

## SONATA OP.13 BY L. BEETHOVEN IN THE INTERPRETATION OF OUTSTANDING PIANISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY: TO THE PROBLEM OF PERFORMANCE STYLE

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**Abstract:** In the article, on the example of the interpretation of Beethoven's work (in particular, Sonata op. 13) in the performance of prominent pianists of the 20th century, it is shown that associativity plays a huge role in the work of the performer. At a certain stage, as a result of the accumulation of meanings, a literary text inevitably turns into a summa summarum – a derivative of many other texts, interpreting them and entering into a dialogue or polemic with them; so, in Beethoven's works, his music gradually becomes a kind of "music about music" and needs deciphering its context, which, in turn, determines the need for special skill of the performer. Each composition of Beethoven is individualized, there are no templates, typical stamps. The performance of his compositions outside the concept is not able to adequately convey the spirit of the music.

**Keywords:** Piano sonata, Era style, Performance style, Performance form, Musical intonation, Piano sonatas of Beethoven.

### 1 Introduction

The perspectives of studying performance as a phenomenon of musical intonation lead to the awareness of musical art in the direction of a real reflection of reality – through the abstraction of procedurality in music, which presents the unity of ideal and material-sensual manifestations, in the contradictory unity of synchronic-diachronic manifestations of classical-romantic stylistic determinants of artistic and performing creativity. L. Beethoven's work, especially his Sonatas, is the source of "dual" performing ways of their interpretation. This is explained by the duality of the very phenomenon of late, "revolutionary" classicism (to which the composer objectively gravitated), which at the turn of the eras of classicism and romanticism gave rise to counter-directed processes of asserting "Beethovenianism" as a "generator" of *romantic* stylistic discoveries (F. Liszt – R. Wagner) and as a "guardian" of the *testaments of the classics* (I. Brahms).

The Sonata genre occupied an exceptional place in the legacy of the great Viennese classic, combining the "etude" genesis (Caprice Sonatas by D. Scarlatti and G. Sammartini) and piano-symphonic expressiveness, which later became associated with the sonata genre in general.

The presence in the composer's work of two-part, "Sammartini's" Sonatas, which were created in parallel with symphonic-orchestral, large-scale piano compositions (such as "Aurora", "Appassionata", etc.), the preservation of the connection with the Italian two-part sonata in the grandiose Thirty-second, – indicate the ambiguity of the composer's understanding of both the genre itself and the stylistic attitudes of reading the Sonatas.

On the example of the most famous Eighth Sonata ("Pathetic") op. 13 of Beethoven, we suggest tracing the stylistic interpretive "vibrations", in the totality of which the artistic merits of the performance are fixed.

### 2 Materials and Method

The study uses the concept of piano interpretation, the content of which is able to accommodate not only the "shop" issues of piano performance, but also many problematic aspects of musical performing arts in general.

The study of piano interpretation from the inside, "from the first person", from the point of view of the performer, allows identifying the general patterns and functional features of the "image-method-style" triad and its fundamental significance for performance. The image can be defined as the artistic object of

musical interpretation itself, the "inner" essence of the phenomenon of a sounding work; in turn, style is seen as the character and features of an artistic object, its, so to speak, "external" expression; method – as a "tool" through which an artistic object manifests itself in real sounding. We understand the method as an artistic and technical "tool" of interpretation.

The methodological basis of the study was a complex of musicological, philosophical, aesthetic, and art criticism approaches, supplemented by certain provisions of the phenomenological method.

### 3 Results and Discussion

L. van Beethoven's Eighth ("Pathetic") sonata contains bright typological features of the genre in its composition and at the same time possesses special moments of construction peculiar only to it. The presence of a slow introduction to the sonata Allegro I part and, especially, the repetition of the Grave at the beginning of the development and before the reprise create a similarity of the general plan of the Sonata with symphonic drama [5, p. 280-281]. This gives deep theatricality, ritual solemnity to the image of Beethoven's considered work, which is carried out thanks to the introduction of the "idea of rondality", a "closed circle", which is "overcome" by the sonata, covering the architecture of all parts of the cycle.

In the part I, the theme of the introduction, similar to the refrain of the rondo, runs through it three times, creating secondary signs of rondality. Part II, Adagio cantabile, is in the form of a classical five-part rondo, and part III, the finale-allegro, marked by Beethoven as "Rondo", is written as a rondo-sonata. Therefore, the image of the Circle turns out to be dominant: All (primary symbolism, which determines the primary rhetorical meaning of symbols [1, p. 27–28]), within the limits of which tragic sonata-dramatic themes-characters acting in it are included, forming thematic-tonal and motivic-figurative antitheses. At the same time, the Eighth Sonata contains many language turns in the melodies of the themes, embodying more than everyday feelings-affects.

