

Oleksandr PEREPELYTSIA

# From New Forms of Notation to Theatricalized Performance Gesture: The Creation of Emotional-Figurative Contexts of Modern Piano Music

*Nuo naujų muzikos notacijos formų iki teatralizuoto atlikimo gesto: emocinių-vaizdinių kontekstų kūrimas šiuolaikinėje fortepijoninėje muzikoje*

Odesa National A. V. Nezhdanova Academy of Music, Novosel's'koho St 63, Odesa, 65000, Ukraine  
o.perepl@gmail.com

## Abstract

The article discloses the characteristics of the influence of new forms of musical notation on performance gesture in piano music, and the creation, in relation to this, of new emotional and figurative contexts for piano music. The piano performer's gesture and movements are stipulated by theatrical psychological meaning, thereby complementing and enriching the process of intonation. In addition, gesture becomes an important meaning-generating element in the theatricalization of performance, in piano compositions where the action is unfolded as based upon the principles of internal and external theatricality. The article examines various approaches to the theory of gesture and determines the relationship between non-standard creative forms of notation and the expanding possibilities of the performer's gesture, where the latter is transformed from an auxiliary field to a field of reflection of meaning-forming theatrical contexts.

**Keywords:** contemporary notation, theatrical performance gestures, gesture theory, emotional-figurative context.

## Anotacija

Straipsnyje atskleidžiamos naujų muzikos notacijos formų įtakos fortepijoninės muzikos atlikimo gestui ypatumai ir atitinkamai naujų emocinių-metaforinių fortepijoninės muzikos kontekstų kūrimas. Fortepijono atlikėjo gestą ir judesius nustato teatrinė-psichologinė reikšmė, papildanti intonavimo procesą. Be to, kūrinuose fortepijonui, kur veiksmas atskleidžiamas remiantis vidinio ir išorinio teatrališkumo principais, gestas tampa svarbiu reikšmę formuojančiu elementu atlikimo režisūroje. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami įvairūs požiūriai į gestų teoriją ir nustatomas santykis tarp nestandartinių kūrybinių muzikos notacijos formų bei besiplečiančių atlikėjo gesto galimybių, kai pastarasis perkeliamas iš pagalbinio lauko į reikšmę formuojančių teatrinų kontekstų refleksijos lauką.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** šiuolaikinė muzikos notacija, teatralizuoto atlikimo gestai, gestų teorija, emocinis-metaforinis kontekstas.

Contemporary composers in their quest for knowledge of various worlds and super-worlds, the energy of the cosmos and its magical manifestations, and following the latest paradigm generated by the music of the second avant-garde's rejection of the song form as the basis of all musical elements, have created a revolution in notation, in each case adapting it to the individual project of their musical works. Presently, almost every composer is in possession of their own structure of musical notation and designations of various performance techniques and seeks to reflect accurately and meticulously the emotional-figurative context and imbue the system of musical notation with something original. The avant-garde music of the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century is on the verge of a new spiritual era, demonstrating to the world countless notational forms, systems, and methods. The movement is characterized by its incorporation of the imagery of the surrounding sounding, moving, and living

world. In connection with this, the musical material necessarily becomes extraordinarily more complex: new atonal pitch systems appear, rhythmic structures become more complicated, and original forms of sound extraction and performance methods associated with specific features of instrumentation are applied. In piano music, the latter include playing clusters, performing on the "prepared" piano, and playing on the strings and pedals, as well as with threads, sticks, and other objects. In solo instrumental performance, electronics are employed. All this leads to the modernization of musical notation and the use of specific forms of notation to reflect the special performance techniques and sound effects present in the music. Usually, every musical composition of this kind is explained by a particular technique or symbol, and in some cases, lengthy performance instructions are placed directly above or below the notes, and it takes a significant amount of time first to learn the entire musical score with all the unusual characters present

in it, and then to move on to perform the composition. By reproducing pitch notation extremely thoroughly, the performer is granted creative freedom not only in traditional settings such as the agogics, dynamics, touch, etc., but also in new dimensions related to playing clusters, playing on the piano strings and pedals, sound gestures, and the theatricality of performance.

