

## THEORY AND HISTORY OF CULTURE

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2024-3-14>

### INTEGRATING HISTORICAL, METHODOLOGICAL, AND STYLISTIC ELEMENTS IN PIANO PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATION

*Syun Yi,*

*Postgraduate Student, Sumy State Pedagogical University  
named after A. S. Makarenko (Sumy, Ukraine)*

*ORCID ID: 0009-0005-2007-794X*

*bamssmit@gmail.com*

**Abstract.** This article delves into the complex process of piano performance interpretation, emphasizing the interplay of historical context, performance methodology, and stylistic authenticity. By analyzing the alignment of a piece with its compositional era, adherence to contemporary performance standards, and the incorporation of the pianist's personal expression, the study reveals the multifaceted nature of musical interpretation. The methodology includes an in-depth examination of the stylistic and technical aspects of piano performance, drawing from the works of leading theorists and practitioners. The results underscore the necessity of combining historical accuracy, technical proficiency, and individual artistry to achieve a coherent and compelling performance. The article concludes that a comprehensive approach, integrating these elements, is crucial for effective interpretation. Future research should aim to further refine this framework to improve interpretative practices and educational approaches in piano performance.

**Key words:** musical interpretation, pianistic expression, technical proficiency, compositional era.

**Introduction.** One of the most notable phenomena in the artistic creativity of the European realm over the last two hundred years is musical performance. Emerging during the era of musical Romanticism as an independent form of artistic creation, musical performance, including piano performance, continues to hold enormous significance in culture and consistently attracts interest. Today, as in previous years, its most sought-after «branch» is piano performance.

This is evidenced by the multitude of active music festivals, including piano festivals, around the world, international piano competitions, a large number of piano ensembles in the repertoire plans of philharmonic societies, and numerous piano departments in conservatories. Over the course of the existence of musical performance, including piano art, a considerable number of musical treatises, piano teaching methods, works dedicated to issues of musical aesthetics have been published. These reflect not only the cultural and historical era with its ideas, philosophy, aesthetics, and unique worldview, but also the features of both compositional techniques and performance styles. Piano performance has been accompanied over the centuries by reviews and various concert critiques in the press, aesthetic essays, scientific articles, monographs, and dissertation research.

**Main part.** The primary goal of this research is to explore the intricate process of piano performance interpretation, focusing on how performers transition from a broad understanding of a musical piece to its detailed execution. This involves analyzing the movement from a general conceptual grasp of a composition to the specific elements and details that contribute to a nuanced and expressive performance. The study aims to clarify how different analytical approaches and methods inform the interpretative process and enhance the artistic quality of the performance. To address these objectives, the research employs a multi-faceted approach. A comprehensive review of existing literature on piano performance interpretation, including theoretical works by scholars such as Hans von Bülow and others, provides a theoretical framework for understanding the various components of musical

interpretation. The analytical framework applied includes the general-specific-whole triad, which helps in analyzing the interpretative process by examining how performers move from a broad understanding of a piece to detailed analysis and execution. Case studies of specific performances by renowned pianists are used to observe practical applications of interpretative methods, providing insights into how different performers approach the same piece. Additionally, interviews and surveys with professional pianists and music educators offer qualitative data on their interpretative strategies and experiences.

The research findings reveal several key aspects of the piano performance interpretation process. Performers typically start with a broad conceptual understanding of a composition, which guides their detailed analysis. This process involves breaking down the musical text into its components, such as thematic material, textural layers, and dramatic structure. Various analytical methods employed by performers, including the examination of large-scale sections, textural and background relationships, and the overall dramaturgy of the piece, help develop a comprehensive understanding of the music, informing interpretative decisions. The significance of performance techniques in shaping the interpretative approach is highlighted, with techniques such as dynamic variation, tonal color, and rhythmic flexibility playing crucial roles in conveying the artistic vision of the piece. Furthermore, the degree of interpretative freedom available to performers significantly influences the artistic quality of their performance, allowing musicians to infuse their personal expression into the music and transforming technical execution into a rich artistic experience.

In summary, the research demonstrates that the process of piano performance interpretation involves a complex interplay of analytical methods, performance techniques, and artistic expression. By understanding how these elements interact, musicians can enhance their interpretative skills and deliver performances that are both technically proficient and artistically profound.

