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Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colors in Black and White, by Hyun Joo Kim. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press and Boydell & Brewster Limited, 2019.

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Book Review

Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colors in Black and White, by Hyun Joo Kim. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press and Boydell & Brewster Limited, 2019. 231 pp. ISBN 9781580469463 (hardcover). \$90. Examples, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, indexes.

Hyun Joo Kim's recent book, *Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colors in Black and White*, contributes meaningfully to the literature about transcription and Liszt's approaches to adapting instrumental sounds to life with the keyboard. With a composer and arranger as prolific as Liszt, it is not possible to be comprehensive, and given the widely inclusive title for this volume there was the danger of overpromising. Because there is so much territory to cover, Kim's book necessarily feels at times like it is setting the groundwork for a larger discussion that space would not allow, and I found myself wanting to spend more time with her writing in the weeds of analysis than on an overview of the broader issues. At the same time, Kim's encounters with the macro issues and the minutiae are both necessary and perceptive; I will share some of these aspects below.

Part of what makes writing about transcription so difficult is that one must wrestle with issues of philosophy, rationale, and execution, and depending on one's position on the spectra any result may be justified. For instance in the realm of philosophical stance, fidelity to the notes-as-written might be favored, and success measured by accurate transmission of that privileged data; or, fidelity to the spirit of the work might be preferred, and the addition of tremolandos, arpeggios, and doublings excused as a means to an emulation. In the realm of rationale, it might be that distribution and promotion are the primary motivators of the transcription; or it might be an act of homage with limited reach beyond the admiring artist. In the sphere of execution, ease of access to the amateur pianist may be the aspect to be admired; alternatively, it may be the sonic or social achievements that matter most, achievable only at the limits of virtuosic technique.

With Liszt the situation is complicated by the sense that his motivations in all domains were dynamic. Each work remained a living entity for Liszt, and indeed he would often provide ossia passages that were completely different but simultaneously valid readings of the text, and not just the expected *più facile* passages to be found in orchestral arrangements

(and even where these do occur—let’s be honest—Liszt’s notion of “easier” was relative, and such passages are often just marginally easier approaches to executing a passage). Liszt would often return to a work again and again, offering reimagined conceptions of how the piece might be arranged, and we are left not with a succession of works that supplant, but rather a constellation of interpretive transcriptions that illuminate one another.

Kim navigates the waters of philosophy, rationale, and execution admirably, and I found that in each area she had things to say that prompted me to consider elements more carefully from a given perspective. A contributing factor to Kim’s success in this regard is that her discussions are not constrained by an assessment of the potentially competing values of fidelity and freedom. To be sure, she addresses these tensions in detail, but the book is structured around analyses of three specific types of arrangement that are each rich in their own ways: rigorous, detailed transcriptions or *partitions de piano* as so-called by Liszt; Liszt’s two-piano arrangements of his own symphonic poems; and Liszt’s piano adaptations of the cimbalom. The types that Kim references are not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive, and she intimates as much as the book progresses. Yet her particular choices of examples manage to bring many of the salient issues to the fore, and it is when Kim employs these specific ones supports that the book is at its most persuasive and extrapolatable to other scenarios of transcription.

Preceding Kim’s analyses of these arrangement types are some familiar discussions of analogs in the realm of the visual arts and linguistics, with a focus on alternative representation rather than translation *per se*. The artistic status of engraving and engraver are put forward as comparable to those of the arranger of music for the piano. Kim’s invocation of Charles Blanc, Luigi Calamatta, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is reminiscent of discussions appearing in the work of Jonathan Kregor,¹ but such references are helpful in making the case for the independent artistic significance of the *replica*. While I think that there are limits to the value of comparisons between visual color palettes and instrumental timbre, I appreciate that Kim’s evaluation does not inherently hierarchize the original over the more homogenously colored engraving or transcription. The fact that Ingres himself admired Calamatta’s engraved translations of Ingres’ own work is significant, as is the friendship between Ingres and Liszt. That Liszt dedicated the first version of his transcriptions of Beethoven’s fifth and sixth symphonies to Ingres offers a direct link to their mutual appreciation of the transformative arts.²

