

INTERPRETATIVE TRENDS OF BEETHOVEN'S ORNAMENTATION

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SUMMARY. Outstanding representative of the classical music composed in the transition period from XVIIIth to XIXth centuries, Ludwig van Beethoven remains memorable in the history of music through the strength, audacity, and remarkable rhetoric of his musical discourse. With the mastery of a demiurge, he coalesces in the texture of his thematic ideas' heroic, pathetic or pastoral configurations, making the most of the technical-expressive possibilities of the epoch's instruments into a authentic instrumental-interpretative manner. Advocate of a prevailingly monumental interpretation, Beethoven will perfect his instrumental style through authentic details which are the subject of the varied attack modes, of ornamentation, articulation, pedaling, etc., which are the personalized elements of a challenging technique. Approaching the aspect of Beethoven's ornamentation, the present article will bring into focus the identification of the dominant ornamental components and their treatment from an interpretative viewpoint with emphasis on the authenticity of the artistic representation.

Keywords: Art & Music, piano, Beethoven's language, ornamentation, interpretation, authenticity

1. Introduction

A musical work can acquire through authentic interpretation a valuable image and offer, at the same time, sheer professional satisfaction to its conductors. Viewed from another perspective, the sonorous outcome

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of a musical creation can reflect an arguable interpretative manner with an uncertain thematic message that can distort the creative image that the composer desired to outline. Nobody wants to fail in his/her interpretation, every instrumentalist valuing the beauty and significance of their artistic performance. A successful interpretation is utterly dependent on a thorough theoretical and instrumental knowledge of the approached work. The final image of the musical creation is the result of several materialized analytical filters, of the acquired instrumental skills, as well as of the stylistic background specific to the musical trend, historical epoch, and respective composer. The details and particularity of the composer's musical language are among the most important artistic coordinates that underlie an exemplary interpretation. The respect shown to the interpreted work, to the composer, audience and artistic performance requires on the instrumentalist's part a deeper understanding of this aspect. Irrespective of the magnitude of the artistic manifestation in which they perform, instrumentalists must approach in their interpretation the authentic elements of the musical language that bestow uniqueness on the work.

Bringing a radical change to the musical language at the turn of the XIXth century, Beethoven is the composer who was mark classical music with a profound musical discourse, outlined by strength and expressiveness. All were various ideas that he dressed in daring and surprising conceptual clothes. Employing the physical-emotional complexity as the cornerstone of his monumental work, Beethoven opens the doors to horizons oblivious of Haydn's predictable comfort and Mozart's unaffected universe. Although chronology ties him to classicism, the novelty of language perceived from a structural and interpretative viewpoint makes its way towards the moving Romantic trend. Nor can one neglect the significant contribution that he made to the improvement of instruments, the intensely emotional perspective from which the composer looks at the musical phenomenon particularly enhancing their expressive qualities.

2. The guiding marks of an authentic interpretation of Beethoven

Challenging even for the most illustrious pianists, Beethoven's repertoire demands of instrumentalists, aside from faultless pianistic skills, a thorough knowledge of the composer's stylistic-interpretative particularity. By combining language elements with timbre effects, typical of an orchestral vision, and various tones of touch personalized through multiple differentiations, Beethoven's interpretative manner can be considerably put to account. The late XVIIIth century witnesses a particular technique that, as Czerny asserts,

casts a shadow on the era's characteristic non-legato in favor of legato's uninterrupted way of touch. "While we were exercising, my attention was particularly drawn to his ability to play legato in a way that could not be broken, and which all pianists of the time thought to be impossible to perform at the piano."² Therefore, centered on the legato, whose sonorous outcome spurs the melodic musicality, Beethoven's piano technique results in the development of the expressive side of the instrumental discourses, the interpretation being dominated by a romantic kind of emotion.

