

# VIENNESE PIANO TECHNIQUE OF THE 1820S AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S PIANISTS

## Table of Contents

- [‘...auf diese Art wird sie nichts’](#)
- [PART 1: Viennese posture and touch](#)
- [A brief summary of instructions in Viennese treatises](#)
- [Understanding the Viennese fortepiano technique](#)
- [The significance of early training](#)
- [Mozart and Nannette](#)
- [PART 2: Applying the reconstructed Viennese technique](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [Coda: 5 steps to reconstructing the Viennese piano technique of the 1820s](#)
- [Endnotes](#)

## Christina Kobb

**Christina Kobb** is a Norwegian pianist and researcher, specializing in fortepiano performance. After having held the position Head of Theory at Barratt Due Institute of Music in Oslo, she is currently finishing her PhD at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Christina and is co-founder and editor of Music & Practice.



## by **Christina Kobb** Music & Practice, Volume 4

### Scientific

In this article, I will present my work on reconstructing Viennese piano technique from descriptions of posture and touch in treatises and method books of the 1820s. Prevalent in these sources, is the emphasis

on correct execution of basic motions in piano playing. Since these sources were primarily targeted at children, and teachers teaching children, I will open the discussion with a letter from Mozart, where he comments on the piano playing of the eight-year-old Nannette Stein. What does Mozart's letter tell us about his preferences regarding piano playing – for children, adults, or both? Quite notably, matters of posture and basic movements are discussed in similar ways in his letter and in piano treatises for the following generation. Why do matters of posture seem to have been so important for the piano teachers of that time? In the first part of this article, I highlight their descriptions on posture and touch, along with the reasoning throughout generations regarding the physical approach and technique of piano playing. Although the word 'technique' was not yet used in reference to bodily actions, I have adopted later usage of this term where it denotes the basic actions (posture and arm, hand, finger motions) of piano playing.

In the second part, I discuss implications for interpretation and performance, and the extent to which we may still benefit from the information in the early piano treatises. I could simply ask: Does it matter today how they played in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? The question deserves to be asked, pondered and discussed, for the simple reason that piano works of this age has captivated, moved and stunned audiences for more than two centuries, and still belong to the core repertoire of pianists around the world. As long as we play the music from the most glorious decades in piano history, we can still benefit from mastering the technique of their time. In text and video, I discuss excerpts from beloved piano works by Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. I will demonstrate how sound and phrasing change, technical difficulties are mastered and study time is saved when Viennese piano technique is put into practice – even on a modern piano.[\[1\]](#)

Finally, in the 'coda' of this text and in the last section of Video 2, I will explain how anyone may adopt the Viennese technique by adjusting their posture and touch step by step. Elements from the Viennese technique may even be used alongside modern technique, for instance in sections of works from the classic and romantic repertoire. The reconstruction of the Viennese technique of the 1820s depend entirely on careful imitation of posture and movements described in piano treatises of the time. Therefore, applying this knowledge in practice may be one important step towards accessing the interpretational space, as it were, of the piano music of the early nineteenth century.[\[2\]](#)

## '...auf diese Art wird sie nichts'

Anyone who sees and hears her play and can keep from laughing, must, like her father [Herr Stein], be made of stone [*Stein* is the German word for stone]. For instead of sitting in the middle of the clavier, she sits right opposite the treble, as it gives her more chance of flopping about and making grimaces. She rolls her eyes and smirks. When a passage is repeated, she plays it more slowly the second time. If it has to be played a third time, the arm must be raised as high as possible, and according as the notes in the passage are stressed, the arm, not the fingers, must do this, and that too with great emphasis in a heavy and clumsy manner. But the best joke of all is that when she comes to a passage which ought to flow like oil and which necessitates a change of

finger, she does not bother her head about it, but when the moment arrives, she just leaves out the notes, raises her hand and starts off again quite comfortably – a method by which she is much more likely to strike a wrong note, which often produces a curious effect. I am simply writing this in order to give Papa some idea of *clavier*-playing and *clavier*-teaching, so that he may derive some profit from it later on. Herr Stein is quite crazy about his daughter, who is eight and a half and who now learns everything by heart. She may succeed, for she has great talent for music. But she will not make progress by this method – for she will never acquire great rapidity, since she definitely does all she can to make her hands heavy. Further, she will never acquire the most essential, the most difficult and the chief requisite in music, which is *time*, because from her earliest years she has done her utmost not to play in time. Herr Stein and I had at least two hours' talk on this point.<sup>[3]</sup>

In October 1777, Mozart paid a visit to the ingenious piano builder Johann Andreas Stein of Augsburg. And, as usual when something interesting happened, Mozart wrote a letter to his father Leopold. Somewhat curiously, a long section of the letter narrates the performance of Stein's eight-year-old daughter, Nannette, who had played the piano for Mozart. The great composer was amused, but also worried, because Nannette grimaced, moved around on the chair and flopped her arms while playing. As a result, her playing was uneven, clumsy, heavy and out of time. Mozart concluded that 'she could become something; she has talent – but in this manner, she will not become anything'.<sup>[4]</sup> After her performance, Mozart records in the letter that he spent two hours of his busy life advising Herr Stein on his daughter's playing.

Reading this letter today, we may find Mozart's reaction exaggerated and his conclusion premature: Why was he not simply delighted with a charming little girl who showed both excitement and talent for music? Underneath the entertaining story, the tone of his letter is severe: '...she will never acquire great rapidity, since she definitely does all she can to make her hands heavy. Further, she will never acquire the most essential, the most difficult and the chief requisite in music, which is *time*'. Today, many teachers would have praised such a child and trusted that time and continued practice would fix whatever was not yet perfect in their performance. But Mozart's letter clearly communicates his fear that Nannette's bad habits of posture and undisciplined movements had already caused lasting, possibly irreparable, damage.

## PART 1: Viennese posture and touch

At the culmination of the era of the great Viennese masters, the number of piano players reached an alltime high. Vienna alone had over 300 piano teachers and the market for piano manuals and collections of piano pieces increased accordingly.<sup>[5]</sup> The fortepiano itself had grown to a mature instrument, bigger and more reliable than most pre-1780 models. It had reached a compass of seven octaves, and the sustain pedal had become an inherent part of its sound, bringing virtuosity and nuance of expression to new levels – qualities which are still highly appreciated in piano playing today. Simultaneously, what we might call 'posture-disturbing features' (short octaves, split keys and double manuals) of plucked keyboards

disappeared as the harpsichord and clavichord lost the battle for the position as primary keyboard instrument. In the fortepiano – for the first time in keyboard history – each pitch belonged unconditionally and invariably to *one* key. This fact, in combination with accommodating touch-controlled dynamics, encouraged more specific instructions regarding all aspects of posture and technical execution.

Piano treatises by Viennese authors of the 1820s reflect the significant transformation of technique and performance style brought about since the invention of the fortepiano a century earlier. Significantly, the greatest composers, like Mozart and Beethoven, eagerly and enthusiastically contributed to the development of these instruments which were so suitable for expressing their ideas. Firstly, it was in their interest that the vehicles for sounding their music were as good as possible, and secondly, the enhanced possibilities on the newest instruments from the best makers inspired the composers. Staying in touch with the instrument builders to exchange opinions and ideas about how the still relatively new invention – the fortepiano – could be developed and perfected, was therefore a natural part of their work.

