

MEDIA REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIC PIANO PERFORMANCE: *ALEXANDRE THARAUD'S* PHENOMENON

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SUMMARY. The problem area of the proposed article is outlined by the issue of the development of academic piano performance in the realities of modern life, marked by the search by musicians for new approaches to the interpretation of musical classics in the conditions of rapid renewal of methods of communication with the audience. The innovative element of the investigation is associated with the inclusion of the media space (which is implemented mainly through the system of Internet tools) in the factual base of scientific research, which is a sign of the exclusive role of modern mass media in promoting the performing achievements of musicians. The study of Alexandre Tharaud's releases from the perspective of media representations of his performance work is of exceptional interest, both from the perspective of revealing the performance phenomenon of the French pianist as a media figure, and from the point of view of solving the problem of actualizing academic art in the present, the way of broadcasting the experience of the past through the use of modern forms of presentation and a system of references between objects.

Keywords: Modern piano performance, Musical work, Interpretation, Representation, Media space, Communication.

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Introduction

The evolution of performing academic art is a natural sign of historical movement. This is confirmed by the most significant changes in the status of a musician-clavierist/pianist during the development of his instrument: the universal musician (17th - first half of the 18th century); the composer performing music (second half of the 18th century); the virtuoso creating music (from the beginning of the 19th century); the interpreter of other people's works (from the middle of the 19th to the end of the 20th century). Since the end of the 20th century, a stage of active searches has been taking place in the profession of piano performer, characterized by a wide range of approaches to works of different eras, as well as to the latest works.

The thorough elaboration of the problems of performing interpretology and the psychology of creativity by music analytics of recent times seems to leave no "open" or "undefined" questions. Meanwhile, the processes of globalization, the rapid development of Internet technologies, the accelerated tempo of life, world pandemics and many other factors have contributed to the strengthening of the positions of digital media in the existence of the modern artistic space, turning them into the most promising way for a musician to communicate with the audience. For a performer, this is an opportunity to increase and expand the circle of fans, for a listener - to join a performance that interests him, at any time convenient for him from anywhere in the world.

Before the advent of sound recording technologies, the path to public representation of a musical text went through the stage. Today, releases in the Internet space are becoming a trigger that contributes to the beginning and further development of a musician's concert career. The rapid transition of art from the real time-space of a concert hall to the digital world increasingly requires from a pianist, in addition to purely performing skills, also awareness of marketing - creativity in presenting material, the use of the latest technologies with the involvement of professionals from various industries. Creating a product that is not only professionally high-quality, but also image-unique, that is not lost in the global information "ocean", but occupies a dominant position in the field of professional competition, encourages the search for a new perspective for studying the artistic individuality of a modern performer. This involves understanding the artist's phenomenon through the study of media representation as a tool for popularizing a musician in the media space along with 'promoting' his performing achievements and strengthening the positions of academic art. Theoretical and practical understanding of such

an approach by modern performers can be beneficial in shaping their own creative careers. The work of the outstanding modern French pianist *Alexandre Tharaud*⁴ serves as a clear proof of the effectiveness of this strategy.

Methodology

The artist's creative output is not only large in volume, but also diverse in specificity. As research material, it can certainly be considered both from certain positions of analytical musicology and the concept of performance interpretation. Meanwhile, to assess the originality of the phenomenon of *A. Tharaud* as a media figure, to understand the instruments he used when adapting to the media environment, it turns out to be insufficient to involve only traditional approaches in the study. Performance phenomenology as a process of cognition of the individual experience of a creative personality is oriented towards "to sensory contact with the instrument (reproduction of the piano sound image)", demonstrating/reproducing "the dependence of sound technology on the development of his professional experience in music making and other artistic influences"⁵.

An integral feature of the French pianist's performance style is his connection with various forms of presentation - visual, verbal, plastic, which turns his author's product into original content, which requires the expansion of the methodological base when studying. It seems appropriate to use an interdisciplinary comprehensive approach that involves relevant developments in philosophy, sociology, psychology, political science, marketing. Extrapolation of the scientific theory of representation (Ankersmit, 2002; Gadamer, 1990; Holl, 1997; Wartofsky, 1979 and others)⁶ into the field of musicological research opens up a wide field of opportunities for understanding the essence of *A. Tharaud's* creative individuality, which is most fully realized in the creation of a performance version as a model of representative practice. This necessitates

⁴ The pianist was born in 1968.

⁵ Kopelyuk, Oleh. *"Ivan Karabyts Piano Art: Phenomenology of Style"* PhD. Dissertation, Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts, Kharkiv: Ukraine, 2018, p. 10.

⁶ Ankersmit, Frank. *Political representation (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, California, 2002.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik (Hermeneutics I: Truth and Method. Principles of a Philosophical Hermeneutics)*. J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1990.

Holl, Stuart. "The Work of Representation" *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Holl. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997, pp. 13-74.

Wartofsky Marx W. *Models: Representation and the Scientific Understanding*. Springer, Softcover reprint of the original 1st ed., 1979.

the introduction of a representational method that allows for the discovery of references – links to objects or experiences (according to Wartofsky ⁷) – between performance versions and objects of the performer's experience.

Literature Review

The consideration of musical performance in the system of communications mainly focuses on the relationship between the author's text and its performing reading, which relies on algorithms of interpretation. Typically, research into the work of a contemporary pianist takes place from the perspective of such issues as "cognitive and motor skills" ⁸, "a genuine understanding of what the music is about, its structure and meaning, and a complete mastery of the instrumental technique" ⁹, a general systematization of the category "musical performing style" ¹⁰, "comparison of interpretations" ¹¹, "artistic energy" ¹², "organizing and controlling musical suggestiveness" ¹³, "the embodiment of artistic and aesthetic components" ¹⁴, etc. At the same time, the act of performance itself can also be considered as a representation of the composer's text. Often the concepts of 'presentation' and 'representation' are perceived as synonyms, but the scope of their use reveals differences in their semantic nuances.

