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A performer’s creative processes: implications for teaching and learning musical interpretation

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The purpose of this study is to investigate aspects of musical interpretation and suggest guidelines for developing performance students’ interpretative processes. Since musical interpretation involves basic issues concerning the nature of music, and competing concepts of ‘interpretation’ and its teaching, an overview of these issues is given. There is tendency towards vagueness and incompleteness in many writings on musical interpretation, which may stem from (1) a lack of music education research that considers Music in Situ – a specific work, a specific performer’s interpretations of that work, and his/her performative realisations of the work; and (2) a traditional tendency to compartmentalise the education of future performers, educators, and researchers, and their studies. In addressing some of the above issues, and probing the complex web of relationships involved in musical interpretation, several methods of research are used: case study; theoretical–historical musical analysis; narrative inquiry; music criticism; and music philosophy. The participant–artist in this study is a renowned Russian concert pianist, Gregory Haimovsky; the music under consideration is Chopin’s Op. 24, No. 4. The study concludes with several interrelated suggestions, including: enabling students to create musically informed, artistic, and personal interpretations of musical works may be assisted by: (1) broadening students’ general knowledge base beyond musical technique; (2) advancing students self-efficacy, using constructivist teaching strategies, and creative democratic teaching–learning contexts; (3) utilising interpretive processes that follow a whole-part-whole pattern of performing, analysing (formal, historical, cultural, and other musical details), re-interpreting, intramusical, and intermusical listening; and (4) considering that ethical issues are central in both performance teaching and musical interpretation.

**Keywords:** musical interpretation; musical performance teaching

**Introduction**

‘The art of interpretation is not to play what is written.’ (Pablo Casals)¹

Enabling student performers to create musically informed, artistic, and personal interpretations of musical works is one of the most challenging and elusive aspects of music education. In this article, I attempt to illuminate aspects of musical interpretation and suggest guidelines for developing students’ interpretative processes. To begin, I review basic issues concerning the nature of music and musical interpretation. I proceed to explain my research procedures, after which I

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detail my study of one concert artist’s processes of developing musical interpretations of a specific work from the Romantic European tradition. My reason for doing so is to draw implications for the teaching and learning of musical interpretation.

In his praxial philosophy of music education, Elliott (1995) proposes that music ought to be conceived, taught, and learned holistically – as more than pieces of music alone. He posits (39–45) a multidimensional concept of music such that each specific piece or musical product is one aspect of several integrated dimensions: (a) music makers (or ‘musicians’, amateur or professional); (b) music making (which, to him, includes performing, improvising, composing, arranging, conducting, and dancing, as these apply, or not, in a specific style); (c) musical products, events, and/or ‘works’ (notated compositions, improvisations, or aurally remembered and transmitted pieces); (d) listening (by auditors of any kind: public audiences, solitary performers, improvisers, composers, ipod users, etc.); and (e) both the stylistic traditions and the historical–cultural–political contexts in which musical products/events are made and experienced. Elliott goes on to say that the sum of all these dimensions is something larger:

... besides having natures and values of their own, each dimension has an inevitable link with all the other dimensions. In fact, these ... dimensions are not merely linked; they form a dynamic system of *dialectic* relationships. Musicians act and re-act in relation to the musical feedback inherent in the quality of their own music-making. They evaluate their musicing and musical works in relation to the context of their actions: the accomplishments and reflections of mentors and peers past and present. And because the relationships formed between and among these ... musical dimensions require the intersection of contexts that are social (at least in part), we can expect these relationships to generate beliefs and controversies about who counts as a good musician, about what counts as good music-making, and so on. (41)

Additionally, of course, to understand the various dimensions and dialectic relationships of a given style one needs to develop what Elliott terms musicianship, which, he says, always includes ‘listenership’, both of which are ‘situated’, artistically, socially, and culturally.

This brings me to the more specific issues of interpretation, which Elliott (1995) frames in these words:

A musical performance is not simply an audible reproduction of what a score indicates. Performing is not the aural equivalent of making a photocopy of an original painting or print. If it was, then any competent production of a score would count as much as any other. But this is not so in musical reality. One of the most enjoyable aspects of truly musical listening is listening for a specific artist’s (and/or a specific ensemble’s) interpretation of a given composition. The quality of a musical interpretation conveys the level of musical understanding – the *musicianship* – possessed by the performers involved ... In the actions of performing, performers convey their understanding of a composition in relation to (a) what the composer must/could/should have intended, or (b) what past performers must/could/should have intended, or (c) what they believe their audience would expect or enjoy hearing emphasised in a composition, or (d) some combination of the above. (165)
O’Dea (2000) adds supporting reflections:

... because the performer’s overall purpose is not just to play the piece fluently but rather to ‘interpret’ it, as her technical facility increases, so too does her desire to shape her sounding in such a way as to vividly display the expressive structures of the work.

Now her listening – her experience of actual sound sensation – does more than simply alert her to technical inadequacies. It makes her cogently aware of ‘expressive’ possibilities – of potential interpretive contribution of a variety of subtle nuances and intonations ... (18)

Stated from a complimentary perspective:

A musical performance (in the Western tradition, at least), always involves not one but two ‘works’ of musical artistry. For example, when pianist Ivo Pogorelich performs Bach’s English Suite no. 2 in A minor we cognize (i) the multidimensional work that is Bach’s English Suite no. 2 in A minor that includes (ii) the musicianship of Pogorelich: the knowledgeable actions of the artist–pianist Pogorelich that project the Pogorelich performance-interpretation of Bach’s English Suite no. 2. (Elliot 1995, 166)

Several contemporary musicologists support Elliott’s holistic approach to music, musical works, musical understanding, and interpretation: for example, Kramer (2002, 2003), Leppert (1985, 1993), McClary (1987, 1991, 2000) and Subotnik (1991). These scholars have been viewed as ‘new’ or ‘cultural musicologists’. As Kramer (2003) writes, they seek to ‘combine aesthetic insight into music with a fuller understanding of its cultural, social, historical, and political dimensions’ (6).

