

Thesis of a Dissertation

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Beethoven: The Kreutzer Sonata
Expressive Means and Performance Traditions from the
Work's Genesis to the First Significant Recordings

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I. Antecedents of the Research

Since the second half of the twentieth century, increasing attention has been paid to performance practices that seek to approach the sound and style of a work's own period through the study of contemporary performance conventions and sources connected with the composer. This approach has become known as Historically Informed Performance Practice (HIPP). The scope of this field was subsequently broadened, notably through the work of Clive Brown and Neal Peres Da Costa, to include the study of historical performance traditions, performance techniques, and early recordings.

My research drew particularly on Brown's *Classical and Romantic Performance Practice 1750–1900* and his studies of nineteenth-century violin performance techniques, as well as on Peres Da Costa's *Off the Record*. My discussion of nineteenth-century tempo rubato was informed by the research of Richard Hudson and Sandra Rosenblum.

An important starting point for my dissertation was Brown and Peres Da Costa's 2021 Bärenreiter edition of Beethoven's violin sonatas and the accompanying *Performing Practice Commentary*. Their work approached Beethoven's notation in the light of contemporary performance conventions, including tempo rubato, portamento, asynchrony, and unnotated arpeggiation. Building on this approach, I focused specifically on the Kreutzer Sonata, examining its nineteenth-

century performance traditions and sources alongside its early recordings.

The pedagogical works of Louis Spohr, Friedrich Hermann, Joseph Joachim, and Andreas Moser were important sources for my study of nineteenth-century violin performance practice. In addition, editions of Beethoven's works by Ferdinand David, Joseph Joachim, Carl Halir, and Fritz Kreisler allowed me to investigate changes in performance traditions and techniques during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as possible connections between them.

Previous scholarship has examined many aspects of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performance practice, Beethoven's notation and its historical interpretation, historical editions, and Romantic performance practices preserved in early recordings. These areas, however, have not previously been brought together in a comprehensive study of the performance history of the Kreutzer Sonata. In my dissertation, I combined Beethoven scholarship with pedagogical and musical sources on nineteenth-century violin performance practice and the analysis of early recordings, treating them as evidence of a broader historical development.

II. Sources

The primary historical sources for my research were documents and early editions relating to the genesis of Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century violin methods, historical editions of

Beethoven's works, and recordings made during the first half of the twentieth century. In examining the work's composition history, I drew on sources concerning its composition, premiere, and first edition. I studied the technical background of violin playing in Beethoven's time and its development through the work of major figures of the French violin school, including Giovanni Battista Viotti, Rodolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Rode, and Pierre Baillot.

For the study of nineteenth-century violin performance practice, the violin methods of Louis Spohr, Friedrich Hermann, Joseph Joachim, and Andreas Moser were important sources. I also used the Beethoven editions by David (1868), Joachim (1901), Halir (1905), and Kreisler (1911) to examine the continuation and transformation of performance traditions.

Of particular importance was Ferdinand David's 1868 edition, which, according to Clive Brown's research, is one of the two earliest surviving editions of the Kreutzer Sonata to contain performance markings. Its fingerings and bowings were important sources for the study of nineteenth-century violin performance traditions. Some of David's performance choices resemble practices documented in the violin method of his teacher, Spohr, while some of his markings also appear in Joachim's later Beethoven edition.

Another important group of primary sources consisted of early recordings. I used Frithjof Vollmer's recording catalogue as a starting point, supplementing it through my own research with the 1940 concert recording by Bartók and Szigeti and with discographical information on

two recordings. From the recordings listed up to 1940, I selected three interpretations for detailed analysis: the 1930 recording by Ignaz Friedman and Bronisław Huberman, the 1936 recording by Fritz Kreisler and Franz Rupp, and the 1940 recording by Béla Bartók and József Szigeti. The list of recordings is included in the appendix to the dissertation. The recordings made it possible to examine which of the performance techniques heard on them could be related to practices documented in earlier sources.

