CRITICAL STUDY OF TWO PIANO TRANSCRIPTIONS BY AUGUST STRADAL AND
THE TRANSCRIPTIONS’ SOURCES: ALTERATIONS TO THE SCORE BASED ON
HISTORICAL EVIDENCE AND ARTISTIC JUDGEMENT

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2015

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Vizcarra, Juan Guillermo. *Critical Study of Two Piano Transcriptions by August Stradal and the Transcriptions’ Sources: Alterations to the Score Based on Historical Evidence and Artistic Judgment*. Doctor of Musical Arts (Performance), May 2015, 35 pp., 15 musical examples, bibliography, 6 titles.

The fact that a number of pianists of the past two centuries adapted, embellished, and rearranged piano works for performance, be these original works or transcriptions, has been well documented throughout history. This thought, in addition to the fact that Stradal’s scores needed revision, encouraged me to make alterations to Stradal’s transcriptions and served as a strong incentive to write the current study. In it, I will comment on the alterations performed to segments of Stradal’s piano transcriptions of Wagner’s *Schluß der letzten Aufzuges* (End of the last Act) from *Siegfried* and *Trauermusik aus dem letzten Aufzug* (Siegfried’s Funeral March) from *Götterdämmerung*. These changes have the purpose of reflecting in the piano as closely as possible the sonorous reality of the transcriptions’ operatic sources and, by doing so, making Stradal’s arrangements more effective for performance.
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By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With my deepest gratitude to my major professor, Joseph Banowetz, and to the members of my committee, Dr. Pamela Paul, Dr. Steven Harlos, and Professor Adam Wodnicki for their support, help, and invaluable advise during the preparation of this study. Also, I would like to express my everlasting gratitude to my wonderful sister, Vickyta, and to Dr. Mi-Jin Kim for their generosity, caring, and constant support throughout the duration of my doctoral studies.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Critical Study

Following in the steps of Franz Liszt, who wrote one hundred and ninety-three transcriptions for the piano, the pianist-composer, and student of Liszt, August Stradal, wrote an enormous number of piano adaptations of works of a wide variety of composers ranging from Buxtehude to Mahler. According to Mark-André Roberge, Stradal wrote around two hundred and fifty piano transcriptions.¹ In the chapter “Transcriptions for Piano,” David Wilde quotes Liszt’s preface to the edition of his transcriptions of Beethoven’s nine symphonies. Liszt writes:

The name of Beethoven is sacred in art. His Symphonies are now universally acknowledged to be masterpieces…. For this reason every way or manner of making them accessible and popular has a certain merit…..²

Besides the known value of piano transcriptions as vehicles for exploration of new possibilities in piano writing and playing, Liszt’s thoughts further validate and ennoble the efforts of composers who, like him, venture to undertake the complicated task of adapting well known masterworks to a different medium from the one for which they were primarily intended.

Between the years of 2011-2013, while choosing repertoire for my second and third DMA recitals at UNT, and for a personal recording project, I became acquainted with the largely unknown virtuoso piano transcriptions of August Stradal. Almost from the beginning I became interested in his transcriptions of full segments of operas and songs of Richard Wagner. During the preparation of the chosen repertoire I encountered a number of problems, which needed unusual solutions. The issues primarily involved discrepancies between Stradal’s original text of

¹ Marc-André Roberge, “From Orchestra to Piano: Major Composers as Authors of Piano Reductions of Other Composers’ Works,” *Notes*, Second Series 49, no. 3 (March 1993): 926.
his piano transcriptions and the transcriptions’ sources (Wagner’s operatic scores). Due to the extreme complexity of Stradal’s transcriptions in terms of texture, technical challenges, and due to a lack of instrumentation guides in his Wagner piano arrangements, it became unavoidable to proceed with a detailed comparison between Stradal's edition of his original works (the existence of manuscripts of these pieces is unknown) and the sources used for the realization of his piano transcriptions.

By comparing both scores, it became evident that, in several instances, the vocal solo line or some other part of the source's texture was not included by Stradal in his arrangements. After learning, practicing, and performing these pieces, in the way Stradal originally wrote them, I couldn't ignore the reality that something important was missing. Due to an intuitive and informed awareness of this reality it became necessary, in order to make Stradal's arrangements more effective for performance, to make changes, reorganize the texture, and make additions to the text of his transcriptions.

