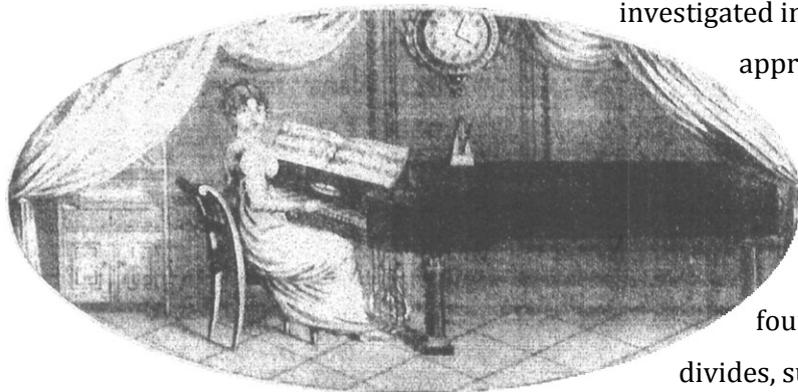


## Reconstructing a practice of the past: Piano playing in Vienna's 1820s.

In countless studies on keyboard playing and performance practice in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, pedagogical treatises – together with instrument and manuscript studies – are the main premises for the research. These sources remain our fundamental informants to musical practices of the past.

However, it is essential to realise that the *practice* of Viennese fortepiano playing died out with the disappearance of the Viennese fortepiano. As commonly acknowledged, there were two schools of piano building (English vs Viennese), and important pianists like Hummel and Kalkbrenner stated that even the players of these different areas were distinguished by their different features/characteristics. With regard to performance and technique, this aspect is finally



investigated in the current study: two equally distinct

approaches to the required playing technique are

mapped on to these two main types of keyboard

instruments. A comparison of keyboard

treatises of the early nineteenth century, where the basic rules or principles of piano playing are

found to convey differences according to geographic

divides, supports this claim.

Title page of Friedrich Starke's *Wiener PianoForte-Schule* (1819)

Indebted to Rezeptionsgeschichte (H. R. Jauss) and Begriffsgeschichte (R. Koselleck), a new theoretical framework has been developed, which aims at tackling the unique challenges of investigating historical practices: The *theory for reconstruction of past practices*. Key components of the theory involve understanding a practice as a **community**, based on **continuity**, consisting of **set of actions** and involving **constant negotiations** between various needs/considerations (investment – gain, risk – security, tradition – innovation, etc).

Translated to our context, Vienna's 1820s becomes the Koselleckian 'society' (Gesellschaft) where the 'rules of the art' equals the Begriffe which are either *confirmed* (i.e. repeated in its current meaning) or *constituted* (i.e. given a new meaning, new associations) by the members of the community. By identifying basic rules of the practice (body posture and arm/hand/finger movements), a remarkable consistency among the sources was found, suggesting a broad consensus in this matter. Further, by relating these rules to each other as a 'set of actions', their interdependency is clarified and 'missing links' attempted to retrieve by applying and sampling the actual skills of the practice. In other words: a tentative reconstruction of Viennese piano technique of the 1820's is presented and its 'interpretative space' explored. With a 'new' approach to technique, the phrasing and perception of the music changes accordingly, which is demonstrated in piano works by Schubert and Hummel.