In addition to my basic interest in contributing to the development of creative, expressive performers, my motivation for this study arises from a notable feature of music education research. In my view, there seems to be a dearth of music education studies that relate analyses of specific pieces to specific performers and their interpretive performances. Music education researchers are rightly concerned with a variety of philosophical and pedagogical concerns. But to some extent, it seems fair to ask, where is the ‘actual music’ in music education research studies? Should we be concerned with studying sonic outcomes and the score-performer–performance-interpretation relationships? Just as journals of theory, musicology, and ethnomusicology rarely discuss pedagogical issues, it seems that our domain errs in the opposite direction.

In addition, it is worth noting that even where musical interpretation is discussed, many past and present discussions tend to be rather vague and implausible. For example, Jorgensen (1997, 2003) and Swanwick (1988, 1994) are generally vague about the nature and teaching of performance. Jorgensen (1997) skims over interpretation as something that is formed ‘musically and culturally’ (36). Swanwick (1994) suggests that we evaluate performances in terms of ‘technical expressive, and structural control’ (109). Reimer (2004) goes somewhat beyond the skills deemed necessary to perform musically and writes that ‘musical feeling, then, resides in how performers, guided by the sounds imagined by the composers they are interpreting, actualise the interactive sound-implications a musical system affords’ (6). He states that performers work within a system of ‘rules and regulations culturally established’ and can also ‘add their own imaginative expressions’ (Reimer 2004, 6). But how, when and where? I believe we need to probe more deeply into the relationships among issues of musical technique, ‘feeling’, ‘rules and regulations’, and related
matters of musical–philosophical, social, historical, political, and personal influences on performers’ pursuits of creative musical interpretation.

Many researchers focus on the music cognition processes they believe are involved in ‘portraying’ an expressive performance. For example, Woody (2003) states that ‘an activity as complex as expressive musical performance involves more than one kind of psychomotor skill’ (52). He argues that expert musicians devise a plan or ‘goal image’, by which he means a mental-echoic image of a desired performance. He claims that musicians can ‘build a mental representation of what the music should sound like by using printed music as cues for accessing a preexisting knowledge base’ (Woody 2003, 52). While this may be plausible, and while his study specifically looks as ‘cognitive skills’, I suggest that much more is involved in musical interpretation and expression than a ‘cognitive skills paradigm’ can render. Juslin and Persson (2002) discuss the tools performers need in order to develop their expressive performances. They state: ‘Knowledge about the relationships between expressive cues and their emotional effects will help performers to reliably achieve desired listener responses’ (229–39). But is it plausible to suggest that we can have reasonable ‘knowledge’ of relationships between ‘cues’ and ‘emotional effects’, and ‘desired listener responses’? Are Juslin and Persson suggesting a direct causal link? And, if we recognise that performers often play for hundreds of listeners, in person, or via recordings, then how is it possible to ‘achieve desired listener responses’? And what is a ‘desired’ response?

I want to suggest that the tendency towards vagueness and incompleteness in some writings on musical interpretation, and the aforementioned lack of studies that relate to selected works and selected performers/performances may be partly related to a traditional tendency to separate strictly the education of future performers, educators, and researchers, and/or a lack of interest in integrating all music students’ development of (1) music-making techniques; and (2) musically relevant historical, social, cultural, and theoretical understandings. As a result, student performers and their teachers may have an interest in or a need to understand more about musical-interpretive processes, and the importance of investigating how excellent performers go about preparing interpretations of specific works.

Methodology

In an attempt to address some of the above issues, this investigation combined aspects of several research strategies: narrative inquiry, case study methodology, musical analysis, music criticism, and music philosophy. The participant in my study was the concert pianist Gregory Haimovsky, whose biography I discuss in a moment.

The study was conducted over a six-month period. Since Haimovsky was giving concerts, recording, and working on other repertoire during this time, my research episodes with him were frequent and incremental. My research, and my work with Haimovsky as a participant observer, was conducted and situated in the context of Haimovsky’s home practice studio as he learned and interpreted Chopin’s Mazurka Op. 24, No. 4. My aim was to investigate the phenomenon of performance-interpretation in a living, processual situation: the real-life, ‘authentic’, working context of a performing musician. In other words, I was attempting to address the problems inherent in a research situation where ‘the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin 1994, 3). As Lincoln and Guba (1985)
write: ‘realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts’ (39).

In terms of procedures, I first asked Haimovsky to select a piece from the Romantic piano literature (a repertoire that he knew deeply, as a whole). There were two stipulations. The piece he selected had to be one that he had never performed before. In addition, the piece he selected had to be one that did not have any literal associations (i.e., a programme or a descriptive title). My reasons for these two preconditions stem from my interest in discerning (if possible) the ways and means that Haimovsky might use to pursue ‘musical meaning’ in a score that many people would likely consider to be ‘pure’, or ‘abstract’ instrumental music.

While he developed his interpretations of Op. 24, No. 4, I utilised the following data-gathering methods: participant observations, semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, and journaling (I kept a journal; Haimovsky documented his own). Throughout his processes of learning and creating his interpretations of this piece, Haimovsky and I continuously listened to audio playbacks of our sessions: his repeated performances of the entire piece, and selected portions; his verbal reflections; my questions; and our mutual discussions of Chopin’s score and Haimovsky’s interpretive processes.

