Cracking the Code: *Teaching Piano Students the Art of Musical Interpretation, with Practical Applications for All Levels*

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Abstract

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The ability to interpret a musical score and deliver an expressive performance is highly prized, both by teachers and students. However, there are relatively few resources which directly address the teaching of musical interpretation. While it is possible for teachers to coach a musical performance from students by dictating or demonstrating the particulars of a piece, such methods are limited in efficacy because they tend to hinder independent learning.

The aim of this paper is to define a methodology by which piano teachers can make the intricacies of musical interpretation accessible to students of all levels, not only advanced students or those gifted with innate ability. This study focuses on helping students to discover and enhance expressive elements in the composer's score.

Each main chapter is organized around a different "pillar" of musical interpretation: imagery, rhythm, geometry and context. Much of the proposed methodology draws from key theories in the field of developmental psychology, including Gestalt learning theory, Jerome S.

Bruner's theory of the spiral curriculum and the Socratic (dialogic) approach. Chapters are structured to reflect a progressive learning sequence in which abstract concepts are first introduced to beginners in a relatable way. As students mature and gain experience, concepts become increasingly more sophisticated and detailed. Each chapter includes a case study of how a teacher might guide an advanced student towards making independent interpretive decisions. I use examples from standard teaching repertoire, with a focus on late intermediate to early advanced pieces.

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This paper is dedicated to my mother, Darlene Young, and to the loving memory of my father, Leonard Young. Mom, words will never express how grateful I am for all you have shown me and given me. You are the reason I am the musician and the teacher I am today.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"What does the teaching of musical interpretation entail? To begin with, one might compare any teacher's basic function to that of a guide on a journey of discovery who points out what to look for and where to look."

Hans Lampl, Turning Notes into Music[1]

CORE PEDAGOGICAL VALUES

In the movie "The Karate Kid," (1984), teenaged Daniel is eager to learn karate to defend himself against bullies. He arranges to study with a rather eccentric sensei, an apartment handyman named Mr. Miyagi, whose unassuming manner belies his mastery of the art. Daniel is confused when, instead of teaching him karate, Mr. Miyagi has him perform a series of tedious and repetitive chores such as waxing his cars, painting his fence, and sanding his floors. Mr. Miyagi insists that each task be performed according to painstakingly specific guidelines: "Wax on, right hand. Wax off, left hand. Wax on, wax off. Breathe into nose…out the mouth. Don't forget to breathe. Very important." In a key scene, Daniel finally confronts his sensei and complains that he has been performing "slave labor" instead of learning karate. Mr. Miyagi then calmly demonstrates to Daniel that through the repetitive motions of his chores, over the course of hours and days, he has become proficient in defensive blocks. It is important to note that Mr. Miyagi's aim was not to "trick" Daniel into learning something. He purposely selected this method because he understood that his student –skeptical, guarded, and impatient – needed to experience how it felt to perform the blocks without over-thinking them.

[1] Hans Lampl, *Turning notes into music* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1996) 5.

The subject of this paper is teaching musical interpretation, not the martial arts. However, this scene from "The Karate Kid" neatly encapsulates several core pedagogical values that pertain to music study: (1) Teaching builds on our powerful connection with students, who are driven by their own interest and need to thrive as autonomous learners; (2) students should learn fundamental concepts by tapping into relatable life experiences; (3) this should be incorporated into the very first stages of their training; and (4) successful teaching is focused on the student, not the transmission of individual skills, enabling the student to draw from what he has absorbed and apply it to other situations.

Though teachers may have different personal reasons for having chosen the music profession, I believe that, across the board, we share the conviction that everyone can be deeply affected by the power of music. Research shows that the desire to "feel the music" is one of the principal motivating factors for those who choose to play and study piano.[2]

Music is considered communication in that listeners generally find "meaning" in music by responding viscerally to the expressive qualities they hear.[3] A sublimely moving musical performance cannot truly be described in words, but rather by the effect it has upon the listener. It can be exciting, intellectually stimulating, calming, or engaging. As the great composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein stated, "Music can name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable."

My experience has been that students are as motivated to learn how to produce an expressive performance as Daniel was to learn karate. However, this aspect of music is often lost as teachers and students navigate the many nuts-and-bolts issues that arise in each lesson.

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[2] Robert Woody, "Emotion, Imagery and Metaphor in the Acquisition of Music Performance Skill," *Music Education Research*, vol 4, no. 2 (2002) 213

[3] Woody, *Emotion, Imagery and Metaphor*, 214

As performers, we understand that playing the correct rhythms, pitches and markings are merely the first steps towards expressing the composer's vision. Therefore, we strive to transform the notes on a page into a sound that communicates our understanding of the composer's vision. Theoretically, it makes sense to apply this kind of systematic and purposeful approach to the art of teaching piano. My research and observations indicate that expressive performances are highly prized, so why is it that interpretation is so often neglected in piano lessons? Through review of printed material, reflection, and conversations with colleagues, I've concluded that barriers to teaching interpretation generally fall into two categories. The first is the challenge of teaching in a studio environment. The second is a widespread utilitarian bias, which prioritizes fostering practical skills over cultivating intellectual depth, emotional sensitivity, and originality."[4]

CHALLENGES OF THE STUDIO ENVIRONMENT

The detractions of reactive teaching

One-on-one lessons are essentially an improvisation, in which both teacher and student are faced with a variety of issues and work to address them within 30, 45 or 60 minutes. In my early years of teaching, I was often overwhelmed by the sheer number of challenges that would arise during the course of a lesson, such as reading difficulties, bad technical habits, or fluctuating tempos. Constrained on one end by limited time and on the other by the mercurial nature of students' attention spans, I had difficulty choosing which aspect of playing to go after and which to leave for another lesson. I spent most of the time reflexively correcting errors and addressing deficiencies. In many cases, the student would either return the following week with

[4] Jeffrey Swinkin, *Teaching Performance: A Philosophy of Piano Pedagogy* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015) 1

the same errors (having "forgotten" to make the corrections), or the original error would be corrected, only to have another spring up in its place.

Apparently, this is not an uncommon phenomenon. At a seminar given by a prominent concert pianist and professor, he likened reactive teaching to a game of "Whack-a-Mole." This is a carnival game in which moles pop up repeatedly. The object of the game is to use a hammer to "whack" as many of them as possible, all while the clock ticks down. This approach keeps both students and teachers trapped in a vicious cycle, limited to working on what is immediately before them. The unfortunate result is that a tedious uniformity will permeate the lessons, depriving both parties of the creative energy that drew them to music in the first place.

Emphasis on competitions and exams

In today's society, the need to compete and win starts early, by way of little league teams, school admissions, exams, contests, and so forth. Teachers often feel internal or external pressure to distinguish themselves by having a large number of students who do well at piano competitions. Consequently, they tend to focus on the performance requirements of a piece rather than the student's development as a musician. This might involve taking shortcuts such as dictating how the piece should go instead of letting an interpretation unfold naturally. Teachers will sometimes have students focus on only one or two pieces at a time, with the intention of dropping the pieces as soon as the competition is over. Gabrielsson writes, "The ever-increasing demands on technical skill and the highly competitive music business make many teachers emphasize technically impeccable performance and conformity to "accepted" ways of performance."[5]

[5] Alf Gabrielsson, "Studying Emotional Expression in Music Performance," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 141 (1999) 47–53.

Here I should note that I am an enthusiastic proponent of competitions, festivals and exams. I often encourage my students to enter them, as long as it is appropriate for their level. There are numerous benefits to these pursuits, and research suggests that children engaged in competitive activities display greater enjoyment and motivation than those engaged in non-competitive activities.[6] For many students, musical growth is amplified when they are reaching for higher performance standards. Win or lose, they also learn valuable lessons in perseverance and resilience, which are transferable to situations outside of music. However, our long-term goal is to show students how to interpret music well enough to be able to do so independently, long after their studies with a teacher have concluded.

PEDAGOGICAL BIAS

Interpretation takes a back seat to "practical" skills

Numerous studies suggest that expression in performance tends to rank lower on the list of priorities in music education. Teachers spend a relatively large portion of lesson time on technical matters and much less time on interpretive skills. As a result, students are often introduced to aesthetic understanding fairly late, at a point when their other musical skills have already been developing for some while.[7] Thus, many students have the technical skills to play advanced repertoire, while lacking the understanding of how to create meaningful content.

Anyone who has taught an instrument for more than a short time is familiar with the phenomenon of a student who can accurately reproduce the notes in a score, while at the same time producing very little in the way of music. At one time, I would have assumed that such a student cared more about being flashy than being expressive. I have come to realize, however,

[6]John Tauer and Judith Harackiewicz, "Winning Isn't Everything: Competition, Achievement Orientation and intrinsic motivation*," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (1999)
[7] Martha Schrempel, "Teaching Expressivity at the Piano: History, Signs, and Strategies" (Doctoral dissertation, Temple University, 2010); M. Tait, "Teaching Strategies and Styles" in R. Cowell (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* (New York: Schirmer, 1992); Woody, *Emotion, Imagery and Metaphor*

that students of all levels do sincerely care about making music, not just playing the correct notes. I have also seen the joy on their faces when they realize that they have made the music sound the way they had envisioned. I am convinced that students want to be expressive at the piano, but often lack the necessary skills to bring their creative impulses to fruition.

Attributing interpretive ability to intuition

The best performances seem to be at once spontaneous and controlled. Fine artists will often interpret the same piece quite differently, yet the liberties that they take serve to intrigue their audience and enhance their enjoyment of the music. In contrast, when less adept pianists vary the particulars of performance, the effect can be unconvincing. Some theorists have suggested that the reason many teachers avoiding addressing interpretation might be the belief that expressive ability springs mainly from intuition. This view is reflected in the way some artists are reluctant to systemize the mechanics of interpretation, as if true talent needs no such cataloguing and only needs to be visited by the muses for inspiration. They may believe that using a methodology based on guidelines is bound to produce an artificial, over-thought result.

There is no question that musical ability is not distributed equally amongst the population. We will always encounter students who seem to be able to express themselves musically with very little prompting from us. However, an effective pedagogical strategy places the emphasis on the ability of students to grow and evolve as interpreters of music, rather than their innate musical abilities.

Lack of guidance in pedagogical literature

One needs to look no further than piano method books and pedagogy textbooks for evidence of a bias towards presenting fundamental skills without accompanying context. For example, reading is usually approached in a purely mechanical way in many method books.

Musical awareness is first introduced to beginners through the eye (reading notation) and body (proper hand position and technique). However, the books do not address what to do with the ear, so it is up to the teacher to figure out a way to incorporate fundamental tonal concepts into the child's training. Camp writes that how a child learns to read music has a profound effect upon psychomotor development. "When too much emphasis is placed upon the actual striking of the keys, young students begin to zero in on the visual and tactile aspects of playing. The ears appear to shut down. The child thinks: eye-page-finger-strike, omitting any aural involvement…subsequently, the design of beginner books affects physical coordination in addition to how one learns to read."[8]

Many performance manuals seem to lack a guiding theory of expression in performance. According to Lampl, "The many texts and 'methods' available which deal with performance mainly address its technical aspects, with little space, if any, given to interpretation. When courses in interpretation are offered, they are most often limited to the performance practices of earlier periods. As a consequence, many individuals preparing for teaching careers in the various areas of performance…complete their formal schooling without being exposed to a systematic approach to musical interpretation."[9]

Musical interpretation is a well-researched phenomenon from the performing artist's perspective, but relatively little research has focused on how it is taught and learned in music education.[10] Among the many books on playing the piano, the most common subject is the physical approach to the keyboard (i.e., fingering, technique, touch). In much of the literature I reviewed, the subject of interpretation frequently occupies a fairly slight chapter near the end of

[8] Max W. Camp, *Teaching Piano : the Synthesis of Mind, Ear and Body* (Los Angeles: Alfred Pub. Co., 1992) 13
[9] Lampl, *Turning Notes into Music*, viii
[10] Carl Holmgren, "The conditions for learning musical interpretation in one-to-one piano tuition in higher music education," Nordic Research in Music education, vol. 1 no. 1 (November 2020) 103-131

the book. Not only does this suggests that interpretation is something to be attended to after the "basics" have been mastered, but this manner of presentation encourages teachers think of interpretation as a separate entity from "front of the book" skills like dynamics, phrasing and rhythm.

TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY

Musical Intelligence

In the music teaching world, interpretive techniques and ideas have traditionally been shared primarily by teacher demonstration and student imitation. The method is limited in efficacy because the principles underlying musical comprehension are not addressed and the student does not learn to become musically independent. It is possible for teachers to coach a musical performance by dictating its particulars – slow down here, a little louder there. However, students must understand the mood, character, and key structural aspects of a piece, or they will be merely parroting their teacher's musical ideas.

To expand upon the quote which opens this chapter, it may be useful to think of ourselves as tour guides, our students as explorers, and "musical intelligence" as the terrain we are helping them to navigate. According to Camp, the definition of musical intelligence is "a working knowledge of the interplay of musical elements and the ability to perceive not only the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and formal qualities of music, but also their interdependence."[11] Students who are musically intelligent can take notation off the written page and turn it into music that moves the listener. In other words, they are able "read beyond the notes."

Much of what we consider to be interpretation involves understanding how to highlight musical structure. If students do not know what to look for in their scores, they must rely on

[11] Max Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 4

talent, intuition, or happy accident. The kind of structural analysis that has any bearing on performance is not to be confused with the music theory that students learn as part of their studies. Foley explains the distinction: the term theory pertains to the "general attributes of a body of music or a concept," while "an *analysis* is an explanation of the structure of a specific piece and various relationships therein."[12] Put another way, *theory* tells us what something is; for example, an authentic cadence, but only an *analysis* can tell us why it is there in the first place.

Contemporary pedagogues have emphasized that when students understand the structure of a piece, they will feel more secure in their interpretations. According to pianist Katherine Goodson, "The pupil should be able to determine the general structure of a piece he is undertaking and should be so familiar with the structure that it becomes a form of second nature to him."[13] Camp stresses the importance of understanding the *architectonic* properties of music. By this, he means recognizing that individual musical elements function both separately and in tandem. "Comprehension of these qualities and of the proportional features of a musical structure assists a student in learning to recognize, evaluate, and articulate what the printed score represents."[14]

Questions to consider

If we understand that analysis is the basis for making informed interpretive decisions, why does it seem that relatively little time is spent exploring the educational ramifications of this? One factor may be the intense difficulty of identifying specific, credible connections

[12] Gretchen C. Foley, "Analysis for Performance: Teaching a method for practical application," *College Music Symposium* vol. 6 (2006) 17
[13] James Francis Cooke, *Great Pianists on Piano Playing: Godowsky, Hofmann, Lhévinne, Paderewski, and 24 Other Legendary Performers* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1999)145
[14] Max Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music, Inc, 1981) 3

between what we find in the score and its subsequent realization in performance. Another factor is the challenge of transferring this knowledge to students.

Addressing these problems requires looking at them from a dual standpoint: that of the artist and that of the teacher. The artist's considerations, more theoretical, involve recognizing *what* expressive opportunities lie within the score, and how these lend themselves to concrete decisions regarding phrasing, tempo, articulation, and other details of performance. The teacher's considerations, more practical, revolve around *how* to teach interpretation to students in a way that will allow them to assimilate the process into their own skill set. To this end, I have been inspired to consider the following questions:

The artist's questions

- Is there inherent meaning in musical structure? If so, what aspects of structure contribute to its ability to affect the listener?
- Are there concrete musical principles that can be harnessed to translate notation into meaningful patterns of sound and motion?
- What musical features contribute to the overall motion and flow in a piece?
- What musical features should be enhanced to create the impression of a rich, full sound?
- How do we determine an appropriate ranges for the variables of performance? For example, how loud is *forte*?

The teacher's questions

- What guiding philosophies and principles can serve as a basis for developing a methodology for teaching musical interpretation?

- How do we incorporate a deeper musical understanding into the teaching of basic and necessary skills, such as sight reading and pedaling? Is there a way to organize a lesson in a way that reflects a larger theme?
- Can students be taught to associate images with their pieces that have a concrete basis in the score?
- Reading the correct notes and playing the correct rhythm are both crucial skills for the elementary student. Should teachers prioritize one over the other, and why?
- How do we help students manifest a physical response to larger patterns in music?
- What criteria should we use when selecting repertoire to develop expressive skills in students?

KEY INFLUENCES

Mastering the art of playing the piano requires a very different sets of skills than any other field of study; for example, learning geography. Yet, the *cognitive processes* by which these skills are acquired is more or less the same. Therefore, much of the methodology proposed in this paper draws from key theories in the field of developmental psychology. This discipline requires teachers to demonstrate a relationship between pieces of knowledge and larger concepts. For example, rather than simply telling a student to play the left hand louder, the teacher can show her how the lower voice contains a melody that must be spotlighted. If the student grasps this reasoning, she can apply it to voicing the complex lines of a fugue sequence that appears in a Beethoven sonata.[15]

[15] Raymond Burrows, "Piano Teaching Psychology," *American Music Teacher* 1, (September-October 1951) 17-18

Among the excellent sources reviewed for the monograph, there were several key theories that I found wholly pertinent to the subject at hand. Following is a brief summary of them:

The Socratic Method

Developed by the Greek philosopher, Socrates, the Socratic Method revolves around the concept of a shared dialogue between teachers and students.[16] The dialogue is instigated by the teacher, who asks thoughtful, probing questions. In searching for appropriate answers, the student is required to engage his *mind*. While the teacher might guide him towards reasonable conclusions, this method allows a student to make discoveries and connections on his own, which will increase his confidence and interest in the subject. Although asking questions enables the teacher to assess how much knowledge the student has absorbed, this is not the ultimate aim of the Socratic method. Burrows states, "It is better used to demonstrate complexity, difficulty and uncertainty rather than to elicit facts about the world." The objective of the questions is to "probe the underlying beliefs upon which each participant's statements, arguments and assumptions are built." [17]

Jerome Bruner's theory of the spiral curriculum

The theory of the spiral curriculum is a learning strategy developed by the American psychologist and educator Jerome S. Bruner (1915-2016). Widely credited with helping to establish the field of cognitive psychology, Bruner emphasized the importance of guiding learners to become independent problem-solvers. Teachers using the spiral curriculum method begin by conveying the basic structure of a subject, including its most important principles, to a

[16] Rob Reich, "The Socratic Method: What it is and How to Use it in the Classroom," published in the newsletter, *Speaking of Teachin*g, a publication of the Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) https://tilt.colostate.edu/the-socratic-method
[17] Reich, The Socratic Method

student. Over time, these ideas are refined and augmented with an increasing amount of detail.[18] Bruner's theory centers on a *sequential* and *experiential* learning plan designed to "(lead) the learner through a sequence of statements and restatements of a problem or body of knowledge that increase the learner's ability to grasp, transform, and transfer what he is learning."[19]

Max W. Camp

A frequently-quoted source in this paper, famed pedagogue Max W. Camp wrote two highly influential books on teaching: *Developing Piano Performance: A Teaching Philosophy* (1981) and *Teaching Piano: The Synthesis of Mind, Ear and Body* (1992). He advocates for a holistic, "all-encompassing" approach to making music, in which everything we understand about music is combined to form a "synthesis for the mind and body to direct the process like a conductor."[20] Camp's recommendations are strongly influenced by the tenets of *Gestalt* psychology, which "support(s) the theory that human beings tend to perceive, recall, and recognize objects and experiences as a whole rather in separate components."[21] In his books, Camp references the body of growing evidence which suggests a direct link between developing as an interpreter of music and perceiving music in grouped patterns.[22]

PAPER ORGANIZATION

Each of the main chapters focuses on a different pillar, or key concept, which supports this methodology. Chapter 2, "Imagery," demonstrates the benefits of using metaphors and analogies in teaching and proposes exercises to help students develop their own expressive vocabulary. In chapter 3, "Rhythm," I explore the aspects of rhythm that give a piece its momentum and discuss strategies for helping students enhance rhythmic features in their

[18] Swinkin, *Teaching Performance*, 155
[19] Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961) 12-13
[20] Camp, *Teaching Piano*, 10
[21] Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 39
[22] Camp, *Teaching Piano*, 5

playing. "Geometry," chapter 4, begins with an overview of the concept of "shape" in music, and concludes with targeted suggestions for using important shaping tools such as rubato, dynamics and voicing. Chapter 5, "Context" examines how our musical choices are influenced by conditions which are similar to those we encounter in speech. The chapter delves into the problem of interpreting the composer's directives, whether they are written or implied.

Each chapter is organized to reflect a sequence of learning, starting with fundamental concepts, which are then refined as a student progresses. However, I have chosen to focus a majority of this work on the late intermediate-to-early advanced stages of instruction. This juncture in a student's musical education seems to present a unique opportunity. By this point, students will have learned to read music and maintain control and awareness of their physical movements. They will also have matured enough to grasp some of the more abstract concepts in playing, such as phrase shaping and rhythm grouping. At the same time, their pieces will not yet contain the intricacies of structure, texture and harmony found in very advanced pieces, allowing them to focus on the specifics of interpretation.

When presented with abstract concepts, I have always found practical examples to be very helpful. Therefore, when suggesting interpretive principles, I will demonstrate how they might be applied to a specific piece of music. Regarding the excerpts, I have purposefully selected pieces that will be very familiar to most teachers. Therefore, readers will recognize what has happened in the music up to a particular point, and how the piece will evolve as a consequence. In addition, each main chapter will feature a case study, which is drawn from a composite of the many students and teaching situations I have encountered over the years. My personal experience is supplemented with an intensive review of pedagogical literature,

observations made at masterclasses and seminars, as well as informal interviews with colleagues. All of the student's names and identifying factors have been changed.

CHAPTER 2

IMAGERY

"The ideal musical performance, at once moving and enlightening, mirrors the noblest impulses in human endeavor: that of rational examination, that of powerfully significative abstract imagery, and that of fervent commitment."

Wallace Berry, *Music Structure and Performance*

METAPHORS AND ANALOGIES

From an early age, children gravitate towards musical activities that involve creativity, such as making up their own songs, musical games and stories. They improvise by using various vocal and gestural devices to convincingly portray sadness or happiness. Children also have the capacity to recognize and use basic expressive musical devices in their play. Experiments have shown that children as young as three reliably demonstrate modal/emotional associations of major-positive, minor-negative.[23]

I have often been intrigued while watching children imitate things that are familiar to them. When pretending to be woodland creatures, they might hop around like rabbits or raise the pitch of their voices to imitate birds. Based upon such observations, we may expect children to have a handy cache of expressive images and tactics available to use at the piano. However, as teachers know, this is not necessarily the case. After all, we are genetically programmed to move and speak, but playing the piano is *not* within our genetic code. Some students have a knack for making creative associations and bringing them to life at the piano. Some display technical prowess with seemingly little interest in musical communication, while others struggle

[23] Marianna Pinchot Kastner and Robert G. Crowder, "Perception of the Major/Minor Distinction: IV. Emotional Connotations in Young Children," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 2 (1990): 189–201.

with technical difficulties that get in the way of expression. Whether a student is innately musical or not, and regardless of whether a piece is new or polished, teachers can take steps to ensure that they are playing musically in *some* way.

Conventional methods of teaching expressive playing

One of the ironies of teaching an instrument is that music is a non-linguistic form of communication, and even speech, yet we are required to describe in words the kind of sounds we want to hear. Traditionally, there have been two main methods for teaching students to play with expression. In the first, teachers use verbal instructions that refer to specific acoustic qualities, i.e., "*legato* here, then *staccato* in the next measure." The second method involves modeling an expressively appropriate performance for students to imitate, possibly to circumvent the ambiguity which can result from teaching primarily by talking.

Over the last hundred years, numerous researchers have investigated the phenomenon of expressivity in music. It was not until recently, however, that psychologists and theorists began to show interest in the pedagogical aspects of expressive performance.[24] Davidson and Sloboda suggested that providing aural models for imitation without instructions is insufficient for teaching expressive performance.[25] Both Matthay and Camp have stressed that teaching primarily by demonstration/imitation tends to preclude independent thinking.[26] Further studies into linguistic modes of instruction found that including metaphors and analogies was a more effective strategy than describing how to play a passage; for example, "as if shot out of a cannon" instead of "go faster here." These studies have indicated that students consider extramusical associations (i.e., "life experiences") to be one of the most important factors in

[24] Robert Woody, "Emotion, imagery and Metaphor" 213
[25] Jane W. Davidson, Derek G. Moore, John A. Sloboda, and Michael J. A. Howe. "Characteristics of Music Teachers and the Progress of Young Instrumentalists," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46, no. 1 (1998): 141–60.
[26] Max Camp, *Teaching Piano*; Tobias Matthay, Musical Interpretation, Its Laws and Principles, and Their Application in Teaching and Performing (Boston, MA: The Boston Music Co. G. Schirmer, Inc., 1913)

playing expressively.[27] As explained by Woody, musicians undergo a "cognitive translation process" in which they convert images and metaphors into more concrete intentions for changing their sound.[28] Davidson found that supplementing teaching strategies with metaphors "creates an affective state within which the performer can attempt to match the model" and helps students "attain a multidimensional grasp of the music."[29]

Teaching strategies

Converting a mental image into discernable acoustic properties is a complex process. It requires identifying which musical features contribute to the image and knowing how to adjust them through subtle deviations in tempo, dynamics and articulation. For students to become independent interpreters, they need to become familiar with basic principles of interpretation from an early stage. Initially, teachers would not discuss concepts with them to the depth that they are outlined in this chapter. Eventually, however, students will profit from learning how to analyze a score for the structural elements that offer the most interpretive potential.

In this chapter, I will discuss steps teachers can undertake to weave imagery into the "essentials" that we must all impart to students as a matter of due diligence. Teaching recommendations are based on three assumptions: (1) beginning students are capable of associating a piece with a mental image and identifying basic expressive characteristics; (2) teachers should draw from imagery to make abstract concepts like musical structure more relatable; (3) students will benefit from interactive exercises that teach them to identify expressive signs in music.

IMAGERY AT THE EARLY STAGES

[27] Paul Haack, "Paint-by-Numbers Music," *Music Educators Journal* 69, no. 4 (1982), 35–36; M. Tait, "Teaching Strategies and Styles," in *Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*, ed. R. Cowell (New York, Schirmer, 1992)

[28] Robert Woody, "Musicians' Cognitive Processing of Imagery-Based Instructions for Expressive Performance," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 2 (2006), 125–137.

[29] Davidson, Moore, Sloboda, and Howe, "Characteristics of Music Teachers", 95

Elementary and early intermediate students will typically be preoccupied with developing technical skills, producing the correct notes and rhythm, and deciphering notation. With some guidance, it is possible for their expressive skills to progress at a compatible rate. This section outlines ways to bring imagery into the student's consciousness, even while focusing on the more fundamental aspects of playing.

