



# Embodied Interpretation: Interpreting Gesture and Expression in Impromptu Op.29 No.1 in A-flat Major by Frédéric Chopin

Chen Ruiyang, Tham Horng Kent✉

Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

Submitted: February 17, 2025. Revised: March 18, 2025. Accepted: June 9, 2025

## Abstract

This article aims to extend Hatten's theory beyond the early nineteenth century by examining the different musical gestures in Impromptu Op.29 No.1 in A-flat Major by Frédéric Chopin. There is a need to bridge Hatten's theoretical framework with its practical application in the Romantic piano repertoire. The current article adopts Hatten's theory as a framework to provide detailed analyses of how stylistic (culturally embedded) and strategic (context-dependent) gestures operate within this impromptu. This study was conducted using a gestural analysis and performance-based research. It provides a guideline for pianists to develop their own interpretation. The findings suggest that Chopin's Impromptu No.1 conveys a spontaneous, dialogical, thematic, rhetorical gesture that evokes a sense of improvisation. Findings also reveal that developing practical tools based on Hatten's theory on musical gestures will help pianists articulate emotional expression, manage rubato, and enhance dynamic control, ultimately leading to more informed and expressive interpretations. This article offers performers the chance to gain insight into the piano practice, which further expands the scope of Hatten's theoretical application to include the Romantic repertoire, thereby offering valuable contributions to gesture studies and performance analysis.

**Keywords:** musical gestures; Hatten's theory; Chopin's Impromptu Op.29 No.1 in A-flat Major

**How to Cite:** Ruiyang, C., & Kent, T. H. (2025). Embodied Interpretation: Interpreting Gesture and Expression in Impromptu Op.29 No.1 in A-flat Major by Frédéric Chopin. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 25(1), 144-158

## INTRODUCTION

Music performance is a multifaceted endeavour that intricately weaves together the acts of interpretation and analysis (Beard & Gloag, 2016). Musical interpretation transcends mere comprehension of a composer's intentions; it demands embodiment through gestures based on a performer's intention. These gestures, whether manifested physically through a performer's movements or metaphorically through musical phrasing, provide an essential toolkit for shaping interpretation

on. They allow performers to imbue their renditions with heightened clarity and emotional nuance (Hatten, 1994). Furthermore, a key function of interpretation is its positive influence on expressing personal characteristics while respecting the composer's intentions. Godlovitch (1998, p. 81) argues that performers are responsible for interpretation, viewing it as a significant privilege.

The complexity of interpretation in music performance is well-documented. O'Dea (2000) emphasizes its intrinsic link to performance, while Beard and Gloag

✉Corresponding author:  
E-mail: [kent@fmsp.upsi.edu.my](mailto:kent@fmsp.upsi.edu.my)

(2016) highlight its capacity to offer numerous advantages within the context of musical performance. Interpretation involves a deep understanding, analysis, and synthesis of information, all of which contribute to a richer, more nuanced performance. The article is motivated by the necessity to explore how musical gestures function as vital interpretative mechanisms, enabling performers to navigate the intricate complexities inherent in these composers' works. By positioning gesture as a central interpretative device, this article seeks to provide performers with a structured approach to elevating expressivity, refining phrasing, and deepening emotional connections during performance. Through this approach, performers can better understand interpretation, technical aspects, and emotional expression. Crucially, gestures act as powerful interpretative tools that unlock layers of meaning within musical works. By focusing on the role of gestures in interpreting Chopin's impromptu No.1, this article aims to provide valuable insights into the performance practice of Romantic piano music, offering a new perspective on how gestures can enhance both analysis and performance.

### Statement of Problem

When it comes to musical gestures, a range of scholars have expressed a strong interest in them. For instance, Pierce (2010) discovered the importance of body movement in examining gesture, structure, and meaning in music. Pierce further indicated that movement is an essential means of comprehending the dynamic processes. Indeed, body movements in musical performances can be expressive and enhance the music's emotional impact (Beard & Gloag, 2016), particularly influencing performance capacity (Davidson, 2006). Moreover, Lidov (1987) presents a more persuasive theoretical explanation of how we perceive musical gestures as signs. He outlines a continuous process in which our direct bodily and kinesthetic experiences are gradually transformed into symbolic elements that operate within a structured semiotic

system. Furthermore, Cumming (2000) offers a particularly perceptive viewpoint by highlighting how gesture is synthetic and emergent. She argues that gesture should be viewed as a nexus of sensory, technological, and experiential qualities rather than as a reducible element.

However, these scholars approach this concept from different disciplinary and methodological angles based on these arguments. Within this constellation of viewpoints, Hatten's theory demonstrates its particular strength: it offers an integrative framework that bridges cognition, stylistic analysis, and expressive interpretation. For this reason, Hatten's approach provides a compelling foundation for this study.

