il se jette souvent avec furie sur les touches d’ivoire; alors surgit une forêt de pensées cahotiques, à travers lesquelles les fleurs des plus doux sentiments répandent leur parfum. Il vous oppresse et vous enflamme tout à la fois, mais la part de l’oppression est la plus forte. Je vous avoue que, quelle que soit mon amitié pour Liszt, sa musique n’affecte pas agréablement ma sensibilité, d’autant plus que malheureusement je suis un voyant, et que je vois les spectres que d’autres ne font qu’entendre.⁴⁵

Divergences in stage presence marked a far more pronounced boundary between the performing styles of Liszt and Thalberg than the character of their sound. Contemporaries were unanimous in describing the “electrically charged” performances of the former and the academic restraint of the latter. Thalberg’s platform image presented a blend of restrained inspiration and Apollonian serenity, whereas Liszt’s temperament was inextricably associated with the Dionysian, ecstatic principle:

L’attitude différente de chacun d’eux indique manifestement la différence de leur nature. Vous vous rappelez la violente contraction du visage et du corps de Liszt, emblème du plaisir fougueux, parvenu jusqu’aux angoisses de la douleur. Thalberg, au contraire, est assis tranquillement, carrément: son large front s’incline vers les touches,

⁴⁴ Smith, P. (1844, June 30). Concert au bénéfice de Mme Bérton. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (26), p. 223.

⁴⁵ Heine, H. (1838, February 4). Lettres confidentielles II. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (5), p. 42.

que ses yeux ne perdent pas de vue: c'est le symbole de la conviction profonde, mais calme, de l'enthousiasme ardent, mais concentré, du feu sans fumée, mais non sans chaleur.⁴⁶

Joseph d'Ortigue was similarly fascinated by Thalberg's "cette force calme, cette puissance tranquille, cette exaltation à la fois modérée et sereine."⁴⁷ Thalberg's outward composure did not imply cold indifference or a lack of inner emotion; the artist's creative fire, as the critic aptly remarked, was devoid of "fumée" but not of "chaleur." Thalberg never allowed emotions to influence his body movements, consistently maintaining a perfectly poised and majestic posture at the instrument. By contrast, in Liszt's performance style, the dynamics of his gestures and facial expressions did not merely complement the impact of the music but became an inherent component of his stage persona. A curious observation regarding this visual contrast was recorded by Ernest Legouvé, who witnessed the legendary duel at the salon of Princess Belgiojoso:

Liszt's attitude at the piano, like that of a pythoness, has been remarked again and again. Constantly tossing back his long hair, his lips quivering, his nostrils palpitating, he swept the auditorium with the glance of a smiling master. ... There was nothing of the kind about Thalberg. He was the gentleman artist, a perfect union of talent and propriety. He seemed to have taken it for his rule to be the exact opposite of his rival. He entered noiselessly; I might almost say without displacing the air. After a dignified greeting that seemed a trifle cold in manner, he seated himself at the piano as though upon an ordinary chair. The piece began, not a gesture, not a change of countenance! not a glance toward the audience! If the applause was enthusiastic, a respectful inclination of the head was his only response. His emotion, which was very profound, as I have had more than one proof, betrayed itself only by a violent rush of blood to the head, colouring his ears, his face and his neck.⁴⁸

This distinction is clearly reflected in the portraits and caricatures of the pianists published in various journals. Liszt was invariably depicted in

⁴⁶ E. M. (1836, May 29). Thalberg. Expliqué par Dantan. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (22), p. 180.

⁴⁷ d'Ortigue, J. (1837, March 19). Concert de M. Sigismond Thalberg. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (12), p. 98.

⁴⁸ As cited in Huneke, J. (1971). *Franz Liszt*. AMS Press, p. 285. (Original work published 1911).

an ecstatic pose—either with his head thrown back or, conversely, bent low over the keyboard. In a caricature titled *Galop chromatique*, the artist captured Liszt's eccentric performance movements in a grotesque exaggeration (*Illustration 3*). A stark contrast is offered by the depiction of Thalberg, who avoided all unnecessary movements of the torso, head, or hands (*Illustration 4*). The caricaturist drew him with eight hands (two of them in the pockets of his coat) instead of two, as many noted that the virtuoso's playing created the illusion of a harmonious and full-toned performance by an ensemble or an entire orchestra. The French sculptor Jean-Pierre Dantan represented Thalberg with two hands, but with ten fingers on each (*Illustration 5*).

Thalberg's technical mastery, which allowed him to play with two hands as if with six, appeared almost supernatural to his contemporaries. When he performed his transcription of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, listeners compared his playing with that of the Orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire:

Nous ne saurions exprimer avec quel charme la mélodie si mélancolique, si passionnée de l'andante s'exhale du piano de Thalberg. Nous nous demandions si l'orchestre du Conservatoire, si la voix humaine, auraient plus d'éloquence intime, plus d'accent vrai, pénétrant.⁴⁹

Notably, the Orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire under the direction of François-Antoine Habeneck became renowned for its profound interpretations of Beethoven's symphonies and was recognized as the finest in Europe, even by such demanding critics as Richard Wagner.⁵⁰

Liszt's playing was similarly associated with the sonority of an entire orchestra, albeit for entirely different reasons. The pianist frequently performed his own transcriptions of the final movements of Beethoven's Sixth ("Pastoral") Symphony, striking listeners with his fantastic ability to render orchestral timbres on the piano:

...écoutez Liszt, orchestre sur son piano! voyez dans chacun de ses doigts la capacité de toute une association d'hommes! ... comme il fait apparaître successivement dans leur magnificence toutes les figures, les monologues grandioses des instruments à vent, les pizzicato démoniaques des basses; depuis le frémissement du pianissimo jusqu'à la tempête des fortissimo! et vous

⁴⁹ E. M. (1838, March 25). Concert donné par S. Thalberg. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (12), 131. https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_sr5CAAAAcAAJ/page/n141/mode/2up

⁵⁰ For a more detailed account of the Orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire, see [11].



Illustration 3. Le Galop chromatique, exécuté par le diable de la musique
(The Chromatic Galop, Performed by the Musical Devil). Anonymous caricature of Franz Liszt. April 18, 1843. Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Paris. Retrieved April 24, 2026, from https://classes.bnf.fr/essentiels/grand/ess_2479.htm



Illustration 4. Unknown artist. Portrait of Sigismond Thalberg. Engraving. Circa 1840. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Gallica. Retrieved April 24, 2026, from <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84271679.r=Sigismond%20Thalberg%20caricature?rk=42918;4>



Illustration 5. Jean-Pierre Dantan (Dantan le Jeune).

Portrait-charge de Sigismond Thalberg. Statuette. Circa 1836. Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris. Inv. S1013. Retrieved April 24, 2026, from <https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/musee-carnavalet/oeuvres/portrait-charge-de-sigismond-thalberg-1812-1871-pianiste-allemand>

conviendrez que Liszt a transformé le piano, qu'il l'a métamorphosé en orchestre, qu'il a centuplé sa puissance.⁵¹

Théophile Gautier explained the “orchestral” nature of Liszt’s style with even greater precision: “Non pas qu’il ait fait sortir de la caisse de son piano un volume de sonorité égal au bruit de tous les instrumens, mais il en a dit toutes les mélodies, fait ressortir les nuances les plus délicates, les intentions les plus fugitives avec un charme, un relief et une pénétration incroyables.”⁵² From such accounts, it becomes evident that Liszt treated the piano not as a vehicle for a powerful, homogeneous sound, but as an instrument capable of conveying the colorful contrast and dramatic expressiveness of various orchestral timbres, as well as dynamic and textural layers.

Pianists’ Perspectives

To gain a multifaceted understanding of the performing art of both artists, the reviews of other pianists who repeatedly attended the performances of Liszt and Thalberg prove to be the most valuable. Robert Schumann, whose own pianistic career was abruptly cut short by a hand injury, was a fervent champion of Liszt’s music, though he occasionally mildly criticized his early works for an excess of virtuoso devices that weakened the integrity of the form. In the context of performance mastery, one of Schumann’s observations confirms the immense role of outward, physical expression in Liszt’s playing: “...Aber man muß das hören und auch sehen, Liszt dürfte durchaus nicht hinter den Coulissen spielen; ein großes Stück Poesie ginge dadurch verloren.”⁵³ In other words, Liszt appealed not only to the auditory but also to the visual perception of his audience.

Schumann maintained a sharply critical attitude toward Thalberg’s compositions. Even when acknowledging certain successful ideas, as in the *Grande fantaisie sur des motifs de l’opéra Moïse de G. Rossini*, Op. 22 or the *Trois Nocturnes pour le Piano*, Op. 21, he did so with clear irritation,⁵⁴ particularly

⁵¹ Franz Liszt: [après son premier concert du 19 décembre 1839, à Vienne]. (1839, December 12). *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (67), p. 531.

⁵² Gautier, T. (1844, May 13). Feuilleton. *La Presse*, p. 1.

⁵³ Schumann, R. ([c. 1890]). *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann* (H. Simon, Ed.) (Vol. 3). Philipp Reclam jun., p. 18.

⁵⁴ Thus, Schumann began one of his 1837 reviews with the following words: “Beim Durchgehen der Kompositionen von Thalberg war ich von jeher immer in einer gewissen Spannung ...” Schumann, R. ([1889]). *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann* (H. Simon, Ed.) (Vol. 2). Philipp Reclam jun., p. 94.

in the late 1830s during the height of the rivalry between Thalberg with Liszt. By 1843, having become somewhat cooler toward Liszt's music and more sympathetic toward Thalberg, Schumann began to mention them together more frequently: „wie sie durch Liszt und Thalberg verireten werden, von denen dem ersteren niemand Genialität in Kombination mechanischer Schwierigkeiten, Ersindung wirklich neuer Instrumentaleffekte etc. absprechen kann, ebensowenig sie dem andern eine Salongrazie, eine Berechnung und Kenntniss des Effektes etc., daß er überall einnehmen und entusiasmieren muß.“⁵⁵

Friedrich Wieck and his daughter Clara genuinely admired Liszt's artistry, and their meeting in Vienna in April 1838 marked the beginning of a fruitful creative relationship. The following day, Wieck recorded his impressions in his diary: “He can be compared with no other player, for he is unique. He startles and astonishes, and is a very amiable artist. His appearance at the piano is indescribable—he is original—forgets himself at the instrument.”⁵⁶ However, as an experienced pedagogue, Wieck could not help but note Liszt's excessive affectation: “He sets no limits to his passion and not infrequently does violence to one's sense of beauty by torturing the melodies and by too frequent use of the pedal.”⁵⁷

Clara Schumann herself spoke of both pianists with equal respect. In December 1838, in a letter to her husband from Leipzig, she noted: “Thalberg arrived yesterday, and played here for 2 hours, carrying us from one state of amazement to another; he can do much, more than all of us (except Liszt), you are right in that, and if I were not a woman I should long ago have said good-bye to virtuosity.”⁵⁸

While Chopin's warm friendship with Liszt is a widely known fact, deciphering his attitude toward Thalberg's playing on the basis of a single reliable statement remains challenging. In an 1830 letter to a friend, the composer noted:

...*Thalberg* ... plays excellently, but he's not my man. Younger than I, pleases the ladies, makes *potpourris* from the Dumb Girl,⁵⁹ gets his piano by the pedal, not the hand, takes tenths as easily as I octaves,—has diamond shirt-studs,—

⁵⁵ Schumann, R. ([c. 1890]). (Vol. 3), p. 151

⁵⁶ As cited in Burk, J. N. (1940). *Clara Schumann: A Romantic Biography*. Random House, p. 149.

⁵⁷ As cited in Burk, 1940, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Litzmann, B. (1913). *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Wife. Based on material found in diaries and letters* (G. E. Hadow, Trans.; Vol. 1), Macmillan, p. 179.

⁵⁹ Auber, D.-F.-E. (1828). *La muette de Portici* (E. Scribe & G. Delavigne, Librettists) [Opera].

does not admire Moscheles; so don't be surprised that only the *tutti* of my concerto pleased him.⁶⁰

Setting aside the irony regarding the diamond shirt-studs and Thalberg's popularity among women, what essentially remains is an acknowledgment of technical superiority in executing tenths, an indication of specific pedaling techniques, and Chopin's subtle resentment over the fact that Thalberg appreciated only the orchestral sections of his piece.

Felix Mendelssohn attended the concerts of Liszt and Thalberg on multiple occasions and more than once paid due tribute to each of them. Following the Parisian "duel," when nearly all musicians who had heard the two virtuosos play felt it their duty to express their views, Mendelssohn summarized his opinion as follows:

Liszt war 14 Tage hier und hat einen Heiden-Scandal verursacht, im guten und schlechten Sinn. – Ich halte ihn für einen guten, herzlichen Menschen im Grunde, und für einen vortrefflichen Künstler. Daß er von Allen am meisten spielt, ist gar kein Zweifel; doch ist Thalberg mit seiner Gelassenheit und Beschränkung vollkommener, als eigentlicher Virtuose genommen, und das ist doch der Maßstab, den man auch bei Liszt anlegen muß, da seine Compositionen unter seinem Spiel stehen, und eben auch nur auf Virtuosität berechnet sind.⁶¹

All these reviews confirm that preferences for one pianist over the other were by no means based on a contrast between the "old" and the "new," the classical and the romantic, or the "profound" and the "superficial." Furthermore, the majority of these judgments cannot be explained merely by individual artistic or personal biases. For instance, Berlioz sympathized with Liszt, yet this did not prevent him from paying due tribute to Thalberg's mastery. Similarly, while Fétis emphasized the scope of Liszt's talent, he also considered it necessary to point out certain deficiencies in his performance.

The Social Profile of the Pianists' Audience

Several Russian and foreign researchers have attributed Thalberg's formal victory primarily to his affiliation with the secular elite. For instance, Andrei E. Budyakovsky wrote:

⁶⁰ Chopin, F. (1931). *Chopin's letters* (H. Opieński, Ed.; E. L. Voynich, Trans.). Alfred A. Knopf, p. 133.

⁶¹ Mendelssohn Bartholdy, F. (1861). *Briefe aus den Jahren 1830 bis 1847* (P. Mendelssohn Bartholdy & C. Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Ed.). Hermann Mendelssohn, p. 224.

...in the singular artistic competition between Liszt and Thalberg in 1837, Parisian high society sided with the latter. ... Chopin, Heine, Berlioz, and other artists, who expressed the tastes and opinions of the most developed and progressive segment of Parisian society, sided with Liszt and offered a completely different evaluation of Thalberg.⁶²

Vera N. Alexandrova and Evgeny I. Meilikh expressed similar views, though they linked the “high society” of Paris with the bourgeoisie rather than the aristocracy.⁶³ In turn, Ralph Locke argued that “Liszt’s short-lived but violent resentment of Thalberg was clearly tinged by issues of social class” [12, p. 67]. The only plausible basis for such a conclusion might be the benefit concert for the unemployed held in Lyon on August 3, 1837, which, in addition to Liszt, featured performances by various other artists.

In her multifaceted study, Dana Gooley presented a more profound, socially oriented concept of the rivalry between Thalberg and Liszt. She classified the former as an artistic symbol of the “aristocracy by birth,” and the latter as an exponent of the “aristocracy of talent” that united writers and artists [10, p. 59–70]. This view seems well-founded, considering Liszt’s close ties with Romantic writers, as well as his friendship and collaboration with Berlioz, Schumann, Chopin, and Meyerbeer. Regarding Thalberg, this concept also appears highly convincing: his aristocratic origins, virtuoso playing, and ability to behave naturally and with dignity evoked deep sympathy among the nobility, while the patronage of the Austrian diplomat in Paris, Count Rudolf Apponyi, opened the doors to the most prestigious salons.

Closer examination reveals, however, that Liszt’s most influential support came not from the artistic elite (although they played a vital role in shaping his reputation), but rather from women of noble birth—socialites belonging to the aristocratic caste of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and Faubourg Saint-Germain: Christina Belgiojoso, the Marquise Le Vayer, the Duchesse de Rauzan, and Countess d’Agoult.

⁶² Budyakovskiy, 1986, p. 19. (In Russ.).

⁶³ Alexandrova & Meilikh, 1963, pp. 57–58. (In Russ.).

Princess Belgiojoso was not merely the musician's patron but also his passionate defender, particularly during the climax of the rivalry. The "duel" in her mansion was evidently designed to provide Liszt with a psychological advantage by allowing him to perform within a familiar environment of his admirers. This was directly pointed out by the author of an article in the newspaper *Vert-Vert*, which had maintained neutrality toward the two pianists and responded to the "duel" with only a brief note:

Les applaudissemens ont été frénétiques et pour l'un et pour l'autre. M. Liszt n'a pas trop fait de folies. M. Thalberg a été calme comme à son ordinaire. Il serait difficile de dire de quel côté a penché la balance. Une partie du public a préféré M. Liszt, le reste de l'assemblée se prononçait en faveur de M. Thalberg, de telle sorte qu'il y a eu égale répartition de bravos.

Et ici nous ferons remarquer que si l'avantage a été d'un côté, c'est de celui de M. Thalberg, qui ne devait pas attendre une grande bienveillance d'un auditoire presque entièrement composé d'admirateurs exclusifs de M. Liszt.⁶⁴

Apparently, Liszt was in dire need of such support due to the barrage of counter-criticism that overwhelmed him following the publication of the ill-fated article. Christina Belgiojoso is credited with an aphorism, allegedly delivered as a verdict at the conclusion of the contest: "Thalberg est le premier pianiste du monde, Liszt est le seul." Although this statement was frequently cited by Liszt's biographers as proof of his superiority, they invariably omitted the princess's own admission in a letter to him written in November 1841: "Je me suis souvent laissé dire que j'étais injuste à l'égard de Thalberg, et que mon admiration pour vous troublait mon jugement."⁶⁵

Between 1832 and 1833, Liszt performed frequently in the salon of another patron of his, the Marquise Le Vayer. It was precisely in her luxurious mansion in the Faubourg Saint-Germain that the pianist met Countess d'Agoult. The Duchesse de Rauzan also regularly invited Liszt not only for piano performances but also to participate in literary and philosophical discussions. All this demonstrates that Liszt, who positioned himself as a representative of the "aristocracy of the spirit" or "aristocracy of talent," preferred to move within the circles of the "aristocracy by birth," rather than among the bourgeoisie or, even less so, the proletariat.

⁶⁴ Concert de bienfaisance. (1837, April 1). *Vert-vert: Gazette de Paris*, (91), p. 2.

⁶⁵ As cited in: Ollivier, D. (Ed.). (1941). *Autour de Mme d'Agoult et de Liszt (Alfred de Vigny, Émile Ollivier, Princesse de Belgiojoso): Lettres*. B. Grasset, p. 184.

This is further indicated by the unprecedentedly expensive tickets for his concerts.⁶⁶ The high prices served as a social filter, screening out even wealthy Parisians. While in 1837 a ticket for a chamber music evening cost twelve francs,⁶⁷ which was considered a barely acceptable sum, Liszt set a fee of twenty francs for admission to his concert on March 27, 1841. Maurice Schlesinger, the publisher of the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, suggested lowering the price,⁶⁸ but as a result, he merely lost the artist's favor.⁶⁹

Thalberg was a protégé of the influential Apponyi family and performed repeatedly at soirées in their home. In the midst of the rivalry, Liszt complained to Marie d'Agoult: "Les Apponyi cabalent (le mot est exact) pour Thalberg et contre moi."⁷⁰ This bitter reproach seems to be yet another severe moral consequence of Liszt's article, in which he publicly ridiculed not only his competitor but also his audience. It is worth adding that Count Rudolf Apponyi, the Austrian ambassador to Paris, had favored Liszt, frequently inviting him to his salon. Once the controversy surrounding the "duel" subsided, Apponyi facilitated the conferral of the Legion of Honor upon Liszt (see [10, p. 63]).

On the other hand, in 1837, Thalberg performed frequently at the soirées of Émile and Delphine de Girardin—representatives of the artistic elite whose "Wednesdays" were considered exceptionally prestigious. At the height of the rivalry, their newspaper *La Presse* (with É. de Girardin serving as its editor-in-chief) adopted a staunchly pro-Thalberg stance and harshly criticized Liszt,⁷¹ who, however, later became a welcome guest in their home.

⁶⁶ Perhaps Liszt's pricing strategy was shaped with Thalberg in mind. At the very least, his letters to Marie d'Agoult reveal how closely he monitored his rival's earnings. Even three years after the "duel," in May 1840, he wrote: "Thalberg n'a pas gagné le tiers de ce que l'on croit en general. Je sais les chiffres exacts. Ils sont loin d'être aussi élevés que je le pensais. Il n'avait que vingt guinées (au plus) par concert. On m'en donne trente, chose inouïe ici." Liszt & d'Agoult, 1933, p. 439.

⁶⁷ Baungarten, Ch. (1837, February 8). Douze francs par billet. *Gazette des salons: Journal de musique, de littérature et de modes*, pp. 497–498.

⁶⁸ Nouvelles. (1841, March 21). *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (24), pp. 183–184.

⁶⁹ For a more detailed account, see [13, p. 11].

⁷⁰ Liszt & d'Agoult, 1933, p. 198.

⁷¹ For instance, in the article by the writer Frédéric Soulié, see Soulié, F. (1837, April 10). Feuilleton. *La Presse*, p. 1.

The presented facts contradict the concept of Liszt as an exponent of the ideals of the “progressive strata of society” in contrast to Thalberg as the favorite of the aristocracy alone. Both virtuosos performed for high society, and Liszt possessed no fewer influential patrons than his rival.

The designation “pianist of the future” was employed by Berlioz as a compliment to Liszt following his brilliant execution of a Beethoven sonata, rather than in the context of contrasting a classical past with a romantic future. Overall, descriptors such as “novelty” or “new” occur more frequently in commentaries regarding Thalberg’s pianism than that of Liszt. The same applies to the characterization of their respective artistic individualities as “romantic.”

The article criticizing Thalberg’s compositions exposed the vulnerability of Liszt’s own works, written and performed by him by early 1837. As a result, some of Liszt’s admirers defected to his rival’s side for moral and ethical reasons, though they later restored their favor toward the artist and continued to attend his performances. Liszt’s letters to friends demonstrate how zealously he monitored the support of his adherents in the subsequent years. For instance, following a series of successful concerts in Vienna in 1838, he wrote:

Je suis adulé, cajolé, et fêté par tout le monde, à l’exception d’une demi-douzaine d’individus assez influents du reste qui enragent de mes succès. ... Thalberg va mieux à ces gens-là. Mais ils ne savent comment faire. Il y a une telle masse qui s’est prononcée unanimement pour moi.⁷²

Notably, Liszt continued to speak of his competitor in a negative light even after Thalberg made a step toward reconciliation, admitting: “... en comparaison avec vous, je n’ai jamais eu que des succès d’estime à Vienne.”⁷³

By 1839, the hostile feelings toward Thalberg began to fade; Liszt immersed himself in composition and was seriously considering ending his career as a virtuoso. The admission made in one of his letters to Marie d’Agoult underscores a re-evaluation of his artistic status: “C’est déjà beaucoup pour moi, qui ne prétendais à rien, d’être de l’avis de tous au moins le second, une moitié de premier; entre Thalberg et moi, il y a un premier prix partagé.”⁷⁴

⁷² Liszt & d’Agoult, 1933, p. 228.

⁷³ Liszt & d’Agoult, 1933, p. 225.

⁷⁴ Stern D. [Agoult M. d’]. (1927). *Mémoires (1833–1854)* (D. Ollivier, Ed., Vol. 1). Calmann-Lévy, pp. 233–234.

Subsequent developments in French pianism demonstrated that Thalberg's aesthetics, rooted in a deep connection with operatic cantabile, proved more attuned to the ideals of the era than Liszt's "orchestral" concept. The most talented and successful young pianists performing in Paris in the following years—such as Theodor Döhler, Clara Schumann, Émile Prudent, and Alexander Dreyschock—were described by critics as representatives, followers, or successors of the Thalberg school, a designation that carried the weight of high artistic status. However, when Henry Litolff debuted on the Parisian stage in 1840, reviewers noted not only his technical perfection but also clear signs of imitating Liszt: "Monsieur Litolff is a young, talented pianist who, unfortunately, has a habit of exerting himself too much in public. Why these rolling of the eyes, these turns of the head, these tossings of the fair hair that conceals his face?" (as cited in [10, p. 58]). Thalberg's significance remained recognized decades later. For instance, an anonymous correspondent for the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, responding to the pianist's London performance in 1862, wrote:

Thalberg a été en effet imité comme nul autre; sa manière a été parodiée, exagérée, retournée, torturée, et il a pu nous arriver à nous tous de maudire plus d'une fois cette école thalbergienne qui nous valait cette avalanche de notes, ces arpèges en haut et en bas, avec, ou le plus souvent sans le moindre chant au milieu. Les apôtres ont altéré la parole du maître. Mais lorsqu'on revient à la source, on est réconcilié avec lui et on se prosterne de nouveau, comme il y a vingt ans, comme au temps de la jeunesse et de l'enthousiasme.⁷⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to delineate the historical and artistic role of the rivalry between Thalberg and Liszt. Numerous accounts demonstrate that Liszt was not the victor of the piano "duel" in March 1837; eyewitnesses recognized the talents of both artists as entirely divergent yet equal in magnitude. Following the Parisian encounter, Thalberg continued his brilliant performances across major cities in Europe and the United States, whereas Liszt did not appear in Paris until 1840. This evidences his successful overcoming of his irritation and jealousy, he clearly re-evaluated his attitude toward the remarks of Parisian critics, particularly the constructive advice of Fétis.

⁷⁵ B. S. (1862, June 15). Correspondence. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (24), p. 195.

Liszt immersed himself in composition and gradually began to shed purely superficial brilliance, developing his own style of piano writing, which was already partially manifested in the *Album d'un voyageur* and the *Douze études d'exécution transcendante*.⁷⁶ Although the rivalry with Thalberg left a bitter aftertaste in the artist's soul, it played a positive and perhaps fateful role in his life. On the one hand, it demonstrated the fragility of a pianist's fame, whose admirers can be fickle in their allegiances and susceptible to external opinions. On the other hand, the experience lent depth, scope, and a capacity for self-criticism to the artist's creative explorations.

Thalberg's artistic destiny unfolded in the opposite direction. While continuing to tour the globe as an unsurpassed virtuoso, he exhausted his creative energies on maintaining an impeccable performance form, yet failed to evolve as a composer. In his pieces, he endlessly repeated the same textural devices, which gradually began to tire the public and attract criticism. In other words, Thalberg did not become a composer in the full and profound sense of the word, as Liszt did. However, this fact provides no grounds to dispute or diminish his historical role in the development of pianism, including the Russian pianistic school.

Thalberg's influence on the oeuvre of many of his contemporaries is undeniable. Aesthetic parallels with his art can be traced in the compositions of Robert Schumann (*Drei Romanzen für das Pianoforte*, op. 28), Felix Mendelssohn (*Praeludium und Fuge e-moll*, WoO 13; *Etüde b-moll*, op. 104b, Nr. 1), Frédéric Chopin (*Études*, op. 25, № 1 As-dur, № 5 e-moll), and Franz Liszt himself (*Trois études de concert*, S. 144: № 3 "*Un sospiro*"). Furthermore, a number of virtuosos—such as Émile Prudent, Henri Herz, Theodor Döhler, and Leopold Godowsky—crafted piano fantasies and transcriptions imbued with the distinctive characteristics of Thalberg's style of writing.⁷⁷ Examples of the "three-hand technique" can be found in the works of Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy, while echoes of his textural innovations can be discerned in Sergei Prokofiev's First Piano Concerto.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ F.-J. Fétis warmly welcomed these compositions by Liszt and "the revolution that has taken place in his creative talent during the few years he spent in retirement." Fétis, F.-J. (père). (1841, May 9). *Études d'exécution transcendante pour le piano, par F. Liszt. Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, (32), p. 263.

⁷⁷ For a more detailed account, see Hominick, 1991, pp. 84–90.

⁷⁸ For a discussion on Thalberg's influence on the music of Russian composers, see [6, p. 107].

Thalberg's compositions were included in the repertoire of prominent nineteenth-century masters, such as Clara Schumann, César Franck, Bedřich Smetana, Johannes Brahms, Anna Esipova, William Mason, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, and, naturally, Franz Liszt himself. Thalberg's students performed in major concert halls across Europe, Russia, and the United States, becoming composers, music critics, and successful pedagogues, thereby laying the foundations for numerous national pianistic schools.⁷⁹

Beniamino Cesi, one of Thalberg's last students, directed a piano class at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire from 1885 to 1891, transmitting to Russian students "the spirit and ideas of his teacher—nobility, restraint, and refined taste" [6, p. 104]. It was precisely these artistic qualities that were inherent to the greatest pianists of the twentieth century, including Sergei Rachmaninoff, Emil Gilels, Yakov Flier, and Sviatoslav Richter.

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⁷⁹ Among the most prominent were Tito Mattei, Costantino Palumbo, Alfonso Rendano, Alexander Gorla, Heinrich Ehrlich, Aloys Tausig (the father of Karl Tausig), Ludwig Rackemann, Eduard Ganz, Arabella Goddard, Wilhelm Kuhe, Marie Pleyel, Paul Bernard, Charles Poisot, and Beniamino Cesi.

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***Fiametta's Four Dead Men* by Nikolai Evreinov:
From the History of Pantomime
at the *Crooked Mirror* Miniature Theatre**

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Abstract. Dramatic pantomime, shaped in large part by Vsevolod Meyerhold's 1910 production of *Columbine's Scarf* at the House of Interludes, held a modest yet meaningful place in the repertoire of the *Crooked Mirror* Miniature Theatre (St. Petersburg). Nikolai Evreinov's *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*, the theatre's first commedia dell'arte pantomime, premiered in 1911 and, as theatre historian Vadim Shcherbakov notes, grew out of this same experiment.