Participant

Gregory Haimovsky (born 1926) graduated from the Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music (Moscow) in 1950. At that time, the Tchaikovsky Conservatory boasted a truly exceptional teaching faculty and student milieu which included Dmitri Kabalevsky, Dmitri Shostakovich, David Oistrakh, Heinrich Neuhaus, Emile Gilels, Mstislav Rostropovich and Alfred Schnittke. One of his most renown teachers, Elena Gnessina² (of The Gnessin Institute), encouraged Haimovsky to develop his own personal approaches to musical interpretations. However, not all his teachers were so open. Indeed, Haimovsky studied at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory under Yakov Zak, who took first prize in the 1937 Chopin Competition. Zak was a strict taskmaster who did not allow Haimovsky any individual freedom of expression. Notably, however (as this study will demonstrate), Haimovsky eventually rose above the rigidity of Zak’s training. Similarly, although Haimovsky’s teachers and peers expected him to pursue a concert career in the tradition of the Tchaikovsky and Chopin Competitions, he resisted their entreaties and the aesthetic of this competitive tradition, which invariably emphasised technique at the expense of expressivity. Instead, Haimovsky applied his virtuosity to the literature of the Romantic and Impressionistic eras, with the aim of producing interpretations that were more personal than the competitions that his time and place in Russia usually allowed.³

To highlight some of his artistic accomplishments, Haimovsky is a champion of French music in Russia, performing Debussy, Messiaen, Milhaud, Daniel-Lesur, and Jolivet.⁴ Thirty years after arriving in the USA, Russia’s leading musical magazines, such as Musical Academy and Music Life, write about Haimovsky as an ‘outstanding artist and an enlightener of our musical culture’.

It is important to emphasise that Haimovsky is also an experienced pedagogue in Russia, Israel, and the USA.⁵ I will explain the implications of his teaching abilities in the last section of this paper. Suffice it to say now that my decision to select
Haimovsky as the subject of this study was influenced by knowledge of his abilities to articulate and model his interpretive processes. I became aware of these abilities in the course of chamber music coaching sessions that I and my peers received from Haimovsky during our doctoral performance studies.

**Chopin’s Mazurka, Op. 24, No. 4**

I suggested in the introduction that developing creative interpretations of musical works depends heavily on a performer’s understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the works s/he wishes to perform. With this in mind, I turn to the work under consideration in this study.

The Mazurka takes its name from the Mazurs, the people of the province of Mazovia, near Warsaw, Poland. Traditionally, this dance form utilises strong accents unsystematically placed on the second and third beat of the measure, and a tendency to end on an unaccented third beat using the dominant pitch. The form usually contains two or four sections of six or eight measures, each repeated. A bagpipe drone, on the tonic, or on tonic and dominant pitches, accompanied the melodies. Groups of couples customarily danced Mazurkas, and the movements were highly improvisational. James Huneker (1934) writes: 'At its best, it [the Mazurka] is a dancing anecdote, a story told in a charming variety of steps and gestures. It is intoxicating, rude, humorous, poetic, above all, melancholy'. Like the Polonaise, the Mazurka made its way from the villages of Poland to the fashionable ballrooms of Polish cities, to Paris, and to London. It enjoyed great popularity among the Russian nobility (it was the official dance of the Czar’s court); thus, it was a form utilised by Glinka, Borodin, and Tchaikovsky. However, arguably, nothing approached the variety of feeling and musical content that Chopin achieved in this form, which he first attempted when he was 10 (in 1820) and last touched in the year of his death. While Chopin’s Mazurkas are undoubtedly Polish in character, he strove to write music that did not carry melodies from folk-tunes. Rather, he created over 50 Mazurkas composed of original material that possessed only a slight resemblance to, or hint of, actual ‘folk Mazurkas’.

At the beginning of our first session, Haimovsky performed the entire piece. After doing so, he played selected sections of the work and verbally analysed (during and after playing each one) how these sections fit together (i.e., he critically reflected in-and-on his musical actions). Armed with his deep historical and cultural knowledge of the genre, Haimovsky began to develop his interpretation of Op. 24, No. 4 by probing the work’s formal parameters. However, he did not apply a strict analytical method to the Mazurka’s structure. Rather, he formed a general view that this piece was a sequence of thematic materials. He noted, though, that theme number one (from measure five) is repeated seven times, ‘like a refrain that comes back and keeps the piece together’. However, to him, the unity of this section is not created by repetitions of the material, but by the introduction of new material, which opens new possibilities for the performer. By introducing new motives, Haimovsky viewed Chopin as striving to make us want more; he intensifies our focus, peaks our curiosity, and invites us to wonder how the performer will solve the conflicts in the musical drama. Haimovsky then turned his attention to the coda of the Mazurka, at measure 116, as notated below (Figure 1).
To him, on one hand, Chopin’s coda seems predictable because the beginning and middle sections of the piece resemble and foreshadow it. On the other hand, the coda is an unusual climax because it progresses, according to Haimovsky, towards sadness.

Next, he examined the Mazurka broadly, noting its dynamic contrasts and unpredictability:

Chopin indicates ff or p or pp? Why? This is not typically Chopin. It is more like Beethoven. Beethoven had these incredible contrasts. Then I have to think about these dynamic contrasts, which work together with extreme dramatic themes, and the incredible sadness of the coda. As one can see, I began my playing with dramatic meaning through the characteristics of thematic materials.

For Haimovsky, the underlying harmonic modulations, which might be the centre of attention for many musicians, did not spark his attention: ‘When changes in the main tonalities coincide with clear changes of thematic ideas, my attention focused on the score’s hidden dramatic elements’.
Haimovský highlighted the Mazurka’s rhythmic and tonal instability:

Chopin uses a syncopated, swaying rhythm in the first four measures, and does not reach the key of the piece, Bb minor, until measure five. He remains in this key until measure twenty, giving the first real glimpse of the Mazurka dance style.

Summarising Haimovský’s next observations, he argued that settling on D-flat major, at measure 21, Chopin hints at a ‘luxuriant episode’, which corresponds, he said, to the ‘flirtatious nature of this swirling section’. After touching on the traditionally pastoral key of F major,8 D-flat major returns at measure 62 with bravura forte episodes that give the piece an even greater sense of drama.

Next, Haimovský emphasised how Chopin creates something unexpected: he introduces E major for the first time (at measure 71). Here, in the middle of this somewhat somber drama, ‘Chopin hints at the possibility of joy’. At this point, Haimovský notes that he had not actually started to interpret the score, only to analyse and reflect upon its ‘meanings’ for him. Again, he emphasised that his primary interest at this stage was considering how his personal associations created musical meaning through Chopin’s score.

