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Living History. The Guitar Virtuoso and Composer Steve Vai

Besides jazz, rock music seems to be one of a very few remaining domains where virtuosity is regarded as a positive value. It is not only tolerated but expected by fans and experts so that performers enjoy the spotlight of solo passages and show their technical and improvisational talents extensively. Within rock bands the virtuoso part usually is synonymous with the lead guitar. Therefore most clichés and connotations of the guitar virtuoso combine elements of historic role models of 19th century's icons Paganini and Liszt with the distortion sound and the habitus of playing an electric guitar. What makes the figure of contemporary guitar virtuosos special for a musicological survey is on the one hand the ability of artists like Richie Blackmore, Steve Morse, Jimmy Page, John Petrucci, Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, and above all, Jimmi Hendrix, to attract a wide range of music lovers and critics (including academic scholars). On the other hand their musical capacities are predominantly underestimated in the sense that the evaluation of their musical talents is usually strictly limited to their performing abilities, forgetting that these artists are not only specialists for improvising solos.¹ Instead musicians of our day, such as Morse, Petrucci, and Vai, compose and execute their parts in detail for recording purposes and reproduce them most accurately – including all complex details – in their live performances. Being observed closely by devoted listeners, who remember the slightest details and compare the different performances in live concerts and on DVD, the fans are just like the ambitious followers of the olden days who could name numerous interpretational nuances of world class orchestras and their famous conductors.

The approach of contemporary rock guitarists to unify the composition and interpretation of highly virtuosic music in one person, in most cases even including the productional procedures in the recording studio, makes it necessary to reconnect the virtuoso-topos with its historical roots in musical aesthetics before 1800. Considering Steve Vai as a prototype of this old musical idea, i.e. to merge compositional and instrumental expertise, the following remarks firstly outline the terminological origins of virtuosity, before secondly examining the electric guitar as one of the most influential instruments of the past 20th century. The final and longest third part will try to bring these elements together, analyzing characteristic means in some of Steve Vai's orchestral scores.

Historical Settings

Virtuosity in general is hard to define as an abstract phenomenon, if a certain temporal musical context is disclaimed. No example could provide the full historical or social range of this issue in so far that virtuosity is a cultural practice, so that these remarks in consequence intend to avoid the impression of showing a complete picture, but instead attempt to highlight some prominent facets of the topic concerning the presence of guitar virtuosos in modern rock and metal.

As far as historical sources can give us a first indication the admiration of virtuosic musicians relies on one of the most prominent threads in musical writings since antiquity, starting with the mastery of god Apollon and the myth of human Orpheus, representing outstanding musical skills with the talent to move their listeners' most inner feelings. Ambition, talent and discipline, charisma and stage presence go hand in hand with a solid technique and knowledge about the achievable limits that are supposed to be stretched elegantly before the eyes and ears of the public. But it seems that a crucial step to speak of virtuosity instead of only technical brilliance is the poetic transformation of these manual skills that creates a personal artistic style.

The earliest sources to track the concept of virtuosity in music history are Italian and German writings around the early 18th century.² In his novel *Der musicalische Quacksalber* (the musical quack salver), published in 1700, Johann Kuhnau featured a man pretending to have outstanding musical skills, betraying wealthy nobles and artsy bourgeois. After many chapters describing failures and frauds the self-proclaimed virtuoso Caraffa finds a priest willing to forgive his transgression by offering him an instructional manual of 64 paragraphs entitled *Der wahre Virtuose und glückselige Mensch* (the true virtuoso and blissful man).³ Here Kuhnau lists all opinions on virtuosity of his time, concluding in the eighth paragraph that a virtuoso not only has to have a full understanding of music theory but also has to perform at the height of artistic practice.⁴ For Kuhnau theoretical overview, compositional experience and instrumental practice are therefore not only related to each other but even more are necessary and indispensable ingredients of a fully skilled artist.

Soon after Kuhnau in the midth of the 18th century this positive ideal of a personal unification of composing and performing in the role model “virtuoso” started to loose its strength. Instead virtuosity in general became dubious, at the same time with increasing demands for both professions of the composer and the instrumentalist. This can be found for example in Leopold Mozart’s textbooks, so that on the one hand the performance habits started to change from poetic (i.e. inner) attributes to expressive gestures. On the other hand a distinction was implemented between “true” and “false” virtuosity, building a hierarchy between mediated tasteful elegance and a presence of sheer mechanical brilliance.⁵ Though musical techniques like the execution of counterpoint, the colorful implementation of symphonic instrumentation or the sophisticated structuring of complex rhythms gained admiration so that analytical vocabularies sometimes include the praise of virtuosic craftsmanship, virtuosity became nearly exclusively reserved for the instrumental practice.⁶ As a consequence these preexisting gaps between the production and the interpretation of compositions deepened amidst the rise of “works” as the

dominating objects of 19th century aesthetics and the rapid growth of the market as the center piece of bourgeois industrial economics – thus stimulating the foundations of special music journals, internationally operating publishing companies, public concert halls, conservatories and expensive, prestigious enterprises such as philharmonic orchestras and luxurious opera houses. Reacting to these fundamental changes, artists swayed between two major professions either to become composers or performers.

Due to the continuing specialization of professions and the accelerating improvement of musical techniques (merging the progress of performer's abilities with the refinement of instruments such as the new pianoforte or standardized mechanical keys for brass and wood winds) again the individual attitude towards virtuosity became a major concern: On the one side romantic composers like Robert Schumann, married to one of most admired female pianists of the century, vituperated virtuosity as presumptuousness against music and the audience due to the display of alleged technical impossibilities in the way an artist demonstrates physical excellence. This line of resistance passed on through the course of the 19th century, with demands like "Werktreue" and a religious devotion to art, propagandizing the cult of the (male) genius, most significantly impersonated by Richard Wagner and firstly supported theoretically by his admirer Friedrich Nietzsche, later meeting in the philosopher Wagner's most harsh critic. Other prominent successors to pass on these ideals were Arnold Schoenberg and his closest allies, so that one major rule in their short-lived Viennese *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen* (Club For Private Musical Performances, 1918-21) was the ban of any virtuosic ambition of the players.⁷

On the opposite side, the expanding European market generated numerous artists unwilling to sacrifice dreaming of a life of wealth and fame, dedicated to their performing passion and in consequence forced to visit all major and minor cities with audiences willing to attend public concerts. To please their audiences and to build up a reputation as an outstanding auratic character, these artists could not refuse their listeners' tastes and instead force them to pay for an unpleasing show. Continuing the legacy of prodigies like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart virtuosos like Franz Liszt and Frédéric Chopin on the piano, and before and above them "diabolic" string sensation Niccolo Paganini serve until the present as classic role models, containing in their media reception all standard clichés of stardom. Starting from unruly potency most of the virtuosos had to endure all kinds of suspicions, including highly dogmatic discourses on racist and anti-Semitic terms.⁸ Most discussions about famous virtuosos in favor of criticizing the performative arena and speculating on condemnable monetary motivations suppress that the majority of the artists considered themselves coequally instrumentalists as well as composers – a quick overview of articles about Paganini in historical dictionaries and contemporary encyclopedias can give a dolorous impression.⁹ Accordingly, it took several generations of musicologists to recognize the compositional heritage even of a capacity like Liszt. The related highly dogmatic debates (about *Werktreue*, *Kunstreligion*, and *Geniekult* as well as devaluating aesthetic pleasure) keep classical music occupied up to this day and are still very popular, e.g. in

TV and music journals. Analogically, certain trends within metal around the turn of the millennium (using the term “Nu Metal”) distanced themselves from old-style heavy metal by the purposeful abdication of virtuosic guitar solos. As a resort from this unfruitful and unpleasing “suspicion of the virtuoso,” to quote Albrecht Riethmüller’s instructive observations about Johann Strauß, a related aspect of this historical topic has to be considered for a moment, adding gender-based connotations, which bring us one step closer to our major concern, the modern electric guitar virtuoso.

