HISTORIC IMPROVISATION IN THE ART OF PIANO:

PRELUDING, FANTASISING AND EXTEMPORISATION

INTRODUCTION

The often-occurring discussions on the dominating canon of sheet music performance would benefit from looking at different epochs and how the music was played when it originated. At the centre of this artistic research project is the art of improvised classical piano music, its origins, current issues and future in the culture of Western music art.

Today, while non-academic music genres, such as jazz, rock or electronic music, increasingly invade the sphere of academic education, the studies of improvisation often continue to rely on established styles and standards. However, during previous epochs, when improvisation was an inseparable part of church, palace or public music concerts, music studies were grounded in improvising. Contemporary opposition between academic piano studies, historical practice and the actual experience of a musician makes these comparisons even sharper. In today's programmes of pianist education, developing improvisational skills is not prioritised, or is not included at all, despite the fact that, even in the beginning of the nineteenth century, piano improvisation was extensively written about and discussed. Moreover, throughout the twentieth century and up until today, one can listen to recorded or live improvisations of the most famous pianists at the biggest concert halls, with new names continuously joining their ranks (Friedrich Gulda, Alfred Brendel, Robert Levin, David Dolan, Gabriela Montero, John Mortensen, Bobby Mitchell, Lucas Debargue *et al*). Based on the fact that historical data or cases of improvising pianists are not widely known, this thesis makes an assumption that the analysis of this information can effectively solve a **problem** of the forgotten heritage of improvisation in academic music.

The choice of this topic was also **inspired** by a search for new approaches towards performing, reflected in the wider musicological discourse. On the one hand, the problem raised in the present thesis is similar to ideas expressed by the movement of authentic music performance. The search for authenticity in the art of performance initiated a real stimulus and diversity: establishing a large number of ensembles of early music and recovering long-forgotten ways of performing music, including improvisation. However, it is important to

note that this research paper does not aim for a utopia of ideal historical authenticity, such as using historical instruments or appropriate fingering. Instead, this research endeavours to follow a path fostered by the most famous performers of early music (Wanda Landowska, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Arnold Dolmetsch, Thurston Dart, Gustav Leonhardt) and, by building on the past, reinvent the works of art (ways of performing) for today's canons in the least opposing way. On the other hand, this thesis looks for new approaches towards the problematisation of piano performance, building on the existent work, namely: Lina Navickaitė-Martinelli's *Piano Performance in a Semiotic Key* (2014), which uses a deep semiotic tonality to alter the take on the professional expression of contemporary pianist and the new discourses of performance studies; and Motiejus Bazaras' study *The Use of Non-academic Practices of Music Playing in the Pianist's Education* (2017), which deconstructs the field of piano art and pedagogy and provides a universal concept of the pianist, thus inspiring to look for, broaden and reinterpret masterpieces and practices of piano music that go beyond the boundaries of the canon.

However, the search for historical truths or researching the most recent performing techniques are not the only poignant issues. The problem becomes even more relevant when one poses quite a 'mundane' question: what can a performer offer to their audience today, at the time when there are thousands of pianists capable to perform the traditional repertoire, and the historical music is in a continuous market competition with pop, rock, hip-hop, dance and many other global and multicultural genres? The declining and aging audience of the piano music recitals, as well as other concerts of classical music, signals a growing need for new performing methods, while staying within the limits of the Western musical canon, exposes a need for further active consideration of the opposition between authenticity and originality, and for a resurrection of the forgotten and unperformed repertoire. Many studies show that improvisation, when fostered professionally, not only effectively develops the musical abilities of the performer, but also brings the audience closer to the process, creating feelings of immersion, newness, risk and many others (Kutschke, 1999; Azzara, 2008; Barkauskas, 2008; Dolan, Sloboda *et al*, 2013; Harris, 2016; Mortensen, 2019). Therefore, the **relevance of this thesis** is grounded in the challenge of finding different ways to revive the tradition of improvisation in the current cultural environment.

The forgotten heritage of improvisational music is discussed by an increasing number of research that looks into the past performing practices: Ernst Ferand's *Improvisation In Nine Centuries of Western Music* (1961), Valerie Woodring Goertzen's *By Way of*

Introduction: Preluding by 18th and Early 19th Century Pianists (1996), Kenneth Hamilton's *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (2008) and Dana Gooley's *Fantasies of Improvisation: Free Playing in Nineteenth-century Music* (2018). However, these authors mainly emphasise facts and reasons for the transformation and extinction of improvisation, rather than offering concrete solutions for the revival of its heritage. The present artistic research paper forms part of the growing phenomenon that could be named a "revival movement of historic improvisation" – constituted by the work of active researcher-practitioners that generate theories and methodologies of improvisation built on the basis of the eighteenth-century music pedagogy. The following examples of studies provide some approaches to historic improvisation: David Dolan's *Back to the Future: Towards Revival of Extemporisation in Classical Music Performance* (2005), Robert Gjerdingen's *Music in the Galant Style* (2007), Giorgio Sanguinetti's *The Art of Partimento: History, Theory and Practice* (2012) and John Mortensen's *The Pianist Guide to Historic Improvisation* (2020). The **originality** of the present thesis arises from the idea that these same theories, as well as the most recent discoveries, can also be applied when reviving the improvisational repertoire from the nineteenth century onwards.

