

Daphne Leong\* and

David Korevaar\*

Get the **free** RealPlayer to hear the audio examples  
and view the video examples.

The Performer's  
Voice: Performance  
and Analysis in  
Ravel's *Concerto pour  
la main gauche*\*



[Comment on this article](#)

KEYWORDS: Ravel, concerto, cadenza, performance, performer, analysis,  
recording, rhythm

*Received April 2005*

---

[Works Cited](#) [Discography](#)

---

VIDEO 1 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): entire cadenza (DL)

[1] Janet Schmalfeldt, in her ground-breaking article "On the Relation of Analysis to Performance" (1985, 2), challenges analysts to develop "a comprehensive critique of the value and the limitations of analysis for performance." We wish to turn this goal on its head: to explore the value and limitations of performance for analysis. What can a performer's voice contribute to the analysis of a work?

[2] We take the opening cadenza of Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand as a case study. <sup>(1)</sup> Certain performance considerations--technical, visual, and affective elements--comprise warp and weft not only of the Concerto's execution and interpretation, but also of its structure and meaning. In addition, we are able to speak both from personal experiences of having performed the Concerto and from insights provided by historical recordings of the work.

[3] After a brief overview of literature on performance and analysis, we explore the cadenza: visual and kinesthetic aspects, rhetorical and tonal function, form and structure, rhythmic features and performance issues.

\* \* \*

[4] The words "analysis" and "performance" have wide purviews: "performance" may refer to live performances, recordings, sight-reading, practice, memorization, improvisation, historical practices, events of performance, and to aesthetic, hermeneutic, social, psychological, cognitive, or motor aspects of the foregoing. "Analysis" might examine style, score, performance, or historical figures, and might take approaches from domains of musicology, music theory, psychology, pedagogy, performance, and so on. Our discussion of "performance and analysis" centers on analysis and performance as related to particular works.

[5] Since the time of Schmalfeldt's article, the literature on performance and analysis has burgeoned dramatically, in two primary directions. The first presents analyses and their implications for performance, and the second studies performances (usually sound or video recordings).

[6] In the first category, the balance is weighted towards "analysis," with "analysis" coming prior to "performance" in both time and importance. The most common scenario features analysis of certain structural elements, followed by suggestions for how these analytical observations might be interpreted in performance. Even Schmalfeldt's article, in which "analyst" and "performer" interchange roles of presenter/responder, has the "performer" receiving "answers" from the "analyst"—not vice versa. <sup>(2)</sup>

[7] This prioritizing of analysis means that the analyst must first ask what types of analysis have a bearing on performance. And indeed, this is a question raised, implicitly or explicitly, by many "performance and analysis" articles. Most suggest or state that elements of design (rhythm, motive, form) and surface-level structure translate directly into performance, while deeper-level structure informs performance decisions indirectly, if at all.

[8] Some examples of the first category follow. "Mid-bar downbeats" in Bach's keyboard works necessitate specific performance decisions, according to Charles Burkhart (1994). One example of such a mid-bar downbeat is shown in [Example 1](#), m. 14; this example shows a mid-bar downbeat that almost performs itself, due to the metric identity of the Gigue subject. [Example 2](#), from Edward T. Cone's *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (1968), shows a clear mid-bar downbeat in the first movement of Mozart's Sonata K. 331. <sup>(3)</sup> A performer may elect to bring out this metric

shift, or to “play the barlines,” as Alicia de Larrocha does in her 1990 recording of the sonata.<sup>(4)</sup>

[9] Rhythm provides a fertile field for “performable” analysis. Other rhythmic constructs applied to performance include extended upbeat/structural downbeat (Berry 1988 on the final movement of Beethoven’s *Eroica Symphony*), phrase overlaps (Rothstein 1989 on Chopin’s Mazurka Op. 6 No.1), and other features of hypermetric or phrase structure.

[10] A related domain, formal design, also falls into the “performable” category. Relevant elements range from smaller- to larger-scale features. Motivic parallelism, in particular, suggests many interpretive nuances. [Example 3a](#) shows a motivic parallelism from Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 7, and the articulative break that it suggests (Example 3b).<sup>(5)</sup> On a larger scale, Schmalfeldt’s (1985) performance interpretation of Beethoven’s Bagatelle Op. 126 No.5 rests on a reading of form.

[11] Surface-level or middleground voice-leading, such as that discussed by Burkhart (1983, 105–112) in the Sarabande from Bach’s Partita in B-flat, also gives rise to interpretive decisions. Deeper-level structures, however, tend to inform a performer’s interpretation on a more abstract level. That is, rather than correlating to specific decisions of micro-timing, articulation, dynamics, and so on, such deeper structures provide the performer with the context for making these detailed decisions.