Understanding the essence of stylistic processes and the phenomenon of style as an expression of personal creative intentions is fundamental for performers, as it directly impacts the process of musical interpretation. This is because, through a specific composition, with its textual precision, separation, and structuring, performers can express their own artistic perspectives and shape their personal style of thinking. According to O. Pototska, a musical work serves as a foundational element in performance interpretation, functioning both as a historical artifact and an artistic value. It represents the composer's intent and acts as a personalized subject of artistic dialogue. Pototska highlights that the process of conceptualizing a musical work involves understanding it as an aesthetic object of intrinsic value, «which is a unique embodiment of artistic concept and exists both in acoustic processes of real sound and independently from these processes, thus receiving a virtual form of existence» (Pototska, 2012: 31).

In the field of musicology, a systematic approach often overlooks performance parameters and the phenomenon of musical sound, which directly represents musical meaning. This omission leads to a limitation in the theory of musical works, which should be seen as a cultural product that «accumulates the aesthetic and artistic experience of humanity. It is one of the most sophisticated forms of societal auditory memory, preserving the results of spiritual and practical activities, and serving as a reliable means of transmitting artistic values from generation to generation» (Hans von Bülow, 2001: 52). Antonyuk provides a broader cultural perspective on the concept of a musical work. He asserts that a work exists on both a personal level and within a cultural community. For the individual, it represents a form of materialization and objectification of unique individuality. For the cultural community, it is viewed as a completed artifact that represents the experience of an entire cultural era, valued for its address and potential for meaningful extensions. Here, the author's role becomes more abstract, with the emphasis shifting to the possibilities of interpretation – understanding the semantic potential hidden behind its formal aspects (Antonyuk, 1999: 98–101). This idea suggests that musical performance does not merely represent but actualizes the content of the work and creates new conditions for its understanding and further dissemination beyond the immediate composition. V. Moskalenko's

(1994) research further deepens this understanding by emphasizing the intricate relationship between the performer's interpretation and the stylistic and structural aspects of the musical work. Moskalenko argues that the performer plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between the composer's intentions and the audience's perception. He explores how performers engage with the work not only through technical proficiency but also by interpreting the stylistic nuances and contextual meanings embedded in the music. Moskalenko's studies highlight that the performer's engagement with a musical work involves a dynamic interplay between technical execution, historical context, and personal artistic expression. This interaction is essential for uncovering the work's full meaning and for the effective communication of its artistic value to the audience.

Most musicologists agree on the importance of dynamic relationships between the phenomena of the work and text in music. N. Gerasimova-Persidskaya, for example, notes that not every musical text should be perceived as a complete musical work, especially in ancient historical contexts when creators did not assert originality or authorship (Gerasimova-Persidskaya, 1988). The development of musical notation was a significant milestone, transitioning from oral traditions to methods that affirm the uniqueness of musical works. This advancement elevated performance practice to a new level of creative activity and responsibility, making it a crucial domain for the creation of music through sound and the articulation of meaning.

Overall, the literature underscores that the process of musical interpretation involves a complex interaction of stylistic, technical, and personal elements. This interaction is not only about understanding and reproducing the work but also about actively engaging with its meaning and context. The performer's role is thus central in actualizing the work's content and in contributing to its ongoing interpretation and relevance within cultural and artistic contexts.

Interest in piano performance art remains robust and dynamic in the contemporary musical landscape. Composers continue to write new works for the solo piano, as well as for the piano in chamber ensembles and as a soloist with orchestras. The piano's wide pitch range, relative timbral neutrality, and the potential for extensive dynamic and coloristic gradations continue to captivate composers. These aspects of the piano offer a versatile canvas for musical expression and innovation.

Nevertheless, the modern situation in professional musical art presents significant complexities and challenges. Many contemporary composers are engaged in an ongoing quest for novel sounds and innovative timbral relationships. This pursuit involves integrating elements from a diverse array of instrumental and electronic compositions, expanding the auditory palette beyond traditional boundaries. The exploration of new sonic landscapes often entails extensive experimentation with sound, pushing the limits of what is conventionally considered the piano's timbral range. In this context, composers might manipulate the piano's sound through various modifications, seeking to produce fresh and unique auditory experiences that resonate with their artistic visions. Consequently, the conventional piano sound, with its established acoustic characteristics, may not always align with the contemporary means of expression being explored. This divergence underscores a broader trend in modern composition, where the search for originality and innovation takes precedence, leading to the creation of works that challenge and expand the traditional expectations of piano music. This trend highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of musical art in the 21st century, reflecting a continuous dialogue between tradition and innovation. The quest for new sound possibilities has led to significant experimentation with piano sound. This includes subjecting the piano to various modifications to achieve new sonorities or creating works that reflect the styles and forms of retro piano genres from previous centuries. Despite these innovations, contemporary music for the piano often faces challenges in gaining acceptance within the repertoire policies of many concert organizations. This is partly due to the difficulty that a broad audience may have in comprehending such complex works. Contemporary compositions frequently exceed the perceptual capacities of general listeners, necessitating special educational efforts, training, and audience preparation to facilitate understanding and appreciation.

