An improvisatory approach to nineteenth-century music

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Chapter 7. Improvisatory timing

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the phenomenon of flexibility in timing will be discussed as a manifestation of an improvisatory approach to the score. In rhetorical terms, such flexibility is an expression of the varietas-idea. Following the taxonomy of Quintilian, it belongs to the part of rhetoric that deals with the actual delivery: *pronuntiatio*. In chapter 4.2, bel canto ornamentation was presented as the 'tip of an interpretational iceberg': it is part of an expressional complex that, among many other things, includes timing. Thus timing can also be seen as an instance of what Ernest Ferand called 'relative improvisation', though it should also be noted that this stretches the concept beyond his intentions. On an online platform like YouTube, many commenters on videos of early recordings use the word 'improvisation' to describe the impression such performances make on them; in many cases it is not added ornamentation or other pitch-related changes to the score that arouse the use of this word, but the variety in timing performers allow themselves. Indeed, in the article by David Dolan and others that was mentioned earlier (→ chapter 2.1), an 'improvisatory state of mind' is primarily associated with this phenomenon.

This chapter explores what I referred to in chapter 6.9 as 'immanent' tempo. It will be argued that, in order to incorporate today a conception of timing that is inspired by nineteenth-century music-making, it is not enough to describe it in terms of deviations from a mathematically strict performance of a score. Indeed, the latter would entail a conception of transcendental tempo instead of the immanent notion of tempo that was suggested in chapter 6. First I will focus on flexibility 'within' the pulse in accompanying arpeggiation patterns in songlike piano music. It is a case study that will show one important aspect of Romantic timing: the avoidance of a rigid 'micro-pulse'. The phenomenon will also be studied with respect to its implications for piano technique. Second, I will discuss more encompassing issues such as the historical *tempo rubato* and overall flexibility in timing. In addition to written sources, historical recordings will play an important part in this discussion, since they provide valuable information that no book or method can offer. Since the purpose of this study is to enrich modern performances with insights gained from nineteenth-century musical praxis, the chapter includes discussions about how a historical approach to timing can be applied to music-making.

During the past two decades, the study of early recordings has become a major field of musicological interest. Early examples are the books of Robert Philip: *Early Recordings and Musical Style* (1992) and later *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (2004).[477] From 2004-2009 the

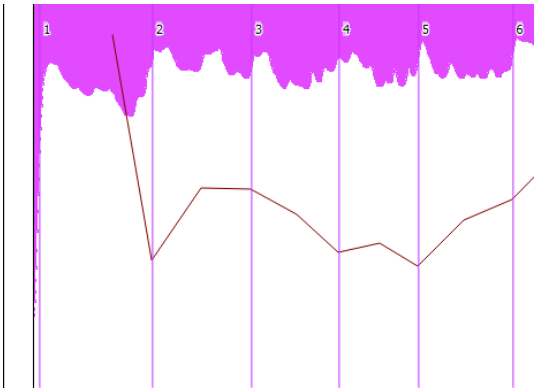
[477] Philip, R.: *Early Recordings and Musical Style*. Cambridge, 1992; *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*. New Haven, 2004.

research program of the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) took place. A landmark study is *Beyond the Score* (2013) by Nicholas Cook, the director of CHARM.[478] Much attention has been paid to early recordings of piano music: not only was the piano recorded in abundance from the very beginnings of the acoustical recording era, but in addition, the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed a competing storage system for performed piano music, the piano roll. In his book *Off the Record* from 2012, Neal Peres da Costa investigates the performance habits of early pianism as it comes to us in early recordings and piano rolls;[479] in 2010, Sigurd Slåttebrekk and Tony Harrison published the website 'Chasing the Butterfly' that describes their research project devoted to the recreation of the 1903 acoustical recordings of Edvard Grieg.[480] This website also provides an overview of lessons that can be learned from early piano recordings in general. In her dissertation entitled 'Romanticizing Brahms', Anna Scott closely examined recordings of Johannes Brahms's piano music by some of the last students of Clara Schumann.[481]

7.2 Immanent and transcendental tempo

Within the limitations of the recording technique of the earliest times, and especially of the piano roll, the most reliable information we can gather from early recordings concerns tempo and timing.[482] A modern listener can be struck by the excessive *rubato* and the structural arpeggiation and dislocation that can be heard on many early piano recordings, ways of playing that have a highly improvisatory effect. In fact, of all musical parameters that are open to on-the-spot decisions by the performer of scored music, it is the timing that most clearly can evoke the association with improvisation in the minds of listeners. In most research so far, these irregularities in timing are described in terms of deviations from an absolutely regular, hypothetical tempo that serves as a reference. A typical diagram of Sonic Visualiser, computer software that was developed by CHARM, shows tempo deviations in a graph, for instance a duration diagram. In the diagram shown below, the horizontal axis represents the playing time, and the vertical axis the amount of time needed for one beat in the score (the duration). The black curve thus gives an indication of the tempo fluctuations, with a rising curve showing a slowing down on the recording. The black graph is projected on a pink diagram, showing the dynamics as a waveform and the corresponding bar lines in the score, both as a function of time. In an absolutely regular performance, the curve would be a straight horizontal line, and the distances between the 'bar lines' would be equal.

[478] Cook, N.: *Beyond the Score.* Oxford, 2013.
[479] Peres da Costa, N.: *Off the Record.* New York, 2012.
[480] www.chasingthebutterfly.no
[481] Scott, A.: *Romanticizing Brahms* (diss., unpublished). Leiden, 2014 (http://hdl.handle.net/1887/29987)
[482] As for piano rolls, not every system could record the precise tempo.



Example 7.2.1: Sonic Visualiser duration diagram of Eugen d'Albert's performance of Schubert's Impromptu op. 90 no. 3 (beginning).[483]

This is a sensible way to describe tempo fluctuations objectively. At the same time, however, this procedure draws the recording from the past into our present horizon; today, a completely regular tempo is not just a mathematical construct, but a reflection of how many musicians actually tend to think about musical tempo. It is an example of 'colonising the past'[484] that recalls the way how the medieval church modes were often described after their 'rediscovery' in the nineteenth century, namely in terms of the then current major / minor tonality. The modes were described as if they are variants of the major or minor scales, and were characterised by their deviations from the 'ordinary' scales, resulting in expressions such as the 'dorian sixth' or the 'lydian fourth'. No doubt such characterisations were (and still are) useful for practice, but as a matter of fact they are anachronistic and therefore they certainly influence our view of the historical modes themselves. Likewise, describing early tempo and dislocation in terms of a modern tempo conception might reveal only a partial truth. It assumes what I called a 'transcendental' tempo: tempo as an extra-musical standard that can be measured and that can serve as a point of reference.

When one aims to copy a performance as precisely as possible, as Slåttebrekk and Harrison did, this application of a modern tempo conception might be the best thing to do; however, when the goal is to explore the improvisatory approach to the score in early recordings, with the intention of enriching music-making, it is worth trying to understand the early performances from within. This involves searching for what I have called an 'immanent' tempo conception.

The opposition of transcendental and immanent tempo recalls the distinction between *temps* [time] and *durée* [duration] in the work of the French philosopher and Nobel Prize winner Henri Bergson, in which *temps* is associated with mathematical time, often imagined spatially, whereas

[483] Accompanying online resources to Cook, N.: op cit., media file 03.01.
[484] Cf. Fidom, H.: *Muziek als installatiekunst* (Orgelpark Research Reports, volume 2). Third edition: Amsterdam, 2020; §43.

durée connects with the intuitive experience of time. It is not unlikely that a general sensitivity to an 'old' and a 'new' conception of time / tempo was in the air at the beginning of the twentieth century. Bergson was almost a cult figure whose fame by far outreached the academic world. His lectures attracted a large and diverse audience that included, in the words of the Dutch writer and chronicler of his time Frans Erens, 'zeer veel meisjes van vijftien à zestien jaar, burgerjuffrouwen, die concierges leken, eerzame burgers, die mij winkelbedienden of caféhouders toeschenen' [many fifteen or sixteen years old girls, middle class Misses who looked like wardens, respectable citizens who could be shop-assistants or café owners].[485] Erens suggests that such people probably didn't understand Bergson's ideas, but it is tempting to suspect that these appealed to many who felt uncomfortable with the relentlessness of modern times and the loss of *durée*. The fact that the experience of time is a theme in three ground-shaking novels which were published within a few years (Proust's series *À la recherche du temps perdu,* finished in 1922, Joyce's *Ulysses*, also published in 1922, and Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* from 1924) can hardly be a coincidence.

Slåttebrekk and Harrison pose the question why so little knowledge about early recorded performances like Grieg's permeates modern playing, and presume that the strangeness of the early performance style might be an obstacle here.[486] Perhaps a part of the answer can also be found in the fact that the notion of transcendental tempo leads to a description of the 'outside' of the music, like chords being arpeggiated, hands not playing together, tempo being highly flexible, etc., without supporting these descriptions with respect to their musical motivations. In fact, we are facing here a situation that is similar to the reluctance of modern singers to add ornamentation in bel canto. Describing the differences with a typical modern performance is one thing, but to put this knowledge into practice is quite another. In bel canto ornamentation, as in extempore timing, a musician cannot do without the inner musical motivations. A discussion of these motivations will be incomparably more speculative than a Sonic Visualiser graph, but it seems to be inevitable.

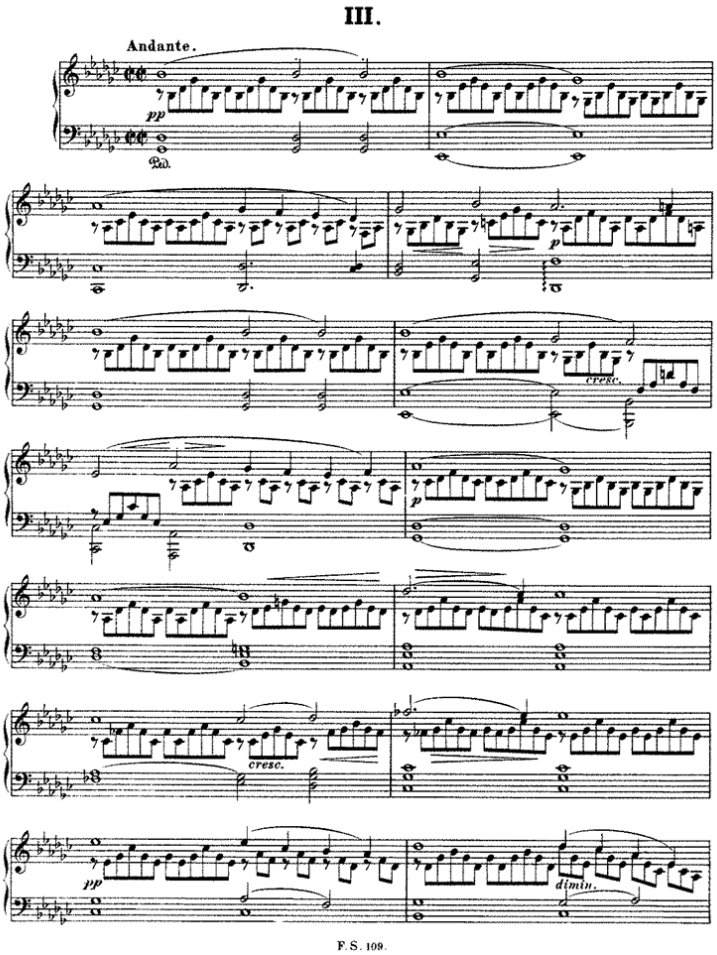
7.3 Timing in accompanying arpeggiations in Schubert's *Impromptu* op. 90 no. 3

In the third chapter of his book *Beyond the Score*, Cook analyses several recorded performances of Schubert's *Impromptu* op. 90 no. 3, some of them piano rolls. One of the most startling ones is by Liszt's star pupil Eugen d'Albert: the graph quoted in example 7.2.1 is based upon this recording. Cook's analysis focuses on tempo fluctuations and their connection with phrasing.[487] In this section, I will interpret the fluctuations as the manifestations of an immanent tempo by focusing on what

[485] Erens, F.: *Vertelling en mijmering.* Roermond, 1922; 124. (Thanks to Klaas Trapman for pointing out this description to me.)
[486] http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no/?page_id=207
[487] Cook, N.: op. cit., chapter 3.

makes d'Albert's tempo flexibility possible – that is, by focusing on what happens within the pulse, notably the accompanying patterns.

In order to create a graph like the one mentioned above, the researcher synchronises the score-based information and the visual representation of the acoustical signal by tapping the pulse on the computer keyboard while listening to the recording.[488] This method has a few consequences that are adverse to the goal that is pursued in this chapter. First, in the case of dislocation or arpeggation it might be problematic to indicate the exact beginning of a beat. Second, the result of this procedure is discontinuous: even apart from the first objection, it only gives information about the time distances between isolated points. The continuity suggested by the curve in the graph is in fact hypothetical.



Example 7.3.1: F. Schubert, Impromptu op. 90 no. 3 (beginning)

[7.3 #1 Schubert: *Impromptu* op. 90 no. 3, Eugen d'Albert (1864-1932); piano roll 1905[489]]

[488] http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/analysing/p9_1.html
[489] Dal Segno 022 [2008]. Quoted in: Cook, N.: op. cit.

The recording that formed the basis of the graph mentioned above is a transfer by Dal Segno Records of a piano roll that d'Albert made for Welte-Mignon in 1905. Following the duration graph, one would expect that the speed of the accompanying figures in the right hand varies dramatically. Strange enough, this seems not to be the case with d'Albert. It is a matter of a distinct stratification in his playing: the melody seems to move almost independently from the accompaniment. A slowed-down play-back of this fragment shows more clearly what happens: sometimes, when there are too many accompanying notes to catch up with the accelerating melody, he simply omits one or two of them. But there is more: the accompanying patterns are metrically irregular in themselves.

[7.3 # 2 Previous recording slowed down]

Interestingly, a similar thing happens in an extempore piano sonata I played in February, 2013. (For a detailed analysis, → chapter 12.4). It was a spontaneous piece, built upon one single theme suggested to me by the audience: a theme from the film music for the Harry Potter movies. The entire improvisation, lasting about 25 minutes, consisted of three connected movements. At the beginning of the slow middle movement, a cantilena is played above arpeggiated chords.

[7.4 #3 Improvised Sonata (beginning slow movement), Bert Mooiman; rec. 2013]

At that time, I was unaware of d'Albert's modification of accompanying figures, and I certainly was not consciously imitating an early-twentieth-century performance style. In the improvisation, my focus as a player (as I remember) was clearly on the melody, the bassline and the harmony in general. The detailed execution of the accompaniment was left to half-conscious processes. Of course d'Albert did not improvise in the same sense in his Schubert performance, yet his playing of the accompaniment makes a similar impression. Nobody knows what guided d'Albert in his playing or where his focus was; what we can tell though is that *if* his intention was to play nicely regular accompanying figures, then his performance was a failure. However, there is no reason to assume that an internationally renowned former Liszt student would have been unable to play the little notes in a relatively easy piece in whatever way he liked. We can be sure that he played that way because he wanted to, that his intention was not metronomic regularity but something else. I think that this 'something else' can be found when we take the stratification in his performance seriously and analyse the functions of the different layers.

Above everything there is a clearly distinct melody: its role is to sing. Underneath is a bass line that forms a counterpoint against the melody: apart from supporting the chords it sings as well. In the middle there is the accompaniment; its role, I argue, is to express the harmony and to provide a general sense of motion. Schubert's sextuplets are primarily arpeggiating the beautiful harmonies. It is easily forgotten today that in nineteenth-century piano playing, arpeggiation must have been

perfectly normal, even when not indicated in the score. Its use was left to the discretion of the player, and its function was clearly to add expression to the chords. As late as in 1911, Ludwig Riemann called the arpeggio 'der feinste, dem Klavier ureigene Gradmesser der musikalischen Gefühlswerte' [the finest indicator of musical expression, characteristic for the piano].[490] Going back further in time, we see that numerous harpsichord and early piano treatises describe several possibilities for arpeggiating, not only with respect to the speed, but also to the direction and the number of rolls.

In the case of my improvised sonata, I referred to my detailed execution of the accompaniment as 'half-conscious'. At this point a more precise qualification may be given: there as well, the function of the accompaniment was to make the harmonies sound, to bring out the expression of the inner voices in relation to the bassline. This happens in a play with timing, sometimes delaying, sometimes anticipating an important tone. Even the order in which the accompanying tones were played was the result of tension and release within the harmonic progressions. In d'Albert's recording, the Schubert score is treated in much the same way: in the accompaniment, his focus seems to be on performing the harmonic expressive beauty of the music.

Was the way of playing of d'Albert unique in this respect? A comparison with other recordings of the same piece suggests that this is certainly not the case. In *Beyond the Score*, Cook also discusses a piano roll made by Wassily Sapellnikoff (1867-1941) that shows the same type of playing in the accompaniment, although differently from d'Albert. It is a way of playing that seems to have changed during the twentieth century: among the examples in *Beyond the Score*, Edwin Fischer and Artur Rubinstein already sound more regular and 'modern', but it is Murray Perahia's recording that definitely brings us back to our time.