For example (Figure 2), Haimovský viewed the first four measures of the piece as indicative of uncertainty, from a tonal point of view.

![Figure 2. Mazurka Opus 24 no 4 by Chopin measures 1-4](image)

He noted that Chopin’s alternations between major and minor modes do not let the listener rest comfortably. For Haimovský, these opening four measures, and the very end (with its tonal interplay), are the driving imaginative forces of the work. All of this creates an atmosphere of emotional uncertainty, even anxiety. Haimovský explains:

As I see it, the beginning, and the ending creates an atmosphere of not belonging to this world. I feel an almost impressionistic watery-world here; this makes me think of something happening underneath the surface of the water. My instinct told me that the opening and the ending corresponded to each other. The idea of uncertainty and not belonging, the shimmering of the modes between major and minor, and the somewhat ambiguous instability of B-flat minor, became the centers of my attention. In some way, these variables were part of an Impressionistic decoy that led me to the idea of Ondine [a reference explained below].

As he began to delve into and replay sections of the score, Haimovský focused on the middle section, from measure 53. Chopin uses very ‘weak intervals’ here, a minor second and an augmented second. The nature of this phrase led Haimovský to imagine someone offering a weak complaint: ‘Ondine, or Rusalka, in Russian mythology, is a tragic story of a woman who committed suicide and after death becomes Ondine. It is not like the character in Debussy’s Prelude, or Ravel’s Ondine from Gaspard de la Nuit.’
The cultural differences of the plot line of this water nymph require further explanation, which Haimovskiy conveyed to me in depth as he reflected in and on his creative interpretation processes. In Dvorak's opera Rusalka, the character of Rusalka is surrounded by tragedy. The opera tells the story of a water nymph who falls in love with a human. Rusalka calls for wizardry and asks to be made human in order to join herself with her love. The witch is willing to grant Rusalka her request, on the condition that when she becomes mortal, she will lose power of speech. She is warned that if her lover betrays her, both will be eternally damned. Undeterred, Rusalka becomes mortal. This tale does not end well for either character. Rusalka becomes a spirit of death, doomed to exist in the lowest depths of the lake, emerging only to lure humans to their death. As for her beloved, he begs Rusalka to come back to him. He pleads for her to forgive him and asks her to kiss him. Now that she has become a spirit of death, a kiss from her means damnation, but her love is resolved. Their lips meet and he dies in her arms.

Debussy's Ondine shows quite a different flavour from the Russian/Slavic tradition:

Ondines . . . are water nymphs, whose crystal palaces are in deep pools of river beds or lakes; singing and dancing, flitting through the waters, they lure voyagers, and transport them to their palaces where days pass in oblivious bliss, surrounded by beauty, and timeless forgetfulness . . . (Schmitz 1950, 178)

In his Ondine, explained Haimovskiy, Debussy alludes to the water and its ripples, and to the capricious splashing and flirtatious play of a beautiful mermaid. Ravel's Ondine is similar to the characteristics portrayed in Debussy's Prelude. Ravel's music evokes the alluring glories of Ondine's watery kingdom. The programme that Ravel used in this piece was from Aloysius Bertrand's poem 'Ondine'. The final stanza of the poem explains the nature of the water sprite's character as ' . . . she pouted, as if vexed; then shed a teardrop or two - but finally burst out into laughter, to dissolve then like radiant raindrops, streaming down the length of my blue-black windows . . .'. Haimovskiy notes: 'After second thinking, I realized that this notion of Ondine-Rusalka (my decoy) incorporates two aesthetics: Russian-Slavic and French-Nordic'. He continued:

Here, in Chopin, I feel someone being victimised. But, at the same time, this someone is thoroughly enjoying the under-water world with its echoes and reflections. Of course, you can tell me that my tradition and culture spoke through me. I cannot prove this. How can one prove something that goes beyond musical certainty?

Indeed, we cannot prove anything about the details that influence an artist's preparations or ultimate interpretations. Nevertheless, whether consciously or subconsciously, it seems plausible to suggest that (as Haimovskiy suggests) 'you can tell me that my tradition and culture spoke through me'. Haimovskiy knows a great deal - formally, informally (i.e., experientially), and intuitively - through his real experiences of 'living' the musical, cultural, and historical Russian-Slavic and French-Nordic traditions. It would seem odd, then, that an artist's 'hands' would 'work' independently of his mind (especially when we consider that, as neuroscientists and philosophers of mind suggest, the human mind is culturally formed). From this, I suggest that there are two possible explanations for Haimovskiy's synthesis. First is the nature of Chopin as simultaneously creating from two aesthetics: French
and Slavic. Chopin was born to a French father and a Polish mother; he lived in Paris from 1831 until his death in 1849. In 1831, France was a welcoming surrogate for Polish immigrants.\textsuperscript{10}

Chopin was one of those great Poles who relied upon France’s hospitality. Throughout the second half of his life he remained at Seine, and only from time to time did he ever journey outside France’s borders. (Niewiadomski in Trochimczyk, 2000, 63)

In addition, we cannot forget that during the last period of his life, Chopin shared an extremely close relationship with George Sand, not to mention French musicians and artists such as Berlioz and Delacroix, who played a very significant role in Chopin’s life.

However, and despite Chopin’s French connections, he was devoted to his native land, and he was emotionally and psychologically affected by Poland’s misfortunes. Perhaps Chopin would not have felt so tied to his beloved soil if he were there, personally and physically experiencing the tragedies caused by Russian oppression. But the fact remains: Chopin was extremely loyal to Poland, infusing his music with the rhythms, harmonies, forms, and melodic traits of Polish popular music.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, the Slavic component of sorrow plays a distinct role in Chopin’s music. As Huneker (1934) writes:

That subtle quality, and for an Occidental enigmatic, which the Poles call \textit{Zal}, is in some of the Mazurkas ... \textit{Zal}, a poisonous word, is a baleful compound of pain, sadness, and revolt. It is a Polish, a Slavic quality ... Oppressed nations with a tendency to lyricism develop this psychical secretion. Liszt writes that ‘the \textit{Zal} colors with a reflection the whole of Chopin’s works.’ This sorrow is the very soil of Chopin’s nature.\textsuperscript{12}

The second reason for Haimovsky’s dual associations and feelings are, perhaps, similar to Chopin’s. He, too, carries in his nature the Russian–Franco musical traditions. However, he, too, is deeply anchored in his beloved Russia and his personal, physical, and psychological experiences of the tragedies caused by Russian oppression. As a Jewish artist living under the Stalinist regime, Haimovsky experienced extreme oppression. Not only was he exiled for 16 years to a Russian province, but upon his return to Moscow he was continually degraded. He was not even permitted to have his name appear on concert posters. Huneker’s explanation for Chopin’s overtly sad character seems applicable to Haimovsky, as well.