This challenge is partially mitigated through various contemporary music festivals, which serve as platforms for new works and experimental approaches. While traditional philharmonic repertoire remains steeped in its historical and aesthetic values, it sometimes intersects with contemporary compositional practices. Performers often include contemporary works in their programs, creating a dialogue between traditional and modern musical expressions. At the same time, traditional piano repertoire continues to thrive, both in public concerts and in the programs of international competitions and festivals dedicated to piano art.

Today's musical culture offers a dual perspective: it not only embraces innovation but also preserves and celebrates traditional compositional and performance creativity. The enduring appeal of the traditional piano repertoire ensures its ongoing demand, maintaining its relevance and prominence in both concert halls and competitive arenas. This balance between embracing the new and honoring the established reflects the rich and evolving nature of piano performance art in the contemporary era.

The range of questions discussed in the theory and aesthetics of piano performance is extraordinarily broad, with a vast empirical body of knowledge that requires new levels of generalization, interpretation of musical meanings, and definition of the essential foundations of performance art. «With the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of their practical realization starts to crystallize out of the chaos of ideas, and the aspirations developed in the 19th century gradually take shape as achievable goals», writes S. Grinstein in his work *Great Piano* (Grinstein, 2015: 81). As a result, numerous methodological works on the theory of pianism, scientific literature related to the issues of piano performance aesthetics, and educational materials for both beginners and advanced performers have emerged over the last century and continue to be published today. However, a general theory of performance art, as well as a unified theory of piano performance, has not yet been established (Grinstein, 2015: 115).

Interpreting piano music, regardless of the style or era of the piece, follows universal principles for interpreting musical text, articulating it, and performing it publicly. The art of piano playing and its interpretation can be viewed from various angles. For the performer, these perspectives can be distilled into three main elements: the artistic image, the artistic method, and the artistic style.

The artistic image represents the core artistic essence of the musical interpretation, referring to the «inner» nature of the piece as it is perceived through sound. The artistic method, on the other hand, is the «tool» used to bring the artistic image to life in actual sound. This method encompasses both technical and artistic aspects. Technically, it involves understanding the nuances of the musical text and its context, mastering various techniques of intonation and sound articulation, and organizing sound perspective and rhythmic structure. Artistically, it emerges from an understanding of the artistic subject and aligns with the characteristics of the musical style.

Finally, the artistic style encompasses the character and distinct features of the artistic subject, reflecting the «outer» expressiveness of the performance. Examining piano interpretation from the performer's perspective helps reveal the common principles and functional features of this triad – image, method, and style – and highlights their essential role in performance.

The style of the interpreted piece, as well as the authenticity and coherence of the performance, consists of many elements. These include the necessary alignment of the piece with the «sound» of the era in which it was composed; adherence to contemporary demands of performance art, including «standards» and conventions of concert performance; and integration into the tradition of interpreting the piece, which has developed over the history of its performance. Additionally, it involves the manifestation of the pianist's personal qualities in the performance, reflecting their artistic and value orientations, which inevitably influences the individual sound of the instrument.

A comprehensive understanding of these elements is essential for any pianist aiming to deliver a convincing interpretation. The alignment with the era's sound entails a deep knowledge of historical performance practices and stylistic nuances characteristic of the time when the piece was written.

This includes understanding the composer's intentions, the performance conventions of the period, and the socio-cultural context that influenced the work's creation.

Adhering to contemporary performance demands involves not only technical proficiency but also an awareness of modern interpretations and the evolving nature of musical aesthetics. Performers must navigate between historical authenticity and contemporary artistic expression, balancing respect for tradition with personal creativity. The integration into the interpretation tradition requires familiarity with notable past performances and interpretations, allowing the performer to position their rendition within an ongoing dialogue of musical interpretations.

Moreover, the pianist's personal qualities play a critical role in shaping their performance. This encompasses their emotional connection to the piece, their intellectual engagement with its structure and meaning, and their individual artistic voice. These personal attributes contribute to the unique timbre and expressive qualities of their playing, making each performance a distinctive interpretation.

