

# Virtuosity and the Musical Work

The *Transcendental Studies* of Liszt

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Minion 10/13 pt    *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub> [TB]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN 0 521 81494 4 hardback

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## Chapter One



# Ecology by numbers

### 3 TIMES 12 ETUDES

In 1827, when Liszt was sixteen years old, a volume of twelve exercises, almost certainly composed in the early months of the previous year, was published by Boisselot in Marseilles. Its full title was *Etude pour le piano en quarante-huit exercices dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*, Op. 6, and it was therefore intended as the first of four volumes. The other three were not composed, though it has been suggested that a recently uncovered piece in F♯ major may have been destined for No. 13.<sup>1</sup> The work was issued simultaneously by Dufaut et Dubois in Paris, where Liszt and his father had been based since December 1823, shortly after his course of lessons with Czerny came to an end.<sup>2</sup> Liszt's (or Boisselot's) use of 'étude' as a collective term for a group of exercises has attracted attention in the Liszt commentaries. In fact it was a common enough practice in the early history of the genre, though already somewhat outmoded in 1827.<sup>3</sup> By 1839, when the work was reissued by Hofmeister in Leipzig, the usage had completely died out, and its demise is reflected in the double plural of the German publisher's confused and confusing title, *Etudes . . . en douze exercices*, Op. 1.<sup>4</sup> In the preface to his edition of the work, Busoni pointed out that this opus number indicated that the *Etude* was the first work of Liszt to have been published in Germany.<sup>5</sup> The title page of the Hofmeister edition has a rather curious vignette depicting a child in a cradle, together with the explanatory, and apologetic, note: 'Travail de la Jeunesse'. It was published without permission, a form of 'piracy' that was common enough in the nineteenth

<sup>1</sup> See the worklist compiled by Rena Charnin Mueller and Mária Eckhardt for the Liszt entry in Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (eds.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn (London, 2001), vol. 14, pp. 785–872.

<sup>2</sup> Intriguingly, Charles Salaman remembered an amended version of the sixth exercise; see Adrian Williams, *Portrait of Liszt by Himself and his Contemporaries* (Oxford, 1990), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Felix Ganz, 'The Development of the Etude for Pianoforte', diss., Northwestern University (1960), p. 298. Ganz's dissertation is still an invaluable source of information on the early history of the genre.

<sup>4</sup> Lina Ramann gives the erroneous date 1835 for the reissue, and this date has been followed by several later commentators. *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1880), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music*, trans. Rosamund Ley (London, 1957), p. 157. For a discussion of the rival claims to the designation Op. 1, see Georg Schütz, 'Form, Satz- und Klaviertechnik in den drei Fassungen der *Grossen Etüden* von Franz Liszt', in Zsoltán Gárdonyi and Siegfried Mauser (eds.), *Virtuosität und Avantgarde: Untersuchungen zum Klavierwerk Franz Liszts* (Mainz, 1988), p. 71.

century,<sup>6</sup> and this contributed to a distinct cooling in the relationship between Liszt and the publisher. The Complete Editions give the work as *Etude en douze exercices*, and this is its usual title today.<sup>7</sup>

Liszt himself remarked that he composed these exercises in his thirteenth year (1824), and this was taken by Alan Walker as evidence that he may have begun working on them in that year.<sup>8</sup> We should be less trusting of the composer's memory, given that on another occasion he claimed to have composed them in Marseilles in 1827. It seems likely that the place of publication was more reliably remembered than the date, especially as the work was published in Marseilles. The most plausible date of composition, then, lies between the two dates given by Liszt, in early 1826, when he stayed in Marseilles for a short period, following a concert tour of southern France. This is the date assigned it by most Lisztians, from Peter Raabe onwards,<sup>9</sup> and it is supported, too, by the dedication on the French editions. This was to Lydie Garella, a young pianist who lived in Marseilles, with whom Liszt apparently played duets during his stay there. Much later, in August 1877, he told his biographer Lina Ramann that he had had an adolescent crush on the girl and that the dedication was intended as an act of homage to the object of this early, uncharacteristically innocent, love.<sup>10</sup>

