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## STYLISTIC APPROACH AS THE BASIS OF PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATION IN PIANO ART

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### Abstract

This article examines performance interpretation as a complex artistic process based on a stylistic understanding of a musical work. It focuses on the relationship between the composer's musical notation and the performer's individual interpretation, examined within the context of the historical, cultural, and pedagogical traditions of piano performance. An analysis of scientific and methodological concepts reveals the role of style as an integrating principle, determining the choice of expressive means and the formation of a holistic artistic image. Particular attention is given to the importance of stylistic competence in the professional training of pianists and in the development of independent performance thinking. It is concluded that a stylistic approach ensures the artistic authenticity of interpretation, promotes a deeper understanding of musical content, and actualizes the dialogue between composer, performer, and listener in contemporary musical culture.

**Keywords:** *performance interpretation, musical style, stylistic approach, piano performance, composer's text, artistic image, stylistic thinking*

In the contemporary artistic landscape, performance art is increasingly understood as an active form of cultural thinking that directly influences the modes of existence of a musical work. It is ever more frequently conceptualized as an active creative process through which a musical composition acquires its true artistic form and becomes a fact of cultural reality. Performance interpretation serves as a connecting link between the composer's intention and the listener's perception, and therefore reflects not only the individual characteristics

of the musician but also the aesthetic, stylistic, and spiritual guidelines of the era.

In a changing artistic landscape, interpretation helps performers align the composer's intentions with cultural context, concert conditions, and audience expectations. Style ensures a coherent approach, preserving the work's logic and meaning. Musical notation represents the composer's intent (Kogan, 1977), and understanding stylistic principles fosters deeper engagement and mature performance thinking.

A musical work, recorded in musical notation, represents a potential artistic reality. As L. Mazel rightly observed, it is “an artistic entity possessing a specific substantive structure” (1978, p. 312), which is revealed only through the process of performance. The musical score preserves a system of meanings, intonational connections, and figurative allusions, however, their actualization is possible only through the performer. It is the performer who translates the abstract system of signs into a living sonic fabric, making the work accessible to perception and emotional experience. In this regard, as V. Medushevsky noted, proper perception and interpretation of music represent an ideal based on the cumulative experience of artistic culture (Maksimov, 1980).

Interpretation combines structural analysis, understanding of semantic and figurative content, and expressive choices. According to Feinberg (1965, pp. 33–34), the composer’s will must merge with the performer’s individuality, avoiding mechanical reproduction, arbitrary self-expression, or cliché imitation.

In the pedagogical practice of higher music education institutions, the issue of developing an artistically meaningful performance approach takes on particular significance. Frequently, intensive work on the technical aspects of performance, repertoire expansion, and preparation of the concert programs tends to overshadow considerations of interpretive depth. Meanwhile, it is precisely conscious work on the artistic image of a composition that fosters independent performance thinking, which is essential for the musician’s full professional development.

A significant factor in the interpretive process is the historical and cultural determinacy of the performance interpretation. The same work can acquire different semantic emphases depending on the time, aesthetic paradigm, level of performance culture, and the audience. Understanding these circumstances requires a pianist to have a developed sense of style, enabling them to navigate the diversity of piano traditions and performance models. Knowledge of the characteristic features of style and the specific musical language of various composers and eras becomes a prerequisite for a professionally sound interpretation.

The same musical work can take different meanings depending on the historical context, aesthetic paradigm, level of performance culture, and the intended audience. This requires the pianist to have well-developed stylistic thinking to navigate diverse traditions and performance models. Knowledge of the characteristic features of style, as well as the specifics of musical language of different composers and historical periods, becomes an essential prerequisite for a professionally sound interpretation.

It is no coincidence that issues of performance interpretation have long remained at the center of attention in musicology and piano pedagogy. In the works of L. Kazantseva (2017), N. Korykhalova (1979), and S. Maltsev (1976), and the relationship between the composer’s text and the performer’s interpretation, the balance between objective and subjective principles in interpretation, and the phenomenon of multiple possible interpretations of a single musical work are analyzed. These ideas are further developed by I. Levin (2021), I. Gat (1957), A. Alekseev (1978), L. Barenboim (1969), E. Timakin (1987), and A. Shchapov (1968), who focus on technical means that support the realization of artistic intent.

The issue of “musicalized” technique and rehearsal culture is also central to performance pedagogy, as discussed by L. Nikolaev (1980), N. Lyubomudrova (1982), and A. Birmak (1973). These authors emphasize the necessity of subordinating technical objectives to the artistic goals of interpretation. The concept of the performance image, uniting emotional-intuitive and rational-analytical principles, is further developed by G. Neuhaus (1967), N. Golubovskaya (1985), and G. Kogan (1977). A. Kauzova and A. Nikolaeva (2001) conceptualize work on a musical piece as “stylistic creativity,” resulting in a coherent performance concept.

