
The Keyboard Accompaniment in the Art of Vocal Music and the Role of the Pianist in the Didactic Activity of Accompaniment

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ABSTRACT

This research brings into discussion a theoretical, aesthetic, stylistic and interpretative point of view regarding the art of keyboard accompaniment as well as the art of singing by analyzing some principles, findings and observations strictly related to the didactic-professional activity of accompaniment. Gradually, the initial research area was expanded from theoretical aspects regarding the generalization of pianistic methods and procedures as well as didactic experience accumulated throughout the years and by consulting a variety of bibliographic material (regarding vocal and instrumental technique, direction, choreography, conducting and so on), to the elaboration of a research project about the pianistic interpretation. The art of vocal and instrumental accompaniment is perceived from multiple angles: aesthetical, musical, philosophical, pictographical and poetical as well as the relationship between musical phrases, themes and motives. Personal opinions are nuanced about music analysis elements such as form, rhythm, melody and aspects of piano interpretation; also about touch, phrasing, pedalling, tone, style unity etc.; and about the vocal and instrumental art of interpretation such as the music-poetry symbiosis as well as the relationship between the singer and the keyboard accompanist. The research opens a certain perspective regarding interpretation, whereby the numerous vocal-instrumental works composed throughout time will be able to find their expressive-artistic fulfillment in the concert halls, in the company of the two collaborating artists: the vocal soloist and the accompanying pianist.

Keywords

Music, soloist, accompaniment, collaboration, musical expression

INTRODUCTION

From the vast field of the art of performing music, a particularly rich genre is the instrumental music with accompaniment. The process of music instrument emancipation began in the sixteenth century, during the full blooming of the Renaissance vocal art. This happened in several ways, one of which was the instrumental transcriptions, most often made for lute (*Luth*). A very popular instrument at that time, it fulfilled the role the piano had in the nineteenth century during the circulation of new musical creations. The lute was both an independent instrument as well as an accompaniment for voice. In the madrigal transcriptions for voice and lute, the upper melodic line was assigned to the voice while the instrument took over the entire polyphonic fabric. The *a capella* vocal music was spread in various instrumental versions along with its original form. The

instrumental accompaniment for voice emerged from ancient times and evolved along with the development of the musical language.

HISTORICAL OUTLOOK OF THE TIMBRAL OPTIONS REGARDING THE INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT

During the time of the troubadours (12th-13th century), the doubling of the main voice became the most rudimentary form of accompaniment. In the Renaissance, the instruments were added to voices in order to enhance their sonority, procedure that was subsequently used sporadically, however, not abandoned even today (the song of masses). This is called *ad libitum* accompaniment. In the Middle Ages, it appeared quite rarely, especially in the form of a rhythmic-musical background supported by percussion instruments, the *obligato* accompaniment, meaning the accompaniment independent from a melody, specific to the homophone style. This procedure was used more in the Renaissance, in the choral works with chordal writing (i.e. madrigals, villanelles, chansons etc.) where, in some cases, the musical interest was concentrated on the upper voice. The accompaniment was realized by a single instrument, as needed: lute (*luth*), harp, harpsichord, piano, organ or by instrumental groups which, in time, have increased in number of instruments, eventually becoming the symphonic orchestra:

The polyphonic vocal works could also be performed by other instruments or by various instrumental groups. Sometimes they doubled the voices, othertimes they replaced them partially or completely. Doubling the chorus with the organ in religious music . . . becomes frequent at the end of the 16th century. Venetian musicians used strings and wind instruments for that same purpose. There were cases in which the same polyphonic piece could be performed both *a capella* as well as by an instrumental group (Comes, 1984, pp. 114-115).

The music accompaniment becomes full, supple and more varied during the advent of the accompanied monody procedure, the opera in Italy, the *song* in England and *l'air de cour* in France, during the second half of the 16th century. For the ancient Greeks, the instrumental accompaniment of the monody (*aulodia*, *citharodia*) was probably based on heterophony, a term mentioned in the writings of that epoch, without much detail. Like the parallel polyphony, this does not respond to vertical demands, but it is integrated into the monodic linear flux, "thickening" or "thining" it, intermittently.