⁷ Wartofsky Marx W. *Models: Representation and the Scientific Understanding*. Springer, Softcover reprint of the original 1st ed., 1979.

⁸ Palmer, Caroline. "Music Performance" *Annual Review of Psychology*. 48, 1997, pp. 115-138.

⁹ Gabrielsson, Alf. "The Performance of Music" *The Psychology of Music. Cognition and Perception* (Second Edition by Diana Deutsch). Cambridge: Academic Press [First Edition published 1982], 1999, p. 501.

¹⁰ Govorukhina, Nataliya; Smyrnova, Tetiana; Polska, Iryna; Sukhlenko, Iryna & Savelieva, Ganna. "Style as a Topical Category of Modern Musicology and Music Education" *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Musica*. LXVI(2), 2021, pp. 49-67.

¹¹ Byelik-Zolotarova, Natalia; Zolotaryova, Natalia; Boiko, Viacheslav; Sukhomlinova, Tetiana; & Zaverukha, Olena. A Performance Interpretation of the Viennese Classics by the Example of Fantasia for Piano, Chorus And Orchestra In C Minor, op. 80 By Ludwig Van Beethoven. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Musica*, 68 (Special Issue 2), 2023, pp. 121–150.

¹² Chernyavska, Marianna; Ivanova, Iryna; Timofeyeva, Kira; Syriatska, Tetiana & Mits, Oksana. "Artistic Energy Of The Performers In The Mirror of Their Repertoire Preferences" *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Musica*, LXVIII (Special Issue 2), 2023, pp. 165-179.

¹³ Garaz, Oleg. "The Origin of the Concept of Style in European Musical Thinking". *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Musica*, LXVII, Special Issue 2, 2022. pp. 7-19.

¹⁴ Batovska, Olena; Grebenuk, Natalia; Kostogryz, Sergi; Dyachenko, Yuriy, & Tkachenko, Viktoria. "Musical Performance in the Context of the Development of Contemporary Musical Art" *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Musica*. LXIX(2), 2024, pp. 139-152.

Presentation is the act of providing or showing something new, or the way in which something is provided, shown. Representation, where the prefix 're' indicates the reversibility of the action, means the repetition of the action anew in the mode of actuality with the creation of references (relationships) between objects (the primary/original and its variant that is reproduced – represented in the process of performing activity) and their contents. Various semantic overtones of representation as a concept are revealed in the works of researchers who are passionate about studying this phenomenon. Thus, H.-G. Gadamer (1990), F. Ankersmit (2002), N. Davey & N. Cynthia (2023) consider representation as a personal reality, a different reality, compared to the prototype, which as a method is very indicative for art. According to F. Ankersmit, representations differ from the represented original, "for the crucial datum here is that we know and expect portraits or representations to be different from what art is all about" ¹⁵. The functioning of representation as a social event (according to É. Durkheim¹⁶) is the key to understanding collective representations. According to M. Wartofsky, anything can be a representation of another if it has relational properties and under the conditions of recognizing this act of repetition as a representation. An important aspect of representation that directly exists in art is reference – a relationship or reference to reality. Reference, therefore, is part of the activity that we do when we construct representations ¹⁷. Therefore, representation is an intentional object – a product of one's own purposeful intellectual and creative activity and personal forms of perception, the influence of the environment, a reaction to certain social relations. This allows us to consider representation as an event that forms its own symbolic field. According to the concept of S. Holl¹⁸, objects of representation do not have content by themselves: it is generated in the process of interpretation and communication, encoding and decoding of texts and depends on the cultural context ¹⁹.

¹⁵ Ankersmit, Frank. *Political representation (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, California, 2002, p. 113.

¹⁶ Durkheim, Émile. (1894). *Les règles de la méthode sociologiques (Rules of the sociological method)*. Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1894. 16e édition. Collection: Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine, 1967. Retrieved from https://philosophie.universite.tours/documents/1894_Emile_Durkheim.pdf (accessed on 05.06.2023).

¹⁷ Wartofsky Marx W. *Models: Representation and the Scientific Understanding*. Springer, Softcover reprint of the original 1st ed., 1979.

¹⁸ Holl, Stuart. "The Work of Representation" *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Holl. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997, pp. 13-74.

¹⁹ Holl, Stuart. "The Work of Representation" *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Holl. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997, pp. 17-18.

Generalization of the semantics of performing arts allows us to propose a definition of musical-performing representation ²⁰ as “a social event with its symbolic field, which is formed around a unique artistic personality” ²¹, has the ability to present the experience of the past in the present tense through the creation of a reference (correlation) with objects and experience²². In the process of perceiving a specific representation, a fundamental multiplicity arises, which changes the vector of reference: it is possible to focus attention on the object of representation, its “prototype”/“original”, which is repeated anew, or on its subject - the one who constructs the representation in the present tense, revealing his Presence. This aspect allows us to discuss self-representation as a concept. The first to introduce this notion was the sociologist Erving Goffman ²³, who defined it as the reflection of one’sself through means that create specific certain situations. His theory was later developed in the works of modern researchers J. Šlerka & L. Merunkova ²⁴, who analyzed self-representation in social networks, and E. Hollenbaugh ²⁵, who systematized modern observations on the nature of self-representation in social networks. Researchers D. Chandler & R. Munday ²⁶ considered the concept of self-representation in the field of media communication. Also interesting is the scientific work of P. Thagard ²⁷, who studies self-representation as a phenomenon inherent in musical art, as a system determined by certain mechanisms, which is implemented in such forms as “selfrepresenting” – the skill of the performer, belonging to a school, repertoire; “self-expansion” – (the musician’s stage and performance role, his work as a public act, communication with fans in the mass media); “self-esteem” according to one’s own standards ²⁸.