The fact that a number of pianists of the past two centuries adapted, embellished, and rearranged piano works for performance, be these original works or transcriptions, has been well documented throughout history. This thought, in addition to the fact that Stradal’s scores needed revision, encouraged me to make alterations to Stradal’s transcriptions and served as a strong incentive to write the current study. In it, I will comment on the alterations performed to segments of Stradal’s piano transcriptions of Wagner’s Schluß der letzten Aufzuges (End of the last Act) from Siegfried and Trauermusik aus dem letzten Aufzug (Siegfried’s Funeral March) from Götterdämmerung. These changes have the purpose of reflecting in the piano as closely as possible the sonorous reality of the transcriptions’ operatic sources and, by doing so, making Stradal’s arrangements more effective for performance.
The reasons behind Stradal’s exclusion of part of the sources’ instrumental texture and important vocal material in his arrangements are unknown to me; one could only speculate in order to create a possible hypothesis. In this regard it could be argued that, as a possible motive, he considered that the inclusion of this material could complicate the texture of the transcriptions excessively, making them too difficult to perform. Also, as an additional possible reason, it could be claimed that he underestimated the harmonic impact that the excluded material has on the overall resultant color of some segments of his transcriptions. In any event, due to a lack of evidence supporting Stradal’s choice of material for the realization of his transcriptions, the real reasons behind his choices will remain in obscurity until further evidence is brought to light.
Method

There has been practically no effort to explore the musical and performance aspects of most of Stradal’s piano transcriptions. The gap in the scholarly literature concerning his transcriptions could be attributed to a degree of unawareness on part of the musical community regarding him and his work, and to his transcriptions’ tremendous musical and technical demands on the pianist.

The method for developing this study will be based on finding solutions to the problems raised by the discrepancies between Stradal’s original text of two of his transcriptions, and the transcriptions’ source. The study will briefly present important biographical information about Stradal and his work as a transcriber, including relevant evidence regarding the different performance philosophies of important musical figures of the past two centuries. Finally, after commenting on the problems which arose due to the discrepancies between the scores, I will present in graphic examples and further commentaries solutions to the issues. The solutions, mainly alterations to Stradal’s text, have the ultimate purpose of making Stradal’s transcriptions more effective for performance by resembling, as closely as possible, the sonorous reality of their source.

CHAPTER 2

AUGUST STRADAL – A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

August Stradal was born in May of 1860 in Teplitz, north of Bohemia, and died at Schönlinde in March 13 of 1930. He studied composition with Anton Bruckner and piano with Anton Door and, in 1884, he became a pupil of Franz Liszt.\(^3\) By 1896 he was already recognized as a notable pianist in Europe, as well as a highly respected interpreter of Liszt’s piano works. By that time, Stradal was already performing in important venues in Europe, being a guest artist in recital series which presented performances of pianists of the stature of Moriz Rosenthal and Alfred Reisenauer.\(^4\) His core repertoire consisted of a number of Liszt’s works, including many of his piano transcriptions of Schubert’s lieder. In the book *Franz Liszts Werke*, Stradal writes about Liszt’s compositions in general and, when writing about his piano transcriptions, he considered his arrangements of Schubert’s lieder as an important milestone in Liszt’s understanding of the art of the piano transcription.\(^5\) *The Musical Times* of January, 1896 comments on Stradal’s solo performance at the Steinway Hall in London, on November 26 of 1895: “the program… consisted of compositions and transcriptions by Liszt, Schubert’s songs and three studies on themes by Paganini. All these were interpreted with a measure of conscientiousness worthy of that earnest Liszt disciple, the late Walter Bache.”\(^6\)

Parallel with his career as a pianist, Stradal transcribed for the piano a considerable number of orchestral and vocal compositions, which were highly regarded by musicians of his time. The pianist and arranger, Harry Hodges, writes about Stradal’s piano transcriptions of

Johann Sebastian Bach’s six Brandenburg concertos: “the six Concertos were arranged for pianoforte solo by my friend, August Stradal, and published by Schuberth, Leipzig. Stradal’s arrangement is much better than that of Max Reger’s for four hands….”

Besides arranging for the pianoforte a great deal of Bach’s music, Stradal also transcribed for the piano a significant number of Richard Wagner’s chamber, orchestra, and operatic works. The high quality and great quantity of his Wagner transcriptions reflect Stradal’s confidence in the effectiveness of the piano as a medium for delivering the dramatic content of Wagner’s music. Stradal's Wagner transcriptions for solo piano, which unfortunately have been largely and undeservedly neglected in modern times, certainly hold a high degree of importance in the piano literature repertoire of this genre. They are the largest group of virtuosic piano transcriptions of full segments of Wagner's operas ever realized by a single composer. Among his significant contributions to the piano repertoire are his transcriptions of full segments of the four operas of Der Ring Des Nibelungen, including Siegmund’s Love-Song, The Ride of the Valkyries, Forest Murmurs, Rhine Journey, Siegfried’s Funeral March and the ends of the four works of this tetralogy (which are considerably long segments, each ranging between 15 to 20 minutes in length), the five Wesendonk Lieder, and a number of transcriptions and fantasies of Lohengrin, Der Fliegende Holländer, Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen, Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Tannhäuser, and Parsifal; most of it tremendously difficult to play.

