

It is a great pleasure to be present at the EPARM Conference and to be a part of the group which represents the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Conservatory of Music, Ghent, Belgium, to be here together with the Dean Mr. Wim de Temmerman, Dr. Katrien Vuylsteke Vanfleteren, Dr. Geert Dhondt and Mr. Hans Roels, composer and researcher.

I would like to introduce myself briefly. My name is [Sergei Istomin](#). I am a cellist and I also play the viola da gamba. I do not want to specify the period with which I work (baroque, classical, romantic or modern music) since I like to play any work which is close to my nature.

My latest concerts include the works of Claude Debussy, Max Bruch, Johannes Brahms, Ludwig van Beethoven and Camille Saint-Saëns. In the upcoming months I will be playing in the Mozart Symphonies with Anima Eterna Brugge, of which I am principal cellist and I will conduct Baroque programme in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

I have been appointed to the position of PhD [research associate](#) at *The Royal Academy of Fine Arts* and the *Royal Conservatory*, which together constitute the *School of Arts of University College Ghent, Belgium*.

The theme and title of my research is “Research on left hand expressive techniques (portamento, vibrato, tone quality and fingering) in solo, chamber music and orchestral repertoire for the Violoncello in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.”

My supervisors are Professor Doctor Francis Maes from the University of Ghent and Mr. Florian Heyerick from the Royal Conservatory, Ghent.

Some of the questions with which my research is concerned are:

What can be considered today as synonymous with progress or as synonymous with restoration?

How can one keep up with the current standards?

Does one have to do so?

What are the current tendencies and principles?

Are we coming back to the “old” expressive effects, that is artistic restoration in the field of Historically Informed Performance?

## Research in music

**In search of the universal truth or an  
act of creation (re-creation...)?**

**All truths are easy to understand  
once they are discovered; the point  
is to discover them. - Galileo**

**Here in Lyon I would like to talk about:**

**The principle of artistic deviation and the search for “truth”.**

“Though this be madness, yet there’s method in’t.” (W. Shakespeare, Hamlet)

After reading the Announcement and Call for Presentations of the European Platform for Artistic Research in Music “Between Madness and Method,” some peculiar thoughts came to mind;

I wanted to refresh my memory about the definitions of Creative and Receptive powers in the Chinese Book of Changes. I remember being fascinated by the exactness and clarity of the texts.

The text of the “*I Ching*” is a set of oracular statements represented by 64 sets of six lines each called *hexagrams*.

Just as a reminder I would like to quote two sentences from the introduction to Richard Wilhelm's “I-Ching” translation: “The Book of Changes – “*I Ching*” in Chinese – is unquestionably one of the most important books in **the world's literature**.

Richard Wilhelm was a German sinologist, theologian, and missionary.

He translated the book into German and published it in Peking (Beijing) in the summer of 1923. It went largely unnoticed until it was discovered by the psychologist Carl Jung.

The English translation by Cary F. Baynes appeared in 1950.

The origin of “I Ching” goes back to mythical antiquity, and it has occupied the attention of the most eminent scholars of China down to the present day.”

For instance, to give you an idea of its particular importance, in his article *Explication de l'Arithmétique Binaire* (1703) Gottfried Leibniz wrote that he found in the hexagrams a basis for claiming the universality of the binary numeral system.

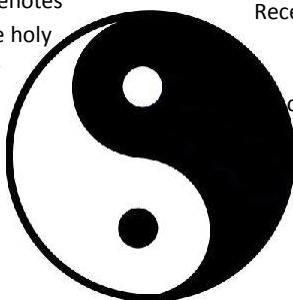
### ***I Ching - Book of Changes***

Modern scholarship suggests that the earliest layers of the text may date from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

It centered on the ideas of the dynamic balance of opposites, the evolution of events as a process, and acceptance of the inevitability of change.

#### **The Creative**

In relation to the universe, the hexagram expresses the strong, creative action of the Deity. In relation to the human world, it denotes the creative action of the holy man or sage, of the ruler or leader of men, who through his power awakens and develops their higher nature.