²⁰ from Latin *representation* – “visual image”.

²¹ Voskoboinikov, Yakov. “*French pianist Alexandre Tharaud: aspects of media representation of piano performance*” PhD. Dissertation, Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts, Kharkiv: Ukraine, 2023, p. 9.

²² Voskoboinikov, Yakov. “Albums ‘Autograph’ and ‘Le poète du piano’: two versions of the media self-representing the French pianist Alexandre Tharaud” *Aspects of Historical Musicology*. XXXV, 2024, p. 252.

²³ Goffman, Ervin. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956.

²⁴ Šlerka, Josef & Merunková, Lucie. “Goffman’s Theory as a Framework for Analysis of Self Presentation on Online Social Networks” *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology*. 13(2), 2019, pp. 243-276.

²⁵ Hollenbaugh, Erin E. “Self-Presentation in social media: Review and research opportunities” *Review of Communication Research*. 9, 2021, pp. 80-98.

²⁶ Chandler, Daniel & Munday, Rod. *A Dictionary of Media and Communication (1ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

²⁷ Thagard, Paul. “The self as a system of multilevel interacting mechanisms” *Philosophical Psychology*. 27 (2), 2014, pp. 145-163.

²⁸ Thagard, Paul. “The self as a system of multilevel interacting mechanisms” *Philosophical Psychology*. 27 (2), 2014, p. 17.

Discussion

The most pressing question of modern piano performance has become: how to preserve classical music, how not to lose the feeling of its undeniable value? To what extent can we "actualize" classical art so that the modern generation does not feel "alienated" from this hopelessly outdated work that has nothing to do with modern life? Performers are looking for answers... Unfortunately, there are a significant number of not very successful attempts at a 'modernized' presentation of classical music by pianists, bordering on circus acts, trying to 'stun' and entertain the audience. However, in this way, the musical work loses its artistic value due to the fact that the "representative" is unable to convey either the content, or the style, or anything other than 'acrobatics' and demonstrating (and not from the best side) himself.

Alexandre Tharaud as a Media Figure

French pianist *Alexandre Tharaud*, who occupies a prominent place in contemporary performing arts, has been successfully representing his artistic individuality through the media space for many years. Continuing the traditions and principles of *Marguerite Long's* pianism, he attracts the attention of researchers not only by the number of recorded albums (today there are already 42 of them), but also by the scale of the presentation of his own creative activity in the Internet space, which allows us to consider it as a phenomenon of media culture (R. Graham (2011), N. Krafft (2013), A. Ueno (2019), R. Nichols (2020), H. Smith (2020), M. Donelson (n.d.) and others). The originality of *A. Tharaud's* creative approach is recorded in the variety of creative representations: audio recordings of albums with music by *J.-P. Rameau*, *F. Chopin*, *F. Poulenc*, *L. Beethoven*, in original video presentations of albums presented on the Internet platform YouTube, soundtracks to films with his participation, in the musical accompaniment of films about the pianist. This list is supplemented by *Alexandre Tharaud's* autobiographical book "*Montrez-moi vos mains*" (2017) and his personal comments, annotations to music albums, texts of his interviews, materials from the pianist's personal website, websites of record companies and musical instrument companies with which *A. Tharaud's* activities are associated. Of particular interest are the results of the performer's compositional searches - his piano cycle "*Corpus volubilis*" (2020) and the piano transcription of *C. Debussy's* symphonic poem "*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*" (2019).

This multiplicity of projects implemented by *A. Tharaud* testifies to the extraordinary scale of the personality and conceptualism of the French pianist's work. The musician's universalism is realized at different levels: in the multi-vector nature of his performing repertoire (world piano classics in *A. Tharaud's* albums are represented by a variety of stylistic, national, and genre phenomena); in the use of a large arsenal of pianos from different companies as an appropriate timbre for a particular work (*Yamaha, Steinway, Bösendorfer*); in his interest and realization of his own intentions in cinema (movies "*Amour*" (2012), "*Boléro*" (2024)), in his own compositional searches (cycle of original works "*Corpus Volubilis*" (2020)). A unique manifestation of this versatility is the pianist's passion for creating an original media product, born in creative collaboration with a whole team of professionals from different fields: directors, sound engineers, video editors, designers, photographers, musical instrument masters, ballet dancers, marketers and others involved in promoting the pianist's creative content. Any release with the musician's participation - an audio album, video, film soundtrack, etc. - turns into a real artistic event, naturally focusing on it the attention of fellow professionals, music critics, the media, the Internet audience of his fans and simply the general public of classical music lovers.

Alexandre Tharaud's performing work in the focus of media representation

The well-deserved popularity of *A. Tharaud* is a confirmation of the creative direction he has successfully chosen in today's conditions, when the most relevant issue for piano performance is the issue of preserving the undeniable value of classical music, depriving the listener of the feeling of its obsolescence and undemandingness in modern life. The French pianist offers his model of presenting his own performing work and interacting with the listening audience through the media space - a social space that includes the media market, virtual reality and the global information environment, in which employees of the media industry and society itself are equal participants. The media space should be understood not as a certain set of mass media, but as an independent reality formed from the interaction of the media and society and individual individuals in it. The concept of 'media representation' as one of the forms of representation means the type and location of the broadcast, where the media is a platform that, representing a part of the general culture with its inherent ideas, trends and idealized values, provides conditions for demonstrating one's own identity (individuality) ²⁹.