[7.3 #4 Schubert: *Impromptu* op 90 no. 3, Murray Perahia (1947); rec. 1984[491]]

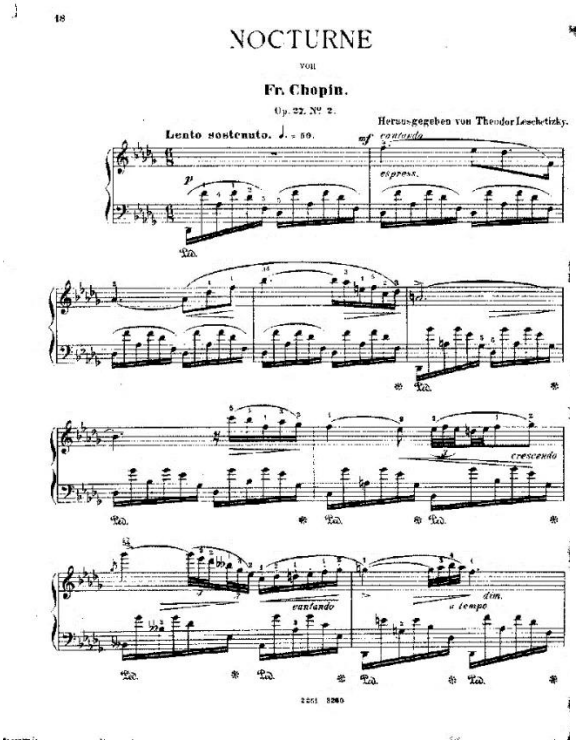
What could loosely be called the 'twentieth-century' approach can be characterised as one that prioritises rhythmic regularity in the accompaniment above giving expression to the harmony by means of timing. The sounding harmony became a result of the movement, instead of the reverse. This is not to say that 'modern' playing is inexpressive. However, as Sigurd Slåttebrekk writes: 'Of the two, (dynamics and tempo), I believe most modern performers would straight away consider dynamics, including sound production and internal voicing, as perhaps *the* most important parameter in the shaping of a musical idea or statement, and in separating important ideas from less important ones. Dynamics is the most instantly recognisable indication of some form of hierarchy of musical elements, both in terms of general dynamics and relative internal balance.'[492] The 'rhetorical'

[490] Riemann, L.: *Das Wesen des Klavierklanges...* (Leipzig, 1911; 89). Quoted in Peres da Costa, N.: *Off the Record.* Kindle edition, location 3290.
[491] Quoted in: Cook, N.: op. cit.
[492] http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no/?page_id=824

playing style, as Cook terms it, belongs to the 'old school' of piano playing that shows very clearly in d'Albert's approach. One could speculate about where the later love for playing accompaniments regularly, precisely as notated, came from. An important factor that is often mentioned might be the emergence of increasingly sophisticated recording technology: in a recording it becomes possible to hear exactly what is happening, often better than in a concert hall. Indeed, several reports tell us about the fear renowned pianists felt when faced with the earliest recordings. At the same time, it is also true that the disappearing tendency to play accompaniments like the one in Schubert's *Impromptu* as expressive arpeggios was roughly simultaneous with the disappearing habit of playing arpeggios even where they were not indicated: both developments are probably two sides of the same coin. The latter phenomenon will be discussed in section 7.13.

7.4 Other examples of expressive arpeggiation

The texture of Schubert's *Impromptu* can be called a locus communis in Romantic piano music: a *Lied* for piano solo, a lyrical melody, usually in a more or less slow tempo, above an accompaniment that consists of a bass line and arpeggiated chords in between (→ section 7.3). Not surprisingly, a similar variety of playing styles can be heard in recordings of Chopin's nocturnes, for instance in his very famous and often recorded *Nocturne* in D flat major, op. 27 no. 2. Though most listeners will naturally concentrate on the melody, focusing on the accompaniment in the following recordings makes one aware of the same type of irregularities as in d'Albert's Schubert recording:



Example 7.4.1: F. Chopin, Nocturne op. 27 no. 2 (beginning)

a. [7.4 #1 Louis Diémer; rec. 1903-1904[493]]

Louis Diémer (1843-1929) was one of the earliest pianists to record for the gramophone. At the Paris Conservatoire, he was the teacher of, among others, Alfred Cortot. Diémer premiered César Franck's *Variations symphoniques*, which was dedicated to him. Interestingly, his pupil Lazare Lévy praised Diémer for the sobriety of his style[494] – a qualification that might come unexpected today.

b. [7.4 #2 Raoul Koczalski; rec. 1924[495]]

As a boy, the Polish pianist Raoul Koczalski (1884-1948) studied with Chopin's former student Karol Mikuli.

c. [7.4 #3 Vladimir de Pachmann; rec. 1916, 1925[496]]

These two recordings by Vladimir de Pachmann (1848-1933) are very different from each other in many respects, yet they share the free timing in the left hand arpeggios.

d. [7.4 #4 Moriz Rosenthal; rec. 1935-1936[497]]

Like Koczalski, the young Moriz Rosenthal (1862-1946) studied with Mikuli; later he became a student of Liszt.

A more regular and 'modern' approach can be heard in the performance from 1935 by Josef Hofmann (1876-1957):

e. [7.4 #5 Josef Hofmann; rec. 1935[498]]

An even clearer representative example of a modern approach can be heard in this recording by Evgeny Kissin (b. 1971):

f. [7.4 #6 Evgeny Kissin[499]]

In the following two historical recordings of Chopin's *Nocturne* op. 55 no. 2, the left hand timing in the arpeggiations can be heard as being motivated by the harmony and the inner voice leading:

[493] https://youtu.be/E-Ix8bnCuAc (uploaded 2009 by 'd60944')
[494] Schonberg, Harold C.: *The Great Pianists* (Revised updated ed.). New York, 1987; 287.
[495] https://youtu.be/W9MY_h6Q1Os (uploaded 2015 by 'gullivior')
[496] https://youtu.be/gwSaHrU7Wk8?t=34 (uploaded 2009 by 'Beckmesser2')
[497] https://youtu.be/3ECn-oe3bOQ?t=267 (uploaded 2011 by 'Beckmesser2')
[498] https://youtu.be/8cw1YqjaR7I (uploaded 2009 by 'Beckmesser2')
[499] https://youtu.be/iAeY6osq8YE (uploaded 2011 by 'Daniel Haris')

g. [7.4 #7 Chopin: *Nocturne* op. 55 no. 2, Alfred Cortot (1877-1962); rec. 1947[500]]

h. [7.4 #8 Chopin: *Nocturne* op. 55 no. 2, Ignaz Friedman (1882-1948); rec. 1936[501]]

The same piece performed by Emil Gilels shows, despite fluctuations in tempo, a twentieth-century approach that leans upon regularity in the accompaniment:

i. [7.4 #9 Chopin: *Nocturne* op. 55 no. 2, Emil Gilels (1916-1985); rec. 1963[502]]

j. [7.4 #10 Fauré: *Nocturne* 3 op. 33 no. 3, Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924); piano roll 1913[503]]

Here Gabriel Fauré, performing his own *Troisième Nocturne* op. 33 no. 3 on piano roll, convincingly plays the accompaniment (from 1'11" on) with great rhythmic freedom, strongly making the impression that he is improvising the accompaniment.

Finally, the idea of expressive arpeggiation can also explain Ilona Eibenschütz's extraordinary performance of Brahms's *Ballade* op. 10 no. 4 (recorded 1952):

k. [7.4 #11 Brahms: *Ballade* op. 10 no. 4, Ilona Eibenschütz (1872-1962); rec. 1952[504]]

As a personal acquaintance of Brahms, Ilona Eibenschütz certainly had a very high regard for the composer, and her piano teacher Clara Schumann famously taught her the ideal of *Werktreue.* To a modern listener, these circumstances only make her very free treatment of Brahms's score even more astonishing. However, when we take her performance of the accompanying eighth notes not as a capricious distortion of what Brahms carefully notated as a regular movement, but instead as free downward arpeggiations of large chords, this performance makes a lot of sense (I will elaborate on this in section 7.5). It seems to evoke the poetic image of a harp player, perhaps the melancholic *Harfenspieler* from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, or the 'Vater der Liebe' in the *Harzreise im Winter*, a text Brahms later was to use for his *Altrhapsodie.*

7.5 Levels of musical pulse

A very important consequence of the twentieth-century change in the way of performing accompaniments is a radical shift of musical pulse. Regularity undeniably creates a sort of micro-pulse that determines the larger rhythmic entities. Of course Kissin did not consider the sixteenth

[500] https://youtu.be/FOl5lhkUems (uploaded 2010 by 'Beckmesser2')
[501] https://youtu.be/iYuXYE3MpiQ (uploaded 2009 by 'Beckmesser2')
[502] https://youtu.be/OQCZ8_u47_g (uploaded 2012 by 'Pianopera')
[503] Welte-Mignon 2775, 1913.
[504] From: Eibenschütz, I.: 'Reminiscences of Brahms'. Recording on: *Pupils of Clara Schumann*, Pearl: GEMM CDS 99049, disc 6.

note itself as a pulse in his performance of Chopin's op. 27 no. 2, but the micro-pulses of the sixteenth notes form a kind of submetrical grid or clockwork that quite strongly limits the flexibility of the large pulse – presumably the dotted quarter note.[505] The only way to avoid the micro-pulse being heard as if it were the main pulse is by playing the accompaniment with a subdued and limited dynamic range – which is precisely what Perahia does in the Schubert *Impromptu.* It is a 'smooth' way of playing that works best on a modern concert grand piano with its relatively 'lazy' and long-lasting tone, and that invites the pianist to use the right pedal almost throughout in a very subtle way in order to blend the tone qualities (→ chapter 5.8). As usual, instrumental design, playing technique and aesthetic ideal go hand in hand (which makes it so difficult to change one element). In the nineteenth-century way of playing, which – as I argue – treats such accompaniments as free arpeggiations of the harmony, the effect of a micro-pulse is almost absent. As a result, the main pulse is strongly determined by the harmonic rhythm and is given much more space to move: the regulating 'clockwork' is hardly existing at all. Consequently, the music can be faster at times, which in the case of Eibenschütz's performance is maybe the most striking impression on a modern listener. Slåttebrekk, too, mentions the more fluent performances on many early recordings.[506] As he notes, it is often much more clear in these performances what is important in the music and what is less so. The figuration in the accompaniment as performed by Eibenschütz is definitely less 'important', just like in the nineteenth-century style performances discussed earlier – or rather, the importance is in the colour of the harmony it circumscribes. As far as I know, there is no reason to assume that Brahms himself had a very different idea about his own music. It is not unlikely that by interpreting scores too literally, we became blind to an important part of their meanings.

What has been discussed here on the small scale of accompanying patterns in piano music has implications for the rhythmic organisation of a performance at large. In all compositions mentioned above, the textural locus consists of three different layers: a melody, a bass line and a harmonic accompaniment. Whereas in performances that are based upon rhythmic regularity the stratification is mainly articulated through tone colour and dynamics, in the nineteenth-century style of playing we hear a rhythmic independence (to a certain degree) of the different layers. Each layer is following its own ebb and flow, which does not necessarily correspond to the other layers: I will call this a 'polyphony of layers'.[507] From section 7.7 on, the aspect of timing will be examined in a wider context. Different forms of rubato will be discussed, and after the perspective has been broadened,

[505] The Dutch piano pedagogue Robijn Tilanus uses the metaphor of squared paper in her book *Vrij spel.* Tilanus, R.: *Vrij spel: de zeven facetten van improvisatie.* Amsterdam, 2013; 107.

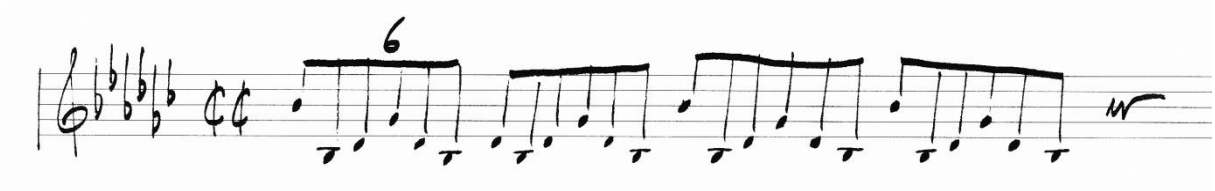
[506] http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no/?page_id=87

[507] The Dutch organist Klaas Hoek comes to a similar conclusion by a different route, namely by focusing on the aspect of sound production and the shaping of a tone. Hoek, K.: *Formgebende Verwendung von Klang und Dynamik.* Orgelpark Research Reports, Vol. 6. Amsterdam, 2021.

the issue of harmony as an expressive force will be revisited in section 7.13. In keeping with the objectives of this study, the question of how knowledge of bygone practices can be applied to modern music-making will always be present. Already the 'free' timing of accompaniments as discussed above poses difficulties in this respect, especially on a technical level. The following section will address this issue before we turn to a consideration of rubato.

7.6 Technical consequences in piano playing

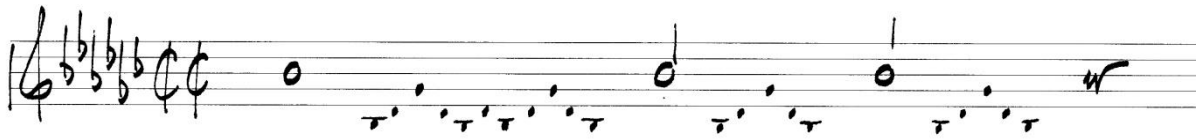
It is not at all easy for a modern pianist to adapt to a freer and, in a way, more random timing of accompaniment figures. In experimenting with this way of playing, one discovers that rhythmic regularity is in a modern performer's blood: it is an important element of professional training, making it a touchstone of critical assessment. This shows in chamber music, too: ensemble musicians are taught to adjust their parts to the short durations of the accompaniment. The larger part of the rehearsal time in chamber music is generally spent on 'being together'. For a pianist practising the type of pieces described above, regularity is also regarded as the basis of technical fluency and command. In the Schubert *Impromptu,* the technical task in the right hand is typically seen as playing the following figure in a smooth and regular way, meaning that all tones are equal in length and in strength:



Example 7.6.1

Many pianists most likely don't even hold the melody tones with the fifth finger, relying on the pedal for the high b flats to sing. Basically, this is the method of playing fast ornamental patterns like scales, as they became idiomatic ever since the Viennese classical period, being applied to almost all faster patterns that occur in piano music – such as this accompaniment. The 'transcendental' tempo, being an 'external' standard the music is supposed to obey, also forms a technical frame of reference. The metronome is a great help for this way of practising: playing technically well thus means meeting an objective norm.

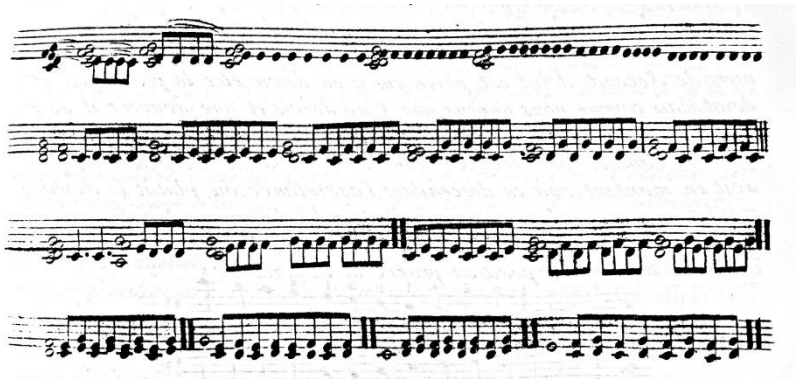
The nineteenth-century approach, as sketched above, is radically different. In this view, the different layers in the music are not just a sounding result of the keys being played according to the score; they are inherent in the musical texture, and therefore also determine the playing technique. The accompanying patterns are structurally distinct from the melody above, and consequently technically disconnected. The technical task of the right hand here is rather like:



Example 7.6.2

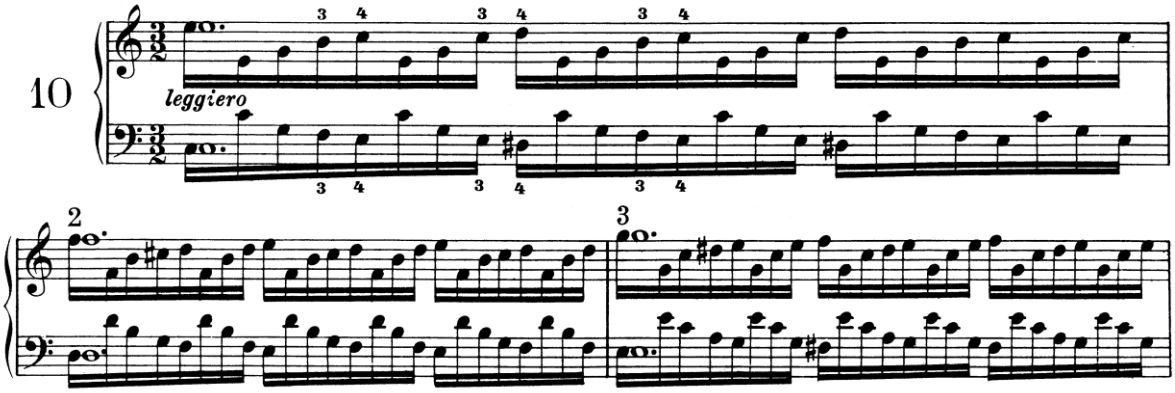
There can be true finger-legato in the melody, making the pedalling rather an additional element than the essential ingredient of the piano tone that it became more recently. This way of playing is closer to harpsichord and early pianoforte techniques, and corresponds wonderfully to the nineteenth-century instruments with their shorter but singing tone, clearer division in registers and less perfect (or dry) damping (→ chapter 5.8). The external norm of regularity is absent, or at least much more in the background. As I argued above, it is the ebb and flow of the harmony that really determines the timing here. As guiding factors, harmony and abstract metric regularity are very different standards: contrary to regularity, there is not one ideal way of performing a harmonic progression; there are many, and which one to take can be decided on the spot. The big question, especially with the modern expectation of technical perfection in mind, is: how to attain technical reliability here? How to acquire an improvisatory mindset that will allow for rhythmic differences from one performance to the next, without little accidents happening every now and again? How to prepare for a performance? It is the difference between preparing a sportive act and taking a stroll, between executing what was prepared beforehand and improvising, between reproduction and recreation.