Beginning students

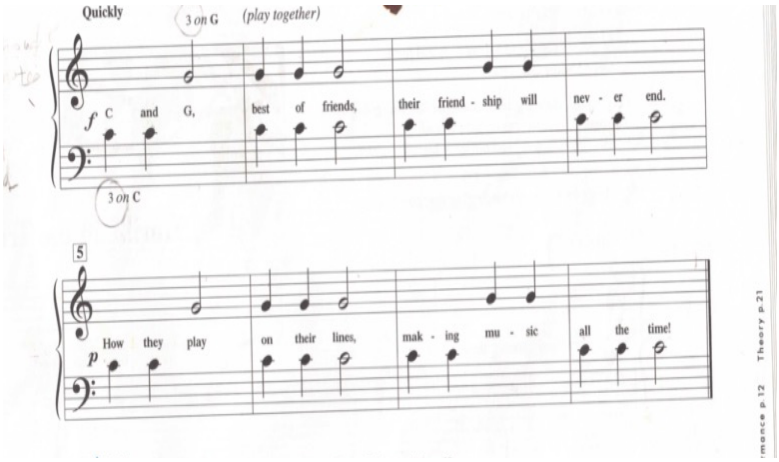
As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. From the start, teachers should encourage children to form associations with the sound of their pieces. This may involve something as simple as starting a discussion with the child the first time a staccato appears in her piece. Why has the composer chosen to use staccatos in a piece called *Springtime*? If the piece is played legato instead, how does this change the feeling of the piece? Do the staccatos sound like raindrops, or do they sound like children playing outside?

Because elementary pieces are so simple-sounding, it may take a bit of creativity to entice a child to listen closely as she plays. According to Jacobson, "when students have an image of the piece - its mood, character or emotion - they are more likely to play musically."[30]

"Best Friends" (fig. 2.1) has only two different notes and a rhythm made entirely of quarter and half notes. The teacher might ask the student to think of one of their friends and show her how the right hand represents one child, and the left hand the other. "Pretend you are singing a song. Here you are singing together. Here, you are taking turns." The second line is identical to the first except for the dynamic marking: "It says *piano* here. Can you tell your friend a secret? It's very special- you're only telling her and no one else. How would you whisper it to her?"

[30] Jeanine M. Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching: Volume I, Elementary Level* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Company, 2015), 245

Fig. 2.1



Some students may enjoy improvising and playing alternate versions of the piece that express a variety of moods or scenarios. One creative activity can involve re-titling the piece and producing a sound that matches. Calling the piece *Hopscotch* would lead the child to experiment with a staccato articulation that mimics the sound of jumping. For a piece titled *Haunted House*, the student could create a suspenseful sound by varying the dynamics, adding a fermata at the end the first line, and a ritardando in the last measure.

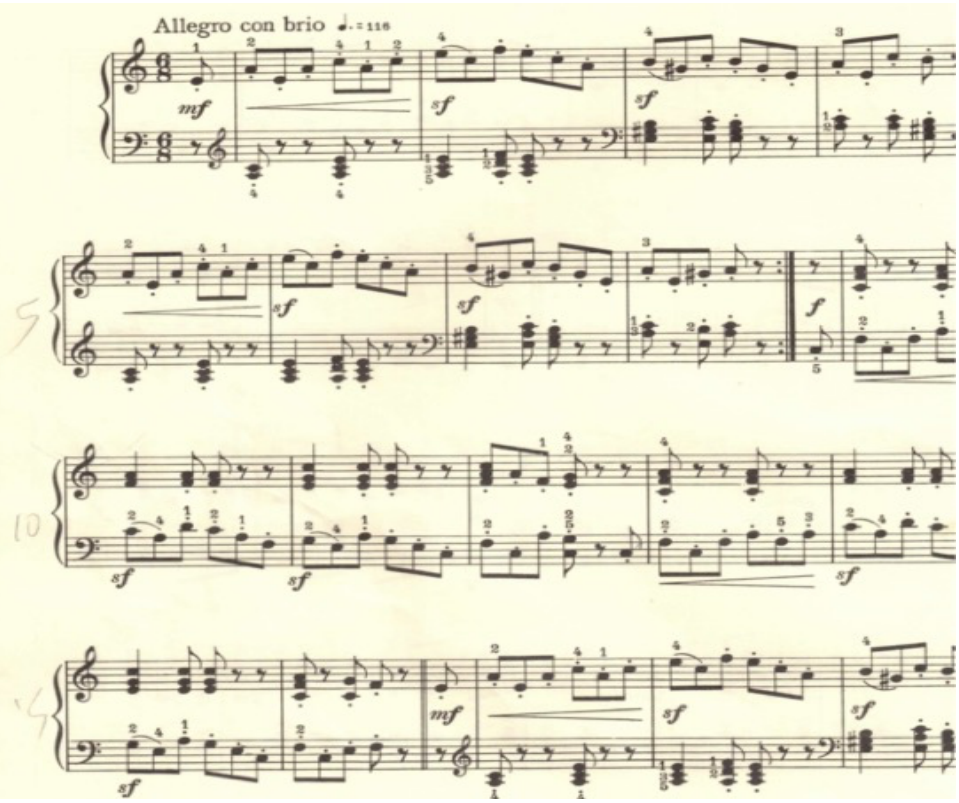
Selecting appropriate repertoire

Along with pieces to advance students' reading and technique, teachers should assign repertoire chosen specifically to develop interpretive skills. Suitable pieces would not require students to play at the upper limit of their speed capabilities nor introduce unfamiliar concepts such as a new key signature. This allows students to focus all of their attention on listening for an expressive sound. Programmatic pieces, which usually have descriptive titles meant to evoke vivid images, are especially useful for this purpose. Students do not have to have extensive theory knowledge or know how to analyze a score at this stage of learning; the object is for them

to articulate their impression of the piece and discover how the composer has created this impression.

Robert Schumann's *Album for the Young* contains early-to-late intermediate pieces written specifically to appeal to a child's imagination. *The Wild Horseman* (fig. 2.2) paints the picture of a rider on a horse, galloping with abandon across the landscape. The piece is economical in scale, but contains all of the motion, energy and excitement that we would expect from a composer who is known for his brilliant musical representations of characters and emotions. Despite its flashy sound, *The Wild Horseman* is accessible to most students with early-intermediate technical skills. The melody, consisting of two different arpeggiated triads, is punctuated by a crisp block chord accompaniment. Students must play staccato throughout, with the occasional two-note slur coinciding with sudden accents.

Fig. 2.2



When I have asked students to provide three words that describe the character[31] of *The Wild Horseman*, they typically use adjectives like *daring*, *energetic* and *unpredictable*. Many students enjoy creating a storyline and embellishing it with details. One imaginative boy imagined the wild horseman as an outlaw, galloping away on his horse and jumping over fences. The outlaw is being pursued by a sheriff, heard in the middle section when the melody is switched to the left hand and the piece shifts into a major mode.

What musical features justify this image? *The Wild Horseman* expresses its *energetic character* right from the first measure. The initial statement of the melody is comprised of arpeggiated triplets that rocket up an octave in the span of a measure. A spare accompaniment adds rhythmic emphasis to the melody by punctuating only the strong beats of each measure. The simple ternary (A-B-A) form of the piece nevertheless contains some surprises that contribute to its *unpredictability*. Not only has the composer written *sf* in the second measure, he writes another accent in the third. That is, after establishing a strong pattern in the first two measures, he breaks it by "skipping ahead" a measure. The asymmetry of this phrase structure lends an impatient quality to the music, as if the horseman cannot wait to jump again.

Instead of explaining the music structure in detail, the teacher can demonstrate how the character of the piece would be changed by playing alternate versions of the piece. A stepwise opening melody instead of one that uses larger intervals sounds like the horseman isn't getting very far (fig.2.3a).

A broken triplet accompaniment figure, while providing the same harmony as the chords, lacks their exclamatory effect (2.3b). If Schumann had followed a more predictable phrase pattern, the first four measures would sound "tame" compared to the original (2.3c).

[31] Character, as applied in this paper, does not refer to an actual person, but rather, the traits that might be associated with a person. For instance, *youthful* and *romantic* instead of Romeo.

Fig. 2.3a:

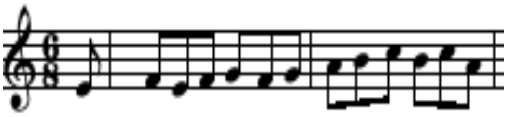


Fig. 2.3b:

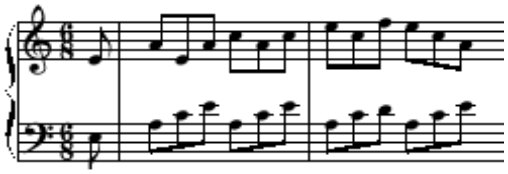
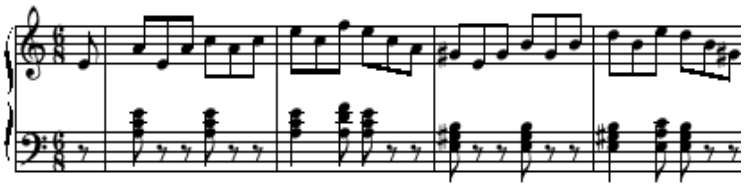


Fig. 2.3c:



When teaching this piece, I normally look out for a few common errors. These include: putting a heavy accent on the first downbeat, playing the first measure forte instead of making a subtle crescendo, forgetting the *sforzandi* and not articulating some of the *staccatos*. By invoking imagery, we can address or prevent all four issues at once. This strategy is more effective than making a series of individual corrections and reminding the student if he forgets one of them. If he imagines that the upcoming *sforzandi* represent the horse jumping, then accenting the first measure and playing too loudly will "spoil the surprise." Omitting an accent means no horse jump, which drains the piece of its *daring* character. The piece requires a crisp, consistent staccato technique that presents a challenge for many young students, but he may listen more closely to his articulation if he imagines the sound of a horse clip-clopping along.

SUPPLEMENTAL IMAGERY

As put by Sloboda, expressive moments in music often occur as a consequence of their harmonic, rhythmic or thematic patterns;[32] thus, it is vital for students to have a grasp of music theory. Storytelling, analogies and descriptors can be used to help students conceptualize structural principles.

Harmony

Harmonic syntax concerns the guidelines that determine how chords are arranged to create "logical" progressions, comparable to the way words are arranged so that sentences can be understood. Musical syntax differs from language in that it often leads us to expect common sequences, and having these expectations confirmed or denied sparks an emotional response. For instance, an authentic cadence (V-I) is the most common kind of harmonic progression, so the appearance of a V chord creates the supposition that the tonic will follow. If we hear a V chord resolving to the tonic, our expectations are fulfilled, and we experience a sense of equilibrium. On the other hand, we do not encounter deceptive cadences as often. A dominant chord that is followed by vi will create the impression of surprise. Well-constructed pieces utilize a mix of typical and atypical progressions, balancing repose and stability with excitement and tension.

The central role of the tonic can be reinforced by referring to it as "home." Subsequent forays into other harmonies are like "excursions" away from home, the exact nature of which depends on the chords used. Subdominant chords are often used to move away from a tonic and expand a harmonic cycle (i.e., I-IV-V-I), so I liken them to "going out" somewhere familiar- a friend or relative's house, for instance. V7 and vii chords occur at the point of least stability in

[32] John Sloboda, "The Acquisition of Musical Performance Expertise," in *Exploring the Musical Mind: cognition, emotion, ability, function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120

cadences, and sound "tense" when a return to the tonic chord is delayed. One of my students has described their sound as "that feeling you get when you really want to go home."

More unusual harmonic progressions are like trips to exotic places. Diminished chords, which have no root, create tension by pulling towards the nearest major or minor chord. If there are no stable chords nearby, this tendency is unresolved, essentially rendering the diminished chord "lost" or "homeless." In popular culture, there is a longstanding tradition of exploiting the distinctive timbre of diminished chords to create a sense of visceral suspense in listeners. Such chords were played by theater organists during the silent movies era to highlight scenes fraught with danger, and they are played today by the electric organ during baseball games when the bases are loaded and the score is tied.

Sonata Form

Sonata-allegro form, which contains a theme, exposition, development and summary, bears a close resemblance to the to the theme papers students are regularly assigned to write. However, students will probably appreciate an analogy that doesn't remind them of homework! According, I use a metaphor that draws upon the dramatic narrative inherent in sonata form.

The exposition, which introduces the main thematic material, is like the first part of a movie when we learn about the "main character" (first theme), and his friends (second theme). Development sections of sonatas usually contain opposite modes, scalar passages that lead in unexpected directions, rapidly shifting harmonies, and other features designed to disorient the listener. We hear snippets of the theme, reminding us of the main characters, but these fleeting moments dissolve into unstable sequences.

Students often say of development sections, "this part is confusing" or "I don't get this part." Teachers might point out that the development is *supposed* to throw things off balance,

before leading the piece back to its resolution. This is comparable to the denouement of an Agatha Christie murder mystery, in which the detective Poirot gathers the suspects together and pieces together an elaborate series of clues, motives and theories. Finally, he resolves the matter by naming the murderer, who has been in the room the entire time.

INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

Dialogic strategies

In a 2019 study, Meissner and Timmers found the most effective model for teaching expressive playing entailed pairing discussions of expressive character with instructions about modifying expressive devices. They agreed that dialogic teaching encourages students to extend their thinking and reflect upon their interpretive choices.[33] According to Camp, an instructional strategy for interpretation should allow for "active student involvement in interpretive decisions and the prioritization of musical independence in learning and performing."[34]

Developing an expressive vocabulary

Even adults sometimes have difficulty translating emotional experiences into words. For students, this difficulty is often magnified by the lesson environment. It may be useful for the teacher to draw a distinction between *perceived* emotional qualities embodied by the music and *felt* emotion, which has fewer implications for performance. In other words, music in a minor key with loudly dissonant chords can be described as having an "angry" character, but it does not necessarily mean it causes us to feel angry.

Whenever students start a new piece, I ask a version of this question: "What is the mood or character of this piece?"[35] If they give a generic answer like "sad" or, as I hear on occasion,

[33] Henrique Meisnner and Renee Timmers, "Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance: an experimental study", *Music Education Research*, 21 no. 1 (2019), 5
[34] Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 43
[35] This question and some of the exercises in this section have been adapted from: Ruth Price*, Right Before Your Eyes: A Fresh Approach to Interpreting a Piano Score* (Cheltenham, Victoria: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2015)

"minor," I encourage them to elaborate. Who is sad? Why did they become sad? Are they also angry, or do they feel sorry about something they did? Some students will take more naturally to providing adjectives and thinking up stories, while others will be more reticent or unable to articulate their impressions. In the case of the latter, I offer a two options and tell them they must choose one. Is this piece about a boy or girl? Is it day or night? Are they outside in the sun, or inside because it's raining? Once students have articulated their instinctive reactions to the piece, we can use it as a springboard to more objective, analysis-based thinking.

The mood wheel, below (fig. 2.4), is one of the most useful tools I have found to help students go beyond the usual sad/happy options. It was developed by psychologist Kate Hevner (1898-1984), who conducted some of the earliest experiments in musical expressivity. In her paper, *Experimental Studies of the Elements of Expression in Music*, she sought to develop a quantitative method for isolating certain variables in musical structure and evaluating their effectiveness for communicating moods to listeners. She tested six different aspects of music[36] and assessed the response of listeners. Subjects were given a list of 66 adjectives describing different moods, and asked to check off the moods they felt were represented in the music. From their checklists, Hevner grouped the adjectives into eight clusters and arranged them in a wheel-like pattern.[37] The chart can be easily adapted by educators to expand a student's expressive vocabulary.

Recognizing expressive devices

It is true that listeners' reactions to a piece of music are subjective and will vary from person to person, to the point that they will sometimes vehemently disagree about its meaning.

[36] The musical aspects Hevner tested were: tempo, rhythmic type, major/minor mode, melodic direction and harmonic complexity.
[37] Kate Hevner, "Experimental Studies of the Elements of Expression in Music," *The American Journal of Psychology* 48, no. 2 (1936), 246–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/1415746.

At the same time, there is general consensus about basic emotional categories we hear in music. This is no accident, as composers strive to embed their intentions within the structure of the piece. This might explain why some so many people hear "heroism" in Beethoven's Fifth, "sentimentality" in Tchaikovsky's Sixth or "narcissism" in Skryabin's "Prometheus" Symphony.[38] One of the most important interpretive lessons students can learn is that character and mood is derived from the music itself.

In his book, *Musical Emotions Explained*, Juslin describes how he conducted a study of causal relationships between specific emotional categories and relevant musical features.[39] The table below summarizes the most common musical features used to express five different emotional categories: happiness, sadness, anger, fear and tenderness (fig. 2.5). Features that can usually be modulated by the performer are in italics. Bearing in mind that these are broad categories and that the principles outlined are not meant to be applied in a strictly formulaic way, it nevertheless provides us with a starting point for discussing expressive devices with students.

Finding interpretive clues in a piece is easier if the composer has given it an evocative title like *The Wild Horseman*. When pieces have non-specific titles like the ones Classical-era composers typically gave theirs pieces (*Sonata*, *Rondo*, *Allegro*), students sometimes have difficulty making an emotional connection to the sound. Yet, these pieces are no less dramatic and expressive than their Romantic-era neighbors. By using a dialogic strategy, the teacher and student can arrive at a mutual understanding of the character of the piece.

[38] Roger Scruton, *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 55
[39] Patrik N. Juslin, *Musical Emotions Explained* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Fig. 2.4


6
merry
joyous
gay
happy
cheerful
bright
7
exhilarated
soaring
triumphant
dramatic
passionate
sensational
agitated
exciting
impetuous
restless
5
humorous
playful
whimsical
fanciful
quaint
sprightly
delicate
light
graceful
8
vigorous
robust
emphatic
martial
ponderous
majestic
exalting
4
lyrical
leisurely
satisfying
serene
tranquil
quiet
soothing
1
spiritual
lofty
awe-inspiring
dignified
sacred
solemn
sober
serious
2
pathetic
doleful
sad
mournful
tragic
melancholy
frustrated
depressing
gloomy
heavy
dark
3
dreamy
yielding
tender
sentimental
longing
yearning
pleading
plaintive

Fig. 2.5

Table 8.1 Summary of musical features used to express five different emotion categories.

Emotion	Feature
Happiness	*fast tempo, small tempo variability*, major mode, simple and consonant harmony, *medium-high sound level, small sound level variability*, high pitch, much pitch variability, wide pitch range, ascending pitch, perfect 4th and 5th intervals, *rising micro intonation, raised singer's formant, staccato articulation, large articulation variability*, smooth and fluent rhythm, *bright timbre, fast tone attacks, small timing variability, sharp contrasts between "long" and "short" notes, medium-fast vibrato rate, medium vibrato extent, micro-structural regularity*
Sadness	*slow tempo*, minor mode, dissonance, *low sound level, moderate sound level variability*, low pitch, narrow pitch range, descending pitch, *"flat" (or falling) intonation*, small intervals (e.g., minor 2nd), *lowered singer's formant, legato articulation, small articulation variability, dull timbre, slow tone attacks, large timing variability* (e.g., rubato), *soft contrasts between "long" and "short" notes, pauses, slow vibrato, small vibrato extent, ritardando, micro-structural irregularity*
Anger	*fast tempo, small tempo variability*, minor mode, atonality, dissonance, *high sound level, small loudness variability*, high pitch, moderate pitch variability, ascending pitch, major 7th and augmented 4th intervals, *raised singer's formant, staccato articulation, moderate articulation variability*, complex rhythm, sudden rhythmic changes (e.g., syncopations), *sharp timbre, spectral noise, fast tone attacks/decays, small timing variability, accents on tonally unstable notes, sharp contrasts between "long" and "short" notes, accelerando, medium-fast vibrato rate, large vibrato extent, micro-structural irregularity*
Fear	*fast tempo, large tempo variability*, minor mode, dissonance, *low sound level, large sound level variability, rapid changes in sound level*, high pitch, ascending pitch, very wide pitch range, large pitch contrasts, *staccato articulation, large articulation variability*, jerky rhythms, *soft timbre, very large timing variability, pauses, soft tone attacks, fast vibrato rate, small vibrato extent, micro-structural irregularity*
Tenderness	*slow tempo*, major mode, consonance, *medium-low sound level, small sound level variability*, low pitch, fairly narrow pitch range, *lowered singer's formant, legato articulation, small articulation variability, slow tone attacks, soft timbre, moderate timing variability, soft contrasts between long and short notes, accents on tonally stable notes, medium-fast vibrato, small vibrato extent, micro-structural regularity*

Note: Shown are the most common findings. Features set in italics can usually be modulated by the performer.
Adopted from Juslin & Lindström, 2010.

Case Study: Charlie, 12 - Mozart Fantasia in D minor K397, Andante

The teacher begins by asking Charlie a now-familiar question, "What is the mood of the *Andante*?" Charlie, noting the minor mode, bass octaves and slow pace, replies that it is "sad." The teacher validates his assessment while coaching him to expand his answer. She plays the *Adagio* section (fig. 2.6), pointing out that, like the *Andante* (fig. 2.7), it is also slow-moving and in a minor key. Playing two sections exactly the same way will have the unintended effect of diluting their emotional impact. They refer to the mood wheel, and the teacher suggests he choose different clusters of adjectives to describe each section. Then, he can "borrow" a few adjectives from other clusters to refine the image. Charlie decides that the *Adagio* sounds sadder and choose cluster 2 (*melancholy*, *pathetic* and *sad*). For the *Andante*, he selects cluster 1 (*lofty*, *dignified* and *serious*).

Fig. 2.6

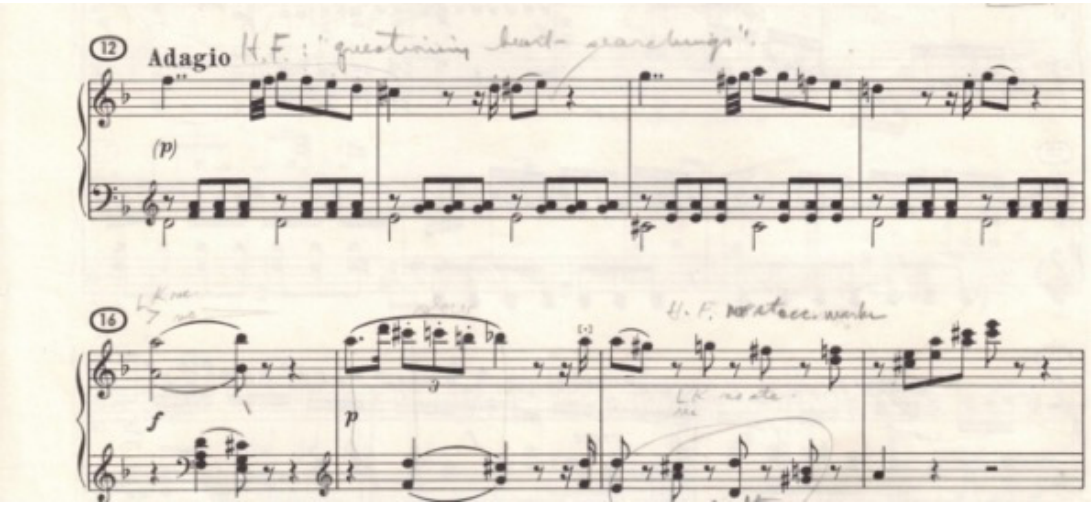
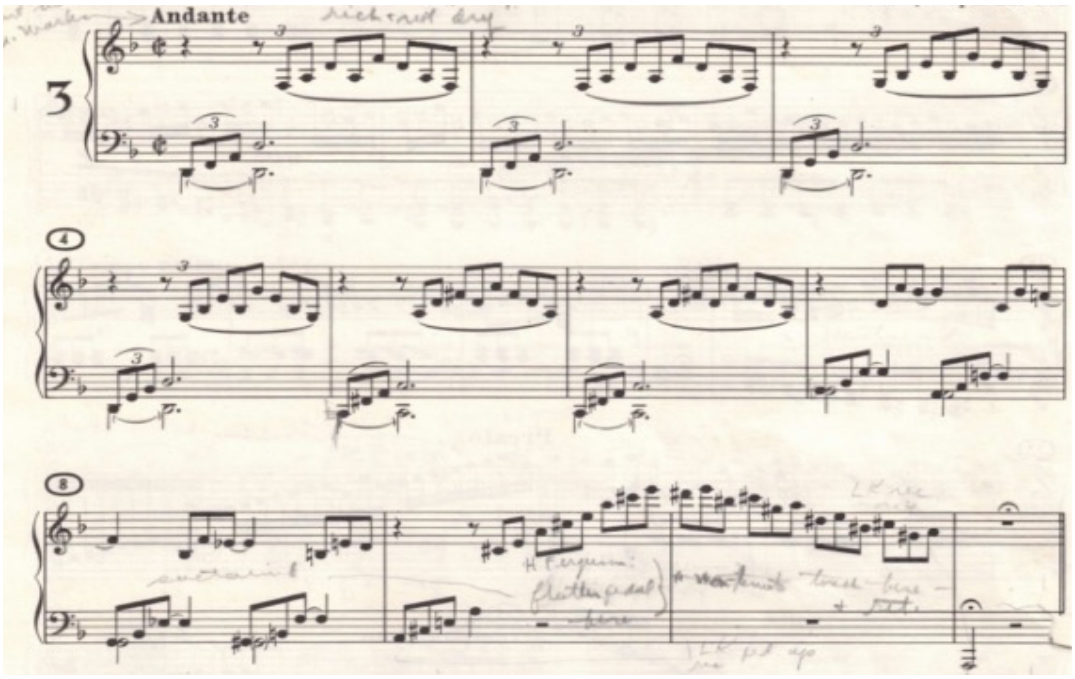


Fig. 2.7



They discuss why the *Andante* sound less *tragic* than the *Adagio*. Despite having a number of features that align with *sadness* in Juslin's chart, it deviates in several key aspects. According to Juslin, large timing variability, long-short rhythms, pauses and "microstructural irregularity" are regularly cited as indications of sadness. These features appear in the *Adagio*, but not in the *Andante*. Instead, the opening is characterized by a steady regularity that gives it a more serene, contemplative sound.

The first ten bars consist of broken chords, flowing forward in a series of continuous triplets. A bass octave arrives on every second beat, like the tolling of a bell. Harmony moves slowly, changing every two measures until measure 7, when a stepwise descending bass line ushers in a new chord every two beats. From this point, changes happen at a faster rate. The beat of emphasis shifts from the second to the first and third. In measure 9, Mozart finally breaks away from the lower and middle register, signaling a transition to the next section. The

music lingers in the dominant key, A major, creating a moment of suspense, and resolves on a low A with a fermata.

The prevailing mood is unhurried, owing to the repetition of musical elements. This can be interpreted as *reserved*, *thoughtful* or *steady*. Charlie also hears "suspense and mystery," in the increasingly dissonant chords. He and his teacher discuss how Mozart may have intended for the *Andante* to function as an overture to the following sections.[40] The slow harmonic movement, repetitive triplets and octaves, and consistent timbre contains little overt drama, although there is a sense of gradually increasing tension.

As he plays, Charlie listens carefully to make sure that the triplets are even and steady, mindful that excessive rubato will distort the "tolling bell" feature that gives the section its solemnity. When he defaults to a predictable ascending crescendo/descending decrescendo pattern to shape each measure, his teacher points out this highlights one measure at a time instead of the larger pattern.