²⁹ Based on materials IDENTITY – HOW DO I IDENTIFY. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://themediastudentsblog.wordpress.com/2016/10/03/identity-how-do-i-identify/> (accessed on 15.04.2023).

In the context of modernity, media representation becomes one of the tools for promoting performing art. And any performing product (music album, creative release, website or personal channel) due to the original concept and broadcasting of intentional objects can be considered a self-representation of the performer. A. Tharaud's presence in the media space is carried out through numerous qualitatively prepared Internet platforms: the YouTube video hosting page ³⁰, the official website of the pianist ³¹, the websites of record companies that promote his work, the websites of instrument companies, etc. It is interesting to trace the stages of formation and certain components of this extensive media environment of A. Tharaud in order to understand the strategy of successful promotion of a creative product in modern conditions.

The starting point that determined the beginning of representative practice in A. Tharaud's work was the release of the thematic album "Versailles" (2019) with music by harpsichordists of the 17th–18th centuries - miniatures by J.-P. Rameau, J.-B. Lully, F. Couperin, P. Royer, J. Duphy, J.-H. d'Anglebert and works by lutenist R. De Visée performed on a grand piano. The album opens with a video presentation of J.-P. Rameau's *Prélude* in the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles ³². In the same interior, J.-B. Lully's Turkish march ("*Marche pour la cérémonie des Turks*") and P. Royer's play "*L'Aimable*" were also filmed. It should be noted that the modernization of ancient and classical music is a very responsible process. There are different approaches, one of which is historically oriented performance. Another way is to reproduce the style of sound on a modern piano - an instrument that has much greater sound and timbre capabilities compared to its ancient predecessors. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the desire of many composers of the past to develop the instruments of their era, since the instrument that existed during the lifetime of geniuses did not suit them.

It is well known that J.S. Bach, L. Beethoven openly declared that they were creating music for the instrument of the future. It is from this position that the performance of harpsichord and classical music on modern high-quality pianos provides the performer with more opportunities to reproduce such works. In this case, the artistic value of the interpretation represents the level of talent and skill of the performer, giving him a wide field for the

³⁰ Tharaud, Alexandre. *Alexandre Tharaud*, 2013. Retrieved from <https://youtube.com/@alexandretharaud7056?feature=shared> (accessed on 23.03.2024).

³¹ Tharaud, Alexandre. *Alexandre Tharaud. Official website*, n.d. Retrieved from <https://alexandretharaud.com/> (accessed on 14.03.2024).

³² The CD "*Versailles*", which is more ambitious in concept, became the culmination of the baroque line in A. Tharaud's work, presented in his previous albums: "*Alexander Tharaud joue/plays Rameau*" (2001); "*Tic toc choc Alexandre Tharaud joue/plays Couperin*" (2007); "*Baroque Alexandre Tharaud RAMEAU BACH COUPERIN*" (2010).

embodiment of music of any genre and style. Regarding the expressiveness of articulation techniques, mastery of the sound palette, skillful use of dynamics and pedaling in general, one can argue for a long time, since ancient instruments did not have most of such artistic possibilities. It is this (albeit in a specific historical context) that forced musicians to constantly improve the 'mechanism of finger mechanics' (*J.-P. Rameau*) of the keyboard instrument, it had to 'be able to sing' (J.S. Bach), and each sound of the instrument had to reproduce 'its own tone' (L. Beethoven).

In the representations of A. Tharaud, the 'realization of dreams' of brilliant composers of the past are clearly traced. By modeling the harpsichord sound on a modern *Steinway* piano, he represents in "*Versales*" the atmosphere of the French aristocratic culture of the past, without imitating the palace ritual inherent in it – these external signs of the gallant era. It is revealed as a world spiritually close to modern man, full of contrasts and contradictions, virtues and valor. Using the possibilities of the instrument, stylistically faithful touch, dynamics, agogics, phrasing and articulation, A. Tharaud reproduces the harpsichord sound, brilliantly embodies the images of the era, the composer's innovative ideas, the spirit of the Enlightenment with its energy, as if rediscovering the potential of the musical text.

The discovery of new meanings of musical language is also facilitated by the choice of location for the video presentation, which turns into a kind of visual 'visit' to the concert. The performance on a modern grand piano in Versailles does not invite the listener into the past and does not cancel the temporal distance between the past and the present; on the contrary, it emphasizes it as much as possible. The actualization begins in the sound of the grand piano itself. The pianist is not in a doublet, without a wig – therefore this is not stylization; it is also not just a game in the interior, in which this music was born, and the music here is not a museum exhibit, but a continuation of a living national tradition. The choice of a 'sacred' place as a concert hall, which embodies the image and spirit of French culture of that era, enhances the perception of music, giving him the most vivid emotional opportunity to experience the work in the context of its time.

If Versailles becomes a symbol of beauty and order, then the dilapidated interior of the dwelling is perceived as a psychological parallel to the dilapidated life of a person. This is the association that arises when you get acquainted with another creative project of the musician – a video recording of the last sonatas of L. Beethoven (op. 109, 110, 111), which made up the soundtrack to the film Mariano Nante "*Beethoven: Last Sonatas*" (2018). The director places pianist A. Tharaud in the atmosphere of a castle abandoned by time, inviting the viewer to take a journey to the secret corners of his consciousness through the combination of a specific interior and Beethoven's music. A. Tharaud's performance makes us wonder: are the heroic and

dramatic, as usual characteristics of Beethoven's music, really the only possible source for representing his music?

