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THE PROCESS OF TRANSCRIBING RICHARD STRAUSS' “EIN HELDENLEBEN” FOR PIANO SOLO: TASKS, APPROACHES, ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

By

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For many, approaching an orchestral score is a challenge. The process of transcribing an orchestra piece for piano solo with the purpose of a further concert performance of the transcription may be both confusing and intimidating. Despite a substantial legacy of transcriptions in the piano repertoire, the process of transcribing an orchestral work for solo piano has never been systematized. An example of an explanation of the transcribing process would be an important document to examine for both pianists learning to play transcriptions and pianists getting ready to write their own transcriptions.

In this essay I provide a thorough explanation of the process of writing my piano transcription of Richard Strauss’s “Ein Heldenleben” as an example. The music of “Ein Heldenleben” contains rich orchestral writing techniques, thus making it an ideal example for a work on which to model a transcription. I use the timeline of my work on the transcription and several versions of the piano score as a frame for detailed discussion of each technical problem that I was able to solve. I provide reasoning for each case along with preparation and performance suggestions. The piano score of my transcription of “Ein Heldenleben” is also part of this dissertation.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The idea of creating an explanation of the process of transcribing for piano came to me when I was exploring different texts on improvisation. I found that while a basic online search yields numerous books and articles on improvisation, orchestration, music theory and instrumental pedagogy; the art of transcription in the form of textbooks or manuals is under-represented. After further research through databases such as JSTOR and ProQuest, I could not find any published materials on this topic.

There is a wide range of details to take into account, which may not be obvious for the beginner wishing to write a transcription. When considering a piano transcription of a major orchestral work, the transcriber should address the following questions:

1. What is the transcribing process and how should the original material be approached?
2. What should be included from the original and what can be excluded, considering the voices and possible range of two hands on the piano?
3. How can the piano imitate varieties of timbres and techniques found within an orchestra?

In this essay I will provide a step-by-step explanation of the way my transcription of Richard Strauss’s tone poem *Ein Heldenleben* was done. I will explain how to identify the most important details to be included in the piano version (beyond the basic lines), how I chose to solve the most challenging problems of emulating the full orchestra and how I overcame them on the piano. Also, I will include my suggestions for practicing and performing this transcription.
Purpose: an Explanation of the Transcribing Process

One purpose of this essay is to provide an example of the detailed process of transcribing an orchestra score for piano solo. It will feature examples revealing the editing process of the most challenging parts, showing side-by-side the early abandoned versions compared to final improved versions of certain measures – along with the entire score of my completed piano transcription of *Ein Heldenleben*. It will reveal important approaches and discuss ways an arranger should work with the orchestral material. Also, it is my intention to inspire new ideas and achievements in the field of piano transcription: along with the practice and performance suggestions provided at the Chapter 5 of this essay, the entire combination of the transcription and the explanation of the process of its creation should encourage pianists to create more solo piano works based on the symphonic and ensemble repertoire.

Challenges of Transcribing a Large-Scale Orchestral Score to be Played by One Pianist

Creating a transcription of a large-scale symphonic work presents the transcriber with a multitude of problems due to the intricate nature of orchestral writing. This is especially true for works written after the middle of the 19th century. An orchestra score contains very dense and complex sonorities, which often exceed the possible capability of two hands on the piano. Also, those sonorities may be very vivid in color, as they are written for different groups of instruments, as well as for combinations of those instruments.
The first transcribing challenge is the difficulty of making the piano’s sound to be as colorful and powerful as the orchestra’s sound can be, and to convey specific timbres of individual orchestral instruments.

The second challenge is that of making transcribed orchestra passages playable and idiomatically justified on the piano.

The third complication is related to the difference in sound production between keyboard instruments and various string, woodwind, brass, or percussion instruments. This difference causes problems, for example, with performance of sustained notes. Not only is the challenge of making crescendi or diminuendi on a sustained note (without repeating it) a critical limitation, but also merely sustaining it with the same level of sound is impossible due to the specifics of sound production of the piano. A fourth challenge is trying to represent specific timbre effects.

Importance of the Study

Support of the Tradition of Transcription

The transcription tradition is a time-honored phenomenon that spans more than six centuries, starting with the first transcriptions from the human voice to the first keyboard instruments.\(^1\) It has benefited from contributions by Johann Sebastian Bach, Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, Feruccio Busoni, Maurice Ravel, Sergey Rachmaninoff, Samuil Feinberg, Vladimir Horowitz, Gyorgy Cziffra, and Arcadi Volodos – among other notable musicians. Having entered its “golden era” in the middle of 19th century with the appearance of Franz Liszt and his contemporaries, by the beginning of the 20th century transcription as a genre became a thriving and inevitable component of recital programs.

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of virtuoso pianists. Since many great pianists were composers (and vice versa), it was natural that more and more transcriptions of various kinds would be created.

By the middle of the 20th century, however, the profession of a concert pianist became very distant from that of a composer. In the present era, the phenomenon of Pianist-Composer is almost non-existent, and so the tradition of making transcriptions started to disappear. It is hard to find concertizing pianists who compose their own music and/or transcribe the music of others as effectively as they perform the standard piano repertoire. Among a very few living examples known worldwide are Mikhail Pletnev, Arcady Volodos and Mark-Andre Hamelin.

Pianists have become mainly the executors of other people’s works rather than creators and performers of their own music. Nowadays, when live performances are instantly being recorded and/or broadcast, concert pianists have to be very polished; so the majority of their time is consumed by practice or travel. Little time is left to compose, to improvise, to paraphrase themes from the current repertoire, or to read scores on the piano for curiosity or pleasure – so there is much less incentive to transcribe. The musician’s skills of imagination, creativeness, inner hearing, and understanding of the ideas behind the musical text get limited as well. However, composition, improvisation, paraphrasing – and transcribing – significantly enhance the professional qualities of a musician and thus should be strongly encouraged and supported.

**Expanding the Repertoire**

There are significant benefits from making a new transcription. The process of making it complements the arranger’s knowledge and understanding of both the piece

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and of piano technique. Moreover, it expands the existing piano repertoire. It also breathes new life into a work and may communicate it to new audiences that are unable to experience it live in original instrumentation. Transcription of a work of tremendous beauty enriches everyone in the line of its creation – arranger, performer, listener, and even possibly a scholar who would study it in the future.

“Orchestral Thinking” on the Piano

Making a piano transcription of a symphonic work benefits both the imagination and sound control of the pianist, who has to associate a wide range of orchestral sound colors with certain musical lines while making the transcription and then performing it. Immediate associations of the inner hearing with the actual playing significantly enhance the quality of playing and ability to control the sound on the instrument. The ability to both hear piano sound as a sound of other instruments and to reproduce it in a way that would remind the listener of those instruments is extremely important for accomplished pianists.

Research Questions

**How to Make a Piano Transcription?**

This question will be answered using the full score of *Ein Heldenleben* and my completed piano transcription of it. Following both the original score and my transcription, I will show and discuss how I made the transcription. It is important to describe elaborately what made me choose certain ways of transcribing. I will talk specifically about places where two hands cannot possibly handle all the musical material, why I had to exclude some lines, and how I adapted them without losing the main structure. Those places are tricky and potentially had various solutions. I am going
to provide examples from the timeline of my work with different options I had, and then I will explain why I have chosen the final versions of them.

**Why is it Important to Explain the Transcribing Process?**

Transcription was a strong tradition developed by pianists-composers of the past, such as Franz Liszt, Feruccio Busoni, and Sergey Rachmaninoff, to name a few. These composers made a lot of orchestral music available to be performed as virtuoso piano pieces. They brought new music to places and audiences that would rarely hear it live in original orchestral versions. However, those composers never shared publically the way they approached original scores – their methods, criteria, and how they found the best ways to solve certain problems.

Having studied more than a hundred transcriptions as a part of my own solo repertoire and for research purposes, I wanted to create a detailed example of an approach to an orchestra score from the perspective of a pianist-transcriber. Since Strauss’s tone poem contains six consecutive sections, each having several differently orchestrated episodes, I had the perfect opportunity to show possible ways to work with a wide variety of orchestral situations and textures. In a sense, this collection of examples of ways to transcribe could be understood as a sort of “glossary of pianistic comprehension of the late romantic era orchestra”.

**Why Should More of Strauss’s Music Be Played on the Piano?**

Richard Strauss’s heritage in the solo piano literature is not nearly as massive as his symphonic and operatic works. Also, his musical style was not fully shaped when he was writing his early pieces for piano solo - *Fünf Klavierstücke* Op. 3, Sonata in B minor Op. 5 and *Stimmungsbilder*, Op. 9. They are relatively simple, conservative, and show the
influence of 19th century composers such as Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms; and do not sound closely related to Strauss’s signature works. By the time he developed his unique and immediately recognized style, his interests were focused on writing for the orchestra and theater. Thus there is no “mature” Strauss music available for piano solo. There are only chamber pieces (Cello Sonata in F major Op. 6, Piano Quartet Op. 13, and Violin Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 18) and works for piano and orchestra (Burleske in D minor and left-hand works, Parergon Op. 73 and Panathenäenzug, Op. 74, that were created for Paul Wittgenstein – the same pianist for whom Ravel and Prokofiev wrote their left-hand concerti). Also, Strauss wrote an unusual work Enoch Arden: the Melodrama for Narrator and Piano, Op. 38, where the piano is involved episodically. He also wrote numerous lieder, accompanied by piano, but the piano part was not written with an intensity that is expected in solo piano works.

So, having focused on the orchestra as the main instrument to convey his ideas, Strauss left the solo piano area and never came back. Perhaps this happened because he himself was not considered an extraordinary pianist.3 But his writing, perfect for the orchestra, has its roots in his piano works, which were his first serious pieces with opus numbers and obviously were a basis of his later style. It is not widely known that Strauss’s earliest pieces (between 1871 and 1877), which did not get opus numbers, were mainly piano sonatinas and character pieces, along with songs for voice and piano.

Adding a major work of Strauss into the piano repertoire would be important and engaging for numerous musicians, and my transcription of Ein Heldenleben would provide a new solo piece of Strauss’s music for pianists. Although there are short

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excerpts from operas, such as *Electra*, and also some *lieder* that were transcribed by pianists Walter Gieseking, Glenn Gould and Cyprien Katsaris, there are no published transcriptions of Strauss’s larger symphonic works available so far.

**Why *Ein Heldenleben***?

*Ein Heldenleben* is one of the longest, most colorful and powerful tone poems ever written, but also one of the less performed. All of the greatest conductors have recorded it, but you rarely can hear it live, due to its difficulty. It consists of six sections, each of them being highly characteristic according to the programmatic content and showing a wide variety of orchestral textures. Each episode portrays a certain situation or image, and has a particular collection of instruments or a main solo instrument to represent that image or situation. This makes *Ein Heldenleben* an ideal vehicle for explaining the transcription process, as it features so many different elements to discuss.

