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**MUSIC IN LIGHT OF THE SOUL**

*SELECTED PIECES FOR STRING ORCHESTRA BY BACH,  
MOZART AND HAYDN*

THESIS OF DLA DISSERTATION

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## The aims of the dissertation

The aim of my dissertation is to use three exceptional works from eighteenth-century musical pieces for string orchestra – *Concerto for Two Violins* by Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sinfonia Concertante* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and the “Emperor” *Quartet* by Joseph Haydn –, on the one hand, to map out the performative attitudes that preceded bourgeois-romantic tastes in music, which included the social and cultural atmosphere of the rising middle classes, yet fundamentally they were still rooted in aristocratic performative attitudes. The other aim of the dissertation is to highlight the reasons behind different ways of musical expression, by the means of comparing different audio recordings of the analysed pieces.

My goal is to draw such authoritative conclusions that can inspire musical performers – especially string performers, but, in a wider sense, other musicians as well – to *rethink* their performance practices. I aim to advance the development of an understanding artist individual, to provide reference points for those who harbour an internal *demand* to make the power of their musical expression more conscious. I am not only addressing performing artists, however: in my opinion, my attitude as a researcher can be, in general, utilized by those who attend musical performances as members of the audience, yet they would like to listen to and appreciate the performance from a more artistic position.

I use such theoretical works from the mid-eighteenth century as secondary sources for my research which were, for the most part, intended for pedagogical purposes and which provide technical instruction on playing instruments – including string and wind instruments as well as keys –, along with excellent theoretical records of style, various musical genres and characters, all in all, about musical performance and expression, of a way of thinking about music, which was not necessarily unified but *striving* towards a unified way of playing. This body of scholarly literature from around 1750 contains four major works: the “violin school” *The Art of Playing on the Violin* by Francesco Geminiani (London, 1751), the “violin school” (*Gründliche Violinschule*, Augsburg, 1756) by Leopold Mozart – the father of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart –, a “flute school” by Johann Joachim Quantz (*Versuch einer*

*Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, Berlin, 1752), and a “clavichord school” by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the son of Johann Sebastian Bach (*Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, Berlin, Volume I 1753, Volume II 1762, later omnibus edition Leipzig, 1787).

First, I rely on this scholarly literature to analyse the selected musical pieces using scores featuring original notes from the composers.

A knowledge of contemporary theory is necessary because composers from any time period will – obviously – only note down instructions which, for them, and for the performative and interpretative practices of their closer or wider social circles *are neither usual nor natural*. No one should want to make *superfluous* notes about performance techniques which are natural or self-evident, no matter how densely they annotate their scores. A musical piece cannot be “deciphered” based merely on its score. The entire score is just a *sign*, which stands for a quantity of marked and unmarked content.<sup>1</sup> Its subject – the piece of music itself – is born only in the moment when the notes are played. That is why it is important and worthy, when learning and practicing the piece, and, in case of an orchestra, rehearsing together, not to rely on the musical notations only, but to take time to map out the composer’s intentions in advance.

The other – and *more important, more fundamental* – objective of my dissertation is to analyse pieces of music not just through their scores but through audio recordings containing the performance of these pieces, comparing two recordings of every single piece. It is not my intention to “declare” any one performance “better” or “more authentic” than the other, nor to rank performers and orchestras as “better” or “worse.” (It would be a laughable attempt to do so anyway, since my selection includes only recordings of successful performers of international renown; however, several of them are entirely unknown in Hungary.) It is my intention instead to highlight the performative *differences* between recordings of the same piece, to map out their fundamental characteristics.

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1 Cf. Katalin S. Nagy (2007): *Mű–művészek–befogadás*. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, p. 64. In this case, the painting can be replaced by the notion of the score, since just like a painting, the score also carries additional meaning as an *image*, that is, visually.