Contemporary musical notation is comprised not only of the fixation of pitch and rhythmic parameters, but also of many other components, such as the theatricality of performance gesture, the direction and parameters of performance technique which affect one way or another the perception of the work as a whole.

The new musical trends of the twentieth century also brought a certain amount of change in the means of musical notation. On the one hand, this change presents a further refinement and enrichment of performance designations, an extension of their complex entities. Thereby, contemporary music has incorporated such elements as the notation of conducting methods and of previously unknown performance types. Different means of notation exist which have been introduced by various composers and which have ever only been used in their own works. On the other hand, the adherents of aleatory music in its various types do not apply any established written fixation of notes in their pieces, leaving many parameters to the discretion of the performer. Composers who believe that the rendition of their ideas must be carried out in a manner approaching free improvisation often realize the musical notation of their compositions as a series of “hints,” as a sort of musical drawing.

Of special importance is the inherent symbolism present in musical notation, where along with such generally accepted symbols as, for instance, Bartok pizzicatos, new ones have appeared, such as playing on the stand, playing with the pedals, playing on various different parts of the piano,



Figure 1. Maksim Shorenkov’s *Through the Spheres* for piano and threads

playing on the strings with the hands or objects, playing on the strings with threads, extracting harmonics, glissando-fluides (by means of glass cups), string pizzicatos, use of various percussion sticks, and singing along with playing.

All these symbols require separate explanations. In addition, some composers have departed from the traditional