The premiere was preceded by Alexander Kugel's programmatic essays on pantomime in *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theatre and Art] and by several small-scale exploratory productions, including a staged adaptation of *The Tale of the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another*. This article analyzes the narrative motifs of *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* and their relationship to *Columbine's Scarf*. The article also examines the étude in one act, *An Hour of the Decameron: A Love Tragicomedy about Zeppo di Mino*, staged at the *Crooked Mirror* on 24 January 1911. The conclusion briefly surveys other pantomimes produced at the *Crooked Mirror*, including Evreinov's *Columbine of Today*.

Keywords: Alexander Kugel, Nikolai Evreinov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Crooked Mirror* Miniature Theatre, *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*, *Columbine's Scarf*, *Columbine of Today*, dramatic pantomime

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Музыкальный театр

Научная статья

**«Четыре мертвеца Фьяметты» Н. Н. Евреинова:
из истории пантомимы в театре миниатюр
«Кривое зеркало»**

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Аннотация. Драматическая пантомима, стимулом к развитию которой стала постановка Всеволода Эмильевича Мейерхольда «Шарф Коломбины» («Дом интермедий», 1910), в репертуаре театра миниатюр «Кривое зеркало» заняла пусть не лидирующее, но значимое место. Первая «масочная» кривозеркальная пантомима — «Четыре мертвеца Фьяметты» Николая Николаевича Евреинова — увидела свет ramпы в 1911 году и, по мнению театроведа Вадима Анатольевича Щербакова, своим появлением была обязана спектаклю Мейерхольда. Вместе с тем премьере предшествовали программные статьи о пантомиме художественного руководителя театра Александра Рафаиловича Кугеля, опубликованные на страницах журнала «Театр и искусство», а также небольшие «предпантомимные» эксперименты,

в том числе инсценировка арабской сказки «О шести красавицах, не похожих друг на друга». Настоящая статья посвящена анализу сюжетных мотивов «Четырех мертвецов Фьяметты» и их связи с «Шарфом Коломбины». В качестве дополнительного источника рассмотрен «этюд в 1 действии» «Декамерона час, Любовная трагикомедия про Цеппо ди Мино», поставленный в «Кривом зеркале» 24 января 1911 года. В заключении работы кратко представлены другие кривозеркальные пантомимы, в том числе пантомима Евреинова «Коломбина сего дня».

Ключевые слова: А. Р. Кугель, Н. Н. Евреинов, Вс. Э. Мейерхольд, театр миниатюр «Кривое зеркало», «Четыре мертвеца Фьяметты», «Шарф Коломбины», «Коломбина сего дня», драматическая пантомима

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Introduction

In studies of dramatic pantomime, a genre widely cultivated in Russian theatrical culture of the Silver Age,¹ scholars typically highlight two landmark productions: Vsevolod Meyerhold's *Columbine's Scarf* (1910, House of Interludes, St. Petersburg) and Alexander Tairov's *The Veil of Pierrette* (1913, Free Theatre, Moscow). Both works drew on texts by Arthur Schnitzler² and featured music by Ernst von Dohnányi.

According to theatre historian Vadim Shcherbakov, Meyerhold's *Columbine's Scarf* directly shaped the emergence of commedia dell'arte pantomime in the repertoire of the *Crooked Mirror* Miniature Theatre, most notably in Nikolai Evreinov's dramatic miniature *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*.

The *Crooked Mirror* arrived at dramatic pantomime through a series of exploratory productions, including silhouette techniques, the mimodrama *Pierrot in Love*, and an adaptation of *The Tale of the Six Beauties Who Were Not Like One Another*.³ The success of Meyerhold's *Columbine's Scarf*⁴ then provided additional impetus for both the artistic director, Alexander Kugel, and the stage director, Nikolai Evreinov.

Neither Kugel nor Evreinov appears to have commented publicly on Meyerhold's production in 1910.⁵ In *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [*Theatre and Art*], widely regarded as Kugel's own critical platform, only a single review of *Columbine's Scarf* appeared, signed with the initials "NN":

¹ For a discussion of the cultural significance of the commedia dell'arte in the Silver Age, see [1, pp. 77–93].

² Interest in Arthur Schnitzler was a notable feature of Silver Age culture. His dramatic works were staged widely in Russian theatres and were also used repeatedly as the basis for operatic libretti. On this, see [2, pp. 1–13; 3, pp. 115–133; 4, pp. 50–67].

³ For further discussion of these productions at the *Crooked Mirror* and of Kugel's theory of pantomime, see [5, pp. 54–74].

⁴ Detailed analyses of Meyerhold's production are provided in [6, pp. 49–76] and [7, pp. 96–105].

⁵ Evreinov later acknowledged Meyerhold's achievement in his memoirs of the *Crooked Mirror* [8, p. 122].

The centerpiece of the production [at the House of Interludes] is Schnitzler's pantomime *Columbine's Scarf*, staged by someone identified in the program as "Dr. Dapertutto." Dr. Dapertutto is, in fact, the true author of the pantomime, for little of Schnitzler remains here. This pantomime enjoyed great success at the Royal Theatre in Dresden and is evidently inspired by Schnitzler's tragedy *The Veil of Beatrice*. To allow those present at the House of Interludes to judge how far the staging departs from Schnitzler's pantomime, we shall briefly recount the plot of at least the second scene. Pierrot has poisoned himself. Columbine dances, trying to banish the terrible memory. Suddenly, in the midst of merriment, the candles dim halfway, and Pierrot appears before her as a ghost. Pale and motionless, he gazes at her intently, invisible to the others. Terrified, she runs to the buffet to drink a glass of wine and steady her nerves, but instead of the attendant, the figure of Pierrot rises before her. The glass slips from her hand and shatters. Summoning her last strength, she begins to dance again, but once more Pierrot appears before her—this time holding her veil, and so on.⁶

The reviewer's synopsis of the second scene of *Columbine's Scarf* is broadly accurate; however, the account is marked by a tone of restrained disapproval. The anonymous critic subtly encourages the reader to perceive the plot as implausible and concludes with the following judgment:

Overall, the very idea of staging this pantomime on a tiny stage, accompanied only by a piano and performed by an inexperienced mime, though a quite capable dancer (Madame [Evgenia A.] Khovanskaya), is more daring than it is well-founded. Neither the very beautiful and original sets by Mr. Sapunov nor the charming, elegant costumes can redeem it.⁷

Whether the editorial board of *Theatre and Art* shared this view cannot be determined. Even so, the publication of such an unequivocally negative review in a journal closely associated with Kugel remains noteworthy.

*'Columbine's Scarf' and 'Fiametta's Four Dead Men':
Shared Features and Distinctive Elements*

Following the success of *Columbine's Scarf*, the *Crooked Mirror* likewise turned to commedia dell'arte pantomime in 1911.

⁶ N. N. (1910). *Dom Intermedii* [House of Interludes]. *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theatre and Art], (42), 774; in that and subsequent citations, the original spelling and punctuation are retained.

⁷ N. N., 1910, p. 774.

A concise synopsis of Evreinov's production is preserved in Maria K. Yarotskaya's account⁸:

Venice, Carnival. In a poor room, an old tailor sits on a trunk; his young wife stands by the window. Before leaving, the old man locks the door. Fiametta opens the window; carnival music bursts in, and at her call, three Harlequins leap inside.⁹ Festivities and dancing begin. But the old man is already turning the key in the lock; the situation is hopeless, and the young men hide in the trunk one after another. To keep them from suffocating, Fiametta wedges a small stone under the lid. Entering the room and sensing something amiss, the old man pulls Fiametta onto the trunk. He notices the gap, removes the stone, and triumphantly leaves, locking the door behind him. Horrified, Fiametta discovers that the three men in the trunk are dead.

She sees a beggar outside the window, entices him with money, and begs him to throw the bodies into the canal; the beggar also throws in the old man as he enters. The scene ends with Fiametta dancing a tarantella.¹⁰

Parallels with Meyerhold's production are most evident in the treatment of the characters. According to the scenario, Fiametta was costumed as Columbine. At the same time, her husband appeared as Pierrot. This configuration seemed to reproduce the familiar commedia dell'arte triangle of Pierrot, Harlequin, and Columbine, precisely as in *Columbine's Scarf*. However, Evreinov, a committed advocate of theatricality, inverted it. He dressed all three of Fiametta's lovers as Pierrot, thereby multiplying the figure onstage and creating a quartet (*Illustration 1*).

Another parallel lies in their treatment of festivity: in both works, the protagonists' tragic experiences unfold against a celebratory backdrop.

⁸ Yarotskaya, M. K. (n.d.). *Pantomimy, postavlennye v dorevolyutsionnyi period teatra "Krivoe zerkalo"* [Pantomimes staged during the pre-revolutionary period of the Crooked Mirror Theatre] (Fund 396, fol. 2). A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, Manuscript Department, Moscow, Russia.

⁹ Yarotskaya's recollection is not entirely reliable. In the *Chronicle*, she identifies the intruders not as three Harlequins but as three Pierrots. Yarotskaya, M. K. (1908–1918). *Letopis' teatra "Krivoe zerkalo"* [Chronicle of the Crooked Mirror theatre] (Fund 2352, Inventory 1, File 62, fol. 1). *Russian State Archive of Literature and Art* (RGALI), Moscow, Russia.

¹⁰ A fuller account of the pantomime's plot, based on the libretto held in the St. Petersburg State Theatre Library, appears in Vadim Shcherbakov's *Pantomime of the Silver Age* [6, pp. 82–93].



Illustration 1. *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*. Drawing by Alexander M. Lyubimov.
Theatre and Art, 1911, No. 39, p. 726

In *Columbine's Scarf*, this backdrop is the wedding of Columbine and Harlequin; in *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*, it is the Venetian Carnival. Yet Meyerhold and Evreinov interpret these festivities in markedly different ways. Meyerhold places the ball directly *on stage*, setting the tragic action against a comic and exuberant environment and thereby heightening its emotional impact. He accordingly subtitled *Columbine's Scarf* a “tragic fairground show” [*tragicheskii balagan*]. Evreinov, by contrast, situates the carnival *offstage*, using it as a symbolic image of joy and freedom that beckons to Columbine-Fiametta.

The productions shared another, perhaps incidental, connection: both featured Evgenia Khovanskaya in the leading female role, the very same actress described by the anonymous *Theatre and Art* reviewer of *Columbine's Scarf* as an inexperienced mime.

Despite these parallels, Evreinov's pantomime departs from Meyerhold's in several important respects. In Meyerhold's staging, Pierrot is the abandoned lover and Harlequin the deceived husband. In Evreinov's version, this configuration is reversed: the detested old husband is one of the Pierrots. Thus, three Pierrots (Fiametta's lovers Lorenzo, Giacomo and Andrea) die at the hands of the fourth (old man Silvio), and he, in turn, is killed by an external character — the Beggar, dressed, however, in a Harlequin costume. Through this device, Evreinov's playful engagement with both the commedia dell'arte tradition and Meyerhold's production shifts the pantomime toward farce, black humor, and even grotesque anecdote. Columbine's tragic death in Meyerhold's version becomes Fiametta's joyful release from her elderly husband and from her three lovers alike. Shcherbakov is therefore right to argue that the relationship between *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* and *Columbine's Scarf* is fundamentally polemical, and that Evreinov's pantomime (chronologically the later work) functions above all as a choreographic response to Meyerhold's staging.

*'An Hour of the Decameron': An Additional Source
of Plot Motifs in 'Fiametta'*

Several motifs in *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* appear to derive not only from *Columbine's Scarf* but also from another source: Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The connection is suggested most immediately by the protagonist's name. Fiametta¹¹ is a recurrent figure in Boccaccio's oeuvre: a novella bears her name; she is the dedicatee of *Teseida* and *Filostrato*; she appears in several sonnets; and she is, of course, one of the ten storytellers in the *Decameron*.¹²

Particularly striking is the fact that several motifs in Evreinov's pantomime coincide with those of *Day Eight, Story Eight*.

¹¹ The name *Fiametta* (or *Fiammetta*) circulated widely in Russian theatrical culture of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The character appears in Ludwig Minkus's fantastical ballet *The Flame of Love, or Salamander (Fiametta)*, in Catulle Mendès's conte dramatique *La Reine Fiammette* (its Russian translation received censorial approval in 1903), in Franz von Suppé's operetta *Boccaccio*, and in several other works.

¹² Some scholars have proposed that Fiametta was a historical figure and Boccaccio's beloved. No evidence for her existence, however, has been found outside the writer's own literary works.

The tale concerns two friends from Siena, Zeppo¹³ di Mino and Spinelloccio. Spinelloccio betrays their friendship and becomes the lover of Zeppo's wife. When Zeppo discovers the affair, he devises a plan for proportionate revenge. In this novella, the trunk becomes the instrument of retribution: through Zeppo's stratagem, Spinelloccio ends up locked inside it. Zeppo exacts his vengeance by having intercourse with the wife who wronged him while her lover is confined within. The central elements of the intrigue are adultery and revenge enacted through the trunk, a configuration that resonates directly with the dramaturgy of *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*.¹⁴

Parallels with Evreinov's pantomime are clear. The elements of adultery, here involving three lovers, and revenge, far more terrifying than in Boccaccio's novella, where all the characters survive, are fully retained. The central motif, however, is the trunk, which firmly links the two texts and which Evreinov underscores scenographically. Describing the setting of *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* on the basis of the surviving libretto, Shcherbakov notes:

The furnishings of the tiny room were marked by an almost symbolic austerity. On the right, the entrance door; on the left, a small window opening onto an alley; in the center, a large window leading to a balcony beneath which the carnival revelry seethed. [...] The only piece of furniture in the room was an unusually large trunk in which the owner [Fiametta's husband, the old tailor Silvio] apparently kept his wares [6, p. 84] (*Illustration 2*).

The resemblance is unlikely to be coincidental. On 24 January 1911, in the sixth program of the *Crooked Mirror* and almost six months before the premiere of Evreinov's pantomime, the theatre staged an adaptation of the same *Decameron* novella: *An Hour of the Decameron*, an étude in one act directed by S. Lyuboshits and titled *A Love Tragicomedy about Zeppo di Mino*.¹⁵

¹³ In Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Zeppa.

¹⁴ One further point of contact links the *Decameron* tale not to *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* but to *Columbine's Scarf*: the motif of the bridal veil. Meyerhold used Columbine's wedding veil as a key prop, and Boccaccio's story turns on the displaced veil of Zeppa di Mino's wife. After meeting her lover, she adjusts her veil in her husband's presence, which then becomes material evidence of the adultery.

¹⁵ Yarotskaya, 1908–1918, fol. 107.

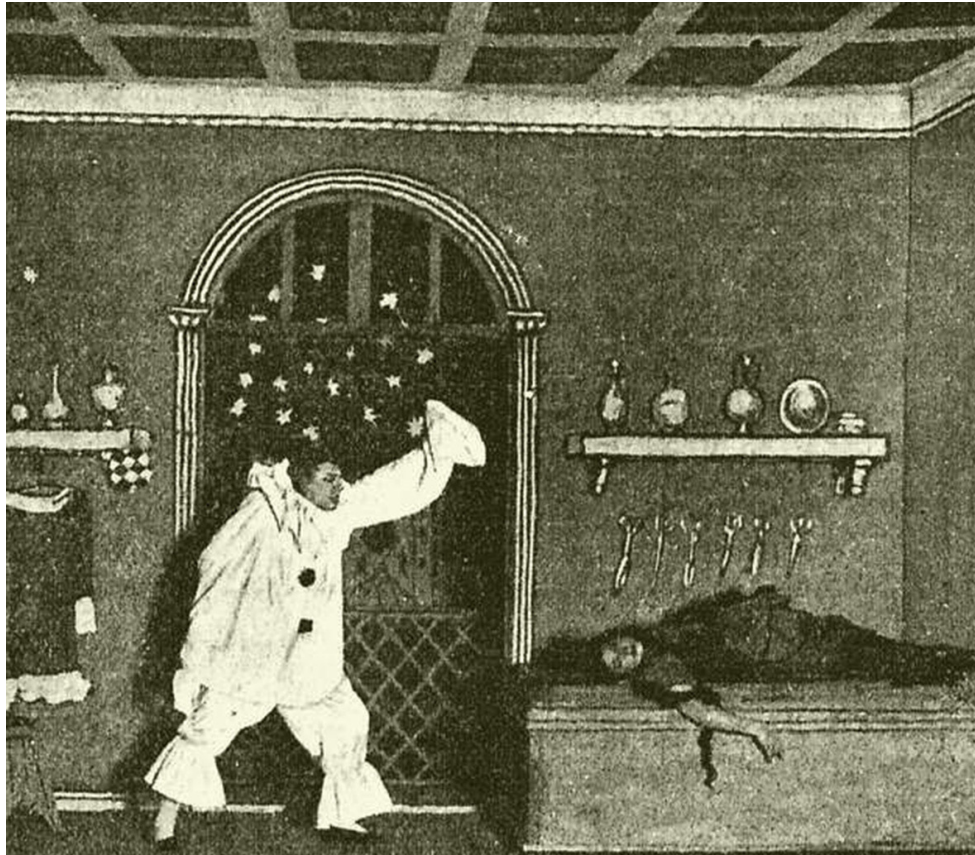


Illustration 2. Fiametta's Four Dead Men. Scene from the production.
Fiametta – Evgenia A. Khovanskaya; Silvio – Lev A. Fenin.
Theatre and Art, 1911, no. 39, p. 725

* * *

The available evidence suggests that Evreinov's Harlequinade-pantomime elicited little response in the press. The *Chronicle of the Crooked Mirror* preserves only a single, fragmentary review. Eugene A. Znosko-Borovsky wrote:

The pantomime *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* was disappointing in that an excellent plot was mishandled, and the director's and choreographer's imagination was curtailed. Nor was there sufficient material for Madame Khovanskaya, who would have been capable of creating an engaging and compelling spectacle.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Apollo. Russian Art Chronicle*, 1911, no. 15 (as cited in Yarotskaya, 1908–1918, fol. 121).

Although largely overlooked by contemporary critics, the *Crooked Mirror's* Harlequinade nevertheless enjoyed a long stage life. According to the *Chronicle of the Crooked Mirror Theatre*, it continued to be performed through 1916,¹⁷ which suggests that it was well received by audiences. Over time, Yarotskaya replaced Khovanskaya in the title role, while the part of Silvio, the elderly tailor, remained with one of the *Crooked Mirror's* leading actors, Lev A. Fenin.

One issue remains unresolved. In his study of Silver Age pantomime, Shcherbakov argues that in creating the production, “Kholmskaya, Kugel, and Evreinov [...] abandoned the well-trodden *Crooked Mirror* path of parody.”

Yet the *Chronicle of the Crooked Mirror Theatre* records a different assessment, attributed either to Yarotskaya or to an unnamed critic:

Fiametta's Four Dead Men (revival). Pantomime, music by [Dmitrii Akimovich?] Bigdai. A parody of pantomime libretti, with the usual accumulation of romantic horrors.¹⁸

For now, this question remains open. However, the conjunction of the terrifying and the absurdly comic was one of the characteristic features of Silver Age theatrical practice.

On the Composers of the Music for 'Fiametta's Four Dead Men'

Fiametta's Four Dead Men is the only *Crooked Mirror* pantomime for which the music has survived.

However, on the first page of the typewritten scenario preserved in the Dramatic Censorship Collection of the St. Petersburg State Theatre Library, the composer's name has been heavily crossed out in black ink. The deleted text is almost impossible to decipher, although it is plausible that the original line read “Music by V. Karatygin.” At present, this hypothesis remains unconfirmed.

The same black ink appears a few lines below, where the handwritten addition “D. A. Bigdai” has been inserted. Yarotskaya likewise names Bigdai as the composer of the pantomime's musical score in the *Chronicle of the Crooked Mirror Theatre*.

¹⁷ Shcherbakov, in his monograph, gives the year 1917 [6, p. 82].

¹⁸ Yarotskaya, 1908–1918, fol. 281.

Bigdai's identity is difficult to establish with certainty. The reference most likely concerns Dmitri A. Bigdai, the son of the well-known Kuban folklorist Akim D. Bigdai. No documentation has survived regarding his years of birth and death or his musical education. The only available evidence relates to his work with the Children's Theatre Workshop in Krasnodar in the late 1920s, where he served as director and head of artistic production. Beyond his presumed authorship of the music for *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*, no further links between Bigdai and the *Crooked Mirror* Theatre have been identified. The vocal score and full score, if they ever existed, have not yet been located.

The *Manuscripts and Documents Collection* of the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music also preserves a vocal score for *Fiametta's Four Dead Men* (coll. 270, inv. 1, file 5). The inventory card identifies the composer as Dmitri B. Astradantsev (1904–1945), a Russian Soviet composer and pianist who was among the earliest film composers in the Soviet Union and wrote scores for several feature and documentary films, including works on the Siege of Leningrad. In the 1920s, he performed as an improvising pianist on the variety stage and worked as a taper. During the same period, he became music director of the *Crooked Mirror*. Astradantsev most likely composed an entirely new score for the Soviet revival of the pantomime, probably because Bigdai's musical setting had been lost, although no evidence survives apart from the vocal score itself.

The vocal score comprises only fifteen pages of handwritten music, divided into numbered sections. Only a few of these sections are labeled in the manuscript, including the first, second, third, and fifth numbers. A further difficulty is the absence of verbal cues, apart from tempo markings, that would allow the musical material to be correlated with the verbal scenario. Consequently, only the most general and necessarily concise observations can be offered regarding the music of the production.

The clearest indications of a dance-like character, and specifically of waltz idiom, appear at the beginning of the pantomime (No. 1). The waltz seems intended to evoke the sonic image of the Venetian carnival, and its introduction bears a faint resemblance to the opening of the waltz from Pyotr I. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (Example 1).



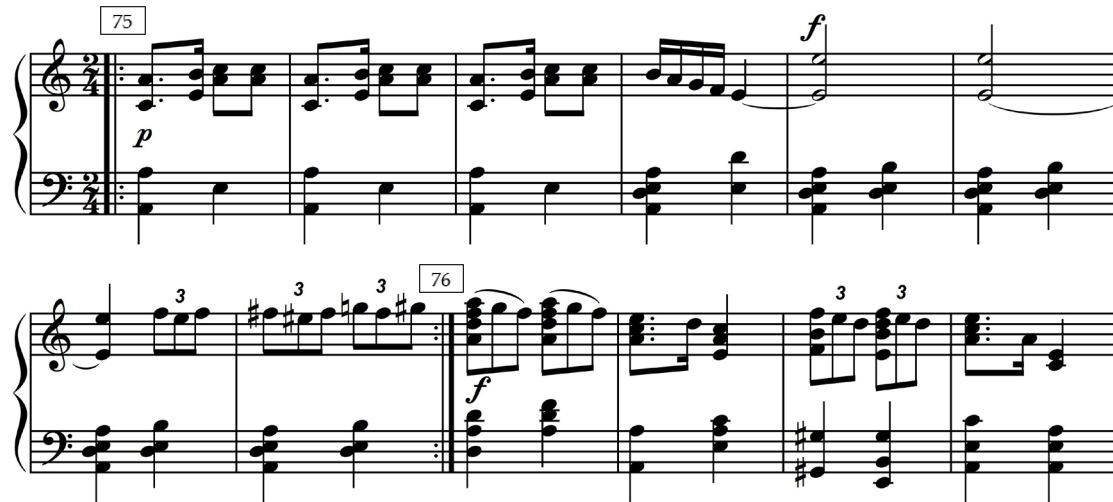
Example 1. Dmitri B. Astradantsev (?), *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*. No. 1.
Introduction to the waltz (seven bars before reh. 1)

A further, barely perceptible allusion follows the principal waltz theme: the subsequent motif faintly recalls either the B minor or the E minor Prelude by Frédéric Chopin (*Example 2*). Both themes recur several times in the vocal score, which suggests that they function as a kind of leitmotif or are at least associated with specific choreographic or narrative images within the pantomime.



Example 2. Dmitri B. Astradantsev (?), *Fiametta's Four Dead Men*. No. 2
(six bars before reh. 12)

The finale also contains a possible reference to the tarantella mentioned by Yarotskaya, although it is only faintly discernible (*Example 3*):



Example 3. Dmitri B. Astradantsev (?), Fiametta's Four Dead Men.
Reh. 75–76

Dance-like elements appear elsewhere in the score, although they are often obscured by frequent changes of meter, texture, tempo, and agogic character. This level of variability likely reflects close coordination between the music and the unfolding choreographic narrative.

* * *

Although *Fiametta* failed to meet the expectations placed upon it, pantomimes continued to be staged at the *Crooked Mirror*. Among them were three productions with music by Vladimir G. Erenberg: *Sumurun*; *The Circle of Life of a Conqueror*, a pantomime-parody of the Prussian king Wilhelm II; and the “mimo-melo-tragi-drama” *When Knights Were Brave*.

In the last of these, the composer devised a distinctive representational technique that in some respects anticipates features of later instrumental theatre: each character in the play was voiced by a separate musical instrument [9, pp. 42–43].

A comparable device was employed by Evreinov in his pantomime *Columbine of Today* (1915).

This production offered a variation on the commedia dell'arte theme, although in an unexpected interpretation. Five characters, including Columbine and her admirers (Pierrot, Harlequin, the American, and the 'Negro,' in the terminology of the 1915 source), enact a story in a contemporary idiom in which

Columbine's little house represents her red heart. Columbine appears in four successive stages: as an innocent girl who rejects the chaste and sentimental love of Pierrot; as a mischievous coquette who frolics with Harlequin after he steals the key to her heart-house; as a courtesan who sells herself to a wealthy American; and finally as a shameless odalisque who ultimately gives herself to the American's servant, the hideous 'Negro'¹⁹ (*Illustrations 3, 4, 5*).

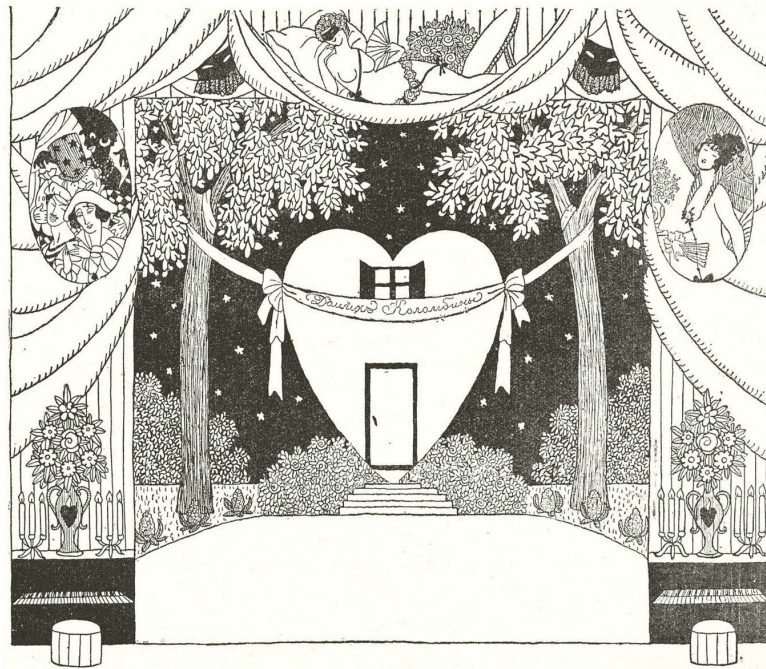


*Illustration 3. Columbine of Today. Set design by Miss.²⁰
Theatre and Art, 1915, no. 47, p. 879*

¹⁹ N. N-v. (1915). *Krivoie zerkalo* [The Crooked Mirror]. *Teatr i Iskusstvo* [Theatre and Art], (47), 875.

²⁰ Anna V. Remizova-Vasil'eva (pseudonym Miss; between 1880 and 1890–1928) was a Russian painter and graphic artist, a member of *Mir Iskusstva* [The World of Art] association. Between 1908 and 1914 she published illustrations in *Novyi Satirikon* [New Satiricon] and *Solntse Rossii* [The Sun of Russia] journals.



Illustration 4.

Columbine of Today. Costume sketch
for Columbine by Miss.

Theatre and Art, 1915, no. 47, p. 881



Illustration 5.

Messrs. Likhmarsky and V. Granovsky
in the pantomime *Columbine of Today*.

Drawing by Yury P. Annenkov.

Theatre and Art, 1915, no. 48, p. 902

The musical accompaniment to the pantomime was written for two pianos, with one instrument voicing Columbine and the other representing the voices of her admirers. Contemporary critics regarded the device as witty and described the music as “charming, delicate, beautiful, and spirited.”²¹ One reviewer noted that the score drew on a wide range of stylistic models:

...Columbine and the tango, Pierrot and football—all of this is presented to the audience with sharpness and with astonishing formal elegance, under the accompaniment of Evreinov’s music, which fuses the musical primitivism of past centuries with the couplet-like rhythm of the most modern American tap dances and two-steps. [...] I would only add that the foot-stomping in the ‘Negro’ dance is unnecessary. It is a naturalistic element that does not accord with the silent

²¹ N. N-v., 1915, p. 875.

stylization of the pantomime and somewhat disturbs its caressing quiet. This stomping with its rhythm and mechanics is already present in the music, and a silent tap dance [...] would be more in keeping with the style of this little piece.²²

Conclusion

The *Crooked Mirror's* pantomime experiment concluded in 1916 with *The Eternal Dancer*, staged and scored by Evreinov. The play carried a markedly rhetorical subtitle, “a choreographic mystery,” and aspired to a philosophical, even supra-mundane, interpretation of existence.

