

## **Dismantling the demands of performing**

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**ABSTRACT:** Many practical pedagogies of instrumental teaching argue (1) that the demands to which the performer is bound when she is practising (the majority of which are defined in terms of the work that is to be performed) remain active when she is performing live on stage; and (2) that it is in the nature of these demands that they should divert the majority of the performer's energy towards their fulfilment. I argue, instead, (1) that during the epistemic passage from practising to performing, from green room to stage, these demands are dismantled; and (2) that they come to afford a source of creative energy for artistic and interpretative decisions when performing live on stage.

**KEY WORDS:** Debussy; demands; live performance; qualitative transformation

“Trust your ears.” (Debussy, cited in Dunoyer, 1999, p. 99)<sup>1</sup>

In a thoughtful and provocative essay in this journal, Mine Doğantan-Dack (2012) discusses live performance and its distinctive characteristics as these are presented to the performer. Her argument is structured around two claims: (1) performers continue to learn while performing live on stage; and (2) such learning functions as a site for knowledge production. An important corollary of these two claims is that research into live performance needs its own methods of inquiry if it is to avoid replicating the insights that the wealth of research into practising continues to uncover. Three other desires motivate Doğantan-Dack's trajectory, though I bracket them in this essay: (1) to position live performance in relation to Artistic Research; (2) to contribute to the formalisation of the research objects that arise during

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<sup>1</sup> “Faites confiance à vos oreilles.”

performance; and (3) to clarify the value of the performer with respect to the disciplinary politics of music. The article is offered both to scholars and to performers, and at the centre of its argument is the concept of musical value. The article remains unusual in its focus on live performance (rather than practising or recording), even within music performance studies considered broadly. Although the logical precision of the analytical philosophy of music has been largely discarded as a basis for the study of music in favour of the empirical precision of music psychology, there is not yet much of substance about live performance from the first-person perspective of the performer herself. This is a shame. Doğantan-Dack's contribution is therefore valuable on several accounts, and the implications of her argument for further work are suggestive and interesting.

This essay supplements Doğantan-Dack's argument with a broadly congruent account of live performing within the Western Classical tradition, and in particular the discourse of what has been termed "presentational performance" (Turino, 2008, p. 59). However, I spend more time emphasising the epistemic passage from practising to performing during which what I term 'demands' are 'dismantled'. My context is broader than Doğantan-Dack's, for the beginnings of my argument are deliberately situated within the folk psychology of performing, within which are found the half-digested – but immensely powerful – residues of ideas from general pedagogy, physical training regimes, cultural mythology, and educational programmes, all brought together in the desire to develop phronesis in the performer through many hours of dedicated practice.

My argument is this. Many practical pedagogies of instrumental teaching, addressing beginners through to advanced students (e.g. Thompson, 2008; Hanon, 1900) assume (1) that the demands to which the performer is bound when she is practising (the majority of which are defined in terms of the work that is to be performed) remain active when she is performing live on stage; and (2) that it is in the nature of these demands that they divert the majority of the performer's energy towards their fulfilment. I argue, instead, (1) that during the epistemic passage from practising to performing these demands are dismantled; and (2) that they come to afford a source of artistic energy for interpretative decisions when performing live on stage.

Section 2 considers the demands that the guardians of performance define and police, all the way from the practice room to the stage. Section 3 considers the dismantling of these demands, focusing on psychological, physiological, and pedagogical registers. Section 4 returns full circle to the performer's pragmatism and her reliance on Qualitative Transformation. My broader interest lies in the question of whether demands on their own (without their dismantling) could be enough to guarantee two things: (1) that in the practice room the performer is learning as well as being taught; and (2) that on stage the performer is able to perform successfully as herself – by which I mean, performing in open acknowledgment of what Doğantan-Dack (2012, pp. 39 & 40) terms the "situatedness and the subjectivity" of her stage presence.

Two notes on terminology and an apology. First note: I could use a term like disturbing, resisting, or undoing; the prefix dis-, re-, or un- would indicate a critical distance from its object. I use 'dismantling' because it highlights a particular aspect of the phenomenology of performing concerning the performer's psycho-dynamics (e.g. Massumi, 2015; Rodemeyer, 2015; Sudnow, 2001; Wagner, 2017), namely that what is dismantled, whether during practice or on stage, does not vanish but remains present around the performer, surrounding

her like an aura. Second note: I could use the term discipline, invoking Foucault alongside alternative mantras about good pedagogy (Michael Hooper, personal communication, July 16, 2016). I use ‘demand’ because it occurs in music psychology, the analytic philosophy of music (e.g. Godlovitch, 1998), manuals for music lovers (e.g. Bacon, 2011), and the various forms of written and verbal feedback that the performer receives while being taught. The apology: this is a study of why demands need to be dismantled – indeed, why they are dismantled, come what may. However, there is little directly practical advice that the performer can take with her back to the piano, and there are only a few *bons mots* to ponder as she boards the train on route to the concert. The hard work remains – for the performer.

### DEFINING DEMANDS

I consider dismantling in the next section. In this section I consider demands: how they are defined, fulfilled, and evaluated.

