

## Proposal EPARM conference 2015

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[Description of the content \(310 w.\)](#)

### **Tempo and rubato in Alexander Scriabin's early piano preludes**

The score is the main source on which a performer's interpretation is based. Despite its level of detail, the score provides only a very incomplete representation of the music itself. The development of an interpretation of a piece of music is in essence a creative artistic process, whereby artists make different personal artistic decisions.

This research examines the parameters tempo and rubato (tempo variation) in the performance of Scriabin's piano preludes on the basis of recordings from 1910 until 2010. A study of the recordings allows an objective comparative research of the pianist's artistic decisions and provides insight in the performance history of these preludes.

Hence, the development of an efficient and consistent method to compare the performers' decisions concerning tempo and rubato on a large scale is a major research objective. The recording analysis, using a combination of different auditory analysis methods, software tools and statistical data analyses, results in a mapping of the differences and similarities in the pianist's interpretations. A reconstruction of a century of performance history opens up opportunities for a more grounded, more profound and deliberate personal interpretation of the preludes for pianists of today.

Based on the (preliminary) results of the analysed recordings the researcher formulated hypotheses concerning tendencies and singularities in the performance history of the preludes, resulting in a setup for a personal artistic experiment. Certain expression forms in playing, such as specific types of rubato playing and types of 'micro timing' (e.g. 'inégalité'), seem to have been gradually falling in disuse over time. Through this experiment the researcher aims to relearn, assimilate and incorporate them as part of his personal playing style, leading to an enriched spectrum of expression tools.

Supervisor: prof. dr. Pieter Bergé (KU Leuven)

Co-supervisor: Johan Lybeert (LUCA School of Arts)

started: October 2009 - expected promotion: February 2016

[Link with the conference theme and questions \(143 w.\)](#)

The subject, aims and methodology of this research project fits well within the conference theme – *(Re-)processing Research: musical practice as both source and target domain for artistic research in music* – since this research starts with the musical practice as source itself, namely the recordings of performances of Scriabin's preludes (and not just the scores or other historical sources). The research questions are focused on the way performers dealt with the artistic decisions which they inevitably have to make when performing the music. Which kind of tendencies or singularities seems to appear in the performers' choices, i.c. concerning the use of tempo, rubato and 'micro-timings'? How can we, as performers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, relate to this performance history, learn from it, and eventually incorporate some insights in our performances of today? A study with a clear impact on the performer's own musical practice.

The actual status of the research project may be qualified under the two following headings (according to the call for proposals):

- *An artistic research project currently in progress that is generating artistically relevant insights for the researcher, with thoughts as to how these might have a longer-term impact on his musical practice*
- *Outputs from a completed or well-advanced artistic research project that can be shown to be having a lasting impact on the researcher's own musical practice*

This research project can address to the following questions proposed in the call:

- *Do I integrate findings of my artistic research in my own artistic practice – including teaching practice - , and if so, how?*
- *Who are the peers I am relating to in my own artistic research project, and how do I relate to them? And what is the impact of this relationship with peers?*
- *Can I provide convincing examples of artistic research where it is very obvious that the artistic material itself makes the argument?*