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# The Mysteries of Urtext Revealed

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## What is Urtext?

The German word “Urtext” is an invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An Urtext edition presents music in its “pure” form, following the final intentions of the composer.

In an Urtext edition the musician will find exclusively what the composer wanted, without assumed improvements, alterations or adjustments. It is the result of intensive study of all available sources.



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# Why Urtext?

**If you want to play from an edition that shows the music as the composer intended it, with no additions by others, you need an Urtext edition.**

Have you ever wondered why different editions of the same piece of music can look as different as the two examples shown here?

This is an excerpt from Beethoven's piano sonata in G major, op. 31, no. 1.

But what about the metronome marking, the pedal marks, the long slurs in the right hand in measure 1 and 3 – all in the one version, but not in the other? Did Beethoven write these details or did he not?

In fact, he did not. As with many editions published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the top example was changed and “amended,” often by famous musicians, sometimes by not so famous music scholars. The problem is that the top example allows for no chance to play or interpret what Beethoven originally intended.

When G. Henle publishes an Urtext edition, we provide exactly this transparency in our score. The bottom example is the score as Beethoven wanted it printed. We have stripped away all unauthorized additions and changes and show you the music in its “pure” presentation. When playing from this score, you play Beethoven, not more, not less! That is the value of Urtext.

## 356 *ADAGIO GRAZIOSO* (♩ = 112)

*(Keinesfalls schneller, eher langsamer) (Pas plus vite, plutôt lentement) (On no account quick-er, rather slower)*



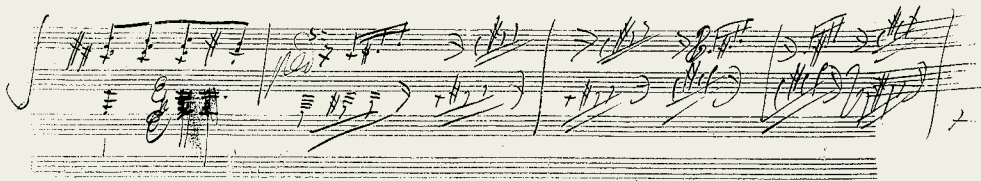
### Adagio grazioso



## Isn't Urtext just the same as the composer's manuscript?

**The music in the composer's manuscript often is not his last word on the composition. For performance and publication he might revise the music substantially.**

A great many musicians believe that creating an Urtext edition of a composition is a fairly straightforward task: a presentation of the music as it is written in the composer's



manuscript. Look at the example from Beethoven's sonata in A major, op. 101. Is it not evident, even at a glance, that the task of making a clear music engraving alone can be a daunting challenge? But more importantly, how can one be sure that when the composer finished the manuscript, he also finished working on the composition? Composers in the past, as now, wanted their music to be played and published. When a piece was played before being published, someone had to copy the parts for performance. In rehearsal, when the composer heard the music for the first time, or after the performance he might have made changes to the playing parts, but did not always amend his own manuscript score. As a result, the composer's manuscript then shows the music in an unrevised state. Something similar often happened when the composer proofread the printing plates before the work was published. He might have made changes in the proofs, but often did not record these changes in his manuscript. Solely looking at the autograph manuscript for the “truth” is, therefore, a sometimes shortsighted approach to establishing a composition's correct text.

# Securing the evidence

**To prepare an Urtext edition it is essential to collect and compare all existing sources of a composition.**

Possible Sources for Urtext Edition Research:

1. sketches
2. autograph working manuscript
3. autograph clean copy
4. copyist's manuscript
5. print proofs
6. first edition
7. composer's copy of first edition
8. revised edition (by the composer)

The first and often most time consuming task of an Urtext editor is to gather all sources of a musical text. Sometimes we have a wealth of material to collect and evaluate, from the composer's first sketches to the first editions. Unfortunately, because we are often editing music from a fairly distant past, it is more likely that only a few of the possible sources have survived. With some composers who have not been in the focus of previous scholarly work, trying to find the evidence can make an editor feel like Dick Tracy. An Urtext editor must be in contact with libraries, estates and private collectors. When trying to find heirs and descendants, one might even turn to the telephone directory as a last resort. And sometimes this detective work is surprisingly rewarded.

