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Chasing Expression: Tracing Notated and Performative Devices that Create a *Bel Canto* Style at the Piano

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CHASING EXPRESSION: TRACING NOTATED AND PERFORMATIVE DEVICES

THAT CREATE A *BEL CANTO* STYLE AT THE PIANO

by

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CHASING EXPRESSION: TRACING NOTATED AND PERFORMATIVE DEVICES

THAT CREATE A *BEL CANTO* STYLE AT THE PIANO

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Discussions of interpretation and performance practice often address specific historical periods, offering analyses of musical practices within a predetermined set of dates, such as ornamentation in the Baroque period, articulation as applied in the Classical era, and phrasing "the long line" in the Romantic era. Such a sectionalized approach yields many valuable insights on how to perform the music of specific composers, but it fails to consider the development of notational practices and performative idioms across different historical eras. Studying the ways in which musicians of different eras applied the same set of musical devices within a specific style could shed new light on the historical transformations of performance practices and promote understanding of expressivity in musical performance.

Topic theory can provide a vehicle for such cross-era analysis. This document examines existing scholarship prior to offering its own definition for *bel canto* style within the framework of topic theory. In addition to identifying specific notated and performative features of this style, this document considers cultural associations and characteristics *bel canto* music held for its contemporary audiences. Crucially, the definition offered here considers the composers and works that contributed to the apex of *bel canto* style in nineteenth-century opera, arguing that they belong to an evolving style understood by multiple generations of contemporary listeners. This historical

consideration opens the door to studying the development of notation and performance practices within a singular topic.

After defining *bel canto* style, this document focuses on keyboard music written in this style by composers from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras. Consideration is given to how specific notated and performative elements combine to imitate vocal qualities of *bel canto* style at the keyboard. Consulting manuscripts, first-hand accounts, pedagogical resources, and current performance practice scholarship, this document traces stylistic continuities found in the notational and performative idioms of *bel canto* style piano music, arguing that they were understood in much the same way throughout this style's historical development.

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CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF *BEL CANTO* STYLE

Bel canto is a style of music born from Italian opera and can be found in works by composers Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, among others. Much of this music received a revived interest among both performers and audiences during the early-to-mid twentieth century,[1] and opera companies continue to regularly program works which feature *bel canto* arias. The term itself means "beautiful singing" in Italian, but there is no consensus within the academic discipline on a codified definition for *bel canto* style. While *bel canto* is most closely associated with opera music by nineteenth century composers (Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti specifically),[2] scholar Rodolfo Celleti's dissenting assertion that "everything or almost everything in Romantic opera differs from the *bel canto* ideal"[3] offers a glimpse at the academic discord over how to define this style.

Further complicating this topic, the term *bel canto* has grown far beyond nineteenth century opera music in both scholarship and everyday use.[4] In addition to

[1] Stephanie Von Buchau, "Bonynge on Bel Canto," *Opera News* 58, no. 9 (January, 1994): 14, accessed January 20, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UON_LINC/1dau7i9/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_224218544.
Will Crutchfield, "The Bel Canto Connection," *Opera News* 62, no. 1 (1997): 31, accessed January 20, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=62&date=19970101&aulast=Crutchfield,%20Will&pages=&issn=00303607&issue=1&genre=article&spage=30&title=Opera%20news&atitle=The%20bel%20canto%20connection&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A195265.

[2] Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

[3] Rodolfo Celleti, *A History of Bel Canto,* trans. Frederick Fuller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 191.

[4] Stephanie Von Buchau, "Bonynge on Bel Canto," *Opera News* 58, no. 9 (January, 1994): 14, accessed January 20, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UON_LINC/1dau7i9/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_224218544.
Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

being a style of music,[5] *bel canto* can refer to different vocal techniques and methods and has grown to envelop a genre of instrumental music that seeks to emulate the vocal qualities of this style.[6] As a result of the varied meanings and connotations associated with *bel canto*, conceptual frameworks of this style form a nebulous haze of overlapping arguments. Collecting and collating the existing scholarship is analogous to putting together a puzzle of a white cloud—there are softly defined edges, but it is hard to find an exact place for any specific idea or argument. The academic discussion has reached a saturation level such that general encyclopedic entries for *bel canto* regularly affix a level of mystique in defining this style.[7] Essentially, the variety of meanings and lack of consensus within the discipline have become a part of *bel canto* style.

This document is concerned primarily with compositional and performative elements of piano music written in *bel canto* style. In order to contextualize these elements, however, it is imperative to first formulate a working conceptual framework of *bel canto* and then place piano-specific music within that framework. The following

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[5] Janice Dickensheets, "The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research* 31, no. 2-3 (April 2012): 108-109, accessed April 1, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=31&date=20120101&aulast=Dickensheets,%20Janice&pages=&issue=2-3&rft_id=info:doi%2F10.1080%2F01411896.2012.682887&genre=article&spage=97&title=Journal%20of%20musicological%20research&atitle=The%20topical%20vocabulary%20of%20the%20nineteenth%20century&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A765901.

[6] Brown Bradley, "Bel Canto is Not a Dirty Word!," *American Music Teacher* 28, no. 5 (April-May 1979): 37, accessed January 20, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=28&date=19790101&aulast=Bradley,%20Brown&pages=&issn=00030112&issue=5&genre=article&spage=37&title=The%20American%20music%20teacher&atitle=Bel%20canto%20is%20not%20a%20dirty%20word!&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A1088897.

Peter Feuchtwanger, "Bel Canto—The Secret to Performing Chopin's Music," *Clavier* 43, no. 9 (2004): 26-27.

Brian Vollmer, "The Basics of Bel Canto," *Canadian Musician* 32, no. 1 (January-February 2010): 32, accessed April 6, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UON_LINC/1dau7i9/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_216496376.

[7] Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

chapter is divided into three sections: the first section organizes existing *bel canto* scholarship; the second section introduces the fundamentals and methods of topic theory and how scholars of this discipline approach *bel canto* style; finally, the third section proposes a topical definition of *bel canto* style.

I.   SURVEYING THE BATTLEFIELD

While *bel canto* music remains popular on stage and with audiences, the study of this style is complicated by numerous diverging opinions, sources, and artists, to the point where the term *bel canto* can take on multiple meanings. *Grove Music Online* goes so far as to state that the term *bel canto* "has been used without specific meaning and with widely varying subjective interpretations."[8] While the *Grove* entry captures the ambiguity and disagreement in defining a *bel canto* style, a more accurate dissection of this academic battleground reveals a shared conceptual foundation from which each warring camp builds its own arguments and conclusions. It is generally understood that *bel canto* is concerned with the expression of beauty in music through a vocal medium, and that this style typically features a melody in a high range, includes large melodic leaps, and is elaborately ornamented (instrumental *bel canto* music seeks to emulate the voice, thus all *bel canto* music is "vocal" in style).[9] From this point of departure, definitions of *bel canto* fall into two general (and non-unified) camps: 1) *bel canto* as

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[8] Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

[9] Janice Dickensheets, "The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research*, 31, no. 2-3 (April 2012): 108, accessed April 1, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=31&date=20120101&aulast=Dickensheets,%20Janice&pages=&issue=2-3&rft_id=info:doi%2F10.1080%2F01411896.2012.682887&genre=article&spage=97&title=Journal%20of%20musicological%20research&atitle=The%20topical%20vocabulary%20of%20the%20nineteenth%20century&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A765901.

compositional construct, versus 2) *bel canto* as performative tradition. This is not to say there is no overlap between each camp's position—*bel canto* music certainly contains both compositional gestures (such as large melodic leaps and a high range) as well as performative idioms unique to its style (such as good tone and legato execution). Rather, the academic divide is over which element is the most important, defining characteristic of *bel canto* style.

Among scholars who fall into the "compositional construct" camp, *bel canto* is defined as an aesthetic goal or set of notated musical gestures. In *A History of Bel Canto*, Rodolfo Celletti connects *bel canto* style to the aesthetic goals of Baroque art—"that of creating through the imagination a world more beautiful, more sumptuous than the everyday world."[10] About *bel canto* specifically, Celleti adds that:

> The aim is to evoke a sense of wonder through unusual quality of timbre, variety of colour and delicacy, virtuosic complexity of vocal display, and ecstatic lyrical abandon. To achieve this, bel canto opera dispenses with realism and dramatic truth, replacing them with a fairy-tale view of human feelings and nature.[11]

Celletti acknowledges the performative aspects that contribute to *bel canto* music (e.g., timbre, sound color, virtuosity), but for him they are a means to achieving a specific aesthetic goal. In weighing the compositional aspects of *bel canto* with the performative elements, consider the conclusion Celletti draws from his aesthetic-forward definition: "The art of *bel canto* was what it was simply and solely because the composers and librettists were inspired by the aesthetic I have already outlined... Thus the 'belcantists' are first and foremost the composers, then the librettists, and lastly the singers."[12]

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[10] Rodolfo Celleti, *A History of Bel Canto,* trans. Frederick Fuller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.

[11] Ibid, 9.

[12] Ibid, 8.

Other positions that fall within the "compositional construct" camp are less dismissive of the role and art of singing in *bel canto* music. However, they do still prioritize notated musical gestures in defining *bel canto* style music. Janice Dickensheets' *Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century* (2012) offers a more mainstream definition in what she calls *aria style*:

> Based on the elaborate, highly virtuosic, specifically Italian opera arias of the nineteenth century. Its sweeping melodic lines are florid, usually encompassing a larger range…, with difficult leaps and ornamentation reflecting its operatic origins. Accompanimental patterns range from arpeggio figures to more complex orchestral gestures designed to feature the melodic line.[13]

Dickensheets' terminological choices aside (her argument is from the realm of topic theory, which will be more thoroughly discussed later in this chapter), she clearly emphasizes composed musical gestures in her definition of this style, completely omitting any discussion of performative techniques (vocal or otherwise). Dickensheets' above description represents one of the most widely accepted definitions of *bel canto* style: born out of the opera arias of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, its characteristics include melodic lines that span a large range, feature difficult leaps, include elaborate ornamentation (especially near cadences), and sparse accompanimental patterns that provide a harmonic foundation. Though these musical characteristics are widely accepted as within *bel canto* style, there is little consensus on how widely they apply to other composers, instruments, or eras of music.

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[13] Janice Dickensheets, "The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research*, 31, no. 2-3 (April 2012): 108, accessed April 1, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=31&date=20120101&aulast=Dickensheets,%20Janice&pages=&issue=2-3&rft_id=info:doi%2F10.1080%2F01411896.2012.682887&genre=article&spage=97&title=Journal%20of%20musicological%20research&atitle=The%20topical%20vocabulary%20of%20the%20nineteenth%20century&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A765901.

In the opposing "*bel canto* as vocal tradition" camp, *bel canto* is primarily considered a performative tradition consisting of different vocal techniques and historical idioms that provide a method for interpreting the notated score. Although there are a wide variety of ideas within this camp, most generally accept the general notated characteristics of *bel canto* style (melodic lines that span a large range, feature difficult leaps, and include elaborate ornamentation over a sparse accompaniment) while holding the performative aspects of *bel canto* music above the notated, compositional elements. An often-heard position belonging to this camp is the notion of *bel canto* as a forgotten historical tradition of singing, often framed as lost treasure to which but a few venerated teachers hold the key. The *Grove* entry observes that the idea of *bel canto* as a lost art is almost as old as the style itself—Rossini himself is reported to have stated in 1858 "Alas for us, we have lost our bel canto."[14] Another example, from Herman Klein's *The Bel Canto* (1923), argues that:

> Our interpretive resources have failed to keep level with the renascence of public interest in these most exacting examples of lyric art. Something has been lost…There has been a perceptible deterioration in the executive level, a gradual weakening in the succession of interpreters, a growing loss of touch with the special qualities and attributes that marked the original realization of the [composer's] ideas.[15]

While *bel canto* as "a lost vocal tradition" has roots in the mid-nineteenth century, it remains a common notion within the larger music discipline and can still be detected in many existing teaching studios.[16] There are kernels of truth in this idea (there are indeed

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[14] Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

[15] Herman Klein, *The Bel Canto, With Particular Reference to the Singing of Mozart* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 8, 10.

[16] Brian Vollmer, "The Basics of Bel Canto," *Canadian Musician* 32, no. 1 (January-February 2010): 32, accessed April 6, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UON_LINC/1dau7i9/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_216496376.

specific performative idioms that are no longer commonly observed, as will be discussed in Chapter Three), but this position is ultimately weakened by how many of its proponents conveniently offer up their own pedagogical pedigree as the definitive answer to the lost art of *bel canto* (including Herman Klein).[17]

Another school of thought in the "performative tradition" camp falls under the study of historical performance practices. Based on historical treatises and a renewed understanding of the development of music notation, this movement seeks to identify historical performative practices and idioms and advocates for their use in modern performances. While acknowledging the impossibility of recreating historical performance styles with absolute authority, proponents of this discipline strive for "historically informed performances." Advocates of performance practice emphasize the importance of performed elements in defining *bel canto* style, such as tone quality, good legato, and embellishments (both notated and performer-added). Among the scholars in the vanguard of this conceptual framework is Robert Toft, who writes about *bel canto*:

> Singers in the *bel canto* era realized that because composers did not write down their ideas exactly as they intended them to be expressed, songs could rarely be performed as they were notated… A broad range of techniques helped singers tell their stories convincingly, and performers produced striking effects by using the tools of expression at their disposal: accent, emphasis, tone of voice, register, phrasing, legato, staccato, portamento, messa di voce, tempo, vibrato, ornamentation, and gesture… How these devices were realized and the degree to which singers favored or disfavored a single component or cluster of components not only determined the collective fashion of the *bel canto* era but also distinguished individual habits within the general custom.[18]

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[17] Ibid, 11.

[18] Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

Toft clearly advocates that the performance choices of an individual singer are a crucial function of *bel canto* music. This is directly opposed to Rodolfo Celletti's position, which holds the aesthetic goals of composers as the true nature of *bel canto*.

Identifying and placing scholars of *bel canto* music into two conceptually opposed camps offers some clarity on the elusive issue of defining this style. However, the question of a time frame for the historical development of *bel canto* style muddies the battle lines drawn above. Conservative time frames for a *bel canto* "era" are as short as fifty years (~1780-1830)[19] while others focus explicitly on the operas of Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), and Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835).[20] By contrast, Giulio Silva and Theodore Baker offer a two-hundred-year span from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth as "the golden age of *bel canto*."[21] Other scholars consider the Baroque era, and Handel's opera music specifically, as directly contributing to the development of *bel canto* style:[22] "across many shifts of compositional style, the basic categories [of *bel canto* style] remained remarkably consistent—slow arias based on long lines, sustained notes, nuanced *cantabile* and subtle intricacy of ornament."[23] Examples 1a and 1b, which juxtapose Handel's aria "Piangeró

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

[21] Giulio Silva and Theodore Baker, "The Beginnings of the Art of 'Bel Canto:' Remarks on the Critical History of Singing," *The Musical Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (January 1922): 53, accessed on January 20, 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/737912.

[22] Rodolfo Celleti, *A History of Bel Canto,* trans. Frederick Fuller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79.

[23] Will Crutchfield, "The Bel Canto Connection," *Opera News* 62, no. 1 (1997): 32,aAccessed January 20, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=62&date=19970101&aulast=Crutchfield,%20Will&pages=&issn=00303607&issue=1&genre=article&spage=30&title=Opera%20news&atitle=The%20bel%20canto%20connection&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A195265.

la sorte mia" with Bellini's "A te, o cara," display just such stylistic consistency. Though

written over a hundred years apart (1724 and 1835, respectively), both arias display

similar *bel canto* qualities: slow tempo; sparse, harmonic accompaniments intended to

feature the melody; and melodic lines which span large ranges and include difficult vocal

leaps.

Example 1a:
"Piangeró la sorte mia" from George Frideric Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*,
mm. 1-17.

Example 1b:
"A te, o cara" from Vincenzo Bellini's *I puritani*, mm. 7-12.

As Will Crutchfield states, "the most important thing to be said about singing style in Handel and in what we habitually call *bel canto* is that the similarities far outweigh the differences."[24] Despite the similarities many scholars have drawn between Handel and nineteenth-century Italian operas, there is no consensus on the timeline and development of *bel canto* style.[25] *Grove Music Online* offers an aptly confusing summary

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[24] Ibid, 31.

[25] Rodolfo Celleti, *A History of Bel Canto,* trans. Frederick Fuller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 66, 107.

