

DLA doctoral dissertation theses

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# Interpretation and notation in the late piano works of Franz Schubert

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## I. Case history of the research

The main areas of my dissertation consist of the comparative discussion of different editions and the mapping of the notational habits of Schubert concerning dynamical indications. The professional literature does not yet know of a study of similar depth about the divergence of several editions. Roy Howat writes about the responsibilities of editors in general („Reading between the Lines of Tempo and Rhythm in the B flat Sonata, D960“ in Brian Newbould (ed.): *Schubert the Progressive. History, Performance Practice, Analysis*, 117. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), and Walther Dürr illustrates this with pertinent examples („Notation and Performance: Dynamic Marks in Schubert’s Manuscripts“ in Brian Newbould (ed.): *Schubert the Progressive. History, Performance Practice, Analysis*, 39-40. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003). Moreover, Miklós Dolinszky, in the course of his presentation of certain notational characteristics of Schubert juxtaposes the solutions of Könnemann and NGA („Hitelesség és hagyományozás. Haydn- és Schubert-zongoraművek közreadói tapasztalatai“ in *Zenatudományi Dolgozatok* 1995-96, 83-97. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1998). David Montgomery also juxtaposes a range of editions in order to demonstrate different editorial interpretations of certain musical situations (*Franz Schubert’s Music in Performance. Compositional Ideals*,

*Notational Intent, Historical Realities, Pedagogical Foundations.* Monographs in Musicology No.11. New York: Pendragon Press, 2003).

The above mentioned studies do not, however, aim at a comprehensive picture, one that would necessitate analyses and interpretations of a great number of cases and editorial inclinations in a multitude of editions.

The professional body of literature pertaining to the notational system of Schubert is more considerable. Elizabeth Norman McKay („The Interpretation of Schubert’s *Decrescendo* and Accent Markings“ in *Music Review* XXII (1961), 108-11. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1961) and Walther Dürr („Notation and Performance“, 46-47) both deal with the problem of Schubert’s *decrescendo* hairpin vs. accent mark notation. In spite of Schubert’s variable-size use of the *decrescendo* hairpin, McKay discusses the *decrescendo* and the accent phenomena separately. Her study is too brief, and takes the notational signs out of context (by citing only individual notes in her Examples) and, while she does refer to the autograph, she does not actually provide it as an example. For the above reasons, I am doubtful as to the relevance of her conclusions.

In his article Dürr states that Schubert, in all likelihood, did not himself distinguish between the two separate functions of the hairpin sign. In light of this statement, it is all the more confusing why NGA (of which Dürr is not merely one editor, but its chief editor) separates the two

functions, resulting in a reduction of Schubert’s often giant hairpins to tiny accent marks. The sonata edition of Wiener Urtext also separates the two interpretations of the sign. Montgomery (*Franz Schubert’s Music in Performance*, 80) nonetheless opines that such decisions are best left to the performer based on a case-by-case evaluation of the musical context (as long as the edition used bothers to reflect the distinct sizes of the hairpins found in the autographs). Kœnemann, Henle and the piano pieces edition of Wiener Urtext do in fact show the different hairpin sizes.

There is no comprehensive study yet about Schubert’s use of dynamics. Dürr discusses the phenomenon of the anticipated notation („Notation and Performance“, 43), where a dynamical mark precedes the note in space to which it refers. Likewise, he calls attention to the distinct use of *diminuendo*. As a consequence, NGA treats *diminuendo* as a tempo indication. Dürr („Notation and Performance“, 39) discusses certain occurrences of doubled dynamical indications. His justification for them, however, remains restricted to their function as boundary markers and to their role in terms of the layout of the page. He does not discuss many different musical justifications for such doublings. Expert discussion about the various schubertian uses of *decrescendo* is also largely absent just as well as about the composer’s use of dynamical indications to point at events that occur at different musical levels. Moreover, Alfred Brendel’s rather disparaging remarks about Schubert’s system of notating dynamics

are also unhelpful („Schubert’s Last Sonatas“ in *Music Sounded Out. Essays, Lectures, Interviews, Afterthoughts*, 132. London: Robson Books Ltd., 1991). Brendel attributes certain seeming inconsistencies of his dynamical markings to Schubert's lack of experience without recognizing the consistently local manner of their use in this composer's output.