In order to undertake a comprehensive analysis, while also maintaining the required scope of the thesis, this research focuses on two genres of piano improvisation – prelude and fantasy. These are some of the oldest improvisational genres for keyboard instruments, found in the written sources and often used synonymously with improvisation, that were especially popular in the nineteenth-century piano performances. This can not only be seen in the letters written by the contemporaries, concert reviews and treatises, but also heard in rare, yet very telling, twentieth-century performance recordings of such pianists as Ferruccio Busoni, Vladimir de Pachmann, Josef Hofmann and György Cziffra. These recordings work as an undeniable proof of improvisational practice as well as being a cornerstone factor when choosing the present research topic. This, together with the aforementioned premises, gives rise to the research **object** of this thesis: manifestations of prelude and fantasy in the nineteenth-century piano performance and opportunities for their reconstruction.

This study is not limited to only analysing surviving audio recordings or treatises. According to Rob Wegman, if one only researches improvisation externally, without taking into account the notated sources (pieces written in the style of improvisation), one might miss compositions filled with specific and essential improvisational features (2001). As a result,

the analysis of notated nineteenth-century style preludes and fantasies, their selection and suggested changes using improvisation are also included in this thesis.

This is an artistic research project; therefore, the problem of improvisation is examined from both, theoretical and practical perspectives of the performer. Both are equally important: the understanding of classical improvisation as it has formed in the theoretical discourse as well as the improvisation and ways of improvising done by performers. This research also uses case studies of live experience, in order to better answer the following questions: how does one learn to improvise? What steps does the pianist have to take, in order to master the historically well known, yet currently rarely heard, practice of music performance?

The main **aim** of this thesis – to uncover the understanding and performing techniques of historic piano improvisation – was inspired by the surviving sources, the most recent tendencies of improvisation research and a need to widen the limits of the pianist's creative competence. It is believed that the following information will allow performers to better recognise the style and structure of musical works in the traditional repertoire, to stand out in the stagnant market of recitals and to adapt when faced with genres of modern music; meanwhile, researchers will find a methodological perspective, providing a renewed look at the historic performance practice.

The process of gathering and classifying the required research material, looking for the most appropriate analytical approaches as well as organising and implementing the necessary practical experience of improvisation gave rise to the following research **tasks**:

1. After reviewing the origins and practices of the art of improvisation, to delineate the notion of historic improvisation.
2. To define and analyse manifestations of historic improvisation related to the development and pressing issues of the piano art.
3. To highlight elements and features of musical language in the nineteenth-century collections of improvisational preludes.
4. To define the process of improvisation using a cognitive aspect and analyse transcriptions of the twentieth-century pianist fantasies.
5. Based on the personal experience and Prof. John Mortensen's improvisation course, which took place at LMTA in 2019, to describe and summarise improvisation as a living musical practice.

Various **research methods** were required to analyse different aspects of improvisation as a phenomenon of performance and composition. In order to refine the concept of improvisation, this thesis used a historical research method as well as a comparative analysis of academic sources; fantasy transcriptions, created by the author of this thesis and others, were used to analyse improvisation in the art of piano; harmonic, textural and compositional analysis, systematisation of data and adaptation of the models discovered were used to research preludes and their structures.

The authentic treatises of piano music and collections of preludes from the second half of the eighteenth century, or more often from the nineteenth century (which are difficult, and without thorough studies even impossible, to interpret in the contemporary canon of piano music), form the primary **literary sources** used in this research. One can only imagine a recital that contains the entire 300th opus of Carl Czerny (1833), two hundred preludes of Philip Anthony Corri (1813), fifty preludes of Ignaz Moscheles (1827) and similar number from Muzio Clementi (1820), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1814), Johann Baptist Cramer (1818), Friedrich Wilhelm Kalkbrenner (1827) as well as prelude collections from other composers.

To support the discussion of the notion, performance and studies of improvisation, the thesis employs improvisation research by canonical scholars, including Ernst Ferand (1957), Bruno Nettl (1974, 2013), Rob Wegman (1996), John Rink (1993), Robert Levin (1992), Aaron Berkowitz (2010) and Dana Gooley (2018). The key points of analytical theory are derived from the articles and monographs by Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff (1983), Eric Clarke (1988), Paul Steinbeck (2013), Marcel Cobussen (2017), David Dolan (2005) and John Mortensen (2019).