Giulio Silva and Theodore Baker, "The Beginnings of the Art of 'Bel Canto': Remarks on the Critical History of Singing," *The Musical Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (January 1922): 53, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/7379 12.

of scholarship surrounding the historical the development of *bel canto*: "Since the singing style of seventeenth-century Italy did not differ in any marked way from that of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, a connection can be drawn; but the term is best limited to its nineteenth-century use."[26]

II.   A NEW ARMY APPROACHES

A different conceptual framework, from the realm of music signification, offers its own method towards understanding historical musical styles—including *bel canto* style: topic theory. A relatively new field of musical discourse, the basis for topic theory was established by Leonard G. Ratner in his book *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (1980). In it, Ratner connects the experiences and traditions of everyday life in the eighteenth-century to specific musical characteristics and gestures:

> From its contacts with worship, poetry, drama, entertainment dance, ceremony, the military, the hunt, and the life of the lower classes, music in the early 18th century developed a thesaurus of *characteristic figures*, which formed a rich legacy for classic composers… They are designated here as *topics—*subjects for musical discourse. Topics appear as fully worked-out pieces, i.e., types, or as figures and progressions within a piece, i.e., styles.[27]

Ratner's argument emphasizes that, as people encountered different types of music in their everyday life, they would recognize and find meaning in the characteristics and gestures of such music in a concert setting. Furthermore, composers could combine and develop these characteristics in infinitely varied ways to create subtle, more layered meanings. Dances offer an example of one type of topical genre. While the types of

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[26] Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

[27] Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9.

dances encountered varied depending on one's social class in the eighteenth-century (e.g., minuet as high-class, the contredanse as low-class), listeners would be able to recognize the characteristics of popular dances within a piece of music.[28]

Other topics take the form of styles: groups of musical gestures that connected to a larger cultural aspect or expressive affect. One example in this category is the "hunt," characterized by mimicking horn calls and chordal (sometimes arpeggiated) patterns, featuring a quick tempo and fanfare-like declamation.[29] While Ratner did not include a *bel canto* style among his topics, his work identifying musical characteristics that held specific meanings for the audiences of a given stylistic era opened a new conceptual framework for discussing historical masterpieces in the classical canon. Danuta Mirka sums up the value and outcome of Ratner's seminal work, writing that "his insight that classical masterpieces were full of references to eighteenth-century soundscape transformed their reception by modern listeners… Today [topics] allow one to gain access to meaning and expression [in music] in a way that can be intersubjectively verified."[30] As an example of topical analysis, consider once again Handel's aria "Piangeró la sorte mia" (shown in Example 2). In addition to the *bel canto* characteristics previously discussed, Handel employs a *sarabande* topic. The Sarabande is a Baroque era dance characterized by a slow tempo and an emphasis on the second beat in triple meter—a "halt [which] gave the dance a deliberate, serious character which represented the high style."[31] The *sarabande* topic can be seen in Example 2, as the vocal melody

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[28] Danuta Mirka, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danita Mirka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

[29] Ibid, 18.

[30] Ibid, 1.

[31] Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 11-12.

begins on the second beat of the measure several times. Additionally, Handel uses the leading tone of the secondary dominant on beat two of m. 14 (circled in Example 2) to reinforce the sarabande characteristic. Handel's blending of *bel canto* and *sarabande* topics help create an affect which reflects the opera's narrative at that moment: Cleopatra grieves over her perceived loss of Caesar and failed coup to rule Egypt. The process of identifying different topics in an effort to understand varied and layered meanings in a piece of music forms the heart of Ratner's topic theory.

Example 2:
"Piangeró la sorte mia" from George Frideric Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, mm. 1-17.

Since 1980, scholars have further explored and expanded the field of topic theory. While Ratner's book focuses solely on Classical era topics, scholarship since then has extended to include different musical eras or composers,[32] expanded the lexicon of

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[32] Janice Dickensheets, "The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research* 31, no. 2-3 (April 2012), accessed April 1, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=31&date=20120101&aulast=Dickensheets,%20Janice&pages=&issue=2-

Classic-era topics,[33] and dissected new functions and methods composers use to create meaning through topics.[34] While several scholars identify the characteristics of *bel canto* style in their topical analysis, there remains no in-depth exploration of *bel canto* itself as a topic. Much of the scholarship into "vocal-style" topics revolves instead around the *singing style*, which first appeared in Ratner's seminal book. *Singing style* is characterized by "a lyric vein, a moderate tempo, slow note values, and a rather narrow range."[35] It is crucial to note that music written in *singing style* is not limited to vocal music and often appears in instrumental music (e.g., the opening of Mozart's K. 332 Sonata in F major).[36] Despite the rather vague defining characteristics of this topic,[37] it fails to capture some of the fundamental elements of *bel canto* music: large leaps and significant ornamentation in the melody, plus a larger-than-normal vocal range (typically spanning more than an octave).

The third movement of Beethoven's Sonata in E major Op. 109 provides a suitable comparison between *singing* and *bel canto* styles. Seen below in Example 3a, the

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3&rft_id=info:doi%2F10.1080%2F01411896.2012.682887&genre=article&spage=97&title=Journal%20of%20musicological%20research&atitle=The%20topical%20vocabulary%20of%20the%20nineteenth%20century&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A765901.

Martá Grabócz, *Morphologie Des Œuvres Pour Piano de Liszt: Influence Du Programme Sur l'évolution Des Forms Instrumentals* (Paris: Kimé, 1996).

[33] Wye J. Allanbrook, "Two Threads through the Labyrinth: Topic and Process in the First Movements of K. 332 and K. 333," *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet M. Levy, and William P. Mahrt (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), 125-172.

Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[34] Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[35] Sarah Day-O'Connell, "The Singing Style," *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 238.

[36] Wye J. Allanbrook, "Two Threads through the Labyrinth: Topic and Process in the First Movements of K. 332 and K. 333," in *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet M. Levy, and William P. Mahrt (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), 161.

[37] The *Singing Style* enjoys its own realm of discussion in topic theory, however no-one argues that it applies specifically to *Bel Canto* music.

theme for the movement opens with a melody comprised mainly of conjunct motion and in a narrow range. Example 3b shows Beethoven's first variation of the theme, where the now-*bel canto* melody transfers to a higher register, includes several large leaps, features significant ornamentation, and spans a larger range. Note also how the bass in Example 3b transitions almost solely to harmonic support, leaving behind the countermelody found in the theme. Though both the theme and first variation of this movement feature imitations of vocal-style music, their different expressive characters offer a clear juxtaposition between *singing style* and *bel canto* style topics.

Example 3a:
Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata in E major Op. 109, movement III, mm. 1-4.

Example 3b:
Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata in E major Op. 109, movement III, mm. 17-20.

There has been some debate on whether and how individual topics apply across musical eras, and other scholars have since begun exploring and identifying topics found in nineteenth-century music. This work primarily centers on the three composers most closely associated with *bel canto* music: Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini. The most concise

definitions of topics that envelop *bel canto* music occur in Janice Dickensheets' *The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century* (2012). Dickensheets identifies two separate topics related to *bel canto* music: *aria style* and *nocturne style*. Dickensheets defines *aria style* as the following:

> This song style is based on the elaborate, highly virtuosic, specifically Italian opera arias of the nineteenth century. Its sweeping melodic lines are florid, usually encompassing a larger range…, with difficult leaps and ornamentation reflecting its operatic origins. Accompanimental patterns range from arpeggio figures to more complex orchestral gestures designed to feature the melodic line.[38]

This definition falls in line with the generally accepted characteristics of *bel canto* music (as previously discussed in this chapter). However, Dickensheets' definition of *nocturne style* complicates the issue of *bel canto* as topic:

> In [Chopin's] hands [the nocturne] became an instrumental (almost always pianistic) evocation of the aria, its melodic material, reminiscent of solos and duets, accompanied by arpeggiated chord patterns in the left hand. Chopin's nocturnes also include virtuosic *fioriture* – evocations of the vocal ornamentations used in opera.[39]

There are two noticeable inconsistencies with the definitions of these topics: First, the main, and perhaps only, difference between *aria* and *nocturne* styles is simply the transfer of a vocal style (*aria*) to an instrument (*nocturne*). However, topics are not confined to a single instrument and are a set of musical gestures and characteristics that are identifiable in a wide range of media. There is considerable precedence for this feature of topic theory, and other scholars use *aria style* specifically in analyzing

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[38] Janice Dickensheets, "The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research* 31, no. 2-3 (April 2012):108, accessed April 1, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=31&date=20120101&aulast=Dickensheets,%20Janice&pages=&issue=2-3&rft_id=info:doi%2F10.1080%2F01411896.2012.682887&genre=article&spage=97&title=Journal%20of%20musicological%20research&atitle=The%20topical%20vocabulary%20of%20the%20nineteenth%20century&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A765901.

[39] Ibid, 107.

instrumental music.[40] Dickensheets' own article demonstrates this inconsistency, as she

uses piano works by Franz Liszt for examples of both *aria* and *nocturne* styles (Concerto

No. 1 in E♭ and "Canzona Nepolitana" from *Venezia e Napoli*, respectively).[41] Second,

Dickensheets associates *aria style* specifically with nineteenth-century Italian opera arias

(a genre led by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini in the first half of the century). However,

other scholars use *aria style* in analyzing Classic era works[42]—though, admittedly,

Dickensheets is writing specifically about nineteenth-century topics. Considering the

wider use of *aria style* within topic theory scholarship, however, it follows that some

mention of the historical development of this topic be included in its definition. It is also

worth noting that neither of the topics above discuss a performative element in

association with the musical characteristics, which is fairly standard in topic theory. Yet,

recent scholarship is beginning to trend towards linking practical, performative elements

to specific topics.[43] Considering that some scholars define *bel canto* as a performative

tradition, the role of the performer merits some mention in the topical discussion. Overall,

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[40] Wye J. Allanbrook, "Two Threads through the Labyrinth: Topic and Process in the First Movements of K. 332 and K. 333," in *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet M. Levy, and William P. Mahrt (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), 161.

[41] Janice Dickensheets, "The Topical Vocabulary of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research* 31, no. 2-3 (April 2012):110-111, accessed April 1, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=31&date=20120101&aulast=Dickensheets,%20Janice&pages=&issue=2-3&rft_id=info:doi%2F10.1080%2F01411896.2012.682887&genre=article&spage=97&title=Journal%20of%20musicological%20research&atitle=The%20topical%20vocabulary%20of%20the%20nineteenth%20century&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A765901.

[42] Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 272.

[43] The 15th International Conference on Music Signification (Scheduled for September 2021) call for papers states the theme for this conference "is the link between music signification and performance."

"15th International Congress on Musical Signification," Support Services, accessed March 18, 2021, https://rosaroda.com/15th-international-congress-on-musical-signification/#:~:text=ICMS%2015%2C%20organized%20by%20Joan,5th%20of%20September%202021.

Dickensheets' definitions for *aria* and *nocturne* styles offer an excellent foundation for a topical definition of *bel canto* style, but further refinement is still required.

III.   ONE FINAL PARLAY (Towards a More Unified Definition of *Bel Canto*)

The subject of *bel canto* appears to be a splintered, nebulous subject within the academic music discipline. The previous sections of this chapter dissect and classify many of the definitions and associations of *bel canto* music, with the final goal of proposing a more unified conception of *bel canto* style. The fundamental approach of topic theory, finding cultural implications and meanings associated with groups of musical gestures and characteristics, offers an optimal vehicle of discourse in this endeavor. Towards this end, a topical definition of *bel canto* style will satisfy the following criteria:

1) What characteristics and cultural associations does *bel canto* hold, and how do they influence an audience's comprehension of this style?
2) What notated musical gestures and compositional devices form this topic?
3) What role do performative elements play in translating notated characteristics into the larger stylistic meaning associated with *bel canto*?
4) What is the historical scope and development of this style?
5) How does this fundamentally vocal style translate to the piano?

As *bel canto* is most closely and commonly associated with the music of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, examining the function of specific *bel canto* style arias within the plots of their operas offers a window into the meanings and associations this style may have held for audiences of the nineteenth century. Throughout the various operas of these three composers, *bel canto* style arias offer *intimate expressions of love and beauty in the face of adversity*. There are two elements of this characteristic, "love," and "adversity," which form a symbiotic association in *bel canto* music. "Love" can be professed, shared, spurned, or lost between characters, but can also define a single character's relationship

to one's family, community, or even oneself. Consider Bellini's aria "Casta Diva," in which Norma (high priestess of the Druids) prays to the chaste goddess for peace and the protection of her community from the occupying Romans. Similarly, "adversity" can be both internal and external, and covers a broad spectrum of conflicts characters might face; from insurmountable external forces (the Roman army in *Norma*) to a comedic elderly guardian who wants to marry his own ward (Bartolo in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*). Most importantly, *bel canto* style implies some element of adversity, the response to which is an empowered, intimate expression of love.

Several of Rossini's, Donizetti's, and Bellini's most beloved *bel canto* arias fall under the cultural symbiotic association of love and adversity. In Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, for example, Lucia is coerced by her brother into marrying Lord Arturo despite her loving another man, Edgardo. The latter shows up after the wedding and curses Lucia for betraying his love; at which point Lucia descends into madness, kills her groom (Arturo), and, singing the *bel canto* style aria "Il dolce suono," imagines herself living happily with Edgardo. The aria, excerpted below in Example 4, expresses romantic love for Edgardo in the face of several conflicts: Lucia's betrayal of Edgardo's love, her murder of Arturo, familial coercion, and her collapse into insanity. Returning to the realm of topic theory, *bel canto* style is often paired with other topics to create layered meaning within a specific piece. In "Il dolce suono," Donizetti captures the tragedy of the moment by opening with a haunted funeral march in the chorus—created by continuously repeated pitches and a dotted rhythm. The shadows of this funeral march can be found in the orchestral accompaniment of the aria proper (seen in the bass line of Example 4). This topical fusion is similar to the previously discussed (Examples 1a and 2) "Piangeró la

sorte mia," from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, which combines *bel canto* style with a

sarabande topic to reflect the solemnity of the plot.

Example 4:
"Il dolce suono" from Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, mm. 49-57.

Having satisfied the cultural association requirements for *bel canto* style as a

topic (1), the next step is to assemble the notated gestures (2) and performative elements

(3) that combine to create *bel canto* style's characteristic expression of love in the face of

adversity. The following paragraphs discuss the compositional and performative elements

of *bel canto* style separately, but they ultimately combine to serve the same unified

purpose. In discussing the compositional elements of *bel canto* style, this section uses

Janice Dickensheets' definitions of *aria* and *nocturne* styles as a starting point but will

work towards a more detailed and specific understanding of the elements she identifies.

Consider the *bel canto* aria "A te, o cara," the 'A' section of which is excerpted below in

Example 5. From Bellini's opera *I Puritani*, the character who sings this aria (Arturo)

expresses love and happiness to his new bride (Elvira), who returns his affection. Though

it still contains the two symbiotic elements of *bel canto* (love and adversity), "A te, o

cara," takes on a slightly different plot function than usual. This aria is not sung in direct

response to adversity—rather, Bellini uses Arturo's professed love to set up the main

conflict of opera. After singing "A te, o cara," Arturo temporarily leaves to help Charles

I's widow evade persecution at the hands of Puritan soldiers (without informing Elvira or

anyone else of his intentions). Hence, when Arturo is seen skulking away with a

mysterious lady, everyone assumes the worst and questions his integrity and love for

Elvira. Arturo ultimately reappears and reveals the truth of his actions, thus proving true

his love for Elvira as expressed in *bel canto* style.

Bellini's aria "A te, o cara" displays many of the notated musical gestures

composers used to create the characteristics of *bel canto* style. First, the orchestral

accompaniment (shown here in piano reduction) is quite sparse—serving primarily as

harmonic support. The continuous eighth notes also provide a stagnant rhythmic motion,

around which the melody navigates. This constant rhythmic element allows the soloist to

make full use of *tempo rubato*, one of the performative elements to be discussed in

Chapter Three. While *bel canto* melodies are typically associated with a larger-than-usual

vocal range, the melody in "A te, o cara" only spans an octave. More notably, however,

its octave span reaches to a high A—a challenging note in the tenor's vocal range.

Register may therefore be considered more important than spanning a large range, as *bel

canto* style melodies can take place higher in register than typical vocal melodies (such as

those written in *singing style*).

Another gesture commonly associated with *bel canto* style is large melodic leaps. This is certainly true in "A te, o cara," as the melody features ascending motion from A to F# (a major sixth) in mm. 6 and 10; but what is equally important to *bel canto* style is that large leaps are often connected within the same breath. Consider measure six of Example 5—the leap from A to F# happens within a single word (*talora*) and under a slur, indicating that the two notes are connected even over the large interval. Despite being disjunct motion, large leaps often function as conjunct motion within *bel canto* melodies. In this regard, it is interesting to note that large intervals in *bel canto* style often take the form of a sixth (major or minor). Certainly, leaps of a sixth are not universal, but they are common enough to make it worth discussing. If one considers the interval of a sixth simply as an inverted third (if one is a major interval, the other is minor), then many large leaps in *bel canto* style are just conjunct melodic pitches rearranged for dramatic purposes.[44] The nature of the interval of a sixth, and its common occurrence in *bel canto* music, serves to reinforce the importance of connecting large melodic leaps in this style (typically through legato execution).

Ornamentation—the final notated characteristic to be discussed—bridges the gap between compositional and performative elements of *bel canto* style. Even with the expected performer contributions, composers typically included some written-out elaborate ornamental figures. Such figures often take the form of *fioratura*, or a quick

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[44] Looking back at Examples 1a and 2 in this chapter, Handel's "Piangeró la sorte mia" makes special use of large melodic leaps. In measures 12-13 of Example 2 the melody is essentially just moving in ascending stepwise motion, up a major second from E to F#. Handel interrupts this motion with several large leaps—jumping down a minor seventh from E to F# and then up a major ninth to G#, which serves as an appogiatura resolving to F# (thus completing the stepwise motion of E to F#). Even though Handel's melody features large, dissonant intervals (a minor seventh and major ninth), they both serve as registrally-rearranged neighbor tones within the harmony.

flourish of notes, as can be seen in measure seven of "A te, o cara" (Example 5). In this example, Bellini adds a considerable ornamental flourish between an otherwise simple, stepwise melodic motion (D to E) within a dominant harmonic function. While composers use the specific compositional devices of *bel canto* in various and unique ways, the general musical gestures that make up this style are: 1) a sparse accompaniment that supplies harmonic support and a generally constant rhythmic motion; 2) melody featured in a high register; 3) large melodic leaps functioning as conjunct motion; and 4) the use of notated ornamental figures.