From the performer’s point of view, *Ein Heldenleben* is a piece which, as a major sonata or cycle, would furnish half of the program of a solo recital and would be a sufficient and unusual addition to the repertoire. Tone poems in general have not been often transcribed as concert pieces for piano solo. Among a few examples are Camille Saint-Saens’ *Dance Macabre* transcribed by Franz Liszt, Franz Liszt’s Complete Tone Poems transcribed by August Stradal, Jean Sibelius’s transcription of his own tone poem *Finlandia*, and Maurice Ravel’s own transcription of his tone poem *La valse*.

My transcription of *Ein Heldenleben* sought to incorporate orchestral ideas in the maximum detail physically possible in order to provide a listener with the full range of primary and secondary lines, imitations, and orchestral effects written by the composer. Its goal was to include everything that a new piece needs in order to be a significant
addition to the piano repertoire – not only is it a showcase of technical skills, but it also provides the pianist with an opportunity to show his/her ability to realize the large-scale shape of this work and demonstrate a nuanced palette of colors.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ein Heldenleben – Overview and Sources

Ein Heldenleben is the 6th tone poem of Richard Strauss, and – uniquely – one in which Strauss quoted over 30 of his earlier works.

“Ein Heldenleben is the proudest of Strauss’s compositions for the orchestra. His zest for life, his virile vitality, his being unafraid to sing a song of long breath, his erotic voice that, which is never turned aside by embarrassment, and finally, the ability to handle the huge orchestra, squeezing from it all richness of its tonal resources, an ability to sure that he seems like a modern-day Cagliostro – all these are found in this, the last of the great tone poems.”

Ein Heldenleben was received as an extravagant and complex piece and a work that was hard to fully understand from the first hearing.

The main studies I used to get a better understanding of the shape, programming and orchestral features of the work were Thomas Armstrong’s Strauss’ Tone Poems, Charles Youmans’ Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music and the German Intellectual Tradition: The Philosophical Roots of Musical Modernism, Earl Moore’s The Symphony and the Symphonic Poem: Analytical and Descriptive Charts of the Standard Symphonic Repertory and Denis Wilde’s The Development of Melody in the Tone Poems of Richard Strauss: Motif, Figure, and Theme.

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**Piano Transcriptions as the Study Field.**

**Overview of Analytical Literature on Piano Transcriptions**

One could easily get lost in the number of books, articles, and dissertations analyzing the history of piano transcriptions in general and particular authors individually. That is why I limit my research to only those related to transcribers who made an essential contribution to transcription of major symphonic works. The first part of this section will cover the general overviews of the history of transcription.

One of the most detailed sources about piano transcriptions is Maurice Hinson’s *The Pianist's Guide to Transcriptions, Arrangements, and Paraphrases.* This book covers over 2,000 works for piano solo, piano 4-hands, piano duo and even some pieces for piano with chamber or symphony orchestra. It helps navigation within the multifarious world of transcriptions and also provides the reader with brief commentaries and evaluations of each piece.

Harold Schoenberg’s *The Great Pianists* and John Gillespie’s *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music* familiarize the reader with the history of the piano, piano music and pianists, also devoting a substantial part of the narration to the development of the tradition of transcription. Victor Chapin’s *Giants of The Keyboard* goes over the great virtuosos of the past, starting with Johann Christian Bach and finishing with Arthur

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Schnabel. The artists described in this book (like J. Field, I. Moscheles, M. Gottschalk or F. Busoni) are famous for their improvising, paraphrasing, and transcribing talents.

Overview of the Literature on the Major Transcription Authors

Franz Liszt

The “father” of the romantic piano paraphrase and transcription, Liszt inspired or influenced the next generations of pianists who ever attempted to make a piano transcription. Jonathan Kregor’s *Liszt as Transcriber* is a major investigation of Liszt’s piano arrangements, where every type of Liszt’s transcriptions is carefully reviewed.10

Ferruccio Busoni

Busoni’s personality and heritage is reviewed with depth in the book of Larry Sitsky, who analyzed Busoni’s musical relationships with other composers, included Busoni’s theories and examined all his written and recorded works.11 The special article in the Aesthetics section is titled *Busoni’s Theories of and Attitudes toward the Art of Transcription*.

Sergey Rachmaninoff

Compositions of Rachmaninoff are described with thoroughness and a critical view in a book of Geoffrey Norris.12 Rachmaninoff, who (like Liszt) would transcribe works of other composers as well as his own pieces, stands apart from other virtuosos and


composers of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, as he could perform his own music and his transcriptions of his own works with the same brilliance as pieces from the standard piano repertoire.

Marc-André Hamelin

A phenomenon of the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century – the pianist, composer and arranger Hamelin creates extremely difficult, but effective and modern-sounding piano arrangements of popular tunes and displays blazing virtuosity at his performances. Robert Rimm’s *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and the Eight* familiarize the reader not only with the art of Hamelin, but also with works and philosophy of other virtuosos such as Alkan, Feinberg, Medtner, Godovsky and Sorabji.\textsuperscript{13}

**Transcribing Theory**

**Transcriptions of Large-Scale Works versus “Encore Pieces” – Critical Differences in Approach and Comparison of Two Basic Types**

Large-scale works transcribed for piano solo were meant to represent the greatness and value of the original. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century they were “pocket versions” of symphonic works that could be brought to places such as salons and living rooms where symphony orchestras could not perform. (Arrangements, as distinct from transcriptions, addressed similar purposes, but I will address the difference between the two later in this chapter.) There is also a special Romantic image that may be associated with “one-man orchestra”, pianists who handle by themselves all the music that was originally intended

for some 60 to 100 people to perform. In the 19th century such pianists were believed to exceed human abilities.

Encore pieces appeared as a showcase of virtuoso performers and embellishments for recitals, given at the end of the concert, after the main pieces on the program. Often, they are transcriptions of waltzes, polkas, polonaises and other dances, marches, and songs. An ideal encore piece cannot last longer than 5-6 minutes, and its entire aesthetics mainly serves to provide volatile sparkle, bravura, brilliance, and astonishment. (Although astonishment is also a part of a single pianist’s performing the transcription of an entire symphony or tone poem, the “dessert” intention makes these main two types very different.)

Between these two types can be found exceptions such as pieces like Liszt’s transcriptions of Schubert’s and Schumann’s songs, very carefully and lovingly done to convey an accurate impression of the original in terms of mood and flow, that yet also contain brilliant virtuoso enhancements.

“Orchestration Backwards”

Books on advanced orchestration like Adler’s *The Study of Orchestration*, Blatter’s *Instrumentation/Orchestration*, or Kennan’s and Grantham’s *The Technique of Orchestration*, as well as other similar sources, usually contain detailed sections devoted to transcribing from the piano to orchestra, with discussion of possible problems and various examples to solve them.

Samuel Adler’s work has an extended chapter (Ch.16): “The Orchestral Transcription,” where the process of changing piano idioms to the orchestral is discussed
using numerous examples throughout the history of music.\textsuperscript{14} Alfred Blatter in his Chapter 10: “Orchestration: Techniques of Transcribing,” offers possible sources of transcriptions of piano and organ literature and specifies ways of approaching different tasks therein.\textsuperscript{15}

Kent Kennan’s Chapter 11: “Problems in Transcribing Piano Music” provides examples of what a poorly transcribed piano part would sound like in the orchestra and how to avoid such.\textsuperscript{16}

None of these sources chose to talk about the opposite process, the process of “orchestrating backwards” from the orchestra to the piano, but general methods of examination of transcribing problems presented in these sources could be used in preparing piano transcriptions.

**The Difference between Piano Arrangement and Transcription**

The critical difference between arrangement and transcription of orchestra music has its roots in the initial purpose of the work. An arrangement does not add any details to the musical material in order to make its appearance on the piano comparable to the original in terms of volume and colors. It does the opposite – it removes some material to be easy enough for sight-reading or playing by a motivated amateur as well as a professional pianist. Arrangement only familiarizes the player with the basic structure of the piece, or - in the case of concerti, operatic and oratorical works - provides an accompaniment that does not take much effort for a pianist to prepare.


A transcription, on the other hand, aims for making up for a full orchestra, using the maximum that the piano as an instrument and pianist as a performer can provide. It may contain passages, textures, figurations, and chord dispositions added by the transcriber in order to adjust the sound, flow or distribution of the musical material for the piano – trying to preserve the original grand and colorful impression that the piece makes when being played by the orchestra. For the same reasons some secondary lines may get cut and/or modified, some transferred to another register, or subdivided between hands in a way wherein needed pitches still are heard but registrally occur in a different place. Transcriptions will also often use pedal and/or keyboard effects and occasionally some extended techniques.

Arrangement of *Ein Heldenleben* by Otto Singer

An arrangement of *Ein Heldenleben* was created by Otto Singer - well-known author of arrangements of orchestral pieces. It is written in the same simplified style in which piano scores of operas, ballets and concertos are generally prepared. It contains only the basic melodic lines and harmonic structure to convey the overall shape of the piece. It does not provide listeners with the full musical experience, as it was not done for this purpose. Singer freely omits voices, chords or accompanying textures when they are subject to any technical difficulty. Also, in some places he transfers uncomfortable

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17 Otto Singer Jr. (1863-1931) is German composer and conductor, author of numerous piano transcriptions and arrangements, such as Beethoven’s 9 Symphonies, Brahms’ 4 Symphonies; vocal-piano reduction of 12 of Wagner’s operas as well as transcriptions of other works by Richard Strauss, Brahms, Beethoven, Bruckner, Tchaikovsky, Mozart, etc.

lines to another register in such an unfortunate way as to make the music almost unrecognizable, even though technically he did not change anything but octaves.

As a result, the piece loses its characteristic density and brilliance, such as in sections like “The Hero” and “The Hero at Battle.” Those episodes cannot be convincingly played without their specific intensity and flow, full of impact. Sections with multiple independent layers, such as “Hero’s Adversaries” and “The Hero’s Works of Peace”, lose complexity and a sense of “crowd.” Singer’s arrangement only guides the player and listener through the main themes and overall shape of the piece, leaving colors, volume and orchestral effects behind. However, its creation did notably serve to introduce a wider audience to the piece, which otherwise could be heard only in major cities.
CHAPTER 3
METHOD
Background

Brief Overview of my Personal Experience in Performing Transcriptions

As a pianist, I learned my first transcription – Liszt’s piano version of his own song “Die Lorelei” – at the age of 10. I remember enjoying the opportunity to play the song, originally written for voice and piano, just on the piano – because the idea of trying to make the piano sound like a human voice was extremely fascinating. Since that moment my repertoire has been enlarged by over 30 other transcriptions: works originally written for all kinds of instruments and ensembles, or orchestra. Among them are the works that inspired me the most to work on Ein Heldenleben: L.van Beethoven – F.Liszt’s Symphony No.7; R.Wagner – F.Liszt’s “Tannhauser” Overture; M. Ravel “La Valse”; E.Elgar. “Enigma” Variations (author’s version for piano solo); I.Stravinsky. Trois movements de Petroushka; I.Stravinsky – G.Agosti. The Firebird Suite; S.Prokofiev. 10 pieces from the “Romeo and Juliette”; P.Tchaikovsky – S.Feinberg. Scherzo from the 6th Symphony.

