

Starter Steps for Playing Eighteenth-Century Repertoire on the Modern Piano

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I. The instrument: Develop an awareness of and feel for the fortepiano sound to dramatically impact an eighteenth-century aesthetic concept

- The modern piano sings, is heavier, stronger, wider, and requires more energy to execute. The fortepiano speaks, is responsive, focused, and requires finesse and technical acumen.
- The fortepiano is rich in overtones with a silvery sound. The sound on the fortepiano contains a variety of colors unmatched by any modern piano. An important characteristic on the fortepiano is its ability to quickly, crisply, and clearly articulate musical thought – to speak; to turn on a dime. One idea may be quickly brought to the forefront and, with equal ease and speed, recede into the background.
- Access the Companion Website that accompanies *Discoveries from the Fortepiano* (OUP 2015). On the OUP website, you will find over 100 music examples demonstrating excerpts on modern piano, fortepiano, and reconciled version on modern piano. [Pedagogical outlines for each chapter are also available to accompany the text.]
- Access recordings of great fortepianists such as Malcolm Bilson, Tom Beghin (Blu-Ray: *The Virtual Haydn*), and Bart van Oort on YouTube and Spotify to develop a feel for the sound aesthetic.

II. Authenticity — *Urtext* Editions: To get as close as possible to the composer's words play from *Urtext* editions

- “The first edition of [Beethoven’s] Opus 2 was produced in at least eight different states.”
---Barry Cooper, *35 Piano Sonatas of Beethoven*, Vol. I (ABRSM, 2007), 17.
- “Made or done in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original; based on facts, accurate or reliable.”
--- *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (OUP, 2010), 108.
- Yet what the composer meant was and *is* vitally important. We have a responsibility to know as much as we can about what was said so we can make intelligent decisions regarding what we will consciously attend to or dismiss.

III. *Affekt*: Determine concepts first. Discover the *affekt* before going to the keyboard. Build from the foundation up – harmonic and formal analysis

- *Affekt*. It all begins here. Nearly every decision was based on *affekt* – from large to small, from form to gestures, from time signature to individual note values, from key choice to intervals.
- Composers built from the foundation up – the bass line and harmonic function.

IV. Time — Rhythm: Meter is associated with character. *In music before 1800, the quarter note receives full value only when under a slur or tenuto. Apply *affekt* determinations from this baseline to adjust actual note length*

- In addition to describing strong and weak beat organization, time signatures are tied to dances and their associated *affekt*.
- The time signature of $\frac{3}{2}$ is heavier, $\frac{3}{4}$ is lighter, and $\frac{3}{8}$ is lighter yet, regardless of any tempo marking.
- *In music before 1800, the quarter note receives full value only when under a slur or tenuto.*
- Each note's actual duration is adjusted depending on the *affekt*. This technique allows the performer informed freedom of expression.

V. Articulation — the Slur — “The Viennese Sigh:” Each slur is a gesture from more to less with the wrist initiating the lift

- Small segments are the cornerstone. They provide guidance for rhythmic groupings and dynamic direction.
- The gesture also indicates attack and release. Notes under the slur should be played in a single impulse without any movement of the hand.
- The slur always indicates a diminuendo; moving from more to less.
- The first note of a slur and the first note after a slur (which may well be a new slur grouping) is articulated through a clean attack (with varying degrees of emphasis), a clean release (with varying degrees of lightness), and a separation of sound (with varying degrees of time) between the two gestures. How new and fresh each impulse is articulated depends on those influencing traits derived from *affekt*.

VI. Dynamics: Dynamics provide direction to nuance, shading, and good taste. Temper dynamic ranges on the modern piano to bring veracity to the original style

- Relatively little was said about dynamics. What was addressed at great length is the performer's ability to project *affekt* through execution.

- *Forte* and *piano* are the backbone, indicating more and less rather than an absolute extreme loud or soft.
- “The marking $f \rightarrow \rightarrow \rightarrow p$ is actually giving direction to begin *forte* and work toward *piano*, not an absolute $f \rightarrow f \rightarrow f \rightarrow f \rightarrow f \rightarrow f \rightarrow p$.”
---*Discoveries from the Fortepiano* (OUP, 2015), 121.

VII. Call to Action

- Make conscious decisions.
- “In faithfully respecting the traditions, we may now do much more. We may express this style on today’s instrument. We are called to confront ‘the way it’s always been done’ and dare to be transformed...”
---*Discoveries from the Fortepiano* (OUP, 2015), 206.
- Visit www.focusonpiano.com to access related links and blogs.