Example 5:
"A te, o cara" from Vincenzo Bellini's *I puritani*, mm. 4-14.

Assessing the role of performative elements within *bel canto* style presents a

significant challenge in that, despite being "vocal" in style, *bel canto* music also occurs in

instrumental music. Thus, the performative devices used in a specific piece depend on the

instrument/voice for which the music is written. For example, vocalists often employ

messa di voce (gradually growing louder/softer while flawlessly holding the same pitch)

when singing in *bel canto* style, but such an effect is physically impossible at the piano

(whose pitches decay once struck). This document is focused primarily on *bel canto* style

as applied to the piano, and the following chapters discuss piano-specific notational and

performative elements of this style. The current chapter, however, deals with the ideation

of *bel canto* style itself, and so endeavors to identify the broader performative elements

crucial to the characteristics of *bel canto* style—without specific technical reference to a

single instrument or voice. Will Crutchfield's *The Bel Canto Connection* offers a

successful start in this regard:

> [the] lineaments [of *bel canto* style] can be summed up concisely. They start with
> a full, sustained tone and good legato… Alongside this went a concern for the
> basic beauty of sound ('warmth' was always a subjective attribute ascribed to the
> Italians' tone); beyond it lay the mastery of ornaments and technical intricacies,
> rapid motion in scales and passagework, flowing yet accentuated declamation of
> the Italian language, and the musicianly skills of improvisation.[45]

While Crutchfield identifies several performative characteristics commonly associated

with *bel canto* music, figuring these characteristics into a topical understanding of *bel*

canto requires connecting them specifically to the compositional gestures associated with

this style.

A full, sustained tone and concern for the basic beauty of sound, for example,

applies to many styles of music—and could even be considered a fundamental element of

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[45] Will Crutchfield, "The Bel Canto Connection," *Opera News* 62, no. 1 (1997): 32, accessed
January 20, 2020,
https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UN
L&volume=62&date=19970101&aulast=Crutchfield,%20Will&pages=&issn=00303607&issue=1&genre=
article&spage=30&title=Opera%20news&atitle=The%20bel%20canto%20connection&sid=EBSCO:RILM
%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A195265.

musicianship. When considering that *bel canto* style melodies occur in a higher-than-typical register, however, the challenge of tone quality takes on more specific concerns. A sustained and warm tone quality is a particular challenge in the high end of a vocalist's range, and instrumentalists often face issues of voicing and projection in their own high registers. "Good legato" is another performative characteristic that applies to many musical styles, but for which *bel canto* style presents unique challenges. The importance of legato articulation in *bel canto* style relates directly to the large melodic leaps—connecting these leaps through legato execution is crucial to projecting their conjunct nature. Additionally, as mentioned previously, *bel canto* style historically implies a level of ornamentation on the part of the performer, regardless of voice or instrument. Performers were expected not only to successfully execute a composer's notated ornaments, but also to add their own. This practice is most typically dictated by the form of a piece, as many *bel canto* arias repeat their 'A' section—and performers were historically expected to add their own ornaments while repeating material. Capturing the characteristics of *bel canto* style (intimate expression of love and beauty in the face of adversity) requires the combined performative and compositional elements of: 1) an accompaniment that supplies harmonic support and a generally regular rhythmic motion; 2) sustained, warm tone in a high range; 3) large, conjunct melodic leaps connected by legato execution; and 4) a melody enlivened by both notated and performer-added ornamental flourishes.

Bel Canto Style: A vocal style of music born from Italian opera, traditional *bel canto* arias often convey an intimate expression of love and beauty in the face of adversity. Applied more broadly, this style characterizes a symbiotic opposition between

"love" and "conflict." The musical elements that make up this characteristic are: 1) an accompaniment that supplies harmonic support and a regular rhythmic motion; 2) a sustained, warm tone often in a high register; 3) large melodic leaps functioning as conjunct motion and connected by legato execution; and 4) a melody enlivened by both notated and performer-added embellishments.

Having assembled a definition of *bel canto* style within topic theory, the next step is to assess the historical development of this style. As previously mentioned, there is no consensus within the discipline on what historical music might fall within the *bel canto* category. While there is room for a more in-depth study into the historical characteristics of *bel canto* style, there is a considerable amount of music from the Baroque and Classic eras that employ the same compositional gestures and performative expectations as the definition above (which is based primarily on nineteenth-century music). Having already discussed Handel's "Piangeró la sorte mia," the best examples from the Classic era come from Mozart's operas. "Porgi amor" (excerpted in Example 6), from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, demonstrates many of the characteristic *bel canto* elements listed above: sparse harmonic accompaniment set in a constant rhythmic motion, melody in a higher register, and notated ornamental figures. Although the ornamentation is not quite as decorative as seen in "A te, o cara," it still falls within this general *bel canto* compositional characteristic. Additionally, "Porgi amor" also features the necessary symbiotic characteristics of *bel canto* style (love and adversity): the Countess faces adversity in losing her husband's affections (the Count is attempting to seduce his servant Susanna), and expresses both love and grief in this aria. While leaving the door open to more in-depth research into the historical development of this style,

there are simply too many historical pieces that fall under the above definition of *bel canto* style to restrict this style to music written in the nineteenth century.

Example 6:
"Porgi amor" from W.A. Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, mm. 18-25.

Bel canto music is considered among the most beautiful and beloved in the classical repertoire. Yet research related this style is so nebulous and disjointed that defining the term *bel canto* has eluded consensus within the academic field. This chapter works to identify main themes throughout the existing scholarship in this field and, with their help, ultimately provides one answer to the riddle of *bel canto* style. The rest of this document is dedicated specifically to the execution of *bel canto* style (as defined in part three of this chapter) in piano music. Chapter Two considers piano-specific conventions within the notated elements of *bel canto* style, while Chapter Three addresses the performative challenges and techniques available at the piano when imitating the vocal features of *bel canto* music.

CHAPTER 2: TOWARDS A CONCEPTION OF SLURS ACROSS HISTORICAL

ERAS

Chapter One used topic theory as a vehicle for understanding *bel canto* style. In doing so, it considered both notated and performative devices that combine to create *bel canto* style's characteristic symbiotic association between love and conflict. Chapters Two and Three focus specifically on *bel canto* style as found in piano music. Chapter Two, specifically, is dedicated to understanding the ways composers use notation to emulate *bel canto* singing at the piano. Towards this end, one notational device is more prevalent and important than all others: the slur. This articulatory sign takes on a heightened importance in piano *bel canto* style music due to 1) the absence of text in identifying melodic inflection, with slurs helping replace the role of text stress in vocal music, and 2) the importance of legato execution in *bel canto* style—particularly across large melodic leaps.

While there is no academic consensus on a historical "period" for *bel canto* style, the composers whose music is most associated with vocal music in this style span from Handel in the late Baroque era, include Mozart in the Classical era, and culminate with Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini in the early Romantic era.[46] This chronological arc is echoed in piano music seeking to emulate the vocal qualities of *bel canto* style and can be seen frequently in the keyboard works of J.S. Bach,[47] W.A. Mozart, and Frédéric Chopin. Assessing the role of slurs in *bel canto* style piano works spanning from approximately

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[46] Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-4. Owen Jander and Ellent T. Harris, "Bel Canto," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed September 1, 2020, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02551.

[47] The Allemande and Sarabande from Partita No. 4 in D major and Sarabande from Partita No. 1 in B♭ major all show notated musical characteristics consistent with the definition of *bel canto* offered in Chapter One.

1700 to 1850 presents significant obstacles. Chief among them is the development of keyboard instruments, as Bach, Mozart, and Chopin all wrote and played on considerably different instruments: Bach wrote for harpsichord and clavichord, Mozart for fortepiano, and Chopin for pianoforte. As such, studies of historical notation tend to consider each era individually: harpsichord and the Baroque era,[48] fortepiano and the Classical era,[49] and the pianoforte in the Romantic era.[50] In addition to writing for different instruments, Bach notoriously published his keyboard works with minimal notated articulation, leaving performers with the task of adding their own articulation. Finally, notational practices themselves developed significantly throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is particularly true of the slur, which saw its notated use and executorial (performative) idioms grow in widely varying and inconsistent ways (the use of longer slurs and whether they still imply an inflection, for example).[51]

The academic discussion around music notation is dominated by the field of performance practice, which seeks to identify historical performative devices and methods of interpretation, advocating for their use in modern performances. Based on historical treatises and a renewed understanding of the development and interpretation of music notation, performance practice pursues what is termed "historically informed performance" (HIP). Interpreting composers' music notation relative to the instruments on which they played (informed by treatises written for those instruments) is among the

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[48] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 144-187.

[49] Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 31-54.

[50] Neal Peres da Costa, "Nineteenth-Century Expressive Performing Practices Preserved in the Playing of the Oldest Pianists on Record," *Piano Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (2014): 10-24.

[51] Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 163-183.

most fundamental and significant contributions from the field of performance practice.[52]

Applied to the slur, this sectionalized approach yields many valuable insights about how

performers can execute this versatile articulation according to specific contexts (such as

an instrument, piece, style, or composer).[53] As a result of this emphasis on instrument and

era-specific execution, however, there have been minimal attempts to understand the slur

as a compositional tool whose use is ubiquitous throughout the Common Practice Era.

The focus of Chapter One was to craft a topical definition of *bel canto* style. The

role of Chapter Two is to frame and examine the slur as a compositional tool in the

service of this style and, in doing so, combines the expressive-executorial focus of

performance practice scholarship with the compositional-stylistic lens offered by topic

theory. Section one of this chapter conceptualizes slurs as a compositional tool for

constructing style (i.e. "topics"), chasing a unifying thread through Baroque, Classical,

and Romantic era compositions. Section two applies this constructional lens in analyzing

the specific roles of slurs in *bel canto* style piano music.

I.   SLURS IN THE SERVICE OF STYLE

Topic theory is a field of study dedicated to finding cultural implications and

meanings associated with specific groups of musical gestures and characteristics. Coined

by Leonard G. Ratner in 1980, topic theory argues that, as people encounter music and

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[52] Robert Winter, liner notes for "Beethoven Sonata in E-flat major, Opus 27, No. 1; Sonata in C-sharp minor, Opus 27, No. 2 ('Moonlight'); Mozart A minor Rondo K. 511; D major Rondo K. 485," performed on fortepiano by Malcolm Bilson, Elektra/Asylum/Nonesuch Records H-71377, 1980, $33^{1/3}$ rpm.

Malcolm Bilson, foreword to *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications*, by Sandra P. Rosenblum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xiv-xv.

[53] Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 112-113.

sounds in their every-day lives, audiences recognize and find meaning in the characteristics of such sounds in a concert setting. If one has experienced a waltz, for example, one would be able to aurally recognize its characteristics (a quick tempo and triple-simple meter with an emphasis on the downbeat) away from the dance floor. Composers not only referenced the daily soundscape of their eras, but could then combine and develop these topics to create layered meanings within a specific piece of music. The following dissection of historical treatises works to frame the slur as one of the most fundamental tools available to composers in notating topics, and in varying and developing a topic within a specific piece.

Before considering examples of slurs functioning as topical construction, it is imperative to first understand what a slur is capable of signifying. A basic modern definition of a slur can be found, with some variation, in any beginning piano method book: a slur shows that a group of notes are to be played connected, with multiple notes played without a break in sound between them.[54] Of course, advanced pianists know that not only are there different ways of playing and creating legato, but also, slurs can often indicate much more than note-length (such as rubato and dynamic shaping). The field of historical performance practice discusses the meaning of slurs at length.[55] However, in addition to considering a single historical era at a time, many performance practice

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[54] Nancy and Randall Faber, *Piano Adventures: Technique & Artistry Book, Level 1*, (Dovetree Productions Inc., 2011) 2.

[55] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard,* trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 104-111, 117-121.

Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 228-258.

Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 158-182.

Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 107-124.

scholars tend to be primarily concerned with the execution of various slurs, not in how they are used to construct style within a piece. Thus, outcomes often take the form of rules and guidelines for various ways to execute slurs within a specified historical era. One such example is Paul Badura-Skoda's *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, in which he proposes a simple rule (with plenty of exceptions, variations, and nuances)[56] with regard to articulation in Bach's keyboard music: "Stepwise passages should be on the whole played legato, whereas larger intervals and leaps should be detached."[57] Similarly, when scholars do discuss the various ways composers use slurs within a style, the results focus on lists of uses rather than methods of interpretation. In *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: a Practical Guide*, Richard Troeger offers a list of eight different purposes for which Bach uses slurs in his keyboard music, ranging from "showing large phrase units" to "imitating string and orchestral idioms."[58] However, Troeger stops short of offering his readers a method for identifying which purpose any specific slur fulfills: "how a slurred group or succession of them is realized by the performer depends on many contextual factors… Musical context and the player's taste must decide the meaning in every case."[59]

Historical treatises form a bedrock of primary sources for the field of performance practice, and scholarship that focuses on various types of slurs and executions reflects the executorial approach found in many of these treatises. One curious anomaly, however, is that very few historical treatises actually define the term "slur" in their musical-basics

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[56] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard,* trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 96

[57] Ibid.

[58] Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 115-118.

[59] Ibid, 112-113.

chapters, while today this articulatory sign gets defined at the beginning of most

pedagogical methods. Consider C.P.E. Bach's seminal treatise *Essay on the True Art of*

Playing Keyboard Instruments. The first notated use of slurs occurs in chapter one (on

fingering at the keyboard), shown in Example 7, yet C.P.E. Bach doesn't address slurs

specifically until chapter three (on rules of performance).[60] Notably, C.P.E. Bach's third

chapter offers an abundance of rules for how to execute slurs, but doesn't actually offer a

conceptual method for how composers use this notational sign:

> Notes which are to be played legato must be held for their full length. A slur is
> placed above them… Patterns of two and four slurred notes are played with a
> slight, scarcely noticeable increase of pressure on the first and third tones. The
> same applies to the first tones of groups of three notes. In other cases only the first
> of the slurred notes is played in this manner.[61]

Example 7:
C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, chapter one, figure
41, p. 60.

C.P.E. Bach's discussion of slurs focuses primarily on different types of executions. Yet,

the fact Bach introduces slurs in relation to fingering at the piano, well before defining its

articulatory effects, suggests this expressive marking also plays a more fundamental role

in musical notation.

Similarly, Daniel Gottlob Türk uses notated slurs in musical figures throughout

his *School of Clavier Playing*, starting from the very first chapter (which introduces

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[60] Carl Phillipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, ed. and
trans. William J. Mitchell (London: Cassell and Company, 1951), 60, 154-155.
[61] Ibid, 154.

musical basics such as pitches, accidentals, key signatures, rhythm, etc.).[62] Yet, this

articulatory notation doesn't receive an explicit definition until nearly 300 pages later, in

chapter six (on execution):

> The slurring (binding) of tones is commonly shown by a curved line… For tones
> which are to be slurred, the finger should be allowed to remain on the key until
> the duration of the given note is completely past, so that not the slightest
> separation (rest) results… It should be observed, in addition, that the note on
> which the curved line begins should be very gently (and almost imperceptibly)
> accented.[63]

Türk's definition hits all the same executorial notes as C.P.E. Bach's treatise (written 35

years apart)—that notes under a slur are connected and receive their full duration, and the

first note under a slur is emphasized. More significantly, Türk also spends a large portion

of chapter six discussing when and how performers should use accentuation and pauses

to achieve clarity in musical performance, using punctuation's role in language as an

analogy.[64] While he brings many different musical elements into this discussion

(including harmony, meter, and rhythm), Türk employs slurs in musical examples to help

demonstrate his point. Consider how the different slurring in Example 8 coincides with

Türk's lingual analogy:

> Just as the words: 'He lost his life not only his fortune' can have an entirely
> different meaning according to the way they are punctuated (He lost his life, not
> only his fortune, or, He lost his life not, only his fortune), in the same way the
> execution of a musical thought can be made unclear or even wrong through
> incorrect punctuation… If a musician would play through a point of rest in the
> music without breaking the continuity—in one breath as it were—this would be as
> faulty and contrary to purpose as if, while reading, one would read beyond the
> point where a phrase or sentence ends without interruption.[65]

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[62] Daniel Gottlob Türk, *School of Clavier Playing,* trans. Raymond H. Haggh (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 56.

[63] Ibid, 344.

[64] Ibid, 327-329.

[65] Ibid, 329.

Example 8:
Daniel Gottlob Türk, *School of Clavier Playing*, chapter six, part one, section 19, p. 329.

Türk's use of slurring in musical examples throughout his *School of Clavier Playing* suggests this sign serves a fundamental constructional, almost syntactic function in music—to which the emphasis of the first note and de-emphasis of the final note under a slur is key.

