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PROJECT: Piano playing in 1820s Vienna. PhD project conducted at the Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo.

Abstract

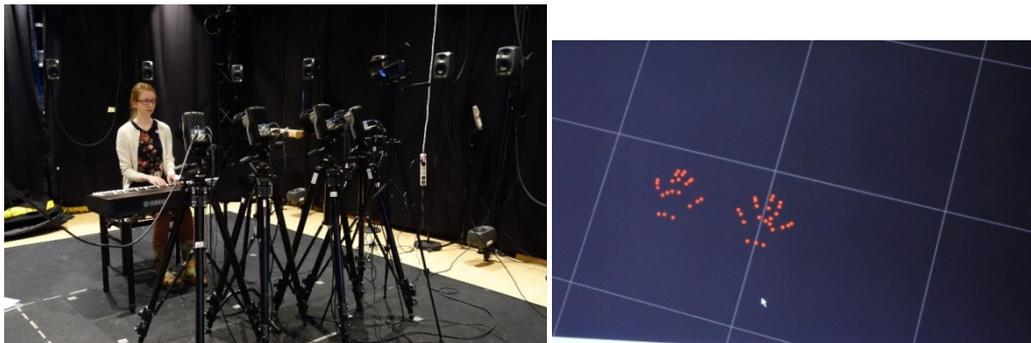
As a part of my nearly completed PhD at the Norwegian Academy of Music, I have worked systematically since 2010 at adopting technical advice from the piano treatises of 1820s Vienna. This procedure has completely 'reconditioned' my technique – and with it, the quality of the sound, the stress (*Betonung*) and the phrasing options. Significant changes are clearly perceivable on historical fortepianos as well as modern pianos. These changes defined a new 'interpretive space' for piano music of the early nineteenth century, as I can easily demonstrate (on any piano). So far, I have particularly studied etudes by J. N. Hummel and solo piano works by Schubert, and am currently reintroducing etudes by Chopin to my repertoire.

Pedagogical treatises – together with instrument and manuscript studies – are the main premises for this research, and remain our fundamental informants to musical practices of the past. However, it is essential to realize that the *practice* of Viennese fortepiano playing died out with the disappearance of the Viennese fortepiano. As commonly acknowledged, there were two schools of piano building (English vs Viennese), and important pianists like Hummel and Kalkbrenner stated that even the players of these different areas were distinguished by their different features/characteristics. A comparison of keyboard treatises of the early nineteenth century, where the basic rules or principles of piano playing are found to convey differences according to geographic divides, supports this claim.

The current projects attempts a reconstruction of basic piano technique developed for the mature Viennese fortepiano. A remarkable consistency among the sources

has been found concerning basic rules of the practice: body posture and arm/hand/finger movements. As I relearned these basics, my playing changed remarkably and my technical command of the instrument gained a completely new consciousness, which my piano students now benefit from. It was never my intention to do a project on piano technique, but I was captured by what I found and realized the close and inevitable relationship between technical choices certain musical solutions, certain ways of phrasing, even a certain sound ideal.

As a final stage in this research, a collaboration with the Motion Capture Lab at the University of Oslo has been initiated, where my hand and finger motion in are documented in great detail by highly advanced computer systems. The use of this technology allows for a confirmation of my changes in technical execution, in phrasing, stress and dynamic nuance.



Conference questions

This research project has completely changed my practice as a (forte)pianist, as well as my perceived performance ideals. I continue to refine and develop my playing according to how I now hear the music differently than before. Along with the practical 'experiment' of a complete make-over of my technical approach to keyboard playing, I study music theory of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

I teach ca. 250 music students in Oslo each year, who benefit from my new knowledge. For the piano students, I am able to explain technical matters very exactly, while for all the music history/analysis students, I teach music analysis and history of reception according to the ideals of the time relevant for the actual works.

All of my future performances and classes will bear the stamp of this research, although these events can hardly be said to *be* the research. Even artists should think!

MATERIAL AVAILABLE: Video (ca. 20 minutes) where the 'reconstructed technique' is demonstrated on an original Viennese fortepiano.

Documentation from the Motion Capture Lab

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION: Demonstration (on any piano) of the findings – my 'before-technique' – compared with my 'reconstructed technique', in music excerpts by Hummel, Schubert, Chopin and others.