The discussion of the meanings and contexts of prelude and fantasy genres is informed by the work of Kenneth Hamilton (2008), Valerie Goertzen (2006) and Danutė Kalavinskaitė (2003). While the structural, schematic and textural analysis of preludes builds on the research by Algirdas Ambrazas (1977), Antanas Krutulys (1975), Janet M. Levy (1982), Johnathan Dunsby (1989), Vince Corosine (2002), Gražina Daunoravičienė (2006) and Robert Gjerdingen (2007).

The **structure of this thesis** consists of introduction, four chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices. The **first chapter** discusses the notion and development of

improvisation; provides historical manifestations of piano improvisation; reviews the development of the study and research of improvisation; provides theories that are relevant and necessary to this research. The **second chapter** employs the harmonic and textural analysis as well as the concept of galant schemata to examine improvisational preludes; building on the prelude reductions which are based on the *partimento* tradition, classifies the galant schemas according to the most frequent prelude manifestations. The **third chapter** provides strategies for learning and performing improvisation, based on schemas and models of organising knowledge structures adapted in the transcripts of improvisations. The **fourth chapter** offers a case study of improvisation which highlights and updates the *partimento* tradition and discusses the improvisation course by Prof. John Mortensen that took place at LMTA; presents a realistic strategy of improvisation, based on the experience of the author of the present artistic research paper acquired during his studies.

1. Improvisation: Concept, Art of Piano and Research

Due to the complex and all-encompassing nature of improvisation, the first chapter mainly focuses on narrowing down its research field. The chapter uses the nineteenth-century methodology and contemporary research of improvisation to define the notion of improvisation as it is employed in the thesis, analyse the improvisation's development and relevant cases of historic improvisation in the art of piano, as well as provide methodological research tools used in the case studies of improvisation.

The review of various studies of improvisation in the history of Western music suggests that "improvisation" as a notion began to be used more frequently in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, *the creation of music whilst performing* appeared a lot earlier. Therefore, this chapter defines contexts and related notions of historic improvisation (1.1). The abundant treatises for keyboard instruments, written at the time when *spontaneous expression of ideas* with a piano reached its peak (mid-18th – beg-19th century), suggest that improvisation was called preluding, fantasising or, more generally, extemporisation. Carl Czerny provides a very detailed definition of improvisation in one of the most comprehensive treatises dedicated to this topic at the time, *Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem*

Pianoforte (1829). He states: "when a practicing musician possesses an ability to perform with the instrument not only ideas that occurred at the time of conception, that were evoked by his ingenuity, inspiration and mood, but also to arrange them in such a way, that connections between them create an impression of a true composition – this is called improvisation or extemporisation [...]" (Czerny, 1829: 1). He also defines preludes as introductions to the musical piece (that have their own types and ways of development), while fantasies are seen as having various forms (from single theme to variations or fugue) of independent improvisatory pieces.

A detailed comparative analysis of Czerny's (1829) and Hummel's (1828) methodologies showed that, at least in the methodological literature, there was a shared understanding of developing improvisational skills, including: a good practical knowledge of harmony; the analysis, performance and adaptation of notated works and their elements; developing one's technical skills and ideas; and an everyday practice of improvisation on one's own or in front of the audience. However, it is not clear if this understanding of improvisation was also widely applied to the piano practice, or if it was fruitful, because these methodologies were mainly used by amateurs and students, thus they do not necessarily accurately reflect the established norms and customs. Therefore, in order to highlight the practical contexts of piano art, this chapter also analyses other sources of historic improvisation (1.2).

The history of piano improvisation highlights two groups of research sources: written material and audio recordings. A very colourful image of piano improvisation emerges prior to the establishment of audio recording technologies (1.2.1). About fifty years after its invention, the piano is recognised as the most suitable instrument for performing free fantasies (in Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, 1753). Even Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who "fought" in the musical duels of prelude improvisation with Muzio Clementi, expresses his fascination with the new timbral and technical capabilities of the instrument. The memoirs of Czerny provide a whole pleiad of famous Viennese pianist improvisation descriptions, including Beethoven, Gelinek, Lipavsky, Wölfl and others. Concert reviews, programmes, letters and memoirs also show the evidence of improvised preludes and fantasies performed by Mendelssohn, Clara and Robert Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Moscheles and von Bülow, and later by Rubinstein, Loewe, Busoni, Debussy, Paderewski, Tausig, Deppe, Carreño, Schnabel, Fay, von Sauer, Rachmaninov and others.