None of these productions achieved even the modest success that *Fiametta* had enjoyed. Moreover, no musical manuscripts have survived, and any understanding of them must be reconstructed solely from secondary sources.

Whether the *Crooked Mirror's* pantomime experiment was ultimately in vain remains uncertain. In one respect, however, a contemporary observer was surely correct: in its finest examples, pantomime was indeed “a joy for the eyes, a delight for the ears...”²³

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²² As cited in Yarotskaya, 1908–1918, fol. 262.

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**The Mozart phenomenon
in the Postmodern interior:
Michael Nyman's television opera
*Letters, Riddles and Writs***

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Abstract. This article examines Michael Nyman's 1991 television opera *Letters, Riddles, and Writs*, created in collaboration with Jeremy Newson and Pat Gavin to commemorate the bicentennial of Mozart's death. It was part of the BBC's experimental project *Not Mozart*, which reflected the values of postmodern culture. The libretto of the opera was based

on documentary sources—fragments of Mozart’s letters and his “carnival” riddles. This article examines the artistic concept of the work, which was shaped by two central ideas. The first, inspired by the psychoanalytic research of American musicologist Maynard Solomon, concerned Mozart’s relationship with his father. The second engages with issues of creative self-reflection, plagiarism, and the place of classical music in a multicultural context. Special attention in the article is paid to the compositional features of the opera and Nyman’s methods of treating borrowed musical material, which were based on the principle of deconstruction. The study concludes that the British composer invests the opera genre with the qualities of a metacomposition, transforming it simultaneously into both a psychological exploration of the artist’s identity and a form of artistic self-diagnosis. By breaking some stereotypes and creating others, Nyman emphasizes the relative nature of our ideas about Mozart and the fact that they are shaped by cultural context.

Keywords: musical theater of the 20th century, Michael Nyman, *Letters, Riddles and Writs*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Leopold Mozart, postmodernism, deconstruction, plagiarism

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Музыкальный театр

Научная статья

Феномен Моцарта в постмодернистском интерьере: телеопера Майкла Наймана «Письма, загадки и иски»

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Аннотация. Объектом исследования статьи выступает телеопера Майкла Наймана «Письма, загадки и иски», созданная в 1991 году в сотрудничестве с Джереми Ньюсоном и Пэтом Гэвином по случаю двухсотлетней годовщины со дня смерти Моцарта. Она явилась частью экспериментального проекта BBC *Not Mozart*, отразившего систему ценностей постмодернистской культуры. Либретто оперы базировалось на документальных источниках — фрагментах писем Моцарта и его «карнавальных» загадках. В статье рассматривается художественная концепция сочинения, которую определили две ведущие идеи. Первая была инициирована психоаналитическими исследованиями американского музыковеда Мейнарда Соломона и касалась взаимоотношений Моцарта с отцом. Вторая была связана с вопросами творческой саморефлексии,

затрагивала проблемы плагиата, а также существования классики в условиях мультикультурализма. Отдельное внимание в статье уделяется композиционным особенностям оперы и приемам работы Наймана с заимствованным музыкальным материалом, которые опирались на принцип деконструкции. В ходе исследования делаются выводы, что оперный жанр британский композитор наделяет чертами метакомпозиции, превращая его одновременно и в психологическое исследование личности художника, и в творческую самодиагностику. Ломая одни стереотипы и создавая другие, Найман подчеркивает относительность наших представлений о Моцарте и их обусловленность культурным контекстом.

Ключевые слова: музыкальный театр XX века, Майкл Найман, «Письма, загадки и иски», Вольфганг Амадей Моцарт, Леопольд Моцарт, постмодернизм, деконструкция, плагиат

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Introduction

January 27, 2026, marks the 270th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's birth. This significant date serves not only as an occasion for numerous celebrations but also invites us to reflect on the creative legacy of the Austrian genius within the context of contemporary cultural values. This article does not aim to trace the changes in the perception of the Mozart phenomenon in the public consciousness of the 20th and 21st centuries. Instead, it pursues a more modest goal: to identify, through a specific artifact, the characteristic value orientations underlying conceptions of creative personality and attitudes toward tradition among composers whose artistic thinking developed under the sign of postmodernism. Michael Nyman's television opera *Letters, Riddles, and Writs* (1991) was chosen as such a model, representing a kind of hermeneutic attempt at a psychoanalytic study of Mozart's personality.

Nyman is primarily known to the Russian audience as a film composer, although works in academic genres (operas, ballets, quartets, etc.) constitute a vital part of his creative output. Over the last decade, interest in the British master's music within Russian musicology has grown significantly, as evidenced by a series of scholarly publications focused on the specifics of his compositional method [1; 2] and issues concerning his music-theatre works [3; 4; 5]. The opera examined in this article has not previously been the subject of specialized musicological study.

History of Creation and Artistic Concept

Letters, Riddles and Writs is part of a project timed to coincide with the bicentennial of Mozart's death. The concept aimed, on the one hand, to demonstrate how the music of the great Austrian composer provides inspiration for contemporary composers and, on the other hand, to highlight the ambiguity of perceiving and interpreting a genius's personality and legacy from a historical perspective. In addition to Nyman, the project featured composers Judith Weir, Louis Andriessen, Misha Mengelberg, Heinz Karl Gruber, and Mathias Rüegg.

The cycle, provocatively titled *Not Mozart*, consisted of six short films:

1. *M Is for Man, Music, Mozart* (directed by Peter Greenaway).
2. *Bring Me the Head of Amadeus* (directed by Barrie Gavin).
3. *Letters, Riddles and Writs* (directed by Jeremy Newson and Pat Gavin).
4. *Not Mozart* (directed by Ernst Grandits).
5. *W. A. M. Limited* (directed by Anthony Garner).
6. *Scipio's Dream* (directed by Margaret Williams).

The project was produced for British BBC television and fell into the category of experimental cinema. Most of the video sequences were surrealist in nature (for instance, in Barrie Gavin's film, Mozart's skull travels across Austria), while the composer's music underwent various "modernized" arrangements (for example, in Ernst Grandits' film, musicians of the Vienna Art Orchestra performed jazz fantasies based on Mozart's themes). On the whole, the *Not Mozart* cycle reflected the value system of postmodern culture, where the phenomenon of Mozart's creative personality became surrounded by various myths and bore only an indirect relation to the actual historical figure. In virtually all the films, the image of the composer was linked in one way or another to the consumer culture: Mozart's music was, on the one hand, transferred into a different cultural context, merging with jazz, rock, and the avant-garde, and on the other hand, it became a commercial brand and, consequently, a source of profit (for example, one of the central leitmotifs in Ernst Grandits' film was *Mozartkugeln* chocolates, considered a hallmark of Vienna).

The libretto (script) for Nyman's television opera was written by Jeremy Newson,¹ who also co-directed the production with Pat Gavin,² however, the idea for *Letters* belonged entirely to the composer. The plot is based on a series

¹ Jeremy Newson (1947–2020) was an English actor, director, and producer. Gained fame in the 1990s as a creator of documentaries about the world of fashion and the entertainment industry.

² Pat Gavin is an English artist, director, and actor. Four-time BAFTA winner as best designer and animation director.

of phantasmagoric visions appearing to Mozart on his deathbed. The half-hour television opera is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the composer's relationship with his father, who appears at times as a wise Sarastro,³ at others as a mercenary miser contrasting his son's impressive income with meticulously calculated expenses, and at still others as a despotic tyrant controlling every aspect of Mozart's life, including his marriage to Constanze. It cannot be said, however, that such a characterization is so far from the truth. For example, in musicological research, Leopold Mozart is often described as a calculating man who "always knew how much he had spent and on what, was able to navigate freely between different European currencies, remembered how much a particular item cost in different countries [...], demanded constant reports on expenditures" [6, pp. 62–63]. He also reportedly did not draw a clear line between "obligation and investment" [7, p. 12], but at the same time "possessed God-given gifts as a teacher" [8, p. 136].

The events of the second half of the opera unfold in a courtroom, where Michael Nyman stands trial, accused of flagrant intellectual theft⁴—the plagiarism of Mozart's music. Franz Joseph Haydn acts as the accuser, while Ludwig van Beethoven serves as the defender (or rather, their busts do, in keeping with the fantastical logic of a feverish dream). During the hearing, a court pianist, played by Nyman himself, performs excerpts from the works under judicial consideration (an excerpt from the first movement of Mozart's Quartet KV 428 and the introduction to the song *I am an unusual thing* from the opera *Letters, Riddles and Writs*⁵). A witness for the defense—the 19th-century Swiss musicologist Hans Georg Nägeli⁶—refers to Haydn's advice to compose in accordance with chosen models. The film concludes with a song in which Mozart foresees his imminent death.

³ In the autumn of 1791, a few months before his death, Mozart himself conducted *Die Zauberflöte* in Vienna, and the film's creators make imaginative use of this biographical detail.

⁴ A line by Haydn, acting as the prosecutor at the court hearing.

⁵ It should be noted that in this instance, a *mise en abyme* technique typical of postmodern art arises, imbuing the opera's artistic text with the characteristics of a metanarrative.

⁶ Nägeli's lectures on music were very popular in the 19th century. Significantly, he was critical of Mozart (for more details, see [9]).

The authors cast German singer and actress Ute Lemper in the leading role, emphasizing the androgynous image of the composer. On the one hand, this decision was a consequence of the representational practices of mass culture, reflecting gender shifts in the structure of modern society; on the other hand, it endowed the image of the Viennese classic with an aura of uniqueness and singularity. The roles of Haydn and Beethoven were performed by Julian Glover and Tony Rohr, while the part of Leopold was assigned to the singer David Thomas.

The texts of the opera's songs and duets were based on authentic documentary materials: specifically, the correspondence between Mozart and his father and the so-called "carnival" or Zoroastrian riddles. The latter were devised by the composer in 1786 during the Vienna Carnival and sent to Leopold Mozart on a separate sheet titled *Excerpts from the Fragments of Zoroaster* [10, p. 345]. For a long time, they were considered lost, but they were rediscovered in the Berlin State Library in 1970 [11].

In total, Mozart composed eight riddles. Two of them were inked over by Georg Nissen, Constanze Mozart's second husband. The reason for such action was likely their content, which he considered unacceptable for reasons of censorship.

The riddles became the subject of a specialized study by the American musicologist Maynard Solomon, known for his psychoanalytic approach to interpreting the biographies of famous musicians. In 1985, he published an article in the journal *American Imago*, in which the riddles were examined through the lens of Mozart's complicated relationship with his father and interpreted as a challenge to the latter's authority. According to the musicologist, due to his emotional attachment, the composer always desired to win Leopold's approval⁷ while simultaneously wishing to free himself from his father's constant control. However, "neither distance nor silence could free Mozart from a lifelong paternal domination of overwhelming intensity," Solomon stated. "On one important level, Mozart's biography is the story of the intricate mechanisms and maneuvers by which he tries to reach an accommodation with the man who had not only fathered him, but had been his primary instructor in all matters and had sought to control his every action through relentless mental pressure alternating with seductive benevolence" [10, p. 357].

⁷ "Your most humble son" or "Your most obedient son," Mozart ended most of his letters to his father with these words.

In the program notes for the opera, published on the Wise Music Classical website,⁸ Nyman indicated that it was Solomon's article that defined one of the key ideas of the work—the exploration of the relationship between Mozart and his father, interpreted through a psychoanalytic lens.

Nyman and Newson relied on the three-volume edition of the letters published in English and edited by Emily Anderson.⁹ Notably, the fragments that formed the basis of the libretto were also cited in Solomon's article. A significant portion of them was taken from Leopold's letters of 1778 and Mozart's letters of 1781, a period marked by growing tensions between father and son. Below are fragments of the libretto with references to the correspondence:

LEOPOLD

Oh, my dear Son! When you were a child, I gave up
all my time so that you could not only to provide
later on for yourself, but also that I might enjoy
a comfortable old age, devote myself to the welfare of
my soul and be enabled to meet my death in peace.

*(Leopold Mozart to his Son,
February 5th, 1778¹⁰)*

If you stay away, I'll die much sooner. If I could have
you live with me, I'll live several years longer.

*(Leopold Mozart to his Son,
August 3th, 1778¹¹)*

You must not lose sight of your main objective in life,
which is to make money.

*(Leopold Mozart to his Son,
October 15th, 1777¹²)*

⁸ Wise Music Classical. (n.d.). *Letters, Riddles and Writs* – Michael Nyman. Retrieved May 11, 2026, from <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/11442/Letters-Riddles-and-Writs--Michael-Nyman/>

⁹ Anderson, E. (Ed.). (1938). *The Letters of Mozart and His Family* (Vols. II–III). Macmillan and Co.

¹⁰ Anderson, 1938, p. 685–686.

¹¹ Anderson, 1938, p. 877.

¹² Anderson, 1938, p. 467.

When you make new acquaintances, you immediately wish to give your life and property to them.

*(Leopold Mozart to his Son,
August 27th, 1778¹³)*

I say nothing about women, for where they're concerned the greatest reserve and prudence are really necessary.

*(Leopold Mozart to his Son,
February 5th, 1778¹⁴)*

You really must consider first the welfare of your parents or else your soul will go to the devil.

*(Leopold Mozart to his Son,
February 11th–12th, 1778¹⁵)*

MOZART

Dearest Papa, *He* knows that my sole aim is to help you and to help us all. Must I repeat to you a hundred times that I can be of no use to you? Here is Vienna than there in Salzburg. I implore you, dearest, most beloved father, spare me such letters. I entreat you to do so, for they only irritate my mind and disturb my heart and spirit; and I, who must keep composing, need a cheerful...

*(Mozart to his Father,
June 9th, 1781¹⁶)*

¹³ Anderson, 1938, p.896.

¹⁴ Anderson, 1938, p.687.

¹⁵ Anderson, 1938, p.709.

¹⁶ Anderson, 1938, p. 1103.

Dearest Papa, I intend to marry. You are horrified at the idea. But I entreat you to listen to me the voice of nature speaks as loud in me as in other men louder perhaps than in many a big strong lout a fellow. I cannot think of anything more necessary than a wife... But who is the object of my love? Not Sophie, not Josepha, it is Constanze.

(Mozart to his Father,
December 15th, 1781¹⁷)

According to the creators' vision, Sarastro and Nægeli symbolized different hypostases of Leopold, reflecting the duality of his nature and intensifying the psychoanalytic subtext. The image of Mozart's Sarastro embodied the idea of the "enlightened monarch," an ideal philosopher-ruler and a source of life's wisdom [12, p. 40]. Leopold's identification with him pointed to the perception of the father as a wise mentor, a guide into the secrets of musical art, and a talented educator thanks to whom Wolfgang became a prodigy. Conversely, the identification with Nægeli demonstrated negative traits—arrogance, disapproval, envy, and misunderstanding. It is telling that during the trial in the film, Nægeli cynically equates the 18th-century compositional practice of borrowing with the 20th-century "cannibalization" of classical idioms, turning the accuser Haydn's own words against him.

In Solomon's view, Mozart's carnival riddles became a way "to settle the score" with his father and to expose his hostility [10, p. 347]. The psychoanalytic aspect of the charades in *Letters, Riddles and Writs* was emphasized by Beethoven, who claimed that Mozart was trying to tell his father something he just can't come out with. Significantly, each riddle was followed by songs based on fragments of Mozart's letters to Leopold, which seemed to decode the hidden meaning of the charades.

Nyman chose two riddles for the opera. Their content is as follows¹⁸:

¹⁷ Anderson, 1938, p.1167.

¹⁸ Retrieved May 11, 2026, from <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/11442/Letters-Riddles-and-Writs--Michael-Nyman/>

No. 1

We are many sisters; it is painful for us to unite as well as to separate. We live in a palace, yet we would rather call it a prison, for we are securely locked up and must work for the sustenance of men. The most remarkable thing is that the doors are opened for us quite often, both day and night, and we still do not come out, except when one pulls out by force.

No. 2

I am an unusual thing; I have no soul and no body; one cannot see me but can hear me; I do not exist for myself; only a human being can give me life, as often as they he wishes, and my life is only of short duration, for I die almost at the moment in which I am born. And so, in accordance with men's caprice, I may live and die untold times a day. To whose we give life I do nothing — but those on whose account I am born I leave with painful sensations for the short duration of my life until I depart.

Mozart's charades belonged to the tradition of bawdy riddles. It was their ambiguity, as Solomon believed, that reflected the composer's contradictory feelings toward his father.

The first charade's answer is "teeth." In psychoanalysis, this image is usually interpreted either as a subconscious death wish toward a relative (Jung) or as the suppression of sexuality (Freud). The creators of the television opera explicated the hidden meanings of the text by placing a miniature figure of Mozart inside Leopold's mouth, thus visualizing the sense of imprisonment experienced by Mozart.¹⁹ The ambiguity of the first charade stems from the fact that in German,

¹⁹ According to Solomon, the palace referred to in the riddle "is really a prison, where he [Mozart] must work for the benefit of others rather than for his own gratification or fulfillment" [10, p. 350].

the word “Zahn” (tooth) in slang also means “chick” (a young woman), thereby containing an allusion to a brothel. The idea of suppressed sexuality and protest against the father is confirmed by Beethoven’s subsequent words (“So, his father had an all-consuming desire to control young Mozart. No wonder he fell into the arms of a woman”) and the song *Dearest Papa*, based on fragments of a letter to his father dated December 15, 1781, in which the composer reveals his plans regarding his marriage to Constanze. Nyman emphasizes this romantic longing at the musical level with allusions to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, thereby appealing to the theme of forbidden or impossible love.

The probable answer to the second riddle is “sound.” Its ambiguity stems from a description that is equally applicable to a “smell.” In the latter case, the riddle takes on a humorous tone due to coprological associations, which were highly characteristic of Mozart’s epistolary style. However, Nyman and Newson ignore this aspect and, following Solomon, interpret the riddle through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on the fear of death. They rely on passages in which phrases concerning the transience of life and the approach of death are predominant: “my life is only of short duration,” “I die,” “I may live and die untold times a day,” and “the short duration of my life.” As if to confirm this interpretation, there follows a song in which Mozart foresees his death. Its verbal basis consists of the composer’s words allegedly spoken three days before his passing. Here, the creators of the television opera turned to the travel diaries of Vincent and Mary Novello, who visited Mozart’s widow in Salzburg in 1829. According to Constanze, when her dying husband learned of his appointment as the music director of St. Stephen’s Cathedral, he exclaimed sorrowfully: “I am appointed to a situation which will afford me leisure to write music just to please myself. And I feel capable of doing something worthy of the fame I’ve acquired. Instead, I must die...”²⁰ These very words formed the basis of the song.

As Carlo Cenciarelli rightly asserts, the adoption of Solomon’s hermeneutic position determined the specificity of the figurative interpretation of the composer in the television opera. Nyman created an image of a “Dionysian Mozart” [13, p. 28],

²⁰ Novello, V. (1975). A Mozart pilgrimage: Being the travel diaries of Vincent & Mary Novello in the year 1829. Eulenburg Books, p. 126.

a creator torn by inner conflicts, in contrast to other prevailing images of him in popular consciousness (for instance, the “Apollonian” image or the image of the “idle reveller” embodied in Pushkin’s little tragedy *Mozart and Salieri* and in Miloš Forman’s film *Amadeus*).

In addition to family relationships presented in a psychoanalytic light, *Letters, Riddles and Writs* also touched upon issues of copyright, presented with a fair amount of irony. The accusations of intellectual theft brought against Nyman during the court hearing defined the second most important idea of the opera, concerning not only creative self-reflection but also the problem of the classical tradition’s existence in the context of multiculturalism. The poignancy of these questions is all the more evident since the music of the entire opera was not originally composed material but consisted exclusively of a “remake” of Mozartian material.

The emergence of the theme of plagiarism in an opera dedicated to Mozart is by no means accidental. “I can more or less adopt or imitate any kind and any style of composition,” the Austrian master declared.²¹

Indeed, his work clearly exhibits influences, borrowings, intersections, and dialogues with the music of other composers, a fact frequently noted in scholarly literature and prompting questions about Mozartian originality. This issue is resolved quite clearly in the monograph by Pavel V. Lutsker and Irina P. Susidko, who perceptively observed: “Ultimately, in Mozart’s time, *how* a composer handled a theme was far more important than how original or absolutely unique the theme itself was. And it is much more interesting today to comprehend the result than simply—without commentary—to state the initial impulse” [6, p. 413]. These words, characterizing 18th-century compositional practice, strikingly describe the situation at the end of the 20th century as well, especially the position of Nyman, who openly declared in various interviews: “I do not hide that I steal...”²² and viewed his creative method as an opportunity to take a fresh look at familiar material. The judicial proceedings staged in the opera, as well as its verdict—which, through the mouth of Beethoven,

²¹ Anderson, 1938, p. 692.

²² A phrase spoken by Nyman in an interview with Dmitry Ukhov in 1998.

justifies composing in accordance with chosen models²³—were likely the British composer’s response to criticism from foreign musicologists who considered his compositional practice an indicator of “commercial opportunism” [14, p. 344].

The parts of the television opera exploring Mozart’s relationship with his father and the issues of plagiarism are united by another problem that can be defined as the “anxiety of influence”—a concept developed by the American literary critic Harold Bloom [15]. Based on the ideas of Freud, Nietzsche, and Emerson, this concept is centered on the psychological barrier experienced by writers due to the conservative pressure of literary tradition. According to Bloom, the influence of great predecessors is inevitable, but their originality hinders the self-affirmation of new poets, causing an “anxiety of influence.” This is overcome through a “struggle” with the influence of the classics, manifesting as a conscious reinterpretation of their legacy. “Strong” writers, in order to realize their own vision, radically distort the masters, whereas “weak” ones merely repeat their ideas, creating derivative works.

The concept of the “anxiety of influence” reflects the Freudian Oedipus complex, and in this respect, both parts of Nyman’s opera align perfectly. Piety and admiration, turning into a hidden rebellion against the dear, function here as a *topos* realized, on the one hand, in Mozart’s riddles and letters, and on the other, in Nyman’s “remaking” of his music. The intersection of these ideas is emphasized both aurally and visually. For instance, in the first half of the opera, the Wagnerian allusion permeating the song *Dearest Papa* actually turns out to be a fragment from the second movement of Mozart’s Quartet KV 428.²⁴ Thus, accusations of intellectual

²³ Interestingly, a complex system of references arises in this instance. Beethoven appeals to the words of Nägeli, who quotes Czerny, who, in turn, refers to Haydn. This concerns Carl Czerny’s treatise *School of Practical Composition*. The creators of the opera include an excerpt from the sixth chapter in the libretto: “The best method is, undoubtedly, that which Joseph Haydn recommended to his pupil: ... must so compose *according to the models chosen*, that the same key, time, form of the period, number of bars and even each modulations, shall be strictly followed ...” (Czerny, C. (1848). *School of Practical Composition; or, Complete Treatise on the Composition of all Kinds of Music* (J. Bishop, Trans., Vol. 1). R. Cocks & Co., p. 36).

²⁴ The connection between this excerpt and the Wagnerian leitmotif of longing from *Tristan und Isolde* was once pointed out by Georgy Chicherin. See [16, p. 195].

theft could be brought not only against the author of *Letters, Riddles and Writs* but also against Wagner. In the second part of the film, Nägeli defends Nyman's "anxiety of influence," legitimizing his compositional practice based on the deconstruction of Mozartian material.

*Genre and Compositional Features,
Working with Musical Material*

The genre and compositional structure of the opera partially appeal to the traditions of the *Singspiel*, particularly in the form it took in Mozart's own works: Nyman alternates songs²⁵ and duets with spoken dialogues. *Letters, Riddles and Writs* is further linked to the *Singspiel* by its fantastic narrative character (though here the plot is transformed from a fairy tale into a surrealist one), a critical (in Nyman's case, ironic) attitude toward reality, and the comicality of situations and dialogues²⁶ juxtaposed with dramatic intensity. Other shared features include a small number of musical numbers, a rapid succession of scenes creating a chronicling effect, and an orientation toward popular music—which, in the contemporary mass consciousness, Mozart's music has undoubtedly become.

Letters, Riddles and Writs belongs to the genre of television opera, which allows for the use of the extensive resources of television technology. This provides opportunities for alternating and combining close-ups and panoramic shots, montage, and special artistic effects based on a polyphony of visual layers. The special effects, makeup, and costumes are striking in their spectacle and craftsmanship, while the deliberate visual aesthetics of each frame are only slightly inferior to the artistic style of the famous Peter Greenaway, with whom Nyman has collaborated since 1976.

²⁵ Nyman calls the solo numbers "songs," but given the dramatic character of the music and in accordance with the traditions of early opera, in our view, they can also be designated as arias.

²⁶ This primarily concerns the dialogues between Haydn and Beethoven, which frequently evoke a smile. An example is Haydn's retort to Beethoven's indignation regarding Leopold's mercenariness (Leopold believed his son's main goal in life was to earn money): "He wasn't an artist. I wasn't an artist. Only you were the artist, Ludwig. The rest of us were jobbing composers trying to make ends meet." It should be noted that the comedy is often provided by numerous anachronisms, which frequently provoke bewildered questions from the Viennese classics ("What's a dollar?" Haydn asks Beethoven; "What's copyright?" Beethoven wonders in turn).

As noted above, visual techniques often help the authors bring hidden meanings to the surface. For instance, it is telling that not only the first riddle, “We are many sisters,” but also the following song, *Dearest Papa*—in which the intention to marry Constanze is voiced—is sung by a sickly-looking Mozart while positioned inside Leopold’s mouth (*Illustration 1*). The combination of the letter’s text with such a visual sequence heightens the sense of hopelessness and helps the viewer interpret the decision to marry not only as resistance to paternal authority but also as the acquisition of long-awaited freedom. Indeed, the appearance of Constanze’s portrait through the gap in the teeth, steadily approaching the viewer while the dark color palette shifts to bright hues and the music moves from minor to major, seems to facilitate the hero’s escape from imprisonment. During the performance of the second riddle, Mozart’s face dominates the frame in a close-up, and his appearance takes on traditional features for the first time (the actress is clad in a wig, a knee-length coat, an embroidered waistcoat, culottes, silk stockings, a jabot, and cuffs; see *Illustration 2*). Due to this, the text of the charade becomes associated not so much with sound in general, but directly with Mozart’s music.



*Illustration 1. A frame from the television opera
Letters, Riddles and Writs (1991)*



*Illustration 2. A frame from the television opera
Letters, Riddles and Writs (1991)*

The opera contains six musical numbers: two duets between Mozart and his father and four songs (two featuring the texts of the riddles and two with fragments from the letters). All of them rely on borrowed material and its subsequent rework. For instance, the basis of the first duet is Sarastro's aria from Act II of *Die Zauberflöte* („O Isis und Osiris“). The source material for the second duet is Leporello's aria from Act I of *Don Giovanni*. The song *Dearest Papa* is based on fragments from the second movement of the Quartet KV 428, while the song *I am an unusual thing* combines fragments from the quartets KV 428 (first movement) and KV 465 (second movement). The material for the final song, *I am appointed to a situation*, is taken from an excerpt of the first movement of the Quartet KV 428.

Nyman's work with musical material is quite diverse. For example, in the first duet, Sarastro's aria, which sounds in F major as it does in Mozart's original, is used almost in its entirety. The composer excluded only a small fragment involving modulations to G minor and C major.²⁷ Everything else—harmony, melodic line, and rhythm²⁸—he left virtually unchanged, with the exception

²⁷ In Mozart's work, this excerpt is accompanied by the words: „Lasst sie der Prüfung Früchte sehen: doch sollten sie zu Grabe gehen.“

²⁸ Due to the fact that Nyman combines Sarastro's aria with a new text (fragments from Leopold's letter to his son), the rhythm undergoes slight adjustments in accordance with the rules of prosody.

of the tempo. Although Mozart's aria is written in a rather slow tempo (*Adagio*), Nyman slows it down even further, reducing it by half. The longer note values significantly alter the character of the music, imbuing it with a sense of ponderousness and heaviness that is uncharacteristic of the Viennese Classical style.

Mozart's part was composed by Nyman himself. It acts as a counterpoint to Sarastro's melody and is written in shorter note values. Its basis is the opening fourth motif of Sarastro's aria. Although the imperative intonation in this context symbolizes grumbling and resistance, its delivery in a more restless rhythm causes it to "drown" against the background of Leopold's "majestic" musical statement. This is visually emphasized by combining the faces of the father and son in a single frame, presented from different angles: frontal view (Leopold), accentuating strength and confidence, and in profile view (Mozart), reflecting secrecy and withdrawal (*Illustration 3*).



*Illustration 3. A frame from the television opera
Letters, Riddles and Writs (1991)*

The second duet is based on Leporello's "Catalogue Aria" from Act I of *Don Giovanni*. The choice of the source material is driven by ironic numerical associations: in both cases, there is an enumeration. However, while Leporello records the number of Don Giovanni's romantic conquests (640 women in Italy, 231 in Germany, 100 in France, and 1,003 in Spain), Mozart and his father are calculating earned and spent money (three concerts at the Burgtheater brought in 800 florins, the performance of *Le nozze di Figaro*—1,000, but the rent for the apartment on Schulerstrasse cost 480, the trip to Prague cost 280, and so on).

Nyman resorts not only to citation but also to self-citation, as the orchestral accompaniment is based on his earlier piece *In Re Don Giovanni* (1977). The Mozartian text (the opening 15 bars of the aria) is deconstructed by the composer into separate textural elements: Leporello's recitative melody, the bass line, imitations in the upper voices, and the middle voices performing the function of harmonic support. The disassembled music unfolds from a "reduced version to a full one" [1, p. 38]. The orchestral accompaniment includes four presentations of the Mozartian material. The first represents only the harmonic skeleton of the borrowed fragment, performed by strings; in the second, the bass line (saxophones) is added; the third presentation is supplemented by imitation in the flutes; and finally, in the concluding section, the material of Leporello's vocal part appears (horns, trumpets, and trombones). Nyman composes the melodies for the parts of Mozart and Leopold himself but essentially extracts them from the harmonic context.

