

Historical Piano 2021 Summer Academy

Declassifying Beethoven
22–28 August 2021

Directed by
Tom Beghin, Camilla Köhnken, and Luca Montebugnoli (Orpheus Institute)

Guest:
Zvi Meniker (Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover)

Report by Sanae Zanane

On Sunday August 22, 2021, our research cluster, Declassifying the Classics, welcomed eight fortepianists from eight different countries for the second edition of the Historical Piano Summer Academy at the Orpheus Institute (Ghent, Belgium): Domitille Bès from France, Stipe Bilić from Croatia, Ignacio González from Chile, Vasco Pereira from Portugal, Katja Poljakova from Russia, Laura Savigni from Italy, Tong Wang from Canada, and Anastasios Zafeoropoulos from Greece. Director of the cluster, Tom Beghin, along with Camilla Köhnken, Luca Montebugnoli and myself, Sanae Zanane, were joined by guest Zvi Meniker, professor at the Hochschule für Musik Theater und Medien in Hannover, Germany. Another guest was Diane Kolin, doctoral researcher from York University (Toronto, Canada).

This was a postponed edition from the Summer 2020, designed to celebrate an important anniversary and devoted to “Beethoven and his contemporaries.” We were finally able to hold it, and could feel that a gathering of this sort was eagerly awaited by all attendees.

The institute provided us with no fewer than eight historical pianos for the participants to practice and get coaching with the professors. Replicas by Chris Maene of Stein (1786, two copies), Walter (1800), Streicher (1808), Fritz (1811), Erard Frères (1803), John Broadwood & Sons (1817) and an original Boisselot (1839) were spread out over the two buildings of the institute. This wide array of instruments elicited many ideas that led to fruitful dialogue and conversation. Both for the pianists already familiar with fortepianos and those who were less experienced, having at their disposal historical instruments of different aesthetics and mechanisms was a unique opportunity to compare and experiment. As such, they could all get in touch with the kind of work that revolves around historical materiality and technologies at the Orpheus Institute. Mornings were reserved to performing and coaching, while afternoons were largely dedicated to presentations and discussions.

The screening of the documentary *A Farewell to Paris: Beethoven and his French Piano* was the kick-off of the academy. It nicely tied with the first edition of the academy that took place in 2018. The aim of the latter was to reconstruct an early 19th-century piano concours at the Paris Conservatoire, and for this purpose all participants delved into a challenging repertoire revealing of French pianism and sound—aesthetic qualities that Beethoven was eager to explore when in 1803 he ordered his Erard Frères *piano en forme de clavecin*. The documentary retraces the



approximately from left to right Tong Wang, Domitille Bès, Katja Poljakova, Zvi Meniker, Camilla Koehnken, Ignacio González, Anastasios Zafeoropoulos, Luca Montebugnoli, Laura Savigni, Stipe Bilić, Vasco Pereira, Tom Beghin at the Orpheus Institute.
(photo by Sanae Sanane)

history of this foreign piano from the moment Beethoven desired it to its final destination on a designated podium in the Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum in Linz, Austria. Beghin invites the viewer to engage with the four pedals as if for the first time, as Beethoven once did, and feel the instrument's deep and bouncy keys creating a distinctly French soundscape from which the "Waldstein" Sonata op. 53 was born. But the journey of Beethoven and his French piano continues with his frustration of missing the speaking tone of Viennese pianos he had been accustomed to, and finally setting it aside, but only after seven years and some serious attempts to "viennicize" it through repeated revisions.

A week before the start of the academy, two texts were sent to everyone to read and reflect on: Chapters 4 and 5, respectively titled "The Framework of Hermeneutics" and "First-Person Beethoven" from the book *The Beethoven Syndrome* by Mark Evan Bonds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) and a chapter written by Beghin titled "Deafly Performing Beethoven's Last Three Piano Sonatas" from *Beethoven Studies 4*, edited by Keith Chapin and David Wyn Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). The exchange of ideas that these texts provoked set the tone of the academy from the outset. Bonds' perceptive analysis of the reception of Beethoven's music during and after his lifetime reveals a change in the context within which composers, performers, and listeners navigated from a rhetorical framework to what Bonds calls the imperative of hermeneutics. Notably after the discovery of the Heiligenstadt Testament, Beethoven's music started to be heard as autobiographical. Hearing the composer in the music or hearing the music as an expression of their inner self assumed a new responsibility on behalf of the listeners, whose listening paradigm was to be based on new concepts of "sincerity" and "oracularity." These two notions fostered a lively reflection on our practice of this repertoire, our roles as modern-day performers, and the place we now attribute to historical keyboards.