#### **The Receptive**

... there is no real dualism here, because there is a clearly defined hierarchic relationship between the two principles. In itself, of course the Receptive is just as important as the Creative, but the attribute of devotion defines the place occupied by this primal power in relation to the Creative.

## The texts are:

### ***1. The Creative***



The first hexagram is made up of six unbroken lines. These unbroken lines stand for the primal power, which is light-giving, active, strong, and of the spirit.

The hexagram is consistently strong in character, and since it is without weakness, its essence is power or energy. Its image is heaven.

Its energy is represented as unrestricted by any fixed conditions in space and is therefore conceived of as motion.

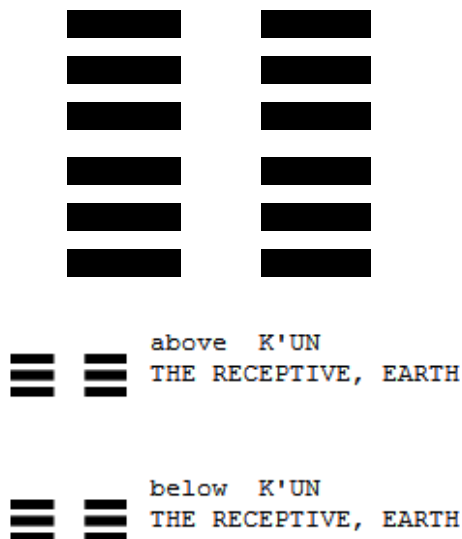
Time is regarded as the basis of this motion. Thus the hexagram includes also the power of time and the power of persisting in time, that is, duration.

The power represented by the hexagram is to be interpreted in a dual sense in terms of its action on the universe and of its action on the world of men.

In relation to the universe, the hexagram expresses the strong, creative action of the Deity.

In relation to the human world, it denotes the creative action of the holy man or sage, of the ruler or leader of men, who through his power awakens and develops their higher nature.

## ***2. The Receptive***



This hexagram is made up of broken lines only. The broken lines represent the dark, yielding, receptive primal power of yin. The attribute of the hexagram is devotion; its image is the earth.

It is the perfect complement of ***The Creative*** — the complement, not the opposite, for the Receptive does not combat the Creative but completes it.

It represents nature in contrast to spirit, earth in contrast to heaven, space as against time, the female-maternal as against the male - paternal.

However, as applied to human affairs, the principle of this complementary relationship is found not only in the relation between man and woman, but also in that between prince and minister and between father and son and ... **I would say, between composer and performer (interpreter).**

Indeed, even in the individual this duality appears in the coexistence of the spiritual world and the world of the senses.

But strictly speaking there is no real dualism here, because there is a clearly defined hierarchic relationship between the two principles.

In itself of course **the Receptive is just as important as the Creative**, but the attribute of devotion defines the place occupied by this primal power in relation to the Creative.

For the Receptive must be activated and led by the Creative; then it is productive of good.

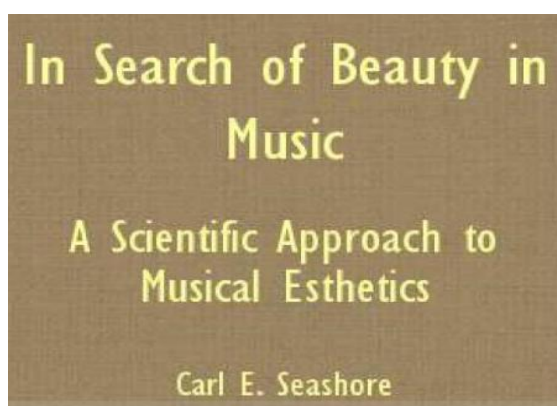
Only when it abandons this position and tries to stand as an equal side by side with the Creative, does it become evil. The result then is opposition to and struggle against the Creative, which is productive of evil to both.

As I mentioned before, I consider a composer as the Creative power and a performer as the Receptive power. It is the happiest situation when these two forces, the Creative, that is the Composer, and the Receptive, that is the Performer's artistic power of interpretation can work together.