The concerts in southern France were just part of an extensive programme of tours organised for Liszt by his father from early 1824 through to 1828, including several visits to England, as well as to Switzerland and other parts of the French provinces. For a variety of reasons – the death of his father, an unhappy love affair, and no doubt the inevitable ageing of the *petit prodige* – Liszt withdrew from the public platform from around the middle of 1828, supporting his mother, who had by then moved to Paris, largely through teaching. It seems he suffered a kind of depression at this time (oddly enough, just as Chopin was enduring a similar malaise out there in Warsaw), and it was by no means a fruitful period compositionally. It was shortly after this, in the immediate aftermath of the 1830 July Revolution, which inspired his own unfinished 'Revolutionary Symphony', forerunner of *Héroïde funèbre*, that he engaged with the teachings of the Saint-Simonians and Felicité de Lamennais, and began to develop notions of the social and moral obligations of art and the artist that remained with him in one form or another throughout his life. And it was also in the early 1830s that he heard Paganini and began to associate with some of the leading artists and writers domiciled in Paris, as well as with composers such as Berlioz and Chopin. These events 'roused Liszt from his lethargy and morbid brooding', as Frederick Niecks

<sup>6</sup> A detailed exposition of publishing practices in the nineteenth century, including the problems associated with variable copyright laws in Europe, can be found in Jeffrey Kallberg, 'Chopin in the Market-Place', *Notes*, 39, 3 and 4 (March–June 1983), pp. 535–69 and 795–824.

<sup>7</sup> By the complete editions, I mean *Franz Liszt: Musikalische Werke*, edited by Busoni, Raabe, Wolfrum and others, and *Franz Liszt: Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, where the etudes were edited by Zsoltán Gárdonyi and István Szélenyi.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters of Franz Liszt*, coll. and ed. La Mara, trans. Constance Bache, 2 vols. (London, 1894), vol. 1, p. 231; Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847* (London, 1983), p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Raabe, *Liszts Schaffen* (Tutzing, 1968; orig. edn, 1931), p. 242.

<sup>10</sup> Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, vol. 1, p. 93. See Mária Eckhardt, 'Liszt à Marseille', in *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 24 (1982), pp. 163–97, for an account of the visit to Marseilles, casting doubt on Ramann's claims of a visit in 1825 and discussing reviews of the concerts in 1826.

put it.<sup>11</sup> In April 1832, his well-known response to Paganini contributed to a new burst of creativity, and a resumption (in 1833) of his career as a professional pianist. He also met Marie d'Agoult towards the end of 1832, and their relationship developed in intensity through to the early summer of 1835, at which point she left her husband. In June 1835 the lovers effectively eloped to Geneva, where they remained for well over a year.

Immediately before departing for Geneva, Liszt wrote to Ferdinand Hiller, outlining some of the major projects planned for the immediate future. It is clear from this letter that he was already thinking about a set of *Grandes Etudes* at that time, though there is no indication of their form or character.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, in a letter to his mother, written in March 1836 from Geneva, he requested 'a copy of my published *Etudes* and, still better, . . . the *manuscript* of the 12 *Etudes*,<sup>13</sup> and this suggests that the basic conception of the work – a recomposition of the early exercises – was already in his mind. It is by no means certain, however, that he put anything on paper then, though it is very likely that he played through the early exercises and conceived at least some of the recompositions *in intellectu*. In any event the real work was undertaken in the autumn months of 1837, while he and Marie d'Agoult were staying in northern Italy, after a year based at the Hôtel de France in Paris. The outcome was a set of twelve *Grandes Etudes* based loosely on the early exercises, and completed, according to Marie, in late October.<sup>14</sup> In the new etudes the clean, classical cut of the originals was replaced by a fierce, hugely challenging virtuosity, stretching even the most developed technique of the day (or any day) to its limits. All the same, the links with the early set are clearly perceptible, and the tonal scheme remains the same (pairings of tonal relatives: C major-A minor, F major-D minor, and so on, ending with B $\flat$  minor). The one anomaly is that the original No. 7 was transposed from E $\flat$  to D $\flat$  and was reworked as No. 11, while a new etude in E $\flat$  major replaced it as No. 7. Even the newly composed etude retained a link with the youthful Liszt, however, in that it reworked the introduction of his *Impromptu brillant sur des thèmes de Rossini et Spontini*, Op. 3 (one of the early pieces sent to Geneva by his mother).

There is an extant autograph Stichvorlage for the first of these new etudes, with the title *Préludes [sic]* given in Liszt's hand.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly this was also the title used by Marie d'Agoult in her letter of 23 October announcing the completion of the work. This autograph was destined for the Haslinger edition, though it differs from the published form in several minor respects. There is a further autograph of the newly composed No. 7, and the page numbering of this (fols. 55–66) suggests that it was at some point detached from the complete

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Niecks, *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries: A Contribution to the History of Musical Expression* (London and New York, [1907]), p. 273.

<sup>12</sup> This letter, published as part of a collection of 'unknown' letters edited by Gerhard Tischler, is quoted by Alan Walker in *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years*, p. 219.

