

Out of Timing: Investigating the Open Pedal Register in Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata

Since its invention, the fortepiano was constantly transformed up until the end of the 19th century. Innovative builders created pianos that represented different sound esthetics, and these coexisted during the 18th and 19th centuries. Around 1880, however, piano building started to standardize around criteria of mechanical reliability, powerful sound and expansiveness of dynamic range. At the same time, and in response to these, interpretation of "common practice" repertoire on modern pianos was enriched in dynamics but impoverished in one crucial, often underappreciated dimension: time flexibility.

This project aims to give insight into time flexibility as it relates to one specific 18th century practice that is hardly applicable to modern pianos: playing with undamped register. This was considered by CPE Bach in his *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen* to be "the most pleasing and, once the performer learns to observe the necessary precautions in the face of its lingering resonance, the most delightful for improvisation". What Bach means by "necessary precautions" is almost certainly the ability to manage a certain harmonic clarity in a mist of sound. My hypothesis is that this ability is linked with the keyboardist's skill of managing musical time, furthermore, I propose that to study the practice of playing in an undamped register yields insight into the other, and directly related, practice of carefully playing with time.

A key example of this practice can be found in the first movement of Beethoven's "Mondschein" Sonata Op. 27 No. 2, which carries the indication "sempre pp e senza sordino," that is, entirely with undamped register. I will present the results of an experiment conducted at two conservatories in Belgium and Germany. This experiment involves students enrolled in fortepiano class as an elective. I will ask them to prepare and perform the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. The students will be divided into two groups. The first group will be asked to raise the dampers throughout the piece whereas the second will not receive any instruction. A 5-octave Walter fortepiano, such as the one that Beethoven had during the time of composing his "Mondschein," will be used for this experiment. Using Sonic Visualiser, I will analyze and describe the timing of each performance. Besides this, I will use professional fortepianists' recordings of the same piece as references for comparison in order to observe how the practice of playing on historical instruments leads to integrating flexibility of timing into performance. By drawing attention to those passages that are most affected from a timing point of view, I will discuss how the lingering resonance of an early 19th-century instrument would have influenced the sense of musical time and how crucial the element of time flexibility would have been for a musician from Beethoven's time.



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Sanae Zanane is a pianist and fortepianist. She completed her piano and fortepiano studies at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris, the Musikhochschule of Stuttgart, as well as graduating from the Sorbonne University in Musicology. She studied with Hortense Cartier-Bresson, Péter Nagy and Stefania Neonato. Her interpretation of classical and romantic repertoire is inspired by historical pianos. Sanae has chosen therefore to work on aspects of interpretation into which fortepianos bring significant insight. In 2018, this led her to integrate the Orpheus Institute in Ghent as a doctoral researcher, working with Tom Beghin. Sanae was invited as a Jury member for the National Piano Competition of Morocco. As a pianist and fortepianist she gives recitals, lecture-recital as well as chamber music performances with a repertoire ranging from the Baroque era to contemporary music.