



## THE ART OF PERFORMANCE

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HEINRICH SCHENKER

Edited by Heribert Esser

Translated by Irene Schreier Scott

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## *Translator's Introduction*

THIS IS THE FIRST publication of Heinrich Schenker's *The Art of Performance*. That its appearance is in translation should not come as a surprise. Interest in Schenker's work is liveliest in the English-speaking world at present and is no longer confined to theoreticians. This practical volume, then, may serve as an introduction to Schenker, particularly directed to practicing musicians.

My personal introduction to the substance of *The Art of Performance* antedates by many years my awareness of its existence. By chance my first piano teacher was Moriz Violin, a wonderfully gifted pianist who also composed. Violin was Heinrich Schenker's younger colleague and closest friend, in whom Schenker confided and with whom he shared his musical ideas. Having intuitively assimilated these concepts, Violin imparted them in his own teaching along with a special, unforgettable approach to the piano. From the age of six, therefore, I was shown a natural way of playing entirely at one with the music and, perhaps because Violin had never taught a child before, I was spared any of the "piano methods" most beginners are taught.

Later, in my college years, I studied with Oswald Jonas (who had meanwhile become my stepfather). Counterpoint, figured bass, and analysis played a considerable role, but I think it is fair to say that what he cared about most of all were our lessons at the piano, with detailed coaching of every nuance. Certainly he pointed out the unique musical content of each work and, in the most memorable

moments, we made new discoveries; the emphasis, however, was on musical expression.

Heinrich Schenker's deep concern for performance—for the execution of the works his analytical insights illuminated so profoundly—has become widely recognized. It is known that his own students were for the greater part taught at the piano, and anyone who has overheard a Schenker student in the process of analyzing a piece of music—probing, playing a segment of a phrase over and over again, emphasizing first one, then another note or group of notes—is aware that the actual sound of the music and its appropriate expression are essential to Schenker's approach to music. In addition, the sections on performance in most of his writings and the many allusions to a forthcoming publication of *Die Kunst des Vortrags* in journals and books by Schenker scholars have already served to introduce this volume. But music students and musicians with no direct experience with Schenker—and this translation is meant every bit as much for them as for the initiated—may still be surprised at the practical, detailed technical advice given by the theoretician they have only associated with apparently esoteric, abstract graphic analyses.

The genesis of *The Art of Performance (Die Kunst des Vortrags)* has been described in detail in the editor's introduction. When I was first asked to translate it and reread the manuscript (not yet in its current form) it seemed like an old friend, and I even queried the usefulness of its publication at a time when, I thought, many of its ideas had become widespread. Since then, however, I have taught a wide variety of students, and I find that the basic approach to the piano taken by most students is very different indeed from the one that spoke to me in a familiar language from the pages of *Vortrag*. Certainly, pianists need the ability to play many types and styles of music, including those unequivocally rejected by Schenker. But the repertoire from, say, Bach to Brahms (as well as much else!) is played convincingly, with its own appropriate expression, only when it sings and breathes. The means, the motions, the physical approach described in the text that follows can point the way to music making that is immediate, alive, spontaneous, and yet controlled. In our more and more programmed world, such music making becomes profoundly meaningful.

I have been helped in the process of preparing this translation by the many friends, colleagues, and students whose enthusiasm for the project was an inspiration. Special thanks to John Rothgeb, Carl Schachter, and William Rothstein for their valuable, expert suggestions; to Robert Lang and Sidney Berger of the University Library,

University of California, Riverside, for their generosity in putting all the materials in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection needed for the illustrations reproduced here, at my disposal; to Maribeth Payne of Oxford University Press and her staff for making the publication possible, with special appreciation for Cynthia Garver who patiently and with expertise helped overcome obstacles; to Andrew Lee for his painstaking, careful work in preparing all the examples on the computer; and to my husband, Dana Scott, for his advice on sensitive linguistic questions and for giving unstintingly of his time in helping in the final stages of organizing the manuscript. I also particularly want to thank Richard Goode for his interest in this work. Without his gentle nudging when the preparation seemed to take forever, the book might still not be in print.

I am especially happy that Oxford University Press undertook this publication during 1997, the centenary of Oswald Jonas's birth. The memory of his boundless enthusiasm for music was the inspiration for my part in the realization of this project, one particularly close to his heart.

*Pittsburgh*  
*March 1998*

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## *Editor's Introduction*

IN THE PREFACE TO his book on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1912), Heinrich Schenker writes (p. 8): "Under the above-mentioned performance rubric I have endeavored, without intending to encroach on the territory of a monograph 'Die Kunst des Vortrags' to be published in the foreseeable future, to set forth performance instructions insofar as possible in general principles and rules."

Where is this monograph? It was never completed. Schenker had begun sketching the projected *The Art of Performance* systematically in July 1911 but interrupted work on it a few weeks later. (See "Sources and Editorial Procedure.") After some two years he took this material out of his desk, but only to "check through it and improve its organization." A considerable part of the usable material had already been included in earlier publications: in *A Contribution to the Study of Ornamentation* (1904), in *J. S. Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* (1909), and in the monograph previously quoted.

We do not know why Schenker did not continue work on this project begun so energetically. It is hard to believe that problems intrinsic to the material were responsible. One might rather agree with the reasons given by Oswald Jonas in an introduction written in 1958 to a never-realized version of the work:

"In the above-mentioned preface [to the Ninth Symphony] it furthermore says "I believe, incidentally, that I am the first to consider similar principles at all applicable to a material that appears to be in

a constant state of flux. Naturally I have also endeavored, however, to provide the rules in all cases with their psychological foundation as thoroughly as possible, in order to shield them from even the appearance of being merely accidental and arbitrary. For this reason the rubric of performance would have automatically required still more exhaustive treatment; but in view of the greater importance of the revelation of content, I had to satisfy myself with less extensive commentary." Herein, simultaneously, lies the explanation for the fact that "The Art of Performance" remained a fragment: it was the "theory of organic unity in the musical work of art"—the idea of the "Ursatz and its prolongations"—which Schenker considered it his mission to present and whose formulation became the uppermost aim of his life's work. Added to this his practical activity as teacher, his battle against the obfuscation of source material (the entire current awareness of the significance of the manuscript for the preparation of the printed text, after all, essentially stems from Schenker's attempts and admonitions)—if one weighs all this it becomes understandable that the "Vortrag," along with many other projects, had to take second place in his life-plan and to remain a fragment.

Many years later, on December 6, 1930, Schenker dictates to his wife, Jeanette, the following diary entry: "Ordered 'Vortrag' and supplied it with a sort of Index. Thus only the book itself remains, destined to be a diversion and distraction from the difficulties of *Free Composition*." He had not completely lost sight of the old papers and their questions during the past twenty years; for this we have proof in the abundant number of notes that are collected in B of "Sources and Editorial Procedure." (See this chapter for this and all following references to the Schenker materials.) Now, apparently, he had come to the firm conclusion to take up that large piece of work once again and to bring it to some sort of resolution. But this was not to happen. Indeed, Schenker did finish *Free Composition* to the extent that it could be published—shortly after his death—in 1935; but the book *The Art of Performance* remained unpublished. Even in its fragmentary state, however, *The Art of Performance* presents its material in such an individual, unconventional manner and contains such a wealth of valuable, stimulating ideas and suggestions that the posthumous publication seems more than justified—even if one knows that it can never be the "book" Schenker intended to write.

"Entwurf (Versuch) einer Lehre vom Vortrag. Ein Beitrag zur Verbesserung /Reform des Klavierspiels im Besonderen" [Draft of (Essay on) a Study