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### **Beethoven's Visual Articulation**

(From Visual Articulation of Reading  
to Truthful Reading of the Original Flow of Music)<sup>1</sup>

*G. Трлер*

### **О визуальной артикуляции у Бетховена**

(От зрительного восприятия артикуляции к пониманию исходного замысла композитора)<sup>1</sup>

**T** There is no better way to know what was the truthful flow of Beethoven's music but to go back and read the original manuscript. When one is reading the original manuscript it is a moment to behold, it is a moment to treasure since there are no barriers between Beethoven and the one who is reading his music. It is up to one's visual and audio abilities and the desire to bring these abilities to a much higher level to realize what a difference this contact with the original manuscript could make for one's understanding of the original flow of music. Unfortunately, most students of music do not experience this revelation because for almost three hundred years printer's version has been so appealing, so inviting in comparison with Beethoven's original manuscript.

In this article I intend to show to students what they are missing by introducing five major visual contrasts between Beethoven's original manuscript and the printer's version. I will demonstrate how the reader of music could find these visual contrasts by developing a sense of visual articulation. This sense will bring one to visual harmony with Beethoven's visual articulation and will lead to more authentic, truthful reading of Beethoven's music.

The subject of this article is based on my book "Manuscript Sense." The book was inspired by the following questions:

- Are we on the same page with Beethoven?
- Are we on the same page with Handel?
- Are we singing from their page of music?
- Are we singing their flow of music?

The names of these composers could be substituted for the names of other great masters such as Mozart, Brahms, Schubert and Rossini, to name a few. Beethoven and Handel were chosen because there is almost no one in the Western civilization who has not heard Handel's "Messiah" or Beethoven's Symphony №5 and "Ode to Joy" from Symphony № 9.

To clarify the philosophical foundation for our subject, allow me to underscore the following:

**Statement №1:** Music is a spiritual lan-

guage.

**Statement №2:** Music writing is the most sensitive form of human expression.

**Statement №3:** Music reading is the understanding and appreciation of the most sensitive form of human expression.

If we share these statements, then a common platform is created. Hopefully one will find this material "thought provoking."

To begin, please find among illustrations provided for this article a short excerpt from Handel's "Messiah" (see the Plate, Ex. 1.).

Why is this excerpt so unique?

The excerpt is written exactly in the style of Handel's music writing and it is written by Beethoven's hand. We will come back to the significance of this excerpt at the end of our article.

### **What do we mean by original manuscript?**

It is a composer's handwriting expressed in a particular style of music signs and written on a specific shape of music paper. It is the most immediate and precise embodiment of the composer's ideas. It is the essence and the nature of composer's original flow of music. Today the prevailing point of view on manuscripts of great masters is that the pages of manuscripts are just pages from the history of music and they should be treated in the manner of someone treating an exhibit at the museum - something historically valuable but which has no important practical relevance to the music education of today or music performance. Most manuscripts are so difficult to read that after studying them for awhile readers are eager to go back to printed

versions to enjoy the clear field of vision.

One of the reasons readers have limited attention span for the original manuscripts is that in most cases readers are never asked to ignore the discomfort of their eyes and instead give more time to their ears to enjoy the experience of listening to the original flow of music. There is no better source to find your way to Handel's or Beethoven's music than to hear just a few bars of music according to their manuscripts. Studying a few bars per day will enable one to achieve a more natural flow of music than the printed version will allow. This particular study of a few bars requires sense and sensitivity of visual articulation.

### **Musical perception and Visual articulation**

According to the Dictionary of Etymology the word "Articulation" comes from Latin and the original meaning is "separation into joints."

When we are saying someone is very articulate we usually mean someone who has good speaking abilities. But it is a very narrow meaning. An articulate person could be anyone

who is able to articulate any human function or senses such as breathing, hearing, vision etc.

Speaking about his renowned theory of relativity Albert Einstein said: "It occurred to me by intuition, and music was the driving force behind that intuition. My discovery was the result of musical perception."

What is musical perception? It is a way one perceives music. Each of us has unique individual musical perception and this is the beauty of it. What is musical perception in the process of reading of written music? It is the way one perceives the reading of written music. The reading perception can be divided into visual and audio perceptions. Our audio perception of written music is based on our initial visual perception.

We all know about music articulation as an art of audio articulation, a specific articulation of particular sounds. To be in harmony with reading perception it requires matching the level of our audio articulation with the same level of our visual articulation.