## II. Sources

I have compared four modern editions: the piano sonatas and piano pieces of Neue Schubert Ausgabe, Wiener Urtext Edition, Henle Verlag, and the piano pieces of Könemann Music Budapest, in all cases matching them with the first editions and the autographs. In some instances I made reference to the old complete edition as well. (A detailed bibliography of the autograph sources is given in the introduction of my thesis text, whereas in the appendix the reader finds a complete list of all referenced printed editions.) Apart from the scores, I also made use of articles by András Schiff and Roy Howat containing remarkable suggestions of interpretation not found in any printed edition (András Schiff: „Schubert’s piano sonatas: thoughts about interpretation and performance“ in Brian Newbould (ed.): *Schubert Studies*, 196. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998; Roy Howat: „What do we perform?“ In John Rink (ed.): *The Practice of Performance. Studies in Musical Interpretation*, 16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; and

„Reading between the Lines of Tempo and Rhythm in the B flat Sonata, D960“, 133).

## III. Methodology

In the first part of my study I compare several modern editions, tracing their different solutions back to the autograph. The goal of this comparison is to demonstrate the primary influence of the score's visual outlay on its interpretation, pointing out its power to alter the performance. In the second part, the discussion about Schubert's use of dynamic marks highlights important aspects of performance realization as well. My suggestion here is that these signs can only be interpreted with respect to their musical context. At the same time I bring together identical dynamic marks occurring in similar musical situations, thus opening the way towards a typology of certain marks. I emphasize nonetheless, that the aim of my method is not such a typology after all, as the very real and tangible inconsistencies of Schubert's notation may indeed render such an effort fruitless. In my writing I rather strive at showing how Schubert – far beyond the traditional use of dynamic marks – calls attention to a diversity of musical events, the actual interpretation of which at all times must vary according to the immediate musical context of his use of such marks. As Schubert's dynamic marks often touch upon the tempo, I considered it necessary to extend my discussion to the more general problems of tempo

in the composer's output. In this connection I endeavor to delineate notable changes in performance practice. Wherever feasible, I also refer to actual performances of outstanding pianists. By doing this I intended to demonstrate the inexhaustible variety of possible interpretations and musical solutions. On the whole, the composer's manuscript remains one of the most important points of reference in my dissertation. Its investigation is enlightening both in terms of comparing editions and in any analysis of Schubert's system of notating dynamics. Concerning the much contested topic of the decrescendo/accents hairpins, I first discuss the respective positions of various editions and extant literature before giving my own account based on the autograph, fully considering the actual musical context, and mindful of Schubert's habits in his notational solutions.

#### **IV. Accomplishments**

The comparison and evaluation of the different interpretations of various editions requires a blend of analytical and performance centric research. Perhaps this explains the absence of a large-scale study on this topic. In choosing this topic I attempt to offer answers on various questions of interpretation by unifying the approach of the researcher and the performer. What is also new in my study is that the comparisons of the different editions focus on their capacity to alter the musical rendering.

Neither is there a comprehensive study on the use of Schubert's dynamic markings aimed directly at their interpretation. My dissertation also attempts to discover the significance of Schubert's unique use of multiple interconnected slurs for the first time.

#### **V. Documentation of activities related to the dissertation**

The topic of my earlier 2005 thesis was the motivic and textural structure of Schubert's C-major symphony.

I have performed in recitals Schubert's Wanderer-fantasy (D 760), the first series of impromptus (D 899), the f-minor impromptu Nr.4 of the second series (D 935), the Three Piano Pieces (D 946), the B-major (D 575), C-major (D 840), a-minor (D 845), c-minor (D 958) and A-major (D 959) sonatas, as well as four-hand piano variations and the four-hand sonata in C-major (Grand Duo, D 812). More recently, I expose Schubert's works in my concert programs in such contexts (for example along with works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) that – transcending their stylistic marks – reveal their exceedingly progressive straits. It is out of such considerations that I plan to mix Schubert's Three Piano Pieces with Schoenberg's Three Piano Pieces Op. 11 in the program of my graduation recital.