The written sources not only give details of historical practices of improvisation, but also definitions of improvisational genres of the time (Czerny, 1829). However, in order to empirically understand and compare different performers' *momentary creative bursts*, one has to analyse improvisations that reached us in the format of an audio recording (1.2.2). Not many sources of this type remain, but the few existent ones show that, during the entire twentieth century and until this day, the performers improvised not only preludes and fantasies, using free themes or those suggested by the audience, but also fugues and reprises. Taking into account that today an improvising musician is commonly the one who demonstrates high artistry, the question arises of why is improvisation not an obvious choice or very popular amongst the pianists studying classical repertoire, and why is it not included in their education programmes or concert experience?

The answer lies in a decline that permeates the history of piano improvisation (1.2.3). The origins of this issue can be found in statements from the improvising composers themselves, this phenomenon is also widely discussed by the contemporary musicological research. This thesis provides scholarly insights that paint a complex picture of circumstances related to the cultural changes in the second half of the nineteenth century, that pushed improvisation to the margins of piano performance. According to John Rink as well as Valerie Goertzen, these circumstances are as follows: a divide between performance and composition; the cult of virtuosity; an increased amount and need for multi-stylistic repertoire; the evolution of composing technique, from figured bass to much more abstract thematic, textural and programme models; improvisational standards becoming similar to compositional ones; and a heightened sense of the author's cult (Rink, 2001; Goertzen, 1996). Robin Moore suggests another reason, namely, the popularity of publishing sheet music and musical education becoming oriented towards its reading (1992). Meanwhile, Dana Gooley implies "ethos of economy" as a reason for growing emphasis on notation and a decreased interest in improvisation (Gooley, 2018: 43); developing improvisational skills required the time and cost of self-education, which, together with its indeterminate result, went against the bourgeoise codes of ethics that called for prudence and rationality. The twentieth and twenty-first-centuries boycott of improvisation was partially caused by audio recordings that had very few cases of improvisation, mainly due to the recording length at the beginning of the twentieth century as well as the attitude of encouraging record buyers to purchase the well-known popular music. Another reason – the orthodox system of piano education, highlighting the tradition of performing limited repertoire that inhibits any attempt at a different type of

expression, creativity or improvisation (Bazaras, 2017: 42) Even with the open access to a large number of historic improvisation sources, the practice of extemporisation is largely ignored. It is clear that this happened (and is still happening) due to a devaluation of improvisational performance skills and functions. However, the surviving and thriving cases of improvisation, no matter how rare, show that this practice is very useful for today's pianists, thus establishing a need to look for theoretical and practical approaches, shedding a new light on the practice of improvisation and its skills in the art of piano.

One of the key assumptions of this thesis is that different approaches to improvisation researched in the studies of contemporary musicology as well as the historical sources play a key role in bringing improvisation back to the discourse of contemporary piano performance (1.3). The main reason of this assumption is a significant increase in the research of improvisation during the second half of the twentieth century, which demonstrates that improvisation is universal, spanning not only the entire development of Western music, but also other world cultures (Ferand, 1961; Nettl, 1974). Due to researchers of various fields showing an interest in the phenomenon of improvisation, the research becomes interdisciplinary, examining the nature of improvisation, its schemes and cognitive models as well as new application in art, law and even the world of business. Improvisation in the art of piano has also caught the attention of researchers. The newly discovered performance contexts of early music, social and cultural changes, and problems that appeared in the canon of classical Western music, encouraged a more thorough look at the treatises and pedagogical principles of the eighteenth century, when improvisation was an integral part of composition and performance (1.3.1).

Here, it is important to note the "movement of historic improvisation revival" as well as the notion of "historic improvisation" (Mortensen, 2019), the beginnings of which are related to the ideological regulation of historically informed performance (1.3.2.1). The main drive behind the "movement of historic improvisation revival" is the work of performer-researchers which gives rise to not only theoretical, but also practical, development of the historic improvisation phenomenon. One of the working methods is the newly discovered eighteenth-century pedagogical tradition of *partimento* – a compositional didactic presented as a form of non-figured bass – which allows one to not only understand the problems faced by musicians in the past, when they were asked to create or perform something new for the manor or church celebrations happening on the same day, but also to try its principles when

examining the improvisational repertoire from more recent times (1.3.2.2) (*e.g.* the nineteenth-century improvisational preludes and fantasies researched in this thesis).

Other theories applied in this research paper come from the established contemporary research methodologies (1.3.3). This, and the adaptation of Steinbeck's idea of *improvisational fictions* (2013), allows to view improvisation from three perspectives: as composition, as cognitive process and as practice of live music. These perspectives arise from the summary of a wide range of literature characterising the research on improvisation. Both methodological and academic literature often link improvisation and composition, for a number of reasons (1.3.3.1). This thesis also selects sheet music examples of the nineteenth-century improvisational preludes and analyses them using theories of classical harmony, figured bass, Gjerdingen's galant schemata and musical textures. While, in Steinbeck's work, the same compositional fiction is attributed to the schemas, this thesis analyses the cognitive schemas, which explain the origin and composition of improvisational behaviour separately. Despite the elements of musical language, these schemas are universal and thus allow a closer look not at the compositional structure of improvisation, but at its performance process.