The ultimate objective of my research is to examine the *methods* of musical performance, especially the examination of the reasons why the audience, the recipient can distinguish one performance from another. Why, and on what basis, is an artistic performance specific, unique, and, ultimately, why is it impossible to replicate?

### **Motivations behind the choice of topic**

I am a trained violinist and violin instructor, which is undoubtedly the reason why I have chosen such pieces of music which feature the violin as a lead instrument. On the other hand, I have chosen the abovementioned three deservedly famous musical pieces from the eighteenth century because I have a professional and personal interest in preromantic methods of musical performance. When I was studying at the Liszt Ferenc Academy in Budapest, I had the chance to meet several famous Hungarian performers who play Baroque instruments – Zsolt Kalló violinist, the art director of Capella Savaria from Szombathely, as well as Anikó Horváth and Borbála Dobozy, both of them harpsichordists –, whose performative and teaching practices made a lasting impression on me. I spent the academic year of 2008/2009 in Salzburg on an Erasmus scholarship, where I had the chance to experience the performing traditions that were customary in Mozart's times and which can only be found in traces in contemporary performances, under the guidance of the late Jürgen Geise violinist, a former student of Sándor Végh. Furthermore, I studied with Tibor Bényi cellist-conductor, the art director of the Kammermusik Akademie Salzburg, which later developed into a long-term work relationship. After graduation, I took a position at the Kodály Philharmonic Orchestra in Debrecen, and soon afterwards I could once again collaborate with Tibor Bényi: as per the orchestra's request, we have been working under his guidance with great success and have given and continue to give many a successful concert with him conducting. In a wider sense, I should also mention the work of conductor Gábor Káli from Nuremberg, whom I owe a great deal when it comes to the more conscious application of musical performance methods.

## The process of artistic creation

The performing artist is positioned between two pillars of the process of artistic creation. One pillar is the creator/author, the other is the recipient/audience. In terms of musical performance: the performing artist – even if they are the composer as well – fulfil the role of a transfer medium. The composer merely writes the score, which, in itself, does not create the sound; the sound is created the performer performing the piece, who engineers the actual birth of the piece this way. This, however, is not the end of the process: we tend not to mistake an orchestra rehearsal for a concert. The reason for this is not the fact that the piece is usually rawer when performed in rehearsal, while in concert the orchestra is more prepared. No, while the former statement is generally true, the most significant difference lies in the fact that in rehearsal it is *not the work of art* that is played, while in concert/performance, *it already is*: the other pillar of the creative process is *the audience*, who basically *finishes* the work by *reacting* to it – either in a positive or in a negative manner.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, both the creator and the performer are in vulnerable positions to the audience (and, potentially, to professional critics as well). This is the kind of vulnerability that has always been and is still, so to say, “mercilessly” present, regardless of time or social-cultural background: the success of a performance does not necessarily depend on how talented the performers are in their own genre, how much time and effort have been invested in rehearsal, what kind of mental state they are in during the performance etc. What matters a great deal more and in the first place is what kinds of *demands* and *expectations* the audience have from the performers. The potential success or failure of a performance ultimately depends on the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of these expectations.<sup>3</sup>

What can a performing artist do in such a vulnerable position? In my opinion, they can certainly utilize all their energy to produce such an intense performance that can

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Nagy 2007, pp. 23–24.

<sup>3</sup> In connection with the definition, according to which the actual birth of the work of art can be witnessed in the reflections of the audience reacting to the piece as a work of art. Cf. S. Nagy 2007, pp. 29–30.

provide the potential maximum of intense artistic experience. Such a constructive, uplifting experience that makes the recipients *realize* that they have been enriched by a cultural *treasure*.<sup>4</sup> This way, the aim is to urge the recipients to *react* as intensely as possible, knowing that there is no worse feedback for a performer – and, at the same time, meaning the *death* of an artwork as well – as a lack of feedback.

