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The 'harpe organisée', 1720-1840 : rediscovering the lost pedal techniques on harps with a single-action pedal mechanism

Cleary, M.C.; Cleary M.C.

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Chapter 8

Double-pedalling on a double-action pedal harp

This thesis discusses historical pedal techniques on a single-action harp.¹ However, with the introduction of double-action pedal harps in 1810, the possibilities for certain pedal moves were still possible, while others became obsolete. This chapter considers the implications of multi-pedalling on the newer type of pedal harp.

The double-action pedal harp

The double-action pedal harp is tuned in C-flat major and each string can be shortened by one semitone twice. This means that each string produces three pitches, in total twenty-one possible pitches, as shown in fig. 8.2.² The pedals have also therefore three levels, a flat (b) level that is the upper position of the pedals, a middle level for natural (♮) pitches and the lower level for the sharp (#) pitches.

To fully exploit the tonal possibilities on the double-action pedal harp, a musical work must satisfy at least one of the following criteria:

- The three pitches on one string are used during the piece, without employing any enharmonic alternatives.
- The work moves upwards or downwards from one major or minor key more than seven times through the circle of fifths. For example a piece in A-flat major modulates at least to E major and upwards in the circle of fifths.
- The work contains a cluster chord which employs more three consecutive strings.

¹The word “harp” is used throughout this thesis to refer exclusively to a harp with a single-action pedal mechanism.

²Erard, *The Harp*, 15.

The following piece, shown in fig. 8.1, fulfils the above first criteria. This is *Auld Lang Syne*, A favorite Scotch Air with Brilliant Variations for the harp, Op. 13, by Frederic Charles Meyer.³ It was published by Cramer, Addison and Beale, London (Plate number 1993), probably in the late 1830's.



Figure 8.1: F. C. Meyer, *Auld Lang Syne*, Op. 13, 2

This work is unplayable, as published, on the single-action harp. The first crochet chord of the *Adagio* bar includes the three adjacent strings of E $\flat$, D $\flat$ and F $\flat$. On page 8, F $\sharp$ is required, so F string functions as F $\flat$, F $\natural$ and F $\sharp$ in the piece. This is the first criteria for identifying a work that is written exclusively for the post-1810 pedal harp.

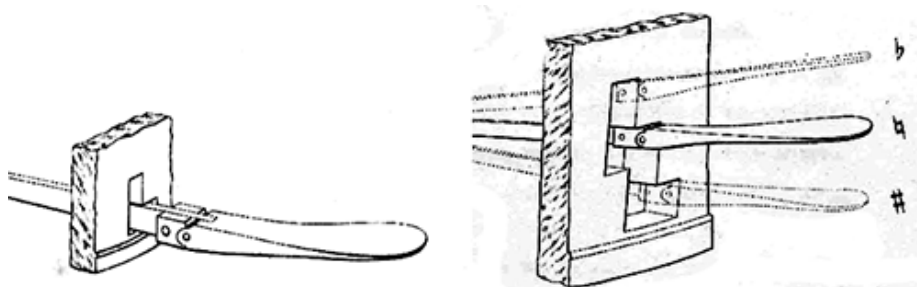


Figure 8.2: Erard, *The harp*, Plate V: single-action harp and Plate VI: double-action pedal harp.

The single-action harp

The single-action harp can be set-up in a variety of “base” keys from D-flat major to B-flat major and each string can be shortened by one semitone, producing two pitches from each string. The pedals have two levels, which can mean a flat, natural or sharp pitch, depending on the “base” set-up key of the harp. The range of keys, where every pitch of the scale is available, without using enharmonics, goes from one major or minor key to a maximum of seven steps away through the circle of fifths. For example, a harp set-up in the “base” key of E-flat major can play all keys up to E major, but cannot play in B major.

³Frederic Charles Meyer (?1780-?1840), harpist, composer and teacher in London, was the second son of the harpist, composer and teacher, Philippe Jacques Meyer, who wrote the two earliest dated methods for the harp.

