

Flexibility in Keyboard performance

Flexibility in performance is an important element of the classical style - probably of all musical styles. While about 'freedom', this talk is not about tempo rubato - tempo fluctuation - but about the subtle gesturing of musical figures, akin to pronunciation of words in speech: together with dynamics the most important tool for shaping a musical figure. This 'freedom of speech' is exercised independently of the rhythmical pulse and is supported by the historical sources. But in spite of that, the dominating performance style of the 20th century was the 'Strict style' - the antithesis of flexibility in performance. Sometimes also referred to as the 'Modern Style' or the 'Straight Style', it also manifested itself as the 'Sewing Machine Style' in the early days of early music. In this short lecture I will deal with the need for the rhetorical classical style to be performed with speech-like diction and gesturing and the origins of the strict style and its influence on present day music life. Together with the strict style, the highly expressive piano technique of dislocation (striking the left hand and right hand not together) became more important, to the point of dominating performances. I will attempt to answer the question whether there is a relation between the strict style and this (no less strict) technique of dislocation. Finally I will document the (often coded but undisputable) historical directions and tools for a speech-like flexibility found in treatises between 1740 and 1990.



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*2006 Bart van Oort completed a ten-year, 14-CD recording project, the *Complete Works for Piano solo and Piano four-hands of Mozart*. With *The Van Swieten Society* he released various cds. Recently appeared *French Nocturnes* (Vol. 5 of *The Nocturne in the Nineteenth Century*), *Dusseck Piano Sonatas*, *Beethoven Piano Quartets*. Bart van Oort teaches fortepiano and Historical Performance Practice at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague.*