Unfortunately, neither Mozart nor Beethoven left us with a piano treatise or similar substantial instructions on piano playing in general. But those who did were their colleagues in a relatively small musical community. Although most of them are forgotten today, authors of such methods were highly respected and well educated, with in-depth knowledge of keyboard playing, music theory and composition.<sup>[6]</sup>

## A brief summary of instructions in Viennese treatises

Commonly, the very first chapter of a nineteenth-century treatise or manual explains basic posture and required movements involved in piano playing. This clearly indicates that learning the correct body posture and hand position would commence with the first lessons. Notably, Beethoven's student Carl Czerny made a convincing argument for learning some basics of *playing* before *reading* music: 'The notes existed before the scores' [*Die Töne waren eher da, als die Noten*].<sup>[7]</sup> By placing these instructions even before elementary musical notation, the treatise authors clearly communicated that these first steps were prerequisites for success. A comparative overview of the instructions from Viennese piano treatises on basic posture and touch is shown in the table of Figure 1.<sup>[8]</sup>

Viennese authors	Seating	Distance, keyboard	Back	Head	Shoulders	Elbows	Elbow height	Forearm	Hands	Wrists	Fingers
<b>Starke 1819</b>	Exactly opposite middle of keyboard	8–10 Zoll <sup>1</sup> to reach all keys conveniently	(Title page drawing shows straight back)	(Title page drawing shows straight head and neck)	Avoid lifting shoulders	Close to body	1–2 Zoll higher than keys	Neither raise nor lower them	Same angle as elbows. Should never obtain another angle	Somewhat raised, move easily and freely	The 3 middle fingers should be bent in 2nd joint to form a line
<b>Hummel 1828</b>	Opposite to the middle of keyboard	6–10 inches; for reaching all keys conveniently	Neither bending forwards nor sideways			Turned towards the body, without pressing against it	So that both hands may rest on the keys, naturally and without effort		Held in a somewhat rounded position and turned rather outwards, yet freely and without effort		Strike the keys with the middle of the tips of the fingers; fingers should form a horizontal line
<b>Kichler ca. 1832</b>			Sit up tall		Avoid lifting shoulders	Obtuse elbow angle	1–2 Zoll higher than keys	Neither raise nor lower them	Lifted hands, same angle as the elbows	Somewhat raised; move easily and freely	Fingers should be bent inwards after the attack
<b>Junghanss 1823</b>	Exactly opposite middle of keyboard	Ca. 1 foot [Schuh] for convenient reach of all keys	Avoid bending forwards or backwards	Head and neck held beautifully straight		Close to body, but not too stiffly	A little higher than keys, for the arms not to tire		Rounded shape, unstrained. Never change their basic position	Do not turn in- nor outwards, not even in passing the thumb	Bend the fingers, mostly the three longer ones
<b>J. Czerny ca. 1821</b>	Exactly opposite middle of keyboard	Appropriate; convenient reach of all keys	Sit decently and unstrained			Neither pressed against the body nor far away			Avoid moving it back and forth on the keys		Bend the long fingers to form a line with thumb and 5th finger
<b>C. Czerny (Müller, 1831)</b>	Exactly opposite middle of keyboard		Free and upright body posture, never bent forwards or to the sides			Not too far from the body, as this makes the hand position impossible	A bit higher than the keyboard	Should always remain in a natural, still position	Should always be kept in a free and natural position to allow for movement of the finger. Never lift the hands (except in chords)	Avoid jerking and up- and downward motion	Finger motion should not involve the upper joint of the finger. Bend the three long fingers to form a line
<b>C. Czerny (1839)</b>	Exactly opposite middle of keyboard	Distance elbows to keys is shorter than shoulders to keys	Not bent over, but also not too stiff			Should be held naturally down along body	A bit higher than the keyboard			The arm should form a straight line from elbow to the fingers	Bend the longer fingers so that they form a line with the thumb

**Figure 1** Table of instructions on posture and basic movements gathered from Viennese piano authors of the 1820s.

The left column shows the authors and publication year of their respective treatises, the upper row indicates the required actions of the body parts involved in piano playing. 1) 1 Wiener Zoll (inch) = 26,32 mm, according to Michael Latham, *The stringing, scaling and pitch of Hammerflügel built in the Southern German and Viennese traditions 1780–1820* (Munich/Salzburg, 2000), II, p. 118. Hence, 8–10 Zoll is c. 25 cm. Hummel adds to his indication that the distance must comply with the size of the child.

While some of the instructions are just what we expect and recognize, others are either hard to understand today or seem completely redundant to the modern reader.

For instance, several sources mention first of all that one should sit exactly opposite the middle of the keyboard. This seems obvious, but it is usually pointed out to beginners nevertheless. The middle position should secure comfortable reach of all keys even when crossing one arm over the other, presumably when they had become more advanced players. Further, the distance to the keyboard should be about 25 cm. One should sit bolt upright or slightly leaning backwards, with the head erect and (as a result), the shoulders drawn slightly backwards. The seat should be high enough for the lower arms to slightly slope down to the keyboard and the elbows should be kept rather close to the body. The lower arms and wrists should be held at the same angle; that is, slightly turned outwards so that the hands get an askew position. This hand position should be maintained at all times, even during virtuoso passages or large jumps. Peculiar to the Viennese school is that the finger is to be moved by bending and stretching from the middle of the finger only, and never by up-and-down motion from the root of the finger.

*Absence* of motion is equally significant as the actual motion. The treatises frequently repeat that excessive movement must be avoided, and even this instruction is to be taken most seriously; because the motions are interdependent, any motion which is not strictly necessary would disturb the proper execution of correct motions. For instance, the hand and elbow should never move up and down, that is, never lifted from the keyboard (all position shifts are executed by lateral movement in elbow and/or wrist). Up-and-down motion would impede the close contact with the keys required for a good touch, look less proper and easily add random accents from bumping the hand or arm.

Altogether, the basic instructions in all of the surviving Viennese piano methods are remarkably similar and never contradictory. In fact, the authors complement each other because some of them describe certain motions in more detail and occasionally even include the reasoning behind the instruction. The repetition and restatements of central principles and concepts indicate the prevalent attitude of preserving good and sensible knowledge acquired by previous generations. The consensus among the Viennese teachers in these matters allows for the label 'Viennese posture'.

## Understanding the Viennese fortepiano technique

Why do the treatises describe basic movements in such meticulous detail? One might wonder if it makes any difference at all, if one holds the hand at this or that angle, or bends the finger this or that much. How strict would the teachers be in actually following through with these rules? First, we should consider the fortepiano itself. Compared to the modern concert grand, the fortepiano models made by Johann Andreas Stein and the Viennese makers of the early nineteenth century, were rather small instruments; straightstrung on a wooden frame – thus with relatively low string tension – with tiny hammers and a simple, but effective, action. Instrument maker Michael Cole has measured crucial parts of the action to compare the Viennese fortepiano with modern pianos. Interestingly, he comments on the close relationship between

keyboard construction and keyboard technique:

An intelligent keyboard maker designs the playing surface of his keys to suit the expected techniques. ... Stein's key heads are only 35–6 mm long. Steinway, Bösendorfer, and many twentieth-century makers use 50 mm or even 52 mm. This makes an enormous difference to the look of the keys and to the manner in which they may be attacked. ... The key dip on Viennese pianos varies, ranging from as little as 4 mm to as much as 6 ½ mm. ... A Steinway model D [has] as key dip of 10 ½ to 11 mm. ... To quietly sound c3 on a Steinway, one drives the hammer through about 9 mm with [a force of] 81 gm [grams] (minimum), while Stein's fortepiano is driven through about 3 mm with 23 gm [grams]. This represents about a 1 : 10 ratio in energy input. ... Sound a fortissimo with both hands, and the contrasting inputs – and their consequent outputs – are even more disproportionate.[\[9\]](#)

In short, the key-dip of a Stein fortepiano was only about half of what a modern concert grand features today, the key-heads were shorter and the hammers remarkably light. Considering these differences in piano construction may help us better understand the basic instructions in the sources of that time.<sup>[10]</sup> However, while organology has provided us with thorough knowledge of period pianos, the exact manner of playing them has received little attention.<sup>[11]</sup> There are several reasons for this unfortunate and certainly unintended neglect. One is certainly that the dominance of Steinway type pianos easily makes pianists accustomed to the touch and sound of one specific instrument type – rather than the wealth of different pianos common in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the habits acquired at the modern piano, in combination with being ‘gramophonically informed’ by listening to recordings on the modern piano for many years, create strong aural and kinaesthetic memory banks. Hence, the inclination towards reproducing the sounds already imprinted in our minds with the movements automated in our muscle memory, must be consciously put aside, at least temporarily, if one wishes to delve into an alternative set of motions and auditory responses.<sup>[12]</sup>