Having agreed months ago to perform Debussy’s *La Plus que Lente* (1910) in next Monday’s concert, the performer’s task is predetermined. Only certain activities suffice, first in private when she practises and later in public when she performs, if the result is to be recognised by her audience as an aesthetically successful performance of *La Plus que Lente* and neither a bad performance of it nor a performance of a different piece or of no recognisable piece at all. There are many such predetermined activities: she must ensure that she possesses the requisite level of digital facility at the keyboard; she must assess the cultural resonances of the title (Howat, 2016); she must consider tempo choices (it is “not really a slow piece” [Howat, 1997, p. 88]); work out a dynamic profile for her interpretation (what volume and textural balance is appropriate for performing a salon piece in concert?); reflect on whether it is a parody (like Ravel’s *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* from the following year); plan how it is going to relate to the pieces before it and after it in the programme; and so on. Many texts on performing Debussy compress multiple and complex issues into single densely poetic sentences: for example, “In the performance [of *La Plus que Lente*], subtle amounts of rubato, allargando, and contrasting animation must follow Debussy’s indications and the multiple curves and allusions of the melodies without losing the basic, and most danceable, waltz spirit” (Schmitz, 1966, p. 128). Everything else, everything that is feared as being extraneous or excessive, is resisted or rejected: pedagogy runs a strict house of correction.

Or so it is believed by those composers, teachers, audiences, and critics whom Alfred Brendel (2001b) terms the “guardians” of performance. These guardians believe that performance “necessarily involves both an appropriate intention and the recognisable preservation of the musical contents of the work” (Davies, 2003a, p. 54), and that the role of the guardian is to define “appropriate” and police “recognition”. The demands that these guardians define, and by which the performer is bound both to the work and to contextual performance matters, operate a stringent “quality-control mechanism” (Godlovitch, 1998, p. 34) that manages the performer’s activity (competitions are the most severe manifestation of this mechanism). The demand, for example, to listen attentively to the sounds of the piano is generally subdivided into three components, combined in varying proportions: listen more closely and effectively; inhabit the auditory space more intimately and efficaciously; hear more neatly and efficiently. It is worth acknowledging that, although Brendel uses the term to tease certain types of musicians, the term ‘guardian’ has both positive and negative

connotations; etymologically it denotes somebody who ‘protects’ and ‘preserves’ something of value to the relevant community.

Demands are more powerful when they are less explicitly articulated, since the culture within which they operate values ‘authority’ more highly than ‘argumentation’; Dan Sperber (2010) terms this the ‘guru effect’. Hence the guardians often also deploy demands at an aesthetic level in addition to the pedagogical level, Debussy, for example,

on the one hand insisting that interpreters follow his markings yet on the other confessing that rhythms could not be exactly notated; on the one hand insisting on singers following exactly his rhythms and nuances and yet admiring above all those who took slight liberties. (Langham Smith, 1999, p. 21)

Teachers use the terminology of demands pervasively but inconsistently, relying on the strongly metaphorical register of their utterances and the force of personal examples, often grounded in decades of hard-won experience performing and / or teaching. Some of their demands are phrased implicitly: the LH staccato quavers on the downbeats of bars 33 and 35 need a Debussyan articulation (not the kind of staccato that has become associated with a Stravinskyian aesthetic). Some are phrased explicitly: “Don’t give too much to the *f* in bar 46, as you’ll need something in reserve for the *ff* restatement that follows.”

Demands come in two types, associated with the ideologies of *Werktreue* or *Texttreue* (Hellaby, 2009, p. 5). On the one hand, *Werktreue* demands include publicly sanctioned and historically sedimented performance practices (Morrison & Demorest, 2009), such as using the pedals to create illusions of space and distance, and the types of tempo gradation and agogic fluctuation that are appropriate embodiments of the markings *En serrant* and *Retenu* in bars 27 and 30 respectively. For Claudio Arrau, “You should start by respecting the text exactly as it is written” (cited in Horowitz, 1992, p. 121). For Brendel (2001a, p. 33), “It is therefore all the more important to observe every sign written down by Beethoven”, the italics indicating the seriousness of the matter and the paradox that such observance needs to be neither fetishised nor assumed to conclude the performer’s work. On the other hand, *Texttreue* demands include the notated musical text, frequently deconstructed but still powerful, which needs the performer to represent the way in which the second section is constructed out of repeated and sequential melodic gestures. Both of these types of demand have cognitive (Repp, 1992; London, 2002) and social registers.

Demands overdetermine what the performer need not do when performing, and underdetermine what she needs to do. In this way, they manage the field of operation within which her artistic intentions become feasible and within which her physical prowess can exert itself. Debussy’s notation doubly underdetermines performing: first, in terms of the linguistic specification of musical materials; secondly, in terms of the demands relating to physical action that are embedded within the materials (Godlovitch, 1998, pp. 86-88). Demands underdetermine how she could get physically and musically from the six-bar cadential codetta ending the first section into the second section of *La Plus que Lente*, navigating across the notated comma and the *fermata*, and they do not offer positive advice regarding which of the possible options could be best (if ‘option’ is the best term), as the performer works to establish an interpretation and an artistic identity appropriate for the concert next Monday lunchtime. The guardians ensure that she has less freedom of choice than she could desire (if ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ are the best terms), and there is a risk that, as the music coalesces into evolving patterns of tension and release, it could drift away from the performer and her

anxiety could increase as she realises the extent to which she is bound by the demands coming from the guardians (including Debussy).