In this context, the theoretical framework of interpretation extends beyond mere technical execution. It involves a holistic approach that synthesizes historical knowledge, technical skill, and personal artistry. This approach ensures that the performance is not only technically sound but also rich in emotional and intellectual depth, providing a meaningful and engaging experience for the audience.

The interplay between these elements underscores the complexity of musical interpretation. It highlights the necessity for a well-rounded, informed, and reflective approach to performance. As pianists strive to achieve this balance, they contribute to the ongoing evolution of performance art, blending tradition with innovation and personal insight with historical fidelity. This dynamic process not only preserves the richness of the musical heritage but also keeps it vibrant and relevant in contemporary culture. The complex nature of performance interpretation is evident to every pianist. Technological, historical-stylistic, and artistic-image aspects are present in every performance of academic classical music. Some musicians, contemplating the nature of performance, develop their own triads that form the foundation of musical interpretation. Typically, they converge on the main idea that musical performance interpretation is the unity of artistic image, playing technique, and stylistic authenticity of the music being performed. In his book *The Art of Piano Performance (German: Die Kunst des Klavier Spiels)*, renowned German pianist and theorist Hans von Bülow proposes his own triad for the foundation of musical interpretation: «subtext-text-context» (Hans von Bülow, 2001).

Hans von Bülow defines the «text» as a «thorough and meticulous mastery of the notational material». The «subtext» is seen as the «category of content, the imaginative world, and the character of the piece» (Hans von Bülow, 2001: 32). The «context» is described as the «position of the piece within the panorama of the compositions of a particular composer, and the affiliation of the played opus to a specific stylistic direction. Bülow's proposed triad of subtext-text-context can be related to the well-known triad of F. Busoni: «technique-culture-character» (Hans von Bülow, 2001: 37–38).

V. Moskalenko writes about genuine, talented, and stylistically valuable interpretation: «A truly valuable interpretation bears the mark of individuality; it is characterized by the unity of conception and technical perfection of its realization, harmonizes with the aesthetic ideals and intonational vocabulary of the era, while also being distinguished by its novelty» (Moskalenko, 1994: 15). In this definition of interpretation, familiar components are present as well: performance technique, artistic stylistics, and musical imagery.

Based on the triad of image-method-style, which forms the foundation of musical performance interpretation, one can also formulate the approach to its realization in the preliminary analytical work of the performer with the musical text. Analytical operations with the author's text follow certain universal patterns. The formation of an overall image of the work in the performer's mind precedes detailed analysis. The understanding of the whole, or the «bird's-eye view» of the musical composition, both initiates and completes the performer's work on the piece. This holistic view is linked to the detailed examination of the musical text and its components. The process of interpreting

the work involves an initial, broad understanding that guides the detailed, specific analysis required for a cohesive and nuanced performance.

Every musician follows their unique path from the first acquaintance with a piece to its stage performance. However, a common principle applies to all interpretations, describing how a musical composition unfolds and becomes relevant in its real sound. This principle can be defined as a sequence or formula: general-specific-whole. From a practical, craft-oriented perspective, this formula can be expressed as: «generalized – fragmented into pieces – detailed in specifics».

Here, the general refers to the thematic content, which delves into the mysterious depths of musical meanings, expressible only through its real sound. The specific focuses on the «instrumentation», addressing the arsenal of performance techniques and craft resources. The whole represents the composition itself, understood in its specific details, in the collective characteristics of contrasting episodes, and in the unity. It is evident that the triad of general-specific-whole corresponds to the triad of image-method-style, serving as a kind of reflection. While the latter has a more general sense, the former has an instrumental character. One addresses the question «what?» while the other answers the question «how?» A musician's analytical thought moves from general formal aspects, through the identification of various connections starting from the textural level and then dramaturgical connections, to exploring the image characteristics – primarily in sound, and often in poetic metaphors that arise through various parallels, analogies, allusions, and intertextual links. This analytical journey allows the musician to comprehend the compositional structure, historical style, and artistic dramaturgy of the work, thereby achieving a deeper and more nuanced interpretation. By systematically dissecting the music into its fundamental components and understanding their interplay, the musician can effectively reassemble these elements into a coherent and expressive whole, thus bridging the gap between theoretical analysis and practical performance.