They settle on a dynamics scheme that draws attention to harmonic movement. Measures 1 and 2, in the tonic, are played *piano*, without excessive emotion. A fuller sound is warranted in mm. 3-4, which features a harmony of minor sixths. Charlie plays these measures *mezzo piano*, listening for the subtle dissonance of the right-hand E against D in the left hand. Measures 5 and 6, containing diminished triads, represent the highest point of tension and call for more dynamic intensity. The teacher suggests a "warmer" sound for measures 7 and 8, which contain faster rhythmic and harmonic motion. Charlie experiments with hesitating very slightly at the end of

[40] Mozart, in fact, had been known to state his love for opera and had been quoted as saying that whenever he wrote music he was always thinking of the voice (Valery Lloyd Watts, "Mastering the Fantasy," https://valerylloydwatts.com/mastering-the-piano/5-Level-6.pdf)

measure 6, then dropping the dynamic level, depressing the keys more slowly and relaxing his arms to create a different color.

The last three measures of the *Andante* need to walk a fine line: active enough to increase suspense and bridge the transition to the next section, but restrained enough to fit in with the *reserved* character of the first section. Charlie's teacher draws an arrow in measure 9 of the score, indicating that the notes should keep moving until they reach the high E in measure 10, then gradually ritard to the low A.

Other exercises

Contemporary writings indicate that people seem to think that music is most representative of emotion.[41] However, we encounter any number of "everyday things" that can also be used to draw associations with music: movement, weather, animals, objects, even abstract concepts like *honor*. Teachers can continue to promote recognition of expressive signs in music by pointing them out and showing students how to adjust them. Following are a few of the non-affective images I have used or observed other teachers using:

Non-pianistic music: Playing a non-melody voice or interesting accompaniment figure "like a cello" or "like a bassoon" encourages students to give it more shape, tone or to vary the articulation.

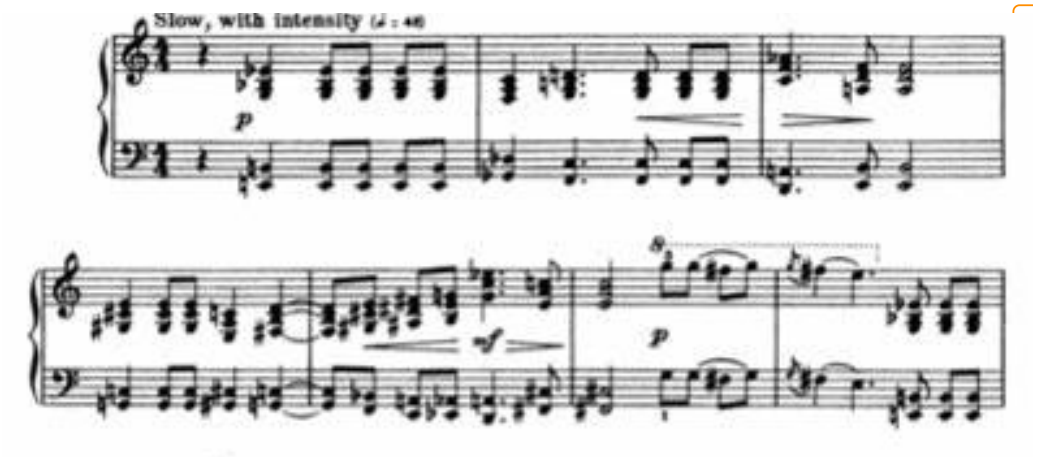
Movement: Getting the right sound is often a matter of making the appropriate gestures. Rather than giving purely technical directions ("lift your hands up and very slowly descend into the keys, using arm weight"), it might be more effective to say: "imagine you are very sleepy and sinking down into a soft feather bed."

[41] Williamon, Aaron. *Musical Excellence : Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 250; Alf Gabrielsson and Patrick S. Juslin, "Emotional Expression in Music," in *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, eds. Richard J. Davidson, Klaus R. Scherer, and H. Hill Goldsmith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 503–34.

Colors: When composers specify extreme dynamics like *pppp*, the dynamic marking is usually more indicative of mood/character than actual decibel level. A student can be told to listen closely until she hears a "light purple" sound that contrasts with the surrounding "dark blue" sounds.

Contemporary composer Robert Starer wrote two intermediate-level sets titled "Sketches in Color." Each book contains seven pieces, all named for different colors such as "Crimson," or "Chrome Yellow." These imaginative pieces provide an excellent starting point for exploring the relationship between color and sound. For example, the color purple is commonly associated with mystery, complexity and solemnity. Starer's "Purple" is a slow, bitonal piece, mostly played at a soft volume. It features a thick texture of triads in the right hand and open fourths or fifths in the left hand (fig. 2.8). Some students will find the resultant dissonance vaguely unsettling, while others may feel that the chords sound contemplative and "bluesy."

Fig. 2.8



SUMMARY

The challenges of teaching necessary piano skills can limit the time teachers are able to devote to expressive and interpretative skills. By incorporating imagery, which draws upon the personal experience and beliefs of students, they can help students connect to musical concepts

as well as stretch their imaginations. When using metaphors and analogies in teaching, teachers should keep the following in mind:

- Children can be taught to associate a character and mood with each piece from the beginning of their training
- Along with other repertoire, students should work on pieces chosen specifically to teach expressive playing
- To underscore how the character of a piece depends on musical features, teachers can demonstrate alternate versions for students
- Imagery can be used to explain musical structure and theory
- To maximize the effectiveness of metaphors and analogies, teachers should pair them with a strategy that enables the student to understand where to find expressive cues in the music and how to adjust them through performance
- Dialogic teaching strategies, in which teacher and student engage in discussion and arrive at a point of shared understanding, are more effective than direct verbal instructions that reference acoustic properties
- Targeted exercises using tools like Kate Hevner's mood wheel and Juslin's chart of musical affects will allow students to articulate their own images and discover how the composer has created them
- Teachers should continue to utilize imagery from the student's daily life when coaching them to produce specific sounds or make appropriate technical gestures

CHAPTER 3 - RHYTHM

"In psychology, musical *rhythm* depends on the fact that the tones presented in temporal sequence are perceived as having not only pitch, loudness, quality and duration, but also *movement*."

James L. Mursell, *The Psychology of Music*[42]

THE PRIMACY OF RHYTHM

Individuals often respond to the rhythmic elements in a piece before other musical features. Could this be because rhythm is an integral part of human existence? Daily life is based on cyclical phenomena such as the revolution of the earth on its axis and around the sun, the ebb and flow of tides, and the changing of the seasons. Our bodies, too, are governed by regular intervals: breathing, the beating of the heart and the shifting of weight from foot to foot as we walk.

The interrelationship between nature, rhythm and motion has captivated writers for centuries. The Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius (c. 99 - c. 55 B.C.) published a poem that is usually translated in English to "On the Nature of Things," in which he puts his scientific theories to verse. In it, he defines time as an "accident of motion." According to Berns, Lucretius believed that the two distinguishable aspects of time are "(1) its dependence on motion or rest of things, and (2) its dependence on human perception."[43]

For the last seventy years or so, pedagogues have maintained that a secure command of rhythm is the most important of all the fundamental skills necessary to succeed at the piano. Joan Last, Ernst Bacon, Stanley Fletcher, Grosvenor Cooper, Abby Whiteside and Max Camp

[42] James L. Mursell, *The Psychology of Music*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1937) 38-39
[43] Gisela Berns, "Time and Nature in Lucretius' 'De Rerum Natura.'" *Hermes* 104, no. 4 (1976) 477–92

have all emphasized that rhythm is an indispensable component of good musicianship.[44] Whiteside, in particular, famously championed the primacy of rhythm in teaching. The premise of her book, *The Indispensables of Piano Playing*, is that rhythm is responsible for transferring the *idea* of music, which originates in the ear, to the *production* of music, which originates in the body.[45]

Pulse

Most students who are past the primary level can demonstrate the difference between *pulse* and *rhythm* by tapping out examples of each. However, many have trouble describing what these terms mean. A pulse, such as the steady ticking of a clock, refers to a predetermined, unchanging unit of time. Rhythm refers to the arrangement of short and long durations that are superimposed over the pulse.

When designing an instructional sequence for teaching beginners, it is useful to remember that a student needs to physically experience the pulse of music before being introduced to other rhythmic concepts. If a student insists that he is "counting inside" but plays inaccurate note values, this is a sign that he needs to work on keeping a consistent beat. Until he can do so, he is not ready to complete rhythmic worksheets, use a metronome, or count aloud while playing.

Recognizing the indivisible association of rhythm and movement, many educators advocate for incorporating physical activities when teaching rhythm to young children. Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967), a Hungarian composer and pedagogue, established a set of principles for teaching children music in a social and exploratory setting. Most people associate the Kodaly method with singing and interval training, but he also stressed that preliminary work should

[44] Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 23
[45] Abby Whiteside, The *Indispensables of Piano Playing,* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1955) 3

consist of "chanting, clapping, walking, and *feeling the beat* in all types of music."[46] Another system that remains popular today is *Eurythmics*, which was coined by Swiss music educator Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950). Dalcroze theorized that all musical concepts could, and should, be taught by movement.[47] Many of his exercises are designed for use in group lessons, but can also be adapted to one-on-one settings. I have used some of the following Eurythmics-based activities to help students experience pulse:

- The teacher and student join hands and step from side to side with the beat
- The student passes a bean bag from hand to hand as she rhythmically chants "1-2-3-4"
- The teacher taps or plays a steady beat and the student matches it
- The student takes rhythmic steps as the teacher plays. Once she has mastered a basic march, she can perform variations like swaying from foot to foot like a penguin
- While the teacher plays, the student conducts by drawing simple shapes in the air: triangles for 3/4 time, squares for 4/4

Rhythmic grouping

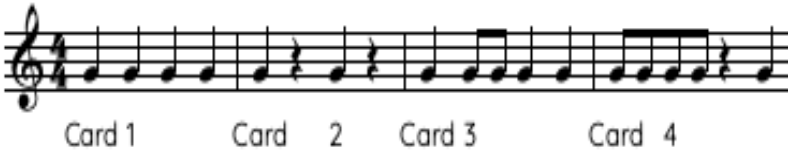
In the most basic sense, *rhythm* refers to the temporal properties of music. However, as Cooper writes in *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, "just as a melody is more than simply a series of pitches, so rhythm is more than a mere sequence of durational properties. To experience rhythm is to group separate sounds into structured patterns."[48] Similarly, Whiteside draws a distinction between the "rhythm of articulation," which refers to the value of separate notes, and the more important "rhythm of form," which represents the way small rhythmic patterns combine

[46] Mary Helen Richards, "The Legacy from Kodaly," *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 49 no. 6 (Jun-Jul 1963) 27-30
[47] Timothy Caldwell and Emile-Jacques Dalcroze, "A Dalcroze Perspective on Skills for Learning," *Music Educators Journal* vol. 79 no. 7 (March 1993), 27-28; 66
[48] Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 1

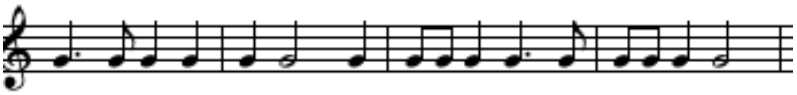
to create larger units.[49] Camp elaborates on this: "the rhythmic sense has to operate on several architectonic levels, including the individual note level, basic pulse grouping level, measure grouping level, and subphrase level, as well as the phrase level."[50]

The interrelatedness of rhythm is one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp. I have found that it is best to have beginners experience rhythmic groupings away from the keyboard at first. Children can start by clapping back rhythms corresponding to a group of words, such as "Run-a-long-and-hop-now" (). Later, they can perform tap-back exercises using flashcards containing one-measure rhythmic patterns (fig. 3.1).

Fig. 3.1



More complex:



Initially, teachers may want to demonstrate the rhythm and have students imitate what they hear. At the next level, the teacher establishes a beat, and students tap the rhythm on their own. When students are consistently accurate with one-measure patterns, a second flashcard is added, then a third.[51] These exercises are especially beneficial when performed in a class setting. As students gain competency, they can compose their own patterns for classmates to tap back.

[49] Whiteside, *Indispensables,* 3-4; 7-8; 24
[50] Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 23
[51] Jeanine M. Jacobson*, Professional Piano Teaching: Volume I, Elementary Level* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Company, 2015) 120

Alternately, the teacher can show them several flashcards, tap the rhythm of one, and ask students which card matches the rhythm.

Transferring the feel of rhythm

Occasionally, we will come across students who routinely struggle to play, clap, tap, or count rhythms accurately. We can always play along with them, but in some cases, simply hearing the correct rhythm is not enough to help them to *feel* it. Whiteside suggests that it may be possible for a teacher to transfer the physical sensation of rhythm directly to such students. With the student's permission, a teacher can slip her fingers between the student's fingers while sitting close by. Not only does this allow her to synchronize her movements with that of the student, she can also check for signs of arm or finger tension.[52] I have used a similar strategy when teaching young children, placing their hand over mine and letting them "ride along" as I play a rhythm.

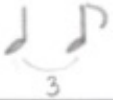
Lower and higher-level patterns

Interpreting rhythm requires a delicate balance between articulating lower-level rhythmic patterns and ensuring that higher-level patterns are audible. By lower-level rhythmic patterns, I mean individual note values, while higher-level rhythm describes longer sequences. In the following sections, I will outline strategies for: (1) establishing the integrity of lower-level rhythm by using the pulse as a guide; (2) enhancing the rhythmic features that create forward-motion; and (3) grouping smaller rhythmic units to articulate higher-level patterns.

RHYTHMIC INTEGRITY

Large, evolving rhythmic patterns may be the lifeblood of every piece, but listeners will not grasp them unless the lower-level patterns are audible. Ambiguous-sounding rhythm can

[52] Whiteside, *Indispensables*, 140

cause listeners to misconstrue a musical statement. For instance, if  is played  , the piece will seem to have a lilt rather than the crisp rhythm the composer intended.

Rests

A young student once played a piece for me with all of the rhythmic values intact except for the rests, which he skipped as if they were invisible. When I pointed to a rest and asked, "What should you do there?" he confidently replied, "Nothing!" This is not an unusual mindset. Students are inclined to ignore rests or cut them short. In other cases, they will pause for what they feel is an appropriate length of time, then continue on. Longer durations, such as half rests and whole rests, need extra attention because students must keep the pulse going without making a corresponding gesture. Teachers can help children feel the rests by having them make a designated motion for rests when clapping rhythms. For example, students can open their hands, palms toward the ceiling while chanting "rest-rest" or "half-rest."

Another reason students seem to stop listening whenever they see rests is because they find silences awkward. Students who understand the emotive aspect of rests are more likely to integrate them into the piece. For instance, rests can telegraph suspense, astonishment, respect, contemplation, awe, puzzlement or serenity. When teaching a piece filled with rests, we can encourage a child to associate the rests with dramatic silence: "Imagine you are one of three finalists in a science fair. The prize is one hundred dollars and a free ice cream sundae. The teacher steps up to the podium to announce the winner, clears his throat, and pauses…a hush falls over the auditorium…" Then, the student can count the rests using a tone of voice that reflects the suspense of the moment.

When there are alternating quarter notes and rests in the accompaniment, as in Clementi's *Sonatina in C major, op 36* (fig. 3.1a), students may not notice if they are holding notes down through the rests, as long as the rhythm of the melody is correct. Yet, rests are crucial to the character of the piece. Clementi could have used a half note or whole note, but chose to use a quarter note paired with a quarter rest to add a snappy *energy* to the simple bass line. This means that the student must make a clean release in the left hand as the right hand plays the E in the first measure. Students can prepare by tapping the rhythm of both hands. It may be helpful to have them visualize a see-saw: at the rest, down goes the right hand and up goes the left hand (3.2b). I have also asked students to imagine that the fifth finger of the right hand is pressing a button that causes the left hand to lift up (3.2c).

Fig. 3.1a

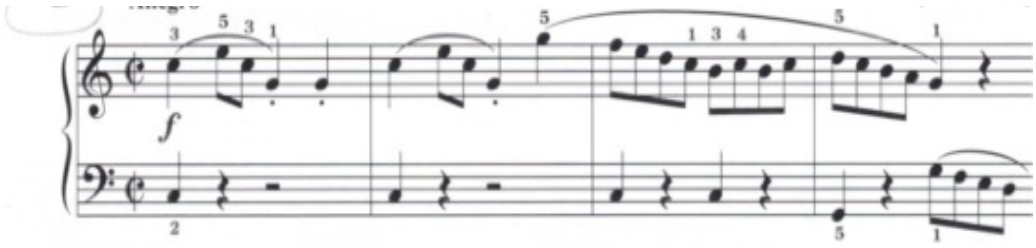
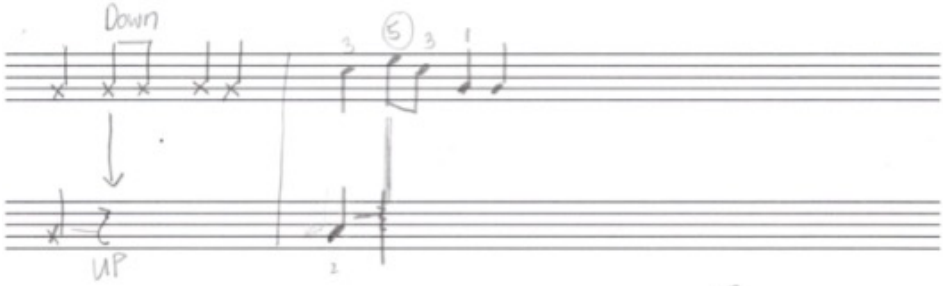


Fig. 3.2b and 3.2c

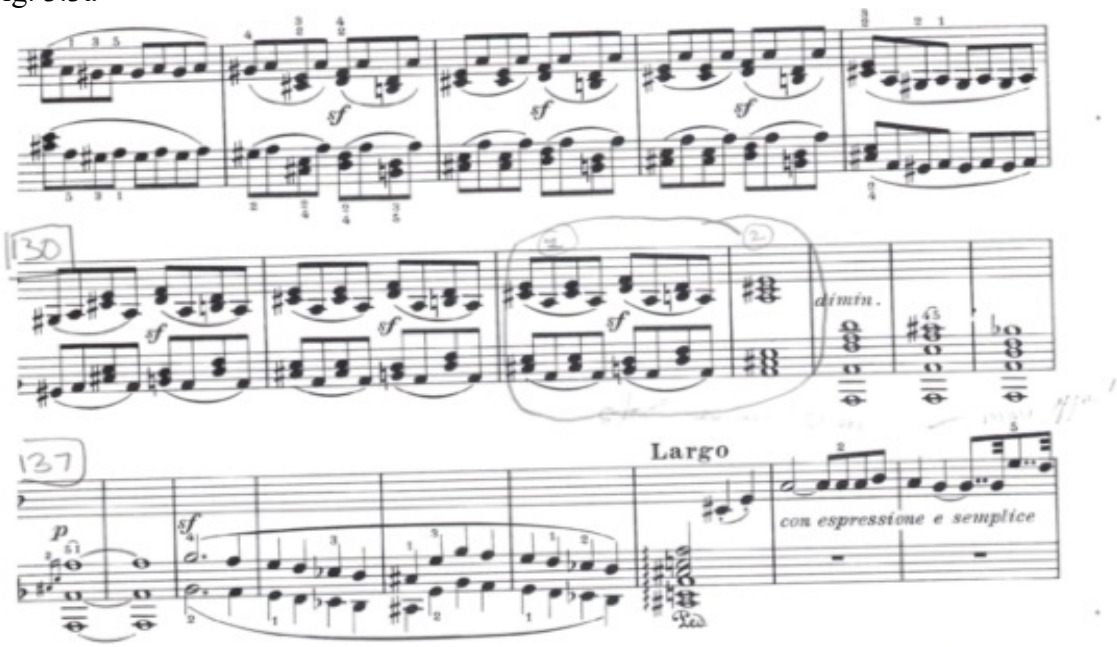


Maximum-value notes

We typically anticipate the difficulties that students will have with measures that contain many subdivisions of the beat. However, I have found that just as many rhythmic errors, if not more, occur in in measures that look relatively slight. These measures contain what I refer to as maximum-value notes, or notes that are significantly longer than their neighbors. Maximum-value notes, like rests, require more concentration from students because they involve feeling subdivisions *mentally* rather than *physically*.

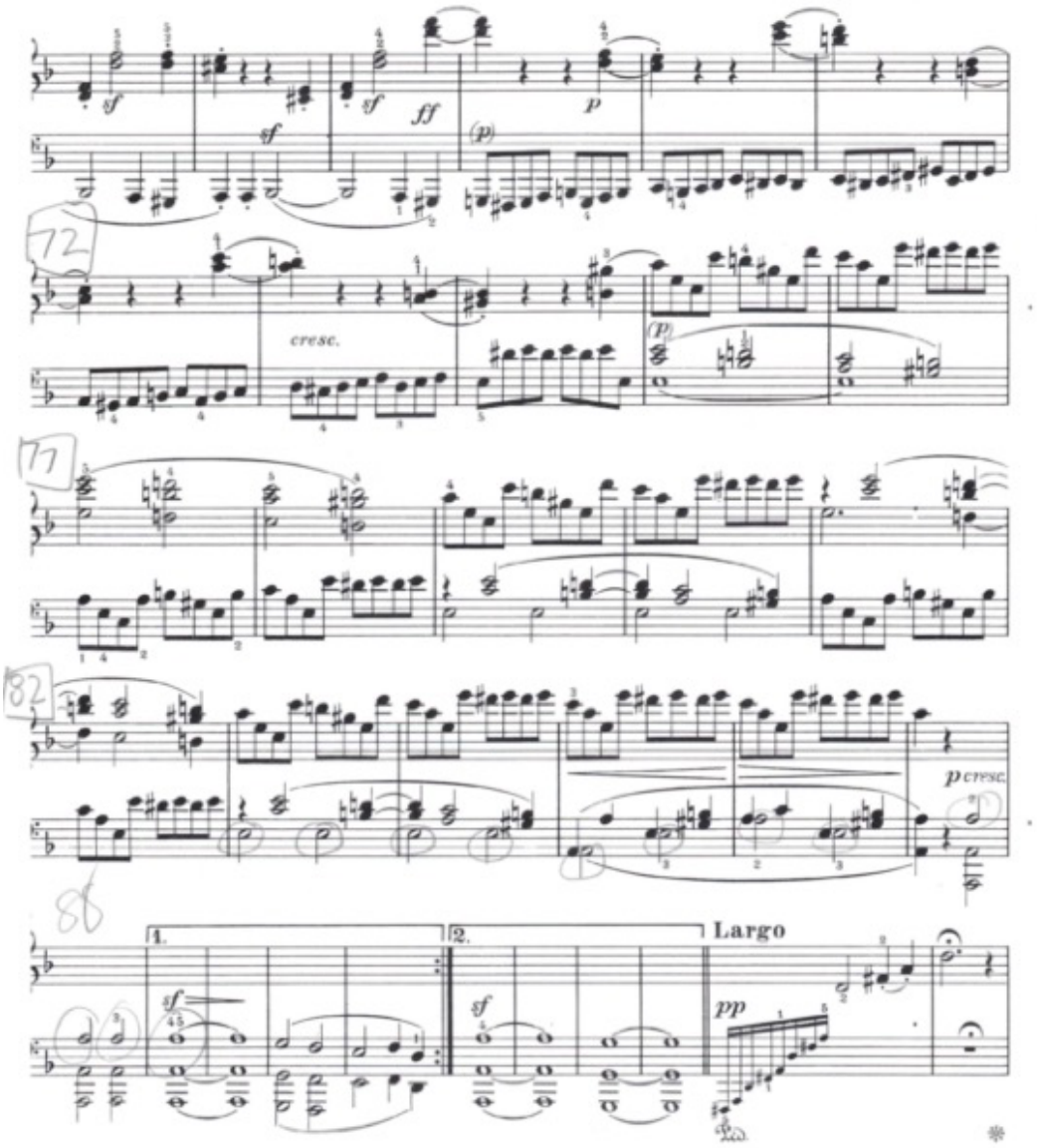
Experienced students are not immune to this pitfall, as many advanced pieces feature abrupt shifts between notes of short and long duration. In the following excerpt from Beethoven's "Tempest" sonata, which of these circled measures will prove more problematic? (fig. 3.3a) Teachers know that the first measure will be easier to count, because it merely requires maintaining a steady flow of eighth notes. However, unless students continue feeling the subdivisions through the whole note in the second measure, the rhythm will falter, and the piece will grind to a halt. Teachers can help students internalize subdivisions of the whole notes by having them play eighth note iterations and chant syllables ("one-and-two-and"). Next, students play the passage as written, while continuing to chant syllables. Finally, they play and silently count subdivisions.

Fig. 3.3a



A similarly perilous spot appears near the end of the exposition, in measures 87-93 (fig. 3.3b). Along with having students practice iterations of the eighth note, teachers might ask them to listen closely to the half notes that appear in the lower bass voice in mm. 79-80 and mm. 83-86. They can practice measures 83-92 by playing only the half notes in the left hand while playing the right hand as written. By the time they reach measure 87, they will have grown accustomed to the feeling of the half notes.

Fig. 3.3b

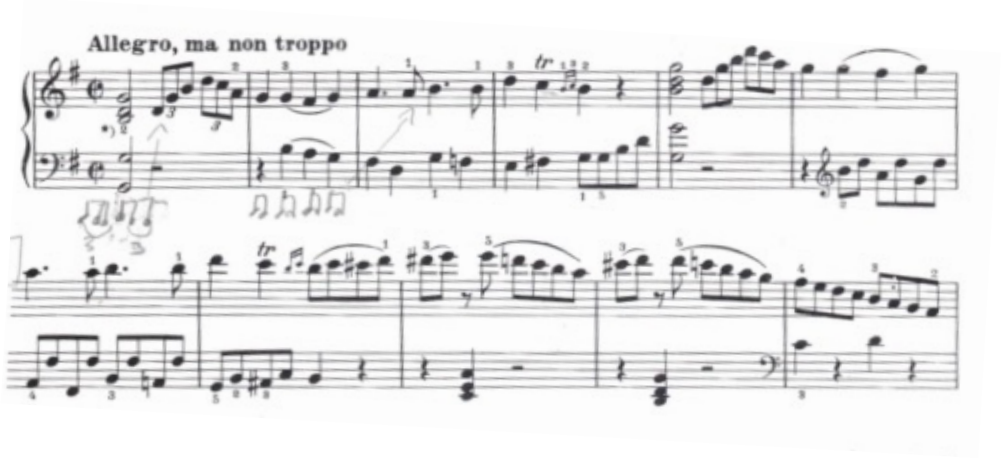


Alternating subdivisions

Until students can reliably subdivide the beat, they should play pieces that have either duple or triple subdivisions, but not both. As they progress, however, pieces may be chosen for the purpose of learning how to play alternating divisions of the beat. Beethoven's op. 49 no. 2 is an excellent choice for students making the transition to early advanced repertoire (fig. 3.4). Performers must mentally divide the opening half-note chord into three parts because it is

followed by triplets. However, the quarter notes in measure two are followed by eighth notes, meaning each beat must have two subdivisions.