Demands control performing. Put generously, it could be said that they ‘monitor’ it. They define a particular field of operation to which the performer is bound. Within this field, theories of gesture “plan” and “control” expressive movement (Jensenius, Wanderley, Godøy & Leman, 2012, p. 14; Drake & Palmer, 2000; LeBaron & Streeck, 2000). At the piano,

[sound] is actually *sensed* by the fingertips, especially in such essentially tactile music as Debussy’s, but created somewhere in the small of the back. At least, the louder the sound, the nearer one is to making and controlling it in one’s back, while softer tones bring the control forward somewhat into the shoulders and arms. (Roberts, 1996, pp. 285-286)

In this context, ‘corrective teaching’ supervises the evolution of an ergonomic technique, limiting the performer’s free play to a relatively minor role, measuring everything in a predetermined manner, and rejecting or revising anything that fails to measure up. This is possible because demands embody an authority that is omnipresent behind performance like an aesthetic Big Brother; it is most explicit in formal assessments like end-of-year recitals. “C-models [constraint-models] are complex clusters of directives, specified and accepted by the performance community, which vary with and partially constitute performance traditions” (Godlovitch, 1998, p. 50).

Demands are described in various ways (including in this essay), but they are not abstract: they insinuate themselves directly into the performer’s field of operation with immediate effect, determining present actions and future attitudes. With demands comes measurement. Guardians (and the performer herself) evaluate the extent to which they are fulfilled on stage, whether implicitly or explicitly, and feedback is usually couched in these terms; the public written guidelines that examiners use are only the most transparent to which the performer is subjected.

Demands are unforgiving and irrefutable, forcing the performer to navigate a path between expert music making and a ‘wooden’ rendition. Their life cycle from definition to evaluation (and, slowly and rarely, modification) is managed by the guardians. Given that the performer faces a notoriously intense training schedule, it is understandable that she could be sometimes culturally unwilling and psychologically unable to resist such deep-seated and overwhelming demands, and could find it difficult to operate fluidly and throw herself open experimentally to the possibility of unscripted expression or outright technical failure, as is more common with theatre practitioners (Ford, 2013). Hiding in Stravinsky’s shadow is seductive, protected by his claim (1947, p. 65) that “my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of operation and the more I surround myself with obstacles [read: demands]”. Certainly, performing wholly within a tradition, bound to a recognised performance practice (often given approval by a recorded history), and deliberately not seeking to assert one’s individual fantasy too explicitly feels comfortable and non-threatening, with expressive decisions being triangulated around immovable ‘obstacles’ and bound to ‘authoritative’ past performances that have been branded so by guardians. Some Debussy performances hide behind just such a Modernist bourgeois ideology.

Demands impose a curiously black and white logic upon the means of their fulfilment. Consider a brain-in-a-vat thought experiment like those once characteristic of analytic philosophy. Two equally able performers are bound to contrasting sets of demands, each set associated with a particular type of interpretation, and asked to implement the associated

physical actions. Performer A performs the second section of *La Plus que Lente* beginning in bar 33 with the notated dynamics, observing the various *p* markings and the hairpins in a normal manner; the term 'normal' does not need definition here beyond noting that it is more than the performer's whim. Performer A sets her ears on one thing, and the relevant demand specifies both the target dynamic range within which her performing at a *p* dynamic level could be recognisable as a *p* and not as a *f* (allowing for a normal decibel range within which *p* is perceived as *p*), and how the dynamics interact with register, voicing, surface pulse, harmonic rhythm and the acoustics of the Assembly Rooms to create this particular musical effect. Performer B is bound to a contrasting demand. She performs the same section at a *f* dynamic level, turning the dynamic profile of the entire section inside out, so that the *f* and *ff* climaxes in bars 46 and 50 are performed *p* and *pp* respectively. Performer B, although she is deliberately not performing the specified *p* like Performer A, does not need to simply reverse or negate the demands specified by the text and which Performer A performs, for Performer B's field of operation deviates qualitatively from what is specified, not just quantitatively. Although Performer B operates within the artificial limitations of demand B ("I'll perform it at a *f* level today just because I fancy hearing the effect"; or "I'll do it because I agreed to participate in this thought experiment"), she could equally well perform bar 33 at any other non-*p* dynamic level. In this sense, bound to the second demand, Performer B's performing cannot really fail if it is evaluated on its own terms. If it transpires that the audience did not perceive the *p* as an *f*, then performer B both failed and succeeded in her performing. She failed because she did not engender the appropriate evaluation in the audience (namely, hearing the *p* as an *f*), and she succeeded for nonetheless deliberately not performing what the text specifies (performing the *p* in bar 33 as a *p*, and the succeeding dynamics relative to this initial *p*). There is also the question of whether, having agreed to perform bound to the B set of demands, Performer B is then additionally deluding herself into thinking that she is performing the section normally just like Performer A. Such delusion ("How could I satisfy myself that I am performing this section sufficiently *p* for it to be not recognised as *f*?") is only diagnosed with respect to the role of the demands operating during performing; there is no delusion without demands and without the guardians' presence behind the performer.