It can be instructive to look into the many piano methods that appeared during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the particular problem in mind of combining a melody and accompanying figure in one hand. It is very interesting that from Dussek / Pleyel on, most piano methods start with finger exercises with one or more 'support' fingers that usually have to be pressed down on specific keys during the whole exercise.



Example 7.6.3 : Dussek, L. / Pleyel, I.: Méthode pour le pianoforte. Paris, [1797]; 17.

The goal of such exercises is usually seen as 'developing the independence of the fingers'. Physically speaking, such independence in the strict sense is an impossibility; moreover, in modern pianism this became a rather unpopular type of exercises, since they contain a risk of overstraining the hand – with Robert Schumann's ruined right hand as an archetypal spectre.[508] Indeed, overstraining can be a real danger leading to injuries, especially on later pianos with their greater key weights and depths. Still, this type of exercise stayed in use for a long time, even in environments where heavier pianos were common. Interestingly, Johannes Brahms wrote a set of virtuoso exercises that to a large degree expands on such finger exercises – and the Viennese grands that Brahms played, still featuring the Viennese action but with much larger hammers, cannot be called light pianos. Brahms's set includes 51 exercises; more than half of them explore the skill of playing a melodic line plus another line or accompanying pattern in one hand simultaneously, much more developed than in the simple traditional exercises with support fingers.



Example 7.6.4: Brahms, J.: 51 Übungen, WoO 6. Berlin, 1893; 14.

Why would Brahms pay so much attention to this type of exercise if they were only meant to address a traditional and slightly obsolete chapter of technical training? Isn't it more likely that he saw this as an important ingredient of piano playing in general? As Johannes Behr emphasizes in his foreword to the *Wiener Urtext* edition of the 51 exercises, Brahms as a pianist had the music in his head, not in his fingers: 'Die Finger kommen schon nach' [the fingers will follow], he once wrote.[509] Brahms's own way of practising apparently was never scholastic, but always improvisatory and in search of variations. Maybe this shows the way to a different kind of preparation for a performance: the idea that the player has the music in his head, and that the role of instrumental or vocal technique is to express the musical imagination through the instrument. Practising technique is not focused on the

[508] According to a rumour started by Friedrich Wieck (but questioned already by Clara Schumann), Schumann's injury was caused by the use of a device that meant to strengthen his fourth finger.

[509] Dietrich, A.: *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms in Briefen besonders aus seiner Jugendzeit.* Leipzig, 1898; 38. Quoted in Brahms, J: *51 Übungen für das Pianoforte.* Wien, 2002; III.

performance of one particular composition, but on developing the ability to perform any imagined musical idea. In chapter 4.6, I already elaborated on the importance of technique in nineteenth-century bel canto training; in chapter 9.6, I will write more about the role of instrumental technique. Both cases match the picture sketched above, and reveal an attitude that is considerably different from what is usual in classical music today.

7.7 Tempo rubato

In a well-known and often quoted letter, W.A. Mozart mentions playing the right hand with rhythmic freedom while keeping the tempo in the left hand:

> daß ich immer *accurat* im tact bleÿbe. über das verwundern sie sich alle. Das *tempo rubato* in einem *Adagio*, daß die lincke hand nichts darum weiß, können sie gar nicht begreifen. Beÿ ihnen giebt die lincke hand nach.[510]
>
> [They all are amazed that I always stay in tempo accurately. They cannot understand the *tempo rubato* in an *adagio*, of which the left hand doesn't know. With them the left hand always yields.]

The *tempo rubato* Mozart writes about is a form of rubato that Richard Hudson, in his comprehensive book *Stolen Time*, terms the 'earlier rubato',[511] and that Neal Peres da Costa calls 'metrical rubato'.[512] It is the phenomenon that in a melody some notes 'steal'[513] time from other notes, in the sense that they are performed longer, earlier or later than written; at the same time the accompaniment strictly keeps the tempo.[514] As a result, the vertical alignment of notes in the score is disturbed, a phenomenon that is often termed 'dislocation'. Metrical rubato (I suggest using Da Costa's term) was first described by Pier Francesco Tosi in 1723;[515] the first application of the term *tempo rubato* occurred in Johann Joachim Quantz's *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (1753).[516] It is a technique that is largely absent in classical music performance nowadays, but that remained common in 'lighter' musical genres which are derived from 'serious' classical styles. The French *chansonnière* Edith Piaf, for instance, singing in a musical idiom that stylistically draws on the music in the Parisian *music-halls* of the *Belle Époque* and on late-Romantic salon music, uses *tempo rubato* in her rendering of the waltz *Sous le ciel de Paris* (1954). She sings a rubato within two bars: at each first downbeat of a group of two bars, the melody is generally together with the

[510] Mozart, W.A.: letter from Augsburg to his father, written in between 23 and 25 October 1777. (http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=919&cat=)
[511] Hudson, R.: *Stolen Time. The History of Tempo Rubato.* Oxford, 1994.
[512] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., Kindle edition loc. 3372.
[513] *Tempo rubato* means 'stolen time'.
[514] Its counterpart, termed 'later rubato' by Hudson and 'tempo modification' by Peres da Costa, will be discussed in section 7.9
[515] Hudson, R.: op.cit., 43.
[516] Hudson, R.: op.cit., 55.

accompaniment; between those downbeats, however, she extensively modifies the quarter and half notes in the score, usually lengthening melodically important tones and adapting the other ones.

[7.7 #1 Edith Piaf (1915-1963): *Sous le ciel de Paris* (rec. 1954)[517]]

Yves Montand's 1964 recording is much more regular:

[7.7 #2 Yves Montand (1921-1991): *Sous le ciel de Paris* (rec. 1964)[518]]

Another genre that derives from nineteenth-century classical music is Argentinean tango music, which is also believed to have been influenced by salon music (which in turn was based upon, among others, Chopin), brought to Buenos Aires by European immigrants. The idea that there is a distant connection between Chopin's art and tango stirs the imagination when one listens to the metrical rubato in the introduction section of Astor Piazzolla's tango *Ausencias* (1989), recorded by himself:

[7.7 #3 Piazzolla : *Ausencias*, Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) and others[519]]

In this fragment, Piazzolla (on bandoneon) plays a rubato that embraces larger phrases than Piaf's: at least two bars in 4/4 meter, while the bass moves on at a steady pace. (The accompanying chord arpeggiations show an irregularity that recalls d'Albert's accompaniment in the Schubert impromptu.) It gives the listener the exciting feeling of an improvisatory expression in the part of the soloist, verging on a metrical lapse.

It is obvious that the origin of the metrical rubato lies in situations where there is a clear division between solo and accompaniment, notably in bel canto, but eventually applied to instrumental music as well. Besides Tosi, there are many other authors who describe the phenomenon, including some north of the Alps. Johann Adam Hiller calls it very useful for varying the performance and for greater emphasis ('zur Abänderung des Vortrags, auch zu mehrerm Nachdrucke'[520]). According to Domenico Corri 'it is an old adage: hours (that is, a rigid observance of time) were made for slaves'. He calls the 'rhythm of time' an 'invention of modern date', which causes a melody to be 'shackled and restrained within its strict limits', so that 'the energy or pathos of singing, and the accent of words, have become as it were cramped and fettered'.[521] 'In order to 'meliorate the rigour of [the] laws [of time] in melody eminent singers have assumed a licence, of deviating from the strict time, by introducing the Tempo Rubato. (...) Composers seem to have arranged their works in such a manner

[517] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kouTi-ocsLg (uploaded 2014 by 'Rino MusicRed').
[518] https://youtu.be/LACZU05vmbk (uploaded 2013 by 'FrenchMeUp!')
[519] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIwb40AsLYQ (uploaded 2013 by 'Diego Baner')
[520] Hiller, J.A.: *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange.* Leipzig, 1780; 89.
[521] Corri, D.: *The Singers Preceptor.* London, n.d. [1810]; 6.

as to admit of this liberty, without offending the laws of harmony.'[522] The latter remark is important: the application of the metrical rubato presupposes a relatively slow harmonic rhythm, because frequent chord changes will lead towards clashes when the melody is changed rhythmically. As many authors do, Corri warns that tempo rubato is to be used 'with moderation and discretion'. At the same time, he also elaborates on the paradox that 'the acquisition of perfect time' is seen as an important prerequisite for any musician. His answer is that the application of tempo rubato is a 'refinement or finish' which is 'the most difficult to attain'. 'Before you begin the practice of the Tempo Rubato, you ought to be a proficient in the knowledge of perfect time.'[523] It is advice that is still to be taken seriously.

For Carl Maria von Weber as well, singing 'involves a certain fluctuation of the beat due to breathing and the articulation of words'.[524] Throughout the nineteenth century, metrical rubato is mentioned by numerous authors. In 1859, the German baritone Julius Stockhausen (who performed with Clara Schumann and Brahms) told his accompanist (the composer, conductor and pianist Bernhard Scholz) to remain in time even when he allowed himself small deviations, for which he would later compensate,[525] and in 1874 Théophile Lemaitre still refers to tempo rubato as a living practice in Italian singing.[526]

In his 1886 treatise *La voix et le chant*, the famous French baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure writes that tempo rubato gives the melody 'le caractère entraînant de l'improvisation'[527] [the stirring character of improvisation]. The context of this remark is a chapter on the *coloris* [colour], which for him not only consists of dynamic nuances, but also of the application of tempo rubato. According to Faure, *coloris* is necessary to keep the attention of the audience. He criticises developments in the 'école moderne' which entirely focuses on 'la partie déclamatoire et expressive du chant', ignoring the subtleties of the *coloris*. He opposes against the one-sidedness of a declamatory style of singing that indulges in being 'vrai, pathétique, puissant'[528] [sincere, emotional, powerful]. Incidentally, Faure admits that it is the predominant role of the orchestra which compels singers of his day to develop the power of their voices, rather than the sweetness.[529] It is a development he regrets:

[522] Ibidem.
[523] Ibidem.
[524] In a letter from 1824, quoted in Hudson, R.: op. cit., 85.
[525] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 86.
[526] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 87.
[527] Faure, J.: *La voix et le chant.* Paris, [1886]; 182.
[528] Faure, J.: op. cit., 181.
[529] Faure, J.: op. cit., 182.

> J'estime beaucoup l'expression et la justesse dans la déclamation; mais la musique demande encore autre chose: elle demande le charme, la variété, la grâce. Il est certaines émotions qui ne s'obtiennent, et certains sentiments qui ne s'expriment que par les effets magiques du coloris.[530]
>
> [I do think highly of expression and correctness in declamation; but music also asks for something else: it asks for charm, variety, grace. There are certain emotions that cannot be obtained, and certain feelings that cannot be expressed but by the magical effects of the colour.]

Faure's words echo what was written in chapter 4.5 about the art of colouring in the bel canto singing style of the first half of the nineteenth century; it must have been less powerful, but much more flexible, sensitive and highly virtuosic. Faure pays special attention to the application by the singer of a wide range of vocal timbres, but with respect to this chapter, it is especially interesting that he includes tempo rubato in his rendering of musical *pronuntiatio*. In his text, many strands come together: the improvisatory quality of tempo rubato, the search for variety, and the embedding of rubato in an expressional complex. It is telling that he makes an explicit connection with spoken language; he states that in singing, this multiplicity of means is what intonation is in speaking. Faure even quotes the French dramatist Ernest Legouvé, who writes about 'le coloris dans la diction';[531] though Legouvé writes about timbres here, it is obvious that *coloris* in a wide sense has an equally important function in *l'art de la parole*. It should not be forgotten that reciting a poem or other text was a popular activity throughout the nineteenth century; it was quite common to include such recitations to enliven a musical concert, especially in salons.

'Rubato' in declamation

It is important to give the nineteenth-century art of reciting serious thought when it comes to a revaluation of an immanent concept of tempo, for vocal art and verbal art were seen as related areas, both governed by the same rhetorical principles. 'Rubato' might be an unusual term to apply to declamation (the term is used here for the art of speaking publicly, not for the 'modern' singing practice Faure opposed to). However, I argue that aspects of verbal *pronuntiatio* may clarify musical timing. Unfortunately, it is hard to get a clear idea of how such verbal expression actually sounded in practice on the basis of written descriptions, just as is the case with music.[532] We know that

[530] Faure, J.: op. cit., 181.

[531] Faure, J. : op. cit., 184.

[532] Nonetheless, many texts with annotations on performance were published; e.g., Joshua Steele: *Prosodia Rationalis* (1779); Gilbert Austin: *Chironomia* (1806); George Vandenhoff: annotated version of *Collin's '*The Passions' in *The Art of Elocution* (1855); James Rush: *The Philosophy of the Human Voice* (1900); Andrew Comstock: *A system of Elocution* (1841). Cf. Wentz, J.: 'An Annotated *Livret* of Lully's *Roland* as a Source for Seventeenth-Century Declamation'. *Cambridge Opera Journal,* Vol. 25, Issue 01 (March 2013), 1-36. Also, Wentz, J.: ' 'Mechanical rules' versus 'abnormis gratia': revaluing Gilbert Austin's Chironomia as a source for historical acting techniques'. In: Forment, B. & Stalpaert, Chr. (eds.).: *Theatrical heritage: challenges and opportunities*. Leuven, 2015; 41-57. Thanks to Jed Wentz for pointing out these sources to me.

Monteverdi worked with *commedia dell'arte* actors for his operas, but we can only speculate about how this might have sounded. For the nineteenth century, however, there is recorded material available that at least gives a fascinating impression of the style of declamation at the very end of this period. Sarah Bernhardt was a French actress of Dutch descent, generally acclaimed the most famous actress of her time. In 1903, she recorded a monologue from Edmond Rostand's play *La Samaritaine* (Act 2, Scene 3):[533]

[7.7 #4 Rostand: *La Samaritaine*, Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923); rec. 1903[534]]

Bernhardt is almost singing her text, and the result is likely to feel very unnatural to modern listeners. Indeed one suddenly becomes aware of the distance that separates us from the performers of little more than a century ago. It is a way of reciting that, in my view, cannot be separated from the fact that she was still speaking without amplification. Already Quintilian (first century AD) calls the cultivation of the voice of an orator a typically musical skill; he mentions the practice of a musician with a *tonarion* (pitch-pipe), standing behind the back of an orator, 'whose duty was to give him the tones in which his voice was to be pitched'.[535] Bernhardt's art is a beautiful example of how a practice develops in connection with technical circumstances; the introduction of electrical amplification deeply changed the conditions, and consequently the practice itself.

Even more alien-sounding is the rendering of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's ballad *Erlkönig* by the Austrian actor Alexander Moissi (1922):[536]

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[533] Il dit encore : / « Soyez doux. Comprenez. Admettez. Souriez. / Ayez le regard bon. Ce que vous voudriez / Qu'on vous fît, que ce soit ce qu'aux autres vous faites / Voilà toute la loi, voilà tous les prophètes! / Envoyez / votre cœur souffrir dans tous les maux!...» / Enfin, que sais-je, moi! Des mots nouveaux! Des mots / Parmi lesquels un mot revient, toujours le même: / « Amour... amour... aimer!... Le ciel, c'est quand on aime.
Pour être aimés du Père, aimez votre prochain. / Donnez tout par amour. Partagez votre pain / Avec l'ami qui vient la nuit, et le demande. / Si vous vous souvenez, en faisant votre offrande, / Que votre frère a quelque chose contre vous, / Sortez, et ne venez-vous remettre à genoux / Qu'ayant, la paix conclue, embrassé votre frère... / D'ailleurs, un tel amour, c'est encor la misère. / Aimer son frère est bien, mais un païen le peut. / Si vous n'aimez que ceux qui vous aiment, c'est peu: / Aimez qui vous opprime et qui vous fait insulte! / Septante fois sept fois pardonnez! C'est mon culte / D'aimer celui qui veut décourager l'amour. / S'il vous bat, ne criez pas contre, priez pour. / S'il vous prend un manteau, donnez-lui deux tuniques. / Aimez tous les ingrats comme des fils uniques. / Aimez vos ennemis, vous serez mes amis. / Aimez beaucoup, pour qu'il vous soit beaucoup remis. / Aimez encore. Aimez toujours. Aimez quand même. / Aimez-vous bien les uns les autres. Quand on aime, / Il faut sacrifier sa vie à son amour. / Moi je vous montrerai comment on aime, un jour... / Amour! N'ayez que de l'amour dans la poitrine !... / Aimez-vous! »

Rostand, E. : *La Samaritaine*. Paris, 1901; 79.

[534] https://youtu.be/FjyB18FVGNc (uploaded 2010 by 'transformingArt')

[535] Quintilian: *Institutio oratoria* I.10.27.

[536] Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind? / Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind; / Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm, / Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.
Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht? – / Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht? / Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif? – / Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif. –

[7.7 #5 Goethe: *Erlkönig*, Alexander Moissi (1879-1935); rec. 1922[537]]

Both performances share aspects that were discussed above in the context of music. The 'singing' way of speaking allows the actors to stretch important words. The changes in tempo are considerable. Both seem to ignore the metrical construction of the text: especially Moissi's performance makes it impossible for a listener to reconstruct the way Goethe's poem was built. This is because both of them prioritise the 'colour' of each phrase or group of words – Moissi to an extreme degree. Incidentally, while Moissi could already take advantage of the electrical microphone for his recording, Bernhardt still was recording under primitive circumstances. The singer or actor had to sing or speak into a horn and was not allowed to move at all. Large differences in dynamics would cause a failure in the recording process; sometimes dynamics were created artificially by moving the platform on which the singer was balancing backward and forward from the horn, while everything was performed with roughly the same dynamics.[538] Therefore, Bernhardt's use of dynamics might have been more extreme on stage. Especially with Moissi, each phrase gets its appropriate timing, dynamics, voice pitch and colour. With Bernhardt, the stretching of important words even leads to the use of vibrato. Tempo, tone colour, pitch and rhythm all become inseparable aspects of one continuous expressive flow. I argue that tempo rubato in music should be understood in a similar way: not as a deviation from a hypothetic absolutely regular tempo, but as a yielding to (what the performer feels as) an inner necessity of the music.