Fig. 3.4



Students who have difficulty switching between subdivisions can prepare with an exercise that allows them to keep a steady beat in one hand while dividing by two or three with the other:

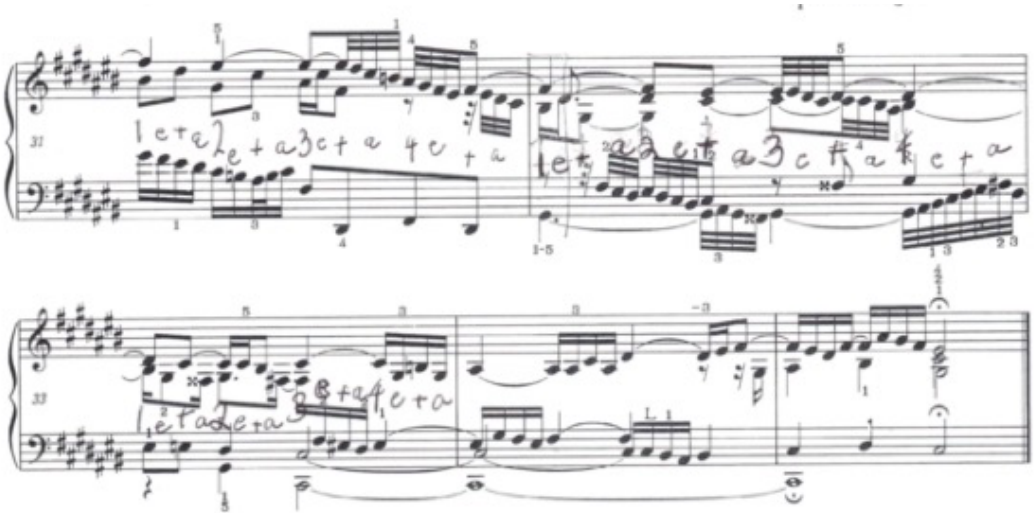
- On a flat surface, tap quarter notes with the left hand and triplets with the right
- Tap quarter notes with the left hand and eighth notes with the right hand
- Continuing to keep the beat in the left hand, tap alternating 4/4 measures of triplets and eighth notes with the right hand
- Tap alternating beats of triplets and eighth notes
- Perform the whole exercise with hands reversed

"Busy" measures

Passages with dense notation can be visually intimidating to many students. As with measures that have few notes, students must first locate the pulse. The fugue from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier II BWV 872, like many Baroque pieces, contains small layers of rhythm superimposed over larger ones, making it challenging for students to feel the beat and maintain a

consistent tempo. To alleviate this difficulty, the score can be prepared as follows: (fig. 3.5: mm. 31-32)[53]

Fig. 3.5



- Find and write in primary beats, then fill in subdivisions of the beat. If there are very many notes, it is useful to highlight the strong beats with a colored pencil
- Play only the notes of the primary beats, counting aloud
- Play as written while counting subdivisions of the beat (1-e-and-a)
- Count aloud only on primary beats while accenting them
- Play without counting aloud or accenting beat

When working on very difficult sections, students should start at a slow tempo and play just a few beats at a time until they are secure. Teachers can also play along on strong beats to help them feel the pulse.

MOMENTUM

One of the most recognizable features of expressive playing is music that seems to flow from one idea to another. With this in mind, composers throughout history have written rhythms

[53]Jacobsen*, Professional Piano Teaching vol. 2*, 70

that draw attention away from one note and towards the next. Cone describes this phenomenon as *musical energy* in his frequently-referenced book *Musical Form and Performance*. In his view, musical energy is activated through three components. These are: (1) the initiation of energy; (2) the time and distance to be traveled in between; and (3) the goal towards which it is directed. He explains this abstract concept by making a practical analogy: when we throw a ball to someone, the action consists of the throw, the ball's travel through the air, and the catch.[54] To take Cone's analogy a step further, we might surmise that the key to a long musical line is "keeping the ball in motion."

Prominent educators have emphasized that *momentum* is central to the concept of rhythm. Whitehead makes it clear that when she refers to teaching rhythm, she does not mean teaching students to observe note values and meter, although this is a necessary part of the equation. As she writes, the term *rhythm* is "reserved for that continuous undulating action which, once started, is impelled to carry the entire musical performance to its close."[55] Artur Schnabel was known to state that one of the primary functions of rhythmic articulation is to suggest *movement*.[56]

Playing over the barline

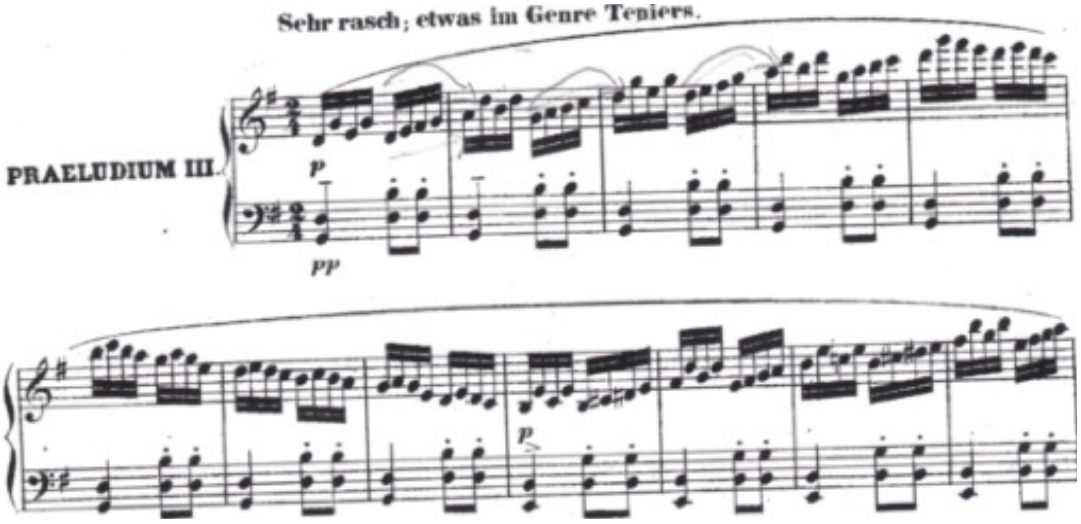
When students open a score, they see pages of notes, rests and dots, grouped together by meter and separated by barlines. The conventions of notation are very helpful for reading and for seeing where the normal accents lie, but they do not aways indicate how a piece should sound. The presence of barlines can cause students to halt slightly at the end of every measure or line. To make them aware of the effect this has on the music, we might read them a familiar

[54] Edward Cone, Musical Form and Performance, (Toronto: McLeod Limited, 1968), 27
[55] Whiteside, *Indispensables*, 24
[56] Konrad Wolff, *Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music*, 71

poem such as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," pausing as if for a period or comma after every few words, then ask them what seems wrong.

It is sometimes necessary to help students re-visualize the score so that they may understand how the composer has built momentum into the piece. This excerpt from Stephen Heller's Prelude in G major, op 81 no. 3 (fig. 3.6) shows a pattern of 16th notes beginning on the downbeat:

Fig. 3.6



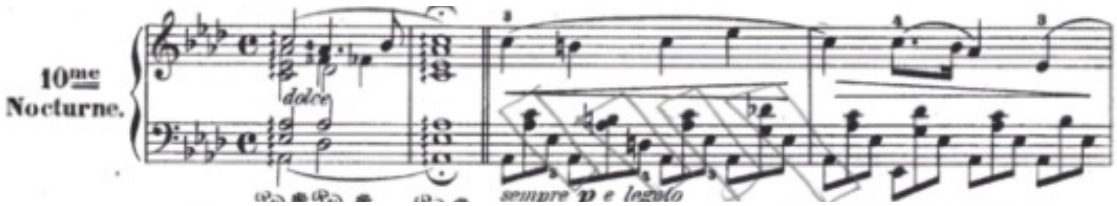
The long slur over the first twenty-seven bars offers no clue about how the notes should be phrased. As with most pieces that contain motoric subdivisions, students are prone to accenting the first note of each beat. Teachers know how this results in a mechanical sound that seems to pause at every barline.[57] To counteract this habit, we can offer an alternate visual that illustrates movement. The ascending scale that runs from the end of the measure, over the barline and to the next downbeat is responsible for creating momentum. Teachers can spotlight this pattern by arrowing the notes forward, which might inspire students to shape the phrase with

[57] Artur Schnabel was known to tell his students that the meter and downbeat are already well-established in tonal music most of the time, so why "underline the obvious?" Wolff, *Schnabel's Interpretation*, 56

a subtle crescendo. When assigning small groups of measures to practice, teachers should specify that the segment ends on the first beat of the next measure instead of right before the barline.

A similar principle can be applied to left-hand accompaniments. Chopin often wrote repeating bass figures that descend to their lowest note on the downbeat of the next measure (fig. 3.7: Chopin Nocturne in A flat op 32 no 2). Students can be directed to play the bracketed notes as one group that continues to the lowest "goal note." This will help move the piece forward, with the additional technical benefit of allowing the student to play notes moving in the same direction with one fluid gesture.

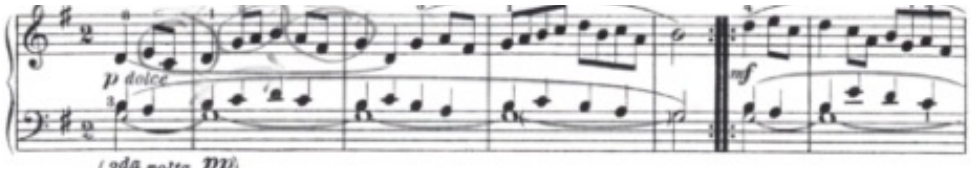
Fig. 3.7



Short-to-long patterns

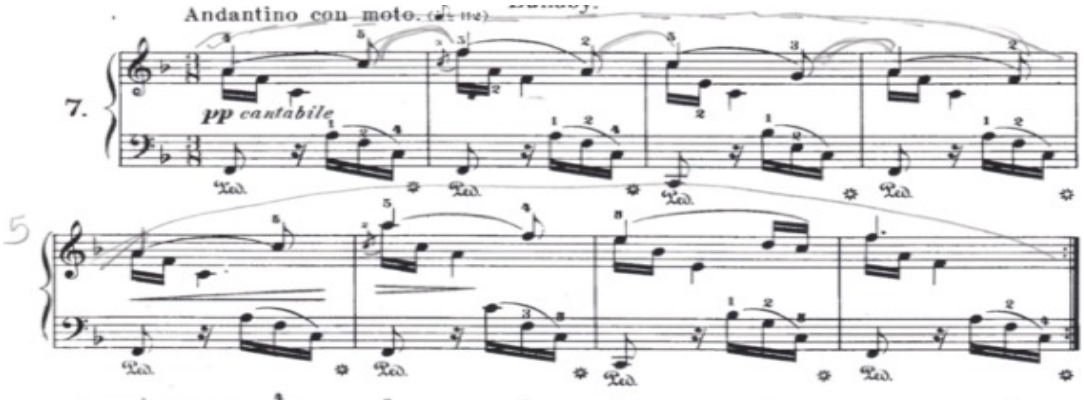
One of the most common ways composers push phrases over the barline is to write a short note right before the barline, followed by a longer note on the downbeat of the following measure. This pattern, which students should be trained to spot, almost always indicates increasing energy between the short and long note. Bach's Gavotte (fig. 3.8: English suite no. 3, BWV 808) begins on the downbeat, implying a long-short-short pattern. However, the rhythm will have more vitality if the basic rhythmic unit is interpreted as short-short-long instead.

Fig. 3.8



Frequently, motion-creating rhythmic devices are obscured by other notation. For instance, slurs do not always indicate ideal phrasing choices. Here, Burgmuller's score indicates that notes are grouped together within the measure, causing students to emphasize the movement of the quarter note to the eighth note instead of the other way around (fig. 3.9: Burgmuller op 109 no. 11). Teachers can draw a slur between the short and long notes to guide the eye forward. Drawing an additional slur above the first four measures will define the phrase. When students practice, they can listen for increasing energy between the short and long notes, perhaps pausing a little after every set.

Fig. 3.9

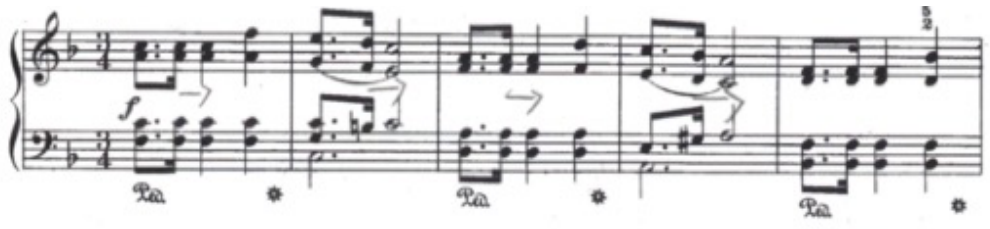


To help students internalize the feeling of short-to-long, we can tell them to think of long notes as "magnets" that draw the shorter notes to them. I have found it helpful to have students sing the short-long rhythm ("to-*there*, to-*there*"), making a slight crescendo towards the long notes. If a student is reluctant to sing, I will play the piece and ask him to conduct along in "1"

by drawing a big "smile" in the air. The student will feel the natural momentum of his arm as it swings upward to the tip of the "smile."

A dotted rhythm, such as a dotted eighth note paired with a sixteenth note, is another example of a short-to-long rhythmic device. Although dotted pairs are meant to propel the rhythm forward, their appearance can cause them to be perceived as a separate unit. When playing this Mazurka (fig.3.10: Chopin Mazurka op 68 no. 3), students often place a tiny separation after each pair of dotted notes. This draws too much attention to the strong beats, which is especially precarious because many of them are on the same pitch. Arrowing a sixteenth note forward will train students to recognize that it belongs with the *following* dotted note.

Fig. 3.10



Anacruses

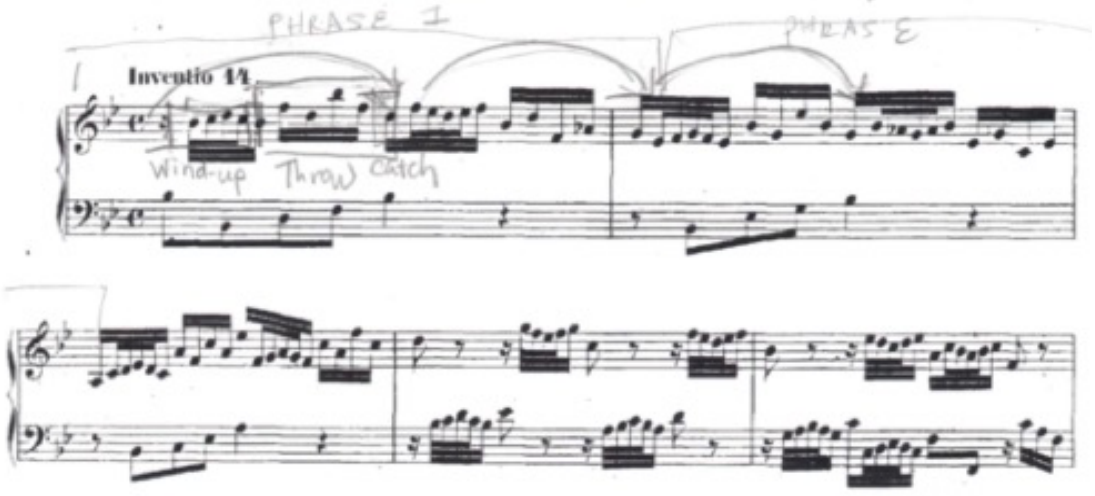
In ancient Greek drama, the leader of the chorus cued dancers to step in unison by raising his foot, which was encased in a wooden shoe designed for this purpose. The Greeks used the terms *anacrusis* and *thesis* to refer to the upward motion of the foot and the downward step, respectively.[58] The relationship between an anacrusis and its thesis involves a transfer of energy from one point to the next, much like the traveling ball in Cone's analogy. In musical terms, the anacrusis, or upbeat, serves an expressive purpose by creating a sense of deliberate motion towards the thesis, or downbeat. As the American composer Walter Piston states, "It is as

[58] James Morgan Thurmond, *Note Grouping*, (Detroit: Harlo Press, 1982) 35

though each downbeat serves in turn as a springboard for the start of another anacrusis, ever renewing the life of the melody."[59] Most students can spot single-note upbeats. However, they may not be aware that an anacrusis can consist of a longer sequence, particularly if it is hiding in a dense texture.

The absence of a right-hand note on the first beat of Bach's Invention no. 14 provides us with a clue that the opening sequence is an anacrusis, leading to a thesis on beat 3 (fig. 3.11). Bach has incorporated several motion-generating strategies into the rhythmic pattern. The sequence opens with a "wind-up" gesture of 32nd notes, which leads to the "throw" of the 16th notes and the "catch" on the last note of the group. The anacrusis is considerably longer than the thesis, putting more emphasis on *movement* rather than *repose*. The end of one sequence seems to generate another.

Fig. 3.11



Each anacrustic sequence is approximately two beats long. However, once students understand this pattern, two sequences can be grouped into a longer phrase. If teachers direct students to "keep going to the end of the phrase," there will be less temptation to pause on the

[59] Walter Piston, *Counterpoint*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1947) 34

third beat of every measure. To attain a longer line, students should steer clear of over-emphasizing the goal notes, striving instead for a "soft landing." I feel that the most expressive part of the sequence is the four sixteenth notes leading up to the goal note, because they contain increasingly larger intervals as well as the highest note of the phrase. Students will need to listen carefully as they play the 32nd notes to make sure these do not overshadow the rest of the sequence. They can practice making a preparatory gesture that will allow them to "sneak" into the beginning of the phrase.

HIGHER-LEVEL PATTERNS

Strong and weak

When interpreting larger rhythmic groups, it is important to keep in mind that segments should never sound exactly alike. Some units should be thought of as more *strong* (S) and others more *weak* (W). It should be noted that while these terms are sometimes associated with *loud* and *soft*, this is not always the case. As applied here, *strong* refers to units that merit highlighting in some way, and *weak* denotes units that should support stronger components. A similar principle applies to the terms *accented* and *unaccented*. Representing the difference between *strong* and *weak* often requires very subtle adjustment, such as a tiny shift in timing or color.

An example of rhythmic grouping[60]

Cooper defines rhythm as the "way in which one or more unaccented beats are grouped in relation to an accented one."[61] At the primary level of rhythm, the placement of the barline determines what is naturally accented (strong) and what is unaccented (weak). Within subdivided beats, the strength or weakness of each subdivided note is based on its proximity to

[60] Source for this section: Thurmond, *Note grouping*, Ch. 2
[61] Cooper, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, 6

the beat. Grouping rhythms together allows listeners to grasp the progressive development of patterns. The following example, taken from the first two measures of Bach's *Gavotte* (previously shown in fig. 3.8), illustrates three levels of rhythmic grouping. The primary level is based on the smallest unit of rhythm, the eighth note. As shown, there are seven strong "focal points," emphasizing the movement from note to note (fig. 3.12a). At the middle level, notes are grouped by quarter note, allowing the listener to perceive Bach's momentum-enhancing rhythmic device (short-short-long) (fig. 3.12b). The higher level features notes grouped by half note, with two apparent strong beats. With fewer stopping points, listeners will hear a longer rhythmic phrase instead of focusing on individual rhythms. Undoubtedly, Bach had this in mind when indicating an *alla breve* time signature. Furthermore, performers can choose to de-emphasize one of the strong points in favor of the other one. For example, the figure shows how the passage can be interpreted as a series of three internal impulses culminating in an end-accented phrase (fig. 3.12c). This is just one of many possible interpretations. Nonetheless, these examples illustrate how rhythmic grouping can be used to draw attention to the longer, evolving structure of a piece.

Fig. 3.12a

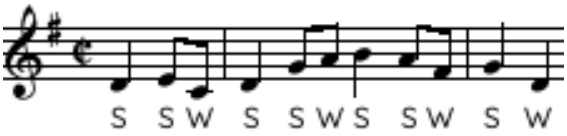


Fig. 3.12b

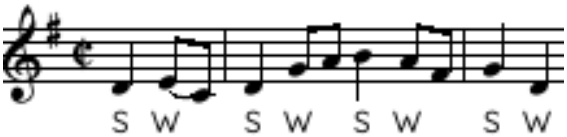
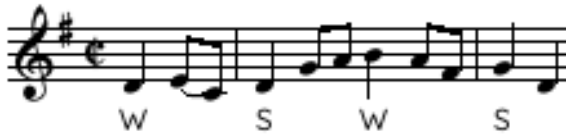


Fig. 3.12c



Case Study: Candice, 14 - Schubert Impromptu op. 90 no. 2

Advanced students are normally assigned perpetual-motion etudes to develop finger dexterity and speed. One of the challenges of teaching these kinds of pieces is that they are filled with non-stop rhythm, but if played the wrong way, they can sound rather static. When rhythmic figures look identical, students are predisposed to make them sound alike. Lower-level rhythmic patterns must be grouped at a higher level to communicate shape, direction and movement.

Candice possesses agile fingers and a clean technique, although she can be somewhat inhibited when it comes expressing herself musically. She tends to become fixated on accuracy, frequently practicing with a metronome at home even if it has not been assigned. Her teacher is aware of this and is trying to wean her off of her "security blanket."

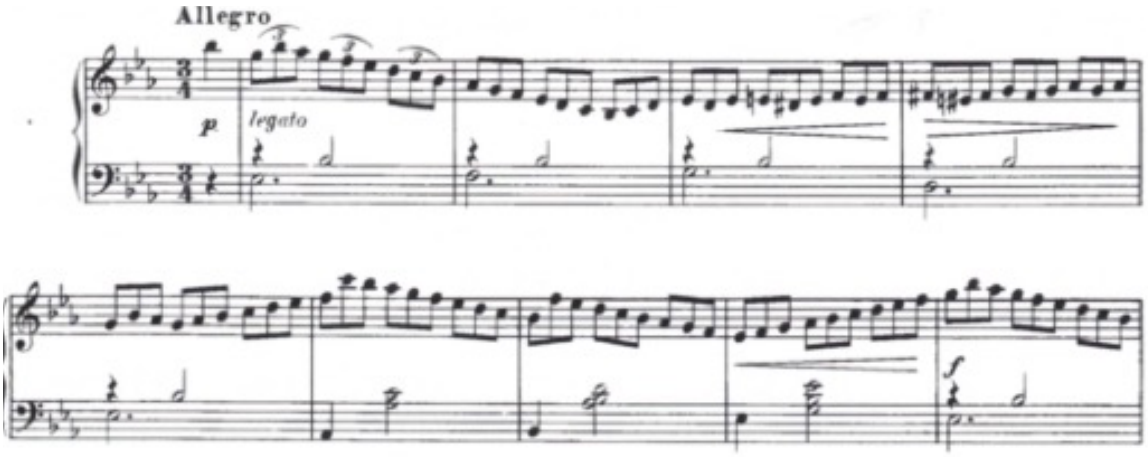
Her teacher is working with her to add musical subtleties that will shape the piece, such as small variations of tone color, dynamics and timing. This must be done at the higher architectonic level of the rhythm structure, as too many details at the measure-level will fail to register or may cause the piece to sound erratic.

Her lower-level rhythms are well-controlled, with clear and even triplets. At the same time, she unconsciously over-articulates the basic pulse hierarchy of each measure (S-w-w). [62] Placing an accent on each downbeat is causing the piece sound a little "stuck in place." Candice's teacher points out that the fast pace of the piece, combined with its short measures, allows the dotted half note to be felt as the basic pulse. Four 3/4 measures can be combined into a larger

[62]Upper and lower case letters are used to indicate the difference between two beats of unequal strength.

hypermeasure (12/4).[63] The teacher draws a bracket over the first four measures and labels them "1-2-3-4" (fig. 3.13a). Individual measures will function as either weak or strong beats. The advantage to grouping notes this way is that, unlike conventional measures, hypermeasures allow for more flexibility regarding the pattern of accents.

Fig. 3.13a



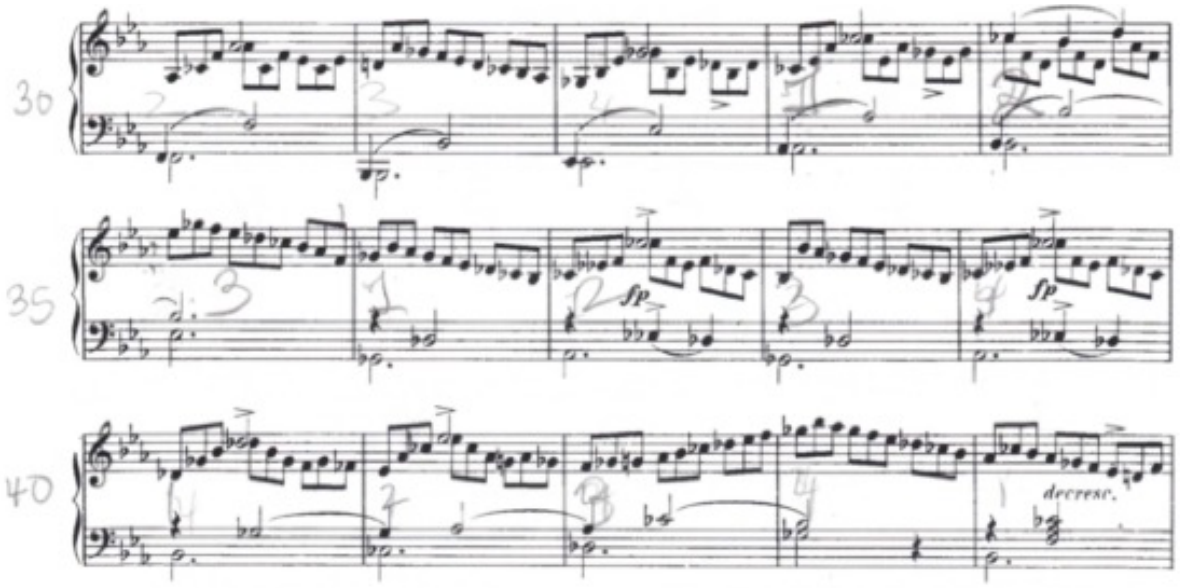
For the first four measures, S-w-s-w seems to suit the curve of the phrase. This pattern happens to conform closely to the typical pulse hierarchy in 4/4, but it is appropriate to use it here. Her teacher also encourages her to experiment with an alternate pattern that recognizes the momentum-creating role of the fourth measure: s-w-w-S. Measures 2-3 are played weaker to draw more attention to m. 4. A somewhat strong beat one will balance out beat four and highlight the overall harmonic direction of the phrase (I-V7).

The melodic and harmonic shape in the next four-measure phrase (mm. 5-8) seems to indicate strength on the second and third measures (w-S-s-w). Conversely, it might be effective to do the *opposite* of what is expected and lighten only the third measure: S-s-w-S. Candice tries both and prefers the first option.

[63] A measure serving as one beat is sometimes referred to as a *hyperbeat*. *Hypermeasures* result from grouping hyperbeats together. For the purpose of clarity, I will refer to regular measures and beats in this section.

Her teacher has her count aloud ("1-2-3-4"), one measure per beat. Further in the piece, the teacher points out an interesting metric incongruity. Measures 33-35 contain a three-measure phrase grouping, tantamount to a switch to 3/4 (fig. 3.13b). For these, Candice counts "1-2-3." Although the disruption is brief, it foreshadows a return to three-bar units at m. 74, which continue to the end of the section (fig. 3.13c).

