

## Singing at the Clavichord:

### Interpretative Aspects of Repertoire from Brødremenigheten in Christiansfeld

The Moravian musical tradition prizes emotional expression in performance, and the clavichord was central to this expressive musical culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The clavichord is a very soft instrument and singing to it is not common practice at all today. Our conference presentation at the sixth Bethlehem Conference on Moravian History and Music, (Bethlehem, PA, USA) on October 11, 2018, reported on performance experiments using 18<sup>th</sup> c. songbooks held in the collections of the Brødremenigheten (Moravian Church) in Christiansfeld, DK. These songs would have been sung to the clavichord. In this brief documentation we will report on “Wenn ich einsam Thräne weine” which appears in two of the notebooks, one of which belonged to Dorothea Nielsen (1762-1796) and another to Gertraudt Müller (1771-1846). The lyrics come from the poem *An das Klavier* by Karoline von Brandstein (1757-1816), published in *Almanach der Deutschen Musen* (1777). “Klavier” was the common name for the clavichord, making the piece all the more appropriate for the experiment. The composer is unknown.



Illustration 1: “Wenn ich einsam Thräne weine” from Dorothea Nielsen’s Notebook.

The process of singing to the clavichord was explored with particular attention to emotions and emotional expressions and we aimed to investigate the encounter between musical artifacts from an historical context and musical performance in our time. As a starting point we studied the instructions for keyboard playing and musical performance given by a German music theorist relevant to this community, Daniel Gottlob Türk in his 1789 *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende, mit kritischen Anmerkungen*.

**In “Wenn ich einsam”:** **Example One**, the singer stood in a normal concert position and sang out toward the room, which created an imbalance in the ensemble and did not promote musical communication.

**In “Wenn ich einsam”:** **Example Two**, the singer sat next to the clavichordist and sang directly into the string band of the instrument, creating a more harmonious ensemble, and inviting the audience to move close to the performers.

**In “Wenn ich einsam”:** **Example Three**, the performers demonstrated the use of emotives in interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Both performers identified emotives within the lyrics and the music, which we chose to organize according to the Baroque doctrine of the four humours: sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic. The following text was used as a map for performance, marking melancholic emotives blue, choleric emotives red, and sanguine emotives green.

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<sup>1</sup> William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

### An das Klavier

Wenn ich einsam Thräne weine, o so weint mein fühlend Herz.  
Wenn ich still und traurig scheine, o so fühl ich meinen Schmerz.  
Wenn der Thoren laute Freuden, schmerzhaft sind für mein Gefühl  
Sehn ich mich nach Einsamkeiten und nach dir mein Saitenspiel.

Wenn mein Herz geneigt zu klagen, Jeder Freude sich verschliesst.  
Wenn von meinen kurzen Tagen Mancher trüb vorüberfließt,  
O, so tönt mir sanfte Saiten! Holdes schmeichelndes Klavier!  
Ach dir singt sein stilles Leiden, Oft mein Mund in Liedern für.

Töne sanft! – so oft zu Thränen, Mich geheime Schwermuth rührt.  
Wenn in deinen Silbertönen, Sich mein süßer Gram verliert.  
Wenn dein mächtiges Entzücken, Tief in meine Seele dringt,  
O so dankt in nassen Blicken, Dir mein Herz das dich besingt.

### To the Clavichord

When I cry tears alone, my heart cries too.  
When I seem to be still and sad, I feel pain too.  
When fools cry out with cheer, they cause my emotional body pain.  
I long for solitude and for you my stringed clavier.

When my heart wants to complain, every joy is removed.  
When some of my few days overflow with troubles,  
Oh! So soft the strings sound to me! Graceful flattering clavier!  
Oh! It sings its quiet suffering, and often my voice follows it in song.

Sweet tones! - so often tears, touching my secret melancholy.  
When in your silver tones, my sweet grief dissolves.  
When your mighty rapture penetrates deep into my soul,  
Oh! Thanks, through moistened eyes, my heart sings to you.

## **Conclusion**

The investigation revealed two significant areas of inquiry: *Acoustical perspective*, nurtured by questions such as how do we create an acceptable balance between two performers and how can communication between them be promoted; *Emotional perspective*, nurtured by the question how immanent feelings and passions in the artifact can be realized in musical performance practice. The key concept “emotive” proposed by Reddy was found effective in order to bridge the gap between the artifacts and the sounding practice, as well as the gap between the two performers.