<sup>13</sup> See Adrian Williams (ed.), *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters* (Oxford, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Many commentators, including Raabe, opt for 1838 as the date of completion. However, Marie's letter of October 1837 celebrates the fact that 'Franz has just finished his twelve preludes [sic]'. Moreover in January 1838, Liszt himself wrote to Adolphe Pictet from Milan: 'With the 12 *Etudes* – monsters – and a small volume entitled *Impressions et Poésies* which I have just finished, I am not displeas'd'. See Williams (ed.), *Selected Letters*, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> This is held by the National Széchényi Library, Budapest (Ms. Mus. 24). For a description, see Mária Eckhardt, *Liszt's Music Manuscripts in the National Széchényi Library* (Budapest, 1968), pp. 96–9.

set. It seems plausible that this too was part of the Haslinger Stichvorlage, though there are some grounds for uncertainty.<sup>16</sup> The set was published ‘simultaneously’ by Schlesinger (Paris) and Haslinger (Vienna) in 1839, with the designation *24 Grandes Etudes*, though as before the promise of more to come remained unfulfilled. Indeed it is hard to see what Liszt could have had in mind for the remaining twelve etudes, given that the existing pieces are recompositions of the twelve youthful exercises. It should be added that for the fourth etude there are important textual differences between the Schlesinger and Haslinger editions, and there is also a separate ‘corrected’ version of pages 23 and 24 of the Haslinger edition of this piece.<sup>17</sup> The cycle also appeared with Ricordi (Milan) and with Mori and Lavener (London). In 1840, shortly after the *Grandes Etudes* were published, Liszt drafted yet another version of the fourth of them, involving a short introduction and a new ending. On this occasion he gave it the poetic title *Mazeppa*, after Victor Hugo, though plans to publish it as a separate piece at this time came to nothing.

Several of the *Grandes Etudes* were performed in the course of the eleven Vienna concerts given by Liszt in April 1838 on behalf of the flood victims in Pest. He himself remarked that it was the success of these concerts that decided him on a career as a virtuoso pianist. Certainly it was from that point that his astonishing series of concert tours really began in earnest, and they lasted for the better part of a decade, during which time he was widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent virtuoso pianist in the world. In the course of that decade of endless travelling, he spent a two-month period of residence in Weimar (in early 1844), and he returned there briefly in 1846. Already during the first of those visits he began to formulate plans for the regeneration of Weimar’s once glorious cultural life, and this was the path he chose to follow when the touring was finally abandoned following a concert in Elisavetgrad in September 1847. Much of the impetus for Liszt’s decision to withdraw from the public platform no doubt came from his developing relationship with Princess Carolyn von Sayn-Wittgenstein, whom he had met during his concerts in Kiev in February of that year, and at whose estate in Woronince he stayed in March and again in October. It was during this year, with things Ukrainian very much on his mind, that he finally published the version of *Mazeppa* drafted in 1840. It was issued as a separate piece by Schlesinger, with a dedication to Hugo, and shortly after by Haslinger in Vienna.

In June 1848 Liszt moved to Weimar with Carolyne, taking on the post of Court Kapellmeister, and Weimar was to be at the centre of his life through to 1860. Shortly after his arrival he embarked on extensive revisions of several of his earlier compositions, including the *Paganini Etudes*, the *Album d’un Voyageur* and the *Grandes Etudes* (including the 1840 version of *Mazeppa*). The *Grandes Etudes* occupied him during the early months of 1851. Some of his revisions to the earlier versions of the etudes are of a fairly minor nature, and may simply have registered on paper his performing practice of several years. But others were much more significant, affecting the formal design and substance of the music. In any event all twelve etudes were reworked on paper at this time. Liszt used the Haslinger edition of the *Grandes Etudes* as the basis for the Stichvorlage he sent to Breitkopf & Härtel,<sup>18</sup> with cancellations

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>17</sup> These changes concern the later stages of the fourth strophe, and they will be discussed briefly in chapter 7.

<sup>18</sup> This is located in the Weimar archive (D-WRgs J 23).

and paste-overs effecting the revisions in most cases. Following the lead of *Mazeppa*, a further nine etudes were given poetic titles in this new version, leaving only two (Nos. 2 and 10) without titles. The entire set was published by Breitkopf & Härtel the following year (1852) as *Etudes d'exécution transcendante*, and Liszt was careful to point out that this was the 'seule édition authentique revue par l'auteur'. He even secured the rights to Haslinger's plates for the 1839 version.<sup>19</sup>

