

# The Phenomenon of Virtuosity in Musical and Instrumental Performance

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of virtuosity in musical-instrumental performance represents a complex intersection of technical mastery, expressive intentionality, and historical-cultural evolution. Despite the widespread use of the term "virtuosity" in both practical and theoretical contexts, its conceptual significance requires systematic analysis and classification within contemporary artistic practices. In instrumental music - particularly piano and string traditions - virtuosity has evolved as a fundamental dimension of artistic expression, transforming the instrument into an extension of the performer's creative and cognitive capabilities. This study employs a phenomenological approach, emphasizing the dual role of consciousness as both subject and analytical tool, revealing how virtuosity transcends mere technical skill to become a medium for deep emotional and intellectual experience. Historical analysis traces the development of virtuosity from Antiquity through the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras, highlighting the continuous interplay between technical innovation, stylistic aesthetics, and performer individuality. The research demonstrates that virtuosity is not simply an elevated level of skill but a cultural and ontological phenomenon, reflecting the capacity of human creativity to expand musical language, shape interpretive paradigms, and transform performance into a conduit for existential and aesthetic experience. Virtuosity, in this context, emerges as both a stylistic and genre-forming principle, representing the dynamic synthesis of technical, expressive, and conceptual dimensions in music performance.

**Keywords:** musical and instrumental performance, the phenomenon of virtuosity, means of musical expression, musical instrument, musical thinking, performing interpretation, performing technique

## Introduction

The concept of virtuosity has long occupied a central position in the discourse of musical artistry, yet its multifaceted nature continues to demand rigorous conceptual exploration. In instrumental music, virtuosity signifies not merely technical prowess but the holistic integration of intellectual, emotional, and physical faculties in the realization of musical works. From the perspective of phenomenology, virtuosity embodies a dual function: the performer's consciousness simultaneously engages with and becomes an instrument of the artistic phenomenon. This perspective emphasizes the performer's capacity to transcend the material limitations of the instrument, producing an experience in which technical mastery merges seamlessly with expressive intentionality, creating the illusion of effortlessness for the listener.

Historically, virtuosity has evolved through distinct cultural and stylistic contexts. In Antiquity, performance skill was inseparable from spiritual and intellectual engagement; during the Renaissance, it became intertwined with the ideals of the universal human, synthesizing technical precision and creative insight. The Baroque era elevated virtuosic performance to a theatrical and affective dimension, while the Classical and Romantic periods further emphasized interpretive autonomy, expressive depth, and the cultivation of personal artistic identity. Throughout these historical stages, the concept of virtuosity has served as a catalyst for innovation in instrument design, performance practice, and compositional style, shaping the very evolution of musical language.

This study seeks to elucidate virtuosity as a dynamic phenomenon that transcends mere mechanical proficiency. By examining its historical, aesthetic, and phenomenological dimensions, the research highlights virtuosity as a defining feature of musical-instrumental culture, a medium through which performers articulate complex emotional and intellectual realities, and a principle that continues to inspire the development of musical art across epochs.

## 2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF VIRTUOSITY IN THE FIELD OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTALISM

Despite the widespread use of the term "virtuosity" in practical and historical-theoretical spheres, this phenomenon and its conceptual meaning require thorough analysis and systematic classification in the context of modern artistic practices. Today, this concept is transformed into a global category with a pronounced psychological connotation, becoming a real phenomenon of musical art. Virtuosity acquires particular importance in the field of musical instrumentalism (primarily, pianism, but also other instrumental cultures); namely instrumental art became the foundation for the emergence of the category of virtuosity as an independent object of musicological research. And although vocal and performing art since the *bel canto* era vividly embodies virtuoso manifestations (influencing instrumental art by adding smoothness and lightness), it was precisely "musical tools specially made by man – instruments – that became an extension-enlargement of himself both in the material-objective and in the ideational-psychological aspects, literally "growing together" with instrumentalists in the act of performing creation" (Chernoivanenko, 2021, p. 21).

Thus, musical instrumentalism, which has confidently developed towards technical and sound-acoustic technological improvements, expansion of the range and articulation-dynamic palette, positional play, etc., provides the musician with much greater prospects in the development of musical virtuosity. It is significant that the specified effect of the increased "musical-sound, mental-sensual

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“centaur” (performers of all eras, from antiquity to the present day, spiritualize-animate, personify their instrument) is always reflected in the quality and spirituality of the instrumental sound (the same instrument sounds differently in the hands of different performers, even of approximately the same level of skill)” (Chernoivanenko, 2021, p. 21-22).

Similar qualitative and sonorous indicators of instrumental sounding are inevitably reflected at the level of musical and instrumental virtuosity, making the latter a musical phenomenon, with the corresponding characteristics of the quintessence of the figurative and emotional world of man, finding and knowing the truth, which is not only perceived in a rational way, but also becomes a moment of its experience, living, and comprehension – the non-verbal, non-conceptual, but semantic and semiological quality of instrumental sounding. Recalling the well-known maxim of G. Buffon (1977) “style is man”, the content of which contains the possibility of seeing a man as a priceless phenomenon, all phenomena of musical art (including virtuosity) are clearly associated with the uniqueness of the creators of music (composer and performer, also – composer-performer), with the ontological moments of its creation. However, the phenomenon of virtuosity allows going beyond the assessment of the skill of an individual performer and seeing how the pursuit of perfection transforms the very structure of musical language and gives rise to new forms of art. That is, virtuosity acts as a style- and genre-forming principle of music.

