

*Gestures, Rituals and Memory: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Patterned Human
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Symbolic Gestures in the Performance of Clementi's *Didone abbandonata*

Abstract

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, over sixty operas were composed on the theme of Dido, Queen of Carthage, and Aeneas; Metastasio's libretto (1724) served as a sort of template for most of them. The subtitle *Scena tragica*, and the dedication to Luigi Boccherini of Clementi's Sonata *Didone abbandonata* (1821) underline the operatic origin of its style.

This presentation identifies through visual and musical examples some of the compositional and interpretive *gestures* that originated in Italian operatic conventions; it follows their transformation into the idiom of the *fortepiano* and the proportions of the classical sonata; it links to the ancient imagery and metric structure of Virgil's Aeneid Book IV (The Passion of the Queen) the *topoi* that reverberate in the Sonata, and for which the composer gave expressive indications on the score (e.g. *con furia*, *languente*); it examines the translation of the symbolic imagery into the parameters of music - stress, distress, discord, tension, re/petition, reiteration, resolution, climax, etc.

Gestural implications are explored through comparison of vocal, *fortepiano*, and piano performances that reflect different *decodings* of the same selected fragments; they also reveal that it is the adherence to the encoded musical gestures, and not necessarily the *authenticity* of the instrumental timbre that brings the symbolic content to life.

Equipment needed: Power Point presentation