With respect to transcription for the piano, the challenge in extending arguments of color too far is that the possibilities are both limited and limitless; limited by a kind of timbral homogeneity in comparison to an orchestral original, but unlimited in the ways in which a composer of imagination might seek to account for those timbral combinations in novel ways. One particularly thought-provoking component of Kim’s discussion of Ingres

1. Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

2. Hyun Joo Kim, *Liszt’s Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colors in Black and White* (New York: University of Rochester Press and Boydell & Brewer Limited, 2019), 24.

and engraving was her emphasis on dimensionality in representing sculpture on a two-dimensional plane. Kim provides striking examples of engravings and drawings with rotational perspectives created after Ingres' studies of ancient sculpture, such as *Cupid and Psyche*.³ The highly detailed yet flexible vantages in representing statuary on a flat surface provides useful examples of how the re-creative artist's perspective can provide fresh insight into a known work. The parallels of rotational perspective with Liszt's work are immediately clear, given his penchant for providing alternative "readings" in the various versions (or ossia passages) of his transcriptions of a particular work.

Liszt's ability to re-examine his work and shift his own perspective is a sign of creative flexibility, and though it may be maddening for those in search of some definitive text, it is in keeping with his persona as a dynamic performer. As Kim puts it in the lead-up to a brief discussion of Ferruccio Busoni (another pianist-composer-transcriber of great relevance), it was Liszt's ability and willingness to modify a source that helped him achieve what he did: "what makes it successful is the arranger's dynamic involvement in reworking the original to offer convincing solutions appropriate for the new medium."⁴ For arrangers of imagination like Liszt and Busoni, there are many possible reworkings available to them, and perhaps even more given their improvisational talents.

Despite the wiggle room Liszt affords himself, there nonetheless seems to be a distinction for Liszt between the goals of a transcription and those of a freer adaptation, despite both being centered on the potential for a convincing performance, independent of the original, as a measure of success. Kim references several of the more rigorous of these transcriptions, called *partitions de piano* by Liszt. In this category we find the Beethoven symphony transcriptions, the Berlioz overtures and *Symphonie fantastique*, the Weber overtures, and Rossini's *William Tell* overture. There are other transcriptions in Liszt's output that fit this mold as well, but Kim is focusing on works so designated by Liszt, and specifically the transfer from orchestral forces to the piano.⁵ As Kim describes it, the "two elements that help define the concept of *partition* of table 2.1 are thus the change of medium from large-scale orchestral music to solo-piano score and the particular type of transferal and reworking that stresses the arranger's scrupulous attention to the original."⁶

The question arises for Kim as to why one would endeavor to create such an attentive transcription. The hallowed status of the original is put forth as motivation, as it should be (Kim includes Liszt's preface to the 1840 edition of the fifth and sixth symphonies of Beethoven, where Liszt opens with "The name of Beethoven is sacred in the arts.")⁷ There is also Liszt's stated desire to offer something superior to the run-of-the-mill arrangements that already existed. Kim's discussion of these motivations undercuts the notion that

3. Kim, 27–31.

4. Kim, 41.

5. Kim, 40. See table 2.1.

6. Kim, 40.

7. As quoted in Kim, 159.

dissemination and accessibility—key goals of many “reductions”—were shared goals of Liszt. These “attentive transcriptions” are arrangements playable only by pianists of great ability, but possess additional value as a resource for study, as famously demonstrated in practice by Robert Schumann’s use of Liszt’s transcription of the *Symphonie fantastique* for his review of Berlioz’s opus.

We return to the question of motivation: one could venture that there are several payoffs for the arranger that are unquantifiable, and largely unaddressed. In addition to the work of transcription being an act of homage toward the original composer and/or work, and beyond the mundane but important motivations of commerce that drive some such arrangements into existence, the transcriber also benefits from a secondary radiance transferred by the glow of the original onto the transcription. It need not be a calculated strategy, but when one associates in this way with the music of a Bach or Beethoven there is an inherent plea for legitimacy. Grappling with the details of creating an arrangement of a work is also one of the most intimate ways to study the original—the admired work is now known in a profound sense.