Instances of metrical rubato in vocal music

Fortunately, there is a recording on wax roll, made around 1900, that most likely preserves the voice of Jean-Baptiste Faure (whose treatise *La voix et le chant* was quoted before). The recording was made long after his retirement, when the singer was already 70 years old. Here Faure performs Alfonso's

„Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir! / Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir; / Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand, / Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand."
Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht, / Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht? – / Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind; / In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind. –
„Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn? / Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön; / Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn, / Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein."
Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort / Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort? – / Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es genau: / Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau. –
„Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; / Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt." / Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt faßt er mich an! / Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan! –
Dem Vater grausets, er reitet geschwind, / Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind, / Erreicht den Hof mit Müh und Not; / In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.

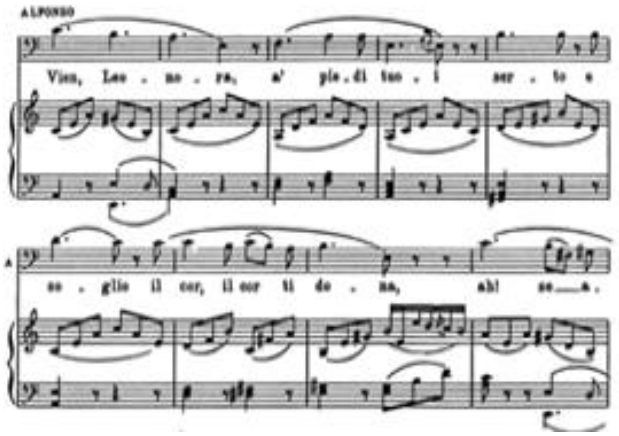
Goethe, J.W. von: *Goethes Gedichte in zeitlicher Folge* (H. Nicolai, ed.). Frankfurt am Main, 1982; 248.

[537] https://youtu.be/WhV2WwEQj7U (uploaded 2016 by 'MIP Musically Informed Performance')

[538] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 670.

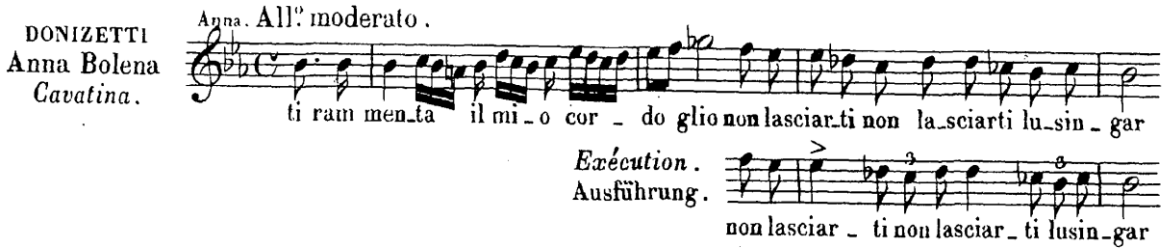
aria *Léonor! Viens* from the second act of Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorite* (French version). In this (abridged) performance, some examples of excessive[539] rubato can be heard beginning at 1'03'' (the accompanist has no choice but to follow the singer here). For the reasons mentioned above, it is unlikely that Faure could use all dynamic nuances he advocates in his *traité* in this acoustical recording.

[7.7 #6 Donizetti: *Léonor! Viens*, Jean-Baptiste Faure (1830-1914), rec. 1900[540]]



Example 7.7.1: Donizetti, G.: La Favorite, act 2: Léonor! Viens (piano reduction).

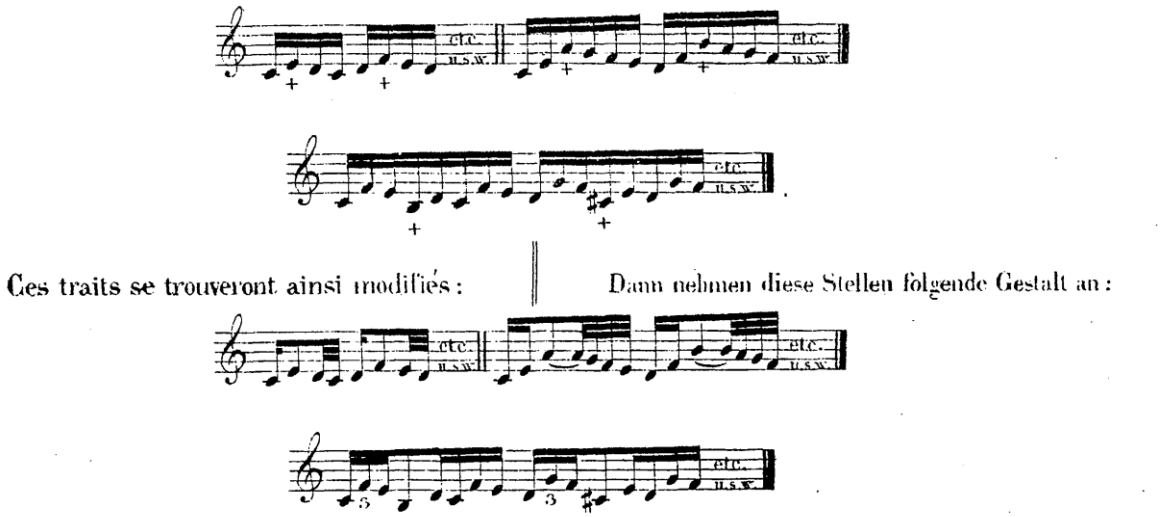
As stated above, verbal explanations don't really make clear how a verbal or musical practice actually sounded. However, there is one nineteenth-century source which attempts to show in musical notation how metrical rubato worked. Manuel García *fils* describes in his *L'Art du chant* several instances of tempo rubato. A few examples concern small-scale rubato, in which the distances between the moments where melody and accompaniment are together are relatively short, as in this fragment from *Anna Bolena* by Donizetti:[541]



Example 7.7.2

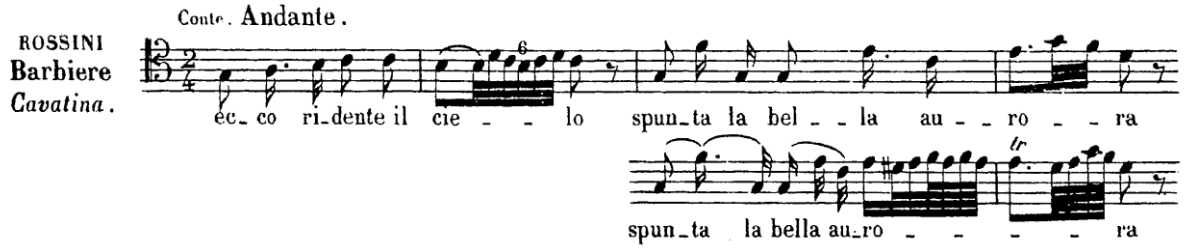
[539] 'Excessive' to modern ears, that is.
[540] https://youtu.be/63PFdrI3YKo (uploaded 2014 by 'ttrill')
[541] García, M.: *École de García,* part 2. French / German edition; Mainz, n.d.; 38.

This is related to what García calls *Temps d'arrêt* (prolongation of one tone in a group in equal notes) in the first part of his treatise, an effect that can also be applied in order to provide the voice with a support or to give clarity to the structure of the melody:[542]



Example 7.7.3

This small-scale tempo rubato can be compared with what Edith Piaf did in her performance of *Sous le ciel de Paris.* García mentions three reasons for the application of tempo rubato: it breaks the monotony and may aid the colouring of a phrase (i.e. it brings variety); it favours 'les élans de la passion'[543] [the bursts of passion]; and finally on a more practical level, it can make the preparation of a trill easier, like in an example from Rossini's *Barbiere*.[544]

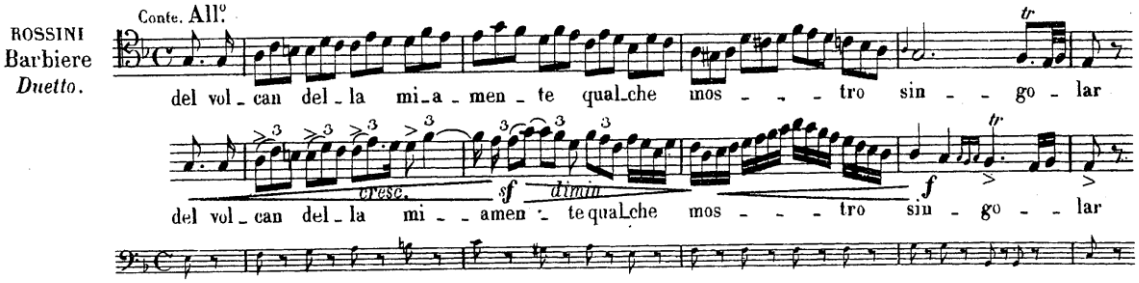


Example 7.7.4

Very interesting is García's attempt to notate an example of large scale tempo rubato, the rubato 'par phrase' [by phrase]. In a fragment from Rossini's *Barbiere*, he shows how his father,

[542] 'Le temps d'arrêt en donnant un appui à la voix, lui permet de rendre distinct ce qui aurait manqué de netteté, et les traits y gagnent beaucoup d'effet.' [The prolongation supports the voice on those parts of a bar which might otherwise be passed over, heightening the effect of passages.] García, M.: *École de García,* part 1. French / German edition; Mainz, n.d.; 43.
[543] García, M.: op. cit. part 2, 38.
[544] García, M.: op. cit. part 2, 40.

Manuel García *père*, used to sing this passage. It is a beautiful example of the type of rubato where only the beginning and the end of a phrase are together with the accompaniment, quite similar to the tempo rubato in Piazzolla's performance. In the third bar, the original melody is ornamented in a way that helps the performer re-establish a clear meter for the final cadence (bar 4).[545]



Example 7.7.5

García cautions that this type of metrical rubato can only be applied when the harmony is relatively stable (which apparently does not mean that there can be no chord changes at all, judging by the previous example). Also, it is a 'moyen difficile'[546] that requires 'an excellent perception of rhythm, and great self-possession on the part of the musician'[547] – very much along the lines of what Corri wrote. According to García, two musicians excelled in this tempo rubato by phrase. One of them was his father, the other one a violinist who perplexed the musical world with his dazzling virtuosity: Niccolò Paganini.

7.8 Metrical rubato in instrumental music

In this casual remark, García naturally brings together vocal and instrumental music, one more indication that the approach of chapter 5.3 ('Bel canto as a reference') is rooted in the way things were actually perceived. There are also good reasons to assume that the aspect of timing was widely transmitted from the art of bel canto to the performance practice of instrumental soloists. In his *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* Leopold Mozart writes about the art of accompanying. According to him, there are several Italian female singers or other *Einbildungsvirtuosen* [would-be virtuosos] who are unable to keep time when they perform the music they 'learnt by heart'; in such cases the accompanist must adapt by now and then 'dropping a half bar' to save them from 'public shame'. However, when the soloist is a 'true virtuoso', the accompanist should not yield, since that would spoil his *tempo rubato* and undo the effect the *Concertist* took great care to build up.[548] Aristide

[545] García, M.: op. cit. part 2, 39.
[546] Ibidem.
[547] García, M.: *École de García*. Transl.; García's New Treatise on the Art of Singing; revised edition. Boston, n.d.; 53.
[548] Mozart, L.: *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule.* Augsburg, 1757; 262-263.

Farrenc quotes García's remarks on rubato in an introductory chapter to *Le trésor des pianistes*, an instructive anthology of piano music.[549] Early nineteenth-century methods such as Spohr's and Baillot's also describe *tempo rubato.*[550] Baillot stresses that it is an effect that should not be applied too often, lest it be 'fatigant et insupportable' [tiring and unbearable].

> Le caractère du passage suffit en général pour pousser l'exécutant à l'improviser d'après l'inspiration du moment. Il ne doit, pour ainsi dire, en faire usage que malgré lui, lorsqu'entrainé par l'expression, elle l'oblige à perdre, en apparence toute mesure et à se délivrer ainsi du trouble qui l'obsède. [551]
>
> [The character of a passage generally suffices to drive the performer to improvise it according to the inspiration of the moment. He should only use it [i.e. the tempo rubato], as it were, in spite of himself, when he gets carried away by the expression, and feels compelled to seemingly lose all time and to get rid of the agitation that haunts him.]

Again, tempo rubato belongs to the *accent*, fuelled by the *caractère* of a composition (→ chapter 5.4). It is fascinating that Baillot uses the word *improviser* here to indicate the activity itself, instead of just the impression that this way of playing makes on a listener: it is exceptional that a nineteenth-century author refers to what I call an 'improvisatory approach to a score' with the term 'improvisation'. Baillot writes that tempo rubato cannot be notated precisely (a remark that is to be found in many texts on this matter). It is essentially a temporary 'disorder' to increase the expression:

> Souvent un beau désordre est un effet de l'art. [552]
>
> [A beautiful disorder is often an artistic effect.]

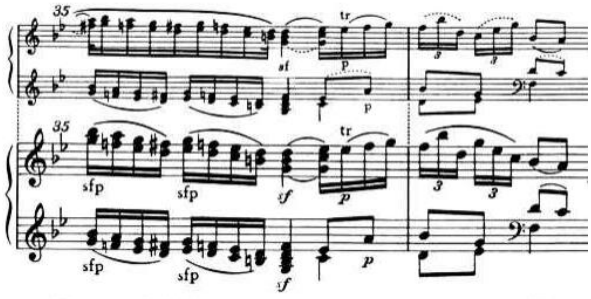
As late as at the end of the nineteenth century, the legendary violinist Eugène Ysaÿe[553] is said to have applied metrical rubato. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, the father of eurhythmics, accompanied Ysaÿe in recitals and reported about their collaboration. Ysaÿe told his pianist not to follow him meticulously in rubato passages where the piano part consisted of a simple accompaniment. '... [A]n accompaniment should always be in time. You represent order, and your duty is to counterbalance my fantasy. Do not worry, we shall always find each other (...)'.[554] Allegedly, Ysaÿe practised this technique in an original way: sitting in a train he would 'make up violin passages based on the

[549] Farrenc, A.: 'Observations générales sur l'exécution', 4. In: *Le trésor des pianistes*, vol. 1; Paris, 1861.
[550] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 100-109.
[551] Baillot, P.: *L'Art du violon*. Paris, n.d. [1834].130.
[552] Ibidem.
[553] Ysaÿe was a friend of César Franck, who will have an important role in chapter 13; Franck dedicated his famous violin sonata to Ysaÿe.
[554] According to Jan Kleczynski (see below), Paganini used to give similar instructions to the accompanying orchestra. Quoted in Philip, R.: *Performing Music in the Age of Recording.* New Haven and London, 2004; 110.

dynamic accents and cadences of the wheels, and to execute "rubato" passages, returning to the original beat each time [he] passed in front of a telegraph pole'.[555]

Pianists

Mozart's description of tempo rubato on the piano, quoted at the beginning of section 7.7, refers to exactly the practice described above, but applied to the piano, with the melody (the 'solo' voice) typically executed with the right hand while the left hand plays the accompaniment. Though Mozart gives no notated examples, we may assume that his right hand rubato matched the above-mentioned descriptions. Small-scale rubato had already been mentioned in earlier books on keyboard playing. François Couperin introduced a sign to indicate the expressive delay of a tone (*suspension*[556]), an ornament that is also mentioned by Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg as an instance of 'tempo rubato'.[557] Marpurg termed it 'Tonverziehung', and in the ornamented alternatives to some slow movements of Mozart's piano sonatas it occurs in notated form.[558]



Example 7.8.1: W.A. Mozart: Adagio from Piano Sonata in F major KV 332, bars 35-36. The upper system shows the ornamented version.[559]

In Daniel Gottlob Türk's *Klavierschule*, too, small scale expressive anticipation or delay is presented as the primary instance of tempo rubato.[560]

Several sources report about the application of metrical rubato in the playing of well-known pianists. Both the Paris magazine *Le Pianiste* and the German / French piano virtuoso and teacher Henri Herz mention Jan Ladislav Dussek's use of rubato. Herz adds that he doesn't know why this way of playing – which he describes as a way to avoid 'monotony' – has been forgotten in his days.[561] (He wrote this in 1838.) Herz's claim that this tradition was dead was not accurate, however; Thalberg's playing (he was already famous at that time) was associated with this type of rubato.[562] It

[555] Ibidem.
[556] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 24.
[557] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 116.
[558] The extent to which Mozart's metrical rubato equates with García's rubato by phrase is hard to establish.
[559] Mozart, W.A.: *Klaviersonaten,* Band 2. Neue Mozart Ausgabe: Kassel, 1986; 38.
[560] Türk, D.G.: *Klavierschule.* Leipzig, 1789; 374.
[561] Herz, H.: *Méthode complète de piano*; Mainz, n.d. [1838]; 33.
[562] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 128.

is likely that the latter's arrangements in *L'Art du chant* (→ chapter 5.9) presuppose metrical rubato. In *Le trésor des pianistes*, Aristide Farrenc mentions John Field (and Paganini) with respect to their use of rubato.[563] As late as 1885, Adolph Friedrich Christiani called the metrical rubato 'the more beautiful' way of rubato.[564]

Most famous, however, are the descriptions of Frédéric Chopin's rubato. According to Wilhelm von Lenz, Chopin compared the left hand with a 'Kapellmeister', steady as a clock, whereas the right hand was free to move.[565] Georges Mathias writes that Chopin also recommended this way of playing for specific passages in the music of Weber.[566] Well-known is Liszt's poetic description of the *rubato chopinesque* as a tree of which the trunk doesn't move while the branches with the leaves undulate in the wind.[567] Camille Saint-Saëns acquired an idea of Chopin's rubato as a visitor of the salon of Pauline Viardot. He writes that Viardot had a very precise memory of Chopin's playing and gave valuable indications about the interpretation of his works.[568] He calls this way of playing 'fort difficile' because it requires a 'complete independency of the two hands' – which is why, according to Saint-Saëns, many pianists corrupt it by dislocating the accompaniment instead of the melody or, even worse, constantly playing one hand after the other.[569]

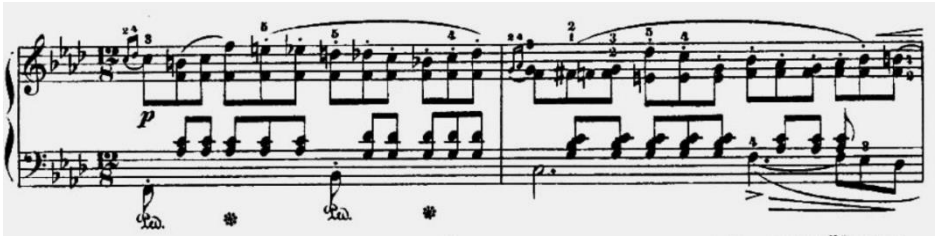
In his book *Frédéric Chopin. De l'interprétation de ses œuvres* (1880), based upon reports from the circle around Chopin, the Polish pianist (and journalist and chess master) Jan Kleczynski attempts to describe Chopin's tempo rubato.

