

A Comparative Study of Performance Versions of Haydn's "Sonata in G Major" (Hob. XVI/6)

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Abstract: Haydn, one of the most influential composers of the Classical period, established the norms for the piano sonata genre and provided important creative paradigms for later composers. This paper takes his early piano sonata, the "Sonata in G Major" (Hob. XVI/6), as its subject. It selects recorded versions by three internationally renowned pianists and utilizes music performance research visualization software to generate spectrograms, waveform diagrams, and tempo-dynamic curves. Through this, it conducts a comparative analysis of the differences in key elements such as tempo, dynamics, and timbre across the performance versions. By comparing these versions, the study reveals the impact of different performance styles on the interpretation of the work, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the academic research, performance practice, and teaching of Haydn's piano sonatas.

Keywords: Haydn; Sonata in G Major; Performance Technique; Version Study

Through artistic practices such as singing, performing, or conducting, performers translate the creative concepts of composers into perceivable sonic reality. In this process, musical performance plays an indispensable role, serving as a crucial bridge connecting the written score with the auditory experience, realizing the artistic transformation of a musical work from static symbols to dynamic sound. Within the realm of musical performance, the interrelationships between fundamental elements like pitch, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics are manifested through the specific meanings of notational symbols. In actual performance, performers employ techniques such as tempo variation, dynamic control, and timbre manipulation to organize and present combinations of pitch and rhythm, thereby shaping unique sonic effects. Thus, the artistic treatment of musical elements like tempo, dynamics, and timbre by the performer directly determines the sonic presentation of the musical work. With the advancement and development of recording technology, the live performances of artists can be completely preserved and disseminated through releases. This technological innovation has made comparative studies of different performance versions possible. The application of modern technology has not only changed the way music is disseminated but has also opened new avenues for music performance research, making in-depth analysis of the art of performance feasible.

1. Selection of Performance Versions and Overview of Pianists

Since its composition, Haydn's "Sonata in G Major" (Hob. XVI/6) has been recorded and performed by numerous pianists, forming performance traditions of varying styles. This paper selects recorded versions by three internationally renowned pianists—Jeno Jando, Marc-André Hamelin, and Anton Kuerti—for comparative analysis. These three pianists are all highly esteemed in the field of classical music, and their recordings were released by the record companies "Naxos," "Hyperion Records," and "Analekta," respectively. These companies have a long history and high authority in classical music recording; therefore, the selected versions possess

strong comparability and representativeness.

Jeno Jando is a renowned Hungarian pianist, famous for his highly precise technique and profound understanding of classical works. His performance style is rigorous and well-structured, with a clear tone, emphasizing the structural logic of the work. He is particularly skilled in interpreting German-Austrian Classical repertoire. Jando has an extensive discography and is considered one of the most prolific pianists in recording history. His recordings for the Naxos label systematically present works by composers such as Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

Marc-André Hamelin is a Canadian pianist and composer, known for his exceptional technical ability and exploration of rare repertoire. He not only excels at performing highly difficult piano works but is also committed to promoting the works of historically neglected composers. His performance style is highly individualized, often incorporating unique understandings of the works into his interpretations. He is an exclusive recording artist for Hyperion Records, a label renowned for its high-quality classical recordings, with a particular focus on the historical reproduction of performance styles.

Anton Kuerti is also a Canadian pianist and composer, regarded as one of the most authoritative contemporary interpreters of German-Austrian repertoire. His performance style leans towards tradition, focusing on the internal emotional logic of the work, with a strong sense of coherence and cantabile (singing quality). His recorded works are mostly released by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Analekta label, primarily focusing on piano works from the German-Austrian Classical and Romantic periods. The audio versions analyzed in the following research originate from these three pianists with distinct styles. The author has carefully collected and organized the basic information of the three performance versions, including the recording date, recording location, name of the album containing the work, and the publishing company, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Basic Information of Each Performance Version

| Pianist | Recording Date | Album Name | Recording Location | Publishing Company |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Anton Kuerti | 2008-01-01 | Haydn:Six Sonates Pour Piano | Canada | Analekta |
| Jeno Jando | 1998-07-31 | Haydn:Piano Sonatas, Vol.8 | Hungary | Naxos |
| Marc-André Hamelin | 2012-05-25 | Haydn:Piano Sonatas, Vol.3 | Canada | Hyperion |