## The significance of early training

Other possible success factors for achieving what seems like a strict regime for posture and touch lies in the teaching and practising ideals of their time. Daily supervised practicing time was considered necessary for beginners to avoid bad habits and obtain a good foundation:

For the first half year, and, if possible, for even the first entire year, every beginner requires one hours [sic] daily instruction; because the pupil is as yet incapable of assisting himself, and if left too long alone, it is to be feared that, by contradicting bad habits, he will rather injure than benefit himself.<sup>[13]</sup>

However, Hummel was far from the first to utter such recommendations. Significant piano teachers from J.S. Bach to Carl Czerny have emphasized the importance of acquiring good posture and good habits right from the beginning, and maintained that correct posture and touch are essential for good execution. According to Forkel, J.S. Bach made his students “practice, for months together, nothing but isolated exercises for all the fingers of both hands”.<sup>[14]</sup> The significance attributed to correct posture and touch, and the diligence with which these were practiced, further emphasize that all the details of the physical approach was indeed practiced and taught by the best teachers.

We realize, thus, that despite his extremely dense and comprehensive treatise, and despite the new styles and performance practices of the new century, Hummel does not intend to reinvent the basics of piano playing. Rather, he reveals a desire to honour his predecessors and then contribute to further refinement of the art brought to perfection through generations:

Let no one imagine that I have everywhere aimed at being *new*, *original*, and *erudite*; on the contrary, I have, as far as possible, endeavoured to retain and turn to account, all the good, and the



useful, which men of sense have written on the subject, during more than half a century, and after mature consideration and long experience; and have added only what I found appropriate and suited to the present style of writing and playing; and on the other hand, have omitted that only, which, at this time, appeared to me to be superfluous.[15]

The attitude that every generation should preserve the 'good and useful' of the past and add what the present style required, was common in the Zeitgeist of the post-enlightenment.[16] A common attitude was that any art or craft could not reach perfection in just one generation, so the best way to excel would be to persevere as much as possible and change only what you could truly improve. This same attitude led to a naturally slow process when it came to altering or developing the basic craftsmanship of a practice, while, at the same time, the shifting winds of style, fashion and personal preferences could keep blowing.

## Mozart and Nannette

The letter in the beginning of this article is especially interesting from the viewpoint of piano technique, as Mozart points out every error made by the young Nannette Stein. Notably, it was the posture-related aspects, more than occasional wrong notes, that worried Mozart. From his emphasis on posture and physical habits, we understand that preserving, conserving and carefully improving the *craft* was apparently not at odds with pursuing new and original *musical ideas*. In the letter, Wolfgang is both entertaining and exasperating his father with vivid descriptions of what piano playing should *not* look like, even for an eight-year-old. The very first thing Mozart remarks is that Nannette does *not* sit opposite the middle of the keyboard, but way up in the treble. As indicated in Figure 1, sitting opposite the middle of the keyboard is the very first instruction in many treatises. The second, and related, error is that she is 'flopping about', which would be contrary to the frequently uttered rule of avoiding 'all unnecessary motion' and keeping hands and arms still. Nannette not only moves her arms and body excessively, but she also makes grimaces, funny faces and eye-rolls! With her arms up, she could produce nothing but heavy attacks, which Mozart could not stand. It also seems from the description that she had not yet learned how to pass the thumb under, and she was thus unable to present a nice scale or passage. All of these errors of posture and arm movement caused Nannette to play gravely out of time and made Mozart fear for her future career.

The performance standard set by Mozart, owing to generations of keyboard players before him, had stunned audiences and learned alike. To better understand his harsh judgement of Nannette Stein, there are several strands to take notice of. One is that, having been brought up under his father's strict discipline and having performed from an early age himself, Mozart may have been especially demanding and critical towards young performers. Yet, as we have seen, his attitude towards learning and towards the serious teaching of children from a young age is reflected in a number of piano treatises of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where the importance of correct teaching from the very beginning demonstrate the high regard for cultivation of talent.



Another interesting circumstance is that Mozart did occasionally teach young kids himself – in fact, he accepted the seven-year-old Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837) to live in his house.<sup>[17]</sup> Hummel later wrote that the development of his talent was ‘completed by instruction under Mozart’.<sup>[18]</sup> Given that Hummel was only 9 when the tuition with Mozart was discontinued, this is an astonishing remark as well as a great testimony to Mozart’s teaching skills. At 12 years, Hummel was already teaching adult students during a stay in Edinburgh, and at 15, he referred to himself as ‘the best performer here [in Vienna]’.<sup>[19]</sup> In the 1820s, Hummel had become one the most well-paid piano teachers in the world<sup>[20]</sup> and had authored a 468-page treatise on piano playing.

Finally, Mozart proudly tells his father how much his own playing impressed Herr Stein. He writes ‘I do not make grimaces, and yet play with such expression, that, as he [Stein] himself confesses, no one up to the present has been able to get such good results out of his fortepianos’.<sup>[21]</sup> Seeing that Mozart evidently applies the same standards to his own playing, strongly indicates that a quiet bearing and a quiet hand were indeed regarded as crucial even for professional players in his day.<sup>[22]</sup> The letter clearly states basic expectations to piano players in general – young and older ones alike – from a most respectable source. By the way, what became of this little charming 8-year old piano player who worried Mozart with her clumsy playing? By 1820, she had not only learned to play the piano very well, but had actually become something quite remarkable: she had taken over her father’s piano workshop, putting her keen energy into perfecting Viennese instrument building and providing Beethoven and Hummel with their pianos of choice.<sup>[23]</sup> Nannette married another keyboard player and composer, namely Johann Andreas Streicher. Streicher insisted that the company should bear his wife’s name, as she was the heir and she possessed a most thorough knowledge of piano actions.<sup>[24]</sup> Together, they continued the piano business in Vienna. In 1801, J.A. Streicher even published a handbook of fortepiano maintenance, tuning and playing. Pragmatically, his brief instructions are targeted at anyone who would like to produce a good sound on their fortepiano. The instructions are similar to the treatises of the 1820s – and contains many of the same points as Mozart pointed out when hearing Nannette back in 1777:

The arm must be held against the body ... In moving the fingers, the hand must lie in the calmest possible position ... The fingers must be curved when playing; that is, one must draw them back until they are in line with the naturally held thumb ... The fingers may not be held too far above the keys before the attack, since a finger falling from too great a height makes a small noise ... It is equally detrimental to fast and light playing. ... Hitting too hard produces less sound than you would normally believe, for every string has only a limited degree of loudness to yield. When single notes are connected together, be they fast or slow, strong or weak, one should move only the fingers, without raising the hand for the attack ... Much easier, and thus more beautiful than working with the fists, one can obtain the greatest degree of loudness through closely connecting the sounds together in such a way that the ear cannot detect any space between them.<sup>[25]</sup>

## PART 2: Applying the reconstructed Viennese technique

The 'Viennese posture' is unlike that of any modern piano technique. The completely straight back moves the entire upper body rather far away from the keyboard. This, in combination with the high seat and narrow arm/elbow position, excludes the possibility for applying arm or body weight, and makes it natural to play with the hands in an askew position. The fortepiano's shallow key dip and light action favour rapid finger motions from a raised wrist, which again create a beautiful legato and string quartet like clarity. In modern piano playing, it has become common to hunch over the piano a little, which again makes it comfortable to hold the elbows out from the sides of the body. This elbow position facilitates flatter palms and equal distribution of arm weight over the entire compass of the modern keyboard. Moreover, it makes it easy to play loudly and to create a homogeneous sound across registers, especially with the help of the sustain pedal. (See explanation of the two approaches in Video 2, 1:17–3:32).