With the publication of the *Transcendentals*, Liszt effectively produced a second version of the new No. 7 (*Eroica*), a fourth version of No. 4 (*Mazeppa*) and a third version of a further ten etudes (the original No. 11, it will be remembered, was not reworked in 1837). The story of the fourth etude does not, however, finish there. The final page of the Stichvorlage for the *Transcendentals* was signed and dated by the composer 'Eilsen 2 avril 1851'. But by then Liszt had already begun yet another version of *Mazeppa*, this time taking us suggestively beyond the boundaries of the piano medium. One of the draftbooks in Weimar – the so-called 'Mazeppa' draftbook (N2) – begins with a thirty-three page orchestration draft of the well-known symphonic poem, including the final march, which is not present in any of the piano versions.<sup>20</sup> Liszt dated the completion of this draft precisely, writing 'Eilsen 1<sup>re</sup> Semanie [*sic*] de 1851'. The symphonic poem was then orchestrated and revised, and was given its first performance on 16 April 1854 at the Hoftheater, Weimar. Liszt arranged it for two pianos in February the following year (published 1857), and the full score of the final form was also published in 1857. Much later (1874) the composer also made an arrangement for four hands (published 1875). This four-hand version represented Liszt's final say about material to which he had returned intermittently over the previous fifty years.

Table 1.1 sets out the chronology of successive versions of the etudes and of the symphonic poem (s.p.). Dates are of composition rather than publication (they mark the completion of the work; the dating of first thoughts will be discussed in the text).

### 3 COMPOSERS

The dedication on the *Transcendentals* is significant. It reads: 'A Charles Czerny en temoignage de reconnaissance et de respectueuse amitié/son élève F. Liszt'. Liszt's tribute to his first and principal teacher made explicit the link between the *Transcendentals* and those youthful exercises, composed in the shadow of Czerny's teaching (1822–3) and partly inspired by it. Indeed it is rather striking that Liszt should have written 'son élève' at a time when he was himself widely regarded as one of the great musicians of the age, while his teacher's reputation had already faded. In earlier days, Liszt's father had used Czerny's name to promote his son's youthful concerts.<sup>21</sup> But by the 1850s it was rather Liszt who could promote Czerny. Indeed he had never been reluctant to do so. He performed

<sup>19</sup> La Mara (ed.), *Letters of Franz Liszt*, vol. 1, pp. 230–1.

<sup>20</sup> The major study of Liszt's sketchbooks (focusing on N5) is Rena Charnin Mueller, 'Liszt's "Tasso" Sketchbook: Studies in Sources and Chronology', diss., New York University (1986).

<sup>21</sup> Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, p. 91.

Ecology by numbers

Table 1.1 *The ‘Transcendental Studies’ and Mazeppa: chronological table*

1826	<i>Etude en douze exercices</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	┌──────────────────┐				↓	↓
1837	<i>Grandes Etudes</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1840				<i>Mazeppa</i> (pf)									
				↓	↓	↓	↓						
1851				<i>Mazeppa</i> (s.p. particella)									
				↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1851	<i>Etudes d'exécution transcendante</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1854				<i>Mazeppa</i> (s.p. full score)									
				↓									
1855				<i>Mazeppa</i> (s.p. arr. 2 pianos)									
				↓									
1874				<i>Mazeppa</i> (s.p. arr. 4 hands)									

Czerny's music on his concert tours (mainly concert pieces, but also heavier works such as the Op. 7 Sonata), wrote to him in December 1828 to ask which of his compositions he thought would make 'the best effect in society',<sup>22</sup> and in August 1830 urged him to visit Paris, where 'you are so widely esteemed that without doubt you will be well satisfied with the reception you receive there'.<sup>23</sup> His most explicit tribute to Czerny is found in a letter to Dionys Pruckner, where he commented on his Beethoven playing, his openness to new developments in piano technique, and the quality of some of the earlier music, blaming Viennese social and publishing practices for the 'excessive productivity' that weakened his later music.<sup>24</sup> Michel Sogny has argued that 'creative admiration' was a central impulse underlying Liszt's work.<sup>25</sup> That thesis will be touched on later. What is certain is that Liszt never lost his admiration for Czerny, who disciplined and directed his prodigious youthful talent ('the talent with which nature had equipped him'<sup>26</sup>) through rigorous technical training.

<sup>22</sup> La Mara (ed.), *Letters of Franz Liszt*, vol. 1, p. 4.      <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Williams (ed.), *Selected Letters*, p. 401.

<sup>25</sup> Michel Sogny, *L'Admiration Créatrice chez Liszt* (Paris, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Carl Czerny, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, ed. Walter Kolneder (Strassburg, 1968; orig. MS, 1842). My excerpts are from the English translation by Ernest Sanders: 'Recollections from my Life', *Musical Quarterly*, 42, 3 (July 1956), pp. 302–17; this quotation from p. 315.