There is an additional benefit for the pianist/transcriber, and one that helps to account for the desire to create a work that is effective in the new medium. This benefit harkens back to Kim’s mention of Busoni and the significance of the performer’s role in the process: the pianist, as a musician excluded from the standard Romantic orchestra, might seek to participate in this admired music by making it accessible to the pianists themselves. Additionally, the control imparted to a single performer suddenly grants an exciting status to the musical medium (medium = piano and performer). This aspect is worth mentioning as a possible motivating factor, as it applies directly to the desire to accurately represent the spirit of a work—another intangible and subjectively assessed aspect that is nonetheless central to the discussion of why an arranger might deviate from the “text” of the original.

Coming back to Kim’s discussion of the *partitions*, she considers a number of factors directly relating to the representation of orchestral sounds on the piano. A celebrated aspect of Liszt’s Beethoven transcriptions, for instance, is his copious use of instrumental cues. Liszt was not the first or last to do this, but his use of them was—at least for a time—integral to his conception of the *partition* (a fact Kim brings to our attention through an interesting letter from Liszt to Breitkopf & Härtel in 1863).⁸ Kim asks just the right question: “what does he expect the pianist to do with the cues in his or her execution?”⁹ The answer is unclear, however; Kim shares some anecdotes about Liszt’s representation of different instrumental sounds through variously imagined articulations, and from there we arrive at a statement that “we may assume that Liszt would have demanded from a pianist a certain articulation and touch appropriate for an individual instrument in his orchestral arrangements.”¹⁰

8. Kim, 44.

9. Kim, 45.

10. Kim, 46.

This may in fact be true, but the analysis here is not robust enough to clarify how one might differentiate—in practice, at the keyboard—a bassoon from an English Horn, for instance, or whether Liszt requires the pianist to possess a complete understanding of how each instrument behaves differently depending on its tessitura and other such considerations. A stronger support comes from Kim's quotation of August Göllerich, where the instrumental *groups* are differentiated.¹¹ A staccato in the horns would sound different from a staccato in the flutes, and conceivably one could transfer those differences by means of their articulation at the keyboard, aided by the labeled group designation. But this becomes problematic as well when considered holistically, as those side-by-side comparisons of instrumental groups might be muddied by things like modifications to the register in the transferal from orchestral instrument to keyboard. Those modifications are identified as wise decisions to prevent monotony, but such changes may at times undercut the fidelity to the implications of an instrumental cue. The Göllerich example is understandably effective because of the quickly conceivable difference between a group of horns playing music adjacent to a group of strings; it is in the extremities of difference that these indications may be the most effective and executable for the pianist. Kim's example from Liszt's transcription of *Le roi Lear* supports this point, and the effects of the differently labeled instrumental groups are buttressed by the clarity of Liszt's articulation markings.¹²

Kim points to statements by and anecdotes about Liszt collected over a large swath of time to support the notion that his views on detailed instrumental cues were consistent. One other aspect of this that I wish had been addressed more fully by Kim are the exceptions to the rule—it is understandable, for instance, why Liszt might persist with a standard in his transcriptions of the Beethoven symphonies if the project were begun with a particular trajectory; it might seem capricious to abandon the precedent of instrumental cuing years later before the endeavor was completed. Yet the counterexample of Liszt's Weber transcriptions gives some pause. As Kim puts it, “[Liszt's] arrangements of Weber's overtures eliminate the meticulous instrumental cues completely.”¹³ If one accepts the laudable premise that arranged works do not always fall neatly into binary camps of strict transcription vs. free arrangement—that is, such elements can and do comingle, as Kim makes clear in her discussion of Liszt's *Guillaume Tell* overture—additional questions arise about whether Liszt's feelings on this matter evolved over time. For a composer as acutely aware of the importance of notation in conveying his message to the performer, Liszt, I would imagine, often reevaluated the effectiveness of the information he offered, taking into account the psychology of a performer's response to the great deal of information presented on a page. His revisions tended to streamline or clarify rather than complicate, and I wonder if this might have led him to be more selective in what information of the instrumental cuing sort was conveyed over time.