Different strategies are used in the songs. The music of the song I am an unusual thing combines fragments from various Mozart compositions. Its first verse is based on the repetition of a harmonic formula borrowed from bars 75–96 of the first movement of the Quartet KV 428²⁹ (*Example 1*).

²⁹ The choice of material here is also intentional. Quartets KV 428 and KV 465 are part of the cycle of so-called "Haydn" Quartets. They were written by Mozart between 1782 and 1785 and dedicated to Haydn. Fragments from this written dedication were included in the libretto of *Letters, Riddles and Writs*: "I send my six sons to you, most celebrated and very dear friend. These children may one day prove to be a source of consolation to me. Please then, receive them kindly, and be to them father, guide and friend. From this moment I surrender to you, Haydn, my dear friend, all my rights over them." Haydn heard the quartets in early 1785 at a meeting at Mozart's home and, addressing Leopold Mozart, said of his son: "He's the greatest composer of his age" (these words were also included in the libretto).

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with four staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The second system features a fortissimo (fp) dynamic. The third system continues with a piano (p) dynamic. The fourth system concludes with a piano (p) dynamic.

Example 1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. String Quartet in E-flat Major, KV 428.
I. Allegro non troppo, bars 75–100

The cadence before the second statement is modified by Nyman in order to modulate back to the original key of C minor (*Example 2*).

First stanza



Refrain

Example 2. Michael Nyman. *Letters, Riddles and Writs*.
“I am an unusual thing” (harmonic scheme)

The soloist’s part is composed using a recombination of segments from Mozart’s theme (*Example 3*). This is followed, starting from the words “if my life is only of short duration,” by a fragment taken from bars 97–100. In the song, it functions as a refrain, as it appears in a shortened form at the conclusion. Nyman leaves the harmonic sequence unchanged, while transferring the first violin’s melody to the vocal part.

A comparison with the original source reveals that the composer borrows only the chord sequence and individual motifs. He offers a different textural solution, a “darker” orchestration (low strings and winds), and, as with Sarastro’s aria, significantly slows down the tempo. All of this affects the character of the music, imbuing it with dramatic features.

The second verse (starting from the words “And so, according to men’s caprice”) is constructed by combining two fragments from the second movement of the Quartet KV 465—bars 13–19 and bars 57–67 (*Examples 4a and 4b*).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. String Quartet KV 428, 1st Movement

The image displays a musical score for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's String Quartet KV 428, 1st Movement. It features two staves. The top staff is labeled with 'V-no 2 (т. 75)', 'V-la (т. 75)', and 'V-no 1 (т. 85)'. The bottom staff contains the lyrics: 'I am an un - u - su - al thing; I have no soul and no bo - dy;'. Arrows indicate the derivation of vocal parts from the instrumental motifs of the quartet.

Michael Nyman. *I am an unusual thing*

Example 3. Michael Nyman. *Letters, Riddles and Writs*. “I am an unusual thing.”
Derivation of vocal part segments from the motifs of Mozart’s quartet

The image shows a musical score for Michael Nyman's 'I am an unusual thing'. It consists of four staves, likely representing different instruments or vocal parts. The score is written in 3/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines.

Example 4a. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Quartet KV 465.
II. Andante cantabile, bars 13–19

In the first instance, the vocal part is based on the first violin’s melody; the orchestral accompaniment relies on the same harmony, but the composer excludes the rhythmic pulsation and cello imitations from the texture, while doubling the voice with individual instruments. In the second instance,



Example 4b. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Quartet KV 465.
II. Andante cantabile, bars 57–64

Nyman's score proves closer to the original source: the vocal part is constructed from segments of the cello line and then the first violin, while the rhythmic pulsation of the texture and the imitations are preserved.

The musical text of the other numbers (*We are many sisters, Dearest Papa, I am appointed to a situation*) relies on similar techniques. On the whole, the “remaking” of Mozartian themes reveals distinct traces of deconstruction characteristic of postmodern thought: Nyman first dissects the source material, breaking it down into its constituent parts (isolating textural voices, specific harmonic progressions, and motifs), and then, through the slowing of the tempo, the renewal of texture and instrumentation, the reduction or repetition of elements, and their recombination and genre transformation, he significantly alters the perception of Mozart's music. In other words, he discovers new expressive possibilities within the borrowed material.

Conclusion

An analysis of the compositional technique allows us to conclude that intervention in the primary source is intended, on the one hand—as Cenciarelli rightly notes—to bring different stylistic codes together and present (not without a touch of irony) the great Viennese composer as a precursor to minimalism.

This is most evident in the duet based on Leporello's aria. "Through these stylistic convergences," the researcher remarks, "Nyman suggests an ideal kinship between Mozart and minimalism, a kinship centred on a constellation of aesthetic markers such as 'simplicity', 'effortlessness' and 'universality'. These markers, implicitly relying on familiar traits of Mozart's musicological and popular images, are used by Nyman to turn Mozart into the perfect partisan for his anti-modernist agenda..." [13]—an agenda that seeks to bridge the divide between academic art and mass culture. Such an approach allows the artistic text of the opera to be interpreted as a metacomposition, since both its themes and musical material are directly linked to the socio-cultural practice of creating works of art. Thus, the trial staged against Nyman forces one to reflect on the fine line between the practice of creative reinterpretation and plagiarism, which in the 20th century essentially loses its meaning, albeit for different reasons than in Mozart's era: not only due to postmodern omnivorousness but also because of the problem of recognizing an author's style among those composers who erect "insurmountable barriers between their work and the listener's perception" [17, p. 45]. In this sense, *Letters, Riddles and Writs* is music about music, music of context, and music of subtext.

On the other hand, by heightening the dramatic intensity of Mozart's music in several numbers, Nyman shatters prevailing stereotypes (primarily those regarding Mozart and his music as idealized and timeless phenomena). Appealing to psychoanalytic practice—which attempts to reduce all myths to the categorical imperative of "how it actually was"—he creates a very real and quite tragic image of an *ordinary man* with a set of psychological problems. In this case, music becomes akin to biographics, and in accordance with the traditions of "unmasking" hermeneutics [18], quite popular in Western musicology, the creative act begins to be interpreted as sublimation. Mozart's compositions are thus perceived as reflections of the composer's childhood complexes and suppressed desires (the hidden meanings lurking behind the "facade" of external elements are unmasked through the technique of deconstruction).

Both the themes and compositional techniques of *Letters, Riddles and Writs* have much in common with Nyman's first opera, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1986), based on the short story of the same title by the American neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks. In both instances, the operatic genre is transformed simultaneously into a psychological *study* of the artist's personality and a creative self-diagnosis, as Nyman attempts to assert his own aesthetic position through a virtual dialogue with tradition.

Finally, it must be noted that the opera *Letters, Riddles and Writs* is a testament to Nyman's profound knowledge in the field of Mozart studies. By denying some musicological myths while simultaneously creating others, it essentially exposes the perceptions of Mozart in the contemporary scholarly space, as well as the characteristic trends in his study determined by the features of postmodern culture. Combining seemingly incompatible elements—a striving for authenticity (reflected in the reliance on documentary material) and neo-mythologism, the high and the low, the serious and the comical, the old and the new—it simultaneously casts doubt not only on the truth but also on the adequacy of any interpretations of Mozart's personality and work, delivering a pessimistic verdict on our failed attempts to comprehend the nature of genius: *Not Mozart*.

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Harmonics and pitch organization of the traditional tanbûr

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Abstract. This article examines the principles underlying the pitch system of the traditional tanbûr, a string instrument widely used in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The study aims to identify the mechanisms governing the formation of the instrument's pitch organization. A comparative method is employed, juxtaposing the tones of the tanbûr scale with the harmonics

produced on its melody string, thereby revealing consistent patterns in pitch relationships and specific features of the instrument's tuning. For the first time, the pitch system of the traditional tanbûr is analyzed in relation to its acoustic characteristics and the historical and cultural context of maqâm performance practice. It is demonstrated that the instrument's pitch system has a heptatonic, non-equal-tempered diatonic structure, in which pitch deviations are regulated by stopping the melody string against tightly tied gut frets. Differences between the natural harmonic series and maqâm performance practice are examined, highlighting the flexibility of the instrument in adapting to various modal systems. The findings contribute to a clearer understanding of the principles governing the tanbûr's pitch system from both scientific and practical perspectives, clarify its acoustic nature, and provide a theoretical foundation for further research on traditional musical instruments of Central Asia. The results may be of interest to performers, instrument makers, and scholars in ethnomusicology and musical acoustics.

Keywords: tanbûr, pitch system, acoustics, harmonics, modal system, Shashmaqom, Central Asian musical instruments, ethnomusicology, traditional music

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Этномузыкология

Научная статья

О гармонике и звукоряде традиционного танбура

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Аннотация. В статье детально рассматриваются основы построения звукоряда традиционного танбура, распространенного в странах Центральной Азии, преимущественно в Республиках Таджикистан и Узбекистан. Исследование направлено на выявление закономерностей формирования звуковысотной системы инструмента. В работе применен сравнительный метод сопоставления тонов шкалы танбура с гармониками, формирующимися на его мелодической струне, что позволило выявить точные закономерности высотных отношений и особенности настройки инструмента.

Впервые звукоряд традиционного танбура анализируется во взаимосвязи с его акустическими характеристиками и историко-культурными особенностями исполнения макомов. Установлено, что звукоряд инструмента имеет семиступенную диатоническую структуру, не являющуюся равномерно темперированной, а высотные отклонения звуков регулируются посредством прижатия мелодической струны к высоко навязанным изжилладкам. Описаны различия между натуральным звукорядом и практикой исполнения макомов, что позволяет выявить гибкость традиционного инструмента в адаптации к различным ладовым системам. Результаты исследования позволяют раскрыть логику построения звукоряда танбура с научно-практической точки зрения, уточняют его акустическую природу и дают теоретическую основу для дальнейшего изучения традиционных музыкальных инструментов Центральной Азии. Представленные выводы могут быть полезны как музыкантам и инструменталистам, так и исследователям этномузыкологии и акустики музыкальных инструментов.

Ключевые слова: танбур, звукоряд, акустика, гармоника, ладовая система, Шашмаком, музыкальные инструменты Центральной Азии, этномузыкология, традиционная музыка

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Introduction

The tanbûr is an ancient plucked string chordophone widely distributed across Central Asia and particularly significant in the musical traditions of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Like other traditional instruments of the East, it embodies a distinctive pitch organization shaped by stable acoustic principles and centuries of performance practice. One of the central research questions concerns the identification of the mechanisms governing the formation of the instrument's pitch system and its relationship to natural acoustic principles of pitch organization.

The acoustic systems of musical instruments have traditionally been studied within disciplines concerned with the physical nature of sound. This field has been developed in the works of prominent scholars,¹ who have addressed a wide range of issues, including the acoustic foundations of musical performance, the influence of overtones on tuning and timbre, and the physical principles underlying the production of harmonics.

The present study focuses on the relationship between the structure of the instrument's pitch system and the characteristics of its harmonic components. In our previous work, we analyzed the types of tanbûr tuning used in the performance practice of Shashmaqom [1], the order of construction of registers and initial octave modes of this instrument [2], the tuning of the tanbûr scale length, an auditory method used by musicians in performing practice [3], and the connection between the construction canons of the Shashmaqom composition and the pitch system of the tanbûr [4].

The pitch system of the traditional tanbûr can be examined in relation to two principal factors. The first concerns the formation of the natural scale, namely the overtones generated by the sounding of the open melody string and the three

¹ Fletcher, N. H., & Rossing, T. D. (1998). *The physics of musical instruments*. Springer; Helmholtz, H. von. (1954). *On the sensations of tone as a physiological basis for the theory of music*. Dover Publications; Benade, A. H. (1979). *Fundamentals of musical acoustics*. Birkhäuser; Meyer, J. (1972). *Acoustics and musical practice*. Verlag Das Musikinstrument; Bach, M. (1991). *Fingerboards & overtones: Images, foundations and designs of a new approach to cello playing*. Spangenberg.

drone (resonating) strings. The tied frets made of thick gut on the instrument's neck create an unequal diatonic system and allow for pitch variation within a semitone. The drone strings serve to produce pedal tones, emphasizing their importance in shaping the overall sonic color [5, pp. 770–771]. The second factor relates to the characteristics of the repertoire performed on the tanbûr (for example, *Shashmaqom*²), which involves various modal systems and often requires retuning of the instrument. Neglecting these parameters complicates an adequate understanding of traditional tanbûr's pitch system.

Studies devoted to tanbûr performance [8],³ (in English, among others [9; 10]) systematize practical knowledge of the instrument's tuning and usage. These works primarily focus on tuning types, string adjustment, features of the diatonic system, and other structural aspects. However, they remain largely descriptive and tend to reproduce established viewpoints. The acoustic specificity of the tanbûr—its spectral characteristics, resonance–harmonic properties, and timbral features—has not yet been subjected to systematic and comprehensive analysis. Addressing these aspects within the framework of pitch organization underscores the need for further in-depth research and defines the scientific novelty of the present study.

Harmonic Basis of the Tanbûr's Pitch System

The problem of tanbûr tuning systems and their terminology has been addressed in a number of scholarly studies, including some of the earliest publications on the subject [11, p. 13; 12, p. 192; 13, p. 35]. At the same time, this issue was examined in greater detail in our previous work [1], where, alongside the primary

² *Shashmaqom* is the name of an integrated cycle widespread in the musical cultures of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. *Shashmaqom* consists of six maqâms: *Rost*, *Navo*, *Buzurg*, *Dugoh*, *Segoh*, and *Iroq*. For information on the tuning of the tanbûr in relation to the performance of *Shashmaqom*, see [6; 7].

³ See also Abdukarimov, M. (1997). *Tanbur, sato i setor v muzykal'noi traditsii Uzbekistana i Tadzhikistana* [Tanbur, sato and setor in the musical tradition of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan] (Abstract of Candidate of Sciences dissertation). Tashkent. (In Russ.); Zufarov, A. M. (2025). *Evolutsiya razvitiya sistemy ladov v makome "Navo"* [The evolution of the modal system in the maqâm "Navo"] (Abstract of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) dissertation in Art Studies). Tashkent. (In Russ.).

quartal tuning *Buzurg*, artificially constructed systems—such as the quintal tuning *Rost* and the second-based tuning *Navo*—were analyzed. The study demonstrates that the use of these tunings is determined not only by the technical demands of performance practice but also by transformations in the instrument's pitch organization within an alternative intonational–modal paradigm. Their emergence is thus interpreted as a natural stage in the evolution of performance practice, aimed at expanding the acoustic and expressive potential of the tanbûr beyond its inherent system. This process is of particular significance in the context of the development of the Shashmaqom performance tradition, which presupposes variability in tuning systems and their correspondence to different modal–intonational models.

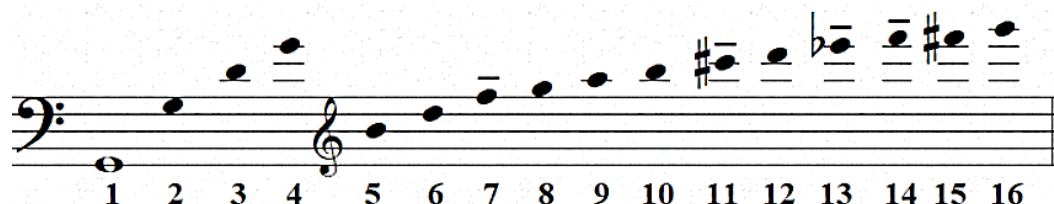
Traditional performers intuitively recognize the importance of the harmonic basis in organizing the tanbûr's pitch system. The tuning process is based on the interaction of two parameters — acoustic and performative.⁴

The natural scale consists of a fundamental tone and its harmonic overtones, each element forming part of a unified harmonic spectrum. The tanbûr, with its open melody and drone strings, derives its distinctive timbre from the interaction between the fundamental tone and the complex array of harmonics produced by string vibration. These overtones enrich the sound, impart brightness, and determine the individuality of timbre even when identical pitches are performed on different instruments. The overtone spectrum of the tanbûr depends on factors such as body construction, materials, and string length and tension, all of which contribute to its characteristic sound.

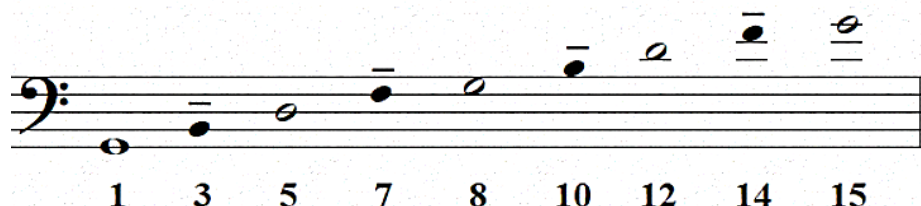
The fundamental tone of the tanbûr's melody string corresponds to the pitch G, generating a natural harmonic series (see *Example 1*).

Some of the overtones generated by the vibration of the tanbûr strings play a particularly significant role; this selectivity is essential in shaping the distinctive structure of the instrument's pitch system. Among these are the pitches G, D, B (natural), and F (see *Example 2*), which are perceived most clearly by the human ear. These tones function as reference points for musicians in the tuning process.

⁴ For the specifics of performance on the Iranian tanbûr see [14], on the Ottoman tanbûr see [10].



Example 1. Natural harmonic series produced by the vibration of the tanbûr's melody string

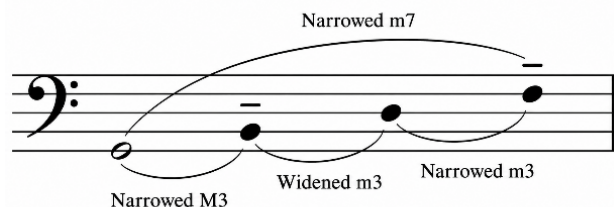


Example 2. Harmonics forming the pitches G, g, g¹; d, d¹; H, h и f, f¹ in the tanbûr scale

In traditional musical practice, the concept of *tabii parda* (*tabû parda*, translated from Tajik as “natural degrees” or “natural tones”) is used to denote the natural steps of the scale. This term refers to frets that appear visually to be evenly spaced along the neck of the tanbûr. In reality, however, they constitute a specific pitch system that does not fully coincide with the natural harmonic series, as it incorporates only a selected set of natural intervals. The selection of these degrees is determined not only by aesthetic and performative considerations but also by the acoustic properties of the overtone series: certain harmonics serve as the basis for the formation of the modal system, defining its characteristic intervallic relationships. Thus, the *tabii parda* system reflects a traditional perception of pitch and ensures the distinctive expressiveness of the tanbûr, while also maintaining practical convenience for tuning and performance by ear.

Some tones of the tanbûr scale correspond to specific degrees of the natural harmonic series, the 7th and the 14th, for example. The analysis of harmonics and intervals within it therefore demonstrates that, despite certain deviations from the complete natural series, the instrument preserves the fundamental principles of harmonic organization. This accounts for the recognizable timbre richness characteristic of the traditional sound of the tanbûr.

As illustrated in *Example 2*, the pitches B and F are slightly lowered relative to G and D. Within this framework, the tones G, D, and the lowered pitches B and F form a harmonic complex spanning the range of a minor seventh. This configuration produces thirds of varying qualities: a slightly narrowed major third (M3), a widened minor third (m3), and a narrowed minor third (m3). The outer tones form a minor seventh (m7), which is likewise slightly narrowed (see *Example 3*).



Example 3. Relationship between overtones
with widened and narrowed intervals

In musical practice, intermediate tones located between the principal intervals were traditionally determined by ear, primarily through the adjustment of frets along the instrument's neck. In this way, they assumed their pitch positions relative to already established harmonic tones. When compared with the equal-tempered system, some of these tones appear either lowered or raised, resulting in the formation of variety of narrowed and widened intervals.

According to the acoustic principles underlying the tanbûr's pitch system, only the octave, the fifth, and the fourth remain acoustically pure intervals, whereas the second, third, sixth, and seventh are realized as either narrowed or widened. This distribution is determined by the specific nature of the instrument's harmonic organization, reflecting the natural laws of string vibration and the corresponding acoustic proportions.

Within this framework, among the seven harmonics occurring within the octave, only G and D, in various combinations, form pure intervals—namely the octave,

the fourth, and the fifth. The remaining tones, including those determined by ear (A, B, E, and F), are tuned slightly lower, whereas the pitch C is, by contrast, slightly raised. As a result, a system of narrowed and widened intervals emerges, a distinctive “natural” pitch organization with unequal temperament.

As an illustration, consider an experimental tanbûr prepared by the author, in which the frets were tuned in accordance with the harmonics of the open melody string, along with additional frets installed on the neck to produce intermediate tones between them. This configuration represents a tanbûr pitch system based on natural intonation within a traditionally unequal temperament (see *Illustration 1*).

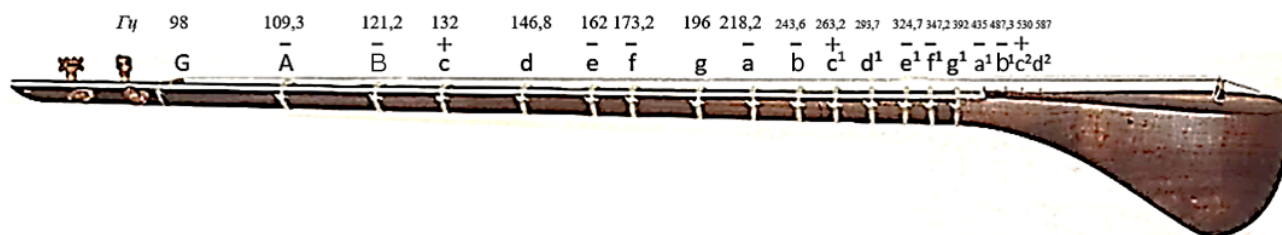


Illustration 1. Pitch system of the tanbûr⁵

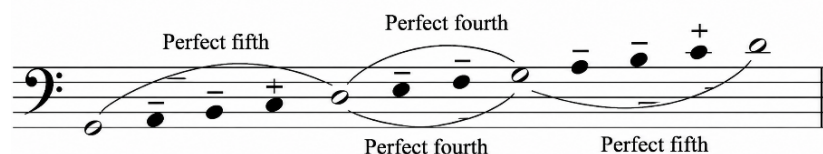
To document the pitch parameters of the scale in the given example, the values of the tones are simultaneously indicated in hertz, allowing for a clear assessment of the degree to which they are lowered or raised relative to the equal-tempered system (*Table 1* — compiled by the author).

Table 1. Comparison of lowered and raised tones of the natural unequal pitch system produced on the tanbûr with the tones of the equal-tempered system

Natural scale produced on tanbûr																		
	G	A	B	c	d	e	f	g	a	b	c¹	d¹	e¹	f¹	g¹	a¹	b¹	c²
Hz	98	109,3	121,2	132	146,8	162	173,2	196	218,2	243,6	263,2	293,7	324,7	347,2	392	435	487,3	530
Fret	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Equally tempered scale																		
	G	A	B	c	d	e	f	g	a	b	c¹	d¹	e¹	f¹	g¹	a¹	b¹	c²
Hz	98	110	123,47	130,81	146,83	164,81	174,61	196	220	246,94	261,63	293,67	329,63	349,23	392	440	493,88	523,25
Difference	0	-0,7	-2,27	+1,10	-0,03	-2,81	-1,41	0	-1,8	-3,34	+2,43	+0,07	-4,93	-2,03	0	-5	-6,59	+6,75

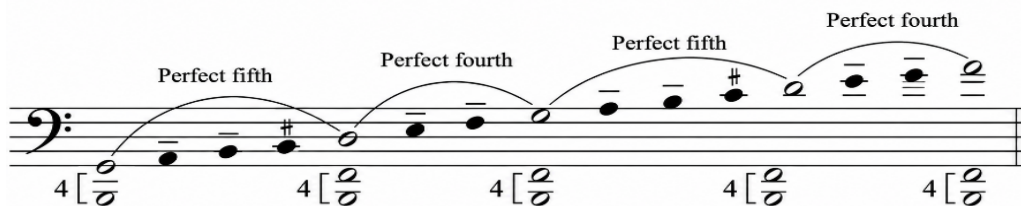
⁵ Illustration compiled by the author.

Pure intervals within a single octave may be formed on the basis of either the fifth–fourth or the fourth–fifth relationship (see *Example 4*).



Example 4. Fifth–fourth and fourth–fifth intervallic relationships in the natural intonation of the tanbûr pitch system

The harmonic organization of the instrument is structured around the relationship between two scale degrees—G and D—and the drone strings. In essence, this system may be described as quartal: the drone strings establish a stable vertical framework based on fourths, while the pitches G and D interact with this framework horizontally across different registers, forming fourth–fifth relationships. In traditional performance practice, this tuning is referred to as *Buzurg* (lit. “great” or “large”). The term denotes the quartal tuning of both the melody and drone strings of the tanbûr (see *Example 5*, compiled by the author).



Example 5. Tanbûr pitch system with natural intonation in quartal tuning, in combination with pure fourth and fifth intervals

Thus, the harmonic structure of the instrument, its system of natural intervals, and the specific characteristics of intermediate tones collectively shape the distinctive sonic character of the tanbûr, ensuring both intonational accuracy and expressive richness in performance practice.

The Pitch System of the Traditional Tanbûr

The melody string of the tanbûr represents the horizontal dimension of the instrument's scale—namely, its pitch organization and limited range. Accordingly, the tuning system of the tanbûr is determined by stepwise movement along the frets in both ascending and descending directions: the number of frets corresponds to the number of scale degrees. Thus, the frets on the neck of the traditional tanbûr—16 primary (*aslparda*) and 4 additional (*khas-parda*)—serve a dual function. On the one hand, they define the instrument's overall range of approximately two and a half to three octaves⁶; on the other hand, they reflect a specific pitch organization—that is, the scale itself [15, p. 27] (*Illustration 2*).

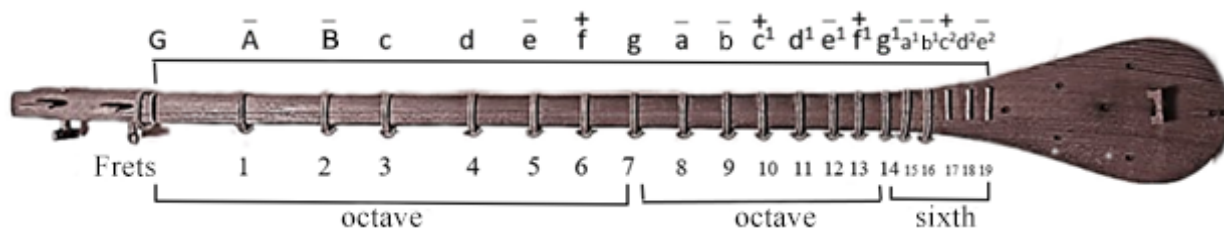


*Illustration 2. Range and pitch system of the traditional tanbûr*⁷

As can be observed, the frets on the neck of the traditional tanbûr are arranged relatively evenly with respect to one another, with the exception of the third fret. As they approach the body of the instrument, the distances between them gradually decrease. Consequently, it is difficult to determine visually to which tuning system this pitch structure belongs. However, in performance, it becomes evident that the octave comprises seven degrees forming a heptatonic diatonic scale, albeit not based on equal temperament. This structure underlies the distinctive melodic and harmonic expressiveness of the tanbûr.

It is important to emphasize that, alongside the pure intervals of the octave, fifth, and fourth—defined in relation to the reference tones D and G—other intervals

⁶ The lowest pitch is G of the lower octave, and the highest is F² of the second octave.

⁷ The authentic traditional tanbûr belonged to the renowned singer and performer of classical *Shashmaqom* music, the People's Artist of Tajikistan Shohnazar Sohibov (1903–1973). The maker of this instrument was Usto Toir (1883–1953) from Bukhara. Notably, for unknown reasons, the final additional fret (*khasparda*) is absent on this tanbûr.

also occur in narrowed or widened forms, including seconds, thirds, fourths, sixths, and sevenths. These arise through the interaction with lowered tones A, B, and E, as well as raised tones F and C. Thus, the diatonic scale of the traditional tanbûr manifests as a distinctive unequal-tempered system. This may be corroborated by examining several traditional tanbûrs associated with prominent masters of the maqâm tradition, including Risqi Rajabi (1887–1977), Rasulqori Mamadaliev (1928–1976), Boboqul Fayzulloev (1899–1964), and Fazliddin Shahobov (1911–1974) (*Illustration 3–6*).⁸

The figures above show that the frets on all variants of the traditional tanbûr are arranged in a broadly similar manner and that, consequently, their pitch systems are based on the same underlying principle. A comparison of these pitch systems with the natural scale suggests the existence of a systematic relationship between them. To verify this hypothesis, we turn to an experimental tanbûr prepared by the author, tuned in accordance with the acoustic



Illustration 3.
Risqi Rajabi



Illustration 4.
Rasulqori Mamadaliev

⁸ All photographic illustrations are taken from various sources, including the personal archives of the performers' relatives and close associates.



Illustration 5. Boboqul Fayzulloev



Illustration 6. Fazliddin Shahobov

properties of the instrument and the pitch organization of a traditional tanbûr associated with the People's Artist of Tajikistan and master Shashmaqom performer Shohnazar Sohibov (Illustration 7–8).