The phenomenological approach used in this article is characterized by the functional duality of consciousness, which is both an object and an instrument of analysis. In contrast to the positivist paradigm of the exact sciences, where the principle of objective detachment prevails, phenomenology eliminates the factor of indifference. This implies the inclusion of the subject in the structure of the phenomenon and the recognition of the axiological significance of the cognitive act. Virtuosity in this sense is the overcoming of matter (the instrument and one’s own body) with the simultaneous effect of the “disappearance of the instrument” (which ceases to be an external object and becomes an extension of the living body), going beyond the limits of the possible, a necessary tool for transmitting deep meanings that are inaccessible to the average performer. The virtuoso does not “use” the instrument, he experiences the world through it. The activation of the subjective stream of consciousness in response to the object determines the productivity of phenomenological analysis of phenomena that have an immanent intention for such a reaction: at the moment of performance, the consciousness of a true virtuoso is focused not on the technique as such, but on the experience - expression by instrumental means, with a certain level of technological automatism, which is higher than the usual conscious control (this does not mean that the instrumentalist ceases to control the techniques and means of playing). In this context, the subjective response acts as a verifier of the acceptance and reflection of the semantic structures embedded in the object under study. Therefore, the phenomenon of virtuosity, acquiring phenomenological features, becomes a means of the total action of musical thinking and experiencing - “thought-feeling” (Chernoivanenko, 2021, p. 72-73).

The key property of consciousness is intentionality – its immanent orientation towards the object (this idea was introduced by E. Husserl). Virtuosity here implies that the performer’s attention is completely transferred from the process (for example, how to press a key) to the meaning or image (what sound idea should be born). An “illusion of lightness” is created: the virtuoso overcomes the resistance of matter, making complex physical actions transparent to the listener’s perception. At the same time, the methodological attitude towards self-reflection initiates a reverse cognitive movement, focusing attention on the genesis of primary impulses. Regarding musical virtuosity, such primary impulses are located in the sphere of the sonorous semantic field – music as the art of sonorous mental-sensual meanings. After all, the signs of a musical text exist not only in projection onto musical sound;

they have a cognitive origin, that is, psychological projections, more precisely – intentional origin. In a virtuoso orientation, intentionality cannot be a simple “finger speed”. Intentionality is not just an “intention”, but a deep orientation of consciousness that underlies any mental act, be it a thought, perception, feeling, or action, which connects a person with the world and other people. So, virtuosity is not finger “athletics”, but a living palette of the European spirit and thinking, a certain cultural code of Europe. The mirror of the development of virtuosity reflects the path of humanity: from ancient dreams of the music of the spheres to the intellectual labyrinths of our modernity. The virtuoso of each time is a kind of symbol: he was both a humble mediator of heaven, and a proud technical demiurge, and a free intellectual. Flipping through the pages of the history of musical virtuosity, we read into the biography of the person himself, who, through the touch of keys or strings, tried to grasp the elusive meaning of his existence.

### 3 EVOLUTION OF THE PHENOMENON AND CONCEPT OF VIRTUOSITY IN A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The evolution of the phenomenon and the concept of virtuosity in the cultural-historical context is due to a combination of artistic and extra-musical factors. Initially, the category of “virtuosity” functioned as a universal characteristic of the perfection of any human activity, where performance was identified with active action (activity). Etymological analysis (*virtù* - valor, talent) confirms the broad semantics of the term, however, historically the concept was localized within the framework of creation - where the transformation of natural material into an artificially created object takes place, but an even more important circumstance is the concentration of the quality (characteristic) on the carrier of virtuosity - on a person, since virtuosity is a quality that is inherent exclusively to a person, is part of the complex of positive manifestations, advantages of human life as creative one. Therefore, the defining feature of virtuosity is the exclusive belonging to a person as a subject of creativity. It is a person who can be endowed with “virtue” (one of the key meanings of *virtù*), aimed at the positive nature of the act. Unlike artisanal skill, where perfection is transferred to the final product (“made thing”), in artistic creativity virtuosity remains an immanent characteristic of the performer. Thus, the performance process becomes not just a means, but the main object of aesthetic perception and evaluation.

The potential of a musical instrument is implemented through a system of many factors: genre-stylistic, historical, socio-cultural, and ensemble contexts, as well as timbre-figurative, textural, articulation-stroke, and loudness-dynamic parameters. Each performance situation forms a specific “listening space” and actualizes the hidden resources of the instrument. The key determinants of the evolution of the instrument are its constructive parameters in the necessary synergy with the performing intentions of virtuosos, whose creativity often serves as a stimulus for composer innovation and for organological transformations. The process of academization of the instrument directly depends on the optimization of its motor-virtuoso and cantilena characteristics, which determine the vector of technological improvement.