The experience of learning, practicing and performing these works gave me a significant understanding of how they were created and the confidence to create my own transcriptions.

Brief Overview of my Personal Experience in the Transcribing Field

I find the transcribing process to be interesting in a special way. I was always very excited to try my own additions to the transcriptions that I was learning to play. My first de novo piano transcription was Gabriel Faure’s Elegie, which was originally written for
cello and piano. Since then, besides *Ein Heldenleben*, I did several other transcriptions, including all four movements of Sergey Rachmaninoff’s Cello Sonata, Op. 19, his *Italian Polka*, and two episodes from Tchaikovsky’s ballet “The Sleeping Beauty”.

**Tasks and Procedures**

**The Musical Task**

The musical task is to preserve as much original musical material in the transcription as possible. Some episodes of *Ein Heldenleben* are very hard to handle on the piano without leaving something behind. Sometimes it is necessary to exclude some inner or even outer lines to preserve the larger musical shape. The decision of what should be left and what has to be preserved is not only very tricky but also very unique for every episode. The transcriber must find a balance between the area of subjective taste and of common sense: the transcription should not be overloaded with massive sound yet has to convey the orchestral volume. Played by the orchestra, *tutti* episodes may sound partly transparent due to the timbres of various instruments. But if the entire vertical line were played on the piano, it could sound overloaded and rough. From this perspective, finding the perfect sound balance is one of the main tasks.

**The Technical Task**

There are two main types of technical tasks. The first type is the attempt to make all musical material to be as pianistic as possible. In respect to piano playing, the orchestral passages often would not feel comfortable on the keyboard. So, one of the most serious tasks is to make the transcription lie well in the fingers in terms of feasible keyboard technique, even though for a piece like *Ein Heldenleben*, the keyboard sometimes has to be approached in an unusual way. Each technical decision should
pursue the best way of featuring the original score’s details, even though there might be a few alternatives.

Another task is to make the transcribed work sound brilliant as a piano piece. Indeed, one possible, although daunting, goal of a transcription is to make the music originally written for other instruments sound as if it was intended for piano. To get this effect the transcriber would have to modify, add, and remove some elements but still retain the same musical material in general.

**A Method of Approaching the Transcription Process**

A recommended working method includes the following:

1. Identifying main challenges and ways of their solution.

2. Pointing out places where technical tricks had to be invented to represent the composer’s ideas.

3. Writing a detailed description of the transcribing process, adding notes about challenging parts, including saved alternative options that were abandoned, with explanations of each of them.

4. Adding guidelines on reading the orchestra score on the piano in order to figure out how much material is naturally playable on the piano and sounds good the way it is written.

5. Adding suggestions on preparation and practicing – general and specific.
CHAPTER 4

EIN HELDENLEBEN’s TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS

Identifying the Main Challenges

Dynamic Range, Density and Coordination

The primary challenges that I faced transcribing Ein Heldenleben were the size and dynamic range of Strauss’s orchestra and the density of his writing. At first glance, it seemed impossible to emulate all this on the piano. Strauss used a large orchestra with winds in fours; and in the instrumentation paragraph of the score he specified not only the winds, but also the exact desired number of string players. The whole instrumentation list includes piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn (also doubles as 4th oboe), E-flat clarinet, 2 B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns in F, E and E-flat, 3 trumpets in B-flat (3 used offstage briefly) and 2 trumpets in E-flat, 3 trombones, tenor tuba in B-flat (euphonium), tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, small snare drum, tenor drum, 2 harps, 16 first violins, 16 second violins, 12 violas, 12 cellos and 8 double basses. There are many episodes in Ein Heldenleben where this 105-piece orchestra plays tutti, and in the climactic moments it often creates the effect of a “wall of sound”. Not only is that sound powerful, but the pitches in it are spread vertically, covering a wide range of registers at the same time. There are multiple types of orchestral homophonic and polyphonic textures that occur in tutti’s, including (but not limited to) chords, passages, counterpoints, sustained harmonies, and a mixture of all of the above.

Given all of that, the challenge of conveying the power, density, and complexity of Strauss’s writing becomes a question of coordination on the keyboard and using special acoustic features of the piano, such as retrieving overtones. Any further challenges depend on this general ratio of instrumentation-coordination. And there could be either different ways to solve the problem, or sometimes a unique way that might be not obvious at first sight.

**Colors and Timbres**

Work written for an orchestra that features such a variety of instruments would, as expected, use the individual timbres of those instruments in a very specific way, often combining them together to create further timbres. In *Ein Heldenleben*, there are some timbres that are not possible to convey on the piano at all, such as unpitched percussion; and some that depend on the performers’ technique and sound control on the keyboard, such as English horn, E-flat clarinet, flutes, oboes, bassoons or horns. Also, there are some timbres that are linked to the register and thus are easier to portray – flute piccolo, trombones, tuba, and low strings. Some instruments are normally featured in a very specific texture that makes them recognizable: harps, which often play prominent glissandi or arpeggios up and down through their entire range; trumpets, when playing heroic calls and wild-horn-like motifs, especially $a_2$ or $a_3$; and the solo violin part that showcases types of virtuoso passages and strokes traditionally associated with this instrument.

In the case of percussion, which seems hopeless at first sight, the composer’s ideas still can be delivered by portraying the rhythmic structure through combining the rhythm from the percussion part with the harmonic pattern of other instruments that play at the same time. Since long passages of unpitched percussion is used only in the
hyperactive episodes, repetition of the harmonic pattern in the needed percussion rhythm perfectly supports the character and energy of the given episodes, also adding to the density and intensity of the sound. Characteristic timbres of certain wind and string instruments can be defined by careful sound production on the piano, when the texture and registers of the original musical lines are not suggestive in terms of instrumentation.

The solo violin part in Section 3, “Des Helden Gefahrtin” (The Hero’s Companion) features virtuoso passages that sound brilliant on the piano as well. There are several phrases that seem to be particularly tricky to perform given that the pianist should not use much of the pedal to help it. (Unless otherwise stated, “pedal” refers to the sustaining, i.e., rightmost pedal.) Pedaling would add a certain “harp effect” to the passages flying up and down and would interfere with reproducing the qualities of a string instrument—qualities that can be preserved if the passages were played mostly with finger-controlled legato with very little pedal support.

**Multiple Layers**

There are many episodes of *Ein Heldenleben* that are extremely busy in terms of number of independent layers, interacting at the same time. Several of them are severely difficult to transcribe due to the structure and intensity of the musical material. There are two main types of multilayered episodes that are important to point out: 1. Strauss’s signature style often features many motifs in different groups of instruments, or even sometimes in the same group of instruments simultaneously. Each of these motifs is so important that they need to be preserved, and at the same time these motifs may be given by Strauss to instruments of different timbres playing in the same register, which, if transcribed exactly, becomes a disaster on the piano. The most vivid examples of these kinds of moments are in the opening episode of section 2 of the poem, “Des Helden
Widersacher” (The Hero’s Adversaries); the climax area of the development section 4, “Des Helden Walstatt” (The Hero at Battle), rehearsal numbers (reh.) 58-66; and the Sehr ruhig episode of section 5, “Des Helden Friedenswerke” (The Hero’s Works of Peace), reh. 85-89. In these examples, the sophisticated web of voices has to be reorganized to exclude repeated notes and certain dissonances that become harsh clusters on the piano, even though they do not sound bad in the orchestra. That is why in the transcription some voices may get short rests, interruptions or even some substitutions from other lines in order to support the overall flow and harmonic progression. But at the same time, individual lines have to be preserved as much as possible, thus here comes the tough decision of possible exclusion of some material. Such exclusion has to be based first on the quality of sound projection of a particular instrument. In a group of instruments performing in the same register there sometimes will be an instrument that is the weakest one in the group. Its line often would not be heard clearly in the hall, but would be adding to the overall volume and density of the phrase or section. Some material that looks prominent on paper may not sound so noticeable when played by the orchestra—an insight that can be gained from comparison of score reading with listening to good recordings or live performances. Thus it is important to quickly identify the “filling” voices that can be excluded, since density can be added to the sound by using the pedal and/or adjusting the touch.

2. Another such type is when the layers are spread out from the lowest to the highest register, having important lines in the middle as well. Many episodes feature that structure to a certain extent, but the most difficult ones are reh. 2, 3 and 10 of section 1, “Der Held” (The Hero); preparation for the recapitulation, reh. 71-75 of the development section 4, “Des Helden Walstatt” (The Hero at Battle); Heftig bewegt, reh. 94-97 of the
section 5, “Des Helden Friedenswerke” *(The Hero’s Works of Peace)*. Techniques of solving the problem of wide spacing include: a) almost acrobatic leaps of the hands on the keyboard; b) writing bass lines in grace notes, or spacing the vertical rhythmically another way; c) usage of the *sostenuto* pedal; d) figuring out overtone effects, i.e., when playing certain combination of notes gives phantom sounds an octave or two above; and e) distributing the middle register lines between hands so as to allow leaps to the outer lines.

**Effects and Inventions**

There are several “special effects” I had to consider in working on things that cannot have exact translation to the piano due to the difference in sound production.

For the love scene, *Mäßig langsam* of section 3, “Des Helden Gefahrtin” *(The Hero’s Companion)* I had to figure out how to portray the thrill created by glissandi of two harps supported by tremolos and trills in other groups of instruments, on top of sustained chords in the bass along with the melody scored in octaves. The glissandi had to be performed very loudly and on the black keys due to the tonality of the episode, but the problem was that black key glissandi are in general quite painful to play, especially in *forte*. And since in this particular moment, glissandi are substituting for the overall mass of the tremolo+trills sound, they had to be very bright. After trying glissando different ways I discovered that the most impactful way of descending is using the fist, touching keys with the muscular pad on the fifth finger side and facing the knuckles towards the direction of moving; or with the lower side of the palm facing fingers upward towards the direction of moving (depending on the particular passage). This technique allowed me to create an impression of a powerful *tutti* with less pain and without abrasion of skin of my fingers:
Example 1. Two possible positions of the hand for black key glissandi.

