

THE ROLE OF PARTNER (PIANIST) IN CHAMBER MUSIC

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Although relatively “young” in the history of universal culture, piano not only became very quickly indispensable, but, which is more important, it imposed as a soloist instrument, as well as a partner in the chamber assemblies. Successor of the harpsichord, piano is actually the instrument that enfranchised in music the temperate system. Its technical performances, especially the possibility of variation, upon the necessities of interpreted work and/ or inspiration and taste of interpreter, of the nuances going from ppp to fff (which gave its name, a name presently maintained in some languages, of piano forte), conferred it from the very beginning a queen- position in the assembly of instruments. The piano is “ the receiver” of important works, from the careless elegance or with this kind of appearance of early compositions, up to the paramount last sonata of Beethoven and to the concerts of the same, together with those of Mozart or Brahms, from the shine of virtuosity of Liszt, to poetry and discrete dramatic of Schubert, from the emotion of speech of Chopin, to the “heroic-romantic furore” of a Grieg or Rahmaninov, especially stopping at the piano music of Schumann. We have to, to say so, with the most complex music instrument. It is surpassed, in some way, by keyboard, but its accessibility to the level of all availabilities and possibilities of the society make it second to none.

It is not an instrument to figure in certain permanence on the concert scene as a member of the orchestra, but it is an absolute champion among the preferences of the public, as a partner of all instruments in the chamber assemblies. What implies totally uncommon difficulties and responsibilities for pianist, when he surpasses his role of soloist and assumes the more ingrate one and, from so many points of view, more difficult, of a partner.

Music and Communication

Together with the plastic arts, the music is a universal idiom. Maybe that one which mostly deserves this qualifying, because it is not affected neither by the language and idiom difficulties, as in the case of creations based on word, nor by the external aspect particularities, conformation, color etc., unavoidable in case of painting and sculpture. Music is the Pure vehicle of communication. With a technique of message transmission, based on one of the most important and interesting physical phenomena, resonance.

Truly, arts – as well as literature – are but less important as informing vectors of the receivers of works that create. They are carriers and transmitters of message. Evidently, if this one exist, which we will always suppose, because we are occupying of authentic works. But, as in any process of transmitting the message, this process is affected by the qualities of transmission channel – in our case, the interpreter, either he is an individual one, or a collective one / as well as by the level of susceptibility, type of sensibility and culture of the receiver. “Noise” is as bigger and more important, as the artistic work is more based on the transmission of a certain text expressed in words. The plastic work does not know this kind of difficulty, the bi-dimensional language of images or the three-dimensional forms being directly accessible. But it has to confront to another difficulty “necessity of movement”, because the access to it, at the exclusive level of printed reproduction has only a documentary value, and not an artistic one. Then, “the esthetical shock” of a painting or a sculpture is so paramount that it become the main element for the receiver, individualizing it in the proportion to the work of which the message transmits. In case of Music, things are a little different.

It is true that the exposition room is replaced with the concert room, but the exclusivity, especially from the time when technique put into disposal the more perfective possibilities of registration and playback, practically it does not exist anymore. And here it is necessary to underline two aspects. First: the plastic work is “permanent”, the musical one, especially through the unavoidable necessity of the interpreter, is dynamic. All that could change in the case of plastic work, is at the individual level, of the receiver who, depending on his cultural evolution and/ or on improvement of his technical methods of approach, he realizes a reception of a progressive complexity. Musical work is permanently recreated – sometimes in good, sometimes in bad – by the

interpreter. Not the quality is interesting here, but the fact that in any of the alternatives, communication is enriched. The second: here we come again on the above affirmation, regarding the phenomenon of resonance. This makes that two or more systems which oscillate (e.g. two pendulum) in the measure in which they are “bound” through a common support, to oscillate with the same frequency. Different bodies, different objects, in our case different portions, areas, of our organism, have what it is called their own frequencies of oscillation. Music has as a primary material, sounds, so multitude of frequencies received by the human body. And not only by ear, these, through a resonance phenomenon, make “to vibrate” as well more, if not all, the receivers of musical work. From this point of view, musical work imposes not only as a receiver, but as a collective receptive phenomenon. The most interesting aspects and with a social explanation, totally exceptional, are in case of ritual music and in a certain measure, in case of some newer types of music, descended directly or indirectly from these ones, but their discussion does not make the object of this work.