2. Visual Analysis of Different Performance Versions

Scientifically, speed refers to the rate of motion of an object, while in the realm of musical art, tempo refers to the pace at which a musical work is performed. Musical tempo is typically indicated through specific terminology or symbolic notation and holds a crucial position in musical practice, being an indispensable core element in music learning and performance. The pace of a musical performance (i.e., tempo) significantly affects the authenticity of emotional expression and the shaping of the artistic image, reflecting the important role of tempo in musical expression. Different performers, due to variations in their musical education, emotional experiences, and aesthetic concepts, adopt different musical approaches when interpreting the same work, resulting in distinctive sonic effects. Therefore, the author used the music performance research visualization software VMUS to generate spectrograms, waveform diagrams, and tempo-dynamic curves for the three performance versions. Based on these graphical data, a comparative analysis of the musical elements of tempo, dynamics, and timbre in the performances of the three pianists was conducted, summarizing their individual performance characteristics and commonalities.

2.1 Overall Tempo Comparison

The study of the three versions performed by the three pianists found that Anton Kuerti's performance has the fastest overall tempo, with a total duration of 13 minutes and 18 seconds; followed by Jeno Jando, with a total duration of 13 minutes and 31 seconds; the slowest tempo is Marc-André Hamelin's, with a total duration of 14 minutes and 59 seconds. The performance time difference between Anton Kuerti and Hamelin is 1 minute and 41 seconds. This considerable difference reflects the pianists' differing perceptions and feelings regarding the artistic conception of this sonata. Details are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Distribution of Overall Tempo

| Pianist | Structure | Start Time | End Time | Duration(s) | Total Duration |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|----------|-------------|----------------|
| Anton Kuerti | I.Allegro | 00:01 | 03:38 | 218 | 13:18 |
| | II.Minuet | 03:39 | 07:29 | 230 | |
| | III.Adagio | 07:30 | 10:59 | 209 | |
| | IV.Allegro Molto | 11:00 | 13:18 | 138 | |
| Jeno Jando | I.Allegro | 00:01 | 03:47 | 227 | 13:31 |
| | II.Minuet | 03:48 | 07:53 | 245 | |
| | III.Adagio | 07:54 | 11:01 | 187 | |
| | IV.Allegro Molto | 11:02 | 13:31 | 149 | |
| Marc-André Hamelin | I.Allegro | 00:01 | 05:53 | 353 | 14:59 |
| | II.Minuet | 05:54 | 08:48 | 234 | |
| | III.Adagio | 08:49 | 12:25 | 216 | |
| | IV.Allegro Molto | 12:26 | 14:59 | 153 | |

2.2 Local Tempo Comparison

2.2.1 Tempo-Dynamic Curve for the First Movement

The first movement is a fast movement, delicate and full of vitality, marked with the term "Allegro," meaning fast, with a tempo value of 132-144 bpm. The durations of the exposition section of the first movement played by the three performers are as follows: Marc-André Hamelin has the slowest speed, with an average tempo of only 68.1 bpm (see Figure 1). It sounds somewhat dragging and lengthy, and he employs a significant ritardando in measure 14, slowing down to around 63 bpm, connecting to the triplet melody in the left hand. Anton Kuerti has the fastest speed, averaging 78.2 bpm (see Figure 2). Unlike Hamelin, he slows down in measure 10, but the extent is small, decreasing to about 72 bpm, smoothly connecting to the left-hand tremolo-like rhythm. Jeno Jando's average tempo for the exposition of the first movement is 71.1 bpm (see Figure 3), similar to Kuerti.