The importance of slurs as tools of accent and emphasis appears even in treatises for other instruments, such as Johann Joachim Quantz's *On Playing the Flute*. Shown in Example 9, Quantz defines slurs through execution—the first note under a slur must be articulated with the tongue, while subsequent notes are "slurred, and the tongue meanwhile has nothing to do."[66] The fact that treatise authors throughout the eighteenth century use the notated slur almost instinctively in their musical figures and examples (and before defining its rules for execution) hints at its key compositional role.

Example 9:
Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, chapter six, figure 5, p. 74.

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[66] Joachim Johann Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 74.

Monsieur de Saint-Lambert's *Principles of the Harpsichord*, published in 1702, adds another piece of the conceptual puzzle when he explicitly equates slurs with ties (musical functions which, after all, use the same notation):

> The slur greatly resembles the tie in its symbol and use. Like the tie, it connects several notes together, and thus increases their value… [the difference being] that the tie only joins notes on the same pitch, while the slur joins notes placed on different pitches.[67]

de Saint-Lambert reinforces this definition with executorial instructions specific to the harpsichord:

> The general rule is to hold down all the notes enclosed by the slur until it is time to release the last one, but there are some instances when they must not all be held… It is enough that the notes enclosed by the slur move by step to make it obligatory to hold only the first and the last.[68]

More closely related to finger pedaling than legato, Saint Lambert's first and most basic execution of a slur is to hold all the notes together, releasing all notes under a slur together with the last note (this technique is often attributed specifically to playing unmeasured preludes, such as those of Louis Couperin).[69] However, Saint Lambert later adds more nuanced executions based on the notes within a slur, suggesting to hold only the first and last notes of a slur if followed by stepwise or non-consonant tones.[70] In any of Saint Lambert's suggested executions, the first note of the slur is always held down for the duration of the slur—creating emphasis by prolonging the sound rather than accenting the attack (as the harpsichord was incapable of accenting a note with volume). Another technical implication of Saint Lambert's instruction is a necessary lifting of the hand after

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[67] Monsieur de Saint Lambert, *Principles of the Harpsichord*, ed. and trans. Rebecca Harris-Warrick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29.

[68] Ibid, 30.

[69] Ibid, 29.

[70] Ibid, 30.

the last note of a slur, which creates a separation in sound after a slur. The general takeaways from Saint Lambert's technical instructions indicate that, even on harpsichord, the first note of the slur is emphasized, and that separation follows the final note under a slur.

The definitions and instructions for slurs from the four treatises above demonstrate a remarkably consistent ideation for this musical notation: that slurs can indicate both emphasis and de-emphasis, both articulation and rest. The exact method of executing this emphasis changes between instruments (finger legato on harpsichord, length and volume on fortepiano, and tonguing on flute), but the idea of slurs functioning as a tool of accentuation serves as a common thread between authors writing for different instruments and across both the Baroque and Classical eras.

Turning to the Romantic era, conceptualizing the slur is complicated by its expanded and widely varying uses in the hands of nineteenth century composers. In Chopin's Prelude in E minor Op. 28 no. 4, for example, slurs extend across entire sections of music. Consider Example 10—accenting the first note under a slur and de-emphasizing the last note becomes impossible when that slur spans half of an entire prelude. Most existing performance practice scholarship approaches the slur's notational development by considering various slurs as having disparate meanings—usually according to their length. For instance, Sandra Rosenblum's chapter on slurs in *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* includes sections titled "The Expressivity of Short Slurs" and "Long Legato Groups and Slurs." Rosenblum's interpretation of historical treatises offers a detailed ideation of slurs functioning as tools of accentuation. However, she confines the idea of slurs as accentuation specifically to short slur-lengths:

"Short slurs, with their initial accented attack, legato grouping, and variable release, provide a clear strong-to-weak linear direction in the shaping of a musical line, highlighting its speechlike or communicative quality."[71]

Example 10:
Frédéric Chopin, Prelude in E minor Op. 28 no. 4, mm. 1-15.

Longer slurs, sometimes called "phrase markings," take on a variety of other functions relating to phrase length, form, and even what Rosenblum terms "illusory slurs."[72] Performance practice scholarship's tendency to classify and understand slurs

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[71] Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 159.
[72] Ibid 163-169.

differently according to various lengths is useful,[73] but again relies on the performer to identify and execute slurs according to the context within a specific piece. Thus, slurs become a result, or an execution, of a style rather than a tool for constructing style itself.

Incorporating the extended and diverse functions of slurs into an ideation of their role as tools for construction requires establishing whether slurs across historical eras uniformly signify accentuation through both emphasis and de-emphasis. Primary sources from the nineteenth century clearly indicate the significance of accentuation in music of the day. In his *A Complete Theoretical & Practical Course of Instructions on the Art of Playing the Pianoforte*, published in 1828, Johan Nepomuk Hummel uses a lingual analogy similar to Türk's *School of Clavier Playing*: "As in speaking, it is necessary to lay an emphasis on certain syllables or words, in order to render our discourse impressive, and the meaning of our words intelligible to the hearer, so in music the same thing is requisite."[74] Shown in Example 11, Adolph Kullak's 1861 treatise *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte-Playing* specifically discusses slurs as a tool of accentuation: "According to a well-known rule, the first slurred note takes a comparatively strong accent, while the second is lifted with the gentlest finger-tip staccato."[75]

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[73] Ibid 158-172.
Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 235-240.

[74] Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *A Complete Theoretical & Practical Course of Instructions on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte*, trans. anonymous (London: T. Boosey & Co., 1829), 3:54.

[75] Adolph Kullak, *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte Playing*, ed. Hans Bischoff, trans. Theodore Baker (1893; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 240.

Example 11:
Adolph Kullak, *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte-Playing*, chapter 15, p. 241.

While nineteenth century treatises offer clear definitions of a strong—weak emphasis on short slurs, they offer little clarity on the role of longer slurs in accentuation. In *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750—1900*, Clive Brown uses a correspondence between Johannes Brahms and violinist Joseph Joachim (to whom Brahms dedicated his Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77) to illustrate differing nineteenth century attitudes towards the execution of slurs.[76] According to Brown, "Brahms regarded the shortening of the last note in [slurred] pairs as obligatory, whether or not a rest or staccato mark was indicated, and in a longer [slur] group as optional."[77] In *Piano Interpretation in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries*, Elena Letňanová uses Jan Kleczyński's first-hand accounts of Chopin's playing and teaching to construct a portrait of Chopin's approach to phrasing and accentuation: "the analogy between music and language is how Chopin expressed his view of necessary separation of different phrases, different nuances of the forte and the piano (even in the smallest

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[76] Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 233.
[77] Ibid, 234.

motives)."[78] Example 12a shows the opening of Chopin's Waltz in A♭ major Op. 69,[79] while Example 12b is Kleczyński's notation of how Chopin executed his waltz in performance. [80] Notice that, even though Kleczyński's notation shows Chopin shaping the notes contained under the long slur, the first note still appears to be slightly accented (evidenced by the immediate decrescendo), while the last note is de-emphasized in both length and volume. While first-hand accounts are not infallible sources, Kleczyński's notation of Chopin's performance suggests that the first and last notes of longer slurs still received special attention (via emphasis and de-emphasis), while the notes between them may be expressed independent from the accentuation on the first and last notes of the slur.

Example 12a:
Frédéric Chopin, Waltz in A♭ major Op. 69, mm. 1-2.

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78 Elena Letňanová, *Piano Interpretation in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Study of Theory and Practice Using Original Documents* (London: McFarland & Company, 1991), 120.

79 As is often the case in Chopin's music, not all published versions of this waltz show the same slur in the opening phrase.

80 Elena Letňanová, *Piano Interpretation in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Study of Theory and Practice Using Original Documents* (London: McFarland & Company, 1991), 120.

Example 12b:
Elena Letňanová, *Piano Interpretation in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries*, chapter five, p. 120.

A survey of how notable historical treatises discuss the slur in music notation reveals a diverse array of uses and executions. Yet, the idea of slurs functioning as tools for emphasis and accentuation creates a unifying thread between these primary sources. While few of these treatises discuss the slur as a compositional tool,[81] an executorial understanding that the first note under a slur is emphasized and the last note under a slur is de-emphasized is common to almost all treatises written between 1700-1850.[82] As this chapter considers examples of how the slur is used as a compositional tool in constructing style, it understands slurs to denote accentuation of some form according to the following definition:

1) the first note under a slur is emphasized, and the last note under a slur is de-emphasized.
2) Additional notated expressive markings can indicate further emphases in longer slurs, or even supersede rule one.

Consider Beethoven's use of slurs and sforzando-piano as he transitions to the development in the first movement of his Sonata Op. 57 in F minor, "Appassionata," shown in Example 13. Slur No. 1 indicates a typical slurred emphasis on the downbeat

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[81] These treatises were, after all, written for student musicians of their respective eras.

[82] The specific treatises considered in this chapter were published between 1702-1861.

and de-emphasis on beat three. Slur No. 2 follows the same slurred accentuation, but

Beethoven's added sforzando-piano indicates an even louder emphasis on the first note of

the slur. Slur No. 3 follows the same pattern of emphasis and de-emphasis on the first and

last notes under the slur, but with an added sforzando-piano accent on beat four. Finally,

Beethoven uses a sforzando-piano to overrule the de-emphasis on the last note under slur

No. 4. Considered all together, Beethoven combines slurs and sforzando-piano accents to

de-emphasize the downbeats in mm. 2-3 and to emphasize beat four in mm. 1-3, creating

metric instability as he transitions between formal sections of this sonata movement.

Example 13:
Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata in F minor, Op. 57 "Appassionata," mm. 61-64.

Having conceptualized slurs as a tool of accentuation capable of indicating both articulation and rest, the next step in this chapter is to examine how this tool is used to construct, layer, and vary topics within a piece of music. The following examples examine piano works by J.S. Bach, W.A. Mozart, and Frédéric Chopin, and demonstrate how these composers employ slurs in the service of style (as understood by topic theory).

The keyboard works of J.S. Bach remain among the most challenging, expressive, and commonly played music in the piano repertoire. Moreover, nearly every pianist has grappled with the interpretive challenge of articulation in Bach's keyboard music. Bach sparingly added articulation marks (e.g., staccato, slur, or portato) in his keyboard compositions, if at all. Several theories have been posited as to why Bach wrote more detailed articulations in his works for voice or string instruments, yet so few in his keyboard works. One antiquated argument suggested the harpsichord as a one-dimensional instrument whose string-plucking action is inadequate and inferior to the modern piano.[83] This argument was often expressed colloquially—for example, with the analogy "why use a broom when you have a vacuum?"[84] While true that depressing the key faster on the harpsichord will not increase the volume, it is in fact quite capable of varying detached and connected articulations. Indeed, diverse and creative articulations formed the bedrock of expressive playing during the Baroque, with note lengths and articulated gestures given considerable attention in scholarship on the era.[85] Paul Badura-

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[83] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard,* trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 170.

[84] Daniel Breedon, anecdote relayed in personal conversation with the author, 2013.

[85] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard,* trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 92-99.
   Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 144-158.

Skoda posits that Bach trusted in the player's education and good taste in eschewing detailed articulation marks from his keyboard scores.[86] Whatever the reason, pianists today face the task of creating their own articulatory road map through Bach's keyboard music. Studying how Bach uses slurs in non-keyboard music offers some direction in applying slurs to his keyboard works.

The opening line of "Buß und Reu," the first aria of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, offers an example of slurs as a compositional tool. Example 14 shows the Bärenreiter Urtext edition,[87] which adds an implied slur in measure one (all other solid-line slurs in this example can be found in the holograph manuscript).[88] In mm. 1-3 the slur takes place in the first two beats of the measure while beat three is detached from the gesture. Bach strings these elements together to accentuate the metric qualities of 3/8—emphasizing the downbeat with the start of a slur, de-emphasizing beat two, and articulating the upbeat (beat 3) by separating it from the slur gestures. This lilting gesture throughout the first four bars suggests a straight-forward *minuet* topic. In the following measures, however, Bach adjusts his slurring to create tension against the meter (which gets continually outlined by the basso continuo). In mm. 5-9 of Example 14, Bach ties beats three and one across the bar-line, and slurs beat one into beat two (recall that Saint Lambert closely relates the tie and slur as markings that connect notes together). Not only do the flutes not articulate the downbeat, the tie-slur figure contains a 4-3 suspension that places a dissonance on the downbeat and resolves on beat two. Bach uses slurs in

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[86] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard,* trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 93.

[87] J.S. Bach, *Matthäuspassion, BWV* 244, ed. Alfred Dürr and Max Schneider (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1972), 39.

[88] J.S. Bach, *Passio secundum Matthaeum*, Manuscript, c.a. 1740, accessed December 1, 2019, https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ReverseLookup/440860.

conjunction with rhythm, harmony, and meter to construct the effect for this aria. As a result, the flute melodies tug dissonantly against the lilting *minuet* in the basso continuo—helping evoke the penance and remorse of which the vocalist sings. Armed with this understanding, performers can work to execute the slurs in a way that draws the listener to Bach's dissonant metric tension.

Example 14:
"Buß und Reu" from J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244, mm. 1-9.

As discussed previously, in the keyboard works of J.S. Bach it becomes the performer's role not just to interpret slurs, but to add them to the score. Using slurs to distinguish the construction of a piece offers a method towards solving the articulatory puzzle presented by Bach's keyboard music, as the following examples suggest. The second movement of J.S. Bach's Italian Concerto is among his most performed *bel canto* style piano works.[89] However, before considering the *bel canto* melody, performers must make decisions about the construction and character of the bass ostinato. Example 15a shows the opening two measures of this movement as found in the first edition, published in 1735 and engraved by Christoph Weigel in Nuremburg (no manuscript copy has been

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[89] Christian De Luca, "J.S. Bach Italian Concerto," masterclass by Sir András Schiff, Juilliard, October 16, 2017, accessed March 1, 2021, https://youtu.be/3-mPaaHvLLU, 19:20-19:35.

found to date).[90] The music consists of two voices: the bottom notes are all beamed together through the entire measure, while the tenor voice is beamed together just in the second half of each measure (after the eighth-note rests). The visual presentation of this example alone is challenging—the full-measure beaming is atypical for 3/4 meter (common practice is to beam by quarter note), plus composers rarely show triadic figures such as these in separate voices. In addition to the two voices delineated by note-stem direction, it is possible to interpret two voices delineated by register—one voice consists of triadic thirds moving in stepwise motion in the tenor register, while the other consists of a quasi-pedal tone in the bass register.

Example 15a:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, bass clef mm. 1-2.

The opening basso continuo of this movement is customarily played today by slurring all thirds together, as shown in Example 15b. [91] This effectively emphasizes the

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[90] Transposed to bass clef by author.

Johann Sebastian Bach, *Zweyter Theil der Clavier Ubung Bestehend in einem Concerto nach,* First edition (Nuremburg: Christoph Weigel, n.d. 1735), accessed march 1, 2020, https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ReverseLookup/71297.

[91] Andras Schiff, "J.S. Bach Italian Concerto, BWV 971," recorded live at Leipzig Bachfest, November 6, 2010, accessed April 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghTitIMtTCM&ab_channel=o_o.

Glenn Gould, "J.S. Bach Italian Concerto, BWV 971: II. Andante," Recorded 1960, accessed April 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYvEUyNCZC8&ab_channel=GlennGould-Topic.

Murray Perahia, "J.S. Bach Italian Concerto, BWV 971: II. Andante," Published to YouTube October 17, 2011, accessed April 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UrZWZ7GSdA&ab_channel=Zolt%C3%A1nGergelySz%C3%A9n%C3%A1si.

Angela Hewitt, "J.S. Bach Italian Concerto, BWV 971: II. Andante," Recorded 1986, accessed April 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMDN9qGwD6U&ab_channel=ClassicalRecords.

bassline as two voices delineated by register while the tenor line is slurred together. Although this performative custom successfully shows the lines between registers in the left hand, it is certainly not the only (or necessarily the best) choice for articulating this figure. Consider the ambiguity Bach creates by beaming entire measures of eighth notes together—though written in 3/4 meter, the beaming and rests in the tenor voice resemble 6/8 meter. Another articulatory option for this figure is to emphasize this implied metric ambiguity by slurring the last three eighth notes of each measure, but not across the bar-line. As seen in Example 15c, this effectively emphasizes the downbeat and the "and" of two—giving the listener a clear downbeat in the next measure while also obscuring the meter. Slurring the final three eighth notes and then subtly lifting to show the end of the slur and subsequent downbeat also helps accentuate a key feature of the melodic line: ties across the bar-line. As shown in Example 16,[92] a key articulatory and rhythmic feature of Bach's *bel canto* melody in the second movement of his Italian Concerto is ties, which he uses to create syncopations and emphasize off-beats. Although slurring the left-hand figure across the bar-line (15b) draws the listener to the melodic tenor line, showing the downbeat with a subtle lift between measures (15c) helps emphasize the ties across bar-lines—a feature of Bach's *bel canto* melody (seen in Example 16) which is very much related to Saint Lambert's close association of ties and slurs. Just as previously seen in "Buß und Reu," Bach plays against the conventions of the meter while still reaffirming the downbeat of each measure.