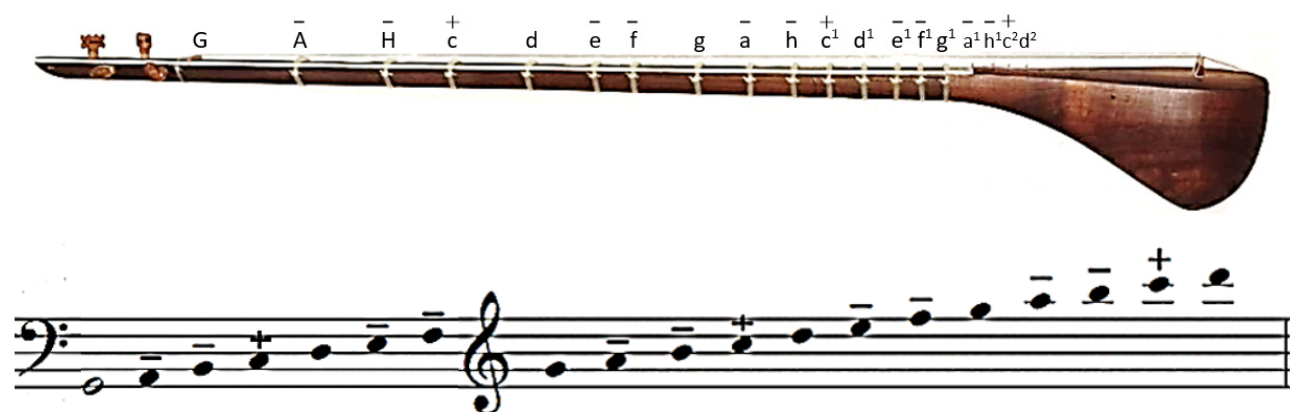


Illustration 7. Pitch system of the experimental tanbûr

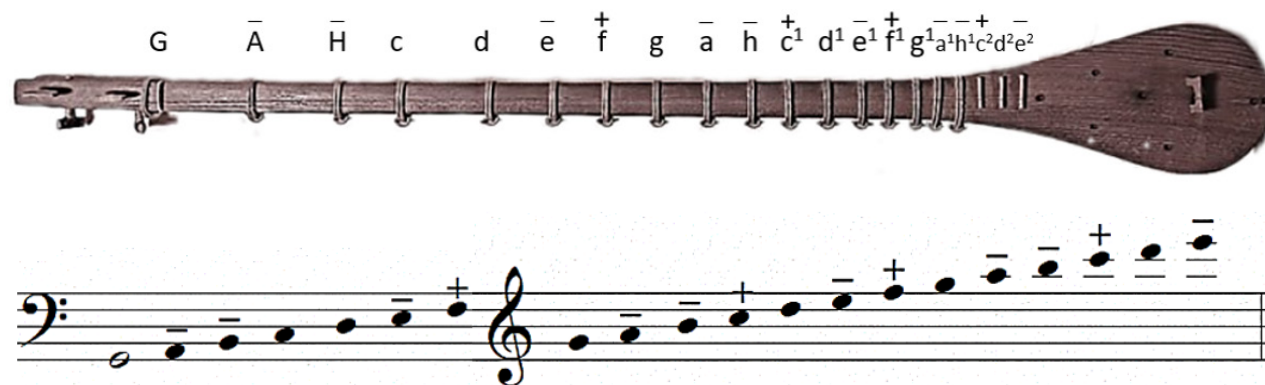


Illustration 8. Pitch system of the traditional tanbûr of Shohnazar Sohibov

A comparison of these pitch systems reveals differences only in the tones C and F of the lower octave, corresponding to the third and sixth frets of the tanbûr. In one case, these frets are positioned lower, whereas in the other they are set higher, resulting in differences in the pitch of the tones produced.

*Tones Produced on the Basis
of the Third and Sixth Frets of the Tanbûr*

The third fret on the neck of the traditional Sohibov tanbûr is, in comparison with the other frets, slightly displaced downward and adjusted to produce the pitch C of the lower octave. In principle, however, it would be expected to lie midway between the second and fourth frets, thereby yielding a naturally raised C of the lower octave (see *Figures 7–8*). In both types of pitch systems, in the higher registers of the tanbûr, the tenth and seventeenth frets are positioned higher and likewise produce slightly raised C in the first and second octaves.⁹

It may be assumed that the principal reason for the displacement of the third fret lies in the introduction of a new harmonic framework. In particular, the adoption of a quintal tuning appears to have necessitated shifting the third fret downward in order to establish C of the lower octave as a central tone of the instrument.

⁹ In one variant of the traditional tanbûr pitch system used by the Shashmaqom master Risqi Rajabi, the raised pitch C is found in all registers of the instrument, including the lower octave. Thus, in *maqâm* performance practice, there are also examples of tanbûrs whose pitch system is constructed as closely as possible to the natural harmonic series.

When the strings are retuned to a fifth, a transformation occurs in the system of principal scale degrees and their interrelationships. The tones C and G acquire the status of structural degrees, on the basis of which, in combination with the drone strings, vertical sonorities are formed. At the same time, the tone D remains the most prominent overtone of the instrument, owing to its resonance with the harmonic partials of the open melody string, and continues to function as a reference tone. Thus, within the quintal tuning system, the tone C assumes a role comparable in importance to that of the degrees forming vertical sonorities.

The sixth fret on the neck of the traditional tanbûr belongs to the category of movable frets, its position depending on the maqâm being performed. This fret may be shifted upward or downward by a semitone, or even by a smaller interval, thereby establishing pitches at specific levels. Its movement operates across three positions—lower, neutral, and upper. The lower position yields F or its lowered variant; the neutral position produces a raised F (i.e., F half-sharp); and the upper position yields a lowered form of F-sharp. In most traditional tanbûrs, including the instrument of Sohibov, the sixth fret is predominantly set in the neutral position, whereas in a natural pitch system it tends to occupy the lower position. The upper position is also actively employed in maqâm performance practice.

As a consequence of lowering or raising the third fret, the tone C of the lower octave, or its raised variant, forms, in relation to the fundamental tone G of the great octave (produced by the open melody string), intervals corresponding to a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth. The sixth movable fret, operating across its three positions (lowered F, raised F, and lowered F-sharp of the lower octave), forms, in combination with the fundamental tone, narrowed and widened variants of the minor seventh, as well as a narrowed major seventh.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the pitch system of the traditional tanbûr is shaped by the combined influence of the instrument's acoustic properties—particularly its harmonic spectrum—and the musical practice of Shashmaqom. This interaction accounts for the internal logic of its pitch organization and the specific features of its sound production, confirming a close relationship between

the structure of the instrument its physical nature, and its musical function. On this basis, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- The harmonics generated by the open melody string of the tanbûr directly influence the organization of its pitch system;
- The pitch system of the traditional tanbûr, formed within the framework of the Shashmaqom classical repertoire, exhibits a natural correspondence with the instrument's acoustic properties;
- Performers and researchers of Shashmaqom should take into account the specific characteristics of this pitch organization in the traditional Bukhara tanbûr in both scholarly and pedagogical contexts.

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**The past and the present chronotope
of the *pāncāi bājā* repertoire in Nepal**



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Abstract. This study attempts to shed light on the changing dynamics of the *pancai bājā* from past to present, particularly with regard to performance occasions, performing communities, ritual functions, and professional practice. The study draws on Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope in literature and cultural performance, Alan P. Merriam's anthropological approach to music studies, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as analytical frameworks in examining the *pancai bājā* musical repertoire. Together, these approaches provide a systematic theoretical framework. In the past, when Nepali society was predominantly agrarian and traditional, Damain community performed the *pancai bājā* repertoire professionally on special occasions and rituals. However, today the Damain community has largely shifted to other occupations. Internal migration, access to education opportunities, modernization, foreign employment opportunities and declining social prestige are among the reasons behind their profession shift. These days, commercially motivated so-called upper caste people form *pancai bājā* bands in urban areas. As a result, the Damain community is gradually losing control over this musical heritage. In the course of studying the chronotope of *pancai bājā* tradition, we have employed a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with different respondents and key informants. Purposive sampling with observation and content analysis are other methods applied in this research. Moreover, the study is based on extensive library and archival research on the *pāncal bājā* tradition. The term *pancai bājā* refers to a traditional Nepali mixed ensemble consisting of shawms, kettledrums, cymbals, natural trumpets and drum traditionally played by the Damain community.

Keywords: chronotope, habitus, *pancai bājā*, repertoire, Damain community, ensemble

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Этномузыкология

Научная статья

**Репертуар панчай-баджа в Непале:
хронотоп прошлого и настоящего**

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается развитие репертуара *панчай-баджа* (*rāṅcaī bājā*) — непальского ансамбля из пяти музыкальных инструментов, состоящего из зурны, литавр, тарелок, натуральных труб и барабана. В прошлом, когда непальское общество было аграрным и традиционным по своим характеристикам, ансамбль составляли исключительно представители касты Дамаи, которые профессионально исполняли репертуар *панчай-баджа* по особым случаям — во время ритуалов и церемоний. Однако в современную эпоху эта каста изменила род занятий. Миграционные процессы, доступ к образованию, модернизация быта, возможности трудоустройства за границей и отсутствие самоуважения стали одними из причин смены профессии. В наши дни мотивированные коммерцией так называемые представители высших каст формируют группы *панчай-баджа* в городской местности. В результате община Дамаи постепенно теряет контроль над наследием *панчай-баджа*, что составляет национально-культурную проблему. Методология исследования музыкального репертуара *панчай-баджа* в статье опирается на теорию хронотопа Михаила Михайловича Бахтина, разработанную для анализа литературных произведений, на концепцию антропологической перспективы в изучении музыки Алана П. Мерриама и понятие габитуса Пьера Бурдьё. В ходе изучения хронотопа традиции *панчай-баджа* мы использовали смешанный метод, включавший взаимодействие с различными респондентами и ключевыми информантами, осуществили целевую выборку с использованием контент-анализа. Кроме того, проведено серьезное библиографическое исследование для сбора и обобщения научной литературы о традиции *панчай-баджа*.

Ключевые слова: хронотоп, габитус, *панчай-баджа*, репертуар, каста Дамаи, ансамбль, Непал, традиционная музыкальная культура

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Introduction

The term *pancai bājā* literally means “five instruments.” *Pancai bājā* is a collective term for a traditional Nepali mixed ensemble consisting of shawm, cymbals, kettledrums, natural trumpets and drum. The Nepali names for the *pancai bājā* are *sahanāi* (a conical-bore double-reed shawm), *dholaki* (a double-headed barrel drum), *damāhā* (a large unpitched copper kettledrum played with a thick stick), *tyāmko* (a small unpitched kettledrum made of either copper, iron or wood) and *narsingā* (a conical-bore natural horn with integral mouthpiece made of finely beaten copper). More broadly, the *pancai bājā* is a mixed ensemble of wind instruments (*sahanāi*, *narsingā*, *karnāl*), drums (*damāhā*, *dholaki*, *tyāmko*) and cymbals (*jhyāli* and *jhyāmtā*).

Traditionally, Damain community, a scheduled caste in Nepal, has carried on the legacy of performing the *pancai bājā* over the centuries. Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi discusses the contribution of the *Shudra* community, including Damain, in nurturing the folk music of Nepal. He claims, “...whether or not music is their principal source of income ... Sudras and the ‘lower’ castes within the caste hierarchy have nurtured Nepal’s great musical tradition, even though music as profession has failed to provide them with a stable income, or bring lasting positive changes in the quality of their lives” (Regmi, 2023, p. 30). Even though there is no inherent relationship between caste status and occupation, the society allocated the duty of tailoring and the *pancai bājā* performance to the craftspeople of the Damain community. The depressed Damain community has a limited access to land and modern job opportunities. The majority of them rely on alternative sources of income such as foreign employment, portering and farming. Their traditional occupation does not sustain their economy.

This article addresses three main research questions. Firstly, it explores the cultural significance of *pancai bājā* in the Nepali social matrix. The second question is why the *pancai bājā* playing tradition has been transforming in recent decades. And the question concerns how temporal and spatial dimensions of the *pancai bājā* performance practices are being altered in relation to modernization process.

Bakhtin’s essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics* introduces the concept of chronotope to refer to the intrinsic relationship between time and space. His theoretical formulation was

originally composed in the 1930s and was published in 1975 in the Russian language¹; however, its English translation appeared only in 1981.² These days, scholars across a wide range of disciplines apply the concept to interpret issues in art, literature, anthropology, film, advertisement, culture and so on. Bemong and Borghart put forth, “Initially designed as an analytical instrument for establishing generic divisions in the history of the western novel, chronotopic analysis has recently been proposed as a conceptual tool for enriching ... diverse fields...” (2010, p. 3). Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope is not formalist in its orientation. Instead of referring to the emotional and referential aspects of art, culture and literature, it points to the spatial and temporal embedding of human activities.

In Bakhtin’s definition, chronotope is the intrinsic connectedness between the temporal and the spatial dimensions in a work of art. Although the term originated in the natural sciences, Bakhtin adapted it for literary criticism. Chronotope is a dynamic entity in which time and space mutually shape each other in a narrative. Extending its scope of application, we can analyze the transformation of the *pancai bājā*, a cultural entity, in its use and ownership, taking the dimensions of time and space into consideration. As a cultural phenomenon situated within the semiosphere, *Pancai bājā* can be examined through the lens of the chronotope, which brings together the time and space dynamics. In the initial phase, Bakhtin’s theory was relatively undeveloped; however, it contained abundant impulses to function as an analytical tool to interpret cultural phenomena and components. The concept of the chronotope provides a productive framework for examining transformations in the *pancai bājā* tradition.

We have explored the social context and knowledge about the *pancai bājā* from an epistemological perspective. Another focus of the article is the ontology of both the instruments and the Damain community. The study also explores shifts in the axiology of the *pancai bājā* tradition over time. Therefore, the research is concerned with the knowledge, existence and socio-cultural value related to the repertoire

¹ Bakhtin, M. M. (1975). *Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane. Ocherki po istoricheskoi poetike* [Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics]. In Bakhtin M. M. *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* [Issues of Literature and Aesthetics] (pp. 234–407). Khudozhestvennaya literatura. (In Russ.).

² Bakhtin, M. (1981). *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (pp. 84–258). University of Texas Press.

of the *pancai bājā* instruments. The central concern of the study is to examine how the *pancai bājā* tradition has changed across time and space. The *pancai bājā* playing tradition extended from rituals to shrines, social occasions and the royal palace. In this context, Regmi states “... at the Gorkha Palace and Hanumandhoka Palace the tradition of playing *pancai bājā* and *naumati bājā*, which was started during the reign of Prithvi Narayan, continues to this day” (2023, p. 77). Documenting the Nepali *pancai bājā* tradition has become increasingly urgent in the context of globalization and the growing influence of Western culture. In this context, our cultural heritage, including ethno-musicological tradition, require preservation, documentation and promotion. We need to explore the spatial and temporal dimensions of the *pancai bājā* repertoire from the past to the present. The chronotopic analysis of the musical ensemble reflects the changes over the decades.

The key informants’ response reveals the deplorable decline of this once rich and dynamic tradition within the Damain community. The Damain tailor-musician community traditionally supplies the *pancai bājā* ritual music at various shrines and on several occasions. About the expanding scope of chronotope in the analysis of literature and culture, Bemong and Borghart assert, “Lately, a number of scholars have hypothesized that some chronotopic configuration underlies every kind of narrative, however minimal, including jokes, strip cartoons, fairy tales, animal stories, narrative poetry and the like” (Bemong & Borghart, 2010, p. 9). Applying chronotopic analysis to the *pancai bājā* tradition expands the methodological tools available for the study of musical and acoustic culture.

Theoretical Framework

Before applying the theoretical approaches adopted in this study, it is important to understand local perspectives on society through an examination of the *pāncāi bājā* tradition, which offers valuable insights into the practices and experiences of Nepali society, both past and present. It is also important to understand the complex and indeterminate relationship between the creation of cultural sound (*pancai bājā*) and the cultural sense-making processes in specific social contexts. Likewise, music should be understood with particular attention to its diverse forms and functions across different communities, including the Damain community in Nepal.

The anthropology of music explores music as a fundamental human cultural phenomenon, analyzing its creation, performance, and social functions within

various societies. Key aspects include understanding the connection of music to cultural values, identity, and beliefs, using both anthropological and musicological approaches to study the complex relationship between sound and meaning in cultural contexts. Pioneering scholars like Franz Boas emphasized the importance of studying music, and Alan Merriam's work *The Anthropology of Music* (1964) defined it as the "study of music in culture." It combines methods and theories from anthropology and musicology to provide a comprehensive understanding of music in its societal context. Influenced by figures like Boas, it emphasizes the importance of understanding cultures and their musical expressions from their own internal standards and values, rather than imposing external judgments.

The sounds of the *pancai bājā* music are not merely acoustic phenomena, but a product of the social behavior of Nepali people and their cultural processes. The theory investigates how *pancai bājā* reflects and shapes Nepali cultural aspects like social relations, community and society, Nepali belief system, socio-cultural values, and collective Nepali identity. Merriam touches on Hood's emphasis on bi-musicality. Hood fundamentally believes that only by being immersed can one accurately describe and understand another musical culture (Hood, 1960). Hood, along with Seeger (1987) and Herzog (1946), reacts quite strongly against the universalizing interpretations of early comparative musicologists and ethnologists (Hood, 1960). Therefore, this research paper aims to explore how the *pancai bājā* tradition musically expresses Nepali cultural values and belief system in the context of chronotopic changes and transformations in habitus as termed by Pierre Bourdieu.

In the course of studying ethnomusicology of the *pancai bājā*, "the problems of ethnomusicology are neither exclusively technical, nor exclusively behavioral" (Merriam, 1964, p. 15), and in technical aspect (sound structure), it is the "internal" study of the *pancai bājā* as a discipline, in which study focuses on what the *pancai bājā* is "at hand," how it is constructed, and what its structure is. In behavioral science, conceptual behavior, ideation, or cultural behavior is the entire process of determination of a system of "musts" and "should" associated with the *pancai bājā*, as well as the system of normative and existential concepts in which socio-cultural behavior, and learning behavior, i.e. interaction, communication and transmission are studied across Nepali society.

This study brings together the concepts of Bakhtin's chronotope, Seeger's ethnomusicology and Bourdieu's habitus. However, these three concepts converge

at one point. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope provides a framework for literary and narrative analysis of the *pancai bājā*; while Seeger's musicological work focuses on the nature and study of the *pancai bājā* itself, and Bourdieu's ideas explain changes in habitus and how *pancai bājā* works as the structure of the everyday life and cultural pattern of Nepali society. However, these concepts are about how meaning is embedded in different forms of human experience and communication. Bakhtin's idea of interconnectedness between time and space in narrative could be applied to the *pancai bājā*. Under the musicological purview, the study analyses the evolving temporal and spatial dimensions of the *pancai bājā*, relating it to musical structures or performances.

Through the concept of habitus, Bourdieu believes that people, in the course of their socialization within a specific social environment, acquire attitudes, habits, skills, tastes and perceptions deeply ingrained in their psyche. Habitus does structure structures and is structured by structure. In connection to the *pancai bājā* performance, on the one hand, the society structured the caste system and the notion of untouchability. On the other hand, the practice of *pancai bājā* music by the Damain community institutionalized the caste system and the practice of untouchability. Socially acquired habitus reflects an individual's cultural taste and social upbringing pattern as well. Webb, Schirato and Danaher believe that our knowledge "is always constructed through the habitus, rather than being passively recorded" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 38). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is an individual's series of dispositions. In this regard, Webb, Schirato and Danaher define habitus as "a concept that expresses, on the one hand, the way in which individuals ... develop attitudes and dispositions and, on the other hand, the ways in which those individuals engage in practices" (2002, p. xii). The influence of social and cultural context is internalized in human beings' habits, but such internalization is relatively unconscious.

The *pancai bājā* itself has a temporal and spatial dimension. A chronotopic approach could analyze how time and space are embedded in the *pancai bājā* compositions, performances, or even genres. Just as Bakhtin explored how chronotopes distinguish literary genres, the concept can be used to analyze how specific musical forms of *pancai bājā* (like other musical forms such as the fugue, the folk song, or the symphony) create distinct "time-space" frameworks. The *pancai bājā* is often a performance, which is inherently a temporal and spatial event.

The concept of chronotope could be used to understand the interaction between time and space within a live musical performance, and how this affects the meaning of the music.

Bakhtin introduced the neologism “chronotope” as a quasi-metaphor that already existed in the field of physics. The metaphor makes a transition from physical to narrative time-space. It is useful to trace the epistemological origins of the term. Bakhtin admits his borrowing of the idea of the chronotope from the relativity theory of Einstein, “The special meaning it [the chronotope] has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (1981, p. 84). As an inseparable whole, time and space intrinsically unite the spatial and the temporal phenomena.

In the Bakhtinian scholarship, the polysemic nature of the concept of chronotope is applicable not only in literary texts but in cultural texts as well. Bakhtin suggests that the chronotopicality of cultural phenomena is an elementary unit of literary imagination. Practical reason and imagination are blended in Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope. His predilection for chronotopicality fascinates the multiplicity opposing the metaphysical essentialism. In this regard, Keunen enunciates, “Bakhtin’s view of the temporal-spatial constellations in literature demonstrates a strong affinity to the ... perception of the spatial world is colored by the lived time experienced by the observer” (2010, p. 36). Bakhtin indicated the application of chronotope in the literary narrative, particularly the novel. However, the disciplines beyond literature have extended and applied the theory of the chronotope. The concept of chronotope has transcended scholarly approaches in cultural studies from the 1980s onwards. Chronotope as a critical tool can serve to navigate the historical dynamics of the *pancai bājā* across time and space, exposing lived experiences of Nepali society.

In the initial definition of the chronotope, Bakhtin unambiguously stated it as a formally constitutive category of literature. This definition precisely drew a limitation in the application of the term. However, recognizing the boundary, Bakhtin, later on, widened the scope, dissolving the borderline, “... we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal existence, but also into a semantic sphere” (1981, p. 258). Bakhtin’s modality of chronotope opposes

the formalist and structuralist search for interpretive universals, neglecting the semantic dimensions inherent in the traditions. Scholars find a lack of precision in Bakhtin's explanation of chronotope. They state that Bakhtin "never provides a systematic definition ... nor does he present a clearly articulated protocol for identifying and analyzing chronotopes and the relations between them" (Ladin, 1999, p. 213). Consequently, Bakhtinian scholars have further interpreted and enlarged the scope of chronotopes. In this regard, Bemong and Borghart state that the "lack of analytical precision in Bakhtin's essays has led to a proliferation of heterogeneous chronotopic approaches to literature and, more generally, culture" (2010, p. 5). This statement hints at the possibility of applying the model of chronotopes in the field of culture. Accordingly, the present study applies the concept of the chronotope to the *pancai bājā*, an important element of Nepal's ethnomusical heritage.

In the Bakhtinian approach, the two categories of time and space constitute a fundamental unity. About the chronotope in art and literature, Bakhtin states, "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterize the artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Despite the fact that Bakhtin discusses the literary artistic chronotope, the successive scholars of the Bakhtinian School have extended the scope of chronotope to other disciplines of culture, too.

As *pancai bājā* is a cultural artefact, we apply the theory of chronotope to examine how this cultural artefact has been influenced by the dual factors of time and space in Nepali society. For this, we make a comparison between the past and the present as well as between the rural setting and the urban setting to demonstrate how time and space are closely intertwined in the historical development of the *pancai bājā* tradition.

Bemong and Borghart assess that Bakhtin took inspiration for his theoretical modality from the contemporary development in the field of mathematics and physics. They state that Bakhtin strongly believes that "the nature of spatio-temporal configuration in narrative worlds ... does share a common ground with the principles of relativity theory ... both in physical and fictional worlds there can be observed

an intrinsic connectedness of time and space, because in both realms chronology cannot be separated from events and vice versa” (2010, p. 4). The chronological history of the *pancai bājā* incorporates the spatio-temporal dimension of its evolution and transformation.

Bourdieu believes that mimetic practices are bound to rites and rituals, where by their performance contributes to the unconscious transmission of social rules without any need to make them explicit. Processes of modernization, globalization and technological development transmit understandings of the world on a corporeal level. Implicit understanding of the musical world is transmitted through the development of various physical activities in musical fields. They structure the musical world without explanation. This way, these various socio-cultural actions transmit systems of oppositions, of “right and wrong”, of “dos and don’ts” from one generation to the next. As in mimetic processes “implicit”, “practical”, or “tacit” knowledge is transmitted, they provide people with unspoken “recipes” for how to “make sense of, and negotiate, the situations they are confronted with in the social world” (Webb et. al., 2002, p.139). In Bourdieu’s words, “[t]here are heaps of things that we understand only with our bodies, outside conscious awareness, without being able to put our understandings into words” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 166). This way, the *pancai bājā* practices, as mimetic processes, contribute to the establishment of symbols that are usually not called into question, as they appear as common-sense logic. Bourdieu called this acceptance without questioning “*doxa*”: “the ordinary acceptance of the usual order which goes without saying and therefore usually goes unsaid” (Bourdieu, 1979/1996, p. 424). However, such internalization without questioning is challenged if we analyze the chronotope of the past and the present.

In sum, the “bodily understanding” of things is inseparable from the historic genesis of the habitus and the “forgetting” of its historicity. Only through the “misrecognition” of the socio-cultural conditions under which an actor’s habitus evolved, systems, rules, and structures that related to the *pancai bājā* may effectively function. The habitus concept enabled Bourdieu to explain why the power exertion of socio-cultural groups over others, or the exclusion of groups from certain resources, often works without resistance on either side.

Consequently, Bourdieu differentiated between social space (referring to “objective class”) and the space of lifestyles (referring to “constructed class”): while social space refers to the conditions of existence, lifestyles are the visible

manifestations of the habitus (Rehbein et al., 2014, p. 112). This enabled him to distinguish between classes based on capital and classes based on habitus, which may differ from each other. In the *Finding and Analysis* section of this study, we have presented the case studies that help to differentiate and visualize the *pancai bājā* practiced and performed by the Damain community in Rawabesi as a constructed class and the *pancai bājā* now practiced in Biratnagar as an objective class or professional class for generating wages in terms of capital. Thus, differences in habitus are, in fact, determined by different social positions or capital possessions, but very importantly, cannot be reduced as such due to the “inventive” or “creative” potential of the habitus.

The pronouncement of these scholars reveals that the intrinsic connectedness between time and space is visible not only in the world of fiction and artistic creation but equally in the real physical world, too. Therefore, we argue that it is important to analyze the chronological development and transformation of the *pancai bājā* tradition, connecting them to the spatial and temporal phenomena. Moreover, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus highlights the dispositions of individuals and that of the society as a changeable phenomenon in the spatio-temporal dimensions. Such an approach assists in understanding the trajectory of the musical repertoire of the *pancai bājā* performance tradition.

Methodology and Study Area

For this research, fieldworks were conducted in two different areas, namely Rawabesi Rural Municipality (Khotang) and Biratnagar Metropolitan (Morang). The first one is in the eastern hills, and the second one is in the eastern terai of Nepal. Thirty respondents and one key informant from each area were selected under the purposive sampling method. The first key informant provides information primarily about the past of the *pancai bājā* ensemble, and the second key informant spoke about the professionalism of the *pancai bājā* that is thriving in the modern urban setting. Our concern here is to show the chronotopic shift of the ensemble. Further, we analyze the changing habitus in Nepali society regarding the ownership and professionalism of the *pancai bājā*. The chronotopic approach is employed here to demonstrate the inseparable connection between the temporal and spatial dimensions of the *pāncāi bājā* tradition. Ethnomusicological research on the *pancai bājā* is in its nascent form in Nepal. In the study, we asked twelve different questions

to the key informants (see Table 1). The principal objectives of the study are to explore the traditional dimensions of the *pancai bājā* performance practices in Nepali society and the present adaptation of its role in response to the social transformation.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents in Study Areas (Source: Field Survey, 2025)

S.N.	Community-based Distribution of Respondents in Rawabesi	Number	Community-based Distribution of Respondents in Biratnagar	Number
1	Brahmin	3	Tharu	3
2	Chhetri	3	Kami (Bishwokarma)	3
3	Newar	2	Chhetri	2
4	Kami (Bishwokarma)	2	Brahmin	2
5	Sarki (Charmakar)	2	Rai	2
6	Rai	3	Tamang	2
7	Gurung	3	Gurung	2
8	Magar	3	Magar	5
9	Damain	4	Damain	3
10	Majhi	1	Sarki (Charmakar)	2
11	Sanyasi	2	Madhesi	2
12	Tamang	2	Marbadi	2
	Total	30		30

This study focuses on two study areas: Rawabesi Rural Municipality and Biratnagar Metropolitan City. The first one is in the hills of eastern Nepal. In the past, the economy of the area was agrarian under the feudal system. The social structure perpetuated caste discrimination. Religious rituals and social ceremonies played an important role in community life. The means of entertainment were very limited. People deeply felt the vibrations of the *pancai bājā* melodies. The second one is in the eastern terai of Nepal. As a metropolitan city, the area has been commercially thriving with its multicultural and multiethnic population. The *pancai bājā* ensemble has undergone cultural transformation. These two areas respectively represent traditional and modern socio-cultural spaces.

Rawabesi Rural Municipality is an administrative division in Khotang District located in the Koshi Province of Nepal. It was formed through the merger of several former Village Development Committees (VDCs): Kubhinde, Kharpa, Haunchur, Lamidanda, Dubekol and Dumre Dharapani. It consists of six wards and its administrative headquarters is in Haramtar Kubhinde. The Rural Municipality is known for its topography, fertile land along the Rawa River, diversity based on culture and community, the nearby Dudhkoshi River and historical sites such as Pirmakot *gadhi* and Dumrekot *gadhi*.