The pedagogue and the prodigy. These labels could serve as literal descriptions of Czerny and Liszt in 1822–3, during the fourteen months of their closest association, and they met almost daily. But the labels resonate more widely. Both terms carry connotative values for an age of emergent Romanticism, and values that point in rather different directions. There was music as a craft to be learned, a discipline to be followed, a set of rules, conventions and practices to be handed down from master to pupil. And there was music as an embodiment of the mystery and magic of individual creative genius, the gift of God or of nature. These values may even have a bearing on the nature and status of virtuosity. On one reading virtuosity would be viewed as the ultimate reward for industry; on another reading it would be the most visible sign of genius. For, ironically enough, a Romantic aesthetic in music, so perfectly attuned to the notion of the prodigy, the Lisztian *Wunderkind*, came to fruition more-or-less in tandem with the growing standardisation and institutionalisation of pedagogical practices. This, after all, was the age of the conservatory, the tutor, the textbook, the classroom; the age, too, when pianist-composers (the *grands pédagogues*), virtually without exception, had their systems, their *Lehrbücher*, and their coteries of pupils; the age, in brief, of the etude and the exercise. And looming behind all of this – behind the conflicting values embodied in the pedagogue and the prodigy – lay a larger, bolder issue. It is to the early nineteenth century that we can trace the beginnings of a perceptible separation of a performance culture and a compositional culture.

Already during the 1830s Czerny the composer was characteristically ridiculed by many of the most representative of the Romantics. He was an ‘inkwell’, ‘bankrupt of fantasy’, a production line for etudes and exercises.<sup>27</sup> Liszt the pianist, on the other hand, was eulogised as the archetypal Romantic artist. He was exuberant, spontaneous, intuitive; opposed – or so it seemed – to the conventional, the predictable, even the rational. In the myth-making of the age, it was precisely these qualities, qualities which served the improvising performer almost as a matter of routine, that were elevated to the status of a compositional ideal. In the quest for Czerny’s ‘beautiful English garden’, executed ‘according to plan’,<sup>28</sup> for a rational, coherent design, the improviser would have spared little thought for that most essential pre-condition of his craft, the spontaneous generation of ‘new’ musical thoughts. Yet it was just this process that was to be freighted with ideology in the age of Romanticism. An idealised reception of Mozart was partly instrumental in promoting one of the most enduring myths of the century – a near-equation of invention and inspiration, where the latter would appear ‘sudden, complete, sublime’, and largely untrammelled by the operations of reason. This image of the creative process rapidly took root (notwithstanding documentary evidence – composition sketches, for example – which tells a different story), and it played a major role in the construction of the prodigy. What was new in this was the significance attributed to prodigious talent, not the talent

<sup>27</sup> The ‘inkwell’ was apparently John Field’s description; see H. Dessauer, *John Field: sein Leben und seine Werke* (Langensalza, 1912), p. 76. Schumann referred to the ‘bankruptcy of fantasy’; see *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker* (Leipzig, 1888), vol. 2, pp. 156–7.

<sup>28</sup> His description of an improvised Fantasy. See Carl Czerny, *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte*, op. 200, trans. and ed. A. Mitchell (New York, 1983; orig. edn, 1829), p. 2.

itself.<sup>29</sup> The fusion of youthful skills and creativity with essentially Romantic concepts of inspiration and genius resulted in a product – almost an institution – that proved eminently marketable in the nineteenth century, and retains much of its spell today.

Czerny, too, had been a so-called ‘prodigy’, and had been given his own musical direction by Beethoven.<sup>30</sup> The symbolic potency of this succession was not lost on Liszt. Like Czerny, he viewed Beethoven as the pinnacle of creative achievement, and, again like Czerny, he was committed to the serious study and proper interpretation of his music.<sup>31</sup> The point needs stressing, since interpretation was by no means a central concern of the early nineteenth-century pianist-composer. Liszt and Czerny shared other enthusiasms. Both were responsive to the music of Bach and were instrumental in its promotion (Czerny was one of the first to edit and publish the *Wohltempiertes Klavier*, an edition still in use today).<sup>32</sup> Both regarded transcription and arrangement as central categories of musical thought, and here again Czerny proposed a decisive influence from Beethoven. And both were committed to technique and virtuosity. Liszt was happy to acknowledge that much of the technical foundation for his own musicianship had been laid by Czerny. As Czerny put it: ‘Since I knew from numerous experiences that geniuses whose mental gifts are ahead of their physical strength tend to slight solid technique, it seemed necessary above all to use the first months to regulate and strengthen his mechanical dexterity. . . .’<sup>33</sup> Czerny’s ‘solid technique’ was in many ways a synopsis of early piano pedagogy, celebrating a ‘finger school’ whose harpsichord ancestry still glimmered through the multiple piano methods of the early nineteenth century, though it also took on board Beethoven’s replacement of short-breathed staccato technique by a longer-phrased legato.<sup>34</sup> Undoubtedly Liszt’s later technique and teaching methods represented a significant departure from Czerny’s methods. Yet it is clear from accounts of his own early teaching, notably the lessons he gave to Valérie Boissier in 1832, that he rejected those methods only when they had been fully assimilated.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, like his teacher, he never lost faith in the virtues of practice, of endless work on technique, however different the goal.