The academy was punctuated by four enlightening seminars. In her presentation "Zukunftsmusik, Beethoven's Sonata Op. 101 as Absorbed by the Liszt Circle," Camilla Köhnken depicted the colorful performance practice of the 19th century by tracking the posthumous life of Beethoven's op. 101. She demonstrated how, for example, Hans von Bülow included it in one of his typically gigantic concert programs dedicated to a single composer. In 1864 he built a Beethoven-heavy program starting with the Variations op. 34, the Sonata op. 81a, followed by op. 101, which itself served as an introduction to the monumental "Hammerklavier" Sonata op. 106, with von Bülow even adding a few bars of transition between these last two pieces as if any silence would have been superfluous. Such an uninterrupted flow of music was also what Richard Wagner cherished and as related by Cosima Wagner in her diary, he considered the first movement of op. 101 as "an excellent example of what I mean by unending melody. That is what music really is." During the presentation we could hear a performance by another disciple of Franz Liszt, Eugen d'Albert, recorded with reproducing piano technologies from Duo-Art (first and second movements, 1920) and Welte-Mignon (third and fourth movements, 1913). To our ears, unacquainted with the stylistic means of the time, the interpretation of d'Albert was both refreshing and disconcerting. At this occasion we were introduced to Köhnken's artistic research and usage of the methodology of embodiment and re-enactment of historical recordings. Anastasios Zafeoropoulos (who had played op. 101 for us earlier that day) readily agreed to try and re-enact the first bars of the sonata's third movement following the dislocations, arpeggiations and rubati as played by d'Albert. Both von Bülow and d'Albert, as two disciples of Liszt, benefited as much from the latter's authoritative affiliation with Beethoven through Czerny as they participated in the immortalization of Beethoven's music through performance practices that continue to fascinate us.

Luca Montebugnoli gave a lively presentation of his research "Re-writing for the Salon: The Practice of Arrangement for (Accompanied) Piano at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century." He invited us to rethink the practice of arrangement through an in-depth reading of Louis Adam's *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* of 1804–05, in particular its eleventh chapter, titled "L'Art d'accompagner la partition." In three brief pages, this chapter on accompanying from the score encourages the piano student to develop the necessary skills and techniques to arrange orchestral music. Interestingly, as the first of its kind, this text represents the transformation of the older practice of figured bass to a newer one of orchestral arrangement. Beyond giving practical advice, Adam exposes an alternative way of considering the piano, perceiving registers for their potentiality to imitate different timbres of orchestral instruments. Such a consideration is identifiable, in fact, in Louis Adam's own writing for solo piano, as was beautifully demonstrated by Montebugnoli in the Sonata in E minor op. 3 no. 3 (1781) on the Erard piano. After looking at an arrangement by Adam of a Cimarosa Aria, examining his choices for registers and trying different ways

of pedaling, Montebugnoli introduced us to his current work on Beethoven's Third Symphony, demonstrating to us his own arrangement of the symphony's first movement for solo piano. We are very much looking forward to hear the full results at the next Declassifying the Classics' concert on September 23, 2021.

Louis Adam's method was also of interest to Zvi Meniker. For his presentation on Beethoven's 32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor WoO 80, he used Adam's tenth chapter dedicated to the use of pedals ("De la manière de se servir des pédales") to inform the performance of the work. Meniker interpreted the thirty-two variations applying different pedal combinations for each variation while soliciting our opinions during his testing process. The result was a delightful sequence of musical tableaux portraying the panoply of sonic possibilities offered by our Erard Frères 1803 fortepiano. What we experienced had little to do with a performance of the same piece on a Viennese fortepiano. Repeated notes, ethereal tremolos, and other French idiomatic motives lose their meaning on the sharper and more articulatory Viennese instrument. All this led Meniker to conclude, with a mischievous smile, that if Beethoven had heard the piece played on the "right" piano, he might not have been so disdainful toward it, as recounted by Alexander Wheelock Thayer: "Beethoven once found Streicher's daughter practicing these Variations. After he had listened for awhile he asked her: 'By whom is that?' 'By you.' 'Such nonsense by me? Oh Beethoven, what an ass you were!'"



from left to right: Zvi Meniker, Tong Wang on a copy of a Stein fortepiano 1786, Orpheus Instituut Koetshuis.
(photo by Sanae Zanane)