The wider point here about the logic of demands and the performer's intentions with respect to the Debussy is that a failure in performance is always a failure in relation to the predetermined demands that measure success. Failure in performance implies that the performer possesses an ability to succeed: the performer could only fail at what is within her power. Thus, when the performer is working out how to fulfil the demands that determine what must happen in bar 33, she does not choose from among a set of possibilities. Performer A, performing according to normal demands, does not avoid failure; she succeeds to an extent, since success is not a double negative. While failing performances could be subdivided into components, it would be unusual for a guardian to evaluate a performance as being successful on the basis of a single component: "Your *p* dynamic in bar 33 on its own made your performance great". This is because, notwithstanding the guardians' claims, the evaluation to which the performer is subjected is holistic, non-linear, emergent, and not wholly dependent upon the manner in which she is bound to demands (this little element of resistance to the ideology of the guardians is shown below to be quite a force for pragmatism in performing).

Such is the discourse created by the guardians. Demands are predetermined and

offloaded onto the performer for her to work through and fulfil when she performs on stage. Evaluations about the success of her performing are made by guardians on this basis. In the next section, I move towards a more pragmatic domain: that of the performer's embodied presence within the world and the way in which her body is central to the dismantling of demands.

### DISMANTLING DEMANDS

The logic of demands, as the thought experiment above suggests, appears to impose a tight, rigid, repressive, and black-and-white field of operation upon the performer. Ideologies like Stravinsky's emphasise this possibility. The guardians' demands to which the performer is bound have a psychological register ('dismantling' overlaps with the Freudian term 'displacement'). Many aspects of this psychological register are positive and productive. For example, Roberts writes of "imagination":

Of all the technical problems encountered in Debussy's piano music, the most fundamental relate to the production and control of sound [...]. But sound I believe to be intimately related to imagination, in a kind of Baudelairean *correspondance* achieved as much by the poetry in one's soul as by the technique in one's fingers. (Roberts, 1996, p. 8)

Claude Abruavanel writes of "intuition":

The creation as well as the expression of the intimate nature of a work belongs to the domain of musical intuition. The interpreter must know how to be in harmony with the spirit and style of the work in order to effect its reconstruction, which becomes a veritable re-creation in the course of performance. (Abruavanel, 1999, p. 28)

In addition, the term demand itself has a physiological register, for demands work to bind the performer to the work and its score, in the process generating a dialectic pulling the performer to and fro between her "respect for the score" (Reid, 2002, p. 106) and her "desire to exercise her own creative insights" (Hill, 2002, p. 130).

Performing is messier than practising. Numerous accounts both folk psychological and empirical discuss the contingencies and risks of performing. Dođantan-Dack (2012, p. 41), for one, writes of the need for "much embodied exploration" while the performer is practising and preparing for performing – and surely also while actually performing – and she has noted elsewhere (Dođantan-Dack, personal communication, July 1, 2018) that practising is far from "a monolithic, homogenous phenomenon", the different modes of practising responding in different ways to demands and preparing in different ways for performing's dismantling of these same demands. Most performers embrace the positive aspects of these phenomena. Arrau, for example, responds to a question about risk in terms of his body:

JH [Joseph Horowitz]: Is there a risk of becoming too conscious of technique?

CA [Arrau]: A great risk. [...] I found out very early that playing in a relaxed way makes one more creative – because it is more natural; because the whole body is involved; because there is a unity of body and psyche. (Arrau cited in Horowitz, 1992, p. 118)

The point is that the interpretive circle always returns to the performer's "whole body" (which includes the ears), and her body always retains its empirical veto on decisions that the performer (thinks that she) has made in response to the guardians' demands. This veto exercised by the performer's body functions as a type of resistance to the discourse of demands policed by the guardians.

Consider an example. In May 2010, while I was acting as an external moderating examiner at a conservatoire, I observed a number of end-of-year violin recitals. In one of these recitals, following the applause after the first piece, which had been a solo (Telemann's *Fantaisie* no. 10), the staff accompanist entered from the left and walked onto the stage towards the piano, mistakenly thinking that the applause was for the second piece, also a solo (Rode's *Caprice* no. 4). Seeing the violinist shaking her head anxiously at her and frowning, the accompanist halted, self-consciously looked around, placed her music on the piano, and reversed awkwardly off stage and back into the green room. After the second piece, the violinist turned apprehensively to watch the stage door, checking that her accompanist was indeed now coming on as needed. As her accompanist came on stage there was a palpable release of tension from the violinist's shoulders, and the accompanist seemed more relaxed. The entire thing was a little unfortunate for the violinist, if slightly comical for the audience. The violinist definitely performed less fluidly and more nervously in the second solo piece, after the initial interruption. There had been a category error by the staff accompanist. The performance had brushed up against the limits of theatrical enclosure that constitute the concert hall, according to which there is an existential divide between the performer's body on stage (dressed up and acting the part) and her body off stage (changing back into normal clothing, putting away the violin, talking to friends). When the performer came on stage for the first piece, her body became a performer's body, and when she walked off the stage with the accompanist after the final piece her body reverted to her normal everyday body.

