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

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Cover Page



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Conclusion

In 2004, I began working and researching the music for harp by Louis Spohr. I recorded several of his works with my husband Davide Monti in 2007. (Arparla, Davide Monti and Maria Christina Cleary, *Louis Spohr: So mach' die Augen zu/.allora chiudi gli occhi*, STR 33848 (2009)). The music provided me with technical challenges and I learnt every day from playing on my original eighteenth-century single-action harp. When I began to learn Spohr's Opp. 115 and 118 in 2014, the only two works by Spohr that I had not learnt or performed, I found certain passages impossible to play, if my foot operated only one pedal at a time, on one side of the harp.

From the scores, it seemed as if Spohr was asking the harpist to move at least two pedals at a time. Knowing that Backofen's method, *Anleitung zum Harfenspiel* (1801) had written about double-peddalling, which is simplified by folding away one pedal in order to operate two non-adjacent pedals at the same time, I began to look for other historical sources on pedalling. From this research on double-peddalling, I also found that pedalling was a movement of the whole foot completely off the floor and that most pedals were not fixed. Pedals were moved as much as possible at the moment where an accidental is indicated in the music and then released immediately.

I identified nine harp treatises and methods that discuss double- and triple-peddalling, listed in Appendix I, section I.2. I have identified five pieces for harp, where the composer instructs the harpist to press more than one pedal at a time: four where double-peddalling is required and one sonata by d'Alvimare where triple-peddalling is required with both feet simultaneously, listed in Appendix I, section I.3. These historical sources show a technique where the whole foot moves two or three pedals together.

I re-visited the complete extant works by Spohr for harp and analysed his use of multi-peddalling techniques. Spohr not only employs the techniques described in the above sources, but his works also require that the harpist uses the heel and toe to operate two pedals independently. I have now classified thirty-seven core moves that are possible on the harp and that are found in Spohr's music. These moves derive from my own artistic research, combined with the historical theoretical evidence. These pedal techniques underline his compositional style.

Spohr composed for harp in a way that the harpist has usually at least one bar's rest each time a pedal needs to be folded or unfolded.

I investigated images of harps and harpists in the act of pedalling and singled out several portraits where the harpist's foot is completely off the floor and placed over a pedal, or perhaps two pedals.

I looked for historical descriptions of any pedalling techniques. As the single-action and double-action harps co-existed for over thirty years, I reviewed the historical sources of the later harps to see if multi-pedalling survived on this instrument. I discovered that some double-pedal moves remained, while some new ones were introduced, due to the different organisation of the pedals.

The research is important for several aspects of harp research. For pedal harpists, the pedals are the most important part of playing, as they produce more than half of the notes on the single-action harp and two-thirds of the notes on the double-action pedal harp. No other comprehensive study on harp pedalling exists.

This research adds to any past studies on harp treatises and methods, identifying here over one hundred books for learning the pedal harps. The music published in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries may look easy on the page. However, a small segment of the repertoire was music for *virtuosi*, composed and played by professionals who developed extraordinary playing techniques including pedal techniques.

Questions from harpists, restorers and organologists regarding pedal noises are addressed in the study. When historical pedalling is used, the important action is a simple up and down movement. Fixing pedals is a rare foot action and is used occasionally and only in exceptional cases. The mystery regarding the lack of pedal markings in harp music up to the middle of the nineteenth century is explained by the pedal technique. Pedal markings are obsolete for tonal repertoire if the feet movements become the musical gesture and work with the hands. Just as much as the hands move when reading a score, the feet "read" the accidentals in the score and act upon them.

The music for harp by Spohr and his compositional style can be viewed in a completely new light, when pedalling is taken into account. A chronology of his works can be delineated by his increasing demands for more and more pedal moves, combinations of the heel and toe operating independently from each other. For any harpist, Spohr's music becomes much easier to play when multi-pedalling techniques are used.

As I have been able to identify that double-pedalling did not die out with the demise of the single-action harp, and continued into the double-action pedal harp repertoire, these techniques can be applied today, on any pedal harp. The techniques are feasible and simplify harmonic modulations for any harpist. Improvising becomes easier.

This research attempts to show the musicality of multi-pedalling, how pedalling is an inherent part of the musical gesture and not a mechanical obligation. The

physicality of the pedal moves becomes of upmost importance, creating tensions and resolutions that mirror the musical line. The findings here can add to the academic field of gesture and music.

The methodology for this study combines distinct historical sources with artistic practice to arrive at a musical performance. This multifaceted approach means that theoretical works (harp treatises and methods) and pieces, where pedalling is described in words, are coupled with non-verbal testimonies, which are the musical ones found hidden in the score. This artistic project was carried out while playing the harp. Without this practical component, it would appear that there are no historical records of moving the heel and toe independently while pedalling. The investigations into shoes and historical portraits give few definite answers presently, but point towards some fundamental aspects of historical pedalling, like lifting the whole foot off the floor.

The most surprising discovery for me was the historical evidence that double-pedalling continued into the Romantic harp repertoire. The new double-pedal possibilities substituted the older ones, sometimes achieving the same harmonic result but using different pedals. As much as my research is an expansion of Mike Parker's research, I hope that the many issues that I have affronted here can be used for further research.

More examples of multi-pedalling may be found in newly identified harp methods, treatises and pieces. In this study, I identify Spohr as being the only composer to use the toe and heel independently and to such an epitome of technique. However, other composers may have also used these moves. Further research is required into the music specifically by Krumpholtz, Backofen and d'Alvimare.

