

Summary

ANNA CHECKA (University of Gdansk) / Virtuosity as transgression of corporality. Between sound and image

Virtuosity and artistic rivalry (musical competition) depend not only on a profound understanding of the composer's idea but also on full awareness of possibilities of the instrument as well as the performer's body. The desire to overcome the technical and somatic limits on the stage is a mirror of human "nostalgia for transcendency". In the 19th century, the growing popularity of the virtuoso (especially in Paris, called then Pianopolis) could provoke associations with an archaic *agon* as a symbol of artistic rivalry. The brightest stars in the galaxy of Parisian pianists were Chopin and Liszt as the two contraries: an angel and a demon. Apart from "artistic duels" of these great musicians, also various devices were invented with the aim of improving and training hand movements. These instruments of torture (such as the dactylion or chiroplast) provoked controversy as signs of the instrumentalisation of human beings. The history of virtuosity is as long as the history of music. We can find its sources in the agonistic culture of Greece thanks to the ambiguous myths of a duel between Apollo and Marsyas. An opposite of Apollo's violence (as well as his heartless virtuosity) is a figure of Orpheus. His musical skills help to cross the borders between life and death, between man and nature. I give a sympathetic hearing to the universal notion of musical agon and "bodily" experience of the contemporary Marsyas, Apollo and Orpheus whose skills are continually tested during musical competitions. It is worth considering whether the concept of virtuosity can still have a transcendental dimension today.