Biratnagar is the capital city of Koshi Province, the headquarters of Morang district and one of the six metropolitan cities in Nepal. It is the biggest and the oldest city of Koshi Province, famous for being the hometown of the first large-scale industry of Nepal, the Biratnagar Jute Mill, established in 1936. The city holds significant religious importance and functions as a gateway to various destinations in the eastern part of Nepal. The city is densely populated by multicultural migrants, mostly from the mid-hills of Koshi Province (*Illustration 1*).

About Methods and Data

While undertaking this research, data were collected from multiple sources and at different levels to gain a comprehensive understanding of the *pancai bājā* tradition. Two sets of interview questions were prepared to gather information or perceptual dimensions of the *pancai bājā*—the first one was for musicians, and the second for listeners or audience.

Primary data were collected from selected Damai musicians who perform the *pancai bājā* repertoire. Interview, musical survey and group discussion proved to be useful methods for gathering information about the *pancai bājā*. Various types of data and information from multiple sources have been necessary for this study. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected using traditional methods, including ethnographic fieldwork, field observations, unstructured and structured interviews, and case studies. Before the field study, a brief encounter visit was conducted with musicians, audiences, and key informants. This is a qualitative research method, so the techniques for gathering information differ from those used in other quantitative methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with musicians and audiences to gain an in-depth understanding of the *pancai bājā*, the Damain community, the *bālī ghar bista* system, and its commercialization, including its spatio-temporal transformations.

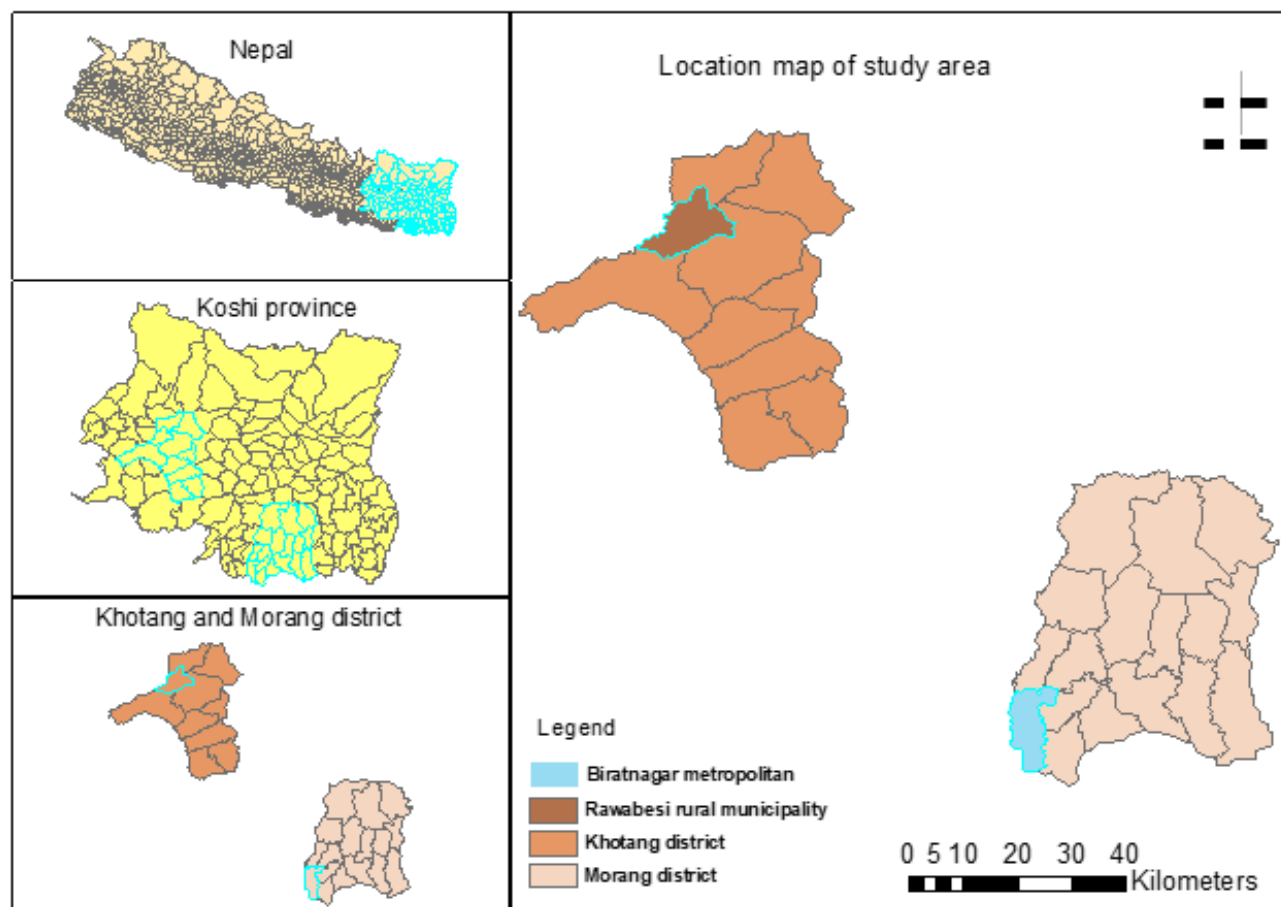


Illustration 1. Location Map of the Study Area

Key-informant interviews were carried out with scholars and elderly musicians who had performed *pancai bājā* repertoire for more than fifty years. The episodic interviews were conducted both in Rawabesi and in Biratnagar to capture the overall dimensions of the *pancai bājā* by participating in a marriage ceremony. The starting point for the episodic interview is the assumption that subjects' experiences of a certain domain are stored and remembered in the form of narrative knowledge—episodic and semantic. Episodic knowledge is organized closer to experiences; and linked to the concrete situations and circumstances whereas semantic knowledge is based on assumptions and relations, which are

abstracted from these and generalized. For the former, the course of the situation in its context is the main unit around which knowledge is organized. In the latter, concepts and their relation to each other are the central units (Flick, 2010, p. 185). Out of these methods, case studies were conducted to identify the changes and new adaptations of the *pancai bājā* repertoire.

Findings and Analysis

Bakhtin, in his essays, connects chronotopes with a temporal experience. Time is a key factor that marks the changes over the period. Keunen claims, "... the concept of the chronotope is a revolutionary category in the study of literature" (2010, p. 38). We can see the application of the theory of the chronotope in a variety of fields that lie at the intersection of language, society and culture. The *pancai bājā* is such a phenomenon situated at the intersection of musicology, rituals, culture, sociology and economy as well in the milieu of Nepali society. Elements from those sectors blend and interact in the analysis of the *pancai bājā* repertoire. About the significance of the temporal dimension, Keunen further states that the concept of time functions as the key in the study of human experience. Experience is a phenomenon that changes in both its spatial and temporal dimensions. He states, "Every observation ... occurs from a changing observational consciousness; every state of thing is colored by the observer's lived time. Together with the observation that our spatial environment implies a flux of changes, the attentive observer observes that he or she is subjected to change, too. The latter form of change could be called 'lived change'" (2010, p. 37). The spatial environment of Nepali society reflects the changes in perception and ownership of the *pancai bājā*.

Holquist differentiates the concepts of time and space between the Kantian school of thought and the Bakhtinian school of thought. He elucidates, "The Kantian categories of time and space are so transcendental that their application ... already compromises their status as pure categories" (2010, p. 31). However, the Bakhtinian position differs in connecting time and space with the immediate reality. Holquist further opines that Bakhtin "differs from Kant in taking time and space not as transcendental but as forms of the most immediate reality" (2010, p. 31). Experiments and innovations can be observed in the musicological tradition of the *pancai bājā* from the past to the present to reflect the immediate realities of the time and those of the geo-cultural space. Musical compositions, in whatever form exist or existed, are devised in their own historical and geographical context.

The history of Damain community in Nepal is connected with the unification campaign of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Regmi states, “Damais were also known for their unswerving loyalty to the royal courts. During the reign of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, one Bishe Nagarchi became famous for his wise counsel. The tradition of appointing Damais permanently in the Shah and Ranas court lasted until 1950 AD. This is evident from the names of the Damais in the financial expenditure lists who were appointed at the service of royal families and paid from the state exchequer” (Regmi, 2023, pp. 31–32). This extract demonstrates how royalty gave significant concerns and patronage to the Damain in the past. The palace always required Damain for two purposes: tailoring and the *pancai bājā* performances during rituals and ceremonies. Bakhtin establishes the decisive power of the time and space phenomena in human beings, “... every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (1981, p. 258). Chronotope provides ground for the representation of events and the concreteness of time.

Ram Sharan Darnal highlights the religio-cultural value of the *pancai bājā* ensemble in Nepali society, “The *pancai bājā* is purely an ensemble of serendipity in the traditional Nepali musicology. Its play is regarded as indispensable on every sacred occasion. The deeply rooted *mangal dhun* in Nepali culture is based on the *dasha awatār* (ten incarnations) of Lord Vishnu, a symbol of the creation and evolution process. In some context, the *pancai bājā* repertoire is interpreted as a symbol of the *panca tatwa* (five elements)” (Darnal, 2003, p. 219). The ensemble bears auspicious qualities in sacred contexts as ritual objects. The people of the Himalayan foothills in Nepal have nurtured traditional music for centuries (Morozova, 2024, pp. 179–184) and one of the examples is the *pancai bājā*, for a long period, bringing different communities together. Damain is a *pancai bājā* playing caste of professional musicians. Tailoring is their supplementary occupation. They are also employed as agricultural laborers. The word Damain is derived from the *damāhā* (a large kettledrum), one of the instruments in the *pancai bājā* ensemble.

Pancai Bājā and Noumati Bājā

The Damain community of tailor-musicians traditionally plays the *pancai bājā*. The term *noumati bājā* literally means “nine instruments”, and it is occasionally substituted for the *pancai bājā* in reference to a larger ensemble. The nine instruments consist of two *sahanāi*, two *damāhā*, *tyāmko*, *dholaki*, *jhyāli*

and a minimum of two *narsingās* (natural horns). However, the ensemble exhibits regional variations across the country, from the terai to the hills and from the east to the west.

Pancai Bājā Ensemble

Conventionally, the *pancai bājā* is a festive and ritual music of the Damain community. A brief introduction of the *pancai bājā* ensemble is presented below:

Sahanāi

It is a curved wind instrument used for creating melodies in the eastern as well as the western hills of Nepal (*Illustration 2*). We can find variation in the organographical features of the *sahanai* instrument throughout the nation. In Tingey's general



Illustration 2.
Sahanāi (Tingey, 1990, p. 26)

description, Nepali *sahanāi* comprises “a compound of double reed (comprising four leaves), seated on a pirouette (lip disc), and mounted on a conical brass staple which fits into the top of the curved conical wooden body. The instrument ends in a flared metal bell” (1990, p. 25). The *sahanāi* is approximately 45 centimeters in length. Moreover, it consists of a reed in the mouthpiece, seven finger holes, and another hole for releasing the air. Ram Saran Darnal clarifies the significance of the *sahanāi*, “In the wedding procession, *sahanāi* entertains people, creating a joyous melody while at the valediction of the bride from her maternal home; it makes people weep heightening their emotions. Even a naïve guy lifts their feet the moment *jhyāure*, *khyāli*, *bhote selo* and *cudkā* melodies are played on the *pancai bājā* or *naumati bājā*” (2003, p. 79). Nepali *sahanāi* bears the capacity of amusing the human heart as well as making it weep.

Dholaki

Dholaki is a double-headed barrel drum attached by lacing or occasionally Y-lacing over a rim (*Illustration 3*). It consists of two unpitched heads. The smaller one, locally named *pothi* (hen), is played with the hand while the bigger one, locally named *bhāle* (cock), is played with a *gajo* (a short wooden stick). The wood of *dār* and *chatiwan* is preferred in making *dholaki*. Animal skin is used for making and lacing the drumhead. The approximate length of an average-sized *dholaki* is 40 centimeters, including an 18-centimeter head and 19-centimeter diameter. Neither an excessively large nor an excessively small *dholaki* is preferred, since the large-sized one produces a low pitch and the small-sized one produces too high a pitch, almost resembling a shriek.



Illustration 3.
Dholaki (Tingey, 1990, p. 39)

Tyāmko

Tyāmko is made of wood, preferably the wood of *khamāri*, *cuwā*, *tuni*, *chatiwan* and so on (*Illustration 4*). However, the *tyāmko* used in the temple play for religious purposes is made of copper. Regarding the size, there is no standardization of *tyāmko*. Nevertheless, approximately the diameter of the head is 16 centimeters and the depth of the bowl is 20 centimeters. *Tyāmko* players strike the instrument with two thin sticks, putting the instrument on the player's chest or stomach. The strap from the neck supports the instrument.



Illustration 4.
Tyāmko (Tingey, 1990, p. 57)

Damāhā

Damāhā is a large unpitched copper kettledrum (*Illustration 5*), which lends its name to the *pancai bājā*-playing musician of Damain (it is claimed that from which the Damain community derives its name). Generally, *damāhā* is played with a short and thick stick locally called *gajo*. We do not find uniformity in the size of *damāhā* across the nation; however, the diameter of the head is approximately 30 centimeters, and the depth of the bowl is around 30 centimeters. Tingey has explained the making process of *damāhā* that needs around 4 kilograms of raw copper. The amount of copper is melted into a solid cake and forged into the desired shape. She further explains that it [the copper] “is heated periodically in the furnace, and the inside of the bowl is beaten with heavy hammers by two or three smiths until the required shape has been produced, when the outside is beaten smooth with a small hammer” (1990, p. 98). The shape of the bowl, the thickness of its walls and the quality of the copper affect the tone produced. The maker punctures a small hole in the base of *damāhā* to facilitate the soaking of the head with water.



Illustration 5.
Damāhā (Tingey, 1990, p. 48)

Narsingā

The instrument *narsingā* is sometimes included and other times excluded from the *pancai bājā* ensemble. However, a pair of *narsingā* is a part of *naumati bājā*. It is a conical bore natural horn with an integral mouthpiece. It is made of finely beaten copper. *Narsingā* is around 150 centimeters in length and made in five to seven parts. These parts facilitate transportation and storage. From the narrow mouthpiece, its width slowly increases and curves into a semi-circular shape. *Narsingā* players pause for breath rather than employing circular breathing. We can find variation in the shape and length of *narsingā* across the nation.

Jhyāli

Jhyāli is a pair of brass cymbals with a diameter of around 16 centimeters. In other words, *jhyālis* (alternatively known as *jhyāmtā*) are thin-walled plate-shaped cymbals (*Illustration 6*).



Illustration 6.
Jhyāli (Tingey, 1990, p. 59)

Caste System and Depressed Status of Damain

The Hindu caste system institutionalized the concept of untouchability, and it exploited the downtrodden communities of Kami, Damain and Sarki for centuries in Nepali society. The implication of untouchability remained grave and far-reaching in the Nepali society. Under the system, according to Tingey, those communities experienced “the non-acceptance of food and water and the taboos concerning sexual relations with higher castes. Pure castes avoid physical contact with the occupational castes, and purify (by sprinkling a few drops of water) things which have come into contact with them” (1990, p. 98). The inhuman practice

of untouchability unreasonably segregated a section of humanity. Tingey also reports that the so-called higher caste people neither ever entered the home of the outcaste castes, nor let the depressed castes enter their “pure” homes. Moreover, the Damain musicians would provide the *pancai bājā* music for a wedding from outside the home of their employer. In addition, they would enjoy a meal outside on disposable leaf plates. Their untouchable status sidelined them from the mainstream of socio-economic progress.

However, modern Nepali society does not act at the same level of apathy, discrimination and cruelty. A horde of social movements have not only introduced the fundamental rights of people in a democratic polity but also secured those rights of the depressed community. The chronotope of Nepali society in the past was marked by a severe lack of human sensibility.

Paradox between Untouchability and Auspiciousness

The traditional society would label the Damain community as untouchable along with Kami (blacksmiths or Bishwakarma) and Sarki (tanners and shoemakers). Although the caste-based traditional Hindu society considers the presence of Damain musicians and their ensemble auspicious as well as indispensable in the sacred rituals, they are placed at the lowest rung, and treated as the untouchable. The occupational caste of Damain exists within the paradox of a downtrodden social status combined with an auspicious ritual role. Tingey has pinpointed the paradox between the untouchability of the Damain community and the auspiciousness of the *pancai bājā* ensemble. She states the “dichotomy of auspiciousness versus disreputability or marginality” (1990, p. 99) of the Damain tailor-musician. She elaborates that the occupational caste of Damain belongs to an extremely low social status, as a social outcast from whom food and water may not be accepted, and with whom contact demands ritual purification. Despite their untouchable status, “the damāi are indispensable to Nepalese society as both tailors and musicians, and in their latter capacity they assume an auspicious quality” (Tingey, 1990, p. 2). The disparity is discernible between the auspicious function of the *pancai bājā* ensemble and the inauspicious status of the *pancai bājā*-playing Damain community.

Bāli Ghar Bista System

In the past, when cash transactions were very limited, the majority of the Damain musicians and tailors provided their services within a traditional patronage

system, locally known as *bāli ghar bista* system. This system was an economic framework under which cash payments normally did not exist. Instead of cash, the Damain would be provided with crops and grains as their remuneration after each harvest for rendering services over the year. Moreover, the patron would offer a traditional ritual gift to the Damain on specific ritual occasions. Under the *bāli ghar bista* system, the Damain would serve not only as a tailor and musician but as a farm laborer, too. Tingey captures the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Damain in the past, “... the damāi works in his capacities as tailor and musician, and he and his family may also supply labour for seasonal field work for his patrons. As a tailor, he usually works at the house of his patron, repairing or altering old clothes as required, and making new ones on the occasions of festivals and family events, such as the life-cycle rites. As a musician, the damai acts as *nāike* (leader, organizer) on behalf of his patron, calling together the band, usually from the ranks of his own family. The events for which the services of a *pancai bājā* may be required during the year include the life cycle rites of the first rice feeding of a baby (*pāsni*), sacred thread investiture ceremony (*bratabandha*), marriage ...” (1990, p. 103–105). The *bāli ghar bista* system was a popular practice in the past when monetary transactions were not flourishing in the agro-based traditional Nepali society. The remuneration system rarely practiced in the cash form would not suffice to sustain their livelihood.

Tingey expresses her worry and possibility about the decline of the *pancai bājā* ensemble because of the economic threat to the connoisseur of the ethnomusicological tradition. She asserts, “Unless the monetary returns are increased or their social status is enhanced, with the alleviation of the stigma associated with their caste profession, there will be a steady decline in the *pancai bājā* tradition. It is doubtful even whether the heartbeat of Nepal will continue to sound into the next century” (1990, p. 113). As Tingey predicted, the displacement of the Damain community from the *pancai bājā* playing occupation took place rapidly. Low income and social stigma discouraged the new generations of the Damain from seeking a career in the field of the musical performance of the *pancai bājā*.

Further, economic activities in the rural hills could not develop and expand since modern transport and communication facilities were hardly introduced. In the course of time, the young generation of the Damain expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional system of patronage because it was insufficient to sustain livelihoods and

had become outdated. Modern life requires cash to purchase modern accessories. The growing need and demand for cash necessitated the young generation to abandon the patronage system and leave their villages for the neighboring or distant towns seeking work or job opportunities that would reward them in the form of cash.

Role of Pancai Bājā: Social Integration and Value Preservation

Tingey is apprehensive about the decline of the *pancai bājā* that once functioned as the “social integrator, unifying the heterogeneous communities of the town through ritual music” (1990, p. 179). The sonorous sound and vibrating melody of the *pancai bājā* arouses a sense of unity among various communities in Nepal. Both in the past and at present, the ensemble as a processional band has involved the journey of people and deities “from one ritually significant area to another. In the case of humans, during *poojā* and *bratabandha*, the journey is between home and shrine, and for a wedding, between the homes of the groom and bride. In the case of deities, the journey may be between shrines ...” (1990, p. 178). From an axiological point of view, the *pancai bājā* is connected to the religious and spiritual values of the society.

In Tingey’s reading, the ensemble, through its medium of propitious music, creates an auspicious ambience against the threat of negative forces. She claims, “The music provides an auspicious aura in which the ritual personnel and/or deities may move between hallowed areas, protected from the threat of malevolent forces. The journeys undertaken during *rites of passage* may be seen as the physical manifestations of the spiritual distance covered by an individual in crossing from one of the Hindu stages of life to the next. At these times, the individual is particularly vulnerable and needs the auspicious environment created by the *pancai bājā* as a safeguard from the forces of evil” (1990, p. 179). However, the *pancai bājā* is not merely a ritual music. Moreover, it is a medium of entertainment, a cultural heritage of Nepal and an integrator among ethnicities. Through the performance of the traditional auspicious *rāgas*, the *pancai bājā* has helped to preserve an original musical aesthetic practiced for centuries by multiple communities in Nepal.

The *pancai bājā* musicians are regarded not only as entertainers but also as harbingers of good luck. Despite the historical, cultural and social significance of the ensemble, some scholars point out the risk of collapse, too. The changing pattern of axiology and the introduction of the Western-style band instruments,

as Tingey pointed out, the *pancai bājā* might face tough competition. Around forty years back, she stated that the ensemble bore “the risk of becoming an anachronism and gradually fading from Nepalese village life” (1990, p. 179). Nevertheless, Tingey’s prediction in today’s context turned out to be false. The cultural renaissance in Nepali society has reiterated the value and significance of the ensemble, and various bands are formed to practically preserve the *pancai bājā-noumati bājā* repertoire. However, the profit-motivated capitalistic cultural market has dispossessed the Damain community of its *pancai bājā* legacy and transferred it to the so-called higher-class communities. The takeover of the *pancai bājā* repertoire by the profit-motivated commercial groups has erased its image as a “low-status” occupation and recast it as a “prestigious creative pursuit”. The chronotopic analysis of the *pancai bājā* reflects the temporal (from the past to the present) and spatial (from the rural location to the urban location) shift in the usage of the repertoire.

Pancai Bājā Playing Occasions

The *pancai bājā* in Nepal is played for diverse purposes. The ensemble functions as a sacred or semi-sacred symbol associated with auspicious occasions. In Hindu *rites of passage*, such as *bratabandha* (holy thread investiture ceremony for young Hindu boys) and wedding, *pancai bājā* performances are fundamental requirements. Tingey mentions other occasions of the plays of the *pancai bājā* ensemble. She states, “It [*pancai bājā*] plays for the calendrical cycle of festivals, both agricultural (e.g. *hile jātrā*, *bajāune ropāin*), and sacred (i.e. *Caite Dashain* and *Thulo Dashain*, *Krishna Janmāshtami*) and leads civil processions and festivities of all sorts, e.g. the birthdays of the royal family, the triumphal procession of the successful candidate in a local ... election” (1990, p. 2). The performance contexts of *pancai bājā* extend from religious occasions and sacred ceremonies to social functions and secular entertainment music such as film music and folk-song tunes.

Case Study 1: Ritualistic Value of the Pancai Bājā under Local Patrons in the Past: An Experience from Rawabesi Rural Municipality

In the past, the agro-based traditional rural society of the hills in Nepal witnessed the *pancai bājā* ensemble as the major medium of entertainment for religious rituals and social ceremonies. Under the patronage of local feudals

and landlords, the Damain community would play the *pancai bājā* ensemble for low remuneration. The chronotopic study of the *pancai bājā* tradition reveals a tremendous shift in both the dimensions of time and space.

Merriam defines music as a form of social behavior worth studying from an anthropological perspective. The interconnectedness of time, space, and society in the study of music is highlighted in his proposition. Merriam explains, “Man moves in time: that is, he has a sense of the past, the present and the future, and he is intellectually aware of himself as existing in time. ... Man also moves in space ... Man moves, too, in society, he identifies himself with his fellows and cooperates with them in maintaining group and assuring its continuity” (1964, p. 21). He establishes connectivity among time, space and humanity, and focuses on the continuity of this connectivity. In the musicological study, spatial and temporal dimensions of the past and present vis-à-vis humanity are of prime concern.

Shyam Lal Pariyar (pseudonym), a resident of Rawabesi rural municipality in Khotang, in the capacity of a key respondent, sheds light on the local history of the *pancai bājā*. He is vocal about the occasions of the instruments’ play, the cause of the ensemble’s decline and experiences of socio-economic subjugation. The respondent draws a picture of the past (temporal dimension) in the eastern hills of Nepal (spatial dimension). The analysis of the interconnectedness between time and space reveals the social scenario and its cultural by-products.

In the past, Nepali rural society practiced caste discrimination, putting Damain, including Kami and Sarki, at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. Shyam Lal recalled, “During our adulthood, sonorous sound produced by Damain through the *pancai bājā* was regarded not only melodious but auspicious, too. However, their social status was attached to untouchability and inauspiciousness. Nepali society sustained such a paradox for centuries.” Water and food items touched by Damain would be of the lowest standard, not to be consumed by the so-called upper caste people. The feudalistic mindset and the structure of the society alienated the creator (Daiman) from its creation (*pancai bājā* melody).

Shyam Lal recalls the days when he used to play *narsingā*. In those days, *pancai bājā-noumati bājā* ensembles were played during weddings, *bratabandha* (sacred thread investiture ceremony), *ghar painco* (house warming ceremony), *laghu rudri*, *purāna* recital, *phulpāti* entry, *phul tārne* parva, *dewāli*, *kul poojā* (worship of the household deities), royal birthdays, *Saraswoti Poojā* and the like. The ensemble largely served ritual purposes and partially social occasions,

such as the birthdays of the royalty and victory rallies. In the rural hills, means of communication and entertainment media were minimal.

While analyzing the chronotope, or the spatio-temporal dimension, of the *pancai bājā* during the decade-long Maoist insurgency in Nepal, we find a significant shift. As the Nepali Maoists launched a violent attack against the polity, the *pancai bājā* playing tradition also declined. Many youths in the rural hills raised their arms against the status quo following the revolutionary Maoist doctrine. Resultantly, younger generations did not become enthusiastic about pursuing a career in the *pancai bājā* performance. Households in the Damain community began selling their musical instruments to coppersmiths at meagre prices. The hills of Nepal were badly affected by the violent conflict. Ordinary people were trapped between the forces of the state and those of the insurgent party. Wedding ceremonies until then would be organized at night. The trend reversed since the violent conflict began. Nighttime wedding practice was not appropriate from a security point of view. Even today, almost all wedding ceremonies are organized under the broad daylight, either in the rural hills or in the terai or in the metropolitan location.

In the geo-cultural space of Rawabesi, the Damain were sidelined from the mainstream of society in the past. They were economically exploited and socially marginalized. Despite the fact that they had to stand at the front of the wedding procession, they were humiliated as the untouchable *shudras*. During the nighttime wedding program, people would quarrel over different issues after taking alcoholic drinks. Very often, the musician Damain would be the victim of the quarrel. Shyam Lal states, “There would not be the police in the far-flung rural setting of the hills. At times, some cantankerous Damains would start a quarrel, other times, some vandals would badly beat and misbehave the Damain musicians.” Giving the credit for the daytime wedding ceremonies to the Maoists, Shyam Lal comments that the wedding ceremony under broad daylight is more disciplined, secure and time-saving.

Due to the unconscious incorporation of the habitus, social inequalities are not perceived as unjust, but as something natural, as deliberately chosen, or as an individual preference. The habitus of Nepali society in the past segregated the tailor musician community. The process of unconscious incorporation of dispositions is the heart of Bourdieu’s habitus concept because it explains how “arbitrary” social norms and rules are naturalized and hence legitimized. Since what is “‘learned by body’ is

not something that one has ... but something that one is” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 73). Despite the fact that there is no inherent relationship between the Damain community and the notion of untouchability, for centuries, the community and its profession of performing *pancai bājā* music and tailoring were regarded as an inferior occupation. However, if we analyze the chronotope and habitus, those professions are not only prestigious but they are sought by the so-called upper castes, too.

From the perspective of chronotope, the spatial environment itself witnesses the flux of changes across the temporal dimension. Respondent one, as a key informant in this *pancai bājā* research, shares his experiences of temporal changes in the rural space where he has been living for sixty-five years, i.e. since his birth. Shyam Lal Pariyar (pseudonym) explains the temporal dimension of the past and the spatial dimension of the countryside vis-à-vis the *pancai bājā*. By using their imaginative faculty of mind, the *pancai bājā* players have experimented with musical forms and melodic patterns within the tradition. As Keunen puts forth, “... human being is an imagining creature that unites the heterogeneity of his actions in a lived moment of time” (2010, p. 47). In the rustic setting of Rawabesi rural municipality, in the past, the *pancai bājā* functioned as a means of entertainment and music for rituals and ceremony. The ownership and the skill of playing the *pancai bājā*, then, were only with the Damain community. However, in today’s socio-economic and cultural context, members of non-Damain communities have begun performing *pancai bājā* professionally.

*Case Study 2: Ownership Transformation and Commercialization
of the Pancai Bājā in an Urban Setting:
An Experience from Biratnagar Metropolitan*

The process of mass migration from the hills to the terai region of Nepal has influenced the legacy of the *pancai bājā* on a massive scale. In the rural location of the hills, Damain community would play the *pancai bājā* ensemble primarily to perpetuate the rituals rather than their professional growth. Their local landlord patrons offered only minimal cash payments for the accomplishment of the *pancai bājā* performances. However, the changing socio-economic pattern of the society has opened an avenue for professionalism in the ensemble play. Nevertheless, the Damain community has gradually lost its hold and ownership of the *pancai bājā* playing profession.