The instrumental music of the Renaissance developed in the shadow of vocal music, lending even its repertoire. Since the 17th century, the instrumental music gained its independence, its role up to that time being as an accompaniment or replacement of the human voice. Different keyboard instruments as well as string and wind instruments improved ever more, so that they reached a never-heard-before wealth of expression. Solo instruments and ensembles begin to be used, a repertoire specific for instrumental music is created and the orchestra is formed.

During Baroque, the musical forms with specific instrumental character, new or derived from the Renaissance, begin to crystallize. The notion of *concert*, with origins in the vocal music, implies the participation of instruments: an artistic collective performance where the opposition between soloists and the instrumental ensemble remains specific. Furthermore, the cyclical forms of *suite* and *sonata* composed of several

parts, are crystallized. The *Ricercar* develops, from an instrumental standpoint, the old serie of melodic phrases with imitative onset of the polyphonic *motet*, opening the way for the advent of the *Fugue*, a significant achievement of the polyphonic art.

The instrumental music of the Baroque, starting from the Italian masters such as Frescobaldi, Corelli, Vivaldi and Scarlatti), in order to be perfected in the hands of German masters such as Bach, Händel and Telemann, created a new era in terms of its complexity. For this reason, “starting with the Baroque, the entire evolution of the European music has been under the hegemony of instrumental music, always bearing the most advanced conquests” (Comes, 1984, p. 116).

The Baroque music, due to the regularity of its structure, was symmetrical in comparison to the predominantly assymmetric construction of the Renaissance. Alongside its instrumental character, a second pillar of the Baroque style is the tonal harmonic framework. During Renaissance, the polyphonic fabric was simplified by hierarchization of the component voices. Thus, the melodic line of the upper voice was kept as foreground along with the bass line, while the other voices became secondary, being utterly simplified. Instead, in Baroque appeared the figured bass also known as *general bass* or *basso continuo*, meaning that only the melodic line of the upper voice of the soprano and the bass notes were notated, thus indicating the harmonic structure via a shortened notation (figures). As this abridged notation was so widespread and characteristic of the Baroque, Hugo Riemann called it *the era of general bass* (Ger.: *Generalbass – Zeitalter*).

During the 16th century, the lute was preferred for its technical abilities and timbral variety of the different types, along with the other string instruments whose existence was due to the famous luthiers of Cremona such as Andrea Guarneri, Antonio Stradivari or Nicolo and Antonio Amati.

During the 17th century, the domination of the lute continued especially in France. The French literature for harpsichord had a clear influence on the lute style.

Among the keyboard instruments, the harpsichord dominated over the 18th century, while the supremacy of the piano in the 19th century was subject to a different set of laws.

The role of the lute was paramount for the development of instrumental genres and contributes to the impressive flowering of the accompanied monody. The lute was associated with the voice, thus enriching the musical discourse. The vihuela and the guitar were other instruments commonly known in Spain, however they remained behind the lute in importance. The advances of instrumental music also transformed the group of strings instruments with bow.

The old family of the violas that appeared in the 15th century contained violas *da braccio* (viola contralto, viola soprano, viola alto), violas *da gamba* (viola tenore, viola basso) and the violin, all together representing an ensemble with a very broad range. With its refined and gentle sonority, the viola became a favorite during the 17th and the 18th centuries even though, at the same time, it was in competition with the violin ensemble.

The definitive model of the violin appeared in the 16th century. Its bright sonority exceeded that of the viola. Gradually, the violin affirmed itself through dance music and became integrated into the orchestra during the second half of the 17th century, so that the violin became the favorite concert instrument of the virtuosos. Viola, cello and double bass complete the sound gamut of the violin family, introducing the most varied shades of timbral color while "the keyboard instruments (organ, harpsichord, spinet) engage a

whole part of music on the path of digital virtuosity, whose promoter in the 17th century was the harpsichord" (Denizeau, 2000, p. 56).

The promotion of instrumental music during the 17th and the 18th centuries was achieved through keyboard instruments: the organ and the clavichord, then the harpsichord and the *Pianoforte* (the direct ancestor of the modern piano). However, the latter did not see a real development until after 1750.