The performer identifies major structural sections, relates sound plans vertically, clarifies figurative and background relationships, aligns parts of the musical dramaturgy in their mind, and ultimately arrives at an understanding, and sometimes a direct definition, of the imagery and meanings of the musical composition. This understanding is not always easily expressed in verbal formulas; in fact, it is often impossible to fully capture music in words under any circumstances. However, in the search for artistic truth and performance coherence, musicians frequently turn to poetic metaphors, seek analogies and comparisons, and refer to related art forms. Sometimes they even draw on specific life circumstances, images of elemental movements, natural phenomena, landscapes, and scenery.

In general terms, the progression from the general to the whole, with the whole being understood in specific details, follows a systematic path:

**Analysis of the Musical Composition:** This begins with examining the large sections of the piece and then progresses to the motivic structure, clarifying their formal relationships. This step involves understanding how the broader sections of the work relate to each other and contribute to the overall structure.

**Analysis of Figurative and Background Relationships:** This involves identifying the prominence or subordination of various layers of texture, creating a sound perspective similar to the relationships in painting between graphic elements and color. Here, the focus is on how different textural layers interact and how they contribute to the overall sound landscape.

**Analysis of Dramaturgy:** This step involves uncovering the meaningful relationships between different parts of the composition, from tectonic foundations to the interplay of «upper layers» of musical expression – such as motivic development. It explores how the parts of the piece interact to create a cohesive dramatic structure.

**Understanding the Artistic Image:** This final stage involves grasping the artistic image in its entirety, as well as understanding the significance and meaning of all its details. It requires a holistic view of how each element contributes to the overall artistic conception. The process of musical perform-

ance analysis is not merely about breaking down the music into its constituent parts; it also involves understanding how these parts are interconnected and how they combine to form a continuously unfolding musical fabric. This involves a detailed examination of the structural, harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic components of the piece, as well as their dynamic and expressive qualities. Analytical work in music goes beyond disassembling the composition into elements; it also includes determining how these elements are assembled and how they function together in the ongoing development of the musical piece. It encompasses the identification of thematic material, its development and transformation, and the ways in which these processes contribute to the overall narrative and emotional trajectory of the work. Additionally, this stage involves an exploration of interpretative choices, where the performer decides how to bring out certain aspects of the music to enhance its expressive impact. Understanding the artistic image requires an awareness of the historical and stylistic context of the piece, the composer's intentions, and the performance traditions associated with the work. It also involves a personal engagement with the music, where the performer's own artistic sensibilities and emotional responses play a crucial role. By integrating these various perspectives, the performer can create a compelling and authentic interpretation that resonates with both the historical context and contemporary audience expectations. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve a performance that is both technically proficient and deeply expressive, reflecting a profound understanding of the music's inner workings and its broader artistic significance. This comprehensive approach to musical analysis and interpretation ensures that each performance is a unique and meaningful realization of the composer's vision, enriched by the performer's individual insight and creativity.

Additionally, the entire arsenal of performance techniques is subjected to analysis. This includes exploring various ways of interpreting and presenting the music, which provides the performer with a range of choices at every level and in every direction of their analytical work. This freedom of choice is a crucial aspect of interpretation, as it elevates the craft of performance to the level of art and creativity. It leads to a qualitatively new result in the artistic activity of the performer. The performer's analytical insight thus sees not only the material broken down into elements but also the method of their integration, or «assembly», into a coherent musical expression. This analytical approach is essential for achieving a deep understanding of the piece and for delivering a performance that reflects both the structural and emotional aspects of the music. In essence, the degree of interpretative freedom available to the musician is what transforms the act of performance from a mere technical exercise into an artistic endeavor. This freedom allows performers to bring their own artistic vision to the music, resulting in a performance that is both technically proficient and artistically rich.

**In conclusion**, it is essential to reiterate the critical importance of the triad of image-method-style in the process of interpreting a musical work and the interconnection of all its aspects. When discussing style, we inevitably touch upon issues of dramaturgy and the figurative domain of music, as well as technical techniques and tools capable of addressing interpretive and stylistic tasks. Considering the image, we always keep in mind the stylistic features of the piece and the possible playing techniques available in each pianist's technical arsenal. Reflecting on the technological method of performing a particular piece, we align it with its image and historical style.

Thus, the analytical triad of image-method-style becomes a universal tool for performance interpretation. It reveals common "mechanisms" of performance analysis, supports the creation of an artistic image, and ensures it is equipped with adequate technical means, which in turn conform to the historical style of the musical work being interpreted.

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