[12] One can postulate several reasons for the rough correlation between closeness to the surface and applicability to performance decisions. Perhaps the most obvious is that the background influences global interpretive decisions—broad questions of direction and shaping difficult to articulate in the form of precise performance directives. A second reason may be that performance concerns itself primarily with expressing unique and unusual elements, with how the background is expressed through middleground and foreground, rather than with the background *per se*. And finally, and most speculatively, perhaps background structure is robust: it is expressed in all but the most idiosyncratic performances, whereas the existence of more surface-level structures depends to some extent on how they are or are not performed.

[13] So the first category of “analysis and performance” writings relates analysis to performance, tying rhythm, motive, form, and foreground and middleground features to interpretive suggestions. The second category approaches “performance and analysis” from the opposite direction by

analyzing performances. Methodologies tend to be primarily empirical or primarily qualitative.

[14] Empirically-oriented studies analyze specific performed parameters (timing, dynamics, intonation, physical motion, timbre, etc.) and filter them through interpretive parameters such as musical structure, musical meaning, listeners' reactions, and artificial models of performance. Data sources range from constructed experiments to actual rehearsals/performances to commercially-released recordings. On occasion, analysis of empirical data is supplemented by analysis of performers' commentary, or interpreted in view of historical and cultural context. <sup>(6)</sup>

[15] More qualitative approaches explore a wider range of parameters—expressive articulation, musical gesture, affect, etc.—in a more holistic fashion. Findings are compared to score analysis, interpreted using semiotic tools, placed in the context of performance traditions or a specific performer's aesthetic, and so on. <sup>(7)</sup>

[16] Both analysis of the score, and analysis of performances, however, beg two basic questions: What is being analyzed? And who is doing the analyzing? With rare exceptions, existing analytical literature on performance studies *texts*: the score, recorded performances or experimental sessions, or even recorded performers' interviews or commentaries. Performers, when included, are usually *objects* of study; rarely do they have a voice in the research that is produced. <sup>(8)</sup>

[17] This is a glaring omission, with serious consequences. Apart from the obvious issue of "who knows the most about performance, anyway?" music-theoretic literature on performance and analysis neglects an integral aspect of performance: works as "something that you do" (Cusick 1994, 18). <sup>(9)</sup> It neglects, in other words, performers' implicit analyses and the gloriously messy aspects of a work as an *activity*, involving score, aural, visual, and kinesthetic aspects. <sup>(10)</sup>

[18] For good reason: music-theoretic discourse admits messiness grudgingly, if at all. And performers are culturally "outside" the music-theory community. Unless invited, they cannot participate in the discussion (nor may they wish to, particularly if the price of admission is "music-theory speak"! ). <sup>(11)</sup> But "analysis and performance" suffers as a result.

[19] This article is co-authored by a theorist-pianist (DL) and a performing and teaching concert pianist (DK). We believe that our combined perspectives enrich an "analysis and performance" discussion by granting

"purely performance" issues a place at the analytic table. Our hope is that "purely analytical" questions might gain from performance insights, as well as the other way around.

[20] In order to complement our individual perspectives as pianists, we also explore historical recordings of Ravel's Concerto. [Appendix 1](#) lists recorded performances of the Concerto by pianists with some association with Ravel: Jacqueline Blancard, Robert Casadesus, Alfred Cortot, Jacques Février, Vlado Perlemuter, and Paul Wittgenstein.<sup>(12)</sup> The recordings are of interest because of their connection, however tenuous, with the composer.<sup>(13)</sup> Asterisks indicate those recordings to which we have had access, and to which we refer in the following analysis. Information on each pianist and his/her connection with Ravel is given at the bottom of the table.

\* \* \*

[21] On a fundamental level, the physical in this Concerto constrains the structural. Maurice Ravel felt that "the music of a Concerto ... should be lighthearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or at dramatic effects" but, because "in a work of this kind [the Concerto for the Left Hand] it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands, ... I resorted to a style which is much nearer to the more solemn kind of traditional Concerto" (Orenstein 1990, 477). "The most formidable aspect of the problem ... is to maintain interest in a work of extended scope while utilizing such limited means" (Orenstein 1990, 396). The left-handedness of the concerto, then, dictated its one-movement length, as well as its dramatic affect (in stark contrast to the *divertissement* character of Ravel's G major Piano Concerto, written at the same time).