Thus, musical performers – apart from their role as a medium – are “co-parents” labouring at the birth of the musical piece as well; they are not only participants in creation by playing the piece, but they are also *conveying* it to the audience. It is an essential part of the process of artistic creation that a work of art also addresses *someone*, and by *providing an experience*, it *makes finishing the work possible*.<sup>5</sup> It is the primacy of this experience provision which differentiates musical, and, in general, every artistic performance and process (including exhibitions) from sciences.

The composer’s most likely reason for writing a piece of music is the question what kind of demands and expectations they can fulfil with it *here and now*, particularly from the perspective of prospective audiences. That is, the real milestones in the premiere and future musical “career” of a piece are the *effects* it has on audiences, the *experience* it provides. This feature of art, or rather, of artistic creation is particularly human, particularly personal, and particularly unique, that is, it carries a different meaning for each and every member of the audience.<sup>6</sup> Just like there no two identical psyches, there are no two identical experiences either, what is more, due to the momentary nature of performance, there are no two identical performances (“*horribile dictu*,” no two identical *works of art*) either.

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4 Cf. Ágnes Losonczi (1969): *A zene életének szociológiája*. Budapest, p. 26.

5 Cf. Losonczi 1969, *ibid*.

6 What we state here is nothing less than the fact that in the reception of a work the recipients are facing *themselves* as well; as social beings, they form an opinion about the work of art through their experiences, habits, tastes. Cf. S. Nagy 2007, pp. 81–82; Losonczi 1969, pp. 28–29. “Just as man is being expressed in the work of art, similarly, the work of art is being expressed in man [...]” Losonczi 1969, p. 202. [*Translation mine.*]

## Aspects of the perception of musical performance

Musical performance is primarily a temporal process: it is mostly the aspects of time perception that shape the performance and expression of music into a unique and individual experience. For the audience, the performance is an experience in time; it carries a message that can be interpreted or, so to say, “decoded” in time. In light of all this, the aspects I apply in my analysis to examine musical performance are as follows:

- a) Tempo, that is, the question of the speed of performance: the connection of keeping or freely interpreting the tempo and the musical content.
- b) Metre, that is, the treatment of beats: differentiating between the musical elements that are stressed (usually starting elements) and those that are less stressed or unstressed from a metric perspective.
- c) Dynamics, that is, the perspective of volume: keeping (constant dynamics) or changing (fluctuating dynamics) within the tune, and the ratio of individual sounds within a harmony, in light of harmonic functions.
- d) The aspect of timbre, which, beside the tempo, is the other major means of expressing character: timbre can provide background and content about the emotions and moods featured in a work in a – usually – varied manner.

After the abovementioned – more general – aspects let us see some further aspects, not unrelated to the previous ones, that will allow for a “more sensitive,” more specific description:

- e) The expression of movements and movement patterns in the musical process with gesture-like elements (even including the movements of the performers themselves, which follow the musical gestures).
- f) The questions of articulation and agogics (microtiming<sup>7</sup>): these are the tools that the performer can use to *delay* – usually – in time, and, by the same token, *highlight* certain elements of the musical process. This can happen in order to showcase tonal or harmonic heights and depths, and, as a result, the tune process can gain a further

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<sup>7</sup> László Stachó (2013): *Bartók előadóművészi modelljei és ideáljai*. Doctoral dissertation. Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, p. 15.

arch, further details (*cf.* the abovementioned play with gestures); or, in order to simply interpret the formal structure of the work. The latter is one of the most important methods of musical expression: mapping out the formal structure of the work down to the elements of microstructure, then showcasing all this in the performance by highlighting formal boundaries. This is just as much a natural, “internal” performative instinct as the previous aspects: nothing could be further from a musical performance “coming from inside” than the metronome-like, mechanical keeping of time, a uniform temporality between each note. This can be “learned” as a result of misguided pedagogical attitudes, but it would not come naturally to any performer.