Although musical gestures have been researched extensively in a wide range of disciplines, there is limited investigation into exploring the link between Hatten's musical gestures and Romantic works. More specifically, while Hatten's theory of musical gestures has been applied primarily to the Classical repertoire, there is a lack of research examining its relevance to Romantic music, particularly in Chopin's works. Romantic compositions are characterized by greater expressive freedom (e.g., rubato, dynamic contrasts), making gestures even more critical when interpreting structural and emotional complexities. In terms of insight into interpretative challenges found in Romantic piano works, pianists often struggle with balancing the structural integrity of the music and its expressive demands. Thus, analysing Hatten's gestures in Chopin's impromptus will offer performers practical insights into identifying and interpreting phrasing, dynamics, and emotional nuances. By identifying specific gestural elements in Chopin's impromptus, this article will expand the scope of Hatten's theoretical application to include the Romantic repertoire, offering valuable contributions to gesture studies and performance analysis. The complexity of Romantic piano works often demands nuanced interpretative strategies. The Romantic model of in-

terpretation allows performers significant influence over the music, enabling them to infuse personal expression into their performances (Ponce, 1998).

Developing practical tools based on Hatten's theory on musical gestures will help pianists articulate emotional expression, manage rubato, and enhance dynamic control, ultimately leading to more informed and expressive interpretations. Although Hatten's theoretical framework provides important insights into musical gestures, it is predominantly analytical and lacks a structured methodology for practical application in live performances. There is a need to develop a practical approach that allows performers to use gestures as interpretative tools during their performance preparation and execution. Current research on musical gestures often emphasizes theoretical analysis rather than the performer's perspective. As such, developing practical tools based on Hatten's theory of musical gestures addresses the need for practice-based research that prioritizes the performer's creative process and decision-making. Developing Hatten's theory into a performative framework will contribute to the broader field of performance studies by providing a clear and structured way for performers to integrate gestures into their interpretation, bridging the gap between analysis, creative process, and artistic performance.

The process of musical interpretation inherently requires the use of gestures as interpretative tools, forming an indispensable link between the written score and the audible performance. This relationship is multifaceted and deeply ingrained in the act of music-making: Hatten (2004) defines musical gestures as "significant energetic shaping through time" (p. 95), highlighting their role in conveying expressive content.

### **Reviewing Romantic Performance Practice**

While Hatten's semiotic approach to gesture has provided a valuable theoretical foundation, recent scholarship on Romantic performance practice has emphasized

the importance of techniques and performer agency. For instance, musical performance is fundamental to human existence (Rink, 2002). In recent years, scholars have conducted case studies on composers such as Chopin, Schubert, Liszt, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff, focusing primarily on issues of musical ontology, epistemology, and semantics (Rink, 2023). In addition, Rink (2002) also explores the dynamic between intuitive and conscious thought that potentially characterises the act of analysis in relation to performance. He further illustrated in a case study of Chopin's Nocturne in C# minor Op. 27 No. 1. Eigeldinger (1986) suggests a range of practical approaches based on pupils' feedback from the Chopin. She particularly focuses on the technique, style, and interpretation of Chopin's works. Additionally, Hood (2014) suggests five more specific elements: (1) rhythm, (2) foreground, (3) analytical notation, (4) a focus on strategy, and (5) dialogue with performance. Her focus is grounded in Schenker's theory (p.22).

Moreover, Agawu (2008) focuses on the musical discourse. He clarifies the discourse of music; it is important to use the paradigmatic method in a versatile manner. Samson (2018) explored the relationship between genre, style, and form a little more closely, particularly the differences in their mechanisms. He indicated that "Impromptu was a genre, such that the individual piece exemplifies as well as makes its own statement". Doğantan-Dack (2015) mentions the term called "Normative Pianistic Cantabile" through showing a case study: Chopin Nocturne Op.9 No.2, he even offers an explanation regarding the embodied feel of the *Arioso dolente* from Beethoven's Op. 110 (p.187). Furthermore, Djahwasi (2021) examined how musicology and philosophical perspectives contribute to shaping the knowledge framework in music performance and explored the defining features of performance style during the Romantic era.

### **Reviewing Musical Gesture**

Music gestures have been connected

with a wide variety of disciplines in recent years, including “musicology, human movement studies, psychobiology, cognitive linguistics, music technology and performance studies” (Gritten & King, 2011, p. 1). In fact, musical gestures have evolved into an “academic discipline” with “cross-disciplinary tendencies” (Gritten & King, 2011, p. 2). Scholars pay more attention to musical gestures for many reasons. One of the main reasons is that musical gestures can be interpreted visually through bodily expression in music performance. As Beard and Gloag (2016) define, bodily movements are important in musical gestures. Gestural demonstration generally encompasses musicians’ bodily movements, actions, and physical expressions during their performances (Doğantan-Dack, 2015). It is also elaborated upon in the relationship between gestures in performance (Godøy & Leman, 2010) and the connection between the musical representation of gesture and bodily gestures (Lidov, 2006).