According to Chernoiivanenko (2021, p. 561), “virtuosity is an immanent property of musical instrumentalism as a masterly, technical, and energetic “increased” extension of human thinking”. In the musicological aspect, the determination of the composer’s idea by the individual qualities of a particular virtuoso is often observed (Jackson, 2017). The activities of outstanding performers are a stimulus for the emergence of innovative works and the intensification of the evolution of musical instruments. The fundamental factors in this context are the motor-virtuoso and cantilever parameters of playing. Navale et al. (2026) Namely these aspects, along with chromatization and optimization of

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articulation-dynamic and timbre characteristics, determine the vectors of modernization of instruments in the process of their academization and professionalization (Stachó & Deliège, 2018).

In musicological (and philosophical) discourse, the concept of virtuosity has undergone a long semantic evolution. The concept of virtuosity has changed along with the development of musical thinking and instrument design. Already in Antiquity, virtuosity was not simply a technical skill; it was embodied through agons - musical competitions, where skill bordered on spiritual rivalry. The etymology of the word *virtus* (courage) tells us that the performance of a work was perceived as an act, not a mechanical exercise. Aedes and kepharedis were not just musicians, but carriers of culture, where a musical instrument (along with the poetic word or outside it) served as a symbol of enlightenment. However, we must remember that the ancient ideal is an indissoluble unity of technology, knowledge, and wisdom. As Eduard Schure aptly noted, modernity often separates these concepts, while for ancient man they were integral (Schure as cited in Zharkova, 2023). In the medieval socio-cultural paradigm, music functioned within the quadrivium as a mathematical discipline subordinated to a sacred purpose. According to Boethius's concept, the hierarchy of musical levels (*musica mundana, humana, instrumentalis*) defined performance only as an instrumental shell of the metaphysical order (Chen, 2017). Virtuosity was transformed from technical skill to spiritual service, beyond the personalization of the performer. In parallel, another vector of virtuosity was formed in the secular environment (troubadours, chansonniers) - the syncretism of poetry and improvisation, which laid the foundation for the further individualization of performing arts in the era of humanism.

The Renaissance brought about a radical change from the medieval theocentric model to humanistic anthropocentrism. Music was transformed into a sphere of individual self-actualization, where the performer acts not as a 'retransmitter' of dogmas, but as a subject of the creative process. The concept of virtuosity in this period was integrated into the ideal of "L'uomo universale" (universal man), combining technical precision with intellectual depth. According to the statement of B. Cellini, Renaissance-type virtuosity consists in the ability to artistic heuristics - the detection and visualization of "invisible" entities, which takes interpretation beyond the limits of mechanical craft (Zharkova, 2023, p. 283), and virtuosity finally removed the mask of anonymity. Here, for the first time, that magical combination of brilliant technique and the personal "Self" of the musician was born, which we namely appreciate today. The performer became a conversationalist, an artist who creates music here and now. It was in this flowering of the human spirit that the seeds of that dazzling concert virtuosity were born, which would later blossom in the majestic colors of the Baroque, when virtuosity was perceived as a perfect mastery of the art of improvisation and ornamentation (decoration of melody).

The Baroque era broke the shackles of restraint, turning musical performance into a magical ritual of effects and passions, where the performer powerfully leads the listener through the labyrinths of emotions, combining brilliant virtuosity with the depth of experiences. The foundation of this aesthetic was the grand theory of affects, inspired by the philosophy of Descartes and the works of the great theorists of the time. (Mishra, S. K., 2026) Namely this focus on emotions gave rise to a new virtuosity: technique became the key to the human soul. The harpsichord school became the true heart of the Baroque tradition. Thanks to such masters as Couperin and Rameau, the world received a new view of the playing: virtuosity here is not just "fast fingers", but the ability to breathe new meaning into the work every time. The technique of virtuosity, previously associated with vocals (since "coloratura" already dominated opera), began to rely on instrumental principles as an "increase in human capabilities" (Chernoivanenko, 2021). In the Baroque, mastery was valued not for literal following of notes and speed, but for the talent to improvise, add embellishments, and invent something new simply during the performance. Thus, the piano and violin virtuosity of the Baroque

era, for example, is a complex synthetic phenomenon. It integrates the concept of affects as a representation of the inner world, technical tools (in particular, coloratura and improvisation, which are vocal in origin), and the specific aesthetics of the new instrumental culture. The performing activity of this period acquired new features: the artist moved from the role of a translator of the text to the role of an active subject of artistic influence, the main goal of which is the emotional and spiritual transformation of the listener.

While in Italy in the 17th century the concept of virtuosity was applied to outstanding artists or scientists in general, at the end of the century the term began to mark the professional status of a musician as opposed to amateurism. Its modern connotation – a performer who perfectly masters the technique and is able to overcome the extreme difficulties of the text – was finally established in the 18th century. Based on etymological data, the Latin root *virtus* can be classified into the following semantic groups: physical and volitional characteristics (courage, energy, strength); activity aspect (heroic feats, valiant deeds); professional and personal aspect (giftedness, talent, advantages); ethical and aesthetic aspect (moral decency, spiritual purity, beauty).