Especially in the field of rock music, the etymological deduction of virtuoso from the latin origin “vir” contains many aboriginally masculine occupied meanings. Besides other attributes as “morally” and “proficient” “virtuosic” therefore is particularly associated with male players. The still lasting, striking absence of famous female guitar players in metal music proves to be an exception from almost all other fields of popular culture. One reason could be found in the genre’s origin within a circle of male musicians and fans (including all related stereotypes and behavioral patterns).¹⁰ Otherwise the apparently rising number of women among audiences (in several of metal’s sub-genres) raises doubts about such moncausal explanations. Nevertheless against this background the display of virtuosity for many observers still appears as a discourse of power by means of distinction so that the solistic abilities of a guitarist (in this way of understanding) serve as a metaphor for male sexual potency.

Pioneers

Though some caution always seems appropriate when epochal progressions are affiliated with one single person, the history of the electric guitar could not be told without Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970). His position as probably the most influential player on his instrument is legitimated by the overlay of cultural-historical, musical, and technical aspects: Raised under adversely social conditions Hendrix learned to play guitar by himself and signed up as tour musician, including jobs with Little Richard, The Supremes and The Isley Brothers. At numerous concerts, which the barely twenty year old played during the next years, he developed his spectacular stage performance in direct interaction with the audience.¹¹ His musical talent to fuse the rhythms, phrasings and tone nuances of the blues guitar with the emerging beat culture did not unfold though in his American home but in the tolerant atmosphere of mid-1960s London instead, where a rapidly growing, predominantly white fan movement gathered around the exceptional black guitar player. His first success in Europe was followed by his breakthrough in the US, where he later built his own recording facility, the *Electric Lady Studios* in New York. This stride is of particular importance, as Hendrix was interested in the progression of his virtuoso abilities only in combination with technical improvements of his guitars (tremolo systems, pickups) and amplifiers, the use of latest effect pedals, and exhaustive experiments in the studio (manipulation of tape machines, various microphone-settings for amps and drum sets, multi-track recordings).¹² Hendrix’s accurate attention for the sound dimensions of his music remind us that the apperception of a person by someone else can be very diverse from one’s own. As Steve Vai said

in an interview with the author he does not consider himself to be an outstanding virtuoso, but instead just trying to challenge himself to stay curious and keep on pushing further his own limits.¹³ Accordingly the public focus on an extraordinary musician can concentrate on the admiration of novel techniques and extremely high levels of difficulties incorporated in passionate music, while the artist above all cares for a most precise shading and coloring of tones. Technique in this sense therefore just serves as a means to an end and includes all dimensions of mechanical structures involved, ranging from human playing skills beyond the adjustments of the guitar, and the guitarist's equipment in conjunction with the machines in the complexly wired recording studios.

Coming back to the influence of electric guitars on rock music, especially British musicians like Jimi Page (Led Zeppelin) and Richie Blackmore (Deep Purple) advanced the playing abilities and the sounds of the instrument in the newly emerging hard rock genre during the 1970s, until Eddie van Halen gained attention at the end of the decade. Growing up as the son of a Dutch saxophone and clarinet player van Halen learned piano and drums first. As guitar player in the famous band (named after him and his brother Alex, their drummer) he created his own style by expanding the playing of his idols Hendrix and foremost Eric Clapton by classical scales. Furthermore he established new fingerings and plucking techniques ("speed picking") and made "tapping" (playing with both hands on the guitar's neck) popular at one fell swoop with his two minute Solo *Eruption* on Van Halen's debut album (1978). Among the next generation of guitarists, musicians like Steve Morse and Steve Vai as well as the Swedish-born Yngwie Malmsteen followed Eddie van Halen's path as they integrated elements of classic guitar playing into hard rock. Malmsteen still tries to write baroque suites in the style of Vivaldi, where harmonically simple motives are chained to provide a foundation for chromatic, pentatonic and modal scales of his electric guitar (most evident in his *Icarus Dream Fanfare*). This style of classic-influenced Hard Rock had its peak in the 1990s and still is rather popular in Japan. So far a coherent explanation is lacking why in Asia especially the Japanese fans remain true not only to current acts but also to older European and Anglo-American rock and metal bands using classical elements, who have in the meantime become much less popular in their home countries.

In contrast to this epigonism, an artist like Steve Morse represents a different view on the broad repertoire for the contemporary electric guitar, ranging from classical and especially baroque influences to jazz and rock. Furthermore, this perspective incorporates the diverse history of the guitar, turning the classical European instrument into an easy accessible and affordable tool for Afro-American blues musicians and making it sophisticated in the realms of jazz. By electrifying the guitar – to compete against the huge brass sections of swing big bands – a major step was taken which secured the instrument's future in the 20th century, while one hundred years earlier a similar situation drew the classical guitar (with its special connections to local cultures on the Iberian peninsula) away from European concert music, where the symphonic rush of bourgeoisie philharmonic societies enlarged the size of concert halls and orchestras in very few years, so that instrumental competitors with a wider range of volumes and

tone colors like violins and celli with steel strings, trumpets with valves and above all the grand pianos with their innovative hammer mechanics won the race.

Regarding the technical development of the electric guitar a few additional remarks have to be mentioned in this context. The leap of virtuoso abilities, located between Hendrix and van Halen, is detectable in the evolution of constructing guitars, too. As can be shown by a short view in appropriate catalogs companies as Dean, Ibanez and Jackson soon took care of the growing virtuoso market. For example Ibanez' *Iceman*-model, designed in 1971 and made popular by Paul Stanley from Kiss, already showed a typical metal-body (though Gibson's *Explorer* and *Flying V* from the mid-1950s of course have to be named in this context). After Floyd D. Rose developed a tremolo system around 1980, which guaranteed reliable tuning stability for extreme bendings, Steve Vai's *JEM* from 1987 shows most explicitly the guitar virtuoso's rising demands. How close in turn the image of the virtuoso is linked to male attributes can be seen on other snapshots from the catalogues. On the one hand only three prominent women with their own model guitars can be found – Jennifer Batten's Ibanez, Orianthi's Paul Reed Smith and Jackson's Jenna Jameson-model, though it has to be mentioned that the first succeeded as Michael Jackson's band mate, the second also being chosen to join Jackson's back-line for his final London *This is it*-concerts and featured by Steve Vai as a support act on his 2007 world tour, while the third lady gained recognition as a star in the American porn industry. On the other hand women appear in advertisements of companies like Dean as stylized groupies, whereas the margin between irony and unintended comedy is not always clear to see.