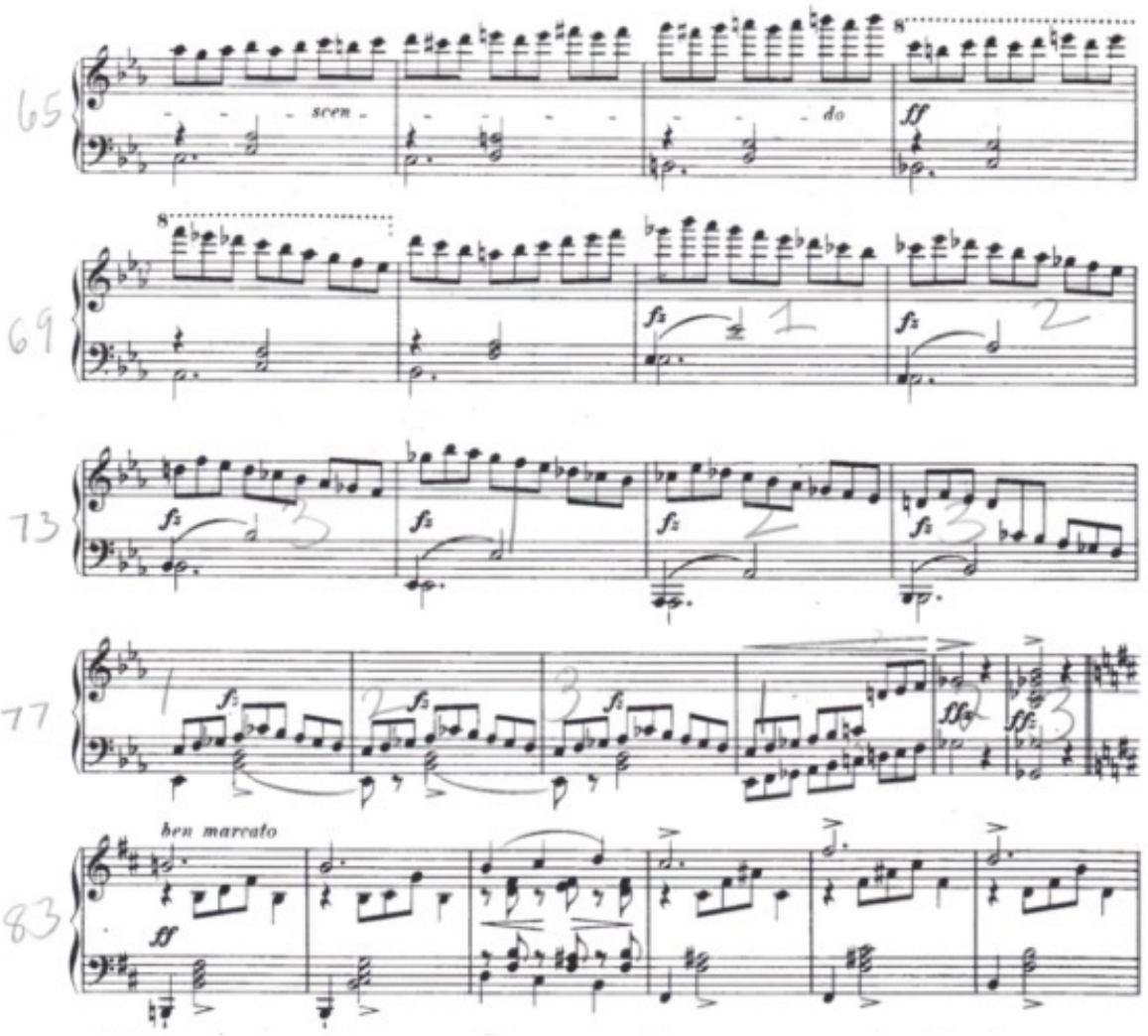
Fig. 3.13b



The physical response to *strong* and *weak* at the phrase level is chiefly internal, and some students must be dissuaded from applying *forte* and *piano* in a formulaic manner. However, if they are aware of structurally important features, they may be compelled to make small adjustments to highlight them. For instance, in m. 6 (the second measure in phrase 2, marked S), Candice puts a tiny hesitation after the first note and plays the following descending notes with a lively "sparkle" in the articulation. In measure 8 (w), she interprets the crescendo as more of a "lean" into the next measure rather than a marked increase in volume.

For the next lesson, the teacher plans to focus on even larger rhythmic groups. The harmonic pattern of the first eight measures indicates a classic question-and-answer phrase structure (I-V7-I-V7; I-IV-V7-I.) They will discuss whether the "question" should be weaker and the "answer" stronger, or vice versa.

Fig. 3.13c



SUMMARY

According to a number of pedagogues, having a secure command of rhythm is necessary to successfully communicate the expressive content of a piece. Students must be able to

articulate rhythm at the primary level, but it is vital that they understand higher-level patterns as well. The visual representation of music can mislead students unless they are aware of some of its detractions. We can maximize the feeling of momentum in pieces by keeping the following in mind:

- Notes with long durations need extra concentration, as they must be mentally subdivided and counted
- Rests are often overlooked but have an important dramatic function
- Measures with many subdivisions and/or overlapping voices will be easier to play if we write in strong beats, subdivisions, and practice small segments while counting out loud
- Look for ways to re-group rhythmic patterns so they move forward into the next measure
- Draw attention to anacruses, which contain more expressive potential than downbeats
- Short-long patterns increase energy from one point to another
- Higher-level rhythm patterns can be articulated by suppressing weaker units in favor of stronger ones
- Hypermetric phrases, consisting of measure-long beats, add more length and direction to shorter rhythmic figures

CHAPTER 4

GEOMETRY

"The same characteristics that please the eye also please the ear."

Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472)

MUSIC AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Common aesthetic concerns

Alberti, quoted above, was an Italian architect, humanist and a principle founder of Renaissance art theory.[64] In an era characterized by "Renaissance men" of many interests and talents, Alberti distinguished himself from his peers by virtue of the sheer breadth of his expertise. This made him uniquely qualified to explore the connections between overlapping fields in the arts.

We frequently use interchangeable terms to describe the visual arts and the performing arts. For instance, a musical phrase has a long *line* and beautifully shaped *curve*, while the elegant proportions of a building exhibit *harmony* and *balance*. While the visual arts and performing arts express meaning through different symbolic systems, they are united by a common concern with *space*. Just as the artist creates a sculpture out of solid materials, so does the composer strive to do the same in an aural medium.

For all their similarities, the "space arts," which include painting, sculpture and architecture, and the "time arts," such as music, drama and dance, have historically been perceived as diametrically opposed in concept and expression. This view dates back to antiquity, when the ancient Greeks classified arts based on whether their beauty was realized in a *state of repose* – juxtaposed in space and perceived at one moment in time- or in a *state of motion* – a

[64] Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Leon Battista Alberti," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leon-Battista-Alberti

succession of elements over time.[65] Yet, in contemporary times, writers and educators have increasingly focused on the correlation between the arts, rather than the chasm separating them. The relationship between music and architecture, in particular, has intrigued writers and educators. Many philosophers, musicians and architects - among them, von Schelling, Zuckerkandl, Scruton, Corbusier and Antoniades - have noted that the sensations evoked by listening to music are similar to those produced by viewing the coaction of architectural forms.[66] The correlation of the two arts is likely what the German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was referring to when he stated, "Architecture is frozen music; music is liquid architecture."

Comprehending musical shape

If we show a student a sculpture and ask them to point out examples of shape, they will instinctively know what to do. They would describe its squiggly lines, tapered point, or rounded edges. However, if we play a piece of music and ask them what shapes they hear, many will need additional instructions or prompting. We are conditioned to think of shape as a primarily visual phenomenon rather than an aural one. Tobias Matthay offers the following explanation to bridge the conceptual gap: music and painting both depend upon *progression*, or movement. "In painting or drawing, the movement is upon the canvas…in music the distinction is, that the movement is upon a time-surface, as it were - instead of upon a canvas."[67]

Understanding how to identify and highlight musical contour is a key component of expressive playing. Performers apply subtle variances of tempo, dynamics and articulation to shape the sound, a complex process that takes many years of study to refine. At the elementary

[65] Dom Andre Mocquereau, *Le Nombre Musical Gregorien: A Study of Gregorian Musical Rhythm* (English translation by Aileen Tone), (Rome: Desclee & Cie, 1908) 29.
[66] Gregory Young, Jerry Bancroft, and Mark Sanderson. "Musi-Tecture: Seeking Useful Correlations between Music and Architecture," *Leonardo Music Journal* 3 (1993) 39–43.
[67] Matthay, *Musical Interpretation*, 32-33

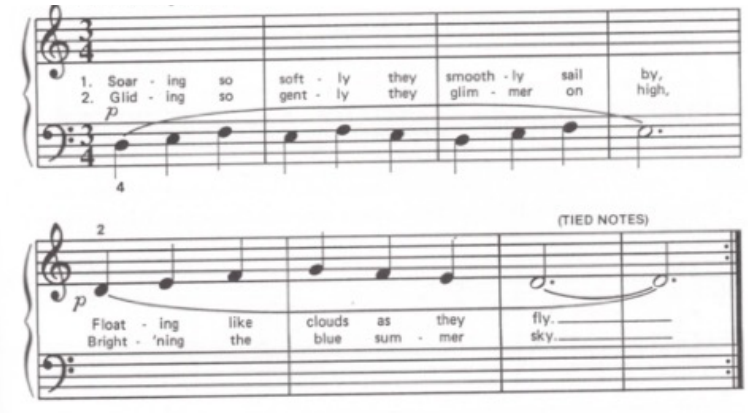
stage, it is best to introduce formal concepts to students in a purely experiential way instead of explaining terminology and principles. Age-appropriate musical experiences may include recognizing basic musical form and learning to read by space and interval. Over time, these concepts will emerge in progressively more complex settings. Students may learn to shape a phrase with rubato or to balance individual voices to create a multidimensional sound.

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Relating "shape" to familiar experiences

We can make the concept of musical shape more tangible to children by using a teaching vocabulary that refers to familiar objects. The contour of this simple piece, (fig. 4.1) evokes the image of balloons floating in the air. The teacher might play the piece for the student and ask leading questions such as: "How do the balloons move in the first line? Do they move differently in the second line?"

Fig. 4.1



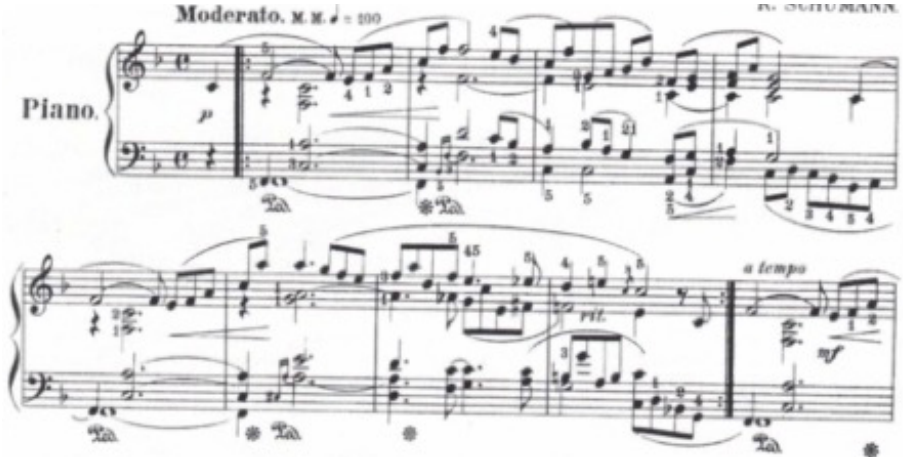
If a student is visually-oriented and describes the way the music looks ("the second line is higher than the first and it goes straight up and down"), the teacher can play the piece again and ask the child to trace the notation with her fingers. Children who enjoy acting may sing the piece while performing a pantomime-dance depicting balloons swaying and bobbing in the

breeze. Some students like using analogies to describe what they hear. If they reply, "the first line sounds like calm waves and the second line sounds more like a mountain," this can serve as a springboard for a discussion about the gentle contour of waves vs. the steep contour of a mountain.

Drawing in the air

Whether performed in a class setting or in a private lesson, exercises that require listening while drawing shapes in the air can be very illuminating for students. In one intermediate class, I played the first four measures of Schumann's *Traumerei* (fig 4.2a) for students as they drew shapes in the air that matched what they heard. While there was some individual variation, most of the drawings resembled the slurs that outline the shape of the phrase.

Fig. 4.2a



I told them that Schumann had "pre-programmed" this shape into the sound, played the passage again, and invited them to describe how he did it. Students correctly observed that the focal point coincided with the highest note in the phrase (F). I pointed out the same note in measure 3 and asked them why the first F was the highlight, not the second. This led to a discussion of the other structural features that contributed to the shape of the phrase. The first F is a half note that falls on a strong beat, while the second is an eighth note that occurs on the

weaker half of the beat. Furthermore, Schumann highlights the first F with a crescendo and a rolled chord that represents an initial move away from the tonic.

Form

An easy way to help children grasp the structural properties of music is teaching them to recognize form in their own pieces. Even very young children can learn to look for *similarity* and *contrast* between groups of notes. Teachers might point to a line of music in their book and ask, "are these notes the same, almost the same, or different than the last set of notes?" Further down the line, this question may evolve into "Does this piece have a binary or ternary form?" or "How are these phrases different? How are they alike?"[68] Ideally, when these same students are older, they will be able to identify motives and sequences using the same line of reasoning.

Play-based activities can be a fun and rewarding way for children to learn about musical form. The teacher might play a ternary or binary-form piece and instruct students to stand when they hear the "A" section and sit when they hear the "B" section. Variations on this game can include alternating movements such as walking and hopping.

The challenges of reading notation

Each page of music contains a significant amount of information that must be processed quickly. A skilled reader keeps his eyes on the music and scans ahead to allow his brain enough time to process the information and send a message to the body. The way we approach pitch-reading with elementary students is crucial to developing their ability to read more complex notation.

Essentially, a score is an abstract representation of a composition, including its geometrical attributes. The five-line staff can be thought of as a grid upon which the composer

[68] These questions are adapted from Timothy Shafer, "Form your teaching to the teaching of form," *American Music Teacher* 53, no. 6 (2004) 18–20.

plots the rhythmic, harmonic and melodic contours of a piece. Pianists read music by scanning horizontally and vertically while their hands move across the keyboard. In this respect, reading musical notation is comparable to reading a map as we walk around from point to point.

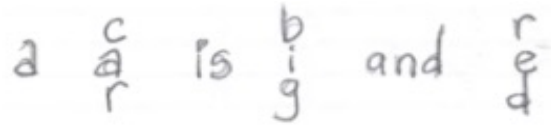
Most elementary students find reading music more difficult than reading lines of text in a book. One obvious reason for this is that reading text requires no concurrent gesture, allowing them to focus on the meaning of the words. The challenge of playing while reading is amplified by the fact that the hands and eyes must sometimes travel in different directions. For example, our eyes travel to the right when we read descending notes, even as our hands move to the left.

Reading from bottom-to-top

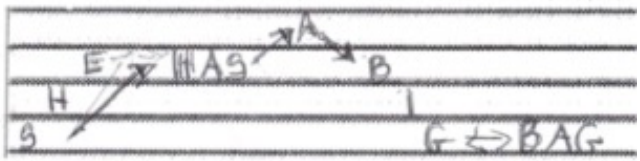
The aspects of reading that will require the most focus are those that are unique to musical notation. For instance, elementary-age children will already have been exposed to the idea of reading horizontally from left to right. However, their experiences with "up" and "down" are likely to be purely spatial: up the ladder, down the slide, etc. Therefore, they are likely to need extra guidance with reading vertically and diagonally.

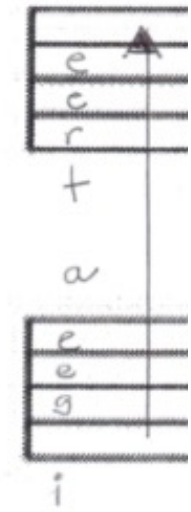
Before introducing children to staff notation, teachers can assign reading exercises that allow them to experience the spatial attributes of notation away from the keyboard. The following reading drills encourage students to keep their eyes tracking both horizontally and vertically (fig. 4.3).[69]

Fig. 4.3



[69] Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching: Volume I*, 130





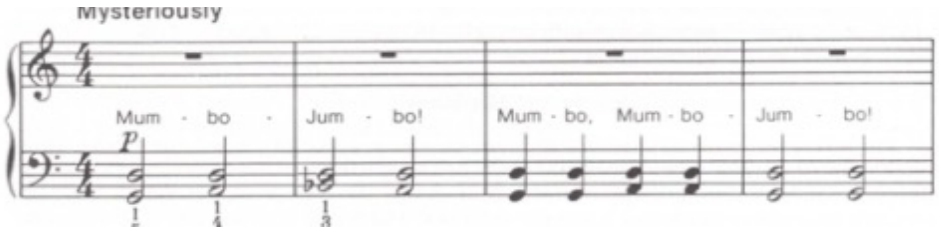
Reading by interval

Like a map, music notation indicates both the direction and distance between points. When students are ready to read on the staff, teachers should prioritize reading by interval rather than pitch names. The advantages of this should be clear to anyone who has ever had a student come to a lesson with all of the note names and every finger written into their music. When students rely on pitch names or finger numbers, they must look up at the writing above the staff, then down at the staff to check whether a note is in the treble clef or bass clef, or if it is lower or higher than the previous note. This multi-step process slows things down considerably. If students learn to read by contour instead, they will be able to gauge the spatial relationship between notes at a glance, allowing them enough time to react. This is not to suggest that students should delay learning note names, but these can be learned in an associative way. The method books I use introduce a few "landmark" notes to students at the outset: treble G, middle

C and bass F. When students are unsure of a note name, I have them look for the nearest landmark note and use interval distance to find the note in question.[70]

When children are ready to experience the concept of melodic and harmonic intervals at the piano, there are many pieces in method books that promote the ability to play different intervals consecutively. If students are encouraged to hear intervals as a continuous progression, this will help prevent a physical problem that Camp calls "finger locking." A student who exhibits this issue will freeze his fingers in one position and seem to need an extra mental step to "unlock" them.[71] The intervallic pattern of *Mumbo Jumbo* (fig. 4.4), is easy enough to allow students to memorize the finger shapes and tap them out in a sequence. Reminding them to "change the finger shape in the air" seems to discourage "locking" on the previous shape and helps them flow from one finger position to the next.

Fig. 4.4



BOTTOM-TO-TOP VOICING

Many of us have had the experience of entering a magnificent building and being riveted by the textures, layers, and soaring spaces that seems to engulf us. This is comparable to listening to an orchestra, with its profusion of sound produced by different instruments as their melodic lines melt together to form beautiful harmonies.

[70] I normally discourage students from using mnemonic devices (e.g., Every Good Boy Does Fine) to remember note names. Not only does this practice de-emphasize intervallic relationships, its overuse can lead to much confusion when they must eventually learn the space notes of the treble clef, the line and space notes of the bass clef, the order of sharps and flats, etc.
[71] Camp, *Teaching* Piano, 69

Although the piano cannot rival an orchestra in its coloristic abilities, it is able to produce more textural variety than nearly any other instrument. Josef Hoffman went as far as to say that "the piano is the only single instrument capable of conveying the complete entity of a composition." As he explains, skilled pianists are able to simultaneously render the melody, bass, harmony and counterpoint of a piece, which grants them a greater freedom of expression than other instrumentalists.[72] While musicians could very well debate the finer points of this statement, it is true that composers take advantage of the piano's capabilities by writing rich, interesting textures. Pianists, in turn, highlight these by carefully balancing and voicing individual "layers" of sound.

Although the terms *balance* and *voicing* are sometimes used interchangeably, many make subtle distinctions between the two. Balance generally refers to the difference between wide swaths of sound - such as "balance the melody against the harmony" - while voicing describes the distinction between specific voices or notes.[73]

When teachers talk about balance or voicing, students normally assume we are referring to making a broad contrast between the right hand and the left hand. Many well-meaning students will focus on "bringing out the melody," to the exclusion of other voices. This can result in a top-heavy sound, with a bass line that sounds thin and insignificant. If the left hand contains an inner voice, it can become mixed in with other voices, producing a murky effect. Projecting the main melody is a vital first step, but once students can consistently do this, teachers should direct their attention to the lower-tier voices.

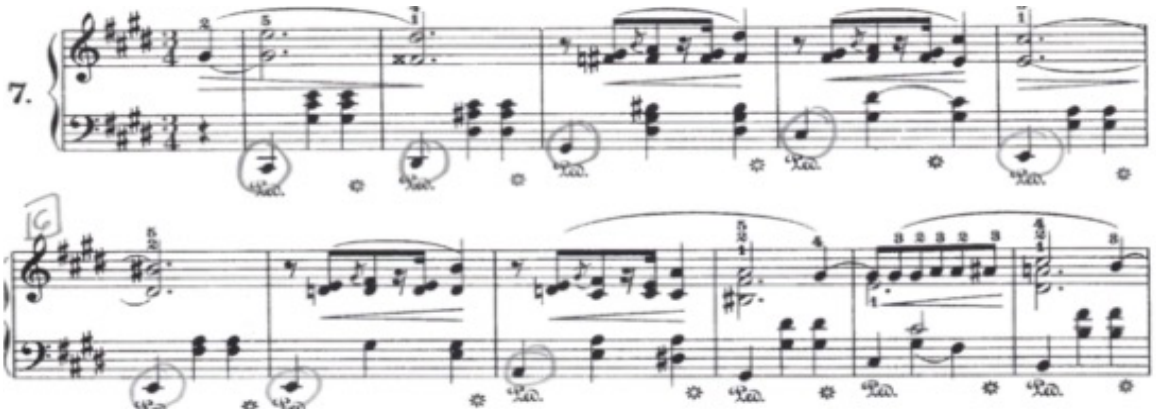
Nurturing the bass melody

[72] Josef Hoffman, *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered*, (New York: Theodore Presser Co., 1920) 5-6
[73] Jacobson, *Developing Piano Performance Vol. 2*, 329

Just as students should learn to read music bottom-to-top, so does it benefit them to discover the layers of a composition by looking for the bass voice first. The lowest voice serves as the foundation of the piece, tasked with performing several functions at once. It provides harmonic information, clarifies the direction of the phrase, and acts as a counterweight to the melody in the right hand. When students learns to identify the bass melody, they will be more likely to shape it through nuances of volume, tone and timing.

Sometimes, the bass melody is relatively easy to find if we know where to look. Chopin's op. 64 no. 2 contains a traditional waltz accompaniment with an obvious vertical division of voices in the left hand (fig. 4.5). The lowest notes (circled), found on the downbeat of every measure, form the bass melody, while the chords that fall on beats two and three comprise the accompaniment. The student can practice the lowest voice as if it were the only melody in the piece, first using whatever fingering is convenient to connect the notes. Then, she can play the melody using only the fifth finger of the left hand, striving to make the contour match the first version.

Fig. 4.5



One of the most accessible ways for students to find bass melodies on their own is to look for Alberti bass patterns. These consist of broken chords, grouped into sets of four eighth notes, and usually presented in this order: lowest, highest, middle, highest. Typically, cobbling

together the first notes of each group will reveal a bass melody. Composers will sometimes outline bass melodies for us by writing double-stems or stems going in the opposite direction. (fig. 4.6: Mozart sonata K 332, Adagio). In other cases, the bass melody may not be delineated, or the order of the Alberti bass notes may be different, but the same principle applies (fig. 4.7: Mozart K 333, Allegro). The inner notes of Alberti bass patterns function to clarify the harmony and to add rhythmic texture, but should be otherwise subordinate to the first note of the measure.

Fig. 4.6

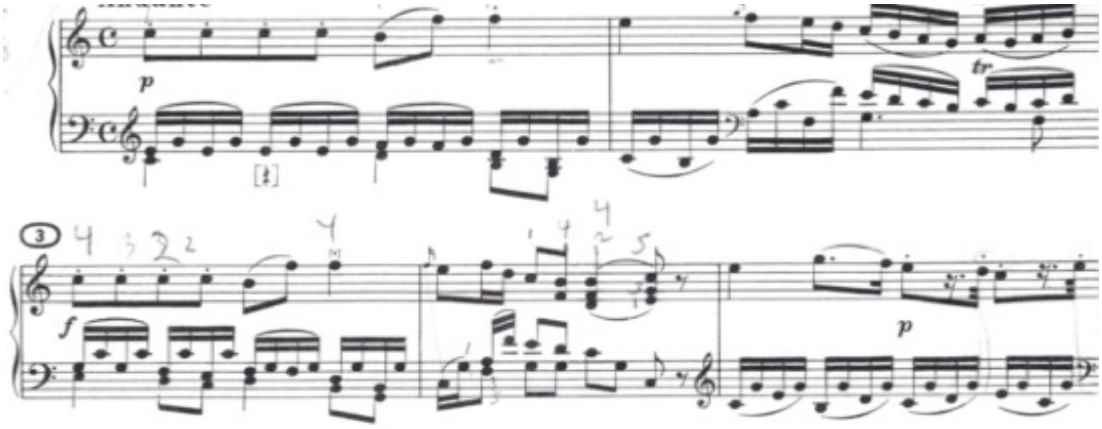
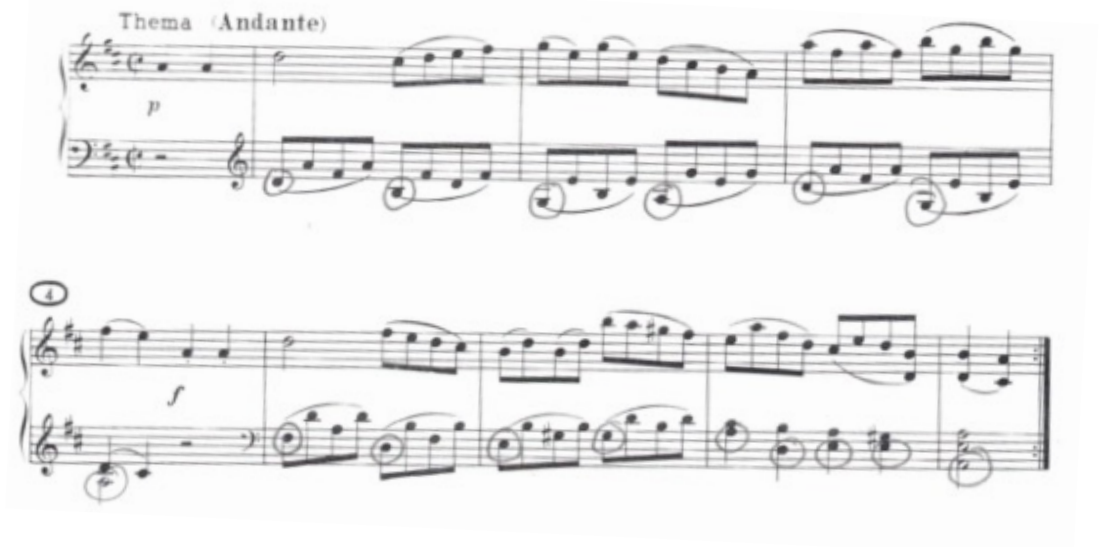


Fig. 4.7



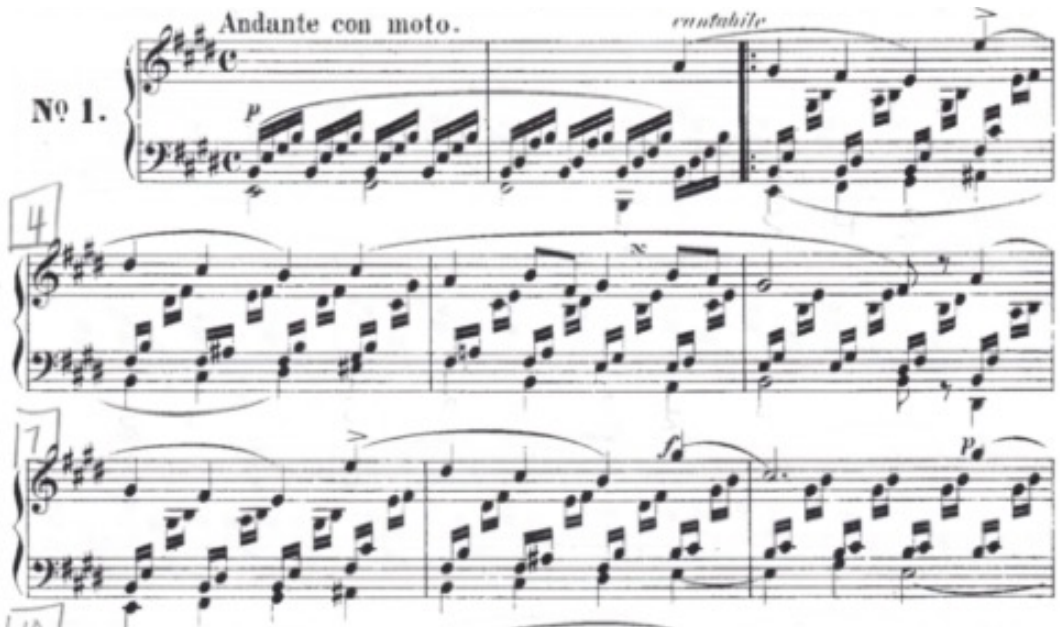
Repertoire for voicing and shaping

Advancing students will benefit from studying pieces with a three-part texture: melody, bass and an accompaniment that may be divided between both hands. Mendelssohn's 48-piece collection, *Songs without Words*, offers a wide selection of such pieces, allowing teachers to select the one that most closely aligns with a student's current level and pedagogical needs. All of the pieces are at the late intermediate-to-advanced level and feature various textural settings. The most straightforward pieces have a song-like texture, with easily-identified melodies in the treble and bass, and an accompanying middle voice. More complex pieces feature a chordal setting or duet-like melodies along with bass and accompaniment. The most advanced pieces are set at a fast tempo, with melodies that are woven into a perpetual-motion accompaniment of 16th notes.