11. Kim, 47.

12. Kim, 46.

13. Kim, 43.

While Kim references salient aspects of the Beethoven symphony transcriptions, her dedication of a chapter to Liszt's transcription of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* overture as a focus of analysis is welcome, because it puts on display how a bit of fantasy can empower the effectiveness of a transcription. Her chapter on the overture first situates Beethoven and Rossini in light of the Dahlhausian "text/event" binary.¹⁴ It is a helpful instigator for the discussion but is also a problematic framework; Kim's use of it is illuminating because it highlights the problem of these types of categories in general: "Liszt's arrangement of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* Overture draws our attention because it straddles the boundary between faithful 'text' and creative 'event' in his manner of transferring and reworking of the original."¹⁵ The qualitative hierarchies inferred also feel forced when applied to a composer like Liszt, possessed of such sincerely diverse tastes.

I will mention two of Kim's excellent points related to the Rossini. The first relates directly to the subject of the book—how does Liszt recreate the initial timpani roll on the piano? Most solutions for such things involve a tremolo, which can be effective as an underpinning when there is more activity happening above it, but is difficult to pull off in performance (at the keyboard) if the timpani is playing a solo. Liszt's solution for this isolated timpani roll (on an E in the orchestral version) is a spinning chromatic line in the rumbling depths of the keyboard moving between E and A#. Kim points out that "his rendering of the chromatic scales is ostensibly new material, yet it makes the bass [A#] literally the lowest note and also preserves the register of the bass. . . . The scales also echo the E-[A#] motion in measures 21–23 in the bass. . . . His reworking thus reveals both his close attention to the integrity of the timpani's rolls and his artistry in extending them into his pianistic version."¹⁶ One could go a step further, however, as this passage demonstrates Liszt's perspicacity as a composer of operatic paraphrase. It is not just a passable pianistic transformation of the timpani roll that provides a discernable contrast from the cello and bass material that precedes it; Liszt's timpani roll is a foreshadowing of the storm to follow at the start of the Allegro, where Rossini literally employs an inverted chromatic trill followed by a scalar revolving outline of a tritone. Consider these elements side by side:

14. Kim, 58.

15. Kim, 58.

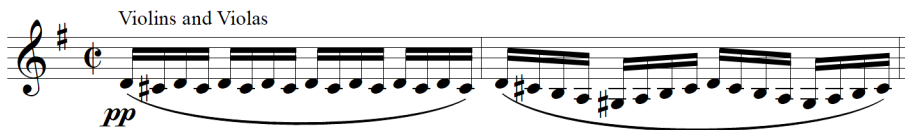
16. Kim, 72–73.



Example 1a. Rossini, *Guillaume Tell* Overture: timpani, mm. 22–23.



Example 1b. Rossini-Liszt, *Guillaume Tell* Overture: extracted and modified timpani part, mm. 22–23.



Example 1c. Rossini, *Guillaume Tell* Overture: extracted violin and viola parts, mm. 48–49.

This is to say that Liszt's solution is not just appropriate and effective for the situation, but motivically relevant and supportive of the dramatic function of the original timpani roll. Liszt's elaborative coherence is an underexplored aspect of his writing in general, and often one can point to clear links like this between an original and Liszt's modifications.

A second aspect of Kim's analysis that emphasized the positive role of modification was her comparison of Liszt's process of developmental accretion in the "Ranz des vaches" section of the overture to similar procedures employed in strophic Schubert settings, particularly "Ave Maria." She highlights Liszt's decisions approvingly, and points to the merits of those decisions given the goal of making a meaningful, independently performable work in the new medium: "When the 'Ranz des vaches' tune repeats, Liszt changes the texture of each appearance over the course of his arrangement. What if Liszt had been consistent with the texture . . . throughout the section, just as Rossini had? . . . If he had done so, his score would have become a simple reproduction of the orchestral score playable by amateur pianists."¹⁷ This is also in line with Kim's identification of the "avoidance of rigid patterns" as a fundamental strength of Liszt's transcriptions.¹⁸