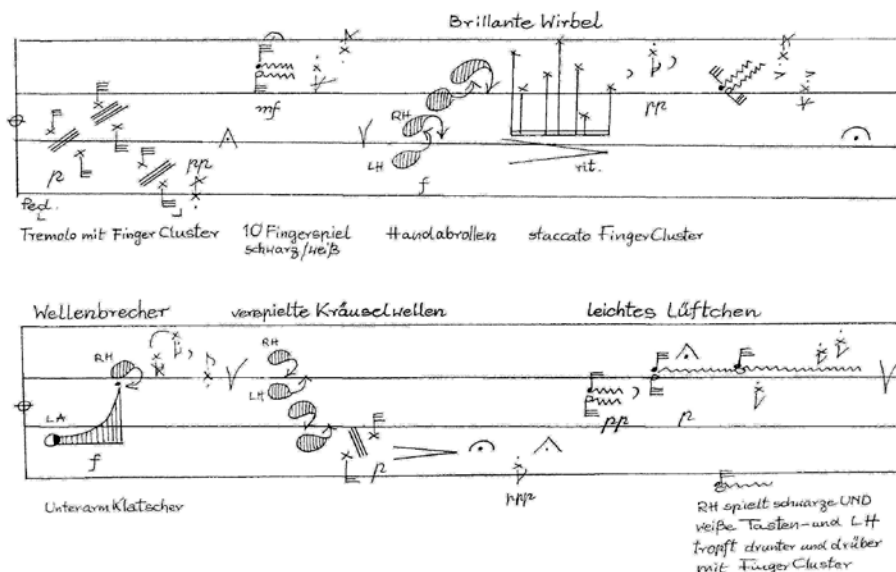


Figure 2. Gertrud Meyer-Denkman’s *Fresh Breeze (Frische Brise)* for piano

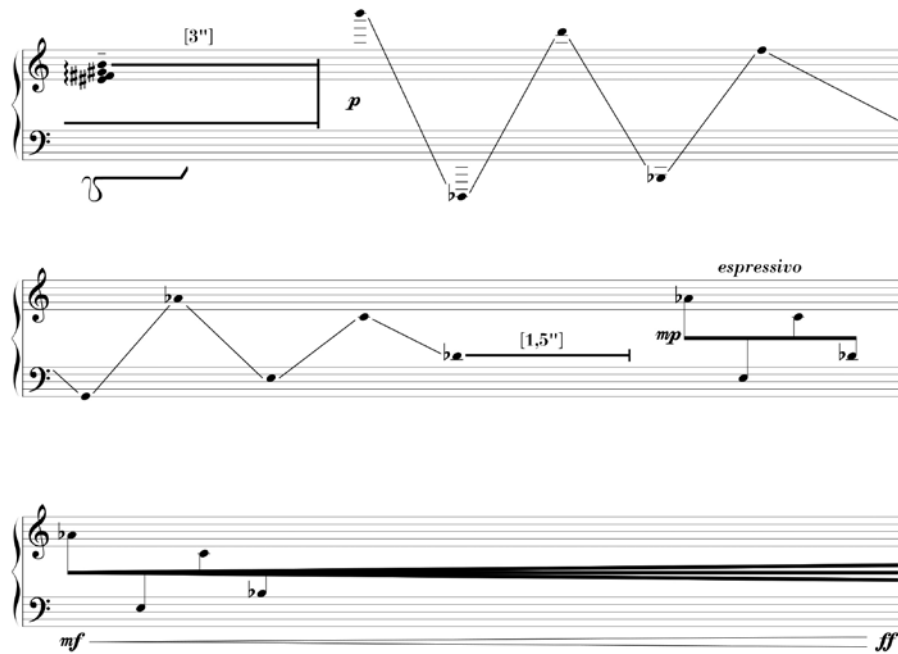


Figure 3. Karmella Tsepkenko's *Evening Solitaire* for piano

framework of the five-lined staff, having created their own systems of musical graphics. Here, various composers, following John Cage, in search of adequate expression of their ideas by means of signs, have turned to notating their musical ideas by means of graphics, transcending all rules of traditional notation (Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, Mauricio Kagel, Krzysztof Penderecki, Karlheinz Stockhausen, etc.).

Along with the various new methods of notation, the aesthetic, visual aspect of the musical score has unexpectedly gained significance. Such kinds of notation provided the impetus for the creation of so-called performances and "theater pieces."

It can be said that such musical scores present various types of written improvisations, the auditory outcome of



\*) Glissando from any sound.

Figure 4. Julia Gomelskaya's *Seven Touches* for piano

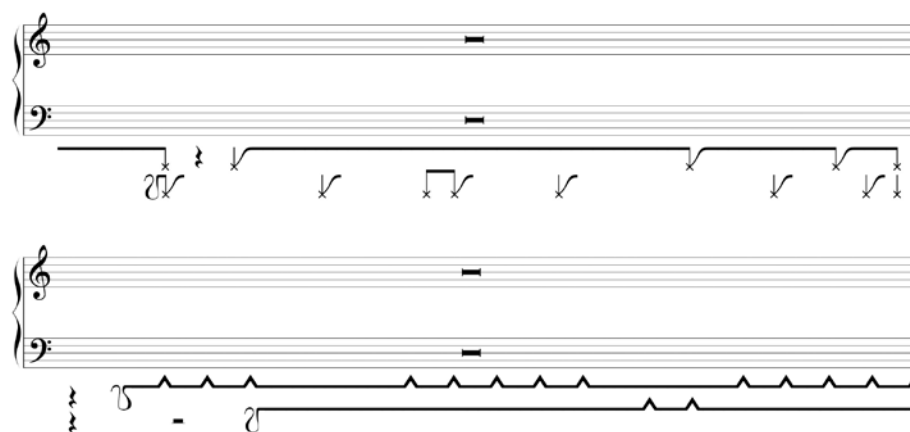


Figure 5. Karmella Tsepikolenko's *Evening Solitaire* for piano

which is not predetermined. The performer is free to choose everything—from the instrument on which they perform to the duration of the sound. Moreover, the number of performers is also random: from one soloist to an entire orchestra.