Another needed effect is figuring a way of combining together passages that in the orchestra are independently played at the same time in the same register by different instruments, into one voice (or just a smaller number of voices compared to the original) for smoother overall flow and for avoiding clusters and unwanted repeated notes. It is especially needed in highly chromatic areas and areas that combine different meters within a quarter note or a measure. This can be achieved by eliminating notes that within individual lines of voices are getting repeated, thus leaving just one pitch instead of two or three. Or, in places with clusters, by figuring what voice is heard better in the orchestra over others within the cluster, partially eliminating the weaker dissonant voices.

Having to deal with multiple episodes that use brass and/or strings pedal point, I had to use the sostenuto pedal quite regularly. The great feature of the sostenuto pedal is that the chord sustained on it is getting “charged” from other pitches that are being played at the same time but not a part of the sustained chord. The accumulation of the overtones in the sustained chord significantly prolongs it, making the sostenuto pedal a great alternative to circular breathing or bowing.

The only pitched percussion in the poem, timpani, are relatively easy to portray. The piano can convey single strokes and tremolos, and the latter also allows doing crescendos at the same time. The ability to make a crescendo on audibly sustained pitches is generally needed most in episodes where timpani perform tremolos.
Explanation of My Transcribing Process

In the following part of the essay I will explain my work on the particular measures and episodes of *Ein Heldenleben* that were challenges in specific coordination, exclusion, re-position or merging. I will not be getting into details of the episodes that were more-or-less straightforward in terms of the transcribing, even when they have included musically intense material. I will provide examples from the first draft and from the final version of the transcription, comparing the two and including examples from the transitional second version when needed. Also, I will describe some of my goals, using examples from the original score.

Section 1, “Der Held” (The Hero)

The first section of the poem is a representation of the Hero – as a detailed portrait, it is powerful, passionate, elegant and complex polyphonically and orchestrally. The first associations that one may get from this music are power, brilliance, a sense of crowd and momentum – with power and irrepressible momentum being the fuel of the whole section. Striving to represent these features, I was surprised sometimes to have to go in the direction of simplifying and smoothing certain things, rather than doing the opposite, but this was still within the larger picture of my original intention.

The opening measures, a hero’s theme, are played by horns and low strings, performing the same progression of pitches in unisons. But the number of players involved and the density of the combined timbres of brass and strings make the melody sound much wider than simple unisons. Also, the impact of hitting low c strings on the first note is very strong, even though it is just one *Forte*. That is why I chose to put the first 7 measures of the theme in octaves. But the following measures 8-12, till reh. 1, featuring a counterpoint in two voices, are scored as written by Strauss.
In the first measure of reh. 1 I initially kept the pace of previous two chords that were incorporating their low pitches through grace notes. But then I realized that I was missing the impression of a high point of the phrase, the timbre of timpani and an ability to make a crescendo on the sustained chord; so in the final version I switched to the “backwards” motion, hitting the upper chord and melody first, then supporting them by the tremolo in the bass, which also helps my left hand to jump back up to the next chord:

**Example 2.** M. 12 - reh. 1, mm. 1: a) first draft; b) final version.

Appearing at reh. 2 is a tricky multilayered contrasting episode that requires handling several important motifs at the same time. There is not much that musically can be omitted or moved higher/lower here, since every melodic figure from this episode will become structurally important and recognizable thematic material that will be used throughout the piece. As much as it is difficult to play it lyrically with all the leaps, grace notes, trills, *arpeggios* and parallel sixths that I decided to preserve, it represents the majority of incredibly important details. I couldn’t keep the trill from the 3rd flute going for whole first three measures of reh. 2, but I was able to give a couple of splashes of it in order to portray its appearance and the atmosphere of the moment – transparent and buzzing at the same time:
Example 3. Reh. 2, mm. 1-3, final version.

I kept the double bass part in octaves for the first three measures to show the volume of their timbre, but in measure 4, I later removed initial octaves to make the flow more complementary for the oboes/violins II motif in the right hand. Also, I removed the arpeggiato sign from the bottom part of the next measure’s downbeat chord to save time for the hand on rolling it through.

Example 4. Reh. 2, measure 4: a) first draft; b) final version.

In general, there are three main ways I handle widely spaced chords that cannot be played by one hand at once: a) I write the bottom notes as grace notes in front of the rest of the chord. The grace notes may roll the bottom pitches, or represent them as a block chords. b) I ask for the chord to be arpeggiated. c) I mix the two. The particular technique that I pick each time very much depends on the individual character of the episode a particular chord appears in. Grace notes may add more thrust to the material in
active and loud sections, than an arpeggiation. At the same time, grace notes are a more economical type of motion, which saves milliseconds of performance time when needed.

Three measures before reh. 4 there was a question of whether I should try to preserve the runs of the 32nd notes of the strings or leave them aside. There is already a lot happening in two hands; but without these little passages, entrances of the voices in the imitative counterpoint may lose their energy and momentum, since the melody in the imitation is rather lyrical and cannot convey the energy of the overall flow without those passages. So I decided to preserve the majority of the passages, but starting at reh. 4, m. 3, I still had to leave out some of the ones from the violas’ part, since the stretching of the hand would get critical, and also the violas are not that audible here because the violins I and II (where I still kept the 32nd notes) go to the higher register.

Two measures before reh. 7 the 32nd notes return, and initially I tried to keep them. But the disposition of hands is so wide in that measure that it would be far too difficult to execute, so in the final version I removed those groups of 32nd notes:

**Example 5.** Reh. 6, m. 9, a) first draft; b) final version.

One measure before reh. 7, I combined the passage from cellos with an upcoming line in double basses in order to create this growling timbre (there is a trill in violas going on at the same time) and at the same time create a momentum for the left hand to get faster into the upper register to catch the tune in the horns:
Example 6. Reh. 6, m. 10, final version.

In reh. 7 the already familiar imitation continues as a large-scale sequence. The first six measures at reh. 7 are spread wide through the registers. I had the option to avoid scoring the bass line in octaves, leaving out the double basses; but then the heaviness and depth of sound would disappear. If I kept the octaves, I ended up with three leaps in the sequence, which at first seemed fine. However, while practicing the piece, I realized that the leaps disrupted the overall flow of the episode. After several experiments I figured that leaving one of the chords in the motif without a lower bass note does not sound like a mistake, because after the progression of octaves the ear automatically hears a long note as a full octave. Also, the same pitch is being doubled in the right hand, which adds an acoustical advantage of an illusory lower bass pitch:

Example 7. Reh. 7, mm. 2-5, first draft.
Example 8. Reh. 7, mm. 2-5, final version.

Two measures before reh. 9, I also had to give up the original attempt to make chords more powerful by involving the lower bass line. Keeping it meant that I had to jump from it to the upper part of the vertical, but the statement and pacing of the chords would get shaky because of that. So, I edited the spacing of the chords, and added a little more harmonic filling in the left hand at the peak that follows:

Example 9. Reh. 8, m. 8 – reh. 9, m. 1. a) first draft; b) final version.

Rehearsal 10 propels the first section towards its climax and the transition to section 2. It is the first truly passionate and overwhelming moment of the piece, that has an almost Wagnerian spirit to it. I worked on measure 4 for a while, in attempt to retain its building power and range, but ended up making it simpler and smoother in order to save room for future sound intensity:
Example 10. Reh. 10, m. 4. a) first draft; b) second version; c) final version.

I went through a similar process with the two measures that prepare the climactic burst: at reh. 11, mm. 3,4 were difficult to handle in the beginning because, in the first version of the transcription, I could not make a crescendo in the bass, and I had to make at least three uncomfortable leaps:

Example 11. Reh. 11, mm. 3,4. First draft.

Later, I gradually edited the passage to achieve the strongest momentum, along with the most economical distribution of the hands, and the ability to make the crescendo and emulate the timpani in the bass:

Example 12. Reh. 11, mm. 3,4. a) second draft; b) final version.
Two measures before reh. 12 I originally tried to feature with as much intense harmonic support as possible, but it almost consumed the continuation of the hero theme motif that gradually climbs up. After I removed some inner notes in chords located in the same register with the motif, the whole picture became much clearer:

**Example 13.** Reh. 11, mm. 7,8. a) first draft; b) final version.

![Example 13](image)

In the reh. 12, mm. 5-7 and further until reh. 13, m. 3 I was working on the blasting *tutti* chords that appear, with timpani tremolos supporting the orchestra playing in a large-scale vertical range. As in some places earlier, my initial mistake here was also in throwing in too many huge leaps within a given time. I therefore applied here the same technique I was able to figure before – hitting the chord first then featuring thunderring tremolo:

**Example 14.** Reh. 12, mm. 5-7. a) first draft; b) final version.

![Example 14](image)

For the climax that occurs in measures 3-7 of reh. 13, in the final version I extended the range further, compared to the first draft, scoring the right hand one octave higher and left hand one octave lower to create a bigger sound before the climax gets interrupted by a grand pause.
Section 2, “Des Helden Widersacher” (The Hero’s Adversaries)

The second section of the poem depicts the spiteful and unpleasant conversations of critics taking place behind the Hero’s back. Voices interfere, support, interrupt each other, build up in number, compete with each other and stay mostly in the upper and middle registers. This “gossip competition” also occasionally features some modified elements of the Hero’s theme. The sense of a multitude of voices, so brilliantly conveyed in the orchestra, is a challenge to transcribe, since many things are happening in the same register thus are hard to define. I excluded repeated notes in areas of intersection of motifs, and removed parts of actual motifs to avoid clusters and other dissonances that on the piano sounded more harshly than in the orchestra.

The opening of the middle episode features the Hero’s theme in slow motion and in a minor key, over a pedal of repeated chords. It is followed by further development of the theme’s elements and then returns to the material of the beginning of the section, now combined with the flow of the middle episode in the bass. Once the material starts to develop a conflict, the 3rd section announces itself with contrasting festive passages tutti.

In the opening episode of the second section, Etwas langsamer, some rhythmic “cheating” has to happen. There are lot of places when one hand is playing two or three voices simultaneously, often with a different meter in each. In the meantime, the tempo of the sixteenth notes is not slow at all, and precise subdividing of meters like 3 against 2 against 4 on the piano causes a sort of rhythmic cluster. To avoid that, I align some rhythms together, like the 2nd note of a duplet with the 2nd note of a triplet. In overall musical flow, the ear will hear the pitch but will not pay that much attention to the minor changes in the rhythm, especially since it was already complicated to start with. A good example of this approach is Etwas langsamer, m. 6 where I struggled with the
continuation of an oboe 3 part. I included it initially but then discarded since the rhythm did not sound good on top of a flute quadruplet. Later, I aligned the triplet with a quadruplet and it worked very well:

Example 15. *Etwas langsamer*, m. 6. a) 1st draft; b) 2nd draft; c) final version.