What is visual articulation in the process of the actual reading of music? It is the ability to articulate, register and recognize visually the difference in the styles of music writing and the influence of this difference on the flow of music.

When we are reading music our audio perception is constantly under the influence of our visual perception. In other words, the level of our visual articulation of reading material is constantly influencing the level of our audio articulation. When one reads original manuscript one is witnessing written material that is a direct result of the harmony of audio and visual articulations. These unique articulations were once a part of the composer's nature. An important part of the composer's early education was a specific training in how to visually articulate music and write it down. If we want to be in harmony with the composer's written flow of music, this would require not only our sense of audio articulation but highly developed sense of visual articulation as well.

How can we discover the sense of visual articulation in ourselves? Let's take any original manuscript written by Beethoven and compare it to printer's version.

The discovery of visual articulation sense begins with the List of Visual Contrasts between Beethoven's original manuscript and the printed

version.

The visual contrasts that will be explored are as follows:

1. Shapes of paper for music writing
2. Spaces in music writing
3. Shapes of Bass clef
4. Rest signs writing
5. Stems and their placements

### **Visual Contrast № 1**

#### **Shapes of paper for music writing**

The shape of original manuscript paper used by Handel, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and many other great masters is known as landscape-shaped, horizontal paper. In order to appreciate the visual value of this kind of paper, consider landscape shaped paper to be a canvas of a painting by some famous painter. Don't be intimidated by not so clear music signs writing. Instead one should enjoy this as a painting with a name like "Magic Flight of Music Signs." This way of looking at the manuscript would help one's nature to be visually at ease and start to enjoy this specific painting of music signs.

The shape of a printer's paper is very familiar to the readers of written music and it is known as portrait-shaped, vertical paper.

This particular visual contrast of music paper shapes gradually develops into a major difference in one's audio perception of written flow of music.

Original manuscript paper invites to read music horizontally by introducing the horizontal platform of written music. (Ex. 2 – 4.)

Printer's paper introduces a dramatically modified horizontal platform of the original manuscript. It suddenly becomes a vertical platform. "Reflection of Clouds on the Water" is one of the most famous paintings of Claude Monet, the father of French impressionism. The painting is so wide and continuous that it takes the entire wall of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. What if someone decided to take this painting and place it vertically. Would one not feel misled? Would one feel cheated because they were not able to experience the beauty of

the visual sensation created by the famous painter? This is precisely what has occurred with the original music flow: Beethoven's horizontal manuscripts were placed vertically. From that moment instead of finding an easy, truthful and natural way toward understanding Beethoven's music, we were doing our best trying to find natural flow of music in printer's version. The good part of this experience was that on the way from our hearts to Beethoven's heart we were not aware about all visual changes and alterations done by printers.

One may question, what is the dramatic visual difference between horizontal paper of original manuscripts and printer's version vertical paper when both have horizontal staves? The visual difference is in the skill and ability to read the Whole Picture. The horizontal lines in the manuscript's paper are dramatically different than the horizontal lines of printer's paper because they are a natural part of the horizontal harmony of the Whole Picture. The difference is similar to horizontal waves of ocean vs. the vertical steps of a staircase. When the Whole Picture is read then one will start to hear dramatically different flow of music, a truthful flow according to the composer's visual and audio articulations. The quality of the horizontal manuscript will be better appreciated with the practice of the reading of music signs as naturally belonging to and enriching the horizontal vision of the whole picture. Then one will find the experience of such reading similar to a game of chess - once you move one piece the whole picture is changed.

## **Visual Contrast № 2**

### **Spaces in music writing**

In the horizontal manuscript there is a celebration of spaces: spaces between all music signs, spaces between sounds and their dots, spaces between alteration signs and notes, spaces of air for breathing music. Composers would leave plenty of space in the beginning of music staves to initiate different airspaces for different movements. They would also leave one or two

completely empty staves at the top or at the bottom of the page. These empty staves served as spiritual and inspirational symbols of a place where all music comes from - from the Flow of Silence. In the printer's version there is no celebration of spaces, everything is printed as close as possible to save on the cost of precious paper. (Ex. 5, 6.)