The influence of the French tradition can be explained in a parallel way. As a performer, Haimovsky immersed himself in the music of twentieth-century French composers. A ‘Debussyist’, Haimovsky dwelled in his Russian–Franco sympathies. When reflecting on the legend of Ondine, he considered both cultural identities of the water nymph’s character. So again, as an artist, he was swayed by cultural–musical implications.

For Haimovsky, the score invited these reflections and feelings. His past and present experiences influenced his responses. Why Ondine? It was the nature of the tonal and modal uncertainty surrounded with the metamorphosis of successive themes that allowed for this association. And, once this association was formed, he began to compose his own unique poem for this piece. For example, at measure 53 Chopin writes \textit{sotto voce}, without the use of pedal (Figure 3).
At the opening of melodies interpreted to fantastic sadness is the statement and answers that with a statement a minor second above. This minor second is an idea. The opening of the sotto voce: the minor second F-Gb. In addition, the con anima section at measure 61 begins on F and its reflection begins on Gb. From measure 61 through measure 87, Chopin makes a musical statement and asks that with a statement a minor second above. This minor second is an
important interval for Chopin in this piece. He uses it to create dramatic development. In addition, in this same section, Chopin begins addressing the musical materials *forte* and *fortissimo* in a major key. The reply is marked *piano* and *pianissimo* in a minor key. Haimovsky reflects:

As I said before, Chopin plays back and forth between major and minor modes and shows varying dynamic contrasts. These modes and contrasts hint at varying musical characteristics. Also, the same tool is applied to show the depth of an atmosphere. This is why this piece is so Impressionistic for me. It is like water. The con anima section in the major key is being shown on the surface. But underneath that surface, pianissimo fragments are presenting something of a different nature. If someone does something on the water’s surface, its silhouette behaves differently. It is lazier and rhythmically uncertain.

For purposes of comparison, let me describe two of my other sessions with Haimovsky when he performed quite different interpretations of the Mazurka. In one session, he adopted a more carefree style to create a feminine elasticity and elegance. He achieved this effect by using a graceful left hand and giving equal importance to the two voices present in the right hand (from measure 5). Even though the opening four measures alluded to the harmonic uncertainty of the score, Haimovsky sought a playful and flirtatious manner. He played the Mazurka melody (at measure 21) with a graceful rubato. The result, to my ears, was, indeed, a pure and child-like playfulness. He described this as ‘Ondine happy, playing, swimming’. The idea of Ondine, seductive and alluring, took over at measure 53 and reinforced his idea of a woman’s plea being answered by a man’s choir. Haimovsky united the soloist-and-chorus nature of this section by means of an elegant forward movement of tempo.

After a connecting bridge and recapitulation he interpreted the coda (measure 114) in a sad, pensive mood. He accomplished this by emphasising the first beat of the measure, by briefly pausing after the half notes, and by avoiding rhythmic regularity in the left hand. At first, performing the coda in this way seemed to contradict Haimovsky’s decision to interpret this second version in a more carefree, femininely elegant style. Indeed, from the viewpoint of interpretative unity, a ‘sad’ coda does not fit the ethos of his lighter interpretive stance. However, considering the tragedy of the Ondine legend that Haimovsky had in mind, the pathos of his coda makes sense. After Ondine leads all those who will follow her into a world of surreal forgetfulness, her conquests ultimately lead to their deaths by drowning. Taken as a whole, the seemingly contradictory nature of Haimovsky’s coda matches his personal, ‘poetic’ intent of this interpretation.

To briefly illustrate his meticulous concern for details, I shall now report on one of our subsequent sessions in which Haimovsky developed, performed, and reflected on his second interpretation of the Mazurka. In this session, Haimovsky developed a much more tragic interpretation of the score. He chose a slow tempo. He began measures 1–4 at a *mezzoforte* level, followed by a *diminuendo* and a *ritardando*, whereas Chopin asks for *piano*. By beginning the piece in this affirmative manner, Haimovsky wished to prepare the listener for something more serious. From measure 5, he sought to express an image of Ondine in contemplative and tragic moods. The resultant effect was the antithesis of his first performance. This effect was achieved in the following ways: ‘The two voices in the right hand start to “talk” to each other in
a heavy manner. Here I placed greater weight on the alto voice in the right hand and made this voice the dominating line'.

Haimovskiy then increased the dramatic effect of this three-voice (two voices in the right hand, one voice in the left hand) sonority by placing heavy accents on the third beat in the bass. Haimovskiy then played the figure at measure 11 in a bombastic style by placing heavy accents on the F and Gb octaves, and by slowing down throughout this figure. At measure 21, Haimovskiy performed in a strong and slightly exacting manner, hardly using rubato. This section seemed obsessed with the rhythm of the Mazurka rather than its emotional content. From measure 53, Haimovskiy exaggerated Chopin's request for sotto voce. He gave this section an element of personal pain by exaggerating the Gb, making it the principal tone in the melody. Through the repeat (as if emphasising the emotional importance on the Gb was not enough), he added a ritardando to the E, C, Bb passage at the end of the motive. This brought an even deeper sadness to the music.