It is known that each individual work of any composer is marked only by stylistic components inherent to him – signs and symbols that represent his artistic individuality. They find written expressions through certain configurations in graphic symbols, which, in turn, are perceived by the bearers of a certain musical content. Dynamism, contrast, independent musical layers, drama of the construction of form are specific features of L. Beethoven's music, and if we concentrate these features into a certain musical symbol, then it will be – *fp*, one of the main markers of Beethoven's text, a graphic remark that is indicated in the notes of the piano sonatas by the composer himself. A. Tharaud offers his own version of the representation of the symbol-marker *fp*. Rejecting total heroization as the basis for interpreting Beethoven's music, he often treats *f* as a separate timbre, giving the sound a certain space that extends the boundaries of the instrument. After it, *p* is perceived in a new intimate way, a reflection of the previous one, a different sound layer. The feeling of space and instant switching of sound planes of acoustic sound propagation, the huge dynamic and emotional distance between *f* and *p* contribute to the multilayered disclosure of the intonation drama of Beethoven's musical text.

As noted above, any representation forms its own symbolic field. And in musical media representation, the transmission of a whole complex of musical, graphic, sound, pictorial (visual) symbols become possible, which are transformed and fixed in a certain unique form. All the symbolic elements present in the composer's original are refracted through the performing individuality of A. Tharaud as a representative of the French piano school. Complemented by the author's directorial concept and a unique video sequence, it gives the musical work a new dimension, freeing it from the layering of performing and listening clichés.

In addition to A. Tharaud's numerous references to French music ³³ in his performance practice, the albums in which the very concept of 'French' is implemented in the most subtle sense of French charm through the embodiment of images of salon Paris of the 1830s–50s and 'swinging' Paris of the 1920s attract attention. An example of the first is the album "*Chopin: Journal Intime*" (2009) ³⁴, which is perceived in the media space as the

³³ "Poulenc : Pièces pour Piano" (1996), "Rameau, nouvelles suites" (2001), "Ravel, Intégrale de l'œuvre pour piano" (2003), "Couperin, Tic Toc Choc" (2007), "Satie: Avant-dernières pensées" (2009), "Baroque" (2010), "Versailles" (2019), Ravel : Piano Concertos (2023).

³⁴ Tharaud, Alexandre. *Chopin: Journal Intime* [Recorded by Parlophone Records Limited] Chopin: Pièces pour piano. [CD]. Europe: Warner Classics/Erato release, 2009. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_n-6TaHwZKGq2ctndLVdo6iwDif7nlsIOY (accessed on 17.01.2025)

pianist's calling card as a representative of *F. Chopin's* music. It contains selected works by the composer, which the performer presents in a new semantic perspective, namely: F. Chopin is 'presented' as French in spirit, and his music is interpreted as a purely Parisian phenomenon³⁵. It is necessary to emphasize the originality of the visual design of this disc, which adjusts the listener's perception to chamberness and intimacy: the performer sits on a windowsill with a diary and a pencil in his hand, as if reflecting poetically. In this case, attention is focused on the intimacy of the expression, programming the role of the artist as a medium - a guide through the pages of a 'musical diary'.

The appeal to the pure personal secret is clearly evident in the concept of the album, which embodies *A. Tharaud's* preferences for the work of F. Chopin. The average duration of most of the works is two to three minutes. Three works of medium form - *Ballades in G minor* and *F major* and *Fantasy in F minor*, which sounds about 12 minutes. Three *ecoses*, op. 72, look especially chamber, each of which lasts no more than a minute. Five exclusively minor *Mazurkas*, Three *Ecoses* and one *Contradanse* outline the genre-dance repertoire of ballroom practice of the first half of the 19th century. The absence of waltzes is noteworthy. The dance sphere of the album is complemented by the 'literary nature' of ballads and fantasies. The emotional-temporal locus of the 'musical diary' is defined by the titles as 'heavy' (*Largo*) and 'night' (nocturnes). Of the two nocturnes, which seem to rhyme with each other the two parts of the "Album", the *Nocturne in C sharp minor* of the 'posthumous edition' is chosen by the pianist as the basis for the video presentation of the disc. An important feature of the performing version by *A. Tharaud* is the interpretation of the *crescendo* designation followed immediately by the *diminuendo* (< >). The pianist perceives this graphic-sound symbol of the composer's text not so much as a sign of dynamics as of agogy: *crescendo* is interpreted by him as an expansion through deceleration, while *diminuendo* is perceived as a compensation of time, accompanied by a slight acceleration. This approach acts as a sign of *A. Tharaud's* representation of Chopin's *rubato*. Such agogy interpretation of the dynamic sign sounds like a certain inhalation and exhalation, which creates representative references to the agogy properties of the "*chanson française*", embedding Chopin's music in the system of French musical culture.

³⁵ These cross-connections are also felt in *A. Tharaud's* interpretation of the works of G. Fauré, C. Debussy, and M. Ravel, presented through the prism of F. Chopin's noble refinement and salon style. The basis for this is the historical fact of F. Chopin's influence on the French school of virtuoso piano performance.

The sophistication of the Parisian salon also finds expression in A. Tharaud's album *"Le Boeuf sur le toit. Swinging Paris"* (2012), which includes two compositions by J. Gershwin: *"The Man I Love"* and *"Do it Again"* ³⁶. Since jazz and the culture of academic music closely interact in the style of J. Gershwin, this poses a number of tasks for pianists. Among them are the feeling and reproduction: agogics and "light breathing", inherent in the vocal jazz manner of intonation of the melody; 'breathing' harmony (with its coloristic "flavor"); the rhythmic nature of the composer's music, with its principle of percussion accentuation in the style of jazz orchestras of the 1920s–30s. All this forms the basis of the performing representation, the artistic feature of which should be the reproduction of the experience of the bright, colorful life of America at that time, marked by the mixing of artistic phenomena of ethnic cultures of different peoples of a multinational country. At the same time, the pianist needs to actualize the musical expression, through the transmission of the spirit of our time, his own life experience and the culture of academic pianism of his national tradition. This is exactly the approach demonstrated by A. Tharaud, representing the French J. Gershwin, combining the original phenomenon of the composer's music with the piano principles of the French performing school. A. Tharaud uses the entire spectrum of expressive means of academic pianism ³⁷. This interpretation of A. Tharaud is considered the closest to the reference one, demonstrating not only a different level of performing reading of J. Gershwin's piano work, but also a portrait of Paris – multinational and bright – in *"Le Boeuf sur le toit. Swinging Paris"*.

