Introduction

Piano music for the left hand implicitly suggests a dramatic scenario of either deception and concealment or defiance and self-esteem. In the former the pianist acts as a two-handed pianist in disguise; in the latter s/he has access to all manner of techniques and processes which are under-developed in two-hand music. Left-hand piano music relies on visual presentation to a much greater degree than music for two hands and elicits an emotional response of a different order from almost all other repertoire.

Works for left hand alone have been composed to provide 'remedial' technical training, in response to right-hand injuries, and as showpieces for virtuosi. The very best of these stand out as ingenious creative responses to the performer's physical state. In approaching the keyboard from an altered perspective, physical gesture attains greater significance, both on a textural and a visual level. Conventional piano technique must be revised and, at times, reinvented.

This thesis aims to explore several canonic works for the left hand, examining the ways in which their composers have employed the two scenarios outlined above, often creating interaction and tension between them. It examines the ways that they have approached the medium, in order to present such scenarios. Thus I pose the following questions:

- How have these composers manipulated or developed conventional piano technique in works for the left hand?
- Which textural devices have proved most useful to these composers in their quest to write music which may be contained within the span of one hand, yet also sound convincing and 'whole'?

While initially I explore works which are transcriptions of two-hand piano music for the left hand alone, later on I examine two concerti for the left hand. Thanks to the legacy of the nineteenth-century virtuoso, much of the solo piano repertoire is characterised by a degree of virtuosity which is rarely matched by that for other instruments. This is reflected in the solo left-hand repertoire, yet it is in the left-hand piano concerto that it reaches its apotheosis. The soloist has not only to master a part of formidable technical complexity, but also to project sufficient power and volume alongside an orchestra. Issues of display and confrontation are essential to the concerto as a genre and demand both technical proficiency and considerable strength from the soloist. In exploring these issues, I have asked the following questions:

- How have the composers for left-hand piano and orchestra approached technique and texture in order to accommodate a pianist whose physical resources will presumably be much reduced?
- Is the large-scale structure of these works affected by the left-handedness of the soloist?
- Have these composers for left-hand piano and orchestra viewed physical limitation as a 'problem'? If so, have they sought to conceal it and, if not, is left-handedness ever regarded or presented as a creative asset?

In appraising these works, it is not sufficient merely to examine composers' responses to the medium. One may gain a great deal by investigating their reception and execution by performers. The most influential left-handed pianist was Paul Wittgenstein, who commissioned a great deal of solo repertoire and the majority of concertos for left-hand piano, including the two under discussion. He made substantial alterations to the works that he received, as is most clearly evident in his scores of the piano concertos and recordings of his performances. In reviewing these

alterations, I have raised the following queries:

- Did Wittgenstein's understanding of the function of a left-hand piano concerto differ significantly from that of the composers from whom he commissioned works?
- How is this understanding reflected in the modifications that he made to the texts of these works and what were his aims in doing so?

While this study devotes itself to a number of case studies, certain conclusions are reached which extend beyond them. Given that the artistic identity of the solo performer is so strikingly defined in these works, they invite us to consider the importance of the visual in live performance, the contrasting claims of performer and composer, the manipulation of works in the formation of a performer's persona, and ultimately, the relationship between the score and performance itself.

Finally, I examine the consequences of this study on my practical activities as a performer. As part of my final recital for the Doctorate of Musical Arts, I performed *Chacony* by Robert Saxton, written for left-hand piano solo. When preparing the piece I noticed that certain aspects of my performance were influenced strongly by factors that I have explored in this thesis. In my conclusion, I pose the question:

- How does study of Godowsky's transcriptions and left-hand piano concertos by Ravel and Britten inform my approach to performance of the solo left-hand repertoire?

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first explores the transcriptions of Frédéric Chopin's *Etudes* op. 10 and op. 25 by Leopold Godowsky, widely regarded as a pinnacle of piano technique in both the two-hand and left-hand repertoire. The aim of these works of course is to imply that the left-handed pianist is as capable as a two-handed pianist, and thus the first of the two scenarios described above is

constantly presented. In comparing etudes by Chopin, written for two hands, with Godowsky's left-hand counterparts, it is possible to identify and codify those commonly-used, two-hand textures adapted for one hand, which advance this scenario.

In the second and third chapters of this thesis I examine compositions by Maurice Ravel and Benjamin Britten for their approaches, both dramatic and technical, to writing for piano left hand. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* was chosen for this study as it is undoubtedly the best known of the left-hand piano concertos; Benjamin Britten's *Diversions*, op. 21, is an equally intriguing yet undeservedly neglected work. As will be shown, both composers share elements of Godowsky's attitude to the left-hand pianist, albeit it to different degrees. While they were aware of his transcriptions, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to attempt to prove direct Godowskian influence upon the later works.[1] The transcriptions are simply used to place the techniques and dramatic results of the others in relief. While the former afford a purely technical glimpse into the world of the left-handed pianist, the concertos by Ravel and Britten show how left-hand techniques can be deployed to considerable expressive and rhetorical effect. Much of this is due to the application of the second scenario, where idiomatic writing celebrates the condition of the left-handed pianist, particularly in Benjamin Britten's *Diversions*.

These effects, however, are dependent to a large extent on the mediator of the work, the left-handed pianist. Of the 28 existing left-hand piano concertos, 19 were commissioned by Wittgenstein, including works by Sergei Prokofiev, Erich Korngold, Paul Hindemith, and Richard Strauss. Both Ravel and Britten's concertos

[1] See Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 111 and a letter from Wittgenstein to Britten on 3 August 1940, currently held in the Britten-Pears Archive in Suffolk.

were written for the pianist, who performed them in public on numerous occasions. It is clear, both from written accounts and from recordings of these performances, that he altered the works significantly. Whether he did so in response to an increased awareness of physical considerations, as a result of his personal brand of virtuosity, or from a sense of 'ownership' of these works are questions which I address in the final chapter of this thesis. Here I examine correspondence between Wittgenstein and the composers from whom he commissioned works, as well as scores which have been heavily annotated by the pianist. These give us an unprecedented glimpse into the perceptions and motivations of a left-handed artist.

In completing this study I have drawn on published research in very disparate fields, both within and beyond musicology, yet the study as a whole is strongly influenced by recent development in Performance Studies. Volumes of collected papers such as *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* and *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation*, both edited by John Rink, or *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects*, edited by Eric Clarke and Nicholas Cook, have contributed to a research climate where performers' experiences are now accorded equal value with those of musicologists.[2] These developments have greatly influenced my personal approach as a pianist to musicological study in general, and to this thesis. An exclusively text-based conception of music is no longer the norm and more imaginative and pragmatic approaches to the musical score have been developed. Nicholas Cook suggests, in 'Music as Performance', that we view a score as a script rather than a text in order to take the temporal nature of performance into

[2] John Rink, ed., *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); John Rink ed., *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Eric Clarke and Nicholas Cook, eds., *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).