Haimovskiy gave the con anima section a reflective quality by performing it more slowly than the preceding sections. The recapitulation (measure 99) was played more pensively than the exposition. His performance of the coda continued this tragic preoccupation, despite some slight glimpse of light, due to the major mode that Chopin toys with. This is arguably the most important section of the Mazurka (it is 33 measures in length). This section sounds as if the whole Mazurka was created around it, as if the previous 99 measures were a preface to this coda. Here Haimovskiy suppressed the dance form and quality of the Mazurka. The melody seems to be expressive of nostalgia, sadness, loneliness, and pity. It seems to be seeking what to say next (expressed by the fermatas placed at the ends of phrases). The major mode gives the pianist the opportunity to perform with even more desperation, because, even though Chopin offers (with the major mode) a 'beam of musical sunlight' in a 'dark' context, Haimovskiy is reminded of what could be, but never will be. He elaborated:

I want to note that the second interpretation seems sadder, to me, than the first reading. I am not so sure that it should be so sad, though. The first reading sounds as if a French pianist were playing it: elegant! The second is heavier, more Russian. But why? Time lapsed between the performances. I experienced some difficulties, creative and otherwise. Such things happen and we cannot do anything to rid ourselves of preoccupations. This affected me, definitely. Some artists can control their playing to such a degree that their inner world does not affect their performance. Artists like that, generally, do not play with inner involvement. They are not interpreters. Interpreters are under pressure all the time. If this pressure is overwhelming at a particular day or hour, it will affect their playing.

I believe it was important that Haimovskiy and I differed about which interpretation of Chopin's score was more artistically satisfying, convincing, expressive, and/or affecting. Haimovskiy believed that the 'elegant', French-style interpretation was more satisfying than the first. He explained that he attempted to express this by playing the left-hand Mazurka rhythm gracefully, using agogical interplay. This, for him, evoked the feelings of 'elegance and grace':

I was watching the score as I listened to my playing [as recorded by me], and every time I saw the Mazurka-rhythm in the score, I noticed that I didn’t once play it even-handed.
This is extremely important in Chopin. A heavy, pedantic Mazurka rhythm in Chopin? No way.

I preferred his later interpretation because its ‘pensiveness’ seemed appropriate to Chopin's nature and to the nature of Chopin’s Mazurkas. As Rubinstein said, Chopin’s Mazurkas reveal Chopin ‘singing, mourning, weeping over Poland’s downfall’ (Huneker 1900, 344). For me, Haimovsky’s later reading epitomised these sensitivities.

An important implication, then, is that listeners, like performers, are interpreters. Listeners bring their own dispositions, moods, preoccupations, histories, and knowledge to listening situations, and to their acts of musical meaning making. Thus, because I preferred one interpretation and Haimovsky favoured the other does not mean that there were any ‘problems’ with his performances. Indeed, part of our enjoyment lay in our dialogues about the wholes and parts of his interpretive performances.

Implications

I must emphasise from the outset of this section that this is only one study of one artist. Thus, the implications of this investigation for teaching and learning are not generalisable. They are only suggestive of issues, problems, and possibilities. I will discuss the implications of this study in relation to a series of questions and replies related to pertinent issues, problems, and possibilities.

What is the role of ‘non-technical’ knowledge in the teaching and learning of creative performers?

This study suggests that the teaching and learning of interpretive performers should include a broad liberal arts education. Over many years, Haimovsky developed an expansive knowledge base that deeply influenced his ability to create multiple interpretive performances. In addition to his knowledge of the artistic, aesthetic, historical, cultural, and social contexts of Chopin’s oeuvre and Romantic music, he was steeped in pianists’ and composers’ biographies, their historical-cultural times, and related poetry and literature, in a variety of languages (as I learned from my interviews). In addition, Haimovsky’s attitude towards developing multiple interpretations of Chopin’s score reflects his understanding of the piano performance practices of Chopin’s era, which was an interpretive-performance culture. That is, ‘Chopin . . . never played his works twice with the same expression, and yet the result was always ideally beautiful, thanks to the ever-fresh inspiration . . . he could have played the same piece twenty times in succession, and you would still listen with equal fascination’ (Eigeldinger 1986, 55). The same holds for Rachmaninov, who not only differed in interpretations of his works, but also changed textual implications, including notes.

... an early nineteenth-century pianistic culture was in a special sense a performance culture, in that it was centered on, and invested in, the act of performance rather than the object of performance, which was usually, but not always, the musical work. (Samson 2000, 112)
What sources of educational knowledge might assist present and future performance teachers in reflecting on their teaching practices? I will discuss a few examples from two sources.

We are familiar with music teachers of all kinds at all levels who (knowingly or unknowingly) adopt an overbearing, authoritarian teaching style. On the other hand, we are equally familiar with teachers who are highly supportive, caring, open, and authoritative, but not authoritarian. I noted in my introduction that Zak was a strict taskmaster who did not allow Haimovskiy any freedom of expression. Notably, however, Haimovskiy eventually overcame Zak’s form of ‘teaching’. One may examine this situation from several perspectives, beginning with Haimovskiy’s personal testimony:

When coming for a lesson with Yakov Zak, my intentions were noble and he understood that, but the presentation of intentions did not work. If I did not understand him, he would come to the piano with his pencil and he would write down above each sound or chord how it should sound related to the previous sound or chord and to the following sound or chord. Pedal also. And if I could not do what he wanted, I was an idiot.

I never could do what he wanted. I could learn what he wanted from me, but when I involved my inner self, I would forget everything . . . A little Nocturne has how many notes? He would spend two hours just writing over each sound. He made a few incredible mistakes. For instance, speaking of the final section of Chopin’s Bb Sonata, Zak turned the fingering upside down to suit his fingers. And he insisted that I should learn these fingerings. Year after year, I had a problem with this passage. For me it was always awkward. My hands were different from his. It did not matter. He would insist. For my graduation recital, I played Liszt’s B minor Sonata very well because Zak never worked on this piece with me. He was mad at me; he did not want me to learn this piece because he was not a Liszt player. I did it anyway. He left me alone and I played it very well.