These different bodies – more accurately, these different personae – are essential to the theatricality of performing, and could be understood in terms of the Freudian dynamic of *fort-da*, the reappearing and disappearing object. It could be argued that, as any number of performers readily agree, “the moment I get on stage I am another person” (Arrau cited in Horowitz, 1992, p. 108). This is the heart of the matter. The issue is not that the everyday body vanishes, but that it is displaced; alternatively, there is an epistemic passage from the everyday body to the performing body. There is no categorical distinction between bodies, simply a dynamic interplay. Indeed, the epistemic shift from practising to performing – and hence the dismantling of demands – begins long before the physical shift from offstage to onstage when the Assembly Room lights are dimmed, but the shift is never simply over, for practising never simply vanishes from the horizon of performing, even in the middle of a concert; it retains its auratic presence during the unfolding of *La Plus que Lente*. Hence the comedic false entrance of the staff accompanist. She came on stage in order to be the accompanist for Léon Roques' arrangement of *La Plus que Lente* for violin and piano (a semitone higher than the original), but by her mistaken timing was abruptly transformed back into her off stage persona, and the calm displacement of one body-persona by another was disrupted. Something similar happened to the violinist, too, even though she was already on stage. The pedagogical lesson here for the unfortunate violinist and her accompanist is, as Doğantan-Dack notes (personal communication, July 1, 2018), that

the power of the performing musician's body to resist these discourses of demands rises exponentially the less distinction there is between her everyday and performing bodies. A 'body' that is able to express 'itself' freely and authentically in daily life will find it easier to break away from the bondage of demanding discourses while on stage (and in the practice room).

There is a general point about the displacement of the performer's practising body by her



performing body, the latter grounding her onstage persona. This concerns the physiological register of demands and its overlapping with the psychological register (the impact of seeing the accompanist before she was due). As this conservatoire example illustrates, every venue has a range of predetermined and acceptable measurements covering acceptable distances from the stage door to the music stand and between the stand and the piano, where 'acceptable' denotes a passage from one space to the next that lasts long enough to host the epistemic passage from practising persona to performing persona. Imagine a counterfactual: it would be strange, given the cultural expectations of a Western Classical music audience, to perform just outside the stage door, close enough to open it, right on the edge of the empty stage. The performer certainly needs a personal space within which her stage persona and performing body can operate, and this tends to be configured around a notion of centre stage that is both physical and symbolic. Regardless of whether the underlying aesthetic ideology is that art should be like nature, that nature should be like art, or even that nature and art should be entirely separate modes of performing (Debussy subscribed to the first belief), all ideologies agree that the relevant difference between the two is found in the performer's body and the dismantling of the demands of the life-body by the emerging art-body. This dismantling begins to bring the predetermined demands defined by the guardians closer to the reality of performing live on stage.

A few of the many demands to which the student violinist was bound were dismantled by her immediate environment, by the way in which the unexpected distraction displaced her body's self-positioning as a stage persona ready to perform the Rode. Doğantan-Dack (2012, p. 37) states the matter in no uncertain terms: "It is the live performance that illuminates the path leading to it rather than the other way around." I add a truism: although it continues to influence performing long after it itself has ended, practising is confined to the practice room. This is an essential point, and strengthens the resistance to the guardians' ideology of performance. To wit: the demands to which the performer and her body are bound are dismantled on stage (if not earlier), since the manner in which she is bound in the practice room is displaced by the manner in which she is nominally bound on stage, since her everyday body working through the demands is displaced by her stage body (a different persona). Several implications for the performer's body can be extrapolated from the case of this particular violinist: her body could catch her mind out; her aesthetic plans could come unstuck by the sensations distracting her body's organs; what gets sensed always gets a response; and her body and its mind (insofar as they are falsely separated) could work as much in tension with each other as in parallel. In short, the entanglement of the performer's body in how she fulfils the demands imposed by the guardians is as complex as it is expressive. Given that the performer's body is divided against itself, differs from itself, is bound to its evolution, struggles with sensation, has a mind of its own, one pragmatic way forward could be for her to focus on setting up performing so that demands can be dismantled and she could afford herself a space for artistic and interpretative decision making.

So the performer's fulfilment of the guardians' demands is an embodied matter. If the performer concentrates on the aesthetics of skill acquisition in the concert hall to the exclusion of their embodiment within the wider world (the performer is also a citizen and gets the same bus home as her audience), then she could miss an opportunity to engage *La Plus que Lente* on more pragmatic terms that focus her attention less on the fulfilment of demands, and more on the evolution of strategies for dealing with whatever could happen

when she goes on stage. It is tempting for her to develop and maintain detailed technique-related demands on the body, and to allow any remaining energy to be diverted to policing these demands (though guardians do not use the term ‘policing’; practice is ‘supervised’). She could expend energy developing ever more efficient ways of fulfilling demands, feeling her body better, and paying more effective attention to the results, in short developing her “inner ear” (Roberts, 1996, p. 313) – a peculiarly insidious form of remote policing operated by the guardians. Some of this energy, however, could well end up diverted to secondary concerns or fetishising the wrong things, at the expense of her artistry on stage. “Artistry,” however, “cannot of course be supplied on demand, but it can be given the conditions in which to take root – and a sound technique, as essential as it is, is not the only condition necessary” (Roberts, 1996, p. 8). All of this would be unproblematic were it not for the fact that the performer is due in Norwich next Monday at 1.00pm to perform the work, and nobody else could suddenly assume responsibility for preparing the music (this would be also true if she were playing in an ensemble). This future task requires her to develop pragmatic strategies that allow demands to be fulfilled-dismantled. As Brendel notes, live performance is “characterized by spontaneity, tension and risk” (2001c, p. 346), and it is important for the performer to learn the Debussy in such a manner that fulfilling the demands of the work does not feel like bondage.

If the above paragraph sounds unduly sceptical about whether the performer is able to develop sustainable ways of connecting her embodied actions on stage with her artistry, then the next section shows that this is an unnecessary worry imposed not by the performer herself, but by the guardians.