Thus, the composer's text sets the duality of the image of the world, in which divine predestination reigns and at the same time the dynamic orientation of human desires and passions is manifested.

Beethoven was not a supporter of the church, but, like his other contemporaries, including the figures of the Great French Revolution, he widely used signs of sacred music in secular works in order to give them the content of the Highest seriousness [4, p. 10-11].

A detailed further analysis is intended to demonstrate the approach adopted in this work, since the analyzes of Beethoven's Sonatas are not new, although the cultural and paradigmatic preferences put forward by different authors in different studies create the multiplicity of musicological "interpretations" that outline the evolution of human knowledge as a whole.

Let us remind that in connection with Beethoven, the idea of his pre-romantic and romantic position was firmly established, especially in the last opuses and with a clear preference for dramatic collisions. That is, associative and programmatic compositions are distinguished, which have become an academic norm of musical expressiveness in relation to the immanent-musical content of creativity as a whole.

Before talking about the interpretations of "Pathétique" by famous pianists, it is necessary to say a few words about the performance of Beethoven himself, who was an outstanding virtuoso. His playing had little in common with the art of fashionable Viennese pianists. It did not have gallant selectivity and filigree refinement, the purity of the "pearl" performance. He was skeptical about this fashionable way of performing,

considering that there are other values in music. Beethoven's performance was distinguished by its breadth and scope. It was taken over by courageous energy and elemental force.

The piano under his fingers "turned" into an orchestra, although the information about how the rebel composer's works were actually voiced is rather confused (see, for example, the materials of Polish researchers [2, pp. 503-512]). Therefore, the question of the interpretation of what is called Beethoven's performance thinking remains open. The orchestral sound of symphonic music, be it individual instruments or groups of instruments, or tutti - all this could be heard in Beethoven's piano playing. Beethoven concentrated the tendencies that formed the Viennese style as a whole, which could be called "orchestral-oriented". After all, even in the work of the great predecessors of the creator of "Pathetic", the orchestralness of the piano was a fundamentally new quality in relation to the clavier-harpsichordity of the Italian and French schools.

At the same time, one should not forget that instruments contemporary for the composer had string tension 5(!) times less than later pianos. The Polish researcher Gudel indicates the relativity, by modern standards, of loudness increases within Beethoven's crescendo [2].

Yet, Beethoven's playing captivated with the richness of the artistic content, addressed to the theatrical association of this content. It was spiritual, majestic, as it was repeatedly emphasized, full of feelings-affects, romance, especially in the Adagio. The latter is essential, since the principle of partiality leads to a "double style" in the work of one person, as soon as we are talking about the composer and the performer in one person. Classicism in the form of revolutionary classicism defined the stylistic core of the great symphonist's thinking in the field of composition, no matter how significant were the "interspersions" of other directions, "close" or "distant" in time relative to the era of his life activity. But the performance style is worth talking about.

The experimental spirit of the most frenzied among the "musical stormtroopers" of the Viennese School introduced him to the circle of "protomanticism" - because Beethoven's performing activity, due to life circumstances, was closed in the decades of the 1790s.

It is known that in the early and middle periods of his life, Beethoven followed a classically sustained tempo in his performance. Ferdinand Rhys, who studied under Beethoven, said that his teacher played his works, for the most part, strictly rhythmically, only occasionally changing the tempo, which is something opposite to the "tempo dynamics" of the Baroque style [3].

In the later period, Beethoven treated the unity of tempo less strictly. According to the testimony of contemporaries [6], with some exceptions, everything heard in Beethoven's performance was free from any shackles of the meter and was performed tempo rubato in the proper sense of the word. This "hypertrophy of the romantic" in Beethoven's legacy is perfectly demonstrated by the thorough monograph of A. Alshwang and the materials of N. Nikolayeva in the collective monograph of the Moscow State Conservatory [5].

The performance of the Sonata by German pianists is subordinate to the idea of tragedy and Order. Lyricism is more noticeable among Slavic pianists, and we believe that it is concentrated in the playing of S. Richter, a "Russian German", born in Zhytomyr, which fully absorbed the cultural features of the Slavs - in accordance with his non-German name Svyatoslav.

