

ON PLAYING THE ARPEGGIONE SONATA BY FRANZ SCHUBERT ON ARPEGGIONE

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In my paper I shall explain my experiences with playing Sonata D 821 by Franz Schubert on arpeggione. The topics are:

1. My relation to the instrument
2. An introduction of the instrument
3. The inventor of the arpeggione
4. Schubert and the arpeggione
5. The question of five or six strings
6. Conclusions

My relation to the instrument

How did I find the arpeggione? The first time I heard of this instrument, I was studying the arpeggione sonata D821 by Franz Schubert during my studies of cello in the 70s at the Sibelius Academy. The sheet music I bought back then had an explanation of it as being an obsolete instrument, kind of like a bowed guitar, by Johann Georg Stauffer and called the arpeggione. I remember trying to play my dear sister's guitar with a cello bow with a rather painful-sounding result. Many years later, when I participated in Baryton Symposium 2000 in Düsseldorf, I met the late Alfred Lessing (1939–2013), who played, built, and researched barytons, arpeggiones, viola da gambas, and cellos. My interest in this event was originally solely in the baryton, but during the after party, when I listened to Lessing play his arpeggione with guitar accompaniment, I got the idea of doing something with it myself too. This desire manifested later in my doctoral studies.

In the Dusseldorf Symposium I also met the late Pierre Jaquier—a French luthier—who read his paper on the arpeggione's history about which I talk later. Two years later, when I met Lessing in Düsseldorf about matters concerning the baryton, I asked him if there were any arpeggiones available. He knew there was one for sale by its maker, Caroline Zillman of Meissen, which I managed to buy the following year. Playing arpeggione was also part of my doctoral degree in the DocMus Doctoral School of the Sibelius Academy completed in 2009. The degree included four concerts and a recording. One of the concerts was with the arpeggione and three concerts and the recording with a baryton in various combinations.

Around year 2000, when played continuo with baroque guitar player Niklas Mellberg, I told him of having an arpeggione—he replied that he had a guitar after Stauffer. Soon we were testing various pieces for arpeggione and classical guitar and consequently had concerts and recordings. Mellberg later arranged the piano part of Schubert's arpeggione sonata for guitar, which we recorded later.

When working on my arpeggione, I soon realized its limitations, mainly the narrow dynamic range especially when playing with fortepiano. Playing with guitar seemed to solve the problem in balancing by making softer dynamics possible. Another important matter is the tuning. Guitar frets, like the arpeggione's, are close to the equal tuning system but sadly not close enough. The differences were more obvious in passages in high registers, where different techniques were needed for an acceptable-sounding result—like releasing finger pressure on the string or playing above the frets, which decrease both sound quality and the dynamic range.

Having all this in mind, I began discussions with Tilman Muthesius of Potsdam (Germany) about making a new arpeggione for me. The idea was to have an instrument with alternative sets of strings—that is, with both 5- and 6-string versions. This idea was familiar to me from one particular baroque cello in Sweden with the possibility to change it from a 4-string to 5-string version—in other words, from a standard cello to a violoncello piccolo. So why not have a similar system for arpeggione too? According to Muthesius, that was possible without any major extra work. The instrument was finished before Christmas 2017, and I got my hands on it very soon after.

An introduction to the instrument

We might find it odd, but the instrument was given its name only at the end of nineteenth century, when the Schubert sonata D 821 was published. I use the name arpeggione because it is generally still used today. The name arpeggione may have its origins in the Italian word *arpeggio*, meaning the notes of a musical chord played quickly one after the other in the harp way. The arpeggione is also an augmented form of an *arpeggio*, like from violino to violone, meaning a big violin, because the arpeggione was bigger than a guitar. Of course, the name could also be an example of wordplay by Schubert or his friends.