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Throughout history, pianists have approached both originally written works for the piano and transcriptions such as Stradal’s Wagner piano arrangements, with different performance philosophies. The evidence suggests two conflicting positions regarding the performance of any written composition. On one side, there are some major figures who followed a free approach to performance, thus allowing themselves to change the text of a work in order to make it fit their personality or to make the composition sound more effective. On the other side, there are those representing a more conservative approach, restraining themselves from making any change to the written notes of a composition, therefore standing for the sanctity of the score.

Artur Schnabel’s position in regard to this matter is one example of a purist approach to performance. In the book *Schnabel’s Interpretation of Piano Music*, Konrad Wolff wrote about Schnabel’s views: “Schnabel insisted that...The pitch indications, which and how many notes to play, except for embellishments, tremolos, etc., are completely strict.” Wolff adds further: “Schnabel believed that the increasing number of instructions in Beethoven’s later works was a sign of skepticism about his interpreters…Schnabel considered the con amabilità at the beginning of Op. 110 as warning against ‘thick’ tone; the semplice in the second movement of Op. 111 as a cautioning against excessive rubato.” Schnabel’s position regarding the sanctity of the score is further evidenced in the editorial comments of his edition of Beethoven’s piano sonatas. Commenting on Beethoven’s hand distribution on a specific passage of Op. 110’s first movement, Schnabel dogmatically writes: “The manner in which these figures are apportioned to

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9 Ibid, 74.
both hands is prescribed by Beethoven and for that reason alone it should not be substituted by another one.”

Frederic Chopin’s position regarding the interpretation of his music by other artists constitutes an interesting case. In the article In Search of Chopin, Alexandra Mullen quotes Moriz Karasowski’s report concerning the different performing styles of Chopin and Liszt. Karasowski writes: “One evening…Liszt played one of Chopin’s nocturnes, to which he took the liberty of adding some embellishments…” Muller continues with Karasowski’s report of Chopin’s reaction to Liszt’s performance: “I beg you, my dear friend, when you do me the honor of playing my compositions, to play them as they are written or else not at all…Then Chopin began to improvise and played for nearly and hour…When he left the piano…Liszt was deeply affected, and said to Chopin… ‘Yes, my friend, you were right; works like yours ought not to be meddled with…’ ‘Oh, it is nothing,’ returned Chopin, gaily, ‘We each have our own style.’ “ It is evident that Chopin disapproved of any changes made in his music by fellow artists. However, the evidence provided by Jean-Jaesques Eigeldinger in the book Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by his Pupils suggests that Chopin allowed many different kinds of changes, when those were written down by him for musical, technical, performing, or pedagogical purposes. Eigeldinger’s section ‘Appendix II: Annotated scores belonging to pupils and associates of Chopin’ highlights the importance of these collections of Chopin’s music, especially those belonging to his student, Jane Stirling. The Stirling scores contain a number of annotations on Chopin’s music made by the composer himself. They contain changes in notes, dynamics, fingerings, cuts and deletions, insertions, additions, modifications, redistributions, facilitations

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12 Ibid.
for performance, etc., on a number of his works.\textsuperscript{14} In this regard Eišgeldinger writes: “The Stirling scores assume exceptional significance not merely because of the many corrections and annotations they contain, but above all because they constitute a unique \textit{corpus} of Chopin’s \textit{oeuvre}, probably assembled and corrected under Chopin’s supervision…”\textsuperscript{15}

The reports of Franz Liszt’s performances evidence his free approach to performance. In the article \textit{Liszt’s Interpreting of Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas}, William Newman writes: “Nearly every contemporary mention of his playing includes reference to liberties he took with the music… In part these liberties must have reflected his immediate involvement in the music. They took the form especially of rhythmic freedom or what Berlioz called ‘excessive rhythmic fluidity,’ of changes in the composer’s editorial advices or additions to them, and of enrichment of the texture and scoring for reasons of virtuosity or fuller sonority.”\textsuperscript{16} Further ahead in the article, Newman shares Wendelin Weiβheimer’s reminiscences of Liszt’s performance of Beethoven’s Op.106 in Weimar, 1858. Newman writes: “The order of Weiβheimer’s four-page account takes up the \textit{adagio sostenuto} before the \textit{scherzo}, leaving the impression that Liszt actually inverted the order of those inner movements. Especially effective were the cantabile section in D major…and the stunning conversion of the final six trills to octave trills in both hands, complete with suffixes.”\textsuperscript{17}