Lalit Magar (pseudonym) expresses his experiences related to the ownership shift, commercialization, government support and the role of women in the *pancai bājā* playing tradition. A certain group of the Magar community in the urban area of Biratnagar formed a *pancai bājā–naumati bājā* band that included players only from the Magar community. Traditionally, the Damain community carried on the legacy of the *pancai bājā* performance despite social stigma and the inhuman practice of untouchability. As the *pancai bājā* playing tradition did not belong to the Magar community, they hired five trainers from outside the Biratnagar metropolitan. The practitioner band of the Magar sought the Damain trainers from the neighboring districts such as Jhapa and Dhankuta. In this regard, Lalit states, “Among those five trainers, only one was from the Thakuri community and the remaining four were from the Damain community. The trainers coached them twice a day: in the morning from six to nine and during the day from one to four.” After the formation of the Magar *pancai bājā* band in the metropolitan, the trend was soon imitated, and four additional bands were subsequently formed. Those bands comprise people from the communities such as Brahmin, Thakuri and Magar.

As our key informant, Lalit clarified mainly the three factors that inspired them to form the non-Damain *pancai bājā* band. First, they just wanted to preserve the originality through the continuation of the *pancai bājā* tradition since it is original and vibrant musical repertoire of Nepal. Second, the increasing invasion of the Western musical band has sidelined the original *pancai bājā* band of the land. The desire was to revive the neglected musical repertoire. Third, the Magar of the Biratnagar metropolitan sensed a great potential for professionalism in the adoption of the *pancai bājā* ensemble.

As interviewers, we asked Lalit whether they felt hesitation in the initial days to practice the *pancai bājā* performance since conventionally the socially outcast Damain community has played it. He responded, “In the beginning, we had some kind of awkward feeling, but later on, we found that our society was becoming much more liberal. The traditional prejudice has been effaced to a larger extent.” The post-Maoist-insurgency society has largely deconstructed the social hierarchy sustained for centuries.

The economic factor has energized the professional practice of the musical ensemble, enlarging its scope. Inside the metropolitan territory, the Magar *pancai bājā* band charges Rs. 1500 to 2500 for a single instrument. Outside the

metropolitan territory, the charges are higher. In the *noumati bājā* band, the number of performers ranges from nine to eleven. Interestingly, the number of women players is approximately two-thirds. Women's participation in the *pancai bājā* band reflects certain facts about their involvement and intelligence. The spatio-temporal dimension of the *pancai bājā* has undergone massive change. Women's musical intelligence is much sharper than that of men. They learn the skill of playing the ensemble much more quickly. Being involved in such a creative pursuit, women feel fresh. In the past, even Damain women were not supposed to play the *pancai bājā*, but women from different communities now perform *pancai bājā* professionally.

The Magar community in Biratnagar metropolitan originated from internal migration from the hills. The hill-origin communities of Nepal have been sustaining the practice of the *pancai bājā* ensemble. Such a historical fact demonstrates that the communities originally from the terai region such as Madhesi, Rajbamsi and Tharu, and the migrated communities from India such as Marbadi do not use *pancai bājā* in their rituals and social ceremonies. The cultural expansion of the *pancai bājā* among the indigenous communities and the India-origin communities in the terai region is almost zero. The hill-origin communities, such as Brahmin, Chetri, Tamang, Magar, Majhi, Newar, Gurung, Rai, Kami, Sarki, and Damain hire the *pancai bājā* ensemble for wedding ceremonies.

About the future of the *pancai bja-noumati bājā* ensemble, Lalit is extremely optimistic. He claims, "The increasing trend of playing *noumati bājā* will minimize the widespread use of the Western musical band. People's inclination to employ the *pancai bājā* in rituals, weddings, and various social ceremonies is certain to grow." In the urban setting of Biratnagar, the players produce the melodies of *mangal dhoon*, *khyāli*, and *cutkā*. Moreover, they perform the melodies of popular songs from the immediate musical market to amuse the audience.

The Magar *pancai bājā* band in Biratnagar received financial assistance from the local municipal government not only for developing *pancai bājā* performance skills but also for purchasing the instruments. In this regard, the municipal government has provided patronage to the *pancai bājā* ensemble. The band of Lalit Magar expects a municipal grant for the repair of the instruments in subsequent years as well.

The clearly structured melody of the *pancai bājā* fascinates the audience. There are various occasions on which residents and government agencies hire the *pancai bājā* band for entertainment and social prestige. Those occasions include weddings, *bratabandha* (sacred thread investiture ceremony), *kul poojā*, *dewāli*, and rallies.

In the age of technological advancement, many people express their concern that the live performance of the *pancai bājā* might be threatened by digital playback. The recorded version of the *pancai bājā* melody might surpass the presence of the players in person in a real spatial location. However, our respondent Lalit confidently said that the recorded music would not much threaten the live performance. Prestige-conscious people prefer the in-person performance of the musical ensemble. The hill-origin communities are positive in the promotion and preservation of the instruments.

This is how the *pancai bājā* repertoire has undergone a massive transformation in the capitalistic market. Ironically, Damain community, the initiator, promoter, and preserver of the rich repertoire of the *pancai bājā* has been losing its hold and ownership over it. During hard times, they continued the tradition, facing the social malignancy. Social stigma attached to their profession discouraged the Damain and their posterity from seeking innovation and professionalism in the field. Gradually, the so-called upper caste communities adopted the profession of the *pancai bājā*, making it an alternative source of livelihood. The Damain community's displacement from the profession reflects the changing matrix of the spatio-temporal dimension in Nepali society. The chronotopic analysis of the *pancai bājā-noumati bājā* tradition suggests that the temporal and spatial dimensions of the ensemble have undergone various phases of crisis and commercial regeneration. Paradoxically, the real connoisseurs of the musical ensemble are pushed to the brink of sustaining the tradition that they nurtured for centuries amid social discrimination. However, the tradition continues to gain strength no matter who is commercially handling it in the technical marketplace.

Conclusion

As a traditional musical ensemble, the *pancai bājā* is performed in the rituals and social as well as religious ceremonies of the hill-origin Nepali communities. The ensemble consists of *sahanāi*, *narsingā*, *dholaki*, *tyāmko*, and *jhyāmtā*. We can see a chronotopic shift in the field of *pancai bājā* performance as we analyze

the spatial and temporal dimensions of the ensemble in both the past and the present. The social habitus (deeply ingrained dispositions) to perceive the *pancai bājā* ensemble has also changed considerably. In the study of the *pancai bājā*, Merriam's anthropological approach to music proves particularly relevant. In the past, only the tailor musician Damain would play the ensemble when the society contained an agro-based economy and rural setting. Their patrons would be so-called upper caste people. Mostly, the Damain musicians would not get their remuneration in cash but in the form of agricultural produce under *bāli ghar bista* system. The socially outcast and economically marginalized Damain community was treated as an untouchable section of humanity. For their service, they would annually collect the crops such as paddy, corn and millet from the households of their *bista* (patrons).

Along with the changes in socio-political and cultural contexts, these days, the so-called upper-caste people have been seeking professionalism in the *pancai bājā* performance. In the urban location, many *pancai bājā* bands are formed, and they perform the music that was traditionally regarded as belonging to the Damain occupational caste. However, in the modern capitalistic market, the so-called upper caste, not Damain communities, are seeking professional opportunities in the *pancai bājā* musical performance. The community that traditionally maintained the ensemble is losing its grip and ownership at the juncture of history when the society is growing more liberal and the concept of untouchability, connected to Damain, is thawing at a greater speed. In this regard, the new generation of Damain abandoned the *pancai bājā* playing occupation since it was associated with social stigma.

However, the Damain community has played a significant role in initiating and perpetuating the *pancai bājā* music in the past when there was neither adequate remuneration nor social prestige attached to the occupation. Despite the fear of the collapse of the *pancai bājā* repertoire, it is sustained in the commercial market, no matter how the ownership has changed. In the urban setting of Nepal, the *pancai bājā* is taking a commercial twist. The internal migration pattern of Nepal shows that a large proportion of the population from the hills has been migrating to the plains of the terai. This phenomenon contributes to the sustenance, development and professionalism of the *pancai bājā* repertoire. As the density of population increased in the terai, demand and consumers of the *pancai bājā* have escalated. In the modern urban cultural marketplace, the *pancai bājā* ensemble is played on occasions such as weddings, *bratabandha* (sacred thread investiture ceremony),

purāna recital, *phulpāti* entry, *dewāli* and *kul poojā* (worship of the household deities).

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*Music at the Turn
of the 21st Century*

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**Composers of the past in dialogue
with contemporary culture**

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Abstract. This article examines the emergence of new formats through which the classical music heritage functions within the contemporary cultural space. Across the diverse spectrum of this artistic paradigm—ranging from traditional concert performance to advertising soundtracks—the music of past masters is revitalized through remakes, including those generated via multimedia computer technologies. It has become a crucial component of highly unconventional genre and stylistic blends (*mixtes*).

The emergence of these hybrids has been facilitated by digitalization, collaboration of artistic collectives with neural networks, and a rapid, often artistically viable, convergence of technical and creative principles in contemporary art. Through an analysis of selected artifacts, the author demonstrates new possibilities for multi-level communication within synthetic artistic texts that integrate language, painting, music, photography, and digital content. The study draws on projects by André and Michel Decostère, Anri Sala, Carl and Åsa Unander-Scharin, and the art studio fuse*. Through interactive engagement with all participants in the artistic process — performers, conductors, audiences, and, in some cases, online communities participating through digital networks — the final creative product becomes inherently variable. Its presentation synthesizes the emotional responses of everyone involved in both the performance and its perception, thereby generating an inexhaustible multiplicity of meanings.

Keywords: remake, genre synthesis, performance, stylistic blends, classical music, multimedia art, fuse* studio.

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*Музыкальное творчество
рубежа XX–XXI столетий*

Научная статья

**Композиторы прошлого
в диалоге с современностью**

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена проблеме новых форматов бытования академической музыки прошлого в современном культурном пространстве. В многообразии этого художественного пласта — от традиционного концертного исполнительства до рекламных саундтреков — музыка мастеров прошлого актуализируется в контексте ремейков, в том числе созданных посредством мультимедийных компьютерных технологий. Она становится важнейшей составляющей самых необычных жанрово-стилевых микстов, возникновение которых стало возможным благодаря цифровизации, работе авторских коллективов с нейронными сетями, стремительному и в ряде случаев художественно полноценному слиянию в современном искусстве технического и творческого начал. На основе анализа ряда артефактов

автором продемонстрированы новые возможности многоуровневой коммуникации в рамках синтетических художественных текстов, объединяющих слово, живопись, музыку, фотографию и цифровой контент. Материалом стали проекты Андре и Мишеля Декостеров, Анри Салы, Карла и Осы Унандер-Шарин, студии *Fuse*. В интерактивных контактах со всеми участниками художественного процесса — исполнителями, дирижером, аудиторией, а в ряде случаев с социумом, аккумулярованным в сетевом интернет-пространстве, — конечный продукт творчества оказывается вариативным. В его подаче синтезируются эмоциональные реакции всех причастных как к представлению, так и к восприятию, что создает неисчерпаемое в своей множественности смысловое наполнение произведений.

Ключевые слова: ремейк, жанровый синтез, перформанс, стилевые миксты, музыкальная классика, мультимедийное искусство, компания *Fuse*

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Introduction

It is a remarkable phenomenon: as years and sometimes centuries pass, the lives and legacies of many composers become historical heritage, yet each generation rediscovers their music anew. We continue to study what would seem to be thoroughly explored terrain, uncovering fresh layers of meaning through new interpretations. Having integrated into contemporary reality, the oeuvre of past composers lives on in numerous performance interpretations. It enters everyday life as an integral component of advertising and cinematic texts, fountain music, or smartphone ringtones—rendering it highly sought-after in entirely novel contexts. This study, however, focuses on a different phenomenon: the creation of new versions based on well-known compositions of past masters, which significantly alters the source material by introducing original elements and transferring it into a different genre. We address a phenomenon most closely aligned with the concept of the “remake”, understood as a reworking of an existing work, a term widely used in popular culture.

Analyzing the nature of contemporary remakes, cultural studies scholar Elena V. Nikolaeva emphasizes their unique capacity for linguistic transformation:

Modern remakes are not only diverse in format and capable of being realized in different sociocultural codes; they also easily resolve the problem of translatability from one symbolic system to another, from one art form to another. A novella turns into a feature film and vice versa, an opera into a ballet, a novel into a musical, documentary chronicles into an episode of fiction cinema, a sonata into a ringtone. There even emerge multi-tier chains such as ‘novel/play–comic book–animated cartoon–feature film–TV series–internet animated series,’ constructed in any given sequence... [1, p. 550].

The latter point is particularly important, since this process enables a particular kind of communication across a broad cultural spectrum.

On the Term “Remake” in Contemporary Art Studies

The term “remake” became prominent in Russian art studies within the context of postmodern culture. The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was characterized by the appearance of numerous films and literary works

that reinterpreted well-known classical models. This extensive body of artistic works naturally increased interest in the phenomenon among cultural studies scholars, art historians, and literary critics. Virtually every study dedicated to this topic offered an authorial definition of the term “remake,” which has English roots.¹ Nevertheless, most researchers highlighted the same defining characteristics: namely, the presence of an original source text and its reinterpretation within a new sociocultural context.

For instance, Veronika V. Dotsenko writes that a remake is “a form of producing secondary texts distinguished by authorial originality, based on classical pre-texts, which incorporate reflections on contemporary life into a broad cultural-historical context” [3, p. 399]. Tatiana O. Kholodinskaya reasons in much the same vein: “The remake-text is fundamentally ‘secondary,’ though it simultaneously attempts to say something ostensibly new using ‘borrowed’ words” [4, p. 60].

In connection with the scholarly analysis of remakes in cinema and literature, several other considerations essential for characterizing the phenomenon arise. Most significant are observations regarding the tendency of remakes to combine different genres, “which can correspond to different literary modes, thereby giving rise to unconventional genre forms” [4, p. 62]. Alongside this, authors point to a tendency toward intertextuality, which gives rise to “a game between the author and the reader—an explicit appeal to the reader’s cultural memory” [5, p. 56], as well as the significance of technological advancement, which allows for “the creation of a highly diverse variety of derivative objects” [6, p. 249].

Drawing together the findings of scholarship on the remake in art historical literature, Galina V. Zadneprovskaya summarizes the key properties of this phenomenon: 1) the presence of a pre-text; 2) the creation of a “double temporal perspective—by reproducing the past, the remake simultaneously addresses the present”; 3) the use of “new technologies, which have developed particularly rapidly in the twenty-first century” [7, p. 323].

While agreeing with these characteristics, it is important to add another feature: the capacity of the remake to transform the genre of its pre-text, especially

¹ Konstantin K. Ognev notes: “It is noteworthy that the term ‘remake’ itself appeared with the release of John Sturges’s film *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), based on Akira Kurosawa’s film *Seven Samurai* (1954)” [2, p. 130].

in the case of musical works. This is connected with the development of multimedia art forms, whose sphere of influence inevitably alters the original genre status of a work.²

Remake and Musical Classics

Unlike in film studies and literary criticism, the term “remake” is rarely employed in classical musicology³—perhaps for ethical reasons. In musical practice, however, we frequently encounter something highly similar, manifested in various forms. For instance, stylistic arrangements of classical compositions—such as their jazz and rock versions—should undoubtedly be classified as remakes. Indeed, this is the exact concept used by scholars who study these forms of artistic activity. Yet, stylistic blends (*mixtes*) represent only the most harmless form of adapting musical classics to “new cultural realities” in order to attract a broad target audience. Such transformations often emerge from the synthesis of different genres and artistic methods that may initially appear incompatible. A prime example illustrating the potential of such experiments is the creative partnership of André and Michel Decostère (Cod.Act studio, established in 1999).⁴

Working in the fields of installation and performance art, they combine compositional and engineering approaches to create works that integrate sound, light, and movement. Their oeuvre has garnered numerous awards at prestigious contemporary art competitions and festivals. Classical music occupies a significant place in the authors’ extensive experiments, as evidenced by the Decostères’ work *Ex Pharao*,⁵ which represents, in the truest sense of the word, a remake of Arnold Schönberg’s opera *Moses und Aron*.

Drawing on the original work, the authors offered their own orchestral version of the opera, preserving the sequence and content of the scenes as well as the dialogues of the main protagonists. These dialogues were recorded by singers in strict adherence to the score, while a multisensory device allowed participants to experience an almost physical connection with the composer’s work [8, p. 133].

² The theoretical development of this specific problem requires independent research.

³ Galina V. Zadneprovskaya’s article *National Russian Opera-Remake in the Context of Modern Culture* is a rare exception [7].

⁴ André is a professional musician, composer, and plastic artist; Michel is an architect.

⁵ *Ex Pharao* [Sound installation]. (2006). *Cod.Act*. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://codact.ch/works/ex-pharao-2/>

By interacting with a computerized installation, the visitor controls the choral part—the voice of the people of Israel—thereby entering into a dialogue with the main characters, Moses and Aaron. Immersed in the center of events and influencing the proceedings, the viewer cannot help but engage with the complex philosophical undertones of the work, which chronicles the relationships of human beings with one another and with God. Commenting on this experience, the Decostères explain:

The creation of the work was done with a view to staying as close as possible to the original character of Schönberg's work. We chose, in the manner of serialism, a rigorous writing system adapted to current computer tools for sound treatment and allowing, without loss in uniformity, a modification of the sound parameters in real time.⁶

Image and music, as expressions of space and time within the labyrinths of history, occupy a central place in Anri Sala's artistic experiments.⁷ The artist uses image and music

for their ability to reveal and 'open up' the space of the present. Drawing upon a range of music styles, from classical and free jazz to pop and contemporary music, Sala evokes an idea of collective, historical and cultural memory via immersive, sensorial installations.⁸

For instance, his installation *The Last Resort* consists of a structure featuring 38 snare drums suspended upside down from the ceiling (*Illustration 1*). The drumsticks are set in motion by vibrations generated by concealed speakers. However, the primary musical component of the work is a remake of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major, KV 622 (1791).⁹

The changes introduced by Sala to the score primarily concern the tempo, which fluctuates according to wind conditions—ranging from “calm” to “storm”—recorded by a certain James Bell in his diary during a voyage from England to Australia in 1838. Aboard the sailing ship *Planter*, Bell transported cargo and emigrants to colonized lands. Sala comments on his concept as follows:

⁶ Ex Pharaon, (2006).

⁷ Anri Sala (b. 1974, Tirana, Albania) lives and works in Berlin.

⁸ Sala, A. (2019). Le Temps coudé. *Mudam Luxembourg—Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean*. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://www.mudam.com/exhibitions/monographic-exhibition>

⁹ Sala, A. (2018, March 30). The Last Resort and If and Only If [Video]. *Marian Goodman Gallery*. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/262551626>



Illustration 1. Anri Sala, The Last Resort, 2019.

Installation view at Mudam Luxembourg.

© Photo: Rémi Villaggi / Mudam Luxembourg.

Source: <https://artmap.com/mudam/exhibition/anri-sala-2020>

My aim was to compose with corruption. I wanted to imagine [...] what would become of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto if it were to float and drift like a message in a bottle, until it is washed ashore after a long voyage.¹⁰

However, this is merely a metaphor. The true meaning of the work lies in reflections on the contradictions of the Enlightenment—between high art, which transmits imperishable values, and historical reality, intertwined with the brutality of colonization.

¹⁰ Sala, A. (2018). The Last Resort. *Garage Museum of Contemporary Art*. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://garagemca.org/en/exhibition/anri-sala-i-the-last-resort-i>

Works of musical theatre likewise acquire new forms of existence through another creative “duet”—the Swedish composer, opera singer, and researcher Carl Unander-Scharin and choreographer Åsa Unander-Scharin. Their collaborative project *Opera Mecatronics* (2010), designed in the format of installations, unites robotics and classical music. The first experiment in such synthesis dates back to 1998 with the work *The Lamentations of Orpheus*,¹¹ in which a 170 cm tall, 500 kg orange industrial robot dances to a famous aria from Claudio Monteverdi’s opera. The plasticity of the robot’s movements and the algorithm of its motions, harmonizing with the emotional impulses, rhythm, and syntax of the aria, are simply astonishing. However, a legitimate question arises regarding the meanings transmitted by this symbiosis of robotics and an acclaimed musical masterpiece. The affective state of *lamento* is an emblematic expression of human emotional experience. While preserving the music and text of the source material, *The Lamentations of Orpheus* undergoes a radical alteration of its visual imagery. This transforms the semantic component of the whole, translating it into the plane of contemporary issues—specifically, the relationship between human and machine. The dancing industrial robot serves as a projection of human feelings onto a machine—a metaphor for the relationship between humans and robots, which for now remain subject to human control.

This initial experiment marked the beginning of an entire series of works exploring new possibilities for interaction among classical music, dance, and robotics. The “sacred” venue for presenting these experimental projects to the public was the Reactor Hall (R1), located 25 meters underground on the campus of the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Another example is the installation *Robocygne (Roboswan, 2010)*, created to an electronically processed version of Rothbart’s theme from Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*, prepared by Carl Unander-Scharin. The black robotic swan, standing 130 cm tall with a wingspan of 160 cm, features a metal frame finished with capron fabric and feathers, creating the illusion of a bird performing a dramatic death dance. The vibrations of the structure are accentuated by electronic pulsating sonorities that intensify the fragile expressiveness of its graceful wing beats. The associations and semantic interpretation of this impressive miniature are left entirely to the audience (*Illustration 2*).

¹¹ The Lamentations of Orpheus. (n.d.). *Operamecatronica*. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://www.operamecatronica.com/the-lamentations-of-orpheus/>



Illustration 2. K. Unander-Scharin & Å. Unander-Scharin.
Robocygne installation (n.d.). Source: Opera Mecatronica
(<https://www.operamecatronica.com/robocygne/>)

This creative tandem has produced numerous interactive projects in which motion-sensitive electronic sensors allow the audience to participate in the sonic transformation of a text that is reproduced differently each time. One such example is the installation *Ombra mai fù*,¹² set to the music of the famous aria from George Frideric Handel's opera *Serse*. As noted by Sweden's largest daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, in the artists' works, "Opera classics are woven into a fascinating futuristic soundscape".¹³

¹² According to the authors' explanatory notes, the project features a singing interactive tree equipped with speakers designed in the shape of leaves.

¹³ "Operaörhängen inbäddade i ett fascinerande futuristiskt ljudlandskap." Abrahamsson, Ö. (2012, May 7). "Opera mecatronica live" på Kungliga Operan, Stockholm. *Dagens Nyheter*. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/scenrecensioner/opera-mecatronica-live-pa-kungliga-operan-stockholm/>

Thus, in the practice of these highly unexpected reworkings, compositions of the classical tradition become part of a new genre blend (*mixte*), which implies different conditions for the existence of music and consequently endows it with new semantic connotations. As demonstrated by the preceding examples, technologies—specifically digital ones—play an immense role. Researchers note that remakes often emerge “...during the artistic ‘transfer’ of ‘high art’ into the media space. In this case, the presentation of musical art takes on the format of media texts.” Concurrently, they offer a caution: there may occur a “transgression of certain artistic phenomena into conditions inconsistent with the very nature of these phenomena,” which is capable of “leading to the annihilation of the original form” [10, p. 81].

It appears that, in most cases, this is exactly what happens. By analogy with physical annihilation, which implies the conversion of colliding particles into alternative forms of matter, the synthesis of diverse artistic texts—classical music, video, technical constructs, and poetry—undergoing digital transformation inevitably yields a new quality of the whole. This allows one to fully concur with the opinion of the Australian scholar Constantine Verevis, who claims (with reference to Robert Ray¹⁴) that the remake “is not ‘a faded imitation of a superior, authentic original . . . [but] a ‘ ‘citation’ grafted into a new context and thereby inevitably refunctioned’ or ‘disseminated’ ” [10, p. 83] (see also [9, p. 82]).

*Genre and Stylistic Metamorphoses: Musical Classics
in the Media Performance “Van Gogh in Me”*

An artistically compelling experiment that revitalizes the music of past composers within a new context is the media performance *Van Gogh in Me*, created by the Italian digital art studio and production company fuse*¹⁵ in collaboration with the Netherlands Chamber Choir (*Nederlands Kamerkoor*). The narrative of this work chronicles the era of the late nineteenth century as seen through the eyes of two iconic artists of the period, Vincent van Gogh and Gustav Klimt, set against a musical backdrop featuring works by Erik Satie, Claude Debussy, Gustav Mahler, and other composers. For the creators of this concept, it was important

¹⁴ Ray, R. B. (2001) Film and Literature. In *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (pp. 120–31). Indiana University Press.

¹⁵ The studio was founded in 2007 by Luca Camellini and Mattia Carretti.

to establish a meaningful connection with the present day, given that both the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century and the turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century were periods of global change. The historical trajectory of the piece spans from the beautifully serene 1870s to the tragic events marking the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The connection between the past and the present is physically materialized in the performance: microphones and biometric sensors attached to all participants track their emotions and gestures, which subsequently influence the visual outcome of the performance in real time. Thus, as conceived by the authors, *Van Gogh in Me* functions as a reinterpretation of the past that is intricately interwoven with our contemporary reality.

Structurally, the work represents a synthesis of a verbal texts presented in three languages, choral music performed by the Chamber Choir and orchestra, a visual component consisting of Van Gogh's paintings, and technologies that analyze and process the emotional states of all participants. In genre terms, the work combines elements of performance, concert, and installation.

The storyline guides the viewer through a sequence of events from the personal and creative lives of Van Gogh and Klimt, placing them within the context of real historical circumstances. Following its narrative logic, the work may be divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to the life of Van Gogh: his walks in the fields, portraits of peasants, his inner turmoil, loneliness, and despair. In the central section, personal suffering is sublimated through the expressive power of Van Gogh's art and the influence it had on Gustav Klimt. The intertwining of the artists' destinies becomes evident through the juxtaposition of their paintings, which reveals a clear line of stylistic continuity (*Illustrations 3, 4*).

The final part of the performance chronicles the evolution of Klimt's style and the redemptive power of Beauty, which served as a refuge on the eve of the Great War. This concept is epitomized in one of Klimt's most monumental works — the Beethoven Frieze (*Beethovenfries*), created for the 14th Exhibition of the Vienna Secession in 1902 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the composer's death.¹⁶

Alongside the biographical narrative, the audience witnesses the unfolding of historical events, immersing themselves in the atmosphere of nineteenth-century

¹⁶ The frieze measures 2.15 m in height and 34.14 m in length. See *Beethovenfries: Die feindlichen Gewalten - Tafel 1, Stirnwand. Österreichische Galerie Belvedere*. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://sammlung.belvedere.at/objects/10503/beethovenfries-die-feindlichen-gewalten-tafel-1-stirnwa>

Vienna, recreated through photogrammetric¹⁷ reconstructions based on archival films and photographs of the period. Their three-dimensional version was realized in the scenes through methods based on deep-learning neural networks. Meanwhile, the paintings of Van Gogh and Klimt, alternating with these historical materials, are presented in the form of continuous, slow-motion animation. Behind the main stage, where the conductor and the 32 singers of the Netherlands Chamber Choir (*Nederlands Kamerkoor*) perform, two massive screens are positioned. The visual material displayed on them was prepared and compiled in collaboration with the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the Belvedere Austrian Gallery (*Österreichische Galerie Belvedere*). Thanks to these partnerships, the fuse* studio obtained the opportunity to work with high-resolution images of the paintings using cutting-edge technologies. The creators of the performance note:

This allowed us to train neural networks (through Generative Adversarial Network) on single paintings or on the basis of stylistic themes recurring in several works. These elaborations have become real explorations of the style and trait of the two artists, revealing a definition and a wealth of detail otherwise not perceptible to the human eye.¹⁸

The musical foundation of the performance is formed by works of composers of that era. The choral pieces were selected and arranged to construct a distinct dialogue with the works of Van Gogh and Klimt. The authors' intention was seemingly to dissolve the boundaries between music and imagery, creating an illusion that paintings can be heard and sounds can assume a tangible presence. The musical works symbolically reflect the twists and turns of the two artists' lives, revealing their personal experiences and creative struggles at the level of emotional meaning.

Furthermore, the music sensitively accompanies the unfolding narrative, shaping an atmosphere that shifts from lyrical intimacy to darkness and foreboding. It constitutes a crucial component of the whole, as it *follows* the dramatic arc of the narrative: from the piercingly powerful *Adagietto* from Mahler's Fifth Symphony

¹⁷ Photogrammetry is a 3D scanning method that derives information about the dimensions and surface characteristics of real objects from photographic images. Technically, the process works as follows: a stationary object is photographed from multiple angles, generating a large number of images. These are then uploaded into specialized software, which analyzes the data, constructs a point cloud, and generates a complete 3D model that incorporates surface relief.