Returning to the development of electric guitar playing during the last decades, it becomes clear that significantly many players with an interest in the historic repertoire of their instrument share the fondness of their classical and jazz colleagues for the time between Vivaldi and Bach, making them all a very heterogeneous group of like-minded individuals. Though this phenomena has not yet been examined in detail, so far a first theoretical approach could be deduced from a comment made by Leonard Bernstein on the fascination of Johann Sebastian Bach: "The ear was conditioned to hear lines, simultaneous melodic lines, rather than chords. That was the natural way of music, strange though it seems to us. Counterpoint came before harmony, which is a comparatively recent phenomenon. [...] That's why jazzmen idolize Bach. For them, he is the great model for the continuously running melody, and this is natural, because Bach and the jazz player both feel music in terms of line – that is, horizontally."¹⁴ Consequently, one reason for a preference of baroque music could be found in the pure harmonies (unaffected by later chromatic expansions) and the melodic latitudes they open up, as well as to the scale dominated motoric exercises, which are predestined for multi-voiced patterns with paralleled thirds and sixths. Striking examples are easily detectable in solo passages of many guitarists. Very impressive for example in many solos of Dream Theater's John Petrucci and Jordan Rudess where the guitar and keyboard parts are synchronized in highly virtuosic arrangements. A second interpretation could be based on Robert Walser's remark on the primary musical socialization of many guitar players: "Metal musicians generally acquire their knowledge of classical music through intense

study, but they owe their initial exposure to the music and their audiences' ability to decode it not to the pickled rituals of the concert hall, but to the pervasive recycling of all available musical discourses by the composers of television and movie music."¹⁵ This observation could be underlined by the role of popular movie tunes for symphonic concert programs, which filled the gap that the compositional developments of the last century left behind by drifting far apart from a broad audience, so that during the last 20 years almost every philharmonic orchestra has started to integrate compiled concerts which included soundtrack-titles in their regular schedules.¹⁶

But alongside such general trends, one still has to keep in mind that musicians, having completed a classical training and built up a career in the field of rock music, are likely to influence youngsters all the more. One example is Dream Theater's keyboard player Jordan Rudess, who, having graduated as a classical pianist from New York's Juilliard School of Music, combined these experiences with a strong interest in live-electronics and experimental gadgets such as synthesizer apps for the I-Phone and the I-Pad that he develops with his own company.¹⁷ A guitarist with a similar educational background and huge impact on others, especially younger generations, is Steve Morse. He demonstrates regularly in guitar clinics and on his several instructional videos how he takes great care in shaping his guitar sound by using very complex hook-ups for numerous effect units and pedals, midi-controlled guitar-synthesizers, simultaneously fade-able amps with different cabinet settings and guitars with modified pick-up configurations (since 1986 he endorses his own guitar model manufactured by music man¹⁸). If this accuracy for sound aesthetics can be identified as one side of his artistic ethos, his combination of playing techniques derived from classical music, jazz and country styles represents the other side. In tracks like *Point Counterpoint* (performed with his Steve Morse Band, published 1991 on *Southern Steel*) and *Flat Baroque* (on *Coast to Coast*, 1992) he presented his view on the guitar's classical heritage.

Combined in a set list for a concert in New York in 1992 (recorded for the DVD *Cruise Control*) these two compositions from Mores himself somehow served as a comment on a title played earlier in the concert, admitting his passion for the music of Johann Sebastian Bach by performing a guitar adaptation of Bach's chorale *Jesus bleibet meine Freude* (BWV 147, entitled *Jesus Joy Of Man's Desiring* on the DVD). Morse used an amplified acoustic guitar with nylon strings for these baroque-inspired pieces, as a hybrid instrument offering the possibility to merge the classical tone with the sounds of his usual effect rack. Starting the chorale's prelude with only a little bit of reverb and flanger he raised the reverb level when the melody sets in, so that the chord arpeggios with the melodic line on top could create an cathedral like aura. As evidence that this stylistic device is a purposeful intention, Morse reduced again the reverb level in the bars with counterpuntal intersections to highlight the melody again with more reverb by simulating the wider sound of a broad hall. Like an organ player would use different tone registers to shape the different horizontal and vertical parts of a piece, Morse in one way took Bach into his world of modern guitar sounds while maintaining the integrity of the composition by means of his

skilled playing technique. This helped to avoid the impression of kitsch as other performers would overload and overemphasize the delicate architecture of Bach's complex voice leading.

Poses

Considering the success of the computer game *Guitar Hero* as well as the huge public interest in air guitar contests, the performative habits of guitar playing seem to be a major attraction to identify with virtuosic rock musicians. For many people having grown up in the beat generation, Jimi Hendrix is a central figure for empathy, who not only coined the desire to liberate youth culture from old fashioned restrictions in his music, but even more serves as an visual icon of the pioneer of the electric guitar. As for example statues in honor of famous people try to picture the historic person with a most telling, typical gesture the bronze figure honoring Hendrix in his native town Seattle freezes his motion, showing him on his knees, leaning backwards with his stratocaster, turning his head away from his guitar with an ecstatic expression on his face while performing a solo. A common reproach against musicians, who try to imitate this habit, is to mime spontaneous inspiration at concerts by orgiastically engrossed facial features, compensating the lacking harmonic and rhythmic design of their bravuras by shrill show elements and excessive display of their playing technique. Of course initially gestural clarification of music is not infamous, but quite common. Nevertheless for most rock musicians, as the level of their musical literacy ascends, their disposition for eccentric stage performances declines. Interpreting this correlation one has to keep in mind that a more or less articulate embodiment of virtuosity firstly is depending on different tempers and other, individual features of a character. Nonetheless, and this refers to strong genre-encoded role patterns, many academically socialized rock musicians internalized the striking cautious habit of their classical or jazz-grounded education where not least the routine of disciplined practice had to be learned to achieve such technical perfection. Furthermore, in the case of virtuosos like Steve Morse or John Petrucci many parts of their playing have to be acted out so complexly, quickly and precisely in connection with their band mates that the necessary degree of concentration leaves little space for affective posing, though the denial of virtuoso-clichés by itself again serves as a kind of stage pose.