Comparing pedal techniques

The harp pedal technique consisted mostly of simple moves that entailed pressing and releasing the pedals. The pedals could be fixed in the lower position, by inserting the pedals into the lower notch. However, fixing a pedal in a lower notch was primarily used to set-up the harp in the key of a piece.⁴

On the double-action pedal harp, with three levels for the pedals, fixing a pedal becomes necessary. This occurs not only when the harp is set-up in the key of a piece, but also for any accidentals during a piece. It is indeed possible to press a pedal from the flat (♭) position to the second, middle position, which is the natural (♮) level, and not fix the pedal in the second level notch. However, the pedal is then in an unstable position, as the pedal is not pressed fully against the ground, as is the case when the pedal at the lower sharp level.⁵

Other factors also come into play including the fact that pedals on the double-action pedal harp are heavier and can require more strength to simply press and hold down. On the single-action harp it entails no effort for the harpist to press and hold a pedal without fixing. Pedals on the double-action harp also become shorter, unlike the longer eighteenth-century pedals, visible in fig. 7.8 and 7.9.

8.1 Double-action pedal harp methods

Double-pedal moves on the single-action harp regularly entail folding away the G or C pedals, so other pedals can be moved together. On the right-hand side of the harp, double-peddalling most often involves moving the F and A pedals together. When the pedals are in the upper “open” position, the F and A strings sound as F[♮] and A[♭]; when the pedals are lowered the pitches become F[♯] and A[♮]. On the double-action pedal harp, when the F string sounds as F[♮], the F pedal is on the middle level and when the A string sounds as A[♭], the A pedal is on the upper level. F[♮] and A[♭] are not anymore on the same plane, as was the case on the single-action harp, so it would appear that this double-peddalling move is not anymore possible.

The author has found three descriptions of double-peddalling for the double-action pedal harp in the nineteenth century. This shows that the practice of double-peddalling continued and can be used in this repertoire. As described in an article in *The Harmonicon*, it remained a technique for the “expert” or professional players.⁶ See fig 8.3.

⁴See Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

⁵Double-action pedal technique is not the scope of this thesis. Further research would be required to research a separate historical pedal technique for the early double-action pedal harps where fixing would occur less often than is used today by modern harpists.

⁶I. P., “On Harps,” *The Harmonicon*, 1831, 30–31. The author’s name is simply signed “I. P.”. It could be John Parry (1776–1851), Welsh instrumentalist, composer and writer.

In the key of A minor ascending, the 6th and 7th are made sharp, thus :



It so happens that the two pedals required are next to one another on the harp, and an expert player will press both with the right foot at once ; but the safest mode is, to fix the F# at the commencement of the bar, and then go to the G# pedal, but should the notes descend again immediately, thus :



To press both pedals at once will be the best mode.

Figure 8.3: I. P., *The Harmonicon*, 1831, 31.

F. C. Meyer, *New Treatise*, 1825

Frederic Charles Meyer's method describes double-pedalling and explains the indications found in his scores. He writes:

"Sometimes two Pedals are required to be put down together, the following signature is then used, Ex. [D# C#] [E# G#] which implies that the Pedals should be pressed down together but not fixed. in the second Ex. the foot must be places across the three Pedals. E. F. & G but if the F is already sharp, it is of no consequence."⁷

T. Labarre, *Méthode complète*, 1842

At the end of Chapter XXVII of Théodore Labarre's *Méthode complète*, there is this short paragraph with a musical example.

"Il y a de certains cas on l'on appuie à la fois deux pédales de même côte l'une avec le talon, l'autre avec le bout du pied. Il faut avoir soin de laisse remonter le pied immédiatement, car, en abaissant le La^b et la Fa[#] , vous avez nécessairement abaissé aussi le Sol[#] , et le Sol qui suit la tierce La^b Fa[#] , doit être naturel. Quant à ce qui regarde la tierce Ré^b Si^b, on ne rieque pas d'abaissier l'Ut, parceque cette pédale étant

⁷Meyer, *A New Treatise*, 82; Review of F.C. Meyer's method is found in Richard Mackenzie Bacon, "The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review," 1825, 249-50.

fixée à la première entaille, elle ne se trouve pas au niveau de celles qui doivent agir.”⁸



Figure 8.4: Labarre, *Méthode complète*, 45.