Following the philosophy of Liszt, Percy Grainger’s edition of Edvard Grieg’s Piano Concerto Op. 16 is an example of different degrees of alterations made to a work in order to achieve a more effective performance. Grainger’s edition of this concerto is the result of his experience rehearsing it with Grieg as preparation for their planned collaborative performances.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 208.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 197.
\end{flushleft}
of the work in Europe—collaboration that was prevented due to Grieg’s death in 1907. Grainger wrote in the foreword of his edition: “The alterations and suggestions fall into three classes: (1) Those written by Grieg himself into my score of the concerto…(marked E.G in this edition). (2) Those suggested to Grieg by me and approved by him…(marked P.G. – E.G. in this edition). (3) Those of purely technical nature, not submitted to Grieg by me, but here offered to students as more effective or easier of execution than are the passages in question in their original forms (marked P.G in this edition).” The end of the first movement’s exposition is an example that falls into the second class of Grainger’s alterations. In this segment (2 measures before rehearsal D, in the piano part) Grainger rearranges the ascending groups of quintuplets written originally by Grieg. Grainger makes them more effective for performance by transforming them into groups of even thirty-second notes (8 notes per beat), and by redistributing the group’s notes between both hands.

Vladimir Horowitz’s rearrangement of the texture of Pictures of an Exhibition by Mussorgsky is one of the abundant recorded examples reflecting a free approach to performance. In the book Evenings with Horowitz David Dubal commented on Horowitz’s rearrangement of Mussorgsky’s Pictures of an Exhibition. Dubal writes: “Horowitz enlarged Mussorgsky’s sound and texture in the Pictures. Purists persist in hating it, but the impact is awesome and is so perfectly Horowitzian in manner that it must be judged on his terms.”

After exploring the previous reports referring to the different approaches to performance, an inquiry for the validity of each position is certainly valid. It is well known that this debate

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid, 11-12.
continues even to the present day, and that a certain amount of weight has been added on towards the side of the purists –this can be easily demonstrated by the growing popularization and general acceptance of the *urtext* editions, which started to be available since the second half of the last century and since then have radically changed the way in which musicians approach the study of the baroque, classical, and romantic repertoire. However, reading the reports the of Liszt’s performances, by carefully reviewing performer’s editions like Grainger’s on Grieg’s piano concerto, or by listening to some of Horowitz’s recordings in which he rearranged some of the works he played, it is certainly most difficult to deny the artistic validity of the changes, additions, and rearrangements they made. This issue is far from being resolved. It might very well never be. As the much missed José Feghali once told me during one of my lessons with him at TCU when commenting on hand redistribution in one of Chopin’s *Preludes Op. 28*: “the hammers do not care if you strike the key with your fingertips or with your elbows.”
CHAPTER 4
ACCOUNT OF THE ALTERATIONS MADE TO TWO TRANSCRIPTIONS OF AUGUST STRADAL

The following account of alterations made to two of Stradal’s transcriptions will show evidence of the additions and changes realized on a number of segments of these works. The chosen segments reflect only partially the whole body of alterations to which these two pieces were subjected. These were chosen due to their evident impact on the design of a particular segment, due to the clarity with which these would stand to the ears and eyes of the reader, and due to the simplicity of notation that these would represent for the purposes of this critical study. A considerable number of these alterations have been omitted due to the convoluted nature of their notation, or because they do not represent a significant impact on the design of a particular segment.