It is important to mention that the availability of a *sostenuto* pedal is priceless in this and the following sections. The intimidating motif in parallel fifths played by two tubas has to have its last fifth sustained for up to three measures. With woodwinds playing *staccato* on top of that, the sustain pedal here is useless. I marked the *sostenuto* pedal as *MP* in the score, using it as a sustain pedal at times, to catch each new harmony.

In reh. 14, m. 1-3, I had to invent a sophisticated subdivision of the inner voices that are given to the oboe 1 and E-flat clarinet. Some of their pitches are doubled in outer voices, so I recreated their paths, still making the whole thing sound as if they are playing all their written notes. In the example below oboe is marked red and E-flat clarinet is in green and will provide an orchestral excerpt for comparison:

Example 16. Reh. 14, m. 1-3.
Example 17. Reh. 14, m. 1-3, orchestra score.

At reh. 14, m. 3-4 is a good example of leaving out a small part of a voice. I left out an E-flat clarinet line where I could not handle it due to the more important activity in other voices, but I then picked it up again in the next beat (marked green in the example):

Example 18. Reh. 14, m. 4.
In reh. 15, mm. 1-3, the combination of English horn, two bassoons and two B-flat clarinets play *fortissimo* and a sudden call of three muted trombones draws so much attention to their parts that the oboes 1 and 3, even at *fortissimo* are barely heard, so I left them out.

There is a very intense moment at reh. 15, from the pickup to m. 4 until the middle of m. 5, where the piccolo, 2 flutes, B-flat clarinet and E-flat clarinet are involved in a *stretto* based on the first theme of the section. The *stretto* rises in register with the entrances of the E-flat clarinet, flute 1 and piccolo, but flute 1 is doubled by the B-flat clarinet an octave lower, and the piccolo is doubled by flute 2 the same way. I left the doubling of the lower voices out but kept it with the upper voices but had to put some pitches of the lowest voice (E-flat clarinet), an octave higher:

**Example 19.** Reh. 15, mm. 3-5.

At reh. 15, in mm. 5-6, oboes 1 and 3 play a familiar whining “countersubject” tune in imitative counterpoint. It would be difficult to keep both lines, so I preserved the oboe 3 because it plays in the higher and thus more piercing register. I featured oboe 1 at the end of reh. 15, m. 6 once the oboe 3 finished its phrase, and in the measure that followed I used a part of the oboe 1 flashy passage in support of a flute piccolo call. Measures 7 and 8 then became an acrobatic moment of the opening episode, where I used a number of technical alterations, such as pitch and rhythm merging, leaving out some
notes, etc. However, simple comparison to the orchestral score shows that almost everything is there:

**Example 20.** Reh. 15, mm. 7-8.

**Example 21.** Reh. 15, mm. 7-8, orchestra score.
The following contrasting middle episode *allmänlich etwas fließender* was much easier to transcribe due to the clearer register subdivision and voicing. Only in reh. 17 the texture gets busier incorporating a very low melody of strings, repeated chords of horns, and a “conversation” between violins and violas (doubled by flutes *a3* and English horn) in the middle register:

**Example 22.** Reh. 17, mm. 2-5.

In reh. 18, I catch the low *c* bass one sixteenth note later, together with an entrance of bassoons. Rehearsals 19 and 20 bring some dreadfully difficult measures to convey. Reh. 19, mm. 1-2 and 4 and reh. 20, mm. 1-2 feature similar multilayered material in the upper register on top of tuba calls and a minor key version of the hero’s theme. Reh. 19, m. 1-2 is somewhat easier since I could keep the bass and harmony on the *sostenuto* pedal, dividing the upper three voices among crossing hands in m. 1 and having two voices in the right hand in m. 2. I had to leave out the oboe 3 and English horn there, since they would create undesirable sound and rhythm clusters on the piano.

In comparison to the previous measures, reh. 19, m. 4 and 20, mm. 1-2 are much more difficult because the left hand is occupied with the hero’s theme, repeated chords, and the tubas’ motif at the same time. Thus in reh. 19, m. 4, the right hand deals with two and a half voices, (at the same time left hand jumps up to catch two notes from the
sixteenth notes motif in the upper register, slightly modified rhythmically) even though some other material was taken out. The hardest moment comes in the last beat of reh. 20/1 and first two beats of reh. 20/2, where the right hand has to do many things simultaneously:

**Example 23.** a) Reh. 19, m. 4; b) Reh. 20, mm. 1-2.

The next several measures bring some relief in transcribing and performance, even though the character of music becomes dramatic. The last challenging moment of the section is the transitional passage, reh. 21, mm. 5-6. Initially I wanted to feature just the first chord of winds, the altered Hero’s theme in the low strings and a violin passage; but then realized that it would sound too empty, so I ended up adding the repeated wind chords, too:

**Example 24.** Reh. 21, mm. 5-6.
Section 3, “Des Helden Gefahrtin” (The Hero’s Companion)

Section 3 consists of two halves. The first half, a “showcase of a woman” was relatively easy to transcribe thanks to the recitative nature of the music, so I will not show many examples from it. The solo violin part alternates with chords and motifs tutti, thus the transcription method here is simple and transparent. The simple outline also means that the expression and colors of this episode greatly depend on the performer’s skills and on the the piano pedals. Overall, the first half calls for sophisticated work with all three pedals, sometimes using them in pairs, as well as a very sensitive touch to emulate different violin strokes.

The second half, the ecstatic “love scene”, is full of transcribing puzzles. It provide a great deal of material for experiments and inventions. Its overwhelming power, register range and independence of multiple layers made it a very difficult episode to transcribe, but also one of the most joyful to perform despite its technical demands.

After the opening passages of Erstes Zeitmas (lebhaft bewegt), running on top of a sustained bass, in reh. 22, mm. 1-2, where the bass moves up the scale, using grace notes instead of arpeggiato in the left hand’s chords helps to emulate the short cello and double bass strokes.

In reh. 22-25 the quiet pedal chords and motifs tutti should be performed una corda. Only starting at reh. 26, when those motifs start to appear mezzo forte and forte, should they be played tre corde.

In reh. 23, mm. 1-2, I applied the same modification of the bass line that I used in reh. 7 of the section 1 to avoid unnecessary leaps:
Example 25. Reh. 23, mm. 1-2.

In reh. 23, the violin starts playing its first unaccompanied passages, which grow longer and longer throughout the section. In general, the violin part sounds more natural when performed on the piano with a minimum of pedal. So, when the violin plays alone it is better to connect the notes relying more on the good finger legato technique, with very light aid of the pedal, which should remain unnoticed. But when the violin plays on top of sustained notes and other thematic material in the rest of the orchestra, the pedal is an important color aid to use.

The first two measures in each of reh. 24, 25 and 28 are occupied with different motifs on top of sustained chords. I found out that those motifs sound the best if not produced while holding the sostenuto pedal, but rather when the chords are being held by the fingers with the aid of sustain pedal, changing on each note in the motif above – a method that somehow brings a lot of overtones into the overall sound of these passages.

In reh. 25, m. 4 and reh. 27, m. 6 the arpeggiati should be rolled with no rush, detached and on the sustain pedal – imitating the harp.

The long solo violin passages should use the most elegant rubato possible while paying attention to the details. Also, the repeated notes in places like reh. 26, mm. 9-10, reh. 27, mm. 3-4 and reh. 28, mm. 5-6, among others, should be played in such a way as
to avoid hammer-like repetition. It is important to remember that, when played by the violin, the first note would be played with the bow going down and the second with the bow going up, which means the would be a different sound quality between the two.

In reh. 30 the best way to handle the repeated chords performed with up and down strokes is to alternate them between two hands for a stroke effect:

**Example 26.** Reh. 30, mm. 7-8.

![Example 26](image)

The second half of this section, *Maßig langsam*, comes as a sudden sound avalanche. Within reh. 32-38 something incredible orchestrally and extremely intense emotionally happens in every measure. An overwhelming amount of musical information covers the listener, and it is a big challenge to portray that on the piano. Fist and palm glissandi, which I’ve already mentioned in “Effects and Inventions” section of this essay, helped me to emulate the overwhelming volume of the opening six measures:

**Example 27.** Reh. 32, mm. 1-6.

![Example 27](image)
In reh. 32, mm. 7-8 the musical material embraces very distant registers along with several independent layers on top of constant tremolos in all the groups of instruments. This only could be reproduced by having tremolos located strictly in the bass, with the other voices in the higher register, catching some notes from the lowest of them with the left hand, jumping up from tremolos and returning back:

**Example 28.** Reh. 32, mm. 7-8.

The reh. 33 is even more sophisticated, with two harps playing passages moving in different directions as an accompaniment to the continuing solo violin part and with high flutes entering above of all of that. In addition to that, the harmonic progression is supported with a pedal point of clarinets and bassoons along with low *pizzicatos* in the cellos and double basses.

The harp lines I merged together into a chord progression with some pitches removed and/or merged rhythmically with the melody to avoid repetitions. The harmonic progression was introduced through *arpeggiatos*. The right hand, playing the melodies of violin and flutes, also catches some upper notes of the harp chord progression, by doing intense leaping back and forth. This approach is kept throughout reh. 33 and 34:
Example 29. Reh. 33, mm. 1-4.

A new development of the same thematic material in the new key starting at reh. 33, m. 5 brought a new local climax, where the long *glissando* was needed when both hands were busy in other registers. The idea of subdividing the *glissando* between hands worked really well:

Example 30. Reh. 34, m. 1.

The “busiest” moment of the reh. 34 comes at mm. 3-5, where the same concept of handling simultaneous textures is kept, creating multiple leaps in both hands. Wide chords here should be performed as a leap between two blocked chords in the left hand. I
mark each block by a bracket, assuming the leap to be played up from the bass. Also, the same approach to the octave motives in the bass was applied here as in reh. 7 and 23:

**Example 31.** Reh. 34, mm. 3-4.

![Example 31](image)

The music at reh. 35 temporarily calms down and gets relatively simpler – a clearer outline with chord progression in tremolos in a lower register topped with a woodwinds/violins melody, with regular harp arpeggios in the middle.