The *varied* experience of duration is so important in our musical perception because *music itself is varied* as well. A musical work of art differs from a mere sequence of sounds in the way it establishes a *relationship* between the sounds, as a result of which the sequence of sounds gains *meaning*; and – more or less consistently – is *organized into a system*. A *hierarchical relationship* is built between the elements bearing different levels of significance in the content of a piece by showcasing, highlighting or downplaying certain elements. Thus, the musical process can be *interpreted* not only by the performer, but by the audience as well.

g) Random variability, that is, the elements of variability that come from the current emotional-psychic state of the performers (not necessarily mistakes, but rather those unconscious elements of expression which in the moment deviate from what was previously usual).

h) Finally, the opposite of the former aspect: the *intentional deviation* from norms established by the genre or style. In such cases, performers *intentionally* break the known (and often generally accepted) rules, usually with agogic or dynamic means (e. g. using stressed agogics in an unstressed location, or by the omission of an expected agogic pause – when articulation does not delay but *hastens* the musical process). But what could be the aim of the performers with such decisions? Obviously, they would like to *surprise* the audience, and, by the same token, *intensify* the effect created.

And thus we have arrived at the final conclusion of our analysis: By employing the aspects of expression listed above, the performer – intentionally or otherwise – will have an *effect* on the audience, while the principles lie in *arousing, maintaining* and *guiding* the audience’s attention, through the stages of interest, excitement and surprise. In fact, *this is* the process that makes a unique, and, ultimately, *human* impression on the audience.<sup>8</sup>

## Comparative analyses

Recordings of *Concerto for Two Violins* by J. S. Bach:

- a) Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman accompanied by the English Chamber Orchestra, 1986, conductor: Daniel Barenboim;
- b) Janine Jansen and Leonidas Kavakos, featuring the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra, 2013 (no conductor).

Findings: the performance of Perlman and Zukerman presents a strict adherence to the tempo; it is predictable, precise, faultless. Their timbres are exceptionally and excellently aesthetic, especially in the slow movement. Their vibrato is rich, their motifs and each individual sound are rippling. Their characters adhere to a framework, they provide few surprises for the audience.

The performance of Jansen and Kavakos is full of extreme tempo changes within the common time, their handling of metre, however, is stable. Their dynamics is highly fluctuating, even within quite short motifs, within clusters made up of a mere few notes. Their performance is not predictable in the least, it is full of agogic surprises both in tempo and dynamics, including sudden delays or gaining speed unexpectedly. Their vibrato has a small amplitude and they do not use it constantly, only in showcases significant from the perspective of expression. Their sparing use or neglect of the vibrato is counterbalanced by large fluctuations in dynamics. Their characters are highly varied, featuring extreme differences in articulation.

Recordings of *Sinfonia Concertante* by W. A. Mozart:

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Stachó* 2013, pp. 15–16.

a) Gidon Kremer (violin) and Kim Kashkashian (viola) with the Wiener Philharmoniker, 1984, conductor: Nikolaus Harnoncourt;

b) Vilde Frang (violin) and Nils Mönkemeyer (viola) featuring the Basel Kammerorchester, 2014 (no conductor).

Findings: Kremer and Kashkashian keep to the tempo and their performance show more sustained dynamic levels (terraced dynamic structure); it is predictable, precise, faultless. Their timbres are exceptionally aesthetic. Their vibrato is rich, their motifs and each individual sound are elegantly shaped. Their characters are predictable, they provide few surprises for the audience. They more or less know and adhere to eighteenth century articulation traditions.

The performance of Frang and Mönkemeyer contains major tempo changes within the common time, specifically highlighting the differences between solo and orchestra sections. Their dynamics is fluctuating, even within quite short motifs, within clusters made up of a mere few notes. Their performance is less predictable, it is full of agogic surprises both in tempo and dynamics, including sudden delays or gaining speed unexpectedly. Their vibrato has a small amplitude and they do not use it constantly, only in showcases significant from the perspective of expression. Their characters are highly varied, featuring extreme differences in articulation. They are entirely familiar with and apply eighteenth century articulation traditions. On the recording, noises made by the audience and occasional mistakes made by the performers also give further nuance to the acoustic experience.

