

Reinstating the Sinister:  
Ravel, *Concerto pour la main gauche* and Britten, *Divisions*

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## Abstract

Left-hand piano music has been written to accommodate injury, to provide specialised technical exercises, for virtuosic display or as a response to compositional challenge. Leopold Godowsky's transcriptions of Chopin's *Etudes* are a cornerstone of the left-hand piano repertoire and were influential in the creation of a number of works for left-hand piano and orchestra written for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, including Maurice Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* and Benjamin Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21. An examination of specifically left-hand techniques and gestures developed in the transcriptions shows how much may be achieved both within and precisely because of self-imposed limitations. In these works, Godowsky posits the body as a central expressive element and it is this aspect which proves most illuminating and intriguing in subsequent composers' approaches to works for left-hand piano.

Both Ravel and Britten acknowledged that writing for the left hand posed a 'problem', yet their respective stances towards this and to the issue of limitation were sharply opposed. An examination of how left-hand piano techniques and gestures are deployed in their works for left-hand piano and orchestra enables us to analyse their contrasting approaches to the medium. The importance of physical gesture and of visual perception of the performer by an audience is intimately linked with the musical and social meanings which these works convey, and was clearly understood by their dedicatee, Wittgenstein. Alterations that he made to these pieces indicate both his specific priorities as a left-handed pianist and the creative and expressive impact which disability may exert on a musical work. They reveal not only the contrasting claims of performer and composer, but also how works may be manipulated as vehicles in the formation of an artistic identity and performance persona.

## Preface

I have no personal ‘claim’ to the left-hand repertoire. I am a two-handed pianist and the vast majority of the repertoire that I perform is written to be played with two hands. Of the left-hand repertoire, I encountered only Scriabin’s *Prelude and Nocturne*, op. 9 as a child and was utterly perplexed by a score of Ravel’s *Concerto pour la main gauche*. Unable to translate the title, or to play it at an adequate tempo, I immediately dismissed it as a dreadful dirge which was, moreover, very badly written for the instrument. It was only a few years later when I heard a recording of the work, and saw that it was written for the left hand alone, that I realised what a magnificent and inspirational piece it was. I began to explore other works of the left-hand repertoire and came across Britten’s *Divisions*, op. 21, which I adored. It still astonishes me how infrequently it is played in concert.

I had stumbled upon a little-known body of repertoire which not only deserved a wider audience, but whose musical fabric intrigued me. I began to wonder how composers had dealt with the left-handedness of the performer, how they had responded to this seemingly impossible challenge. That there must have been left-handed pianists for whom these works were written struck me as a revelation.<sup>1</sup> I could not imagine how one could build up and sustain a career when impeded, as I saw it, so strikingly by the absence of a right hand, the hand which is largely dominant in the repertoire I had played to date. This thesis is an attempt to explore both composers’ and performers’ responses to this resource and to ascertain how left-handedness may be perceived not as a burden but as creative inspiration in its own right.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation I have used the term ‘left-handed pianist’ to refer to a pianist who plays with the left hand alone, rather than one who, in the usual sense of the phrase, demonstrates superior capacity in their left hand.

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I would like to thank Rhian Samuel for her supervision of this thesis, Malcolm Gillies for helping me to get started and Christopher Wiley for his suggestions at key stages in its development. I am grateful to Nicholas Clark and Lucy Walker for allowing me to study Paul Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction of *Divisions* at such length and for guiding me through the Britten-Pears Archive. The Octavian Society kindly granted my request for photographs of Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction and full score of Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, while Georg Predota, curator of the Wittgenstein Archive, arranged for these to be taken. Fiona McKnight's advice at the Serge Prokofiev Archive at Goldsmiths' College, and Malcolm McKeand's patient responses to my queries about the history of the piano, have been invaluable. The insights gleaned from discussion with left-handed pianists Keith Snell and Nicholas McCarthy have enriched this study immeasurably, while Paul Banks, Tom Corfield, Martin Ennis, Helena Gaunt, Roy Howat, Pamela Lidiard, Alexander Lingas, Steven Neugarten, Laudan Nooshin, Ronan O'Hora, Ian Pace, Robert Pascall, and Kate Romano have all helped greatly in discussing my work at various stages. Without the support of a doctoral scholarship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council I would not have been able to complete this research, and I am very grateful for grants from City University and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama which enabled me to attend conferences.

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## Introduction

Of all piano music written for one hand, left-hand works comprise the majority. 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.

In an attempt to ascertain what elements of piano technique may be particularly exploited in the left-hand repertoire, I have turned to the transcriptions of Frédéric Chopin’s *Etudes* op. 10 and op. 25 by Leopold Godowsky. While a study of original works for piano left hand has its value, it is difficult to extract specifically ‘left-handed’ textures from the whole. By comparing etudes by Chopin, written for two hands, with their left-hand counterparts, it is possible to see how commonly-used textures may be adapted and encompassed by one hand while preserving harmonic and melodic material. Technical elements can, in this way, be divorced from the musical material of which they form a part. Paradoxically, by basing his transcriptions on the musical material of another composer, the technical solutions which Godowsky develops in writing for the left hand are of necessity unique.

Extracting a lexicon of left-hand piano techniques from Godowsky’s transcriptions equips us to approach the most prestigious works of the left-hand repertoire, the concertos, and to explore the extent to which they manifest ‘left-handedness’. How to discern which gestures are composed uniquely for the left-handed player and whether composers have sought to conceal or reveal the

performer's one-handedness are of vital importance in decoding the musical, social and dramatic impact of these works. Whether thematic or motivic material has been influenced by physical constraint, how composers have developed or modified existing textural conventions and whether large-scale structure is affected by the nature of the work are all relevant to an understanding of compositional technique in the left-hand concerto.

The best known of the left-hand piano concertos is undoubtedly Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, arguably the only left-hand work which has entered the mainstream repertoire. I have chosen to compare this with an equally intriguing yet undeservedly neglected work, Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21. Both these works were commissioned by the Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein, whose right arm was amputated during the First World War and who, on his return to Vienna, set about commissioning a repertoire of left-hand piano pieces. There is evidence that both Ravel and Britten were aware of Godowsky's transcriptions and they may have used them as models, in some capacity, for their left-hand concertos. While it is highly unlikely that either composer sought to transpose techniques directly from the transcriptions into their works, each may have benefited from Godowsky's exposition of hitherto uninvestigated compositional resources. While the transcriptions afford a purely technical glimpse into the world of the left-handed pianist, the concertos by Ravel and Britten show how these techniques can be deployed to expressive and rhetorical effect.

This effect, however, is dependent to a large extent on the mediator of the work, the left-handed pianist. Wittgenstein performed both Ravel and Britten's concertos in public on numerous occasions, yet it is clear, both from written accounts and from recordings of these performances, that he altered the works significantly.

Correspondence between Wittgenstein and the composers from whom he commissioned works, as well scores which have been heavily annotated by the pianist, give us an unprecedented glimpse into the perceptions and motivations of a left-handed artist. Whether Wittgenstein modified works 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.

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.<sup>1</sup> These developments have influenced my personal approach as a pianist to musical study in general, and to this thesis, greatly. 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 account.<sup>2</sup> Eric Clarke, in ‘Expression in performance: generativity, perception and

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Cook, ‘Music as performance’ in Martin Clayton, ed., *The Cultural Study of*

semiosis', states that expression should not be viewed purely as deviation from the score and highlights the importance of dramatic characterisation and narrative in interpretation, while, in *Music and mind in everyday life*, he discusses our awareness of physicality in performance with Nicola Dibben and Stephanie Pitts.<sup>3</sup>

In 'Finding the Music in Musicology: Performance History and Musical Works', José Bowen promotes a view of the performer as interpreter rather than executant and underlines the value that recorded and aural history contributes to musicological study.<sup>4</sup> The concept of music as sound or event, rather than as an abstract entity embodied in a score, is one that had gained greater credence in recent years and which is reflected in Joel Lester's 'Performance and analysis: interaction and interpretation'.<sup>5</sup> Here he appeals to analysts not to work with their imagined rendition of the piece, derived from the score alone, but on 'sounding music', namely performances.<sup>6</sup> In 'Performance analysis and Chopin's mazurkas', Nicholas Cook provides us with an example of how the analysis of recorded sound might revive an idea 'which was central to musicology in the first half of the twentieth century but subsequently marginalised: that of style analysis'.<sup>7</sup>

There are comparatively few published papers on the subject of left- or of one-hand piano music. The earliest paper, to my knowledge, which discusses the issue in depth is Leopold Godowsky's 'Piano Music for the Left Hand' of 1935, in which he

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*Music: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 204-214.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Clarke, 'Expression in Performance: Generativity, Perception, and Semiosis' in Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance*, pp. 21-54; Eric Clarke, Nicola Dibben and Stephanie Pitts eds., *Music and mind in everyday life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> José Bowen, 'Finding the Music in Musicology: Performance History and Musical Works' in Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist eds., *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 424-451.

<sup>5</sup> Joel Lester, 'Performance and Analysis: Interaction and Interpretation' in Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance*, pp. 197-216.

<sup>6</sup> Lester, 'Performance and Analysis', p. 210.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Cook, 'Performance Analysis and Chopin's Mazurkas', *Musicae Scientiae*, 11/2, 2007, pp. 183-207.

enumerates his motivations in transcribing Chopin's *Etudes* op. 10 and op. 25 and the specific advantages which the left hand possesses.<sup>8</sup> Theodore Edel's *Piano Music for One Hand* is an essential source for anybody involved in left-hand piano music. Here he discusses the primary reasons why composers have written left-hand piano music and provides brief biographies of four of the most influential left-handed pianists, Alexander Dreyschock, Adolfo Fumagalli, Count Géza Zichy and Paul Wittgenstein.<sup>9</sup> The extensive catalogue of solo works for left or right hand alone, of works for one-hand piano and orchestra and of left-hand piano chamber music is the most thorough currently available, although Donald Patterson's *One Handed: a guide to piano music for one hand* has also been of use in this respect.<sup>10</sup> After a brief history of the genre, he presents a catalogue of one-hand works including transcriptions and anthologies followed by a short discography. The most recent addition to the literature is Albert Sassmann's monograph '*In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister*: Technik und Ästhetik der Klaviermusik für die linke Hand allein' ('It is working within limits that the master reveals himself': Technique and the Aesthetics of Piano Music for the Left Hand Alone).<sup>11</sup> This comprehensive study provides a historical overview of the genre, taking into account the use of the left hand in two-handed repertoire from the Baroque period onwards. Sassmann discusses the performance practice of left-hand works, specific aspects of left-hand technique, anatomical peculiarities and the incentives which have encouraged composers to work within the medium. An examination of the ways in which limitation might promote creativity, both in music

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<sup>8</sup> Leopold Godowsky, 'Piano Music for the Left Hand', *MQ*, 21/3, 1935, pp. 298-300.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Donald Patterson, *One Handed: a guide to piano music for one hand* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Albert Sassmann, '*In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister*: Technik und Ästhetik der Klaviermusik für die linke Hand allein' (Tutzing: Verlag Hans Schneider, 2010).

and literature, is followed by a précis of contemporary developments, and a catalogue of solo, chamber and concerto repertoire for left hand alone.

The hypothesis that physical limitation may, in fact, encourage creative freedom rather than restrict it is also explored in ‘Creativity and Constraint’ by David Novitz where he states that creativity ‘[resides] in the ability of the individual to transcend and radically transform these constraints and, in the process, discover new possibilities’.<sup>12</sup>

When discussing works written for one-armed artists, questions of disability and of the body will inevitably come to the fore. Joseph Straus’s ‘Normalising the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory’ and ‘Inversional Balance and the ‘Normal’ Body in the Music of Schoenberg and Webern’ question current understandings of embodiment, their relationship to organicism in music and how these might be extended, or recontextualised, to fully acknowledge the part that disability plays.<sup>13</sup> ‘Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability’ by Blake Howe draws on ideas from the field of Disability Studies to examine the reception of Wittgenstein’s performances and how disability both defined and nourished his artistic legacy.<sup>14</sup> Simi Linton’s *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* disputes the medicalisation of disability and suggests that the designation is primarily of social and political significance.<sup>15</sup> Both Linton’s work and Tanya Titchovsky’s *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment* question traditional

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<sup>12</sup> David Novitz, ‘Creativity and Constraint’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 77/1, 1999, pp. 67-82 (the citation is from p. 68).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Straus, ‘Normalising the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory’, *JAMS*, 59/1, 2006, pp. 113-184; Joseph Straus, ‘Inversional Balance and the “Normal” Body in the Music of Schoenberg and Webern’ in Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus eds., *Sounding Off: Theorising Disability in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 257-268.

<sup>14</sup> Blake Howe, ‘Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability’, *JM*, 27/2, 2010, pp. 135-180.

<sup>15</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

narratives of ‘overcoming’ and challenge representations of disability in contemporary culture.<sup>16</sup> Lennard Davis’ *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* critiques the notion of ‘normalcy’ in order to present alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal.<sup>17</sup>

More generalised studies of the body in music include Elisabeth Le Guin’s *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*: an inspired account of how an increased awareness of eighteenth-century notions of embodiment, and of the centrality of performance, may enhance our appreciation of the kinaesthetic and the tactile in Boccherini’s music.<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Kramer’s *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* shows how audiences’ perceptions of the performer’s body was a key element in nineteenth-century critiques of virtuosity.<sup>19</sup> Mark Johnson’s discussion of the centrality of human embodiment, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, is extended in Janna Saslaw’s ‘Forces, Containers, and Paths: The Role of Body-Derived Image Schemas in the Conceptualisation of Music’ to encompass theories of modulation and of tonal development.

Naomi Cumming’s exploration of musical gesture in ‘The Subjectivities of “Erbarme dich”’ shows how a listener may participate vicariously in kinaesthetic experience and that musical gesture may induce one to perceive a subjective voice in

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<sup>16</sup> Tanya Titchovsky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Janna Saslaw, ‘Forces, Containers and Paths: The Role of Body-Derived Image Schemas in the Conceptualization of Music’, *JMT*, 40/2, 1996, pp. 217-243.

music.<sup>20</sup> These ideas are extended by Peter Johnson in his response to her article, ‘Performance and the Listening Experience: Bach’s “*Erbarme dich*”’ in which he advocates that performance be understood as a central factor in the ontology of a work.<sup>21</sup> In ‘Communicating with the body in performance’, Jane Davidson discusses social interaction on the concert stage and visual cues in performance, while the importance of expressive devices in improving the communicability of structural features is analysed in ‘Developing the ability to perform’.<sup>22</sup> Andrew Mead is inspired by these ideas in ‘Bodily Hearing: Physiological Metaphors and Musical Understanding’ and emphasises the importance of a listener’s empathy with the performer’s bodily involvement in order to engage fully with a work.<sup>23</sup>

There are numerous studies of issues of handedness in music.<sup>24</sup> In ‘Hand Asymmetry in Professional Musicians’, Lutz Jäncke et al. demonstrate that musicians

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<sup>20</sup> Naomi Cumming, ‘The Subjectivities of “*Erbarme dich*”’, *MA*, 13/4, 1932, pp. 418-420.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Johnson, ‘Performance and the Listening Experience: Bach’s “*Erbarme dich*”’ in Nicholas Cook, Peter Johnson and Hans Zender eds., *Theory into Practice: Composition, Performance and the Listening Experience* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), pp. 55-102.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Davidson, ‘Communicating with the body in performance’ and ‘Developing the ability to perform’, both in Rink, ed., *Musical Performance*, pp. 144-152 and pp. 89-101.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Mead, ‘Bodily Hearing: Physiological Metaphors and Musical Understanding’, *JMT*, 43/1, 1999, pp. 1-19. Suzanne Cusick and Andrew Mead’s papers in particular share many characteristics with, and develop ideas from *L’écriture féminine*. While there are a number of fascinating musicological studies related to this discipline, their relevance to this study is tangential.

<sup>24</sup> A related issue here is instrumental morphology. With all precursors to the piano, including early organs, harpsichords, spinets and clavichords, the higher register of the instrument was manipulated using the keys at the right-hand side of the keyboard. In much repertoire, the most important melodic voices would be placed in the upper register, to project above an accompaniment. As most people are right-handed, it was deemed most practical to entrust melodic material to the right hand and, therefore, for the higher register to be placed at the right-hand side of the keyboard. Papers which have proved interesting in this respect include John Baily, ‘Movement Patterns in Playing the Herati Dutar’ in John Blacking ed., *The Anthropology of the Body* (London: Academic Press, 1975) pp. 275-330, where he states that instrumental morphology imposes certain constraints on the way an instrument is played and that ‘music can be viewed as a product of body movement transduced into sound’ (p. 330). He explores similar ideas with Peter Driver in ‘Spatio-Motor Thinking in Playing Folk Blues Guitar’, *The World of Music*, 34/3, 1992, pp. 57-71. Similarly, Laudan Nooshin in *The Process of Creation and Recreation in Persian Classical Music*, unpublished PhD thesis, Goldsmiths’ College, University of London, 1996, shows that instrumental morphology and aesthetic criteria are reflexively influential.

have a lesser degree of hand-skill asymmetry than non-musicians.<sup>25</sup> Reinhard Kopiez et al. show, in ‘The advantage of a decreasing right-hand superiority: the influence of laterality on a selected musical skill’, that people with decreasing right-hand superiority, that is to say those who are more ‘left-handed’, are better sight readers.<sup>26</sup> In ‘Handedness in musicians’, Richard Oldfield shows that left-handedness does not occasion any special difficulty among musicians, even when playing instruments which require more complex right-hand movements.<sup>27</sup>

In *Music, Motor Control and the Brain*, edited by Eckart Altenmüller et al., there are a number of papers which examine hand movements in performance.<sup>28</sup> The final paper in this collection, ‘The end of the song? Robert Schumann’s focal dystonia’ by Altenmüller, suggests that Robert Schumann’s performing career was cut short when he developed focal dystonia, a neurological condition which affects a specific group of muscles, causing involuntary muscular contraction or twisting, and which has affected numerous left-handed pianists. *Medical problems of the instrumentalist musician* contains a number of papers which deal with the problems faced by handicapped musicians and recommended clinical practice.<sup>29</sup> In ‘Maurice Ravel and right-hemisphere musical creativity: influence of disease on his last musical works?’, the impact that cerebral lesions in the left hemisphere may have had

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<sup>25</sup> Lutz Jäncke, Gottfried Schlaug and Helmuth Steinmetz, ‘Hand Skill Asymmetry in Professional Musicians’, *Brain and Cognition*, 34/3, 1997, pp. 424-432.

<sup>26</sup> Reinhard Kopiez, Niels Galley and Ji In Lee, ‘The advantage of a decreasing right-hand superiority: The influence of laterality on a selected musical skill (sight reading achievement)’, *Neuropsychologia*, 44/7, 2006, pp. 1079-1087.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Oldfield, ‘Handedness in Musicians’, *British Journal of Psychology*, 60/1, 1969, pp. 91-99.

<sup>28</sup> E. Altenmüller and M. Wiesendanger eds., *Music, Motor Control and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> P. Amadio and R. Tubiana, eds. *Medical problems of the instrumentalist musician*, (London: Martin Dunitz, 2000).

on Ravel's final compositions is discussed.<sup>30</sup> Amaducci et al. argue that, as Ravel seemed to be suffering from damage to the left hemisphere of his brain, his final compositions, the *Boléro* and the *Concerto pour la main gauche*, will show 'certain patterns characteristic of right-hemisphere musical abilities'.<sup>31</sup> They conclude that in 'avoiding the difficulty of elaborating a complex structured theme', an activity apparently better suited to the left hemisphere, 'Ravel adopted the alternative use of different timbres... the Concerto for Left Hand, with its extraordinary richness of timbres, is music originating predominantly from the right hemisphere'.<sup>32</sup> While I am unqualified to comment on the medical aspects of this study, their failure to define what they mean by 'timbre', and wilful dismissal of Ravel's capacity for thematic elaboration in this work, make the study as a whole unconvincing.

'Godowsky the Performer' by Cyril Ehrlich, Charles Hopkins' article on Godowsky for the Grove Music Dictionary, and *Godowsky: The Pianist's Pianist* by Jeremy Nicholas have all provided biographical information which has been pertinent to my study of Godowsky's transcriptions in the first chapter of this thesis.<sup>33</sup> In researching the context of Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, Arbie Orenstein's collation of correspondence, interviews and newspaper articles in *A Ravel Reader*, as well as his extensive enumeration of Ravel's colleagues and the nature of their collaborations, has proved invaluable.<sup>34</sup> Jean Roy's interviews of Vlado Perlemuter,

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<sup>30</sup> L. Amaducci, F. Boller and E. Grassi, 'Maurice Ravel and right-hemisphere musical creativity: influence of disease on his last musical works?', *European Journal of Neurology*, 9/1, 2002, pp. 75-82.

<sup>31</sup> Amaducci et al., 'Maurice Ravel and right-hemisphere musical creativity', p. 79.

<sup>32</sup> Amaducci et al., 'Maurice Ravel and right-hemisphere musical creativity', p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, 'Godowsky the Performer', *MT*, 130/1757, 1989, pp. 405-406; Charles Hopkins ed., 'Godowsky, Leopold', in Grove Music Online (accessed March 17, 2009); Jeremy Nicholas, *Godowsky: The Pianists' Pianist: A Biography of Leopold Godowsky* (Hexham, UK: Appian, 1989).

<sup>34</sup> Arbie Orenstein ed., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

collated in *Ravel d'après Ravel* by Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, provide an intriguing insight into the reception of Ravel's works and their dissemination.<sup>35</sup> Sassmann's 'Zur Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Paul Wittgenstein gewidmeten Klavierkonzerte von Maurice Ravel und Sergej Prokofjew' (On the Emergence and Reception History of the Concertos for Paul Wittgenstein by Maurice Ravel and Sergej Prokofiev) is a continuation of this theme and chronicles correspondence and other documentation from the inception of these works to the present day.<sup>36</sup>

There are far fewer sources which deal with Britten's *Divisions*. The most relevant has been *Letters from a Life*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, which contains correspondence from Britten in which he discusses *Divisions*.<sup>37</sup> A number of letters from Wittgenstein to Britten are held in their original form at the Britten-Pears Archive in Suffolk. Unfortunately, much of the return correspondence has been lost.

My analysis of the interaction between soloist and orchestra in the concerto is grounded in theoretical ideas developed by Charles Rosen and Simon Keefe. In *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, Rosen refers to the 'individual voice against the sonority of the mass' and traces how these interact throughout a number of concertos.<sup>38</sup> In his three papers 'Koch's Commentary on the Late-Eighteenth Century Concerto: Dialogue, Drama and Solo Orchestral Relations', 'Dramatic Dialogue in Mozart's Viennese Piano Concertos: A Study of Competition and Cooperation in

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<sup>35</sup> Hélène Jourdan-Morhange and Vlado Perlemuter, *Ravel d'après Ravel* (Lausanne: Editions du Cervin, 1953).

<sup>36</sup> Albert Sassmann, 'Zur Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Paul Wittgenstein gewidmeten Klavierkonzerte von Maurice Ravel und Sergej Prokofjew' in Carmen Ottner ed., *Das Klavierkonzert in Österreich und Deutschland von 1990-1945* (Vienna: Doblinger Music Publishers, 2007), pp. 250-290.

<sup>37</sup> Mervyn Cooke, Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed eds., *Letters from a Life: Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W. H. Norton & Co.), p. 185.

Three First Movements' and 'An Entirely Special Manner: Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 14 in E flat, K. 499 and the Stylistic Implications of Confrontation', Keefe discusses the influence of eighteenth-century notions of dialogue and drama on the relationship between soloist and orchestra in Mozart's output.<sup>39</sup> These ideas are both developed in *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, edited by Keefe, and extended to include more recent works.<sup>40</sup>

In the third chapter of this thesis, *The House of Wittgenstein: A Family at War*, a biographical study by Alexander Waugh, has provided an insight into the dynamics that shaped the pianist's career and his family life.<sup>41</sup> 'Ursprung und Geschichte der Sammlung Paul Wittgenstein im 19. Jht', 'Dokumente aus der Sammlung Paul Wittgenstein', 'Paul Wittgenstein 1887-1961: Patron and Pianist' and 'More on Franz Schmidt and Paul Wittgenstein and their triumph with the E-flat Concerto' by Fred Flindell document correspondence between Wittgenstein and composers including Korngold, Hindemith, Prokofiev, Johann Strauss and Franz Schmidt, while also providing biographical information about his activities as patron.<sup>42</sup> Georg Predota's article, 'Badgering the Creative Genius: Paul Wittgenstein and the Prerogative of Musical Patronage', is a detailed and absorbing study of Wittgenstein's relationships with the composers he worked with and includes a detailed analysis of the alterations

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<sup>39</sup> Simon Keefe, 'Koch's Commentary on the Late-Eighteenth Century Concerto: Dialogue, Drama and Solo Orchestral Relations', *M&L*, 79/2, 1998, pp. 368-385; 'Dramatic Dialogue in Mozart's Viennese Piano Concertos: A Study of Competition and Cooperation in Three First Movements', *MQ*, 83/2, 1999, pp. 169-204; 'An Entirely Special Manner: Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 14 in E flat, K. 499 and the Stylish Implications of Confrontation', *M&L*, 82/4, 2001, pp. 559-581.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Keefe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Alexander Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein: A Family at War* (London: Bloomsburg, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Fred Flindell, 'Ursprung und Geschichte der Sammlung Paul Wittgenstein im 19. Jht', *Mf*, 22/3, 1959, pp. 298-314; 'Dokumente aus der Sammlung Paul Wittgenstein', *Mf*, 14/4, 1971, pp. 422-431; 'Paul Wittgenstein 1887-1961: Patron and Pianist', *The Music Review*, 32/2, 1971, pp. 107-127; 'More on Franz Schmidt and Paul Wittgenstein and their triumph with the E-flat Concerto' in Irene Suchy ed., *Empty Sleeve: der Musiker und Mäzen Paul Wittgenstein* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), pp. 133-169.

which he made to Ravel's concerto.<sup>43</sup> I have used this material, in combination with photographs of Wittgenstein's personal copies of Ravel's concerto, in my own account of his revisions to the work. For my work on the modifications which Wittgenstein made to Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, I have used his two-piano reduction of the work, which is held at the Britten-Pears Archive. Wittgenstein's three-volume *Schule für die linke Hand*, comprising a series of exercises, études and transcriptions of two-handed works for left hand alone, provides an overview of his personal left-hand technique and the Preface, in particular, has been of great use in decoding his annotations of Ravel and Britten's concertos.<sup>44</sup>

Much of the literature on virtuosity and on the changing perceptions of the concert pianist from the nineteenth century onwards has been helpful in understanding the context of Wittgenstein's activities. J. N. Burk, in 'The Fetish of Virtuosity', published in 1918, and 'Virtuosity and Music' by R. A. Harman from 1943, provide an overview of changing perceptions of the virtuoso in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> Dana Gooley's papers, 'Warhorses: Liszt, Weber's "Konzertstück", and the Cult of Napoléon', 'La Commedia del Violino: Paganini's Comic Strains' and 'The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century' in *Franz Liszt and his World* and his book *Virtuoso Liszt*, chronicle the rise and fall of the piano virtuoso from the early nineteenth century onwards.<sup>46</sup> His account of the backlash against the cult of personality, changing dynamics in the hierarchy between composer

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<sup>43</sup> Georg Predota, 'Badgering the Creative Genius: Paul Wittgenstein and the Prerogative of Musical Patronage' in Suchy, ed., *Empty Sleeve*, pp. 71-102.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Wittgenstein, *Schule für die linke Hand*, vols. 1-3 (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1957).

<sup>45</sup> J. N. Burk, 'The Fetish of Virtuosity', *MQ*, 4/2, 1918, pp. 282-292; R. A. Harman, 'Virtuosity and Music', *MT*, 84/1209, 1943, pp. 329-330.

<sup>46</sup> Dana Gooley, 'Warhorses: Liszt, Weber's "Konzertstück", and the Cult of Napoléon', *I9CM*, 24/1, 2000, pp. 62-88; 'La Commedia del Violino: Paganini's Comic Strains', *MQ*, 88/3, 2005, pp. 370-427; 'The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century' in Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley eds., *Franz Liszt and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 75-111; *Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and performer, and the importance of the visual element of performance are all issues which are of prime importance in understanding Wittgenstein's approach to the left-hand concerto. Kenneth Hamilton, in *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism*, discusses similar concerns and highlights the particularly fluid relationship between the score, instrument and interpreter.<sup>47</sup> Jim Samson, in *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, tracks changing attitudes towards virtuosity, the influence of a new middle-class elite on concert life in the mid-nineteenth century, and changing perceptions of the performer-composer.<sup>48</sup>

Piano music for the left hand is intriguing, in part because of its novelty, but principally because composer and pianist are forced to respond creatively to what may at first seem an insuperable obstacle. 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. To encompass, with one hand alone, textures which sound as convincing and complete as those written for two hands is challenge enough in itself. Yet, in the left-hand piano concerto, 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. How, then, to provide for a left-handed pianist whose resources in both respects will presumably be much reduced?

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<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The history of the left-hand piano repertoire, be it of solo works or of the concerto, chronicles composers' attempts not merely to compensate for reduced range or power, but to exploit and to expand the possibilities that are inherent to the medium.<sup>49</sup> While many works have been written in response to injury, an equal number were designed to develop technical proficiency, for virtuosic display or because of the creative inspiration that the perceived limitations of the genre provide. The first published pieces that were written entirely for left hand alone are believed to be Ludwig Berger's *Etudes*, op. 12 (1820), which were followed by a host of technical works designed to develop the left hand so that its capacity matched that of the right. Much of the repertoire of the time, and indeed of today, entrusted both projection of the melody and more complex textures to the right hand with the result that the left hand, more usually confined to a subordinate, accompanimental role, lagged behind technically. Yet the pedagogic role that the left-hand repertoire initially represented was soon eclipsed by its transferral to the concert stage in works which were written primarily to amaze audiences. Pianists such as Alexander Dreyschock (1818-1869) and Adolfo Fumagalli (1828-1856) were quick to capitalise on the 'wizardry' of the left-hand work and achieved great public and critical acclaim with variations on popular ditties and operatic arias.<sup>50</sup> There are numerous stories of listeners who were deceived into thinking the pianist was playing with two hands, most noticeably the celebrated critic, Paolo Scudo, who 'usually so reserved and sparing of praise could not resist shouting "Bravo!"'.<sup>51</sup> That a pianist should play an entire piece with one hand was remarkable enough, but to do so with the left,

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<sup>49</sup> I am greatly indebted to Theodore Edel, and to his book *Piano Music for One Hand*, which forms the basis of much of the following discussion.

<sup>50</sup> Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, pp. 17-25.

