

Rehearsing Beethoven: A meditation on musical understanding

Lena Johnson and Ulrik Volgsten

What does it mean to interpret a piece of music? In this presentation, we explore what it might mean to interpret a piece of music, drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In particular, Gadamer's concept of *play* as a basis for interpretation and understanding helps us illuminate several aspects of the particular process of musical shaping that we study. At the same time, the music itself sheds new light on and gives new substance to Gadamer's metaphor of play.

The study draws on logbook notes kept by one of us during an earlier set of rehearsals of Ludwig van Beethoven's Sonata for Piano and Violin in C minor, Op. 30 No. 2. The rehearsals took place over twelve sessions, conducted in three separate periods over a span of six months. Most sessions lasted between two and three hours. The final session also included a recording of the sonata, which had a particular influence on its shaping.

While Gadamer's concepts proved particularly illuminating during the initial stages of the process, we found his concept of the fusion of horizons insufficient to describe the moments of felt coherence that gradually emerged between the performers and the musical work as the process progressed. As a substantive development of Gadamer's ideas, we therefore propose – on the basis of our experiences of the musical shaping process and in response to our initial question – the concepts of *vitality affect* and *affect attunement* developed by Daniel Stern.