The musical example shows a raising scale in thirds, where the passage from the second quaver to the third quaver requires double-pedalling on the F and A pedals with the right foot. The movement from F[♮] and A[♭] to F[♯] and A[♮] are not on the same plane as the F pedal moves from the natural (♮) middle level to the third sharp level (♯), while the A pedal moves from the upper position (♭) to the natural (♮) middle level. The G pedal is fixed in the natural (♮) middle level beforehand. When moving the F and A pedals like this, the G pedal is also touched by the weight of the whole foot over the pedals. For this reason, Labarre advises the harpist to release the pedals immediately as the fifth quaver contains a G[♮].⁹

A. Prumier, *Méthode*, 1865

Antoine Prumier’s *Méthode* includes five musical examples for multi-pedalling.¹⁰ The first two extracts are similar to Labarre’s instructions and examples, but are in a different key. He then follows with a further three phrases and this explanation:

“Dans cet exemple [exemple 6] il faut, au 3^e. temps de la 1^o. mesure appuyer le pied droit (toujours en poussant) sur les 3 pédales FA, SOL, LA, le talon sur le FA et la pointe du pied un peu élevée, de telle façon que le talon fasse descendre la pédale du FA tout à fait en bas pour le ♯ et que la pointe du pied fasse descendre la pédale du LA au ♮, il faut ensuite levée le pied pour laisser remonter les deux pédales.”¹¹

⁸Théodore Labarre, *Méthode complète pour la harpe contenant les notions élémentaires etc, suivies de 20 exercices en forme d’études*, op. 118 (Paris, 1842), 49: “There are some cases when one presses two pedals at a time on the same side, one with the heel, the other with the toe. One must be careful to raise up the foot immediately because, lowering the F and the A, you also lower the G by default, and the G that follows the third A and F, must be natural. Concerning the third D and B, there is no risk to lower the C, because this pedal fixed in the first notch, so it is not at the level of those [pedals] that will be moved.”

⁹Ann Fierens, an expert on nineteenth-century double-action pedal harps, has most graciously tried out these pedal moves on her Erard double-action pedal harp. She says they are “surprising easy”. Email correspondence, December 15, 2015. I thank for her involvement in this pedal research.

¹⁰Antoine Prumier, *Méthode de harpe à double mouvement*, op. 76 (Paris: Brandus & Dufour, 1865), 23. Antoine Prumier (1794-1868), French harpist, teacher and composer.

¹¹*ibid.*, 23: “In this example, the right foot must be pressed down (always pushing) on the 3 pedals, F, G, A, on the third beat of the first bar, the heel on the F and the toe raised a little, in order that the heel can go entirely down to the sharp [notch] and that the toe of the foot can lower the A pedal to the



Figure 8.5: Double-action pedal harp: pedals set-up to play $E^\flat$, $F^\sharp$, $G^\sharp$, $A^\flat$. The pedals $F^\sharp$ and $A^\flat$ are not on the same plane.



Figure 8.6: Double-action pedal harp: pedals set-up to play $E^\flat$, $F^\sharp$, $G^\sharp$, $A^\sharp$. The pedals $F^\sharp$ and $A^\sharp$ are not on the same plane.

He continues:

“Dans les exemples 7 et 8, c’est encore le talon qui doit appuyer sur la pédale la plus rapprochée du harpiste, c’est à dire sur le *MI*# dans le 7^e exemple et sur le *SI*# dans le 8^e, mais l’autre note étant # aussi, le pied doit appuyer de façon à faire descendre entièrement la pédale qui doit produire l’autre #.”¹²

Prumier’s instructions continue by stating that no horizontal movement of the feet should occur, in order to not fix the pedals. He also suggests an alternative to double-pedalling and suggests to use two feet on one side of the harp. Backofen¹³ and Prumier are the only two harp methods known that suggest to use the left foot for the pedals on the right of the harp and vice versa. He also warns that the harp can slip and suggests to put some pieces of chamois under the two rear feet of the harp to stabilise the instrument. Modern harps use rubber to prevent the harp slipping.



Figure 8.7: Prumier, *Méthode*, 23.

8.2 Double-action pedal harp repertoire

The following musical examples from the nineteenth-century double-action pedal harp repertoire and all works by F. C. Meyer, show that double-pedalling was an inherent part of the harp technique.

F. C. Meyer’s *Fantasia and Variations on the Favorite Scotch Air, Saw ye my Father*, Op. 24

Fantasia and Variations on the Favorite Scotch Air, Saw ye my Father, Op. 24 (Pl. 1995), is by F. C. Meyer. It is difficult to date this piece to establish whether it was

natural [notch], then the foot immediately releases the two pedals.”