<sup>51</sup> Filippo Filippi, *Delle vita e delle opere di Adolfo Fumagalli* (Milan: Ricordi, 1858), p. 65, cited in Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 22.

traditionally viewed as the weaker of the two, firmly established the left-hand operatic paraphrase as one of the travelling virtuoso's calling cards.

Yet one of the most pervasive influences on the creation and dissemination of the left-hand repertoire has been injury. The right-hand parts of much of the standard repertoire are so much more complex than those for the left that they frequently require substantially more practice. The resultant strain has often temporarily or even permanently disabled pianists and many works, including Scriabin's *Prelude and Nocturne for the left hand*, op. 9, were written in response to this problem. All but three of the twenty-eight existing concertos for piano left hand were composed explicitly for musicians whose right arm was either incapacitated or had been amputated.<sup>52</sup>

The two wealthiest and most influential left-handed pianists, Count Géza Zichy (1849-1924) and Paul Wittgenstein (1887-1961), lost their right arms: the former in a hunting accident and the latter during the First World War. Count Zichy composed works to suit his personal specifications whereas Wittgenstein both arranged a great deal of music for left hand alone and commissioned a substantial body of works from an array of composers. Otakar Hollmann, a Czech pianist, was paralysed in his right arm after serving at the front in the First World War and commissioned both the *Capriccio for Piano and Winds* from Leos Janáček and *Divertimento for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* from Bohuslav Martinů.<sup>53</sup> The English pianist, Harriet Cohen, was permanently disabled when a wine glass shattered in her right hand, severing an artery. A year later, Arnold Bax dedicated *Concertante*

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<sup>52</sup> The compositional motives behind the remaining three concertos (Cor De Groot's *Variations-Imaginaires* of 1962, Kurt Leimer's *Concerto* of 1953 and Lucijan Marija Skerjanc's *Concerto* of 1963) are not clear, though they may also have been written for a specific left-handed pianist.

<sup>53</sup> Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 116, p. 110.

for left-hand piano and orchestra to her.<sup>54</sup>

The least immediately evident, and most intriguing, of incentives to compose for left hand alone, however, lies in the compositional challenge that it represents. In the Preface to his *Miniatures* for left hand, the Polish pianist and composer Leopold Godowsky wrote that ‘working within self-imposed limitations convinced me that economy of means leads to a superior form of concentration’.<sup>55</sup> Johannes Brahms, transcribing Bach’s *Chaconne* in D minor from the second Partita for violin, decided to score it for left hand alone, rather than for both hands, as this preserved the emotional tension of the original.<sup>56</sup> As the violinist crosses strings to execute multiple stops, so must the left-handed pianist spread chords. The sense of a musician striving to encompass a texture is preserved. In the left-hand repertoire the essential challenge of performance, whereby the ‘body – necessarily finite, limited – must transcend its boundedness to embody not just music’s ineffability but the superhuman agility, dexterity, and skilfulness its physical performance demands’ is magnified.<sup>57</sup>

The repertoire of left-hand piano works is much greater than that of works for the right hand alone, largely for the reasons discussed above. As much of the standard piano literature entrusts more complex material to the right hand, there is no need to isolate it for ‘remedial’ technical training. The difficulty of maintaining a convincing harmonic ‘foundation’ in a work for right hand alone, given the awkwardness with which one would stretch for the bass register, would be significant. The virtuosi of the mid-nineteenth century would have had far less success with pieces for right hand alone, partly because the emotive impact would have been weaker. After all, words

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<sup>54</sup> Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 108.

<sup>55</sup> Godowsky, ‘Piano Music for the Left Hand’, pp. 299-300.

<sup>56</sup> Berthold Litzmann, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms 1853-1896* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), p. 54.

<sup>57</sup> Howe, ‘Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability’, p. 136.

associated with the left hand such as ‘sinistra’ or ‘gauche’ often have negative connotations and left-handed people are in the minority. In overcoming such disadvantages so spectacularly in concert, the effective impact of the left-hand work is much increased. Pianists tend not to over-practice their left hands to the extent that they do the right, and thus there are far fewer playing-related injuries that would necessitate right-hand music. While one may assume that as many soldiers returned from war with only a right arm, they either lacked the financial resources to commission a substantial body of works, or decided that a concert career which was dependent on right-hand music was not a feasible prospect.

That this should have been the case poses an intriguing question, namely, whether the left hand has any inherent advantages over the right in one-handed music. In terms of dramatic effect, when a left-handed pianist performs it is very evident to an audience that the right arm is either not playing or is absent. For the right-handed pianist, the left arm is concealed which weakens the visual impact of the enterprise. The most striking attribute of the left hand, however, lies in its physiological structure. The thumb of the left hand is highest of the fingers on the keyboard and is thus able to project melodies, most often entrusted to the highest voice, with greater ease. The left-handed player also has direct access to the bass register of the keyboard, which is essential for providing harmonic support.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, there are specific features which apply to one-hand music, whether for the left or right hands, which do not arise in the standard repertoire. Fingering is much more detailed as composers guide the performer through unusual and unorthodox textures. This is, in itself, a response to the irony of the one-handed repertoire where the performer

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<sup>58</sup> I am grateful to the American left-handed pianist Keith Snell, who kindly agreed to be interviewed for this study in May 2010, for these insights.

frequently negotiates greater complexity than in two-handed pieces. The hand span that is required is often considerable, stretching beyond conventional limits, and the pedal must be used with greater subtlety and precision since it enables the one-handed pianist to sustain multiple voices simultaneously.<sup>59</sup>

These issues are explored at length in Godowsky's transcriptions of Chopin's *Etudes* op. 10 and op. 25, which are widely regarded as a pinnacle of piano technique not just in the left-hand repertoire, but also for two-handed pianists. They enabled Godowsky to develop novel approaches to the keyboard in subsequent works for left-hand piano and influenced numerous other composers as well. It is no coincidence that the quality of much of the left-hand repertoire increased dramatically after their publication.

These transcriptions were so well regarded by Wittgenstein that he recommended them as a model to a number of the composers from whom he commissioned concertos. As 19 of the 28 existing left-hand piano concertos were written for Wittgenstein, moreover, the influence that Godowsky may have exerted on the genre should not be under-estimated. Thanks to immense financial resources, Wittgenstein was able to commission works from composers including Maurice Ravel, Benjamin Britten, Sergei Prokofiev, Erich Korngold, Paul Hindemith and Richard Strauss and as a result, the quality of this repertoire is almost uniformly high.

These composers have responded in novel and innovative ways to the compositional challenge the left-hand concerto represents, whereby the pianist must not only project a texture which sounds 'whole' but must also interact and contend with a substantial body of orchestral musicians onstage. The technical challenges of a

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<sup>59</sup> The question of whether exclusive use of one hand to play the piano affects interaction between the two hemispheres of the brain, enabling a different 'type' of musical performance, is worthy of attention yet lies beyond the remit of this study.

soloist's part match those of the solo etudes while virtuosic display is part and parcel of the genre. The left-hand concerto combines all of the attractions and challenges that the left-hand solo repertoire poses, yet these are intensified and compounded by the presence of an orchestra and the transformed social dynamic between soloist and audience. In no other body of repertoire are an individual's struggle and the concomitant challenges so powerfully and movingly enacted.

## Chapter 1. Transcending Limitation: Godowsky's transcriptions of Chopin's Etudes

Leopold Godowsky was a celebrated virtuoso pianist who was particularly famed for his supreme technical command of the instrument.<sup>1</sup> Admired by many of the leading pianists of the day, including Sergei Rachmaninov and Josef Hofmann, he nevertheless suffered from extreme stage fright and was at his best, not on the concert stage or in the recording studio, but in private performances. Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1870, he was largely self-taught yet performed widely from an early age. He frequently played his own compositions in concert, which are characterised by complex contrapuntal textures and rich chromatic harmonies, and is best known today for his paraphrases of works by other composers. In the late 1890s he began to write transcriptions of Chopin's *Etudes* op. 10 and op. 25. Many of these were intended to be played with both hands, but he also created transcriptions of each study (except for a few of op. 25) for the left hand alone. The programme for his Berlin debut in December 1900 included a selection of these transcriptions which were met with tumultuous applause. Godowsky later recounted that 'pianists like Pachmann, Josef Weiss, Hambourg, Anton Foerster and the entire audience . . . were screaming like wild beasts' and the critic and writer Arthur Abell stated that he would 'never forget the unparalleled enthusiasm that his playing aroused' on that occasion.<sup>2</sup>

Godowsky's intentions in transcribing Chopin's *Etudes* were manifold and are described at length in his introductory remarks to the *Studien über die Etüden von*

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on Leopold Godowsky is not extensive. For the purposes of this chapter the most useful texts have been Cyril Ehrlich, 'Godowsky the Performer'; Leopold Godowsky, 'Piano Music for the Left Hand'; Charles Hopkins, 'Godowsky, Leopold' and Jeremy Nicholas, *Godowsky: The Pianists' Pianist*.

<sup>2</sup> Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 13.

*Chopin*.<sup>3</sup> In common with Chopin's original *Etudes*, technical issues are paramount. The aim of the transcriptions is to 'develop the mechanical, technical and musical possibilities of pianoforte playing' while the 'unusual mental and physical demands made upon the performer . . . must invariably lead to a much higher proficiency in the command of the instrument'.<sup>4</sup> Most of the transcriptions, whether for two hands or for left hand alone, are prefaced by exercises composed of patterns both from Chopin's original *Etudes* and from Godowsky's transcriptions. Godowsky was inspired to 'build upon [the] solid and invulnerable foundation' of Chopin's *Etudes* as he felt that their combination of 'beautiful pianoforte music' and 'indispensable mechanical and technical usefulness' would best enable him to '[further] the art of pianoforte playing'.<sup>5</sup>

Godowsky sets out his agenda for the left-hand transcriptions in a series of 'Special Remarks'.<sup>6</sup> In writing these works he intended to 'oppose the generally prevailing idea, that the left hand is less responsive to development than the right' and states that it may in fact be 'more elastic owing to its being much less employed in daily use . . . than the right hand'.<sup>7</sup> He cites as 'proof of its greater adaptability' the fact that 'there have been a number of compositions written for the left hand alone, while to the authors' knowledge, with one exception, none have as yet been written for the right hand alone'.<sup>8</sup> While many of the works previously written for left hand have produced merely a

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<sup>3</sup> Leopold Godowsky, *Studien über die Etüden von Chopin* (Berlin: Robert Lienau, Hinrichsen Edition, 1914).

<sup>4</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. iii. In this edition, the Preface is presented in German, English and French. The names of the translators are not mentioned.

<sup>5</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. iv.

<sup>6</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii.

<sup>7</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii.

<sup>8</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii. While Godowsky is correct in stating that far fewer pieces have been written for the right hand alone than for the left, this is not necessarily for the reason he states, as explained in the Introduction to this thesis.

superficial effect . . . in this particular set of left hand studies it has been the author's intention to assign to the left hand alone a task commensurate with the demands made by the modern evolution in the means of musical expression.<sup>9</sup>

Godowsky's desire to make a contribution to modern composition beyond the merely technical is evident in his assertion that composers for the piano 'will find a number of suggestions regarding the treatment of the instrument and its musical utterance in general'.<sup>10</sup> He was inspired by 'self-imposed limitations' and was convinced that the 'resourcefulness needed in dealing frugally with the means at our command often opens up unexplored and unsuspected regions of the imagination'.<sup>11</sup> By proving that 'it is possible to assign to the left hand alone the work done usually by both hands simultaneously', Godowsky asserts that, should this attainment be extended to both hands, future composers would have incalculably greater resources at their disposal.<sup>12</sup>

In the transcriptions, Godowsky employs or manipulates a series of musical features, shown in Figure 1, which will be discussed in detail below. Overarching all of these issues for Godowsky is the aural effect of the transcriptions. While occasional passages seem eccentric, or even ill-conceived, the vast majority reveal how much may be achieved both within and precisely because of self-imposed limitations. This lexicon of compositional concerns will in turn be used to illuminate

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<sup>9</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii.

<sup>10</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. iii.

<sup>11</sup> Godowsky, 'Piano Music for the Left Hand', pp. 299-300. The value of 'self-imposed limitations' is one that Brahms explores in his transcription of Bach's Chaconne in D major for left-hand piano, originally written for violin. Brahms was keen to play the Chaconne himself but, as he was not a violinist, was obliged to transcribe it. He felt that a two-handed version would be inappropriate since the pianist would be able to play the wide-ranging chords with too great an ease. The sense of a violinist striving to encompass the texture, while crossing strings, would be lost, as would much of the expressive impact of the piece. The only way he felt he could 'secure undiluted joy from the [Chaconne] though on a small and only approximate scale, [is] when I play it with the left hand alone' (in Litzmann, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms*, p. 54).

<sup>12</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii.

‘unexplored and unsuspected regions of the imagination’ in Ravel and Britten’s concertos for left hand, although some features, such as fugal textures, are of less relevance in these works. Thus, instead of discussing key in the concertos, I shall examine the use of register, and shall also investigate the influence left-handedness exerts on large-scale structure.

Figure 1. Key musical features in Godowsky’s left-hand transcriptions

1. Melodic use of the thumb
2. Span
3. Balance of multi-layered textures
4. Style brisé
5. Key
6. Fingering and the sustaining pedal
7. Contrary motion
8. Fugal textures
9. Aural effect

### **1. Melodic use of the thumb**

One clear advantage which the left-handed player has over the two-handed player is the fact that the thumb, arguably the strongest of the five fingers, is higher on the keyboard than the other fingers of this hand and is thus ideally placed to project a melody above an accompanimental texture. Godowsky states in the introduction to his transcriptions that ‘the left hand is favoured by nature in having the stronger part of the hand for the upper voice . . . of a melody’.<sup>13</sup> While in standard piano repertoire, the left hand is more often confined to the lower range of the keyboard and is

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<sup>13</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii.

habitually responsible for accompanimental content, it is in left-hand works that its melodic potential is fully realised. Two-handed pianists must spend years training the fourth and fifth fingers of their right hand to present melodies with the requisite strength and control, yet the left-handed player may almost take this for granted. Godowsky exploits the thumb as the player of the melody in a number of the transcriptions.

Chopin's Etude op. 10, no. 3, for example, is clearly designed to train the weaker fingers of the right hand to project a melody above lower accompanimental voices (see Ex. 1a).

#### Example 1<sup>14</sup>

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 3, bb. 1-2



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 5, bb. 1-2<sup>15</sup>



Here the right hand plays both the melody in the treble clef and the upper accompanimental line in the bass clef. While the player of Godowsky's transcription (see Ex. 1b) must contend with a more complex texture than is usually entrusted to one hand, the principal technical aim of the original etude is rendered redundant. The primary challenge that the player now faces is not to project the higher line, but to balance multiple layers within the texture, an issue that is much easier to resolve in

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<sup>14</sup> All excerpts from the Chopin *Etudes* op. 10 and op. 25 are taken from the edition edited by Ignacy Paderewski and published by Polish Music Publications in Cracow in 1949 while those from Godowsky's transcriptions are from the Robert Lienau, Hinrichsen Edition published in Berlin in 1914.

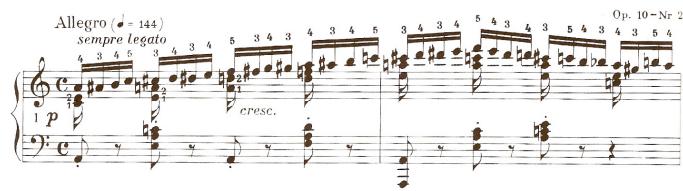
<sup>15</sup> Many of the transcriptions are transposed to other keys, an issue which I examine in the discussion of 'Key' below.

Chopin's etude with the benefit of a second hand. The thumb, as is the case in much of Godowsky's left-hand music, takes the whole of the melodic line, yet the hand must extend over more than two octaves, reaching back to the low Ab on the second semiquaver of b. 1 and so on, all aided by the pedal.<sup>16</sup>

The rapid semiquaver motion of the opening of Chopin's op. 10, no. 2, shown in Ex. 2a, originally entrusted to the right hand, is replicated in the transcription, as shown in Ex. 2b, yet here the left hand has also to contend with a melodic line at the top of the texture which was only implied in the original.

## Example 2

### a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 2, bb. 1-2



### b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 3, bb. 1-2

Chopin's etude covers a wide vertical range which the transcription cannot hope to match. For example, at b. 2.1, the interval between the lowest and highest note exceeds three octaves (see Ex. 2a). The necessarily reduced sonority of the

<sup>16</sup> I have used the standard form of pitch nomenclature whereby 'Middle C' on the keyboard is termed 'c', that an octave above, 'c<sup>1</sup>', two octaves above, 'c<sup>2</sup>', an octave below, 'C', two octaves below, 'C<sub>1</sub>' etc. Also, with regard to the identification of notes in the musical examples, 'b. 1.2' implies a note in the first bar on the second beat.

transcription, reconfigured to fit within one hand, sounds sparse and restricted. Godowsky thus constructs an additional, sustained melodic line from the uppermost pitches of the accompanying chords of the original. The resultant thicker texture helps to compensate for the reduced span. The thumb here is ideally placed to project this melodic line. Thus the entire texture is easier to encompass than it would have been if entrusted to the right hand alone.

In the transcription of the opening of the fifth etude, pitches are extracted from the original accompaniment and chromatically altered to create another quasi-melodic line (see Exx. 3a and b).

### Example 3

#### a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 5, bb. 1-2

#### b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 12a, bb. 1-2

#### c) Hypothetical version of Ex. 3b

This is another case where the vertical span of the transcription must of necessity be much smaller than that of the original. Godowsky could have retained the triplet semiquaver figuration (though at a lower octave) as well as accompanimental triads in the rhythm of the original, as shown in Ex. 3c; the difference in the ‘mass’ of sound produced between Ex. 3b and Ex. 3c is not significant. However Godowsky, once

again, inserts an additional melodic line to be played by the thumb, shown in Ex. 3b, which increases the aural perception of activity. The melodic line has an agency which the accompanimental triads lack (see Ex. 3c). Again, the thumb is ideally placed to project this melody above the complex figuration beneath.

## 2. Span

While the facility with which the thumb of the left hand may project melodies is an advantage to the left-handed player, the reduced span of notes which may be encompassed at any one time poses a significant challenge.<sup>17</sup> Godowsky overcomes this in a number of ways. As shown in the examples above, the addition of a melodic line is one means of compensating for a smaller vertical range and consequently thinner sonority. In etudes which cover a wide *melodic* span, however, the left-handed pianist is not forced to compromise to the same extent. Godowsky demonstrates numerous ways to maintain textural integrity, giving the impression that the hand is both much larger than it actually is and even, on occasion, that it may be in more than one place at one time. Thus he shows that far more lies within the capabilities of the left-handed player than one might at first assume.

Chopin's Etude op. 10, no. 1, was intended to develop both the span of the right hand and its facility in covering large areas of the keyboard quickly. The opening bars are given in Ex. 4a. In the transcription, a wide span is preserved and the texture is complicated with the addition of melodic fragments, indicated by notes with double stems (see Ex. 4b). In Chopin's original, the pianist covers just over five

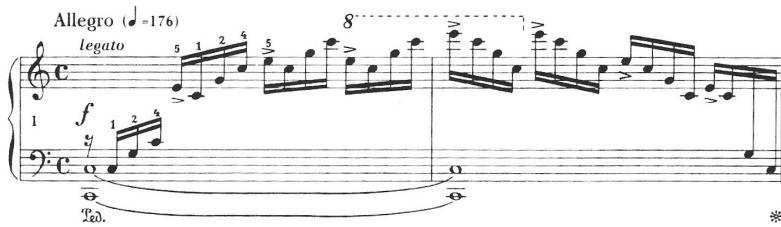
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<sup>17</sup> It is impossible to deduce from the transcriptions what physical span Godowsky would have expected from a left-handed pianist. Chords which span a tenth, with intermediate notes, are common and are frequently not marked to be spread. However, there are also a number of twelfths and even thirteenths, matching the fabled hand-span of Rachmaninov, which are not marked to be spread but which the vast majority of pianists would be unable to play without doing so.

octaves in the first two bars, if one includes the C<sub>1</sub> of the dyad in the left hand. The first bar of the Godowsky transcription encompasses just under four octaves.

#### Example 4

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 1, bb. 1-2



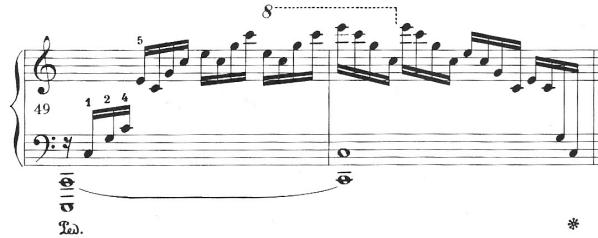
b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 2, b. 1

At the recapitulation, shown in Ex. 5a, Godowsky extends the range of the passage to just over six octaves, if one takes the D<sub>b</sub><sub>1</sub> of the dyad at the beginning of b. 25 into account (see Ex. 5b). This both provides a more dramatic flourish than at the same point in Chopin's original, which now covers just over five octaves, and demonstrates that the left hand is more than an equal match to the challenges of the two-handed repertoire.

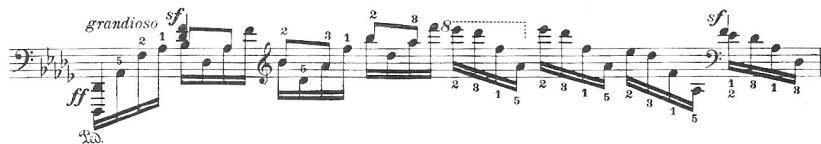
A desire to match the range and power of the original etudes is apparent throughout the transcriptions, but particularly in those of op. 10, nos. 4 and 5. For instance, Godowsky takes a passage which is played in four octaves in the original (see Ex. 6a) and encompasses this with one hand (see Ex. 6b). Godowsky presents an ingenious way to cover three octaves, apparently 'simultaneously', by using a different pair of octaves from one quaver to the next. The *Ossia* is perhaps closer to

### Example 5

a) Chopin, Etude op. 10 no. 1, bb. 49-50

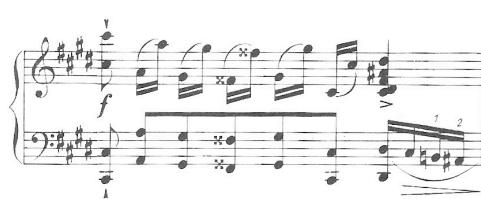


b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 2, b. 25

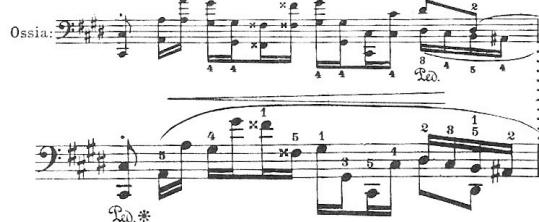


### Example 6

a) Chopin, Etude op. 10 no. 4, b. 4



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 6, b. 4



the original, and fiendishly difficult to play, yet this version is neither elegant nor practical. It represents the application of brute force rather than inventiveness and is thus, arguably, of less use to the potential composer of left-hand piano music.

The right hand of Chopin's fifth etude at bb. 23-4, shown in Ex. 7a, pivots about a central point over a range of nearly two octaves. This 'pivoting' is a technique which increases the aural impression of a large span, as used by Godowsky in Ex. 6b. In his transcription, shown in Ex. 7b, Godowsky matches this feat and adds an accompanimental voice, this time in the lower voice. While the right hand in Chopin's

original covers nearly two octaves, however, the upper voice in Godowsky's transcription uses only a twelfth. It is tempting to suggest that this is in response to the limitations of one hand, yet it would be easy enough to substitute the E♭ with a G♭. Four bars later, Godowsky replicates the original melody of Ex. 7c, despite the enormous stretch that this entails for the left hand (see Ex. 7d). The E♭ at b. 23.2 and b. 24.2, therefore, may be the result of an aesthetic preference rather than of technical compromise.

### Example 7

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 5, bb. 23-4                    b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 12a, bb. 23-4

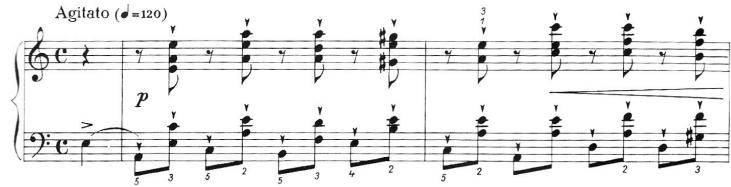
c) Chopin, op. 10 no 5, bb. 27-8                    d) Godowsky, Transcription no. 12a, bb. 27-8

Leaping chords demand still greater span and strength than simple or doubled octaves and may pose a significant problem for the left-handed pianist, particularly when melody and accompaniment occur simultaneously. The left hand of Chopin's sixteenth etude plays a series of leaping, broken chords, the right hand augmenting them on offbeat quavers (see Ex. 8a). The top notes of the right hand produce a rather angular melodic line, made explicit when it is repeated, as shown in Ex. 8b.

Godowsky replicates the texture, albeit over a smaller range (see Example 8c).

### Example 8

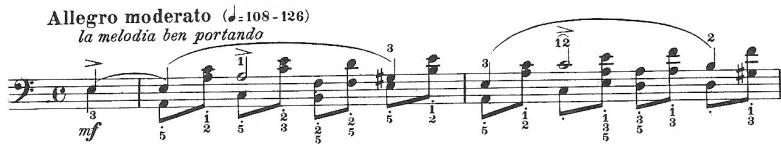
#### a) Chopin, op. 25 no. 4, bb. 1-2



#### b) Chopin, op. 25 no. 4, bb. 9-10



#### c) Godowsky, Transcription no. 31, bb. 1-2



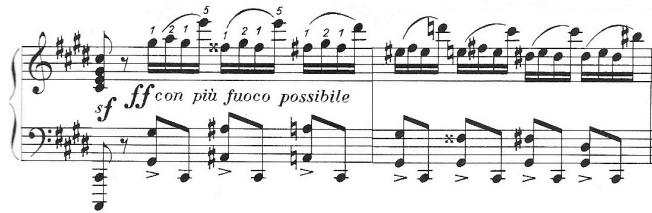
The upper note of the right-hand chords in Godowsky's transcription is between a tenth and a thirteenth lower than its counterpart in Ex. 8a. From the very beginning Godowsky emphasizes the melodic line, which is only implied in the original. This compensates for the reduced chordal sonority of the transcription, caused by necessary diminution of span. The contortions of the hand which a pianist must achieve in order to project all levels of the texture successfully are quite beyond what one might ordinarily encounter in the piano literature. Yet again, Godowsky shows that the technical accomplishment demanded of the left hand may both match and exceed that of two.

Godowsky is forced to reduce the span of the leaping chords of the left hand in

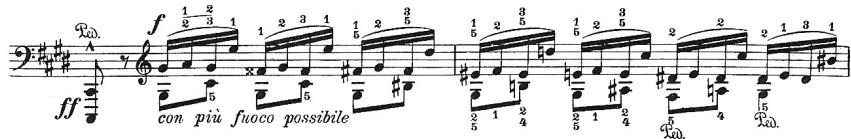
Chopin's fourth etude so that he may also encompass the rapid semiquaver figuration originally entrusted to the right hand (see Exx. 9a and b). Left-hand octaves are reduced to single notes.

### Example 9

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 4, bb. 71-72



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 6, bb. 71-72

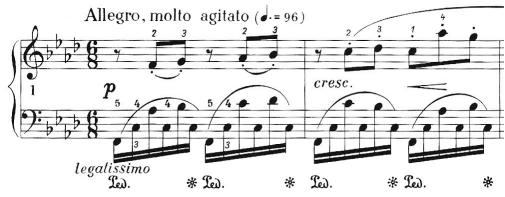


Both versions are marked *con più fuoco possibile* yet, despite Godowsky's subtle alterations, with such reduced sonority it seems that in this case the power of the transcription will not match that of the original.

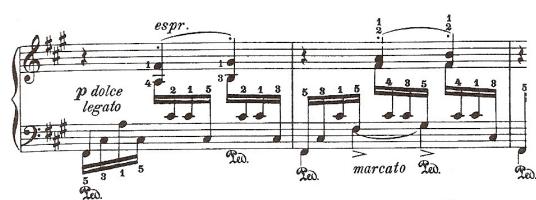
Chopin's ninth etude develops the span of the left hand and its ability to leap relatively small distances within a very short space of time. In comparison with the concerns of the transcriptions of the preceding etudes, this technical issue seems trivial indeed. Moreover, the entirety of the opening bar could be played by the left hand alone without any alteration whatsoever. In response, perhaps, to the apparent simplicity of this study, Godowsky treats the original text of the etude very freely (see Exx. 10a and b). The transcription preserves the vertical range of the original and, in replacing the three-voice counterpoint of Chopin's etude with a denser, chordal texture of rapid notes, increases the demands placed on the span of the left hand. The

### Example 10

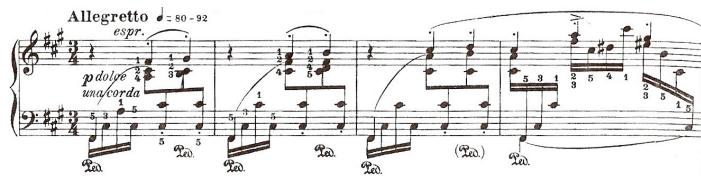
a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 9, bb. 1-2



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 18a, bb. 80-81



c) Godowsky, Transcription no. 18a, bb. 1-4



transcription preserves constant semiquaver motion, as shown in Ex. 10b, but the difficulties of the extended left hand stretches in Ex. 10a are compounded in b. 80.2-3, and yet further in b. 81, by the addition of an extra voice on the lower stave. The figuration of Ex. 10c derives from Ex. 10a, yet the cessation of semiquaver movement alters the character of the passage entirely. This almost excessively ornate response to Chopin's original may reflect the extent to which Godowsky believed his technical aspirations exceeded those of previous composers. After all, Chopin's original étude was designed to develop a facility in the left hand that is taken for granted in Godowsky's transcriptions.

### 3. Balance of multi-layered textures

In the two-handed repertoire the technical difficulty of projecting the various layers within a texture so that those of greater melodic prominence are heard, otherwise known as ‘balancing’, is often considerable. With only one hand, this challenge is likely to be even greater, yet it is not one at which Godowsky baulks. In fact, there are

numerous occasions where the texture of the transcription is far more complex than that of the original, usually thanks to the addition of melodic lines. In demanding more of the left-handed player than one usually does of the two-handed pianist, Godowsky proves that the former may both match and exceed the capabilities of the latter.