Finally, improvisation, as a live practice of music (Bailey, 1992), allows one to understand if information that was gathered theoretically, can also be applied in a real-life situation (1.3.3.2). Because this artistic research paper is also informed by the author's experience (and vice versa), it is possible to gather some specific data about the understanding and performance techniques of improvisation. This is explored practically, during real performance situations, and presented as the author's self-reflection.

2. Preluding: Harmony, Galant Schemas, Textures

Preluding was highly regarded way of performing music in the nineteenth century, which is testified by the amount of attention paid to the genre in published treatises and prelude collections of those days. The analysis of harmony and recognition of its recurrent patterns was used as one of the first methods while examining *improvisation as composition* (2.1). For this purpose, the author looked at more than a hundred and a half improvisational preludes

from collections by Corri, Hummel and Czerny. While some repetitive chord formations or their combinations were found, the analysis showed that each case is too individual, therefore, it is impossible to make more specific conclusions on the form or larger functional schemas of improvisational preludes.

Due to the epoch when preludes were improvised being dominated by different harmonic principles and systems, it was more useful to delve deeper into the compositional practices of earlier times. The key for analysis was found in the theory of Robert Gjerdingen (2007), which represents the logic of music composition of the eighteenth century (2.2). The construction of music in galant style is being explained in schemas, which are shown as musical events made up of: bass scale degrees in the melody; harmonies as intervals above the bass note (like in figured bass); bass and melody direction towards the next sound; and the strength of the beat. The choice of this theory was determined by discovering parallels between musical standards of jazz and galant schemas, melodies that were popular at their corresponding times, and were likely to be played by the eighteenth-century professional musicians: *Fonte*, *Monte*, *Ponte*, *Quiescenza*, *Romanesca*, *etc.* The performance of schemas, as it is shown in all improvisational preludes by Corri, demonstrates that these prototypes, which resemble the jazz standard principles, were also used by the improvising pianists of the nineteenth century. Moreover, reduction of the same preludes to the bass lines, presupposes a classification of schemas depending on the aspect of prelude division (opening, elaboration and closing). According to this classification, the author is offering models for prelude improvisation (2.3).

Even when there is an understanding of schemas characteristic to improvisational preludes, or their disposition within the form, a question of their realisation remains: how can they be performed to resemble compositions in recognisable styles? To answer this question, the thesis applies the prelude analysis of musical textures (2.4). The fact that, in music theory, the notion of texture is used only from the beginning of the twentieth century, after the era of tonal music, determines a relatively small number of related theories, especially when it comes to the question of past styles of music. Therefore, this thesis looks for the clarification of the notion in definitions offered by Lithuanian musicologists Kašponis, Krutulys and Ambrazas, as well as the arrangement textbook by Vince Corosine and the encyclopaedia of *Oxford Music Online*, which suggests the notion of "texture" used in the Western tradition. A wide pallet of textures and their selection opportunities are found in the improvisational prelude collections by Corri, Hummel and Czerny, analysed in the chapter. It is precisely the

selection of textures that might reveal the style of an individual improvising performer; and there is a lot to choose from, including: chordal, *arpeggio*, passage-like, reciting, polyphonic and other textural techniques. The third subsection of this chapter (2.4.3) offers a method for making melodic passages – yet another way to grant improvisation more individuality.

3. Fantasising: The Origin of Spontaneity and Cognitive Schemas

In order to define *improvisation as cognitive process*, this chapter looks into theories of psychology that analyse the origin of spontaneous behaviour and representations of cognitive processes during improvisation.

The first section of this chapter (3.1) presents the origin theory of spontaneity devised by a pianist-researcher David Dolan, which delves deeper into the components of improvisation in the nineteenth century, but can be used to understand improvisation of any period or style. Dolan sees improvisation as synchronous and complementary meeting of elements of human knowledge and behaviour in real time. Here, the feeling of *flow* works as a uniting principle: losing oneself in an activity, forgetting oneself, abandoning the sense of time and strong feelings of pleasure and feedback. While the state of flow is an expected result, Dolan also discusses knowledge and behaviour during improvisation through the prism of *learned* and *natural schemes*. The *learned schemes*, as suggested by the title, is the knowledge of music, recognisable by all involved in the chain of musical communication (performers, audience, *etc*). Meanwhile, the *natural schemes* are seen as unmeasurable knowledge structures, which form as reactions to certain events and which change and control primary musical parameters (such as pitch, intensity, timbre, density of event change and time elements) in real time. The chapter then makes use of these definitions when presenting a case study that analyses a video found on the audio-visual media platform "Youtube". The video shows the process of mastering an instrument, starting with learning specific works (fixed material) and ending with creating through improvisation.