The radical differences in those two general types of posture must result in divergent technical solutions as well as divergent musical expressions. Each posture type has its corresponding range of motions and resulting sounds. The Viennese approach has one set of interdependent actions, which look and sound different from that of any modern school posture. [26] Spatial differences inherent in each of these sets of motions affect the timing and phrasing, and thus, how we hear and play the music. In the following, we shall look at a number of excerpts where the choice of technical solution to common challenges in piano playing makes for obvious differences in musical expression. Certain technical difficulties will always require some extra attention and practice, even for the most accomplished performer: large leaps, jumpy basses, leaps in contrary motion, and balance problems caused by busy left-hand patterns. Below, 'Viennese solutions' to these difficulties are discussed in excerpts from some of the best-known and most beloved pieces in the piano literature of the early nineteenth century, by Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. [27]

The practical demonstration of the same excerpts may be viewed in Video 2. The Video has the following sections:

00:10 Introduction: Posture, motion, sound and phrasing

01:10 Modern school posture

02:25 The Viennese posture

03:35 Applying the Viennese technique to Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin on the modern piano (the six music excerpts presented in the article)

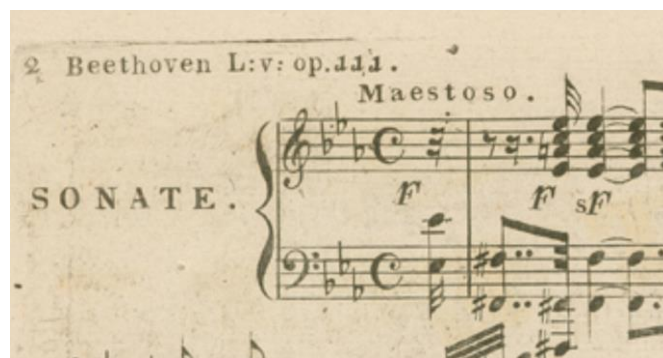
12:45 Five steps to the reconstructed technique of 1820s Vienna

**Video 2** *Piano Technique and Posture in the Early 19th Century*. The piano technique of 1820s Vienna, with examples discussing its relevance for modern piano playing.

## I: Large jumps (Video 2, 3:35–4.40)



*Figure 2* The iconic opening of Beethoven, op. 106. (Vienna: Artaria, n.d. [1819], accessed via [www.beethoven.de](http://www.beethoven.de)).



*Figure 3* Beethoven: Sonata, op. 111, the opening bars. (Vienna: Cappi & Diabelli, n.d. [1832], accessed via [www.beethoven.de](http://www.beethoven.de)).

Large, quick jumps are among the pianists' main fears. The iconic openings of two of Beethoven's sonatas, op. 106 and op. 111 (Figures 2 and 3), are both famous for their scary left-hand jumps. In fact, these gestures are sometimes played with both hands to avoid potential disaster in the very first second of a performance. What, exactly, makes these jumps difficult? Is there a way to avoid frightening moments even when playing them with the left hand only? Let us take a close look at the movements involved: In op. 106, the left hand must move from a low B-flat to a B-flat major chord two octaves higher up. The opening of op. 111 consists of a downward octave move spanning a diminished seventh. Both jumps must be performed rapidly and with high energy, and utmost precision is required for successful execution. One way to practise the op. 106 opening is to place the left hand on the chord of the first downbeat, with the elbow and arm close to the body. After having established a relaxed hand position, move to the low Bflat *without* moving the elbow. Simply swing the forearm to the left until the B-flat is reached, maintaining the hand position of the downbeat chord. This way, the upper arm is not involved in the move at all. The firm elbow position represents a kinaesthetic 'GPS' point which facilitates the move and increases the chances of hitting a clean chord. Simply strike the low B-flat with the 4th finger (as this will disturb the hand position the least, in most cases) and let the hand jolt up to the chord in a flash. [28]

The opening octaves of op. 111 may be solved in a similar way. The elbow should not move at all, but should be held close to the body. Since the distance between the octaves is rather short, even the forearm can be kept almost still. Instead, execute the move by lateral wrist motion. Practice slowly at first, and feel how the hands move with active fingers, almost without arm motion at all.

We saw above that keeping the elbow close to the body and sitting bolt upright is recommended in a number of sources. Accepting this advice for the scary openings of op. 106 and op. 111, will improve the control of the arm motion and thus reduce the fear and increase the chance of success.

## II: Alberti bass easily overpowering right hand melody (Video 2, 4:37–6:10)

Perhaps the most popular among Beethoven's sonatas is his op. 27 no. 2. The third movement has frequent use of Alberti basses and similar left-hand patterns which easily overpower a *piano* right-hand melody. If the left hand becomes too active, either by lifting the fingers too high above the keys and/or by rotation of the wrist, these motions will add hand or arm weight which increase the volume and cause undesired accents. To keep the left hand soft, it is crucial to hold the hand still and move only the fingers as close to the keys as possible. In the very best case, one moves the fingers only from the middle joint of the finger, keeping the knuckles low and the hand and arm relaxed. (Caution: Employ this touch only on a light action and in soft dynamics to prevent overstrain of the hand and arm). It is also important to keep the arm relaxed and avoid lifting the shoulder.

In bar 72 (see Figure 4), the Alberti bass pattern even starts with a giant leap, adding to the challenge. By applying the advice from the previous excerpts (Figures 2 and 3), it is possible to enter the Alberti bass section without taking much time on the first beat, as the narrow elbow position reduces the time and attention needed for the move.



Figure 4 Beethoven: Sonata op. 27 no. 2 (Vienna, Cappi & comp., n.d. [1802], accessed via [www.beethoven.de](http://www.beethoven.de)), 3rd

mov., bars 72–74.

### III: Jumpy left-hand patterns (Video 2, 6:10–9:00)

In the 2nd movement of Sonata in a minor, D. 537, we encounter a theme which Schubert used in several works. However, in D. 537 in particular, the music contains an unusually large amount of markings in the score, and the complexity is heightened because these are different for the two hands. In the opening, the right hand is legato, with occasional accents, while the left hand has staccato throughout. The combination of an octave melody – which one usually would pedal to aid the liaison – and the jumping ‘ragtime bass’ chords, is tricky. If one does employ pedal, the left-hand staccato is interrupted, and if one does *not*, the octave melody is almost impossible to perform beautifully! Additionally, the jumpy bass is hard to play in a relaxed manner for fear of hitting wrong notes. When approached with a modern posture, the execution by both hands will suffer. Again, the reason is the wide elbow position (elbows placed away from the body and hands pointing in towards the middle of the keyboard), which forces the wrist to be bent outwards to reach the notes. In the table (Figure 1), Czerny remarks that the arm should not be hold too far from the body, as this makes it impossible to maintain a correct hand position.<sup>[29]</sup> As we understand, a distorted hand position is a clear disadvantage as it makes it unreasonably difficult to execute refined textures like this bass in Schubert’s sonata.