In addition to concentrating on bodily gestures, existing research provides valuable insights into the musicians, particularly pianists’, interpretation and analysis in the context of gesture, which is more closely related to the author’s research direction. For instance, research on solo piano performance has shed light on the possible motif-like roles of gestures created during performance (Rink et al., 2011). In other words, gestures play a particularly vital role in the performance of Romantic piano music, where expressive phrasing and emotional nuance are key elements. Research by Rink et al. (2011) on Chopin’s performance practice emphasizes the importance of gesture in shaping rubato and dynamic contrasts, suggesting that performers use physical and musical gestures as interpretative tools to navigate these complex works.

Indeed, musical gestures not only serve as physical movements but are an integral part of musical interpretation, playing a crucial role in demanding passages while maintaining the expressive flow of the music. This integration ensures

that technical challenges do not disrupt the overall interpretation of the intended vision. Furthermore, empirical investigation has developed into the exploration of expressive gestures in Grieg’s recording of two Op. 43 lyric pieces (Volioti, 2019). King (2006) further emphasises the importance of “breathing” in piano performance, which may assist performers in having a better understanding of musical tempo, musical structure, and musical rhythm (London, 2006).

To sum up, a large amount of research in the field of music has focused on two closely connected areas: the study of “the musical body” and “the study of music cognition” (Gritten & King, 2011, p. 1). From the author’s perspective, performers need to use movements to convey music, carefully study the musical notation, and comprehend the composer’s thoughts and background.

While Hatten’s theory on musical gesture is unique and insightful, he mainly concentrated on Viennese Classical works, with a particular emphasis on composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), and Franz Schubert (1797-1828). Additionally, recent investigations on Hatten’s theory show that scholars are only concerned about the music analysis itself but not how it is related to the performance of a piece (Scott, 2009; O’Malley, 2013; Velázquez, 2012). These Baroque, Classical, and Modern period works were only relatively investigated.

Based on this, it is important to focus more on Hatten’s framework in order to expand expressive characteristics and gestures in the musical works from the Romantic period, particularly in the nineteenth century. It might fill in the gap of the applying Hatten’s theory, especially in extending stylistic and strategic gestures.

In addition to observing scholars utilizing Hatten’s theory, the author will also focus on other scholars who have already explored the impromptu. For example, Rink (1989) extensively explored Chopin’s structural style and improvisa-



tion in his dissertation. Likewise, Samson (2018) provided a more detailed description of aspects related to genre based on impromptu. Additionally, Huneker (2008) focused on “characters” among Chopin’s four impromptus. However, from the author’s point of view, there is still a lack of in-depth investigation into gestural description, even though various scholars have made some significant achievements. It seems that more attention could be paid to specific techniques in order to present a stylistic performance at the end. It is interesting that Henle Verlag’s comments make a kind of comparison between Chopin and Schubert and emphasise that Chopin’s four impromptus possess a distinctively improvisational quality, accompanied by a graceful and tasteful charm, and exuding a sense of agility and lightness (Zimmermann, n.d.).

Despite the extensive research that has been conducted by scholars on Chopin’s impromptus (Hunker, 2008; Rink, 1989, 2017; Samson, 2018; Eigeldinger, 1986; Robin, 2022; Hinson, 2005), it seems that the focus has mainly been on the historical context and musical analysis. Therefore, the author’s main focus will address these performance-related issues, including examining the challenges of interpretation and providing performance guidelines for stylistic and strategic gestures. This article is anticipated to enrich the performance of these pieces and contribute to further studies on impromptus by Chopin.

### Objectives of the Research

By understanding how gestures shape the flow of musical expression, performers can use them to convey emotional intensity, articulate structural changes, and create a more meaningful connection with the audience. Therefore, the objectives of this article are divided into three aspects; 1) To identify and analyze Hatten’s stylistic and strategic gestures in Chopin’s Impromptu No.1, exploring how these gestures contribute to the structural, emotional, and expressive dimensions of the music,

2) To develop Hatten’s theoretical framework of musical gestures as interpretative tools in Chopin’s Impromptu No.1, and 3) To perform Chopin’s Impromptu No.1 in the form of a recital.

This article arises from a gap in applying Hatten’s gesture theory to the Romantic repertoire and its lack of practical insight for addressing interpretative challenges in Chopin’s music. The need stems from a lack of performer-focused, practical methodologies that allow for the application of Hatten’s gestures as interpretative tools in performance and pedagogy, bridging the gap between theory, analysis, and practice. Therefore, this article aims to clearly define musical gestures as the central focus of the interpretative process. It mainly provides a performance guideline for pianists to interpret Chopin’s impromptus by comparing their musical gestures.

## METHOD

### Performance-based research

This article advocates for performance-based research that cultivated personal exploration. Indeed, the phrase practice-based research has gained popularity in the realm of creative arts research (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Practice-based research is a unique inquiry conducted to acquire new insights, primarily through practical application and the results derived from that practice (Candy, 2006; Davison, 2016). In fact, a piece of research is considered practice-based if the contribution to knowledge is based on a creative artifact. Likewise, this research is also considered practice-based due to the nature of how gestures are applied in the preparation and execution of performances.