The chapter then looks at Eric Clarke's theory of generative principles in music performance, which schematically represents the *cognitive structures* of different types of performance, including improvisation (3.2). Clarke provides a graphic representation of these

cognitive structures (resembling roots of a tree) showing schemas of playing from memory or from sheet music, and thus forming a hierarchic image of musical events and their organisational order: from the largest abstract formations of form, to the smallest and most detailed syntax formations. Improvisational events can be organised not only in a hierarchical way, but also by association as well as selectively. These aspects are illustrated by analysing fantasy transcriptions of different performers, such as György Cziffra, Bobby Mitchell and Gabriela Montero. This reveals the possible forms of thinking while improvising and shows that organisational types of events are adapted independently from the style or elements of musical language (3.3). As a symbiosis grounded on presented theories of *knowledge structures* and galant schemas, another model for improvisation is offered. This time it is focused on individual and always changing structure of the improvisational process (3.4).

4. Extemporisation: The Tradition of *Partimento* and a Case Study

In order to assess the theoretical information provided in the previous chapters, this chapter examines the idea of *improvisation as live music practice*. This is done through both a case study based on the author's experience during the historic improvisation course led by Prof. John Mortensen, which took place between November 20th to December 20th 2019, at LMTA, as well as the preparation and performance of his own improvisation during a public concert.

Due to the *partimento* tradition playing a key role during the historic improvisation course, the chapter first provides detailed definitions of its theoretical principles (4.1). It shows that the beginnings of this tradition influenced the study of music in Italian, and later also Parisian, conservatoires from the end of the seventeenth until the beginning of the nineteenth century. One of the main performing principles of *partimenti* – unfigured bass melodies – is an ability to memorise and adapt a large repertoire of small musical models to appropriate motifs (4.1.1). One important way to realise *partimenti* is the rule of the octave (*regola dell'ottava*), which allows to harmonise diatonic, unfigured, longer melodic passages (4.1.2). Another element of solving *partimenti* is the cadences (*clausulae*). The style of their realisation in those days depended on individual conservatoires and the style of *maestro*, however, everyone would start by learning three types of cadences: simple, compound and

double. By mastering the rule of the octave and the cadences in all tonalities, one acquires a skill to realise the most elementary bass melodies so they resemble a composition of homophonic texture (4.1.3).

This foundational knowledge was extended and developed during Mortensen's lecture titled "The Partimento Tradition as Foundation for Musicianship and Improvisation" (December 3, 2019, LMTA), elaborating on how to deal with notated, unfigured bass melodies (4.2.1). He offered a logical constructive methodology for using *partimenti*, in the form of "recognise, realise, stylise"; and demonstrated that by studying *partimento*, one develops their knowledge and skills of harmony, voice leading, counterpoint, composing, style, pitch, playing piano, accompaniment and improvisation.

The final subsection of this chapter provides an improvisational strategy based on the author's experience, stemming from the knowledge acquired during his studies as well as analysing a sound recording of extemporised fantasy, performed during the concert at the end of Mortensen's course (4.2.2). This case study reveals the importance of the preparation process for improvisation. A method for selection and planning of useful themes, textures, and improvisational models is offered. The musical events of improvisation are analysed as it happened during the concert. These preparatory and performance processes are summarised and compared between each other.

Conclusions

Even though increasingly more scholarship nowadays is interested in improvisation as a research object, and it is investigated from the variety of methodological perspectives, the history of piano improvisation gets unfairly little amount of attention. There is no research done directly about harmonic, formal or textural aspects of the nineteenth-century improvisatory preludes; no studies on improvisatory process in extemporised fantasies; no proposals for improvisational models in piano music. All above mentioned topics were discussed in the present artistic research paper, while aiming to uncover the understanding and performance techniques of historic piano improvisation.

Improvisation in popular thought is associated with something that is performed without preparation, happens immediately by itself. It is false assumption. Naturally, it is difficult to explain something, that is hardly palpable. However, existing historical sources and living music practice today proves that improvisation, as as also the arts of performance or composition is a result of consistently and professionally organised preparation.

Hereby, after research done in this thesis, following conclusions are formulated:

1. The analysis of historical and scholarly sources demonstrates that one cannot find a singular view of improvisation. For some, improvisation is a process that cannot and should not be explained; for others, it is a critique of and opposition to the established rules, a way to initiate and implement change; yet others claim that it is a craft but not art, and should be evaluated based on the compositional criteria. However, it was made clear that improvisation is universal, connecting all different areas of music. Therefore, building on the ideas of historic performance and the logic of piano art development, this thesis understands improvisation as preluding, fantasising and extemporisation in piano. In other words, the historic improvisation is a practical skill to, confidently and in an appropriate manner, perform immediate ideas, by arranging them in such a way that they resemble a composition of a recognisable music style of the nineteenth century.