An interesting exception to these explanations can be discussed in conjunction with Steve Vai. Being a professional with decades of stage experience, he not only combines instrumental mastership with all typical rock star poses. More than that – and this is another characteristic of virtuosos – he serves as a role model to numerous offspring musicians to whom he passes down his playing technique in courses and instructional videos (significantly recessing his compositional experience). Furthermore, he wrote a series of articles called *Musical Meditations* for a guitar magazine. The forth part *The Physical* was dedicated to the wish of musicians to make their instrument a part of their own body and to learn how to display their emotional state: "When someone plays an instrument, facial and body language play important expressive roles. [...] The more animated you allow yourself to be, the more the music seems to come alive. True, it takes a certain lack of inhibition to use this technique live, but hey, what do you care, right? I don't

suggest you use these body language techniques all the time. But in the never-ending struggle to be original, you must search the depths of your soul, and these techniques may help.”¹⁹



Pic. 1: Steve Vai Live At The Astoria London 2001 – © Steve Vai 2003

An important limit – that Vai keeps in mind when he performs himself – is the set of social rules and conventions that triggers the individual habit. Stepping out on a stage to create an artistic situation by means of outstanding individual skills turns a private person into a public figure, so that the audience evaluates both the personal abilities of the performer and the impression of the music he plays, and in the same moment compares (be it by purpose or unintentionally) the presented accomplishments with other pieces, styles and artists. In general each style of music incorporates different rules for the participants, so that common and socially accepted behavior of an audience or an artist provokes misunderstandings in a different field where the same set of rules has opposite meanings. Mostly these conventions are dealing with the physical activities in a concert, where clapping, cheering, shouting, singing, dancing and all their contradictory concealments of emotional and somatic excitement direct the course of the social ritual “concert”²⁰. Accordingly Steve Vai decides very carefully to move and act more cautious when performing his music with a classical orchestra instead of doing a rock show, though the majority of the audience consists of his regular fans, so that the aura of the symphonic orchestra overrules the much more casual manners in a rock’n’roll-show. Another element limiting the animation of a performer, which brings us to the final part of the essay, is contributed by the degree of musical complexity and the space, which is left for spontaneous motion (for example during an improvised solo). As he affirmed in a conversation with the author²¹ the musical communication with dozens of orchestra players occupies much more of his concentration in comparison to playing with his regular band mates, so that the much tighter architecture of his orchestral pieces correlates with the more reserved rituals of classical music, which in turn shapes the display of his virtuosity significantly.



Pic. 2: Steve Vai Live with the Holland Metropole Orkest 2005 – © Steve Vai 2007

Virtuoso Concertos

Concerning the organizational dimensions of an musical enterprise involving more than one hundred contributors (incl. artists, producers, technicians, craftsmen and other engineering staff) a concert with a rock musician and an orchestra naturally takes much more compromise and is much more spectacular than a solo recital. Taking a closer look at the programs, which Steve Vai hosted with the Holland Metropole Orkest in July 2005 (documented for the DVD *Visual Sound Theories*) and with the Noord Nederlands Orkest in October 2010 (broadcasted by dutch radio in march 2011²²), a description like “spectacular” is not only suiting for the public relation-marketing of such events but further more necessary for mainly musical reasons. As will be shown in this last segment of the paper the possibility to write for a full orchestra, as Vai was offered the opportunity to do during the last years, closes a circle back to the beginning of his solo career, his years with Frank Zappa and the first pieces for his debut record *flex-able* (1984), a circumstance which needs further explanation. Here two main principles of his way of working can unfold in more details than ever before: (1) the need to meet expectations and build musical bridges between different stylistic traditions; and (2) the drive to challenge all of his skills and find territories he has not explored so far. One methodological difficulty of this duality is the circumstance that Vai did not shift from one extreme to the other, but instead he combines these two elements within his way of reflecting the world as a musician.

1. Meeting Expectations

Throughout his outstanding career Steve Vai has experienced different ways of dealing with individual and collective expectations. The regular biographies, usually short summaries circulating in the internet, begin by mentioning the friendship with his first teacher Joe Satriani and the following collaboration with Frank Zappa, further on merging his solo career with

cooperative endeavors that have seen him working with Alcatrazz, David Lee Roth, Whitesnake and others.²³ Though autobiographical commentaries often are difficult to verify, his own website goes much more into detail, completing the picture with notes on his family background, his musical socialization and education that turn out to be essential when not his instrumental but instead his compositional approach is taken into close consideration.

Born in 1960 and growing up in Carle Place, on New York's Long Island, biographies first relate Steve Vai's musical discoveries to bands like Led Zeppelin and leading progressive rock groups of that time, that are nowadays considered to be classics, but had a very rebellious and huge refreshing impact on all predecessors. Already years before he had developed a precise idea of shaping music on paper and on instruments. In a conversation with the author, Vai mentioned an epiphany being four or five years old when he touched the keyboard of a piano for the first time and experienced the notes' ambitus from the lowest to the highest registers. When seeing notes on paper, he then recognized this relation and henceforth got highly fascinated by drawing scores himself. At the age of nine he took music lessons, learning to play the accordion. At the same time his parent's musical preference for broadway musicals got him in touch with Leonard Bernstein's *Westside Story*, which made a huge impression on him by mixing jazz sounds and popular melodies with the mastery of orchestral instrumentation. Filled with inspiration and motivation he soon started to draw his own notes and figured out what his sketches sounded like. As a teenager in high school, he received intensive theory classes studying with Bill Westcott, whom Vai recently credited in a very personal obituary as his "greatest musical influence".²⁴

Through Westcott he earned, during his four years of high school classes, all his theoretical knowledge of analyzing and composing music, both through studies of classical pieces as well as frequent exercises he had to hand in for his lessons on a daily basis. Further more Vai had the chance to learn about instrumentation and experience it practically through working with the high school's orchestra. The repertoire Westcott used for his instructions consisted mostly of pieces from the Viennese classical period of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, though Vai was not very attracted to the aesthetic results besides a systematical interest in the constructional aspects of this music. Only masters of impressionistic instrumentation like Ravel and Debussy and especially Strawinsky caught his musical attention. Here the circle closes to his other field of influences, his classically trained compositional ambitions meeting with his love for the hot bands of the time around the mid-1970s, in particular Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Jethro Tull and Queen, where he found the emotional content of powerful passionate music. While having started to play electric guitar at the age of 13 (in 1973) and soon taking intensive lessons with his friend Joe Satriani, he developed his compositional skills and made a first attempt to write a piece for his school orchestra about a year later.

When Vai entered Berklee College of Music in Boston for further studies of guitar and composition his musical influences changed as did the schedules of his theory classes, focusing more on jazz, orchestrating for big bands and the like. But above these exercises he appreciated Berklee's library the most, where he could fill huge gaps in his knowledge of repertoire that had

to wait in earlier steps of his education where he did not have access to a well-assorted collection of scores and recordings or the money to buy them himself. Here again a circle closed to his teenage years, where he could now follow up on his most admired musical influence, Frank Zappa. Along getting acquainted with Zappa's entire catalog in Berklee's library, his attention was drawn to Zappa's historical points of inspiration, in particular the complete works of Igor Strawinsky, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Edgar Varèse, which lead him to discover furthermore the music of Maynard Ferguson and The Beatles in its entirety.