I also used Carl Flesch's memoirs and biographical documents relating to the performers examined as historical sources. These helped to investigate performance traditions, connections between the musicians, and the historical background of the interpretations.

Among the secondary literature, I drew primarily on the research of Clive Brown, Neal Peres Da Costa, Richard Hudson, and Sandra Rosenblum on performance practice, as well as on studies concerning Beethoven's life, the composition history of the Kreutzer Sonata, the French violin school, and the performers examined in the dissertation. This literature allowed me to place the conclusions drawn from the primary sources and recordings within their historical and performance-practice context.

III. Method

My research method was based on historical source research, the study of nineteenth-century performance practice, the tracing of the

transmission of performance traditions, and the comparative analysis of early recordings. My aim was to examine how performance techniques documented in Beethoven's time and during the nineteenth century could be traced in later sources and in recordings from the first half of the twentieth century.

Alongside the study of the genesis of the Kreutzer Sonata, I examined Beethoven's connections with violinists of his time, as well as the influence of the technical innovations of the French violin school on Beethoven's works for violin. By comparing historical and musical sources, I placed the work within the technical context of violin playing in which it was composed and in which its first performers worked.

The next major part of my research focused on nineteenth-century performance practice. By comparing contemporary violin methods, historical editions, and the relevant literature, I traced changes in particular performance traditions and techniques. I dealt separately with different forms of tempo rubato, the use of vibrato and portamento, changes in bowing technique, as well as asynchrony and unnotated arpeggiation in piano playing. I used historical editions primarily to compare fingerings, bowings, and other performance markings.

I supplemented the comparison of sources by examining indirect connections between performance traditions. On the basis of teacher–student relationships and documented artistic collaborations, I examined possible lines of transmission that could connect nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century performance practice. In the case of violinists,

one important line was the connection between Spohr, David, Joachim, and subsequent generations of violinists; in the case of pianists, I examined, among others, Beethoven, Czerny, Liszt, and the performance traditions that followed them. I also illustrated these connections with professional family trees included in the dissertation.

The largest analytical section of the research was devoted to the study of early recordings. Of the known recordings of the Kreutzer Sonata made between 1911 and 1940, I selected three significant interpretations for detailed comparative analysis: the 1930 recording by Friedman and Huberman, the 1936 recording by Kreisler and Rupp, and the 1940 recording by Bartók and Szigeti. After examining the performers' careers and artistic connections, I analysed the previously identified performance techniques at specific musical passages. I examined tempo relationships and fluctuations in the recordings by comparing metronome values, and compared the performance choices heard in the recordings with practices documented in contemporary violin methods, historical editions, and other historical sources.

An important principle of my method was that I did not regard twentieth-century recordings as direct reflections of Beethoven's own performance practice. I examined which of the techniques heard in the recordings showed similarities to, or could be connected with, performance practices whose existence was documented in earlier historical sources.

A distinctive feature of my research was the combined use of historical source research, the comparison of score and pedagogical

sources, the mapping of connections between performers, and the analysis of recordings in the study of the performance history of a single work. I applied the findings of international research on performance practice to the three interpretations of the Kreutzer Sonata examined in the dissertation and compared performance techniques documented in historical sources with the performance choices heard in the recordings.

IV. Results

I have been interested in the Kreutzer Sonata and its early recordings since the age of fifteen. I was particularly struck by performance choices that differ from present-day performance practice, especially in the use of tempo rubato, vibrato, portamento, asynchrony, and unnotated arpeggiation. One of the starting questions of my research was therefore what historical precedents these performance techniques had, and what connections could be identified between period written sources and recordings from the first half of the twentieth century.

As a result of my research, I showed that the technical characteristics of the violin part in the Kreutzer Sonata should not be understood in isolation, but can be related to Beethoven's earlier violin-piano sonatas and to the technical innovations of the French violin school. A comparison of the Sonata in D major, Op. 12 No. 1, and the Sonata in A major, Op. 47, shows that the role of the violin increased considerably: in the Kreutzer Sonata, the part is characterised by a greater

variety of characters, more extreme dynamics, a wider register, and a higher degree of virtuosity.