¹²ibid., 23: “In examples 7 and 8, it is again the heel that pushes on the pedal closest to the harpist, that is the E# in the 7th example and on the B# in the 8th, but the other note was already # too, the foot ought to push in a way that the other note also becomes #.” He means the G# in example 7 and D# in example 8.

¹³Backofen, *Anleitung*, 1827, 35. See section 3.4.4.1.

composed after the invention of the double-action pedal harp around 1810. Meyer published other pieces between 1813 and 1817.¹⁴ The *Fantasia* was published by the publishing house Cramer, Addison & Beale of 201, Regent Street and 67, Conduit Street, which was founded in 1824.¹⁵ The *Variations brillantes, pour le piano forte, sur la ronde favorite "Je vends des scapulaires"*, Op. 12, by Frédéric Chopin, written in 1832, was published by Cramer *et al* around 1834 and the plate number of this work is 1251. As music went out of fashion quickly at this time, it could be assumed that the work was published after Chopin's Op. 12, therefore after 1832.

The score is published for a double-action pedal harp as can be seen by one printed pedal marking, G $\flat$, in bar 4 of Variation 3. A score for the single-action harp would not include a G pedal marking, as this harp does usually not have the pitch of G $\flat$ (F $\sharp$ is, of course, feasible).¹⁶

The *Fantasia and Variations*, Op. 24, by Meyer is in the key of E-flat major and seems conceived perfectly for the single-action harp. Actually there is nothing in this work, as so much of the harp repertoire up to 1840, that exploits the new keys and modulations that were possible on the new Erard double-action pedal harps.



Figure 8.8: F. C. Meyer, *Fantasia and Variations on the Favorite Scotch Air*, Variation 3.

If a harpist plays this piece on an Erard double-action pedal harp and follows the pedal markings printed in the score, then double-pedalling on the F and A pedals with the right foot occurs in bar 2. The asterisk and bracket under F $\sharp$ and A $\sharp$ points to the note at the bottom of page 5 of the piece stating: "To be put down together". The G pedal is not folded away, as bar 4 has a notated G $\flat$, which is played as such

¹⁴D. W. Krummel, Alan Tyson, and William Hawes, eds., *Music Entries at Stationers' Hall, 1710-1818: From Lists Prepared for William Hawes, D.W. Krummel and Alan Tyson and from Other Sources* (Routledge, 2016), 675, 682, 687.

¹⁵Simon McVeigh, Jerald C. Graue, and Thomas Milligan, "Cramer: (2) Johann Baptist," *Grove Music Online*, n.d., <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/44589pg2#S44589.2>.

¹⁶An exception is Spohr's WoO 27/28, as the harp is set-up with the "base" key of D-flat major.

because the composer/publisher has indicated after the G_b to press the G pedal down to the natural level making a $G^\sharp$ for bar 5.

From the perspective of a single-action harpist, I would simply play the G_b as $F^\sharp$ in bar 4, using the F pedal which my foot is already over from bars 2 and 3. The G pedal move and marking seems superfluous. If the piece is a pre-1810 work, then it is my opinion that the G pedal is the editor's later addition, making the work appear as a piece for the new double-action pedal harp. However, the double-peddalling markings indicate that the piece could have been composed before 1810, as the double-pedal instructions point to an earlier style of composition.

F. C. Meyer's *A Favorite March and Pastorale*, Op. 31

In Meyer's *A Favorite March and Pastorale*, Op. 31, page 7, there is a similar passage where double-peddalling with the F and A could be possible, but the pedal markings show that the F and A are intended to be pedalled separately. This piece contains written indications however for double-peddalling with the E and G pedals.¹⁷

This publication is an example of a transition period in pedal technique, where indications for both types of pedal harp are found within one piece. The old approach (D. P.: $F^\sharp$ and $A^\sharp$) is combined with the new possibility of playing the notated G_b with the G string and using the G pedal.

F. C. Meyer's *Serenade Du Troubadour*, No. 2

The diminished seventh chord on $F^\sharp$ was instantly accessible on the single-action harp using double-peddalling with the right foot on the F and A pedals. Meyer uses this same chord in music for the double-action pedal harp by employing double-peddalling with the E and G pedals.



