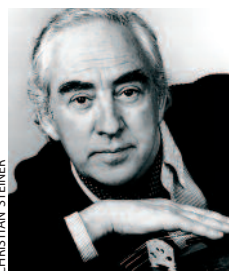


SCHUBERT'S ARPEGGIONE SONATA (VIOLA TRANSCRIPTION): FIRST MOVEMENT

BRUNO GIURANNA explores the choices open to violists in a subtly contrasting work conceived for a lower-register, six-stringed instrument



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Franz Schubert wrote his Sonata in A minor D821 in 1824 for a newly invented instrument called a 'guitar-violoncello' or 'bowed guitar'. It was played between the knees like a cello but tuned like a guitar (E-A-d-g-b-e'), and it had frets on the fingerboard, which gave the sound a glassy quality. Only after the sonata's publication in 1871 did the instrument

come to be known as the arpeggione.

Although the sonata doesn't plumb the same expressive depths as Schubert's late quartets and piano trios, it is a beautiful, charming piece. It has been played on almost every stringed and wind instrument – the arpeggione itself has been used occasionally in period performances – but the cello is the only modern instrument that matches

the arpeggione's register without any need for changes to the music. However, the piece is hard to play on the cello and, with its lyrical nature negated, becomes a virtuoso vehicle. For this reason, there is a strong case for playing the sonata on the viola, where it sounds more comfortable. The drawback is that some changes of octave are required (this is an 'original sin' of several other pieces from the standard viola repertoire that have been transcribed from other instruments, most notably Brahms's Sonatas op.120, originally composed for clarinet). It is up to each player to decide where the necessary changes can be best effected without disturbing the musical line.

Another important point to bear in mind is that until the publication in 1970 of the Urtext within Bärenreiter's New Schubert Edition, some inexplicable misreadings – especially in the second and third movements – had been perpetuated from one edition to the next.

INTRODUCTION AND EXPOSITION

The sonata starts with a chorale-like introduction on the piano (**example 1**). At the viola's entry, the same material becomes a melody with accompaniment. The pianist should bring out the expressive middle voice in bar 5. Although the first slur in the viola part is originally one and a half bars long, sometimes it is advisable to play an up bow on the second bar: it is an imperceptible change that allows a more expansive sound. Both players should be conscious of the imitation between piano and viola in bars 15–16 (the ascending C–E–A–C); the pianist should put forth something worth imitating. The diminuendo to the pp in bar 18 shouldn't become too soft: that low D is the bass of the chord. Playing bar 21 in one bow makes for a more natural phrasing, and think of the turn as a quintuplet, to avoid the squareness of four semiquavers (♪) (**example 2**). Bars 22–30 are often played as a new motif, but they are just a confirmation of the A minor key. The diminuendo in bars 28–29 underlines the contrast with the recitative-like character of what follows. I play the bar 29 note as a harmonic, in an up bow, with the two previous quavers (♪) staccato at

the tip. Make sure you give this note a sparkling attack (within the pianissimo) and hold it for its full value of five beats (**example 3**).

In the subsequent transitional passage (bars 31–39) any sense of the mechanical should be avoided. Bring out the semiquavers in bar 38, and emphasise the second beat of bar 39, with the dissonant G sharp, before relaxing into the next bar, where the second subject starts in C major (**example 4** on page 69). I suggest playing this incisively, with little bow, near the bridge and not too softly. If the viola plays this passagework in the clearest possible way, it won't suffer from the comparison when the piano takes it up in the following bar. This imitation in the piano is more interesting than what the viola does in bars 41 and 43; the latter is just an accompaniment that often gets blown out of all proportion by temperamental violists. In bars 44 and 46, make sure you observe the crescendo followed by a piano subito. Here I suggest an asymmetrical bow division, to facilitate the crescendo. Work your way back to the frog in the following bar.

I often hear bar 48 played mechanically, and then in bar 49 it is as if a switch with the word 'espressivo' written on it had been turned on.

[1] Bars 1–13, with annotations by the author

Allegro moderato

The score for bars 1–13 is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano part in G major, starting with a *pp* dynamic. The second system shows the violin part with a *mp* dynamic and various articulation marks, including accents and slurs. The tempo is marked **Allegro moderato**.

[2] Bars 20–24, with annotations by the author

This section focuses on the violin part for bars 20–24. It includes dynamic markings of *fp*, *dim.*, *p*, and *cresc.*. There are also articulation marks such as accents and slurs, and fingering numbers (2, 4, 3, 1, 4) are indicated above the notes.

[3] Bars 28–34, with annotations by the author

This section focuses on the piano part for bars 28–34. It includes dynamic markings of *dim.* and *f*. There are also articulation marks such as accents and slurs, and fingering numbers (4, 0, 2, 0, 2, 4, 4, 0, 3, 4) are indicated above the notes.