Starting to grow in the beginning of reh. 36, at reh. 37 the climax of the section arrives. Catching tremolos in the middle register right after hitting the heavy bass octaves helps to convey the “buzzing” of *tremolos* in strings. And again, an ability to put a lot of weight on the *glissandi* on the black keys through the entire keyboard by using the meaty side of the left fist is a great benefit here. I was able to take advantage of the entire range of the keyboard, pounding on the bass for the next measure’s support:

**Example 32.** Reh. 36, mm. 5-6 – reh. 37, mm. 1-2.

![Example 32](image)
Reh. 38-40 is an after-climax, prayer-like episode, and simple to transcribe. Extensively using the *sostenuto* pedal, it still requires holding some chords with the fingers in places where the *sostenuto* pedal cannot help much. Starting in reh. 40 the “whining” triplet motif begins to return, leading to the reminiscence of “Hero’s Adversaries” at reh. 41, but which now has an absolutely different character and color on top of the sustained G flat major pedal. This time it features a long trill that keeps the left hand busy, so the upper two voices have to be addressed by the right hand through leaps:

**Example 33.** Reh. 41, mm. 5-6.

After “adversaries” motifs fade and disappear, a variation of the first four measures of reh. 39 appears here an octave lower, interrupted by the subsequent entrances of three trumpets, opening the next section.
Section 4, “Des Helden Walstatt” (The Hero at Battle)

“The Hero at Battle” was the movement that was holding me from writing this transcription for a while. It seemed undoable to transcribe the elaborate and intense musical material of the section into two hands on the piano without it becoming humanly impossible to perform.

From reh. 44 until reh. 78, this episode of continuously growing sound bacchanalia requires a pianist’s full power, strength, and focus on all registers at the same time, and understanding of how to wisely distribute that throughout the section. Even those very few measures that do not have a fortissimo mark or leaps through the half of the keyboard require a lot of attention. In this entire 4th section, the groups of orchestral instruments take on roles that they did not have earlier in the piece. The idea of a battle juxtaposed orchestral groups and gave them individual characters: a) trumpet call in the opening that keeps repeating itself through the section; b) three trumpets playing the main edgy theme of the section, that itself is a variation on the main motif from the section 2; c) the Hero’s theme that multiple times comes in low strings+low winds, or low strings+low brass, or altogether; d) high winds with short whistling passages, adding a sensation of attack and impatience; e) virtuoso passages of violins I, II and violas, creating the sound of constant buzz where individual pitches are of secondary importance; and f) heavy trombones and horns, playing the last element along with other parts of the hero’s theme in a manner of some tuba mirum.

The theatrical aspect of this conglomerate of themes and their inversions and elements, exaggerated in their intensity, prepares the foundation for the incredibly powerful recapitulation. Each element is irreplaceable both in developmental and orchestral ways.
The opening measures in reh. 42 and then in the similar reh. 44 articulate the trumpets’ call perfectly well with two hands while the bass is sustained on the *sostenuto* pedal. Even though there could be different ways to handle three trumpet voices on the piano, the most effective one is hand alternation (versus dividing voices between hands).

**Example 34.** Reh. 42, mm. 1-5.

For the music at reh. 43, mm. 1, I kept the higher G flat bass (there was an option to score it one octave lower since the double basses are playing it lower) so that the B flat played by timpani in m. 2 could be much lower than the previous bass, which made it stand out more.

Reh. 45 contains the first example of the above-mentioned juxtaposition: element of the hero’s theme in strings and brass, elements of the first trumpet trio passage in trombones, the permeating string passages and the short descending motifs in high woodwinds which are derived from the lyrical tune of the second contrasting episode of section 1 “The Hero”. In section 4 this element drastically changes from its original elegant and coquettish character to the heroic and even aggressive one. Still, three bassoons playing a supporting line (also based on a trumpet trio tune) had to be excluded due to their relative transparency compared to other instruments playing at the same time:
Reh. 46–48 is a contrasting episode, a variation of the tune from section 3, that is developed as a continuous crescendo towards the “main battle” that occurs in reh. 49. The 3rd section’s theme appears in sequence distributed between violins and violas, with the support of ascending harp passages, pizzicato of double basses, trumpet trio elements and – later - descending runs of woodwinds and horns. A careful distribution of material between hands helps to incorporate almost everything:

**Example 36.** Reh. 47, mm. 1-3, first version.
Example 37. Reh. 47, mm. 1-3, final version.

The two lines that did not make it into the piano score in this episode were the bassoons and violas (and flutes at the last measures of reh. 48). These have passages that add bulk to the overall sound but do not contain specific thematically important material. On the piano, here again the pedal is a useful way to add bulk in places where needed. In reh. 48, where violins compete in prominence with high woodwinds and horns playing the same descending motif, scoring them with an outline of harmonic progression (represented here by trombones and tubas) and with rich pedal is enough to recreate the orchestral volume without having to include secondary details, as mentioned above:

Example 38. Reh. 48, mm. 3-7 – reh. 49, m. 1.
In four measures of reh. 49 the chord progression, tremolo, and the bass line used with pedal were sounding “busy” enough that I did not have to include the three independent passages at 16th notes that are played by the violins and violas.

*Festes Zeitmass* was a place where I was happy to figure out how to show rhythm and aggression of the snare drum without having a snare drum installed in the piano. In the opening three measures, I noticed that the cellos, violas and violins II repeat fifths c-g in the same rhythm that occurs in the snare drum. In measure 4 they stop and then come back with the same material only a couple of times later in the section, but in different combinations of instruments. Once the strings stop playing their repeated harmony, the bass line is supported mainly by the bassoons, with occasional help from trombones, playing long pedal points. The snare drum doesn’t play all the way through the section, but it plays through rehearsals 49-52, 54, 59-62. I decided that I should use a repetition of a chord or pitch, currently sustained in the orchestra by the winds, in the rhythm pattern of the snare drum in order to convey the impact and momentum that it provides. Also, most of the places featuring the snare drum are also supported by the bass drum, which in the piano score I put an octave lower than the regular bass line.

Dealing here with very widely spread registers, I had to choose the main line that remains unchanged, and in the moments when my hand is free from playing the main line, play particles of the surrounding musical events, focusing on the most prominent. In measure 6 of the following example, after hitting the diminished six chord at the top and returning to the main E flat trumpet tune, (which is a rhythmically and characteristically modified Hero’s Adversaries theme from section 2) I cannot go back to the flute passages in the following m. 7, even though I have two beats free. The reason is - because in mm. 8 and 9 I would not have enough space for the continuation of those passages and it
would sound strange to feature them in just one spot. So I opt for featuring just the chord of oboes in the same harmony, since it sounds more piercing than the flute passages, but makes up the color of the passages, because it is the same harmony. In mm. 7-9 in the left hand I keep the rhythm and bass pitch going, and omit a couple of foreign notes in order to avoid clusters and leaps. Each detail from the the last two paragraphs is in the following example:

**Example 39.** Reh. 49, mm. 5-13.

Reh. 50 continues the same percussion parts in the bass and features the dialog of the 4 trumpets in the right hand, with the E-flat trumpet continuing its melody and three B-flat trumpets playing ascending “warning” motifs. Some pitches were removed in those motifs to clear sound space for the main melody to stand out, and to be able to include a piccolo passages in the high register:
Example 40. Reh. 50, mm. 2-4.

![Example 40](image)

Rr.51-52 are built with the same principles, this time with violas contributing to the rhythm-harmony pattern. On the second beats of reh. 51, mm. 3-5 there is the same harmony featured in three groups: strings playing chords *pizzicato*, 3 trumpets playing chords and piccolo playing ascending splashes. I preserved the latter since piccolos are heard the best in the overall texture:

Example 41. Reh. 51, mm. 3-5.

![Example 41](image)

Similar to reh. 46, in reh. 53 there appears another contrasting episode based on the “Hero’s Companion” melody, this time much more relaxed and having no obvious anticipation of the next episode. I made up the accompaniment by merging harp, cello, and bassoon parts together, excluding overlaps and harsh dissonances to emulate the sensation of waves created by those groups of instruments. Strauss also features a horn solo here, starting at reh. 53, m. 2, with a modified tune (the descending motif from the peak of the phrase here being added as an upbeat to the beginning of the melody) from the contrasting second episode of section 1 (“The Hero”):
Example 42. Reh. 53, mm. 1-4.

Reh. 54 is similar to reh. 50, but here the bass starts to include leaps a fifth down and up, so the rhythmic pattern follows that as well.

Reh. 55 marks a new episode of development, alternating the Hero’s theme, the companion’s theme and modified theme from the section 1 second episode. Above them there are passages of woodwinds and strings that feature multiple gestures simultaneously – arpeggiated descending passages in flutes playing in parallels; leaps of different kinds in the oboe section, with alternated directions; and descending block chords in violins. Since the harmony and direction for all gestures is the same, I only can emulate these two factors in the right hand, scoring them as descending short arpeggios with intervals on the first notes of each beat. It is important to mention that in reh. 55, m. 1 (and in following similar measures in a sequence) I chose the upper note of the passage in consideration with the upper note of the B flat clarinets and flutes – b natural, not the g of violins - since woodwinds speak through much louder than violins playing pizzicato:

Example 43. Reh. 55, mm. 1-4.
In reh. 56 there is a passage of first violins that adds the feeling of *perpetuum mobile* to the episode that otherwise would just feature the brass and strings playing the Hero’s theme in an imitative counterpoint. The violin passage interferes with the counterpoint registrally – thus being a difficult detail to perform, especially in mm. 4-11, where it has to be constantly distributed between hands, catching other motifs within the short time of two or three 16\textsuperscript{th} notes:

**Example 44.** Reh. 56, mm. 4-6 – reh. 57, 1-5.

Starting at reh. 57, m. 7, the 16\textsuperscript{th} notes get transferred to the violas, but the interference with other tunes in the same register is getting so severe, that on the piano it sounds like a progression of unreasonable dissonances (and changing fast!), even though in the orchestra that line is almost unheard. I excluded that line, but kept almost all other elements (except the bassoon’s short passages) with sustained bass transcribed as tremolo, topped with three other lines. The spatial distribution of them initially led me to keep the tremolo going with the short pauses in it. But later I realized that if I were to jump from tremolo to the notes in the middle register and back, all the details may fit
within. The speed at which all of this is happening, makes that slight tremolo interruption unnoticeable so I did not write that down, to keep the score cleaner:

**Example 45.** Reh. 57, mm. 6-9.

![Example 45](image)

Rehearsals 58–60 are preparing for the substantial climax that arrives in reh. 62. This period bears some features found in reh. 55 (where the Hero’s theme is alternating with other themes in a sequence.). Similar descending passages in winds and strings, this time in eight notes, support the Hero’s theme and alternate with the trumpet trio tune and the modified Hero’s Adversaries tune from the *Festes Zeitmass*. This alternation repeats 4 times in a sequence, changing keys and accumulating power in a prolonged crescendo, which leads to the grinding climactic area at reh. 62.