Classicism appeared to be a unique era that grew on the foundation of Antiquity and the Renaissance. It was closely connected with the ideas of the Enlightenment, which ultimately led to the outbreak of the Great French Revolution of 1789–1794. This is the main paradox of the time: music strove for ideal order, harmony and peace, while society stood on the verge of radical changes. In the work of composers, this resulted in the search for the “golden mean” - the ideal balance between the logic of reason and the sincerity of feelings, where each note has its own clear place, clarity, pearly play (“*jeu perlé*”) and proportionality came to the fore. The rationalistic tendencies of classicism led to the formation of the concept of “purity of style” and balanced expression. In this context, virtuosity is interpreted as a manifestation of artistic equilibrium. The musical-instrumental tradition is characterized by the reduction of excessive decorativeness and the search for refined, noble means of expression. The ethical-aesthetic ideal of the *honnête homme* was formed - a “noble performer”, whose art is based on the principles of measure and proportion. The transformation of virtuosity occurred through the rejection of external showiness in favor of rational discipline and nobility of presentation. The French piano school of this period (in particular, the late period of J.-Ph. Rameau) appeals to the transparency of texture and rhetorical accuracy of articulation. Performing skill integrated enlightenment values: harmony and intellectual balance of the musical image. Such a determination of style became decisive for the formation of the French national tradition, which determined further evolution of European pianism. In parallel with this, the Viennese school flourished. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven established completely new rules of instrumental playing. Virtuosity ceased to be a mere decoration; it became a powerful instrument for profound artistic expression. Sonatas and concertos combined technical perfection with drama and psychologism, laying the foundation for all of 19th-century Romantic pianism.

Romanticism marked a radical paradigm shift in performing culture, where the phenomenon of virtuosity acquired spiritual and aesthetic autonomy. The emphasis shifted from purely technical skill to the subjective and personal aspect of interpretation. The concept of the performer as a romantic Hero was formed, whose individuality becomes a medium between the listener and the metaphysical content of the work. Thus, virtuosity in the romantic discourse appears as an instrument of psychological expression and translation of complex emotional states. The transformation of the artistic paradigm from classicism to romanticism led to the establishment of a hierarchical priority of musical art. According to the philosophical concept of romanticism, music is the most adequate form of expression of subjective spiritual experience and transcendent ideas. In this context, virtuosity undergoes a

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significant reassessment: from a technical category it moves to the status of metaphysical mediation. The virtuoso performer appears as a subject that provides an ontological connection between individual consciousness and the universe (Yang, 2023). The performance act acquired the features of a sacred action, where technical perfection is only a means of transmitting spiritual meanings. The transformation of aesthetic paradigms in the 19th century led to the emergence of the public concert stage as an independent social institution. There was a transition from chamber and palace music making to mass forms of communication. The public stage became an arena for competition and representation of instrumental performance, acquiring a status equivalent to the opera house. The flourishing of pop culture became a determining factor for the evolution of performing skills. Namely this institutional base made possible the professional activity and worldwide recognition of such representatives of the virtuoso style as Paganini, Chopin and Liszt. The soloist had to “hold the audience” only by instrumental means, and here virtuosity came to the fore. A radical transformation of the sociocultural status of the performer took place: the functional role of the “artist-servant” of the Baroque-Classical paradigm was replaced by the concept of the “artist-demiurge”. The romantic virtuoso became the personification of anthropocentric ideals – absolute creative freedom and individual genius. The concert environment was transformed into a space of spiritual drama, where the performance act acquired signs of a transcendent experience. The key aspect of communication between the artist and the audience became a state of spiritual elevation and emotional catharsis (Samson, 2003). During this period, a new type of performance was crystallized, based on the synthesis of technical perfection, nobility, and meaningful depth. The work of Chopin, Liszt, and Paganini determined the development of romantic virtuosity, establishing the reference parameters of the style.

The historical development of musical virtuosity demonstrates a consistent transformation of its aesthetic and functional meanings across cultural epochs. The main stages of this evolution and their characteristic features are systematized in Table 1.

**Table 1- Historical stages of the development of musical virtuosity**

<i>Historical Period</i>	<i>Dominant Cultural Paradigm</i>	<i>Key Characteristics of Virtuosity</i>	<i>Functional Role of the Performer</i>
Antiquity	Unity of art, philosophy, and spirituality	Virtuosity as integration of knowledge, wisdom, and technical skill; performance associated with ritual and competition (agons)	Mediator between cosmic harmony and human perception
Middle Ages	Sacred and metaphysical worldview	Virtuosity subordinated to spiritual service; music within the quadrivium system	Performer as transmitter of divine order
Renaissance	Humanistic anthropocentrism	Integration of technique and intellectual creativity; emergence of individual artistic identity	Performer as creative personality and interpreter
Baroque	Affective and theatrical aesthetics	Development of improvisation, ornamentation, emotional expressiveness	Performer as active emotional communicator
Classicism	Rational	Refinement of technique,	Performer as

	order and balance	stylistic clarity, aesthetic equilibrium	disciplined interpreter of structured musical logic
Romanticism	Individualism and emotional expression	Virtuosity as medium of subjective expression and artistic individuality	Performer as artistic hero and cultural symbol
Modernism and Avant-garde	Intellectual and experimental paradigm	Development of new sound techniques, rhythmic and textural complexity	Performer as co-author and innovator
Late 20th–21st centuries	Multicultural and polystylistic paradigm	Cognitive flexibility, technological adaptability, integration of electronics	Performer as universal artistic thinker

Source: developed by the authors

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that virtuosity has never been a static technical category but rather a historically dynamic phenomenon shaped by cultural paradigms and aesthetic priorities. Each epoch introduced new functional roles for performers, transforming virtuosity from a spiritual and ritual practice into a complex intellectual and artistic system characteristic of contemporary performance culture.