"Do you believe that I think of your miserable fiddle when the Spirit dictates and I write it down?" Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) writes to Ignaz Schuppanzigh (1776 – 1830).

Let's imagine that performers may also have the feeling that the Spirit dictates to them when they play. I believe, however, t

hat the composition process is totally different from delivery, that of performance.



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According to Carl Emil Seashore's work "In Search of Beauty in Music" (1947), Chapter 6 which is called "PRINCIPLES OF DEVIATION FROM THE REGULAR":

"Esthetics in the past has dealt primarily with the composer's design, or the musical form which comes to us in the conventional score.

But this score has a number of limitations.

The score is certainly a very inadequate blueprint for the artist's performance."

**A musical score is only a map – there is the whole landscape hidden within...**

How do we combine a composer's "blueprint" with the actual artistic performance?

Can we still allow some subconscious feelings mixed with "natural perception"?

Musical performance of course depends on the individual characteristics and technical abilities of a person and manifests itself in dynamic and tempo inflections (deviations) such as articulation, phrasing, different ways of sound production – timbre and sonority ("sonance" - a term used by Carl Seashore).

Today one can still perform without any logically viable explanation of how an interpretation is structured. I personally perceive it as a flaw when the person performs only the way he or she feels.

There is a danger that one's performance may become too idiosyncratic without adequate respect being given to the composer's score, except when the composer is playing his own works.

In my opinion, transcendental, spiritual and intuitive approaches to the interpretation of the score should be based upon general knowledge and intelligence.

## Adolph Christiani

(1836 – 1885)

**The principles of expression in  
pianoforte playing**

Copyright, 1885, by Harper & Brothers

In his book “The principles of expression in pianoforte playing” (1885), Christiani, Adolph Friedrich (1836 – 1885) highlights four essential qualities required of a good musician:

“Of these four pianistic requisites let us consider **talent** to be the first,” he says.

The remaining three would follow in this order:

2. Emotion, representing the aesthetical element, being the highest.
3. **Intelligence**, representing the scientific element, coming next.
4. Technique, representing the mechanical element, the last.

The following table will suggest such probable results:

With				The Highest Obtainable Result would be :
Talent.	Emotion.	Intelligence.	Technique.	
1	2	3	4	Executive artist, of highest order.
1	2	3	..	Non-executive artist ; probably first-class teacher.
1	2	..	4	Natural artist, without musical training ; for instance, Hungarian gypsy musicians.
1	..	3	4	Executant musician ; probably scholarly and critical, but dry.
1	2	..	..	Enthusiastic music-lover ; more impulsive than discriminating.
1	..	3	..	Probably a good teacher.
1	..	..	4	A virtuoso, without being either an artist or a musician.
1	..	..	..	An individual possessing the key to a treasure-chamber, without ever having opened the door.
..	2	3	4	An ever-laboring artist, whose life is too short to attain the perfection he aims at.
..	2	3	..	Artistic connoisseur ; probably a good art-critic.
..	2	..	4	Spasmodic executant ; for instance, certain lady pianists with more sentimentality than judgment.
..	2	..	..	Music-lover by instinct ; a good listener.
..	..	3	4	Scholarly executant, but cold.
..	..	3	..	Musical theorist.
..	..	..	4	Virtuoso of the music-box kind.

So what is Artistic Research in Music? Is it a search for the truth?

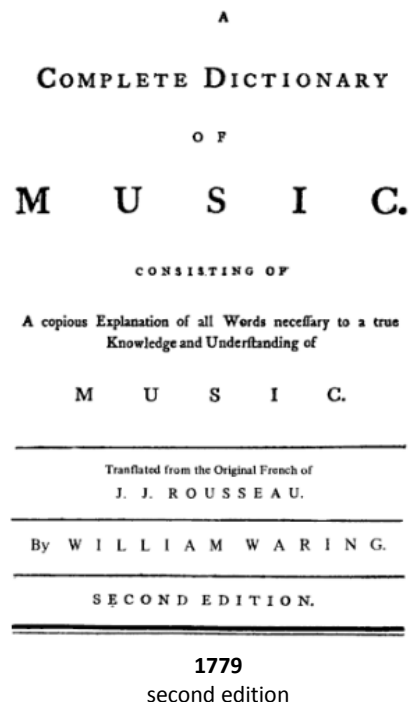
I would like to quote the words of an Italian physician Dr. Carmelo Lombardo: "There is no such a thing as "the" truth. Truth is **not** something you can think of possessing. Truth is search. Truth can only be found by stretching the limits of your horizon, by widening your way of thinking."