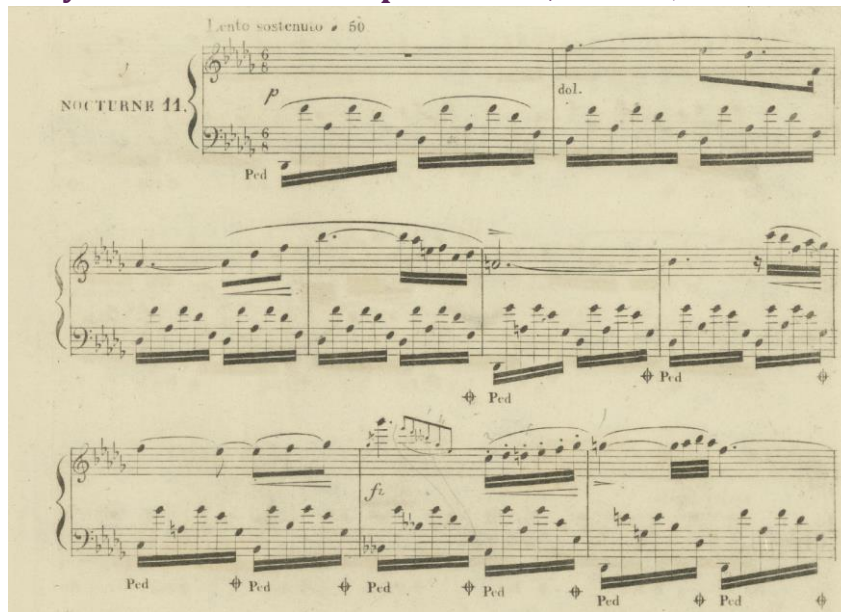
The Viennese posture is supreme for solving all of the difficulties inherent in this theme. Placing the elbows close to the body and the hands in an askew position, the angle of the hand corresponds much better with both the left-hand and the right-hand parts. Moreover, this posture prevents the upper arms from moving at all, and only forearms and lateral hand motions are used in both hands. This way, the lefthand part maintains a natural emphasis despite the staccatos, and the legato and overall control of the right-hand octaves greatly improves.



The image displays two pages of handwritten musical notation for the second movement of Schubert's Sonata in A minor, D. 537. The top page contains the first system of music, starting with the tempo and dynamic markings "Allegretto quasi Andantino." and "p". The notation is in 2/4 time and features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The word "ligato." is written above the first measure, and "staccato" is written below the first measure of the bass staff. The bottom page contains the second system of music, starting with the dynamic marking "mf". The notation continues with similar melodic and rhythmic patterns. The paper shows signs of age, including some staining and discoloration.

Figure 5 Schubert: Sonata in a minor, D. 537 (Vienna: C. A. Spina, 1853), 2nd mvt., bars 1–16 and 43–50.

#### IV: 'Nocturne style' left-hand accompaniment (Video 2, 9:00–11.03)



**Figure 6** Chopin: *Nocturne in D-flat major, op. 27 no. 2, bars 1–9* (Maurice Schlesinger, Paris, n.d., Plate MS 1935). Already the two first notes of Chopin's D-flat major nocturne will sound quite differently, depending on whether the performer employs the 'Viennese posture' or a 'modern school' posture. If one plays with a modern school posture, the elbow will be held away from one's body and the hand be held flat. The fingers will point a little inwards, almost towards the middle of the piano. In this position, body weight is easily transferred to the keys, easily producing louder dynamics. However, since weight transfers so readily, one has to beware of getting some kind of accent on every single note – thus impairing the legato and *piano* in favour of a brilliant touch. Brilliance and a large, nice sound are advantageous in many cases, but is it really desirable in the opening of this nocturne? Commonly, we would want to create a soft and flowing left-hand pattern, preparing for a soaring right-hand melody to catch the listeners' attention. However, the opening move from the low D-flat to the F more than two octaves above feels like a long distance when the fingers, hand, elbow and entire arm must all be involved. To prevent an abrupt move and undesired accent, the problem is commonly solved by taking time between the first two semiquavers. This could be done both beautifully and musically! Nevertheless, it is an expression imposed by an action inherent in a technique conceived of at a much later time than Chopin. Moreover, it involves extra work (compensation) to attain the required legato and *piano*.

Applying the Viennese technique, the opening figure could easily be performed with great ease. Placing the elbow close to one's body and the hand in an accordingly natural askew position – moving only the hand and lower arm to reach down to the low D-flat – will reduce the overall movement. Also, lateral hand motion may further optimize the move between the notes throughout the bass texture. This makes it easier to play with the fingers close to the keys, which again makes it easier to play more softly. Inherent and idiomatic to this approach is clarity of tone (as only the fingers – not the weight of the arm – are striking the keys), a gentle legato touch and a dynamic register ranging from the softest *pp* to healthy *ff*



chords. For a flowing semiquaver pattern marked *piano* and legato, the ‘Viennese technique’ has many advantages. The piano and the legato we get for free. The stable hand position makes the actual note-hitting effortless as well. The last point, however, is what immediately sets it apart aurally: there is no need to take time between the first two notes. This again makes it easy to keep a steady left-hand throughout, and rather let the melody float on top.

Interestingly, Chopin’s hand cast reveals the askew hand position (slightly leaning outwards because of the narrow elbow position), the light thumb and the fingers bent from the middle phalange. This hand pose is exactly as described in the Viennese sources, and splendid for performing bass figures as requires in Chopin’s nocturnes.



**Figure 7** Chopin’s hand cast, by Jean Baptiste August Clesinger reveals his ‘Viennese’ hand position.

([www.kunstkopie.de/a/clesinger-jean-baptiste-a/a-cast-of-the-hand-of-fre.html](http://www.kunstkopie.de/a/clesinger-jean-baptiste-a/a-cast-of-the-hand-of-fre.html))

## V: Tricky, virtuosic passages (Video 2, 11:03–12.45)

The same approach of a stable, askew hand position is called for even in extremely virtuosic passages, like those of Chopin’s ‘revolutionary’ Etude, op. 10 no. 12 (Figure 8). Even when the passages get tricky because of very low or very high register, the solution in Chopin is, nevertheless, to rigidly maintain the same angle of the hand. The wrist, however, must be supple, and the fingers active and flexible.



**Figure 8** Chopin: Etude in c minor, op. 10 no. 12, bars 37–38. First Edition, Paris by Schlesinger, n.d. [1833]. Plate M.S.

1399. Fingerings (those included in the score are in bold, the rest is extended by me):

5-2-1-4-3-2-1-4-3-2-1-3-2-3-1-3 (4)-2-1-2-4-1-2-4-1-2-4-2-1-2-4-2-1

Examples of virtuoso passages in extreme (or quickly changing) registers are seen in the Etude in c minor, op. 10 no. 2 (for instance bars 37–38, left hand) and Etude in G-flat major, op. 10 no. 5 (see Figure 9). In my experience, to practice slowly and relaxed in the Viennese posture, with a particularly flexible wrist allowing for lateral motion, will always bring out a good result in any difficult place in Chopin's works.



**Figure 9** Chopin: Etude in G-flat major, op. 10 no 5, bars 41-46. First edition by Maurice Schlesinger, Paris, 1833, M. S.

1399.

Interestingly, Chopin's fingerings always support the narrow elbow position and askew angle of the hand. His fingerings are sometimes regarded as peculiar, and they are edited in modern editions when they make little sense in combination with a modern posture. As is well-known, Chopin sometimes crosses 4th finger over the 5th, or the 3rd finger over the 4th. This manner of fingering is not Chopin's idea, but a result of his knowledge of Viennese fingering principles. C. P. E. Bach, Beethoven, Hummel and others have used these same fingerings (although they are more frequently needed in virtuosic music), because this fingering supports the highest principle of fingering; namely that of keeping the arm and hand as still as possible. The Viennese posture is the only arm position in which such fingerings are comfortable to play. In all modern techniques, the elbow is further away from the body, which would make these fingerings awkward and clumsy. If we should believe the famous silhouette by Phillip, Chopin may have lifted his hands from the keyboard every now and then and leaned back a little extra, but he basically employed a Viennese posture.



*Figure 10 Silhouette by F. Phillip, showing Chopin leaning backwards, elbows close to the body, forearms sloping down towards the keys and a supple left-hand wrist relaxing for a second or two.*

## Conclusion

Pianos and piano construction have changed considerably since the early nineteenth century. So has the way we play the works of the great Viennese masters, and composers like Chopin, who was strongly influenced by them. After having reviewed the historical sources, details of fortepiano construction, and common attitudes and preferences of influential keyboard teachers, we have begun pondering the musical consequences of the practice they represent. Granted, it is no easy task to discuss musicality, or argue that one way of phrasing is better than another. The challenge is, of course, that we cannot travel back to Vienna and hear Beethoven or Hummel play for us, so who are we to say in hindsight that something made, or did not make, sense in their day and time?