[22] The Concerto's left-handedness is essential. Ravel's disapproval of Alfred Cortot's two-handed rendition (Orenstein 1990, 327) suggests as much, for the concerto exploits and stretches to their limits the possibilities of this single hand.

[23] In an essay entitled "Ravel ou l'esthétique de l'imposture" (Ravel or the Aesthetic of Imposture), Ravel's student and biographer Roland-Manuel states that "il ne procède pas habituellement par métaphores, ... mais volontiers par antithèses, allusions, ...".<sup>(14)</sup> Ravel loves to exploit ambiguity, to fulfill expectations in unanticipated ways. For example, in *Alborada del gracioso* he both fulfills and fools the listener's expectation of a trumpet by simulating the sound of a trumpet with a flute (Roland-Manuel 1925, 20-21). The left-hand concerto is about

the left hand masquerading as two hands, and hence about the distance between the physical and the musical.

[24] To no one is this more evident than to the performer. [Example 4](#) shows the left hand leaping between two lines, playing the roles of two hands and maintaining the illusion of two contrapuntal lines.

VIDEO 2 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): Example 4

[25] [Example 5](#) displays one instance of the concerto's first theme. This example provides several illustrations of the left hand's multiple roles. The performer must give the illusion of a legato singing line with the use of thumb-only on the melody. A true legato is impossible using only one finger; this legato line is made even more impracticable by the left hand's leaps to the bass register. The passage is further complicated by accompanying harmonies too wide for the average hand (circled); these chords must often be split.

[26] Yet Ravel also endows the passage with characteristics true to the left hand. The thumb-only melody exploits the thumb's ability to produce a rich full tone. The theme's casting for one finger alone heightens the performer's sense of the expanding leaps leading to the peak of the melody. And the physical motion between melody on beats one and three, and sarabande-like bass on beat two, creates a palpable rhythmic "groove."<sup>(15)</sup>

VIDEO 3 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): Example 5

[27] These parallels and conflicts between physical and musical narratives create meaning for the performer, and, in so far as the (in)congruences are displayed, for the audience member as well.<sup>(16)</sup> In the Vivo passage of the earlier [Example 4](#), the visual contrast between physical motion and linear strands contributes to the drama of the passage. As the distance between the two contrapuntal strands increases, so does the physical demand on the performer and the visual drama for the audience member. Other (in)congruences, however--the illusory (one-fingered) legato and split chords of [Example 5](#)--should be concealed.

[28] The physical and visual omission of the right hand brings aesthetic issues--"unusualness" and the challenge of limitation--into play. An analysis of the "text" of this concerto--the score or its aural representation--would surely bypass what lies at its heart: the left hand's immensely successful portrayal of two hands at work.<sup>(17)</sup>

**Overview of the Cadenza**

[29] The opening cadenza of the concerto performs the rhetorical function of announcing the soloist and establishing his/her authority: clarifying key, presenting and transforming thematic material, and establishing a wide keyboard range. The cadenza provides striking proof of the one-handed pianist's keyboard prowess: having one hand is no handicap, since this pianist can traverse the entire keyboard and make as wide a variety of noises as any two-handed performer. (Compare this piano entrance to that in Ravel's G-major Concerto: in the two-handed concerto, the soloist begins the piece as part of the orchestra and is initially confined to a high register.)

[30] We have divided the cadenza into four sections. (Please see [Example 7](#), which is a continuous score of the complete cadenza. We refer to this example throughout our discussion; the reader may wish to print it out for ease of reference). With the Opening Gesture (OG) ([Example 7a](#)), the pianist announces a triumphant arrival with flourish. Then, the stage set, the soloist "sings" the lyrical Theme 1 (T1) ([Example 7b](#)), with its lush harmonies. Theme 1 transforms into the majestic and fanfare-like Theme 2 (T2) ([Example 7c](#)), featuring full dynamic, octave doublings, and double-dotting, and building to a virtuosic passage of dramatic leaps. The increasing intensity culminates with the Closing Gesture (CG) ([Example 7d](#)), comprising virtuosic scalar passages, noisy *tremolandos*, and a dramatic *glissando*.

[31] We now dissect these first impressions. OG and CG bookend the cadenza, framing its thematic content (T1, T2) with virtuosic gestures. [Example 8](#) compares and contrasts the OG and CG. Both are predicated on pitch class A, closing with a motion to D. OG inhabits the white-key pentatonic {DEGAB} exclusively, while CG presents a combination of A Mm7 (with flat 9) and black-key pentatonic. Both OG and CG claim a large keyboard range and traverse their ranges with equivalent pitch contours: up-down-up, followed by a low register motion to D. <sup>(18)</sup> The fast initial "up" establishes the range, the slower "down" explores it in a more leisurely fashion, and the final "up" builds to the arrival of tonal center D. <sup>(19)</sup> As rhetorical gestures, OG and CG differ: since the OG presents and establishes the soloist, it unfolds more expansively and more comfortably, on the white keys, while the CG, as the culmination of tension built up through T2, is more compressed in time and more awkward, with fast black-key passagework.