A comparison of the performances of the German pianists A. Schnabel, A. Bredel and the Russian pianist S. Richter indicates a different understanding of the Sonata. Schnabel has more radical tempo contrasts (in Part I Grave  $\approx 30$ , Allegro  $\approx 132$ ). Persistence, tenacity, purposefulness stand out [1, p. 356]. When performing the "dialogue" of the first side part, staccato and legato contrasts stand out as articulation characteristics of the

lower and upper registers in the presentation of the theme; mordents appear as sounds of "quiet crying". But the second side is the complete opposite, and its image "wins" as it were: the final chords (in the melody - an inversion of the theme of the Cross g-h-c, which outlines the themes of the Part II) contain echoes of the dialogue of the first side, because the two chords in bar 4-3 from the end are shown softly, deeply, while the final two are sharp and bright.

The second part of the Sonata - Adagio cantabile - performed by A. Schnabel sounds emphatically calm. In the Part II, chorality, an image of reflection is noticeable. In general, the "speech" intelligibility of his playing is impressive. Part III is performed by Schnabel seriously and strictly.

In the performance of A. Bredel, an outstanding German pianist of the second half of the 20th century, the concept of Beethoven's Eighth Sonata is sustained in strict and solemn tones. Grave in his performance is emphasized by slow movement ( $\approx 30$ ), the build-up of the crescendo takes place for a long time, with the perceived effect of "approaching" the sound. Bredel's Allegro is more restrained than Schnabel's:  $\text{♩} = 120$ . Therefore, a *glorifying* sound is distinguished - in the spirit of an ancient tragedy, born of dithyramb. The dithyrambic composition defines the music of the Part II, in which peace and enjoyment of this peace are felt.

Bredel does not allow special contrasts between the music of the refrain and the episodes, as well as between the melody and texture of the "accompaniment", that is, he singles out the choral principle of presentation. In his performance, the smoothness of the transition to the expressed relief of the presentation of themes with the subsequent "retreat" into silence becomes the leading one. Part III is built as a gradual build-up, from a calm and attentive sound to sharp motivic and thematic declarations at the end: Bredel clearly avoids contrasting comparisons of dynamics - he prefers the unity of the line, the transition from one quality of expression to another.

The content of Beethoven Sonata in S. Richter is different. Richter in Part I has the pace Grave  $\approx 40$ , Allegro  $\approx 130$ . His playing in Adagio becomes especially tender and subtle. The melody literally "moves" the heart, while in the third part of Sonata in Richter's performance, the Allegro is marked by the dominance of a dreamy tone. The Russian pianist, as it were, "removes" the drama, emphasizes pastoral pacification and harmony of expression. Only near the very end of the piece, the pianist's sound clearly becomes "harder": the power of the final passage brings the listener back to the drama of the Part I. In general, the general tone of Richter's performance is frankly lyrical. This is especially true of Part II, where the theme literally hovers over the texture. In general, intonation-linguistic expressiveness prevails here, in contrast to the intonation-linguistic "expressiveness" of sound management of German musicians.

For comparison, we will also consider P. Serebryakov's performance. We should immediately note that he plays all parts of the Sonata faster than the other pianists named here. Grave of the Part I in him  $\text{♩} \approx 44$ ,  $\text{♩} \approx 122/124$ , but with a gradual and relentless acceleration hereafter. The side part is very interesting in its timbral presentation - the rapidity of the change of register timbres is obvious. The Part II of the Sonata is presented in a calm manner. The contrasts of the refrain and episodes are muted: the performer clearly contrasts the whole Adagio with the fast parts of the Sonata. The Part III in Serebryakov's playing is presented at a rather rapid pace - and this rapidity is enhanced by selected melismatics. The main thing in the performance is virtuosic brilliance and emotional pressure.

If to summarize the impressions of the playing of pianists A. Schnabel, A. Bredel, S. Richter, and P. Serebryakov, the common and different in their interpretations can be reduced to the following indicators.

All named pianists emphasize contrasts, contradictions of the image created by Beethoven. However, tragedy is closer to

Schnabel, epic restraint appears in Bredel, drama with a lyrical bent is found in Richter, theatrical drama distinguishes Serebryakov's interpretation. Schnabel's contrasts are sharp, changes in the dynamics of textural filling are instantaneous. Bredel "distances himself" from tragedy and pathos; in his play, drama is "objectified" in the spirit of the "performance theater" of mid-20th century art. In S. Richter's expression, sharpness in the iconic turns of the work are deliberately "erased", his playing in the Part II is "emotional", almost prayerfully insightful. Serebryakov performs convincingly and brilliantly from the position of the "theatre of life".