Chopin's Etude op. 25 no. 4, shown in Ex 8a above, does not pose any particular difficulties in terms of balance. The study employs sectional repetition, which Godowsky uses as the basis for a transcription 'in the form of variations'.<sup>18</sup> At each restatement of the original theme, the texture becomes more complex and hence the difficulty of balancing each line increases. At the opening, shown in Ex. 8c above, the positions that the hand must adopt are extremely difficult to apprehend. As the transcription proceeds, the left hand continues to rotate about the thumb very quickly, shown in Ex. 11a, yet now it must also encompass running quavers in an accompanimental voice and an offbeat melody. In the same transcription Godowsky transforms the accompanimental line so that the pianist must contend with running triplets and the cross rhythms which result (see Ex. 11b). The amount of time it takes to practise these passages until they may be performed at a respectable tempo is disproportionate to their value as 'technical tools' to be deployed in the standard repertoire. Textures which involve rotation about a fixed point rarely include so many conflicting voices. In this case, Godowsky has created a texture of such monumental complexity that the exertion necessary to balance the voices outweighs the musical benefits. In this sense, the transcription represents a pinnacle of pianistic technical endeavour, yet its value as a compositional device is severely compromised.

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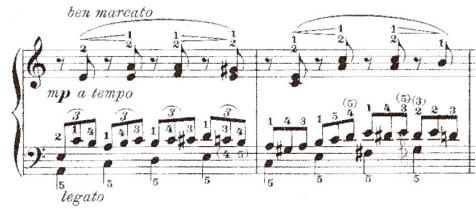
<sup>18</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. viii.

Example 11. Godowsky, Transcription no. 31

a) bb. 9-10



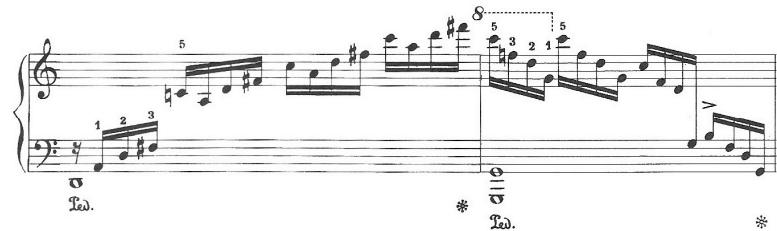
b) bb. 37-38



The texture of Chopin's first étude, shown in Ex. 12a, is comparatively straightforward. One must merely ensure that the semibreve chords of the left hand are balanced successfully with the single-line semiquaver figuration of the right. In the transcription, Godowsky continues to add melodic fragments to the original semiquaver line, as in Ex. 4b, yet by b. 19, shown in Ex. 12b, there are not two but three separate voices. These must be projected independently at a relatively fast tempo.

Example 12

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 1, bb.37-38



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 2, b. 19



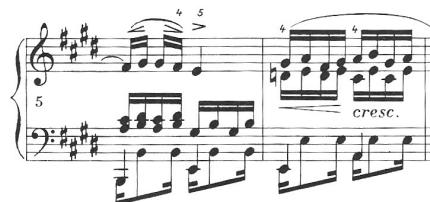
Once more, I would suggest that the technical effort needed here is out of proportion to the musical gain. At such a tempo, and with such fragmented melodic lines, the

listener would have great trouble discerning the direction of each voice in this passage, regardless of the pianist's dexterity in balancing the texture.

The number of voices to be balanced, in both original and transcription, is even greater in the third etude (see Exx. 13a and b). At b. 19 of Godowsky's transcription the left hand must encompass five separate voices. The fact that the pianist has only one hand is not the sole reason that the transcription is much more challenging than the original etude. Godowsky places an additional melodic fragment above the principal melodic line. Now the thumb must contain its strength and allow the second finger to take precedence. The texture, working as it does against the natural configuration of the left hand, merely adds to the difficulty of balancing this passage.

### Example 13

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 3, bb. 5-6



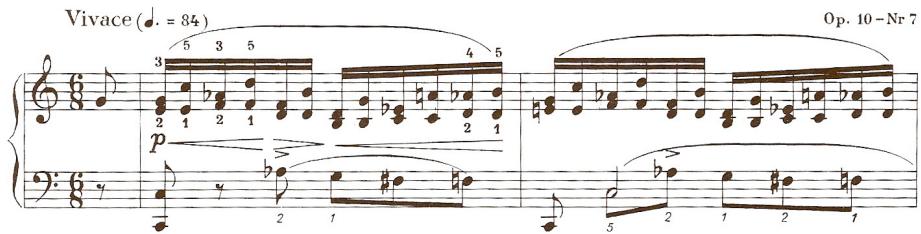
b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 5, bb. 5-6

In the examples cited above, the intricacy of the textures, and the strain of balancing them, is due primarily to the addition of voices not found in the original. While such technical accomplishment in the pianist who performs them is impressive, the extent to which these examples would inspire potential composers of left-hand piano music is questionable. In cases where Godowsky is forced to develop novel textures in order to incorporate multiple voices in the original, however, the results are much more gratifying.

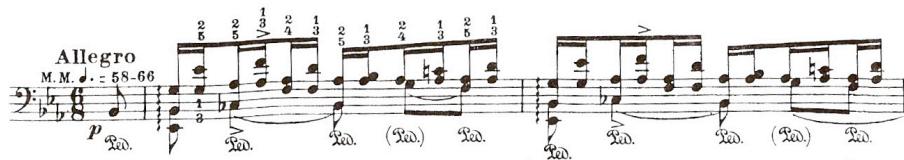
Melodic lines from Chopin's seventh etude, shown in Ex. 14a, are modified and combined in the transcription, preserving far more of the original material than one might think possible to encompass within the span of one hand (see Ex. 14b). Dyads and repeated notes from the right hand of Ex. 14a are combined in Ex. 14b with descending fragments in the lower voice, which are reminiscent of the descending chromatic line of the original. Were the G and F transposed downwards by an octave, the similarity would be yet more pronounced. With this ingenuity, Godowsky shows how such disparate material may be balanced successfully by one hand.

#### Example 14

##### a) Chopin, Etude op. 10 no. 7, bb. 1-2



##### b) Godowsky, Transcription of Etude op. 10 no. 7, bb. 1-2

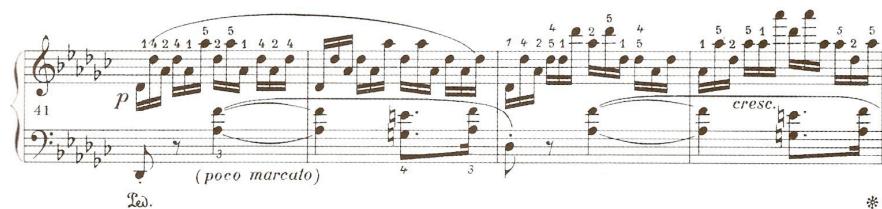


Despite the difficulty of balancing an arpeggiated semiquaver line with a melody within one hand, the melodic line heard in the left hand of Chopin's fifth etude, shown in Ex. 15a, is preserved in the transcription, as in Ex. 15b. It occurs in the higher voice on its first appearance, then in the lower on its second. While this is done to accommodate the arpeggiated figuration from the original etude, it does mean

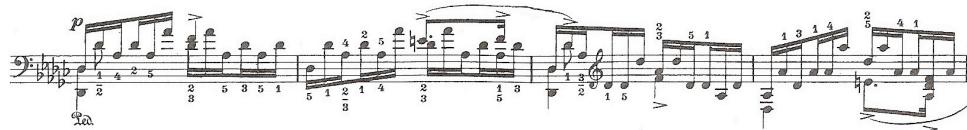
that all fingers of the left hand must be prepared to take on both melodic and accompanimental roles in quick succession and to balance accordingly. Yet again, Godowsky demonstrates how increased technical dexterity on the part of the performer may increase the number of textural options available to composers.

### Example 15

#### a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 5, bb. 41-44



#### b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 12a, bb. 41-44



### 4. Style brisé

It is frequently necessary to spread chords in the transcriptions, due either to extended chordal writing or to the complexity of multi-layered textures. While this often occurs of necessity and could be perceived as a technical compromise, Godowsky develops the concept to the extent that spread chords constitute an aesthetic and expressive feature in themselves. In this case, the *style brisé*, as it is termed, may be used for various expressive purposes.<sup>19</sup> In the transcription of Chopin's third etude, shown in Ex. 16a, the slight delay and rich sonority of the spread chord stresses the emotional

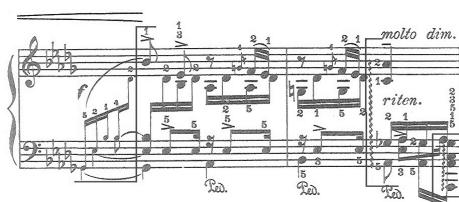
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<sup>19</sup> ‘Broken style’: a term for a broken or arpeggiated texture in music for plucked string instruments such as the keyboard, lute or viol. The term is most commonly applied to seventeenth-century French music, but here refers to the use of spread chords.

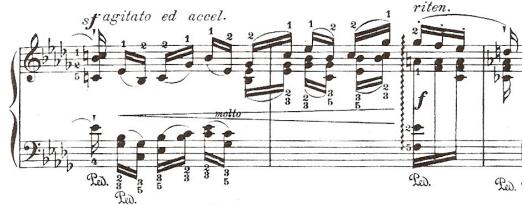
intensity of the passage. The spread has a similar effect a little later on, as in Ex. 16b, yet here it also accentuates a climax. At the beginning of the transcription, shown in Ex. 16c, the spread would necessitate a slight delay, yet, far from being a disadvantage, this forces the pianist to emphasize the upwards leap of a fourth in the melodic line in much the same way that a singer might. Leaps on the piano are so much more straightforward than on other instruments, or for the voice, that pianists are often inclined to underplay their expressive significance. The apparently reduced physical capacity of the one-handed pianist may in fact prompt an increased awareness of the significance of register.

Example 16. Godowsky, Transcription no. 5

a) bb. 7-8



b) bb. 36-38.1



c) bb. 1-2



Spread chords are a common enough cliché at the end of late-romantic piano pieces where they are used to emphasise closure. Godowsky uses this convention in his transcription of Chopin's eighth etude, shown in Ex. 17, yet as the chords on the higher staves are not spread, he gives the impression that two hands are playing. In this case, the superposition of spread chords with those whose notes are struck

simultaneously contributes to an aural deception and belies the perceived limitations of the medium.

Example 17. Godowsky, Transcription no. 16a, bb. 92-93



## 5. Key

Godowsky comments on numerous occasions that the lower register of the piano, to which the left hand is more often restricted, is more resonant than and ‘superior’ in tone quality to the higher range.<sup>20</sup> This is reflected to some degree in his choice of key in the transcriptions. Of the twelve etudes which comprise op. 10, five are in the original key and four of these are played either one or two octaves lower than the original, as this both enables a more natural position for the pianist while creating a ‘deeper’ sound. Within the seven studies that are transposed, Godowsky seems to demonstrate a preference for flatter keys, whose more mellow characteristics he may associate with the left hand. Etudes op. 10 nos. 1, 3, 7 and 8 are transposed downwards from C, E, C and F major to D, D, E and G major respectively. In the case of op. 10, nos. 1 and 3, this helps the player technically. The altered angle of the wrist that the transposition entails makes the figuration slightly easier to encompass. Black keys occur more often in the transcriptions and, as they are slightly shallower than the white, may be depressed with less effort. Yet they are also narrower, so a

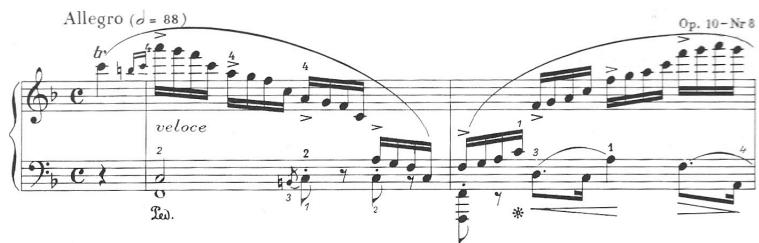
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<sup>20</sup> As in Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vii, and ‘Piano Music for the Left Hand’, p. 299.

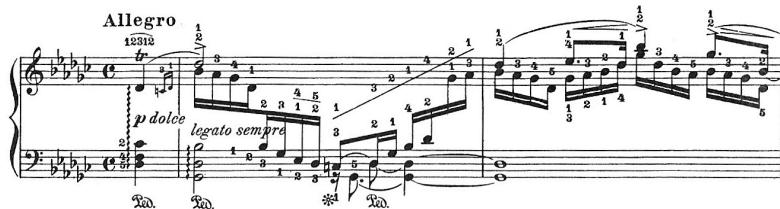
pianist must approach them with greater precision to avoid missing the note. This problem is particularly acute in the transcription of op. 10 no. 8, as the arpeggiated figure, which was confined principally to the white notes in the original (see Ex. 18a) is now distributed over the black (see Ex. 18b).

### Example 18

#### a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 8, bb. 1-2



#### b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 16a, bb. 1-2



If Godowsky were to express a preference for black keys, whether easier to play or not, this might also be manifested in transpositions to keys with many sharps. The only etudes which are rewritten with sharper key signatures, however, are op. 18 nos. 9 and 12 which are transposed from F and C minor to F $\sharp$  and C $\sharp$  minor respectively, and for an evident reason. These are the two of the op. 10 Etudes where the left hand is encumbered with the greatest technical difficulty in the original. Godowsky was aware that most people who attempted his transcriptions would already be familiar with Chopin's *Etudes*. In attempting to improve their technique and stamina, he would surely not wish for them to merely replicate passages they had

already learnt.

## 7. Fingering and the sustaining pedal

The pianistic technical accomplishment pioneered in Godowsky's transcriptions is impressive and reveals the astonishing potential of the solo left hand, both from a textural and, at times, an expressive perspective. It is important, however, not to underestimate how daunting the complexity of these transcriptions is, even to the modern-day player who may, perhaps, be accustomed to textures of greater complexity than would a pianist of the late-nineteenth century. Godowsky possessed an instrumental technique which astonished most of his contemporaries. The critic, Ernst Taubert, expressed his admiration for the transcriptions, premiered by Godowsky in 1900, yet doubted that they would enter the mainstream repertoire as they were 'only calculated for the abnormal abilities of their author'.<sup>21</sup> With this in mind, Godowsky provides very clear fingering and pedalling indications throughout the transcriptions, which he regarded as of a 'revolutionary character'.<sup>22</sup> His aim, after all, was to reveal the options available both to players and to composers for the left hand. In order to achieve this, he was not content merely to present the transcriptions as a *fait accompli*. Players must be led through the works and their complexities, particularly those of a contrapuntal nature, must be made intelligible. Thus fingering and pedal indications often serve more of a didactic purpose than an expressive one.

In Exx. 8c and 19 above, the fingering is extremely detailed. This helps to maximise the performer's efficiency by minimising the amount of superfluous movement, yet also serves as a valuable aid to initial comprehension. The textures of

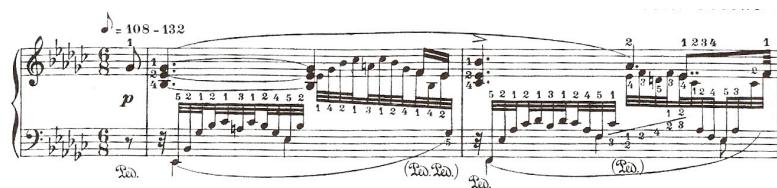
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<sup>21</sup> Ernst Taubert, *Die Post* (Berlin, 1900) in Edel, *Piano music for One Hand*, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. iii.

many of the left-hand transcriptions are so unfamiliar that it takes far longer to assimilate them that it would two-handed textures of comparable complexity. In Godowsky's Transcription no. 31, shown in Ex. 8c, it is possible to 'read' the fingerings to a similar degree that one reads the notes, which accelerates the learning process immeasurably. While previous composers had written melodic lines to be sustained in the middle voice, surrounded by accompanimental figuration, it is unusual to find examples where one hand is stretched to such a degree, and without substantial aid from the pedal. It is possible, using Godowsky's fingerings, to play the whole of this excerpt *legato* without using the pedal, although, for the sake of expediency and to reach a respectable tempo, one might resort to its occasional application in performance. In his transcription no. 13, shown in Ex. 19, the fingerings are not as necessary, since the texture is easier to assimilate, yet the high level of detail shows how seriously Godowsky took the didactic purpose of these transcriptions.

Example 19. Godowsky, Transcription no. 13, bb. 1-2



Godowsky's pedal indications are unusually frequent and the instructive passage on their use in the Preface to the transcriptions implies that they were written with the student in mind.<sup>23</sup> They usually denote nothing more than that consecutive

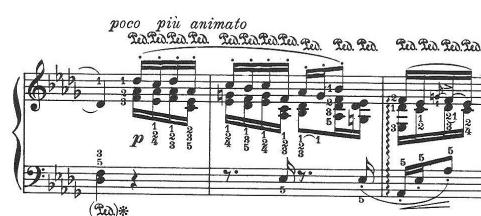
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<sup>23</sup> Comments such as 'the player should bear in mind, that different parts of the instrument require a different treatment of the pedal' and that the una corda is 'not only used in order to soften the

harmonies should not be blurred, as in Exx. 20a and 20b where a change of pedal is marked with each semiquaver and each quaver respectively. While the effect of the pedal indications is relatively superficial, the pedal itself is of vital importance in these transcriptions. Godowsky stated that in playing music for the left hand alone ‘the damper-pedal becomes so important in its function that it almost replaces the other hand’.<sup>24</sup> It enables one to sustain the tone when the hand must play several voices at once and maintain their individual characters. The variations in pedalling which one would need to accommodate complexity of multi-layered textures in the transcriptions, however, are impossible to dictate. In this case, Godowsky is restricted by musical notation and must rely on the performer’s experience and intuition.

#### Example 20. Godowsky.

a) Transcription no. 5, bb. 21-23.1



b) Transcription no. 21, bb. 1-3.1



#### 8. Contrary motion

While Godowsky has provided an impressive litany of what may be accomplished by the left hand alone, there are textures which are virtually impossible to adapt for the medium. Pronounced contrary motion is one such example as, while one hand may leap large distances, it clearly cannot move in two directions at once. Where contrary motion does occur in the original etudes, it is often omitted in the transcription, as in

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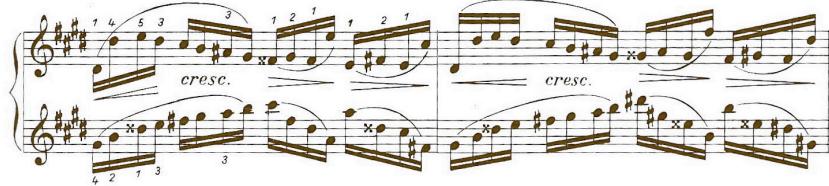
tone but also to obtain a different and somewhat nasal timbre’ show that Godowsky did not intend the transcriptions purely for the experienced pianist (Godowsky, *Studien*, p. vi).

<sup>24</sup> Godowsky, ‘Piano Music for the Left Hand’, p. 299.

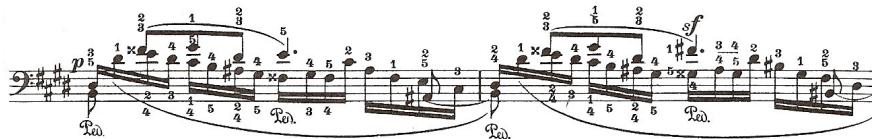
b. 41.3-4 and b. 42.3-4 of Exx. 21a and 21b.

### Example 21

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 4, bb. 41-42



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 6, bb. 41-42

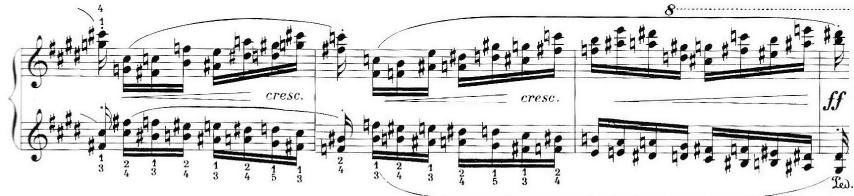


Despite this, there are a few examples of passages in contrary motion which Godowsky manages to preserve, albeit on a reduced scale. Ex. 22a shows the most explicit example of contrary motion found in both op. 10 and op. 25 of the Chopin etudes, which occurs in the third etude. In the transcription, shown in Ex. 22b, the original diminished harmonies are largely lost and even the upper line, which carries the greatest melodic significance, is altered, yet the original rhythm and phrase structure are maintained. The gestural effect of this passage is significantly diminished, although Godowsky does manage to preserve some of the contrary motion from the fourth semiquaver of b. 40 to b. 41, in the remaining three semiquavers of b. 41.1 and from bb. 41.2-42.1.

The contrary motion of Chopin's eighth etude, shown in Ex. 23a, is not preserved in the transcription but reconfigured (see Ex. 23b). The hands move in contrary motion in b. 37.2-4 of Ex. 23a and change direction with each crotchet beat.

### Example 22

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 3, bb. 39-42.1



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 5, bb. 39-42.1

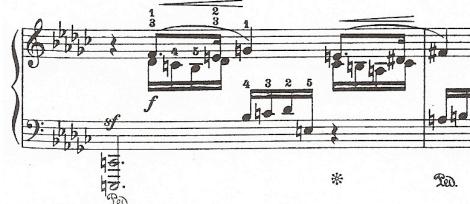


### Example 23

a) Chopin, op. 10 no. 8, b. 37-38.1



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 16a, b. 37-38.1



Thus, at b. 37.2 both hands move inwards whereas at b. 37.3 both move away from each other. As the left hand alone cannot move outwards and inwards about a central point simultaneously, Godowsky changes the direction on alternate crotchet beats. Accordingly, in Ex. 23b at b. 37.2, the left hand moves upwards and then rotates towards the bass at b. 37.3.

## 9. Fugal textures

Imitative fugal textures are also presumed to lie beyond the capacity of the left hand alone. They are generally irrelevant to the transcriptions, being absent from the

original études. Yet, in line with his personal compositional style, Godowsky was keen to ‘expand the peculiarly adapted nature of the instrument to polyphonic, polyrhythmic and polydynamic work’ in these transcriptions, and examples of complex contrapuntal writing on a small scale are numerous.<sup>25</sup> On a structural level, the only transcription which reflects a contrapuntal aesthetic is that of op. 25 no. 4, shown in Ex. 11 above. The continuous repetition of the original thematic statement and its successively more elaborate variations are reminiscent of the chaconne.

Some 15 years later, Godowsky was to write an explicitly fugal piece for the left hand alone, the Prelude and Fugue *B.A.C.H.*, thus situating himself in a canonical tradition encompassing works by Bach, Liszt and Reger. Godowsky described this as “a real fugue in three voices [with] inversions, contractions, pedal points and all kinds of devices on B-A-C-H”.<sup>26</sup> The narrow range of the theme, combined with repetitive motivic, rhythmic and harmonic schemes, detracts from the musical impact of the work, yet it does at least show that the left hand can articulate fugal textures.

## 10. Aural effect

Despite the limited ability of the left-handed pianist to play prolonged passages in contrary motion or to encompass fugal textures, the overall impression of a performance of the left-hand transcriptions is of formidable technical competence. All transcriptions, moreover, sound as texturally complete as the originals. The transcription of op. 10 no. 6, shown in Ex. 19 above, is almost ludicrously elaborate. The original étude, shown in Ex. 24, is extremely simple and, as with op. 10 no. 9 shown in Ex. 10, this seems to have tempted Godowsky to more pronounced flights of

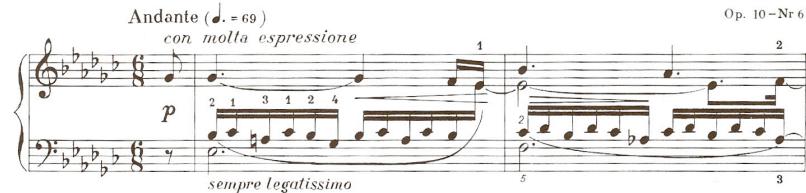
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<sup>25</sup> Godowsky, *Studien*, p. iii.

<sup>26</sup> Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 61.

fancy. While it is still possible to project the melody above the accompanimental demi-semiquavers, the necessarily slower tempo reduces its expressive effect.

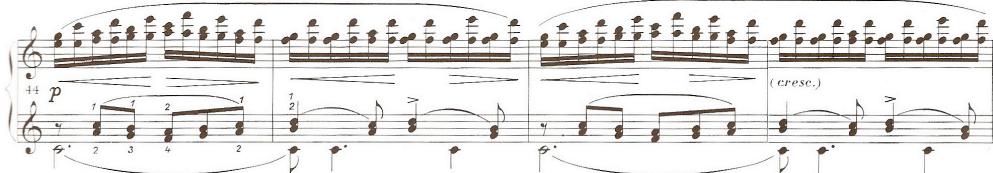
Example 24. Chopin, op. 10 no. 6, bb. 1-2



On occasion, Godowsky uses octave displacement to exaggerate the impression of ‘two-handedness’. Towards the end of Chopin’s seventh étude, shown in Ex. 25a, a melody is repeated twice in the same register. In his transcription, shown in Ex. 25b, the second statement of the melody is transposed downwards by an octave. By transforming bb. 46-7 into an antiphonal answer to bb. 44-5, Godowsky endows both statements of the melody with independent agency, reinforcing the impression that they are played by separate hands.

Example 25

a) Chopin, Etude op. 10 no. 7, bb.44-47



b) Godowsky, Transcription no. 15a, bb. 44-47

The most compelling attribute of the transcriptions lies neither in their technical merit, nor in the compositional possibilities they unveil, but in their effect. Many audiences who hear these transcriptions in concert will already be familiar with Chopin's original etudes and aware of the technical difficulties these pose. To hear a left-handed pianist dashing across the keyboard in the transcriptions with as much flair as a two-handed pianist, while handling additional melodic material, creates quite an impression. From an aural perspective the pianist's one-handedness is concealed, yet, visually, given the probable exertion on the part of the player, one's perception of a performer struggling with adversity is exacerbated. The disjunction between aural illusion and visual actuality posits the body as a central expressive element and it is this aspect which proves most illuminating and intriguing in subsequent composers' approaches to the left-hand piano concerto.

## Chapter 2. Concealing Disability: Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*

In the following two chapters I shall examine Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* and Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21 in relation to the lexicon of left-hand techniques gleaned from Godowsky's transcriptions of Chopin's *Etudes* in the previous chapter. After considering each composer's approach to left-hand piano technique, I shall investigate in which ways each work is 'one-' or 'two-handed' and how variations in texture and register enable one to experiment with notions of 'left-' or 'right-handedness'. Exploration of physical gesture and of visual perception of the performer in concert will contribute to a clearer understanding of how audiences may relate to the medium.

When recounting his approach to writing a work for left-hand piano and orchestra, Ravel refers to a 'problem' which he sets out to solve. His principal concern is to 'maintain interest in a work of extended scope while utilising such limited means'.<sup>1</sup> For Ravel the notion of limitation is key to the genre and something which has either to be concealed or overcome: he declares that his intention in this concerto is to give the impression of 'a part written for two hands' in a 'style... which the traditional concerto is partial to'.<sup>2</sup> Thus it seems that he is attempting to compensate for the performer's handicap and to 'normalise' the situation. It is worth noting, however, that at times he does use one-handed textures, which often function as an ironic commentary on the concerto's largely two-handed sonority.

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<sup>1</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview to the *Daily Telegraph* Ravel stated: '*Dans une oeuvre de ce genre, l'essentiel est de donner, non pas l'impression d'un tissu sonore léger, mais celle d'une partie écrite pour les deux mains. Aussi ai-je recours ici à un style beaucoup plus proche de celui, volontiers imposant, qu'affectionne le concerto traditionnel*' ['In a work of the kind, it is essential to give not only the impression of a light sound texture, but of that of a part written for two hands. I also had recourse here to a style much closer to that which the traditional concerto is fond of' (my translation)] in Jourdan-Morhange *Ravel d'après Ravel*, p. 77.

Maurice Ravel visited Vienna in 1930 and was commissioned to write the *Concerto pour la main gauche* in D major by the pianist Paul Wittgenstein. He completed the work in the autumn of 1931.<sup>3</sup> Prior to commencing, Ravel studied Godowsky's transcriptions of the Chopin *Etudes*, as well as Saint-Saëns' *Six Etudes*, op. 135, Scriabin's *Prelude and Nocturne*, op. 9, Czerny's *Two Etudes*, op. 735 and Alkan's *Fantasie in A flat*, op. 76 no. 1.<sup>4</sup>

In an interview published in *Le Journal* in 1933, Ravel stated that the amputation of Wittgenstein's right arm following a war injury 'poses a rather arduous problem for the composer'.<sup>5</sup> Works which attempt to 'resolve the problem' are extremely rare and, while the best known might be Saint-Saëns' *Six Etudes*, these avoid the most significant issue, that of maintaining interest in a large-scale work, because of their 'brevity and sectionalisation'.<sup>6</sup> Despite the formidable challenge of writing a concerto for a one-armed player, Ravel conceded that 'the fear of difficulty... is never as keen as the pleasure of contending with it, and, if possible, of overcoming it'.<sup>7</sup> In his attempt to 'overcome' the problem he has much in common with Godowsky. The transcriptions of Chopin's *Etudes* represent an attempt to

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<sup>3</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 396.

<sup>4</sup> Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, p. 111. Edel mentions the composers from whom Ravel drew inspiration, but does not specify which individual works he studied. Godowsky wrote a number of pieces for the left hand but, with the exception of the transcriptions, these were published towards the end of his life. A *Symphonic Metamorphosis of the Schatz-Walzer Themes from 'The Gypsy Baron'* by Johann Strauss for Wittgenstein was finished in 1928 and a number of incidental pieces for left hand were published in 1930. Ravel is highly unlikely to have seen the latter prior to composition of the concerto and, as Wittgenstein disliked Godowsky's *Symphonic Metamorphosis*, it seems improbable that he would have recommended it to Ravel as a model. Therefore, we can conclude that Ravel examined the transcriptions rather than other works by Godowsky. Saint-Saëns wrote only the *Six Etudes*, op. 135 for the left hand and Scriabin's output for the medium consists entirely of the *Prelude and Nocturne*, op. 9. Czerny wrote three etudes for the left hand over the course of his career, but only the *Two Etudes*, op. 735 were published prior to 1972. Similarly, although Alkan wrote a *Fantasie in A flat*, op. 76 no. 1 and an *Etude*, op. 35 no. 8, only the former was published during Ravel's lifetime.

<sup>5</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 396.

<sup>6</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 396.

<sup>7</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 396.

conquer a technical problem of Godowsky's devising in order to develop piano technique and, by extension, resources available to the composer.