The run in bar 48 should already have a modicum of *espressivo*. The pianist should be discreet with the octaves in bar 51; the interest here is in the viola part. Some editors put the viola part up an octave, starting with the second note of bar 51. However, a characteristic of Schubert's music is the repetition of phrases, and he always writes small differences into them. If just the articulation is changed, the difference between bars 53–56 and bars 40–43 will be subtler and clearer than if you also change the octave. Players often make a big *rallentando* in bar 51, where it is out of place: we are still in C major, and nothing new happens. A *rallentando* in bar 59 should be avoided altogether.

The subito *forte* in bar 57 (example 5 on page 69) works best when what goes before it is very soft. The original has the subsequent semiquavers legato, which is nice enough: making them picchettato (detached) or staccato violates the music's character, turning it into a virtuoso showpiece. Take care not to accentuate the down-bow D of bar 58. Play the C major arpeggio and the top notes in bar 61 in a relaxed way, with a slow vibrato. There is no need to show off your

temperament here: that would just make for a very stiff vibrato. Bar 62 should not sound like a scale; there is no reason to hurry, and the beginning of the bar should be declamato. At the end of the exposition we have two contrasting feelings: there is big tension in bar 63, followed by a relaxation (and the same pattern from bar 67). Pianists should enjoy the rests at the end of the exposition and not rush them, especially when going on to the development.

DEVELOPMENT

In bars 74–77 of the piano part, I suggest bringing out the upper note of the octave. Then, from the middle of bar 77, change colours and bring out the lower octave, becoming darker and more dramatic to prepare for the *forte* on bar 79 (example 6 on page 69). Violists should make sure not to rush the pizzicato – for a resonating pizzicato, pluck the string parallel to the fingerboard, rather than pulling the string away from it. The dialogue between viola and piano intensifies in the development. Even if the figurations look the same on the page as in

[4] Bars 40–53, showing imitation in the piano part, with annotations by the author

a tempo

pp

piano

cresc.

p

cresc.

f

tr

p

mp

piano

[5] Bars 57–63, with annotations by the author

f

p

cresc.

f

[6] Bars 74–79, with annotations by the author

pizz.

p

p

the exposition, the music is more dramatic, needing darker colours. The piano chords at bars 95–96 (**example 7** on page 70) should prepare the listener for the pianissimo that follows. The piano line in bars 97–98 must be built up, so that the viola can take it over. This connection doesn't come by itself – one should work at it consciously. Bring out the major–minor contrast of bars 101 and 103. The build-up from bar 105 must be gradual; don't be too loud at the forte in bar 110, otherwise you won't make the necessary impact at the fortissimo two bars later.

A note for pianists here: take pity on poor violists, and don't leave them hanging on too long on the E in bars 115–117. To avoid breaking up the subsequent descending arpeggio, I recommend playing a high B in bar 117. This is the lesser evil, because you then have an unbroken descending line. After the arpeggio, don't change octaves on the F, because this sounds to me like doubling the 9th of the chord which, as we know from our harmony lessons, shouldn't be done. It is better to jump down a 9th after the F. Anyway, everything

[7] Bars 95–101, with annotations by the author

[8] Bars 188–196, with annotations by the author

will be forgiven and forgotten once the main theme restarts on the viola's gorgeous G string.

RECAPITULATION

At the start of the recapitulation (bars 124–125, corresponding to bars 10–11 in example 1) I would certainly play the original, longer bowing, *molto tenuto*, and change the sound at the three quavers to a more flautando sound. Everything I have said about the exposition applies, of course, to the recapitulation. The only new element is the piano solo in bars 138–139 and 142–143, a passage that somehow seems to make pianists nervous. Just take it easy and don't rush. In bar 145 I play the chords *pizzicato*. They are just accompaniment, and would be too intrusive if played as three-part chords with the bow.

I play the whole passage (bars 144–148) in the higher octave in order to preserve the change of octave after the high E in bar 148. The passagework from bar 161 lies more awkwardly under the hand than the corresponding passage in the exposition, and accordingly requires more work.

I play the 10ths in bar 173 across three strings, touching the D string with the first finger to prevent it from re-sounding. Peter Schidlof suggested to me going all the way up to the C in *allegretto* in the A major arpeggio at bars 177–178 (instead of going down in the middle of bar 177, as is usually done). I did it a few times, but it is quite high.

CODA

There is no need to take the coda (example 8) at a much slower pace than the rest, as is so often done. Schubert has already taken care of slowing down the accompaniment, which now is in crotchets (♩) rather than quavers. I suggest that the pianist brings out the bass line from bar 188 as a melody, holding the crotchets slightly longer and with the offbeat chords 'rebounding' from them. The viola's short phrases can't be just played piano. I would play the first phrase (from bar 188) slightly stronger, the next one less, then more again. Follow up with a real pianissimo in bar 192, and then give a little more volume, before dying away. At the very last exchange between viola and piano, the former should play at the higher octave, to be nearer to the piano's pitches. I play the last arpeggio going all the way up. Otherwise, what do we practise arpeggios for? ■

Interview by Carlos María Solare

The complete viola part of Schubert's *Arpeggione Sonata*, edited by Bruno Giuranna, can be downloaded from www.giuranna.it

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