Predictable for the epoch's conservatism, the new approach was criticized, Mozart's supporters disapproving of Beethoven's manner of interpretation with such terms as *imprecise*, *extreme*, *indelicate*, an interpretation lacking the luster and elegance of the majority of the era's pianists. It was natural that the old school interpretation with its clear and clean execution of the musical text, often in a graceful manner, with the Allegros commonly interpreted in staccato, should conflict with the legato and cantabile manner adopted by Beethoven, a technique that was, as Czerny argues, utterly strange to the contemporary pianists. "The legato and cantabile on the piano were unknown at that time, and Beethoven was the first to discover new and grand effects on that instrument."³ The original vision sets the tone of a new stylistic era, profound and noble, which, as Andre Watson points out, offers the interpretation an escalating expressiveness, a new tone whose cantabile profile gives weight particularly to the deep slow movements. "The expressive quality of Beethoven's own playing, according to Czerny, was distinguished by passionate strength, alternating with all the charms of a smooth cantabile, strict legato of chords, a new type of singing tone and many hitherto unimagined effects, characteristics which would be mirrored throughout his creative life, especially in his many profound slow movements."⁴

In the history of classical music, Beethoven will be known as a supporter of an interpretation marked by expressiveness and character, in which high sensitivity takes precedence over the epoch's elegance and balance. The perspective from which he looks at the musical phenomenon makes a great difference for the evolution of classical music, the seeds of the Romantic movement springing along with the characteristic emotion of his creation whose intensity increases in the works of his last two production periods.

² Prod'Homme, Jaques, Gabriel. translation Bălan, George. *Beethoven văzut de contemporani*, (*Beethoven Seen by His Contemporaries*). Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007.

³ Kullak, Franz. *Beethoven's piano playing*, Dover Publication, Mineola, New York, 2013.

⁴ Watson, Angus. *Beethoven's Chamber Music in Context*. Boydell & Brewer Press, Woodbridge, 2010.

3. The melody and its ornaments – a general view

A perfect interpretation of a musical work involves the instrumentalist's compulsory acquisition of a plurality of elements specific to the composer's musical language, among which the melodic ornamentation – "secondary notes used to embellish the main notes of a melody."⁵ Apparently a minor detail as compared to the dynamic and agogic elements or the expressive interpretation of the musical discourse, the melodic ornamentation can seriously damage the stylistic aspect of the musical work or even impinge on "the true spirit and character of a composition"⁶, as stated by Frederick Neumann. A shallow approach to this aspect can give the work a stylistically confusing image of the creation period and, at the same time, can oversee certain particularities that can define the composer's own way of expression. The ornamental elements, of which some are structurally secondary, embellish the melody, giving the musical ideas a design that is unique, or characteristic in certain circumstances. At the same time, the ornamental elements, though of a melodic character, can emphasize the individuality of a rhythmic formula, whose attribute can carry a thematic weight in a certain musical context. Dating back to the XIIIth - XIVth centuries, the ornamental notes acquired a final form along with the establishment of the pre-classical trend, which tested their utility particularly out of the desire to replace the short duration produced by the sounds of the harpsichord. The baroque melody, dedicated to the harpsichord, practically aimed through rich ornamentation to prolong certain fundamental notes, whose structural significance required their mental support in the absence of their graphic representation. At the same time, the melodic diversity, because of the rich ornamentation, deprives the text of a work composed for the harpsichord of a possible monotony of the musical discourse, the deficiencies of the instrument bringing their own contribution to this aspect. Of these, one can mention the lack of dynamics, the metallic timbre, a low volume, as well as the impossibility to realize an expressive tone. The role of ornaments in the context of the baroque melody does not limit itself only to the sonorous intensification of the main notes, as the linear aspect resulting from the unification of several ornamental elements contributes to the embellishment of the musical phrases, feature that places them in the category of melodic ornaments. The harmonic properties of the melody can as well be influenced by certain ornamental aspects, the ornamentation – viewed from the perspective of

⁵ Popovici, Timotei. *Dicționar de muzică, (Dictionary of Music)*. Publisher Musical Grafoart, Bucharest, 2015.