The performances of Schnabel and Bredel are "synchronous" within the national German school, although the time diachrony 'records' the "change of generations" in the German piano culture of the 20th century. Beethoven gave the subtitle to his Sonata – "Pathetic", but at the same time the idea of the Circle as a ritual sign is structurally emphasized. Accordingly, the pathos of personalism or supra-individual tone is a decision of performer's choice. Dramatism in the traditions of piano classics was very strongly associated with Beethoven, although objectively his work is no less significant in epic stylistic dimensions.

Dramatism is clearly brought to the fore by Schnabel - and in this, his interpretation is more "classical", it corresponds to the stylistic norms of the academic interpretation of Beethoven's music. Against this background, Bredel's approach is more "romantic"; he pushes the idea of "German Beethoven", highlighting that hyperpersonal tone, which is also characteristic of the creator of the Ninth Symphony, although in the hierarchy of expressiveness preference is given to dramatic dialogue.

In the same vein, Richter's lyricism is perceived as more original - a free aspect of Beethoven's reading, while Serebryakov, "lightening" the dramatic load of the finale, still remains within the limits of academic classics, the primacy of the dramatic mental stereotype traditionally associated with Beethoven. At the same time, both named artists represented the Slavic piano school to one degree or another.

Simultaneously presented performance versions of German musicians vividly embody the "reference" concepts of performance, corresponding to the cultural and paradigmatic advantages of one or another time period of the 20th century: the neo-romanticism-neoclassicism of the first half of the 20th century in Schnabel and the minimalist inclination towards rapturous joy - in Bredel.

A natural question arises: What is the classification of interpretations? Translated from Latin, "interpretation" is an explanation that classifies the principle laid down in "interpretation". However, this rather subjective "interpretation" of the performer (and, it turns out, also a subjective understanding of this or that work) may not coincide with the aesthetic or artistic norm. The number of interpretations is equal to the number of performers (of course, performers who are "seeking" and not "stamping" what already has been found, although the line between them is quite conditional, if we take into account the role of the "perfect model" of performance in the specific conditions of the existence of music). It is obvious that only a few ones can be suitable for a true performance, namely, according to the author's intention or contrary to it, but only in correction with the aesthetic and artistic standards of the era.

#### 4 Conclusion

Left alone with the work, as if looking into its eyes, the performer must catch its features, remember their expression. Each time, opening the notes, the task is solved, and there is a desire to understand what the author thought and felt, and one realizes the illusory nature of such an "embodiment". Every performer, every expounder, and, therefore, every interpreter of the author's text, must think about many things, including the fact that the performance should be alive and not museum-like for listeners. It means, namely, when the composer lived and

created (era, country, customs); what social position he occupied; his life path (starting with upbringing in the family), his thoughts, statements, letters, his love, his children and also in which period this or that work was written, under the impression of what, to whom it is dedicated. This is all important, but it can still be aloof from the creative discovery of the Master, because every Discovery is Enlightenment, attachment to the ideal, which has no direct analogues in the bustle of life: this is the law of compensability of artistic and aesthetic activity.

There are many questions, but the answer is sometimes impossible to find if one is not guided by the cultural-paradigmatic attitude of modern world, which provides vital energy to what is being done today, even if it was written in distant times.

So, the analysis of performance interpretations of such a stylistically representative work of Beethoven as the Pathetic Sonata shows the following:

- 1) Outstanding musicians in every way emphasize the orchestral-symphonic potential of these piano works on modern pianos, ignoring the historical reality of the dynamically restrained sound of such compositions in the conditions of the instrumentation of Beethoven's time;
- 2) All considered interpretations of outstanding pianists of the 20th century in one way or another are related to the experience of performing modernism, that is, in contact with the art of the era, which clearly confronts the romantic potential of Beethoven's works;
- 3) The preference of the romantic tendency in the presentation of Beethoven's sonatas, bypassing the frank *ad libitum* - according to descriptions - rhythmic presentation of his works by the composer himself;
- 4) The "classical – aclassical" alternative of performance stylistic positions defines the limits of the manifestations of alternative stylistic approaches, in which the "classicism" of the composer's text as such is complemented by aclassical elements of expression: tempo, metro-rhythm, agogics, dynamics, articulation, phrasing, timbre, expression, organology, artistry;
- 5) The superiority of the classical principle of performance, despite the fact that the romantic "exaggerations" of Beethoven himself in the field of rhythmicity are widely known, which testifies to the worship of the genius of the performers who preferred to introduce their *varietas* into the once declared meanings-images of Beethoven's works, thereby demonstrating the performing individualism of the "interpretive co-creation" based on the text of the author-composer.

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