#### 4. TERMINOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION ISSUES REGARDING VIRTUOSITY PHENOMENON IN THE PRESENT DAYS

Thus, as the research clearly demonstrates, even from an etymological point of view, *virtus* - virtuosity is literally “sewn” into the very nature of performance. The semantic meaning of this phenomenon is enhanced in musical art, because the author and the listener need an intermediary - a performer, a person who will embody the composer’s text in a live sound, applying own feelings, thinking, and sound expression. Virtuosity is not just a technically perfect playing of the instrument, but a conscious demonstration of how the artist overcomes technical difficulties, transforming them into valor and thinking. All encyclopedic and dictionary definitions of virtuosity claim that this is the “highest measure of mastery”. But the essence of these definitions is much deeper: a true master transforms the most complex passages, textural and articulatory-dynamic complexities into the illusion of absolute ease of performance. As Stefan Zweig accurately noted, the pinnacle of mastery is when the unbearably difficult seems the most natural and simplest to the viewer.

So the emphasis in this conceptual field is actually shifted from “abstract” virtuosity to the specifics of the term “virtuoso,” which has acquired a special meaning in music. Virtuosos are perceived as musicians-performers “who perfectly master the technique of their profession. In a more precise sense, the word virtuoso is “an artist who valiantly (i.e., boldly, courageously) overcomes technical difficulties (Royce, 2004). A virtuoso (from Italian virtuoso; Late Latin virtuosus; Latin virtus – “valor”, “perfection”, “skill”) is a person who has outstanding talent and technical skill in a certain field of art, such as fine arts, music, singing, playing musical instruments, or composition (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The term is also applied to a person who has a developed taste for artistic excellence, whether as a connoisseur or collector. The defining element of virtuosity is the musician’s performance skill, capable

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of demonstrating skills that are well above the average. However, both critics and musicians themselves have different opinions about virtuosity. While the intended meaning is undoubtedly positive, musicians who focus on virtuosity per se have been criticized for neglecting content and emotional depth in favor of pure technical brilliance.

The meaning of the word “virtuoso” goes back to the Italian speech and conceptual usage of the 16th and 17th centuries, when it was a honorary title given to a person who had distinguished himself in the intellectual or artistic sphere. Over time, the term evolved, both expanding and narrowing its meaning depending on fashion and discussions. Initially, a musician was called a virtuoso for achievements in the fields of music creation and performance or music theory, and not for his actual performing skills (Jander, 2001). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the meaning of the word changed, and many musicians began to apply it to themselves without taking into account outstanding merits. In the modern sense, virtuosity is usually associated with spectacular, technically complex performance, and not with achievements in composition, theory, etc. Modern virtuosos are known for their fast, exciting tempos, spectacular sound design and performance of melodies, and often demonstrate their talents at prestigious international competitions. Although historical virtuosos such as Niccolò Paganini and Franz Liszt were both performers and composers, in the 21st century the virtuoso is primarily a performer.

With the growing popularity of virtuoso performance over the centuries, music became an integral part of culture, already in the emancipated quality of pure musical art, where instrumentalism managed to “win” its own autonomous positions, and the 20th-21st centuries brought instrumental art to the forefront of musical innovations, in particular, to the formation of its phenomenological quality. Many teachers pay special attention to technique in individual training as a means of mastering the modern virtuoso repertoire base. In addition, a significant part of classical music, which is gaining popularity among the general public, is usually distinguished by its complexity and effectiveness.

In the musical and academic context of the 17th-19th centuries. the phenomenon of virtuosity was inextricably linked with composer activity (Bach, Mozart, Liszt, Chopin). In the 19th century, virtuosity reached such a peak that the question arose of differentiating “true virtuosity”, based on artistic expression and depth of interpretation, as opposed to “attempts of virtuosity” – a phenomenon where the dominance of the technical aspect leads to the devaluation of the artistic value of the work. The genesis of the phenomenon of virtuosity, which originates from the vocal culture of the 17th–18th centuries, led to the formation of the salon direction, characteristic of the 19th century. Within this paradigm, the musical text (primarily, the new piano culture) was subjected to significant subjective changes: arbitrary decoration with passages, tremolo and octave technique in order to demonstrate the mechanical speed of the fingers. Such hypertrophy of the technical aspect occurred at the expense of leveling the ideological and substantive structure of the works. The opposition to this trend by Liszt, Paganini, Schumann, and other prominent artists contributed to the rethinking of the term “virtuoso”, which in professional discourse began to be used with the epithet “real” or “genuine”. Despite the criticism of “empty” technique, virtuoso brilliance remained a necessary condition for the professional legitimization of the performer, acting as a key factor in the academic existence of musical instruments (piano, strings, and wind instruments in the 19th century, modernized folk instruments in the 20th century).