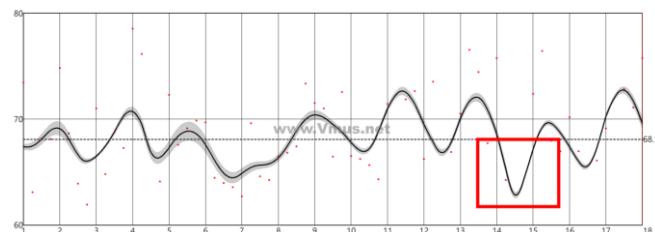


Figure 1: Marc-André Hamelin: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Exposition of the First Movement

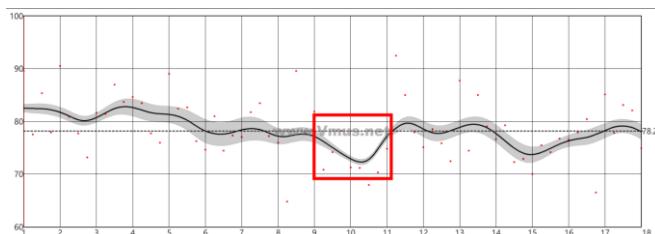


Figure 2: Anton Kuerti: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Exposition of the First Movement

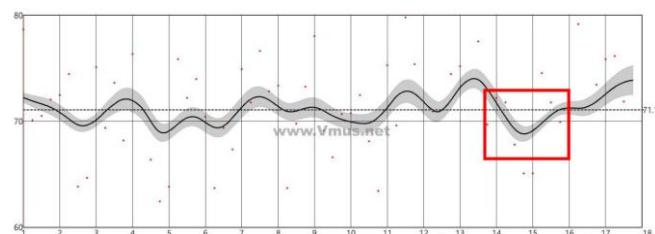


Figure 3: Jeno Jando: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Exposition of the First Movement

The tempo-dynamic curves of the three performance versions show that in this section, Hamelin's performance tempo fluctuates considerably, while Jando and Kuerti's performance tempos are relatively stable. In the interpretation of the exposition of the first movement, the control of tempo is crucial. The author believes that the performance tempo of the exposition should not be too slow; attention should be paid to highlighting the triple-meter pulse in the left hand, reinforcing its rhythmic effect through appropriate dynamic control to create a strong audiovisual experience. In measure 10 of the piece, a ritardando can be appropriately applied, but the extent should not be too large, causing the music to feel

stagnant and lack flow. It should transition naturally and smoothly to the right-hand trill passage, ensuring the integrity and expressiveness of the music are fully realized. Therefore, for this section, the author prefers Anton Kuerti's performance.

2.2.2 Tempo-Dynamic Curve for the Trio of the Second Movement

The second movement is a Minuet, in ternary form, marked with the term "Minuet," with a tempo value of 88-104 bpm. When the music enters the Trio section at measure 29, a clear decrease in speed can be seen on the tempo-dynamic analysis charts of both Marc-André Hamelin and Jeno Jando (see Figures 4 and 5); they apply rubato (flexible tempo) here. In contrast, Anton Kuerti's tempo-dynamic analysis chart shows a gradual acceleration (see Figure 6). Furthermore, at measure 41, the musical phrase is constructed with two-measure basic units and developed using sequential techniques. This phrase alternates between G major and E minor, creating a clear major-minor contrast, thus producing a noticeable effect of tonal instability. Based on this musical characteristic, all three performers consistently adopt a slowing tempo here to ensure a perfect connection between the right-hand trill and the left-hand melodic line. Among them, Jeno Jando's interpretation is particularly outstanding; he reduces the tempo to 105 bpm (see Figure 5). This approach not only strengthens the coherence of the musical material but also highlights the instability brought about by the tonal shift.