## **Visual contrast № 3**

### **Shapes of Bass clef**

#### **Bass clef in original manuscript**

To know the shape of original manuscript's bass clef is to know the root of visual articulation for all other music signs of the original manuscript. This is a visual symbol, visual platform on which the entire flow of original manuscript is based. The shape of the bass clef in original manuscript was a natural part of the visual articulation platform for Handel, Mozart and other great masters. The shape of their bass clef was in the shape of letter C. Handel and Mozart based all other music signs on this shape of bass clef. Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin based all other music signs on a different shape of bass clef which was in the shape of letter S.

The shape of the printer's bass clef is absolutely opposite to Beethoven's bass clef. It is in the shape of backward letter C. After reading the bass clef shape of original manuscript, the printer's version bass clef looks like someone is asking to open Beethoven's music room with the wrong key.

One could start experiencing the influence of visual articulation on the flow of music by visualizing the different historical shapes of the bass clef while listening to one's own singing of the sound F. (Ex. 7,8.)

## **Visual Contrast № 4**

### **Rest signs writing**

In the composer's original manuscript the rest signs are written either horizontally or partially horizontally. What is more important they are written in different spaces and on different lines. Visually they are musically

moveable by moving along with the sound signs. They serve very often as a visual introduction to the spaces or places where upcoming sounds will be written. This way of rest signs writing invites one to read the rest signs as a source of air, a source of life, and a source of breathing for sound signs.

In the printer's version the rest signs, except whole and half rest signs, are written strictly vertically. This was a good way for printers to save precious paper's space. The rest signs are visually frozen in time. They are non moveable and have the same particular space to reside. It is almost as if the rest signs were saying to the sound signs "Here is our place and there is yours, and please don't bother us with your unpredictable movements." (Ex. 9– 11.)

## Visual Contrast № 5

### Stems and their placements

One of the most important meanings for the word Stem is "The Root of the Word." This meaning should serve as an eye opener for musicians since music is all about words of a spiritual language. The correct placement or misplacement of stems could make or break the speaking roots of the entire flow of musical language.

Beethoven's original manuscript stems are always placed on the right side of the note and it does not matter where the notes are on the staff or if stems are going up or down. This is the way stems were visually conceived by Beethoven and Handel. Their audio perception was influenced by this vision of the stems and one should be truthful to the composers' original harmony of the visual and audio perceptions. One should read, understand and appreciate their stems as articulation signs for the particular flow of music. In essence, the composer's placement of stems should be read like visual and audio antennas to the truthful reading of composer's music, the truthful reading of a particular language of music. (Ex. 12– 14.)

Printer's version

Complete disregard of the composer's visual

and therefore audio placement of stems. Stems were placed according to rules invented by printers in order to accommodate their desire to make everything as clear as possible for the eyes while making it easy for printing. Printers made it possible to spread written music across the globe quickly and in large quantities. However the quality of the original manuscript flow of music was diminished dramatically. By making everything clear for one's eyes printers unwillingly changed the flow of music.

As a result, the printed version became very foggy and confusing for one's ears because the composer's original harmony of audio and visual articulations was altered and changed to something which only the eyes were able to enjoy.

### Coda

The above mentioned material constitutes five major visual contrasts and therefore five major audio contrasts of music flow between the composer's original manuscript and printer's version. The ability to recognize and register these visual contrasts demonstrates our skill of visual articulation. As in everything in music it takes practice, practice and practice. Practice your sensitivity of reading, practice your visual articulation of the whole picture.

Here is a formula for Truthful Reading of Original Flow of Music - Reading Beethoven according to Beethoven's style of music writing:

Visual articulation + Audio articulation = Truthful reading of original flow of music

A dramatic example of what happened on the way from Beethoven's visual articulation to the printer's version:

### First two bars of the Symphony № 5

From the very beginning of the Symphony №5 printers completely ignored or did not pay any attention to Beethoven's visual articulation. Printers created their own visual articulation and by doing this they changed the natural flow of music which was the result of Beethoven's harmony of the visual and audio articulation. For the sake of this example, let's bypass the obvious

visual change in the shape of the paper and the shape of the bass clef sign and start to examine the printer's version of the first two bars of the symphony (Ex. 6).