> 1° On ne saurait donner des règles précises, car une bonne exécution du *rubato* exige une certaine intuition musicale, en un mot, un certain talent;
>
> 2° Tout *rubato* cependant a pour base l'idée suivante: chaque pensée musicale comprend des moments où la voix veut être renforcée ou baissée, des moments d'arrêt ou de hâte. Le *rubato* n'est que l'exagération de ces diverses parties de la pensée: les nuances de la voix se font plus marquées; les différences de valeur des notes, plus apparentes. Il naît ainsi dans notre âme une image de la pensée musicale plus vivante et plus poétique, mais toujours régulière et soumise à les lois. [570]
>
> [1° Precise rules can't be given, because a correct execution of rubato requires a certain musical intuition, in short: a certain talent;
>
> 2° Any rubato however is based upon the following idea: every musical thought contains moments where the voice wants to be stronger or weaker, moments of rest or of hurry. Rubato is nothing else

[563] Farrenc, A.: op. cit., 4.
[564] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 325.
[565] Eigeldinger, J.-J.: *Chopin vu par ses élèves* (nouvelle édition mise à jour). Paris, 2006; 74.
[566] Ibidem.
[567] Eigeldinger, J.-J. : op. cit., 76.
[568] Eigeldinger, J.-J. : op. cit., 241.
[569] Eigeldinger, J.-J. : op. cit., 74.
[570] Quoted in Eigeldinger, J.-J.: op. cit.; 75.

> but the exaggeration of these different parts of the thought: the nuances of the voice are marked more clearly, and the differences of the note values are more obvious. In this way a more lively and poetic image of the musical thought is born into our soul, an image however that is always regular and according to the rules.]

The last remark probably aims to refute the idea that rubato is something capricious, an offence that in the eyes of Kleczynski is undeserved, at least in the case of Chopin. Indeed, warnings that exaggerated, tasteless or illogical rubato can ruin a performance are ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, but also before. Kleczynski repeats the principle that is so familiar from bel canto: we borrow time from the less important notes in order to give it to the main notes. As an example he mentions the f-minor section of Chopin's *Nocturne* in A-flat major, op. 32 no. 2. According to Kleczynski, the pianist should lengthen the high f in the first bar and the high d-flat in the second one, and slide over (*glisser*) the other notes.[571] Unfortunately he does not specify whether the left hand keeps the time or yields to the right hand.



Example 7.8.2: Chopin, F.: Nocturne op. 32 no. 2, bars 27-28.

Kleczynski's description furthermore confirms several notions that play a role in this study. Rubato escapes any precise description, and its proper application requires talent (and, as earlier writers would have termed it, taste). The claim that it cannot be learnt from a book (a remark that accompanies many descriptions of rubato, including early eighteenth-century French *inégalité*) matches experiences in present-day teaching of jazz students from all over the world, especially since many of them do not have a background of direct contact with the living tradition during their early training.

Kleczynski's remark that rubato exaggerates the parts of a musical thought is also important, since it expresses a notion that played an important role in chapter 3.6: like ornamentation, rubato amplifies a musical gesture. Though Kleczynski does not use the word *phrase* here, it is clear from other descriptions such as García's that rubato functioned within the musical phrase.

In *Off the Record*, Peres da Costa not only lines up written documentation of metrical rubato in piano playing, but also compares such sources with the earliest recordings and piano rolls. He concludes that 'the recordings reveal many features that would have been impossible to deduce from

[571] Kleczynski, J.: *Frédéric Chopin*. Paris, 1880; 77.

written texts alone'.[572] One example is the claim in many historical texts that in metrical rubato, the left hand (or the accompaniment) is to maintain the tempo strictly. Today, one tends to understand the word 'strictly' in terms of a transcendental tempo conception – that is, it must be absolutely regular. The findings of Peres da Costa, however, show that 'in the context of tempo and rhythm, it [i.e. the word 'strictly'] incorporated a certain flexibility that was still perceived as being strict'.[573] Like the speed of a walker (→ chapter 6.4), immanent musical tempo can be 'strict' though it is not absolutely regular. On a more detailed level, Peres da Costa writes, 'early recordings reveal (...) that around the turn of the twentieth century, metrical rubato and other forms of rhythmic alteration remained indispensable expressive devices in piano playing. (...) Yet few late-nineteenth-century written texts mention such practices. And those that do are generally lacking in detail. In the case of metrical rubato, the texts rarely describe more than its underlying principle.'[574]

7.9 Tempo modification

The 'later' rubato (Hudson), or 'tempo modification' (Peres da Costa), is the still familiar rubato in which melody and accompaniment stay synchronous. 'Nowadays (...) [it] is used in fairly subtle ways to enhance the ebb and flow of a musical phrase.'[575] Also in this respect, early recordings can sound startling to present-day listeners, since at that time (roughly before World War II), many musicians obviously tended to allow themselves much more freedom than their modern colleagues. Quite often musicians were in their writings critical of 'exaggerated' tempo flexibility, dislocation or the application of not notated arpeggios, while they allowed themselves such freedoms in their own recordings.[576] This might be explained as musicians not practising as they preach, but the phenomenon is too widespread for that. It is much more likely that the conception of tempo most modern 'classical' musicians grew up with is indeed radically different from the one of an average nineteenth-century musician, as this study argues.

Hudson's division into 'earlier' and 'later' rubato might have disadvantages because the two coexisted for a long time. Türk described the 'later' rubato in his *Klavierschule*.[577] Several witnesses have remarked that in Chopin's own performances, his rubato was such that his mazurkas could make the impression of being in a duple metre (2/4 or 4/4), rather than in the (notated) 3/4.[578] This must have been a consequence of lengthening the accented beat (often the second or the third one), most likely in the accompaniment as well as in the melody. Another interesting mention of 'later'

[572] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 4284.
[573] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 4179
[574] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 4289.
[575] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 4316.
[576] For example Reinecke in Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 4562.
[577] Quoted in Hudson, R.: op. cit.; 142.
[578] Eigeldinger, J.-J.: op. cit.; 106, 192.

rubato is by the renowned music critic Eduard Hanslick, who writes about a performance (1855) of some Chopin mazurkas by Wilhelmine Clauss, a successful pianist. He praises her musicianship in general: every composition she performs has not merely been '«studirt» im gebräuchlichen Sinne' [practised in the usual sense], but 'vollkommen in sich aufgesogen; als ein warm und eigenthümlich Empfundenes, Selbsterlebtes gibt sie es wieder' [completely absorbed; she reproduces it as something she has felt in a warm and characteristic way, something she has lived through herself]. Hanslick contrasts her true musicianship with 'dem kühlen, reinlichen Herabspielen der meisten «Virtuosen»' [the cold, tidy and automatic playing of most 'virtuosos'], a difference that he considers immediately obvious, even to the layman.[579] However, he disapproves of her performance of Chopin: he complains that 'das leidige *Tempo rubato* (...) den (...) engen Rahmen dieser kleinen anmutigen Gebilde sprengte' [the dreadful tempo rubato went beyond the scope of these lovely small creations]. Hanslick then adds an interesting remark:

> Es ist bekannt, dass Chopin selbst diese krankhafte Unstätigkeit des Zeitmaßes in hohem Grad liebte; unsere Künstlerin hat also die Tradition für sich. Trotzdem halte ich fest daran auch in der Musik stets auf den Urtext zurückzugehen.[580]
>
> [It is well-known that Chopin himself loved this morbid unevenness of the metre very much; our artist is therefore supported by the tradition. Nevertheless I prefer to hold on to the original text, even in music.

What seems remarkable to me is not only the fact that rumours about Chopin's way of playing had apparently reached Vienna (for his mazurkas date from his years in Paris, after his 1829 debut in Vienna), or that Hanslick so clearly elevates a poetic way of performing in which the musician truly 'recreates'; in his last remark Hanslick strikingly separates the musical text (the *Werk* in nineteenth-century parlance) from the composer's own interpretation. In this case, he even thinks that the original text should prevail over Chopin's manner of performing. At first sight, Hanslick may seem to argue for *Texttreue* here; but as his earlier remark reveals, he expected a strong sense of 'ownership' on the side of the performer. It is a view that supports one of the guiding ideas in this study: that, once a composition is written down, it becomes an independent entity, a 'work' in nineteenth-century terms, that serves as a basis for any future performance. This is not the same thing as a 'code' that the performer has to crack (as in the *Urtext*-paradigm); performing a composition means recreating it – that is, creating again while performing, as if the notated musical ideas were the performer's own inventions. It is an attitude that calls for extempore decisions – and even Hanslick seems to support this improvisatory approach to music-making.

[579] Hanslick, E.: *Aus dem Concertsaal.* Wien, 1870; 83.
[580] Hanslick, E.: op. cit., 85.

7.10 Discussion: understanding nineteenth-century timing

The clear division into 'earlier' or 'metrical' rubato versus 'later' rubato or 'tempo modification' seems to be motivated primarily by written sources, not by the multifaceted picture that arises from early recordings. Sometimes it is not even entirely clear how to classify a phenomenon one notices in a recording; when a melody note is highlighted in performance by being played after the corresponding bass note, it can be seen as an instance of metrical rubato, but also of simple dislocation. Sometimes recordings also show a sense of rubato which seems to escape both prototypes, for instance in Rosita Renard's piano roll of Schumann's *Traumeswirren* from his *Fantasiestücke* op. 12. In the homophonic middle part (1'07''), she plays the equal quarter notes with an unevenness that seems difficult to fit in with the general understanding of rubato, and that rather resembles the old *inégale* playing as it was described in French baroque music.

[7.10 #1 Schumann: *Traumeswirren*, Rosita Renard (1894-1949); Steinway duo Art piano roll 1918[581]]

Conversely, not everything discussed in nineteenth-century texts is easy to find on early recordings. Several modern authors claim to hear examples of metrical rubato by phrase on specific recordings, for instance Peres da Costa when he writes about Ysaÿe, or Robert Philip about Patti.[582] I personally didn't manage to find a historical recording that really gives an example of large scale metrical rubato of the type García notated (→ section 7.7); the examples mentioned by these authors all seem to be rather limited in scope to me, never exceeding the space of one bar. I did not find an equivalent of 'Piazzolla' on early recordings. There could be several explanations for this: the metrical rubato might have been already old-fashioned when the recordings were made (though that does not fully explain the difference between the anecdote about Ysaÿe and his own recordings); the recording circumstances might have been uncomfortable, preventing the musicians from using this kind of freedom (they certainly were, but this argument would not apply to piano rolls, in any case); the fact that they were recorded perhaps made musicians change their way of playing (there are indications that some of them exaggerated personal characteristics,[583] but it is not clear why this would have led to less rubato); or, finally, the metrical rubato might typically have been something that occurred only during live performances (but this is speculative).

Since the goal of this study is not to deliver an academic description of manifestations of rubato, but to make knowledge of a forgotten practice fruitful for modern music-making, the division into two types of rubato seems to be far too schematic for present purposes. Combined with a focus on

[581] https://youtu.be/KGIKLQHaVHw (uploaded 2009 by 'Pablo Quintana')
[582] Philip, R.: op. cit.;,111.
[583] Personal conversation with musicologist Kolja Meeuwsen.

phenomena such as dislocation and (not notated) arpeggiation, this taxonomy defines a historical practice in terms of modern performance paradigms. The mere term 'dislocation' strongly suggests a deviation from a norm, namely that anything notated vertically in perfect alignment should sound precisely at the same time. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this may be very useful when one aims to copy one specific performance, as Slåttebrekk / Harrison did. However, for the purpose of this study, with its focus on improvisatory approaches to performance, this method has its limitations.

It is characteristic for the improvisatory that a next performance of a piece does not aim to repeat a previous one, whereas copying a recording naturally focuses on one specific instance. A central question in this study is how to give room to variety without being arbitrary. One composer who can serve as an example here is Edvard Grieg, who was an accomplished pianist himself and lived long enough to record some of his own music; at the same time, his work was popular and often recorded by other pianists, some of whom (like Percy Grainger and Arthur de Greef) he admired and knew well personally. Thus there is a body of early recordings available of his composition *Till Våren* [To Spring] op. 43, no. 6 from the Lyric Pieces. Grainger even recorded the piece more than once. When we compare these recordings (presented below in chronological order), there are definitely common aspects, but also many differences. All pianists apply 'techniques' as described by Peres da Costa: metrical rubato, tempo fluctuation, arpeggiations, dislocation – but the amount and the manner of application vary. Focusing on one recording would entail the risk of making something absolute that is actually in constant flux.

[7.10 #2 Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), rec.1903[584]]

[7.10 #3 Rudolph Ganz (1877-1972), rec.1916[585]]

[7.10 #4 Percy Grainger (1882-1961), rec. 1919586]

[7.10 #5 Grainger, piano roll 1919[587]]

[7.10 # 6 Arthur de Greef (1862 – 1940), rec. 1929[588]]

[7.10 # 7 Grainger, rec. 1936[589]]

[584] https://youtu.be/p8I9BtL-kyU (uploaded 2008 by 'theoshow2')
[585] https://youtu.be/zjIVsXNVi14 (uploaded 2019 by 'itapirkanmaa2')
[586] https://youtu.be/TSIRWexM-X4 (uploaded 2012 by 'StockhausenIsMyCat')
[587] https://youtu.be/e5NFORf_jlU (starting at 1'23", uploaded 2013 by 'The Player Piano Group')
[588] https://youtu.be/6bW1UFgBxtA (uploaded 2012 by 'gullivior')
[589] https://youtu.be/MVtD_4ACv6M (starting at 0'19", uploaded 2018 by 'Danny's Radio')

[7.10 # 8 Fridtjof Backer-Gröndahl (1885-1959), rec. 1937[590]]

While comparisons of multiple early recordings of the same work reveal a picture of variety, this is not to diminish the importance of Slåttebrekk and Harrison's project; indeed, those authors present thoughtful reflections on what can be learnt from their imitations. Anna Scott also explores this question in her dissertation about the process of copying historical recordings from the Brahms circle, focusing on the aspect of timing. She writes:

> While the preceding chapter of this volume also includes detailed written-out examples of the minutiae of De Lara and Eibenschütz's recorded performances, they too are intended as practice aids: examples of 'riffs' to be abstractly learned for the purposes of extrapolating them across many other works. While it can be difficult for modern performer-scholars to accept that these pianists' use of such effects may have been motivated by general propensities and spur-of-the-moment decisions rather than by rules or the notational features of specific works, this does seem to be one of the keys to playing as they did. [591]

It is these 'spur-of-the-moment decisions' that this study focuses on by trying to understand nineteenth-century timing 'from within', as it was formulated in section 7.2. This implies putting in brackets the modern, 'transcendental' conception of tempo, and embracing the idea of 'immanent' tempo. Rhythmic fluidity will thus not be considered to be a deviation from a mathematical standard tempo, but a result of an inner necessity of the music as felt by the performer. As for the different types of rubato, I would suggest seeing them as varieties of rubato in general, which, according to the musical circumstances, can occur mainly in one part ('metrical rubato'), all parts together ('tempo modification'), or anything in between (a variant so far unnamed). I argue that they are not to be understood as different types of rubato, but as ways in which rubato manifests itself in different performances. In the next three sections, an attempt will be made to articulate the 'inner necessity' mentioned above.

7.11 Shaping the line

It might be a good idea to start where most performers will start, namely with the question of how to shape a (musical) line, to borrow an expression from Robert Donnington.[592] The word 'line' here primarily refers to any melody in the musical tissue: the singing melody, usually in the upper part, but also the supporting bass line which in itself can have melodic value. 'It is by shaping the line in every part and in every dimension that we [i.e. performers] give meaning to the music.'[593] It has been shown already that the musical phrase is of fundamental importance for the shape of a melodic line.

[590] https://youtu.be/l1s3jl64FQU (uploaded 2012 by 'gullivior')
[591] Scott, A.: op. cit., 285.
[592] Donnington, R.: *Baroque Music: Style and Performance.* London, 1982; 29.
[593] Ibidem.