By comparing nineteenth-century pedagogical sources and historical editions, I identified indirect connections between particular performance traditions. The fingerings and bowings in Ferdinand David's 1865 edition of Beethoven's Violin Concerto and his 1868 edition containing the violin-piano sonatas show similarities in several respects to practices documented in the violin method of his teacher, Louis Spohr. Some of David's performance markings can also be found in Joseph Joachim's 1901 edition of Beethoven's sonatas. The comparison of these sources makes it possible to trace changes in particular nineteenth-century violin performance techniques and their possible connections.

For the study of recordings, I used Frithjof Vollmer's recording catalogue as a starting point, supplementing it through my own research with the 1940 concert recording by Bartók and Szigeti and with discographical information on two recordings. From the recordings listed up to 1940, I selected three interpretations for detailed analysis: the 1930 recording by Ignaz Friedman and Bronisław Huberman, the 1936 recording by Fritz Kreisler and Franz Rupp, and the 1940 recording by Béla Bartók and József Szigeti. A comparison of these three interpretations shows that performance techniques documented in nineteenth-century sources did not appear in recordings from the first half of the twentieth century as a uniform style, but rather in different ways and in different combinations in the playing of individual musicians.

In Huberman's playing, certain elements of the "masterly" style of performance described by Spohr are particularly evident, including a varied use of vibrato and portamento. Kreisler's more continuous vibrato already points towards twentieth-century violin playing, while his use of portamento and rubato, as well as some of his approaches to bowing, can be related to nineteenth-century practice. Szigeti's playing likewise displays tempo rubato, vocal-style portamento, and a use of vibrato that can be connected with earlier traditions.

The analysis of the pianists revealed similar differences. Of the three pianists examined, Bartók made the most varied use of asynchrony, unnotated arpeggiation, and different forms of tempo rubato. These techniques were also prominent in Friedman's playing, while Rupp employed them considerably more sparingly.

Taken together, the historical sources, editions, connections between performers, and recordings show that the interpretations examined from the first half of the twentieth century contain a number of performance techniques whose existence had already been documented in Beethoven's time and in later nineteenth-century sources. Although these recordings cannot be regarded as direct reflections of Beethoven's own manner of performance, some of the performance choices heard on them can be related to performance practices described in earlier sources. In this sense, the playing of these musicians, preserved for posterity, represents an indirect trace of Beethoven's time in the musical life of a century later.

V. Documentation of the Activities Relevant to the Topic of the Dissertation

Lecture and mini-concert as a scholarship holder of the New National Excellence Programme (ÚNKP), 2019–2020

Dates and venues:

23 January 2020 – Kodály Institute, Kecskemét

24 January 2020 – Liszt Academy of Music, Lecture Room I

Title of the lecture:

Beethoven and the Violin Sonata Genre, with Particular Reference to the Kreutzer Sonata*

Description:

Musical and technical changes in the violin sonata genre as reflected in Beethoven's violin sonatas.

Programme of the mini-concert:

Ludwig van Beethoven: Kreutzer Sonata in A major, Op. 47

Performers:

Oszkár Varga – violin

Imre Dani – piano

Chamber Music by Schubert and Brahms – Concert Series at the Bartók Memorial House

Dates:

Concert 1 – 17 March 2024

Concert 2 – 23 March 2024

Concert 3 – 27 April 2024

Description:

A chamber music series consisting of three concerts, in which I based some of the fingerings, portamenti, and bowings I used in Schubert's chamber works on Ferdinand David's historical editions. The concerts thus provided an opportunity to apply in practice some elements of nineteenth-century violin performance practice examined in the dissertation.

Performers:

Oszkár Varga – violin

Gábor Csalog – piano