
ABSTRACT

Beethoven the Pianist: Bibliographical, organological and performance-practical aspects of his years as a public performer

Ph.D. dissertation in musicology, artistic-creative programme
at Göteborg University, Sweden, 2007

Author: Tilman Skowronek

Language: English

Department of Culture, Aesthetics and Media / Musicology, Göteborg University

Series: Skrifter från Institutionen för musikvetenskap, Göteborgs universitet nr 84

ISSN 1650-9285

ISBN 978-91-85974-00-9

Modern performance practice research has accepted the traditional picture of Beethoven as a rough pianist, impatient with his instruments. This picture is not altogether accurate: modern ideas about Beethoven's pianism are influenced by anecdotes dating from when deafness had begun to impair his playing. A revision of this picture is necessary for approaching Beethoven performance practice with confidence. This study reviews Beethoven's formative years and his career as a keyboard virtuoso in order to show how his musical development was influenced by his teachers, contemporary theorists and various keyboard instruments.

The development and decline of Beethoven's pianism is described by analyzing the contemporary reports. His opinion of fortepianos is juxtaposed with other contemporary judgments and with modern organological findings. His treatment of his Érard piano from 1803 is studied in detail. The result is a revised picture of Beethoven the pianist showing his development from an impetuous young musician into a virtuoso in command of many musical resources. At the peak of his powers, Beethoven was able to play exceptionally well on his fortepianos and the public response was unanimously positive. Not until the early years of the nineteenth century did Beethoven's pianistic powers decline.

Two selected topics are discussed that were special for Beethoven's pianism; his legato and the performance of his trills. We know less than is often assumed about the influence of the 18th-century keyboard tutors on Beethoven's style. The influence of Beethoven's teacher Neefe, however, is clear in some notational details.

Two conclusions provide help in performing Beethoven's piano music and a starting point for further studies in this field. First, playing Beethoven on historical pianos is a representative choice that reflects Beethoven's professional practice. Second, his expressive notation was designed to indicate his personal style to a reader used to traditional notation. For understanding this notation, 18th century conventions generally still apply.

Keywords: Historical performance practice; Ludwig van Beethoven; Johann van Beethoven; Christian Gottlob Neefe; Carl Czerny; Muzio Clementi; Johann Andreas Stein; Nannette Streicher; Anton Walter; Andreas Streicher; Sébastien Érard; Broadwood piano firm; Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach; Daniel Gottlob Türk; Beethoven's first period; Beethoven's middle period; Beethoven's early works; Beethoven's late works; Beethoven interpretation; Beethoven's Piano Sonatas; Beethoven's pianism; piano playing; early piano; forte-piano; legato playing; interpretation of trills; keyboard compass; Clavichord; Clavier; 18th-century musical aesthetics.