[32] Tonally, the two gestures move from dominant to tonic in D. The "V"-I motion of the OG is shown in [Example 7a](#), mm. 35-36. This arrival on the tonic D--the first of the concerto--provides a strong sense of resolution after the harmonic ambiguity of the preceding orchestral introduction. The resolution, however, is an "imposture," on three counts. First, as

mentioned earlier, the OG motion from A to D occurs entirely in a pentatonic collection {GABDE}; it thus lacks the force and leading tone (C#) of a true V–I cadence in D major. Second, the pianist *appears* to attack the arrival on D (m. 36, downbeat), but in fact does not. Rather, the pedal is cleared, allowing D to emerge from the clamor of the pedal A (much as the contrabassoon earlier emerges from the cello and bass murk of the opening). The downbeat D is thus revealed rather than actually being sounded.

VIDEO 4 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): Example 7a, mm. 35–36

[33] Third, the OG's arrival on the tonic acts merely as an interior cadence, a way-station *en route* to the  $V^7$  of the CG ([Example 7d](#), m. 57.2). This long-awaited  $V^7$ --the work's first complete dominant chord--resolves to I at the orchestral reentry (mm. 58–59), combining tonal resolution with timbral, thematic, and formal emphasis.<sup>(20)</sup> The result is a "structural downbeat" following on the heels of the "expanded upbeat" comprising the orchestral introduction and opening cadenza.<sup>(21)</sup> The particular nature of this structural downbeat derives from the solo piano's materials: the orchestra's bass D arrives late just as the piano's bass D did in T1. The lateness mandated by the pianist's one-hand limitation thus carries over to the orchestra, which has no such physical limitation.

[34] The underlying harmonic progression of the cadenza is thus "V"– $V^7$ –I. The cadenza clarifies the tonal function of the preceding orchestral introduction. As shown in [Example 6a](#), the concerto begins ambiguously, with a *divisi* sonority of stacked fourths {E, A, D, G} played softly by celli and double basses in their lowest registers. The sound emerges gradually, as if it has been going on for a while before the listener becomes aware of it.<sup>(22)</sup> Thematic material (not shown) emerges slowly in the contrabassoon and passes eventually to upper winds, brass, and strings. Dynamic and texture build, culminating, as shown in [Example 6b](#), in the final chord of the orchestral introduction, a re-orchestration of the opening chord {E, A, D, G} over an E pedal.

AUDIO 1 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): orchestral introduction--beginning and end

(Charles Dutoit, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, 1983)

\* This example begins quite softly. \*

[35] The pianist's entry, with its forthright articulation of the dominant, answers the harmonic ambiguity and timbral build-up of the orchestral introduction. It is only here that the tonal function of the orchestral introduction--supertonic--becomes clear. The entire introduction to the concerto (including the opening cadenza) articulates a large-scale



supertonic–dominant–tonic progression: large blocks of pedal tones move from E (orchestral introduction) to A (cadenza’s OG and CG) to D (orchestral reentry).<sup>(23)</sup> This E–A–D motion is foreshadowed by the opening <E, A, D> arpeggio in the double basses.

### Performance Considerations

[36] The OG and CG frame an exposition of thematic material in which the piano takes over, clarifies, and transforms themes that had first appeared in the orchestral introduction. In the pianist’s version, the two themes differ markedly in melodic vocabulary. While the first theme ([Example 9](#)) moves primarily by major second, perfect fourth, and perfect fifth, the second theme ([Example 10a](#)) focuses on minor second, major second, and minor third.<sup>(24)</sup> Since the melodies are played with the thumb only, each interval requires a corresponding arm motion, and the pianist experiences intervallic distances physically as well as aurally.<sup>(25)</sup>

[37] The cadenza brings several interrelated pianistic considerations to the fore: dynamics, pedaling, and voicing. [Example 7c](#) shows one problem in dynamics. The second theme (see especially mm. 54–56) increases in dynamic as it rises in register, contradicting the piano’s properties. (The piano decreases in resonance with rising register.) Furthermore, the primary melody notes enter before their supporting bass notes, compounding the problem. The pianist must compensate for this contradiction between desired musical effect and instrumental properties by carefully rationing the crescendo; the strain of rising register and increasing dynamic also contributes to the building intensity of this passage.