For the twentieth century, the manner in which the sound is extracted has gained significance; performance articulation has become imbued with meaning. The performers may play with the palms of their hands, or with their knuckles, thereby realizing the composer's artistic conception (Galina Ustvolskaya's piano sonatas), pressing the keys soundlessly to create special sound effects (Sofia Gubaidulina's *Echo*) or use of the piano's pedals as a percussion instrument (Karmella Tsepikolenko's *Evening Solitaire*).

The piano performer's gestures and movements are similar to the psychological gesture in the theater, which reveals and formalizes the intention for a psychologically significant intonation. There also exist shock manifestations, where the performer crawls under the piano, lies upon it, plays with the mirrored hand position (Ivan Sokolov's *Volokos*), or produces sound effects with, for example, their nose or elbow. In contemporary music, the performer is presented with the task of creating a performance script in which theatrical performance gestures would be recognized and orchestrated, and the actors' moves comprising the performance are well thought out. Undoubtedly, contemporary music finds itself in need of special types of performance combining its inherent theatrical components and the individual directions present in it.

Traditionally, pianistic motions have been divided into two groups: those associated with motions focused on sound extraction and those which aspire towards the goal of obtaining the necessary sound according to such factors as the indicated pitch, duration, volume, or timbre. Such motions are called "working," "playing," or "expedient" motions.

The second group includes more explanatory motions, which may often appear on the level of an unconscious process, as the result of a type of a "directorial" task, making it possible to reveal more clearly the semantic meaning of a musical composition and convey a particular individual interpretation. Such motions are referred to as "visually expressive" and "subjectively tuning." They include moving the hands (these are also perceived as pertaining to the first group), the shoulders, the torso, and the head as well as facial manifestations as part of the performance. Facial expression pertains entirely to the field of non-auditory visual gestures during the performance and is referred to as "silent speech" or "silent playing" (Moroz 2018: 132).

The contemporary era, as reflected in modern musical notation, has placed numerous additional requirements on the performer. The general provisions of the art of gesture in modern music are complemented by many more positions related to the skill of cluster performance, playing on strings, pedals, by means of auditory gestures, and theatricalization of the performed material. Ukrainian researcher Marina Pereplytsia, when researching the manifestation of theatricality in the art of music, notes the multi-directional nature of theatricality in non-theatrical musical genres—internal playing development and external theatrical performance. The author identifies three types of theatricalization in non-theatrical musical genres: the internal type, namely, the theatricalization of the figurative sphere without any demonstrational manifestation on stage; external theatricalization, which involves demonstrational manifestations of the musical composition; and the duple theatricalization, which combines both types—the figurative and demonstrative. External theatricality, being in itself largely predetermined by the laws of theater as a spectacular art, relies on visual imagery. Internal theatricality is based purely on the musical text, reflecting the action in an illusory way, by means of associativity, and receives expression on



**Figure 6.** A musical performance by Lang Lang

the psychological figurative level of internal connection of music with theatre (Perepelytsia 2015: 77). The issue of performance gesture in piano music has recently attracted the attention of researchers. Thus, British pianist Frances Wilson, when studying the issue of performance gesture, observes that the concert hall resembles a theatre, and the performer on stage plays the role of an actor. And for the audience a concert becomes both a visual and an auditory experience—we listen with both our eyes and ears. The physical movements and gestures of the performers not only affect the nature and quality of the sound, but also reveal the hidden context of the work and help the listener attain the desired association. However, at certain times, some performers discard gesture out of the content, “overdo” the effects, or “grimace” with no present necessity, as a result of which the performer’s gestures interfere with the music or have no connection with it, which may be unpleasant or even annoying to the viewer. But in cases when the “correct” gestures are applied, the performance improves in a magical way both for the listener and for the performer. According to Frances Wilson, every musical style brings its own original aesthetics of performance gesture: Bach’s style is accompanied by the gestures which reflect its depth and religious detachment; the era of Haydn and Mozart is characterized by elegance, lightness, and playfulness; Beethoven’s music is accompanied by more intense and wider gestures, while Romantic music with its deep contrasts, dramatic bursts of emotion, and tragic cries of despair correlates with sharp, possibly even hysterical gestures (Wilson 2016).