The fundamental climax of reh. 62-66 features two elements that are important to mention separately: the pitches and rhythms of supporting lines. The first element is the 16\(^{th}\)-note independent passages in violins I, II and violas that create an effect of a shattering buzz and *perpetuum mobile* which was already mentioned. In the first four measures of the climax, where the ear can hear only the prominent G-flat major harmony in horns, trumpets and trombones with a Hero’s theme in trombones and tubas in the middle – those string passages get consumed by the *fortissimo* chords and tunes of brass, along with all other details such as percussion rhythms, strokes and other pitches, therefore I only write down *tremolos*:
Example 46. Reh. 62, mm. 1-4.

![Music Example 46]

But after that, in the remainder of the reh. 62-63, the themes in the middle register are played mainly by horns and trumpets with only two short passages supported by trombones and tubas, so the string pitches are able to be heard and we can hear passages running; so for this episode I combined the upper string voices together to create the line, which reasonably could not be in three voices, but retained enough material to sound busy. Since the trombones feature a dotted rhythm in reh. 62, mm7-8, I did not worry about scoring a percussion rhythm that goes on at the same time, especially since it disappears at reh. 63:

Example 47. Reh. 62, mm 6-8 – reh 63, mm. 1-5.

![Music Example 47]
The second half of the climax area, reh. 64-65 features some changes, although continues the same type of textures. In reh. 65 the main modified Hero’s tune transfers to tubas and trombones in unisons, which completely hides the string passages, leaving only the sensation of volume from them. At the same time, the snare drum comes back, supporting the woodwinds, that were playing the same rhythm ever since reh. 62. In reh. 62-63 that rhythm did not come through, but here with the support of percussion it does, so I focus on the rhythm in reh. 65, leaving out the string passages behind:

Example 48. Reh. 64, mm. 1-4.

Reh. 65 is a climactic crisis where the voices playing the modified Hero’s Adversaries’ theme collapse into *stretto* to create the sound of a big crash. Some pitches from the motifs overlap, which helps the disposition on the keyboard. In m. 2, double basses and cellos leap an octave lower to support the bass drum entrance, which on the piano sounds dramatic:

Example 49. Reh. 65, mm. 2-5.
Reh. 66-71 is a temporary step back in power and intensity. It is a new developmental episode, juxtaposing already known themes in new combinations. Reh. 66 features trumpet vamping of an element of the main tune, topped with familiar descending short arpeggios distributed between winds and strings with a compressed tune from section 1 in the low strings. I left out the descending chords in the violins, since the leaps of flutes in the orchestra speak through better:

**Example 50.** Reh. 66, mm. 1-4.

Reh. 67 is a condensed version of reh. 50, with motifs playing together instead of alternating. I dropped the first bottom notes in each motif of oboes to avoid repetitions between oboes and trumpet lines. Also, the flute/string passages were impossible to include, because I had to feature the brighter entrance of the horns.

Reh. 68-70 is the trickiest part in this episode. It has an intense imitative counterpoint featuring all themes. Some themes have matching pitches, some spread out very far from each other registrally, so I had to drop some notes to avoid repetitions, or include only parts of chords to be able to also feature certain motifs. For example, in reh. 70, mm. 3-4, I feature the tuba motif, then the trumpet trio entrance, and after that the passage of violins, having to drop some notes of the trumpets at the downbeat to keep both lines. The entire part becomes at first sight somewhat difficult to track motif by
motif. But it is important to know for each measure when and where each tune starts and ends, since all of them should be preferably played in different timbres:

Example 51. Reh. 68, mm. 1-8.

In reh. 71, the massive preparation for the recapitulation begins. In reh. 71, mm. 3-6 – reh. 72, m. 1, where the brass section did not yet get to its peak power and trumpet 1 line did not enter yet, the passages of piccolo and flutes in the upper register can be heard very well:

Example 52. Reh. 71, mm. 3-5.
In reh. 72, m. 2, the ascending trumpet line begins, and the level of overall sound gradually increases. Thus I am unable to include flute passages any more (they barely can be separated from the rest of the sound already) and have to start rolling another tremolo in the right hand along with the trumpet line, to increase the power of the sound:

**Example 53.** Reh. 72, mm. 2-5.

In reh. 73, imitative counterpoint starts again, causing the right hand to cease tremolo and the left hand to jump from its own tremolo to the middle voices and back. In reh. 74 the entire sound building reaches its peak and crashes down in all orchestral groups. The multilayered chromatic motion, generally directed down, consists of several different kinds of textures, all being mixed together in a messy waterfall of chords, motifs, splashes and calls. On the piano, I only could portray the sense of chromatic falling along with the most prominent tunes in the bass:
Example 54. Orchestral score, reh. 74, mm. 2-5.
In reh. 75, the material of the opening of the 3rd section announces the recapitulation, and another descending tutti in reh. 76 prepares the return of the Hero’s theme. To make it more massive, I raised the descending line an octave higher a measure and a half later than it appears in the original score, and kept the two-octave span for most of the passage (instead just one octave, as it is written in the score for most of the passage):

Example 56. Reh. 76, mm. 1-3.

The recapitulation of the main theme of the piece in reh. 77 comes with an accompaniment of repeated chords, as in reh. 1, mm. 5-8. But the difference is that here it is orchestrated with many more instruments involved, with multiple doublings through the different registers, so both the melody and the accompaniment take two hands to play. Thus when the melody has triplets, the accompaniment gets a temporary rest. The following developmental episode, reh. 78, pairs inverted elements of the main theme in
the upper strings along with the sequence derived from another element of the same theme in the lower horn. The upper line includes grace notes that rarely speak through, so I did not include them. The two motifs are supported by massive chords, which range call for a leap for every other one:

**Example 57.** Reh. 76, m. 4, – reh. 78, m.3.

Through a short reminiscence of the second contrasting episode from section 1, the music at reh. 80 begins an episode based on a completely new theme, that may have been compiled from inverted elements of other tunes, combined with the continuing theme from the above-mentioned reminiscence. It could be easily a coda of the entire piece – as it has such a concluding sensation about it, with low timpani playing a series of “knocking” motifs. The ascending passages in parallel thirds are pushing the melody higher and higher, and the counterpoint soon develops more and gets spaced wide.
With so many precious details in this episode, showing the development and interaction of themes and motifs, it is difficult to discard or move any of the lines. I only excluded the harp parts, as they are too transparent and only give out overtones that the piano can emulate with pedal and with minor details such as trills and some secondary motifs. As a result, this episode is very beautiful yet extremely difficult to play.

Some of the difficulties include the juxtaposition of meters that asks for constant jumps to accommodate them. Some of these meters can be played as written, some have to be wisely aligned with others, and it depends on the pianist’s adventurousness; so I did not put grace notes and arpeggiato signs here, leaving minor “time cheats” to the discretion of the performer:

**Example 58.** Reh. 80, m. 1 – reh. 81, m. 1.

A conclusion of the entire section comes at reh. 83. It is prepared with 3 measures of fanfares that are accompanied by 2 harps and 2 clarinets, running arpeggiated passages up and down in the opposite directions. Harp 2 plays an octave higher than the first harp,
so I merged two directionally opposed semi-long passages into a single, really long one, placed in such a way that would allow me to play the fanfares at the same time:

**Example 59.** Reh. 83, mm. 2-4.

![Example 59](image)

The *etwas breit* starts with the timpani tremolo and repeated chords in brass, but since there is a crescendo growing towards the next harmony at reh. 84, I saved the bass tremolo for the moment of resolution, before that holding the repeated brass choral-like chords for four measures.

The music at reh. 84 dissolves into the silence of the *lange pause*, which is a transition to the next section.
Section 5, “Des Helden Friedenswerke” (The Hero’s Works of Peace)

The opening this section is a reminiscence of the parallel fifths motif from the section 2 “Hero’s Adversaries”. It is followed by a tune from the section 3 “Hero’s Companion”, that is fragmented and serves as a preparation for a nocturne-like episode Sehr ruhig that contains many quotes from Strauss’ previous works.

The wave-like accompaniment of two harps, overlapping each other in Sehr ruhig, becomes a problem for the transcriber when soloing instruments start entering at reh. 86, as they create unwanted repetitions and clusters. In this episode Strauss’s imitative counterpoint along the themes from this poem also embraces quotes from his early opera Guntram, symphonic poems Don Quixote, Don Juan, Death and Transfiguration, Macbeth, Also sprach Zarathustra and Till Eulenspiegel, along with some lieder. A regular number of independent voices, playing at the same time in this section (not counting the accompaniment) is three. Excluding some of the voices would also remove the impression of the calm crowd of people, nicely talking to each other, which is so strong in this episode. Thus I decided to keep all voices and only remove repetitions and clusters.

The resulting complex texture has to be clearly separated in the pianist’s inner ear by timbres – bassoon, English horn, flute, oboe, clarinet, solo violin, etc. The relatively slow tempo and lyrical character allow the individual voices to be played with individual attention, the inevitable leaps to be performed smoothly and the overlapping of meters to flow gracefully, especially when the voices are moving far from each other. Compared to the episode in reh. 80-82, which is similarly intense but flows faster, making it a terribly uncomfortable passage to perform, this one is much easier. The peaceful and relaxed flow of the music still has to be played crisp – and clear – in terms of voicing the instruments
and getting the right articulation for each. In the orchestra, individual voices have their individual dynamics, that do not necessarily match with the other lines that are playing at the same time. The dynamic differences allow the different voices to rise above the overall textural surface and soon disappear. Putting those individual dynamics into the piano score would make it very difficult to read, but if the performer studies the orchestra score, they will have a better idea of how to approach these lines:

Example 60. Reh. 87, mm. 1-6.

This over-intense type of texture is present through the reh. 88-90, resolving into the next episode, and concluding the peaceful part of the. The harp passages in 16th notes from that episode cannot be featured on the piano, so the overall motion seemingly gets less detailed, than the previous episode, even though it still remains challenging for the performance:
Example 61. Reh. 91, mm. 1-3.

The local climax in this episode features much overlapping of several themes and motifs in the same register. Experiments in spreading those elements up and down octaves did not sound good, so I kept it in original disposition:

Example 62. Reh. 92, mm. 1-3.

In the following two runs of gradually dissolving harp passages, the second one is important to mention because on top of it, the flutes, clarinets and bassoons “warning” motifs an octave apart, which require a certain coordination between piercing motifs and flowing harp passages. I could not keep the motifs in octaves all the way through, having to remove the lower voice in some places:
Example 63. Reh. 93, mm. 1-5.