VIDEO 5 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): mm. 54 – 57.1

[38] The separation of bass and melody creates a need for pedal, and the added dilemma of how to pedal. As shown in [Example 7](#), Ravel marks pedaling in OG and CG.<sup>(26)</sup> In both OG and CG, the marked pedaling reinforces the underlying pedal A. In the OG ([Example 7a](#)), for example, a single sustained pedal holds the initial bass A0–A1 through the entire opening cascade from A4–A5 back down to A0–A1. The pedal is then changed with each octave ascent so that the rising line is not lost amidst the more resonant lower sonorities. The passage’s penultimate pedal change at the return of A0–A1 (m. 35) is held until A resolves to D (m. 36).

[39] Depending on the acoustics of the hall, however, the performer may have to clear the pedal (at least partially) more often than indicated by Ravel.<sup>(27)</sup> In my performances, I (DL) aim to carry the low A0–A1 pedal through, at least conceptually. I (DK) sometimes use the piano’s middle

pedal to sustain the bass A0–A1 through the first OG descent, then release it and follow the marked pedaling for the rest of the passage.

VIDEO 6 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): Example 7a, mm. 33.0–33.2

[40] Other performers, such as Blancard (1953) and Perlemuter (1955), do not carry the bass A0–A1 through, clearing the pedal with the arrival of each long note, or even more often. In our opinion, this detracts from the momentum and drama of the passage.

AUDIO 2 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): Blancard 1953, mm. 33.0–33.2

[41] Février (1957) presents an entirely different conception of the OG. He pedals very little in the opening descent (m. 33.1), playing the sixty-fourth notes non-legato and at times detached. Then, rather than grouping the OG ascent (mm. 33.2–34) according to the octave ascents of the bass A's and Ravel's pedal markings, he opts (as shown by brackets above the staff) for four-“beat” groupings initiated by the rhythmic change to constant sixty-fourth notes in the middle of m. 33.2. Février articulates the groupings by replacing Ravel's indicated pedal changes with his own (particularly noticeable at the point marked \*), accompanied with accentuation (at \*) and slight pauses before the melodic B's of the first “beat” of each group (marked with ~).<sup>(28)</sup> He thus preserves the lower octave as bass for each succeeding move upwards, and facilitates a focus on a long melodic line and forward motion. (The melodic line is circled; Février projects a continuously-rising line by correctly playing E4 at the end of m. 33.2 rather than the published G4.<sup>(29)</sup>) The overall effect is that of a continuous build-up of texture and momentum.<sup>(30)</sup>

AUDIO 3 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): Février 1957, m. 33.0–36

[42] In the first and second themes, a different kind of pedaling dilemma occurs. Here harmonies in the melody change above a bass line that remains static or changes at a different time than the melody. The pianist's single hand cannot physically sustain both lines; the pedal must sustain the melody while the bass is being played, and vice versa. As a result, lifting the pedal for harmonic clarity in one line often breaks the flow of the other line.

[43] In the first theme ([Example 7b](#)), for example, pedal changes can only be made on the downbeat if notes are to be sustained as written. This follows Ravel's pedal indications and the notated rests. However, harmonic changes in the melody occur on both beats 1 and 3, leaving the pianist with the choice of clearing the pedal partially or entirely on beat 3 and shortchanging the bass D, or holding the pedal and bass D and

blurring the third beat. A third option is to pedal as indicated, voicing chords carefully with an ear to dissonance and consonance.

[44] The second theme ([Example 7c](#)) presents trickier problems.<sup>(31)</sup> In mm. 47–48, for example, one cannot sustain notes as written with any degree of clarity: the only “legitimate” pedal changes occur at the rests, with a long stretch of changing harmonies in between. In general, judicious voicing lessens the need for pedal changes, but occasionally, as in this last passage, the pianist must half-pedal, or “sneak” pedals. And as with many other performance decisions, choices remain subject to the specific characteristics of piano and hall.

VIDEO 7 ([\[broadband\]](#) [\[modem\]](#)): mm. 46–48

[45] Because of the registral split between melody and bass, then, pedaling acquires a structural significance. More than merely providing color and timbre, the pianist’s pedaling choices determine harmonies, lines, and gestures heard. We prefer to maintain the lines as much as possible, bringing out the melody and half-pedaling where necessary for harmonic changes. Blancard 1953 and Casadesus 1947, on the other hand, value harmonic clarity over sustaining individual lines, and clear the pedal very frequently. Wittgenstein’s (1937) pedaling neither clarifies harmonies nor sustains individual lines; he holds the pedal through rests in first and second themes, creating unnecessary blurs.