The *Etude en douze exercices* testifies to the direct influence of Czerny on Liszt’s compositional thought. Yet there was clearly a marked divergence of temperament and approach between teacher and pupil, just as there had been between Beethoven and Czerny. In his autobiographical sketch of 1842, Czerny expressed his disapproval of the exploitation of

<sup>29</sup> Research in educational psychology suggests that the idea of the prodigy has been overvalued in the past; see, for example, Michael Howe, *The Origins of Exceptional Abilities* (Oxford, 1990). Whatever the truth of that, the potency of the idea in the nineteenth century could scarcely be overestimated; see Peter Kivy, ‘Child Mozart as an Aesthetic Symbol’, in *The Fine Art of Repetition* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 200–13.

<sup>30</sup> A useful account of Czerny’s transformation of this Beethoven legacy is offered in George Barth, *The Pianist as Orator: Beethoven and the Transformation of Keyboard Style* (Ithaca and London, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> From 1816, Czerny gave or arranged weekly performances devoted exclusively to Beethoven at his home.

<sup>32</sup> Barth (*The Pianist as Orator*) points out that Czerny was a pioneer of the modernising tendency in nineteenth-century editing.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Recollections from my Life’, p. 315.

<sup>34</sup> Barth, *The Pianist as Orator*. It seems that, for all his reputation as a ‘legato’ pianist, Clementi had a finger technique that was not dissimilar to Couperin’s, and that it was above all through Beethoven and Beethoven interpretation that modern legato playing was developed.

<sup>35</sup> Mine Augrste Boissier, *Liszt pédagogue: Leçons de piano données par Liszt à Mlle. Valérie Boissier en 1832* (Paris, 1927).

Liszt's youthful talent through premature concertising in the early 1820s.<sup>36</sup> A few more years in Vienna would not only have secured his technique, according to Czerny; it would have enabled him 'to fulfil in the field of composition all the high expectations that were then rightly cherished by everyone'. He referred to the loss of many years 'during which his [Liszt's] life and his art became misdirected'. In the years immediately following their early association, the two men were in touch only by letter. Then they met again in the spring of 1837, when Czerny visited Paris on one of his rare excursions from Vienna. He was clearly disconcerted by the radical change in Liszt's piano technique. 'I found his playing rather wild and confused in every respect, the enormous bravura notwithstanding'.<sup>37</sup> This comment neatly identifies the divide that had by then taken place between two fundamentally different approaches to piano technique and style. In a nutshell it was a divide between post-Classical and Romantic virtuosity. A suggestive comment in Liszt's earliest sketchbook, dating from the early 1830s, and almost certainly penned in 1831, is revealing of the underlying shift in impulse and motivation: next to the name 'Czerny', and some fragments of exercises, he wrote 'Celui qui n'a pas souffert/que fait-il?'<sup>38</sup>

It may have been that meeting with Czerny in 1837 that spurred Liszt to turn to the project he had announced in 1835, a set of *Grandes Etudes* which rework material from the *Etude en douze exercices*. He worked on this second version of the etudes in Italy towards the end of 1837 (hence the Ricordi edition), well before he visited Czerny in Vienna the following April. He had almost certainly played at least one of them in Italy without success, and he performed several of them during the Viennese tour.<sup>39</sup> Intriguingly, Czerny decided on this occasion that Liszt's genius had 'received a new impetus' and that his playing had taken on 'that brilliant and yet more limpid style of playing for which he has now become so famous throughout the world'.<sup>40</sup> It is tempting to ask just who had changed. Admittedly Czerny was now on home ground and may have felt more secure about his own standing, but the possibility that he may also have found some measure of accommodation with the new manner is supported by Liszt's comment in another context that 'he [Czerny] did not set himself up against some progress that had been made in technique'.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, when Czerny later sketched a history of performance styles, he identified six schools, of which the last, a 'new style' represented chiefly by Thalberg, Chopin and Liszt, 'may be called a mixture of and improvement on all those which preceded it'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> 'Recollections from my Life', p. 316.     <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> This is located in the Library of Congress. Compare Liszt's remark in his book on the Hungarian gypsies: 'As soon as Pain makes her appearance in art . . . her influence upon the heart changes character'. *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* (Leipzig, 1981). This extract from the English translation: *The Gypsy in Music*, trans. Edwin Evans, 2 vols. (London, [1926]), vol. 1, p. 102.