Australian musicologist Jane Davidson, when trying to substantiate the semantic aspect of the pianist’s gestures, has examined the movements of the hands and the body as well as the facial expressions of the performer during the performance of the music (Davidson). For the first time, the

attempt has been made to link the communicative musical motions with the artist’s facial expressions in creating an expressive musical performance. The respective motions have been studied in solo and ensemble performances.

As an example for experimental study in solo performance, the participation of world-famous Chinese pianist Lang Lang, who is distinguished by his extreme communicative and expressive gestures and facial expressions, has been chosen. The process of his performance has been recorded with the use of five cameras. Standard classical concert repertoire has been used as the musical material.

Analysis of the video of the recorded performances has revealed a variety of combinations of facial and bodily expressions reflecting the structural features of the music. They can be reduced to basic expressive types of gestures correlated with facial expression: forward and backward tilts, most often with the eyebrows slightly raised, sometimes with a slightly open mouth; nods of the head (up and down)—with the eyebrows slightly raised, sometimes with a slightly open mouth; shaking of the head (side to side)—with eyes closed, eyebrows raised, mouth slightly open; leaning back, with head tilted up—with eyes closed, eyebrows raised and mouth open; leaning forward or extremely close to the keyboard—with a frowning forehead and the whole face tense and covered, as if crying or sobbing; an explosive spring actuated thrust of the body, with quick motion back—with the mouth and the eyes wide open; the left or the right hand raised, as if conducting, while the eyes often follow the direction of the hand; the hand making a gesture, raised high as if emphasizing a note or chord, while the eyes often follow the direction and intensity of hand gestures.

The data obtained indicates the presence of a repertoire of expressive gesture information used to enhance and convey to the viewer the meaningful components of the work.

Australian-English pianist and researcher Zubin Kanga notes that, although gesture has always been an important component of music, the study of musical gesture, especially in its literal sense of body gesture and motion, has become an important area of research only during the last decade. The study of gesture is based on a wide range of disciplines, including dance, choreography and dramatization of musical performance. The study of gestures becomes especially relevant when examining modern music, which explores new technologies and creates acoustic electronic and multimedia performances. In the elaboration of the theory of gesture, it is possible to develop a fresh outlook on extant musical scores by making use of unconventional analytical methods for studying their dynamic visual dimensions (Kanga 2016).

Giusy Caruso, Esther Coorevits, Luc Nijs, and Marc Leman from the University of Ghent in their studies apply motion sensors not to control sound through gestures, but to analyze gestures performed in contemporary musical compositions. Case studies have made it possible to expand Leman's theory of perspectives about gestures as well as to present the model of how the drawing of motions may assist artists in the preparation of gestural dimensions when interpreting contemporary musical compositions. The article also suggests a method which aids the performer in solving the problems of avant-garde musical manifestation. The method aims to make the performer's artistic process, based on cognitive and sensorimotor patterns, more explicit in order to understand better the relationship between the goals, actions, and sounds. The method is intended to help performers form their interpretive views, while at the same time presenting their performative code by explicitly using innovative mirror technologies. First, the authors provide a common basis for understanding musical performance, based on the concept of spaces and performance frames, and then they set up the general concept of gesture corresponding with the content and style of the musical work (Caruso 2016).

Bériashvili's article contains a brief overview of ideas and quotes from twentieth-century thinkers on gesture, covering the overall panorama of music-related studies about gesture over the past three decades. A special section is devoted to the role of gesture in the work of contemporary composers in the avant-garde vein. The central part of the article is devoted to analysis of the theories of Hatten, Cox, and Imberty. The author's own concept of the "imprint" of gesture in the musical space and the possibilities arising from this for analyzing the historical development of the art of music in the twentieth century are also presented.