The beginning of the flow of music in the original manuscript is in the eighth rest sign and its particular visual articulation. Instead of placing the rest sign according to Beethoven which is on the same line with the following notes as a direct indication where the flow of music really starts, printers placed rest sign not by following the music, but according to their own rules. Everything should be clear for the eyes and so they placed rest sign on completely different line. This change visually interrupted the flow of music by introducing the rest sign and notes separately and left readers with musically challenged atmosphere. Then printers changed Beethoven's spirit of writing by printing the rest sign in much more vertical manner than the original which was in the horizontal style of writing.

For the finishing touch printers changed the musically powerful visual detail which was a visual crescendo of three G's stems. In the original manuscript each stem of the three G's was longer than previous stem as a visual indication of crescendo. It was done consistently by Beethoven in the rest of the symphony's first movement as the sign of his particular audio

articulation.

Printers obviously did not know the importance of this particular style of writing because they placed every stem neatly in one line and by doing this they neutralized the speaking power of Beethoven's music. The result of this change is known – you do not hear original flow of music from any symphony orchestra because printers boxed in the most famous group of notes and left performers on their own without any visual indication of the real and truthful power of the original manuscript.

### **Handel by Beethoven**

In the beginning of our article we were talking about an excerpt from Handel's "Messiah" written by Beethoven's hand. In Beethoven's time a part of a good music education included the study of the style of music writing by famous composers in order to hear and understand their music better. When Beethoven was copying Handel he actually was practicing his sense of visual articulation which is the ability to visually register and hear the difference between different styles of music signs writing (Ex. 1).

If Beethoven felt that the study of every detail of the music masters' handwriting was very important for his education, shouldn't we pay attention to this, too?

## **Questions and Answers**

*Q. Why do we need to know how to read music of original manuscript?*

*A.* Here are a couple of rhetorical questions which could help to appreciate our subject better. If you were adopted, adopted by printers, wouldn't you like to know and meet you real parents – manuscripts? If you realized that the food you love is full of artificial unhealthy ingredients, wouldn't you feel it is time to take care of your health and start eating natural organic food?

*Q. How is it that the art and discipline of writing has a direct relation to the performance of classical music?*

*A.* The art and discipline of writing is based on strokes of your hand. To be specific and precise the art of writing is based on the mastery of one's mini strokes. The mini strokes of your hands and the way you master them are the base of your writing. When you are learning the art of writing you are also learning and practicing the art of

visualization of specific strokes, the art of recognizing the difference between them, the art of hearing different sounds when you are applying the same strokes to different spaces and places. Examples: p – b – d – q have the same strokes but different sounds. The same base is in the art of music performance – strokes, strokes and more strokes. Here lies the natural connection and the root of the nature of reading and performing music according to the original manuscript.

- Q. How could someone begin to experience the difference in music flow between the original manuscript and the printed version? What is the first step?*
- A.** The first step is an adjustment of your memory, your memory of the first encounter with the piece of printed music. I assume that your memory of the first encounter was the memory of portrait shaped, vertical music paper. That encounter became your memory foundation for the reading of music. In order to be on the same page with Beethoven you should replace this memory foundation with the new memory foundation. In other words move your memory foundation to the field of Beethoven's memory foundation – his first encounter of written music was the memory of landscape shaped horizontal music paper.

This new memory of the shape of music paper should be your memory №1 when you are thinking, visualizing and listening to Beethoven's written music. It should always come before memory of the printed version. The same adjustment of your memory foundation should be extended onto Beethoven's memory foundation regarding the original shape of his bass clef, his moveable rest signs, plenty of spaces between music signs and correct musical placement of his stems. It is a perfect time to be introduced to the true nature of written music by such composers as Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert and other great masters of classical music. In our time there are no problems in finding and reading

original manuscripts.

Here is a word of caution, study and pay attention only to manuscripts written by the composer's hand and avoid manuscripts written by copyists since they often changed the nature of the composer's visual articulation by copying music in their own style of music writing.

Original manuscripts, facsimiles, are available from different libraries, such as "themorgan.org", British museum library, Deutsche library and many other public and private sources. You could buy the copies of original manuscripts or simply download them. It is a perfect time to be in visual – audio harmony with such composers as Handel and Beethoven without any interference such as alterations and changes done by printers or copyist. It is a perfect time to be as close to the composer's original flow of music as possible. It is a perfect time to be as close to the human nature of the great masters of classical music as you wish.

## Note

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1. The full version of the article was published in February, 2013. See: *Trier G. Beethoven's Visual Articulation*. Heartohopia Press, 2013 (ISBN-0-09725184-4-4).