⁶ Neumann, Frederick. *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque*. Press, Princeton University, New Jersey, Oxford, 1983.

its sonorous verticality – being possibly responsible in certain situations for the dissonant particularization of the musical discourse.

In time, along with the evolution of instruments and compositional conceptions, ornamentation will experience new states and its approach will be much closer to the structural quality of the melody. Ornamentation tends to occupy a well-defined place in the melodic structure of the works, becoming an integrating part of the musical thinking, an ideology adopted by the grand masters of the XIXth century like Chopin and Liszt.

3.1. The melodic ornamentation seen from the perspective of Beethoven's language

Born in antithesis to the abundance of decorative elements, to the luxuriant design and the rich melismas representative of the XVIIth century and the first half of the XVIIIth century, classicism imprints new features on cult music. Balance, simplicity, and control are the labels of the new trend that reflect on all musical language elements, particularly on melody. It is the era of instrumental music, which, in key with the new tendencies, offers the instruments the possibility to develop significantly, the acme being reached at the turn of the century. Chronologically identified as a period in which Ludwig van Beethoven perfected his compositional qualities, the era bears the mark of the great composer's vision. The evolution of the instruments is the result of Beethoven's need to sonorously materialize the varied and novel ways of expression. Beethoven's freedom of language and the systemic greatness of his vision represented the most considerable challenge, particularly for the piano manufacturers, for whom the composer's insistent requirement as to the exploitation of the expressive qualities of the instrument was a priority.

Because of the classical influences, ornamentation will experience certain limits, the need to use abundant constitutive elements having less resonance as compared to the stylistic tendencies of the preceding period. Dealt with in a more decorative manner by Haydn or Mozart, ornamentation will carry with Beethoven an expressive connotation as well, some components being an integral part of the melody, figures interpreted as thematic elements in certain contexts. The aspects related to the interpretation of the melodic ornamentation from a Beethovenian perspective are rooted in the methodical sources that accompanied the composer's educational path. The influences of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach or Leopold Mozart, whose second violin method was edited exactly in the composer's birth year, were assuredly acquired under the guidance of his teachers Eeden, Pfeiffer and Neefe. The latter "[...] himself was educated in the strict Leipzig school, and likewise that

he taught his pupil, Beethoven, according to Philipp Emanuel Bach's school."⁷ Beethoven's language identifies from an ornamental point of view such dominant elements as appoggiaturas, turns, and trills, which are frequently used in his musical creations. The list can be completed with freer grouping of grace notes, mordents, *arpeggiato* or fioritura, which is an element adopted from the Italian ornamentation, unfolded at the end of the musical phrase, placed between two main notes of the melodic lines (see E.g., 1) like the ones encountered in the opus 27, no. 1 sonatas.

E.g. 1



Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata op. 27, no. 1, part IV, measure 265.

As a common denominator of both sonatas, the cadential recitative aspect of the fioritura precedes personalized passages through agogic changes, the ornamental element thus creating a bridge between the respective fragments and, at the same time, emphasizing the agogic particularity of the moment. The technical realization of the ornament is not restricted metrically, the framing of the component notes rather answering an interpretative freedom dominated by the expressive aspect of the created atmosphere. Although it is an episode characterized by virtuosity, a debut in rubato is indicated, as it marks even more suggestively the specific cantabile feature of the measure, the extended rhythmic initiation of the ornament finding its correspondence in the evocative extension of the fermata on the first beat of the measure. Harnessing the value of the fioritura will observe the relation between the graphically represented times, the three-quarter notes with which he ends his discourse being measured according to the preceding sixteenths. As compared to the appoggiatura, trill, or mordent, the fioritura is an infrequent ornamental element like the *arpeggiato* that Beethoven employs even more sparingly. Though few, the *arpeggiato* moments carry a suggestive weight such as the one that resides in the type of accord with which the piano sonata opus 31, no. 2, starts (see E.g., 2).