The two polyphonic eras, the Renaissance and the Baroque, showcased different ways of realizing the polyphonic structures:

- 1) According to the priority of the melodic factor, horizontally or vertically;
- 2) According to the modal or tonal unfolding framework;
- 3) According to the vocal or instrumental character.

Thus, the Palestrinian and the Bachian polyphony reflect two basic attitudes of polyphonic thinking: the linear (horizontally-intervallic controllable) and harmonic (elaborated on a vertical chord progression).

After the Bachian era, around the middle of the 18th century, the musical language enters into a long, homophonic period, based on the tonal-functional harmony, through the two successive, Classic and Romantic styles. From Haydn to Beethoven, the promotion of instrumental music continues in Romanticism as well, through Schubert, Berlioz, Schumann and Brahms. The abandonment of the *basso continuo* principle, the predilection for tonal, the continuation of the counterpoint-style writing, a greater attention given to the melodic cell, then to the idea of musical motif from an architectural point of view, are characteristics of the musical Classicism. "Pure" music appears, no longer subordinated to the word, refusing any programmatic dimension. In this age, the creators enjoy the music materialisation possibilities of the phenomenon of tonality, the symphony, the string quartet and the sonata for harpsichord representing the most suitable patterns for this materialisation. Musical Romanticism marks the triumph of instrumental music, as Gérard Denizeau affirmed in an article from the *Larousse* encyclopedia:

Formed by Reich and perhaps influenced by Gossec, Berlioz makes the timbre to go through a comet jump by creating in 1830 the modern orchestra along with the *Fantastic Symphony*. At the same time, the piano reaches its peak through Chopin, Schumann and Liszt. The Romantic era will also coincide with a second moment, with the culmination of an already old genre, the opera, characterized in the nineteenth century by an extraordinary extension of all the structural elements of the lyrical theater (Denizeau, 2000, p. 170).

The musical accompaniment gradually reduces its role as accompaniment and is featured increasingly more into main roles of a soloistic nature. Its development leads, in this sense, in the 19th and the 20th centuries, to the presence of overlapping sound layers equal in importance. Today, we also meet the accompaniment in the entertainment music as well.

In the 20th century, the renunciation of the harmonic-tonal system, with the end of Romanticism, led to a number of important consequences, opening new and unexpected perspectives of development. Numerous symphonies, operas, sonatas, quartets, masses,

cantatas etc. were written during the first half of the twentieth century. The success of the old genres seems to remain intact. At the same time, however, by consulting the music catalogs of the great European composers of that period such as Ravel, Schoenberg, Falla, Prokofiev, Honneger, Bartók, Stravinski, Berg etc., we realize that, listening to these works, profound mutations take place since Debussy, that intimately alter their essence. Examples are: ballet, religious music, the works of Edgar Varèse etc.

The art of musical accompaniment at keyboard instruments

In order to better understand the approach to this research, let us first define the term accompaniment as a noun (Fr.: *acompannement*, It.: *accompagnamento*) and as a verb (Fr.: *accompagner*), with the meaning of “joining,” “accompanying.” The accompaniment is an instrumental or orchestral musical part that accompanies and sustains a soloist or a coral ensemble.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the main old musical instruments with keyboard were: organ, psalterion, timpanon and clavichord and, at the end of the 17th century, the clavecin was added to the list. Around the 1500s there appeared other instruments with strings and keyboard such as spinetta in Italy (called *épinette* in France), the harpsichord or clavicembalo in Italy (the *clavier* in France), the virginal in England (similar to *spinetta*) and the harpsichord (a sort of clavecin with two manuals).

The construction of the piano in 1750, in Florence, was due to Bartolomeo Cristofori, a builder of clavicembalos. It was the first clavicembalo where the strings were hit by hammers, their heads being dressed in felt. At this instrument, it was possible to play with nuances from *piano* to *forte*, reason why its builder gave it the name *Gravecembalo col piano e il forte*. Gravecembalo meant *cembalo con grave*, meaning an instrument with the role of bass accompanist. His original name was simplified by Cristofori himself and only the name of *pianoforte* remained.