Bériashvili stresses that, simultaneously with the accumulation of aesthetic philosophical, musicological, and technological research of gesture, the concept of gesture has become intertwined on a more intensive level with

composers' artistic practices. First, most noteworthy are the composers' projects related to developments in information technology: new electronic instruments, electronic extensions of traditional instruments, as well as multimedia tools.

At the present stage, many presently active composers who find themselves in contact with electronic devices employ the meaningful aspect of gesture. Some of the composers (Francesco Filidei, Pierre Jodtowski, Helmut Lachenmann, and Edson Zampronha) have elevated gesture to the status of a life-generating impulse that provides the starting point of a musical composition, where gesture appears in all its multidimensionality: as a performance gesture, as a complex figure of sound, and as a semantic element of the composition. In its direct meaning, gesture may be associated with a motion made by the performer to extract sound, and it may also be associated with the sound material, which becomes an audible sign of the gesture itself. In both cases, gesture becomes a connecting substance between the sound material and the musical meaning (Bériashvili 2018).

Russian scholar Tatiana Tsaregradskaya in her book *Muzykal'ny zhest v prostranstve sovremennoy kompozitsii* (*Musical Gesture in the Space of Contemporary Composition*) observes that most of the compositions from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries rely to one degree or another on "gesture" in its different meanings (Tsaregradskaya 2018). From these standpoints, the artistic portraits of 12 composers—the 12 apostles of new music—are painted. These are: Morton Feldman, Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, Helmut Lachenmann, Toru Takemitsu, Harrison Birtwistle, Luciano Berio, Kaija Saariaho, John Cage, Brian Ferneyhough, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Mauricio Kagel.

As Elena Alkon notes, a certain perspective has been found by Tsaregradskaya for each of the composers. The distribution of the material in the respective chapters stems from a hypothetical set of properties present in musical gesture: the introduction gives a general assessment of the state of development of the concept of "musical gesture," which, according to the author, exists "in the zone of conceptual and terminological formation"; the first chapter "Gesture at the Source of Sound" describes gesture which generates sound (sound production as the sum of such qualities as the touché, dynamics and articulation, instrumental touch); the second chapter "Gesture as Topography: Trajectory, Line, Pattern" addresses "tactility at a distance"—the visual stimuli which give rise to a musical response; the third chapter "Body – Motion – Gesture" is aimed at physicality in its entirety—the interaction of musical and physical gesture both in the choreographic and virtuoso instrumental planes; the fourth chapter "Gesture as a Phenomenon of 'self-sufficient artistry'" goes beyond the human body itself, referring to gesture as an "act"—the avant-garde gesture; in the fifth chapter "Composers and Their Gestures: Theoretical Concepts," musical gesture becomes the object for

musicologists' and composers' reflections. The conclusion sums up and introduces musical gesture into the context of extant musicological categories in the form of a "metaphor-concept." Gesture manifests itself in at least two situations: 1) characterizing a certain motivic unit; 2) describing the actions of the performer. In different contexts, the material, element, or theme may become synonymous with gesture. Therefore, gesture may be represented both as an object and as an action. To understand music in its entirety, it is necessary to see both the gesture and the motion which creates sound (Alkon 2018: 92-95).

We may continue to identify examples of modern notation and describe new methods of sound production indefinitely. Notational graphics is a "living language" and is modified throughout the practice of performance of new music. New elements are constantly being introduced; they replace or displace old forms and enrich tradition or disappear in the process of inevitable evolution.

It is important to note that the new forms of notation reflect the changes that have occurred in music which has broken free from the shackles of tradition and has become, among other things, sonorous, dodecaphonic, pointillistic, or aleatoric. Composers, often contrary to the extant conventions of notation, have boldly changed the means of notation of various strokes and rhythmic groups, having avoided notating such aspects as measures, keys, or accidentals. Many composers have supplied their musical works with new musical symbols and presented detailed explanations of these symbols in text comments.