Figure 8.9: F. C. Meyer, *Serenade Du Troubadour*, No. 2, 6

If the F pedal on a double-action pedal harp is fixed on the lowest level, sounding as $F^\sharp$, then the $E^\sharp$ and $G^\sharp$ pedals can be easily moved together to make $E^\sharp$ and $G^\sharp$. The chromatic sequence shown in the second bar of fig. 8.9 shows $G^\sharp$ resolving to $A^\sharp$ and $E^\sharp$ resolving to $F^\sharp$. This is the same as A_b resolving to $A^\sharp$ and F_b resolving to $F^\sharp$, which is a commonly found in the single-action harp repertoire.¹⁸ This work is in D major and is published for the double-action pedal harp, but is completely playable on a single-action harp with a “base” set-up key of E-flat major.

¹⁷See below, F. C. Meyer's *Serenade Du Troubadour*, No. 2.

¹⁸Petrini, *Folies d'Espagne*, Op. 28, no. 11. See section 4.3.1.2.

Meyer employs this same pedal solution several times in his pieces, like in his *A Favorite March and Pastorale*, Op. 31 (Plate number 1997), which has E# and G# double-pedalling on pages 1 and 4. Another piece is *Auld Robin Gray, Divertimento for the harp* (Plate number 1024), which indicates E# and G# double-pedalling on page 5. This was advertised in *The Harmonicon* in February 1827. Both of these pieces are also completely playable on the single-action harp.

F. C. Meyer's *Adagio Patetico and Waltz of the Black Forest*, Op. 26

Double-pedalling with the left foot is possible on both pedal harps. Moving the D and B pedals from flat to natural position is still possible as the D $\flat$ and B $\flat$ are on the same plane on both harps, but was rarely used, except by Spohr. The *Adagio Patetico and Waltz of the Black Forest*, Op. 26 (Pl.1999), instructs the harpist to use this pedalling on page 2. This piece is written for the double-action pedal harp, as it uses the *synonyme* effect,¹⁹ where two strings B $\flat$ and A# are used to play one pitch.



Figure 8.10: Labarre, *Méthode complète*, 49

It is not known if this piece was composed before the invention of the double-action pedal harp or afterwards. It could be assumed that the work is later.

8.3 Double-pedalling in the twentieth century

Double-pedalling is still considered an exception to the modern harp technique. One of the most important harp methods of the twentieth century discusses double-pedalling and gives a musical example.²⁰ Peter Eagle, Professor of harp at the Indiana School of Music, Bloomington from 1965-81, taught his pupils double-pedalling and used multi-pedalling techniques extensively in his own performances.²¹

Most jazz harpists move at least two or three pedals on one side of the harp.²² Classical harps who use double-pedalling include Josh Layne, who wears soft leather

¹⁹The *synonyme* effect means employing two notes to sound at the same pitch. In the nineteenth century it was compared to the strumming of a mandolin. It is like a Baroque *trillo*.

²⁰Renié, *Méthode*, 7, 81. Henriette Renié (1875-1956), French harpist, composer and teacher.

²¹I thank Kim Glennie de Libero of Las Vegas for this insight. Peter Eagle (1910-1988), harpist, teacher and designer of Venus harps.

²²Park Stickney, American/Swiss jazz harpist.

shoes with a very low heel.²³ The French harpist, Pauline Haas, pedals in her socks, with her feet off the ground and uses double-pedal techniques.²⁴

When the author began researching historical pedalling techniques, she re-read Salzedo's bi-lingual method of 1921. This method does not discuss double-pedalling but Salzedo devised internationally recognised symbols for pedalling and most extended techniques on the harp.²⁵

Salzedo describes the act of pedalling in a poetic way, showing how pedalling is a musical act and not a mechanical one. This is often lost in current harp teaching.

"This *new musicalness* (infinitely more in harmony with the elemental vibrations of the Universe), finds in the harp, and in the harp alone, a perfectly responsive medium, thanks to the use of the pedals, whose multifold combinations open an illimitable field both to science and to fantasy in harmony; thanks also to the tone-effects, so diverse and as yet so little known, which spring naturally from the *direct* contact established between the sensitiveness of the executant's touch and the vibration of the strings producing the sounds."²⁶

"Every unnotching of the pedals is scrupulously indicated in accord with the rhythms of the musical expression. By conscientiously taking note of this, one will acquire two things important in themselves and necessary to interpret faithfully the musical thought. First of all, the pedals will cease to occasion special solicitude, and thus the needless worry they cause will disappear. Then, also, owing to their correspondence with the musical accentuation (aesthetically and sonorously considered) the movements of the feet will no longer be left to chance. The action of the pedals can thus be controlled in a manner both unnoticeable and silent (a most important matter), and the ensemble of the player's gestures will constitute a **whole** indissolubly harmonious and more essentially artistic."²⁷

²³Josh Layne, Canadian harpist and composer. He uses "Jazz dance shoes made by Capezio, with a thin sole", email correspondence, August 17, 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtkZGMR4eWo. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfd7jt1whJE>. I thank Prof. Robert Adelson for pointing out these videos to me.

