

Shakespeare's Presence in Violin Repertoire: A study of Ysaÿe's *Poème élégiaque* and Beyond.

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL INTRODUCTION

Considering the appearance of my musical trajectory throughout the last recent years in the Netherlands, I have come to realize that what really drives my musical curiosity is the will to dig into the depths of diverse artistic influences and ideas within the music I perform; finding an existing correlation between music and the rest of art disciplines. Hence, my interest and attraction for the concept "*program music*" is an idea I wish to investigate and implement in my way of playing.

On the other hand, I am aware of the wideness of this very distinct approach to music playing. I have been considering confining the original intention of this paper into a more specific concept of interdisciplinary art and music, such as literature as an object of attention towards the music that has been composed for violin repertoire.

Context in terms of "*Program Music*"

Since the beginning of program music in the XIX century, composers have been significantly influenced by the beauty and visceral power of drama and tragedy, so idiosyncratic from the Romantics, when artists would dream about the inspiration evoked by the nostalgia and the anti-present sentiment. Delusion and void would be filled by ancient ideas coming from the Classical Greek times and Renaissance Period.

The dramatic genre or "theater" ruled as the main literary genre in both periods as it originated in Classical Greece. Program music met at once the English renaissance dramaturgist William Shakespeare, when those composers made use of the so-called romantic feature "*glorification of the past*" and their emphasis on emotional suffering, being love and death the main topics to be inspired on. Shakespeare's works were used as a major exponent in program music.

Studying Ysaÿe's *Poème élégiaque* inspired by *Romeo and Juliet* Theoretical and Practical framework

As well as it sounds “*élégiaque*” or “*elegy*” is a borrowing from middle French, etymologically coming from ancient greek, meaning “*poem of lamentation for the death in mournful style*”¹. Elegy based on the death of the well-known tragedy drama *Romeo and Juliet* by W. Shakespeare. Taking Ysaÿe’s piece title as a description I want to investigate how his concept of program music works here.

In a theoretical research context, I want to investigate the relation Ysaÿe felt with Shakespeare; what did *Romeo and Juliet* mean to Ysaÿe? Under what circumstances did Ysaÿe composed such a piece? What did the terms such as *tragedy*, *love* and *death* evoked in him? And ultimately, what is the straight and technical compositional relation between the music written as program music and the literature written in the play *Romeo and Juliet*? Did Ysaÿe keep those ideas, concepts and influences throughout his life as a composer? We are talking, after all, about a piece that took him over ten years of his life to complete, starting at the adult age of 36.

It is, in other words, the curiosity that arises within myself that makes me want to discover the depths of Ysaÿe’s musical language that is so very unique from the rest of his contemporaries and how he inspired himself to create this monumental musical poem. By studying, analyzing, practicing, performing, showing, disseminating and disclosing his “*Poème élégiaque*” op.12 as the working process of this paper and core piece of my research, I think I would be able to understand and explore what the program music offered to the violin literature during Ysaÿe’s times.

From the empirical practice point of view, a fair description of what I now want to do is exploring the possibilities of interaction between the musician and the audience through program music. *What can I do as a musician to acquire an engaged audience during my performance?*

This research project will become one important endeavor in my musical development where I believe I will learn more about how to offer this particular performance event, learning how to formulate a musical-literary bridge between the music that is being heard and the story behind it.

Sequentially, I aim to design a dynamic feedback loop between the performer and the listener where I establish a symbiotic reciprocal relationship, fostering a shared and an interactive spoken momentum and an exclusively musical experience in a performance setting.

¹ “Elegy, N., Etymology.” Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, June 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4412133169>.

RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS and CORE QUESTION

I believe there are quite some elements to take into account when formulating the research question as the core of this paper, following the sub-questions, objectives towards the final result and the theoretical hypothesis following the empirical practice.

- **Research Topic – broad subject to be investigated**

- Program music

- The theoretical study:

- How can I relate literature (> Drama as the main literary genre) to program music composed for violin repertoire?

- What is the relation between the music composed to the literature according to the composer?

- How can I propose an applied and empirical practice of these concepts in a real performance? How would I connect text (literature) with performance (music)

- The practice:

- How can I propose an applied and empirical practice of these concepts in a real performance? How would I connect text (literature) with performance (music)

- **Research Problem – broad subject within a more specific topic**

- Program music composed for violin repertoire (taking Ysaÿe's piece as an example) based on Romeo and Juliet

- The theoretical study:

- What is the method Ysaÿe followed in order to do justice to the actual story that is written as a play (with words, in dialogue) through music as a different disciplinary art?