¹⁸ Van Gogh in Me—Live Media Performance. (2022, September 21). *fuse**. Behance. Retrieved May 19, 2026, from <https://www.behance.net/gallery/153190617/Van-Gogh-in-Me-Live-Media-Performance>

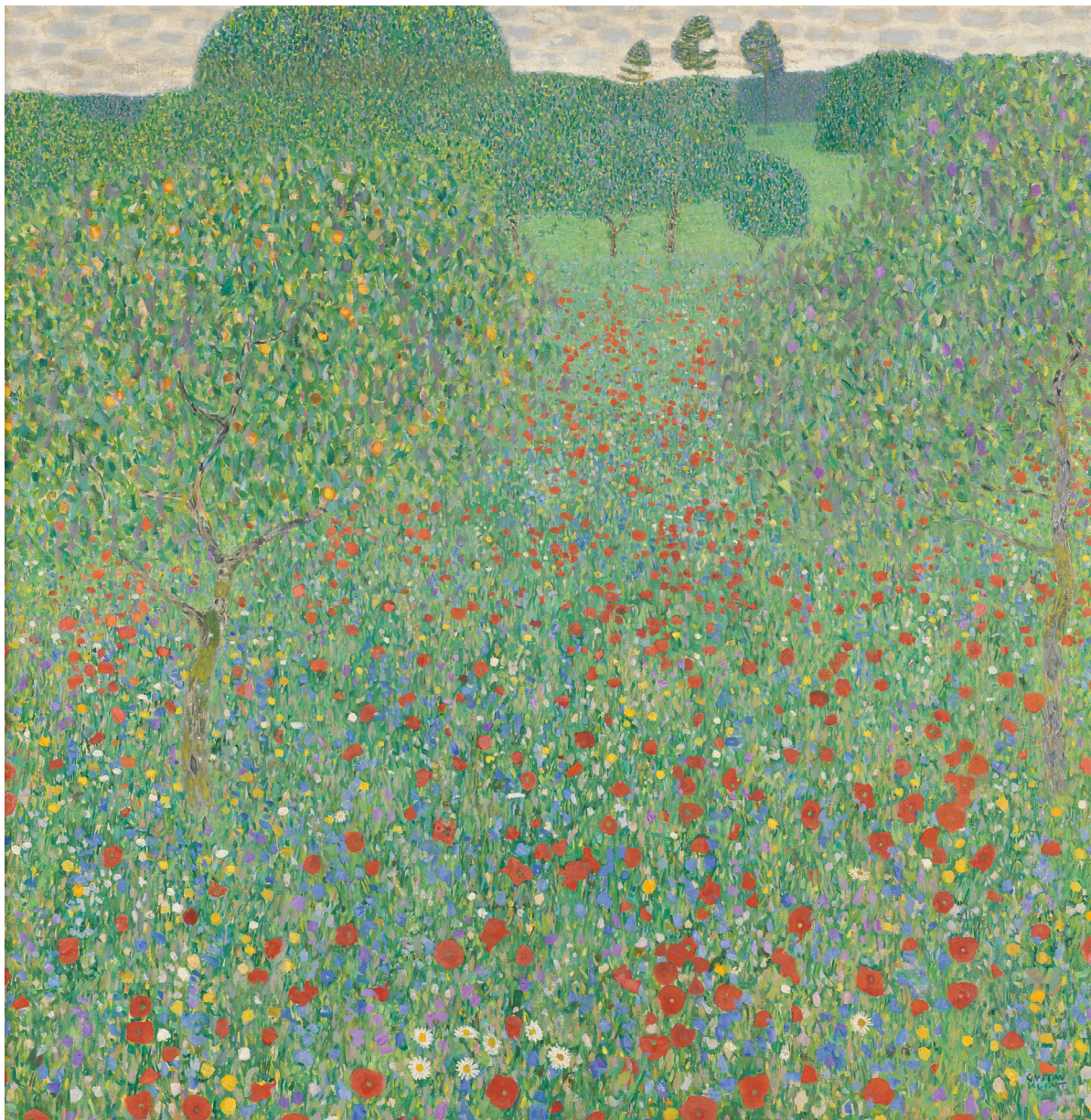


Illustration 3. Gustav Klimt, Blühender Mohn (Poppy Field), 1907.

Oil on canvas. Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

Source: <https://sammlung.belvedere.at/objects/3917/bluhender-mohn>



Illustration 4. Vincent van Gogh, Papaverveld (Poppy Field), 1890.
Oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague, Netherlands.
Source: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/DgEIFHy5TuAC1g>

to Richard Strauss's breathtaking *Traumlicht* set to the poetry of Friedrich Rückert. The performance concludes with Arnold Schönberg's poetic choral tableau *Friede auf Erden* ("Peace on Earth") for mixed choir *a cappella* (1907, op. 13) based on a poem by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, which serves as a direct reference to its visual counterpart—Klimt's Beethoven Frieze.

The uniqueness of each performance is determined by the active participation of everyone present—both the performers and the audience—in its scenic realization. New transformations of the visual component emerge depending on the real-time emotional responses of both the active participants and the spectators. This is facilitated by a suite of technical devices. Specialized microphones—ambient panoramic ones for the choir and individual lavaliers for the soloists—allow for detailed analysis of vocal vibrations, while GSR (Galvanic Skin Response) sensors measure the choristers' level of emotional arousal in real time.

In addition, a specialized infrared camera captures emotional data from the faces of the audience. The conductor, who serves as the physical and emotional conduit between the audience and the choir, is also integrated into this analytical framework: his gestures and facial expressions, scanned via facial recognition software, are analyzed and incorporated into the aggregate data processing system that dictates the visualization and animation of the paintings.

As a result, the visual effects evolve like a living organism through a continuous "dialogue" between the audience and the choir, giving visual form to the emotions elicited by the artistic sublimation of history in the minds of contemporary viewers. All participants in the performance do not merely co-experience and reflect upon what transpires on the stage and screens; they collaborate, advancing step by step toward the finale of an action that becomes, in the truest sense of the word, an unrepeatable work of art. Undoubtedly, *Van Gogh in Me* grants a new level of agency to its participants, elevating them to the status of co-authors.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the phenomenon of the remake, in relation to the classical music of the past, has ceased to be a marginal practice of popular culture, evolving instead into a powerful instrument for the revitalization of classical heritage within the context of technological and media-driven

modernity. The analysis of diverse artistic projects—ranging from installations and performances to large-scale media spectacles—demonstrates the formation of fundamentally new formats through which music functions, radically transforming the conditions of its presentation and perception. Contemporary interpretations of classical compositions that transcend the boundaries of traditional performance represent more than mere stylistic arrangements; they constitute a complex process of cultural “transfer” mediated through digital technologies and genre synthesis. This approach ensures a vital dialogue between historical artifacts and current creative practices, rendering the heritage of the past relevant to a new audience.

Digital tools—including neural networks, robotics, interactive sensors, and data analysis algorithms—have ceased to function as a neutral backdrop. They have become active creative agents capable of generating new aesthetic qualities and semantic layers. In the works of Decostères, Anri Sala, the Unander-Scharins, and the fuse* studio, technology does not merely illustrate the music but enters into a substantive synthesis with it, translating the philosophical and emotional concepts of the compositions (from Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to Arnold Schönberg) into the plane of contemporary issues, such as the relationship between human and machine and between the individual and the collective.

A key feature of the examined practices is the creation of cohesive art objects where music, visual imagery (painting, video, animation), language, and engineering constructs form an indivisible whole. As vividly demonstrated by the media performance *Van Gogh in Me*, such a synthesis leads to the annihilation of the original forms and the birth of a new artistic quality. The interactive and variable nature of the final product, which depends on the real-time emotional responses of all participants—performers, conductor, and audience alike—becomes of fundamental importance.

Inasmuch as interactive systems that read and process physiological and emotional data transform the passive spectator/listener into a participant in the creative act, a decentering of the authorial function occurs, giving rise to distributed authorship and a collectively generated outcome that remains unique to each individual performance. Consequently, the dialogue with modernity is actualized not only at the level of interpreting the musical text but also through the transformation of the very model of the artistic communicative act.

Thus, the revitalization of the music of past composers through the remake in the digital era emerges as a profound process of semantic transformation. When classical works enter new technological and generic contexts, they do not forfeit their cultural significance; rather, they acquire a “polyphonic” resonance that responds to the demands of the contemporary recipient. These practices, balancing the preservation of the original’s aura and its radical reinterpretation, open new perspectives for reading the history of art and point toward future directions in the development of synthetic forms of creativity in the twenty-first century.

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=====*Theory of Performing Arts*=====

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Pierre Boulez's *Anthèmes I* for solo violin: On the virtuosity

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Abstract. The article explores the technical–performative aspect of Pierre Boulez's *Anthèmes I* (1991) for solo violin from a physiologically oriented perspective. This non-standard analytical approach is inspired by the reflections of Yehudi Menuhin—who commissioned the work for a violin competition—and aligns with the neuropathic image invoked by Boulez himself: ataxia,

a performer's loss of motor control. Viewed through this lens, the work's technical eccentricities emerge as the result of Boulez's intent to cultivate the violinist's reflexes. The article identifies instrumental features that testify to this focus on coordination: pitch contours that complicate conventional fingering patterns; deliberately unnatural bow strokes; abrupt, almost convulsive shifts in bow direction paired with finely calibrated irregular dynamic contrasts, among others. The accumulation of diverse technical demands, that often work against the instrument's natural mechanics, suggests that Boulez consciously modeled ataxia within the piece. By relying on the violinist's psychophysical capacities and agile musical thinking, he expanded the instrument's technical vocabulary and shaped a new type of virtuosic composition—one requiring, in Menuhin's words, “dexterity of mind as well as fingers.” These overload and material resistance markers point to the dialectical relationship between the “composer's gesture” and the “performer's gesture.” Virtuosity serves as the common ground that links them, which Boulez understood in a multifaceted way. The transdisciplinary essence of the performance techniques introduced in *Anthèmes I* helps illuminate the content of gesture in the piece and articulate its overarching compositional agenda.

Keywords: Pierre Boulez, *Anthèmes I*, Yehudi Menuhin, violin performance, virtuosity, ataxia, reflex

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Исполнительское искусство

Научная статья

***Anthèmes I* для скрипки соло П. Булеза:
к вопросу о виртуозности**

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Аннотация. В настоящей статье предлагается рассмотреть технологически-игровой аспект *Антемов I* Пьера Булеза (1991) для скрипки соло, исходя из предпосылок, ориентированных на физиологию. Необычный аналитический подход подсказан наблюдениями Иегуди Менухина, заказавшего Булезу произведение для конкурса скрипачей, и согласован с нейропатической ассоциацией композитора — атаксией, то есть потерей исполнителем двигательного контроля. Избранный ракурс способствует обоснованию технологической эксцентричности как следствия установки Булеза на выработку рефлексов у скрипача. В статье выделяются характерные инструментальные признаки, свидетельствующие о тренировке мышечной координации: вычурный звуковысотный контур, ограничивающий удобство подбора аппликатурных комбинаций,

нарочито неестественные штриховые решения, конвульсивные изменения направлений смычка в сочетании с детализированно иррегулярными динамическими контрастами и т. п. Присущая пьесе избыточность разноплановых технологических задач, зачастую идущих вразрез со скрипичной органикой, наводит на мысль о моделировании композитором атаксии в пьесе. Полагаясь на психофизическую оснащенность и мыслительную операциональность скрипача, композитор пополняет инструментальный тезаурус и формирует новый тип виртуозного произведения, требующий от исполнителя, по словам Менухина, «ловкости ума и пальцев». Отмеченные признаки перегруженности и сопротивления материала указывают на диалектику отношений в паре «жест композитора — жест исполнителя». Общей платформой, обеспечивающей их корреляцию, выступает виртуозность, понимаемая Булезом многозначно. Трансдисциплинарная подоснова оригинальных исполнительских приемов, введенных Булезом в *Антеммах I*, раскрывает содержательное наполнение жеста и декларирует, таким образом, композиционную сверхзадачу.

Ключевые слова: Пьер Булез, *Антемы I*, Иегуди Менухин, скрипка, исполнительство, виртуозность, атаксия, рефлекс

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Introduction

The compositional legacy of Pierre Boulez, a leading figure of the post-war avant-garde, is entering a new phase of scholarly interpretation. Over recent decades, Western European musicology has yielded several comprehensive studies examining general aspects of Boulez's creative work—such as aesthetics, technique, and musical language [1; 2; 3]—as well as his individual pieces [4; 5]. Meanwhile, Russian musicology addresses the complex definitions of Boulez's style within the analytical essays of Nadezhda A. Petrusева [6] and Tatyana V. Tsaregradskaya [7; 8].

Remarkably, while focusing on Boulez's compositions—which are characterized by the highest level of performance complexity—many authors either overlook the realm of virtuosic writing or treat it as a secondary concern. At the same time, academic interest in this issue is growing steadily. This trend is reflected, in particular, in the 2016 symposium on virtuosity organized by the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music (ESCOM) at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest, as well as the recent publication of major works, including a monograph by David VanderHamm [9] and a collective volume edited by Louise Devenish and Cat Hope [10]. Summarizing the outcomes of the aforementioned 2016 symposium, László Stachó and Irène Deliège outlined the current issues encompassed by virtuosity. The phenomenon was examined through empirical observations, semantic interpretations, performance realization, and transdisciplinary approaches, which emphasize the interaction between “mental agility” and “sports science” [11, pp. 451–452].

Musicologist and pianist Francisco Monteiro explains the essence of this phenomenon from the perspective of embodiment. In his article “Virtuosity: Some (quasi phenomenological) thoughts,” he resorts to such vivid expressions as “the apotheoses of the body” and “prodigious works, composed in an intentional sadistic and devilish way, intended to be a torture” [12, p. 318].

The physiological factor largely determines the specific nature of virtuosity in Boulez's *Anthèmes I*, while also setting the vector for the piece's perception. It is no coincidence that Peter O'Hagan, a researcher and performer of contemporary piano repertoire, emphasizes the “mechanical virtuosity” of Boulez's solo works, which include *Anthèmes* [4].

Thus, the relevance of virtuosity as a phenomenological category is beyond doubt. The purpose of this study is to substantiate the physiological (motor-coordination and muscular) genesis of the original instrumental and performative-technical parameters in Boulez's *Anthèmes I*. The discussion focuses on the instrumental layer of this work for unaccompanied violin from a transdisciplinary perspective.

Types of Virtuosity According to Boulez

Virtuosity is one of the components of Boulez's creative worldview, repeatedly becoming the subject of his reflections. In his lectures of the early 1980s at the Collège de France, the composer concluded that the manifestations of this phenomenon in music are multifaceted. In his view, virtuosity has two dimensions: *performative* and *compositional*. True to his analytical approach, he further complicates this opposition by presenting each of its parts as a pair of subcategories. *Performative* virtuosity is embodied in the mastery of solo and collective playing. *Compositional* virtuosity, in turn, encompasses technological and instrumental types. The former shapes an immanently musical texture that does not depend on the nature of the instrument. It is given intervals chosen with flexible connections, using different scales, changing rhythmic connections, modified tempo, textural parallelisms, statistical grouping, etc. [13, p. 544]. The second type of compositional virtuosity points to the mastery of instrumental writing, that is, knowledge of the properties and potential of a specific instrument [13, pp. 545–546].

Virtuoso work in both fields—technological and instrumental—“transform compositional gesture” [14, p. 115]. In other words, it influences the composer's actions, which, as Tatyana V. Tsaregradskaya summarizes, either “possess a mediating function” or “themselves become a source of creative impulses” [8, p. 286]. From Boulez's own words, we also know that the composer's gesture can enter into complex dialectical relationships with the performer's gesture. Boulez allows for three scenarios of such relationships: 1) the gesture of the composer negates the gesture of the performer, 2) the gesture of the composer absorbs the gesture of the performer, and finally, 3) the gesture of the composer is dominated by the gesture of the performer [14, p. 117]. The French master illustrates exclusively the first case, referencing his own *Structures I*. We will focus on

how, in our view, the second model of relationships—the dominance of the composer’s gesture—is realized in Boulez’s *Anthèmes I*¹ for solo violin.

Anthèmes I: Technique and Reflexes

Anthèmes is more than a virtuosic compendium of violin techniques, and what ‘extended’ techniques there are in *Anthèmes* are used to confer a characteristic contour or colour to the musical figures it contains, in line with Boulez’s renewed interest in thematic writing [1, p. 160].

The author of the cited quote, Jonathan Goldman—one of the leading experts on Boulez’s oeuvre—managed to derive the compositional “formula” of *Anthèmes*, identifying the two most significant aspects of the work and pointing to their interdependence: thematic integration framed by virtuosity. It is no coincidence that Goldman uses the word “contour,” clearly aiming for a direct association with Boulez’s own term, *enveloppe*.²

The piece came into being in 1991 due to a coincidence of two circumstances: a request from Yehudi Menuhin to compose a mandatory work for a future violin competition over which he was to preside, and the upcoming anniversary that same year of Alfred Schlee, the head of Universal Edition. For Boulez, this was his first experience writing for unaccompanied violin. Although the commission of a competition piece established a high level of technical difficulty, this fact in itself does not confirm that *Anthèmes* belongs to the second type of gestural relationships between composer and performer. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it is precisely Boulez’s inventiveness that dictates and controls all steps of the instrumental execution. What, then, supports the view that the composer’s gesture dominates in this work?

To answer this challenging question, let us look to Yehudi Menuhin, who, in his correspondence with Boulez, characterized *Anthèmes I* as follows: “C’est une œuvre très originale présentant des problèmes techniques inusités” [2, p. 430]. Here, one must take into account Menuhin’s attitude toward the physiological

¹ Boulez, P. (1992). *Anthèmes 1: Pour violon seul* (UE 19992) [Violin score]. Universal Edition.

² The composer’s interest in the transformational nature of thematicism, in its broader interpretation, is declared in the very title of the work—*Anthèmes*. In his lectures delivered at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1985, Boulez resorts to the concepts of the infratheme and hypertheme, whose function is to structure thematic material: the infratheme carries the genetic (intervallic) code, while the hypertheme extends it over an extended temporal span.

aspect of violin playing. Recall Menuhin's post-war fascination with yoga, which directed his professional interest toward the problems of performance mechanics. In his memoirs, *Unfinished Journey*, the violinist admitted:

...the discovery of yoga and its contribution to understanding violin playing [15, p. 335];

The direction of the search established, every experience pushed me further: my own practice, exchanges with other violinists, the laws of physics, a passage to India, and of course and specifically yoga, which taught me lessons it would have taken years to elaborate for myself. All influences pointed toward less tension, more effective application of energy, the breaking down of resistance in every joint, the coordination of all motions into one motion; and illustrated the profound truth that strength comes not from strength but from the subtle comprehension of process, of proportion and balance [15, p. 250].

In other words, Menuhin had a profound sense of the violin's organic nature, as well as of any technical irregularities. He succinctly formulated the essence of the effect created by the research of *Anthèmes'* author as follows: "C'est une œuvre qui exerce autant les réflexes que la technique du violon en soi." [2, p. 428]. Emphasizing the virtuosity of Boulez's style, Menuhin captured the intentions of his creative will: within a concept as elusive as the composer's gesture, the virtuoso violinist discovered the dominance of the composer over the performer.

Menuhin's statement implies that the unusual writing in *Anthèmes* is driven by two aspects of virtuosity: the technical and the reflex-driven. We understand the technical aspect from the professional standpoint of a practicing performing musician—specifically, as a system of techniques mastered through years of practice and perceived as familiar. Conceptualizing reflexes is somewhat more complex, as this domain lies at a deeper physiological level of the unconscious and therefore cannot be part of routine self-analysis. Recall that a reflex is the primary form of nervous system activity in a living organism. Accordingly, technique depends on the variety of reflexes that predetermine the performer's technical proficiency. At the same time, the concept of a reflex is both broader and more multidimensional, whereas playing technique appears as a more highly specialized domain of knowledge. When Menuhin dissociates reflexes from technique, he most likely attributes to *Anthèmes* an extra-musical function: the training of the violinist's motor coordination.

It is highly remarkable that the training of the performer's physiological flexibility accompanying virtuosic playing resonates with the composer's associative

perception of the third, most eccentric variation of *Anthèmes*. In this section, according to Boulez's concept, it should create the impression that the violinist "ne contrôle plus ces mouvements."³ The composer compares this playing state to a clinical disorder—ataxia, that is, a disorder of muscular coordination.

Performance Aspects of the Third Variation

Turning directly to the text of the third variation of *Anthèmes* (Example 1), Boulez juxtaposes two types of textural patterns characterized by regular and irregular rhythmic pulsations, as indicated by the composer's performance marks. The variation opens with sixteenth-note durations, with each beat further subdivided into sixty-fourth notes. This extremely fine subdivision evidently serves a metric-stabilizing function, which Boulez denotes with the performance remark *régulier*. As soon as this subdivision disappears in the third bar along with the smooth dynamic pattern, the indication *très irrégulier* appears, and the new section of the variation becomes filled with spontaneous changes in dynamics and accents. The means of achieving irregularity are diverse and encompass several parameters. The unstable dynamic profile results from abrupt switching between loud and soft dynamics. Both gradations of volume have two variants: *f–ff* and *p–pp*, which is explained by practical considerations. The difference of a single nuance is determined by the varying pressure of the bow on the string during up-bow and down-bow movements: the up-bow movement is always weaker, whereas the down-bow movement, conversely, is stronger and more natural.

The dynamic specificity is significantly reinforced by the textural and rhythmic factors. As in the preceding regular section (*régulier*), the sixteenth note remains the unit of measurement. Performance complexity arises from the grace notes that are attached to some of the principal notes within the irregular (*irrégulier*) mode. Contrary to the string-bowing tradition, which dictates performing a grace note and its principal note in a single bow stroke (typically under a slur), Boulez separates them in every instance. Thereby, in this way, the violinist is required to acquire a new coordination-based performance skill. Regardless of how briefly the grace note sounds, it is subject to the same dynamic rule as the principal note: an up-bow is softer than a down-bow. At the same time, the grace note can be preceded

³ Goldman, J. (2001). *Understanding Pierre Boulez's Anthèmes: 'Creating a labyrinth out of another labyrinth'* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Université de Montréal, p. 122.

Example 1. *Anthèmes I*, third variation, bars 46–64

by a note featuring any of the four dynamic variants and bowing directions. Another bowing configuration includes several successive strokes in the same direction—either exclusively up-bow or exclusively down-bow. Here, a dynamic alternative also exists: either with a change in nuance or with its retention. The most paradoxical combination appears in bar 54 (*Example 2*), featuring two consecutive up-bow movements—first at a *piano* nuance (the principal note) and then at *forte* (the grace note)—as this combination appears to “disrupt” neural pathways and blocks playing inertia.

Example 2. *Anthèmes I*, bar 54

To this, two further observations concerning the interaction of sound production and dynamics may be added. In an additional performance note, Boulez requests the violinist to lengthen loud sounds and shorten soft ones in accordance with the required intensity. It is worth noting that the parameter of bowing itself is entirely irregular.

Based on the foregoing, three rules of rhythmic-dynamic relationships in the third variation of *Anthèmes* can be derived:

1. Notes performed successively with alternating bow directions always conform to the rule “an up-bow is softer than a down-bow.”
2. Notes performed at a *forte* dynamic must sound longer than notes at a *piano* nuance.
3. Principal notes played with a down-bow are always performed at a *fortissimo* dynamic.

These rules clearly demonstrate Boulez’s consistently rational approach to shaping the dynamic-articulation profile. By managing the violinist’s actions, the composer models ataxia so authentically that the visual impression of the performance evokes suggestions of involuntary, spasmodic playing movements by the musician. By fully embracing the operational logic prescribed by Boulez, the violinist undoubtedly transforms their own motor apparatus.

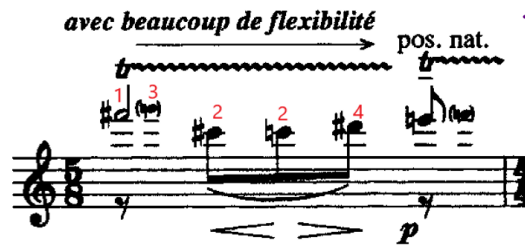
Specific Compositional Tasks

In *Anthèmes*, Menuhin notes, among other things, the scrupulously detailed and verified writing, characterizing it with the oxymoronic expression “Je n’ai jamais vu ‘stable’ instable” [2, p. 429]. Undoubtedly, Boulez provided grounds for such an ironic turn of phrase: for instance, his performance remark in bar 92, *assez irrégulier, mais rythmique*, also did not escape Menuhin’s attention. It seems that in the case of *Anthèmes I*, the abundance of performance indications in the score restricts the virtuoso performer’s freedom so severely that it oppresses their will, challenging the competition violinist with sophisticated “assignments.” In other words, the composer’s gesture in *Anthèmes* is primary in relation to the performer’s gesture.

One of the prominent characteristics of *Anthèmes* is the awkwardness of learning it. This is all the more surprising given that the piece’s repertoire of techniques and technical difficulties is limited and even quite traditional. It comprises *legato*,

staccato, *ricochet*, as well as trills, chords, and passagework. The timbral palette is enriched by the localized use of *glissando* and *sul ponticello* techniques. In *Anthèmes*, one will find neither microtonality nor extended techniques. Nevertheless, at times the piece resembles a complex puzzle, which is precisely what likely fascinates the violinist.

The pitch layer demands no less careful reading and analytical immersion. The issue of fingering selection lies not in the realm of performance preferences, as is typical—namely, string timbre, articulation quality, convenience, or beauty of intonation—but rather in the very possibility of realizing the musical text, its “playability.” Let us demonstrate this with a specific example. In the aforementioned third variation, there is a two-voice element consisting of a long trill and a three-note slurred motif. The continuity of the melodic line forces the performer to execute the trill using a fingering that is highly unusual in violin practice—skipping a finger. Meanwhile, the omitted finger must smoothly articulate the melody. This element is accompanied by Boulez’s performance note *avec beaucoup de flexibilité*, which, besides agogics, may also hint at the literal flexibility of the fingers (*Example 3*).



Example 3. *Anthèmes I*, bar 58 (fingering by the author)

What is this if not the formation of a new reflex? Regarding a similar awkwardness in the first variation, Yehudi Menuhin wrote: “il y a des doubles-notes presque impossibles à soutenir, déjà à la mesure 3 c’est compliqué – à moins que vous permettiez des petites interruptions dans le chant des voix.” [2, p. 430]. It is noteworthy that the described fragments are variable not only in terms of pitch and register. Crucially, this variability is observed at the level of fingering: on this occasion, the finger combination must be altered during the course of the trill.

Let us supplement the list of the puzzling characteristics of *Anthèmes* with another observation by Menuhin, this time concerning the second—pizzicato—variation of the piece (*Example 4*). Because of the relatively muted sonority of violin *pizzicato*, it is not a self-sufficient technique, despite its idiomatic character. In virtuoso pieces of the Romantic era, it is typically combined with other techniques. One need only recall a few examples of this technique’s application within the Romantic violin repertoire: the virtuoso variation from Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst’s arrangement of the Irish song *The Last Rose of Summer*, where the theme, presented *pizzicato*, is accompanied by an arpeggiated bow-drawn accompaniment; or fragments from Niccolò Paganini’s *Introduzione e Variazioni sul tema “Nel cor più non mi sento”*, derived from Giovanni Paisiello’s opera *La molinara*. Menuhin considers an essential condition for plucking sound production in the *pizzicato* variation of *Anthèmes* to be the search for a resonance resembling a “d’un ‘cimbalon’ [sic] hongrois.”⁴

Rapide ♩ = 156, très rythmique, rigide

The musical score for Example 4, *Anthèmes I*, second variation, is written in 16th notes. It begins with a tempo marking of "Rapide ♩ = 156, très rythmique, rigide". The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number (15, 22, 31, 36, 43). The first system (measures 15-21) is marked "pizz." and "mf", with a crescendo leading to "f sempre". The second system (measures 22-30) continues the "f" dynamic. The third system (measures 31-35) features a dynamic shift from "f" to "ff" and back to "f". The fourth system (measures 36-42) starts with "ff" and "f sempre". The fifth system (measures 43-49) is marked "Libre arco" and "ppp", with a glissando ("gliss. pas trop lent") and a simile ("sim.") marking. The score concludes with a final measure marked "pppp".

Example 4. *Anthèmes I*, second variation

⁴ Presumably, this refers to the Hungarian cimbalom.

Achieving a loud dynamic nuance at a fast tempo is evidently possible only through such an approach. The clarity of the *pizzicato* attack and the fullness of sonority depend on specific left-hand positional choices—namely, limiting the height of the position and selecting more resonant strings.

Conclusion

Menuhin famously bestowed the title of “sacred monster” [16, p. 148] upon the figure of the virtuoso. Applied to *Anthèmes*, it can be argued that romantic virtuosity—understood as “the boundless capacities of the man-machine, displaying ever newer and ever more fabulous technical possibilities without the slightest effort...” [17, p. 117]—is effectively negated, rendering the concept of stage prowess meaningless. The effect of “taming” the material, which simultaneously evokes sympathy and empathy from the audience, fails to occur. The once-prevalent notion of sublime virtuosity as the “fusion of the performer with the instrument”⁵ undergoes critical re-evaluation. The composer transcends the boundaries of the “sublime,” prompting the performer toward dissonant stage behavior. If it can no longer be justified through artistic flawlessness or audience sympathy, what, then, legitimizes the new virtuosity of *Anthèmes*?

The technical arguments presented above confirm the piece’s angularity and difficulty. Undoubtedly, performance complexities serve as a means to expand the domain of virtuosity. First, they foster an immersive experience into novel playing states. Second, they enrich the violinist’s reflex spectrum through rapid, frequent shifts in technique. These shifts are unpredictable and exceptionally difficult to memorize. Unsurprisingly, Menuhin doubted the piece would ever be performed from memory. Third, they offer the violinist a journey through surprises and discoveries. As Menuhin summarized, the piece demands “une agilité d’esprit et des doigts très grande” [2, p. 430]. Yet, the composer’s vision of his work appears entirely different. An audio recording of his masterclass reveals a striking naturalness.⁶ This is evidenced by his effortless humming of passages from a purely

⁵ VanderHamm, D. (2017). *The social construction of virtuosity: musical labor and the valuation of skill in the age of electronic media* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of North Carolina, p. 9. <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/downloads/47429922r?locale=en>

⁶ ClaudiaSchaerViolin. (2017, January 5). *Pierre Boulez discusses Anthèmes I, with violinist Claudia Schaer* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/shgFRqx2-sA?si=YKNpNqIvIoKEowdW>

instrumental part. The organic ease with which Boulez does this sets a new benchmark for virtuosity. It simultaneously instills hope that reaching this standard is indeed possible.

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