²⁴Pauline Haas, French harpist. www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NOQqCzbw1w.

²⁵Salzedo, *L'Etude Moderne*.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 3: "Cette *musicalité nouvelle* (infiniment plus en accord avec les vibrations élémentales de l'Univers), trouve dans la harpe—et dans la harpe seule—son médium parfaitement adapté, grâce au jeu des pédales dont les multiples combinaisons offrent un champ illimité à la science et à la fantaisie harmonique; grâce aussi aux sonorités si diverses et encore si peu exploitées, qui découlent naturellement du contact *direct* établi entre la sensibilité tactile de l'exécutant, et les vibrations des cordes productrices des sons."

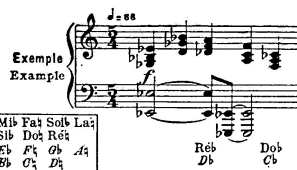
²⁷*Ibid.*, 4: "Chaque déclanchement de pédale est scrupuleusement indiqué en accord avec les rythmes de l'expression musicale. En en tenant consciencieusement compte, on acquerrera doux choses importantes en soi et nécessaires pour interpréter fidèlement la pensée musicale. D'abord, les pédales cesseront d'être une préoccupation particulière, ce qui fera disparaître l'effroi qu'illogiquement elles causent. Puis, du fait de leur correspondance avec les accentuations musicales (esthétiquement et sonoremment considérées), les mouvements des jambes et des pieds ne seront plus livrés au hasard. Ainsi, l'action des pédales pourra s'effectuer (ce qui est de toute première importance) de façon aussi

SIGNS IN USAGE AND NEW
SIGNS FOR THE METHOD OF
WRITING FOR THE HARP.

(The Metronomic tempi indicated at the head of the given examples, are intended to denote the rate of speed at which each effect appears at its best.)

Ce signe, mis en tête d'un morceau, ou d'un passage, indique l'ARMATURE HARPISTIQUE (*la disposition des pédales*).

This sign, at the head of a piece, or of a passage, indicates the HARPISTIC KEY-SIGNATURE (*the arrangement of the pedals*).



La#
A#

pour indiquer une pédale.
to indicate a pedal.

Mi#
E#

pour indiquer qu'une pédale appartenant au jeu du pied droit devra être actionnée avec le pied gauche (et vice versa).
to indicate that a pedal on the right side must be moved by the left foot (and vice versa).

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{Re}\# - \text{h} \\ \text{Do}\# - \text{h} \end{bmatrix}$$

pour actionner deux pédales avec le même pied. Ce mouvement, qui ne peut être employé que pour des durées très brèves, est conseillable seulement lorsque l'autre pied ne pourrait atteindre l'une des pédales, ou lorsque trois pédales devraient être actionnées simultanément.

$$\begin{bmatrix} D^\# - \frac{1}{2} \\ C^\# - \frac{1}{2} \end{bmatrix}$$

to move two pedals with the same foot. This motion—impracticable excepting for very brief durations—is advisable only when the other foot cannot reach one of the pedals, or when three pedals have to be moved simultaneously.

Sol# _____
G# _____

pour actionner une pédale sans la mettre dans le cran (le pied ne quittant pas la pédale).
to move a pedal without putting it in the notch (keeping the foot on the pedal).

Do#
C#

pour actionner une pédale pendant un point d'arrêt.
to move a pedal during a hold.

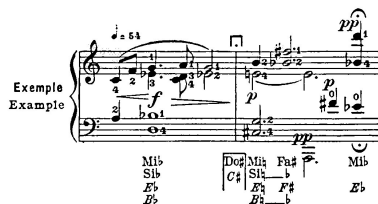


Figure 8.11: Salzedo, *l'Étude*, 7

inapercevable que silencieuse, et l'ensemble des mouvements de l'instrumentiste constituera un **tout** indissolublement harmonieux et plus essentiellement artistique."