Alexandre Tharaud's Artistic Individuality in the Focus of Self-Presentation

Commenting on E. Goffman's ³⁸ theory of selective self-presentation, E. Hollenbaugh ³⁹ believes that a modern performer has the opportunity to focus the attention of media listeners on specific works of his repertoire at his discretion ⁴⁰. These two different versions of A. Tharaud's self-

³⁶ The presence of J. Gershwin's music in an album with this title is not accidental, since the musician's work has often been associated with the atmosphere of Paris (for example, in J. Gershwin's famous symphonic poem "An American in Paris").

³⁷ Voskoboinikov, Yakov. "Jazz transcriptions of G. Gershwin in piano performance of the academic tradition" *Aspects of historical musicology*. XIX-XX, 2020, p. 444.

³⁸ Goffman, Ervin. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956.

³⁹ Hollenbaugh, Erin E. "Self-Presentation in social media: Review and research opportunities" *Review of Communication Research*. 9, 2021, pp. 80-98.

⁴⁰ Hollenbaugh, Erin E. "Self-Presentation in social media: Review and research opportunities" *Review of Communication Research*. 9, 2021, pp. 81-84.

representation in the media space are two albums by the pianist: “*Autograph*”⁴¹, consisting of 23 tracks (presenting works by 22 composers from the Baroque to the present day) and “*Le poète du piano*”⁴², which combines a variety of names, styles and genres in 63 tracks.

The uniqueness of “*Autograph*” in A. Tharaud’s performing work is determined by the novelty of its concept compared to the previous 29 albums recorded by the pianist. Instead of focusing on the work of a single composer, style or historical era, a whole spectrum of musical phenomena is represented here. By combining key works from the artist’s media legacy (from 1997 to 2013), “*Autograph*” became the culmination of the musician’s many years of presence in the media space. The album’s title relates to the idea of a collection of works that are usually performed ‘encore’. Regarding this, in one of the interviews, the pianist shared his opinion:

*“I searched for a long time for the name of the album, at first I wanted to call the album – ‘Encore Works’, ‘Best Works’, and then, remembering the feeling after each concert, I came to the conclusion, that it is precisely the moment when I give out autographs to those who wish, that is that special moment, which for me and the listeners is still full of impressions and sounds of those last ‘encore’ works, which seem to be engraved in my autograph.”*⁴³

The composition of the album is also determined by an original approach – the pianist’s refusal from large-scale romantic sonatas, ballads, virtuoso etudes and concentration on small pieces with a duration of sounding of each from 2 to 6 minutes maximum. The absence of brilliant virtuoso pieces in “*Autograph*”, traditionally performed ‘encore’, once again emphasized A. Tharaud’s love for miniature, presenting virtuosity of a different order, dictated by the intellectual type of personality of the musician himself with his inherent approach to the work. The refined play of timbres, the quality of articulation in the piano tone, the intimacy of images, the disclosure of each piece as a unique sound world becomes signs of the musician’s individual performing style. Self-presentation, thus, is realized in “*Autograph*” in a conscious choice of pieces, which, on the one hand, reveal A. Tharaud’s performing manner as fully as possible, on the other hand, occupy a special place in his repertoire, which confirms the fact of their

⁴¹ Tharaud, Alexandre. *Autograph (Encores)*. Warner classics, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.warnerclassics.com/release/autograph-encores> (accessed on 27.01.2025).

⁴² Tharaud, Alexandre. *Le poète du piano* [Recorded by Parlophone Records Limited] Chopin: Pièces pour piano. [CD]. France: Warner Classics/Erato release, 2020.

⁴³ Tharaud, Alexandre. *Interview pour son album Autograph*, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxvFCsbxTZY> (accessed on 28.01.2025).

dissonance in previous albums of 1997–2012 ⁴⁴. Interestingly, 5 tracks from “Autograph” will be included in “*Le poète du piano*” – an album with a new concept, which, as mentioned above, can be considered an example of an expanded self-representation of the most important aspects of A. Tharaud’s inner world, his own ‘self-portrait’ ⁴⁵.

“*Le poète du piano*” can also be compared to “*Au Château d’Argol*” ⁴⁶ of piano art, where its owner and at the same time the architect is the pianist himself, who embodies his world of the Imaginary based on his own piano repertoire ⁴⁷. Released by A. Tharaud in 2020, it has 63 tracks, lasting more than four hours. The “extensiveness” of the repertoire is admirable, among which there are not only works by composers from different countries and eras, but also transcriptions and original works by A. Tharaud himself. Each of his tracks as a ‘memory’ (of what I love), ‘*Amarcord*’ (after F. Fellini) refers to other albums of the artist and thus actualizes the past. The media world of A. Tharaud presented here was created over three decades. It is presented by various forms of self-realization of the musician: solo performance, chamber and ensemble music making, co-creation with singers. But this is not positioned as a collection of the most spectacular examples, a business card of the master’s virtuosity. On the contrary, the album demonstrates the musician’s attempt to realize the ‘real’ himself through a gallery of selected musical images.