So, what it is happening from the same point of view of communication, \if the musical work is received, not directly, but reproduced on a indifferent support, by an individual situated in a more or less stressed solitude? Here manifest another part of a profound signification of musical work: through a similar effect discussed above, music facilitates conscientious or unconscientiously, that many times could lead to (and actually make) at superior understanding, and once unexpected, independently of the receiver’s profession.

At the level of stiff amateur or at the level of the professional, piano offers a so formidable way of “read” area and transmission of music that we are continuously trying to overview the stages in which it make both. Before that, we will briefly stop to overview.

Short history

Music specifically instrumental born in fact in the second half of 17th century, when starts the grouping in small orchestral formation of stringed and wind instruments.

During the Middle Ages, instrumental music cannot be separated of vocal music, instruments – very many and different, as proved by the Middle Ages iconography – even they were not specified in the musical sheet, played the role of coral assembly. Net separation between both kinds of execution took place in the 15th century. If at the beginning the sheets were conceived in the old vocal style, during the improvement of their construction from the last ones, situation comes to reverse, so that Johann Sebastian Bach, for example, treats the human voices in an instrumental style!

Between the 16th and 17th century an important jump in the history of music: thinking and writing of music to be played only by instruments.

Polyphony sacrifices in the 17th century for the dramatic lyrics. Vocal chorus is abandoned to conquer the world of instruments and to adapt to their exigencies. Instrumental forms, issued by all musical suggestions provoke reactions of the public, similarly to those that are registered ion our century in the same time with the shock provoked by the non-figurative painting.

Big revolution brought by the 17th century is the birth of sonata form. Revolution, initiated by Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, constituted a true revelation for Haydn and Mozart. The first movements of pre-classical sonata for violin or for viola da gamba and harpsichord, were constituted on a single theme. Bi-thematic introduces by Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach transform at once the first movement of sonata. If in the pre-classical form, this remained always on the same level of expressive intensity, in the new form, this first movement has a totally exceptional power.

In the Baroque époque, lexical and the entire music medieval syntax passed in the instrumental music. Incipient with the madrigals polyphony, motets and ricercars, and not less of fugue, we can hear this aspect in the early works of Gabrielli (1675), one of the composers who, together with Giovanni Batista Degli Antoni and Giuseppe Jacchini, inaugurate as well the sonata for violoncello and continuo. Although the time keyboards were doubling the going of stringed’ continuo, the polyphonic technique of motet is predominant and the modal system, with its poor modulation became evidently obsolete.

Yet in his first sonatas, the harmony of plated accords insinuate to affirm continuously strongest as a main constitutive element of the new instrumental kind. Instrumental sonata develops in the Baroque époque, in the first part of 18th century, when polyphony, far away from disappearance, is also submitted to the harmonic system based on tonality, which represents the primordial characteristic

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feature of the musical world inaugurated by Baroque. The phenomenon is correlated with that of tempering the scale and constituting of classical harmony.

An innovative spirit influences also the organization of sound world. Duo-sonata, as we know today, although it has a history of just four centuries, hardly could be separated from the beginning of human culture and behavior. Its first inflorescence is concomitant with the increase of interest for violin, queen of stringed instruments. Italy, the place of birth of this instrument through Amati family, is otherwise the place of birth of duo sonata. Fortunately, the first editions of duo sonata have been kept, for the today public to be able to enjoy the originality of works as of Giovanni Batista Fontana and Biagio Marini.

Although, violin was not the only instrument totally responsible for formation, if not even the birth of duo sonata. Violoncello, although the possessor of a more restrict repertoire, but more interesting, contributed, together with violin, at the consolidation of this process. Despite the fashion early set by trio sonata and the appearance of keyboard and then of piano forte, which insured the structure known by us with the large term of sonata, duo sonata had indeed a long and continuous history.

Before the time of Bach and Haendel, even if it was called duo sonata, this was interpreted sometimes by more, sometimes by fewer instrumentalists than its name showed. It was actually a sonata for violin solo and continuo, and the sheet was printed in two distinct notebooks, one of them containing the part for violin, and the other one for bas. The latter was played by the harpsichord person, upon the numerical indications of accords, proper to coded bas and equivalent to the current part of left hand and with the viola da gamba or violoncello doubling the keyboard.

And so, parallel to the technical improvement process of instruments and with one of writing evolution, starts to shape another remarkable evolution, that of harpsichord person and then of pianist as a fundamental participant to the act of chamber music.

Pianist as accompanist

Public needs soloists. He needs their shine, he needs a “organization center”, which represent a unique point that arrest, he needs to “focalize” the soul to potentate, externalize and use its sensibility.