In the following discussion of left-hand techniques in the *Concerto pour la main gauche*, the majority of which are pioneered in Godowsky's transcriptions, I shall consider how Ravel endeavours to conceal the one-handedness of the performer and to what extent he succeeds. Techniques are discussed in the same order as in the study of Godowsky's transcriptions in the previous chapter, with additional consideration of the concerto's large-scale structure.

## 1. Melodic use of the thumb

Ravel was not slow to exploit the inherent strength of the thumb in the *Concerto pour la main gauche*. Its use in extended melodic passages is ubiquitous. Vlado Perlemuter, a leading exponent of Ravel's music who worked closely with the composer from 1927, attributes the use of the thumb for this purpose to Ravel's superior intuition. However, it also features heavily in almost every work of the left-hand repertoire, and is used extensively in Godowsky's transcriptions.<sup>8</sup>

In this concerto, every principal melodic statement is played almost entirely by the thumb. During bb. 36-57, in the first cadenza, the melody is at the top of a chordal texture and alternates antiphonally with an elaborated D pedal-note below (see Ex. 26a). Although isolating the melody from the chords to which it belongs is relatively straightforward, the added resonance of the D pedal-note and of the extended pedal markings complicates balance of the overall texture. At bb. 83-4, the

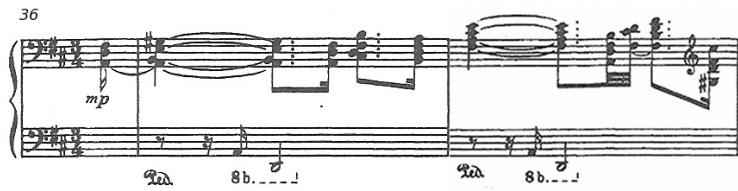
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<sup>8</sup> 'Avec son intuition, Ravel a résolu le problème mélodique posé par le fait qu'il n'ya qu'une seule main en faisant jouer la partie mélodique de l'accord... par le pouce, doigt fort et qui a plus de poids dans la main' ['With his intuition, Ravel resolved the melodic problem created by the fact that there is only one hand by making the thumb, a strong finger which has more weight in the hand, play the melodic part of the chord' (my translation)] in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d'après Ravel*, p. 79.

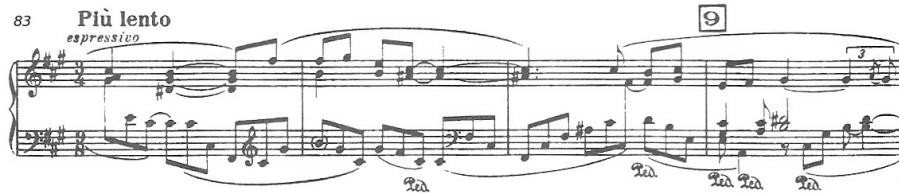
second theme is more intricately bound with subordinate voices and, in order to project the melody successfully, weighting of individual fingers is as important here as precise use of the pedal. (See Ex. 26b.)

Example 26. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 36.3-8



b) bb. 83-4

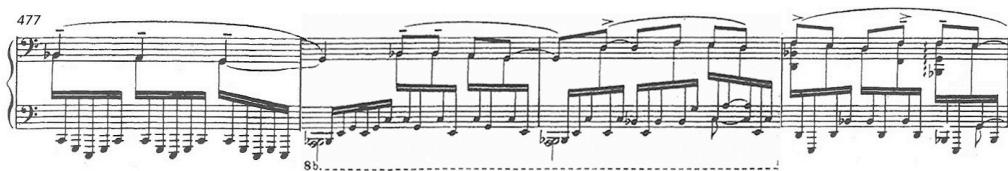


At bb. 477-80, in the second cadenza, the melody, yet again, is played almost entirely by the thumb (see Ex. 27a). This material is a reconfiguration of the opening where it was played on contrabassoon, with growling accompaniment from the double basses. At the re-appearance of the second theme from b. 83 at b. 485 (shown in Ex. 27b), the rapidity of the demi-semiquaver accompaniment necessitates extremely nimble passagework, while the difficulty of projecting the melody clearly above such a welter of notes is compounded. For the majority of the time, Ravel utilises the inherent strength of the thumb, placing the melody in the top line of the texture. Noticeable exceptions to this occur at bb. 495 and 498 (see Ex. 27c), where the appearance of a counter-melody in triplets in the lower voice complicates matters. However, as every extended melodic statement in Ravel's piano concerto for two

hands in G major is also in the top line of the texture, it seems that his choice to do likewise in the left-hand concerto reflects his personal style more than it does the demands of the medium.

Example 27. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

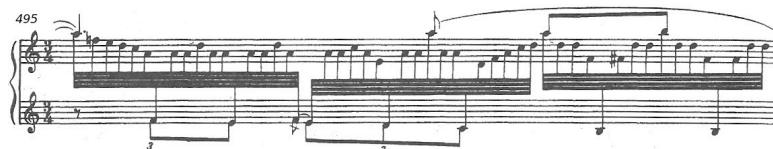
a) bb. 477-80



b) b. 485.3-6



c) b. 495



In the central section, which is essentially a second movement played *attacca*, the thumb is also used in this way, although melodic passages are comparatively fragmentary. At bb. 138-42, the thumb occupies its ‘default’ position at the top of the triadic texture and is thus responsible for the melodic line (see Ex. 28a). Vlado Perlemuter recommended using the thumb not only to project a melody above accompanimental figuration in this concerto but very often elsewhere, particularly at bb. 152-5, where it helps to ‘underline the rhythmic stature of the passage’ (see Ex.

28b).<sup>9</sup> Whether or not Perlemuter was doing so on Ravel's recommendation is a moot point, but this does at least demonstrate an interesting facet of the work's reception.

Example 28. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 138-41



b) bb. 152-5



## 2. Span

Throughout the concerto, the demands put on the performer in the span of chordal writing, and the range that one must traverse over short periods of time, are extreme. Unsurprisingly, when asked what the greatest technical difficulties particular to this concerto were, Vlado Perlemuter cited the 'wide-ranging movement and leaps'.<sup>10</sup> The pianist is frequently required to cover large areas of the keyboard at great speed, as evidenced at bb. 33-4 (see Ex. 29a) with the opening gesture of the first cadenza. Here the pianist strikes a low A octave, which is held by the pedal, then moves to the higher end of the keyboard prior to an extended chordal flourish returning to the A. This falling opening gesture is characteristic of the Romantic piano concerto and is

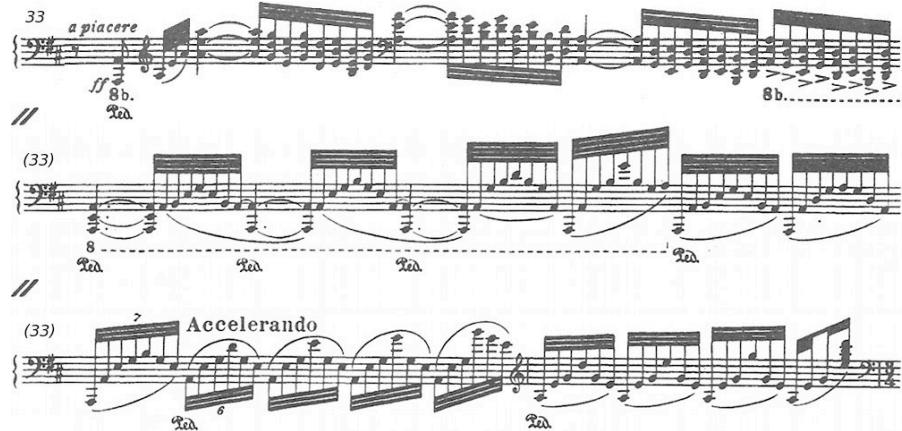
<sup>9</sup> 'Vous remarquez que j'utilise le plus possible le pouce, même dans les passages qui ne sont pas seulement chantants. Dans ce cas-ci, j'ai trouvé ce doigté qui permet de souligner la carrure rythmique du passage' [‘You notice that I use the thumb as much as possible, even in the passages which are not purely *cantabile*. In this case, I have found that this fingering allows me to underline the rhythmic profile of the passage’] (my translation) in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d'après Ravel*, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Il y a deux difficultés: les grand déplacements et les écarts’ (‘There are two difficulties: the wide-ranging movement and the leaps’) (my translation) in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d'après Ravel*, p. 78.

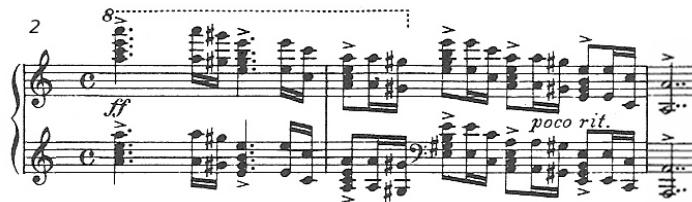
found in Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 16 and Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 54 among others (see Ex. 29b).

### Example 29

#### a) Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 33-4



#### b) Grieg, Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 16, bb. 2-4



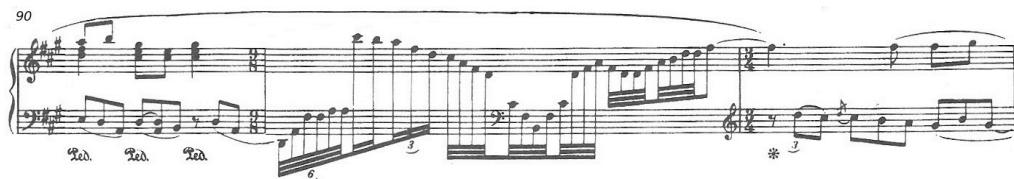
Once the low A is re-attained, rising, arpeggiated flourishes gradually increase in size until they break free from the bass note and accelerate to the top of the keyboard. As an opening statement by a one-armed pianist, this rapid and elaborate traversal of the keyboard is a striking gesture and dispels any doubts an audience may have held regarding the performer's technical competence.

Dramatic use of a wide span and registral dexterity in this way is common throughout the concerto, yet rapid, extended flourishes are also used in more modest circumstances. When placed between two melodic statements, such gestures serve to

articulate melodic structure. In bb. 90-91, which form part of the second principal theme of the concerto, the decadence of the arpeggiated demisemiquaver passage may initially seem out of keeping with the restrained poignancy of surrounding melodic material (see Ex. 30a). Yet the challenge rests solely with the performer, who must summon both delicacy and agility, characteristics which are not habitually associated with the left hand. Later on, at bb. 204-8, a glissando serves both to signal the end of one melodic statement and to herald the beginning of the next (see Ex. 30b). Once again, the rapid and virtuosic traversal of range, particularly in the context of a passage which is so tightly conceived rhythmically, contributes to the exuberant energy of the whole.

Example 30. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 90-1



b) bb. 204-8



Wide-ranging leaps are used frequently throughout the concerto and often give the aural impression that the pianist is in possession of two hands, with an artificially exaggerated span. The leaping chords in bb. 35-6, shown in Ex. 31a, instil a rhetorical tone and a sense of gravitas, following the virtuosic outburst of the preceding cadenza, shown above in Ex. 29a. This gesture is striking and clearly articulates the

entry of the first theme. As each chord is split into two parts, two separate registers, or perhaps two hands, are implied. At b. 57, the three chords which precede the ‘Strepitoso’, bolstered by the resonance of the pedal, traverse the entire keyboard in an imposing manner before dissipating in a flurry of hemidemisemiquavers (see Ex. 31b). The sheer breadth of sonority, power and drama of these clearly articulated gestures belie any limitation of span on the performer’s part.

Example 31. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 35-6



b) b. 57

At bb. 437-40, a rapid alternation of register, as the hand leaps between two opposing lines, gives the aural impression of a large span and a two-handed texture yet is also very effective on a visual plane (see Ex. 32a). The pianist accelerates until b. 458, culminating in a *fff* glissando across the entire keyboard before tumbling back to an elaborated D pedal-note at b. 460 (see Ex. 32b). This coincides with the climax of the work as material from the first section of the concerto returns. The speed at

which the leaping chords are played, particularly towards the end of the passage, refutes any notion of limitation. From the audience's perspective, as the pianist's hand moves so quickly that it becomes blurred, change of register here functions both aurally and visually. With the rising glissando and subsequent plunge back to the bass, the pianist must master the span of the entire keyboard in one fell swoop with consummate technical prowess.

Example 32. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 437-40



b) bb. 457-60



At numerous points during the concerto, the left hand gives the aural impression that its span is larger than it is. Whereas, in the transcriptions, Godowsky achieved a similar effect with technical 'trickery', by artfully redistributing the texture, Ravel uses a quasi-orchestral timbre and exploits the resonant sonority of the lower register of the keyboard. In the first cadenza, shown in Ex. 26a above, the chords of the top line are widely spaced and the registral 'distance' between this line and the low pedal-notes is considerable. By deliberating opposing the sonorities of the low and central areas of the keyboard, and with such prolonged use of the sustaining pedal, the 'mass' of sound which results is not just 'two-handed' but almost orchestral in conception. Likewise, at bb. 477ff (shown in Ex. 27a above), the contrabassoon

theme from the opening of the concerto is placed in the top piano line and the murky accompaniment of the double basses appears in the lower octave; this shows that much of the second cadenza is conceived orchestrally yet, in practical terms, is still encompassed within the span of one hand. The use of a conspicuously deep register when combined with the sustaining pedal, as is surely implied, creates the impression of an immense ‘volume’ of sound, notwithstanding the quiet dynamic.

When the second theme appears, at b. 485 (see Ex. 27b above), one might be forgiven for assuming the pianist would need a third hand to deliver such textural complexity. The melody, marked *espressivo*, must be projected clearly above an exceptionally wide-ranging, arpeggiated accompaniment which is composed primarily of hemidemisemiquavers. Not only does the music give the impression that the pianist possesses two hands, but the performer here seems to transcend the notion of what is and is not possible. The aural dissimulation is complete.

At several points in the concerto, a technique reminiscent of Godowsky is used to give the impression that the hand has an exaggerated span, namely, pivoting in octaves about a fixed point (see Ex. 7b). At bb. 102-3, the pianist plays an accompanimental pattern in demisemiquavers which rotates around the thumb. The thumb, in turn, plays an implied melody whose pitches occur on each quaver beat (see Ex. 33a). The extended accompanimental passage at bb. 113-4 is constructed in much the same way, except that it provides only harmonic support (see Ex. 33b).

### **3. Balance of voices in multi-layered textures**

One might imagine that the difficulty of balancing voices in the solo part of a left-hand piano concerto is much less than in repertoire for left-hand piano alone. After all, the orchestra is responsible for a large proportion of the texture. Yet, as many

Example 33. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 102-3



b) bb.113-4



passages in the solo part of Ravel's concerto comprise broad and complex textures, and as clear distinction between melody and accompaniment is an integral element of his style, balancing the voices poses a considerable challenge. In taking on the work of two hands, as it were, the left hand is forced not only to encompass twice the number of notes, but also to fulfil a dual function, projecting a melody with one finger while accompanying with another.

Long pedal marks in the first cadenza, shown in Ex. 26a above, imply that all levels of the texture should be sustained, yet, with the low register and dense chordal writing, it is very difficult to balance voices, particularly on the modern instrument. An audience should be able to perceive the melodic line clearly, even while the elaborated D pedal-notes focus attention on the extreme bass of the instrument. The texture is vertically dense, yet the greatest challenge is that of sustaining and projecting conflicting lines horizontally while preserving clarity. Here, the performer is required to weight voices within specific chords, as in Godowsky's transcriptions, while using demi-pedalling, or even 'vibrato' pedal, to balance the timbres of

opposing registers.<sup>11</sup>

In b. 83ff, at the second theme, the ‘weighting’ of different fingers is even more vital (see Ex. 26b above). The pianist does not aspire here to an orchestral timbre but to a crystalline sonority. As the triplet accompanimental voice in the lower line moves concurrently with melodic material, rather than alternating antiphonally as in the first cadenza, the left hand must oscillate much more quickly between melodic and accompanimental function. Juxtaposition of duplet and triplet rhythms necessitates artful pedalling and the contorted positions which the hand must assume in order to sustain both lines are both unfamiliar to and surpass the requirements of much of the standard piano literature.

In the second cadenza, at b. 485 (shown in Ex. 27b above), the issue of balance is relatively two-dimensional. It is clear which voice is melodic and individual accompanimental notes must be as unobtrusive as possible, subsumed into the whole. Yet the sheer velocity of the hemidemisemiquavers, and the fact that the melody here, ‘*en dehors*’, should be particularly pronounced, requires swift alternation between melodic and accompanimental function within the left hand. This issue is particularly acute at b. 495, with the entrance of a counter-melody in the lower, less audible, voice (see Ex. 27c above). The triplet rhythm is a ‘new’ feature at this point, yet the audience barely has time to register its intrusion before we return to the duplet quavers of the melody.

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<sup>11</sup> Vlado Perlemuter highlighted the difficult of pedalling this section and recommended ‘vibrato’ pedalling, as often used in Debussy, to avoid overlapping and mixing the harmonies: ‘*L’emploi de la pédale est ici complexe. Il faut utiliser les demi-pédales “vibrato” ainsi qu’on les emploie souvent dans Debussy, pour éviter que les harmonies ne se chevauchent et ne se mélangent*’ [‘The use of the pedal is complex here. One must use half pedals in a ‘vibrato’ fashion as one does often in Debussy, to prevent the harmonies overlapping or mixing’ (my translation)] in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d’après Ravel*, p. 80.

#### 4. Style brisé

In Godowsky's transcriptions, spread chords are used either as a compromise, to enable the pianist to encompass gigantesque chordal writing (see Ex. 17), or as an expressive gesture (see Ex. 16). In Ravel's concerto, spread chords frequently contribute to a rhetorical tone. In bb. 35-6 (see Ex. 31a above), the unconventional notation implies that the chord be split into two parts, with the upper dyad sounding separately. This results in a pronounced physical gesture, as the left hand sways heavily between the lower notes and the dyad. The comparatively weighty rhythm, the return to a low register after the opening of the first cadenza (see Ex. 29a above), and the quasi-cadential progression of the gradually accumulating cluster chord introduces a theatrical element. The solemnity of this moment grounds the opening gesture and allows time for the initial excitement of the audience to abate. Thus it functions as an emotional transition to the appearance of the first theme at b. 36, shown in Ex. 26a above.

Throughout the presentation of this first theme, the *style brisé* is not notated, but would be a necessity for most pianists as the span of the chords is so great. Vlado Perlemuter claims that, while Ravel was opposed to spreading chords in *Le Gibet* from *Gaspard de la Nuit*, whose character is similar to that of this passage, in the left-hand concerto it is possible.<sup>12</sup> One may attempt to minimise the disruption caused by spreading the chords as quickly as possible, yet I would argue that this detracts from the expressive impact of the passage. Whether one spreads the chord before or after

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<sup>12</sup>. *Comme dans Le Gibet, certains accords, des dixièmes et onzièmes, posent un problème d'exécution pour beaucoup de pianistes. Mais alors que dans Le Gibet, le caractère même du passage exclut la moindre idée d'un "arpeggiando" – Ravel s'y opposait d'ailleurs – il est possible dans le concerto de ne pas jouer ces accords plaqués, mais de les arpégier*. [As in *Le Gibet*, the execution of certain chords, tenths and elevenths, is difficult for many pianists. But while in *Le Gibet*, the specific character of the passage forbids the slightest suggestion of an 'arpeggiando' – Ravel opposed this moreover – it is possible in the concerto not to play these chords in one go, but to arpeggiate them. (My translation.)] in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d'après Ravel*, p. 79.

the beat, the chord is not ‘struck’ at a particular moment in time. This lack of simultaneity gives the impression of slight rhythmic dislocation, which adds an eloquence and dignity to the melody. An audience may associate the rhythmic dislocation with its cause, namely a one-handed pianist striving to encompass a wide span, and thus may empathise with the performer. The only explicitly spread chord in the concerto appears at b. 480 (see Ex. 27a above), coinciding with a *tenuto* mark on a repeated F, which imparts a vocal quality to the melodic rubato. It would be necessary for most pianists to spread chords preceding this, as the span is considerable, therefore it seems that this spread, notated explicitly, is not merely a practical necessity but also an expressive feature.

## 5. Register

Ravel’s use of register in the *Concerto pour la main gauche* reflects Godowsky’s preference for the ‘superior resonance’ of the lower portion of the piano, the customary domain of the left hand, and fosters a solemn character in the mode of a ‘traditional’ concerto.<sup>13</sup> The timbre used by Ravel at the very opening of the work is extremely distinctive. As mentioned above, the principal melody in the contrabassoon weaves through a murky and indistinct texture provided by the cellos and double basses, as shown in Ex. 34a. This characteristic choice of instrumentation sharply highlights a tessitura bias, which is reinforced by the use of low register in the piano in the first cadenza. One might be tempted to suggest that a low register constitutes the left-hand pianist’s ‘default’ position, yet the two conspicuously virtuosic and wide-ranging gestures which frame the first cadenza, as shown in Ex. 29a above, indicate that register is by no means constrained by physical limitation.

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<sup>13</sup> Godowsky, ‘Piano Music for the Left Hand’, pp. 298-300.

Example 34

a) Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 1-3

b) Ravel. Piano Concerto in G major, bb. 1-4

Such pronounced use of low register at the opening of the concerto, and the subdued tone, stand in direct contrast to the opening of Ravel's concerto for two hands in G major, scored for piccolo, drum, high piano and high strings, and written deliberately to reflect a 'divertissement' aesthetic (see Ex. 34b above).<sup>14</sup> The use of low register in the first cadenza of the left-hand concerto ensures that the 'mass' of

<sup>14</sup> In an interview with the journal *Excelsior* in 1931, Ravel stated, in relation to the concerto for two hands in G major, 'My only wish... was to write a genuine concerto, that is, a brilliant work, clearly highlighting the soloist's virtuosity, without seeking to show profundity'. On another occasion he remarked that it was entitled 'divertissement, or musical diversion' as 'one should not make pretentious assumptions about this concerto which it cannot satisfy', a criticism that he leveled at Brahms' 'symphonic concerto' (Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, pp. 485, 473, 494).

sound will be considerable. Exploiting the resonance of the bass of the instrument, may represent an attempt to sound more like a ‘two-handed’ work while avoiding associations of ‘stunt-like’ writing or virtuoso gimmicks that were part and parcel of much of the left-hand repertoire in the nineteenth century.

In the central section of the concerto, from b. 121 onwards, register is used to play with our expectations of what ‘one-’ and ‘two-handed’ or ‘left-’ and ‘right-handed’ textures might consist of. Register is no longer used in a specifically ‘left-handed’ way but is manipulated, as are certain textures, to give the aural impression of ‘left-’ or ‘right-handedness’, for example. The principal theme, beginning at b. 152, and shown in Ex.28b above, is written as a single line and, for its first nine bars, is contained within the span of an augmented octave. In the context of the concerto as a whole, this span may seem narrow. Moreover, the frequency of ‘single-line’ writing confers an explicitly one-handed character upon the central section. Where structural divides between iterations of the melody are articulated, they are accomplished with a glissando, as at b. 205 (shown in Ex. 30b above), rather than an arpeggiated flourish, as seen elsewhere in the concerto (see Ex 30a). A glissando is clearly audible as a one-handed gesture. The principal theme of the central section is initially heard, at bb. 152-3 (shown in Ex. 28b above), in a comparatively low register of the keyboard, yet it never has such close affiliation with extreme bass sonorities as does the first section. As the theme is contained within such a narrow span, it can be placed in different octaves while clearly defining these new registral areas. Thus it is ideally configured for registral play.

With the exception of the leaps at bb. 437ff (shown in Ex. 32a above), most of the central part of the concerto may be heard as ‘one-handed’. The preponderance of chordal writing and resonant use of the pedal, found so frequently in the first section,

is absent here. Yet, even in the central section, there are several attempts to build up the texture and to exploit the resonance of the bass register in order to emulate a two-handed sonority. In bb. 138-41, shown in Ex. 28a above, the melodic fragment is harmonised with parallel triads and the first iteration of the principal theme, shown in Ex. 28b, is low enough that it captures something of the ‘superior resonance’ of the bass register. While glissandi constitute one-handed gestures, they do provide a ‘wash’ of sound, which contributes to vibrancy of timbre. Subsequent appearances of the principal theme are harmonized with triads, as at bb. 168-79 (Ex. 35a), or with fifths, as at bb. 207-9 (Ex. 35b). Many of these ‘supplemented’ versions of the theme occur when placed in the central register of the keyboard and may represent an attempt to ‘simulate’ the resonance of the bass.

Example 35. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb. 168-70



b) bb. 207-9.



At bb. 246-7 (see Ex. 36a), notions of registral and textural signification come explicitly into play. Here the left hand executes rapid arpeggiated, semiquaver figuration in a high register. The pianistic texture and the orchestration, comprising piccolo, flute, harp and high strings, is closely related to the opening of Ravel’s two-handed piano concerto, shown previously in Ex. 34a.

There is a great deal of semiquaver figuration in the central section, the vast

Example 36. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

bb. 246-7

a) bb. 417-8

majority of which is high on the keyboard. Here, semiquavers are the shortest note value and are never associated with the principal theme, whose almost clumsy quaver rhythms are diametrically opposed to the fleet nature of Ex. 36a. The use of piccolo at this point, and of the E-flat clarinet at the reappearance of this material at bb. 417ff (Ex. 36b), establishes clear timbral and tessitura identification. In the context of the central section, semiquaver passages are conspicuously ‘virtuosic’ and, as they are also placed in a high register, are tantamount to a ‘right-handed’ texture.

Intriguingly, within the central section, such conspicuously right-handed material is only ever granted accompanimental function. More ‘significant’ melodic material is clearly identifiable as ‘left-handed’. The left hand, historically, has been

viewed as inferior, less able technically and is usually granted accompanimental function in a lower, less audible register. In a left-hand concerto, written for a one-armed pianist, there is also the stigma of disability through which the performer may be accepted as an object of pity or compassion, but not as a proactive instigator in his or her own right. In Ravel's concerto the left hand is clearly the sole protagonist, and in the central section, by initiating registral play and creating textures which are deliberately ambiguous, it is able to comment on and subvert conventional associations and functions of the left and right hands. Thus it redefines its own situation and expands the ambit of its expressive and symbolic range.

At bb. 304 *ff* (see Ex. 37) the principal theme of the central section is placed in the highest octave of the keyboard, as a single line without supplementary triads, and is marked ***pp***. Indeed, on the rare occasions that Ravel uses the two highest octaves of the keyboard, the material invariably consists of single-line writing. Ex. 37 shows the highest point of the entire concerto and no attempt is made to bolster the resonance of this passage. Rather, the thin sonority exaggerates its 'one-handedness'. Intriguingly enough, at the point where the concerto sounds most one-handed, the passage is placed in such a high register, combined with the otherworldly harmonics in the string section, that it comprises a grotesquely exaggerated caricature of a right-handed texture. Such parody mirrors both the extremely low range of the opening of the concerto (see Ex. 34b above) and the serious character of the first theme. Its openly mocking tone, treating the 'right hand' as a subject of fun, stands in stark contrast to the sincerity and solemnity of the characteristically 'left-hand' opening cadenza.

After this passage, the left hand attempts to reassert its identity prior to the return of the first theme at b. 459. Ex. 38 shows the lowest iteration of this 'stamping' passage, at bb. 373*ff*, which has been used previously in the central section to add

Example 37. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 304-5

Musical score for Example 37, page 304. The score includes parts for Bassoon (Fag.), Piano solo, 1st Violin (Div. in 3), 2nd Violin (Div. in 2), Viola (Div. in 2), and Cello/Bass (Div. in 8). The piano part is marked *p* and *pp*. The strings are marked *ppp* and *pizz.* The bassoon part is marked *mp* and *p*. The violins play eighth-note patterns. The viola and cello/bass parts show sixteenth-note patterns with dynamic markings like *sul G*, *sul D*, *sul SOL*, *sul RE*, *arco*, and *pizz.*

emphasis or to denote the end of a melodic section. Here it is placed in an extremely low register, rests statically on the tonic for nine bars and shares its rhythmic profile with the single-line theme of Ex. 28b.

Example 38. *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 373-377.1

Musical score for Example 38, page 373. The score shows a single line for Bassoon (Fag.) with dynamic marking *fff* and 6b.

Such explicit association with previously ‘left-hand’ passages can be viewed as an attempt to normalise the situation. At the end of the central section, with the leaping chords of bb.437ff (see Ex. 32a above), the return to a ‘two-handed’ texture

constitutes a climactic gesture and signals an end to parodic registral play. The ambiguity of registral and textural significance in the central section culminates here with the incredible speed of the leaps prior to a majestic reprisal of the first theme, and of conventional left-hand material, at bb. 457-8 (see Ex. 32b above). With such complexity of registral discourse in the concerto, Vlado Perlemuter's assertion that that one 'would not attain the same expressive unity' in playing the concerto with two hands as one would with one seems particularly apt.<sup>15</sup>

With the return of the opening material at b. 457 (Ex. 32b above), the pianist returns to the lowest element of the opening cadenza, the elaborated D pedal-note. This is clearly for practical reasons as, in the midst of an orchestral tutti, the lowest register is that in which the pianist may contribute the greatest volume of sound, thanks to increased resonance. However, as the pianist is still likely to be inaudible here, the choice of a low register at a climactic point may also function as a visual cue. The left-handed pianist's body is at its most balanced when playing in the bass register. At *fff*, across the lower octaves of the keyboard, the performer gives the visual impression of natural power and of physical engagement. The lower register is shown to be the true home of the left-handed pianist as one 'returns to normality', after the central section.

At the opening of the second cadenza at b. 477 (shown in Ex. 27a above), identification with the low register is even more explicit, as the pianist imitates the contrabassoon and double basses. The melodic emphasis on the falling three-note motif, over a minor third (indicated with brackets in Ex. 39a), creates an oppressive sense, both emotionally, in its obsessive repetition, and in its weighty timbre. This

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<sup>15</sup> *Paradoxalement il serait plus difficile de jouer ce concerto avec les deux mains: on n'attendrait pas la même unité expressive* ['Paradoxically it would be more difficult to play the concerto with two hands: one would not attain the same expressive unity' (my translation)] in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d'après Ravel*, p. 79.

falling motif is twinned with the first theme when orchestra re-enters at b. 477 (Ex. 39b below) and its sombre gravity is only dispelled with the very brief return of material from the central section in the final five bars. In the final two bars of the piece (Ex. 39c), a fragmentary motif from the melodic line at b. 138 (Ex. 28a above), found in the central section, is placed in the lowest two octaves of the keyboard.

Example 39. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) bb.477-82

b) bb. 516-7

c) bb. 529-30

Once again, this is partly due to practical reasons as the low register enables a natural position for the pianist while the octaves, in the place of triads, allow for

greater power and volume. While a throwaway ending of this sort is unlikely to provide a platform for profound comment on symbolic discourse in the concerto, the use of a low register here may also help to ‘normalise’ the central section by allying a previously subversive motif with the more ‘traditional’ registral identity of the opening.