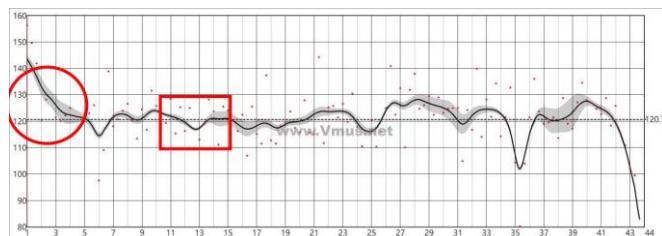


Figure 4: Marc-André Hamelin: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Trio of the Second Movement

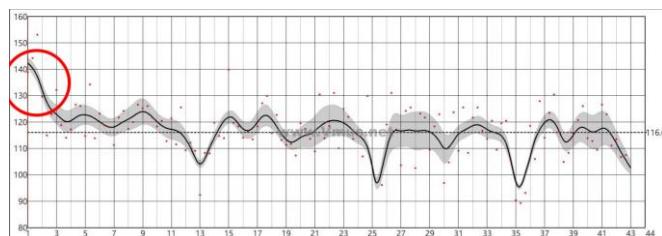


Figure 5: Jeno Jando: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Trio of the Second Movement

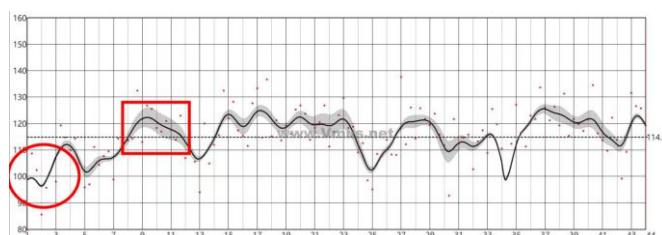


Figure 6: Anton Kuerti: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Trio of the Second Movement

2.2.3 Tempo-Dynamic Curve for the Exposition of the Fourth Movement

Entering the fourth movement of the piece, marked with the

term "Allegro molto," meaning very fast, with a tempo value of 110-160 bpm. The performance tempos of all three pianists increase significantly, especially Anton Kuerti, whose average performance tempo reaches 272 bpm (see Figure 7), making the overall rhythm of the exposition more brisk and intensifying the sense of tension. It is worth mentioning that in measure 23 of the piece, all three pianists show a tendency to slow down, but the degree of decrease and its manifestation differ. Among them, Jeno Jando's decrease is the most significant (see Figure 8). This treatment not only demonstrates his precise grasp and emphasis of the rests in the score but also skillfully sets up a contrast for the subsequent appearance of the alternating textures between the hands, further emphasizing the dynamic and unstable developmental character of the piece.

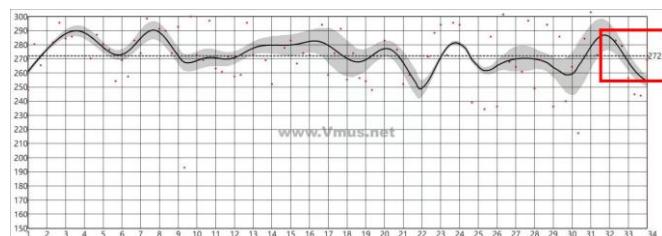


Figure 7: Anton Kuerti: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Exposition of the Fourth Movement

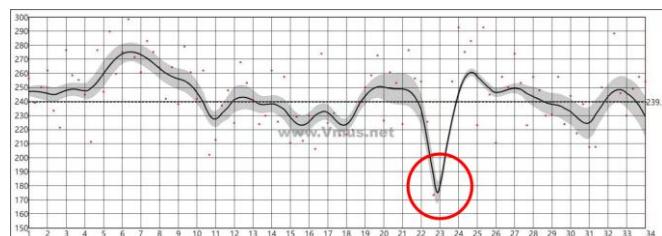


Figure 8: Jeno Jando: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Exposition of the Fourth Movement