### Rhythmic Considerations

[46] In *De musica*, Augustine writes about music as being in the realm of mind-spirit, rather than that of the body—“as *disciplina* and *scientia*, not as *operatio*, in which the corporeal show dominates. In *operatio* one is captivated by the visual input of music (or a theatrical performance) being produced before one’s eyes. In this capacity these two arts imitate and exhibit rather than seek after truth.” Augustine sees rhythmic pattern as a perceptible and rational path to this truth.<sup>(32)</sup> We will demonstrate, however, that *operatio* contributes to and defines rhythmic patterning in this cadenza. The first rhythmic feature we discuss, “split beats,” arises from the physical limitations of a single hand. The remaining two, iambic groupings and their transformations, and expansion/contraction, direct a performer’s sense of momentum, rhythmic contour, and affect.

[47] The single-hand nature of the work decrees that registrally-distant bass and melody be articulated separately. Thus beats “split” between melody and harmony, creating characteristic metric structures.

[48] The opening of the OG ([Example 7a](#)) illustrates a characteristic “split beat.” As shown by “beats” numbered below the staves, the passage consists of “measures” of four unequal “beats,” where the fourth “beat” is frequently shortened (m. 33.1, m. 33.2, absent in m. 33.3), providing a sense of acceleration.<sup>(33)</sup> The very first “beat” of the gesture (m. 33.1) falls in a strange place—at least one quarter note after the orchestral downbeat of m. 33.0.<sup>(34)</sup> We interpret the pianist’s low A0–A1 octave as the bass of the chord, with the top of the chord arriving at m. 33.1; the boxed notes all form part of a single verticality, broken out of physical necessity.<sup>(35)</sup> We view the entire broken chord as part of the preceding orchestral downbeat, although it must follow the orchestral downbeat so that the pianist can be heard.

[49] This “split-chord” interpretation affects the way that I (DL) play the passage. Rather than waiting for the orchestra’s final chord to die down, I come in immediately, weighting the low A, and playing the high A5–A4 as an extension of the bass A0–A1. I (DK) approach it similarly, with the feeling that the momentum of the orchestra’s cutoff leads directly into the piano gesture. Other performers’ recordings reflect various interpretations. Wittgenstein 1937, Perlemuter 1955, and Blancard 1953 wait for silence before entering.<sup>(36)</sup>

AUDIO 4 ([[broadband](#)] [[modem](#)]): Blancard 1953, mm. 30–33.2

[50] Blancard then lingers on the first of the ascending sixty-fourth notes, and Perlemuter “places” the top chord. Casadesus 1947 and Février 1957, on the other hand, enter immediately, Casadesus lingering on the first of the sixty-fourth notes and Février “placing” the top chord.

AUDIO 5 ([[broadband](#)] [[modem](#)]): Février 1957, mm. 30–33.2

[51] A similar phenomenon occurs at the juncture between the pianist’s second theme and CG. As shown by numbers in diamonds between staves in [Example 7c](#), the second theme expresses four-measure hypermeter, with a bass arpeggio acting as the fourth-measure anacrusis to each hypermetric downbeat. The Vivo passage ending the theme (m. 57.1—a “stretched” fourth measure) leads to the hypermetric downbeat beginning the CG ([Example 7d](#)). This downbeat, articulated by the long-awaited  $V^i$ , “splits” three ways, between the bass arrival, the circled melodic arrival on A5 (ending the large-scale melodic line <Eb5, F5, G5, A5>), and the beginning of the *Strepitoso* on A6 (which begins another 4-“beat” measure).<sup>(37)</sup>

VIDEO 8 ([[broadband](#)] [[modem](#)]): mm. 54 – 57.2

[52] The two large split beats that we have just discussed articulate analogous points in the cadenza's structure (the openings of OG and CG), and dramatize the cadenza's articulation of the dominant ("V" and V<sup>7</sup> respectively). Ravel thus parlays physical limitations into articulators of tonal middleground.

[53] Both of these cases feature bass arriving first, followed by melody. Beat "splitting" also occurs in the opposite order (melody first, harmonic filler second), as shown in [Example 7a](#), mm. 35–36. Here, the primary motion A to D is elaborated with a pentatonic descending line <A1, G1, E1, D1> (circled); the pianist attacks this line first, then fills in the upper harmonic {A,G} dyad. In contrast to this interpretation, both Wittgenstein 1937 and Blancard 1953 interpret the lower notes as literally notated—as grace notes to the upper ones.