- What musical language uses Ysaÿe to undertake the elegy (in terms of harmony, compositional language, textures, expressions, range...etc)?

How did Ysaÿe get inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*? What is the story behind this piece? Is there any correspondence between Ysaÿe and someone else where he talks about the piece, work in progress during the composition or his influences?

The practice:

How can the plays written by Shakespeare relate to program music written for violin during a performance?

- **Research Purpose – a statement of the intent or purpose of the study**

The theoretical study:

I want to find more information about violin program music related to Shakespeare's works explaining the origins of those compositions or the reason why they were composed.

The practice:

To encourage violinists like me into understanding and performing this sort of repertoire in a more analytical and contextualized way.

- **Artistic Connection – connection to your own artistic practice or development**

- **Interaction between the audience and the musician in a performance**

How can **I** propose an applied and empirical practice of these concepts in a real performance? (How would I connect text (literature) with performance (music))

How can **a musician** show to the audience the message that hides in the music intended by the composer.

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- **Research Question – an interrogative sentence that asks a question about...**

My ultimate goal as a performer is to make people enjoy the music I play.

I think it is very important to present the music while explaining where the music comes from for a greater experience.

So, how can I complement the music I perform with the topic of the repertoire, the composer's and writer's presence and the engagement of the audience during a concert?

METHODS

Schematic overview of theoretical and practical framework *modus operandi*:

Theoretical Framework

REVIEWING LITERATURE

Relevant literature provides exposure to the research problem, it may enhance knowledge I already had about certain aspects of the topic and it consolidates the coherence between the result of my studies and those of the others.² Ideas I have come across by skimming data

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

- Scores, manuscripts and early printed editions (First edition 1893)
- Musical or spoken audio recording
- Letters or correspondence (Ysaye's correspondence with X person, especially about this piece)
- Autobiography
- Film footage of rehearsals
- Personal Journal

²Info taken from <https://guides.library.illinoisstate.edu/music/typesofsources>

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

- Biographies
- Review articles
- Critical essay about people or past events

C. TERTIARY SOURCES

- Bibliography
- Discography

List of reading to check out, some titles taken from the website *tandfonline.com* (look at references)³:

1. Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 127.
2. Scher, "Literature and Music," 229–36.
3. Steve Paul Scher, "Literature and Music," in *Interrelations of Literature*, ed. Jean-Pierre Barricelli and Joseph Gibaldi (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1982), 225–50.
See also Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).
4. Julie Thompson Klein and Richard Parncutt, "Art and Music Research," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Carl Mitcham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142.
5. For a definition of this program music contract, see James Hepokoski, "Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's Don Juan Reinvestigated," in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 136–37.

Other sources and websites to look at:

1. Research Catalog⁴
2. Books, articles and other online sources at Yale University Library Research Guides⁵

³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01411896.2016.1268900>

⁴ <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/>

⁵ <https://guides.library.yale.edu/music-research/books-reference>

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3. Oxford Music Online⁶
 4. Jstor⁷
 5. WorldCat⁸

Practical Framework

I have thought about a number of activities I would like to accomplish in order to determine how to achieve an enjoyable interaction between the musician and the audience where everyone delights in the music and the story behind it. There are three different activities where I would test this approach:

1. Narrative Concerts: Create a musical narrative and encourage the audience to interpret and discuss the story. Use multimedia elements like visuals or spoken word to enhance the storytelling
2. Musical Q&A: Include a Q&A session where musicians explain their creative process and answer audience questions. Encourage the audience to suggest themes or emotions for improvisational segments.
3. Musical Workshops: Conduct workshops where musicians and the public collaborate on short musical projects. Foster a sense of co-creation and exploration during these interactive sessions

● How would I collect feedback?

Feedback can be collected from the audience after a concert through various channels such as online surveys, social media polls, or setting up a designated feedback area at the venue for written comments.

Engaging directly with listeners through post-concert interactions or encouraging them to share thoughts on the performance can also be effective. In order to do so, I have ideated tasks that will allow me to deduce immediate feedback.

1. Leveraging technology by creating a dedicated section on a website for concert feedback; utilizing email newsletters to gather opinions, or even exploring specialized feedback apps.

⁶ <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>

⁷ <https://www.jstor.org/>

⁸ <https://www.worldcat.org/es>

2. Encouraging the listeners to use event-specific hashtags on social media platforms would allow real-time feedback and create a sense of community around the concert experience.
3. Hosting a live Q&A session on social media platforms where listeners can share their thoughts and ask questions about the concert.
4. Creating a post-concert survey with a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions can also provide more detailed insights into the audience's experience.

TIMELINE