Namely instrumental virtuosity became the engine that directed the art of Romanticism in a new vector. In true virtuosos, virtuosity did not so much give artists the opportunity to demonstrate their professional skills, but rather changed the very essence of musical thinking, dictating new rules of

playing not only for the autonomous musical specification of performers, but also for composers' thinking, language, and expression of music of the 19th century. The main heroes of this era were the violin and the piano. Franz Liszt, a true magician of the keyboard, revealed to the world the previously unseen orchestral power of the piano. His playing was striking in its contrasts: from "avalanches" of chords, dazzling octave cascades, and complex wide jumps to 'jewelry', hyper-fast motor technique, from *alla fresco* sounds to piano-lyrical outpourings. In Liszt, virtuosity turned into an extravaganza, where technique bordered on magic, creating a new standard of artistic expression, capable of holding the audience's attention throughout a large solo concert performance, with a noticeable impact of visual-artistic, psychological effect. Another type of virtuosity was demonstrated by the music (and performance) of Chopin, with its "absolute cantilena" (instrumental *bel canto*), born within a complex piano texture and passage, the "germination" of melodies through lace or, even, "labyrinths" of piano figurativeness and polyphony, when not only thematic lines themselves, but also passage-figurative lines must be sung on string-percussion instruments. In fact, the music of Liszt and Chopin point to two main directions of pianistic mastery (and virtuosity): the bright concertity, scale, bravura, and enchantingness of the Hungarian Maestro is opposed by the fundamentally different virtuosity of the Polish Master – intimate-poetic, chamber-secret, specifically instrumental-singing ("every note of the texture" sings) sonorities, at first glance inaccessible and contradictory to the percussive nature of the piano. "Singing legato" in Chopin's interpretation was naturally combined with elegant, sometimes quite abundant pedaling (especially in various wide arpeggios and passages close to them), revolutionary fingering (changing fingers on one key, in particular - the first finger for the fifth; sliding one finger from a black key to a white or even from white to white, etc.), rich ornamentation (even in the bass). Such specifically piano performance techniques contributed to achieving "vocal" coherence in the process of intonation, special sophistication of articulation, and phrasing.

In the aspect of the "explosion" of romantic virtuosity (in general and in the work of Liszt), one cannot fail to mention the violin "magician of virtuosity" of the era – N. Paganini. Liszt's purposeful refraction of certain features of the innovative art of the famous violinist – phenomenal virtuosity and "fantastic", dazzling color – was reflected not only in Liszt's style. As a result of Paganini's style of performance, the image of a virtuoso-creator, a musician-tribune was formed. Romanticism in the person of Paganini introduced the pathos of superhuman virtuosity, frenzy, fiery expression, unbridled imagination, endowed with enormous spiritual power. The mastery of a genius is universal, he comprehensively masters his activity, craft, deeply and consciously penetrates its essence. The breadth of horizons, knowledge, the ability to apply them creatively, make it possible to see the unique. Thus, Paganini revolutionized the understanding of creative tasks of a musician: he discovered and introduced new playing techniques. The violin not only "sang cantilena", but also played staccato, pizzicato, double flageolets, which were perceived by the surrounding almost circus winds - the motor apparatus, the position of the performer's hands, the body, even the manner of holding the violin. But his work, first of all, serves as an example of the search for spiritual ideals in instrumental (non-verbal) sound. Each musical and instrumental phrase, according to Paganini, should be saturated with ideas of understanding the meaning of life, ideals of love, passion, strength of spirit, and in the center of musical expression - the spiritual perfection of the individual, creative search. Paganini thus made a revolution not only in the violin school, but also in the musical creativity of the era in general.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the impressionist paradigm radically changed the criteria of performing skill and virtuosity: technical athleticism was replaced by work with the phonic properties of sound and microdynamics (and it was the sphere of instrumental music that presented such inexhaustible possibilities). The emancipation of dissonance, the use of polyharmony and

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polymodality led to a specific structuring of instrumental (primarily piano) texture. The performing task was transformed into a complex process of controlling autonomous layers of sound fabric, where the key parameter is the articulation of timbre-color nuances within a holistic sound space. An alternative model of virtuosity was formed in the aesthetics of impressionism, based on precise control over sonority and sound matter. The priority task was modeling the specific atmosphere of the work, where each unit of the sound text is endowed with a special semantic and coloristic weight.