Considering this musical education when nineteen-year-old Steve Vai graduated from Berklee in 1979 it is not such a surprise anymore (as some biographies describe it) that his transcriptions of one of Zappa's instrumental pieces drew his idol's attention to his skills as a trained musician as well as a performer (sending the transcriptions to Zappa, Vai had included in his letter a tape with his own recordings). Very soon Zappa invited his young admirer to transcribe some more music and to join his band. This is a crucial point to understanding Vai's way of thinking about being a composer and a performer, because it was exactly this double talent (resonating with the baroque meaning of virtuosity) that laid the groundwork for his exceptional solo career. Numerous stories about Vai emerged which could not convincingly explain why he left Zappa's environment already after two years, only returning occasionally for collaborations. But taking his first solo recording *flex-able* (1984) – which Vai himself calls “very Zappa-esque”²⁵ – the diversity of styles, the blendings of wild guitar playing with elements of rock, blues and jazz and the ignorance against any strategic compromises or genre specifications to reach a special audience start to make sense as one first insight into a universe that is made of classical and modern influences, of compositional and performative ambitions, of theoretical and emotional devices.

Despite this rich heterogeneous cosmos Steve Vai built up his primary career in rock music, when after a series of guitar jobs (the most well-known for David Lee Roth and Whitesnake) his second solo record *Passion and Warfare* (1990) became a huge success and established his name as one of the leading and most inventive guitar virtuosos of his time. The next dozen years saw Vai develop his reputation as a solo artist in the world of rock music, so that his involvement in a project with Japanese composer Ichiro Nodaira to play the solo part in a concerto for electric guitar *Fire Strings* with the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra (July 2002) came as a surprise to some critics and fans. After Metallica's highly successful collaboration with Michael Kamen and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra *Se&M* (1999) had reanimated a format that The Nice, Deep Purple and again Frank Zappa had established years before and which found numerous followers (until the present) Vai seemed to follow this trend when he carried out a first cooperation with a symphony orchestra in 2005 (documented on the DVD *Visual Sound Theories*). But the point of his collaboration with the Holland Metropole Orkest and its conductor Dick Bakker (five years later continued with the Noord Nederlands Orkest and its conductor Kasper de Roo²⁶) is Vai's turn to his earliest pieces when he had to choose material from his catalog for orchestration.

Reflecting for a moment the constellation – a prominent rock musician entering a stage with a classical orchestra – certain expectations, stereotypes and doubts arise about what to expect from the concert and the music, when the occasion features the rock star and the program for the show was written completely and originally by him. Speaking in principle terms, an artist almost always develops his reputation in one genre and from thereon starts to stretch out into other stylistic fields. When he has managed to establish a stable career over a longer period with a devoted following therefore the usual reaction of his admirers, when their idol turns to experiment with elements from outside of their mutual primary preferences, is to follow him only up to a certain extent. Only as long as he does not go too far, avoiding to delve beyond what the common sense of fans and critics prescribe as his main musical territory, they will tolerate and support the investigation of unfamiliar scenes. Philosopher Malcom Budd gave a precise explanation of the reasons to preserve the stability of one's own taste:

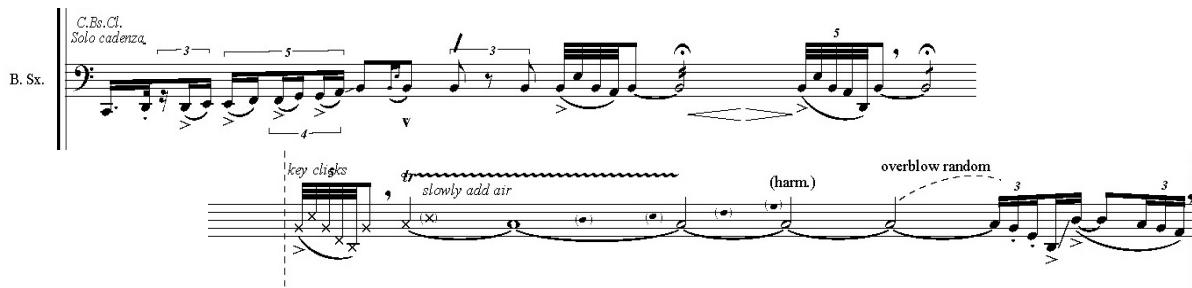
A present musical stimulus has meaning for a listener if, and only if, it leads him to expect a more or less definite subsequent musical event. Hence, music in a style with which the listener is totally unfamiliar is experienced as meaningless. For expectation is largely a result of stylistic experience, and music in an unfamiliar style will arouse in the listener no expectations as to how the music will progress. In fact, a style is basically a complex system of probability relationships.²⁷

Coming back to Steve Vai and his choices for the first project with his own orchestral pieces in 2005 he had to balance the different expectations that came together at this occasion: Based on the rapid ticket sales, the audience belonged predominantly to Vai's regular fan base. On the one hand he knew about their tolerance and interest in being surprised, but on the other hand he also knew – as he regularly reworks several of his best-liked pieces for different instrument constellations (e.g. *Liberty* or *For The Love Of God*) – that they certainly would appreciate hearing favorite tunes in a symphonic version. Vai's ambition to merge the fulfillment of expectations with unexpected challenges matches with his curiosity to seek temptations and face risks: For the majority of his audience, being rooted in rock music, Vai's interest in musical abstraction (to open up compositional stereotypes of typical rock songs) could result in alienation. For the followers of the regular orchestral programs, being familiar with the purist development of orchestral music in the 20th century and unfamiliar with the range of his musical interests, Vai's use of pathos and appealing melodies, rhythm and settings could be interpreted as a simple and unbearable affirmation of popular consumer habits. The choice of pieces that could demonstrate how productive and surprising such an inter-stylistic event could come out was surely another driving force for Vai and even more for the orchestra's management who had to account for the collaboration.

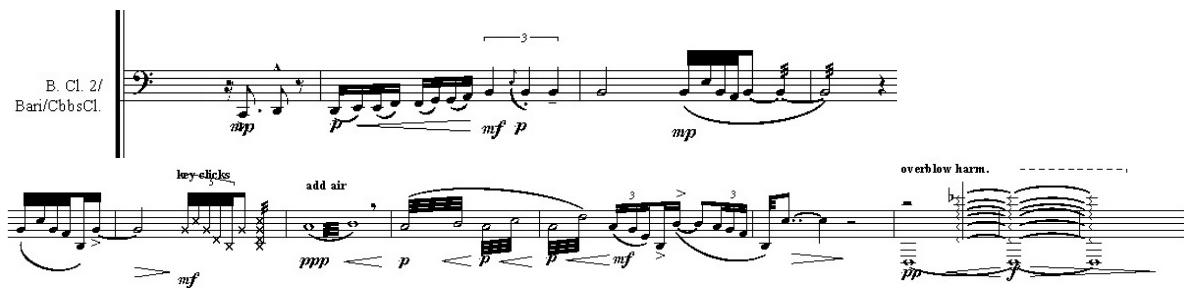
Besides such planning that motivated the dramaturgy of the enterprise, Vai had to take certain very practical obstacles into consideration. Preparing the scores for the concerts, which meant the arrangement of existing pieces and the composition of new material, kept him

occupied for several months, so that many final decisions had to be made at an early phase of the project. It is therefore no surprise, but instead a logical consequence of his musical development, that he turned to pieces that were written at the beginning of his career (like *Helois and Vesta* and the first part of *Frangelica*) and had been laid out in a symphonic manner (the following paragraph will present corresponding examples). But not every result can be forecasted in a score so that last minute changes by the composer are always the outcome from experiences being made during the rehearsals. An example is the revision of the score for the second part of *Frangelica* which was performed both with the Metropole Orkest in 2005 and the Noord Nederlands Orkest in 2010. It is a very personal attitude of composers how they deal with the abilities and talents of the musicians who are designated to perform their pieces. Artists like Brian Ferneyhough are famous for their habit of writing overly complex scores, which overburden the physical and artistic possibilities of the instrumentalists. Here neglecting performative limits is turned into an artistic principle to challenge the musicians to work out their own very personal interpretation of a piece, relieving them of the impossibility of exact, error-free renditions by encouraging them to find their own interpretational approach. Profiting from his personal experiences as a performer, Vai prefers a different way of working and keeps an eye on the playability of his music within professional limits to avoid a lack of interpretational quality, especially with respect to the very limited rehearsal time orchestras nowadays can afford to invest into new programs.