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[92] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Italienisches Konzert, BWV 971*, ed. Walter Emery and Renate Kretschmar-Fischer (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1977), 10.

Example 15b:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, bass clef mm. 1-2, slurs added by author.

Example 15c:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, bass clef mm. 1-2, slurs added by author.

Example 16:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef mm. 4-6.

Returning to the idea of metric obscurity in the second movement of Bach's Italian Concerto, the melody is clearly written in 3/4 meter: the eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes are all beamed to clearly show three beats per measure. Assuming Bach consciously decided to beam the left-hand and right-hand figures differently, topic theory can provide an interpretive path towards understanding this notational anomaly. Entertaining the idea that the LH ostinato figure throughout this movement is in 6/8, it is possible to interpret this figure as a *pastorale* topic. The key signifiers of the *pastorale* topic are a sustained bass—usually a drone on a pedal tonic or dominant, triple or

compound meter, and a simple, folk-like melody or melodic flourish.[93] In *The Musical Topic*, Raymond Monelle traces the metric association between *pastorale* and *siciliano*, the latter a slow dance in compound meter and featuring a dotted rhythm (see Example 19—Mozart Sonata in A major K. 331, movement I). Monelle identifies a genre of "*aria siciliana*" from the early seventeenth century that is written in triple (as opposed to compound) meter and features "dotted rhythms, making it possible to hear it as a *siciliana*."[94] Bach's ostinato figure in the second movement of the Italian Concerto not only skews towards a 6/8 time signature, but also features a bass drone-like element in the bass register (Example 15). Although these bass notes do not sustain like a drone (a physical impossibility given the register changes in the LH), they do form pedal-like harmonic support throughout the entire movement. Indeed, playing just the low-register bass notes alone offers a harmonic outline for the piece (D minor modulates to F major via a circle of fifths progression). Monelle's research even offers historical precedence for composers writing the compound metric elements of *pastorale* and *siciliano* topics in triple time. Bach himself uses this compositional tactic in the Minuet of his Partita No. 5 in G major (Example 17), as evidenced by the double stems on beat one and the "and" of two.

In the Minuet from Partita No. 5 in G major, shown in Example 17, Bach blurs the line between minuet and gigue (both quick-tempo dances) by using note-stems to visually direct the performer to accent the melody according to a 6/8 time signature. Only in cadential moments does Bach reveal the written 3/4 meter of the movement (measure

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[93] Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 21.

[94] Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 215.

four in Example 17). Bach recycles the same device in the second movement of the Italian Concerto, shown in Example 18. Not only does the second measure in Example 18 incorporate quarter-note and half-note values in the LH figure, but Bach also beams the eighth and sixteenth notes according to 3/4 meter as the movement cadences in F major.

Example 17:
"Minuet" from J.S. Bach's Partita No. 5 in G major, mm. 1-5.

Example 18:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, mm. 25-27.

Having deconstructed the bass ostinato that occurs throughout this movement, there is ample evidence to suggest a performer should bring out the *pastorale* elements of the movement. Slurs are the tool for creating this emphasis (compare Examples 15b and 15c), as the performer can fool the listener into feeling 6/8 meter by accenting (via volume or note-length) the first note of the slur, then de-emphasizing the final note of each measure (thus preparing the downbeat of the subsequent measure).

The first movement of Mozart's Sonata in A major, K. 331 offers several examples of slurs in the service of both constructing and varying topical style. Mozart

establishes a *siciliano* topic in the theme of this movement. The *siciliano* is characterized

by a 6/8 time signature, slow tempo, and dotted eighth-sixteenth note pattern on the

downbeat, which, according to Türk, expresses gentleness and requires legato

execution.[95] Mozart's sparse slurring in Example 19 indicates just such a character, as it

emphasizes the downbeat in the first two measures and de-emphasizes the sixteenth note.

Having established the dance topic for this movement, the slurs in the first variation on

this theme show Mozart playing with various characteristics of the *siciliano*—preserving

some elements while changing others. Consider Example 20: Mozart uses slurs to

maintain the prevailing dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm (superimposed at the bottom of

the first measure). Mozart then juxtaposes the *siciliano* characteristic in the melody with

an emphasis on beats two and five in the left hand—in direct opposition to the *siciliano*'s

prevailing rhythmic emphasis.[96] Notice that, as the right-hand encounters longer slurs in

measure four of Example 20, the left hand returns to its lilting pulse and gets back in step

with the dance. While Mozart's later variations spin further away from the *siciliano*

theme (even moving to a 4/4 time signature in the final variation), he continues to use

slurs to demarcate his many variations on the *siciliano* dotted rhythmic impulse. In

variation five, for example, the right hand opens with the *siciliano* rhythm displaced to

begin on beat two instead of one (shown in rectangles in Example 21).

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[95] Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 15.

[96] It is also possible to interpret this variation as having four beats in 12/16 rather than two beats in 6/8 time signature. Mozart's slurring is consistent with such an interpretation, and this understanding could foreshadow the final variation in 4/4 time signature.

Example 19:
W.A. Mozart, Sonata in A major, K. 331, movement I, mm. 1-4.

Example 20:
W.A. Mozart, Sonata in A major, K. 331, movement I, mm. 19-22.

Example 21:
W.A. Mozart, Sonata in A major, K. 331, movement I, mm. 91-92.

Chopin's Nocturnes are cornerstone *bel canto* style works in piano literature. While the use of slurs in these *bel canto* melodies will be discussed later in this chapter, Chopin often pairs *bel canto* style with other topics—typically found in the 'B' section of his nocturnes. Example 22 excerpts two measures from the 'B' section of Chopin's Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2. A typical performance of this undulating melody includes an unbroken legato execution, with the brief trills used to emphasize beats two and four of these measures. Chopin's slurs, however, suggest a densely articulated

melody that actively de-emphasizes downbeats in the right hand. The slurring in the first measure of Example 22 indicates an emphasis on the third triplet of each beat, an effect that evokes a *mazurka* topic.[97] Different *mazurka* rhythmic emphases are excerpted in Example 23. The quick pace of the slurred groups in this example suggests it is an *oberek* (a type of *mazurka*),[98] while the left hand grounds the dance in quasi-pedal-tones on the tonic and dominant.[99] Chopin's slurred rhythmic emphasis of a cadential figure in the 'A' section (excerpted in Example 24) is another example of a *mazurka* topic in this piece. The first slur in Example 24 de-emphasizes beat two, while the slur and dotted rhythm emphasize the second triplet note in beats two and three. *Mazurka* topics are characterized by an accent on a weak beat of the measure, and although in Example 22 Chopin accents a subdivided beat three and a subdivided beat two in Example 24, the slurring in both excerpts emphasizes a weak beat. Additionally, there are examples of *mazurkas* that emphasize both beats two and three, sometimes within the same piece (see Example 23). Understanding slurring as emphasis in various parts of this piece highlights how Chopin layers a *mazurka* topic within the prevailing *bel canto* style Nocturne.

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[97] The *mazurka* is a Polish folk dance in triple meter with accents on the weak beats.
Stephen Downes, "Mazurka," *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed February 1, 2021. https: //doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.18193.
[98] As opposed to other types of *mazurkas*, such the *kujawiaka*, which features a moderate tempo and longer phrase lengths.
Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

Example 22:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, mm. 29-30.

Example 23:
Stephen Downes, "Mazurka," *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

Example 24:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, m. 9.

II.   BEL CANTO STYLE AND THE SLUR

With the above conception of slurs as tools of both emphasis and de-emphasis in constructing style, the final section of this chapter is dedicated to understanding the role of slurs specifically in *bel canto* style. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, slurs play a significant role in *bel canto* style piano music as they replace the role of text stress in imitating vocal *bel canto* music and due to the importance of legato execution—particularly over large melodic leaps.

As discussed in Chapter One, large melodic leaps are one defining gesture of *bel canto* style, often taking place within the same breath as notated by both slurs and text. Example 25 offers an example of a large, legato leap in Bellini's aria "A te, o cara." According to the above conception of the slur, the first note under the slur (the "lo" on A natural) is emphasized, while the last note under a slur is de-emphasized ("ra"). Executing a similar passage at the piano presents a significant challenge because vocalists—along with wind and string players—are capable of producing a tone without articulating it. Of course, the piano must articulate each note via a hammer striking the strings. Consider Example 26, which shows a large leap in the second movement of Bach's Italian Concerto.[100] The slur indicates the pianist must emphasize B♭ and de-emphasize G. However, as the G is tied into beat two, it cannot be de-emphasized by length. Similarly, if de-emphasized solely by volume, the G will not be able to adequately sustain its extended length. Pianists, therefore, must produce enough sound to sustain the G in Example 26 without articulating it louder than the preceding B♭. Fortunately, composers often come to the pianist's aid by displacing the de-emphasized high note of large leaps—de-synchronizing the right and left hands (playing the roles of the vocalist and accompanying orchestra, respectively). In Example 26, Bach places B♭ on the downbeat, displacing the G by a sixteenth note, which prevents the G from competing directly with an articulation in left hand and allows the left hand to reinforce the emphasized B♭.

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[100] Slur added by document author.

Example 25:
"A te, o cara" from Vincenzo Bellini's *I puritani*, mm. 8-9.

Example 26:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, m. 19.

Examples 27 and 28 show different notational methods that produce the same displacing effect. Classical performance practice dictates the grace note takes place on the downbeat, displacing the note to which it is slurred, witnessed in Example 27. There is an interpretive quandary, however, in where to place Mozart's notated sforzando accent. The pianist is presented with two equally viable options: keep the sforzando on the downbeat, accenting the E♮, or use the sforzando to overrule the slur's de-emphasis on D♭.[101] In Example 28, Chopin ornaments a melodic leap from C to A♭ with both a turn and grace note on C. While not explicitly notated, such ornamentation (particularly the added C grace note) allows the pianist license to de-synchronize the A♭ from beat two in

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[101] Either interpretation is within the conception of slurs and method of application discussed in this chapter. No preference is declared.

the left hand. Note that de-emphasizing A♭ helps make space for the following *mazurka*

topical embellishment (see Example 24). Regardless of whether composers

desynchronize large leaps in *bel canto* style piano music, pianists must walk a fine line

between projecting and de-emphasizing high notes when placed as the last note under a

slur.

Example 27:
W.A. Mozart, Sonata in F major, K. 332, movement II, m. 7.

Example 28:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, m. 9.

In the absence of text in *bel canto* style piano music, slurs receive heightened

importance in their dual function of directing articulation and rest. While some

scholarship on *bel canto* emphasizes the importance of good legato and sustained tone,[102]

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[102] Will Crutchfield, "The Bel Canto Connection," *Opera News* 62, no. 1 (1997): 32, accessed January 20, 2020, https://unl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01UON_LINC&vid=01UON_LINC:UNL&volume=62&date=19970101&aulast=Crutchfield,%20Will&pages=&issn=00303607&issue=1&genre=article&spage=30&title=Opera%20news&atitle=The%20bel%20canto%20connection&sid=EBSCO:RILM%20Abstracts%20of%20Music%20Literature:A195265.
Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58-69.

articulation and rest within an otherwise legato performance is crucial in imitating both breath and diction at the piano. Consider Chopin's Nocturne in G minor Op. 37 no. 1, shown in Example 29. Although Chopin asks for a sustained *sostenuto* sound throughout the movement, his use of slurs shows four distinct melodic ideas. Note how each slur begins on a different beat or subdivision throughout Example 29—the melody begins on an upbeat to the first measure, on the "and" of two in measure two, on the downbeat in measure three, and on beat four in measure four. Chopin's slurs are, in effect, weaving melodic emphasis around the straight quarter-note pulse in the left hand. In the beginning of Example 30 (the second movement of Mozart's Sonata in F major K. 332), the grace notes merely fill in a descending diminished-seventh chord. Yet Mozart's use of slurs indicates each grace note is pronounced, while the actual tones of the diminished-seventh chord are de-emphasized. This rapid succession of slurs on beats one and two is then balanced with a longer moment of legato on beats three and four (by combined use of slurs and ties). In beat two of the second measure, the F is emphasized as the beginning of two different slurs, which then fade into different tones within the dominant harmony.

Herman Klein, *The Bel Canto, With Particular Reference to the Singing of Mozart* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 22, 25-29.

Example 29:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in G minor, Op. 37 no. 1, mm. 1-4.

Example 30:
W.A. Mozart Sonata, in F major, K. 332, movement II, m. 7-8.

As mentioned above, J.S. Bach's keyboard music requires the added challenge of adding articulation to the printed music. However, he does occasionally notate the odd slur—often at seemingly random moments in his music. The question of how to interpret the few articulations Bach provided is a subject few pianists seem willing to face. In his 500page tome on interpreting Bach at the keyboard, Paul Badura-Skoda dismisses Bach's notated slurs, arguing that "in many cases Bach's slurring is difficult to decipher because his slurs, as those of Haydn, are usually too short and are placed arbitrarily above groups

of notes."[103] Considering that a slur need only be two notes at minimum, how exactly they are "too short" remains unexplained. Richard Troeger comments on the uncertainty of published scores and first editions from the eighteenth century, noting that "it is not always clear which notes [Bach's] slurs are intended to cover… These are uncertain waters, but a useful rule of thumb is to assume that the less clear a slur is, the more generic its meaning."[104] While incomplete and often puzzling, it is worth attempting to understand Bach's existing slurs as pianists work to create their own articulatory roadmap through his music. Example 31 excerpts the opening measures of the second movement of Bach's Italian Concerto, each of which includes a slur. Observe the slur on the downbeat of measure six: Bach appears to indicate an emphasis on A, and then a re-emphasis on G on the "and" of beat one (by way of ending the slur a note earlier). Consider that the pitches on beat one of this measure constitute a written-out turn. Without the slur present, pianists might execute the entire beat as this single ornament. However, Bach's slur indicates that there are two different gestures to consider: a short descending third from A to F, followed by a re-articulated G before beat two.

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[103] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94.

[104] Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 115.

Example 31:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, mm. 1-7.

Turning from a micro example to constructing a macro understanding of slurring

in Bach's *bel canto* style keyboard music, the following method is suggested:

1) Deconstruct written-out ornamentation where possible
2) Use slurs to emphasize these important notes in the melody

It is crucial to understand ornamentation not just as the use of mordents, trills, turns, and

other gestures with specific notated signs (such as the mordent on the first note of the

melody). Rather, ornamentation is considered here as any elaboration on the melodic line.

Example 32 demonstrates one outcome of this method,[105] identifying the melody while

maintaining its specific metric and rhythmic placement. Example 33 then adds slurs to

the fully notated opening of this movement, with most of the melody notes identified in

Example 32 emphasized as the first note under a slur. While this method helps delineate

the melodic line, it also emphasizes Bach's unique placement of the melody within the

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[105] This process is heavily influenced by the idea of "surface level" and "foreground" within Heinrich Schenker's analytical theory. It will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

Allen Cadwaller and David Gagné, *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 115-116.

meter—similar to Chopin's Nocturne in G minor, Op. 37 no. 1, excerpted in Example 29,

Bach weaves the melody around the accompaniment's constant rhythmic pulse.

Example 32:
Deconstructed melody, J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef,
mm. 4-7.

Example 33:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef, mm. 4-7, slurs added by
author.

Bel canto music written for the piano seeks to emulate the vocal qualities of this

style. Towards that end, this chapter identified the slur as a fundamental articulation in

both executing large melodic leaps and imitating the declamatory and pronunciative

elements provided by the text in vocal *bel canto* music. In studying the slur's role

specifically in *bel canto* style piano music, however, it is first necessary to understand

what the slur signifies. This question is complicated by the length of development for *bel

canto* style, progressing over 150 years from the Baroque to Romantic eras, and across

several different types of keyboard instruments. In answering these riddles, this chapter

uses historical treatises, correspondences, and first-hand accounts to conceptualize the

slur as a compositional tool for accentuation, which composers use to indicate both

emphasis and de-emphasis, both articulation and rest. Composers used this dual function to construct style (understood here through the lens of topic theory), as well as to vary and combine topics within the same piece. Existing performance practice scholarship focuses on the many types and rules for executing slurs yet relies on the performer to place these executions within the proper context. This chapter's conceptualization of slurs as a compositional tool for constructing specific styles is intended to provide a method for identifying and interpreting the context within a particular piece.

CHAPTER 3: ON THE PERFORMER'S ROLE IN *BEL CANTO* STYLE PIANO

MUSIC

Chapter One of this document identified both notated and performative elements in defining *bel canto* style within topic theory. Chapter Two focused specifically on the slur as a notated, compositional tool for building this style. Chapter Three examines the role of the pianist in executing *bel canto* style, considered through the elements of ornamentation and *tempo rubato*. Part one of this chapter proposes an analytical method for performers to embellish a given *bel canto* melody. Part two considers several performative devices under the umbrella of *tempo rubato*.