This article seeks to examine Hatten’s musical gestures in the context of the Romantic era, and to expand more gestural ideas within the genre of impromptus. Furthermore, the concept of embodied interpretation recognizes that musical gestures are not only expressive movements but integral elements of the performer’s

interpretative process. In the performance of Romantic repertoire, these gestures are closely linked to emotional expression, shaping the performer's decisions regarding phrasing, articulation, and dynamics. Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, the author's conceptual framework is designed to investigate the following:

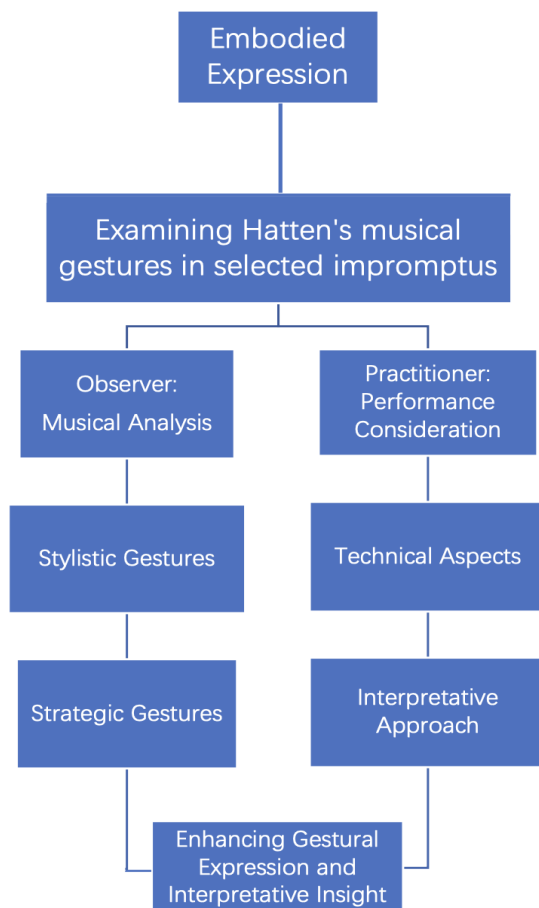


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

In Figure 1, within the context of embodied expression, the procedures in this article are divided into two (2) perspectives. Specifically, the first perspective involves musical analysis, which is developed from the viewpoint of an observer. A range of gestures related to stylistic and strategic elements will be discussed in this context.

The second perspective concerns performance consideration, which is examined from a practitioner's viewpoint. In this context, the author will address various technical aspects and interpretative approaches

that contribute to gestural expression and reflection. In summary, based on the significant number of musical gestures that serve as interpretative tools, the author explores interpretation and execution from the performance perspective in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

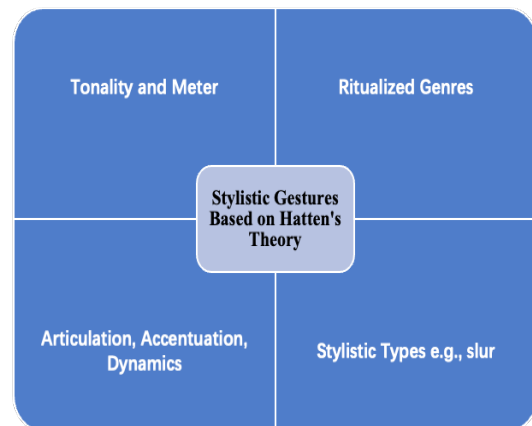


Figure 2. Stylistic Gestures Based on Hatten's Theory

Figure 2 was modelled on Hatten's (2004) stylistic gesture, which involves the following essentials: (1) Tonicity and meter; (2) Ritualized genres e.g., dances and marches; (3) Articulation, accentuation, dynamics, tempo, timing; (4) Range of stylistic types (e.g., the two-note slur). Hence, it seems that performers could utilise these aspects to examine the stylistic gesture.

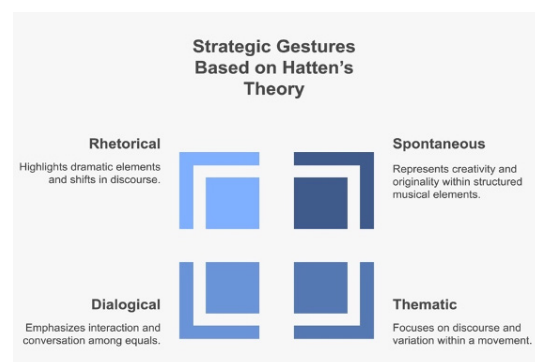


Figure 3. Strategic Gestures Based on Hatten's Theory

Figure 3 was also modelled on Hatten's (2004) strategic gesture, which involves four gestural aspects: Rhetorical, Spontaneous, Dialogical, and Thematic.