When comparing the original text of Stradal’s transcription of Wagner’s Schluss des letzten Aufzuges (End of the last Act) from Siegfried with its orchestral source, several discrepancies between both texts became evident. The first discrepancy can be observed between measures 11-20 of his arrangement. In it, Stradal’s does not include Brünnhilde’s vocal line. See examples 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.
Ex. 4.1.1 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s original text
Ex 4.1.2 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s text with the addition of Brünnhilde’s vocal line. (The thirty-second notes tremolo should be interrupted briefly while playing the additions of an eight-note value. In measures 16,18,19,20, due to the difference of register between the additions and the original text of the arrangement, the tremolo should be slightly interrupted while playing the additional notes)
As can be observed in example 4.1.1, Stradal’s transcription mostly reflects the instrumental section between pages 335-336 of Wagner’s opera.\(^{23}\) In order to make Stradal’s arrangement conform as closely as possible to its source, as shown in example 4.1.2, it became necessary to include the soprano’s vocal line into the transcription’s segment. In doing so I kept as much as possible Stradal’s organization of his arrangement in the register he wrote it, while inserting Brünnhilde’s line in a similar register to that of Stradal’s transcription and, when needed, higher than it. The complications for performance resulting from these additions are evident. The main difficulties are related to keeping the *tremolo* figuration of the right hand softer than Brünnhilde’s vocal line, in some cases, displacing the right hand between two registers in order to play Brünnhilde’s line and Stradal’s arrangement almost simultaneously and, as shown in mm. 18-20, keeping a distinct balance between the four layers of the resulting new texture. As a purely harmonic aspect, the addition of the vocal line into Stradal’s arrangement further contributes to the enrichment of the arrangement’s harmonic color. This can be seen in m. 13 of the segment; the performed alteration includes in the right hand a G-sharp over the third beat. In the right hand, the added G-sharp acts as a passing note between the previous A and following F-sharp, creating a colorful dissonance against the continuous D dominant seventh harmony of the measure.

Next, between mm. 102-105 of the transcription, Stradal’s original text partially reflects the sonorous reality of page 347 of Wagner’s setting.\(^{24}\) In his transcription, Stradal excludes and metrically displaces some of the pitches of Brünnhilde’s vocal line, omits part of the


\(^{24}\) Ibid, 347.
instrumental section of the segment, and changes the dynamic and expressive markings of his source. Besides leaving out and displacing part of the soprano’s line, his arrangement also omits part of the sustaining harmonic support provided by the horns and bassoons, and by the string and woodwind sections of Wagner’s setting. Due to the absence of these elements throughout the duration of these measures, Stradal’s arrangement evidences a lack of continuous harmonic support, creating an acoustic vacuum in the ear. As in the previous example, to solve the discrepancies between Stradal’s and Wagner’s texts it became necessary to make some changes and additions to the piano transcription. These alterations involved restructuring the upper voice of the arrangement to include part of Brünnhilde’s vocal line, substituting the dynamic and expressive markings of his transcription with those markings indicated in the source, and including a number of tremolo figurations that, without disrupting the architecture of his arrangement, could resemble the sustaining and driving effect produced by the horns, bassoons, and string and woodwind sections of Wagner’s orchestration. See example 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.

Ex. 4.2.1 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s original text
Ex. 4.2.2, End of Siegfried: Stradal’s text with the rearrangement and completion of Brünnhilde’s vocal line, changing of dynamic markings, and addition of tremolo figurations. (The tremolos should be played immediately after playing the chord or octave in the left hand. In the right hand staff, the eight-note and quarter-note rests after the added D of measure 102 should be ignored)

As shown in example 4.2.2, the change of the dynamic markings, the inclusion of tremolos in the left hand to simulate the sustained harmony needed in the segment, and the metrical rearrangement and addition of some of the pitches of the vocal line all complement with the architecture of Stradal’s arrangement. It can be argued that, as a further commentary, Stradal’s inclusion of two long pedal markings in his setting, throughout the length of measures 103 and 104, argue for the necessity of sustaining the harmonic support provided by the chords of beat one of both measures with the purpose of imitating the harmonic sustain of Wagner’s setting. On trying the original text of Stradal’s arrangement, without making any addition or change to it, I noticed that his pedal and dynamic indications do sustain the harmony but, after each first beat, due to the nature of the piano, the sound decays considerably fast, leaving an
acoustic vacuum. The inclusion of *tremolo* figures in the low register, and the changes of the dynamic and expressive markings solve this problem making Stradal’s setting conform more closely to its source, without altering much of its design.

Next, between measures 164 and 171 of the piano transcription, Stradal’s version once again omits Brünnhilde’s vocal line. Stradal’s transcription mainly reflects the instrumental section of the source, but for unknown reasons he doesn’t include the vocal line, which presents an expressive melodic gesture and beautifully counterpoints the melody of the oboe and clarinet of the source’s score. See example 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

Ex. 4.3.1 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s original text. (The right hand’s top voice presents a well-realized transcription of the oboe’s and clarinet’s melodic line)
Ex. 4.3.2 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s text with the addition of Brünnhilde’s vocal line. (In measure 167, the lower Eb of beat one in the right hand staff can be omitted. In the right hand staff, beat one of measure 168; the added Ab octave should be played slightly after placing the lower Bb minor chord on the first beat of the measure)