In the last seminar of the week, Tom Beghin gave us an overview of the concepts that framed his research during the last few years. He explained, for example, how Ian Hodder's theory of entanglement between things and humans is applicable to the development of Beethoven's relationship to his Erard, from the initial enthusiasm of *dependence* to the frustration of *dependency*. We were also introduced to the notion of "affordance," as defined by James Gibson and further developed by Donald Norman. These theories focus on materiality and have the advantage for the historian to move away from teleological or evolutionistic narratives of instruments in favor of one that focuses on particular moments of these instruments' existence in a person's life, enlightening us with fluctuating facts about changing pianist-instrument relationships that may be highly relevant for our performance of a composer's creative output. Thus, drawing from his experience with the other "foreign" piano in Beethoven's life, his 1817 Broadwood, Beghin proposed a materiality-based journey for the "Diabelli" Variations, op. 120, connecting the two different stages of creation in 1819 and 1823 respectively to the changing psychology of Beethoven as a disabled pianist-composer—with the construction of a *Gehörmaschine* (hearing machine) as an important marker in 1821.

From the participants we had insightful presentations that touched upon a large range of topics. Ignacio Gonzalez attempted to problematize the systematization of notation in music editions, specifically regarding signs of articulation, pointing out their inevitably versatile meanings and interpretations, which the performers should embrace. Anastasios Zafeoropoulos addressed the issue of Muzio Clementi's fingering, which he claims is generally analyzed from an anachronistic point of view. Revealing striking similarities between Clementi's approach and earlier French harpsichord treatises, Zafeoropoulos managed to question some of our beliefs of early nineteenth-century pianism. Domitille Bès introduced us to the important nineteenth-century French virtuoso pianist and composer

Thérèse Wartel, offering us a glimpse into female schooling and musical practice, but also the interesting way by which certain female pianists bypassed the discriminatory rules of the time. Tong Wang shared with us her original work on the topic of cuteness, its psychological framework and usage in popular culture; after an analysis of musical cuteness, she proposed possible applications in classical music. Stipe Bilić talked about how historical pianos define the aesthetic direction of their repertoire and elaborated on projects that he is currently carrying out in Graz, Austria. Vasco Pereira shared his atypical background of an autodidact, passionate harpsichordist and appealed to historical evidence to make a case for more performance on the harpsichord of classical repertoire. Laura Savigni, who forms a duo with her sister guitarist Enrica, presented some arrangements they wrote to complement the narrow repertoire that is available to them.



Stipe Bilić playing on a copy by Chris Maene of a Walter fortepiano 1800, in the Orpheus Instituut Koetshuis (carriage house). (photo by Sanae Zanane)

In the middle of this already busy week, an excursion to Ruiselede was organized to visit the workshop of eminent piano builder Chris Maene. He personally welcomed us and guided us through the different areas of the Pianos Maene company, from the warehouse where wooden planks are stored to his personal office where he takes care of the last fine-tunings of an instrument. More than a dozen playable original pianos were on display in the showroom to the delight of the eager group of thirteen pianists that we were. One such original piano by Graf (1835) provided the perfect context for Katja Poljakova to share her research about this master piano maker, including her travels to various locations in Central Europe to investigate extant instruments.



From left to right, Diane Kolin, Tong Wang, Tom Beghin, in the concert hall of the Orpheus Institute on a copy of a John Broadwood & Sons 1817. (photo by Camilla Köhnken)

Diane Kolin, whose research focus is critical disability studies, joined us for the four first days of the academy, enriching the conversation with her knowledge about musicking and deafness. Already familiar with Beghin's work in this domain, she was curious to experience a tactile feeling of sound through Beethoven's Broadwood and the Hearing Machine. While Tong Wang and Katja Poljakova played Sonatas op. 110 and 111, Kolin wanted to *touch* the sound, engaging with instrument, stage, and pianist *through vibration*. Witnessing such private interaction, where Beethoven's instrument managed to bypass the one-and-a-half meter distance rule between one human being and another, was all the more striking during a pandemic that has all but banned tactility as one of our senses.

The closing event of the Summer Academy was a series of three wonderful afternoon and evening concerts on August 28. The participants played parts of their program, and a whole range of fortepianos and repertoire (Mozart, Dussek, Clementi, Schubert, and, of course, Beethoven) was given to the public to hear. This event also marked the first in the beautifully renovated Koetshuis ("coach house"), which since a year has housed the Ton Koopman library, a precious collection of books and scores from the 15th to the 19th century, as well as thousands of modern books. Listening to the sounds emanating from beautifully crafted replicas of historical instruments surrounded by equally superb examples of literary materiality evoked a distant past, yet instilled in the researchers a fresh inspiration to push the exploration of historical performance toward new horizons.