The author will further explore their functions in the results section based on the stipulated guidelines by examining their functions. Through these two figures, the concept of embodied interpretation recognises that musical gestures are not only expressive movements but integral elements of the Romantic repertoire. These gestures are closely linked to emotional expression, shaping the performer's phrasing, articulation, and dynamic decisions. Thus, the following could be concluded based on Hatten's concept related to stylistic and strategic gestures: A spontaneously creative or individualized gesture could serve various roles within a musical work. It may be highlighted thematically, engaged in a dialogical interplay with another gesture, utilised to indicate a rhetorical change, integrated into the dramatic progression of the piece, or combined with other gestures for a specific effect (Hatten, 2004). The author intends to conduct a closer examination of musical gestures with consideration of stylistic gestures in the Romantic style. In other words, further analysing the characteristics of music gestures in the context of Romantic music, a musical period gap in Hatten's theory may be filled, as Hatten (2004) only used works from the Classical period.

The development of musical gestures is an iterative process, evolving throughout the performer's rehearsal and practice sessions. Through repeated experimentation and reflection, the performer refines gestures to support interpretative decisions, enhancing the expressiveness and cohesiveness of the performance. This practice-based approach allows for a deeper engagement with the music, as gestures are adjusted to align with the performer's evolving interpretation. Thus, this article will provide detailed analyses of how stylistic and strategic gestures operate within the selected impromptu.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Impromptu No. 1 seems to provide a wide variety of musical gestures, such

as phrasing, slurs, and so on. These particular gestures convey the music's emotional content, particularly in Chopin's impromptu. The musical features in this piece consist of a range of emotional tensions and lyrical passages, which means that a performer might focus on specific details such as ornamentation, dynamic contrast, and lyrical phrasing. The following section will illustrate two perspectives: Musical analysis and performance consideration.

### Musical Analysis

One of the distinctive musical gestures in the A-flat major impromptu is the use of a wide range of phrasings. This means performers might convey more emotional expressions through phrasing. In fact, Chopin was unmatched in his ability to phrase a melody, highlight a thematic fragment, and shape a musical line (Eigeldinger, 1986, p. 44). For instance, there are two similar phrasings in bars 1-2 (Figure 4) in the right-hand part, which indicates that Chopin seemed to have an initial motivic idea with spontaneous qualities.

More specifically, this phrasing is generally made up of three triplets and a crotchet. However, the key element related to this phrasing seems to allow a performer to prioritise "smaller gestures", particularly on "slurs" (Hatten, 2004). For instance, a three-note slur could be interpreted subtly with smaller gestures (c<sup>2</sup>-b<sup>1</sup>-flat-a<sup>1</sup>-flat) and (f<sup>2</sup>-e<sup>2</sup>-natural-e<sup>2</sup>-flat) respectively, with gradual volume that improves the musical expression.

By so doing, the phrasing might further be interpreted when pursuing the improvisatory character of the slur over the semitone. That is to say, a kind of mysterious character might be created from this particular tone colour. Furthermore, the indication of the imperfect cadence (I-V) could express a sense of suspension. In this context, it seems that the sense of illusion might be based on the harmonic progression.

Meanwhile, regarding the right-hand aspect, although the appoggiatura is hidden at the beginning of this phrasing, it

still could be expressed naturally. To some extent, it could be understood as a spontaneous gesture based on Hatten's musical gesture. More specifically, this appoggiatura (e<sup>1</sup>-flat- f<sup>1</sup>- e<sup>1</sup>-flat) could be given a bit of accent at the beginning due to the indicated accented marking. Then, impressive expression could be strengthened through the dynamic marking, especially the small slurs, so-called F-E-natural-E-flat. It might be created as a kind of subtle quality regarding this semitone quality.

Afterwards, a longer phrasing seems to provide a response. It could be referred to Hatten's dialogical gesture, which gives a kind of musical discourse. In order to improve the musical expression, it is encouraged to emphasize the dynamic marking called decrescendo so that the performer is able to demonstrate the phrasing in bar 3. Meanwhile, the smaller phrasing called e<sup>1</sup>-flat-e<sup>1</sup>-natural-f<sup>1</sup> in the left hand could create a solid foundation, with subtle pedalling that could give expression.

In general, the phrasing of the right-hand in bar 1 might be interpreted as a "thematic gesture" (Hatten, 2004), which reveals a thematic fragment (Eigeldinger, 1986, p.44). As Robert Hatten (2004) suggested: "certain motive-length gestures may be marked as thematic for a movement... (p.95). It could be seen in the repetition in bar 5. Thus, several musical gestures can be discerned in these bars:

- Appoggiatura
- Slurs
- Phrasing
- Dynamic contrast



Figure 4. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat major Op. 29 No. 1, bars 1-5

As the illustration of a dialogical

gesture, in bars 15-17 (Figure 5), Chopin placed a great deal of emphasis on another stylistic gesture, in particular, accent marking. Indeed, Brown (2002) asserts that although accentuation is the most basic of the principal determinants of style in performance, it could be recommended to deal with it not too sharply (Eigeldinger, 1986, p.54). For instance, notes with accents (Figure 5) might suggest a gentle interpretation that contributes to a kind of sub-phrase expression. From the author's perspective, these accented notes seem to be interpreted gently as three sub-phrases: e.g., f<sup>2</sup>-flat-e<sup>2</sup>-flat-e<sup>2</sup>-double-flat-d<sup>2</sup>-flat and so on.