As we know, no aural transmissions of fortepiano playing in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century can possibly have been preserved. Even surviving instruments in more or less original shape are quiet until someone presses down a key. In this act of touching a key – the core action of sound production in any keyboard instrument – lies the secret to possibly unlocking the sound of the past. By investigating the actions required for the simple procedure of keyboard touch in the early nineteenth century, and comparing these to our modern practice, we may understand what has changed and how we may, once again, approach the preferred sound ideal of their time.[\[30\]](#) For something to make sense musically or artistically, it must first make sense physically; the movements must be possible to execute and not incur additional strain. Usually, this requires that each action and their interdependency are fully understood. When put into practice, the technical ‘paradigm’ has to aid the performance advice otherwise found in the sources. The results of the actions should support performance ideals expressed by the great Viennese masters, or what ‘eye witnesses’ observed in respectable pianists of their time.[\[31\]](#) Perhaps we can even dare to say that if beauty, nuance and expressivity are enhanced – qualities we know they cared about in the early nineteenth century – then we are probably doing something right. Finally, a great indication to

the reliability of the sources, and our interpretation of these, is that playing becomes easier. The Viennese technique reconstructed from instructions regarding posture and touch, solves a heap of technical problems that I used to struggle with. Musically, my new way of playing opened another interpretative space, which, most probably, allows for interpretations of nineteenth-century works that are closer to the imagination of their composers. To me, this is a fascinating and meaningful thought, because it means to discover, capture and communicate the beauty of the music in greater depth.

Most likely, the Viennese posture and technique will feel awkward and perhaps uncomfortable to any pianist of today. Not surprisingly, twentieth-century historians on piano technique tended to a more personal and individualized approach, rather than the quite rigid instructions found in the Viennese sources.<sup>[32]</sup> However, when we know the significance attributed to good posture, further investigation should be of interest to any serious pianist. Mozart cared about piano posture because it highly influenced sound and phrasing. It still does, even when playing classical and romantic music on a modern concert grand.

## Coda: 5 steps to reconstructing the Viennese piano technique of the 1820s

In this article and videos, I have explained two fundamentally different physical approaches to piano playing which are so different, almost opposite to each other, that they create two different interpretative spaces for music making. For a pianist, it pays off to make a conscious choice according to the preferred musical result. Although the two approaches cannot be simultaneously combined, they may both be applied within the same piece for different sections.

For those of you wanting to adopt the Viennese technique, or certain aspects of it, I have outlined the various steps below. This time, however, I have done so in my own language and largely with my own words, which might be easier to understand than dusty German – especially due to the benefit of video presentation. (See Video 2, 12:45–16:30). The steps and advice reflect by my own process of almost ten years of making sense of nineteenth-century instructions, both theoretically and practically.

For each of the steps below, I recommend taking your time and get used to one change before proceeding to the next. Pianists who are changing from one set of already acquired habits and movement patterns, to another, need time and repetition to establish new habits. Sharpened focus and rest between each practice session is required. To prevent yourself from losing your concentration of establishing new, basic movements, each practice session should be short. You need a certain number of repetitions and to exercise the will-power driven by conscious thought if you really want to change, and you need devoted time to focus on these elementary changes only.

In order to avoid over-strain of muscles, I strongly recommend practising softly and slowly. Do focus on the correct motion rather than volume and virtuosity until the new movements are mastered. This time period of forced slowness and softness is also perfect for consciously refining one's piano sound, to really listen again, once more, to the instrument and its sonic capabilities. Enlarging one's range of timbres and dynamics means enriching one's expressive capabilities as a pianist.

Changing posture and motion patterns easily leads to feeling a lack of control. One of the reasons is probably that the 'control point' is changing, from the control being felt in elbows and wrist (due to weight transfer), to – finally – the keys are controlled directly by the fingers. When control is lost due to changes of movements, one typically feels the urge of reverting to old patterns in order to regain the essential feeling of controlling the instrument. However, this temporarily loss of control must be endured as it is necessary to develop a new way of controlling ('operating') the keyboard. Slowly and gradually, a new sense of control will emerge. Being able to do everything in a relaxed manner is essential, both for perfect control and great sound.[\[33\]](#)

**Step 1: The back** (Video 2, 13:23–14:00).

The first step to adjusting your posture is the back. Sit up straight on a relatively high bench. If you have been used to sit rather low and hunch over the keyboard, this change means that the distance to the keyboard increases, because the straight back actually causes your torso and head to be positioned further away from the instrument. The first step is to get used to this feeling of sitting "high above" and "far away" from the keys. My advice would be to play simple chords, slow scales or easy pieces – even just five-finger exercises in each hand separately while feeling into the new posture. Practice something which is easy and allows you to be focus on and be aware of the new "set-up" of your body. Concentrate on the middle of the keyboard at first, without practising at the extremities of the keyboard yet. Make sure your back is relaxed. It may help to rock a bit from side to side every now and then to help your back adjust to its new state.

**Step 2: The arms** (Video 2, 14:00–14:35).

The next step is to focus on the feeling in your arms. Feel that your shoulders are drawn back – as a result of Step 1 – and that your arms are completely relaxed. Practice slowly up and down the keyboard with a relaxed arm and elbow close to the body in all positions. Swing the lower arm from the elbow when you need to jump up and down – without altering the elbow position! When the shoulders are drawn back, the elbows lie naturally close to the body. Practice maintaining your new, relaxed posture while playing ascending scales or arpeggios with the right hand and descending with the left. Make sure your elbows do not suddenly turn outwards again (for instance in a moment of 'panic' over something difficult, which is usually when old habits will want to kick back in, hunch your back and point your elbows out, to desperately control the situation). Also remember that no weight is required, or even supposed to be applied. Do not worry about volume or speed until correct movements have been established.

### Step 3: The head and neck (Video 2, 14:35–15:05).

To maintain an upright position, it is important that also the head and neck are kept straight.<sup>[34]</sup> Therefore, in this third step, focus exclusively on freeing your neck. Play simple tunes, chords and scales while looking around, looking out the window, up in the ceiling, closing your eyes – while realigning your back, shoulders, elbows, arms and hands. Tilt your head a bit back and forth while playing, move your chin up and down, look right, look left – while playing. In short, spend this step consciously doing anything but staring at the keys. Feel how you can play with focussed fingers *without* controlling them with your gaze. Experience how your concentration on the keys is independent of your eyes – how you may even be able to concentrate more deeply on the music by closing your eyes or looking away from the keyboard.

### Step 4: The wrists and hands (Video 2, 15:05-15:20).

In the fourth step, the focus is on hands and wrists. Make sure the hand position is aligned with the elbow, and remains stable even in shifts. When having the elbows close to the body while playing, the hands naturally take an askew position which aligns with the angle of the forearms sloping down to the keyboard. This slanted position of the hands (the hands curved outwards) facilitates position shifts. Oftentimes, lateral motion of the wrists is perfectly sufficient for smaller jumps. When the distance is too far to be reached by aid of wrist motion, forearm motion should come into action (ref. the discussion of Figure 2 and 2 above). Remember, the ideal is to avoid unnecessary motion. Discover how little motion is necessary, but stay relaxed at all times!

Similarly, thumb motion is improved. When the hand is slanted, the thumb will have a shorter way to go when passing under the other fingers. Also, the slanted hand position removes all weight from the thumb. This is great advantage, as the thumb otherwise may suffer from being ‘heavy’ and causing unevenness. For perfect thumb motion, two realisations I gained were especially helpful:

1. Understanding that Viennese fingerings in the early nineteenth century were written with one main rule in mind: To avoid moving the hand. (Video 1, Hummel’s thirds etude). Oftentimes, acrobatic finger motions are required to execute the required fingering. The effect is that the hand itself remains completely still while all of this is going on “underneath”.
2. Understanding that with each required position change (when passing under of the thumb), the arm – contrary to modern teaching, where it often gradually anticipates the up- or downward motion – is kept quiet. The arm position remains basically unaltered and only follows the hand, to the extent required, *after* the fingers have passed. This is quite opposite to the modern thought of letting the arm lead the hand and fingers. In the Viennese technique, the fingers always move ahead of the arm.