As shown by example 4.3.1, Stradal chose to include in his arrangement only the melodic line of the oboe and clarinet, which is accompanied by his left hand’s piano adaptation of the harps’ texture. The transcription of the source’s instrumental material is very well realized by Stradal and by itself works very well in the piano, but when comparing it with the source one
realizes that something important is missing. In this case the missing portion is once again Brünnhilde’s vocal line. Example 4.3.2 shows the addition of the missing vocal line. The simplicity of the line’s melodic design, which, as shown in the example, has been placed in the higher register of the arrangement, completes and solidifies the overall atmosphere and color of the segment. Furthermore, besides the overall aural effect achieved by the addition of the vocal line to Stradal’s text, the performed alteration makes Stradal’s arrangement richer in terms of the musical information that the new three layers’ texture presents.

Between measures 308-311, the attacks of each one of the beats in Stradal’s transcription correspond clearly with those on the original source. In this segment, his arrangement very effectively reflects the melodic contour of the source, but due to the exclusion of the source’s sixteen-note figurations of the violins’ and violas’ texture, the overall effect of this segment leaves an acoustic impression of verticality, rather than the desired forward motion that this section requires. It would be suggested, due to the textural discrepancy between both scores, to include the corresponding sixteenth-note figuration in each of the right hand’s octaves of Stradal’s arrangement. See example 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.
Ex. 4.4.1 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s original text

Ex. 4.4.2 End of Siegfried: Stradal arrangement with the addition of the strings’ sixteenth-note figuration. (The notes between parentheses can be omitted)

As it could have been observed, by comparing the previous two examples, the addition of the violas’ and violins’ sixteenth-note figurations of example 4.4.2 basically complements
Stradal’s arrangement without interfering with the transcription’s melodic outline. Additionally, the performed rearrangement and addition contributes to the enlargement of the sonority of the segment and provides forward motion to it, thus contributing to the implied musical excitement of the passage.

Next, an alteration has been performed to Stradal’s arrangement between measures 312-313, and to the corresponding segment between measures 322-323. This final section of the transcription, which could be considered as a coda, presents a combination of many of the motives previously heard in the work, which at this time are presented in a faster tempo and with more intricate contrapuntal textures. By designing these segments with a texture constructed with full chordal sonorities, Stradal evidently intends to make these sections of his transcription sound considerably louder and with a distinct and accented articulation – as is indicated by the \textit{FF martellato e grandioso} marking on his setting. Aside from the unusual, but well-designed and overly virtuosic texture of these segments, Stradal’s arrangement is in divergence with its orchestral source. By looking at Wagner’s score it becomes apparent that in his setting he intended a somewhat less \textit{grandioso} character and a sonority less massive and percussive than the one reflected by Stradal’s arrangement; this is clearly evidenced by the source’s orchestration and dynamic markings (\textit{P}). In order to solve the discrepancy between both texts, an alteration reflecting a degree of conflation between Stradal’s transcription and its source has been effected. See example 4.5.1 and 4.5.2.
Ex. 4.5.1 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s original text

Ex. 4.5.2 End of Siegfried: Stradal’s arrangement conflated with some of the instrumental texture of the source
As illustrated in the previous examples, the conflation of both texts allows Stradal’s transcription to reflect some of the orchestral colors present in the source. This procedure leaves untouched the distribution of the transcription’s chordal sonorities that are in charge of carrying out the melodic outline of the segments, which are the chords detached by an accent (Λ). As shown in example 4.5.2, the replacement of the inner chordal sonorities with a texture built of arpeggios in contrary motion in both hands (which contain all the pitches included on the A major seventh harmony), thus imitating the harps’ color of the source, considerably changes the overall effect of the passages (the ascending arrows refer to ascending arpeggios, the arrows on a opposite direction refer to descending arpeggios). The arpeggios make this segment sound more harmonious and provide a clearer distinction between the melodic contour and the inner harmonic color. As a further benefit, from a purely pianistic standpoint, the arpeggiation of Stradal’s inner chordal sonorities facilitates in a considerable manner the performance of these extremely virtuosic passages, which otherwise, considering the fast tempo of the transcription’s coda, would require from the pianist a high degree of physical energy and unusual acrobatic abilities.