Meanwhile, a performer might also express a bit more towards a crochet series left from the bar 15. In fact, this passage implies a continuous two lines, which seems to result in an expressive interaction. It seems to be referred to as a dialogical gesture. Based on Hatten's concept, it refers to the sense of "dialogue" in music, conveyed through interactions among voices, or timbres (Hatten, 2004, p.136).

Consequently, this interaction between higher-voice and underlying voice seems to provide more expressiveness and musical tension, particularly when combining it with gradual volume. Thus, a series of musical gestures can be discussed in these bars:

- Sub-phrases
- Accented marking
- Decrescendo



Figure 5. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat major Op. 29 No. 1, bars 13-18

One of Chopin's characteristic textures lies at the heart of his stylistic gesture, melodic phrasing. A performer could arti-



culate more dramatic expressions through the *bel canto* style, although the middle section seems more ruminative. In Figure 6, the musical gestures have a stronger sense of expressiveness, especially with the range of dynamic markings. A performer might subtly interpret the rising melodic gesture from bar 35 onwards.

Meanwhile, two crochets in the left-hand, so-called A-flat and G, resonated with Hatten's rhetorical gesture. Accordingly, "rhetorical gestures indicate a sudden or unpredicted changes or shifts" (Hatten, 2004, p.136). Thus, these two notes seem to change the original arpeggio, then suddenly lead to another kind of lyrical passage.

Therefore, it requires a performer to subtly deal with these two notes so that they create a sense of lyrical mood. Thus, the additional musical gestures that arise here are as follows:

- Sostenuto indication
- Melodic phrasing
- Dynamic contrast



Figure 6. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat major Op. 29 No. 1, bars 34-40

In terms of ornamental passages in bar 48 (Figure 7), it seems to provide a room to allow performers to achieve a sense of improvisation. Moreover, it could resonate with the spontaneous gestures. As Hatten suggested, spontaneous (individual, original, creative), as negotiated within a meter and tonality. (Hatten, 2004, p.136). Furthermore, Gritten (2011) seems to support Hatten's argument; he suggests that the quality related to "expression and spontaneity" is linked with performance (p.190). Perhaps a performer could choose normative pianistic *cantabile* practice. For

instance, after the accented note on G-natural, a performer could adopt a relatively flexible approach with the ornamental notes, using *tempo rubato* to create a *cantabile* sound. In other words, a performer might choose to express this spontaneous gesture more naturally by means of carefully nuanced *rubato* and shifting timbre. In fact, according to Kravitt (1973) and Martin (2002), *rubato* is an essential aspect of Romantic-era expression. Kravitt indicated *rubato* into two types: one that affects only the melodic elements and another that influences the entire texture. Martin (2002), however, challenged Kravitt's classification, suggesting that *rubato* is such a complex musical phenomenon.

Chopin initially described this distinctive style of playing, which became a hallmark of his virtuosity, using the term "*tempo rubato*": stolen, broken time—a rhythm that is both flexible, abrupt, and languid (Eigeldinger, 1986, p.54). In terms of *tempo rubato*, although this approach is hard to approach, it seems to be conducted from the perspective of tonality and texture. For instance, this ornamental passage is interpreted through the progression of V7-I, which might press performers towards a sense of completion based on the quality of the perfect cadence. Specifically, after the accented note on g<sup>1</sup>, Chopin provides another clue as to how he envisioned the execution of *tempo rubato* in bar 48. In the middle of bar 48, he marks a range of ornaments to indicate that the performer should speed up slightly leading up to the B-natural, then slow down gradually on the cadential resolution. As such, by using the technique of *tempo rubato*, a performer might achieve the perfect cadence more spontaneously. In other words, the interpretative approach should sound as if it is improvised. Thus, a range of musical gestures could be contributed to this spontaneous gesture:

- Ornamental passage
- Harmonic progression (perfect cadence)



Figure 7. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat major  
Op. 29 No. 1, bars 47-50

In this passage, it seems that a series of stylistic gestures could be implied, particularly with the trill and accented markings (Figure 8). The interpretive approach seems to subtly build as a continuous energy, ranging from the minim on a<sup>2</sup>-flat, b<sup>2</sup>-flat, and b<sup>2</sup>-natural and peaking in the crotchet note on c<sup>3</sup> in bar 64. Furthermore, other stylistic gestures should be noted, especially the accent and crescendo markings. In other words, the abrupt rhetorical gestures of these trills are shaped by accents and crescendos, which create a dramatic trajectory.