[54] We have been describing ways in which the physical constraints of a single hand impact metric structure in the cadenza. Now we will look at two rhythmic features of the cadenza pertinent to performance: iambic groupings, and expansion/ contraction.

[55] The cadenza prominently features groupings in which metrically-weak first parts precede metrically-stressed second parts. These iambs and their transformations pervade the rhythmic structure of the cadenza at multiple levels. <sup>(38)</sup>

[56] In the lyrical first theme ([Example 7b](#)), for example, transformations of the basic iamb X = <sixteenth note, longer note (on the beat) > into successively expanded gestures Y, Z, and Z' parallel the theme's melodic contour and delineate its rhythmic shape. In the melody, Y highlights changes of direction in pitch contour, preceding both the arrival at the melodic peak (m. 38) and a departure from a strictly descending contour (m. 40); in the bass, Y (m. 39) and Z (m. 41) follow these two points. Z and Z' contribute to the theme's expansion, preceding expansive melodic echoes, and, in the process, influencing transformation of the melodic iambic pattern <sixteenth, dotted eighth, sixteenth, long> into triplet eighth notes<sup>(39)</sup> and "delaying" the melodic long note that would normally occur on the downbeat. In short, successive expansion of iamb X into Y, Z, and Z' undergirds a performer's sense of the theme's expansion.

[57] The second theme ([Example 7c](#)) takes over much of the rhythmic structure of the first (iambic patterns, second-beat accompaniment, specific rhythmic motives), but transforms it to communicate a dramatically different affect. It sharpens iamb X = <sixteenth, long> to X' = <32nd, long>, and transforms Z' into the dramatic descending flourish of Z". These transformations, combined with octave doublings, expanded

register, and arpeggiated sweeps, contribute to the majestic and powerful character of this second-theme presentation.<sup>(40)</sup>

[58] In his 1939 recording, Alfred Cortot conflates first-theme iambs (X = <sixteenth, long>) and second-theme iambs (X' = <32nd, long>): he tends to double-dot first-theme iambs, and softens second-theme iambs to <sixteenth, long>.<sup>(41)</sup> In so doing, he blurs the distinction between the two themes.

[59] Iambs also govern the cadenza's rhythmic structure on deeper levels. In the OG ([Example 7a](#)), for example, each group of thirty-second notes leads to the following long note (m. 33.1); the momentum of the entire opening cascade carries through to the arrival of the low A0-A1 of m. 33.2 aided by the accumulation of sound, the shortening of the fourth "beat," and the accents marked on the final thirty-second-note gesture.<sup>(42)</sup> On a larger scale, the A pedal of mm. 33-35 acts as upbeat to the D of m. 36, and on an even deeper level, the concerto's entire introduction (orchestral introduction and opening cadenza, Exx. 6a through 7d) expresses an expanded upbeat to the orchestral reentry's structural downbeat on the tonic ([Example 7d](#)).<sup>(43)</sup>

[60] Although the listener expects the iambic downbeat to be strongest on the deeper levels, Ravel undercuts it: he fudges the arrivals on D in the OG ([Example 7a](#), m. 36) and at the end of the cadenza ([Example 7d](#)) with evaded attacks and split beats. On larger levels, then, the iambic "downbeats" reify Ravel's penchant for masquerade--his "esthétique de l'imposture."

[61] Iambs and their transformations significantly impact performers' physical experiences of and affective projection of the cadenza. A second rhythmic feature, expansion / contraction, does the same.

[62] As we observed earlier, a process of iambic expansion occurs in Theme 1. Expansion--motivic expansion--also occurs in Theme 2, underlying a process of rhythmic contraction. [Example 10a](#) provides a rhythmic reduction of the second theme's melodic line; bold bar lines indicate hypermeasures and rectangular noteheads represent unmeasured durations. As shown by upward stems, the theme traces an ascending stepwise trajectory <C5, D5, Eb5, F5, G5, A5>. (In the score, each note of this ascent, except for the final A5, is marked by the iamb X' = <32nd, long>.)

[63] As shown in [Example 10b](#), the <C5, D5, Eb5, F5, G5, A5> ascent breaks down into three sections, labeled AA'B at the top of the example.<sup>(44)</sup> The two A sections follow each member of the ascent with a descending step (<C5, B4>, <D5, C5>), while the B section comprises a steady rise through the tritone

<Eb5, F5, G5, A5>. Some pianists, such as Casadesus (1947), point out the change in pattern (<Eb5, F5> rather than <Eb5, D5>) by emphasizing the F5 agogically.