2. Piano improvisation was used since the emergence of the instrument in the eighteenth century, due to:

- the continuation of figured bass tradition, which naturally presupposed keyboard improvisation;
- technical innovations and new timbral possibilities that met the composers' visions of expression in galant and romantic styles;
- piano being an effective tool to try out compositional ideas in practice, before notating them.

The practice of historic improvisation in the art of piano is manifested by:

- Historical sources that discuss improvisations by such authors who are part of contemporary piano repertoire: J. S. Bach, C. Ph. E. Bach, M. Clementi, W. A.

Mozart, L. van Beethoven, C. Czerny, J. N. Hummel, F. Mendelssohn, I. Moscheles, F. Liszt, F. Chopin, R. Schumann, C. Schumann, S. Rachmaninov, A. Rubinstein, C. Debussy and others.

- The surviving piano improvisation treatises by C. Ph. E. Bach, J. N. Hummel, Ph. A. Corri, C. Czerny and others.

- Collections of improvisational preludes published in the first half of the nineteenth century by M. Clementi, P. A. Corri, J. N. Hummel, J. B. Cramer, J. C. Kessler, I. Moscheles, C. Czerny and F. Kalkbrener.

- Audio recordings of improvising pianists of the nineteenth (Ferrucci Busoni, Vladimir de Pachmann, Egon Petri, Joseph Hofmann) and the twentieth century (Vladimir Horowitz, György Cziffra, Friedrich Goulda, Alfred Brendel, Robert Levin, David Dolan, Bert Mooiman, Karst de Jong, John Mortensen, Gabriela Montero, Bobby Mitchell, Lucas Debargue and others).

- The phenomenon of the "movement of historic improvisation revival", led by performer-researchers and lecturers who apply the eighteenth-century music pedagogy methods and improvisation styles.

3. This thesis identifies and reviews the key musical elements and features of historic improvisation:

3.1. **Harmonic aspect**.

The theory of classic harmony shows that:

- The improvisational preludes of the nineteenth century used the following: IV, V, II, VI, VII degree fifth chords, seventh chords and their inversions; secondary dominants; deviations and modulations towards the first and second degree distant affinity tonalities; diatonic sequences; and chains of secondary dominants.

- There is no fixed or clearly defined number of chords, or any other principles, allowing to determine the form of improvisational prelude. In this case, each prelude is unique.

3.2. **Schematic aspect**.

Building on the theory of galant schemas by Gjerdingen, the thesis discovered the following logic of bass, melody, harmony and form in improvisational prelude:

- Applied schemas are dependent on a section of musical material or improvisational fragment. Preludes also use connecting or modulating schemas – cadences. Accordingly, it is suggested to divide schemas into three groups: opening, elaboration and closing.

- The following schemas are found in the opening section of the preludes: *Do-Re-Mi*, *Sol-Fa-Mi*, *Meyer*, *Romanesca*, *Ponte* and *Quiescenza*; the first three being the most popular.

- Only two schemas of galant style are found in the section of prelude elaboration: *Prinner* and *Fenaroli*. However, they are only characteristic to the longer preludes by Corri. In the shorter preludes, these schemas are not found at all; instead, after the opening section and before the closing, they use cadences of various types (most often deceptive cadence, resolving to the VI degree). Clausula type cadences (*Comma*, *Passo Indietro*, *Clausula Vera* and *Aug. 6th*) are used to extend the elaboration period, interlinking schemas characteristic to it. At times, elaboration is limited to only one cadence or the entire prelude becomes a cadence itself. *Fonte*, *Monte* and *Ponte* are rarely found in preludes.

- The closing episodes use cadences of two types: compounded and evaded.

3.3. **Textural aspect**.

The analysis determined the following textural types to be the most characteristic to improvisational preludes:

- homophonic, with predominant chord movement, or melodies of cantilena and recitative with accompaniment;
- polyphonic;
- diaphonic.

The thesis also classifies most often occurring textural elements: chords, *arpeggio*, passages, recitatives and imitations.

Arpeggio arising from chord texture is classified into:

- *appogiando,* when chord sounds are played one after another and retained, connecting to the main note;
- *arpeggio,* when chord sounds are arranged in an even rhythm, one after another or in a certain order;

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- repetition of one, a few or even all chord notes, a composite figuration of *arpeggio* and *appogiando*.

  It also provides the making of melodic passages which happens in two ways:

- by freely choosing one or a few breaks, which often become chord or auxiliary notes. When a note sequence reaches a break, it changes direction, as if drawing a line, which continues until the next break.

- by using a figuration model of changing direction, where, before every long passage tone of *arpeggio* that rises or falls, one inserts either a chord note which regresses in a different direction or a lower auxiliary note.