A practical example is the first production of *Frangelica*. Without making these details public, its two parts bridge Vai's development as a composer, where the first part dates from 1981, being written originally for six instruments, so that the existing sketches could be orchestrated easily. Disclaiming a solo part for himself in *Frangelica*, Vai wanted to close the concert with an up-tempo piece and supplemented a second part, so that both chapters span a period of 27 years. The first detail to be analyzed is the ending solo cadenza of the counterbassclarinet in *Frangelica II* which had to be revised for the 2010 performance: During the first concert series in 2005 the notation had proven to be too complicated for the soloist, because Vai had chosen an instrument outside of the orchestra's catalog, so that the player had to deal with unfamiliar instrumental techniques. The final result matched Vai's intentions quite well – he had instructed the player to stick primarily to the exact notes and if necessary make modifications with tempo demands and rhythmic coherences. A comparison of the two versions in the first example (see pic. 3 and 4) demonstrates how Vai reworked the passage, mostly transcribing the actual interpretation from 2005, by building shorter units with differing pauses, by reducing rhythmic complexities and the use of advanced playing techniques (glissandi) and by specifying certain notations (especially the accomplishment of harmonics).



Pic. 3: *Frangelica II* (Metropole Orkest-Version 2005), Counterbassclarinet bar 147-148 – © Steve Vai 2010



Pic. 4: *Frangelica II* (Noord Nederlands Orkest-Version 2010), Counterbassclarinet bar 159-170 – © Steve Vai 2010

2. Expanding the Universe

As far as outlining general characteristics about Steve Vai's music, one element is the heterogeneity of styles that he likes to work within. Ranging from soft and melancholic tones with elements of blues, jazz, pop, and funk to aggressive and driving parts with heavy distortion, noise sounds and dissonant passages, all these elements serve as the palette of colors Vai uses to paint his symphonic images, thus blending an orchestra with a rockband's guitars, keyboards, bass and drum set. The more appealing pieces like *Frangelica*, *Kill The Guy With The Ball*, *Gentle Ways*, or *Liberty* – composed in regular meters and tonal harmonies, some in a driving tempo, others using baladesque or elevated forms – could be interpreted as offers from Vai to his regular listeners to get acquainted with the classic setting of the performance. A few other pieces form an explicit contrast by challenging average manners of reception.

Again one has to come back once more to the beginning of Vai's work as a solo artist to find references to this love for polarities which directed his decision to take many pieces from his early years and orchestrate them. A striking example of that kind is *There's Still Something Dead In Here*, premiered in 2010 at the *Steve Vai*-Festival in Groningen by the Noord Nederlands Orkest under Kaspar de Roo. As he revealed in a conversation with the author, he was traveling on an airplane in 1981, experimenting in his mind with tensions of intervals and harmonies. Due to his instrumental possibilities at that time, he recorded a version for multiple guitar and synthesizer tracks and published it a few years later on his debut album *Flex-Able* (1984). Vai considers this piece as one of his most interesting ones because of its mysterious character, falling out of all regular conventions for rock music and just sharing with it the use of overdriven electric guitars. It starts with a falling minor ninth, stepping up a minor third to rest on a tight layer of small intervals. For the symphonic version Vai took the chance to elongate the original ideas by

introducing more elements (represented in fast chromatic scales, at first in the harp) and combining them in the further course of the piece.

Pic 5: *There's Still Something Dead In Here*, extract from bar 1-4 – © Steve Vai 2010

Reducing the first bars to the motive's content (see pic. 6 in comparison to pic. 5) the first chord of E flat (respectively D sharp), E and F sharp is a sequence of the first two intervals, a minor second downwards (with the subtraction of the octave) and a following minor third upwards (so that the first and the third note span the distance of a major second).



Pic 6: *There's Still Something Dead In Here*, extract of the first wood wind intervals

The possibilities to build tensions and stretch them over the different orchestral voices is a driving force of the piece, so that the core element of a minor second with a following larger interval is kept stable and only modified by gradually enlarging the second interval step. Means of contrast and combination are chromatic scales as mentioned and passages in unison. Vai is very much aware that he is reaching into the area of avant-garde music with such a concept. Since he has a favor for ironic commentaries and is not fond of music where he senses an experimental, atonal attitude just for its own sake without musical purposes, he included his own reflection of this constellation (and probably anticipating the anxiety of his regular audience) in the piece by requesting the orchestra to shout “stop it!” in forte fortissimo and subsequently to rest in a general pause (see bar 72 in pic. 7).

Picc. f 4:3 7:6 G.P. f 7:6

Fl 1-2 f 4:3 7:6 G.P. f 7:6

Ob. 1-2-3 f 4:3 7:6 G.P. f 7:6

Bs. Cl. 1 f 4:3 7:6 G.P. f 7:6

Bs. Cl. 2 f 4:3 7:6 G.P. f 7:6

Bs. Cl. f 4:3 7:6 G.P. f 7:6

Perc. 1 Random [Pic. Whistle] f 7:6

Perc. 2 FILL C.Bell G.P. f mf

Perc. 3 FILL [R.Toms] Marba. f 7:6

E. Gtr. * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P. Dist. 7:6

E. Bass Distr. G.P. clean (dist. off)

Drc. f FILL * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P. W.BL. 7:6

Synth G.P.

Pno. f * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P. mf

Vln I f div. * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P.

Vln. II f * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P.

Vla f * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P.

Vc. f * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P.

Cb. f * SCREAM randomly Stop Stop Stop it! G.P.

Pic 7: *There's Still Something Dead In Here*, extract from bar 70-75 – © Steve Vai 2010

As a result of this (self-) critical annotation the piece continues with moderate and often unison segments (at least in the rhythmical structure), until a symbiotic ending builds up (see pic. 8).

randomly attack this note, hold notes for 0,5 - 2,5 sec.
leave 3-7 seconds between notes

The musical score consists of multiple staves for various instruments. The first section of the score (measures 85-89) features woodwind and brass instruments like Picc., Flutes, Oboes, Bassoons, and Trombones. The second section (measures 90-91) features percussion (Perc. 1, Perc. 2, Perc. 3), a xylophone (Xylo.), a bass drum (Thunder Sheet.), and a piano. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mf*, and *ff*. There are also performance instructions like "randomly attack this note, hold notes for 0,5 - 2,5 sec. leave 3-7 seconds between notes" and "fill". Measure numbers 85 through 91 are indicated at the bottom of the score.