The frets are metal, and the arched shape of the fingerboard makes it exceptionally difficult to place on it. The problem lies in the different profiles of the bridge and fingerboard creating varying tension in the string and thus changing the pitch. The number of frets is 24—and all are needed in Schubert sonata. There is no endpin in the arpeggione, so it should be held between the knees like a Baroque cello or viola da gamba. The bow can be a transitional cello bow like a Cramer or early Tourte, which are from about 1750 to 1770.

The inventor of the arpeggione

The instrument was invented by Johann Georg Stauer of Vienna or Peter Teufelsdorfer of Pest. Stauer built arpeggiones with three different shapes named after the gamba, cello, and guitar. To follow the evolution of Stauer's models from extant instruments is difficult or even impossible because few of them have survived.

Schubert and the arpeggione

Historical examples of concert programming in early nineteenth-century Vienna included virtuoso pieces, opera potpourris, and arias. Often the concerts included variations from a tune from some well-known Italian opera like *Tancredi* or *Moses in Egypt* by Rossini and flashy virtuoso pieces f.e. by Mauro Giuliani, who composed many virtuoso works for violin or flute with guitar. In my doctoral arpeggione concert, my aim was to follow these ideas in programming. There was, however, one piece which I couldn't leave out: the sonata D821 by Franz Schubert with fortepiano played by Irina Zahharenkova. The rest of the program was performed with guitar played by Niklas Mellberg, including works by Mauro Giuliani, Friedrich Burgmüller, Filippo Gragnani, and Franz Schubert's Original Tänze with guitar part probably arranged by Anton Diabelli.

What about Franz Shubert and the guitar? Schubert's father played the cello with other amateur musicians, one of whom was a guitar player. It has been suggested that Schubert's father gave his son his first guitar lessons, but there is no evidence. The debate about whether Schubert played the guitar is ongoing. There are many opinions supporting his playing it but very little evidence to

support it. He presumably knew the instrument well because he had been exposed to it more or less all his life, during the golden age of guitar.

Schubert may have met Vincenz Schuster at the musical gatherings of Leopold von Sonnleithner, where discussions of the new instrument may have aided Schubert's composition. Famous guitar players of the time such as Mauro Giuliani and Luigi Legnani also attended the gatherings and inspired the other participants. Schubert probably owned two guitars during his lifetime, which both have survived in two museums in Vienna. The other is a Legnani model by Stauer.

The sonata by Schubert was composed in November 1824 and premiered probably before 22 December by Vincenz Schuster, an amateur cello and guitar player. There is no evidence of the pianist in the premiere; it could have been Schubert himself. Of Vincenz Schuster there is very little information—he owned an antiquarian bookshop in Vienna.

The question of five or six strings

Alfred Lessing suggested that I acquire a five-string arpeggione with the tuning $e^1-a-d-A-E$ to play the Schubert sonata D 821. The tuning for a 6-string arpeggione is similar to a modern 6-string guitar: $e^1-b-g-d-A-E$. The idea was also introduced in the article by Pierre Jaquier. Lessing regretted when meeting him at 2002 not having tested it but thought it would be interesting.

The idea originates from the introduction of a new instrument in *Wiener Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* on 5 March 1823, where arpeggione was explained to have 7 strings but 6-, 5-, 4-, and 3-string versions would also be available. After studying the sonata during spring 2018 with a 5-string arpeggione, I found two passages which I demonstrate with both 5- and 6-string versions of the arpeggione in the short video included.

Conclusions

Schubert's sonata D 821 is probably for the 6-string arpeggione despite the examples discussed here. The 5-string instrument offers only one advantage—to avoid the strings crossing. Also, the advantage of similar tuning to a 6-string guitar would be lost when playing on the 5-string arpeggione. Testing the 5-string arpeggione with a fortepiano would have been interesting, but when the 5-string version didn't work out in the way expected, I didn't see the point of rehearsing the sonata to the level for it.

In general, the arpeggione is often a more suitable companion for guitar than to fortepiano, even when the balancing is satisfying the tunings differ between arpeggione and fortepiano. There is a wide, interesting, and challenging repertoire when we look at the models of concerts in the Biedermeier era.

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