In addition, in order to give a better impression of interpreting rhetorical gestures, a performer could use a series of pedaling. By doing so, the oscillation related to those trill gestures could be gradually shaped, with more rhythmic and energetic playing. Thus, the additional musical gestures that arise here are as follows:

- Trill
- Accented marking
- crescendo marking



Figure 8. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat major  
Op. 29 No. 1, bars 59-69

## Performance Consideration

### Interpretation (Emotional Expression)

With the emotional expression, there is a concern regarding the consistency of sound intensity in the phrasing. As Robert

Hatten's suggestion, a thematic gesture is generally crafted to capture the expressive mood and character of the piece or movement (Hatten, 2004, p.135). Therefore, from the perspective of a performer, a kind of subtle quality could be further discussed. For instance, the harmonic progression between the tonic and dominant in the key of A-flat major could be observed from bars 1 to 2 (see Figure 4). In other words, there is room to express a sense of expectation and sonorities that could be built up for the listeners.

In order to address this issue, the author's view is that a deeper emotional expression could be built up, not just through harmonic progression, but also through a range of stylistic gestures. A series of markings, such as *accents* and *trills*, could be employed to guide the performer's interpretative decisions. Thus, the sound intensity could be achieved to create the impression of an improvisational gesture.

Indeed, Chopin demonstrated exceptional skill in melodic phrasing, thematic articulation, and the shaping of musical lines. He regarded phrasing slurs as highly significant, typically releasing the hand with a diminished tone at their conclusion, though such markings are not always accurately represented in many of his scores (Eigeldinger, 1986)

As a result, the author utilises a technique known as Hatten's spontaneous gesture in order to interpret the phrasing. The author tends to use 2-3-2 fingering instead of the 3-5-2 (see Video 1), allowing more flexibility in expressing the stylistic gestures. To maintain a particular flow, the author's priority is to focus on the phrasing itself, rather than individual notes. By doing so, it would be better to maintain gestural continuity so that the shape of this short phrasing.

## Technical Competency

There exist two distinct technical obstacles that need careful consideration from bar 15 onwards (see Figure 5). The first technical problem relates to the expression of accented marking. The second

is related to tempo control. In reference to the first technical problem, attention should be paid to the role of semitones, which could be interpreted as phrasing. In fact, although Chopin disliked overly loud sounds on the piano—calling them a dog barking (Eigeldinger, 1986, p. 26), a performer still could give dynamic contrast and round sonority in this passage. Thus, by linking the dialogical gesture, a performer might give a rich sound between both hands (Figure 5). This means that a performer not only focuses on the accented marking in the right hand but also needs to give a more flowing gesture regarding the left-hand crochet. Therefore, the author's solution is to combine the accented markings with dynamics to highlight the role of the semitones. Meanwhile, daily exercises should be utilised for weak fingers (see Video 2).

With the second issue, there seems to be a huge change in the mood in the middle of the section (see Figure 6). Thus, to express the potential melodic gesture after bar 34 onwards, a performer might take a bit more time regarding two notes (A-flat, G), which give room to express a melodic musical gesture (see Video 3). In other words, a performer might think about how to make a good connection between bars 34 and 35. Although there is no indication, a performer still could take a bit more time in terms of the last two notes. It could be regarded as a kind of rhetorical gesture, making a solid foundation for the shift of color sound.

Another instance of spontaneous gesture can be observed through the application of appropriate tempo rubato in Figure 7, particularly in bar 48. An effective interpretative strategy involves allowing the left hand to maintain a steady pulse while the right hand plays with expressive freedom (Eigeldinger, 1986, p. 51). Although Samson (2017) suggests that the true definition of Chopin's rubato is a complex and debated topic, it still could inspire numerous poetic qualities (p. 630). Moreover, from the right-hand perspective, the performer may slightly broaden the tempo at

the beginning of the phrase and accelerate towards the end.

Consequently, this spontaneous approach offers a refreshed expressive meaning to the perfect cadence, and (see Video 4). As Robert Hatten indicated, "Spontaneous gestures provide an avenue for the expression of individuality, and they broaden the expressive range of a style" (Hatten, 2004, p.135).

With the last issue, Chopin includes the *leggiero* marking, indicating that the performer should treat these ornamental passages more subtly at the beginning of bar 61 (see Figure 8). Hence, from the performer's perspective, a possible interpretative approach related to the tempo should be utilised with a technique called tempo rubato. That is to say, a more flexible approach (see video 5), for instance, slowing down a little more on the first few notes and choosing a slight acceleration on the rising notes in bar 61 could be done. This approach might have a better interpretation of the shape of the "spontaneous gesture" (Hatten, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the application of Hatten's theory is comprehensively effective, as it provides a range of interpretative decisions within Chopin's *impromptu*. Developing practical tools based on Hatten's theory of musical gestures potentially improves a pianist's articulation, emotional expression, rubato management, and enhancement of dynamic control, ultimately leading to more informed and expressive interpretations. Thus, there are three points that could be concluded.