I.   HISTORICAL ORNAMENTATION: IN SCHOLARSHIP AND IN PRACTICE

The relationship of performer-added embellishments to the composer's notation and intent has a long and contentious history, particularly in keyboard music.[106] While it is generally recognized that historical performers were allowed and expected to embellish the notated score, the practice remains something of a specialty today. The divided and individual tastes of various composers and performers make the codification of ornamentation practices over time extremely difficult—particularly in the nineteenth century. A general overview of historical performative embellishment recognizes that ornamentation was ubiquitous and expected in the Baroque era, often used in performance during the Classical era, became a point of contention in the Romantic era, and fell out of style by the mid-twentieth century. While there does not seem to be a simple explanation for the demise of ornamentation by performers, the aesthetic push

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[106] Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 182-197.

against ornamentation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries framed the practice as self-indulgent and against composers' intentions in any given piece of music. This aesthetic ideal is often expressed in quotes similar to the following, attributed to Sviatoslav Richter: "the interpreter is really an executant, carrying out the composer's intentions to the letter. He doesn't add anything that isn't already in the work."[107]

In one of the more curious cognitive dissonances surrounding performative aesthetics, artists both for and against embellishing the notated score claim to be in dedicated service to the composer's intent. In *Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music*, Konrad Wolff comments that, for pianist Artur Schnabel, "humility towards the printed score is a foregone conclusion… Intense penetration of the letter and spirit of a composition acts as a stimulation and leads to its revitalization in performance."[108] Such an attitude is directly opposed to vocalist Manuel Garcia, who is quoted instructing his pupils that:

> A musical idea, to be rendered interesting, should be varied, wholly or in part, every time it is repeated… These changes should be introduced more abundantly, and with ever-heightening variety and accent. The exposition of the opening theme alone should be preserved in its simplicity.[109]

Scholar Robert Toft echoes Garcia's instruction, noting that embellishing the score was simply an expectation for historical performers.[110]

Issues of performer-added embellishment were often rolled into general discussions about interpretive ideals in the twentieth century. Pianist Moritz Rosenthal, a

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[107] Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 184.

[108] Konrad Wolff, *Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 15.

[109] Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*)New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 140.

[110] RobertToft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

student of Franz Liszt and Carl Mikuli, reflects on the changing interpretive attitudes in

an interview with *Etude* magazine (1937): "the more typical representatives of this

modern day [pianism] seem less concerned with a free outpouring of generous

enthusiasms, than with the practical means of achieving some goal."[111] Glenn Gould

echoes Rosenthal's sentiment of changing interpretive attitudes in his 1963 review of a

series of refurbished Welte piano rolls (originally recorded between 1905-1913),

describing:

> A listening experience which is both enormously rewarding and deeply
> disturbing… Disturbing because many of these performances are hard to reconcile
> with the architectural notions which our own generation prize most highly.
> Consequently, whether one is… occasionally baffled by the whimsical nature of
> the interpretation offered, one is made deeply aware of the transitory nature of
> interpretive ideals, and one is even led to ask fundamental questions about the
> nature of stylistic concept as viewed by the performer.[112]

While there is considerable scholarship on historical styles of performing, including

ornamentation,[113] substantially embellishing the notated score remains an act of

blasphemy in the eyes of many performers today.

    The academic discussion around historical practices of ornamentation in music is

dominated by the field of performance practice. Thus, scholarship follows the trend of the

field and typically considers ornamentation according to specific historical eras. A wealth

of performance practice scholarship offers numerous ideas on historical practices of

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[111] Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

[112] Glenn Gould, quoted in liner notes, "Legendary Masters of the Piano," Recorded 1905-1913, rerecorded 1962-1963, The Classics Record Library SWV 6633, $33^{1/3}$ rpm.

[113] Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 139-224.

Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 106-163.

Brent Yorgason, "Mandatory Mannerisms: The Evolution of Notated Expressive Asynchrony in Liszt's Transcendental Etudes," *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 69, (2018): 5-27.

ornamentation,[114] yet much of this scholarship does not always translate to the stage in modern performances. The field arguably has had most success in resurrecting ornamentation practices found in the Baroque era: the idea that Baroque composers intended for performers to embellish the notated score—particularly while repeating material—is now accepted by many performers.[115] However, performances of Baroque era music without any ornamentation, or even without repeats, remains quite commonplace. Similarly, performer-added embellishments in Classical and Romantic era music remains extremely rare in modern performances. Reverence and fidelity to the score remain the rule of law among most pianists today.

Before considering a method for embellishing a *bel canto* style melody, this chapter will briefly survey some of the scholarship and sources on historical practices of ornamentation. The goal is not to resolve the debate, but to establish the performer's license to embellish one's own performances of *bel canto* style piano music. Just as in Chapter Two, the development of *bel canto* style is understood to have taken place from about 1700 to 1850 and can be seen quite clearly in the keyboard works of J.S. Bach, W.A. Mozart, and Frédéric Chopin. As such, the following survey of scholarship and ornamentation methods will focus primarily on specific works of these three composers.

As previously mentioned, it is widely accepted that composers during the Baroque era expected performers to add their own ornaments to the notated score—particularly

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[114] Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 216-292.

Neal Peres da Costa, "Lost Traditions and Hidden Meanings: Implications of the Comparison Between Written Texts and Early Recordings," *Consort* 57, (2001): 22-38.

Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 174-206.

[115] Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 200-206.

during repeated material. This practice is most often seen today in performances of

Bach's dance suites. A vast repertoire of different ornamental devices developed

alongside this historical practice, each with several different types of executions and uses.

The types, notations, and uses of these ornaments varied according to regional tastes and

practices during the Baroque era, and Bach fluently mixed several different regional

styles. As a result, when Bach notates an ornament, he uses both the symbol and written-

out notation interchangeably—sometimes within the same piece. Examples 34a and 34b

show different notational methods for the mordent as found in the second movement of

Bach's Italian Concerto. In *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, Paul Badura-Skoda sums

up the varying roles of notated and performer-added ornaments:

> [There is] a distinction between "essential" and "arbitrary" embellishments. The
> essential ornaments (appoggiaturas, trills, mordents, etc.) were expressed by
> means of symbols. The arbitrary ones corresponded to [the] concept of free
> embellishment and were either improvised or written out in small notes. In Bach
> the two kinds of embellishment merge to form an expressive kind of melody.[116]

Example 34a:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef, m. 4.

Example 34b:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef, m. 36.

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[116] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (New York:
Oxford University Press: 1993), 250.

There is no shortage of sources or scholarship on the many types of ornaments found in Baroque era music. A detailed discussion of individual embellishments here would prove redundant and is beyond the scope of this document. However, existing scholarship on this topic offers a crucial criterion: any method for performer-added ornamentation must also account for the specific ornamentation Bach included in his music.

While modern performances of Mozart's music that include performer-added embellishments are uncommon, historical sources demonstrate that ornamentation was considered quite routine during the late eighteenth century. As Clive Brown notes of the Classical era, "the embellishment and elaboration of all kinds of music by performers was endemic and, in many respects, fundamental to the aesthetic experience of composer, performer, and listener alike."[117] Certainly, the style and uses for various ornaments changed from the Baroque to the Classical era, but their notated and performer-added use remained ubiquitous in piano music even through the first decades of the nineteenth century.[118] Sandra Rosenblum sums up the stylistic development of ornaments through the second half of the eighteenth century:

> A historical overview discloses the Classical period as a time of gradual transition from late Baroque and early Classic ornament usage to that of the dawning Romantic period; from indicating the conventional, prescribed ornaments largely by sign to absorbing most of them into the notation of the melody; from a combined harmonic and melodic orientation to a predominantly melodic or motivic role.[119]

There are direct examples in Mozart's piano music that demonstrate the level of ornamentation employed during the Classical era. In the second movement of his Piano

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[117] Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 415.

[118] Ibid, 416.

[119] Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 216.

Concerto in D major, K. 451, for example, Mozart left a portion of the piano part unornamented in his manuscript—an error that Mozart's letters suggest his sister, Nannerl, caught. In a letter to his father dated June 9, 1784, Mozart writes "please tell my sister… she is quite right in saying there is something missing in the solo passage in C in the andante of the concerto in D. I will supply the deficiency as soon as possible and send it with the cadenzas."[120] Example 35 shows the original, unornamented melody underneath Mozart's corrected, embellished version.

The elaborate embellishments Mozart added to the manuscript, which was initially published in its un-ornamented form, demonstrate the lengths to which performers of the day could add and make changes to the printed score. Mozart does more than pepper the melody with a few trills and turns. Large leaps are filled out with entire scales and broken thirds, and Mozart even briefly changes the contour of the melody on the downbeat of the penultimate measure in Example 35.[121] Briefly returning to the debate over ornamentation and composer intent, there are recorded performances of this concerto in which pianists use the unornamented version.[122] Consider a hypothetical scenario where the ornamented version of this melody was lost before it found its way into modern-day editions (as is the case with many of Mozart's own cadenzas). Would a pianist who crafted their own ornaments to this melody be more or

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[120] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Leopold Mozart, June 9, 1784, in *The Letters of Mozart and His Family,* trans. and ed. Emily Anderson, vol. 2 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 880.

[121] Instead of G descending a third to E, Mozart embellishes this downbeat by leaping up a sixth. As noted in Chapter One, the third-sixth inverted interval relationship is fundamental to understanding one of *bel canto* style's defining features: disjunct leaps functioning as conjunct motion. This example also demonstrates how a simple register transfer (moving E an octave higher) can be a highly effective embellishment.

[122] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Piano Concerto No. 16 in D major, K. 451*, performed by Géza Anda and the Camerata Salzburg at Mozarteum University, 1963, posted January 27, 2012, accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K3RjhZltCM&ab_channel=scrymgeour34.

less accurate to Mozart's intent than one who plays the notated, unembellished line? While composer intent is ultimately impossible to establish with certainty, the above argument at least provides modern-day pianists the license to ornament Mozart's notated scores.

Example 35:
W.A. Mozart, Concerto in D major, K. 451, movement II, treble clef, mm. 56-63.

The Romantic era saw an intense debate over the kind of liberties performers could take with the notated score.[123] This certainly included ornamentation, but the idea of embellishment was extended to include tempo and even general aesthetics[124]— encompassing much more than simply adding notes to the printed page.[125] Each composer and performer handled the various issues and topics of the day differently, but

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[123] Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 182-197.

[124] For example, Hans von Bülow added his own titles and narratives to each of Chopin's Twenty Four Preludes, Op. 28.
Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*)New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 136.

[125] This discussion played out as the piano recital became its own performative medium during the nineteenth century.
Ibid, 130-142.

they generally fell into one of two aesthetic camps. On one side were those pianists who—to varying extents—regularly embellished the notated score in performance: Franz Liszt, Hans von Bülow, Ferdinand Hiller, Sigismond Thalberg, Niccolò Paganini, and Frédéric Chopin. Arguing against what they saw as excessive and self-indulgent liberties that diminished the expression inherent in the notated score, the opposing camp included Eduard Hanslick, Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Clara Wieck Schumann, Friedrich Wieck, Ignaz Moscheles, and Johannes Brahms. Sources from the era indicate that public audiences seemed to favor more heavily embellished performances,[126] yet prominent virtuosi of the day were situated on both sides of the aesthetic divide. While the individual artists of the nineteenth century certainly engaged with and influenced one another, they also excoriated each other in both public and private, sometimes to the point of pettiness.[127] As Mendelssohn wrote in 1834, "both [Chopin and Ferdinand Hiller] labor somewhat under the desperate Parisian addiction to despair and search for passion, and have often turned their eyes away from correct timekeeping and the truly musical."[128] The twentieth century's largely uniform opposition to performer-added ornamentation can be traced to nineteenth century anti-excessive-liberties arguments by performers and composers such as Clara Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn.

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[126] Friedrich Wieck, *Piano and Song: How to Teach, How to Learn, and How to Form a Judgment of Musical Performances,* trans. Mary P. Nichols (1875; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 181.

[127] A favorite anecdote among pianists is that Johannes Brahms fell asleep while Franz Liszt was giving an exclusive performance of his Sonata in B minor.
Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, vol. 2, *The Weimar Years 1848-1861* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 229.

[128] Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 190.

Performance practice scholarship, however, offers a more nuanced and rational

approach to the various aesthetic and performative practices during the Romantic Era. As

Clive Brown discusses in *Classic and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750-1900*:

> The present-day musician who wishes to understand the ways in which, with respect to embellishment… or the sorts of expectations that composers might have had about the interpretation of their notation, needs to be conscious of a number of important distinctions. At one extreme was the addition of more or less elaborate fiorituras to the given musical [notation], substantially modifying the melodic line or introducing material at cadences: at the other was the application of various less obtrusive embellishments, ranging from vibrato, portamento, and subtle modifications of rhythm to the interpolation of arpeggiation, trills, turns, and appoggiaturas. The former type of embellishment was considered appropriate and necessary in specific circumstances and genres of music, especially in vocal or instrumental pieces: the latter (though its precise nature was subject to changes in taste and fashion) was regarded as an essential aspect of musicianly performance in all circumstances, without which the music would be lacking in communicative power.[129]

Essentially, Brown suggests that different styles call for more or less elaborate

embellishments on the part of the performer. Notably, the musical elements he associates

with more substantial embellishment are also key characteristics of *bel canto* style music:

elaborate fiorituras (often over cadential harmonies) and a focus on melodic modification.

While performance practice scholarship and many primary sources suggest a

certain amount of license in ornamenting piano music of the Romantic era, Chopin's own

scores and teaching offer a more distinct conclusion in favor of embellishment. As Jan

Ekier notes in the forward to the Vienna Urtext edition of Chopin's Nocturnes, "in the

course of his lessons Chopin wrote a number of variants for different passages at different

times into his pupils' printed copies."[130] Chopin's Nocturne in E♭ major, Op. 9 no. 2

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[129] Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 416.

[130] Frederic Chopin, *Nocturnes,* ed. Jan Ekier (Vienna: Wiener Urtext Edition, Schott, 1980), XI.

offers the best examples of the composer's own re-ornamentations.[131] Example 36a

shows the *fioritura* in measure 14 as it was published, while Example 36b shows two

different versions notated in Chopin's hand in his pupils' scores. This example of re-

ornamenting a notated *fioritura* over cadential harmonies falls directly within the vocal

tradition of performing *bel canto* music: "there is considerable evidence that, even in

Verdi's generation, opera composers did not necessarily expect the singer to execute

written-out cadenza-like passages literally; they provided them rather as a guide to length

and correct positioning."[132] Chopin has done exactly that in his Nocturne in E♭ major,

Op. 9 no. 2, as each version begins and ends on the same pitches and metric placement.

Example 36a:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in E♭ major Op. 9 no. 2, treble clef, m. 14.

Example 36b:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in E♭ major Op. 9 no. 2a, treble clef, m. 14 (version with later authentic variants).

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[131] Ibid.

[132] Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 420.

Another example from the same nocturne demonstrates a similar type of elaborate embellishment, but this time ornamenting a large melodic leap at the very beginning of a phrase (Examples 37a and 37b). This example maintains the skeletal melodic leap but displaces the metric placement of the eighth-note upbeat.[133] While the question of ornamentation in nineteenth century music remains a hotly contested topic, scholarship of the practices during the era and Chopin's added embellishments to his own music give performers today ample license to ornament *bel canto* style keyboard music.

Example 37a:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in E♭ major Op. 9 no. 2, mm. 4-5.

Example 37b:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in E♭ major Op. 9 no. 2a, mm. 4-5 (version with later authentic variants).

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[133] Playing so many notes within the time span of an eighth note is impractical and nearly impossible at the piano. Performers compensate by either beginning the ornamented version early or delaying the downbeat (or a combination of both).

Having established modern performers' license to embellish *bel canto* style keyboard music, the next step is to address methods for ornamentation in this style. While the field of performance practice has yielded substantial insight into the types of ornaments used and their various executions within specific historical eras, there have been few serious attempts to offer a method for embellishing the notated score. Like the slur in Chapter Two, uses for various ornaments are left up to the individual context of a specific piece of music: "here as elsewhere, context is all-important. The interpretation of ornaments must never be perfunctory; they must suit the line, the harmony, the mood, and the instrument."[134] Historical documents rarely offer more specific conclusions, and usually provide a few guiding sentiments, such as choosing "ornaments which are suitable to the character of the composition… and the more or less animated tempo of a composition."[135] Part of the difficulty in constructing methods for ornamentation is that, by nature, the practice involves the choices and tastes of the individual interpreter— variation between performers is an expected feature of the practice. As Paul Badura-Skoda summarizes, "ornamentation is in fact as diverse as life itself, as language, music, or the various individual styles. It must always adapt itself to the flow of the music and to the claims of harmony, melody, and rhythm. It can scarcely be mastered with a few rules of thumb."[136] This observation doesn't stop Badura-Skoda from offering his own vague guidelines:

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[134] Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 175.

[135] Daniel Gottlob Türk, *School of Clavier Playing,* trans. Raymond H. Haggh (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 232.

[136] Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press: 1993), 248.

Three virtually self-evident requirements form the basis for the correct understanding of ornamentation:[137]

1. An ornament must embellish and beautify, that is, it should be beautiful and pleasing.
2. There must be a harmonious relationship between the ornament and the embellished object, and thus it should be light, indeed weightless. A necklace should not be larger than the body it adorns.
3. Although the application of an ornament must be regulated by tradition and compositional convention, it also requires a certain freedom.

Existing scholarship on historical ornamentation offers a challenging set of criteria that any method for embellishment must navigate. Such a method must 1) be primarily informed by the style and construction of a specific piece of music; 2) account for historical types and uses for specific ornaments; and 3) allow several variations and differences between different interpreters using the same method.