### QUALITATIVELY TRANSFORMING DEMANDS

I noted in the previous section that the dismantling of demands has physiological, psychological, and pedagogical registers. The last of these is witnessed by the transformation of corrective teaching into projective teaching (*Don’t do it like that!* is transformed into *Do this in order to perform!*). In such moments when the three registers come together, the directives of teaching are switched into the possibilities of learning, and the performer experiences Qualitative Transformation. This phenomenon, discussed below, can be summarised as what happens when the expressive possibility of a particular moment, possibly unplanned, comes alive in response to contingent factors in the event, and the performer finds herself experiencing and contributing to something new as the music passes by.

Luckily, the performer is nothing if not pragmatic. She does not need to prepare *La Plus Que Lente* for some unspecified point in the future (or in order to provide examples for this essay), but for the concert in the Assembly Rooms on Monday at 1.00pm. Thus she does not need ‘a’ solution to the problem (if ‘problem’ is the best term) of how to perform the close of the first section with the descending octave run starting in bar 27. She needs ‘the’ solution that could work next Monday lunchtime, even though in Humean fashion this could turn out not to be ‘the’ solution that she uses for the evening concert in Cambridge the following week. Of course, black swans are infrequent, and she could find herself relying on ‘the’ solution many times without having to invent a new solution each time. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the plethora of statements about her task (including those proposed in this

essay), she could find it useful to create a *modus operandi* for dismantling demands, and a flexible mode of performing that respects Debussy's text and affords her a means of embodying artistry and finding a way of letting her "intuition and sensitivity" emerge (Arrau, cited in Gavoty, 1962, p. 27). One such *modus operandi* is Qualitative Transformation.

Consider this statement:

There is no single, ideal performance of any work – performing must be creative if it is to be convincing. Performers might allow themselves to be advised by composers' intentions, where these are known, but they should not sacrifice their creative autonomy to the fixed will of the composer, for without the exercise of that autonomy performance reduces to the bare transmission of characterless notes. (Davies, 2003b, p. 62)

Out of context, this statement could read like a manifesto of the performer's most important artistic beliefs. Much of the guardians' wisdom that the performer ponders when practising and that are qualitatively transformed when performing live is supervenient upon such claims. As it happens, however, this statement was written by an influential analytic philosopher as an example of what he claims successful performing must not be, and he himself rejects the statement in favour of pretty much the polar opposite position. It is only fair to say though that, within the terms of the analytic philosopher's own argument, which stretches beyond this essay, the quotation has a perfectly logical role. The point here is simply that, for the performer, truth is less the end of artistic work than its beginning. This is why myths and ideologies operate in such a powerfully seductive way within the performer's life. By transferring energy to her body, they set her in motion to go and be artistic, to "use her discretion" and find ways of opening up her performing to qualitative transformation and to its "affective" dimensions, which are central to Doğantan-Dack's argument (2012, pp. 35, 36, 39, 44, 45). As Brendel concludes his essay on *Werktreue*,

Those of my readers who are more at ease when they can use their own discretion will now feel relieved. I share their feelings. But the free elements – fire, water and air – will not carry us unless we have first practised our steps on firm ground. We follow rules in order to make the exceptions more impressive. From the letter we distil our vision, and on turning back observe the letter with new eyes. (Brendel, 2001a, p. 41)

The performer is bound not only to the ideas in the philosopher's statement above, but to the pragmatics of Qualitative Transformation, which frequently coalesce around the "desire for something magical", as Doğantan-Dack phrases it (2012, p. 45). Marguerite Long similarly reports that Debussy's performing was "all depth, allurements and an explicable magical charm" (1972, p. 78). Qualitative Transformation is the position that "in live performance new decisions can occur about interpretation and interaction with co-performers and audience" (Davidson, 2002, p. 150). Doğantan-Dack explains:

During the live event, the performer makes decisions based on his or her *belief* in a phenomenon that does not yet exist, that he or she hopes to bring about by surpassing what has been achieved in the practice room, by sometimes taking risks and acting *wisely* enough just at the right moment following the subjective evaluation of the expressive potential of a given moment" (2012, p. 44).

Qualitative Transformation, in other words, is dismantling writ large: an anthropomorphic incorporation of the contingency of temporality into live performing.

The desire for Qualitative Transformation is highly seductive. Qualitative Transformation is the *Ur*-demand to which the performer and her body are bound, and the filter through

which other demands pass. It is the one demand that cannot be misinterpreted as a constraint. Roberts puts it the other way around:

if it were possible to reveal the meaning of [Debussy's] music through the precise translation into sound of the composer's written symbols and instructions – leaving out of account all personal human engagement, all emotional reaction – then the interpreter *would* be superfluous and a machine could do the performing. (Roberts, 1996, pp. 9-10)

– qualitative transformation would be unnecessary, indeed impossible. It is in the nature of Qualitative Transformation that many of the demands that the performer encounters are unavoidable, and some of them are unpredictable: Doğantan-Dack acknowledges that “the conditions of live performance do not always support one's musical intentions and aspirations” (2012, p. 43). There is no need to lose sleep worrying about whether or not they could interfere with her artistry. Instead, her time needs to be spent developing ways of operating such that these demands could be dismantled and incorporated into her field of operation alongside her “imagination and critical scrutiny” (Brendel, 2001b, p. 132). Qualitative Transformation saves the performer from feeling that she must confront demands head on (the most popular ideology) or resist them wholesale (less common), both of which assumptions effect nothing more than a further tightening of the demands to which the performer is bound. Instead, in Qualitative Transformation demands are dismantled and switched from deterministic figures of perfection into everyday cultural practices (*Do or die!* is dismantled into *Do and enjoy!*).