When working on an Urtext edition of the Six Sonatas for Violin solo, op. 27, by Eugène Ysaÿe we were able to consult the composer's copy of the first edition, which we had found in a Belgian library and which included his changes to the music, shown in the example. As a result, G. Henle's edition was the first to present this music according to the composer's final intentions – the real Urtext.



## Even Beethoven's "Für Elise" needs an Urtext edition

Using Urtext editions is not only beneficial when playing difficult and complex music. Of course, it is true that there is more danger for error in the printed scores of highly sophisticated music. Here it more often occurs that engravers, and even composers themselves, fail in checking the music and overlook these errors. Consulting the composer's manuscript, and other sources, can then help to detect the mistakes. Even in the case of a fairly modest piano piece like Beethoven's "Für Elise," an Urtext edition can reveal severe mistakes in the editions we have been using in the past. The publication history of this famous composition is a prime example why we need Urtext, and why Urtext is even possible without the composer's manuscript at hand.

Ludwig Nohl, a music scholar of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, discovered the manuscript of "Für Elise" and had the music published for the first time in 1867, long after Beethoven's death. After publication the manuscript soon disappeared and was never seen again. Here are the first measures of Nohl's edition. Does anything look suspicious to you? Turn the page and find out ...

A musical score for the first measures of Beethoven's "Für Elise". The score is in 3/8 time and starts with the tempo marking "poco moto." and the dynamic marking "pp". The notation is for a piano, with a treble clef and a bass clef. The first system shows the right hand playing a sequence of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, with a fermata over the first measure. The left hand plays a simple accompaniment of eighth notes. Pedal markings "Ped." and "0" are present. The second system continues the right hand melody, with a fermata over the first measure and a first ending bracket labeled "1" over the final measure. The left hand accompaniment continues. Pedal markings "Ped." and "0" are present.

In many editions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century you will find the music exactly as Ludwig Nohl published it, including the E in the right hand in measure 7. But this E is a suspicious note, because the same phrase reappears several times in the piece and always with D instead of E. Was it a deliberate deviation of Beethoven's that the first statement of the phrase is different? Did Ludwig Nohl or the engraver of the first edition copy the music incorrectly? Was it a proofreading mistake? How can we decide this without the composer's manuscript? In this case, we are lucky. The Beethoven-Haus in Bonn owns Beethoven's sketches of "Für Elise." This draft does not yet show all aspects of the finished piece, but it clearly has a D at our suspicious spot:



This then makes it highly likely that the E perpetuated in most editions is based on a copying or printing error of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only by following the Urtext method can we shed light on this not so little detail, even in a famous piece like "Für Elise." With the G. Henle Urtext edition a pianist can now play this little composition just as Beethoven wanted it.

## What distinguishes G. Henle's Urtext editions?



When Günter Henle founded the publishing house G. Henle in 1948, his vision was not only to provide the musician with Urtext editions, but also to support the performance from our scores in any way possible. Over sixty years of worldwide success with G. Henle Urtext editions has proven him right. Today and in future both goals remain center stage. Our editions are based on a profound scholarly method that ensures the most reliable musical edition possible. In our commitment to publishing the best performance editions, we provide engraving of the highest quality. Optimal page turns, and even fold-out pages in some instances, support a smooth practice session or performance. Gently colored paper prevents the spotlight from reflecting on the page. Sophisticated, custom binding inhibits the score from "unmotivated" page turns, and also lasts a lifetime of use. Our substantial catalog of almost 1,000 editions for piano solo and chamber ensembles makes us the worldwide Urtext leader.

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