Haimovskiy continued:

Zak damaged, for me, all composers I played. He gave me ‘schooling’ – a discipline of ear and fingers, no question about that. But speaking stylistically, about being authentic, he completely distorted everything that my intuition, if left alone, would have understood. If he did not intervene in such a way, I would have instinctively found my way to different styles.

Haimovskiy viewed his time ‘under Zak’ as a tragic episode in his education. It took him over 10 years to escape the demands of his teacher. It was extremely difficult for him to reconstruct the piano repertoire with his own voice. It was not until he worked to gain confidence in himself that he found his own interpretations:

People were finally saying to me, ‘you are a good pianist.’ Our inner-self adjusts our physical possibilities. I do not believe in technique in general terms. Horowitz’s technique had nothing in common with Richter’s. It means your personality applies to your technical managing of materials.

Educational psychology

Educational psychology offers useful principles that apply to two major issues above. First, teachers would be advised to place a strong emphasis on developing students’
personal and musical self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to how confident someone 'feels' to handle particular tasks, challenges, and contexts (Snowman and Biehler 2006). Self-efficacy develops from several intertwined factors: a steady growth in knowledge and skills 'matched' to appropriate levels of musical challenges; a steady rise in performance accomplishments; deepening experiences of intrinsic motivation; and, thus, a valuing for and commitment to raising the level of one's musical abilities, not to mention musical enjoyment. Individual, creative interpretation, finding and expressing 'one's own voice', will not evolve in settings where fear, embarrassment, or teachers' domination suppress individual risk-taking and expression.

Closely linked to the development of self-efficacy is the concept of constructivism, which is concerned with 'meaningful learning'. Constructivist teachers create learning situations where students can 'actively create their own knowledge structures from personal experience' (Snowman and Biehler 2006, 310). This does not imply the suspension of direct instruction about issues of technique, and so forth. Teachers usually have far more experience and technique than students, of course. However, this must not be imposed. Constructivism proposes that meaningful learning occurs when students become more and more able to find and solve musical problems themselves, with appropriate, caring guidance (and modelling) from their teachers, and with mutual dialogue. Back-and-forth questioning is a key principle of constructivist teaching/learning. In these ways, students can learn how to guide, coach, and teach themselves, in the present and, most importantly, in the future.

Clearly, although Zak's teaching was the opposite of what I have just described, several factors might explain Haimovsky's success in rising above Zak's negative influence and learning to teach himself. Fortunately, Haimovsky received vital encouragement and guidance from Elena Gnessina; he had a strong tendency towards independent thought (recall his early resistance to some of his teachers' entreaties to enter competitions, and his decision to perform repertoire he preferred); he accumulated significant musical achievements from university onward; also at the Conservatory, he had continuous opportunities to listen to a wide range of interpretations and repertoire by his professors and fellow students. From these and other experiences, and the strength he gained from surviving his exile under Stalin, he was able to maintain and enhance his self-efficacy.

**Democracy and ethics in teaching**

Inherent in true constructivist teaching, and as educational philosophers emphasise (e.g., Dewey 1902, 1915, 1921), teachers should cultivate a mutually democratic learning environment. Non-democratic teaching situations are those in which teachers adopt a domineering, one-directional style. Democratic teachers work to build self-efficacy, personal 'voices', individual creativity, and the means for lifelong learning. Through dialogical relationships, teachers and students create a musical space for mutual action-and-reflections. Although throughout this study, my relationship with Haimovsky was not one of teacher–student, Haimovsky's positive disposition towards dialogical teaching and learning was exemplified in the ways we compared, contrasted, and then freely and openly debated the results of his various interpretive efforts, and 'listened back' on these recorded discussions.

In addition, a democratic approach to teaching involves ethical issues. It is essential to consider that every decision a teacher makes has an ethical component.
For example: deciding why, when, and how to emphasise technical work, or not; why, when, and how to choose and increase the difficulty of repertoire, or not; why, when, and how to plan recitals, appearances at master classes, concerts; and when to accept student input in all these decisions, or not.

What are the implications of this study for interpretive processes and performance ethics?

Haimovsky’s processes began with reading through the work as a whole. He then reflected and remarked on the music generally, using descriptive adjectives to help him understand the sense of the Mazurka: words like ‘dancing’, ‘flowing’, and ‘feminine’. Once he had some generalisations in place, Haimovsky separated out parts for analysis, understanding, and performance. (He continuously employed a whole-part-whole approach.) He ‘chunked out’ important parts (as he saw them), thoroughly examining certain sections separately. Of course, students who do not have Haimovsky’s level of artistry do not have to play a whole piece – ‘whole’ is relative to a student’s ability. A ‘whole’ might be a cogent section. Once that section is played, probed, and understood, then students select subsections of this ‘whole’ on its own: performing and reflecting upon these sections while trying to make sense of the relationships between sections before attempting the ‘cogent whole’. And so the process continues.

Haimovsky’s approach leaned heavily towards musical individuality. Still, his ‘all-inclusive’ processes (e.g., the use of musical images from Russian mythology and Debussy’s Ondine), rested on meticulous analyses of all musical elements of and respect for the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, timbral, textural, and formal structures of Op. 24, No. 4.

I note that Haimovsky’s interpretative work with this single piece extended over a number of months. He came back to the score many times. We might suggest, then, that students need to learn and create interpretations over various time intervals. Like Haimovsky, it is desirable (though not always possible) for students to work on scores, put them away for a time, and then come back to them for repeated reflections and analyses. Interpreting a score is never a finished process. There is always more to be done as students’ experiences fuel future interpretations.

Implicit in this study and these implications is the fundamental issue of listening. Listeners are also interpreters. Here, there was no one-to-one correlation between (1) Chopin’s intentions (Haimovsky made inferences about the score in relation to his knowledge and personal history); (2) his preferences for specific interpretations; and (3) my views and preferences (from my knowledge, observations, and personal history). Musically creative performances are ‘open’ to multiple interpretations (unless teachers or students hold fast to a formalist concept of works and performances). Accordingly, imposing particular interpretations on students, however ‘authentic’ or ‘authoritative’ some teachers may believe they are, is an arguable practice. Again, dialogue, and the generation of ‘multiple solutions’, may be more fruitful.