In bel canto, but also in its translation into instrumental music, the frequent organisation of a melody into groups of=four bars is paramount, a situation that remained valid for the whole century. Theorists such as Reicha formulated which principles make us regard a section of a melody as a phrase, and (some form of) the cadence has always been considered a natural way to finish a phrase. A cadence, however, usually does not come as a surprise that makes the listener suddenly realise that a phrase has ended; often the course of a phrase is such that the listener 'feels' that the cadence is approaching, and he may even have a clear sense of when exactly this will happen. There is a strong sense of musical expectation in a melodic phrase; it seems to have a 'direction', which makes possible the metaphor of a musical gesture. Theorising about how such expectations arise in a listener is a complicated matter,[594] far more difficult than when we try to define harmonic expectations. Several factors play a role here: the 'tendency' of the different tones of the scale, the overall melodic movement, and the rhythmic set-up, to name a few. Familiarity with melodic 'shapes' (melodic loci communes) also definitely plays a role, on a small scale but also on the level of a phrase as a whole.

Vocal music: following the text

The first task of the performer is to recognise such melodic loci communes in the score; the next step is to shape the line in such a way that this musical potential comes to life. On the basis of what was discussed in the previous chapters, I argue that there is good historical reason to treat the musical text in a rhetorical way. During my work with singers, I have noticed that listening to e.g. Alexander Moissi's reciting of *Erlkönig* (discussed in section 7.7) inspired many of them (after the initial shock) to explore the expressional possibilities that lurk also in vocal phrases. They often found it liberating to follow the ebb and flow of the text more than they used to allow themselves, trained as they are to obey the regime of the 'micro-pulse', the transcendental tempo. It is fascinating to hear how the melodic shapes of the phrases can become more convincing in this way. In fact it means playing with the *accent* in all its diversity: highlighting the individual character of a phrase, enhancing its direction, expressing its emotion. This can be done in a potentially infinite number of ways and therefore invites the singer to explore *varietas.* Since any repetition would be contrary to the idea of variety, this way of performing cannot be planned in detail: the *accent* has an essentially extemporaneous quality.[595]

As for the timing as such, this indeed means making important syllables longer (but also more expressive) and rushing over the less important ones. In classes, singers are invited to play with diction and articulation, which may indeed lead towards changed musical rhythms here and there. As long as the focus remains on the direction within the phrase, the flow of the melody doesn't have to suffer.

[594] In chapter 2, footnote 67, I already referred to the work of David Huron in this field.

[595] This is not to deny that there is a very prominent role for the 'caractère' of phrases as well; this is preeminently the case in Goethe's poem *Erlkömig* with its three personages: the father, the child and the Fairy King. Highlighting those three roles has also become a tradition in the performance of Schubert's song on this text.

For a singer, this also implies an increased attention to the expressional qualities of language; my experience is that often the command of foreign languages is too basic to really get to this level, especially with students. The assumption that a singer should perform music in its original language is really a modern development; during the first decades of the twentieth century, it was still the norm that singers would perform songs in their own native languages. Thus we have historical recordings of Grieg's songs in Norwegian, Danish, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian![596] During the first half of the twentieth century, it was common that performances of operas and oratorios in the UK would be in English, and even in the Netherlands operas were performed in Dutch until the 1950's.[597]

It has been stressed many times in this study that not only ornamentation, but also timing are parts of an encompassing expressional complex, which makes it difficult to separate them out. The shaping of a phrase concerns many diverse but connected 'techniques': rubato, vibrato, inflections, *portamenti*, playing with the dynamics, and (when it fits the style of the composition) ornamentation. Bel canto methods offer special exercises for all of these elements separately, and it might be a good idea for a modern singer to practise in the same way. When it comes to the performance of a piece, though, everything has to be brought together, and a guiding idea becomes necessary. I believe that this is the reason why the Moissi example is so effective: rhetorical declamation serves as a good model for music-making. An example of a particularly 'rhetorical' performance is this recording of Grieg's famous song 'Jeg elsker dig' [I love you] op. 5 no. 3, made in 1904 by the Swedish baritone John Forsell, singing in Norwegian.

[7.11 #1 Grieg The vocal music in historic interpretations, CD 1, no. 8]

The changes in tempo may seem excessive to modern listeners, but comparison with many other recordings from the same time (it has always been one of Grieg's most popular songs) shows that they were by no means unusual. Grieg was still alive when this recording was made; moreover, the only surviving recording of his wife, the singer Nina Hagerup Grieg, performing Solveig's Song in 1889, shows similar 'liberties'. It is more than likely that Grieg himself assumed such freedom in the performance of his work.

Many modern musicians might worry that by stressing the individual character of phrases so much, and by allowing themselves so many changes in tempo, the continuity in the performance could be threatened. This is not necessarily true, as long as the concatenation of phrases results in a 'story' – in other words, when there is some sort of overarching 'logic' behind the succession of

[596] CD box: *Edvard Grieg's vocal music in historic interpretations: acoustical recordings 1888-1924*. Simax PSC 1810. Thanks to Mona Julsrud for bringing these recordings to my attention.
[597] Cf. footnote 346.

phrases. However, it is also a matter of a changed taste: many modern listeners would indeed feel that early recordings of Grieg's songs tend to 'fall apart', and Moissi's *Erlkönig* as well. This, I argue, is due to the current paradigm of unity, as opposed to the aesthetics of rhetorical variety that was still prevalent in the nineteenth century. If we consider ourselves being in dialogue with (relics of) nineteenth-century music-making, it is important to put aside our biases for a while and truly 'listen' to our partner in dialogue. We should not forget, however, that our 'horizon' will never coincide with the horizon of nineteenth-century music. Inevitably there will be elements in historical performances that we cannot get used to, and that we will never like. I can't imagine that a modern actor can be brought to copy Sarah Bernhardt in detail, and the same might apply to singers who study a performance like Forsell's. In the end, it is a merging of the horizons that should be aimed for. What should be feasible to anyone truly embarking upon this dialogue is a transformation of our approach by means of our understanding of the past. This goes deeper than simply applying a few external features of early performance styles into modern playing, like modern string players who play Bach *senza vibrato* without adapting anything else, or singers who add a few ornaments while maintaining a modern singing style. It is a relation with the past that every musician will have to develop for himself.

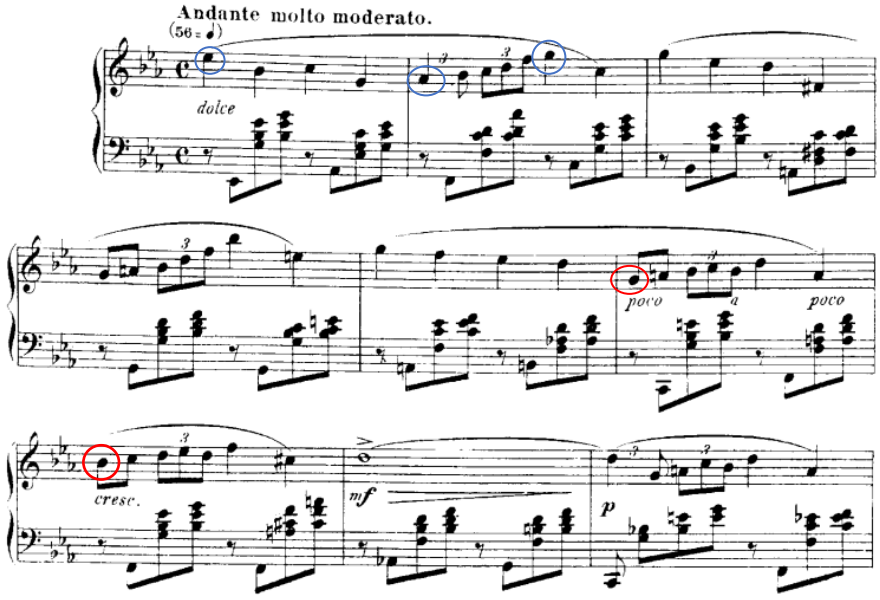
Declaiming instrumental melodies

In chapter 5 I argued that vocal music can be seen as a model for instrumental music, especially for pieces that adapt stylistic features of bel canto repertoire. But also in more idiomatic instrumental styles, the connection with singing – and consequently, rhetoric – remains important. More than once, I have invited (advanced) instrumentalists to listen carefully to a live performance of a vocal composition in which the singer emphasised a rhetorical interpretation, and after that to imitate the singer's rendering in detail, 'playing' the text and translating the timing, articulation and inflections to the instrument. In my experience, such an experiment can be a real eye-opener for instrumentalists, since it may open up an expressive potential that is not normally addressed in instrumental practice. Applying this potential to purely instrumental music turns out very well indeed, resulting in an approach that may be called 'rhetorical'. A historical anecdote about Paganini suggests the kind of impact this way of playing can have: he is said to have greeted his audience by playing 'buona sera' on the violin so realistically that the audience said 'good evening' back to him.[598]

As I mentioned in chapter 5, imagining concrete text can be an option for an instrumentalist to kindle a rhetorical approach when shaping the melodic line. In many cases, however, a composed instrumental melody doesn't really invite this method because it is too complex rhythmically, too ornamented, or too lively to be imagined as a vocal line. The melody that opens Gabriel Fauré's

[598] Kawabata, M.: *Paganini: The 'Demonic' Virtuoso.* Woodbridge, 2013; 12.

fourth *Nocturne* op. 36 for piano, for instance, contains so many jumps that it does not resemble Fauré's songs; nevertheless it is a very lyrical melody. Imagining words might be not very helpful here, and yet this melody seems to sing.



Example 7.11.1: Fauré, G.: Nocturne 4 op. 36 (beginning)

Even without concrete words to imitate, rhetorical principles may in a more abstract sense guide the pianist. Even when there are no syllables to prompt stretching a tone, there might be musical reasons to consider some tones more important than other ones; even without text there are musical phrases with gestures that can be enhanced. Though the phrasing slurs in the score of Fauré's nocturne do not correspond with phrases in Reicha's sense (that is, by finishing with a cadence), it is the repeating rhythmic pattern that justifies interpreting the two-bar groups as musical units. The French pianist Marguerite Long, who worked closely with Fauré, recorded this composition in 1937. She seems to enhance Faure's musical syntax by focusing on the 'important' tones in the melody, which are played longer than the others (blue ovals for the first phrase, next phrases similarly). In bars 4, 6 and 7 the first notes of the gesture with triplets are as 'important' as the corresponding note in bar 2, and therefore stretched by Long – resulting in a small rhythmic change.

[7.11 #4 Fauré: *Nocturne* 4, Marguerite Long (1874 – 1966); rec. 1937[599]]

More examples of instrumental declamation

In 1928 Artur Rubinstein made his first electric recordings (reluctantly at first, after having had bad experiences with acoustical recordings). He recorded Chopin's *Barcarolle* on a Blüthner piano that

[599] https://youtu.be/UAL-FojZ6z8 (uploaded 2012 by 'pianopera')

he allegedly had disliked at first, but that eventually inspired him to this very expressive recording. Like many pianists of his day, he tended to play less rubato in his later recordings. This early recording, however, exhibits many instances of agogic emphasis on expressive tones, for instance in the A-major section (4'00").

[7.11 #5 Chopin: *Barcarolle*, Artur Rubinstein (1887-1982); rec.1928[600]]

The effect is an undulation, not unlike what Sarah Bernhardt did with her text. A similar 'swing' in a triple meter can be heard at the beginning of Vladimir de Pachmann's recording of Liszt's third *Liebestraum* (1916).

[7.11 #6 Liszt: *Liebestraum* 3, Vladimir de Pachmann (1848-1933); rec. 1916[601]]

Equally striking is Claude Debussy's timing in the opening section of his piano roll recording (1913) of *Clair de Lune* from the *Suite Bergamasque.* In fact, Debussy plays the eight notes *inégales*, and in this way brings out the expressive harmonic basis of the passage (0'08"-0'32"). Also, for the contrasting idea at 0'52"-1'20", he plays the repeated chords not in the way they are usually performed today (starting under the tempo, gradually speeding up and slowing down again towards the end of the phrase), but much more fancifully, generally lengthening important tones.

[7.11 #7 Debussy: *Clair de Lune*, Claude Debussy (1862-1918); piano roll 1913[602]]

In these and many other early recordings, the striving for rhetorical variety in melodies extends to the timing of short durations. One gets the impression that not only in arpeggiated accompaniments (→ section 7.3) but also melodically, rigid micro-pulses were avoided throughout whenever the music had any sort of lyrical character; like in (most) walking, absolute regularity was rather an exception, something that occurred only in motoric passages – for instance, Mendelssohn's *Spinnerlied* op 67, no. 4 from the *Lieder ohne* Worte, as demonstrated here in a piano roll recording by Ignaz Paderewski (1922):

[7.11 #8 Mendelssohn: *Spinnerlied*, Ignaz Paderewski (1860-1941); piano roll 1922[603]]

Needless to say, regular micro-pulses are an exception in spoken language too, occurring mainly in fast tempo; in normal speech they induce a sing-song manner. On Camille Saint-Saëns's Welte-Mignon piano roll (1905) of Chopin's nocturne op. 15 no. 2, for instance, the melodic line is

[600] https://youtu.be/f5G_8JHbEck (uploaded 2009 by 'Beckmesser2')
[601] https://youtu.be/tlsfFfyb62o (uploaded 2012 by 'Beckmesser2')
[602] https://youtu.be/Yri2JNhyG4k (uploaded 2018 by 'Adagietto')
[603] https://youtu.be/tiodZ8-9-8w (uploaded 2016 by 'comensus')

constantly alive, typically showing this sense of *varietas*. Already in the first bar, the notated equal sixteenth notes are subtly modified (*inégales*, to borrow a term usually associated with Baroque music).

[7.11 #9 Chopin: *Nocturne* op. 15 no. 2, Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921); piano roll 1905[604]]

Saint-Saëns also does something that has become almost totally extinct today: he frequently uses anticipation by starting a phrase early (e.g. at 0'12''-0'13''). Most modern performers will be very reluctant to use this effect, and the same applies to rushing over 'less important' notes. In Marguerite Long's recording of Fauré's fourth nocturne, we can hear her speeding up the very end of each 'unit'. It is this type of flexibility that contributes to the touch of lightness we find on so many early recordings. Modern musicians, if they play rubato at all, tend to stretch and slow down only: they mainly add time, which easily gives performances an emphatic character.

A final example of *varietas* in a melodic line is Leopold Auer's recording (1920) of Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*. Auer, who was 75 years old at the time of this recording, was almost a contemporary of Tchaikovsky.

[7.11 #10 Tchaikovsky: *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*, Leopold Auer (1845-1930); rec. 1920[605]]

To summarise, one could say that in nineteenth-century music-making a phrase 'hangs' like a garland from a few (textually, structurally or expressively) important notes, to which the other notes are adapted. Very often, stressing the important notes means (also) making them longer, which is just a different way of saying that the immanent tempo is stretched in these moments. To use another metaphor: it is as if one is walking through uneven terrain, spending a relatively large amount of time on steps on firm ground, and rushing over the less secure bits. Sometimes the supports are close to each other and recur at regular time intervals, like in the examples from Chopin's *Barcarolle* and Liszt's *Liebestraum*; sometimes the distance is larger.

When we, as modern musicians, want to make ourselves familiar with this way of shaping the line, we must try to forget temporarily the rigour of the micro-pulses, and focus more on the melodic shape itself. To many, this must sound ominous. Isn't this a recipe for rhythmic chaos, or an encouragement to neglect all too necessary basic musical training? It is good to remember the words of Corri and García here: tempo rubato was considered a *moyen difficile*, a 'refinement or finish'. A performer who applies rubato should think, as it were, on two levels of awareness at the same time. On one level one may yield to the emotion of the line, but simultaneously one should be aware of the

[604] https://youtu.be/5gOIOKB2k7Y (uploaded 2010 by 'romophonic')
[605] https://youtu.be/s1vVlMp2YTA (uploaded 2009 by 'pochetta1')

strict metrical framework one is playing with. Of course, this shows most clearly when we are dealing with a musical line in combination with an accompaniment (or other melodic lines). This issue has been ignored so far in this chapter, but will be addressed in section 7.12.

A parallel from theatre: Stanislavski

As a last example of the importance of the phrase as a fundamental musical unit, I present Ignaz Paderewski's acoustical recording (1912) of *Aufschwung*, the second one of Schumann's *Phantasiestücke* op. 12 (3'57").

[7.11 #11 Schumann: *Aufschwung*, Ignaz Paderewski; rec. 1912[606]]

Some listeners might find that Paderewski separates the phrases too much, or plays with whimsical changes of tempo. However, I think that he, much more than is usual today, brings out (or yields to) the characters of the individual phrases. It is true that the tempo fluctuates dramatically, but this is a natural consequence of the dramatic changes of mood between first and second 'idea'.

I argue that Paderewski's approach may be interpreted as a musical translation of a concept coined by the Russian theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski used to ask his actors to segment their parts into a series of discrete 'bits'. This term was introduced in the US by Stanislavski's students; because of their strong Russian accent, they pronounced the word as 'beats', which is why the term is often spelled as such. 'Bits' are units of action, each of them with its own motivation. The concept may be understood metaphorically as well, and be applied to, e.g., the performance of a text.[607] Moissi's performance of *Erlkönig* very much sounds as if it has been divided into bits, and in fact this applies to Paderewski's *Aufschwung*, too. In drama, a bit can be characterised by a specific action or movement that has a clear sense of direction. It is especially this aspect of direction which makes the concept so useful for music. When an actor, for instance, has to kneel down and light the fire, this can be done in an endless number of ways; the goal is obvious, but the details can be decided extempore. In the case of the reciting of a text, a sense of direction can be conveyed by choosing one keyword in a phrase which serves as a centre of gravity. Translated to a musical text, Stanislavski's bits could be viewed as equivalent to musical phrases. By dividing the score into musical 'bits' and defining their motivations, it becomes possible to 'improvise' with the score without losing track of the larger 'story'. Though he may not have thought in these terms, it is easy to imagine that Paderewski did something similar: the *caractère* of each musical unit is 'recognised' by the musician and consequently established on the basis of the score. This act of recognition is important, because

[606] https://youtu.be/Y-cPrIePZO4 (uploaded 2009 by 'Beckmesser2')
[607] Thanks to Kenneth Rea for discussing this connection with me.