Recordings of the “*Emperor*” *Quartet* by J. Haydn:

a) The Amadeus Quartet; members: Norbert Brainin (violin 1), Siegmund Nissel (violin 2), Peter Schidlof (viola), and Martin Lovett (cello); Deutsche Grammophon 1964;

b) The St. Lawrence Quartet; members: Geoff Nuttall (violin 1), Owen Dalby (violin 2), Lesley Robertson (viola), and Christopher Constanza (cello); Houston, Texas 2014.

Findings: The performance of the Amadeus Quartet presents a strict adherence to the tempo and dynamics; it is predictable, precise, faultless. Their timbres are exceptionally and excellently aesthetic, especially in the slow movement. Their

vibrato is rich, their motifs and each individual sound are rippling. Their characters adhere to a framework, they provide few surprises for the audience.

The performance of the St. Lawrence Quartet contains major tempo changes within the common time, thus highlighting the division between different formal parts. Their treatment of metre is stable. Their dynamics is highly varied, featuring both fluctuating and terraced structures. All in all, their performance is full of agogic surprises – including unexpected delays or sudden gaining of speed –, which they use to showcase a wide spectrum of characters even within movements. They use vibrato sparingly or not at all, at most in highlights significant from the perspective of expression. Their sparing use or neglect of the vibrato is counterbalanced by large fluctuations in dynamics. In connection with this, their articulation shows extreme differences, from traditional aesthetic standards to particularly rough, almost provocative timbres. Noises made by the audience provide further nuance for the acoustic experience.

## Conclusion

Based on my findings, the literature of classic musical recordings can be divided into two major groups, at least along the lines of differences of expression.

a) The bourgeois-romantic taste, which was considered to be the standard decades ago – 50–60 years ago and even longer. Its expectations: fascinatingly beautiful quality of sound, elegant virtuosity, mechanical faultlessness, predictable, standard musical formation. The romantically inclined audience expects the performers to be *geniuses* and to dazzle them with their *individuality*. If they do not live up to the expectations, they will be considered mediocre, thus losing all previous interest from the audience. The romantic-bourgeois popular taste puts the performer into the focus, and not the piece being performed. The work itself and its exploration is of secondary significance.

b) The so-called early music movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s started an old yet novel approach: a modern “re-mediation” of performing attitudes from before the rise of the middle classes, that is more accessible, more understandable to general

audiences. Its principal point is putting the *work*, the *work of art*, and not the artist, into the focus. This attitude wants to explore *the work of art itself*, concentrating on the musical *content*. It wants to show the audience the different characters, the turns of the musical process, the surprising elements, in a manner that is as varied, interesting, and, most of all, *exciting* as possible. The performers can still be geniuses – the two notions are not mutually exclusive. But whether the performers are geniuses or not, the *emphasis* is on the work, not on them.

In my dissertation I chose the pairs of recordings in a way that they would present this difference in attitudes. I attempted to illustrate these two groups with the pairs, which are undoubtedly extremely different recordings, so that my intention should be clear not only for “professional musicians,” but for everyone interested in art.

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## Discography

- Perlman–Zukerman:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4LEjuWvwzw>

Last download: 17. 08. 2017

- Jansen–Kavakos:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ohsBg6onXY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ohsBg6onXY)

Last download: 21. 08. 2017

- Kremer–Kashkashian:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdN\\_GZFYR1U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdN_GZFYR1U)

Last download: 28. 08. 2017

- Frang–Mönkemeyer:

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=v0xypy7JCF4>

Last download: 30. 08. 2017

- Amadeus:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leiz6wyQSTc>

Last download: 07. 09. 2017

- St. Lawrence:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCnlsdx-dBg>

Last download: 18. 09. 2017