Haimovsky did not limit his listening to his performances of the score’s intramusical designs; he listened intermusically – across his own various recordings. This provided him with more reflections and insights as he worked creatively. Digital audio and video recorders allow teachers and students to document alternative
interpretations for comparison, reflection, future actions, and later performative ‘revisions’.

Similarly, listening to different interpretations, various recordings, and numerous live performances can significantly enlarge students’ awareness of interpretive possibilities. Some teachers may resist this, lest students try to mimic performances. I can only say that, in Haimovskiy’s case, the opportunity to learn from intermusical listening has been a major part of his development. In fact, since this study, we frequently discuss various recordings of the same works by many pianists. He is a voracious listener and an ever-reflective critic. Our debates are invigorating and highly educative for me, and, I think, for him.

Finally, creative interpreting also involves ethical issues. On the one hand, educated audiences might expect performers to demonstrate their musical individuality (more or less), within the bounds of a musical style, score, and historical performance practice. On the other hand, implicit in styles, scores, and performance practices is a ‘call’ for responsibility to the ‘authority’ or ‘ideal’ embodied in notation. From this viewpoint, performers are called upon to balance individual expression with a musically ethical disposition to be ‘faithful’ (more or less) to a musical score. As Grossman (1987) puts it, performing involves an important tension between constraint and freedom that amounts to a ‘double obligation’ (257). To various degrees, ‘an ethical contract comes into play when someone undertakes to interpret a musical composition. Our actions in musical performing parallel our actions in moral affairs. As with all ethical situations, there is a self–other obligation’ (Elliott 1995, 167).

Notes
2. Haimovskiy studied at the Gnessin Institute and graduated from there prior to attending the Tchaikovsky Conservatory.
3. Haimovskiy’s student years coincided with the most severe stages of Russian totalitarianism. Under Stalin’s regime, the arts were practiced at the highest level, in so far as art was seen as a means of ‘fighting’ with and claiming superiority over the West. Virtuosos, such as Gilels, Oistrakh, and Richter, were ‘special weapons’ that Stalin sent to Europe and the USA to persuade Westerners that Russia was the finest civilisation. Competitions aided this goal. In this context, a young artist who wished to compete needed the support of the Conservatory, or a leading professor of a major Russian musical institution, and/or the Ministry of Culture of the (former) USSR. Haimovskiy was advised to enter competitions to support the Soviet mission for cultural excellence. However, at the age of 19, he did not feel ready to compete against Sviatoslav Richter, who was then 33 and a seasoned artist. Haimovskiy held to this belief, despite the fact that his renown teacher, Elena Gnessina, was certain he was a fine contender. The same situation occurred again later when his doctoral supervisor, Yuri Bruschkov, tried to persuade Haimovskiy to enter competitions. However, the new liberal attitudes of the Soviet government under Kruschev made it easier for Haimovskiy to refuse the opportunity.
4. Under the Melodia label, he made the first Russian recording of Messiaen’s Quartet For the End of Time. He also introduced Messiaen to Russia through published articles and in concerts, and gave premiere performances of his most famous works. Importantly, Haimovskiy premiered Messiaen’s Turangalila Symphony under Evgeny Svetlanov. This premiere was done by invitation of the Moscow Philharmonia to perform in the same concert with Emil Gilels. Haimovskiy was the organiser of and chamber performer in an
ensemble of Moscow’s finest performers, the Chamber Ensemble of Soviet Radio and TV. He performed premieres of leading contemporary composers and received written praise by these composers for his extraordinary performances. In an unpublished letter, 14 March 1992, Nikolai Sidelnikov wrote: ‘All the time, while working on *Labyrinths*, I am living knowing I am writing this piece for you. I want you to experience joy from this piece because it is written on the brink of pianistic capabilities, as well as on the verge of physical and spiritual capacities. All the time, I see you, your caliber and mastery and musicianship’. In an unpublished, personal letter, 5 May 1985, Sergei Slonimsky wrote: ‘I have been listening to your recordings of Debussy. They show unique interpretations, refined powerful performances, and supreme artistry’. Mark Kopytman is quoted: ‘Gregory Haimovsky has given such a profound and superb artistic reading of my music. He has magnificently discovered my subconscious intentions’. Elena Dubinets in Yulia Krenin’s *Voices of memories*, (2004, 172).


6. This quote is taken from the preface to Mikuli’s edition of the Mazurkas.

7. Franz Liszt wrote: ‘That latent and unknown poetry which in the original Polish Mazurkas was only indicated, was by Chopin divined, developed and brought to the light of day. While he preserved the rhythm of the dance he ennobled its melody and enlarged its proportions; and in order to paint more completely in these productions, which he loved to hear us speak of as ‘pictures from the easel’, the innumerable and widely varying emotions which agitate the soul during the progress of this dance, above all in those long intervals during which the cavalier has the right to retain his place at the side of the lady whom he never quits – Chopin wove into their tissues harmonic lights and shades which were as new in themselves as the themes to which he adapted them’. *Life of Chopin*, (Liszt 1913, 64–5).

8. According to Deryck Cooke, there has been a ‘historical development of key signatures, instruments, etc’. He characterises D-flat major as ‘luxurious’ and in this particular instance, I would concur. *The Language of Music* (Cooke 1989, 175). Of course, one cannot blindly justify his belief that key signatures alone carry specific emotional characteristics.

9. From Louis ‘Aloysius’ Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la nuit*.

10. At this time, there was a great uprising of Poles against Russian rule. Before arriving in Paris, Chopin left Poland for Vienna, under his parent’s orders, after which he left for Germany. These moves away from his native land left Chopin feeling guilty for not defending his homeland.

11. An example of Chopin’s use of national idioms is his usage of the Lydian mode with the raised fourth: such a mode was characteristic for Polish folk music.

12. From the Preface of the Mikuli edition of the Mazurkas.

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