Style functions not only as a set of musical traits but also as a holistic system of artistic thought, encompassing intonation, rhythm, texture, form, and conceptual, figurative, and value-based principles. In the works of A. Alekseev (1978), G. Kogan (2004), Ya. Milshtein (2021), and A. Nikolaeva (2001), style is viewed as existing in two interconnected dimensions: the composer’s

creativity and the performer's interpretation. The adequacy of interpretation depends directly on the performer's ability to understand stylistic principles and realize them in performance.

It functions not only as a set of external characteristics of musical language, but also as a holistic system of artistic thinking, incorporating intonation, rhythm, texture, form, as well as conceptual, figurative, and value-based principles. In the works of A. Alekseev (1978), G. Kogan (2004), Ya. Milshtein (2021), and A. Nikolaeva (2001), style is considered a category existing in two interconnected dimensions: in the composer's creativity and in the performer's interpretation. Moreover, the adequacy of interpretation directly depends on the performer's ability to comprehend stylistic principles and embody them in performance.

Stylistic awareness allows performers to access the deeper intent of a work and align their interpretation with its cultural and historical context. It guides meaningful interpretation while defining boundaries for creative freedom; the more closely a performer engages with the score, the more their performance reflects the composer's original intent.

According to A. Nikolaeva, musical style should be understood as a multi-level structure, that includes material-sound, figurative-semantic, and conceptual-ideational dimensions (2001, p. 254). This understanding allows us to go beyond formal analysis and view style as an integrative phenomenon, uniting the technical, expressive, and semantic aspects of performance. For the pianist, this entails the need to work simultaneously with intonation, sound production, articulation, form, and artistic image, all subordinated to a coherent stylistic logic. For pedagogical practice, this approach opens up broad opportunities for the purposeful development of students' stylistic awareness and ability to comprehend musical material the unity of its expressive and conceptual aspects.

Stylistic competence is central to a musician's professional development. It goes beyond knowledge of historical facts or external stylistic traits, requiring the ability to "read" the score as a meaning-generating structure, extract its hidden content, and relate it to its cultural and historical context. The multiplicity

of performance possibilities stems from the work's semantic richness and ambiguity, a "polyvariance" inherent in mature compositions (Lukyanova, 2006, p. 17). Conversely, superficial attention to style or formal reading of the score results in unconvincing interpretations and a loss of artistic integrity, as repeatedly noted in performance studies.

The stylistic approach assumes particular importance in pedagogical practice. In the context of intensive work on technical tasks, there is a risk of shifting focus on mechanical mastery of the material at the expense of artistic and semantic analysis. Nevertheless, it is precisely interpretation-oriented work that develops independent thinking in students and their ability to make deliberate artistic choices. G. Neuhaus (1975) emphasized that the teacher's task lies not only in transmitting skills but, above all, in nurturing the musician as an interpreter, who is able to grasp the meaning and content of a work (p. 194).

Mastering musical style involves analyzing a work from whole to parts. The teacher's role is to guide students in understanding the music, identifying its semantic core, and developing a coherent performance concept.

The pedagogical concepts of S. Feinberg (1984), G. Kogan (2004), L. Barenboim (1969), Ya. I. Zak (1980), and other prominent musicians converge in recognizing the priority of stylistic and semantic analysis over the superficial or external effects of performance. They view performance as a form of creative comprehension of the composer's design, requiring deep engagement with the conceptual and emotional dimensions of the work. Performance resources – dynamics, agogics, articulation, and pedaling – acquire artistic significance only when they are organically aligned with the composer's intention and the stylistic features of the music/work. In this regard, the performer does not act as a «co-author» who arbitrarily transforms the score, but as an interpreter engages in a creative dialogue with the composer. J. Milstein (2021) emphasized that without a profound understanding and knowledge of a work's stylistic characteristics, a full artistic performance is impossible (p. 7). He also highlighted the existence of a performance style, which, like a composer's style, has its own artistic direction and is shaped by socio-cultural factors.

A stylistic approach in teaching cultivates the student's individual performance style and shapes their artistic outlook. Understanding compositional logic and stylistic patterns guides interpretive exploration, while teacher–student interaction develops performing thinking and a conscious artistic stance.

D. Dyatlov (2019) introduced the triad “image–method–style” as an important methodological framework for understanding interpretation, which allows us to consider piano performance as a multi-level process. The artistic image defines the semantic core of interpretation, the method encompasses a set of technical and expressive means, and style establishes the framework and principles for their application. The interaction of

these components ensures the integrity of the performance concept and allows it to be adapted to different historical and individual styles without losing artistic authenticity.

The stylistic approach considers sound, rhythm, and timbre as carriers of meaning rather than mere technical elements. Performance interpretation becomes a multi-layered process, with technique subordinated to artistic goals and style serving as the unifying principle.

In conclusion, a stylistic approach is essential for the artistic integrity of piano performance. It bridges text and sound, tradition and individuality, and pedagogy and practice, fostering mature performance thinking while ensuring continuity of tradition and creative development.

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