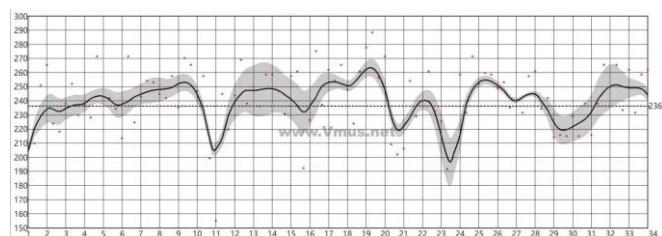


Figure 9: Marc-André Hamelin: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Exposition of the Fourth Movement

2.2.4 Dynamics Comparison

"From the perspective of its definition and characteristics, dynamics refer to the levels of volume intensity in a musical piece, specifically the intensity of sound during musical performance. In musical activities, dynamics often refer to the perception of dynamics (i.e., subjectively perceived intensity)." "The characteristics of dynamic shapes in piano music can be integrated into compositional and performance styles; similarly, styles can also be realized through the composition and performance of certain dynamic shapes."

In the development section of the fourth movement, the dynamic expressions of the three pianists vary. Jeno Jando creates a large-scale dynamic change across measures 53-58 (see Figure 10), transitioning overall from soft to loud, enhancing the integrity of the recapitulation rather than

emphasizing small phrases, demonstrating a strong sense of structure. This also creates a contrast with the subsequent alternating broken-chord textures between the hands, emphasizing the humorous and witty character of the music in this movement. Anton Kuerti's approach to dynamics is more conservative; the overall dynamic range in his performance is relatively stable (see Figure 11). He does not employ highly dramatic treatments, nor extremely strong or weak playing styles; his dynamic performance style is quite steady. Marc-André Hamelin's treatment of phrase dynamics in the development section differs from Jando's. He increases the dynamic intensity in measures 67-70 (see Figure 12), highlighting the use of turns (gruppetti), adding a unique flavor to the melody.

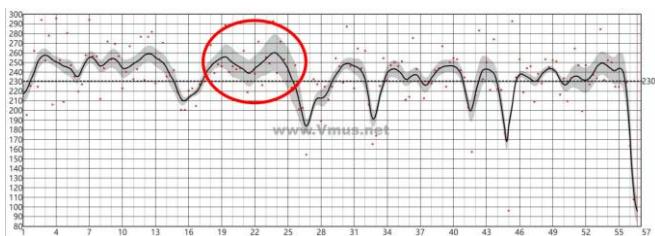


Figure 10: Jeno Jando: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Development Section of the Fourth Movement

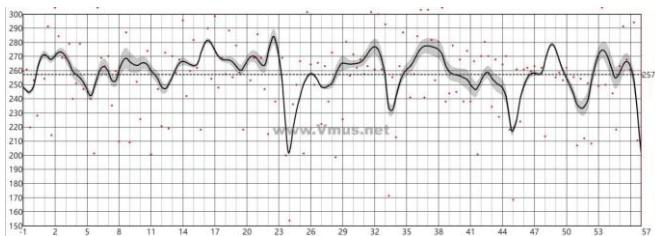


Figure 11: Anton Kuerti: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Development Section of the Fourth Movement

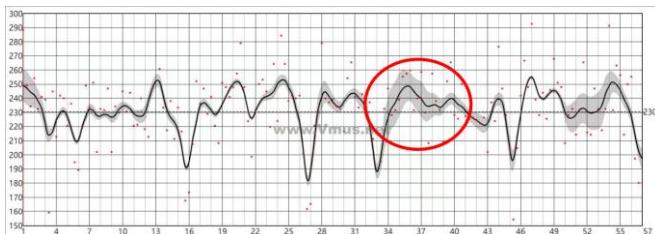


Figure 12: Marc-André Hamelin: Tempo-Dynamic Analysis Chart for the Development Section of the Fourth Movement

2.2.5 Timbre Control

“Musical elements are indispensable in the performance of most instruments. If intonation is the foundational element, then timbre can be considered a high-level factor crucial to performance expression.” The “Sonata in G Major” consists of four movements, and the three pianists exhibit different performance characteristics in their interpretation of each movement.