⁷ Kullak, Franz. *Beethoven's piano playing*. Dover Publication, Mineola, New York, 2013



Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata op 31, no.2, part I, measures 1-2

Like the fioritura, the *arpeggiato* element belongs to the recitative ornamental category, expressiveness asserting itself as an interpretative condition. To paraphrase Robert Hatten, the mystical quality of the chord can have rhetorical qualities with, at the same time, timbral connotations, the illusion of a harp through whose chords the wind breathes offering the instrumentalist an image of a moving and expressive beauty, which accords with an exemplary interpretation. "The mystical quality of the rolled chord implies a 'Fantasie'- like discourse, and its extended and durationally delayed upper arpeggiation also suggests a play with overtone sonorities-or an allusion to the Aeolian harp."⁸ Excelling in expressiveness, the recitative ornaments complete the dominant elements, the high frequency with which they are used in context developing certain patterns in execution. Appoggiaturas are among the most common components.

3.1.1. The ornamental patterns of Beethoven's appoggiaturas

Graphically represented through miniature notes placed before the main tones, appoggiaturas are ornaments that serve, as stated by Neumann, "to set off the structural elements to greater aesthetic advantage, most typically by imparting to them more grace, elegance, smoothness or variety."⁹ According to the number of the component notes, appoggiaturas can be classified as simple, double treble or even multiple, the simple ones breaking down as short and long, the name depending on its metrical framing during the execution. Beethoven's works reflect the composer's preference for a more

⁸ Hatten, Robert. "Interpreting Beethoven's Tempest Sonata through Topics, Gestures and Agency" in *Beethoven's Tempest Sonata: perspectives of analysis and performance*. Peeters press, Leuven, 2009, pp.163-180

⁹ Neumann, Frederick. *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque*. Press, Princeton University, New Jersey, Oxford, 1983.

intensive use of the simple appoggiaturas in comparison with the long ones. Regarding the manner of their execution, some suspicion may be aroused as the vagueness of Beethoven's graphic representations does not guarantee the interpretative authenticity of elements. One cannot ignore the fact that in the absence of the stroke across the stem, as William Newman stated, the editors, who were obviously uncertain, could have solved the problem resorting to their own experience to the detriment of authenticity. "Beethoven certainly gives no help in his notation, for he uses the eighth or sixteenth note quite indiscriminately, with or without a stroke across the stem, leaving editors even more nonplussed that with his dots and strokes for staccato."¹⁰ As for the long appoggiaturas, elements that the composer employed sporadically as compared to Mozart, there is evidence that confirms the authenticity of execution. Referring to the piano sonata opus 10, no. 3, Czerny argues that Beethoven always interpreted it as a long appoggiatura, its duration being observed precisely due to the value it represented. "For that [the second theme of the opening movement in Sonata op.10/3] use we have Czerny's specific remark that the grace note is "a long appoggiatura."¹¹ The respective moment is the subject of the secondary theme (see E.g., 3), with whose debut it identifies itself. Analyzed from the perspective of voice leading, the linear aspect of the secondary theme places the appoggiatura among the melodic ornaments as it particularizes thematic discourse through fluency.

E.g. 3



Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata op. 10, no.3, part I, measures 53-55

Known as a lover of bantering humor, Beethoven tastes the irony of the secondary thematic motive by placing the appoggiatura dissonantly from the perspective of the harmonic verticality. We witness an ornament with a double role, Beethoven turning to account both its melodic and harmonic attributes. The short appoggiaturas are the subject of several musical moments,

¹⁰ Newman, William. *Beethoven on Beethoven Playing His Piano Music His Way*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1991.