After another reminiscence of the Hero’s Adversaries’ parallel fifths motif, the fragmented tune from section 3 “Hero’s Companion” (similar to the one found in reh. 85) quickly catches fire in a furious development in reh. 94-97. This episode is somewhat related to the previous peaceful one in reh. 85-92 by the level of intensity and number of voices. I struggled in my wish to keep its purely demonic burst of overlapping passages and chords that are happening in opposing registers:

Example 64. Reh. 94, m. 8 – reh. 95, m. 2.
In reh. 90 I tried having those passages in their original form in parallel octaves, keeping the brass chord progression in its full range. However, the result in the first draft is barely playable, because having a leap on each beat in this tempo is unreasonably difficult to execute:

**Example 65.** Reh. 96, mm. 1-3, first draft.

The final version cuts the chords down to reduce the frequency of leaps required, thus making the performing challenge easier:

**Example 66.** Reh. 96, mm. 1-3, final version.

The long transition the last section starts at reh. 97, m. 3. A series of aggressive chords gradually soften and lead to the “miraculous” pianissimo episode, where recitatives of English horn alternate with gentle phrases of violins on top of sustained quiet chords of woodwinds and low strings. In the very beginning of this episode there are also repeated timpani strokes in the bass. Overall, this episode works well with the regular sustain pedal, because the long sustained chords, moving the music through
several keys before reaching the needed dominant seventh chord are too wide to capture on the *sostenuto* pedal:

**Example 67.** Reh. 99, mm. 1-4.

![Musical Example]

The long-anticipated B-flat dominant seventh chord, that Strauss resolves into E-flat major, appears pianissimo at reh. 101 and leads to the final section, orchestrated in the most intimate and quiet way.
Section 6, “Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung” (The Hero’s Retirement from this World and Consummation)

The Langsam episode that opens this section, is an incredibly solemn melody, which puts behind everything that came before. This melody, which first briefly appears in section 3, here obtains its full development. It has a prayerful quality to it, and gets interrupted by the conflict in the middle episode. It has to be played with extreme sensitivity and delicacy. In the transcription, measure 6 of the Langsam contains very wide chords due to the important lines in the orchestra version that should not be changed. Leaps that could not be avoided have to be addressed in a most elegant way that would not noticeably disrupt the overall flow of the melody.

In this section, I purposefully do not merge same notes in overlapping lines, to show the voice leading for better phrasing.

Reh. 103-105 provided a challenge with its constant tremolos occurred throughout the strings except for the cellos that play a very fast chromatic scale passage at the same time. The string tremolos supported by tremolo in timpani and cymbals creates a bulky sonority that is very difficult to transcribe. Featuring just that harmony with a cello passage above sounded oversimplified and pale. But the combination of the passage with the tremolo type of motion, which creates a special kind of passage that spreads the ascending and then descending chromatic pitches in leaps a tenth apart, substitutes for both volume and stroke, leaving room in the right hand to play other details. Following that passage, in reh. 104, a quartet of horns plays motifs consisting of parallel diminished seventh chords above the same tremolos in strings and chromatic passages that are now featured in violins I, too. Here tremolos have to be played with occasional interruptions:
Example 68. Reh. 103, m. 4 – reh. 104, m. 6.

In reh. 105 two harps play their passages in unisons one octave apart. One hand cannot perform octaves at that tempo, so I transformed the two harp lines into one line that covers the range of the octave passages.

The last measure of reh. 105 in the transcription contains a trick with the bass note that has to be held first by the finger, then by the middle pedal in order to stay clear for another phrase taking place above it:
In the coda (or conclusion), reh. 107-109, there is a pedal point of repeated octaves in horns. Starting on E-flat, the pitch then changes to B-flat, but the pulse and interval of an octave remain the same. The task was to preserve the pulse because it is creating an anticipation and at the same time a sense of conclusion. There were some measures that would not let me keep the interval of an octave, but the pulse was successfully preserved all the way through, with some three measures getting to be very tricky due to other voices going the opposite direction simultaneously:

**Example 69.** Reh. 105, m. 5.

In reh. 109, mm. 5-8 my task was to convey a quiet fullness of the orchestra’s chords. Originally, I tried to feature the widest range possible, but it led me to having to either play bass notes as grace notes before the remainder of the chord, or to add the bass just after the chord, with both versions affecting the stillness of the moment.

Experimenting, I ended up using simpler voicing that still made the chords sound full without having to include leaps and even leaving out some notes:

**Example 70.** Reh. 107, mm. 5-8.
Example 71. Reh. 109, mm. 5-9, first draft.

Example 72. Reh. 109, mm. 5-9, final version.

The last emerging choral of brass and woodwinds is supported by *tremolo* in timpani. In general, multiple winds playing *tutti* produce a lot of overtones, combined together, and those overtones create quite noticeable beats, which sound almost like *tremolos* as well. That is why I included harmonic tremolos in the middle register of the measures that are 3rd and 2nd to the last. In the final version I changed the voicing in tremolos for a bigger volume and more convenience, and also changed the inversion of the chord in the right hand at measure 2nd to the last:

Example 73. Reh. 109, mm. 17-19, a) first draft; b) final version.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, ADD-INS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Work and Discussion of the Results

My piano transcription of *Ein Heldenleben* was written in a period between March and November, 2014 in honor of the 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Strauss’s birth, and was premiered on December 6 the same year. Always having been inspired by Richard Strauss’s orchestral writing and his boundless spirit, I dreamt to transcribe this piece for a long time. To me, like Ludwig Van Beethoven’s 9\textsuperscript{th} Symphony and Gustav Mahler’s Symphony #8, *Ein Heldenleben* is a quintessential expression of the freedom and limitless possibilities of human nature. The challenge of transcribing it was not only a technical task for my mind, but also a challenge of conveying the precious nature of the music and of my own view of it: how do I make this piece sound *the way I hear it*, when I am not even conducting it? *Ein Heldenleben* is a 45-minute piece, extremely demanding due to the constant intensity of its musical events. Its textures and episodes might possibly have multiple transcription versions. To me, the most important was to make the countless number of voices be always present over the vertical harmony, since the melodies develop and multiply horizontally and this is a major part of the overwhelming impression that *Ein Heldenleben* creates. Another need was to be able to both accumulate and emulate the power of a full orchestra, with richness of the orchestra, avoiding the flat and harsh sounds, that a piano may give when being played with a constant *fortissimo* for long periods of time. Work on this transcription very much supported my linear and counterpoint thinking and inspired my own musical composition in the most engaging
way. I have had insights about next possible transcriptions, some of which by now I am already working on.

Another important aspect of this work was that I was writing everything by hand. Writing every single note by hand emulated the process of composing the piece and got me closer to the musical text, especially at the stage of modifying of the drafts. I made copies of each draft, before making changes in the manuscript, and that re-composing and enhancing was literally coming through my hands, which made me much better acquainted with the text and all changes I made. I half-learned the piece by writing it down, (a technique that my middle school piano teacher introduced me to regarding Bach’s fugues, which had to be copied by hand before I could bring the piece to class) and the ability to write it by hand made an important connection between the text and physical efforts, that were required later in the performance of the piece.

The performance of this transcription was one of the most exhausting but at the same time rewarding recitals I have ever played. It made me withstand much more than a regular recital asks for, but at the same time it made me refine my performance and preparation skills, making me a stronger and a better pianist that I was before.

**Comprehension of Orchestral Writing**

**Listening to the Orchestra and Writing/Performing on the Piano**

An approach of listening to the orchestra and trying to play what you hear before getting to look in the score for precise answers is the way the work normally starts with pieces that you are already familiar with. But also the ability to play an orchestra work from the score without listening cannot be understated either, because an unengaged ear may find hidden details that get buried in traditional interpretations. The following
subchapter talks about preparation for the performance, which engages the very same technique a person just starting to study the score should use.

**Preparation and Performing Tips**

This transcription of *Ein Heldenleben* is a work that cannot be first approached solely at the piano. Getting acquainted with the piece, a pianist should first listen to the orchestral original, better in multiple interpretations. The path of listening should gradually lead to the transcribed version, by first listening without following any score, then listening while looking into the orchestral score and, finally, listening while looking into the piano score. By the time pianists start practicing the piano transcription, they have to know exactly what instrument plays every single note, otherwise the timbres and sound production would never be right. *Ein Heldenleben* is a piece that has many overwhelming moments, but overwhelming in the orchestra and overwhelming at the piano are very different types of experience. The traditional “pianistic” approach to such moments would ruin them. In general, music written for the orchestra and music written for piano solo have different flows of time. Solo piano has much more freedom and possibilities of *rubato* and other time-related expressive tools, than the orchestra. The orchestra, on the other hand, has colors, power and other features that the piano lacks. The tricky part is not only to try to emulate the orchestra’s palette and intensity, but to do that also in orchestral time without falling for a more traditional pianistic approach where the idea of expression may seriously affect pacing and tempo correlation within a given
episode. The significant part of the beauty of orchestral music is an expectation of a
downbeat, which in the orchestra seems to happen rather later than sooner.\(^{20}\)

One of the practicing techniques that has helped me the most, derived from the
old tradition of learning to play J.S. Bach’s fugues in any combination of voices from
memory, was learning to play *Ein Heldenleben* by groups of instruments. That is –
separating just strings, just winds, just brass; then combining strings plus winds, strings
plus brass, brass plus winds; individual voices within the same group separately and then
in different combinations together (for example, in section 2 where multiple woodwinds
are playing together). Such separation helps to define voices and associated timbres in the
inner hearing, and it significantly improves the ability to deliver various colors and create
a multidimensional sound on the piano.

Performing *Ein Heldenleben* on stage, the pianist should have a big picture in
mind, to be able to convey large structures without losing a sense of overall shape and
direction. It is important to think ahead in this piece, imagining upcoming melodies,
phrases, chords, and motifs in their original orchestration and anticipating their original
volume, power and colors. Strong anticipation, or “pre-hearing”, is key to making this
piece sound up to its potential, and for the pianists to enjoy being an orchestra of their
own.

\(^{20}\) This statement is derived from my personal experience of playing different works in the
orchestra as the member of the orchestra, which was absolutely different activity compared with playing
with the orchestra as a soloist.
Conclusion

Writing the piano transcription of *Ein Heldenleben* helped me not only to see the old dream come true, but also to learn a lot more about myself. Working on the intricate and challenging episodes of this piece, I found out new details about the way my own mind works in processing, categorizing and modifying musical information. I also felt that I expanded my understanding of the piano as an instrument and of my own abilities as a pianist. The process of creating this transcription brought me a feeling of discovering limitless possibilities on the keyboard, as well as limitless opportunities for creation.
APPENDIX I

Manuscript of My Piano Transcription of *Ein Heldenleben*
Nachtig langsam
allmählich im Zeitmaß etwas steigen

...
WORKS CITED