But “Musical” soloist cannot maintain continuously his interest, attention of an audience at the same intensity level a sufficiently long time to attain his goal – no matter which. A “melody”, to become truly interesting for the receiver, must be “discovered” by him, which imposes an harmony ambient. Our physiological and intellectual structure imposed from the very beginning this thing, as a proof for the age in Music of what it is called “continuous bas”, imposed in the same time with the accompanied monody and which set in a high measure as base of harmony and promoter of the assembly.

The appearance of the piano situates the pianist at a time in a favored position from this point of view. He becomes the ideal accompanist, as for the soloist instruments, as well as the violin, as well as for the human voice. What makes him extremely in great demand, but, at the beginning of the form of life, situates him on a secondary position. Either he interprets a sheet designed to him, or it is about a reduction for piano of a symphony or opera sheet, piano has especially the role of “creating a found” on which the soloist could impose. This situation, pianist, as accompanist, must be a very good technician and nothing more. Other things are not necessary. Situation may be someway assembled to that of a choir-master who would not have anything else to do in front of an orchestra but to step.

As we expected, during the technical improvement of instrument, according to the technically more and more performance executions of pianists, neither the latter ones were not content with this role, nor the piano itself could not be anymore constrained to remain in a such limited situation from all points of view. The technical development at the level of interpreter imposed modifications of composition approach. Piano started to be the receiver of the symphony works of a technical shine and musical thinking without precedent. In which the piano is the star and the pianist does not share the listener’s attention practically with anybody, at least for the listener who does not propose himself a more detailed analysis of the listened play. Things happen the same way in the case of chamber music, which, little by little, set the pianist where it was his adequate place.

Pianist as a partner

Let's take two big categories of examples from vocal literature: transcriptions for voice and piano on the arias of Verdi (we are preparing to celebrate his centenary) and the lied of Schubert and Schumann. In the first case, the pianist is exclusively an accompanist. But lied are written for voice and piano! As strong the personality of pianist is in the first case, he...has nothing to do but play. Verdi writes only for singers, with a small enough preoccupation for the orchestra (existing for sure notable exceptions as the performances in the scene of abduction of Gilda from the last act of from Rigoletto), as Schumann and Schubert are not only big composers (as Verdi) and great pianists, but make part of those who realize that their message cannot be communicated but through the co-work of the two partners, either it is about piano, an instrument, or about the piano and human voice.

Pianist CAN NOT resume this time to a secondary participation, first because the sheet does not allow him anymore. He continues to assume his duty on soloist, but he makes this time to another level. In singular works of art, as "King of the iele" or in cycles as "Love of woman" or "Winter travel", piano is equally with the voice, a communication channel, and the role of responsibility of pianist are great.

Let's remember only three performances hardly to imagine without taking into account the technical and intellectual qualities of both partners – noticeable in the registrations that maintained to us: George Enescu together with Dinu Lipatti in the sonatas for violin and piano of the first one; brothers Stefan and Valentin Gheorghiu in the interpretations of the late '50 years – early '60 years of the same sonatas, as well as of great Elisabeth Schwarzkopf together with Gerald Moore in the lied by Schubert and especially the incredible (and probably yet unequaled) interpretations of lied by Hugo Wolf.

We especially chose these three examples because they raise another very interesting problem: to realize a good chamber couple, both interpreters must be in the same time soloists with comparable performances? We have here three cases totally different: Enescu and Lipatti were both interpreters with soloist-concert executions or chamber – totally exceptional (intrinsic, not only for us or Romanian people, as soon as the version of Enescu for the Partite of Bach or that of Lipatti for the concerts by Grieg or Schumann or for the Concert in Do major by Mozart are even today reference interpretations); Valentin Gheorghiu is even today a formidable soloist of an impressive number, and of a more remarkable stylistic variety of operas for piano, from Beethoven to Paul Constantinescu, meanwhile Stefan Gheorghiu was not excessively interested in interpretation as a soloist, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf shined exclusively as a pianist-accompanist. As well as to us it was the case of some important pianists, as Dagobert Bucholz or Ferdinand Weiss. Consequently, it is hard to make trenchant affirmations here. Personal disposition of the pianist is determinant, and this is the only one that establishes its value as an artist.

Partners of pianist

When we talk about chamber music, or more specific, about the chamber assembly, we take into consideration at least two participants. In direct link with variable number of interpreters and the requests expressed by the composer by intermediation of sheet, we can draw the conclusions that in the absolute majority of cases, the pianist will be an integrant part of a whole. What presupposes a team work.