¹¹ Idem.

their states emphasizing certain particularities of these moments. The only evidence referring to the significance of Beethoven's short appoggiaturas is provided by the same Carl Czerny, his disciple. The references are related to the Rondo of the first piano and orchestra concert whose refrain Czerny suggests that it should be initiated through short appoggiaturas for qualitative sonorous reasons, which agree more with the dancing character of the fragment. The ornamental emphasis of certain rhythmic particularities appears to become a pattern for the short appoggiaturas, a pattern that can outline and clarify the pointed rhythmic formulas such as the ones in the development of the sonata op. 31, no. 3 and, at the same time, the syncopated formulas, an example being the main theme of the famous Waldstein sonata. The short appoggiaturas are favored by the fast tempos, their execution speed rather fitting the energy and virtuosity specific to them. The circle closes with the register change, the composer preferring to resolve the appoggiatura through a leap to a usually ascending octave due to the timbral diversification of the musical discourse and to the emphasis of the main notes.

3.1.2. Beethoven's turn and its belonging to the contextual features

Paraphrasing Neumann, "turn is a collective name for a group of graces that is related to one principal design."¹² Formed around a main note, the turn is the ornament that composers favor mostly in the compenence of the lyrical melodic lines. Typical of slow movements, these vibrate with the recitative aspect that the turn can approach during the interpretation. At the same time, the moderate tempos allow for the generous execution of the component elements particularly of those rhythmically positioned on the small note values.

Manifesting predictability, Beethoven's vision relates the turn more to the sentimental discourses in the works of his first period of creation. An analysis of the piano sonatas reveals the composer's lack of interest in the use of the ornament starting with the second period of creation, with a tendency to complete absence throughout the last works of this kind. The turn's profile does not limit itself in the Beethovenian sense only to the slow movements, particular situations drawing the attention also to the fast parts, the challenge of the execution rising with the quarter time states of the ornament. A discussion follows of the piano sonata op. 10, no. 2, which hosts such a situation in the context of development. As also results from example 4, the turn is positioned in measure 72 on the second quarter time. Its execution

¹² Neumann, Frederick. *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque*. Press, Princeton University, New Jersey, Oxford, 1983.

begins with the main note, Beethoven employing the ornamental element to emphasize it in the respective fragment. Its importance carries a tonal connotation, the context identifying it as a leading tone element of the new tonality. Harmonically, it offers stability to the semi cadence of this first phrase in the development. Its diatonic position in the harmonic variant of the tonality completes the respective chord. Given the phrase dynamics and its semantic belonging to the ethos of the minor mode, one can attach to the turn expressive attributes that grant freedom of expression to it from a rhythmic point of view. The emotional weight residing in the melodic of the developing debut finds a common denominator in the recitative kinetic representation of the ornamental elements rather than in its technical and precise execution. Approached suggestively, the turn integrates into the emotional universe of the development, a state which may motivate a rhythmic imbalance or a delay of some values.

E.g. 4



Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata op.10, no.2, part I, measures 72-73

Contrary to the expressive aspect, the quarter time turn can also be encountered as the rhythmic ornament that highlights a particular formula like the one in the Rondo of the piano sonata op. 22. As a component element of measure 22, it embellishes the musical discourse of the first couplet and is executed according to the model that is representative of the pre-classical standard turn. As a result, it will start with the upper tone of the main note, the visibly rhythmic character of the phrase being scrupulous with its precise realization. Beginning with the upper note, the number of constitutive tones is lower, the chances of a precise representation increasing.

3.1.3. Schneller in Beethoven's language

Of all the ornamental elements approached by Beethoven throughout his creation, the *schneller* – the so-called Beethovenian trill – is by far the composer's favorite. Simple or double, cadential or integrated into the melodic lines, the trills complete Beethoven's ornamental vision and embellish with their