The key to understanding the author’s concept of the entire album is the film adaptation of the piano version of “*Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*” by C. Debussy in A. Tharaud’s transcription, which emphasizes the central role of this track in the musical collection “*Le poète du piano*” ⁴⁸. Let us recall that A. Tharaud’s albums of the past years, some of which were mentioned in the article, are also marked by bright musical visualizations. Their central “directorial” idea has always been the projection of emotional and aesthetic

⁴⁴ “*Autograph*” also includes tracks that are later duplicated in future albums (“*Poulenc – Piano Concerto*”, 2018), which creates references between this release and the artist’s work between 2013 and 2020.

⁴⁵ For more details on the references between the albums “*Autograph*” and “*Le poète du piano*”: Voskoboinikov, Yakov. “Albums ‘*Autograph*’ and ‘*Le poète du piano*’: two versions of the media self-representing the French pianist Alexandre Tharaud” *Aspects of Historical Musicology*. XXXV, 2024, pp. 251-271.

⁴⁶ Julien Gracq’s surrealist novel “*Au Château d’Argol*” (1939).

⁴⁷ Only in the period from 2013 to 2020, A. Tharaud recorded the albums: “Mozart, Jeunehomme” (2014), “Bach, Goldberg Variations” (2015), “*Barbara*” (2017), “Brahms – Chello Sonates” (2018), “Beethoven, Sonatas Opus 109, 110, 111” (2018), “Versailles” (2019), “*Chanson d’Amour*” (2020), “Schubert” (2020).

⁴⁸ Each of the works, specially recorded for the album “*Le poète du piano*”, was presented with a video clip on Youtube.

factors onto visual effects, which emphasizes the significance of spatial techniques, the movement of the instrument in the frame, and the musical co-creation of the pianist with the grand piano.

The video presentation of the album "*Le poète du piano*" presents an original solution: a variant of intermedial interaction of musical and visual with new components – literature and choreography. The possibility of such an approach was dictated both by the very essence of the referential relationship between musical (*Prélude* by C. Debussy) and literary ("*Au Château d'Argol*" by J. Gracq) works, and by the representative potential of each of them. Thus, *Prélude* by C. Debussy (1894), having received several interpretations in the form of piano transcriptions, choreographic incarnations⁴⁹, is also present on the pages of the novel in poetically inspired descriptions of the characters' musical improvisations, their feelings, the exuberance of natural elements, images of heat, sun, and reverie. These direct analogies of the text with music, as well as freer associations, are emphasized in the video presentation.

Dramaturgically, the clip is composed as a narrative, built on the complex interaction of the plot of *Julien Gracq's* novel, the symbolism of Claude Debussy's music and the plasticity of *Chun-Wing Lam's* dance. This is reproduced in the existing parallels between the heroes of the novel and the actors in the video presentation. A. Tharaud's piano performance is detailed in a visual sequence (directed by *Raphaël Wertheimer*), which unfolds as a parallel montage of frames of the pianist's playing on the piano and a self-sufficiently expressive plastic line (choreographer-producer *Wun Sze Chan*, soloist – *Chun-Wing Lam*), complemented by picturesque shots of nature in Brittany, the symbolism of individual objects, images (stone fortress, ocean coast, three stone pillars, sun, book, blood, etc.). Choreography here plays the role of a mediator between the surrealism and mysticism of the literary and the sophistication, non-objectivity' of musical texts; it complements the picture of the artistic whole by revealing secret impulses, the expression of

⁴⁹ The author's version for two pianos (1895) was eventually supplemented by piano transcriptions by M. Ravel for four hands (1910), L. Borwick for piano solo (1912); L. Kuhn (1930), V. Gryaznov, G. Richter for 8 hands. A. Tharaud's own transcription of the *Prelude* dates back to 2019. As for choreographic readings of C. Debussy's music, first of all, we should mention the famous 1912 production of the one-act ballet by *Vaclav Nijinsky*, who was inspired by images on ancient Greek ceramics and used plastic stylized as antiquity. His choreography, recorded in numerous photos, symbolized a break with the classical tradition. *Serge Lifar* presented his modern choreographic version on the Paris stage in 1935. The modern choreographic version with piano transcription by A. Tharaud cultivates the poetics of classical ballet. And in this it comes close to Jerome Robbins' 1953 production, in which the action unfolds in a ballet class. Later, in the 1970s, this choreography was also used by Rudolf Nureyev.

which is beyond the power of either verbalization or sound recording, only dance. The literary source motivates the appearance on the screen of the dancer as the pianist's symbolic double, his conditional 'Avatar' in the field of illusion.

A. Tharaud's self-representation through screen images contains a wide range of associations. They create a unique space of intertextual connections, symbolically reflecting the pianist's creative experience, and, at the same time, comprehensively represent the album "*Le poète du piano*". Just as *Julien Gracq's* literary text contains references to the music of C. Debussy's Preludes, *J.-P. Rameau*, to other literary works, the mysticism of the Middle Ages, etc., and the video presentation is full of signs of what is valuable for A. Tharaud (what I love) and what corresponds to the poetics of the surrealist novel. Thus, the image of the Book, repeatedly appearing throughout the composition, and especially at the beginning and end of the video, positions the main character of the presentation - pianist *Alexandre Tharaud* - as both a Poet and a person of the Book. The first image-personification, fixed in the very title of the album, is perceived as a metaphor, evoking analogies with the tradition of romanticism. The second - reveals the deep essence of the pianist's creative individuality as a musician-intellectual.

The very specificity of the pianist's authorial approach in creating a transcription of Debussy's work, the nature of its performance appeals to the harpsichord strokes of *J.-P. Rameau*, the virtuoso techniques of filling in the harmonies of F. Chopin, creating pedal allusions. In the texture of his own transcription, Taro uses the experience of pianist composers, many of whose works he has recorded in more than forty albums of music of various styles. The idyllic images of nature in the video, along with the eerie images of the dungeon, establish parallels with other pieces of the album - "*Idylle*" by *E. Chabrier*, "*Le Rappel des oiseaux*" by *J.-P. Rameau*, the images of "*Orphée et Eurydice*" by Ch. Gluck in the piano transcription by A. Siloti. Finally, the author's "*Faune*" by A. Tharaud (in the album under No. 47) is perceived as an echo of "*Faune*" by C. Debussy.