The Keyboard instruments developed continuously to reach today's modern forms and they are still improving. The clavecin, piano or organ accompaniment of the voice as well as the creations for these instruments are still enjoying increasing popularity. The authors of various musical works have given the piano a main role in the accompaniment, due to its technical and sounding possibilities which, up to a certain point, could replace the orchestra. According to the role of the piano in this new posture, the piano performance had to change from the usual soloistic manner and get new dimensions and traits. A significant change has occurred in the domain of musical sound. In its modeling, it is recommended to take into account the sound possibilities of the accompanied instrument or the vocal possibilities of the performer as well as the type of the performed work.

From the multitude and complexity of tasks that are given to an accompanist, only a few of them are addressed here, with particular reference to the accompaniment of the human voice. Thus, some issues directly related to its specificity and possibilities of interpretation are discussed, because the voice is a sensitive, complex and expressive musical instrument. At the same time, it is pretentious, capricious and prone to unexpected illnesses. Therefore, the role of the piano as an accompaniment to voice had to increase in color and sensitivity.

In order to be able to suggest the timbre and color of the symphony orchestra but also the warmth and vibrations of a human voice, the piano has to surpass the valences of

a keyboard instrument. In this context, the pianist will have to shift his attention from the sphere of the pianistic individuality to the musical accompaniment of singing. This type of accompaniment brings with it discretion, simplicity, delicacy, transparency and naturalness. The pianist is supposed to develop his skill, like the conductor, to look at both the musical score and the lyric artist. Also, the *lied* accompanist has to follow a single melodic line, while the opera or oratory accompanist follows the ensembles of voices with all their graphic load from a score related to the orchestral material (solo parts and chorus sections with their related texts).

The main or secondary characters are presented according to timbre and ambitus, and the panel of instruments is actually the orchestral accompaniment. The opera is divided into musical acts, scenes and numbers. Unlike the miniature vocal-instrumental genre, in which the artistic message focuses on the power of expression of the musicalized poetic word, in the opera performance the musical and literary text is supported by other expressive factors: decoration, light effects, scenic movement, costumes and so on.

Most of the vocal works are composed with piano accompaniment and those with chamber or orchestra accompaniment are performed with a piano reduction, the latter being quite useful for the accompaniment work in the classroom (individually or for an ensemble). Therefore, when realizing the musical vocal accompaniment, one must take into account the importance of piano's role, regardless of the voice being accompanied, thus completing the sonorous approach.

The vocal repertoire contains numerous musical genres such as: aria, arieta, arioso, ballad, cantata, cavatina, chorale, hymn, madrigal, march and song of the masses, messa, motet, oratory, recitative, requiem, romance and *lied*, as well as vocalization. In order to obtain a valuable interpretation, both the vocal soloist and the pianist accompanist will first make a brief analysis of all the works to be studied, from the point of view of harmony, form, melody and rhythm. The gradual approach to a repertoire is recommended, taking into account the technical and stylistic difficulties of the vocal and instrumental musical scores, as well as the artistic interpretation of the repertoire by performing all means of expression (intonation, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, voice timbre, diction, phrasing etc.).

The expressive character of the mimicry of the pianist accompanist is suggestive in the reproduction of feelings and emotional experiences. If, in the sphere of the miniature, its character is a retained and internalized one, in the art of lyrical theater it becomes at once a sad, cheerful, sometimes severe, all of these being achieved by observing the nuances of the score but also by externalizing the feelings and the artistic emotional senses.

The pianist will have a diversified sound, a rich color palette (realized by his own imagination and an expressive thinking of sounds), which will allow an accurate reproduction without distortions of the information in the musical text, processed in the inner hearing. In performance, he must aim at the differentiation of sound layers, the dynamic contrasts between musical phrases as well as the timbral differences between sounds and musical motifs, or to follow the relations between them.

In the chamber genre (*lied*) it is necessary to communicate between the two interpreters (vocal soloist and pianist) and the practice has shown that there is a natural harmony between the artistic realization and the physical and emotional state of the performer.