### Step 5: The fingers (Video 2, 15:20–16:05).



The final – and hardest step – is to ‘reprogramme’ the fingers to the Viennese touch. This peculiar touch means moving the fingers from the middle joints only (as opposed to moving them from the root of the finger). In the Viennese sources, finger motion is always described in terms like ‘stroking’ [*gleiten, ziehen*] and often paired with a warning to avoid ‘perpendicular motion’ or ‘up and down motion’. There are no indications of downward motion of the finger. When mastered, the advantage is a beautiful legato touch and cantabile tone, brisk *fortes* and quick chord repetitions. For anyone who wants to explore this peculiar touch, I strongly recommend practising on light actions only. Great patience is needed, because this change of basic finger motion will require endless repetitions and countless sessions of soft-slow practising.

At some point, my mental image of finger motion suddenly changed: I started to think of playing like walking. When walking, the point is never to stomp the feet into the ground, but to take advantage of the friction between the foot and the ground to propel forward. (Watching world-class runners, this becomes especially clear). Similarly, the finger’s contact with the key never benefits from a motion which drives the key deeply into the key bed – that will only make it harder to get to the next key destination. In order for the fingers to ‘run’ over the keys, the motion takes places ‘underneath’ the hand. The fingers may stretch out, cross over, under or play rapidly without the hand position being affected.

I hope you will enjoy exploring the Viennese technique!

## Endnotes

[1] This article relates to my forthcoming study (Christina Kobb, *Piano technique of 1820s Vienna*, PhD diss., Norwegian Academy of Music), where I explain in detail how I reconstructed the Viennese technique by identifying and imitating all the instructions to basic piano posture and touch.

[2] For me, changing the actual motion patterns in my playing was that which unlocked this new realm of interpretation. However, although this article focuses on basic technique, studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music theory is equally necessary for approaching a complete understanding of the ‘interpretive space’ of the music of this time. I shall return to treating issues of time [Takt], metrics, key, form and analysis in future publications.

[3] Letter from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Leopold Mozart on 23 October 1777. Otto Jahn, *Life of Mozart*, Vol. I, p. 361. Translated by Pauline D. Townsend. London, 1882. The translation (except for the last sentence) is from Maurice Hinson (ed.): *At the Piano with Mozart*. Alfred Publishing Co., 1986. Foreword, p. 7.

[4] ‘Sie kann werden, sie hat Genie, aber auf diese Art wird sie nichts, sie wird niemals viel Geschwindigkeit bekommen, weil sie sich völlig befleißt, die Hand schwer zu machen’. Letter from W.A. Mozart to Leopold Mozart on 23 October 1777 (my translation).



[5] According to Mark Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 257, Vienna had over 300 piano teachers in the early nineteenth century.

[6] We know that at least some of the publications were very successful and popular. For instance, Beethoven's friend Friedrich Starke would hardly have published Vols. 2 and 3 of his method unless the first one had made it worthwhile. Another major pedagogical success was Mozart's student Johann Nepomuk Hummel, whose voluminous work sold 4000 copies of the first edition (according to Benyvovsky, quoted in Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel*, p. 270 (footnote 83)).

[7] Carl Czerny: *Briefe über den Unterricht auf dem Pianoforte vom Anfange bis zur Ausbildung* (Vienna: Diabelli, 1839), pp. 4–5.

[8] The table contains translated and occasionally shortened excerpts from the following sources: Friedrich Starke: *Wiener Fortepiano-Schule in III Abtheilungen*, Werk 108, Vol. 1 (Wien, 1819), p. 4; Kichler, Martin: *Vollständiges theoretisch-praktisches Lehrbuch in Pianofortespiel*, op. 42. (Wien, 1830), pp. 67–68; Junghans J. [Christ.] Gottl: *Theoretisch-praktische Pianoforte-Schule* (Wien, 1823 [dating according to Montgomery]), pp. 1–3; Müller, August Eberhardt (1831): *Grosse Fortepiano-Schule. Achte Auflage. Mit vielen neuen Beyspielen und einem vollständigern Anhang vom Generalbass versehen von Carl Czerny* (Leipzig, bey Carl Friedr. Peters, 1831), pp. 4–5; Joseph Czerny: *Wiener Clavier-Lehrer* (Wien, 1825), p. 14; Carl Czerny: *Briefe über den Unterricht auf dem Pianoforte vom Anfange bis zur Ausbildung* (Vienna: Diabelli, 1839), pp. 4–5; J. N. Hummel: *Vollständige Theoretisch-Praktische Anweisung* (Wien: Haslinger, 1828), pp. 1–2; J. N. Hummel: *A Complete Theoretical and Practical Course of Instructions on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte*, London: Boosey & Co, 1828), pp. 2–4. Many of the same instructions are found in earlier sources of German and Viennese keyboard treatises, like Friedrich Starke (1809), J. A. Streicher (1801), Löhlein and Müller (various editions).

[9] Michael Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 306–7.

[10] The fortepiano models of the 1820s were larger and heavier, with a greater compass and somewhat longer key-heads; yet the action and overall construction followed the same principles. For a further discussion of the early fortepiano, please see Cole, *The Pianoforte*, pp. 292–310, especially the comparative Table 18.1 (p. 301).

[11] Research on performance practices in piano music has predominantly focused on execution and notation. To date, there is no single study devoted to keyboard technique of the nineteenth century, nor even a thorough chapter on detailed technical instructions, apart from Ludger Lohmann: *Studien zu*

*Artikulationsproblemen bei den Tasteninstrumenten des 16. – 18. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Bosse-Verlag, 1982; originally his PhD diss., Universität Köln, 1981). In the chapter 'Spieltechnik' (playing technique), he explains that instructions on fingering and articulation cannot be discussed without taking body posture and hand/arm motion into consideration. That his work seems to have gone unnoticed in even the most significant studies in English on performance practices, indicates the extent to which the German/English

language barrier has impeded research. Additionally, eighteenth-century German sentence structure is simply complicated, meaning of words may have shifted and a thorough knowledge of practical as well as musicological aspects is required to make sense of the information in the original sources. Thus, there are probably several reasons for this obvious gap in the literature.

[12] See also Mark Lindley, 'Keyboard fingerings and Articulation' in Sadie, *Performance Practice. Music after 1600* (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 186, who discusses the 'deep-set habits to overcome' if performers are to take early fingerings seriously.

[13] Hummel *A Complete Theoretical and Practical Course of Instructions on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte* (London, Boosey & Co. Importers and Publishers of Foreign Music, n.d. [1828]), p. III, in the preface called 'Preliminary observations addressed to parents and to teachers of music'. Similar advice is recorded in many sources.

[14] Johann N. Forkel, *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke*, (Leipzig, 1802), quoted in Quentin Faulkner, *J.S. Bach's Keyboard Technique: A Historical Introduction*, 20): 'The first thing he [J. S. Bach] did was to teach his students his peculiar mode of touching the instrument, of which we have spoken before. For this purpose, he made them practice, for months together, nothing but isolated exercises for all the fingers of both hands, with constant regard to this clear and clean touch. For a number of months, none could get excused from these exercises; and, according to his firm opinion, they ought to be continued, at least, for from 6 to 12 months. But if he found that anyone, after some months of practice, began to lose patience, he was so obliging as to write little connected pieces, in which those exercises were combined together. Of this kind are the 6 little Preludes for Beginners, and still more the 15 two-part Inventions'. See also Czerny in (what he published as the 8th ed. of Müller's piano method), August Eberhardt Müller, *Grosse Fortepiano-Schule. Achte Auflage. Mit vielen neuen Beyspielen und einem vollständigen Anhang vom Generalbass versehen von Carl Czerny* (Leipzig, bey Carl Friedr. Peters. 1831),

p. 3: In allem, was man recht lernen soll, besonders wo auch der Körper eine bedeutende Rolle spielt, kömmt auf den ersten Unterrichte sehr viel an – folglich auch, wenn man wirklich gut Klavierspielen lernen will'.