The significance of the choreographic component in the video presentation has an autobiographical subtext. For A. Tharaud – a person who has been developing since childhood in an atmosphere of constant professional studies in music, theater, ballet ⁵⁰ – dance, choreography forever became a part of his artistic universe, subconsciously determining the musician's attraction to intermediality, the focus of his perception of the role of the visual component in musical media representations. The youthful experience continued

⁵⁰ The pianist's mother was a ballet master at the Paris Opera, and A. Tharaud himself was also fond of choreography.

in subsequent repertoire preferences, when the pianist turned to performing dance miniatures by *J.-P. Rameau* and *F. Couperin*, waltzes and mazurkas by *F. Chopin*, cabaret dances... In the pianist's performing work, dance becomes "Ariadne's thread", which, penetrating eras and centuries, concretizing in historical versions, unites disparate fragments into a single stainedglass window. Commenting on the collection of his own works "*Corpus volubilis*" (2020), most of which are dances, *A. Tharaud* determines that his compositional work is a tribute to the body, its movements, weightlessness⁵¹. Seven dances from "*Corpus volubilis*" were included in the album "*Le poète du piano*"⁵², emphasizing the significance and expressiveness of the choreographic element in the system of the pianist's creative preferences, its importance for the musician's self-representation.

Conclusions

In modern culture, the paths of communication between the performer and the listener invariably intersect in the Internet space. Phenomenal virtuosity, multiplied by the dexterity of the impresario and the bribery of newspapermen, could make a name for a musician in the 19th century. Today, somewhat different mechanisms work. A performer cannot focus only on the models of the past. Even high-quality advertising cannot provide the necessary resonance for performing activities in an academic direction, that is, contribute to expanding the circle of listeners and actively promoting work in society. Therefore, an important task for a musician is to create an information platform for his own concert activities. Releases posted on the Internet in audio or video formats with high-quality design not only give an idea of the creative personality of the performer, the originality of his interpretations, their novelty, but also opens him up to the public sphere. Finding ways to solve the problem of the functioning of musical classics in the modern space requires creativity not only from practicing musicians. It is necessary to use new research methods to master these trends.

The concept of media representation makes it possible to focus the research perspective on the study of the creative work of a modern performer in all the complexity of its intertextual connections. Performative representation, as a product of performing intentions, combines intentional objects and

⁵¹ Tharaud, Alexandre. *Corpus volubilis* livre 1. Retrieved from <https://www.henry-lemoine.com/en/partitions-piano/6627-corpus-volubilis-livre-1.html> (accessed on: 04.03.2023).

⁵² In "*Le poète du piano*" are №№ 43–49: *Sama, Rumba, Sicilienne, Avant-deux, Faune, Pavane, Vaudou*.

presents them in another and through another. In interaction with the listener, it can also be subject to certain social influences: the public's reaction to a certain release can determine the course of the performer's repertoire strategy, but the right of final choice still remains with the musician. Performative representation is not devoid of variability in terms of interpreting its content: the interaction of the subject and the vector of research each time adds a new analytical field to performing creativity, such as, for example, representations in the media space. Considering performing art from this perspective allows us to encompass the multi-vector nature of the creative functioning of modern musicians in the world media.

A striking example of such creative self-expression is the professional activity of the contemporary French pianist *Alexandre Tharaud*, a recognized media figure in the world of classical music. The multitude of forms of representation that mark his creative output allow us to interpret the pianist's work as a set of references to objects of other art forms, focusing their content at a certain point in time, namely in a recorded video or audio recording. By analyzing just some of *A. Tharaud's* numerous releases, the importance of all components becomes clear - from the subject matter, the choice of works for forming a playlist, locations for recording to the visual design or montage of frames in video presentations. All these elements of the musician's creative 'message' are constructed and interact in such a way as to create meaningful parallels between the original text and its interpretation, cultural events dispersed in time, literary or historical sources. This gives the right to define the content of *Alexandre Tharaud's* performing representations in the media space as a multifunctional system of media representation objects that are meaningfully combined by the performer into a system of references between them.

The definition of representation as a social event, a container of collective ideas, is realized in *A. Tharaud's* media releases through the breadth of the inter-artistic network, which, in addition to music, encompasses professionals from various fields: sound engineering, literature, photography, graphics, modern cinema, ballet, etc. In parallel, *A. Tharaud* has always been characterized by a high degree of individualization, which is traced in the need to focus on what he loves throughout the pianist's entire creative path in the media space. The need to represent himself, that is, self-representation, was realized by *A. Tharaud* in the creation of transcriptions of works by other composers (G. Mahler, C. Debussy), in his own compositional activity ("*Corpus Volubilis*"), in the concept of the albums "Autograph" and "*Le poète du piano*". The video presentation of the album "*Le poète du piano*" becomes a concentrate, which summarizes a certain summary of the performer's creative searches, represented through the music of his own transcription of

C. Debussy's Prelude, choreography, video plot and semantic references to *Julien Gracq's* surrealist novel "*Au Château d'Argol*". The proposed approach to studying the performing achievements of a modern pianist of academic tradition through the prism of media representation acquires the status of a universal one, which can be applied to the work of any musician associated with the media space. The chosen perspective becomes a tool for revealing the multi-vector plurality and systematicity of the artists' creative realizations, the strategy of their success in the conditions of changing reality.

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