Op. 19 no. 1 features a soprano melody, a bass countermelody, and an inner-tier accompaniment that is shared by both hands (fig. 4.8). Students may practice voices separately or in the following combinations:

- Upper melody and bass melody together, no accompaniment
- Only right hand (melody and accompaniment)
- Only left hand (bass melody and accompaniment)
- Right hand as written, left hand bass melody only
- Right hand as written, left hand accompaniment only
- Left hand as written, right hand melody only
- Left hand as written, right hand accompaniment only
- Hands together as written

Fig. 4.8



Shaping voices using dynamics

Mendelssohn indicates *piano* for the first section of op. 19 no. 1. There are a few crescendos and decrescendos sprinkled over the melody, but little else to aid a performer in dynamic shaping. The teacher's challenge is helping students vary the level of volume to shape a phrase while still producing an overall impression of *piano*.

Writing additional crescendos and decrescendos into the score is certainly a viable option. However, many students will benefit from instructions that help them to determine exactly how loud or soft to play. Teachers can use a mathematical formula in which specific dynamics are assigned numerical values:

pp = 1, *p* = 2, *mp* = 3, *mf* = 4, *f* = 5, *ff* = 6.[74]

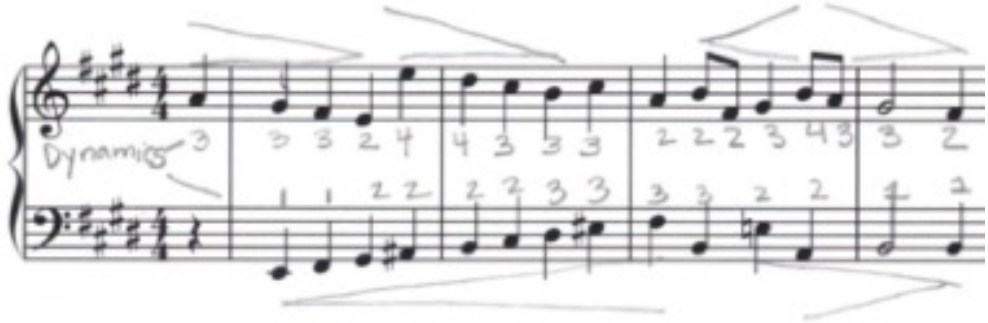
If we add the numbers that correspond to the dynamics of a phrase, the sum can be divided by the number of notes in the phrase to reveal its overall dynamic level. For example,

[74] Source for numbering system: Jacobson, *Developing Piano Performance vol. 2*, 304

the dynamic value of measures 1-6 is “2” (*piano*). However, this is just an average, meaning individual voices may be played louder or softer. The main melody can be assigned a “3,” the bass melody “2” and the inner voice “1.”

Furthermore, each voice can be shaped individually using numbers (fig. 4.9). The numerical value of the treble melody is 50/17, or 2.94. The number that corresponds to the bass melody is 48/14, or 2. While this system may not suffice for advanced students working on intricate nuances of phrasing, it will still provide most with a solid template for varying the sound level when there are few dynamic marks.

Fig. 4.9



The melody of the first phrase consists of three semi-phases of gradually increasing intensity, culminating in a half cadence, while the bass line features a steady stepwise ascent. By combining them we see that the melody and the bass generally move in contrary motion, at first drawn to each other like a magnet, then driven in the opposite direction. Shaping the individual voices serves to highlight this relationship.

RUBATO

Rubato is one of the most powerful tools available to musicians for the shaping of musical lines and phrases. Composers will sometimes indicate *ritardando* or *accelerando* in a

score, but rarely will they designate the subtle deviations from the steady pulse that characterize an effective rubato.

An oft-quoted "golden rule" about rubato nevertheless bears repeating: rubato can bend a structure, but it should never break it. Students seem to sense that rubato is needed for expressive playing, but sometimes apply it *a la caprice*, speeding up or slowing down as the spirit moves them. Many teachers have observed that students unconsciously change their tempo in response to shifting moods in the music. For instance, students may rush as the music grows louder or more intense. Conversely, the tempo may suddenly begin to drag when the character of the music becomes introspective. These common misapplications of rubato can create a wobbly, "seasick" sound that throws listeners off balance. As Lampl puts it, "The listener should always be 'part of the action,' never feel left out, or even out of step."[75] Our goal is to foster a rubato that enhances the character of a piece without distracting from it.

It is not feasible to address here all of the nuances of rubato as an artistic tool. Furthermore, setting up strict guidelines and rules regarding its use would be self-limiting. It is possible, however, to make some general observations that may give teachers insight into the nature of rubato and its pedagogical implications.

Case Study: Todd, 13

Chopin Prelude op. 28 no. 15 ("Raindrop")

A misconception about romantic-era rubato is that it is played mainly by the right hand, against a steady and unyielding accompaniment in the left hand. This can sometimes work, but should be the exception rather than the rule. In Chopin's "Raindrop" Prelude, the listener hears the same note (A flat/G sharp) in the same register in a continuous rhythm of eighth notes, no

[75] Lampl, *Turning notes into music*, 49

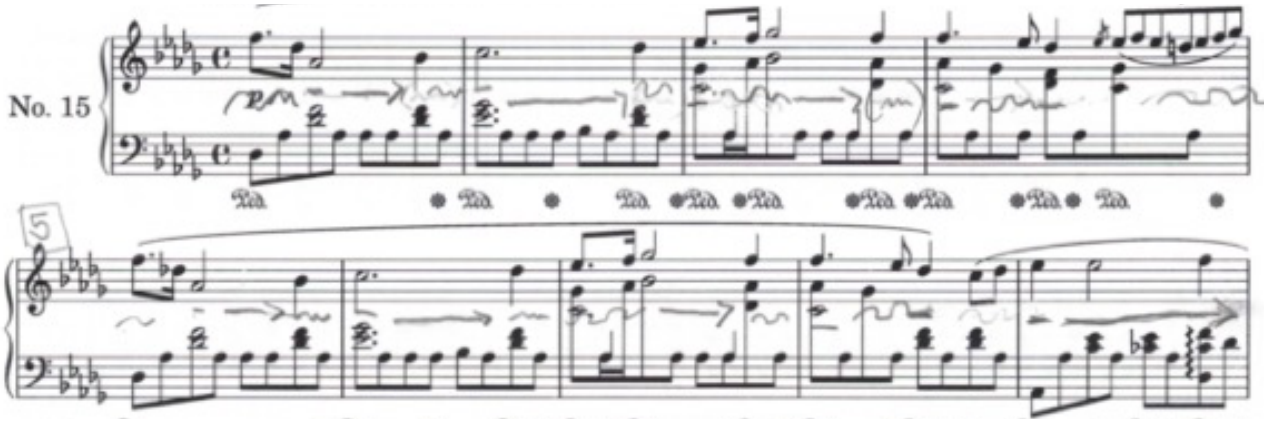
fewer than 450 times. Playing a stationary left-hand rhythm throughout the piece while the right hand melody bends and stretches would be highly inadvisable. The piece requires a performer to imperceptibly adjust the space between eighth notes to produce a convincing rubato.

Todd is highly musical and loves music of the romantic era, particularly dreamy, contemplative pieces. His rubato is sometimes out of proportion, however, and his teacher is working with him to address this. She has selected this piece, in part, because the consistent eighth notes in the left hand can be used as a guide to calculate incremental changes to the beat.

Rubato should sound spontaneous, but requires forethought

It is customary to follow an acceleration with a compensating deceleration and vice versa. However, these must be strategically timed. Most musical resolutions tend to happen on the strong beats of the musical structure. Todd's teacher draws an arrow in his music to indicate a slight forward-movement, and a wavy line to signify the opposite (fig. 4.10).

Fig. 4.10



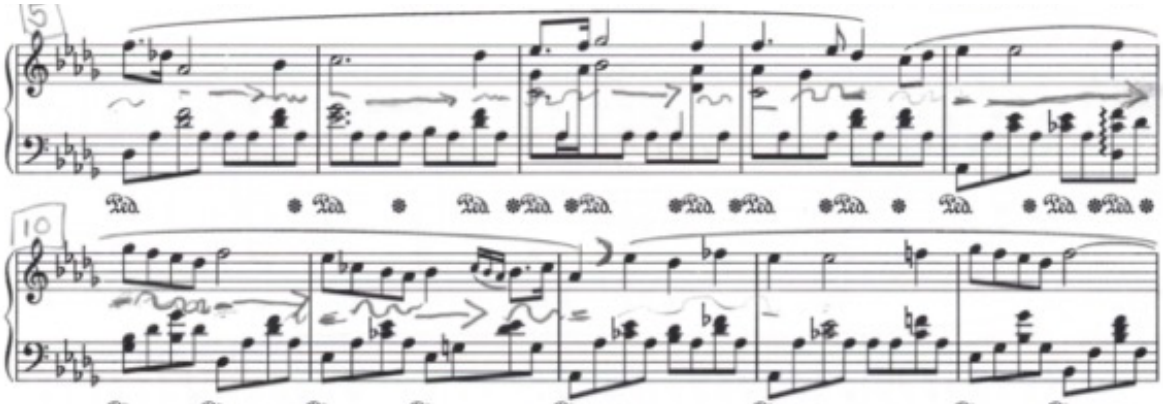
She coaches him to make a subtle ritard at the cadence in measures 3-4. This is paired with a slight acceleration at the beginning of the phrase to keep the tempo from bogging down. At the same time, they must be mindful that the rubato does not impede the larger phrase structure. The second half of the phrase is a near-verbatim repeat of the first half, the only

difference being a cadential embellishment in the fourth measure. She suggests that Todd highlight the progression of the phrase, culminating in measures 7 and 8, by downplaying the arrival point in measure 4 to leave room for a slightly more pronounced ritard at measure 8.

Use rubato to spotlight structurally interesting features

Unusual or interesting musical features sometimes need extra time to give listeners a chance to absorb them. At measure 9, Chopin begins a phrase in A flat major that ends with a surprising little dip into A flat minor. Todd's teacher counts and conducts to help him keep the tempo moving through measure 9 to leave room for an imperceptible ritardando in m. 10. This is followed by a tiny hesitation before the E flat at the beginning of measure 11 and a ritenuto and the end of the measure (fig. 4.11).

Fig. 4.11



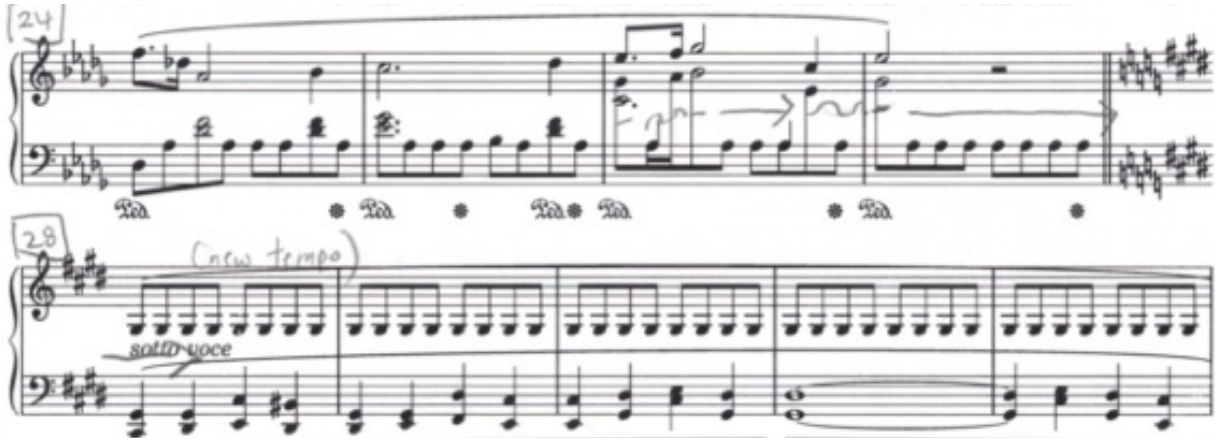
Changes should happen gradually

No one likes the feeling of riding in a car with a driver who suddenly accelerates or slams on the brakes. Making incremental changes to the tempo will help preserve the overall shape of the piece. To illustrate this point to Todd, his teacher hands him a rubber band and asks him to stretch and release it in proportion to her tempo fluctuations as she plays. First, she performs the passage using a well-considered rubato that allows him to slowly stretch and contract the rubber band using smooth motions. Then, she repeats the passage, speeding up and

slowing down arbitrarily, which causes him to manipulate the rubber band in a similarly erratic fashion.

Chopin does not indicate a different tempo at m. 28, but it is customary to play the middle section slightly faster to reflect the change of mood and a shift in emphasis from the melody to the harmony (fig. 4.12). The teacher has Todd make a ritardando in m. 26, telling him it must be "carried through" to the end of the phrase on the downbeat of the next measure. He practices accelerating the eighth notes in the left hand of m. 27 very gradually through the beginning of m. 28, reaching the new tempo by the third beat of the measure.

Fig. 4.12



Rhythmic patterns must be distinguishable

Todd is unclear about what to do at measures 71-75, where the rhythmic construction of the passage presents an obstacle to making an effective rubato (fig. 4.13). After indicating *smorzando* in m. 71, followed by *slentando* in m. 73, Chopin writes a two-measure figure of unaccompanied quarter notes. It is vital that listeners are able to perceive that these notes are of equal value. Too much rubato here will cause rhythmic confusion, while too little might make the brief passage sound inconsequential.

Todd asks his teacher which is slower: *smorzando*, which means "to die away," or *slentando*, which indicates a gradual decrease in tempo. His teacher suggests that the markings have more to do with character than precise metronome settings. To help Todd internalize the push-pull feeling of the decuplet in the measure marked *smorzando*, she asks him to imagine the feeling of being on a swing. She says, "if someone pushes the swing, you go up into the air. What happens when you are at the highest point?" Todd answers that there is a moment when the swing seems to hang in the air, and then gravity takes over. They utilize this principle for measures 71-72 (fig. 4.14).

Fig. 4.13

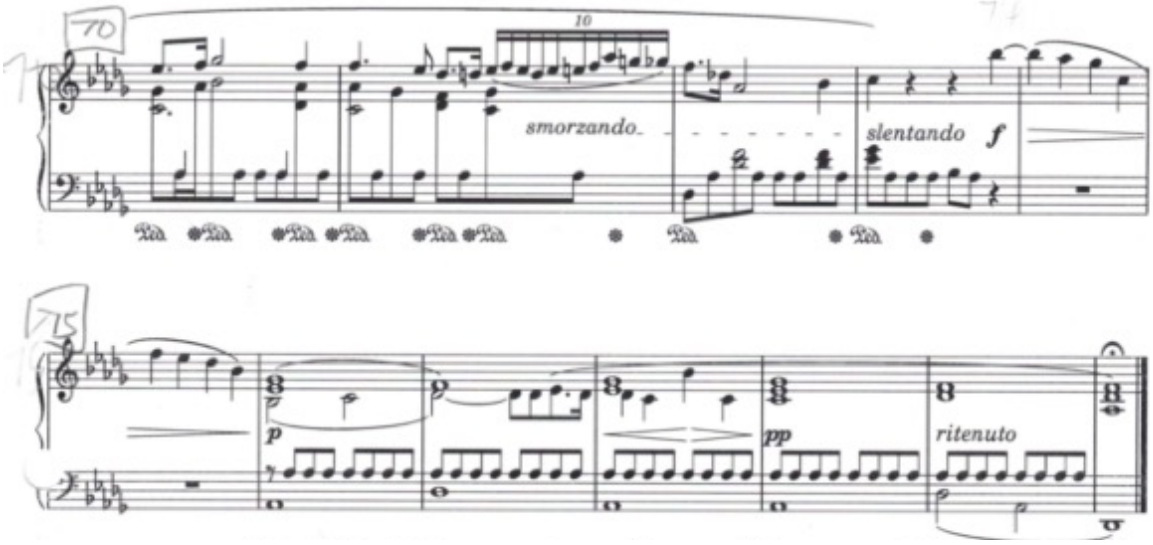
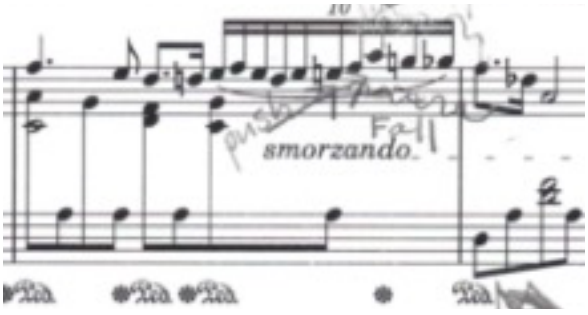
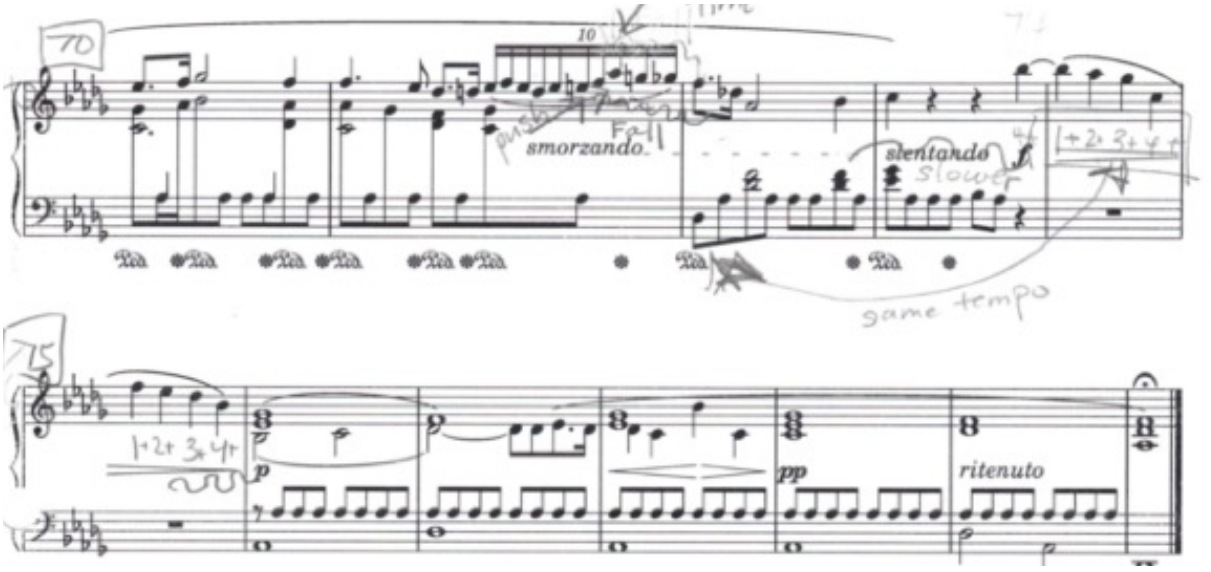


Fig. 4.14



There can be a more pronounced ritardando in measure 73. The teacher has Todd count subdivisions aloud (one-and-two-and) and gradually increase the space between the notes. For measures 74-75, he counts subdivisions at approximately the same pace as measure 72 without slowing down until the last two notes of measure 75. This preserves the integrity of the rhythm while staying true to the spirit of Chopin's expressive markings (fig. 4.15).

Fig. 4.15



Proceed with caution when rubato is composed into the piece

The appearance of longer note values, a slower rate of harmonic change, or a less active melody can create the impression that music is slowing down, even if the tempo does not change. "Composed-in" ritardando can be found anywhere in a piece, but often occurs near the end. The piece concludes with a series of V-I cadences, one chord per measure. The slow-moving harmony is paired with a melody that consists of rising and falling cadential figures. If the performer continues the ritardando from measure 75 through the remaining six bars of the piece, the music will slow down to an interminable crawl.

To prevent this, Todd's teacher directs him to begin measure 76 *a tempo*. They agree that he can make a slight expressive hesitation at the swell of the melody in m. 78, as long as it is promptly followed by a return to tempo. The most significant ritenuto is reserved for the final two measures. Todd counts measures 80-81 aloud, gradually increasing the time between counts. His teacher paints a mental picture to help him make a natural-sounding ritard: an airplane taxiing to the gate after landing, or a bike rolling to a stop as he applies the brakes.

SUMMARY

Music is generally viewed as an abstract art form, possessing ephemeral qualities that cannot be seen or felt. Because of this, the concept of "shape" in music can be elusive to many students. At the beginning stages of instruction, teachers can help students recognize the presence of structure and shape in their music by incorporating these concepts into "skills-based" activities like reading. As they mature, they can be taught to look for opportunities to enhance contour in their pieces. Teachers can help students navigate the increasing structural complexities of their pieces if they:

- Ask students to describe, act out, or draw the shapes they hear in elementary pieces
- Conduct classroom activities that allow children to explore how composers write shape into their music
- Show students how to distinguish between contrasting sections of a piece
- Acquaint students with basic musical form
- Emphasize intervallic relationships between notes and scanning from bottom-to-top when designing a reading sequence
- Remember that bass voices are regularly overlooked but add dimension and stability to the musical structure of a piece

- Show students how to hunt for bass melodies in waltz accompaniment figures and Alberti bass patterns
- Assign pieces with three-part textures to develop the ability to shape and balance multiple voices
- Consider using a numbers-based formula to help students shape a phrase with dynamics
- Foster a strong instinct for rubato, determined by a passage's relationship to the phrase and to the larger contour of the piece
- Enable students to perform a convincing rubato by using mental imagery, movement and counting-based strategies

CHAPTER 5: CONTEXT

"The interpreter has two tasks which are inseparable. He must absorb the score as it is, and he must try to perceive the composer's *idea* behind it."

-Konrad Wolff, *Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music*[76]

MUSICAL INTERPRETATION

The motivation to work at the piano is sustained by the desire for self-expression. One of the most compelling aspects of music performance is that there are an infinite number of ways to interpret a piece, allowing us to give voice to our own thoughts, feelings and preferences while playing the music of a great composer.

Yet, if it is true that there is no one "correct" way to play a piece, why do some interpretations seem better than others? For instance, famous artists will play the same piece very differently, yet most people would agree that each version is quite convincing, in its own way. The apparent spontaneity which characterizes such performances can lead us to believe that musical interpretation is a talent that only a lucky few possess. Traditional methods of instruction have generally subscribed to this view. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many teachers felt that the "secrets" of musical interpretation could only be learned from "master artists," who taught their pupils to imitate what they played. If all went well, these pupils would go on to become master teachers who demonstrated for their students, and so on.[77]

Such methods might be able to coax a good performance out of a student, but they do not benefit the student in the long run. Teachers who rely on demonstration/imitation as a primary pedagogical strategy may inadvertently lead students to doubt their own capacity to make interpretive decisions. This belief, unfortunately, can manifest itself in a number of unmusical

[76] Wolff, *Schnabel's Interpretation*, 73
[77] Camp, *Developing Piano* Performance, 43

ways. For example, students who are insecure about their musical judgement may avoid taking risks. Their playing might be characterized by a strict adherence to the beat and a dynamic range of *mezzo piano* to *mezzo forte*. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the students who reason that if one is not sure when to be expressive, is better to err on the side of being expressive all the time. These students may be prone to over-shaped phrases and exaggerated rubato.

In her classic pedagogy book, *On Teaching the Piano*, Hetty Bolton writes that good musical interpretation involves understanding music's many elements, including rhythm, phrasing, structure, texture and tone.[78] Students will gain confidence if they understand that many of the "secrets" of music interpretation are accessible to those who know where to look.

The score

At first glance, a score appears to be sufficiently detailed. The musical notation system, refined over centuries of performance and practice, uses an enormous set of symbols that specify not only which notes to play, but also their duration, volume, articulation, tempo, expressive characteristics, and more. As musicians know, however, notation alone cannot inform the finer details of our performance. The composer is limited in what he is able to communicate, because musical notation is sound translated into a visual medium, and in the process of translation, some things are necessarily lost.[79]

Note pitches and durations are the only values in a score that are truly fixed and not subject to variation.[80] Virtually every other mark in the score is an *approximate* value, the exact level of which must be determined by the performer. This leaves us with a vast amount of "gray area" to negotiate. How loud is *forte*, how short *staccato* and how fast *Allegro*? The short

[78] Camp, *Developing Piano Performance*, 21; Hetty Bolton, *On Teaching the Piano* (London: Novello, 1954) 45-46
[79] Wolff, *Schnabel's Interpretation*, 73
[80] This statement applies only to absolute rhythmic values and does not pertain to variances of tempo and pulse, which may be subject to a performer's adjustments.

answer: it *depends*. The fine line that separates appropriate choices from "unmusical" ones is determined by musical context.

