

Reconstructing a Nineteenth-Century Fantasy: Between Model Composition and Reimagining Improvisation

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Gilad Rabinovitch
Queens College, CUNY

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This file includes the abstract, keyword list, bibliography, and related material for the video essay, “Reconstructing a Nineteenth-Century Fantasy: Between Model Composition and Reimagining Improvisation” by Gilad Rabinovitch. This video-essay may be found at <https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/smtv116rabinovitch>

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**Abstract for
Reconstructing a Nineteenth-Century Fantasy: Between Model Composition and Reimagining
Improvisation**

by Gilad Rabinovitch, *SMT-V* 11.6

Though we tend to perceive classical music as fixed “composers’ compositions,” historical music making and learning in Europe included a great deal of improvisation. This video reports on my creative reconstruction project: a reimagining of a fantasy latent in pedagogical fragments in Carl Czerny’s ([1829] 1983) *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*. Czerny’s treatise is uniquely generous in documenting a variety of improvised genres, ranging from serious fantasies to light variations and potpourris on popular tunes. My reconstructed fantasy takes three written-out transformations of a hypothetical audience suggestion and uses them in a multi-movement sonata-fantasia. Though my project—as [recorded](#) by pianist Bang-Shyuan Chen—is a composition, not an improvisation, it represents one of the many scholarly and musical paths towards reimagining historical practices. In addition to providing a background on improvisation in this period, I discuss two technical aspects associated with this project—motivic transformation and the large-scale organization of a sonata-fantasia.

Short Keyword List

Carl Czerny, historical improvisation, fantasia, model composition, sonata form

Extensive Keyword List

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Carl Czerny, Jan Ladislav Dussek, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Frédéric (Friedrich) Kalkbrenner, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt, fantasia, sonata form, model composition, historical improvisation, post-Classical style, Brilliant Style, improvisation in Classical music, Classical improvisation

About the Contributors

Gilad Rabinovitch is an Associate Professor of Music Theory at Queens College, CUNY. He has published widely on eighteenth-century schemata and the reimagining of historical improvisation in journals including *Music Theory Online*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, and the *Journal of Music Theory*. He is the recipient of an Emerging Scholar Award from the Society for Music Theory for an article on Carl Czerny and improvisation.

Taiwanese pianist Bang-Shyuan Chen has performed in prominent concert series across the U.S. and Taiwan. He has taught at Florida State University as a Graduate Teaching Assistant and at Indiana University as an Associate Instructor. Chen holds a Doctor of Music from Florida State University, a Master of Music from Indiana University, and a Bachelor of Music from the Manhattan School of Music.

Supplementary Materials

[Recording](#) of the fantasy as performed by Bang-Shyuan Chen, piano.

Further Listening

Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Fantasy in E-flat major, Op. 18

Franz Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 760, “Wanderer”

Frédéric (Friedrich) Kalkbrenner, *Grande fantaisie “Effusio musica,”* Op. 68

Franz Liszt, Piano Sonata in B minor

In addition, Kolja Lessing has commercially recorded musical examples from Czerny’s treatise Op. 200 as well as his collection of preludes, Op. 300.

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