Still, it persists the question: which of the two – in the case of the assembly with minimum number of members – is "the partner". The stringed instrument seems to be the first choose, but this is not once a thoughtlessly one. Because the fundamental works of chamber creation are conceived with the thought mainly to the piano, as sonata by Cesar Frank for piano and violin, or sonata op. 69 by Beethoven for piano and violoncello? Is it just a style figure? A gesture of considerateness? We may be tempted to consider them this way if it is about works more close to us from the point of view of time, where we could suspect a necessity of originality no matter of price., but not at Beethoven and Frank. In each of the sonatas, the two instruments are evidently in a dialog. They – compositions – are conceived as this dialog to allow the listener the receiving and decoding the message. It is a message "distributed" between the two and re-building in the mind and soul of the listener. Received, judged, assembled by the person who listen, the sheets of the two instruments form IN the listener a critical mass. As well as in a nuclear explosion, only then it is possible the emission of light. In compositions

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of this kind two realize the true partnership of the piano with the instrument that some other time – to other composer, in other era – it just accompany him.

Piano is here discursive, not illustrative. It establishes the theme and tone of discussion. It seems, in some places, as it happens especially in the sonata by Frank, to install directly as a leader and to take all. An attitude which leads hardly enough, but without regret.

The role of pianist is determined by the importance of his speech. Very important in a chamber assembly is the team work: permanent pleasure, joy, to play together, but to maintain the freshness of room. A concert pianist may, in some way, to have bigger chances to recreate chamber pages of an optimum quality, but not to realize the adaptation to the request of an assembly, either because of rhythmic licenses, or by sonorities too contoured, too underlined in report with his companions who has to co-operate with. Not for few times, on other side, the solitary character of pianist may be another source of non adaptation to the assembly, compared with the other instrumentalists, accustomed from the symphonic orchestra to play together. It could say, without too big exaggeration that the role of pianist in the chamber music is outrageous. He is the architect who must have, to impose and explicate the vision of the whole assembly. He is no more the beneficiary of the almost exclusive attention of the public and of the almost the same predominant care to value, but it is him who must give sense to the entire work. The difficulties of comprehension from the part of listener who search in interpretation mark points to allow or at least facilitate the access to the message and partial significances of musical works, the obligation of anticipation of the partner by definition accustomed with principal place on podium, but with a substantial plus of difficulty for the role of pianist who can not accommodate with a full artistry and technical control (or even virtuosity) of the instrument. He needs more in addition. He needs a perfect knowledge of instrument-partner, a perfect knowledge of partner-human and an uncontroversial general culture of specialty and in many more other domains, which allow him, on one side the correct approach of work, and on the other side, its leadership.

Because, by its own nature, by what it could offer, piano has the role to lead, as discretely it makes it, the more it is more efficient. By its ambits, it allows different games of registers, as by using the pedals it can create special effects, not talking about of the frequent use of clusters and different new ways of writings typical for contemporary music. In the same time, as the bright model of sonata “In popular Romanian character” by George Enescu, piano has unthinkable resources and regarding the timber possibilities – as it happens here with the sonorities that imitate cymbalist and cobs.

Its “recurrence” to a situation – although – easier, takes place within the chamber assemblies with more than two partners. Trios of Schubert with violin and violoncello, his quintet with piano on the theme of “Trout”, are good examples here. Better than trios of Beethoven, where the incredibly complex need of expression of the composers make harder at comparable levels all participant instruments.

Either we are talking about sonatas, trios, quartets or quintets with piano, classic works are characterized by an impressive equilibrium between the instruments of the assembly that sometimes dialogue on an equal positions, some other times impose the piano attributing to it a preponderantly soloist role.

We come again with dispatches to Beethoven (three quartets with piano, one trio with piano, his experiments of combination between wind instrumentalists and piano, all realized between 1785-1795) where he searches, the same as Mozart, to equilibrate either the assembly of chord instruments, or the one of wind instruments, with piano, still maintaining to it the independence of its lines.

And how could we not remember the openings to remarkable riches of variety and timber at Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, even if it is more based on virtuosity in chamber works of piano), Schumann and Brahms.

To us, beside the mentioned works of Enescu, to which it must add Quartets with piano op. 16 and 30, we must remember great composers as Mihail Jora, Dimitrie Cuclin, Constantin Notarra, Alfred Alessandrescu, Marcel Mihailovici, Tudor Ciortea etc.

In these assemblies, piano encounters this way, even if partially, its privileged position. And pianist encounters, as well, partially, that plus of attention with which he is accustomed to enjoy from the orchestra part.