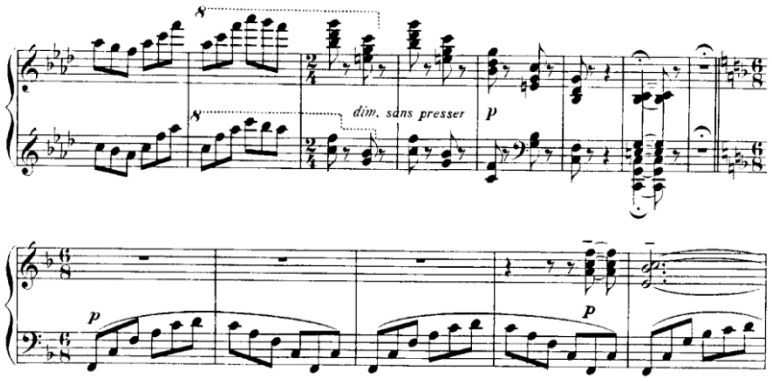
it enables the musician to 'sympathise' with the musical idea – which presupposes a common ground (→ recognising loci communes, chapter 2.3).

Stanislavski's principles were codified within a 'system' that was based on the idea that actors would use their emotional memory to identify with the feelings of the characters they are playing, over and over again. Something similar can be done by a musician: once one 'sympathises' with a musical idea, it becomes like one's own idea; how precisely this idea will take shape in performance (the *accent*) depends on many factors (whether external to the performer, or psychological in nature), and will therefore be different every time the piece is performed. It is a process that demands complete devotion to what is being expressed in the very moment. Whoever thinks ahead to the next unit during performance is like Gadamer's bad actor: as a listener one notices that he already knows what the next word will be (→ chapter 2.3). In music this sounds 'well-practised'. The musician should 'immerse' himself in the phrase, which increases the sense of being 'in the moment' – a psychological state that is often mentioned by musicians as an important quality of improvisation.

Inevitably this means that expression marks in scores cannot always be observed strictly, as countless early recordings witness. Whereas many musicians today take pride in an work ethic that makes one start a crescendo exactly with the note under which it is notated, this would be far from a nineteenth-century approach, where it was the recognition and appropriation of a musical thought that counted. Sometimes this could lead to considerable deviations from a score. In Marguerite Long's recording (1933) of Fauré's second *Impromptu* op. 31, for instance, the pianist not only plays the piece much faster than Fauré's metronome mark (she plays at a frenzied M.M. 105 or faster for the bar, whereas Fauré gives 69); at the end of the first section (as well as at the corresponding spot at the very end of the piece), Fauré writes: *sans presser* [without rushing] – precisely where Long suddenly propels the tempo exuberantly (at 0'42")! Though her performance might deviate from some of Fauré's prescriptions here, she does seem to embrace the *caractère* of this passage: an extended dominant that serves as a musical colon.

[7.11 #12 Fauré: *Impromptu* 2, Marguerite Long; rec. 1933[608]]

[608] https://youtu.be/bz7TREqNiFs (uploaded 2010 by 'Bernardo Santos Carmo')



Example 7.11.2: Fauré, G.: Impromptu 2 op. 31, bars 63-75.

To be sure, there are many aspects of the shaping of a line in nineteenth-century music that couldn't be addressed here. The music for piano occupied centre stage in this chapter, and techniques like *portamento* and especially vibrato, of eminent importance to singers and players of melodic instruments, were hardly discussed at all. This is because these issues would lead too far from the central topic of this study. I hope that the ideas suggested in this section will nonetheless be of some interest, also to string and wind players; it is my belief that a rhetorical approach, starting from the phrase structure, can in a natural way also shed light on such aspects that could not be dealt with in this study. Early recordings not only serve as an inspiration, but have to be regarded as a primary source of information about (late-) nineteenth-century music-making. It would be very good if a comprehensive collection of the earliest recordings,[609] including high-quality reproductions of piano rolls, would not only be readily available to musicians but also find its way into higher music education. This certainly concerns more than just the melody as such, as will be shown in the next section.

7.12 Polyphony of layers

So far, only the shaping of a line was considered, disregarding other musical factors. Of course, the vast majority of pieces in the period under consideration consists of more than just one melodic line, and there are many different kinds of musical texture. Along a continuum from homophonic to increasingly polyphonic, several stages may be distinguished. Very often, for instance in bel canto, we encounter a melody with a simple accompaniment that provides the supporting harmony. Second, sometimes the bass line in such an accompaniment becomes a second melodic line itself, like in the Schubert impromptu passim at the beginning of this chapter; this situation primarily occurs when the bass moves by step, implying a harmony that is not limited to simple root positions. Third, an inner voice may free itself from the harmonic background; Chopin's writing in the nocturnes

[609] Continuing the ground-breaking work of CHARM (http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/discography/disco.html)

often highlights such voices, for instance in the 'messa di voce' fragment of op. 27 no. 2, which was discussed in chapter 5.12. Especially in orchestral music, inner voices can be very expressive, see for instance many Slavonic Dances of Antonín Dvořák. In highly chromatic late-nineteenth-century harmony the number of inner voices can become such that the harmony seems to dissolve into counterpoint, as in music of (or influenced by) Wagner. And finally, 'real' polyphony in which the different voices have equal importance also exists in nineteenth-century repertoire, though much less so than in pre-Classical music and often modelled after the example of J.S. Bach. The majority of compositions, however, belong to one of the first three categories, and usually a skilled performer recognises without much difficulty in a score what is to be considered a melody and what has an accompanying role.[610] What happens when the 'shaping of the line' is applied to such diverse situations?

As stated above, modern descriptions of tempo rubato tend to distinguish between 'metrical' rubato and 'tempo flexibility' only, while focusing on the simplest kind of texture mentioned earlier – that is, a melody with a simple accompaniment. Much literature centres on piano music, and as a consequence 'techniques' like dislocation and arpeggiation receive a great deal of attention. In this section, I would like to continue on the path taken throughout this chapter by regarding the individuality of a phrase or musical unit as a point of departure. I argue that dislocation and the like are not to be seen as 'techniques', but as results of different priorities. What will happen when we do not try to imitate a nineteenth-century performance style by applying dislocation here and there, but instead embrace the idea that notes that are vertically aligned in the score do not always necessarily have to sound together? That chords do not always have to be played as one block? That the members of a string quartet can very well play a recurring theme in different ways?[611] It will involve a change of attitude that makes possible what was explored in the previous section: yielding to the individual character of a phrase or larger unit, and prioritising the notion of variety. It will enable a rhetorical performance style that does not end up with the kinds of mannerisms so many nineteenth-century authors were already warning against (among others Camille Saint-Saëns, → section 7.8), but that is truly motivated by the *caractères* of the musical ideas. The result is what I term a 'polyphony of layers': an enhanced individuality of the different layers in a musical texture. In what follows, three textural situations of increasingly complex polyphony will serve as examples of this phenomenon.

[610] Only Arnold Schönberg felt the need, because of the harmonic and melodic complexity of his orchestral scores, to introduce signs to indicate whether a line was to be regarded as a *Hauptstimme* [principal voice] or *Nebenstimme* [secondary voice] – apparently the dissolution of tonality makes it more difficult to assess the structure of a score.

[611] Philip, R.: *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*. New Haven, 2004; 112. See also Stam, E.: *In Search of a Lost Language: Performing in Early-Recorded Style in Viola and String Quartet Repertoires* (diss., unpublished). Leiden, 2019; 145-174.

(1) An expressive melody against a neutral accompaniment. A clear division of a melody and a simple accompaniment occurs especially often in late-eighteenth-century bel canto, where the singer-virtuoso is accompanied by an almost minimalistic orchestra part with simple harmonies and commonplace patterns – for instance in operas of Cimarosa or Paisiello. This is the repertoire García was primarily referring to when he gave his unique description of *tempo rubato*, i.e., 'metrical rubato'. In such music the harmonic rhythm is usually slow, the chords are predictable and the accompaniment has little expressive value by itself. It is the ideal situation for this type of rubato: the text is full of passion and calls for a rhetorical shaping of the melody, while the accompaniment is rather 'neutral'. There is even not much reason for the accompaniment to follow the temporal inflections of the soloist: if there are no chord changes or only subordinate ones, it makes a much stronger impression when the accompaniment moves on 'strictly', since this will allow the soloist to highlight the melody by rhythmically distinguishing it from the accompaniment. This is why Leopold Mozart recommends that the accompanist choose for this approach if the soloist is a true virtuoso. Even by way of small scale metrical rubato, a melody can be made to stand out against its accompaniment. A beautiful example from chamber music can be found in a 1935 recording of Saint-Saëns's first *Cello Sonata* by Paul Bazelaire (cello) and Isidor Philipp (piano).[612] Philipp, a student of (among others) Chopin-pupil Georges Mathias and Camille Saint-Saëns, subtly shifts the melody in the second movement against the accompaniment by the cello, increasing the distance when the expression is heightened. At places where the roles are swapped, Bazelaire can be heard to play less rubato, but with some anticipations.

[7.12 #1 Saint-Saëns: Cello sonata 1, Paul Bazelaire (1886-1958) / Isidor Philipp (1863-1958); rec. 1935[613]]

In a similar way, Alfred Cortot makes the melody stand out in his 1933 studio recording of Chopin's *Barcarolle* (0'34" – 0'42"), where the melody is delayed against the accompaniment at a moment of increased expression.

[7.12 #2 Chopin: *Barcarolle*, Alfred Cortot; rec. 1933[614]]

In addition, Saint-Saëns's piano roll recording of Chopin's nocturne op. 15 no. 2 (→ section 7.11) shows how he highlights the melody through small scale metrical rubato. These accompaniments are harmonically too varied to allow for large scale metrical rubato as in early bel canto, but their continuous movement, especially in Saint-Saëns's sonata, nevertheless favours a steady pace.

[612] Philip, R.: op. cit., 111.
[613] https://youtu.be/Boij7hOgvIk (uploaded 2013 by '2ndviolinist')
[614] https://youtu.be/KZNSiYX3dRo (uploaded 2008 by 'truecript')

(2) More complex accompaniments that follow the melody. In the course of the nineteenth century, such harmonically rich accompaniments became the norm. In the case of piano accompaniments in vocal repertoire, my impression is that it became usual for a pianist to follow the soloist. This, at least, is the picture that arises from early recordings of Grieg songs as quoted in section 7.11, where the pianists sometimes can be heard waiting for a stretched note to be finished. Robert Philip mentions Adelina Patti's acoustical recording (1905) of 'Voi che sapete' from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* (already quoted above) and writes that the pianist 'follows her overall pace but leaves her to be free either side of each beat',[615] suggesting metrical rubato. Listening to this recording, my interpretation is rather that the pianist actually follows Patti quite closely, just like the accompanists in the Grieg songs.

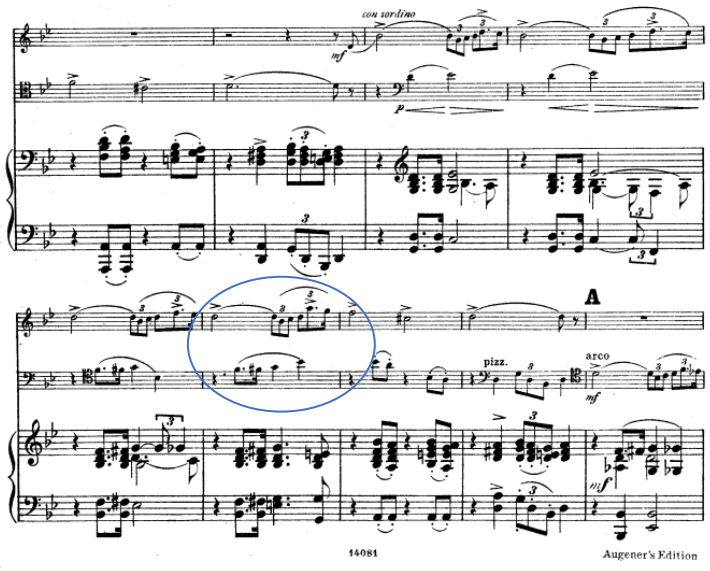
[7.12 #3 Mozart: *Voi che sapete* (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Adelina Patti (1843-1919); rec. 1905[616]]

c. Melodic independence in secondary voices. With respect to rubato, an interesting situation arises when a secondary melodic layer can be discerned in a score. The first example that jumps to mind is a bass line with melodic qualities. Gabriel Fauré liked to stress the importance of the bass line by exclaiming ('six times per hour', according to Marguerite Long[617]): *'À nous les basses!'* [the bass to us!]. In his fourth *Nocturne*, we come across a way of writing that is typical of Fauré: the melody tones are on the downbeats, whereas the bass notes consistently enter after an eight note rest. When played literally, this can be rather awkward because it somehow makes the bass 'too light'. On her recording of the piece (→ section 7.11), Long applies a rubato that makes the bass notes come early; in this way the bass sounds like a 'normal' bass line with anticipating melody tones. Her way of playing elevates the bass to an important second voice.

Anything considered to be a melody potentially has its own *caractère* and calls for *accent* to be added by the performer; this applies to secondary voices as well as to the main melody. As a consequence, a melodic bass line or an inner voice can have its own ebb and flow, which does not necessarily coincide with the main melody. Here it is really a matter of a 'polyphony of layers', in which the musical texture consists of several layers that, to a certain extent, have their own individuality. It is very much in line with the nineteenth-century rhetorical performance style, emphasising exactly this individuality by phrase, to express the individual characters of lines even when they sound together. This means that the timings of simultaneously sounding lines may be

[615] Philip, R.: op. cit., 112.
[616] https://youtu.be/r1fIdT3QG4E (uploaded 2012 by 'Zack216216')
[617] Long, M.: *Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré.* Paris, 1963; 103.

slightly different, resulting in musical layers sometimes being 'not together'. It is true that this form of rubato is not really mentioned separately in the literature; however, it is a logical consequence of nineteenth-century 'immanent' timing and rhetorical performance, and indeed its existence is confirmed by early recordings. In 1889, the wealthy businessman Julius Block purchased a specimen of the newly developed phonograph from Thomas Edison. Back home in Russia, Block started documenting some of the most important artists and personalities of his time on cylinder. Early recordings of chamber music are rare (because of technical limitations), but Block managed to record Anton Arensky's *Piano Trio* with the composer at the piano in 1894. In the second movement, *Elegia*, we can hear how the violin and the cello play their parts with individual rubatos; as a result, the lines are not synchronous (0'39" – 1'29").



Example 7.12.1

[7.12 #4 Arensky: Piano trio no. 1 (3rd movement), Anton Arensky (1861-1906) & Jan Hřímalý (1844-1915) & Anatoly Brandukov (1859-1930); rec. 1894[618]]

The violinist consistently stretches the fourth beat, and especially in the circled bar, the cellist doesn't let this disturb the urge in his phrase, and consequently plays the b-flat earlier.

Another example can be heard on a Welte-Mignon piano roll Gabriel Fauré made of his first *Barcarolle*. At 0'58", where the main theme comes back with an accompanying layer of semi-melodic arpeggiations in the right hand, the sixteenth notes in the melody and in the accompaniment don't match because Fauré gives each layer its individual rubato.

[618] CD box: *The Dawn of Recording: The Julius Block Cylinders*. Marston 53011-2.

[7.12 #5 Fauré: Barcarolle no. 1, Gabriel Fauré; piano roll 1913[619]]

A special case of 'not-togetherness' occurs when a melody is performed by more than one instrument or voice and is played both with and without rubato simultaneously. As Richard Hudson explains, some eighteenth-century writers warned against such heterophony; nevertheless, this seems to have been tolerated, at least based on a comment by García.[620] One also sometimes encounters composed-out heterophony, for instance in a passage in the *Adagio* of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (bars 98-114).

7.13 Harmonic phrases

At the beginning of this chapter, I developed the idea that many written-out accompanying patterns in piano music can be seen as free arpeggiations of chords. At this stage, I would like to address the phenomenon of arpeggiation once more. It is a well-known feature in early recordings of piano music that chords which are notated as simultaneities are very often arpeggiated in performance. It is probably impossible to establish a general 'rule' for this, since the differences between players are large; however, it seems safe to say that up to 1914 (the end of the 'long' nineteenth century) it was common in piano playing to arpeggiate not only chords, but also octaves and other dyads. Though arpeggiation as such does not necessarily result from extempore decisions, it is relevant for the concept of immanent tempo, and it is this aspect that deserves attention here.

In the third volume of his *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule* op. 500 (1839), Carl Czerny describes the *willkührliche Anwendung des Arpeggirens* [the discretionary application of arpeggiating].[621] He starts with the obligatory warning against excess by players who cannot strike any chord or dyad synchronised – a warning that actually makes one suspect that in the early days of the piano, habits that were inherited from harpsichord playing were ubiquitous. Czerny takes the trouble to sum up a large number of situations in which he considers arpeggiation appropriate, intending to limit overuse. Summarising his advice, it seems that unindicated arpeggios especially belonged in music that is not too fast, adding expression to 'important' chords. In his comprehensive survey of unnotated arpeggiation, Peres da Costa mentions a composition of Edward MacDowell, *Starlight* op. 55 no. 4 (1898), in which a special sign indicates chords that are *not* to be rolled; the sign is used only sparingly.[622] Here too, one sees evidence that the 'present-day obsession with synchronised chord playing'[623] is historically an exception, something that became the standard only after World War II.