## 6. Fingering and the sustaining pedal

No fingering is marked in the *Concerto pour la main gauche*, and, as the work, unlike Godowsky’s transcriptions, is not explicitly didactic, one would not necessarily expect to find any. Unless a specific effect is intended, many composers prefer to leave fingering to the performer’s discretion, particularly as the size and shape of pianists’ hands vary so greatly. Vlado Perlemuter, when asked if there was advice he would like to give regarding fingering in the concerto, merely stated that ‘As there is only one hand, it is not possible to redistribute material [between the two hands]’.<sup>16</sup> Thus the left-handed pianist is constrained in this respect and one must find more ingenious, and personal, solutions to awkward passages.

Pedal indications occur at various points in the concerto, occasionally to striking theatrical effect. In bb. 35-36, shown in Ex. 31a above, the final D octave is struck silently while the cluster chord resonates. As the pedal is lifted, the D, as tonic resolution following the pianist’s initial outburst on the dominant, is presented both with great subtlety and marked impact. From b. 36 onwards, shown in Ex. 26a above, long pedal marks indicate that all lines of the texture should be sustained, yet, as precise use of the pedal will depend very much on the instrument and acoustic, more

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<sup>16</sup> ‘*Du fait qu’il n’y a qu’une main, il n’est pas possible de faire des arrangements*’ in Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d’après Ravel*, p. 80.

detailed indications here would be counter-productive.

In the second theme, beginning at b. 83, as in Ex. 26b above, pedal marks indicate how the performer may negotiate a complex and unfamiliar texture in order to preserve harmonic clarity. It is difficult to pedal this passage intuitively and thus the pedal markings, particularly in bb. 85-6, function in much the same way as Godowsky's fingerings in the transcription of Chopin's *Etude* op. 25 no. 4, shown in Ex. 8a above. In both cases, pedal marks, or fingering, 'lead' the performer and help one to encompass unorthodox hand positions.

## 7. Contrary motion

In Godowsky's transcriptions, contrary motion is used sparingly in an attempt to replicate Chopin's use of the technique in the *Etudes* for two hands. As such, it represents a purely technical exercise and achieves limited success on an expressive level. The *Concerto pour la main gauche* uses it for affective purposes, by playing upon an audience's preconceptions of what is or isn't possible for a one-handed pianist. By b. 57, in the first cadenza, shown in Ex. 31b above, Ravel has already stretched the limits of what one might think is viable for a left-handed pianist. From an audience's perspective, the cadenza barely sounds as if it could be contained by one hand and the use of contrary motion, prior to a final flourish in b. 57, forms a gripping denouement.

While one hand may encompass a wide range, dart across the keyboard with phenomenal dexterity and play with great power, it is incapable of moving in opposite directions simultaneously. Yet the chords at the 'Vivo', shown in Ex. 31b, give the aural impression that it is doing just that. The passage starts **p**, grows in volume and accelerates then slows down briefly, prior to a grand virtuosic flourish across the

entire keyboard. It constitutes an extremely impressive gesture aurally and the visual aspect, as the performer's horizontal arc of motion grows steadily throughout the 'Vivo', contributes significantly to the audience's excitement.

In bb. 437*ff* (see Ex. 32a above) contrary motion is employed on a much smaller scale. Within each bar, the top line of the leaping chords moves downwards whereas the lower line moves upwards. While this does not form as striking a gesture as the use of contrary motion in Ex. 31b, it does endow each voice with individual agency and enables the audience to perceive them more easily as two separate lines. Thus it contributes to the illusion of a two-handed texture. Yet again, the passage starts **p**, grows in volume and accelerates prior to the return of the first theme, which highlights the visual excitement created by the sheer speed and agility of the performer. Thus, in this concerto, contrary motion is used both for its dissimulative power, giving the aural impression of a two-handed texture, and for its affective impact, as the disjunction between aural illusion and visual disclosure contributes to the intensity of audience engagement.

## 8. Fugal textures

There are no explicitly fugal textures in this concerto, nor would one expect to find any, as fugal writing is used infrequently in piano concertos, be they one- or two-handed. While Godowsky proves that the left hand is capable of sustaining a fugal texture in his Prelude and Fugue *B.A.C.H.*, this is primarily an academic exercise of little musical interest. As the pianist is not responsible for the entire texture in a piano concerto, except in the solo cadenzas, the use of a fugal texture would not carry the same cachet as in solo piano music. One would have to entrust statements of the theme to other instruments, and thus the pianist would lose the distinction of

managing each and every line of the contrapuntal texture alone.

## 9. Large-scale structure

As Ravel's principal concern in writing a piano concerto for the left hand alone was the difficulty of maintaining 'interest in a work of extended scope while utilising such limited means', one might expect the large-scale structure of the piece to be influenced significantly by the physical limitation of the medium. The work is in one movement, yet within this frame is comparatively fragmented and lasts just under 16 minutes. The essentially tripartite form, as material from the first section returns after the completion of the second, is divided into extended solo passages, those where the orchestra plays alone and those where soloist and orchestra combine.

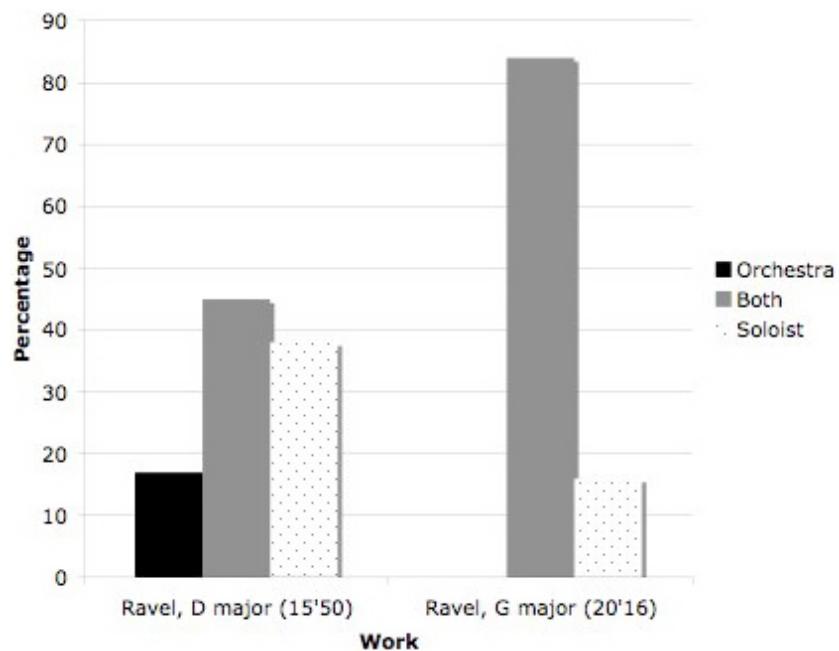
Figure 2 below indicates in what percentages Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* and his Piano Concerto in G major for two hands are divided into solo piano, orchestral and tutti passages.<sup>17</sup> In constructing this diagram, I initially noted which sections were played by the solo pianist, by orchestra alone and by all performers together, and for how long these sections lasted. In these particular works, passages which were clearly cadenzas lasted longer than 40 seconds, whereas solo piano passages, or those with orchestra alone, of less than 40 seconds were very much part of the ongoing dialogue and did not function as separate statements. I therefore decided that a passage should be longer than 40 seconds before it would be classified

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<sup>17</sup> In order to gather this data, I listened to recordings of Pedro de Freitas-Branco, conducting the Piano Concerto in G major under Ravel's supervision, as recorded in 1932 with Marguerite Long on piano and the Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux, and of Bruno Walter conducting the *Concerto pour la main gauche*, played by Paul Wittgenstein with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam, and recorded in 1937. Both recordings are available on the Urania label (URN 22.341) and, while I would not regard them as 'definitive' by any means, they are those over which Ravel or Wittgenstein exerted the greatest influence. There is no extant recording of Ravel conducting the entirety of the concerto. Only a few clips remain as part of a Pathé news reel, with Paul Wittgenstein as soloist and l'Orchestre Symphonique de Paris. This was first broadcast on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1933 and is currently available on the website of the Gaumont Pathé Archives.

as a new section. Thus, were the pianist to play a 35-second solo, in the midst of a passage where both orchestra and piano were playing, this would not qualify as a separate solo section. As a result, the bar chart in Figure 2 implies that the orchestra never plays without the soloist in Ravel's concerto in G major, which is clearly only true within the somewhat crude parameters of this study.

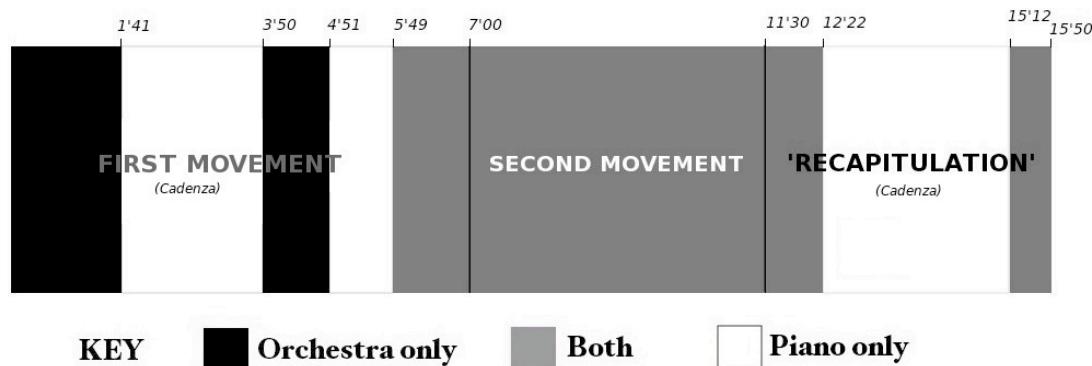
Figure 2. Bar chart showing timbral proportions of Ravel's two piano concertos



From the diagram in Figure 2 it is clear that, in the concerto for left hand, Ravel uses solo piano passages to a much greater extent than in his concerto for two hands, and that the orchestra is also granted a significant role, independently of the soloist. This contributes to the timbral sectionalisation of the work and is another way to maintain the audience's interest, in addition to varied orchestration, lively rhythmic characterization of themes and novel reinterpretations of registral and textural signification.

Ravel's use of the solo piano cadenza, in particular, constitutes an insightful comment on the challenges faced by the left-handed pianist. Figure 3 shows the progression of the concerto, the axis of time running from left to right.

Figure 3. Diagram of the form of Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*



It is clear that the solo piano cadenzas, in white, comprise a considerable proportion of the entire work. In particular, it is relatively unusual for the first statement by a pianist in a concerto to take the form of a prolonged cadenza. Cadenzas tend to function as technical showpieces, and the two in Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* are no exception. Yet in a left-hand concerto, the pianist also has a profound point to make. The concerto as a genre is often read as an allegory of the interaction between an individual and the crowd.<sup>18</sup> While this may take the form of cooperation, it can also imply a monumental struggle against unyielding opposition. In this case, the opposition which one would most readily identify with would be that of physical disability and of the prejudice associated with it. The sheer scale and technical accomplishment of both cadenzas in this concerto, however, confound the audience's expectations and affirm the soloist's expertise.

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<sup>18</sup> See Rosen, *The Classical Style*, p. 185 and Keefe, *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, p. 13.

## **10. Aural effect: how ‘one-’ or ‘two-handed’ is the concerto?**

The first cadenza aurally implies a two-handed player. The range covered and volume produced by the pianist, combined with rapid alternation between different techniques and between melodic and accompanimental function, all give the impression of a complete texture which, at times, aspires to an orchestral sonority. Ravel stated that the second theme, shown in Ex. 26b, was ‘treated pianistically as though written for two hands, with an accompaniment figure weaving about the melodic line’.<sup>19</sup> Placed in the central register of the keyboard this is the most conventionally two-handed passage in the concerto, although the use of the *una corda* may create a somewhat disengaged timbre. The central section, with its high prevalence of single-line writing, is the most ‘one-handed’, yet Ravel makes numerous attempts to conceal this fact and, with registral and textural play, complicates notions of what one-, two-, left- or right-handed figuration might consist of. Such shape-shifting is reflected in the second cadenza in the extremely rapid alternations the pianist must make between melody and accompaniment, as at b. 485 (see Ex. 27b), while the insouciant codetta, despite its brevity, unsettles any equilibrium that may have been restored previously.

Ravel’s attempt to create a concerto that sounds as if it were two-handed is largely successful. Yet it remains to ask how precisely the concerto functions on a visual and communicative level. An audience will be aware that the pianist is playing with only one arm. The increased physical exertion involved and the manifestly acrobatic character of certain passages will be visually clear. The performer, moreover, will be keenly aware of register, since, with only one arm, more effort is required to traverse the keyboard. This may also translate into a keener perception of register by the audience.

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<sup>19</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 396.

As the performer in the first theme of the first cadenza sways between the central and bass registers of the keyboard, shown in Ex. 26a above, this pendulum-like motion will encourage the audience to associate physical gesture with register. After the orchestra enters at b. 457 (see Ex. 32b above) material from the first cadenza is split between different instrumental groups, as can be seen at bb. 459-60 (see Ex. 40). The top line of Ex. 26a is entrusted to upper strings, high winds and horns, while the elaborated D pedal-note is given to the lower strings, low winds, trombones, timpani and piano. The pendulum-like motion of the pianist in the cadenza, as described earlier, is transformed here into a sonic motif as the orchestra itself sways between two timbral areas.

Thus left-handedness affects the work on numerous levels, both within the musical substance of the concerto itself and, in performance, through communication between player and listener. The sheer virtuosity with which Ravel negotiates the symbolic space generated by the notion of a left-handed pianist is remarkable and his indignation at Cortot's decision to play the concerto with two hands, fully justified.<sup>20</sup>

The technical achievement of Ravel's work is clear and, rather than constraining the expressive possibilities of the concerto, its one-handedness enhances the experience, both from a pianist's and from an audience's perspective. The numerous levels on which the left-handedness of the work is manifested adds an unexpected dimension to the communicative relationship inherent in performance and to an audience's involvement, achieved to a large extent by close interaction between

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<sup>20</sup> Cortot frequently played the *Concerto pour la main gauche* with two hands and performed it in his adapted version with Paul Paray conducting the Colonne Orchestra on December 19, 1937, nine days before Ravel's death. (See Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 327). Intriguingly enough, Cortot's recording of the work from 1939 with the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire* under Charles Munch appears to be played with the left hand alone. There are delays as he stretches up to the higher notes of a chord, a particularly high prevalence of wrong notes in the upper register of the piano, and leaps that are clumsier than one might expect from a pianist using both hands.

Example 40. Ravel. *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 459-60

The musical score for Ravel's Concerto pour la main gauche, page 459-60, shows a complex arrangement for a large orchestra and a piano solo. The piano solo part is prominent, with a glissando and dynamic markings fff and 8 b.... The orchestra consists of Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Mi b, Clarinet in Si b, Bassoon, Bassoon/Tuba, Tambourine, Piatti, G.C., Piano solo, 1st Violin, 2nd Violin, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. Various dynamics like f, ff, and p are used throughout the score.

sonic, physical and visual gesture. Yet, unique as this achievement is, Ravel's interpretation of what a left-hand piano concerto might be does not stand alone. Written ten years later, in an entirely different compositional style, Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, constitutes yet another exploration of the left-hand piano concerto and furnishes us with a drastically reworked perspective on the medium.

In *Divisions* Britten was keen not to conceal the performer's one-handedness and composed the work using a 'single line approach', in marked contrast to Ravel.<sup>1</sup> He stated, in the Preface to the facsimile of the full score, published by Boosey & Hawkes in New York in 1941, that he had 'tried to treat the problem in every aspect'. While Ravel referred to the one-handedness of the work as an 'arduous problem', which had to be overcome, Britten's 'problem' is somewhat less formidable and the issue of 'limitation' seems to be an irrelevance. A one-armed pianist is only perceived as 'limited', after all, when he or she is compared with a two-armed player. Every performer works within a particular set of parameters, which are in turn to be assessed and explored by the composer. Indeed, Britten was 'attracted from the start by the problems involved in writing a work for this particular medium, especially as I was ... extremely enthusiastic about Mr Wittgenstein's skill in overcoming what appear to be insuperable difficulties'.<sup>2</sup> In *Divisions* he celebrates the 'one-handedness' of the performer and concentrates on 'exploiting and emphasising the single line approach'.<sup>3</sup> He stresses that in 'no place in [Divisions] did I attempt to imitate a two-handed piano technique'.<sup>4</sup>

*Divisions* is in variation form, where each variation comprises an exposition of a different aspect of piano technique. Thus we find 'trills and scales in the Recitative; wide-spread arpeggios in the Nocturne; agility over the keyboard in the

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<sup>1</sup> Britten, in the preface to the facsimile of the full score, published by Boosey & Hawkes in 1941, in Kildea, *Britten on Music*, p. 369.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Kildea, *Britten on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 369.

<sup>3</sup> Kildea, *Britten on Music*, p. 369.

<sup>4</sup> Kildea, *Britten on Music*, p. 369.

Badinerie and Toccata; and repeated notes in the final Tarantella'.<sup>5</sup> As a result, some have dismissed the work as 'purely technical . . . hardly more than a set of accompanied studies for the left hand', yet this ignores both the wit with which Britten treats his subject, and the originality of his approach to the medium.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, by using a number of different styles in turn, Britten creates a lexicon of left-hand piano techniques to an even more explicit degree than does Godowsky in his transcriptions.

Britten was commissioned to write *Divisions*, op. 21, by Paul Wittgenstein in July 1940. Initially enthusiastic about the project, he set to work immediately. On 3 August, 1940, Wittgenstein sent a letter to Britten accompanied by the score of a work by Franz Schmidt, a Viennese composer from whom he had commissioned a great number of solo, chamber and concerto works. He stated that 'from a pianistic point of view it is cleverly written' and also recommended Godowsky's Chopin transcriptions, whose style would 'only be applicable [sic] for the cadenza or solo variation, for which indeed it would be excellent'.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Britten was aware that the Godowsky transcriptions existed, yet it is impossible to say whether he used them as a model to any great extent. The only published work for left hand which is currently held in Britten's collection of scores at the Britten-Pears Archive is Frank Bridge's *Three Improvisations* (1918), yet it is possible that, had Britten owned a copy of Godowsky's transcriptions, it may have been left behind when he returned to the United Kingdom from the States in 1942. Britten did hear Ravel's *Concerto pour*

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<sup>5</sup> Britten in Kildea, *Britten on Music*, p. 369.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Mason, 'Benjamin Britten', MT, 89, 1948, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> This excerpt, and all subsequent citations from the Wittgenstein-Britten correspondence, are from letters held at the Britten-Pears Archive. It is not clear which work of Schmidt's was sent to Britten but it is likely to have been one of the two pieces for left-hand piano and orchestra that Wittgenstein had commissioned, namely the *Concertante Variations on a Theme of Beethoven* (1924) or the Piano Concerto in E flat major (1934).

*la main gauche* at a performance by Wittgenstein in Florence in 1934, although whether he ever saw the score of the work has not been ascertained.<sup>8</sup>

While we cannot say with any certainty that Britten studied Godowsky's transcriptions in detail before embarking upon *Divisions*, there are many techniques which the two works share. Yet, as Britten's compositional ethos is sharply opposed to the Romantic aesthetic of Godowsky's transcriptions, which translate an early nineteenth-century style into the patois of the late nineteenth-century virtuoso, these techniques are recontextualised accordingly. Textures in *Divisions*, as in Britten's Piano Concerto op. 13 for two hands, are comparatively sparse and, as Britten's expressive aims are so different, his technical requirements diverge strongly from those pioneered in the transcriptions. While Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* could be interpreted as neo-Classical in some respects, its textures are essentially Romantic and thus akin to Godowsky's vision, as was Ravel's preference that the one-handedness of the pianist be concealed.

Britten, therefore, stands apart from Godowsky and Ravel, both musically and ideologically. For him the left-handedness of the performer is not a burden, but should be celebrated. By showing what the left-handed pianist may achieve, not despite physical limitation but because of it, he approaches the medium on its own terms. In the subsequent analysis of left-hand techniques in *Divisions*, I shall attempt to show the ways in which he achieves this and the novel perspective he brings to bear on works for left-hand piano and orchestra.

## 1. Melodic use of the thumb

Instances of a melodic use of the thumb, as demonstrated by Godowsky in his

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<sup>8</sup> Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 276.

transcriptions, are rare in *Divisions*. The two cases, from the ‘Romance’ and the ‘Chant’ variations, are shown in Exs. 41a and 41b, and constitute fragmentary melodic gestures. In accordance with a single-line aesthetic, when melodic lines are entrusted to the pianist, they are usually accompanied by the orchestra rather than by the remaining fingers of the left hand. A clear hierarchy between melody and accompaniment has far less importance texturally here than in Ravel’s concerto, for example, as is evident in bb. 177-80 (see Ex. 41c below). In this excerpt from the ‘Arabesque’, the pianist plays two lines, the lower of which initially moves in stepwise motion against the static repetition of the higher. Both lines have agency, but whether they are entirely independent is a moot point. Melodic and accompanimental function is blurred.

Example 41. *Divisions*, op. 21

a) ‘Romance’: bb. 64-5



b) ‘Chant’: bb. 208-9



c) ‘Arabesque’: bb. 177-80



Vast swathes of the piano part are comprised solely of accompanimental motifs, yet, within a less clearly hierarchical texture, this figuration is no longer principally confined to the background. In the ‘Nocturne’, the pianist repeats a characteristically accompanimental figuration throughout the entire variation, yet, despite the *ppp delicatissimo* marking, this is of equal importance as the melodic interjections of the orchestral instruments. (See, for instance, bb. 240-2, shown in Ex. 42 below). Likewise, in the Tarantella, at bb. 559 *ff*, the pianist repeats unvaried accompanimental figures for some time, occasionally punctuated by the quasi-melodic interjections of the accented quavers from b. 562 (see Ex. 42b). While the higher of these accented quavers would be played by the thumb, it is likely that the lower would be taken by the fifth finger.

Example 42. *Divisions*, op. 21

a) ‘Nocturne’: bb. 240-2



b) ‘Tarantella’: bb. 559-63



c) ‘Toccata I’: bb. 413-414



A ‘*moto perpetuo*’ character is common to several of the variations, most particularly to the two ‘Toccatas’, as at bb. 413-4, shown in Ex. 42c above. The

pianist is absorbed into the ensemble and each musician plays similar figuration from which a complete texture gradually emerges. The blending of boundaries between melodic and accompanimental figuration and the disintegration of a strict hierarchy between soloist and orchestra imply a democratic attitude towards textural construction. Britten's 'single line approach', therefore, explicitly militates against the melodic use of the thumb, as employed by Godowsky, and encourages the dissolution of traditional social hierarchies within the ensemble.<sup>9</sup> In choosing to call the work '*Divisions*' it is possible that Britten did not conceive of the work as a concerto in the traditional sense, where the soloist is of significantly greater importance than the orchestra.<sup>10</sup> The pianist, in *Divisions*, is more dependent on the rest of the ensemble than in Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, simply to ensure textural integrity. The stereotypical nineteenth-century concept of a 'virtuoso soloist', to whom the orchestra provides little more than a scenic backdrop, is severely undermined.

One might respond that less hierarchical distinction between melody and accompaniment, or soloist and orchestra, is merely an aspect of Britten's personal compositional style, rather than a feature which arises directly from the left-handedness of the work. Yet, in his Piano Concerto for two hands, op. 13, we find a more traditional approach to the genre. Extended melodic statements are the norm and the pianist, who with two hands may encompass a far richer texture than a left-handed pianist constrained by a single-line aesthetic, stands apart from the orchestra with

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<sup>9</sup> This has strong parallels with Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 4 for left hand alone of which an anonymous critic said 'The solo part is no virtuoso standout . . . it is a kind of foreground commentary on the music as it unreels' (Time Magazine, 17 September 1956, S. 42 cited in Sassmann, 'Zur Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte', p. 272).

<sup>10</sup> In *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto* Simon Keefe states that a concerto 'in broadest terms . . . from the eighteenth century through to the present day . . . is expected to feature a soloist or soloists interacting with an orchestra, providing a vehicle for the solo performer(s) to demonstrate their technical and musical proficiency', but highlights the great number of types of solo-orchestra interaction and virtuosity that occur in practice (p. 7).

greater conviction. The Piano Concerto, op. 13, is, of course, a very early work, written when Britten was only 24 and before he had truly established his personal ‘voice’. Nonetheless, *Divisions* is hardly a work of his maturity, written only three years later. Rather than signalling a rapid change of style between the two works, the absence of sustained melodic writing in the piano part of *Divisions* seems to reflect his approach to writing for the left hand. It is possible that, when considering which textures would be most appropriate for the work, he was faced with Ravel’s primary concern, namely to ‘maintain interest in a work of extended scope’. Having taken the decision to write single-line material, if the pianist were then to play extended melodic passages, this could rapidly become tedious.

The way in which melodic material is used, the comparatively transparent textures, both in the piano part and the orchestra, and the pronounced topical allusions throughout *Divisions* contribute to a clarity, which I would argue arises directly from Britten’s decision to write using a single-line approach. I have already shown how a reaction against the nineteenth-century notion of a virtuoso pianist relates directly to his interpretation of what a left-hand concerto should be, and his decision to ‘treat the problem in every aspect’ is directly responsible for the variety of styles and characters that we find in each variation. Godowsky cites the strength of the thumb, and the fact that, in the left hand, it occupied the highest position on the keyboard as a considerable advantage for the left-handed pianist. Yet this is only relevant within a compositional practice which prioritises extended melodic statements, at the top of a texture, and a strict hierarchy between melody and accompaniment. Godowsky clearly approaches the transcriptions as a series of technical puzzles and revels in the intellectual challenges that they pose, yet in his wider aim, to expand the possibilities available to future composers, he fails to foresee the pronounced shift of stylistic and

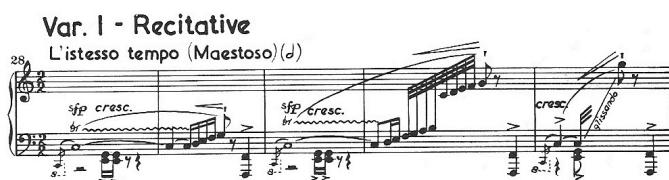
textural priorities that would diminish his enterprise.

## 2. Span

As in Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, the opening cadenza of *Divisions*, the 'Recitative', plays with extended spans in a way that seems to deny any perceived 'limitation' on the performer's part. There are many similarities between the very opening of Britten's cadenza, shown in Ex. 43a below, and the passage from the first cadenza of Ravel's concerto, shown in the second system of Ex. 29a above.

Example 43. *Divisions*, op. 21

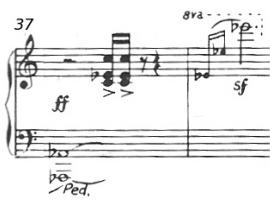
a) 'Recitative': bb. 28-33



b) 'Recitative': bb. 34.1-2



c) 'Recitative': bb. 37-38.2



Both start in the lower range of the keyboard and comprise a repeated series of gestures, each of which culminates in a rising arpeggio or scale before returning to the original bass note. The rapidity with which these gestures are repeated and the

ensuing rhythmic diminution that results contribute to the virtuosic élan of the passage. In the ‘Recitative’, at b. 34, this rising sequence arrives on c<sup>3</sup> before plunging down to the bass of the piano, as shown in Ex. 43b. This downwards gesture is mirrored explicitly three bars later, as in Ex. 43c, when a wide-ranging and rhetorical ascent across the entire keyboard heralds the end of an extended opening flourish comprising trills, rapid scales and glissandi. These complementary gestures frame the first half of the ‘Recitative’ and, in their conspicuous traversal of the entire range of the keyboard, function as clear spatial markers. Britten’s left-handed pianist is no more constricted in span than Ravel’s and registral signification will play as great a part in his work.

As one might expect, from a work which espouses a single-line approach, the instances in which the physical span of the left hand is stretched to the same extent as in Ravel’s concerto are few and far between. In ‘Chant’, bb. 212ff, we encounter one of the few examples of a two-handed texture in *Divisions* (see Ex. 44). The higher and lower lines are placed some distance from each other and move in contrary motion, which increases a sense of their independence. However, the tempo is slow enough, and the regular alternation between the higher and lower voices is so easily discernible, that an audience would not necessarily be ‘fooled’ into thinking the pianist had two hands.

Example 44. *Divisions*, op. 21, ‘Chant’: bb. 212-15



In the ‘Nocturne’, at bb. 240ff in Ex. 42a above, the figuration in the piano part is wide-ranging in the context of *Divisions*, although it cannot match the sheer breadth of the monumental writing in the *Concerto pour la main gauche*. Despite this, in counterpoising the pianist’s arpeggiated motif with stepwise melodic lines in the orchestra, the expansive span of the passage is highlighted.

In ‘Toccata I’ the pianist is required to stretch across extremely wide spans in the context of rapid semiquaver motion, as at bb. 417-20 in Ex. 45, which is as technically challenging as anything to be found in Godowsky’s transcriptions. Intriguingly enough, the span of these figures in the original version of *Divisions*, prior to revisions made in 1954, was even greater, yet, as they are so fleet, the rhetorical impact which is often implicit in leaping passages is absent. In performance, the pianist may very well be inaudible at this point, therefore the velocity of these leaps may function primarily on a visual rather than an aural plane: yet again, the pianist’s hand moves so quickly that it seems blurred. ‘Toccata I’ comprises a steady and gradual rise in register combined with a single crescendo and functions primarily as a ‘lead-in’ to the orchestral passage in ‘Toccata II’, itself a preparation for the second piano cadenza.

Example 45. *Divisions*, op. 21, ‘Toccata I’: bb. 417-20

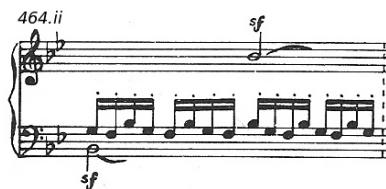


In the cadenza in the second half of ‘Toccata II’, we encounter the pivoting octave technique which is characteristic of Godowsky’s transcriptions (see Ex. 7b), although it is here used to very different effect: not to give the impression of a greater span but

to present the primary technical ‘theme’. The figuration in ‘Toccata II’, shown in Ex. 46a, comprising isolated notes which rotate above and below an oscillating semiquaver passage, accelerates at b. 464 (see Ex. 46b) as the semiquavers become triplet semiquavers, then dissolves into a trill (Ex. 46c).