Discovered elements of musical language, schemes, models and textures is to be considered as creative stock material, according to which one can make original extemporisations.

4. These are the ways of understanding and assessing improvisatory process in context of historic improvisation, using theories of musical spontaneity and *knowledge structures*.

Building on Dolan's theory of musical spontaneity and its origin, the thesis suggests that improvisation arises when the following two types of schemas are combined together:

- *Learned*. This is a whole "baggage" of musical elements and their parameters that the performer absorbs consciously, while learning music (from chords, rhythms, melodies, to creative pieces, forms and styles), as well as subconsciously – hearing it in their environment.

- *Natural*. These are spontaneously arising, general knowledge schemas that control the primary musical parameters and express themselves through four types, depending on the musical parameter: 1. Manifestation range; 2. Change in time; 3. Definition degree; 4. Natural operations (such as changes within the limits of certain rules).

Following Eric Clarke's theory of *knowledge structures*, the thesis determines three ways of understanding how structural musical events are organised in improvisation:

- Hierarchically. Musical events are organised according to the following principle: some events are prepared in advance, while others composed during the performance. For example, in case of fantasy, if one has a pre-prepared harmonic plan, the texture can be applied during the performance.

- Associatively. Every musical event arises from the precedent one. For example, if one improvises a fugue, every new theme is performed in a new tonality, modified during the performance. Same goes for the theme and variations.

- Selectively. All musical events are prepared in advance, but their order is decided during the performance. For example, when performing a fantasy from a few different themes.

After having analysed transcriptions of the twentieth century pianists' (Bobby Mitchell, Gabriela Montero and György Cziffra) fantasies based on the principles of structural organisation of musical events, it is determined that while organising improvisational events hierarchically, one can choose the piece that already exists. In this case one has to learn by heart the tematic material, form, harmonic plan, and textures. Then, it is upon to performers' decision, which level of events will be "not fixed" during improvisation. In any occasion, all the musical material that could be required during improvisation must be prepared in advance. While organising events associatively, it is important to prepare as much musical material based on first or the following planned events. This type of improvisation consists of fugues or variation style. Improvisation based on selectively organised events is the freest form of fantasising. It is important to prepare many events which do not have to possess much of strong relation with each other. Nor must they be intricately developed during the improvisation.

It is apparent that in real improvisatory situation different structural musical events and elements of musical language will be organised in all three above mentioned ways. However, one of the organising types will always be dominating.

5. The case study was used to discover if the theoretical approaches analysed and discovered in this thesis can be realised in practice.

5.1. Using the author's personal experience of improvisation, the thesis determines conditions that render a successful improvisation:

- Musical elements selected for improvisation have to be mastered in order to be smoothly performed in every tonality, in various tempos and with a metronome.
- The experience of improvisation practice on one's own significantly differs from improvising in public, in front of the audience. Therefore, it is highly recommended to improvise in different situations.
- One has to constantly seek new musical elements that can be used in improvisation, thus widening the scope of expression. This is the only way not to lose the feeling of spontaneity and continuously renew one's improvisational skills.
- The above also suggests that, similarly to learning a language, when one expresses their ideas through music, a deep, subconscious practical knowledge of musical structures is necessary.

5.2. The case study highlighted empirical experience of improvisation:

- The theory of classical harmony provides information on singular elements of musical syntax, which makes it difficult to develop an improvisation resembling a composed piece.
- Various types of sequences and modulation schemas discussed in the classical harmony can be used for improvisation.
- Galant schemas (memorised specific bass, melodic and harmonic combinations) are also good for improvisation; especially when improvising the nineteenth-century preludes, following the order of schemas as suggested in this thesis.
- In order to link any musical elements used in improvisation, one needs a good knowledge of textures.
- When using *partimento* bass, one can improvise in the style of a different period – from Baroque to Romanticism – by applying a musical language of the corresponding period.

5.3. John Mortensen's course at LMTA (20-11-2019/20-12-20) confirmed the following:

- The knowledge and skills of improvisation, similarly to the tradition of music performance practice, can be effectively transmitted face-to-face, from one person to another, through practice.
- A result is achieved fairly quickly when studying historic improvisation by following the tradition of *partimento*. After a couple of individual sessions, students who never improvised in public before, were able to do so during the final concert.

Ability to improvise not only gives rise to a different understanding of music or yourself in music. The historical knowledge of improvisation provides a different connection to the repertoire. A deep understanding of compositional principles of music and structures of relevant period allows one to look at the sheet music in a much more creative way, no longer only valuing the dynamics, pedalisation or general, derivative analytic theories of a particular piece, often emerging after the author's death. When a person holds an ability and confidence to improvise in a particular style, they not only hear the musical text differently, but the musical text in itself becomes part of the performer's musical language.