I would like to comment on some of the changes made to Stradal’s transcription Trauermusik aus dem letzten Aufzug (Siegfried’s Funeral March) from Wagner’s Götterdämmerung. Stradal’s transcription of the Funeral March is a work that demands from the pianist a high degree of imagination and flexibility in order to bring out its wide dynamic range and emotional complexity. The following alterations and suggestions have the purpose of making more effective the performance of this work.
The first alteration concerns an important clarification for the performance of Stradal’s text regarding the passages between mm. 50-52 and mm. 56-58 of his piano transcription. In these segments Stradal’s setting very effectively imitates in the piano the sonority of the thematic material exposed by the horns, as well as the cellos’ and basses’ answering gestures of the source’s text. What would somehow seem unclear for the performer is the tremolo marking under the thirty-second notes figuration in the right hand. Due to the speed of the segment, which is of a relatively slow pacing, the performer could be tempted to play the thirty-second note figurations strictly in rhythm. In order to emulate the continuous support of the choral harmonies produced by the tenor and bass tubas of the source, which is somehow missing in Stradal’s setting due to the texture of his arrangement, it is recommended to play the thirty-second notes of the right hand, which simulate the violin and viola sections of the source in their rhythmic design, as rapidly and unmeasured as possible. Playing this accompanying material as an unmeasured tremolo will aid in providing harmonics to the overall sonority of the segment, thus more closely resembling the sustaining tubas’ sonorities simultaneously with the violas’ and violins’ texture in the source. See example 4.6.
Ex. 4.6 Siegfried’s Funeral March: Example suggests playing the right hand thirty-second notes faster than their written note-value

Considering that the main purpose of these figurations is to accompany and harmonically support the melodic material arranged in a conversational manner between the right and left hands in the piano setting, Stradal’s *tremolo* marking very effectively simulates the effect created by the orchestration of the source. Furthermore, Stradal’s *tremolo* marking follows a known performance practice tradition applied to similar passages. In some instances this approach is expected from the performer, even though the segment in question could not be necessarily marked *tremolo* by the composer. A reference to this practice is mentioned in the book *The*
Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt 1884-1886. In it, August Göllerich shares Liszt’s thoughts regarding Göllerich’s performance of Liszt’s Le Triomphe Funèbre du Tasse during his master class of June 19 of 1885 in Weimar. With regard to a passage of Le Triomphe Funèbre du Tasse, which is written similarly to that of Stradal’s arrangement, but lacks of a tremolo marking, Liszt commented: “At bar 20, immediately play a very loud, full, and grand crescendo until the first theme in bar 21, which must be played strictly in time but not too slowly, with long, full tremolos in the bass.”

Continuing further, there is a discrepancy between both scores which can be observed between mm. 161-162 of Stradal’s transcription. In this segment, Stradal’s arrangement reflects only partially the effect displayed between pages 250-253 of the source. In beat one of measure 61, Stradal writes two chords in FF dynamic followed by an eighth-note rest, this is followed by a staccato figuration, two more chords, and a tremolo with a rapid scale figuration between beats two and four. Measure 62 exhibits a similar design. His arrangement very effectively imitates the attacks of all the instruments involved in Wagner’s instrumentation but, due to the inclusion of an eighth-note rest accompanied by a simultaneous release of the damper pedal marking in the second half of beat one, a sudden interruption in the sound is produced and the resemblance to the continuous harmonic pedal provided by the brass and woodwind sections between beats 1 to 4 in Wagner’s orchestration of this segment is not fully achieved. It became necessary, in order to find a solution to the discrepancies between Stradal’s setting and its source, to experiment and explore other possibilities outside of Stradal’s notation. See example 4.7.

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Ex. 4.7 Siegfried’s Funeral March: Addition of the *sostenuto* pedal to Stradal’s setting. (The *sostenuto* should be depressed immediately after striking the first sixteen-note of measure 161; it should be released at the end of measure 162)

As shown in example 4.7, in order to create a similar sustaining effect to the one created by Wagner’s instrumentation, without disrupting any of the notes written by Stradal in his original work, it became necessary, in beat one of measure 61, to add the *sostenuto* pedal to the pedal markings of Stradal’s transcription.\(^{27}\) The addition of the *sostenuto* pedal in the first chord of the measure, besides helping to sustaining the sonority of the harmony throughout the length of mm. 61-62, also aids the execution of the *staccato* figuration in beat two as well as the remaining gestures of the segment with the articulation, sonority, and pedaling intended by Stradal.