<sup>39</sup> Liszt referred to his performance of a 'prélude-étude' in La Scala in December 1837. See Franz Liszt, *An Artist's Journey*, trans. and annotated Charles Suttoni (Chicago and London, 1989; orig. letters, 1835–41), p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> 'Recollections from my Life', p. 316. For an interesting perspective on Liszt's changing approach to performance in the 1830s, see Katherine Kolb Reeve, 'Primal Scenes: Smithson, Pleyel, and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz', *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music*, 18, 3 (1995), pp. 211–35.

<sup>41</sup> La Mara (ed.), *Letters of Franz Liszt*, vol. 1, p. 266.

<sup>42</sup> This is found in the fourth volume of the *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School*, Op. 500, trans. J. H. Hamilton (London, 1839), where Czerny offers advice on the performance of 'new music'.

And perhaps most telling of all is his contribution to Liszt's *Hexaméron* variations, composed for Princess Belgiojoso probably during his visit to Paris. Here there is stylistic evidence that even as a composer Czerny was far from immune to the attractions of the 'new style'.

This was not the first occasion on which Czerny adopted a modern idiom (his titles not infrequently include the gloss 'in the modern style', though by 'modern' here he often meant simply 'bravura'). But in general he reserved it for more serious works, notably the sonatas, and especially the tenth sonata, Op. 268 (the *Grande sonate d'étude*), whose elaborately decorated slow movement was probably his closest point of stylistic contact with the younger generation.<sup>43</sup> In the context of his output as a whole, such moments are relatively rare. The bulk of his music remains firmly rooted in the idiom of a post-Classical 'brilliant style', to use his own label.<sup>44</sup> Adolph Kullak remarked that his *Pianoforte School* 'closed an era'.<sup>45</sup> This was a reference to Czerny the pedagogue, but it might equally be applied to Czerny the composer, and especially to his contributions to the etude, the genre where these two roles ideally meet. As everyone knows, Czerny wrote etudes in generous quantities. He used them to develop technical prowess, of course, but also to codify and systematise the numerous techniques associated with an instrument whose idiomatic potential was still under exploration. The titles of his etudes also hint at an element of stylistic classification, based principally on categories labelled 'salon', 'brilliant' and 'characteristic'. This taxonomy was reinforced by the categories used in his *Pianoforte School*, and it can speak of real stylistic and aesthetic distinctions, extending well beyond Czerny, and well beyond the etude. Yet for Czerny's own etudes the distinctions remain at best notional. Even those described as 'characteristic' smack of the post-Classical past rather than the Romantic present, of the classroom rather than the salon or concert hall. Seldom, if ever, do they enter the orbit of the new pianism, where they might have rubbed shoulders with the later etudes of his pupil Liszt. Or with those of Chopin.

Liszt's *Grandes Etudes* were dedicated to Czerny in the Schlesinger and Haslinger editions. However the Ricordi edition registered an intriguing change. Here the dedication was shared between Czerny for the first volume (Nos. 1–7) and Chopin for the second (Nos. 8–12). Of course we cannot be entirely certain that this change was instigated by Liszt, but there could have been little reason for the publisher to alter the dedication, and little probability that he would have done so without consulting the composer. However the new dedication came about, it brought into the frame a composer whose career until that point had paralleled Liszt's in interesting ways. It is possible that the two men originally met through Ferdinand Paër,<sup>46</sup> who introduced Chopin to many of Paris's leading musicians when the young composer first arrived there in the autumn of 1830. In any event they were soon part of the same circle of artists and musicians, meeting at restaurants, at one or other of their apartments,

<sup>43</sup> Contemporary critics described the sonatas, especially their slow movements, as 'romantic' in character. See Randall Keith Streets, 'The Piano Sonatas of Carl Czerny', diss., University of Maryland (1987) for relevant documentation.

<sup>44</sup> In volume 3 of the *Pianoforte School*, Op. 500.

<sup>45</sup> Adolph Kullak, *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte-Playing* (New York, 1972; based on the 3rd edn, 1889), p. 76.