Another rich area of exploration for Kim are the transcriptions for two pianos of Liszt's symphonic poems. I have already mentioned her compelling discussion of the motivations for Liszt's choice of medium, which rather deliciously complicates things in terms of advantages and disadvantages, with respect to artistic aspirations and performance liabilities. In the former category one can circumvent the physical limitations of a four-hands transcription wherein rubbing elbows is almost unavoidable, and at the same time

17. Kim, 63.

18. Kim, 153.

exploit the sonic resources of two pianos. At the same time the interpretive flexibility of the soloist is lost with the addition of the second pianist (though of course there are other advantages in a chamber music scenario involving excellent musicians), and the venues available for performance are minimized, limiting the scope of live performance opportunities. Similarly to the circumstances with his solo piano transcriptions, Liszt's two-piano arrangements also required the advocacy of professional pianists.

The two-piano transcriptions found that advocacy in the guise of eminent figures like Camille Saint-Saëns and Francis Planté, and Kim relates the near-simultaneous production of these arrangements alongside their orchestral versions as a promotional tool to aid audience comprehension. Kim states that the "impulse behind such eager sharing [of the transcriptions] was apparently not only his belief in the medium of two pianos as the most effective means to convey the essence of his own orchestral compositions, but also his desire to ensure that his audience obtain a fuller and richer comprehension of the original."¹⁹ Here access is flipped to a different form of participation than the amateur plucking out the notes of an unknown piece at the keyboard; the two-piano transcription is both didactic and a work-in-itself, as is made clear in the attention Liszt gave to adapting the works for the new medium. The creation of these transcriptions is time-intensive, and it was fascinating to read Kim's account of Liszt's savvy approach to promoting his work among those who might be positioned to influence the reception of the orchestral works.²⁰

It is natural, perhaps, that Liszt should feel more license to take liberties with his own work in order to create a standalone piece, and Kim demonstrates this through examples from symphonic poems like *Hunnenschlacht* and *Mazeppa*, the latter of which traversed perhaps the widest range of versions of all the symphonic poems, from many solo piano versions to the orchestral work and back again.²¹ One aspect of Kim's discussion of *Les préludes* that was particularly thought-provoking involves the very opening of the piece. Piano 2 starts the piece by itself, but then the music shifts mid-phrase to piano 1.

The material is presented in three octaves in both parts of the phrase, yet is labeled "Quartet" in each instance, suggesting a string intimacy to the performer as opposed to an accurate reflection of what is happening in the orchestration, which begins with five parts (the string section) before switching to three for the end of the phrase in the example (m. 5). As Kim describes it, "Liszt strikingly cuts the phrase in the middle by dividing the unison strings between the pianos. . . . It is no coincidence that this division corresponds to the

19. Kim, 82.

20. It was outside the scope of Kim's study, but it is worth mentioning that some of Liszt's students did for Liszt what Liszt had done for other composers, but with little appreciation for their efforts until recent times. In particular the solo piano transcriptions of Liszt's symphonic poems by August Stradal come to mind, drawing as they do on figuration types to be found in Liszt's two-piano versions of the same pieces, yet manageable for solo pianists of considerable skill.

21. Along those lines it would be interesting but at a remove to consider the four-hand figuration in his proto-*Les préludes*, the choral work *Les quatre éléments*.

shift in instruments from a grouping of four string parts to a grouping of three. Liszt's deliberate redistribution in mid-phrase represents his faithful response to the subtle distinction of timbres by means of the shift from one group of strings to the other."²² That is, the distinction is subtly acknowledged in the shared distribution of the part between the two pianos. Using the examples Kim provides, we can see that the alignment is not actually exact, suggesting that other considerations may also be at play. For instance, Liszt drops the bottom octave from the thematic presentation in the orchestral version of m. 5, and the cellos and basses continue through the end of m. 4 (but not in the piano 2 part); Kim acknowledges some of these discrepancies in her notes.²³ Instead of mirroring the orchestral version exactly, Liszt employs a dovetailing technique of pitch overlap, and his choice of using C as the point of overlap serves to underscore the role of the repeated C's of the work's opening. His continuation of the three-octave distribution of the theme (as opposed to a literal approach that would have dropped the bottom octave) suggests that he is interested in both continuity of line and the subtle contrast in timbre to which Kim alerts us. Added to the mix may be Liszt's consideration of the performers, distributing difficulties and opportunities judiciously between parts to ensure active performer engagement. Kim's appreciation of these subtle points suggests the plenitude of solutions that Liszt brought to the arranging table to solve whatever problems might arise.