The aesthetics of modernism determined a fundamental transformation of the category of virtuosity, integrating it into a new system of artistic coordinates. Performing skill moved from the plane of individual talent into the sphere of the methodology of new thinking. The key requirement was the ability to cognitively adapt in the conditions of destruction of tonality and the search for innovative systems of pitch organization. In particular, the work of Messiaen represents this process through the complication of rhythmic structures and textural multi-layering (Berger et al., 2024). Virtuosity here transcends into the dimension of intellectual discipline, requiring the subject to fulfill a specific spiritual intention. Schoenberg forged “intellectual virtuosity” in Vienna, which required the performer to immerse himself in the cold logic of series. Stravinsky initiated changes in the field of rhythmometric organization, which became a virtuoso challenge for performers. Bartók synthesized folklore material with polyphonic modernist structures, demanding maximum accuracy and expression (Pachet, 2012). Thus, the pan-European context of modernism defined virtuosity as a metacompetence – the ability to stylistically adapt and form an individualized interpretative language. The musician was to become a true universalist: today he plays an atonal piece, tomorrow – serial music, and the day after tomorrow – experiments with unusual sounds of the instrument. In such a world, virtuosity is primarily flexibility and the ability to quickly switch between different artistic languages. Now the performer does not just flaunt his technique – he builds his own artistic universe, where music and his personality merge into one. Virtuosity became a universal formula that combines skill, complete freedom of interpretation, and the search for own “Self” (Schulkin & Raglan, 2014).

The avant-garde of the mid-twentieth century continued the radical search started by modernism, but even more sharply sharpened the requirements for musicians. Virtuosity obtained the meaning of courage to experiment. The performer had to master completely new ways of extracting sound from an instrument, creating artistic meaning from non-traditional means. His role changed radically: he no longer simply read the musical text, but became a full-fledged co-author of the work, discovering unexplored sound spaces together with the composer right on stage. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, virtuosity, while retaining its romantic parameters, shifted, in particular, towards mastering new timbre sonorities of instruments, non-traditional means of sound extraction (extended techniques), and interaction with electronics. Virtuosity in this context is defined as the cognitive ability to operate with various stylistic models and intertextual connections. The criterion of performing skill becomes the mobility of interpretive thinking – the ability to quickly change artistic codes within the single time-space of the work. Musical instruments become a real laboratory of sound wonders. And for the semantic intonation of new means and the accuracy of performance (for example, sonors can change timbre not only through the high register, but also through density, attack techniques, etc.) a new level of virtuosity is required. But this literally turns the performance into a “theater of one actor”, requires thinking through the forms of performing movements, being precise, etc. The performer receives not just the right, but the real duty to be a co-author. Virtuosity itself now looks different: it is the ability to freely maneuver between styles, perceive notes as an “open text”, and immerse the listener in an intellectual game where meanings, irony, and different musical worlds mix. Virtuosity in this coordinate system is interpreted as cognitive mobility: the ability to operate with a

musical work as an “open text” (according to U. Eco) and to implement polystylistic strategies. The criterion of mastery is the ability to semantic hermeneutics (correctly organized and articulated semantic technique and speed are not discussed - all performers must possess this) - the immersion of the recipient in a complex system of intertextual contexts. In the musical art of the first quarter of the 21st century, the category of virtuosity underwent evolution in the context of the aesthetic principles of metamodernism. The modern performing paradigm is based on the synthesis of rational and emotional principles, actualizing the concepts of “new sincerity”, “new simplicity”, “new complexity”. The work of such composers as Murray, Dusapin, Benjamin, Runchak, and others demonstrates polystylistic integration: from sonoristic experiments to elements of jazz and ethnic stylistics. Virtuosity is defined as the performer’s ability to semantic multi-layering and technological flexibility within the framework of a multicultural artistic code.

In the scientific discourse and musical practice of the 20th-21st centuries, a specific type of virtuoso performer is distinguished, whose activity is aimed at the implementation of three main intentions: theatricality (impression), expression (statement), and intellectual and spiritual comprehension. The fundamental characteristic of this type is “artistic courage” - a special state of the psyche, expressed through the spirit of creative freedom (improvisation) and activity (energy). The aesthetic value of virtuosity in culture is traditionally associated with artistry and artistic perfection (in contrast to the above-mentioned virtuosity, when technical demonstration acquired the status of hegemon, turning into an end in itself, shifting the emphasis from the depth of the performing content and the important substance of Beauty for art to emasculated technique). It is precisely “the concept of artistry... can be used to denote the quality of a musician-performer’s playing if he demonstrates a higher level of skill in the aspect of virtuosity, certain signs of artistic technique in the format of public aesthetic activity” (Yergiev, 2014, p. 38). At the same time, Yergiev (2014) derives the concepts of psychomotor and psychoemotional virtuosity of an instrumentalist, which are closely related to each other, and also represent their highest “visual” manifestation as a necessary component of stage artistry. Therefore, motor skills and emotionality are extremely important for an instrumentalist in the process of instrumental (non-verbal) intonation, in the formation of performing skills, achieving virtuosity, in shaping his attitude towards forming himself as a performer-artist personality, and choosing a specialization (musical instrument).

Further localization of the term “virtuosity” implies its correlation with the category of the highest level of skill. In the context of craft activity, perfect qualities are objectified in the final product (artifact). The only sphere where virtuosity immanently remains an attribute of the subject, characterizing the process, not the result, is artistic creativity. Therefore, virtuosity is associated with artistic and performing activities, where the performance is the chosen semantic center, and the performer is the key actor of the artistic event (unlike dramatic art, where the character image dominates). Virtuosity emphasizes the intrinsic creative abilities of a person, which is most clearly manifested in the emotionally saturated musical and poetic intonation sphere. This determines the fixing of the category for musical performance, in particular instrumental, and most often - piano, which is explained by the early autonomization of the latter as a solo performing practice. The younger accordion art logically transfers the categorical meaning to its specifics, since both the piano and the accordion are orchestral keyboard instruments, albeit with different sound sources.