Further ahead in the transcription, between mm. 72-74, it will be necessary to hold the low F as a pedal point in order to imitate the prolonged bass resonance written in the orchestral source as a harmonic support for these three measures. Due to the musical complexity of the segment, on which Stradal superposes three of the main ideas heard in the transcription’s

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opening section on top of the supporting low bass sonority, a number of redistributions and a combined use of the three pedals of the piano become a matter of necessity (in this case, the use of the *una corda* would depend of the instrument’s general tone and the acoustics of the hall). In the book *The Pianist’s Guide to Pedaling*, regarding the simultaneous use of the three pedals, specifically commenting on the synchronized use of the *una corda* and *sostenuto* pedals using only the left foot, Joseph Banowetz shares Percy Grainger’s thoughts in this respect: “The player must be freely able to take and release the soft pedal while holding the sustaining pedal, to take and release the sustaining pedal while holding the soft pedal…experience shows that all sizes of feet can master this double-pedal-technique…It is an *absolute necessity* to modern pianism.”

See example 4.8.

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Ex. 4.8 Siegfried’s Funeral March: Simultaneous use of the *una corda* (U.C.), *sostenuto* (S.P.), and damper pedals

I would like to suggest some possible spots in which the performer could use the proposed pedaling combination:

1) Starting in measure 72, slightly before beat 2, depress and hold the *una corda* pedal with the upper left side of the left foot.

2) While holding the *una corda*, depress the *sostenuto* pedal with the upper right side of the left foot. The proposed moment to depress the *sostenuto* pedal is at the first eight-note of beat four in measure 72. This will allow, by slowly releasing and fluttering the damper pedal, to gradually clear out some of the sustained harmonies of the previous three beats, while still managing to catch with the *sostenuto* a relatively clean low F sonority.
3) Keep both pedals depressed throughout the 4th beat of measure 72 until measure 74, releasing the *sostenuto* pedal slightly before the change of harmony in measure 75.

As shown in example 4.8, this segment of the transcription would benefit by holding the low F with the *sostenuto* pedal throughout mm. 72-74 (for this purpose it would be necessary to make a suitable hand redistribution in order to hold the low F). While sustaining the low F as a pedal point, and simultaneously doing full, partial, and fluttering changes with the damper pedal for color and connection, it would be a good idea to use the *una corda* pedal, depending on the hall and the piano, and to keep it depressed throughout the length of the segment to aid in coloring the dark and sinister atmosphere of the passage.

Finally, an important change an addition was made at the end of the transcription. In the last measure, the c minor chord of Stradal’s arrangement has been replaced by six measures inspired by the end of Ludwig Stasny’s *Siegfried’s Tod und Trauer-Marsch* from Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*.29 See example 4.9.1 and 4.9.2.

Ex. 4.9.1 Siegfried’s Funeral March: Stradal’s original ending

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Ex. 4.9.2 Siegfried’s Funeral March: Replacement of Stradal’s last measure with my own transcription of the last six measures of Stasny’s Siegfried’s Tod und Trauer-Marsch

In the source’s score, contrary to what Stradal does in the original text of his transcription, Wagner doesn’t end the section dedicated to Siefried’s funeral music with a c minor chord. On the contrary, Wagner doesn’t resolve the G major seventh harmony of the last measure of page 259; he leaves it suspended and continues the development of the opera’s drama by bringing back with a sinister character, as a distorted reminiscence of the hero’s life, motives related to Siegfried which were previously heard earlier in Götterdämmerung and in the three previous operas of the cycle. The dramatic continuity displayed by Wagner’s setting at the end of this

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section makes Stradal’s placement of a closing c minor chord on the last measure of his transcription sound somehow abrupt, as shown in example 4.9.1. It became necessary, in order to give a more natural conclusion to Stradal’s transcription, to prolong the closure of his arrangement by replacing the last c minor chord with a paraphrase of the last six measures of Stasny’s orchestral paraphrase *Siegfried’s Tod und Trauer-Marsch*, as shown in example 4.9.2. As a tragic reminiscence, the added six measures in c minor bring back the motives heard at the beginning and throughout the development of the segment dedicated to Siegfried’s Funeral March. By adding them to Stradal’s transcription, the disturbing atmosphere evoked in the last page of the arrangement gradually resolves and, due to the extended length of this closure, progressively brings the segment to a convincing and inevitable ending.

By providing a detailed account of the changes made to Stradal's piano transcriptions, by providing an account of the methods used to solve the problems found in his scores, and by grounding the reasons for editing the text of his arrangements on a careful observation and comparison between Stradal's original work and its source, the present critical study aims to inspire the growing number of pianists interested in learning the recently rediscovered music of August Stradal to approach these pieces with a critical mind. Due to differences in pianistic technique, musical imagination and perspectives, and personality, the end result of a fellow colleague's comparison and exploration of these works might bring to light new ways and methods to solve the problems encountered in the performance of Stradal's transcriptions.
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