Interestingly, Doğantan-Dack has recently glossed her position (personal communication, July 1, 2018), making it clear that Qualitative Transformation should be configured as arising as much while the performer is practising as while she is performing. The two places have different phenomenological qualities but they both afford experiences of flow. She writes:

I still think that the holistic experience of qualitative transformations that *sometimes* happens in live contexts can only happen in such live contexts, in the presence of an audience; but there are individual aspects of these transformations that can transpire when one is practising (for instance, one can enter a state of flow during practice; and the kind of practice where one continues to learn each time can generate its own peculiar qualitative transformations).

This is an important point, driving home the continuity between practising and performing, the auratic nature of dismantling (demands do not vanish), the dialectical relationship between the performer's everyday body and performing body, and the imbrication of the one in the other (which is why performing is so complex a human phenomenon).

This said, the emergence of Qualitative Transformation begs two questions about practical pedagogy. First: why, beyond the basic technical ability needed for *La Plus que Lente*, the performer could feel compelled to divert energy towards repressing anything that distracts her from concentrated listening, as if such repression in itself guarantees artistry: why she could feel under pressure not to whistle like Glenn Gould, not to focus on the piano's faulty pedal (Rosen, 2001, p. 9), and so on. Secondly: why, despite wider shifts in auditory practices outside classical music and despite the changing nature of Performance in the contemporary world (McKenzie, 2001), it is often assumed that anything that gets in the way of concentrated listening could be bad for the health of the performer's inner ear, a problem, and a threat to the “continuity” and “integrity” of performing (Godlovitch, 1998, pp. 34-41).

Qualitative Transformation affords a different story about the fate of the performer's concentrated listening: listening operates not against performing but within it, and the dismantling of demands functions as a "transformational endeavour" that "enable[s] persons to become reflective learners" (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 61, cited in McCaleb, 2016) – a massive existential and epistemic passage from technician to musician, which could be useful for the performer, who, Doğantan-Dack explains (2012, p. 43), usually feels that she "could try something new in each life performance and keep discovering the expressive boundaries of the music."

Ironically, although Qualitative Transformation allows the performer to dismantle the demands defined by the guardians, it is also sometimes (falsely) assumed that Qualitative Transformation could be guaranteed, that its nuanced aesthetic shaping of performing could be predetermined, and that evaluations of the success of the performing could be planned beforehand: that Qualitative Transformation is a technique that could be implemented with a degree of intention. As illustrations, consider the position underwriting otherwise contrasting interventionist texts (though these texts do not use the term Qualitative Transformation): the measured reflections of Boris Berman's *Notes from the Pianists' Bench*, the pop psychology of David Rowland's *The Confident Performer*, and the excitable optimism of Barry Green's *The Inner Game of Music*. Notwithstanding sensible exhortations about "leaving the piece alone [during the final stage of preparation], not pushing it, letting it mature by itself", "focussing on the big picture", and being brave about "letting go" (respectively: Berman, 2000, p. 187; Rowland, 1997, pp. 77-79; Green, 1987, pp. 102-124), all of which could afford Qualitative Transformation, these texts expend much energy developing both tighter demands with which the performer could be bound, articulated in terms of imagery, metaphors, and protocols that apparently improve the performer's concentration. In all three texts, the question of how the performer could afford herself the possibility of Qualitative Transformation is ignored or implicit, despite the fact that it is important to any future successful discourse of performance, not to mention the individual performer as she prepares *La Plus que Lente* for next week, such affordances varying between performers, between pieces, and between performances. Instead, they assume simply that the performer is always paying full attention to what is happening and is bound to the demands imposed on her by the music's discursive set-up. In fact, Qualitative Transformation is only a 'technique' that could be mastered to the extent that it opens up performing to the contingencies of temporality and prevents its own mastery: the performer could not 'choose' Qualitative Transformation, she could merely acknowledge it as a possibility and set up her performing in such a manner that new and unexpected changes and decisions on stage could be welcomed. How relaxed could matters be if, during practice, instead of attempting to open up performing to the possibility of Qualitative Transformation by rigidly engaging with demands or inventing further demands (as with the three texts mentioned above), the performer were explicitly licensed to take the kind of position put forward by Arrau (Horowitz, 1992, p. 128): "If I am in any doubt about the way I play something – whether to make a crescendo, whether to make a *ritard* – I just let it evolve. When you're working on a piece, such things should simply ripen." By the time performing comes around, the performer could have "ripened" and got herself into a position that is ready for whatever might happen.

Understandably, then, performance anxiety is common, especially at low and unreported levels. If performance anxiety is "The experience of persisting, distressful apprehension about

and / or actual impairment of performance skills in public context, to a degree unwarranted given the individual's aptitude, training and level of preparation" (Salmon, 1990, p. 3), then in relation to the management of demands such anxiety arises when demands have not been openly acknowledged as a form of bondage and neither wholly positive nor wholly negative in what they do to the performer's body. Performance anxiety, then, is "unwarranted" and problematic only when it arises from an assumption that imposing tighter demands on the performer helps her to manoeuvre better around her musical environment. The performer needs to develop a way of working autonomously, which means: setting up performing so that the demands to which she is bound could be dismantled so that she feels free enough to invest without condition in her performing, to "surpass" previously prepared plans, as Doğantan-Dack says – to capitalise on the teaching she has had and to begin learning from and while performing: to begin performing as herself.