In overall, in contemporary musicological discourse, virtuosity is interpreted as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes several interrelated structural components. The main components of musical virtuosity and their functional manifestations are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Structural components of musical virtuosity in contemporary performance practice**

<i>Component of Virtuosity</i>	<i>Core Characteristics</i>	<i>Functional Manifestation in Performance</i>	<i>Artistic Outcome</i>
Technical (Motor)	Precision of movements, coordination, speed, endurance	Execution of passages, chords, jumps, and complex textures	Technical reliability and fluency
Psychomotor	Integration of brain and muscular response	Anticipation of movements, automatization of technique	Reduction of physical effort and increased efficiency
Psychoemotional	Emotional sensitivity and expressive response	Interpretation of expressive nuances, dynamic shaping	Emotional depth of performance
Cognitive	Intellectual processing of musical structures	Understanding of form, style, and semantic layers	Interpretative clarity and stylistic accuracy
Timbral	Control of sound color and articulation	Use of articulation, pedaling, and sound extraction methods	Individualized sound identity
Suggestive (Artistic)	Psychological communication with audience	Creation of emotional impact and stage presence	Cathartic artistic interaction

Source: developed by the authors

Table 2 systematizes the internal structure of virtuosity as a complex artistic phenomenon integrating technical, cognitive, emotional, and communicative dimensions. This multidimensional interpretation confirms the holistic nature of virtuosity in contemporary performance practice.

From the point of view of psychophysiology, virtuosity is based on phenomenal coordination between the brain and muscles: it is the ability to perform complex movements (passages, jumps, movement in intervals and chords) with minimal energy expenditure (sensorimotor culture); the virtuoso's brain works several bars ahead of the real sound, preparing the performing apparatus for the next technical complexity (anticipation); transferring technical tasks to the subconscious level, which frees the musician's attention for creative interpretation (automatism). But in live performance, virtuosity is enriched with a unique (individual) thought-sensual and sound-expressive coloring, reaching the level of a cultural-aesthetic phenomenon, a specific way of artistic thinking.

Performing virtuosity can also appear at different levels: chronotopic - skillful management of musical time (agogics, pulsation, gravity, sense of form), textural - the ability to highlight the main and second (third) order layers in a complex musical fabric (for example, conducting a theme within dense

chords, differentiation of voices in one register, transition of the voice from one accordion keyboard to another, etc.), timbral - the ability to individualize the sound of the instrument using articulation and dynamic means, sound extraction and sound management, as well as the composition of sonorities, artistic-suggestive - the psychological impact on the audience, when technical complexity becomes part of the emotional interaction, a common catharsis with the listener.

## conclusion

Thus, instrumental virtuosity is the highest form of performing professionalism, where technical skill becomes absolutely transparent, allowing music to sound freely and unhindered. It is an integral part of musical progress, since it represents the search for new virtuoso possibilities that stimulates the development of the instrument and the expansion of the boundaries of musical language. Modern musicology treats virtuosity as a complex phenomenon that determines going beyond the limits of purely technological mastery of the instrument into the plane of deep interpretative processes. Virtuosity appears not as an end in itself, but as a mediating means of articulating musical meanings, where the performer operates with categories of artistic integrity. The process of realizing virtuosity is carried out through the mediation of musical syntagms endowed with deterministic imaginative functions. This implies that each technical unit of the text is not just a formal element, but a carrier of a specific figurative and semantic load aimed at activating the listener's creative imagination. So today virtuosity is finally established as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon of a creative nature and a specific way of artistic thinking that determines the internal logic of musical expression.

The actualization of the study of musical and instrumental virtuosity is enhanced by several factors. First, the transformation of musical instrumentalism (primarily piano, but today also other instrumental cultures) into a global communicative and ethical and aesthetic center of culture. Second, the potential of the phenomenon of virtuosity for the introduction of axiological and acmeological approaches into the theory and practice of performance, into musicology as a whole, which allows for the formation of new evaluative criteria of discourse. Therefore, an important aspect here is the experience of the historical genesis of virtuosity as a mental and emotional phenomenon in the activities of modern instrumental masters.

Virtuosity is an important characteristic of a particular individual interpretation, one of the most important criteria for assessing the skill of a particular performer. The concept of virtuosity, as a parameter of an instrumentalist's playing, one of the professional qualities of the artistic universe, includes not only a narrowly technical motor component (in the literal sense - the speed of the fingers, bow, lips, legs, other means of the articulatory apparatus). Virtuosity is also (or rather - primarily) a wide spectrum of artistry: from the mobility of internal experiences, emotional switching to psychosemantics and, ultimately, the explicit expression of images of courage, valor, other attributes - not only purely musical archetypes, but also general artistic and spiritual ones

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