Example 46. *Divisions*, op. 21

a) ‘Toccata II’: b. 464. ii<sup>11</sup>



b) ‘Toccata II’: b. 464.vi



c) ‘Toccata II’: b. 464.viii-ix



This gives the impression of a texture in three layers yet, while in Godowsky’s transcriptions one might often be led into hearing a ‘two-handed’ texture, here the single-line approach is still audible. The notes which are struck above and below the oscillating pattern do not coalesce to form a melody and thus the different layers of

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<sup>11</sup> The entire cadenza at the end of ‘Toccata II’ takes place within b. 464 which Britten has divided into more conventionally proportioned bars with dotted barlines. Thus I use ‘b. 464.ii’ to denote the second of these bars within a bar.

the texture do not assume separate agency. Britten reconfigures a typical ‘Godowskyian’ technique to accommodate contrasting expressive aims.

In the ‘Adagio’ we find yet another characteristically ‘Romantic’ texture within the context of an essentially modernist musical language. At b. 497 the pianist plays leaping chords across a relatively wide range (see Ex. 47a).

#### Example 47

a) *Divisions*, op. 21, ‘Adagio’: bb. 497-8



b) Tchaikovsky, Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor, op. 23, bb. 6-7



c) *Divisions*, op. 21, ‘Tarantella’: bb. 657.3-662.1



In the context of this sombre passage, in triple metre, at a *f* dynamic, this seems to constitute a momentary reference to the opening of Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 (see Ex. 47b). The range traversed is not as great as in the Tchaikovsky, and the visual ‘pendulum’ effect produced as the pianist sways between the low and high registers of the keyboard is not as pronounced. Yet there is still perceptible gestural similarity. At the very end of the work, shown in Ex. 47c, accented rising octaves, at

**fff**, prior to the final cadence are characteristic of many late Romantic piano concertos, among them Tchaikovsky's first and Rachmaninov's second. Such recontextualised references to the Romantic virtuoso piano tradition complement the reconfigured deployment of Godowsky's lexicon of left-hand piano techniques.

### **3. Balance of multi-layered textures**

Thanks to Britten's single-line approach, the incidence of multi-layered textures in *Divisions* is low. In fact, there are some occasions, such at b. 208 in the 'Arabesque', where two lines should be played with equal volume and projection (see Ex. 41c above). Furthermore, in a work for left-hand piano and orchestra, the onus of producing a complete and full texture does not rest entirely with the soloist, apart from in the cadenzas. Despite the high level of virtuosity and sheer range of techniques used in 'Recitative', the single-line approach is audible throughout and there are no points at which the pianist is required to balance multiple voices concurrently. In the second cadenza 'Toccata II', shown in Ex. 46 above, balance is an issue, yet, as the central oscillating voice is so repetitive, it does not conflict with the other lines. Britten is well known for his pragmatic and listener-centred approach to composition and thus his motives in *Divisions* differ sharply from those of Godowsky's transcriptions, which were written primarily with the composer and pianist in mind. In the transcriptions, the issue of balancing multiple voices arises with such frequency because of the attempt to replicate, and to outdo, a two-handed texture. Britten, unlike Godowsky, places dramatic goals above technical feats, as indeed does Ravel in the *Concerto pour la main gauche*.

#### 4. Style brisé

Most spread chords notated in *Divisions*, of which there are far fewer than in Ravel's concerto, occur during 'Burlesque', as at bb. 375-6 in Ex. 48a. As the vast majority of the chords here fit within the span of one hand, the *style brisé* is used as a rhythmic feature to contribute to the slightly pompous character and po-faced humour of the variation, rather than as a technical compromise. The low register and ponderous double-dotted quavers are combined with the slight rhythmic disjunction of the *style brisé* to create a quasi-imperious character which contrasts strongly with the smooth crooning of the alto saxophone. There is no sense here of a performer grappling with physical limitation, as in the first cadenza of Ravel's concerto for example. The 'Adagio' offers the only other instances of explicitly notated spread chords, in b. 500, 503 and 509-11 (shown in Ex. 48b). Again, most of these chords fit within the span of one hand and are thus not a response to an otherwise unmanageably dense texture. Here, spread chords are in dialogue with the melody in the strings and with the spread triads of the harp. They form a shared and responsive gesture that does not arise from the piano part alone.

Example 48. *Divisions*, op. 21

a) 'Burlesque': bb. 375-6

Musical score for Example 48a, 'Burlesque': bb. 375-6. The score shows two staves. The top staff is for the piano, with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a tempo marking of Molto moderato ( $\text{♩} = 100$ ). The bottom staff is for the strings. The piano part consists of two measures of spread chords, each with a dynamic of ff and a staccato mark. The strings part consists of two measures of eighth-note patterns.

b) 'Adagio': bb. 509-11

Musical score for Example 48b, 'Adagio': bb. 509-11. The score shows two staves. The top staff is for the piano, with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a tempo marking of 8va. The bottom staff is for the strings. The piano part consists of three measures of spread chords, with dynamics ff and dim. The strings part consists of three measures of eighth-note patterns.

## 5. Register

While both Godowsky and Ravel side with the ‘superior resonance’ of the lower range of the keyboard, and while a lower register may be viewed as the left-handed pianist’s ‘default’ position, Britten’s *Divisions* does not show a particular preference for low sonorities. The pianist enters, in the ‘Recitative’, in a comparatively low register, yet the illusion that this may be related to physical limitation is swiftly shattered at bb. 28ff, as shown above in Ex. 43a above. Many passages in *Divisions* are confined to the central or higher ranges of the keyboard and none of the ‘themes’ of the variations have a specific registral bias. ‘Burlesque’ does start in a low register, yet this contributes more to the pompous character of the variation than to explicit tessitura identification, as in the opening of Ravel’s first cadenza. On the other hand, the steady and gradual rise throughout the entire range of the keyboard in ‘Toccata I’, shown in Ex. 45 above, reveals an utter lack of registral bias.

It may seem paradoxical that, in attempting to conceal the left-handedness of his player, Ravel opted for a characteristically left-handed register throughout much of the work, whereas Britten, exploiting and celebrating one-handedness, uses all areas of the keyboard equally. The choice of a low register in much of Ravel’s concerto represents a desire to harness the increased resonance of the bass, to give the aural impression of a bulkier, two-handed texture, and to enhance the serious and traditional character of the concerto, thus avoiding any associations of a virtuoso party trick. While Britten, in *Divisions*, does not attempt to give the impression that the pianist possesses two hands, in his use of thinner textures he opens up all registers of the keyboard. It is perfectly possible for a left-handed pianist to play thick textures in the higher areas of the keyboard, but it is much less comfortable to do so. Where Ravel uses a high register, as we have seen, the material most often consists of single-

line writing. As Britten employs the single-line approach for the vast majority of *Divisions*, his choice of register is less affected by physical considerations.

As in Ravel's concerto, leaping passages, and the rapid alternations of register that result, are used to humorous effect, yet the topical associations of register are not manipulated to the same extent. In the 'Badinerie', which literally translates as 'a joke', the primary motif is placed in vastly divergent registers to humorous effect. The rhythmic instability of the principal theme, alternating three-crotchet groups with maniacally repetitious hemiola figures, as at bb. 283-6 in Ex. 49a, is exacerbated by a diatonic harmonic scheme whose rapid and sudden incursions into chromatic territory preclude any sense of security.

After its first iteration, the principal theme is repeated in various extreme registers, before the rapid antiphonal exchange at bb. 353-6 in Ex. 49b. This playful character, reminiscent of a particularly spirited game of tag perhaps, is enhanced by the grotesque waltz parody in the strings of 'Badinerie', previously shown in Ex. 49a, and culminates in a dash to the top of the keyboard in the final four bars. This is the most explicitly humorous variation and register is clearly the subject of its joke. The opening four bars, shown in Ex. 49c, and a similar two-bar fragment towards the end of the variation, punctuate the discourse and, with an almost artificially held tempo, sustained notes and static harmonic compass, the solemnity of these passages throws the surrounding farce into sharp relief.

It is tempting to draw parallels between the registral play in 'Badinerie' and that in the central section of Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* and, from a purely technical point of view, one would not be misguided. Both passages use single-line motifs of restricted span, and place them in vastly differing registers, often using the highest range for the most pronounced effect. Yet, while Britten's is explicitly

Example 49. *Divisions*, op. 21

a) ‘Badinerie’: bb. 283-6

Musical score for 'Badinerie' (bb. 283-6). The score includes parts for Solo Pianoforte, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The Solo Pianoforte part starts with a dynamic of *molto p*. The Violin I part is marked *Vivacissimo* ( $\text{d}=96$ ) and *p p leggiere*. The other string parts (Violin II, Viola, Cello) are marked *p p leggiere*. The Double Bass part is silent.

b) ‘Badinerie’: bb. 353-6

Musical score for 'Badinerie' (bb. 353-6). The score shows parts for Piano and Double Bass. The piano part has eighth-note patterns, and the double bass part has sixteenth-note patterns.

c) ‘Badinerie’: bb. 279-82

Musical score for 'Var. VII - Badinerie' (bb. 279-82). The score includes parts for Horn in F, Trumpet in C, and Trombones. The title 'Var. VII - Badinerie' and dynamic 'Grave  $\text{d}=46$ ' are at the top. The score shows three measures of music for these instruments.

humorous, Ravel’s, in the context of a more ‘loaded’ discourse, cannot so easily be taken at face value. Both play with concepts of what a specifically left-handed texture might entail, but the ambiguity of Ravel’s discourse is absent from ‘Badinerie’. In this respect, as in many others, Britten’s work is much closer to the ‘divertissement’ aesthetic which Ravel promoted in his Piano Concerto in G major for two hands, and deliberately avoided in the *Concerto pour la main gauche*.

## 6. Fingering and the Sustaining Pedal

There is no fingering marked in *Divisions*, for much the same reasons as in Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*. Pedal marks are not infrequent but, as one would expect in a work of this kind, they do not fulfil a didactic function as in Godowsky's transcriptions, nor are they as precise. In the 'Recitative', at bb. 35-6 in Ex. 50, the sustaining pedal contributes to the resonance of the whole and enables the pianist to maintain the low semibreves while playing semiquaver figuration in a high register of the keyboard.<sup>12</sup>

Example 50. *Divisions*, op. 21, 'Recitative': bb. 35-36.ii



It would theoretically be possible to read the 'Ped.' indications throughout the 'Recitative' as implying the use of the *sostenuto* pedal, yet I do not believe this to be the case for a number of reasons. Firstly, the *sostenuto* pedal itself was much less widespread at the time that this work was written and most pianos would not have been equipped with one. The texture is simple enough that a pianist could sustain all principal lines with the *sostenuto* pedal, which places the 'Recitative' in stark contrast to the first cadenza of Ravel's concerto with its broad, multi-layered texture and quasi-orchestral sonority, for example. Notwithstanding this, however, the resulting timbre in the 'Recitative', if one were to use the *sostenuto* pedal exclusively, would be excessively dry and brittle. Personally, I would employ only the sustaining pedal,

<sup>12</sup> Here, 'pedal' or 'sustaining pedal' denotes the pedal to the right of the pedal lyre. The 'third pedal', or 'sostenuto' pedal, is in the centre and can be used to 'catch' specific notes, rather than releasing the dampers over the entire length of the keyboard.

lifted momentarily to play the repeated semiquavers of b. 35 for example, as shown in Ex. 50, while half-raising and depressing it to control the degree of resonance throughout the rest of the cadenza.

In the ‘Romance’, at bb. 64-5 in Ex. 41a above, ‘with Ped.’ is marked, and coincides with one of the few instances of melodic use of the thumb. At this point, the pedal acts as ‘another hand’ in much that same way that Godowsky recommends in the Preface to his transcriptions. Although this is a fragmentary passage of little duration, it is intriguing to note that a traditional ‘Godowskyian’ use of the pedal corresponds with one of the rare instances of the most characteristic texture in Godowsky’s left-hand transcriptions, the melodic use of the thumb (as in Ex. 2b). Elsewhere in *Divisions*, the pedal is used primarily to enrich the timbre and to prevent higher notes from sounding shrill or failing to sustain. As in Godowsky’s transcriptions, and in Ravel’s concerto, the pedal would often be used even when it is not marked, primarily for timbral and coloristic purposes. In *Divisions*, however, the pedal’s contribution is not essential to underpin textural foundations.

## 7. Contrary motion

Contrary motion is only used to any significant extent on one occasion in *Divisions*, in the opening cadenza, the ‘Recitative’, at bb. 38-39 (see Ex. 51). Here it functions in exactly the same way as the ‘Vivo’ of the first cadenza of Ravel’s concerto, at b. 57, shown in Ex. 31b above, and creates an identical rhetorical effect. Both instances occur towards the end of the opening cadenza prior to a final, exuberant flourish. The pianist should accelerate through each passage, both of which gradually encompass a larger range and grow in volume before slowing down slightly as they lead into the closing gesture of the cadenza.

Example 51. *Divisions*, op. 21, ‘Recitative’: bb. 38.3-39.1



The opening cadenzas to both *Divisions* and the *Concerto pour la main gauche* give each composer the chance to lay his cards on the table, as it were. Both prove that a left-handed pianist is not constrained in any way by physical limitation and both conclude their exposition of technical prowess with the use of contrary motion, an apparently ‘impossible’ texture for a one-armed pianist, with similar rhetorical effect.

## 8. Fugal textures

While one might not be surprised to find fugal writing in Britten’s work, given the diversity of topical allusion and neo-Classical character of the work, there are no examples of such textures in this work.

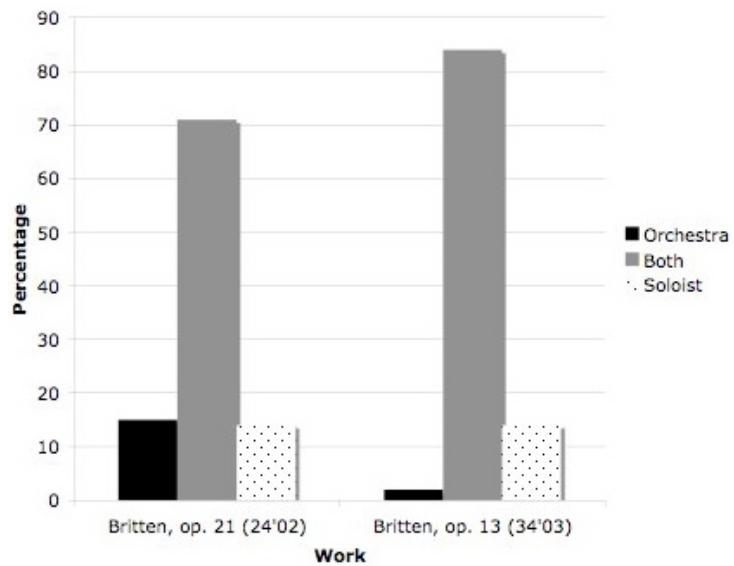
## 9. Large-scale structure

Although Britten did not express a concern to ‘maintain interest in a work of extended scope’, his approach to the large-scale structure of *Divisions* can be interpreted as an attempt to ensure variety and interest throughout the work. As with Ravel’s concerto for the left hand, Britten’s *Divisions* is shorter than his piano concerto for two hands lasting only 24 minutes, a full 10 minutes less than op. 13. The use of variation form cuts *Divisions* into segments and reflects the fragmented nature of Ravel’s concerto, albeit in a more pronounced fashion. Indeed, Ravel could quite easily have levelled

the same criticism at *Divisions* as he did at Saint-Saëns' *Six Etudes* which, in their brevity and sectionalisation, he accused of avoiding the most significant issue of left-hand piano music: namely, how to create an extended, through-composed structure without boring one's audience. By using variation form, however, diversity is inherent in Britten's work and he is not compelled to introduce such extended solo piano cadenzas or passages where the orchestra plays independently of the soloist as Ravel does in his concerto.

Figure 4 compares the percentage of solo piano passages, those with orchestra alone and those where all musicians play together, in *Divisions* and in Britten's Piano Concerto, op. 13.

Figure 4. Bar chart showing timbral proportions of Britten's two piano concertos



The proportion of solo piano writing in both works is similar and, although the orchestra does play independently of the piano to a greater extent in *Divisions*, the difference is not as pronounced as between Ravel's two concertos. Indeed, in *Divisions* the orchestra plays alone for 15% of the time and in the concerto, op. 13,

for 2% of the time. In Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, the proportion of orchestral passages to the whole stands at 17%, whereas it comprises 0% in the G major concerto (see the discussion on pp. 86-7). While Britten's use of variation form creates natural divisions in the work, Ravel felt compelled to introduce variety using other methods, one such being to oppose solo piano and orchestral timbres to that of the whole in a more striking way.

As Britten failed to see the necessity of 'concealing' the performer's one-handedness, so he disregards any presumed imperative to create an organic formal structure based on the principles of conventional thematic development. He himself had no overblown notions regarding the work, describing *Divisions* in a letter to Elizabeth Meyer as 'not deep – but quite pretty', and clearly intended to write a work in a 'divertissement' mould.<sup>13</sup> In its audibly one-handed textures, *Divisions* does not attempt to be anything other than it is, and in its formal scheme it is decidedly unpretentious. The theme on which the set of variations is based is less a melodic figure than an intervallic scheme, composed primarily of the interval of a fifth, and its inversion, the fourth. As a result, subsequent variations are extremely free in their use of thematic material, maintaining interest and variety while ensuring some degree of commonality throughout the work.

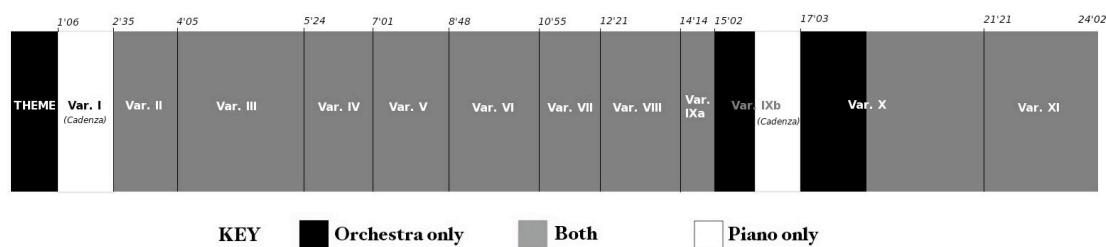
Although the proportion of cadenzas to the whole in *Divisions* is less than in Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, they occur at similar points in the progression of each work and are used for similar purposes. Both works are in one-movement form and the pianist enters after a short orchestral exposition, in Ravel's case, or after the 'Theme', played by the orchestra, in Britten's. While an opening cadenza is a comparatively unusual initial statement by a pianist, in a work for left hand and

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<sup>13</sup> Cooke, Mitchell and Reed, *Letters from a Life*, p. 861.

orchestra this device enables the composer to highlight the soloist's technical proficiency and to engage the audience's attention from the outset. Figure 5 indicates that the placement of the second cadenza, towards the end of the work, in *Divisions*, is approximately equivalent to that in Ravel's concerto. In both works, the second cadenza fulfils a more reflective purpose, commenting on preceding motifs.

Figure 5. Diagram of the form of Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21



Britten's approach to form in *Divisions* is encapsulated in his avoidance of extended melodic statements. In the Piano Concerto, op. 13, melodic lines are much longer than those in *Divisions*. One may propose that prolonged use of primarily melodic material would be out of place in *Divisions*, a work of such sectionalised form. Yet it is possible that Britten chose variation form precisely because it would preclude extended melody, with which he may have felt a left-handed pianist, playing single-line material, would not be able to sustain an audience's interest.

I have already shown that by blurring the traditional distinction between the status of melodic and accompanimental material, Britten dissolves boundaries between that of soloist and orchestra. In the comparatively democratic context of this work, therefore, the 'allegory' that one might perceive is not that of the struggle of an individual against the crowd, as in Ravel's concerto, but that of co-operation. The soloist is accepted for what he or she is, as an equally valid member of a communal

ensemble, regardless of disability. Thus the musical and social dynamics which result are closely intertwined.

## **10. Aural effect: how ‘one-’ or ‘two-handed’ is the work?**

Britten’s single-line approach is audible throughout *Divisions*, even within the thickest textures of the ‘Recitative’. The register in this variation is higher than that of Ravel’s first cadenza, and the greater distance between lines means that they are not confused aurally. Yet, such lack of ambiguity means that the visual impact of *Divisions* on an audience is more clear-cut. In the *Concerto pour la main gauche* the disjunction between aural illusion and visual disclosure creates one of the key emotive dynamics of the work, as the audience seeks to reconcile the two aspects. In Britten’s work it is perfectly obvious, both aurally and visually, that the pianist is only playing with one arm and thus this particular issue ceases to exist. Visual effects, such as the pendulum-like motion of the pianist in Ravel’s first cadenza, are fewer and have less impact in Britten’s work. The nearest equivalent in Britten’s work is the Tchaikovskyian passage shown above in Ex. 47a, yet the arc of motion across the keyboard is both less pronounced than at the opening of Tchaikovsky’s concerto and in Ravel’s cadenza. The leaping figuration of the ‘Badinerie’ has visual impact but, as the pianist does not experience the same physical demands as in leaping passages from Ravel’s work, registral awareness is no longer so intimately related to physical gesture.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that both Ravel and Britten’s left-hand works, from a technical perspective, perpetuate some aspects of Godowsky’s transcriptions and neglect others. Yet whether or not they could be said to have

fulfilled Godowsky's broader compositional aims has yet to be addressed. Godowsky's first intention, in creating the transcriptions of Chopin's *Etudes*, was to respond to the technical challenges of late nineteenth-century music. He achieves this with considerable flair and Ravel, in the sheer textural scope and breadth of his work, takes this one stage further. Britten's work is technically challenging and cannot be said to lack virtuosic spirit, yet its disavowal of nineteenth-century conventions means that the techniques he uses resemble those of Godowsky's transcriptions far less.

Godowsky's belief that the left hand was more suited to pianistic endeavour than the right is difficult to prove, yet his conviction that its potential was not realised in his own time is less so. In both the *Concerto pour la main gauche* and in *Divisions*, the sheer variety and ingenuity brought to the medium certainly contributes a great deal to the left-hand concerto as a genre. In experimenting with registral and textural signification, Ravel shows how the potential of the left-hand concerto extends into symbolic realms far removed from a purely technical treatment of his subject. In *Divisions* Britten shows how one might create a work for left-hand piano and orchestra on its own terms, from within the medium, as it were, revelling in limitation rather than seeking to disguise it.

Indeed, limitation was one of the key aspects that initially attracted Godowsky to the exploration and manipulation of left-hand piano techniques. His belief that working within limitations 'leads to a superior form of concentration' and 'opens up unexplored and unsuspected regions of the imagination' is one that resonates with both works. Although he sought to obscure the performer's physical limitation, Ravel could not transcend it in actual terms, however convincing the sonic allusion that he creates may be. The left-handedness of the work, while superficially concealed, permeates the textural, timbral and gestural scheme of the entire concerto and

constitutes an elaborate comment on the emotive and physical significance of the genre. Britten's decision to use a single-line approach in *Diversions* and his choice of variation form, with its explicit sectionalisation, may seem to set even more limits on the work than are already entailed by the performer's one-handedness. Yet his success in showing how much may be achieved within such limitations, without seeking to conceal them from an audience, is perhaps akin to Godowsky's initial compositional objective as he expressed it in writing, even though it is belied by the two-handed nature of the transcriptions themselves.

Godowsky's final desire was that the development of left-hand piano technique, to the point where it could mimic two hands aurally, would increase the possibilities available to composers of the future. Whether this was fulfilled or not is impossible to say in the context of a study of left-hand music. By developing the technical proficiency of the left hand one may increase the ingenuity of techniques that a one- or two-handed pianist can deploy, or merely the number of notes that one may encompass in a given period of time, yet this does not necessarily equate to enhanced expressive possibilities. While Godowsky was, necessarily, preoccupied with technical goals in his transcriptions, the expressive power and breadth of Ravel and Britten's works lie in their deployment of advanced left-hand techniques to emotive and communicative ends.

## Chapter 4. Acknowledging Wittgenstein's voice: the left-hand piano concerto in practice

It is clear that left-handedness permeates Ravel and Britten's concertos on a number of levels, and that its impact extends far beyond their mere initial configuration. Yet a study of these works would be incomplete without an examination of how they have been implemented and received in concert. A one-armed pianist may phrase gestures in a way which reflects a modified approach to the instrument which, in turn, could affect the rhetorical impact of the work. These concertos are often performed by two-handed pianists, whose right arm lies temporarily dormant or, on admittedly rare occasions, even participates. The social and cultural meanings which these works convey are drastically altered by the performer and the audience's perceptions of physical disability. No one manipulated these meanings more comprehensively than the pianist who commissioned these concertos, Paul Wittgenstein, and it is to his interpretation and deployment of these works that we now turn.

Paul Wittgenstein was born, in 1887, into a wealthy and cultured family whose members circulated freely among Viennese high society.<sup>1</sup> His father, Karl, had accumulated an enormous fortune as an industrialist and participated enthusiastically in artistic patronage. Leopoldine, his mother, was a gifted pianist and passed on her musical talent to her brood of eight children, of whom Paul was the seventh. Musical soirées were common in the Wittgenstein household and the guests were of the highest distinction. Johannes Brahms, Clara Schumann and Gustav Mahler were frequently welcomed to the house.

Wittgenstein received piano lessons as a child and engaged the services of

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<sup>1</sup> The details of Wittgenstein's biography as presented here are indebted to Flindell, 'Paul Wittgenstein', in particular, p. 110-111, and Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*.

Theodore Leschetizsky (whose pupils included Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Artur Schnabel) prior to his Viennese debut recital on 1 December 1913.<sup>2</sup> This performance was heavily subsidised by the family coffers and the families of servants and other dependents were given free tickets in order to boost attendance. Wittgenstein's programme included four consecutive works for piano and orchestra; a concerto by John Field, *Serenade and Allegro giocoso* by Mendelssohn, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Czerny* by Labor and Liszt's Concerto in E flat.<sup>3</sup> The reception was mixed and the influential critic Julius Korngold left after the first piece, but, undaunted, Wittgenstein resolved to pursue a career as a concert pianist.

Any hopes he had of establishing a career at this stage, however, were swiftly terminated by the onset of war in the summer of 1914. In October of that year, while fighting near Zamość in Poland he was shot in the right arm, which had to be amputated. The hospital where he was recuperating was captured by the Russians and he was transferred to prisoner of war camps in Orel' and Omsk before gaining his freedom in November 1915 and returning to Vienna. Remarkably enough, despite now only having a left arm, Wittgenstein continued in his pursuit of a performing career. He set about using his considerable fortune to commission solo, chamber and concerto works from the principal composers in Vienna and, later on, from those across Europe.

Although he was very generous financially, he was well-known for his high-handed attitude towards composers, which was often resented. He frequently modified the scores of the works that he commissioned to better suit his own needs, to an extent which seems remarkable now, and which was conspicuous in the context of his own times. Whether this was due to the pressures of building a repertoire and a

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<sup>2</sup> Flindell, 'Paul Wittgenstein', p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 7.

career as a left-handed pianist, to his perceived social superiority, or to a sense of ‘ownership’ of these works are questions which deserve further scrutiny.

Between December 1922 and Easter 1933 Wittgenstein approached Paul Hindemith, Erich Korngold and Franz Schmidt, commissioning them to write concertos for left-hand piano and orchestra. On receiving scores from the composers, Wittgenstein set about modifying them to better match them to his expectations. He considered the concertos by Korngold and Schmidt to be too heavily scored and cut parts liberally. While Schmidt was compliant, Korngold was affronted by Wittgenstein’s assertion that, against such a heavy orchestral presence, ‘the piano sounded like a chirping cricket’.<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein assured him that ‘if I play the piece with you conducting, you can nonetheless, as you see fit, still have the bracketed sections played. But if I were to play the piece behind your back, then I would leave out the bracketed instruments’.<sup>5</sup> Hindemith’s concerto suffered an even more unfortunate fate. Wittgenstein felt no affinity with his style and cancelled the premiere. *Piano Music with Orchestra* languished in his archives for decades and was not performed until 2004.

With greater experience and confidence, Wittgenstein felt able to approach Richard Strauss to commission a work, which subsequently became the *Parergon zur Sinfonia Domestica* (1925) and for which he paid the astronomical fee of \$25,000. On receiving the finished work, Wittgenstein once again complained of over-scoring and, after extensive negotiation, Strauss allowed him to thin the orchestral score and to transfer a theme from the orchestra to the piano part.<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein’s demand that the ‘pianist should have a brilliant part’ and ‘could be heard at climactic points in the

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<sup>4</sup> Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius’, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius’, p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius’, p. 165.

concerto' did not fall on deaf ears.<sup>7</sup> After negative critical reception, Strauss agreed to write another work for Wittgenstein, the *Panathenäenzug*, although this work met with an equally frosty public reception and was also criticised for over-scoring by the pianist. Wittgenstein, once again, made extensive changes to the finished score and inserted numerous additional solo cadenzas. He gained a notorious reputation among composers as a 'tricky customer'. Prokofiev, for example, while writing his fourth piano concerto, was aware of the dispute between Wittgenstein and Ravel and was bold enough to ask Wittgenstein whether Ravel had 'made the necessary modifications'.<sup>8</sup>

Over-scoring may have been a natural consequence of the composers' prior experience with two-handed pianists, and their failure to take Wittgenstein's reduced forces sufficiently into account. Yet many of the other criticisms which the pianist brought to bear on these works may have their roots in a disjunction between his understanding of what a concerto should be, and that of the composers. Simon Keefe highlights two

perennially controversial topics that lie at the heart of the concerto: the nature of the interaction among participants, solo and orchestral alike, and, by extension, the function of the 'accompanying' orchestra; and the nature of the music given to the soloist(s).<sup>9</sup>

Both solo-orchestral interaction and the kind of music given to the soloist were perceived, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to be threatened by excessive virtuosity in the soloist's part. An egotistical quest by the soloist for personal glory, to the detriment of the orchestral contribution, was criticised by scholars, including Heinrich Christoph Koch and Johann Karl Friedrich Triest, and

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<sup>7</sup> Flindell, 'Paul Wittgenstein', p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> 'Comment va votre travail sur le concerto de Ravel? Avez-vous parlé à l'auteur? Vous a-t-il fait les modifications nécessaires?' ['How is your work on Ravel's concerto going? Have you spoken to the author? Has he made the necessary modifications for you?'] (my translation)], from a letter on 8 July, 1931, in Flindell, 'Dokumente aus der Sammlung Paul Wittgenstein', p. 428.