Contemporary musical notation has captured the plethora of artistic manifestation of contemporary composers who in their music have conveyed the most complex images of social reality, nature, the Cosmos, the World Space, philosophical ideas, and other contextual vital layers of the world. Contemporary music has arguably greatly expanded the boundaries of performance gesture, compelling the performer to play by using virtually all the parts of their body. Performance gesture has become a reflection of the objective communicative cognitive contexts enclosed in contemporary music. Each time they compose a new work, the composer complements and enriches the extant musical language. Thereby, the musical language has turned from a stable sphere into a stably unstable sphere, fluctuating in correspondence with various artistic contexts of a musical composition.

In turn, the expansion of boundaries of artistic search and the desire to obtain new, unexpected meanings and effects has led to the expansion of the thesaurus of performance gesture. Gesture has become not only an expression of content, but also a symbol of everything new. Hence, a certain deliberateness and theatricality of performance gesture has become apparent. As music researchers have observed, in some compositions gesture has become a bearer

of meaning, and the absence of performance gesture has removed one of the meaning-generating layers of the work, which has led to the loss of the meaningful structure of the musical composition (Perepelytsia 2015).

Nothing of the sort exists in traditional classical music. There, performance gesture introduces the colorfulness of perception but does not possess any independent meaning. This is actually what forms the main difference between performance gesture in contemporary and classical music. Having become meaningful, performance gesture has acquired the features of theatricality, convexity, and significance.

The contemporary performer during the process of learning designs a specific script of gestures for each specific musical work. Performance gesture is practiced and rehearsed the same way as the music of the composition. The contemporary performer in this aspect can be compared to a conductor who works on the gesture system in each specific musical work. It must also be noted that with the acquisition of the meaning-generating function, musical gesture has become a phenomenon which has attracted the attention of many academic disciplines, such as semiotics, anthropology, philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, and linguistics, not to mention the musicological disciplines proper. Gradually, a direction has been formed, which may be designated as the theory of gesture, combining the studies of both the humanities and science. Gesture has come to be regarded as one of the contextual layers of a musical composition, combining meaning and emotion in itself.

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## Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamas ekspresyvus gesto vaidmuo atliekant fortepijoninę muziką. Remiantis teorine analize, parodoma, kad šiuolaikinėje muzikoje atlikimo gesto tema, susijusi su spektaklio teatralizavimu ir su faktu, kad daugeliu atvejų muzikos atlikimas yra įgavęs scenos meno bruožų, išsiskiria bendrųjų artistiškumo temų kontekste. Bendrąsias gestų meno nuostatas šiuolaikinėje fortepijono muzikoje papildo pozicijos, susijusios su klasterio atlikimo menu, stygų ir pedalų naudojimu, garso gestais ir atliekamos muzikos teatralizavimu.

Straipsnyje parodoma naujų muzikos notacijos principų įtaka įvairių kategorijų gestų, naudojamų šiuolaikinėje muzikinėje praktikoje, formavimui. Tai gestai, susiję su klasterių atlikimu; su verbalinių garsų įtraukimu į fortepijoninės muzikos atlikimo procesą (vadinamieji verbaliniai garso gestai); grojimu stygomis pirštais, pagaliukais ar kitais daiktais; pedalų naudojimu; teatralizuotais gestais ir kt.

Muzikinės kalbos ribų plėtimas, atlikimo meno ir teatralizuotų kūrinių praktika paskatino atlikimo gestų tezauro ir gesto prasminių funkcijų vystymąsi. Šiuolaikinėje muzikoje gestas įgijo prasmę ir tapo vienu iš semantinių muzikinio kūrinio komponentų.

Delivered / Straipsnis įteiktas 2020 06 01