The third category of transcription that Kim puts forward in the book is in some ways the most intriguing, as it offers some concrete examples of Liszt's representation of a non-keyboard instrument on the piano—namely the cimbalom. Here the notion of fidelity to score and style intersect in compelling ways, as the focus is not so much the transferal of written music, but rather the representation of the cimbalom on the piano. Kim's background on V. József Schunda's chromatic cimbalom and Liszt's relationship to that instrument and its predecessors is eye-opening for a number of reasons. Among them is the discussion of tuning and the physicality of achieving certain effects like wide-spaced trills and repeated hammering, and how Liszt managed to embrace those features of Gypsy cimbalom playing in works like the Hungarian Rhapsodies.²⁴ Much is made, for instance, of Liszt's notation of alternating hands for trills and tremolos to recreate the kinetic sensation of the cimbalom tremolo—the idea may well have had its origin in cimbalom playing as Kim suggests, but once discovered and artfully employed it is far from unpianistic, offering the pianist a great deal of control over the velocity and articulation of repeated notes. Another fruitful comparison between keyboard and dulcimer-cimbalom points of contact is given in Kim's appraisal of Pantaleon Hebenstreit (a contemporary of J. S. Bach), and in particular that he early on "exploited different types of coverings for his mallets, not only the 'bare

22. Kim, 84–85.

23. Kim, 188. Given the direct relevance of the observations, it is unfortunate that the information was relegated to endnotes as opposed to footnotes. Kim's endnotes are rich with content that would be more immediately accessible as footnotes.

24. Kim unpacks the Gypsy–Hungarian question as much as is needed for this particular discussion.

sticks,' but also 'sticks with cotton'"²⁵ in his exploration of different timbral effects, bridging relationships between the hammered instruments. Additionally, Hebenstreit's forays into concert music with his hammered dulcimer pantalon (named after him) showed how these instrumental worlds might spill into one another's territory.

Part two of this compelling chapter on "Interpretive Fidelity to Gypsy Creativity" is a wonderfully clear synopsis called "Liszt's Renderings of the Cimbalom," which point by point supports Kim's ideas in seven areas.²⁶ One has the sense that given time and space, Kim would be able to offer up such an accounting of other forms of instrumental renderings at the keyboard, and while she indeed retraces her steps methodically for each chapter, I found myself wishing that the specificity and clarity brought to the cimbalom exploration might have been applied similarly to other instrumental cases. For instance, Liszt's solution to the Rossini timpani transcription problem could have benefited from a broader accounting of Liszt's other representations of timpani-percussion strikes and rolls at the keyboard, so that we might have a better sense of whether these solutions were unique or drawn from a repertoire of possibilities deployed in some systematic fashion.

To return to Kim's black-and-white–full-spectrum analogy of piano color versus a broader instrumental palette, the notion of degrees of detail in resolution comes to mind. Studies like Kim's help to illuminate the macroscopic experience of listening to a transcription by resolving the focus at different levels of the transcriber's art. There is a functional, discernible difference in the detailed work of an arranger like Liszt from that of the mainstream reductionist. The native artistic resolution has the capacity, under the right circumstances, to be reformatted to a medium that can provide a different yet related and substantive form of aesthetic experience with an artwork. *Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano* is a thought-provoking book, and my chief criticism is that I wanted to hear more from the author about her assessment of the nuts and bolts of Liszt's techniques across the range of his output. Hyun Joo Kim spurs us to look more closely at arrangements as works-in-themselves, and does so with a unique set of examples from the "Liszterature" that between them contend with many of the subject's thorniest issues. After reading we emerge with a greater appreciation for the artistic values and imagination of Liszt, a titan of transcription.

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25. Kim, 108.

26. Kim, 123–43.