Coordination of the breath of the two performers, depending on the variety of musical phrases and the dramatic evolution of the musical text, the precise observance of the rhythmic formulas, of the dynamic signs, are just some of the aesthetic norms of this chamber genre. In order for every moment of interpretation for chamber performers to evoke deep moments of artistic and spiritual experience, it requires both resilience, power of concentration as well as increased attention paid to the artistic act, the internal dynamics of the entire sound content. Therefore, the pianist accompanist needs an extraordinary somatic sensitivity.

A well-developed technique gives the pianist the opportunity to transform the sounds of the piano into colors, in an imaginary plane, in musical images close to the illustrative capacity of the human voice. Also, the lyrical artist with impeccable vocal technique will give a certain perspective to the reliving of the atmosphere created by the poet and composer. In the dosage of nuances, the pianist must take into account the sound timbre, quality and color of fellow performer's interpretation. At the same time, the solo theme must be followed and highlighted. It can sometimes appear to the vocal soloist, sometimes to the accompanying pianist. The two musicians will listen and follow each other throughout the performance, creating an authentic musical dialogue between them. Through a reserved gesture and mimicry, but also in a restrained, internalized attitude, the two performers will add value and meaning to the musical act.

The didactic-professional activity of accompaniment and the pianist's contribution to the formation of new generations of lyrical artists

The accompanist is an active participation in the process of interpreting a musical work, according to the role entrusted by the composer. He has the task of highlighting the solo instrument or voice, to have equal participation in the polyphonic pieces or to assume the role of the conductor, suflor and orchestra in the opera works. Moreover, the pianist must know each part separately in order to be able to give the necessary answers, ensuring musical continuity. The accompanist has a primary role next to the vocal teacher, not as a mere accompanist, but as a valuable collaborator.

The accompanist should have knowledge of vocal technique, in order to make suggestions when analyzing the works to be performed. The accompanist should also be present in solving musical and stylistic problems, in establishing the interpretation concept as well as in educating and training the personality of the future artist. He must ensure a correct and clear pronunciation of the text.

Due to his specific ability to collaborate with more performers and teachers, the pianist accompanist accumulates a vast experience that he is constantly enriching and transmits perpetually. In recitals, the accompanist becomes an integral part in the process of interpreting the work by completing and highlighting the musical discourse. In such situations, he observes, supports and helps the soloist to form a true team with him. In the classroom, in the presence of the vocal coach, the accompanist, in addition to the complete execution of the work with the interpreter, retains and applies on the spot the teacher's observations; also offers more suggestions regarding form, interpretation or ensemble. At the individual class time, the student will be reminded of all the problems and indications given by the specialty teacher.

In the case of music sight-reading, the accompanist must demonstrate good sight-reading skills and orient quickly in deciphering a new musical text. A correct reading,

faithful to the score, that does not neglect small details of aesthetic and performing order, is required from the pianist accompanist. The work of individual accompaniment with the interpreter is particularly complex. It demands that the accompanist possesses a multifaceted musical training that includes solid knowledge of form, harmony, pedagogy and psychology. The rehearsal starts with a warm-up (vocalizes) to provide the range needed for the song to be rehearsed and to ensure the most accurate intonation. The accompanist is required to know the work well and be familiar with the musical text, in order to play an active role during the rehearsal.

The first rehearsals are intended to make contact with the work and determine the general character of the interpretation. Certain more difficult passages need to be worked out separately, in a slower tempo. Such rehearsals include a kind of balance sheet of the discussed aspects and expressing the interpretative vision of both parties. From this joint work, a form of interpretation is born which will be refined on-the-fly.

The general rehearsals are especially important. Their goal could be *singing at a rehearsal as in the concert and at the concert as in the rehearsal*. During the last rehearsals excessive emotionality due to performance anxiety may be reduced. Everything is aimed at achieving a fair amount of self-control, as the interpretation of a work in ensemble demands special responsibility, concentration and self-control from all artists involved.

When approaching a musical work, the keen observance of the musical text is required from both artists. The accompanist is advisable to possess a varied interpretative palette, meaning to master as many forms of musical expression as possible. In collaboration with the voice, he must not give up the individual style of interpretation.

