

Abstract for keynote

***Interpreting Topics for Performance:
Gesture, Texture, Troping, Virtual Agency, and Emotion***

Robert S. Hatten

What are the implications of topics for performance? How might the kinesthetic associations of topics (especially stylized dance topics) be realized in musical *gestures*? Can *texture* provide hints to interpreting topics? How do topics interact as *tropes*: from blending (as in metaphor) to resistance (as in irony)? Do topics ever imply *virtual agency*? How might a performer embody, and enact, topically cued *expressive trajectories*?

I pursue these questions with the following five examples, spanning a hundred years and multiple styles, in order to demonstrate how nuanced topical interpretation can directly affect performance. My approach seeks to integrate topic theory with other approaches to musical meaning, as viewed through a topical lens.

1. Bach (Partita no. 4 in D Major, 1728-31): A Courante that blends the energetics of fanfare and French-overture extra-dotting with the stateliness of the French courante and hints of *empfindsamer* lyricism. Is there a virtual agential dramatic trajectory at work, as supported by textural developing variation?
2. Mozart (Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332, 1778): A sonata that premises Ländler vs minuet, with touches of topical play involving ironic uses of learned style, hunt topic (in a music-box register), and mock-serious *tempesta*. Is there a virtual agential drama at work here, as well, and how might one project it?
3. Late Haydn (Piano Sonata in C Major, Hob. 50/Landon 60, 1794-95): A first movement that begins with a *buffa* textural invention and moves from low humor to sophisticated wit. Is there a dramatic trajectory in this “monothematic” movement that focuses on texture and sonority, leading to a troping of topics and styles?
4. Late Beethoven (Eleven Bagatelles, Op. 119, no. 11 in Bb Major, 1820): A bagatelle that blends hymn-like and pastoral topical characters with, again, a virtual-agential drama that draws on *empfindsamer* and learned-style elements before ending with a homophonic chorale texture. Is this an invocation of virtual subjectivity within a spiritual trajectory?
5. Early Chopin (Etudes, Op. 10, no. 6 in Eb Minor, 1829-32). Might acknowledgement of Chopin’s tempo indication in the first edition (1833) lead to the discovery of a hidden topic and a tropological interpretation of a more complex emotional trajectory?

I conclude by considering the consequences of these interpretations for topic theory, arguing for a more flexible account of topics that embraces allusions to established style types, hints of topics-in-formation, and the creative ways in which topics can interact.