The word "context" is derived from its Latin source, "contexere," which means "to weave or join together." Musical context informs us whether our interpretive choices will fit in with the existing fabric of the piece, or whether they will be out of place. Unlike personal tastes, which are subjective, musical context is based on objective criteria contained within the score. Once an appropriate range of choices has been determined, a performer is at liberty to select an option that suits her personality and tastes. Students of all ages can become acquainted with the concept of musical context, as long as the information is scaled to suit their level of experience.

FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

"Basic" vs. "expressive" speech

Even as young students are learning the rudiments of technique and reading, teachers can make them aware of some of the basic tenets of musical interpretation. For example, they should understand that there is a difference between a performance that is merely mistake-free and one that is *interesting*. This is best demonstrated to children through an analogy to speech. We might read them a passage such as the following, taken from *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls:

"The great, dark trees of the Big Woods stood all around the house, and beyond them were other trees and beyond them were more trees. As far as a man could go to the north in a day, or a week, or a whole month, there was nothing but woods. There were no houses. There were no roads. There were no people. There were only trees and the wild animals who had their homes among them."

First, we read the words in a bland, monotonal voice. Then, we read the passage a second time, varying the pitch and volume of our voice, slowing down or pausing for dramatic emphasis. The first version will be technically "correct," but it will not sound "expressive" because it conveys only the basic meaning of the words and little else. The second version will sound like a marked improvement, as our vocal inflections allow the listener to hear what the author might be *implying* with her words, whether it is a feeling of loneliness, peace, wonder, stillness or unease.

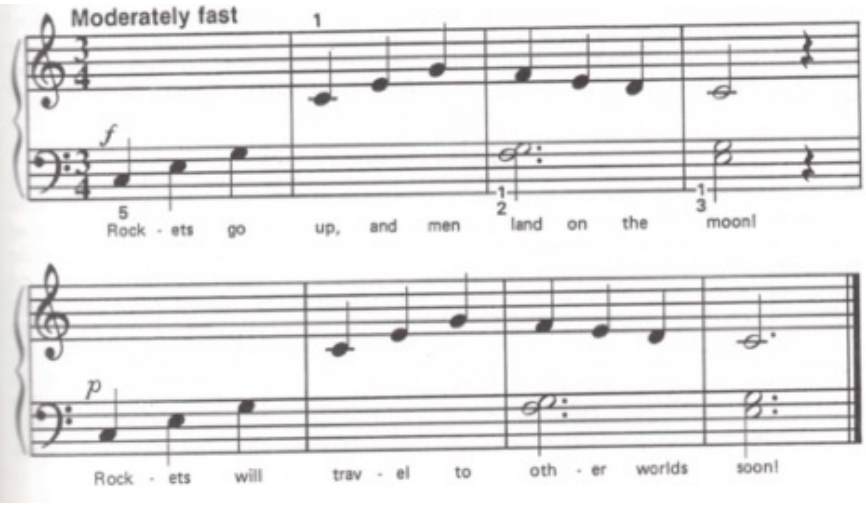
Once we have illustrated the difference between a basic and an expressive performance, we can let students experiment with changing the variables of their speech to suit different contexts. I sometimes use an exercise that involves students "acting" from a script, which many seem to enjoy. I give them a neutral sentence such as "I am going to *school* today," and ask them to read it under different imaginary circumstances. If I tell them that instead of classes today, there will be a school-wide party with lots of cake and games, they might raise the pitch of their voices, use a bright tone, or speak quickly to telegraph excitement: ("I am going to school today!") On the other hand, if I tell them that today there will be a test that they have forgotten to study for, they may lower the volume and pitch of their voice, speaking slowly to portray dread, or, perhaps, resignation: ("I am going…to…school today...")

Why did the composer write that?

Young children, who are accustomed to following instructions in school, sports and at home, will often dutifully follow dynamics without giving them much thought. This can result in wispy pianos or harsh, unmusical fortes. Teachers can encourage children to consider the purpose of a particular mark by initiating a discussion about why the composer chose to use it.

In the following piece, we can point to the *piano* in the second line and ask, "why should we play softly here?" (fig. 5.1). If the student replies "Because it says *piano*!" we can ask a follow-up question: "But *why* does it say *piano*?" Now the student will be required to engage his analytical mind. With strategic leading questions from his teacher, he will conclude that the second line is an echo of the first. Therefore, line one must be played loudly enough to produce an echo, but he must take care to produce a clear tone that will sound pleasant when it comes "bouncing back." Line two must be played softly enough to sound like an echo, but not so softly that it sounds like a whisper.

Fig. 5.1



FOR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

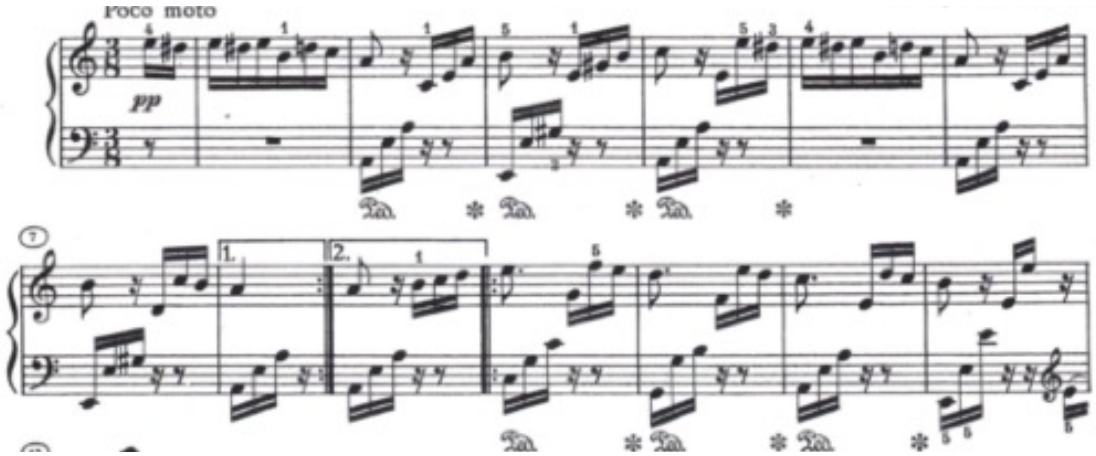
Musical grammar

In speech, there are fundamental rules that we must observe if we wish to be understood. For example, if someone says, "I live in Washington," he can vary his vocal pitch and speed, but he cannot change the pronunciation of WA'-shing-ton to Wa-SHING'-ton. Similarly, the laws of "musical grammar" stipulate that there is a pattern of accents that should remain constant. As

with speech, the difference between accented and unaccented syllables is very subtle. However, the correct pattern of musical accents can change, depending on several factors.

One of the main determinants for the placement of musical accents is the location of the barline.[81] Either consciously or unconsciously, students will often accent a note that should not receive emphasis. This can cause listeners to misunderstand or "mishear" the music. For example, if a student places a strong accent on the first note of Beethoven's *Fur Elise*, the listener will perceive it as a downbeat rather than an upbeat (fig 5.2).

Fig. 5.2



This sets off a pattern of metric ambiguity. Is the piece in 3/4 or 4/4? The right hand is unaccompanied, so either meter will sound feasible at first, but listeners will be confused by measure 2. If they hear the piece in 3/4, the left hand will seem to enter at the wrong time. If they have been assuming the piece is in 4/4, the rhythm of the right hand in measure 2 will seem "off."

I have found that students who do not observe metric patterns will exhibit other problems related to this issue, such as not being able to coordinate left hand entrances, playing the wrong

[81] Lampl, *Turing Notes into Music*, 26-27

harmony, or putting extra beats in some measures. Once they comprehend that they must clarify the meter, these problems usually resolve themselves.

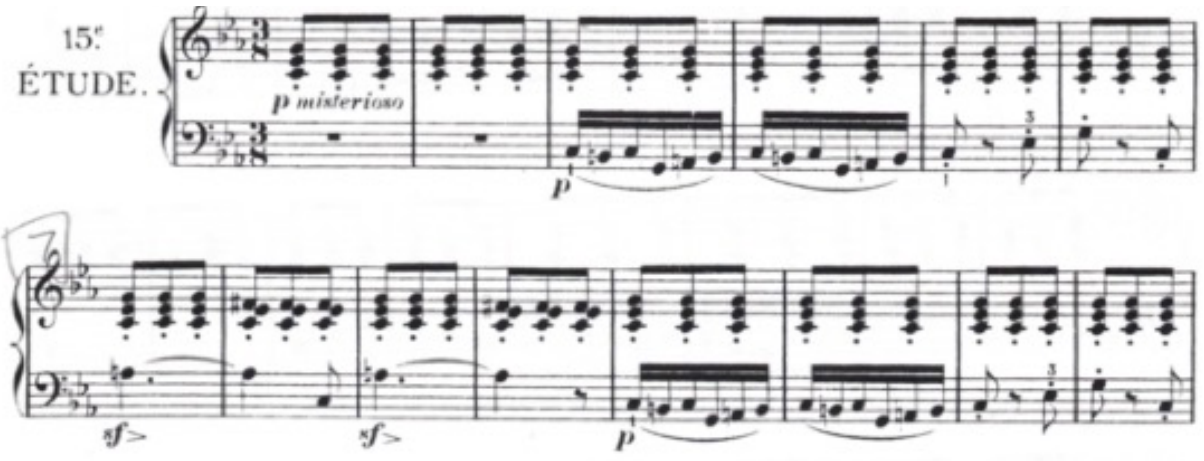
An appropriate range

Intermediate-level students are typically at an age when they prefer to exercise independent judgement in their daily lives instead of waiting for their parents to tell them what to do. Therefore, they are often highly receptive to the idea of making informed musical choices and not having to rely on their teacher to tell them "how it goes." Just as clever parents only let children choose from options that have been pre-approved, teachers can weed out "unmusical" choices by pointing students towards a range of viable options.

Case study: Jane, 10 - Burgmuller op. 100 no. 15 "Ballade"

Jane is a good-natured 5th grader who transferred to her current teacher when her former teacher retired. Her new teacher has noticed that Jane seems to play dynamics without listening to them. In *Ballade*, for example, Jane plays the first couple of left-hand *sforzandos* with a loud, harsh tone (fig. 5.3). Subsequent *sfs* are played *mezzo piano*, *forte*, or omitted entirely.

Fig. 5.3

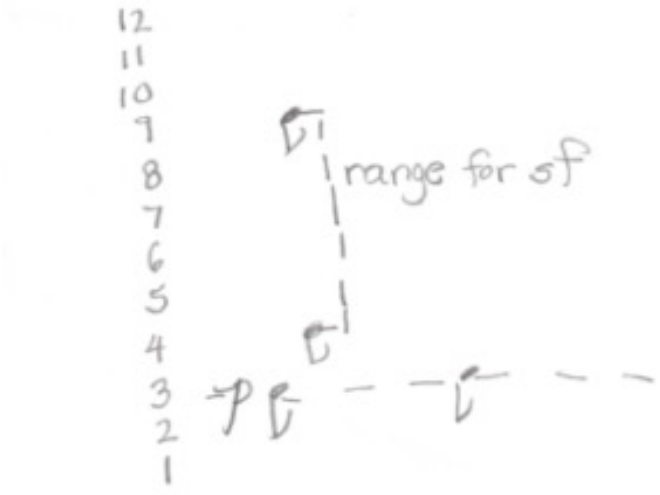


Rather than calling attention to each incident or demonstrating the right volume, her teacher employs a phrase she regularly uses to set boundaries around performance variables: "it's

too (*blank*) if…" At today's lesson, the teacher will help Jane determine if she is playing "too loud" or "too soft."

They will need a specific way of gauging Jane's volume, so her teacher uses a numerical-grading method similar to the system presented in chapter 4. Here, the diagram uses a scale of one (*ppp)* to twelve (*fff*).[82] The teacher assigns "3" as the numerical equivalent of piano, with the level of the *sf* to be determined (fig. 5.4).

Fig. 5.4



The function of the *sf* is to stand out; thus, a volume of "3" or below is inappropriate and can be eliminated. To narrow the range further, the teacher asks Jane what kind of scene would fit the music. Jane imagines a winter storm raging outside her window. The staccatos in the right hand represent rain, while the dramatic, undulating left-hand melody is the wind blowing the leaves around. "What about the *sforzando*?" her teacher asks. "It's the lightning!" Jane replies.

They turn their attention to the diagram. The *sf* is "too soft if" listeners are not somewhat startled by the lightning. Jane chooses "4" as the minimum acceptable level of volume. They

[82] Chart adapted from Lampl, *Turning Notes into Music*, 3

agree that the *sf* is "too loud if" the listeners are so disturbed by the volume that they become distracted from the music. The volume limit is set at "9".

With an acceptable range of 4-9, Jane is free to choose the exact level of sound for each sf according to her tastes and imagination. For the opening section, she pictures the skies turning gray and the wind beginning to blow. The storm is "just starting," so she chooses a *sforzando* on the lower end of the scale, "5." She also comes up with idea of using an "8" for the *sfs* at the end of the piece to depict the strongest phase of the storm.

INTERPRETING TEMPO

When practicing passages at different speeds, many musicians are struck by how much the tempo influences the character of the music. Tempo is a key aspect of musical performance. Nevertheless, the most common tempo markings are those that are the least specific, such as *Allegro*, *Andante*, and *Moderato*. In some cases, the composer will leave no tempo marking at all, as was typical during the Baroque era. The performer must often "read between the lines" to pinpoint the tempo that best reflects their understanding of the composer's intentions.

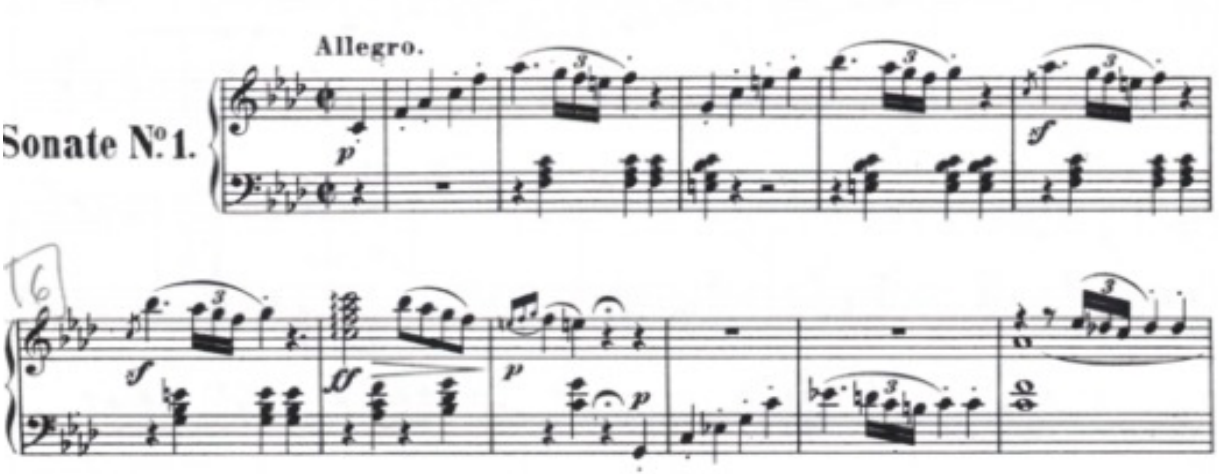
Tempo and character

When faced with tempo decisions, many students turn to guides which stipulate metronome settings. While these can be a valid starting point, tempo markings are more indicative of character than speed. For this reason, it may be helpful to put the metronome away when students are experimenting with performance tempos and encourage them to use the compositional features of a piece as their primary guide.

The first movement of Beethoven's piano sonata, op. 2 no. 1, is marked *Allegro* (fig. 5.5). How fast should it go? The piece opens with an unaccompanied broken-chord melody in the right hand. The delayed entry of the left hand, on the second beat of measure 2, creates an air of

uncertainty. The listener must wait until measure 3 to hear a strong downbeat in the accompaniment. A triplet motive appears in m.2, which is re-stated with increasing urgency in mm. 4-6.

Fig. 5.5



These features, which convey a rather nervous, unstable mood, will emerge more clearly if played quickly. *How* quickly depends on our understanding of Beethoven's intentions. If we believe this piece depicts someone anxiously pacing around, we can listen to the sound of the chords played by the left hand to gauge whether they sound "jittery" enough at our chosen speed. On the other hand, if we conceive of the piece as mysterious rather than agitated, we might pick a slightly slower tempo that makes the opening melody sound as if it is "tiptoeing" in.

Harmonic rhythm

One of the most important factors that determines the tempo of a piece is its harmonic rhythm, or the rate at which its harmony changes. When the harmony of a piece changes at a rapid rate, the tempo must be slow enough for the listener to register the shifts. Conversely, slow harmonic rhythm usually indicates the need for a faster tempo.

The harmony of Bach's Prelude in C minor changes once per measure. The shape of the harmonic progression, with its inherent points of tension and stability, will be more apparent at a

faster tempo. The piece should be played fast enough for the listener to focus on the evolution of the harmony rather than the individual notes of each measure (fig 5.6: Bach WTC I, no. 2 BWV 847). In contrast, there are two different harmonies per measures throughout most of Bach's Prelude in C sharp major (fig 5.7: Bach WTC II, no. 3 BWV 872). Despite having the same time signature and the same type of rhythmic subdivisions as the C minor prelude, the C sharp prelude calls for a tempo that gives listeners enough time to follow the harmonic changes that occur in every measure.

Fig. 5.6

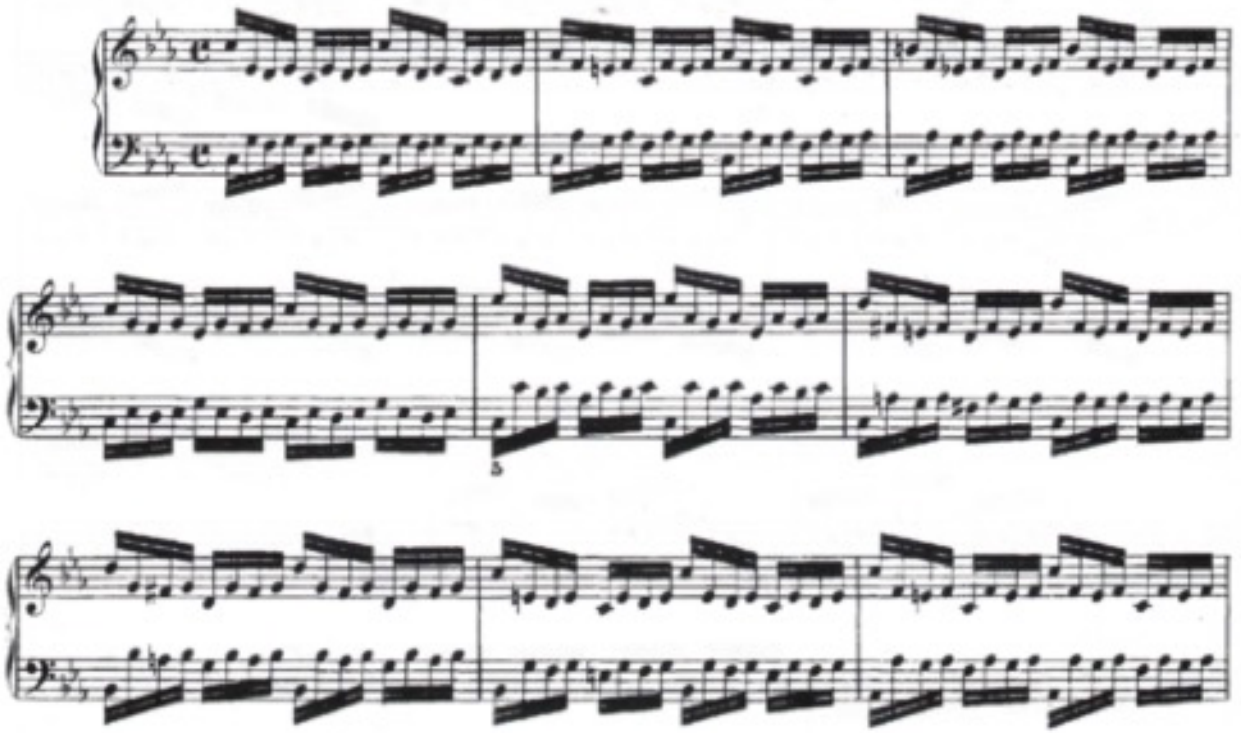
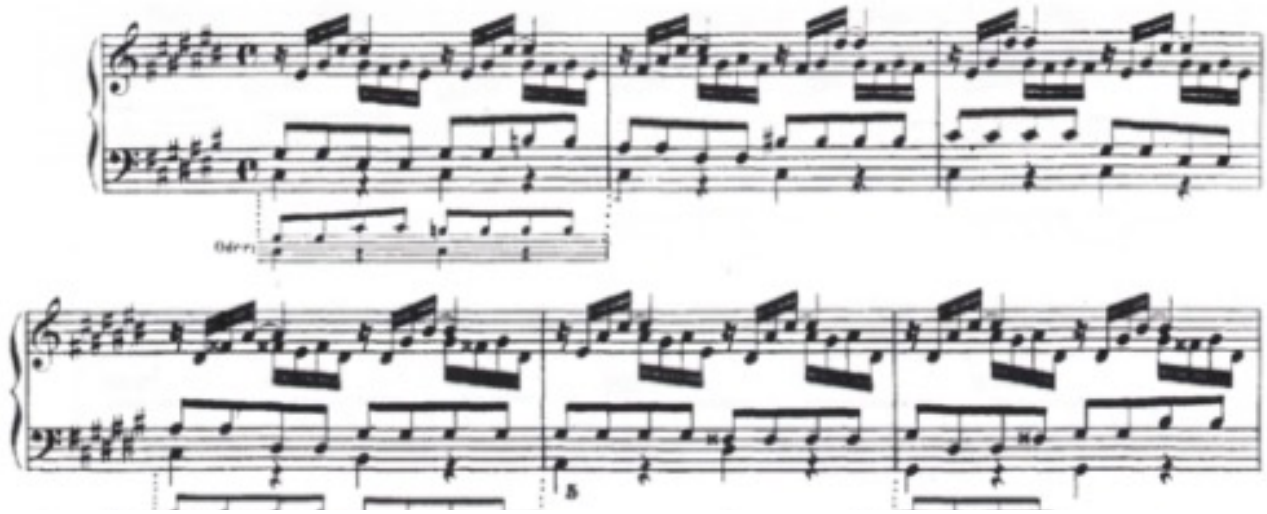


Fig. 5.7

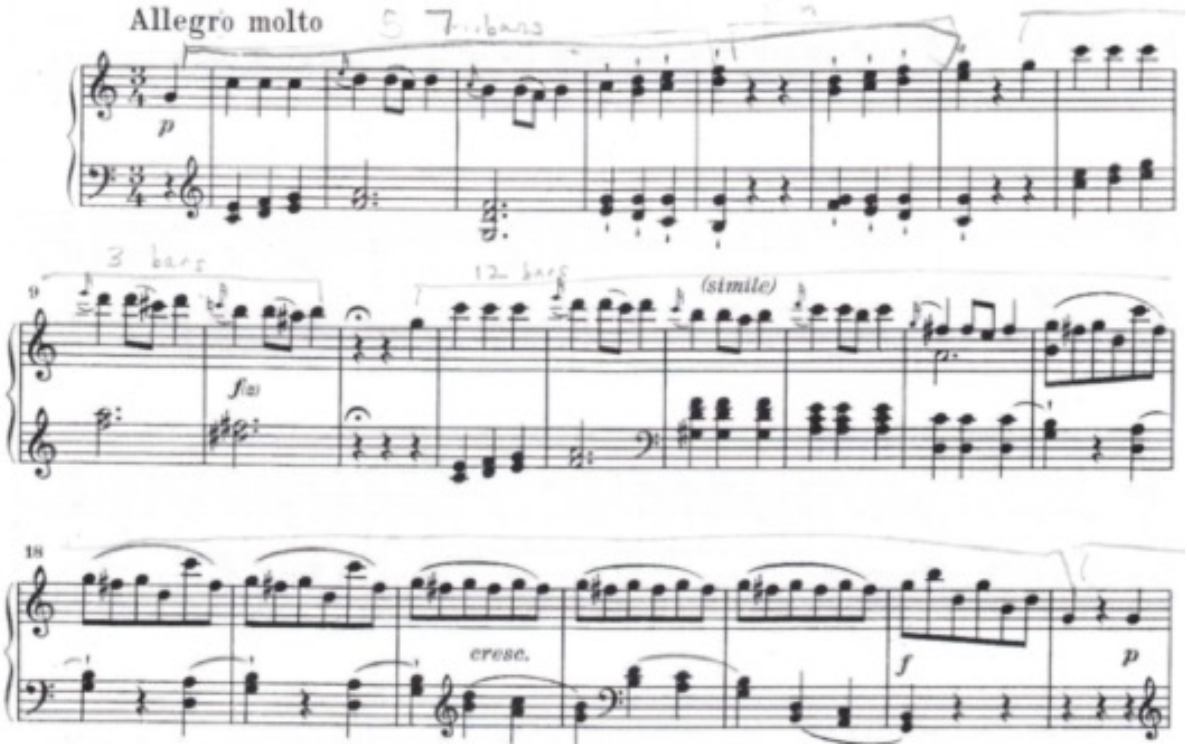


Larger-level patterns

Some pieces need to be heard "in one" for their larger-scale patterns to emerge. Much of the humor in the following Haydn sonata comes from its asymmetrical phrase structure (fig. 5.8a, piano sonata in C major, Hob. XVI:50). The opening ten measures are broken up into phrases of unequal length: seven bars followed by a three-bar phrase that ends abruptly on the "wrong" chord, B major. After a short pause, the C major theme resumes as if nothing has happened, this time stretching into a 12-measure phrase.[83]

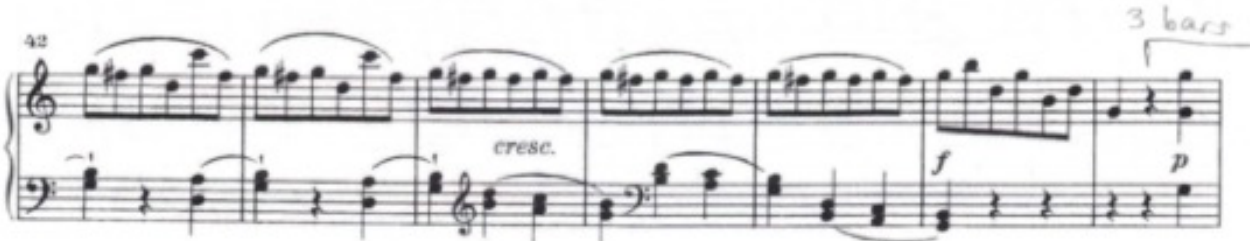
[83] Source for previous analysis, Price*, Right Before Your* Eyes, 22

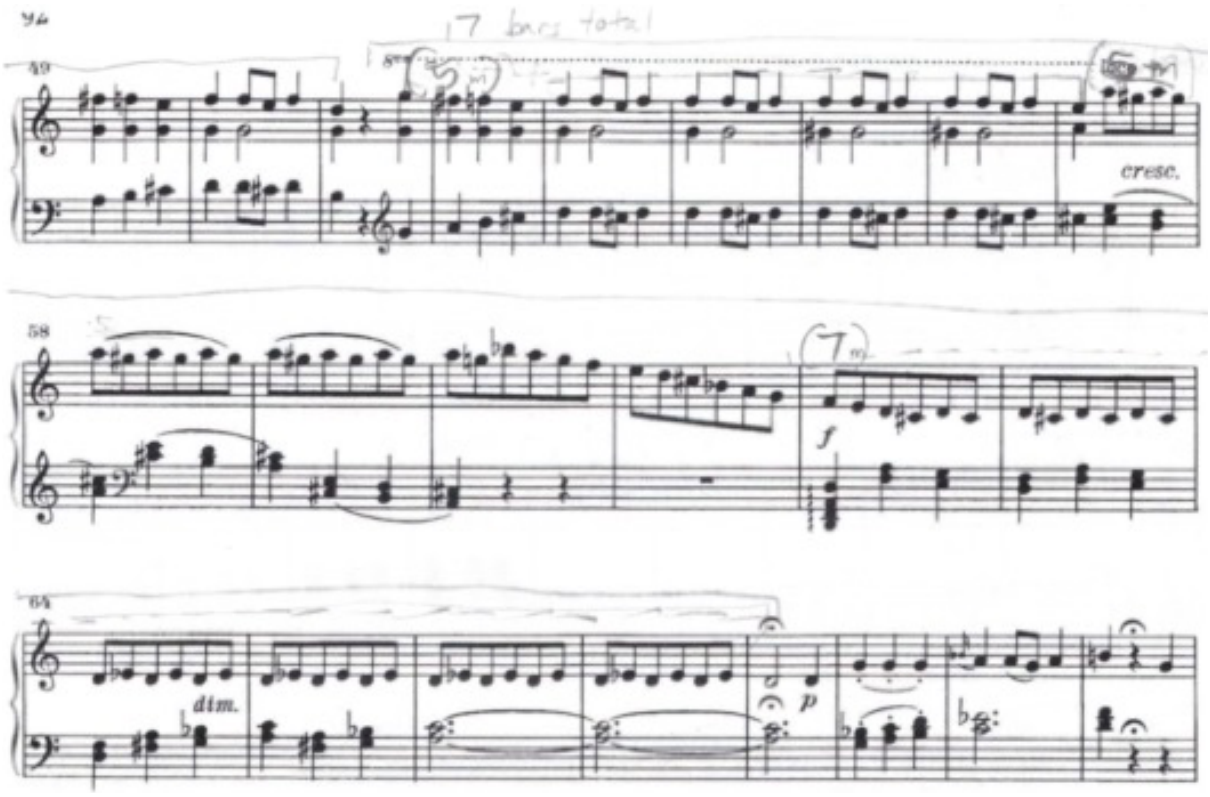
Fig. 5.8a



The entire sequence repeats, after which Haydn writes a 3-measure phrase (fig. 5.8b: mm. 48-51). This is followed by an 17-measure passage that is broken into segments of 5 + 5 + 7 (mm. 51-68). The very long phrases, juxtaposed against short phrases, are funny in the way comedy duos are funny when they feature one large person and one small person. A very fast tempo will emphasize the inherent lopsidedness of the piece.