Pic 8: *There's Still Something Dead In Here*, end of the piece, bar 85-91 – © Steve Vai 2010

In detail these last seven bars demonstrate exemplarily Vai's methods to interlock the different aspects of the composition:

- In bar 85 the groups of instruments share related rhythmical patterns, which are slightly dislocated (good to study with the two violins) so that their similar motives of four to seven falling chromatic and diatonic tones superimpose each other.
- The overlay of these heterogeneous groups of instruments – each held together by their mutual tone color – results in a shimmering web of sound, structured by the complex architecture of various meters (including combinations of notes from 32nd to 8th-length and groups of different n-tuple meters).
- The energetic fluctuating forte fortissimo sound discharges in a diminuendo layering of tremolos pronouncing the notes C-sharp, D, F and G-sharp in middle and low registers and resembles the starting motive with its tensious minor second. Again, this layer of woodwinds and strings is aerated by glissandi of the harp and chords of the piano.
- The piano chords in bar 87 on C-sharp minor, E major as well as in diminished and augmented constellations anticipate the final dissolving in D major while the tremolo of the other players increase their tension from bar 88 and 89 from a whispering piano pianissimo back into a forte fortissimo, ending in a shining D major with Vai's favorite additional ninth.
- And again, calming one parameter by fixing the pitch is still not the end of the piece yet. Profiting by the intensive exploration of the category “sound” in 20th century music – both on the side of popular and of contemporary classical music – after another general pause the sound still keeps resonating for a few seconds. Loosening the pitch from the accentuation by means of controlled random operations allows Vai to receive a different rhythmical complexity than in the fixed notation of bar 85.
- It is no surprise that passages of that kind share characteristics with compositional developments expedited in particular by Arnold Schoenberg (especially in *Farben* (colors), the third of his orchestral pieces op. 16 from 1909) and György Ligeti (in *Atmosphères* from 1961, as well in *Apparitions*, *Volumina*, *Requiem*, *Lux Aeterna* and *Lontano*, all between 1959 and 1967), because among his most adored artists from Vai's own life time Ligeti and his colleague Luciano Berio rank the highest. His intensive examination of their scores can be felt within several moments of his latest composition, for example in *Chaos Theory*, the third part of his cycle *Expanding The Universe* (see pic. 9).

Pic 9: *Chaos Theory* (part III from *Expanding The Universe*), bar 66-67 and 72-74 – © Steve Vai 2010

- The two examples from the middle section of *Chaos Theory* underline the general impression how Vai used the chance of the commission for *Expanding The Universe* for Noord Nederlands Orkest's *Steve Vai*-Festival in 2010 to explore different treatments of interpretive clearance. This can either mean to fix a unison pulse of semiquavers and assign the “lowest four notes” of every instrument (bar 66 to 67), so that the resulting sound will always be different, spontaneous and enhancing the musician’s attention. But it can also mean just to sketch roughly the sonic silhouette of a gradient sound (bar 72) by giving points of orientation to “slowly morph to these notes,” so that the space between the mutual pitches will be filled with all sorts of micro-intervals, noises and overtones.
- The significance of all of Vai’s latest compositions – not to make notes of the guitar parts that he played during the concerts in 2010 – leads over to the general assumption of this paper that is to take the historical concept of a virtuoso under reconsideration. In the person of Steve Vai one can see the idea of a double talent, i.e. to compose and to perform. This is stretched to a maximum limit in the artistic professions in modern music business, uniting the planning of the compositions, their dispatch as orchestral arrangement with the mixing and production of the visual and sonic recording in one single hand. Though the control of all steps during the production of a new work always occupies his complete attention, it is not supposed to give the impression that the production of Vai’s orchestral projects did not involve a team of collaborators. But especially the blending of a guitar with an orchestra, Vai considers a very complicated and difficult task where one single person has to take the responsibility to gain an artistic success, which means to implement the acoustic specifications of an amplified electric guitar (accompanied by a bass guitar, keyboards, and a drum set) from the first sketches into the conception of the complete score.

The title of his latest piece *Expanding The Universe*, used to headline this last part of the essay, seizes his preference for metaphysical imageries. In a larger perspective it is based on his own perception of music as potentially addressing other musicians (both colleagues and interpreters of his music), his audience and music in general as a historical continuum. In a conversation with the author, Vai explained the practice of “expanding” as a basic human desire to progress, change and develop the world around us, regardless of how big or small one individually wants to envisage the size of “universe” and universal elements. In a musical meaning, expanding the universe also could be attached to his efforts to blend on a higher, synergetic level the variety of musical experiences that characterize the (musical) world of today. In clear distinction to average efforts of “crossover”-projects, importing elements from one context into another and portraying the implemented bits like *objet trouvés* in the manner of postmodern collages, Vai is one of a few contemporary artists seeking to weave their various inspirations into one single context. As always in progressing art, this approach does not warrant general success of the results. The reception is depending much more on the flexibility, curiosity and familiarity of listeners with other musical repertoire so that they potentially could appreciate the composer’s

effort to reflect what the musical world nowadays is about. Explaining his understanding of the concept of “expanding the universe,” Vai though concentrated more on the aesthetic and metaphorical dimensions of the term “universe,” pointing at the human desire to include the infinite into the finite in the sense of a constant struggle for perfection and search for ways to strive for quintessential situations through inevitably imperfect means, which is a traditional task and a special gift for artists if the recipients connect to the intended aesthetical capture of these core issues of mankind.

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For lack of a developed terminology and in advance of a systematical model, this artistic attitude provisionally could be called “inter-stylistic composition,” the more so as it subsumes works of musicians like Heiner Goebbels, Matthew Herbert, Thomas Adès, Simon Stockhausen or Steve Vai that popularized their originators outside of their aboriginal domain. It seems to be more than a simple coincidence that the term matches with artists that belong to generations, which were raised in a world of dominant popular culture. As far as the functional conditions of inter-stylistic composition can be sketched, preliminarily every artist is predominantly associated with one specific genre. Furthermore, genres like progressive metal, free jazz and avant-garde music in general are exceptions where constant change is part of the genre’s history and exercise. This does not mean that innovation is a mechanism of its own sake with no connection to the world outside of art, potentially protecting against inspirational stagnation and stylistic conservations. The reflex to stand up against ideological rigidifications and find solutions to overcome dogmatic conventions therefore is not only aimed against massive economical pressures offending the arts from outside and hierarchic battles between various genres but also in a self-critical impulse against certain tendencies within the own sector. Fortunately, the return to a state of artistic risk-taking, which is a key talent of keeping music progressing, often made the results much more exciting and unique than the average and spread their recognition from inter-stylistic to inter-temporally historical terms. Prognoses are always difficult and questionable, because evaluating present occurrences by measuring them with historical scales to forecast their potential impact on future innovations leaves open spaces for speculations and false estimations. But nevertheless the numerous transformations and regenerations that a traditional category like the virtuoso underwent during the last two hundred and fifty years, at least encourage expecting further unexpected influences and ideas from Steve Vai.