[64] With regard to the overall <C5, D5, Eb5, F5, G5, A5> ascent, the B section contracts the A sections in several ways (Example 10a). The duration between successive ascending pitches decreases from 4 measures to 2 measures to 1 (<4, 4, 2, 1, 1>), along with a decrease in the number of primary iterations of each pitch (<3, 3, 3, 2, 1, 1>), an elimination of the descending step found in the A sections, and a contraction of the 3/4 meter of the A sections to the implied 2/4 beginning the B section. This rhythmic contraction, along with rising register and increasing dynamic, heightens tension in the second theme, in sharp contrast to the rhythmic expansion, descending register, and level dynamic of the first theme.

[65] As shown in Example 10b, however, the rhythmic contraction of the pitch ascent conceals a deeper-level motivic expansion: the descending steps <C5, B4> and <D5, C5> are answered and expanded by the “descending step” <Eb5, D7>. What is initially heard as a process of contraction turns out to be an “imposture” hiding an expansion on a larger level.

[66] This view of the overall shape of the second-theme section conditions our performance interpretations. We strive to project the underlying expansion by carrying the line from the B section through the arrival on the dominant (CG) to the final *glissando* up to the tonic pitch D7.

[67] Blancard 1953 does not do so. Contrary to Ravel’s indications, she makes a break between the first two chords of the Vivo ([Example 7c](#), m. 57. 1, G-major triad and low G# octave), thus separating the Vivo passage and its arrival on the melodic A5 (m. 57.2, circled) from the < C5, D5, Eb5, F5, G5> line leading up to it.<sup>(45)</sup> In addition, she slows at the end of the *strepitoso* run, and deliberately articulates the endpoints (A0 ?D7) of the *glissando* ([Example 7d](#)); these features of her performance militate against hearing the larger melodic motion from Eb to D. In general, Blancard’s interpretation of the cadenza displays surface-level details clearly, at the expense of overall shape and drama.

[68] Finally, as we mentioned earlier, the two “frames” of the cadenza (OG and CG) exhibit both contraction and expansion in relation to one another. As shown in [Example 8](#), the CG expands the OG’s pitch range upwards by an octave, and compresses its temporal unfolding dramatically, for a showy gesture that is more complex both technically and harmonically. It provides a fitting culmination to the performer’s proof of prowess, to the rhetorical build-up of the cadenza, and to the harmonic and rhythmic momentum of the concerto’s introduction as a whole.

\* \* \*

[69] In the course of this article, we have presented an analysis informed and motivated by our knowledge of the piece as performers, one in which we pointed out those aspects of performance we deemed relevant to analysis, and those aspects of analysis we considered relevant to performance. We have shown how aspects of rhythm, motive, and form--expanded upbeat/structural downbeat, hypermetric and phrase structure, rhythmic motive, deeper-level harmonic structure, voice-leading and motivic parallelism--can influence and be influenced by performance interpretations. In our references to our own performances and to historical recordings we have investigated musical gesture and articulation in relation to musical structure and rhetoric. Our perspectives as performers, in particular, have contributed specific insights into metric structure, pedaling as a structural determinant, and the purely visceral experience of the work in motion. Along the way, we have illuminated an essential premise of the Concerto for the Left Hand and, in some respects, of Ravel's *oeuvre*--"l'esthétique de l'imposture."

[70] Our discussion has opened up possibilities in the interface between analysis and performance. All too frequently, the kind of in-depth analysis that might bring interpretive intuitions to the performer is brushed off as unnecessary or, even worse, as somehow impeding the performing artist's emotional connection to the music. Analysis as it is often treated by performers remains only a "taking apart"--that is, analysis without subsequent synthesis. The process undertaken in this article involves two steps: a taking apart and a reassembly of the parts with greater understanding of the phrase structure, metric organization, and large-scale structure of the music.

[71] This process has clarified some of our intuitive perceptions as performers, pointing the way to performance applications. The analysis of such intuitive considerations--the "feel" of a gesture, the direction of a progression, the rhythmic character of a theme--forces us to refine and articulate our interpretive approach. This process of verbalization/analysis often occurs in the course of teaching a piece--somewhat haphazardly. However, integrating such considerations with structural analytical observations proves a stronger and more relevant framework for performance interpretation. Our exploration of the opening cadenza of Ravel's Concerto has served as a vehicle for introducing another analytical voice--that of the performer and not merely of his/her performance--into musical analysis, complementing the voice of the theorist in the study of score and performance.