A real artist should continue his intellectual and spiritual development. Research, therefore, plays a very important role.

Fundamental skills and knowledge obtained by studies, and hopefully by a desire for self-improvement, are the basis for further personal development.

The scientific research and practice of one's craft allow us to come closer to universal truth and "practical" wisdom.

Musical performance differs from other types of arts, for instance painting or sculpture since it demands an act of secondary creation and intermediation between player and listener. Schools of performance, styles and esthetics (esthetical tendencies) reflect the historical, social and national characteristics and **tastes** of different epochs.



I would like to quote some sentences from Jean - Jacques Rousseau's (1712 – 1778), *Dictionnaire de Musique* (Paris, 1768; English translation, 1771, 1779 by William Waring).

From the article on TASTE:

Of all natural gifts, taste is that which is most felt and least explained. Since each (person) has only his own taste to set against that of another, it is evident that there is no dispute to be made.

**BUT** there is also a general taste, on which all organized persons agree, and it is only this to which we can absolutely give the name of taste.

Let a concert be heard by ear sufficiently exercised, and men sufficiently instructed; the greatest number will generally agree on the judgment of the pieces, and on the order of preference convenient to them ...

... Genius creates, but taste makes the choice;  
and a too abundant genius is often in want of a severe sensor,  
to prevent it from **abusing** its valuable riches.  
We can do great things **without taste**, but it is taste alone which  
renders them interesting.  
It is **taste**, which makes the composer **catch** the ideas of the poet:  
It is **taste**, which makes the executant **catch** the ideas of the composer.

LECTURES  
ON  
RHETORIC  
AND  
BELLES LETTRES.

By HUGH BLAIR, D.D. & F.R.S. ED.  
ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH, AND  
PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES  
IN THE UNIVERSITY, OF EDINBURGH.  
  
IN THREE VOLUMES.  
  
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1783: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*

**Another definition of TASTE from Dr. Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric, Dr. Hugh Blair (1718 – 1800), an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish Preacher, Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres.**

...The inequality of Taste amongst mankind is to be ascribed, undoubtedly, in some degree, to the different frame of their natures... yet it owing still more to culture and education.

Taste is certainly one of the most improvable faculties which adorn our nature. What is actually written in the score? What is the “correct” and adequate way of playing or recreating the composer’s thoughts?

**LE CYGNE**  
 (EXTRAIT DU CARNIVAL DES ANIMAUX)  
 Mélodie pour VIOLONCELLE et PIANO

C. SAINT-SAËNS

VIOLONCELLE

Adagio



If we look at the score of the Swan from the Carnival of the Animals by Saint-Saëns, Durand Editions, 1886, there are not many expressive markings written in the score, and therefore performances differ greatly. The final result is based on the performer's skills and good judgment.

**The following Links to music examples of the Swan by Camille Saint-Saëns will give you some idea of these differences.**

1. Joseph Hollman, the Swan, Victor, (rec. 1906)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UynU7pPtrUI>

2. Hans Kindler, the Swan, Victor, 1916

[http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/700002678/B-17644-Le\\_cygne](http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/700002678/B-17644-Le_cygne)

3. Mischa Maisky, the Swan (2010)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODw9q2C3rAo>

4. Clara Rockmore (plays Theremin – an electronic instrument patented in 1928), the Swan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhmATZNUY9Q>



Clara Rockmore, theremin

Here is a fragment from Saint-Saëns's letter with a critical remark on Joseph Hollman's performance of the author's 2<sup>nd</sup> Violoncello Concerto in Paris on December 26, 1915 (Saint-Saëns was conducting the concert) : "Je vous assure que ce n'était pas commode, car le brillant violoncelliste ne pense qu'à son instrument et se fiche du reste...", (I assure you it was not easy, because the brilliant cellist thinks only of his instrument and does not care for the rest): Letter to M. and Mme Destombes of the 26 December 1915, Jean Gallois, Camille Saint-Saëns, Edition Mardaga, 2004, p. 358-369.