Firstly, this article enriches the interpretative considerations regarding Chopin's *impromptu* from the perspective of Hatten's stylistic and strategic gestures. The findings of this article reveal that Chopin's gestures emphasise more fluid expression that invites performers and listeners to explore moments of emotional spontaneity (see *Impromptu* No.1, bars 59-69).

Secondly, this article emphasises the practical and performative applicability of Hatten's gesture theory, addressing a significant gap in practice-based studies of the Romantic repertoire. By adopting performance-based research, this article prioritises performers' creative process and decision-making, aimed at analysing the musical gestures contained within Chopin's selected impromptus, which is based on Hatten's theoretical framework as one of the interpretative tools. Such a framework provides performers with structured strategies for incorporating gestures into their interpretative processes, bridging the gaps between theoretical analysis, creative exploration, and artistic performance. This contribution is particularly important for addressing the lack of performer-centred methodologies that integrate Hatten's gestures as interpretative tools in both analysis and performance.

Lastly, this article highlights the role of gestures in conveying emotional depth, articulating structural transitions, and fostering meaningful connections with audiences. In other words, it defines musical gestures as the central focus of the interpretative process. Through the integration of theoretical and practical perspectives, this article offers specific guidelines for interpreting Chopin's impromptus and gives new perspectives for future research and performance practices of the Romantic repertoire.

In general, the application of Hatten's theory of musical gestures demonstrates significant effectiveness and profound influence within this Romantic repertoire. Based on this exploration, it further developed Hatten's gestures as practical tools that will help pianists articulate emotional expression, manage rubato, and enhance dynamic control, ultimately leading to more informed and expressive interpretations. The following findings will be responded to regarding the previous performance question step by step:

This article, in fact, makes musical gesture central to the interpretative process. More specifically, it primarily explo-

res two perspectives: stylistic and strategic gestures. By identifying specific gestural elements such as slurs, fermatas, and phrasing, the dissertation not only broadens the applicability of Hatten's framework to Romantic compositions but also offers valuable contributions to gesture studies.

Hatten's insights into musical gestures provide a theoretical foundation that can directly inform interpretative decisions in performance. This dissertation insists on Hatten's musical gesture as an interpretative tool, following musical analysis and performance consideration respectively. By understanding how gestures shape the flow of musical expression, performers can use them to convey emotional intensity, articulate structural changes, and create a more meaningful connection with the audience.

By incorporating a practice-based research process, exploring how musical gestures are integrated and refined throughout rehearsal and performance could be beneficial. By observing and documenting the evolution of these gestures throughout the rehearsal process, this dissertation captures the dynamic relationship between gestures and interpretative choices, providing valuable insights into their role as interpretative tools. The finding shows that Chopin's impromptus convey a spontaneous thematic and rhetorical gesture and a dialogical gesture that evokes a sense of improvisation. In other words, the performer could interpret Schubert's Impromptus with more rationality, while interpreting Chopin's Impromptus with more emotion.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, UPSI, for the opportunity to study here. First of all, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Tham Horng Kent, for imparting his knowledge, expertise, and insightful advice throughout my Ph.D study. He has provided insightful suggestions and feedback through detailed meetings.



Thus, I highly appreciate our many conversations and have benefited from them over the years.

Secondly, I would like to express my appreciation to the Dean, Associate Professor Dr. Muhammad Fazli Taib bin Saearani, Deputy Dean (Academic and International), Dr. Christine a/p Augustine, Deputy Dean (Industry Network and Commercialisation), Associate Professor Dr. Kamarulzaman bin Mohamed Karim, and the Head of Department, Dr. Mohd Yusran bin Mohd Yusoff. My appreciation also includes the examiners of the pre-Viva session, Dr. Herry and Dr. Chiu Ming-Ying. My thanks also extend to Mdm. Ann and anyone who directly or indirectly helped me during my Ph.D. Studies at UPSI.

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#### Artistic Practice Video:



**VIDEO 1: A practice session on thematic gesture in Chopin's Impromptu Op.29, No.1, bars 1-5:** <https://youtu.be/II-HK-KORAWQ>



**VIDEO 2: A practice session on dialogical gesture in Chopin's Impromptu Op.29, No.1, bars 13-18:** <https://youtu.be/T-TmlqkuuJk>



**VIDEO 3: A practice session on rhetorical gesture in Chopin's Impromptu Op.29, No.1, bars 34-40:**  
<https://youtu.be/4YcN02ixsPs>



**VIDEO 5: A practice session on spontaneous gesture in Chopin's Impromptu Op.29, No.1, bars: 59-69:** <https://youtu.be/AxEGdv89Efc>



**VIDEO 4: A practice session on spontaneous gesture in Chopin's Impromptu Op.29, No.1, bars: 47-50:** <https://youtu.be/lKl9PFgLNIk>