Another concern of the accompanist is sonority, the dosage of sound. He must apply the principle of self-restraint, of the discretion of sonority, in order to avoid eclipsing the vocalist as much as possible and avoid distracting the listener's attention from the soloist. He can thus enhance the beauty of the melodic line and the sonorities of the vocal interpreter. Between the two partners, sound balance can be permanently installed during interpretation. The accompanist must also pay close attention to singer's diction and to offer suggestions for phrasing, recitatives, agogic elements and nuances.

The relationship between notes and words represents the essence, the substance of the vocal art. The text should not be renounced in favor of the musical phrase. On the contrary, certain syllables may be emphasized in order to emphasize the musical discourse. However, a danger to avoid is the breaking up of the musical phrase.

The basis of a musical accompaniment course is individual teaching, the repertoire refining stage and the ensemble classes. Besides the refined repertoire designed for concerts and exams, some material is also used for sight-reading. Clef reading and transposition are also included within the objectives of the course. The verification of the correct reading of the score is done with the purpose of faithful rendering of composer's intentions, taking into account all the specific aspects of the musical work: melodic development, agogic elements, rhythm, tempo etc.

Through the recommendation and use of the approaches described in certain specialty books, but also during the singing, accompaniment and intensive study classes, students will assimilate many technical and expressive elements in the interpretation of musical works belonging to composers of different periods, highlighting the specific features of each style in part: Baroque, Classic, Romantic, Modern and Contemporary. The

purpose of practical courses is to train young musicians capable of integrating themselves into any branch of musical accompaniment (vocal, instrumental and ballet, opera and oratory).

DISCUSSION

In order to perform an artistic act, the work of the performers, both the lyrical artist as well as the pianist accompanist, involves efforts of a psychological nature. As a result, different traits such as affectivity, perseverance in work, willpower, power of concentration, intelligence, personal initiative and creativity are developed.

The keyboard accompaniment, by its practical artistic character, materializes the effective preparation of students for the disciplines that imply singing, in order to acquire the skills necessary for interpreting a vast music repertoire and with any kind of accompaniment: piano, organ, harpsichord, chamber and orchestra.

The research on musical activity of interpretation such as the subspecialization of pianist accompanist, suggests the formation, over time, of professional and transversal skills and competencies. Among the professional skills we list:

- Identification of the specific elements of ensemble interpretation (voice-piano);
- Definition of the main features of the solo and chamber repertoire for voice: the degree of technical difficulty, the stylistic characteristics and the interpretative requirements (correlation between the particularities of the voice and the piano);
- Demonstration of the formation of strategies for studying and assimilating the solo/chamber repertoire, integrating the acquired musical knowledge and skills (technical skills necessary for artistic expression through voice and strategies for studying and assimilating the solo and chamber repertoire, integrating the assimilated theoretical knowledge in relation to the piano);
- Fair appreciation of the quality of one's own and others' interpretation, referring to the use of hearing and musical thinking in establishing the necessary connections between the grammatical organization of the text and musical meaning, as well as in establishing and correlating them with the vocal technique and with the soloist-accompanist relationship;
- Interpretative support of a significant selection of musical works that demonstrate the mastery of vocal technique, accuracy and expressiveness as well as the ability of integration with the piano in an ensemble.

Among the transversal competencies we list:

- The design, organization, conducting, coordinating and evaluation of an artistic event (performance, concert, recital etc.) at a learning institution, including the specific contents from the curriculum of music disciplines;
- The application of efficient working techniques in a multidisciplinary team on different hierarchical levels;
- The objective self-assessment of the need for vocational training for the purpose of insertion into the labor market and adaptability to its demands.

CONCLUSIONS

The experiences gained as a soloist instrumentalist (piano, harpsichord and organ) harmonized with the didactic activities can offer the opportunity to approach the research

regarding the musical accompaniment at keyboard instruments. This study represents a general analysis, both from the standpoint of musical interpretation as well as the didactic-professional activity of accompaniment. The topic being quite vast, only what is most essential in deepening some simple theoretical and interpretive knowledge by students interested in this field was highlighted. The study can contribute to the preparation and training of new generations of young performers, especially lyrical artists and piano accompanists.

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