[619] https://youtu.be/_sSGYomCZHc (uploaded 2015 by 'Isaure Clausse')
[620] Hudson, R.: op. cit., 74.
[621] Czerny, C.: *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule* op. 500. Wien, n.d. [1839]; 40-42.
[622] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 2244.
[623] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 2191.

The connection with expression is beautifully demonstrated in a Hupfeld piano roll (1910) Gabriel Fauré made of his seventh *Nocturne* op. 74. During the first presentation of the theme, there is not much arpeggiation (despite an otherwise flexible timing); however, at the varied repeat of the theme (0'58''), this time intensified with a continuous and chromatic countermelody, Fauré starts to arpeggiate the chords, thus heightening the expression of the passage.

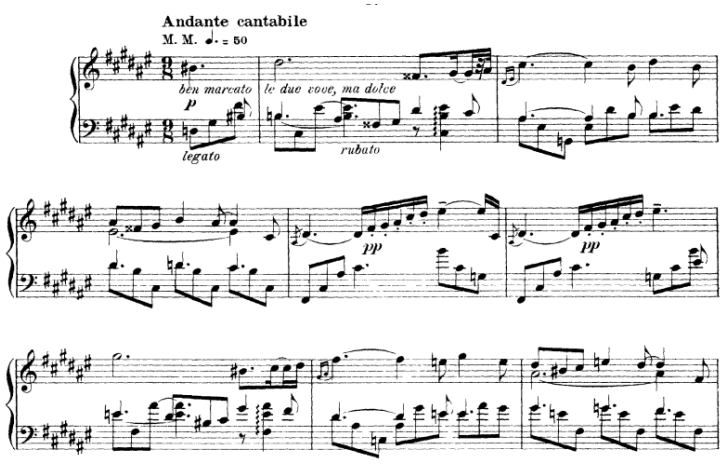
[7.13 #1 Fauré : *Nocturne* 7, Gabriel Fauré; piano roll 1910[624]]

An effect of arpeggiation that is of importance in connection with improvisatory timing is that it tends to blur the pulse. It 'contributes to a sense of ambiguity, softening the edges of the rhythm and texture'.[625] There is another way of expressing this point: arpeggiation creates *durée* by emphasising the length of a chord. Together with other aspects of timing discussed earlier, it enhances linearity by producing a sense of continuity that makes one forget that the piano is in reality a percussion instrument. Without arpeggiations, Claude Debussy's already mentioned rendering of his *Clair de lune* would lack its fluidity.

An expansion of the phenomenon of *durée* created by arpeggiation occurs in the music of Alexandr Scriabin. A striking example is his *Poème* op. 32 no. 1; the score itself already contains written-out rhythmic freedom, but Scriabin's highly flexible own performance on Welte-Mignon piano roll (1910) makes a listener who is not reading the score completely forget any specific pulse, creating instead a very strong sense of continuous ebb and flow, centring around the melody tones that stand out.[626]

[7.13 #2 Scriabin: *Poème* op. 32 no. 1, Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915); piano roll 1910[627]]

[624] https://youtu.be/jIkweLLTigs (uploaded 2014 by 'RollaArtis')
[625] Peres da Costa, N.: op. cit., loc. 2163.
[626] Cf. Klaas Hoek's notion of 'grondwaarde' [basic value]. Hoek, K.: op. cit., 84-91 and 348. Hoek opposes music-making that is oriented on 'grondwaarden', which may differ in length, against music-making that is based on an invariable pulse.
[627] https://youtu.be/bLWNE-AGq5Q (uploaded 2015 by 'Aleksandr Skrjabin')



Example 7.13.1

Through the use of arpeggiation, harmonic progressions become like melodies; they, too, are like musical gestures with a direction, they too have 'important' notes that can be stretched while other ones are rushed. There is every reason to speak of a 'harmonic phrase' as a counterpart of the melodic phrase. In the polyphony of layers, harmony is a factor just like the 'true' melodic voices. Nineteenth-century music-making seems to have been very attuned to the gestural force of harmony. Fanny Davies for instance, who studied with Clara Schumann, writes:

> [Robert] Schumann's manner of writing is so often in chords that one cannot lay too great stress on the importance of playing chords in a way that will convey to the hearer the significance of the harmonies therein contained. They are not padded octaves! And it will not do to force out melody or exaggerate a rhythmic scheme which must necessarily imply a neglect of the less obvious – but just as great – beauties. Take for example the little 'Nachtstück' in F [op. 23 no. 4]: what a different meaning the top notes convey when the changing middle notes get their full value![628]

I stated earlier that it is easier (or at least, less impossible) to describe and categorise harmonic patterns than melodic ones. Many theoretical approaches to harmony, from Riemann to more recent developments such as the rediscovery of the *partimento* tradition, are, at the end of the day, based on the existence of recurring harmonic progressions. From the point of view of musical rhetoric, however, this is only half of what musicians need: they have to know the ordinary, in order to assess the extraordinary. Saying that harmony is a force of utmost importance in nineteenth-century music is a commonplace; but much traditional harmonic analysis makes one overlook the importance of the word 'force'. Chords on paper can be analysed and labelled, but harmony-as-it-sounds is directly accessible to experience. Traces of nineteenth-century music-making as they come to us by means of the earliest recordings and piano rolls strongly suggest that the awareness of harmonic expression was

[628] Davies, F. & Corder, F.: 'Robert Schumann. About Schumann's Pianoforte Music (Continued).' *The Musical Times*, Vol. 51, No. 810 (Aug. 1, 1910), 493.

very much alive at that time. In chapter 14 I will discuss how a more experience-based approach might enrich harmony teaching at conservatories and other institutions of higher music education.

7.14 Rubato on the organ

In a letter to his father from October 17th, 1777, Mozart famously called the organ the 'king of instruments'. With this qualification he was reacting to the less flattering opinion of pianoforte builder Johann Andreas Stein, which however is often left out from the quotation. Stein thought that the organ lacked *douceur* [sweetness] and expression, and that its tone was incapable of dynamic nuances. Though there is no reason to doubt Mozart's enthusiasm, we may assume that the judgement of Stein better reflected the general opinion at the end of the eighteenth century.[629] Already at that time, the organ had lost its central position in music life and had become an instrument that was primarily associated with the church – which was no longer the place where the important musical developments took place.[630] Czerny linked the instrument to the *gebundener und fugirter Styl*[631] [polyphonic and fugal style], about which he writes elsewhere that all the notes of a chord have to be struck simultaneously.[632] It may seem that relative improvisation as it has been discussed in part 2 of this study is not applicable to organ music: references to bel canto are far removed from the stern fugal way of writing that is so idiomatic to the organ, and extempore ornamentation and tempo flexibility seem frivolities that are out of place in the hallowed environment where this instrument is at home.

Some sources sketch a different picture, though. The organ clock[633] (*Flötenuhr*) with music of Joseph Haydn, built by his friend Joseph Primitivus Niemecz for the prince of Esterházy in 1793, shows – besides remarkably fast tempi and lots of small ornaments – occasional chord arpeggiations.[634] The suggestion that a different treatment of the organ, closer to the piano, at least existed as an alternative even in the nineteenth century, is confirmed by an organ method which was published in 1858: Wilhelm Volckmar's *Orgelschule.* Volckmar was well-known as a teacher and as a travelling organ virtuoso and improviser, and was highly regarded by Spohr and by the Weimar circle

[629] Ideas such as Stein's led to the innovations in organ construction that were suggested by Georg Joseph ('Abbé') Vogler. (Fidom, H.: *Diversity in Unity: Discussions on Organ Building in Germany between 1880 and 1918* [diss.]. Dieren, 2002; 28-30.)

[630] As musicologist Hans Fidom has shown, the years around 1800 were at the turn of the twentieth century seen as a period of decline in organ construction. (Fidom, H: *Miskend, verguisd & afgedankt: Nederlandse orgels uit de vroege 20e eeuw.* Zaltbommel, 2005; 16.)

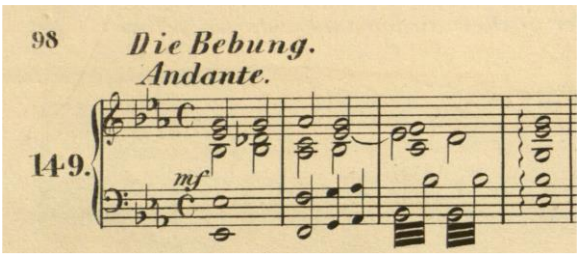
[631] Czerny, C.: *Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem Pianoforte op. 200* [Wien, 1829]; facsimile reprint: Wiesbaden, 1993; 100.

[632] Czerny, C.: *Von dem Vortrage (Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule op. 500, 3. Teil).* Wien, 1839. Facsimile reprint: Wiesbaden, 1991; 41.

[633] An organ clock is a (usually small) automatic organ, operated by a cylinder with pins.

[634] Haspels, J.J. (ed.): *Haydn herboren: 12 originele opnamen uit 1793.* Utrecht, 2004.

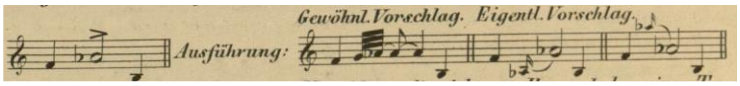
around Liszt.[635] He was influenced by Liszt's ideas on organ playing and by the innovations of organ builder Friedrich Ladegast.[636] Volckmar was the first composer to publish an organ 'symphony': his *Symphonie für die Orgel* op. 172 (1867) appeared one year before César Franck's famous *Grande Pièce Symphonique.* Unique in this work is the *Intermezzo*, which contains a lengthy passage of 3 to 4 part polyphony in the pedal, accompanied by fast arpeggios in the manuals. Volckmar's organ school contains a systematic treatment of a highly virtuosic pedal technique (including the use of toe, heel and ball); the section about polyphonic pedal also mentions the possibility of organs with two pedal boards. The first section of the book is entirely devoted to *manualiter* technique, remarkably similar to piano technique as it had been developed at that time. Fifteen years after the *Orgelschule*, Volckmar even published a *Geläufigkeits-Schule* Op. 270 for organ! It would however be a mistake to assume that Volckmar taught students to play the organ as if it were a piano. In the introduction to the book, he mentions what he sees as the two main difficulties the instrument poses to the player: the strong resistance of the keys and the stability of the organ tone. As for the latter, he seeks to overcome the characteristic rigidity and coldness [*Starrheit und Kälte*] by training the independence of the fingers and the mastering of all nuances of articulation in between *staccatissimo* and over-*legato.*[637] Volckmar mentions many techniques that are usually associated with piano playing, even arpeggios (in both directions) and octave tremolos (*Bebung*); the latter in particular is generally considered unidiomatic for organ.[638]

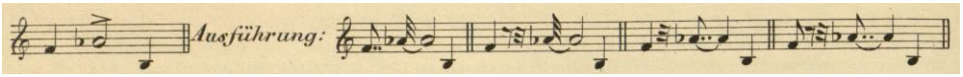


Example 7.14.1

Volckmar pays a lot of attention to bringing out one voice in a texture without playing it on a separate keyboard. The means he recommends are remarkably consistent with everything that has been discussed earlier; individual tones can be highlighted with *Vorschläge* and other ornaments, or by anticipation:[639]

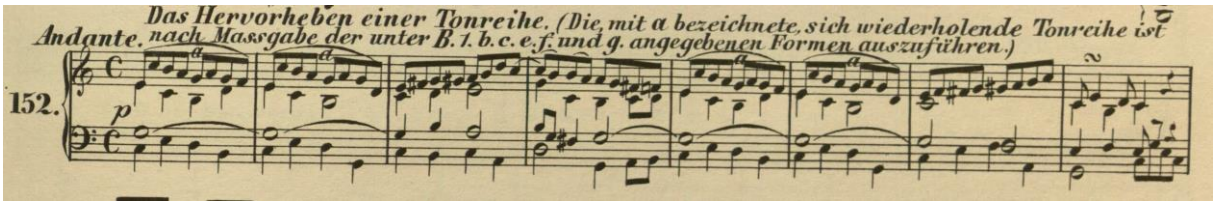
[635] Grove Music Online https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29640
[636] Fidom, H.: op. cit., 12.
[637] Volckmar, W.: *Orgelschule* op. 50. Leipzig, 1858; III.
[638] Volckmar, W.: op. cit., 98.
[639] Volckmar, W.: op. cit., 99 and 100.





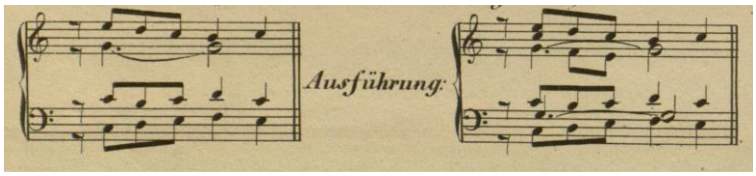
Example 7.14.2

A melody as a whole can be given individuality by means of a different articulation, but also by dislocation and *tempo rubato*:[640]



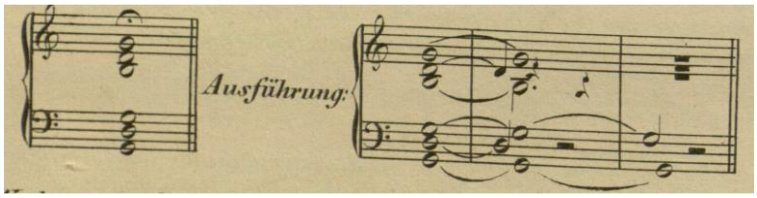
Example 7.14.3

Crescendo can be achieved by adding voice doublings:[641]



Example 7.14.4

In rooms with little reverberation, final chords are to be played 'diminuendo' in a manner that is very similar to old harpsichord techniques:[642]



Example 7.14.5

To summarise, Volckmar proposes a free and improvisatory approach to the score; the performer has to recognise the musical ideas and 'recreate' them on his instrument. Unfortunately there are very few early acoustical recordings of organ music available that could be evidence of this way of playing

[640] Volckmar, W.: op. cit., 103.
[641] Volckmar, W.: op. cit., 100.
[642] Volckmar, W.: op. cit., 102.

the organ. However, the M. Welte company, whose reproduction pianos were already mentioned several times in this study, developed a similar system for organs in 1911: the Welte Philharmonic Organ. Several famous organists-composers made recordings in Freiburg, including Max Reger and Marcel Dupré.[643] Interestingly, some of these organ rolls show features that were mentioned by Volckmar. The adding of voices to create the impression of a crescendo, for instance can be heard in Joseph Bonnet's recording of his *Deuxième Légende* op. 7 no. 10 (0'59" – 1'29"):

[7.14 #1 Bonnet: *2me Légende*, Joseph Bonnet (1884-1944); organ roll ca 1911-1928]

Eugène Gigout can be heard arpeggiating the final chords of his *Toccata* in b minor from the *10 Pièces*:

[7.14 #2 Gigout: *Toccata*, Eugène Gigout (1844-1925)]

In addition, Max Reger arpeggiates the chords in a particularly expressive passage in his *Canzone* op 65 no. 9; he plays this passage slower as well (1'14" – 1'37"):

[7.14 #3 Reger: *Canzone*, Max Reger (1873-1916)]

In his recording of the *Lamento* from the *Douze Pièces*, Bonnet expressively stretches important melodic tones (2'35" – 3'04"):

[7.14 #4 Bonnet: *Lamento*, Eugène Bonnet]

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that improvisatory timing occurred in practically every field of music-making throughout the entire nineteenth century. A major area that has not been investigated in this study is orchestral music. Admittedly, the symphonic orchestra is at the core of nineteenth-century musical developments; with respect to an improvisatory attitude, however, it is a complicated case, one that would form a separate field of research. The relation between the individual player, the collective, the conductor and the audience has varied considerably during the nineteenth century, and generalisations easily lead to contradictions. On the level of individual members of the orchestra, for example, it would be tempting to assume that an improvisatory attitude was not expected (especially beginning with Wagner); on the other hand, there is Leopold Stokowski, who in the twentieth century still applied 'free bowing', which implied a certain degree of differentiation within the string sections. If the orchestra is seen as the conductor's 'instrument', it is actually the conductor who may show an improvisatory attitude. The example of Willem Mengelberg might come to mind here, the conductor who performed such extensive rubato with his

[643] Examples 7.14 #1 - #4 are taken from the CD: *Die Welte-Philharmonie-Orgel im Museum für mechanische Musikinstrumente in Linz*. Intercord 860.857, 1986. The rolls were probably made around 1912.

Concertgebouworkest. But then, it is well-known that Mengelberg's 'freedom' actually was based on an unusually large number of rehearsals.

In part 2 of this study, improvisatory aspects of score-based music-making in a variety of situations have been examined, focusing on ornamentation and timing. A common thread has been a fundamentally rhetorical understanding of music-making, with a leading role for the *varietas* principle. Two aspects of variety have been highlighted: the application of ornamentation and flexibility in timing. With respect to the latter, an analogy between music-making and walking has been proposed to introduce a different view on musical tempo. In this way, the idea of 'playing with scores' could be framed; today, too, performances can be true 'recreations' without being arbitrary (→ chapter 2.2). However, I argue that, in order to make this possible, a performer needs a working knowledge of the musical languages concerned: an improvisatory attitude to score-based music-making presupposes the ability to extemporise in the same style. In other words: to a certain extent, a recreator has to be a creator. This aspect of nineteenth-century music-making will be the subject of part 3.