Fig.5.8b

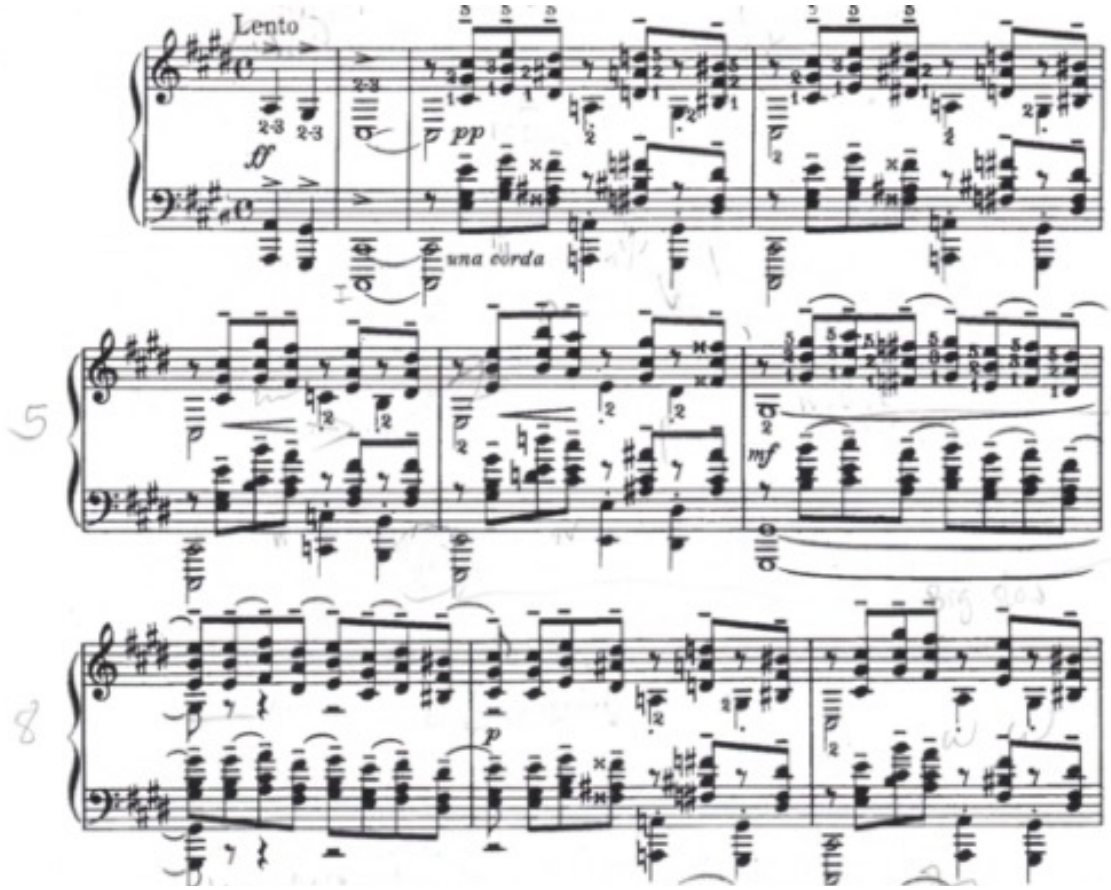




Complex structural feature need more attention from the listener

Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C sharp minor op. 3 no. 2 is marked *Lento* (fig 5.9). However, many students who have good technical and reading skills play the piece too fast, not because they should, but because they *can*. In such cases, teachers are understandably tempted to point at the *Lento* like a traffic cop and exclaim "slow down!" However, students will play the piece more expressively if they understand *why* a slow tempo is needed. Rachmaninoff's Prelude features a dense texture, highly chromatic harmonies, and wide leaps. These features, which give the piece its characteristic brooding, imposing sound, will elude most listeners if the piece is played too quickly. A slower speed allows listeners to absorb the intricacies of Rachmaninoff's musical structure.

Fig. 5.9



Students should look for certain compositional features in their pieces which indicate the need for a slower tempo. These include: [84]

- Intricate or subdivided rhythms
- Many ties, suspensions or dramatic rests
- Numerous and/or complex ornaments
- Rapidly shifting contrast
- Unexpected dissonances
- Complex textures such as counterpoint

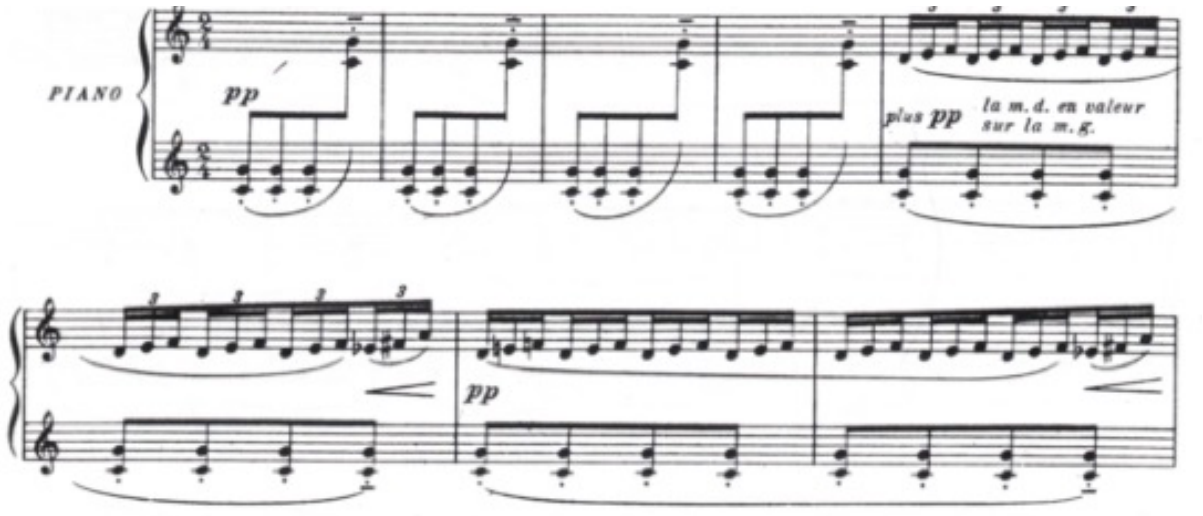
[84]Source: Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching: Vol.* II, 307

- Vocal-like melodies, especially those with wide leaps, cadenza-type passages, and sudden changes of direction

Plan for subdivided rhythms

Students will sometimes have trouble gauging the tempo for pieces that open with a simple rhythm that later becomes subdivided. In Debussy's *Mouvement*, it is very easy (and very dangerous) to play the first four measures too fast, leading many students to pick a tempo that must be reduced as soon as they reach measure 5 (fig. 5.10). To prevent this, they should ascertain how fast they can play the most difficult section of the piece. It is essential that they take a moment to mentally subdivide the opening eighth notes into sixteenth-note triplets before starting the piece.

Fig. 5.10



At times, a subdivided rhythm at the beginning of a piece can mislead students into picking a tempo that is too slow. Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata, op. 27 no. 2, begins with triplets in the right hand. The tempo marking is *Adagio sostenuto*, and students sometimes interpret this to mean that each triplet-beat must be played slowly. However, Beethoven indicates cut time for this piece, meaning the meter should be heard as 2/4 rather than 4/4.

Time signatures affect tempo

Students can be trained to look at the time signature, which will provide a clue as to the speed the composer had in mind. For example, an *Allegro* in 3/4 should be paced differently than an *Allegro* in 3/8 or 6/8. According to Jacobson, "in 3/4, the quarter note should sound lively. In 3/8 and 6/8, the dotted quarter note should sound lively." Because compound meters can be counted "in one" or "in two," they imply a faster tempo.[85]

INTERPRETING DYNAMICS AND ARTICULATION

By the time they are advanced, students will have a working knowledge of theory as well as some experience with score analysis. Most will be intrigued by the idea of creating a more expressive sound by making subtle adjustments to the composer's marks, including dynamics and articulation. The following case study illustrates some of the ways teachers can use musical context to guide students towards informed performance choices.

Case Study: Spencer, 17: Beethoven, Sonata op. 31 no. 3, Allegro

Spencer plans to major in piano performance when he goes to college next year. He and his teacher are working on one of his audition pieces, the first movement of Beethoven's sonata op. 31 no. 3. Spencer is using the Breitkopf-Hartel edition of the score, which is virtually identical to his teacher's Henle (urtext) edition. As their editions are presumed to represent Beethoven's original markings, there are a few general indications of volume and articulation, but it is clear that they will need to determine what additional adjustments must be made. At today's lesson, the teacher plans to help Spencer refine his dynamics and articulation to highlight the structure of Beethoven's musical ideas. [86]

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[85] Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching Vol. II*, 307

[86] Sources for the following section: Donald Tovey*, A Companion Guide to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas* (London, ABRSM Publishing, Inc., 1931) 130-131; Kenneth Drake, *The Beethoven Sonatas and the Creative Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994) 182-184; Robert Taub, *Playing the Beethoven Piano Sonatas* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2002) 165-167

Measures 1-6 (fig. 5.11a)

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the opening of this playful piece is what Taub refers to as the "good-humored, quizzical, unsettled sensation created at the very beginning of the work." It contains many characteristically "Beethoven" musical features, including ambiguous tonality and music that stops and starts - all in the first six measures.[87] It is difficult to recognize the home key when we hear the opening chord. Although the tonic key, E flat major, establishes itself in m. 8, the chords are in second inversion rather than in root position.

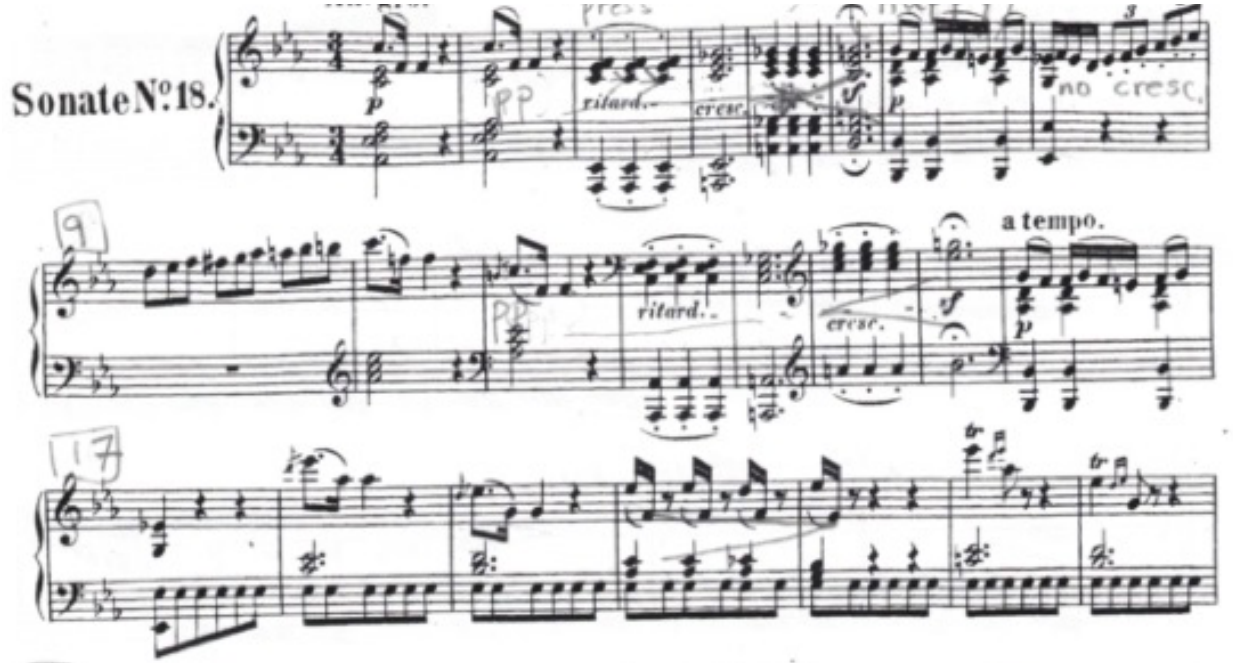
The exposition of the *Allegro* is marked *piano*, with very few exceptions. The primary motive is a brief dotted-rhythm falling fifth in the melody over a subdominant chord with an added sixth in the bass. This figure is stated twice. Spencer's teacher coaches him to play the first measure with a "singing" tone and the second measure *slightly* softer. She tells him to maintain this volume level until the crescendo. He plays *pp* from measures 2-3, but plays measure 4 a little too loudly. His teacher shows him how to enhance Beethoven's interesting harmonic progression by voicing the top note of the chords rather than increasing their overall volume. She instructs him to "pass" the chord in m. 4 to put the focus on the tonic chord in m. 6, marked *sf*. Spencer plays measures 1-6, this time waiting until the second beat of m. 5 to begin the crescendo.

As indicated by Beethoven's markings, the notes in measures 3 and 5 are to be played *portato* (i.e., held longer than a staccato, but still detached). Spencer experiments with putting a slight gap between notes, but this seems to draw attention to each individual chord rather than the larger musical idea. His teacher tells him that because the chords are repeated, the performer is compelled by necessity to put a tiny bit of space between them, so no additional gap is needed.

[87] Taub, 165

Spencer keeps his fingers connected to the surface of the keys, making a slight pressing motion to articulate each chord. They are happy with the way this sounds.

Fig. 5.11a



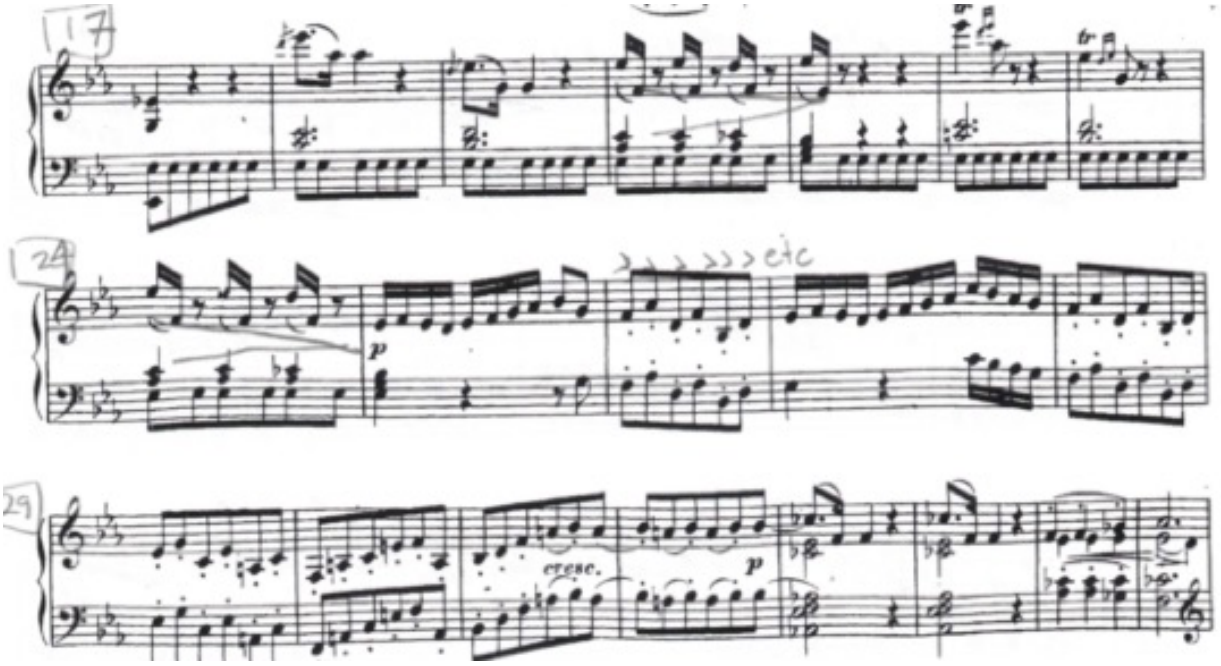
Measures 7-17 (fig. 5.11a)

In measure 7, marked *piano*, Spencer returns to his original dynamic level. His teacher notes that the mood of this passage is more cheerful than the contemplative opening motive and suggests a "bouncier" sound. Spencer brings out the bass notes, which provides a solid foundation for a more articulated melody in the right hand. This increases the volume slightly, but still gives the overall impression of *piano*.

Measure 8-9 contain a rising-triplet figure in the melody; however, it is used as a bridge between the opening theme and its restatement. He should avoid pairing this figure with a crescendo, as it will divert attention from the crescendo that Beethoven has already incorporated into the main theme (m. 4; 14). Instead, Spencer works to keep his volume and articulation consistent through the passage.

Measures 18-32 (fig. 5.11b)

Fig. 5.11.b



Spencer and his teacher decide that the call-and-response phrase pattern in mm. 18-24 could use some dynamic contrast. He plays mm. 18-19 a bit louder and makes a decrescendo in mm. 20-21. He repeats this when the subject reappears at m. 22. Spencer's teacher has him "lean" a bit on the E flat in the right hand (mm. 18-19) to give the note more tone. To act as a counterweight for the E flat, the A flat on the second beat must be held for its full value (quarter note). His teacher tells him it is customary to shorten the sixteenth-notes (m. 20-21), which places the emphasis closer to the beat.

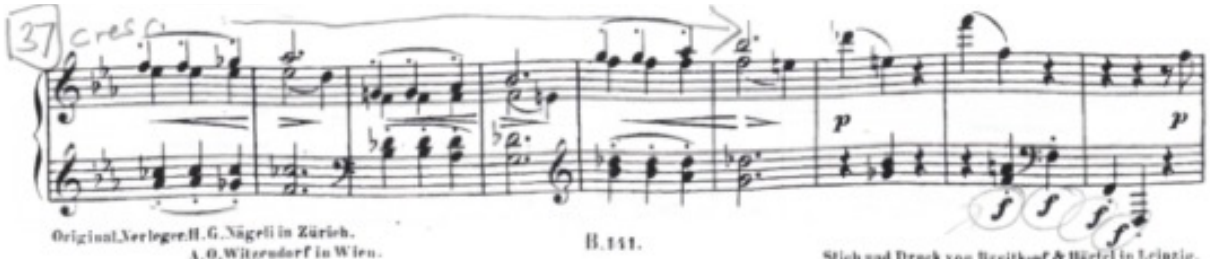
Spencer is somewhat unclear about the articulation for measures 26-32. He knows that Beethoven sometimes wrote conventional-looking staccatos when he had a longer sound in mind. He attempts a *tenuto* in this passage; however, it quickly becomes apparent that this drags the tempo down. His teacher suggests that the fast tempo of the piece calls for a crisp

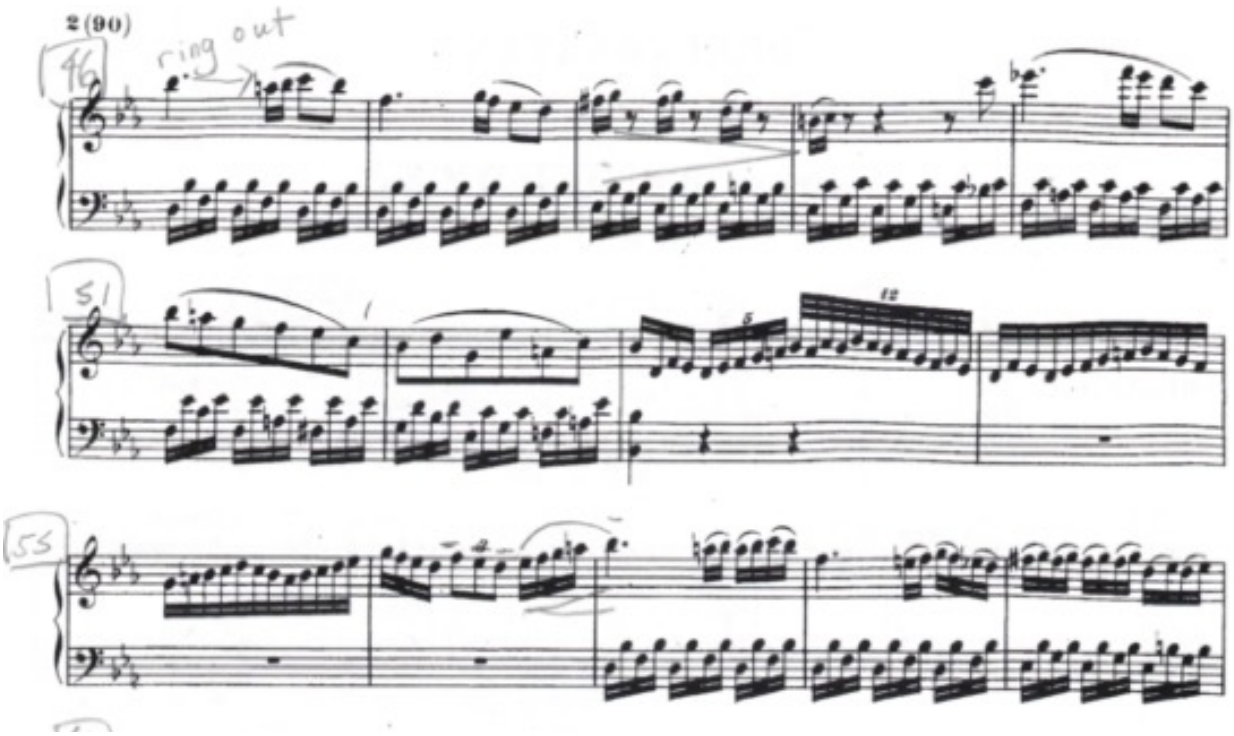
articulation, such as *marcato* (“marked”). This will give the notes the presence they seem to require, without the need to hold on to the staccatos.

Measures 35-42 (figs. 5.11b & 5.11c)

Beethoven has indicated crescendos and decrescendos for measures 35-42, which enhance the hesitant, questioning quality of the music. In addition to observing these dynamic markings, Spencer shapes the entire sequence with a subtle crescendo, beginning with *pp* at measure 35, then increasing his volume throughout mm. 36-42. He drops back down to *piano* at measure 44 so that the upcoming *fortes* in the bass will registers as a surprise.

Fig. 5.11c





Measures 46-56 (fig. 5.11c)

Unlike nearly all other instruments, the piano is non-sustaining, meaning that the performer has no control over a note once it has sounded. To compensate for this, longer notes placed next to shorter ones must be played slightly louder. Spencer's teacher instructs him to practice the right hand melody alone (mm. 46-50). He should play the B flat with a "ringing" tone, listen to the sound of the note at the end of its duration, and match the subsequent sixteenth notes to its volume.

Measures 53-56 contain a transitional passage that is a longer and more florid variation on the figure in mm. 8-9. His teacher suggests that the passage will have more momentum if it is played without a noticeable crescendo, with the exception of the last four notes of measure 56. She also thinks using different articulations will highlight the interesting change of direction in this measure. She writes *tenuto* marks over the falling triplets and a slur over the rising sixteenth notes.

The first section of Beethoven's sonata is intriguing because he manages to say much with relatively little thematic material. Thus, any repetition or deviation from the material must be treated as a significant event.[88] At Spencer's next lesson, he and his teacher will explore the themes as they appear in the development section.

SUMMARY

The score is the only clue the composer left us as to his intentions. However, most scores contain only general indications of volume, timing and articulation. These features are subject to adjustment by the performer, who must use musical context as a guide. We can help students make informed decisions by:

- Exposing them to key concepts during the elementary years by demonstrating the difference between "basic" and "expressive" speech
- Conducting speech-based exercises designed to show students how context affects delivery
- Initiating a conversation about why a composer choose a specific mark
- Familiarizing them with them the pattern of musical accents that must remain consistent
- Involving students in the process of choosing an acceptable range for the variables of performance, such as tempo and dynamics
- Helping them understand the factors affecting tempo choice, including character, harmonic rhythm and complexity of musical features
- Working with them to determine how to interpret and supplement a composer's markings

[88] Drake, *The Beethoven Sonatas,* 183

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