The method for performer-added embellishments offered here is focused solely on ornamenting *bel canto* style music and, as such, will use the characteristic and musical elements identified in Chapter One as the context for analysis and application. It also refrains from making explicit rules on how or where to use specific types of ornaments. The goal is not to define how and when to use any specific ornament, but to propose an analytical process for applying any number or types of ornaments to a specific piece. *Bel canto* style piano music seeks to imitate a vocal medium that features an accompanied vocalist. As such, ornamentation in this style takes place almost entirely in the melody— while the accompaniment plays several crucial roles, embellishment is rarely among them. Traditional *bel canto* arias follow an 'A-B-A,' or "da capo" form, and performers at the time were expected to ornament material upon repetition. While there are exceptions, this formal placement remains the most widely accepted guideline for

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[137] Ibid, 253.

performer-added embellishment. As such, this method will be applied toward formal repetitions within specific works. As defined in Chapter One, *bel canto* style includes both notated and performer-added ornamentation. Before turning to the latter, it is imperative to first understand the former.

Having identified appropriate sections for embellishment (repeated melodic material), the first step of this method is to deconstruct the melody by removing any notated ornamentation. Heinrich Schenker's theory of analysis offers a starting point for this task—specifically his idea of various structural levels within music. One of the basic tenets of Schenker's theoretical approach is that composition begins with a basic skeletal structure, which composers then fill in, or "compose-out" [Auskomponierung]—a process that involves prolonging structural tones. As Allen Cadwaller and David Gagne describe the process in their textbook, *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach*, "when a tone remains active in its context, even though other tones may intervene, that tone is said to be prolonged."[138] Written-out ornamentation happens to be one of several methods composers used to prolong a melody. Consider the "da capo" section in the second movement of J.S. Bach's Italian Concerto (beginning in measure 28 of the movement). The bottom line of Example 38 shows the melody as written, or the *surface level*, while the top line reduces the melody to its structural tones (within Schenkerian analysis, this level of structural reduction is termed the *foreground*).[139] Number 1 shows various written-out turns, each of which prolongs a single structural melodic tone. Number 2 is a double turn—simply two turns placed back-to-back. Number 3 identifies

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[138] Allen Cadwaller and David Gagné, *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.

[139] "Structural" is a relative term in Schenkerian analysis. Many pitches identified as "structural" in the foreground get reduced out in deeper structural levels (the middleground and background).

filled-out diatonic thirds, which Bach uses to anticipate the arrival of a structural tone.

Number 4 reduces out a redundant tone, while the B♭ at number 5 serves as an

appoggiatura, delaying the melody's arrival on A (the tonic note of the dominant

harmony).

This Schenkerian-influenced method for deconstructing an ornamented melody

offers several analytical insights into how Bach used notated embellishments to achieve

various effects. On beat two of the penultimate measure, for example, he strings together

multiple ornaments to connect distant structural tones with conjunct motion. Elsewhere,

Bach metrically displaces structural melodic tones—effectively embellishing the melody

using rhythm and meter instead of pitch (measure three). He combines both of these

ornamental techniques on beat two of the second measure: the structural B♭ is delayed by

a brief, stepwise ascending third. This embellishment creates an artificial—meaning non-

structural—large leap between D and G, while also ornamenting the descending melodic

contour with a spike of ascending motion.

Example 38:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef, mm. 28-32, with
structural melody.

Analyzing the function of notated ornaments offers a starting point for performers when looking to create their own embellishments with the deconstructed melody. The previous example demonstrates a wide range of possibilities: within a mere four measures of music, Bach uses ornaments to connect, separate, anticipate, and delay structural melodic tones. For performers looking to add their own embellishments to an unadorned structural melody, the wide range of options and functions can be overwhelming. It is suggested to pick a specific element from the original, notated score to preserve. Example 39 shows the "da capo" melody in Bach's Italian Concerto with performer-added embellishments (line 1) above the structural (line 2) and original surface level (line 3) versions of the same melody.[140] While the surface level pitches in lines 3 and 1 are considerably different, note how the structural pitches are all present in nearly the same metric placement. Additionally, the performer in this case chose to accentuate Bach's use of ties to create tension within the meter—preserving and adding more ties than in the original notated melody. It is significant to note that this document understands the art of embellishment as encompassing an immense range of options: more than just sprinkling in trills, turns, mordents, and appoggiaturas, the method proposed here understands the practice of ornamentation as prolonging (or composing out) the structural melody. Reducing a notated *bel canto* style melody to its structural tones ensures some level of consistency between the original and newly embellished melody while allowing for significant variation from the composer's notated version. Additionally, as demonstrated

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[140] Line 1 embellishments added by document author.

above, undergoing such a process yields insights into the role embellishments can serve within any given melody.

Example 39:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, treble clef, mm. 28-32, with structural melody and performer-added ornamentations.

Having introduced an analytical method for deconstructing and embellishing a *bel canto* style melody with Baroque era music, the following examples apply the same reductive approach to Classical and Romantic era *bel canto* music. Example 40 excerpts the return of the 'A' section in the second movement of Mozart's Sonata in D major, K. 576. As above, line 3 shows the melody as written, line 2 shows the structural melodic pitches along with the harmonic outline, and line 1 demonstrates one possible re-embellished outcome. For the purposes of demonstrating this method, all articulation markings have been left out. While Baroque keyboard music tends to be heavily ornamented throughout, Classical era embellishment tends to be used in more concentrated moments. Consider the first stanza of Example 40—the first two measures lightly ornament various structural melodic tones, followed by a chromatic meandering through the predominant harmony that arrives at a half cadence in measure four. In measure three of the original melody (line 3), Mozart emphasizes the subdominant (F# within a D major harmony) arriving via its chromatic neighboring tones G and E#. This chromatic embellishment effectively tonicizes the subdominant within the melody—a decision the performer might choose to repeat in one's own embellishments by tonicizing B (line 1). While the structural melodic outline does not include B in measure three, the pitch fits comfortably within the underlying pre-dominant harmonic movement. This example was chosen to illustrate that, while this appropriated Schenkerian analysis is a useful tool in deconstructing a melody, the process of reduction itself reflects interpretive decisions within the identified harmonic progressions. It is entirely possible for different performers to interpret different structural melodies within a piece, so long as the differing pitches still function within the harmony.

Example 40:
W.A. Mozart, Sonata in D major, K. 576, movement II, treble clef, mm. 44-55, with
structural melody and performer-added ornamentations.

The Romantic era continued the trend of contrasting longer, unadorned melodies with more concentrated embellishments reserved for specific moments—often near cadential harmonies. Typical *bel canto* style melodies in both voice and piano music reflect this trend. As such, embellishments tend to appear on only a few structural melodic notes, while the embellishments themselves are much more elaborate. Consider Example 41a, which displays measure 62 of Frédéric Chopin's Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2. Chopin's notated *fioritura* (line 3) embellishes a single structural tone: A♮. The performer-embellished version in line 1 follows suit, merely extending the fioritura with an ascending chromatic scale. Examples 41b and 41c offer Romantic-era examples of rhythmic embellishment. As the structural melody (line 2) shows, Chopin ornaments a simple descending A♭ major diatonic scale with a dotted triplet figure.[141] By the time the performer arrives at measure 57, the audience has already heard the notated version of this measure three times. Line 1 in Example 41b offers a subtly embellished variation of this oft-repeated material: changing the placement of the dotted rhythm from the second to the first note of each triplet. Example 41c shows the very last time this melodic material is heard in the Nocturne, as the piece winds down towards its closing "Lento" measures. In this case, the performer chose to leave the structural melody unornamented—even leaving out the B♭ that serves as a lower neighbor tone between two C's. When embellishing a structural melody, it is not always required to add more material than is in the original notated version.

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[141] Chapter Two discussed this as an example of the *mazurka* topic (Example 24)

Example 41a:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, treble clef, m. 62, with structural melody and performer-added ornamentations.

Example 41b:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, treble clef, m. 57 with structural melody and performer-added ornamentations.

Example 41c:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, treble clef, m. 74, with structural melody and performer-added ornamentations.

The above method for performer-added ornamentation, to deconstruct a given melody to its structural pitches, is not intended to be a comprehensive approach to the art of embellishment. Rather, it is presented as a tool for both analyzing the existing, notated ornamentation and for identifying the important structural melodic pitches that must be present in any re-embellished version. It is also important to consider that, while the field of historical performance practice heavily influences the embellished versions above (line 1 in Examples 39-41), this reductive method is principally a modern interpretive tool. It is presented here not as a method for authentically recreating historical practices of ornamentation, but as a tool that offers a consistent approach to the daunting task of embellishing the notated score within the spirit and framework of the composition.

II. PERFORMATIVE NUANCES OF TEMPO RUBATO IN *BEL CANTO* STYLE

Tempo rubato is among the most challenging performative musical elements to study and teach. Translated as "stolen time," *tempo rubato* is the art of flexibility within the basic tempo of a specific piece of music. In its most basic form, *tempo rubato* involves speeding up or slowing down from an established tempo. In practice, this musical device encompasses an infinite variety of nuances and applications. Contributing to *tempo rubato*'s elusive nature is that it has no explicit notational symbol in the score. There are examples where composers wrote *tempo rubato* in the score itself, but such an indication does not guide the performer to any specific moments or type of application for its use. Instead, there are a variety of notations that can imply its use. These notations can take the form of a character or expressive marking, such as *dolce*, *espressivo*, and *diminuendo*, or as a stylistic gesture of notated pitches and rhythms. The *fioritura* in

Example 42, from Chopin's Nocturne in E♭ major, Op. 9 no. 2, demonstrates the latter:

the dramatic change in rhythmic motion from eighth notes to thirty-second notes

combined with *portato* notation over the first half of the *fioritura* implies an element of

flexibility in the tempo. Exactly where and how this flexibility should be applied

throughout this excerpt remains entirely up to the performer. While not universal, there is

a tangible connection between ornamentation and *tempo rubato*—whether timing an

elaborate *fioritura* or simply lingering on an appoggiatura before a cadence,

ornamentation often implies some flexibility from the established tempo. Some types of

rubato, such as agogic accents, could even be considered as their own classification of

ornament.

Example 42:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in E♭ major, Op. 9 no. 2, m. 16.

Historical sources offer some instruction on the types and application of this

crucial expressive tool, but throughout history have come to the same unsatisfying

conclusion: successful and musical *tempo rubato* is dictated by the concept of "good

taste."[142] Indeed, those qualities deemed "tasteful" often change from era to era and

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[142] Daniel Gottlob Türk, *School of Clavier Playing,* trans. Raymond H. Haggh (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 359-365.
Adolph Kullak, *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte Playing*, ed. Hans Bischoff, trans. Theodore Baker (1893; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 280-294

person to person. The elusive and imprecise nature of *tempo rubato* has resulted in a range of various "truisms" that can be found in most piano studios and loosely govern the modern performative understanding of *rubato*. To paraphrase the most common of these sentiments, "*tempo rubato* means 'stolen time,'—what is stolen from one moment must be returned to another."[143] Taken literally, this phrase suggests that when a performer momentarily slows down, they must compensate by speeding up at some point in the piece. In practice, however, this is an entirely arbitrary approach that offers little tangible instruction on how to apply *rubato* within a specific piece. Its use in the teaching studio can help students avoid excessively slowing down throughout a piece, but it does not offer much toward a method for employing this expressive tool.

Richard Hudson's *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato*, a seminal book in performance practice literature, offers thorough historical research on a topic that eludes convincing empirical study. While there are a plethora of sources that discuss *tempo rubato*,[144] Hudson's book is the first to consider the historical development of this performative device throughout the Common Practice Era. As Hudson notes, "the accumulated literature [on *tempo rubato*] is vast, and yet questions remain

Carl Phillipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, ed. and trans. William J. Mitchell (London: Cassell and Company, 1951), 160-162.

[143] The exact origins of this expression are unknown, but probably date back to the nineteenth century.

Frances Wilson, "Sooner or Later? Tempo Rubato," *Interlude*, published October 22, 2017, accessed April 10, 2021, https://interlude.hk/sooner-later-tempo-rubato/.

[144] Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach at the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 162-164

Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20-44.

Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 373-392.

Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press: 1993), 63-70.

unanswered."[145] Summing up the wide-ranging and elusive character of *tempo rubato*, he writes:

> Rhythmic flexibility, which robs the tempo of its regular beat, occurs in a variety of musical forms and for a variety of purposes. In one sense a certain amount of flexibility appears in the performance of any piece… Furthermore, music in general—from any period in history—is not to be performed mechanically and without regard for the sense of the sounds. On the other hand, flexibility of a somewhat higher degree has been recognized at particular times in history as being suitable for certain types of music in order to project certain effects.[146]

As *bel canto* style developed through multiple historical eras from about 1700 to 1850 (in both vocal and keyboard idioms), Hudson's historical overview of *tempo rubato* forms a natural starting point for studying the role and application of *rubato* within this style.

Hudson identifies two main types of *tempo rubato*, which he terms *earlier* and *later*.[147] *Early rubato* alters "some note values within a melody for expressive purposes while the accompaniment maintains strict rhythm."[148] *Later rubato* refers to "rhythmic alterations not only in the melody, but in the tempo of the entire musical substance."[149] Regarding the timeline for these two types, *earlier rubato* applies to Baroque and Rococo era music while *later rubato* became more popular during the nineteenth century and is still employed in performances today. Hudson notes, however, that "for at least the first half of the nineteenth century both types of rubato exist[ed] concurrently."[150] Thus, the

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[145] Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), v.

[146] Ibid, 11.

[147] Other scholars discuss these two types under various other terminology: *melodic* and *structural* (Howard Ferguson), *borrowed* and *stolen* (Robert Donington), and *contrametric* and *agogic* (Sandra P. Rosenblum). Ibid, 1.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

development of *bel canto* style was influenced by and performed with both types of *rubato.*

The exact execution of *earlier rubato* in keyboard music remains a point of contention among both scholars and pianists.[151] One of the most specific historical mentions of this type of rubato at the keyboard appears in a letter dated October 23, 1777, from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to his father, Leopold, in which Wolfgang celebrates his recent successful performances and bemoans the technical prowess of one of his students (and the poor pedagogy that produced it): "everyone is amazed that I can always keep strict time. What these people cannot grasp is that in *tempo rubato* in an Adagio, the left hand should go on playing in strict time. With [others,] the left hand always follows suit."[152] There are two general takeaways from Mozart's letter. First, a single performer playing strictly in time with one hand and rhythmically free in the other is a remarkably difficult feat of coordination. Second, Mozart's description of keyboardists whose left-hand always follows the rubato used in the right hand is quite similar to the definition of *later rubato.* The implication, then, is that both styles of *tempo rubato* were present in some form in 1777, even if one style was considered "lesser" by Mozart.[153]

While Mozart describes *earlier rubato* in solely terms of independent hand coordination and tempo, Richard Hudson offers other keyboard sources which describe *earlier rubato* "almost exclusively in terms of displacement between a melody and its

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[151] Ibid, 148-153.

[152] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Leopold Mozart, October 23, 1777, in *The Letters of Mozart and His Family,* trans. and ed. Emily Anderson, vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 340.

[153] Mozart's letter is unclear as to whether the type of *later rubato* he decries was popular with audiences of the day.

accompaniment, and thus between the right and left hands."[154] This displacement between a melody and accompaniment offers a stylistic parallel to the discussion in Chapter Two of desynchronizing the hands as a common and crucial effect for executing *bel canto* style's characteristic large melodic leaps. Intentionally separating a melodic pitch from its accompaniment allows a pianist to employ a softer attack in the right hand while still projecting over the left-hand accompaniment. As Chapter Two noted, composers both explicitly and implicitly notate desynchronization in piano *bel canto* style music (see Examples 27-28). Hudson's research into *earlier rubato* suggests performers also held the prerogative to displace the melody and accompaniment, even where not expressly notated. The following agogic performative devices are all considered as tools for melodic expression through the lens of *bel canto* style. As will be demonstrated below, these same devices can be used according to both *earlier* and *later rubato* styles and are present in various forms of *bel canto* style piano music throughout 1700-1850.

Arpeggiation

Arpeggiation takes a set of pitches that are notated simultaneously and instead executes them consecutively. This performative device can be found in keyboard music of all eras and is discussed in every major treatise of the Common Practice Era. Arpeggiation can serve many different functions but is most often used as a decorative harmonic device that ornaments a vertical chord. Arpeggiation is typically discussed as a type of ornament, but it can also serve as a tool for *tempo rubato*. Richard Hudson defines its agogic role by writing:

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[154] Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 113.

when the arpeggio moves from the lowest to the highest pitch, and when it commences on the beat, it steals time from the upper note of the chord and thus delays a note that ordinarily functions as a part of the melody. Since the speed at which the notes of a chord can be arpeggiated varies widely, a great diversity of effects can be achieved by this means. Long after the Baroque period the arpeggiated chord continued to be used on occasion for intensely expressive purposes.[155]

Consider the arpeggiations in Example 43,[156] which excerpts the second movement of Mozart's Sonata in D Major, K. 576. While this type of arpeggiation might seem to ornament the accompanimental line in the left hand, it actually desynchronizes the melody and frees it from the metric confines of the left hand. Additionally, as the left-hand features four consecutive arpeggiated chords, a performer may add an additional agogic nuance by varying the speed of arpeggiation. One such possibility, applied to Example 43, would be to roll the first chord at a relaxed pace and the next two quickly, reserving the slowest arpeggiation until the melody returns to tonic harmony on the fourth chord.