First is Jeno Jando’s performance. He grew up in mid-20th century Hungary, an era of prosperous musical culture and a well-established piano education system. The Hungarian piano school is renowned for its unique style and rigorous teaching system. Therefore, his performance style is classical and elegant, focusing on musical structure and line, adept at revealing the connotation of the work through subtle touch and precise rhythm, and interpreting the work’s inherent style

well. When performing the “Sonata in G Major,” he employs a more articulated (pearly) playing method, enhancing the sense of urgency in the music, particularly evident in his handling of dotted rhythms and triplets. As a scholar-performer, Jando has an extremely precise grasp of the work’s structure, likely benefiting from his profound academic background. In timbre treatment, he can present warm and penetrating qualities while controlling the layers and dynamic variations of sound through exquisite touch technique. His performance style cleverly blends the elegance of classical music with the dynamism of modern music, giving the music a unique artistic charm.

In Anton Kuerti’s performance, great attention is paid to the connection of timbre between melodic lines. Through smooth connection between notes, he achieves natural transitions in timbre, resulting in a highly cantabile (singing) performance effect. As an important figure in the European and American music scene from the mid-20th to early 21st centuries, Kuerti, under the influence of diverse musical styles, gradually developed a unique performance style and artistic philosophy. His timbre is deep and powerful, with a firm and controlled touch, capable of precisely adjusting the intensity and color of the sound. His performance style inherits the rigor and depth of the German-Austrian piano school while incorporating the passion and poetry of Romanticism. When handling rhythmic elements like syncopation, Kuerti always centers on the music’s cantabile quality, avoiding the disruption of the natural flow by overemphasizing dynamics or rhythmic accents. Through skillful timbre variations, he successfully shapes rich musical images, allowing listeners to deeply feel the power and emotion contained within the music.

Hamelin’s performance is known for its slowest tempo among the three versions. His timbre is bright and highly penetrating, exhibiting a unique and adventurous performance style. He particularly emphasizes using the natural weight of the arm and hand, combined with wrist rotation for leverage, while precisely controlling the power of the knuckle joints and the variations in speed levels. In his playing, the fingers achieve a subtle balance between independence and correlation, capable of producing delicate and transparent effects in fast passages, while perfectly blending the timbre within chords. His finger movements, though subtle, are highly effective, allowing him to easily navigate difficult sections with large intervallic leaps and complex textures. This philosophy of playing technique offers profound reflection and reference for the long-standing domestic piano pedagogy that often overemphasizes high finger lifting.

3. Conclusion

Through the comparative analysis of three performance versions, this study reveals the impact of differences in ornamentation notation, rhythmic markings, and detailed treatments on musical interpretation. Version studies not only broaden the understanding of performance practices for Haydn’s works but also provide richer perspectives on the evolution of interpretation under different historical contexts. However, as this study’s analysis of early original editions and manuscripts is relatively limited, certain historical issues, such as the evolution of ornamentation marking systems and rhythmic treatment methods, still require further investigation.

Future research could utilize more original edition materials, combined with perspectives from music philology and historical performance practice, to conduct in-depth analyses of the similarities and differences between various versions. Furthermore, integrating experimental performance research methods to explore performance techniques more systematically will help deepen the understanding of performance styles in Classical period piano works. By expanding the scope of research, deepening version analysis, and combining it with experimental exploration in performance practice, we can not only gain a more comprehensive understanding of Haydn's piano works but also provide more practically significant theoretical support for the performance and teaching of classical music.

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