This process of learning to learn from performing may be helped by engaging in a certain type of activity:

*creating a personal space in the practice room that is then taken onto the stage by the performer as part of her body – leading the performer to exist in a space on stage that is minimally different in its (artistic, expressive) affordances from that experienced in the practice room.*

Doğantan-Dack terms this a "peri-personal space", and she believes it to be "a powerful facilitator for the emergence of qualitative transformations, which can never be guaranteed!" and that its aura surrounds the performer in both practising and performing spaces (personal communication, July 1, 2018). Given the motivating force of this peri-personal space, it is likely that the process of dismantling demands begins while the performer is practising, and does not happen wholly on stage. Some demands, such as those concerned with technique, may well be the first to be dismantled. Demands regarding timbre and sonority, such as those concerning the shaping of the delicate final line or so of *La Plus que Lente*, being so dependent upon the acoustics of the concert hall, may well be only dismantled on stage. With all demands, it is the epistemic shift from practising to performing that affords the performer the achievement of dismantling the demands that, like these in the Debussy, face her every time she performs – and hence the possibility of Qualitative Transformation.

Thus, when performing, Qualitative Transformation could in fact be an expressive, productive, even pleasurable element of the performer's activity and central to the evolution of her concentrated listening skills. It could impact on how she subsequently practices and prepares. It could afford her a way of overcoming three potentially negative aspects of the bondage to demands: (1) failure to fulfil the full set of demands specified in the work; (2) the likelihood of unproductive performance anxiety; and (3) failure to fulfil musical demands in the way that one fulfils demands outside music. This is one way of reading distinctions between "listening which scrutinizes" and "listening which is productive" (Furtwängler, 1995, p. 171): Qualitative Transformation in performing could tip the balance towards the latter. For, even if the performer decides, with or without the support of peers, teachers, the recorded legacy (Debussy's piano roll of *La Plus que Lente* was issued in 1913), historical context (e.g. perusing the orchestral version of the work, which had been "dictated by [Debussy's] financial need" (Herlin, 2011, p. 167)), or personal textual study, not to fully embrace the notion that performing could deliberately seek to dismantle the demands of *La Plus que Lente* as part of an interpretative strategy, the demands of practising are necessarily

superseded by the possibility of Qualitative Transformation, so she might as well relax and acknowledge them upfront. More often than not, there are aspects of demands and the manner of their embodiment that could raise unexpected issues when the performer walks out through the stage door. Resisting them wholesale is misguided, indeed impossible, just as acknowledging one's bondage without a second thought does not afford the development of artistry.

### CONCLUSION

Preparing *La Plus que Lente*, the performer's path lies somewhere between total bondage to demands and total freedom from demands. Travelling the path, however, is not a matter of choice: she treads it regardless, and it comes to an end on Monday. If being fully bound to the demands of the work embodies an inability to hold a thought, and if being fully free embodies an inability to acknowledge that the mind is never in full control, then the performer's compromise is pragmatic. Somewhere along this middle ground, which is a constantly shifting epistemological attitude of mind and embodied praxis, the performer feels her body coming into its own. As Roy Howat concludes his study of the sources for Debussy's piano music, "The inevitable subjectivity of intervening in such cases [of notational ambiguity] is much less than the subjectivity of ducking the problem, or of dull, uncomprehending obedience" (Howat, 1997, p. 107). Dismantling demands could allow the performer to balance "intervention" and "obedience". It could afford her a pragmatic tool for making decisions and managing the contingencies of performing live – of acknowledging and making the most of "the surprise" that awaits her, as Doğantan-Dack concludes her article.

This suggests that the pragmatic way of grappling with demands is not to struggle in them like a bear caught in a trap. The more fluid, even languid, the performer's concentrated listening, the better. The more flexible her body, the better. The more readily she accepts that "The epistemic boundary between practising and performing needs to be fuzzy, if the performance is to be 'living', artistic and sincerely and genuinely expressive", the better (Doğantan-Dack, personal communication, July 1, 2018). Such pragmatism affords the performer her ultimate goal, namely "the conjunction of artistry and technique" (Roberts, 1996, p. 313), but it needs work. As Debussy himself claims, "How much we have first to find, then to discard, to arrive at the bare flesh of emotion" (cited in Howat, 1997, p. 107).<sup>2</sup> When the performer comes to perform *La Plus que Lente* next week in Norwich, there could be a further dismantling of the guardians' demands, and it could be reasonable for her to be prepared to change her mind, to act on the spot, even to vacillate, as she manages the temporal contingencies of performing and opens herself up to Qualitative Transformation. Thank goodness! Performing *La Plus que Lente* without demands would be a mistake (it would be merely a Radical Interpretation), but performing determined by demands would be just as bad: it would not be expressive.

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<sup>2</sup> "Combine il faut d'abord trouver, puis supprimer, pour arrive jusqu'à la chair nue de l'émotion."

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## Article

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entropy, ergonomics, listening, problem solving, recording, and timbre.