<sup>9</sup> Keefe, *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, p. 7.

began to be associated with the genre as a whole, which was subsequently considered to be devalued.<sup>10</sup> Such critical reception continued well into the twentieth century as is evident from J. N. Burk's assertion in 1918 in *The Musical Quarterly* that 'the public . . . seems highly satisfied with that contemptible institution, the concerto – with rare exceptions a mere show case'.<sup>11</sup> In advocating the 'abandonment of the concerto', Burk hopes to promote 'devotion to the finest music obtainable rather than self-advancement'.<sup>12</sup>

As Wittgenstein commissioned these concertos specifically to advance his career, however, such sentiments were unheeded. While Tovey could recommend that 'the solo should first be inclined to enter into dialogue with the orchestra – the speaker should conciliate the crowd before he breaks into monologue', Wittgenstein's personal prerogative may have precluded such an accommodating stance.<sup>13</sup>

In the study that follows I present excerpts taken from the orchestral reductions of Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* and Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21 for two pianos, which were owned and heavily annotated by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction of the Ravel is currently held in the Wittgenstein Archive by the Octavian Society in Hong Kong, as are the orchestral parts which were used during his performances. After Wittgenstein's death, his papers and effects were kept by his widow Hilde Schania and it was only with her death, in 2001, that these reemerged.<sup>14</sup> In 2003 they were offered for sale by a major auction house and were acquired the following year by a private collector in Hong Kong, who has created the Wittgenstein Archive. While visitors are not permitted to access the archive, I am

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<sup>10</sup> Keefe, *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Burk, 'The Fetish of Virtuosity', p. 282.

<sup>12</sup> Burk, 'The Fetish of Virtuosity', p. 288.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Tovey, *Essay on the Classical Concerto* (1903) in Burk, 'The Fetish of Virtuosity', p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Suchy ed., *Empty Sleeve*, p. 9.

very grateful to Dr Georg Predota, who manages it, for sending me photographs of the most relevant pages of the two-piano reduction.

Wittgenstein's reduction of *Divisions*, op. 21, is held at the Britten-Pears Archive in Suffolk where I was able to view it personally, although the full score is untraceable. The orchestral parts are held in the Wittgenstein Archive and, once again, I am grateful to Dr Georg Predota for examining these and sending details of markings and alterations to me. In both works, I have transcribed into printed notation each of the examples included in this chapter.<sup>15</sup> In some cases this has involved minor editorial alterations, most frequently in clarifying accidentals. At times, I was presented with more than one version of a particular passage and have either selected what I consider to be a 'final' version or have provided alternatives. In each case I have explained my rationale for doing so.

The excerpts that follow have been grouped into two categories: (1) embellishments and improvisatory additions, and (2) cuts.

### **Embellishments and improvisatory additions**

Of all the 'types' of alterations made by Wittgenstein to the concertos that he commissioned, embellishments are the most numerous. These usually entail addition of new, or extension of existing, arpeggiated figuration in order to expand the range of the keyboard part. In most cases this results in a heightened virtuosity, which often significantly impacts and alters the melodic or harmonic trajectory of the original.

Between bb. 346-53 of Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, shown in Ex. 52, Wittgenstein rewrites the arpeggiated figuration, although this has latterly been

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<sup>15</sup> In the case of Ravel's concerto I have used photographs of the two-piano reduction as my primary source, supplemented by Predota's paper, 'Badgering the Creative Genius', which details alterations made to the orchestral parts.

Example 52. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations, bb. 344-53

This image shows a two-piano reduction of Ravel's Concerto pour la main gauche, specifically bars 344-53. The score is written on multiple staves, likely for two pianos or a piano and a conductor. It features complex harmonic progressions with many sharps and flats. Handwritten annotations are present, including circled numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) above certain notes and chords, and a large 'X' drawn across the middle section of the page, indicating a specific performance choice or analysis point.

b) Wittgenstein's solo piano part, bb. 346-354

This image shows Wittgenstein's solo piano part for Ravel's Concerto pour la main gauche, spanning bars 346 to 354. The music is in 6/8 time and consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The notation includes various note heads, stems, and rests, typical of a piano solo score.

struck out. While this results in an altered harmonic profile, the most conspicuous effect is the significant increase in range of the solo passage. In Ravel's original the

maximum distance covered by the hand in any one bar is just over two octaves, as in b. 346. In bb. 346-9 of Wittgenstein's version, one must cover just under three octaves and, with octave displacement in bb. 350-3, just under four. Not only is fiendishly difficult to play this accurately at the intended speed, but the visual effect of such wide physical displacement across the keyboard is strikingly different from that of the original.

While one could state that Wittgenstein merely wished to increase the difficulty of the original in order to vaunt his technical credentials, his primary motivation here may rest in the visual impact of the passage. On studying the concerto, prior to a rehearsal with orchestra, he may have felt that such a thin pianistic texture would be inaudible against a backdrop of full strings, trumpets, piccolo and percussion. If an audience was going to be unable to hear him, he might as well make sure that they saw how masterfully he could dart across the keyboard. As mentioned, the altered version is crossed out, however, and he plays Ravel's original passage in the 1937 recording with Bruno Walter and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. By the latter half of the 1930s his technique was beginning to falter and it is possible that he realised both how exposed he was in this passage and how unfeasible were his proposed modifications.<sup>16</sup>

In the second piano cadenza of the concerto, Wittgenstein makes substantial alterations to the already intricate solo part (see Ex. 53). This involves both extending the arpeggiated figuration, as at b. 508.2, or cutting the accompaniment to focus on the melodic lines, as at b. 511.3.

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<sup>16</sup> Waugh writes in *The House of Wittgenstein* that Wittgenstein, at his peak between 1928 and 1934, 'was a world-class pianist of outstanding technical ability and sensitivity who was able to galvanise an audience by his arresting stage manner' (p. 292). It is clear from subsequent recordings, however, and the gradually more critical tone of concert reviews that his technical capabilities decreased sharply from this point, much to the detriment of his posthumous reputation.

Example 53. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 508-512

a) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations

b) Transcription of Ex. 53a

508

510

sfb

event. bis  
ganz hinauf

mehrma...

512

8va

At b. 510.2 he writes that the inserted arpeggio could extend ‘possibly to the very top [of the keyboard]’ (*‘event. biz ganz hinauf’*) and in the following beat, at b. 510.3, writes ‘repeatedly’ (*‘mehrmals’*). I have not continued to insert pronounced arpeggiated flourishes from this point in my transcription as it seems that

Wittgenstein later renounced this intention. My transcription of this passage, shown in Ex. 53b, matches both what is played in the 1937 recording and the short excerpt of the concerto which was broadcast as part of a Pathé news-reel in January 1933.

As the piano is playing solo at this point, the additional flourishes and forays into the higher register of the keyboard cannot be interpreted as an attempt to emerge from the orchestral texture. It seems that Wittgenstein is instead amplifying the original technical difficulties and range in order to create an even more impressive and overwhelming part than that provided by Ravel. The interpolation of extended flourishes does interrupt the rhythm of the principal melody, as the dotted quaver-semiquaver figure in b. 508.2 and elsewhere becomes a double-dotted quaver-demisemiquaver figure, or in the considerable delay to the melodic progression at b. 512.3, for example. The melody is also displaced from the top line of the texture to the middle, surrounded on both sides by accompanimental figuration, and harmonies are freely re-voiced or substituted. While this creates a very different impression from Ravel's original, it is still extremely effective. Such pronounced virtuosity is very dramatic in this context and the emphatic rhetorical impact of the exaggerated rhythms in the melody is striking.

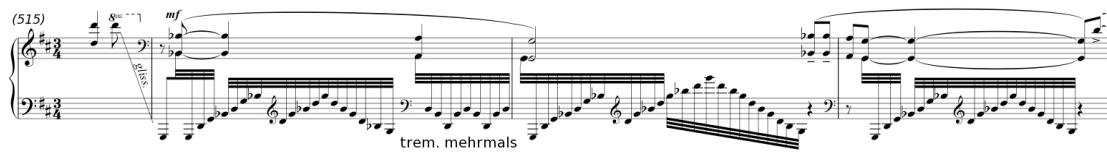
A few bars later, at the very end of the second piano cadenza, Wittgenstein replaces the descending arpeggiated figure in b. 515.3 with a glissando that starts an octave higher (see Ex. 54). From an aural perspective this stands out sharply and, of his additions, is the least successful in terms of stylistic continuity. The arpeggiated figures in Ravel's original are sometimes extended to cover the whole keyboard and eliminated entirely at others, as at bb. 517.3-518.1. The indication, at b. 516.3 to 'tremolo repeatedly' ('*trem. mehrmals*') could imply a repetition of the existing configuration, at double the speed for example, or a 'tremolo' in the more conventional

Example 54. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations, bb. 514-519

This image shows three staves of a two-piano reduction of Ravel's Concerto pour la main gauche, specifically bars 514 through 519. The reduction is annotated with various markings and lyrics. In bar 514, there are annotations like 'Schissend oben' and 'mit dem'. In bar 515, there is a large bracket over the top staff with the lyrics 'wie im früheren Pt., aber liegend eine Stelle höher'. In bar 516, there is a bracket with 'wie oben'. The piano reductions show complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

b) Transcription of the solo piano part of Ex. 54a, bb. 515.3-519



sense of the term, where the hand would ‘trill’ between the D and B<sub>1</sub> struck simultaneously and the B<sub>2</sub> below. The wide range of the interpolated arpeggios does make them more audible, at the top of the range at least, and, by cutting all but the melodic notes between b. 517 and b. 518, Wittgenstein ensures that his line will be heard.

Embellished passages are even more common in Wittgenstein’s score of Britten’s *Divisions* than they are in Ravel’s work, and tend either to be superimposed upon figuration in the cadenzas or inserted as separate sub-sections, especially between variations. Ex. 55a offers Britten’s original version of the first four bars of the ‘Recitative’, the first variation, which signals the pianist’s entry and takes the form of a solo piano cadenza. Alterations to this passage are sketched at several points throughout Wittgenstein’s two-piano reduction (see Ex. 55b). The most complex of these, written out on a blank page at the end of the score, is transcribed into printed notation in Ex. 55c. Previous versions do not diverge from this in harmonic contour or the nature of the figuration, but are merely sketched less fully.

In comparing Exx. 55a and b, one can see that Wittgenstein doubles in octaves both the trill in b. 28 and the acciaccatura which precedes it. A strict octave trill is impossible with one hand, but one may approximate its sonic effect by alternating c and d, played simultaneously by the thumb, with C and D, played with the fourth and fifth fingers, as a tremolo. In place of the rising semiquaver scale in b.29.2-3 of Britten’s original, Wittgenstein provides an arpeggiated flourish, with chromatic

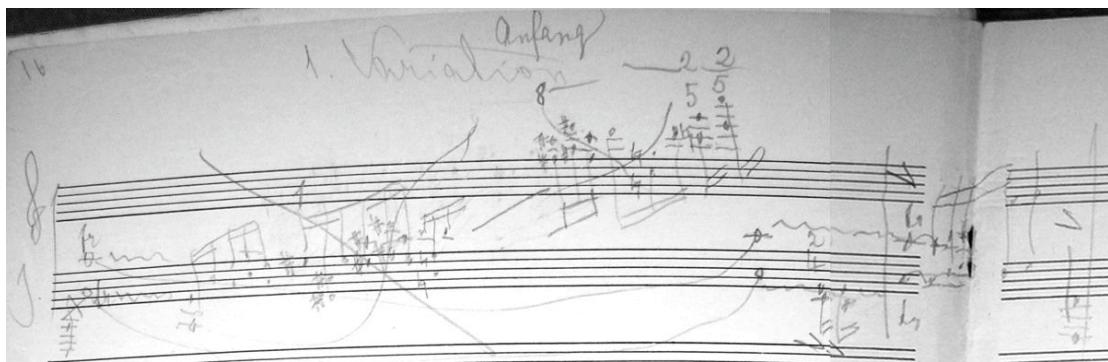
Example 55. Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, bb. 28-31

a) Britten's original version

**Var. I - Recitative**

L'istesso tempo (Maestoso) (d)

b) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations



c) Transcription of Ex. 55b

1. Variation Anfang

(28)

alterations, which extends to the highest reach of the keyboard. In b. 30 he doubles the trill in octaves once again, yet preserves Britten's rising semiquaver scale in b.31.2-3 although this, too, is doubled in octaves.

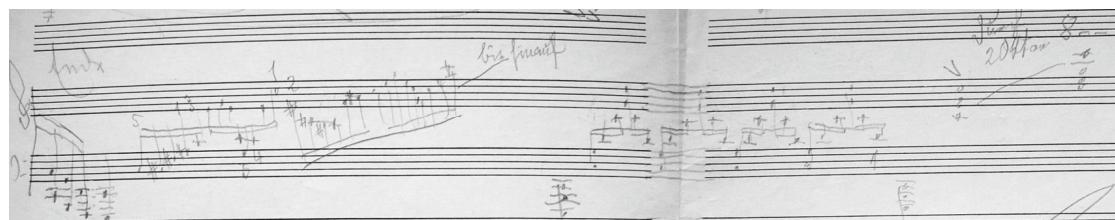
Octave doubling does not alter the contour of the original to a substantial extent. It merely increases the technical difficulty of the passage and the volume of sound that the pianist can produce. The arpeggiated flourishes are somewhat more problematic, both harmonically and stylistically. The chromatic interpolations, with

added F♯, C♯ and G♯s, stand in stark contrast to the diatonic material in C major which surrounds them. Arpeggiated flourishes are part and parcel of a Romantic style of piano writing and, as such, additions by Wittgenstein to Ravel's concerto merge naturally into the textural fabric of the whole, even if he unsettles the harmonic structure. In Britten's *Divisions* there is little precedent for such flourishes and, in the context of a comparatively sparse texture, they are extremely conspicuous.

At the end of the 'Recitative', Wittgenstein introduces another series of flourishes and substantially extends the cadenza prior to the 'Romance' which follows it (see Ex. 56).

Example 56. Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, b. 46

a) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations



b) Transcription of Ex. 56

A musical transcription of Example 56. The transcription is divided into two systems. The top system shows a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F♯), and a common time signature. It includes dynamic markings '(45)' and 'Ende'. The bottom system shows a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp (F♯), and a common time signature. Both systems feature sixteenth-note patterns. Annotations include 'bis hinauf' with an arrow pointing to a sixteenth-note cluster in the first system, and '2 Oktav.' with an arrow pointing to a bass clef note in the second system. Measure numbers 1 and 2 are indicated above the notes in both systems.

These additions are formulaic, both harmonically and texturally. We start with octave doubling of what are the final four notes of Britten's cadenza in b. 46. Again we see extended arpeggiated passages across the keyboard ('to the top' [*'bis hinauf'*]) combined with chromatic harmonies. Reinforced bass chords, which are a feature of Wittgenstein's style, make an appearance and frame a repeated flourish over a wide range about middle C. In what now seems a tremendously optimistic and flamboyant gesture, Wittgenstein ends the passage with a glissando in octaves, which may include the triads between the outer notes, over two octaves of the keyboard in the higher register. As the notation is incomplete one cannot say for sure what exactly he intended, yet to include the inner triad seems, at first, preposterous. Although Wittgenstein sat somewhat to the right of the centre of the keyboard when he played, his left hand would still have had to cross over his body in order to execute this. Leading a glissando with the thumb, in an upwards direction in this range of keyboard is by no means straightforward. To do so in octaves with added triads is nigh impossible on the modern instrument.

We cannot know whether or not Wittgenstein managed this feat in performance. There are no recordings of his playing the work, either at the premiere or in subsequent performances. Nor do we know what kind of instruments he had at his disposal when he was touring in America. The Viennese pianos of the early twentieth century would have had a much lighter key depth and action than the pianos to which we are accustomed today, or indeed to those which Wittgenstein would have been likely to come across in America in the 1940s. On a Blüthner from the turn of the twentieth century, for example, this glissando is, miraculously, effortless.<sup>17</sup> If

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<sup>17</sup> Over the past 50 years, the touch depth of piano keys has deepened considerably in response to the increased weight of hammers. Whereas in 1960 the depth of keys might be 9mm on a Bluthner or 9.5mm on other brands, today one is more likely to encounter key depths of 10mm, or perhaps even 10.5 or 11mm on occasion. (I am grateful to Malcolm McKeand, piano technician at the

Wittgenstein did manage to translate this feat onto modern instruments then it would have formed an impressive finale to the cadenza.

The second cadenza of Britten's *Divisions* comprises the second half of 'Toccata II', the thirteenth variation of the set. Beyond a few octave doublings, Wittgenstein does not alter the body of this cadenza to any great extent, although his modifications to the final part are quite striking (see Ex. 57). There are a few sketches of this passage in Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction of the work which precede the excerpt I have provided in Ex. 57b. As these are not in any way continuous or complete, however, and tally with the outline given in Ex. 57b, I have disregarded them for the purposes of the transcription.

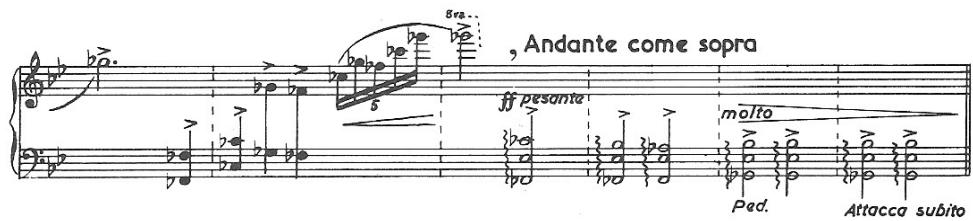
Instead of the final seven minims which conclude Britten's cadenza, Wittgenstein creates a conglomerate of low semibreve chords and arpeggiated figures across the entire breadth of the keyboard, with extra notes liberally inserted into the original harmonies. The pianist does provide a brief concession to the emphasis placed on the final E♭ minor harmony in Britten's original by extending the closing descent, but this does little to restore its original character. The variation which follows this cadenza, the 'Adagio', starts with an extended melody for *pianissimo* strings and wind which forms arguably the most peaceful and introverted point of the entire work. The final seven minims of Britten's cadenza bring us from the comparatively pyrotechnic nature of the preceding variation to the calm of the following 'Adagio'. Wittgenstein's reworked version amplifies and prolongs the brilliance of the virtuosic figuration without taking into account the consequences that this will have for the internal logic of the work. He complicates the passage substantially, while focusing attention on himself at the orchestra's expense.

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Guildhall School of Music & Drama for this insight).

Example 57. Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, b. 464.xix-xxii

a) Original version b. 464.xvii-xxii



b) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations

A handwritten musical score for two pianos, labeled "Satz 28 von dem Adagio". The score consists of eight staves of music, each with various annotations and markings. The annotations include various symbols such as dots, crosses, and horizontal lines, likely indicating specific performance techniques or Wittgenstein's own compositional ideas. The score is written on a grid of five-line staves.

c) Transcription of Ex. 57b

Seite 28, vor dem Adagio

These modifications may seem extreme, but they do accord with Wittgenstein's personal motivations in commissioning *Divisions*. He asked for a 'showpiece', and thus the substance of these alterations, if not their style, better fits the work to its intended purpose. While embellished passages usually occur within cadenzas, or at junctures between variations, why Wittgenstein should have felt compelled to insert such conspicuous figuration at this point is an intriguing question.<sup>18</sup> The slow rhythmic values of the original could perhaps be taken as an invitation to improvise, as if the passage was left deliberately incomplete to allow the performer creative licence. One could suggest that Wittgenstein superimposed a

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<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein's preference for inserting passages in the spaces between variations or movements is also evident in his modifications to other works. Josef Weinberger have recently published Schmidt's Piano Quintet in G major (1926), which includes an additional cadenza written by Wittgenstein to be inserted between the final two movements (I am grateful to the pianist Keith Snell for drawing my attention to this).

Baroque aesthetic onto a modernist work, in the quest for a more personal interpretation. It seems more likely, however, that the simplicity of Britten's original did not afford Wittgenstein sufficient latitude for virtuosic display.

The final excerpt which Wittgenstein embellished significantly in *Divisions* is the last bar of the ‘Adagio’, just prior to the final variation, the ‘Tarantella’. Britten’s original consists merely of a dotted minim on an E $\flat$ <sub>2</sub>, in place of which Wittgenstein interpolates yet another cadential passage. There are three substantial sketches for this section, two of which are complete and one of which lacks only the final modulation to C major. I have provided the sketch for the first of these in Ex. 58a and that for the latter two in Ex. 59a. The first version proposed in Ex. 59a, which remains incomplete, is crossed out and Wittgenstein indicates that only the second version, transcribed in Ex. 59c should be played.<sup>19</sup> Although the versions share harmonic progressions and textural figuration, I have transcribed all three in the hope of providing some insight into Wittgenstein’s method of working.

In the first version, transcribed in Ex. 58b, Wittgenstein writes four consecutive ascending octave flourishes. It is not clear in the sketch precisely where the second and third of these should end, so I have finished them with the same pitch on which they start as, in both cases, this is the most physically comfortable version to play and sounds most complete. Whether this was intended or not is impossible to say. The passage ends with a descending chromatic scale in fifths over three and a half octaves which is, needless to say, fiendishly difficult and the pianistic equivalent of a particularly vicious tongue-twister. It would take extensive practice to make the scale fluent and swift, both of which are necessary if one wishes to sound like a virtuoso rather than a student practising a technical exercise.

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<sup>19</sup> He writes ‘*nur das als Überleitung zur Tarantella*’ [‘only this version [should be played] in the approach to the Tarantella’ (my translation)].

Example 58. Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, b. 519

a) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations

This image shows a handwritten musical score for two pianos. The title "Zwischen Es-moll, Variation und Tarantella" is written at the top. The score consists of four staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of E-flat major (one flat). Annotations include various numbers (e.g., 4, 5, 12, 45, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 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1899, 1900, 1901, 19

b) Transcription of the first version shown in Ex. 59a

c) Transcription of the second version shown in Ex. 59a

The other two versions of this passage preserve many of the features of the first. In Ex. 59b the initial arpeggiated flourish from Ex. 58b is replicated but then descends, still broadly within an E $\flat$  minor harmony. This is followed by a low octave on an E $\flat_2$ , which is then succeeded by the second and third ascending arpeggiated figures from Ex. 58b. A second low octave E $\flat$  is followed by another ascending figure, which is somewhat more complex than its predecessors, and which seems to have led to a dead end. It is possible that, at this point, Wittgenstein decided to abandon the attempt and sketched a simpler version, which is transcribed in Ex. 59c. This third version is almost identical to the first. One has only to cut the first three ascending figures from Ex. 58b. All versions stand in stark contrast to the peace of the preceding ‘Adagio’ and all would sound like an imposition in performance. There is no precedent in *Divisions* for the descending chromatic scale in fifths, nor for the pronounced virtuosity of this gesture. The motivic and stylistic disparity of these

passages with the surrounding musical material would be evident, even to an inexpert ear, yet many would still be impressed with the pianist's technical dexterity.

## Cuts

In concertos which he had previously commissioned, Wittgenstein had not been reticent when it came to making cuts and Ravel's was no exception. In 'Badgering the Creative Genius', Predota shows how Wittgenstein cut the triangle, woodblock and tambourine parts from b. 373 onwards, which radically changes the character of the passage in question.<sup>20</sup> It seems unlikely that the performer could have felt threatened by their presence at this point. The piano part is already subsumed in the orchestral texture and, in reducing the volume of sound produced by these instruments, Wittgenstein is still unlikely to be heard clearly by an audience. It is far more probable that their percussive timbre had too 'modern' an edge and did not correlate with his desire for a rich, melodious sonority.<sup>21</sup>

At the very end of the concerto, shown in Ex. 60, Wittgenstein cuts an entire bar from both the solo piano and the orchestral parts. Remarkably enough, this version is used in both the 1937 recording with Bruno Walter and the 1933 Pathé film clip where Ravel himself is conducting. The dispute between Wittgenstein and Ravel regarding the former's alterations to this concerto is legendary. After hearing a performance of the work in 1932, played by Wittgenstein with a piano accompaniment at a private soirée in Vienna, Ravel was incensed. In the furious exchange of letters which followed, Wittgenstein asserted that 'interpreters do not

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<sup>20</sup> Predota, 'Badgering the Creative Genius', p. 83.

<sup>21</sup> It seems unlikely that this part was expunged for financial reasons as it would not necessitate hiring an extra percussion player.

Example 60. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*, bb. 525-30.

Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations.



have to be slaves' to which Ravel notoriously responded, 'Interpreters are slaves'.<sup>22</sup>

The two men eventually came to an agreement and, when Wittgenstein finally came to Paris to play the work, the orchestra played the parts as written whereas the pianist was permitted to perform his own version of the cadenzas.<sup>23</sup> In general this principle

<sup>22</sup> Marguerite Long, *Au piano avec Maurice Ravel* (Paris: Juilliard, 1971), pp. 87-8.

<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Madeleine Goss on 24 August 1947, Wittgenstein mentioned that he 'proposed a change, but not for facility's sake, before the entrance of the piano in the last cadenza [see Ex. 61 below], but Ravel objected, I had to submit and I did submit!' (Flindell, 'Paul Wittgenstein', p. 123). It seems, given his 'obedience' to the composer in the tutti passages, if not the solo cadenzas, of the 1937

holds for the performance filmed by Pathé, yet the omission of b. 528, in a passage that one would assume was in Ravel's domain, seems odd. In the 1957 recording by Jacques Février, to whom Ravel entrusted the first 'official' performance of the concerto in 1937, both orchestra and soloist play this passage as written.

Despite the considerably sparser texture of Britten's *Divisions*, Wittgenstein still found fault with the scoring: in a letter to Britten on the 31 July 1941 he states that it creates 'not only an unequal, but a hopeless strife'.<sup>24</sup> In bb. 144-5 of the 'March' the piano resembles a 'cricket chirping between two roars of a lion'. In bb. 624-40 of the 'Toccata', the brilliant passages in the piano part will be entirely inaudible due to the strings, brass and high woodwind. He concludes by saying that such heavy scoring 'not only contradicts the aim and sense of a concerto; it also throws . . . an undeserved bad light on the unfortunate soloist. [They will say that] the pianist has no strength'. Presumably this quarrel had been going on for some time, as Britten writes in a letter to Ralph Hawkes on July 23 'I'm having a slight altercation with Herr von Wittgenstein over my scoring - if there *is* anything I know about it is scoring & so I'm fighting back. The man really is an old sour puss'.<sup>25</sup> It seems that Britten held his ground and that the orchestra played the parts as written at the premiere in Philadelphia on the 16 January 1942.

Wittgenstein did perform the piece extensively throughout the United States on subsequent occasions, however. A set of orchestral parts for *Divisions* is held in the Wittgenstein Archive and it is clear, from markings in different colours and hands, that these were used in performance on at least two occasions.<sup>26</sup> In the passage which

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recording that this assertion was sincere.

<sup>24</sup> The letter to which I refer in this passage is held in the Britten-Pears Archive in Suffolk and is, as yet, unpublished.

<sup>25</sup> Cooke, Mitchell and Reed, *Letters from a Life*, pp. 956-7.

<sup>26</sup> I am grateful to Dr Georg Predota for studying the orchestral parts and for informing me of the passages which Wittgenstein cut.

he found problematic in the ‘Toccata’, he has cut the trombone, horn and bass tuba parts so that the interjections by the pianist are more clearly audible. At the end of the ‘Chant’, in bb. 224-30, he cuts the flute, clarinet, viola, cello and double bass parts which originally doubled the piano. He is essentially left with a piano solo, supported by a lone harp, marked *pianissimo*.

There are a number of passages in both works where Wittgenstein cuts orchestral parts, only to reappropriate the material as a piano solo. The most striking example of this occurs in Ravel’s *Concerto pour la main gauche* from b. 459 (see Ex. 61). This is at the very beginning of the third principal part of the work, where themes from the very opening return in a phenomenal climax, in orchestra and piano alike. Wittgenstein silences the entire orchestra during bb. 459-471.2 allowing it to re-enter, only to provide a flourish prior to the second solo piano cadenza.<sup>27</sup> From his two-piano reduction, shown in Ex. 61a, it seems clear that he has considered how to rearrange the entire passage for left-hand piano, as an additional solo cadenza.

In the empty stave, just beneath the rehearsal figure [46], Wittgenstein sketches a lead-in to the passage in triplets. The low D at the beginning of the glissando in b. 459 is doubled in octaves. He then takes the repeated F major chords in bb. 459-60 from the orchestral part, before returning to the solo piano part to play the elaborated D pedal-note. The transcription continues this approach, alternating orchestral melody and piano interjections, until b. 463.3 where it seems that Wittgenstein replaced the first part of the flourish in the piano with a quaver chord, perhaps to increase the volume of sound that he could produce and to amplify its rhetorical effect.

The figuration in b. 464 is transposed to the highest four octaves of the

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<sup>27</sup> See Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius’, pp. 87-8.

Example 61. Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche*

a) Wittgenstein's two-piano reduction with annotations, bb. 458-64

b) Transcription of Ex. 61a, bb. 457-63

keyboard and is displaced so that the highest note of each subgroup is played on the quaver beat. Both of these features would make it easier for the solo pianist to break through the orchestral texture and to be heard, were the orchestra playing. In this case, one could suggest that the final quaver chord in b. 463.3 is to provide bass resonance in order to support the figuration which follows, and that the higher placement of the flourish in b. 464 is intended to add a virtuosic sparkle to the passage. Wittgenstein continues in this vein throughout this section and it is clear, from the emphatic instructions in the orchestral parts, that this version was performed a number of times.

On this occasion, Wittgenstein's attempt to increase the impact the solo pianist has in performance by cutting orchestral parts is misjudged. By creating a solo cadenza in place of the orchestral climax he not only significantly decreases the volume and impact of the passage at this point, he also radically undermines the large-scale structure of the work. This section provides its fulcrum and, far from merely altering the 'coloration' of this passage, Wittgenstein has severely compromised its architectural function. In the original version, Ravel takes material from the first solo piano cadenza and redistributes it in bb. 459-471.2 among contrasting sections of the orchestra, preserving the alternation of high and low register on the keyboard in the oscillation between different instrumental groups. This passage transcends the individuality inherent in the first solo piano cadenza and provides a moving climax to the work. When played by a solo piano, it does not even approximate the power of the original and, in the context of the tutti passages which frame it, sounds ludicrously insubstantial. In this case, Wittgenstein's sister Gretl's assertion that 'he insists on trying to do, what really cannot be done' seems apt.<sup>28</sup>

Wittgenstein does much the same thing in the 'Adagio' of Britten's

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<sup>28</sup> Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 276.

*Divisions*, which follows the second solo piano cadenza of the work shown in Ex. 58, although here the effect is not as detrimental. One could, after all, argue that the muted peace of the ‘Adagio’ is better served by a lone pianist than by an ensemble of mixed wind and strings. The orchestral reduction of the part for second piano is heavily annotated and, once again, it seems that Wittgenstein considered how to rearrange the material to be played by the left hand alone (see Ex. 62).