Example 43:
W.A. Mozart, Sonata in D major, K. 576, movement II, m. 56, with performer-added arpeggiations.

While Hudson's description above ascribes an *early rubato* element to arpeggiation, this device can also be employed according to *later rubato* when an

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[155] Ibid, 23.

[156] Arpeggio notation added by document author.

arpeggio begins before the beat. As Hudson notes, if the arpeggiation begins on the downbeat of Example 43, then time is stolen from beat one in the melody. This effectively keeps the left-hand accompaniment in time while the right-hand slows behind the tempo. However, if the arpeggiation begins before the downbeat (thereby placing the melody on the beat), then time is stolen from beat three of the preceding measure and the tempo of the entire musical substance is affected—more closely resembling *later rubato*.

In fact, there is evidence of arpeggiation as a tool for melodic and agogic emphasis throughout the common practice era, and in both types of rubato. Two-note arpeggiations (effectively just de-synchronization) are discussed in Perrine's 1680 treatise on Lute playing,[157] and are analogous to melodic delays notated in Liszt's piano music.[158] In his article "Mandatory Mannerisms: The Evolution of Notated Expressive Asynchrony in Liszt's Transcendental Etudes," Brent Yorgason discusses various techniques used to create "expressive asynchrony between hands, often emphasizing melodic arrivals in the right hand by delaying them slightly, thereby strengthening the singing quality of a performance."[159] The techniques Yorgason identifies, *chord-spreading* and *hand-breaking*, are considered here under a broad definition of arpeggiation. Yorgason presents several notated, or "composed-in," examples of these techniques in Liszt's music, but also notes that:

> Impromptu chord-spreading appears to have been a very common performance technique in the nineteenth century… Such spontaneous arpeggiation need not be regarded as a violation of the composer's wishes. Rather, there is considerable

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[157] Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

[158] Brent Yorgason, "Mandatory Mannerisms: The Evolution of Notated Expressive Asynchrony in Liszt's Transcendental Etudes," *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 69, (2018): 10.

[159] Ibid, 5.

evidence that notated scores did not indicate all of the arpeggiation that was *expected* in performance.[160]

Historical sources have different names for various subtle arpeggiation techniques, but nearly all effectively assess agogic accents by desynchronizing the melody from accompaniment. Perhaps nowhere is this more crucial than in *bel canto* style piano music, where the expressive melody must overcome the confines of the instrument (articulated hammer-strikes) and medium (solo versus collaborative).

Türk's Rubato

Türk's Rubato is so named because it receives its most explicit definition in Daniel Gottlob Türk's 1789 treatise *School of Clavier Playing*. While Türk observes that *tempo rubato* holds more than one meaning, he specifically notes that "commonly it is understood as a kind of shortening or lengthening of notes, or the displacement (dislocation) of these."[161] This description is accompanied by the notated examples shown in Example 44. As Türk writes, *a* shows the basic notes, "at *b tempo rubato* is put to use by means of *anticipation*, and at *c* by means of *retardation*."[162] As Sandra Rosenblum observes in *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*, syncopating the melody is a form of *early rubato* (or as she terms it, *contrametric rubato*) in which the left-hand stays constant while the right-hand is rhythmically displaced.[163] The rhythmic exactness with which the right-hand syncopations are executed depends on the performer, but Türk's rubato remains a recognized notational sign for employing *tempo rubato*.

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[160] Ibid.

[161] Daniel Gottlob Türk, *School of Clavier Playing,* trans. Raymond H. Haggh (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 363.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 378.

Example 44:
Daniel Gottlob Türk, *School of Clavier Playing*, chapter six, part five, section 72, p. 363.

While Türk's rubato is more closely associated with *earlier rubato* in keeping the accompaniment in time, it can also be performed according to the *later rubato* style. In Example 45 (Italian Concerto, movement two), for example, Bach syncopates an ascending melody against a descending accompanimental line. There are two general agogic options that performers could choose: the first is to delay each subsequent syncopated melodic note a little more than the last while keeping the left hand steady; or, the performer could slow down in both hands, which would emphasize the contrasting contours and result in the largest agogic accent on E as it suspends into the next measure. Whether one option is more historically authentic than the other is ultimately impossible to determine. Either option is appropriate and offers an expressive variation on a straight performance of this syncopated figure.

Example 45:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, m. 4.

Trills, Turns, and Mordents

As mentioned above, ornamentation and *tempo rubato* are often closely related.

As such, notated ornamentation often presents an invitation for the performer to employ

tempo rubato. Even some of the most essential and basic ornaments, such as trills, turns,

and mordents, are often more expressive when not executed equally and in-tempo. As

Richard Troeger offers in *Playing Bach on the Keyboard: A Practical Guide*:

> Perhaps the most important thing to understand concerning ornaments is that,
> while they are stereotypical in shape, they are not to be played stereotypically.
> The speed, the particulars of rhythm, and the number of repercussions are not
> supposed to be invariable. The signs were developed for ease of notation and to
> allow variety in the rendition of what would otherwise look too uniform in full
> notation. For instance, the mordent sign tells [the performer], fundamentally, to
> play the written note, the note just below, and the written note again as a rapid
> figure. The sign does not tell just how rapidly to render the ornament, whether to
> crush the notes together or play the figure lingeringly, or how many repercussions
> to play.[164]

The intentionally unequal and varied execution of ornaments is among the least employed

type of *tempo rubato* today. The vast majority of method books require piano students to

trill between two notes absolutely evenly—and the faster the better. This is true of

historical methods and treatises as well, which typically advocate students learn to trill

evenly and equally well with various finger combinations at the piano. Yet, instructions

for technical mastery are not the same as expressive execution. Richard Hudson classifies

several ways a single trill may serve as *tempo rubato*:

> The upper neighbor steals time from the main note as they alternate during the
> main body of the trill. If the trill commences with the upper note or a lengthier
> prefix on the beat, then the initial appearance of the main note is delayed, often in
> the manner of an appoggiatura. When there is a prefix that begins before the beat,
> it steals time from the preceding note. When the trill has a suffix, ordinarily the
> note below the main note and the main note itself, it steals time from the end of

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164 Richard Troeger, *Playing Bach at the Keyboard: A Practical Guide* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2003), 175.

the main note of the trill. When the alteration of the two notes in the body of the trill accelerates, another type of rhythmic freedom occurs.[165]

Most relevant to *bel canto* style piano music is Hudson's last point—when the alterations between the two notes of a trill accelerate or decelerate.

In imitating vocal *bel canto* music, the trill takes on the role of vibrato. As Clive Brown notes, despite vastly different approaches according to varying schools and individuals, "there seems to have been a broad consensus among the great majority of musical authorities that the basic sound should be a steady one and that vibrato… should occur as an incidental colouring or embellishment on particular notes."[166] Thus, the goal of vibrato (and the trill in *bel canto* style) is not speed or number of repetitions, but to decorate particular notes. Varying the trill speed represents a highly expressive method for doing so—one that didn't go out of fashion until the early twentieth century.[167] Examples 46a and 46b, Bach's Italian Concerto movement II and Chopin's Nocturne in A♭ major Op. 32 no. 2, respectively, each offer prime examples of how varied trill oscillation speed can serve as a tool for both *tempo rubato* and melodic desynchronization. In both examples, the trill begins on the beat and concludes with a notated suffix in the form of a turn. By beginning with a slow oscillation that accelerates into the suffix, a performer can create an illusory *tempo rubato* effect, in which the left-hand stays in time while the right-hand's agogic execution of a single ornamented note creates the sensation of changing time.

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[165] Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21-22.

[166] Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 521.

[167] Ibid.

Example 46a:
J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971, movement II, mm 17-18.

Example 46b:
Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2, mm. 8-9.

Tempo Rubato is an essential performative ingredient in any style and type of music-making. Like ornamentation, its role in *bel canto* style piano music is most closely associated with an expressive performance of the melodic line. While historical research on *tempo rubato* reveals two different main types, the exact execution of *earlier rubato* at the piano and the general overlap between the two types remain as yet ill-defined. Ultimately, the above agogic devices serve to highlight the melody in *bel canto* style and are capable of being performed according to either type of historical *rubato.*

The performer plays several crucial roles in *bel canto* style piano music. While the performer is critical in the successful realization of any musical style, *bel canto* style presents unique challenges in that, historically, flexibility and creativity in realizing the notated score were an expected feature of this style. This chapter examined the role of the

pianist in executing *bel canto* style by proposing a method for performer-added ornamentation and detailing specific agogic devices that contribute to an expressive performance of this style. Embellishing the composer's notated score presents a daunting challenge—one complicated by the twenty-first century's lingering reaction against performer-added ornamentation. In crafting a method for approaching this task, this chapter employs Heinrich Schenker's idea of structural levels in musical composition as a tool for de-ornamenting the notated score. The process of identifying structural melodic pitches provides insight into how the composer originally decorated and prolonged the melodic structure, and also provides the performer with a structurally consistent template on which to create one's own embellished outcome. In this method, ornamentation is understood to hold one of four roles in relation to the structural melody: it can 1) prolong a structural pitch, 2) delay an arrival on a structural pitch, 3) connect two structural pitches by conjunct motion, or 4) separate two structural pitches by disjunct motion.

Tempo rubato is a musical device whose use is ubiquitous in all styles and historical eras and a necessary ingredient in any expressive performance. Yet the rules and sentiments governing its use are constantly changing, making it an elusive topic to study empirically. This chapter identified two different types of *rubato* that were present over the course of *bel canto* style's historical development: *earlier* and *later rubato*. While questions remain about the exact nature of *earlier rubato* and how much the two types overlapped in use during the Common Practice Era, this document posits that both types of *rubato* are requisite for an expressive performance of *bel canto* style music. As such, it specifically considered both types of *rubato* as applied to the agogic elements of arpeggiation, Türk's rubato, and the most common types of ornaments: trills, turns, and

mordents. Among the most specific expressive functions *tempo rubato* holds in performing *bel canto* style music is intentional asynchrony between the melody and accompaniment. Chapter One specifies that accompanimental figures in this style typically feature a regular rhythm. This allows the melody added flexibly to weave in and out of the tempo, which is continually established by the accompaniment. Historical sources and performance practice scholarship all suggest that certain types of musical styles require using *tempo rubato* to a greater degree, and this sentiment almost certainly applies to *bel canto* style piano music.

CONCLUSION

While it is considered among the most expressive repertoire in the classical canon, *bel canto* music often eludes convincing academic study. Certainly, there is thorough scholarship on various elements of *bel canto* music—such as Robert Toft's performer's guide,[168] or Rodolpho Celletti's historical study of *bel canto*'s formative aesthetics.[169] Few sources, however, offer a complete and consistent understanding of this style. As a result, the term *bel canto* holds a variety of meanings and connotations, with the subject becoming so saturated as to attain a level of mystique in both its popular and academic uses. Chapter One of this document divides existing scholarship on *bel canto* style into two conceptual camps: those who understand *bel canto* as a compositional construct, versus those who consider *bel canto* primarily as a vocal, performative tradition. It then draws and combines material from each side of this conceptual divide to identify both notated gestures and performative devices that help create *bel canto* style music.

In attempting to establish its own definition, this document approaches *bel canto* style from the field of topic theory, which seeks to identify cultural meanings and associations with specific musical gestures and devices. Chapter One studies the function of *bel canto* arias within the narratives of various operas by Romantic era composers Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini (whose music is considered the apex of this style). The outcome of this study combines notational and performative elements to propose a symbiotic association of love and conflict as *bel canto* style's defining cultural

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[168] Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[169] Rodolfo Celleti, *A History of Bel Canto,* trans. Frederick Fuller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

characteristic. This definition is formulated to function within topic theory's operating conceptual framework: that composers can combine different topics and styles to create an infinite variety of layered meanings within a single piece of music. The value of topic theory, beyond identifying contemporary cultural associations for historical styles of music, is in studying how a composer's application of various topics and styles can create layered meanings and expressions. Among the methods this document demonstrates are vertical topical layering,[170] consecutive topical variation,[171] and topical development between formal sections.[172] The definition of *bel canto* style offered in this document is designed to contribute an expressive, notational, and performative foundation for a single topic which fits within the nuanced interpretive approach offered by topic theory.

The second and third chapters of this document focus explicitly on notated and performative elements of *bel canto* style in solo keyboard music, drawing heavily from the field of historical performance practice in doing so. Crucially, this document considers *bel canto* style to have developed during an historical period from approximately 1700-1850. Studying the development of notational and performative elements throughout this time period is at odds with the general method of performance practice scholarship, which tends to approach specific historical eras individually. While this scholarship offers a wealth of information on era-specific topics, such as ornamentation in the Baroque era, the role and execution of articulation in the Classical era, and phrasing "the long line" in the Romantic era, such a sectionalized approach ultimately emphasizes how practices change from one era to the next. In the course of

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[170] *Sarabande* or *pastorale* topics in J.S. Bach's Italian Concerto, movement two.

[171] *Aria* style and *bel canto* style topics in the third movement of Beethoven's Sonata in E major, Op. 109.

[172] *Mazurka* topic in the 'A' and 'B' sections of Chopin's Nocturne in A♭ major, Op. 32 no. 2.

defining and studying *bel canto* style, this document takes a contrary approach by applying a broader historical lens to examine the ways in which the performance practices within a specific style stayed consistent from one era to the next.

Another commonly encountered drawback this document identifies with performance practice scholarship is a tendency to leave the application of specific articulatory executions or performative devices up to the prevailing context within any given piece. This document uses topic theory to provide the context through which to study both the function and application of specific notational and performative idioms. Chapter Two seeks to understand slurs not only as instructing execution, but as a compositional device for constructing style. In doing so, it identifies slurs as a tool for accentuation in music, capable of signifying both emphasis and de-emphasis. Analyzed within the context of *bel canto* style piano music, slurs are often used to indicate asymmetrical accentuation: while the accompaniment provides a steady rhythmic motion, melodic emphases often weave around the accompaniment's metric and rhythmic regularity. This extends to *bel canto* style's unique treatment of large melodic leaps, as the goal note is often de-emphasized under a slur and de-synchronized from the accompaniment (via either notation, ornamentation, or *tempo rubato*).

Dedicated to the role of the performer, Chapter Three focuses on ornamentation and *tempo rubato* as fundamental features of *bel canto* style piano music. A sub-field of performance practice, scholarship on historical practices of ornamentation follows the same trends identified above: offering an abundance of research on various types of ornaments within an historical era but offering few convincing methods for their application. Using *bel canto* style as the designated context, this document proposes a

method for performers to add ornamentation to the notated score. Based on the reductive tenants of Heinrich Schenker's analytical theory, this method centers on first de-ornamenting a section of the score by reducing it to its structural melodic pitches. Doing so offers insight into how the composer uses ornamentation to decorate and prolong the melodic structure while also providing the performer with a structurally consistent template on which to create their own embellished outcome. This method understands embellishments as serving four basic functions: prolonging, delaying, connecting, or separating structural pitches. By identifying the function served by a notated ornament, a performer can make intentional choices on when and where to preserve or apply a new ornamental function (with the same or different ornament type) in relation to the structural melody.

This document's discussion of *tempo rubato* briefly surveys different historical types of *rubato* before turning to specific agogic devices and functions that serve critical roles in *bel canto* style piano music. Chief among these are the concepts of intentional asymmetry and expressive asynchrony in *bel canto* style keyboard music. Like slurs, *tempo rubato* can create metric or rhythmic asymmetry, but it can also de-synchronize the melody from the accompaniment—through which a pianist's two hands mimic collaborative asymmetry between vocalist and ensemble.

In studying *bel canto* style, this document combines the fields of topic theory and historical performance practice to offer its own approach towards this complex and expressive style of music. Topic theory offers a nuanced interpretive method in which types of topics (i.e., "styles") can be fully worked-out pieces or small sections within a larger work. In seeking to understand a composer's use and application of various styles,

topic theory can offer tangible expressive meanings within specific works of music. However, while this field offers a host of implications and uses for performers, topic theory scholarship rarely explicitly addresses the role of performers in realizing any given topic. Conversely, historical performance practice is centered around the performer's role in realizing historical styles but often leaves the application of specific types of executions, devices, and idioms up to the prevailing context. This document uses topic theory to provide such a context, while using performance practice to develop a more thorough understanding of the performer's role in realizing *bel canto* style music at the piano. More significantly, narrowing the context to a single topic allows one to study the development and use of specific musical devices from one era to another. In applying this thesis to *bel canto* style piano music, this document found that many fundamental musical gestures and devices (slurs, ornamentation, and *tempo rubato*) were understood in much the same way throughout this topic's development. Assessed and compared individually, there are considerable changes in tastes and performative practices from one historical era to the next. Instead, considering the same musical devices consecutively within the confines of a specific style offers a more nuanced view of the pace and types of changes historical, notational, and performative idioms underwent. While a singular example, this document's study of *bel canto* style suggests that interpretive changes are more dependent on a continuum of styles rather than artificially defined historical eras.

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