I would like to repeat that schools of performance, styles and esthetics (esthetical tendencies) reflect the historical, social and national characteristics and **tastes** of different epochs.



In the critical new National Edition of Chopin's works, Poland, 2010; Edition with Source and Performance Commentaries one still can find text such as, "**Performers with NO interest in source-related problems** and who wish to rely on a single text without variants can be recommended to use the text given on the main staves, etc.

Should this type of commentary be considered as an unnecessary, with regard to the contemporary state of music and especially the Historically Informed Performance movement's influence on the music making of today?

Does one think?

Pablo Picasso said: "I paint forms as I think them, not as I see them."

The time of the intuitively - subjective performance has passed. Facsimiles of First Editions and Manuscripts, Urtext materials, Critical Editions based on an extensive research have come out recently, for instance:

the Beethoven Symphonies, Cello and Violin Sonatas and Variations; the Debussy Cello Sonata; the National Chopin Edition which is the latest source-critical edition of Chopin's complete works, etc.

I believe that nowadays performers are **expected** to participate actively in Artistic Research.

They are invited to use Research Materials and Publications which are widely available through the internet, archives and libraries. Research opens doors for the active and intelligent participation in a process of "recreation" of a compositional process and the interpretation of music.

One should recall the past to understand better the “new” ideas.

Everything changes; everything changes in the arts – perception, taste, style, tone quality, expressive effects, etc. Art changes everything, is that right?

I do not want to give you an impression that I am trying to preach to you about spirituality, philosophy and religion.

But I would still like to mention the words of Ecclesiastes, (I omit the “Meaningless” part though and go straight to the verses):

<sup>9</sup>     What has been will be again,  
        what has been done will be done again;  
        there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup>    Is there anything of which one can say,  
        “Look! This is something new”?  
        It was here already, long ago;  
        it was here before our time.

I started my research six months ago. My Method today (and it may again change a bit) is one of deductive reasoning – studying the mid-twentieth century method books and schools (for instance Hugo Becker Modern Method for the violoncello for the pre-Casals era, Pablo Casals’s violoncello “reinvention” and the influence of methodical works by Maurice Eisenberg, Diran Alexanian; the works of Maurice Gendron, Paul Tortellier, William Pleeth, etc.).

I will then come back to the “foundation” of the nineteenth century national schools and methods – the Brussels and Paris Conservatoires, as well as those of Berlin, Dresden, Moscow and St. Petersburg...

Several solo projects which are directly connected to the research will be recorded in the future (L. van Beethoven, Violoncello Sonatas and Variations; J. Brahms, Violoncello Sonatas; C. Debussy; C. B. Romberg, Violoncello works.)

My further activities will include:

- “Discriminative” listening “quiz”/survey for students, colleagues and the “general” public, which might clarify some contemporary tendencies in taste development and music appreciation, a sort of “listening comprehension test”
- Possibly “discriminative” self - listening analysis.
- A closer look at the Viola da Gamba’s influence on the violoncello technique.

A new CD with Saint-Saëns’s The Carnival of the Animals (Le carnaval des animaux, 1886) was recorded for Zig-Zag Territoires by Anima Eterna Brugge in January, 2013.

The famous Swan (Le Cygne) for cello solo was a small piece of evidence for my investigation. After being so “conservative”, is there going to be a return to portamento in my interpretation?

My research has been a great help for making a number of stylistic changes in my playing and teaching. I have definitely come closer to a more meaningful performance.

I would like to express my gratitude to Jos van Immerseel (Anima Eterna Brugge) and Dr. Dirk Moelants (Gent University) for directing my attention to the names of Adolf Christiani and Emil Seashore. My special thanks to Christopher Cartwright who helped me with the editing.