Example 62. Britten’s *Divisions*, op. 21, bb. 465-70

a) Wittgenstein’s two-piano reduction with annotations

b) Transcription of Ex. 62a

Piano anfangen

He writes that the piano should start the variation, presumably to the exclusion of the orchestra. The bracket, combined with the figure ‘8’, which he uses at b. 465.1 and b. 467.3 for example, indicates that the chord should be reinforced at the lower octave.

He writes that the f in the melody at b. 465.1 should be played ‘later’, presumably intending it to be played later than the chord on the lower stave. In bb. 475–8 he states that ‘this octave is to be played, when this chord is left out’ (my translation).<sup>29</sup> Although it is unclear in which precise order he wishes to play particular chords, it does show that Wittgenstein was trying to minimise the necessary asynchronicity that would occur when spreading chords or leaping across wide areas of the keyboard with one hand.

At b. 471.3 he indicates that the notes on each stave should be spread to make a single chord, in contrast to his attempts previously to leap between the staves. Fingerings and expressive markings continue to be added until b. 476 when it appears that the orchestra is to re-enter. Whereas in Britten’s original the orchestra plays for 19 bars before the soloist enters, Wittgenstein permits them an interlude of only eight.

This alteration to the ‘Adagio’ seems like a transgression and Wittgenstein does not mention his intentions for this passage in any surviving correspondence. Britten stated in a letter to Albert Goldberg that he had dashed to Philadelphia for the premiere of the work ‘to hear Wittgenstein wreck my *Divisions*’ but does not describe in detail how the pianist achieved this.<sup>30</sup> Whether Wittgenstein dared to omit the orchestral parts of the ‘Adagio’ in the composer’s presence is an open question. His enthusiasm for making such significant alterations to works may have been dampened through experience of Ravel’s displeasure, but Britten was, at this point, a very young composer and had been paid a considerable fee.<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein may have

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Diese Oktave ist zu spielen, wenn dieser Akkord weggelassen wird’.

<sup>30</sup> Cooke, Mitchell, and Reed, *Letters from a Life*, p. 1014.

<sup>31</sup> Britten was paid \$700 for *Divisions* which, in comparison with the concertos Wittgenstein had previously commissioned, is actually rather a low figure (see So Young Kim-Park, *Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die linke Hand* [Aachen: Shaker, 1999], p. 171). Yet Wittgenstein had lost a great deal of his fortune when he left Austria and may not have been in a position to pay such high fees. For Britten, moreover, \$700 represented half his income in 1941, a not inconsiderable proportion.

felt he was in a position to take greater licence with the work. One can see, moreover, from the orchestral parts of *Divisions*, held in the Wittgenstein Archive, that on subsequent performances the orchestral parts were cut in this passage.

Thus it is clear that Wittgenstein's alterations to these two concertos had varying levels of success, both on a practical and an aesthetic level. Some of the harmonic alterations, substantial cuts and rebalancing of timbres derive from impulses which seem to have been driven more by personal taste than by considered judgment. Yet this is not always the case. On many occasions Wittgenstein would have been more aware of the practical effect of scoring in performance than the composers were, and some of the cuts to the orchestral parts that he practised may have enhanced balance within the ensemble. While frequent octave doubling may initially resemble an attempt at superficial virtuosity, it is also the simplest and least intrusive way to reinforce the sonority that the solo pianist can produce. The passages where Wittgenstein has significantly exaggerated the virtuosic impact of his part cannot merely be dismissed as vainglory. At times, particularly in the second cadenza of Ravel's concerto, the dramatic and rhetorical import of his version is masterful and could provide a valid alternative to the original. Moreover, he demonstrates an incisive awareness of the visual aspect of performance. The 'body' of the performer is always a key element in live performance, but as a left-handed pianist it takes on a heightened significance. As the right sleeve of his jacket lay dormant, the visual impact of his struggle with certain figurations, whether 'artificially enhanced' or otherwise, would have enriched the stereotypical concerto narrative of the individual striving to assert himself against the crowd.

While Wittgenstein's wealth, social status and, at times, seniority may have been factors in the freedom he took with these works, many others issues clearly come into play. Wittgenstein occupied an ambiguous position in the performer-composer spectrum and often straddled the two disciplines. His understanding of his function as a soloist had much in common with traditions of the late-nineteenth century and of romantic pianism, as defined by Kenneth Hamilton, where the 'performer, not the composer, is the centre of interest'.<sup>32</sup> In this tradition, being 'faithful' to the score was encouraged, but musicians' understanding of what this entailed diverged strongly from a modern conception where we proceed 'from more literal assumptions'.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century the piano itself was in a state of flux and performers, Godowsky included, felt the need to improve 'music of the past in the light of modern advances' to better adapt it to new instruments.<sup>34</sup> This ethos extended well beyond the realms of piano music. Wagner's essay 'The Rendering of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony', for example, was an attempt to 'rectify' passages where Beethoven had had to 'compromise the musical logic in order to accommodate the technologically limited instruments available to him'.<sup>35</sup> While this may seem like gross impertinence today, at the time it was part and parcel of mainstream musical thought.

The growing strength of the work-concept in the nineteenth century can be viewed as a reaction against these trends, 'preserving the work from contaminating contexts and contingencies, including the imperfections of its performances and the

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<sup>32</sup> Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, p. 255.

<sup>33</sup> Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, p. 186.

<sup>34</sup> Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Cook, 'The Editor and the Virtuoso, or Schenker versus Bulow', *JMA*, 116/1, 1991, p. 83.

limitations of its material base'.<sup>36</sup> Audiences became more vocal in their criticism of performers whose liberties with the score 'owed more to egotism than inspiration' and this change in values began to be reflected on the concert stage.<sup>37</sup> David Trippett shows how Liszt, in the late 1840s, 'appeared to reflect a well-documented shift in values. His emphasis moved from virtuosity to interpretation . . . from the ephemeral performance to the immutable work'.<sup>38</sup> By the first half of the twentieth century, the pendulum had reached the height of its arc. The notion of a composer's score as sacrosanct was widespread and Ravel, in his criticism of Wittgenstein's alterations, saw the pianist 'not only as impinging upon a socially accepted hierarchy . . . that granted considerably higher value to the composer, but also accused him of violating and corrupting the purportedly indelible significance of the musical text'.<sup>39</sup>

Wittgenstein's questioning of the inviolability of the composer's score can be attributed both to an old-fashioned musical sensibility and to a rather domineering streak in his personality. Yet one could also suggest that he placed greater value on the performer's role in the creation of a work. The great violinist, Joseph Joachim, for whom Brahms wrote his Violin Concerto in D major, was a great uncle of Wittgenstein and the significant part that he played in the creation of Brahms' work would have been well known to the pianist. Wittgenstein's attempt to create a 'perceived equilibrium of artistic collaboration' was not, therefore, without precedent, although it may have been distorted somewhat by his incorrect presumption that the violinist had complete freedom in the cadenza to the first movement.<sup>40</sup>

That the performer had the scope to modify works once they were completed

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<sup>36</sup> Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, p. 197.

<sup>38</sup> David Trippett, 'Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and *Werktreue* in the "Dante" Sonata'. *I9CM*, 32/1, 2008, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> Predota, 'Badgering the Creative Genius', p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> Predota, 'Badgering the Creative Genius', p. 97.

was also very much a part of Wittgenstein's ethos. After receiving a request from Ravel in 1932, in the form of a legally binding contract, to play his work as it appears in the score, Wittgenstein countered that

a formal commitment to play your work henceforth strictly as it is written . . . is completely out of the question. No self-respecting artist could accept such a condition. All pianists make modifications, large or small, in each concerto we play.<sup>41</sup>

A little later in this letter Wittgenstein states, somewhat perplexingly, that 'I have in no way changed the essence of your work. I have only changed the instrumentation'.<sup>42</sup> That the pianist believed instrumentation to be a purely superficial element of a work goes a considerable way towards explaining the authority he felt he could wield in making such substantial alterations to the orchestration. It is clear that for Wittgenstein, in many respects, the 'age of active collaboration was not at all dead'.<sup>43</sup>

These facets of a nineteenth-century, romantic ideology are reflected in the nature of the virtuosity to which it seems Wittgenstein aspired. Jim Samson highlights an understanding of virtuosity from the 1830s onwards as 'a liberal ideology' where the 'composer-performer as a free, in some sense otherworldly, spirit, achieved real dignity'.<sup>44</sup> In 'heroically overcoming his instrument, he was a powerful symbol of transcendence'.<sup>45</sup> This model may have appealed particularly to Wittgenstein as he was not only compelled to overcome his instrument, but also the stigma of being a 'one-armed pianist'.

Wittgenstein commissioned a great number of solo, chamber and concerto works but the proportion of concertos is surprisingly high and tallies with his primary goal which was to advance his career. He had the financial means to hire orchestras,

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<sup>41</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 594.

<sup>42</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 594.

<sup>43</sup> Flindell, 'Paul Wittgenstein', p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, pp. 74-5.

book large halls and to support international concert tours which ensured both larger audiences and greater publicity than if he had restricted himself purely to solo recitals. His declaration to Ravel that he wished ‘to be put in the spotlight’ and that he had ‘the right to request the necessary modifications for this objective to be attained’ shows that he clearly intended the concertos to function as showpieces for his talent.<sup>46</sup> The Pathé film clip of 1933 reflects this distinctly. Ravel, conducting the orchestra, is almost fully obscured by the raised lid of the piano. The clips that are selected from the concerto are largely those in which the pianist is either more prominent than the orchestra or plays a solo cadenza. Wittgenstein felt that a hierarchy, in which the ‘soloist plays the principal role and should not concentrate too much attention on the orchestra’, was implicit in the concerto as a genre.<sup>47</sup>

That Wittgenstein felt he ‘owned’ the concertos which he had commissioned, in several senses, is also very clear. He had, after all, paid for these works which had been written with his specific requirements in mind. In attempting to build a career as a left-hand pianist, with no serious precedents on which to model this effort, securing exclusive performance rights for at least five years after the works were completed was essential. It would be disastrous, for example, if better known, two-handed pianists were to play these works in their own concerts and Wittgenstein was notorious for collecting full scores and orchestral parts of these works after each performance to prevent them going astray.<sup>48</sup> He refused to let Prokofiev rearrange for two hands the un-premiered fourth piano concerto in case, were Wittgenstein to play it in public in future, people might think that he was playing an arrangement of a two-handed work

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<sup>46</sup> Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 594.

<sup>47</sup> My translation [‘Der Solist die Hauptrolle spielt und das Orchester nicht zuviel Aufmerksamkeit auf sich konzentrieren darf’], Kim-Park, *Paul Wittgenstein*, p. 184.

<sup>48</sup> Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius’, p. 85.

and not an original.<sup>49</sup> That his fears were not unfounded though, is clear from the fate of Franz Schmidt's works for left-hand piano, to which Wittgenstein felt particularly close. After Wittgenstein left for America in 1938, these works were appropriated by the Austrian pianist Friedrich Wührer who arranged them all for two hands and who described Wittgenstein as 'rich, presumptuous and, as a pianist, lousy'.<sup>50</sup> Wührer gained great success with these arrangements in concert, ignoring the fact that they were still exclusively contracted to Wittgenstein, to the extent that, until recently, the arrangements were the only versions of these works available in print.<sup>51</sup>

This sense of ownership extended beyond purely practical concerns into the intellectual and creative territory of the work. After the premiere and almost universally negative critical reception of Strauss' *Parergon zur Sinfonia Domestica* in 1928, which many considered to be a mere rearrangement of the orchestral symphony, Wittgenstein took a much firmer hand in the creation of the concertos he commissioned.<sup>52</sup> That this episode, where critics had dismissed Wittgenstein as nothing more than a rich dilettante and Strauss as prematurely senile, was present in his mind as late as 1940 is clear from correspondence with Britten. In a letter on the 11 August of that year, he leaves the choice of the title for the work up to Britten but does state 'the only thing I would rather not have is "for Paul Wittgenstein": The words "for P.W. to my taste smell too much like "written at the request of P.W." I would prefer:

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<sup>49</sup> ['En cas que, mettons dans quelques années après la publication de l'arrangement pour deux mains, mes oreilles se seraient faites à votre musique, et qu'alors j'aurais le désir de jouer votre concerto en public, je risquerais que le public croirait que c'est un arrangement que je joue; tandis qu'il m'importerait alors qu'on sache, que c'est là l'original' ['In the case where, several years after the publication of the arrangement for two hands, my ears accustomed themselves to your music, and that I therefore wanted to play your concerto in public, I would risk that the public believed I played an arrangement; while it is important that they know that what I play is the original'] (my translation)] from a letter sent to Prokofiev on 11 October 1934, held in the Prokofiev Archive.

<sup>50</sup> Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 284.

<sup>51</sup> I am grateful to Tom Corfield for this insight.

<sup>52</sup> See Predota, 'Badgering the Creative Genius', p. 97.

“Dedicated to Paul Wittgenstein”.<sup>53</sup> By March of 1941 Britten was considering meeting Sir John Barbirolli to discuss a premiere of the work. Wittgenstein mentions, in a letter on the 6 March, that ‘a *stress*, I think, should be put under the fact, that you have written that work not under any kind of external compulsion, this being perhaps otherwise suspected, but with genuine inspiration like your other works’. While Wittgenstein was perfectly aware that he had commissioned these concertos to serve a very real practical purpose, he understood that, to ensure a positive reception, inspiration must be seen to have played a larger part.

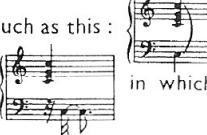
While creating and sustaining a concert career was certainly a priority, that Wittgenstein had long-term prospects in mind is clear from his attempts to create his own ‘school’ of left-hand piano playing. This ambition is most clearly expressed in his three-volume *Schule für die linke Hand* (1957) which comprises exercises, studies and transcriptions of popular pieces from the mainstream repertoire for the left-handed pianist.<sup>54</sup> In the ‘Preface’ to this work he enumerates the principal techniques which he had developed over the course of his career. These include the ‘skilful application of the half change of the pedal’, playing particularly forceful notes with his fist (indicated with an ‘o’) and others with two fingers simultaneously, in order to increase their volume. He elucidates a technique which was very particular to his style of playing, whereby the higher part of a chord is struck loudly, a split second before the bass notes which are played *pianissimo* (see Figure 6). If one uses the pedal, it is possible to give the illusion that the left hand has played a chord simultaneously which is, in fact, far beyond its span. As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein also sat slightly to the right of the centre of the keyboard, and recommended this position for left-hand playing, as one

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<sup>53</sup> This letter, and those from Wittgenstein to Britten which are cited subsequently, are held in the Britten-Pears Archive in Suffolk.

<sup>54</sup> Wittgenstein, *Schule für die linke Hand*, ‘Preface’.

Figure 6. Excerpt from the ‘Preface’ of Wittgenstein’s *Schule für die linke Hand*

fingering to be the surest and most convenient. Among other things, I wish to point out that for chords such as  for which a fingering of  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{2}{1}$  is most often indicated, I always advise  $\frac{1}{2}$  instead; because this fingering, if executed with the proper turn of the wrist, permits a faster  $\frac{3}{5}$  and thus less noticeable breaking of the chord. In instances such as this :  the bracket ) is meant to suggest approximately the following execution :  in which, it will be noted, the accent is on the *chord* and not on the bass note. Therefore, one must not play thus:  but the bass must immediately follow the chord pianissimo ; the chord itself must be held by means of the pedal, in order to achieve the impression that both are played simultaneously—a special feature of technique which must be practised separately.

does not have to turn the body excessively to reach the higher range of the keyboard.

While Wittgenstein freely acknowledged the superiority of the composers with whom he worked, as composers, he always asserted that he was the better left-handed pianist.<sup>55</sup> He was the first one-armed pianist to build and sustain a credible concert career and, as he must have realised at the time, set the standard for those who were to follow. The works that he commissioned, and the ways in which he performed them, comprise a canon of left-hand pianism in which questions of the authority of the text and of virtuosity are intimately entwined.

The physical process of playing the piano with one hand is not different from playing it with two and, in essence, no more challenging. Difficulties are imposed, as it were, from outside, in the kinds of material which people write for the instrument. If one imagined a race of one-armed people, for example, it is feasible that they might invent a musical instrument which resembled the piano, whereas a violin would be utterly out of the question. As with one’s experience of the physical aspect of left-hand piano playing, so is one’s musical and social reception conditioned by preconceptions

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<sup>55</sup> Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius’, p. 97.

and, at times, prejudices. Wittgenstein was keenly aware of the dangers which might befall him as a left-handed pianist, most especially of being perceived as a ‘freak’ rather than an artist in his own right. That people might buy tickets to his concerts in the hope of seeing a ‘fun-fair exhibit’ or to empathise with the ‘victim’ pianist were very real possibilities.<sup>56</sup> It seems particularly unjust, moreover, that a two-armed artist playing the concertos that Wittgenstein had commissioned, while significantly transforming the original meanings of these works, would not run the risk of such disparagement. Thus, as a left-handed pianist, Wittgenstein was obliged not only to develop a technique and to build a repertoire but also experienced an acute need to project credibility on the concert stage. In elaborating the original technical difficulties of a work, Wittgenstein was able to demonstrate that his competence matched and even exceeded that of many two-handed pianists, and that he was not, in effect, a ‘one-trick wonder’.

In prioritising the technical impact of his performances, he fell prey, at times, to a more superficial virtuosity than he might initially have intended. Many criticisms of virtuosity itself, from the eighteenth century onwards, focus on its associations with triviality and degradation of noble cultural ideals. In the mid-twentieth century the word still implied in many circles that ‘technical excellence has become an end in itself’ and entailed the ‘total and condemnable subjection of the work to the interpreter, to his “physical” pleasure’.<sup>57</sup> Yet Wittgenstein’s aspirations lay far more in the realms of high art than of mass entertainment and, while the quality of some interpolations may be questionable, his distinctive virtuosity contributes a great deal to the expressive impact of these works.

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<sup>56</sup> See Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 110 and Patterson, *One handed*, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Harman, ‘Virtuosity and Music’, pp. 329-30; Marc Pincherle and Willis Wagner, ‘Virtuosity’, *MQ*, 35/2 (1949), p. 227.

Wittgenstein's concern over heavy scoring in the concertos is often justified and reflects an insecurity which is specific to the left-handed player. Indeed, his anxiety that the audience might doubt his strength occasionally borders on hypersensitivity. Clearly a left-handed pianist will have less strength at his or her disposal than a two-armed pianist, especially as the body's centre of gravity is imbalanced when playing with only one arm. Yet there are plenty of occasions in the two-handed concerto repertoire where the pianist is also drowned out by the orchestra. In these cases, an audience may hear a work on multiple occasions and can compare different artists. They may realise that the pianist cannot be heard because of the orchestration, and not because of a personal deficiency. A pioneer of the left-hand repertoire, Wittgenstein did not have this luxury. In the debacle following the premiere of Strauss' *Parergon zur Sinfonia Domestica*, Wittgenstein was referred to in the press as a patron but was 'with benign condescension and injudicious embarrassment relating to his disability, ignored as a pianist'.<sup>58</sup> As the only exponent of the works he commissioned, for at least the first few years after their composition, comparison with other artists was impossible. The blame would rest entirely on his shoulders.

To the stigma of being a one-armed artist is also added the stigma of left-handedness itself. I have already highlighted how the left hand is often regarded as technically less competent than the right and is frequently given an inferior role. While I have argued that, in *Divisions*, Britten celebrates the one-handedness of the pianist, one could also counter than the title of the piece is in some way an apology. He describes *Divisions*, in a letter to Elizabeth Mayer on the 12 September 1940, as

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<sup>58</sup> Predota, 'Badgering the Creative Genius', p. 97.

‘not deep – but quite pretty!’.<sup>59</sup> Did he believe that the left hand was in some way incapable of managing more serious fare? Or was he merely revelling in the virtuosic and light-hearted character of what Ravel would have termed a ‘genuine concerto’?<sup>60</sup>

With so much to struggle against, both in musical and social terms, it is not perhaps surprising that Wittgenstein’s relationship to and perception of his own disability was so complex. It is possible, as Prokofiev rather disparagingly put it, that without his disability Wittgenstein would have ‘not stood out from a crowd of mediocre pianists’, that he, in some way, owed his career to the loss of his right arm.<sup>61</sup> Yet Wittgenstein managed to transform his disability into an expressive feature in its own right, while clearly, at times, feeling a need to ‘overcome’ it.

Disability studies is littered with critiques of what is known as the ‘overcoming’ narrative. This is both the most commonly presented method of solving the ‘problem’ of disability and is perceived as an imposition from outside.<sup>62</sup> Through it, the disabled person is obliged to adapt to society with no mutual obligation on society to take responsibility for the ways its deals with disability.<sup>63</sup> Disabled people are ‘depicted as pained by their fate or, if happy, it is through personal triumph over their adversity’.<sup>64</sup> Wittgenstein’s personal brand of virtuosity, then, as an attempt to transcend not only the instrument but also his disability, is very clearly part of this dialectic.

There is currently a common understanding that disability should be defined

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<sup>59</sup> Cooke, Mitchell and Reed, *Letters from a Life*, p. 861.

<sup>60</sup> In an interview with *Excelsior* in October 1931 Ravel described his two-handed piano concerto in G major as a ‘genuine concerto’ then cites Mozart and Saint-Saëns as his models before saying that he originally thought of entitling the work ‘*Divertissement*’ (see Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 485).

<sup>61</sup> My translation [‘Он может и не выбился бы из толпы пианистов среднего разряда’] in Sassmann, *Zur Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte*, p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> Titchovsky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*, pp. 177–9.

<sup>63</sup> Linton, *Claiming Disability*, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> Linton, *Claiming Disability*, p. 25.

not as a medical condition *per se* but as a social and cultural construct projected onto that condition.<sup>65</sup> The multifarious ways in which disability may be perceived from the outside are evident in the variety of critical responses to Wittgenstein's performances. Some are utterly dismissive of his venture, as with Ernest Newman who reviewed Wittgenstein's performance of Ravel's left-hand concerto in the *Sunday Times* in 1934:

I wish composers would stop writing one-hand concertos for him . . . the thing simply cannot be done; the composer is not only hampered in the orchestral portion of the work by consideration of the limitations of the pianist but even in the purely pianistic portions he is driven to a series of makeshifts and fakes that soon become tiresome.<sup>66</sup>

The majority of positive reviews express their amazement at the aural illusion Wittgenstein creates, as, despite playing with only one arm, he 'deceives us into imagining a two-handed pianist: indeed sometimes in the power of his attack, into imagining two two-handed pianists'.<sup>67</sup> While these can clearly be ascribed to the school of 'overcoming', reviews which accept Wittgenstein on his own terms are few and far between. A rare and unusually sensitive account was written by Julius Korngold in Vienna's *Freie Presse*, a week after Wittgenstein's debut as a left-handed pianist on the 12 December 1916.

Paul Wittgenstein does not play the piano with one hand in a way one plays in a world where two hands are needed for such a task, but in a way one would play in a world where people only had one hand. His playing should then only be evaluated on its own terms.<sup>68</sup>

The 'overcoming' narrative is closely allied with the pressure some disabled people feel to 'pass' as normal, to make every possible attempt to hide their

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<sup>65</sup> See Straus, 'Normalising the Abnormal'; Linton, *Claiming Disability*; Titchovsky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*; Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*.

<sup>66</sup> See Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 195.

<sup>67</sup> Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 166.

<sup>68</sup> Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein*, p. 111.

disability.<sup>69</sup> Wittgenstein was unable to hide his in actual terms as, both in everyday life or on the concert platform, everybody could see that he only had one arm. Yet he was keen to make the attempt in aural terms and delighted in achieving on the piano with one hand something for which others would need two.<sup>70</sup> In 1946 Wittgenstein was interviewed by the journalist Stephen West and described how a left-handed pianist, whom he assumes previously had two arms, must ‘adapt the technique he already possesses to one-armed use’.<sup>71</sup> He himself views the one-armed pianist as a subset of a larger group and seeks validation from that group by attempting, in some senses, to ‘pass’ as a two-handed pianist.

Wittgenstein possessed tremendous ambition, determination and talent, and, even when one takes the criticism of composers and reviewers into account, sustained a formidable career as a concert artist, but he was clearly a troubled man. While the more problematic aspects of his personality can be attributed largely to his upbringing, the strain of attempting to ‘overcome’ his disability may have compounded these in later years. His left-handedness was an integral part of his career and was a vital component of his artistic identity. Yet as a one-armed pianist he was certainly in a very small minority, if not quite unique. His lifelong battle as an individual attempting to assert himself against the crowd is powerfully enacted in the concertos that he commissioned. Had he relaxed and accepted, as the left-handed pianist Keith Snell states, that he was ‘not limited – it’s just that the music comes from that side’, the strain of his ambition may have been a little easier to bear.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Linton, *Claiming Disability*, pp. 17-22.

<sup>70</sup> Flindell, ‘Paul Wittgenstein’, p. 113.

<sup>71</sup> In Flindell, ‘More on Franz Schmidt and Paul Wittgenstein’, p. 136.

<sup>72</sup> As recounted in an interview over Skype with the American pianist, Keith Snell, on 26 May, 2010.

On first hearing, the alterations that Wittgenstein makes to both Ravel's *Concerto pour la main gauche* and Britten's *Divisions*, op. 21, seem suspect. They both pose a serious threat to the integrity of the composer's score and are, at times, risible. It is easy to dismiss stylistic incongruities as absurd and to condemn Wittgenstein's virtuosic elaborations as tacky or self-important. Yet, on closer inspection, his alterations represent an ingenious re-imagining of these works which draws upon his practical experience as a one-armed pianist and his particular understanding of disability.

At the height of his career, Wittgenstein had a consummate grasp of the left-hand techniques developed by Godowsky in the transcriptions and deployed to expressive effect in both Ravel and Britten's concertos. It is in his modifications to these works, however, that we see how he uses, and perhaps abuses, these techniques to very specific ends. These works are intensely personal. They were written for a unique man in a very unusual situation, and, although they have been played on numerous occasions since by both one- and two-handed pianists, we risk impoverishing our appreciation of them by losing sight of their particularity. Wittgenstein's alterations show an acute understanding both of virtuosity as a dramatic and rhetorical feature and of the importance of visual display and theatre in the relationship between performer and audience. To some extent, drama, rhetoric and display are all inherent in the works in their original versions, but Wittgenstein refocused these elements to reflect his practical needs in concert more closely and to enhance the communicative impact of his performances.

By commissioning these concertos as 'showpieces' it seems that Wittgenstein felt he had something to prove and that he regarded his disability as something to be overcome. Yet the works that were created in response to his requests do not

necessarily reflect this stance. While Ravel largely attempts to conceal the performer's one-handedness, he also plays satirically with typically 'one-' or 'two-handed', and 'left-' or 'right-handed', material in the central section of his concerto. Britten takes a more open attitude altogether and explores the concept of a left-hand concerto 'on home turf', as it were. In Wittgenstein's reception of these works, however, the overcoming narrative regains its hold. With the concertos, he was able to flaunt his technical ability, 'passing' aurally as a two-handed pianist, to pit himself against an orchestra, and was instrumental in the creation of an extensive new body of repertoire. The physical and emotional strain that he clearly suffered, however, is testament to the fact that

both passing and overcoming take their toll. The... anxiety, and the self-doubt that inevitably accompany this ambiguous social position and the ambivalent social state are the enormous cost of declaring disability unacceptable.<sup>73</sup>

Wittgenstein was raised in a family that set great store by fortitude and perseverance at a time when left-handed children were 'retrained' and when having a disability, more often than not, meant that one was largely excluded from society. His desire to conquer his disability and to 'fit in' is understandable, both in the context of his own times and from a contemporary perspective, and one cannot help but admire the energy and dedication with which he pursued his goal. The body of left-hand concertos which he commissioned is arguably the most comprehensive and insightful commentary on disability which exists in Western art music. His alterations to these works should not be viewed as a corruption of their integrity, but as an integral part of their significance and ongoing reception.

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<sup>73</sup> Linton, *Claiming Disability*, p. 21.

## Afterword

Although progress is being made, the left-hand repertoire is still very little known and most people's reaction on first hearing a piece for left-hand piano is to regard it as a novelty, albeit, at times, a sublime one. It is inevitable that the repertoire, and the left-handed pianists who play it, will constantly be compared to the two-handed canon and, as a result, perceived as lacking in some way. Yet playing the piano as a left-handed pianist is, in essence, hardly different mechanically from doing so as a two-handed performer. The notions of 'deficiency', of triviality or even of transcendental determination in the face of overwhelming opposition, are all imposed from outside the genre. They tell us more about the culture which makes such pronouncements than about the left-hand repertoire itself.

The ways in which composers have both perceived and responded to the medium are spectacularly varied. Whether they write to conceal a limitation, or as if none existed, these works show that left-hand piano pieces can sustain creative endeavour both as convincingly as the two-handed repertoire and, most importantly, in a unique fashion. They are not, in any sense, poor substitutes. From this perspective, Godowsky's belief that the transcriptions, in advancing the technical capabilities of the left hand, would precipitate a similar development in right-hand technique and thus furnish future composers of two-handed piano music with more substantial resources, was inherently flawed. According to this formula, more notes would enable greater creative scope. The left-hand repertoire, particularly in those works which are very sparsely scored, disproves this theory spectacularly.

As far as my own playing is concerned, I have, of course, now played more of the left-hand repertoire myself and, in two-handed repertoire, am much more attentive

to the sonority of the left hand and to its fundamental role in underpinning the musical texture. I am aware of the rich history of the repertoire and of the very real difference that playing these pieces as a two-handed musician makes. Not only does my approach to the instrument, my sense of balance and, hence, my phrasing differ from that which a one-armed artist might employ, but I am also exempted from a need to engage with the ‘overcoming’ narrative. While this may initially seem to place me in a privileged position, it does, ultimately, impoverish the musical and social meanings which my interpretations can transmit.

I now consider gesture in music in, perhaps, a more explicit sense and am more keenly aware of the visual aspect of a relationship with an audience in performance. The effect which playing with one arm has on the rhythmic and rhetorical impact of the music has encouraged me to consider how certain factors in two-handed music are equally contingent on physical circumstance. I no longer take the mechanics of playing, or the morphology of the instrument, for granted.

Perhaps the most striking result of trying to understand how bodies which are different from my own function in relation to the instrument, however, has been my belated acknowledgement of the primacy of the physical aspect of playing. As a performer with an academic bent, I have been inclined in the past to think of musical works as abstract entities. In a misguided quest for an ‘ideal’ performance, and in a belief in the timeless nature of musical masterpieces, I have frequently disregarded the temporal aspect of music-making. In appreciating anew the elemental concept that music takes place in time through the action of bodies I now feel that I have, as a performer, a ‘right’ to be on stage. My performances are not imperfect realisations of an unattainable ideal, but valid and interesting precisely because of the insight that I bring to them as a unique individual.

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