[15] Hummel, *A Complete...Course*, pp. I–II.

[16] Indeed, the sensible choice in any field was indeed to preserve the hard-earned knowledge and spend it as wisely as possible in the relatively few years one could expect to live. By leaning on previous generations, one could save oneself much time, and thus be crucial for success; or, in some cases, even for survival.

[17] Hummel stayed with the Mozart family from age seven to nine. He continued to refer to Mozart as his primary influence throughout his career. See Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel*, pp. 26–8.

[18] Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel*, p. 3.

[19] Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel*, pp. 13–14 and 242.

[20] Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel*, p. 263.

[21] Jahn, *Life of Mozart*, Vol. I, p. 361. Translated by Pauline D. Townsend. London, 1882.

[22] Maurice Hinson, in his foreword to a collection of Mozart pieces, comments of this same letter and concludes that 'We learn from this letter that Mozart sat quietly at the middle of the keyboard and played without making faces. We learn that he did not change tempo in repeated sections of a piece, although he probably varied it by adding ornaments, etc. We also learn that he did not like the arm to be raised and that he favored a light wrist with the fingers always in contact with the keys'. In Maurice Hinson (ed.): *At the Piano with Mozart*. Alfred publishing Co., 1986. Foreword, p. 7. See also Jahn, *Life of Mozart*, Vol. 2, p. 442: 'He [Mozart] insisted mainly that the player should have a "quiet, steady hand", the natural ease, flexibility, and smooth rapidity of which should be so cultivated that the passages should "flow like oil"'. From this, we gather that his view was that smooth rapidity would not be possible without a quiet, steady hand.

[23] Öhm-Kühnle, 'Er Weiss jeden Ton singen zu lassen' *Der Musiker und Klavierbauer Johann Andreas Streicher (1761–1833) – kompositorisches Schaffen und kulturelles Wirken im biographischen Kontext*. PhD diss., Universität Tübingen, 2008. See p. 62 for a reference to the piano Hummel happily acquired c. 1820. [24] After Nannete's death in 1833, her husband wrote of her accomplishments (quoted in ÖhmKühnle, 'Er Weiss jeden Ton...pp. 59–60): 'So gewagt es auch scheinen mochte, dass sich eine Frau, eine

Mutter von drey Kindern an die Spitze eines der schwierigsten Geschäfte stelle; und obwohl es ohne Beyspiel war, dass ein solches Unternehmen unter einem weiblichen Namen ausgeführt wurde, so bestand ihr Gatte dennoch darauf, weil sie nicht nur durch ihre kindliche Treue und Hingebung gegen einen so trefflichen Vater [den Klavierbauer J. A. Stein] die gerechtesten Ansprüche an eine so öffentliche Würdigung sich erworben, sondern auch die genaueste Kenntniss derjenigen Mechanik hatte, die einem Pianoforte erst den eigentlichen Werth ertheilt; dass nämlich jede Taste eben so willig und folgsam den Ton ansprechen mache, wie der sie berührende Finger es erheischt'.

[25] J. A. Streicher, *Kurze Bemerkungen über das Spielen, Stimmen und Erhalten der Fortepiano, welche von Nannette Streicher, geborne Stein, in Wien verfertigt werden* (Wien, 1801), pp. 6–7. Translation in Cole, *The Pianoforte*, p. 308.

[26] These two main approaches to posture and thus basic motions at the piano do not exclude a vast range of personal styles and expression, as there are many more variables in piano playing.

[27] Despite his non-Viennese origin, Chopin is included for his affinity to Hummel and the high value he placed on Hummel's piano treatise. See Kroll, *Johann Nepomuk Hummel*, pp. 312–13.

[28] Admittedly, this approach will restrict arm weight on the low B-flat as the finger is now solely responsible for producing the *ff* of the upbeat. Nevertheless, the pedal and the still greater emphasis on the downbeat chord should suffice for a nice *ff* impression.

[29] Czerny (in Czerny, Müller 1831), § 9c: 'Man halte den Oberarm nicht zu weit seitwärts vom Körper ab, weil dies die richtige Lage der Hand unmöglich macht'.

[30] Although modern performers do claim to adjust their technique when playing the fortepiano, it seems to happen on a practical level without consulting early sources for technical details. See for instance Christopher Kite: "The day has still to come when Mozart on a Steinway will be regarded...as necessarily a kind of transcription" in *Early Music* 13/1, Feb. 1985, p. 55, who notes that one must 'dispense with the habit of using arm weight as a matter of course, and learn to play much closer to the key, with greater precision and evenness', and Paul Badura-Skoda: 'Playing the early piano', in *Early Music* 12/4, Nov. 1984, p. 479, who states that playing the fortepiano 'requires less strength yet more agility than the modern piano ... supple wrist motion and much less use of the arm'. In recent years, Ronald Brautigam, 'one of the most important contemporary fortepiano exponents of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven' according to Patrick Jovell, explains that "There is not really a lot of difference in my text approach on fortepiano or on modern piano. The text is the most important information the composer left us, and tells us everything we should do, whether on a Walter or a Steinway. Playing on a fortepiano, the instrument the composer had in mind, we can simply interpret the score as it is written'. See Jovell, Patrick: 'Exciting Time Travel – Exclusive Interview with Ronald Brautigam'. *Piano Street's Classical Piano Blog*, 2014: <http://www.pianostreet.com/blog/articles/ronald-brautigams-exciting-time-travels-exclusiveinterview-2397/> Accessed 09.10.2014.

[31] For instance, 'Beethoven played with his hands so very still', according to his portrait painter Mähler (quoted in Newman, *Beethoven on Beethoven: playing his piano music his way*(W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), p. 278. As we saw above, Mozart obviously wanted still hands and no grimace while playing. On the whole, if our interpretation of the historical sources is in harmony with already confirmed information from the same geographical area at the same point in history, we are likely to be on the right track. (For instance, a wealth of contemporary sources support that sitting or standing up really straight was considered proper and healthy, signified a high status and was the expected attitude of a soldier, a horse-back rider, a king, a woman in corset, and so forth. The same 'litmus test' may be performed on different levels, from wellknown historical facts to details of wood-work or musicologically inspected watermarks in the scores). I call this the 'compliance principle': The greater the compliance, the greater the probability of our hypotheses and assumptions.

[32] See for instance Louis Kentner, *Piano* (London, 1976), p. 47: 'But let us be patient and accept the fact that for different individuals all the conflicting answers could be right, or at least have something good in them. No teacher ought to force his pupils to become, even in his physical attitudes, a copy of his master, but allow him to follow his own instinct.

[33] If you do not manage to perform the movements in a relaxed manner, take a break, and 'play' the correct movements in your mind. The movements away also be practiced isolated, away from the piano, to train up the isometric muscle power needed. For instance, I strengthened my upper back by

swimming until I reached a perfectly upright position. (It took me a couple of years, so I do not have advice for quick fixes. Just enjoy the progress as you go!). To master the finger motion described, I practised moving each finger separately from the middle joint only – on the couch, in the car, while having breakfast, and so on. [34] Personally, I found the habit of constantly staring at the keys particularly hard to break, as this had been such an ingrained part of my posture for so many years. Moreover, I realized that this staring is connected to the feeling of control. During the first years, I did not manage to play with a completely free and straight head/neck, which may have slowed down the entire process of adopting the reconstructed technique. The reason for this correlation is probably that the staring at the keys leads to the shoulders tilting forwards, thereby misaligning the new and desired posture. However, when I finally manage to release the head and neck from the ‘staring position’, the shoulders and arms reached a new level of relaxation and freedom of movement, which again caused my fingers to move more freely and easily on the keyboard.