specific vivacity the design of certain musical discourses. As for interpretation, from an authentic perspective, the approach to Beethoven's trills first treats the starting note. Consequently, this aspect will be analyzed here vacillating between the dissonant initiation of the ornament with an adjacent note as a promotor in execution – just like Bach's model or the pianistic treatises of that time – and the debut prevailingly on the main note of the trill, seldom contrary to the harmonically natural consonance. As a short digression in this regard, the sonata op. 27, no. 1, in measure 26 of the *Adagio con espressione*, initiates the trill with the main note being aware of its dissonance, which represents the seventh note of the dominant chord of the E-flat major. Despite all the influences of Bach's school, of whose ornamental vision he has a disciple, Beethoven made his choice in most situations, the realization of the trills beginning with the main note. The pro arguments are closely tied to the graphic representation of this ornamental element according to the manuscripts or first editions. They are reflected in the graphic absence of the auxiliary note, written as an appoggiatura preceding the trill and the fingering directions that undoubtedly invoke the debut on the main note. Fingering like "3-4" and "1-2", mentioned by Beethoven himself in the original edition of Bagatelles op. 119, the first two measures of no. 7 or "2-3" in the coda of the WoO 40 variations for piano and violin as well as "1-2" in measure 112 of the last movement of the sonata op. 111, confirms, as Kullak stated, that "Beethoven began the trill on the principal note."¹³

Having clarified the issue of the debut, the following discussion will focus on the end of Beethoven's trill, an aspect with controversial states in certain musical contexts. The end of the trill becomes debatable given the lack of graphic representation of the suffix notes. If these notes are written down, interpreters know how to address the end. But how do they proceed when they are not represented? Do they resort to the rules specified in the epoch's treatises, which argue as stated by Newman that "a trill may be rounded off, or tailored, with a suffix whether one is indicated or not"¹⁴, or do they finalize it on the main note, the kind of note with which it usually starts? It is indicated that the approach to the suffix notes be related to the respective context as they have an important contribution to the realization of the melodic or harmonic objectives representative of the fragment in question. Thus, in the case of a cadential trill, the suffix underlines and completes the effect that the ornament has on the fragment, the interpreter facilitating the technical realization of the harmonic authentic concatenation. At the same time, the existence of the suffix is welcome in the situation of a chain of

¹³ Kullak, Franz. *Beethoven's piano playing*. Dover Publication, Mineola, New York, 2013.

¹⁴ Newman, William. *Beethoven on Beethoven Playing His Piano Music His Way*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1991.

descending trills like the ones in the sonata op. 31, no. 3, the component notes realizing a bridge between ornaments, or in the case of a dynamic support such as the one that anticipates the end of the fugue in opus 106. Ending the trill with a suffix is avoided in the fast tempos, the limitation of the number of ornamental notes being required by the great technical difficulty of certain passages.

4. Conclusions

The interpretation of a musical work in as truthful a manner as possible presupposes a deeper theoretical-practical knowledge of the particularities that are representative of the respective epoch and composer. The details related to the ornamental aspect are significant for an authentic and quality interpretation, although they do not have a prominent place regarding discerning the language elements specific to the studied composer.

Beethoven's language is known for its complexity as well as for the controversial stylistic aspect that defines it. Seen as a radical and being an innovator of those times, Beethoven managed to fundamentally change the perspective of cult music along with the artist's status in society for the first time in history. He elevated instrumental music to art because of the compositional vision born from his inner needs as a creator. The states of the melodic ornamentation record in Beethoven's music a clarity of the volume of representations unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, the number of the component elements decreasing with the maturation of the compositional conception. If their existence is notable in the first creation period due to Bach's influences, in the second and third periods his interest in the ornamental elements diminishes systematically. Their integration into the melody is closely related to the respective context, reasons of harmonic, rhythmic or semantic nature taking priority over the decorative feature. The analysis of Beethoven's works mirrors the composer's preference for the short appoggiaturas, which are important for defining and highlighting the rhythmic formulas. At the same time, it is worth remarking that Beethoven prefers to approach turns in an expressive manner, particularly throughout the slow movements of the sonatas. Trills are not treated shallowly either, both their beginning and last part being connected to the melodic-harmonic particularities of the respective context. A precarious approach to ornamentation will not define the interpreter's representation as authentic, the details of this aspect being an integral part of a whole that outlines the composer's originality of his compositional vision.

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