Annotations

- 1 Popular music expert and German musicologist Peter Wicke for example differentiates musical works and their interpretation from one another by defining virtuosity, as freeing pop musicians from the servitude to follow the instructions of a composer in a classical sense. See Peter Wicke, *Virtuosität als Ritual. Vom Guitar Hero zum DJ-Schamanen*, in: *Musikalische Virtuosität*, edit. by Heinz von Loesch, Ulrich Mahlert and Peter Rummenhöller, Mainz 2004, p. 233f.
- 2 Johann Mattheson, *Critica Musica*, Hamburg 1722 [quoted after the facsimile-reprint Amsterdam 1964], p. 114. See also Joh. Christoph und Joh. David Stößel, *Kurzgefaßtes musicalisches Lexicon*, Chemnitz 1749 [Leipzig 1975], keyword “Virtuosi”, p. 418
- 3 Johann Kuhnau, *Der musicalische Quacksalber* (1700), chapter 53, quoted after the reprint, edit. by Kurt Benndorf, Berlin 1900, p. 242-258
- 4 See ibid., p. 242f.: “So gedencke ich auch der Vergnügen der verständigen Ohren, darum, weil erforderlich wird, daß ein Virtuoso nicht alleine die Theorie, das ist, das ganze Fundament und alle Regeln der Music wohl inne habe, vernünftig davon discurriren, und andern gewissen Lehr-Sätze beybringen; (denn wo er da nicht zu Hause ist, so mag er so gut und so delicat spielen oder singen, als er will, wird er doch nicht viel besser seyn, als etliche Vögel, welche ihre Lieder auch gar niedlich und wohl eher pfeiffen), sondern auch in Praxi wohl fort kommen solle. Die Music ist ja ein Practicum, und wie soll das Ohr, auff dessen Vergnügen sie zielet, von ihrer Süffigkeit etwas empfinden, wenn nicht der Musicus in der Action begriffen ist, und sein Instrument würklich hören lässt. Und ist ein Musicus ohne Praxi eben so was ungeräumtes, als ein Redner, der aber stumm ist.“ (“Thus I also ponder the pleasure of reasonable ears, because required is that a Virtuoso can not alone internalize, the theory, which is, the whole foundation and all the rules of the music but also to reasonably dispute and to teach others certain theroms (since when he does not feel comfortable doing so then he can play as well and as delicately as he may, but he will not be much better than those birds who sing their songs cutely and with a rather dull whistle), but also in a practical sense he should also be able to do so. Music is a Practicum, and how should the ear, whose pleasure is its aim, understand the enjoyment of such when the musician himself does not understand the action which he intends and truly lets his instrument be heard. And is a musician without experience just as unusual as a speaker who is mute.“ Translation: Britta Padberg-Schmitt)
- 5 See Brockhaus Riemann Musiklexikon, edit. by Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, 2nd Vol. L-Z, Wiesbaden and Mainz 1979, article *Virtuose*, p. 667
- 6 Erich Reimer, article *Virtuose*, in: *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1972, p. 1
- 7 Alban Berg, *Prospekt des Vereins für musikalische Privataufführungen*, in: *Musik-Konzepte 36 Schönbergs Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*, München 1984, p. 5 (§ 6, segment c): “Die Aufführenden sind vorerst solche, die sich dem Verein aus Interesse an der Sache zur Verfügung stellen. Durch strenge Auswahl wird jenes Virtuosentum ausgeschaltet, dem das aufzuführende Werk nicht Selbstzweck ist.“ (“The performers are at first those, who make themselves available to the association due to an interest in making the concern available to others. Using strict selection criteria, each Virtuosentum is eliminated for whom the work is not a means to an end.“ Translation: Britta Padberg-Schmitt)
- 8 Daniel Jütte, *Juden als Virtuosen. Eine Studie zur Sozialgeschichte der Musik sowie zur Wirkmächtigkeit einer Denkfigur des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 66 (2009), Heft 2. Albrecht Riethmüller, *Die Verdächtigung des Virtuosen – Zwischen Midas von Akrugas und Herbert von Karajan*, in: *Virtuosen. Über die Eleganz der Meisterschaft*, edit. by the Herbert von Karajan-Center, Vienna 2001
- 9 See for details Michael Custodis, *Musik im Prisma der Gesellschaft. Wertungen in literarischen und ästhetischen Texten*, Münster 2009, p. 78-80
- 10 Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil. Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Hanover 1993, p. 76f.
- 11 Charles Shaar Murray: *Crosstown Traffic. Jimi Hendrix and Post-War Pop*, London 2005, p. 48
- 12 Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise. An Aesthetics of Rock*, London and New York 1996, chapter *I'll Be Your Mirror: Recording and Representing*
- 13 Steve Vai in an interview with the author on January 4th 2011. Likewise I would like to thank Steve Vai for the kind permission to study his scores and publish the utilized excerpts.
- 14 Leonard Bernstein, *The Joy of Music* [1959], Pompton Plains (New Jersey) and Cambridge 2004, p. 245
- 15 Ibid., S. 62f.
- 16 See Michael Custodis, *Klassische Musik heute. Eine Spurenreise in der Rockmusik*, Bielefeld 2009, chapter *Film Music in Concert: Metallica mit Michael Kamen*
- 17 See Michael Custodis, *Performing Live-Electronics. Der Keyboarder Jordan Rudess*, in: *Intermedialität und Ästhetische Erfahrung im Zeitalter der Massenkommunikation*, edit. by Thomas Becker, Bielefeld 2011
- 18 <http://www.stevemorse.com/gear.html> (approached February 8th 2011)
- 19 Steve Vai, *Musical Meditation*, part 4 *The Physical*, http://www.vai.com/LittleBlackDots/MLS_04.html (approached February 8th 2011)
- 20 See Martin Tröndle (edit.), *Das Konzert. Neue Aufführungskonzepte für eine klassische Form*, Bielefeld 2009
- 21 Steve Vai in an interview with the author on January 4th 2011.

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- ²² I would like to thank Co de Kloet at Dutch Public Radio NPS and Tom Trapp for kindly supporting my research.
- ²³ Even the very detailed article on wikipedia does not tell about his time before working with Satriani and Zappa.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Vai (approached February 8th 2011)
- ²⁴ <http://www.vai.com/News/bill-westcott/> (approached February 8th 2011)
- ²⁵ <http://www.vai.com/AllAboutSteve/vaiography.html> (approached February 8th 2011)
- ²⁶ Each year the NNO organizes a festival for a contemporary composer, which so far included Wolfgang Rihm, Terry Riley, Hans Werner Henze, Arvo Pärt, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Heiner Goebbels, Sofia Gubaidulina, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and Michael Nyman. <http://www.nno.nu/nl/duits> (approached February 8th 2011)
- ²⁷ Malcom Budd, *Music and the Emotions. The Philosophical Theories*, London et al. 1985, p. 162