<sup>46</sup> Serge Gut, *Franz Liszt* (Paris, 1989), p. 250.

or at concerts. The musicians in the circle regularly participated at each other's 'benefits', and there are several documented (as well as numerous fabled) concerts involving both Liszt and Chopin as pianists. The two men may have been temperamental opposites, and to some extent professional rivals, but each had great respect for the other's very different talents, at least in the early days. Chopin exerted a special fascination for Liszt, based less on his prowess as a thinker than on his exceptional musical gifts, allied to the inevitable attractions that attend a personality wrapped in secrecy. As a pianist, his technique had been largely self-acquired, eschewing contemporary orthodoxies, and this translated to a pronounced individuality of playing, and to a no less singular teaching style, hostile above all to 'mindless' mechanical exercises. Anything further from Czerny's approach would be difficult to imagine, and it is likely that Liszt took careful note.

By 1837, when Czerny visited Paris, Chopin was still involved, albeit reluctantly, with the Liszt circle at the Hôtel de France (he had been introduced to George Sand through Liszt and Marie d'Agoult a few months earlier). It is not certain that he and Czerny renewed their earlier brief acquaintance during these months,<sup>47</sup> but it was at least the only time when all three composers almost certainly found themselves in the same place at the same time. Moreover, like Czerny, Chopin contributed a variation to *Hexaméron* in the spring (albeit belatedly), adding another strand to that most remarkable of pianistic documents, itself immensely revealing of collective styles and personal rivalries. It is worth recording too that later in the same year Chopin prepared his Op. 25 etudes for the publisher, that he dedicated them to Liszt's mistress Marie d'Agoult, and that Liszt himself performed several of them in April 1837, prior to publication. Could this have been a further impetus for him to turn again to his own etudes? Already by then he had established a special and recognised affinity with Chopin's etudes. Five years earlier (1832) Op. 10 had been dedicated to him and had made a decisive impression. Liszt had composed nothing of remotely comparable stature at that time, and his new-found creativity in the early 1830s certainly owed something to his contact with Chopin. Such was his feeling for Op. 10 that his readings gained even Chopin's approval, always given sparingly: 'Liszt is playing my studies . . . I wish I could rob him of the way to play my own studies.'<sup>48</sup> However we interpret the Chopin connection, and more will be said on this in due course, one certainty is that Liszt's admiration for Chopin's etudes perfectly complemented his admiration for Czerny's. He gained a stimulus of quite another kind – poetic rather than technical – from the music of the Polish composer, even if it remained no more than a catalyst to his own, emphatically singular, expressive world.

It is a commonplace of music history that it was through Chopin and Liszt, albeit in very different ways, that the piano found its idiomatic voice. This is not to denigrate earlier or coeval approaches to the instrument (Clementi, Cramer and Beethoven in particular

<sup>47</sup> They met in Vienna when Chopin spent eight months there immediately prior to settling in Paris. 'There is more feeling in Czerny himself than in all his compositions' was Chopin's verdict. See *Collected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, collected and annotated B. S. Sydow, trans. and ed. Arthur Hedley (London, Melbourne and Toronto, 1962), p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

transformed the medium through their insistence on a basic legato touch<sup>49</sup>), but simply to argue that Chopin and Liszt crystallised the essential relation between medium and style that so clearly set the Romantic piano apart from Classical and post-Classical antecedents. For both composers the musical idea was inseparably welded to the instrument, determined in every particular by its potentialities and its limitations. Of course a study of Romantic pianism might refer to many names, styles and genres. But, as Walter Benjamin suggested, antithetical exemplary models can often reveal more about a topic than any amount of subject survey.<sup>50</sup> Adorno, following Benjamin, adopted just this approach when he set out to reveal the true nature of Modernism in music through a near-exclusive focus on Schoenberg and Stravinsky rather than an exhaustive survey of individual Modernists.<sup>51</sup> There were undoubtedly casualties of Adorno's approach (not least due to a subtle denigration or marginalisation of composers and materials that failed to conform to canonised procedures<sup>52</sup>), but it did at least mark out provisional boundaries, defining an arena within which later negotiation could take place. And in a rather similar way, I suggest that Chopin and Liszt might serve as plausible exemplary models for a study of the Romantic piano, that the forcefield between them might reveal with greater clarity than any survey of composers and genres what we may call the 'historical moment' of the piano. The polarities between them (of temperament, technique, style and aesthetic) will be explored in a little more detail in chapter 4; for now the comparison will remain at a level of greater generality.

The personalities of the two men could scarcely have been more sharply contrasted: the one extraverted and ostentatious, flaunting convention at every turn, embracing (however insecurely) the most radical intellectual, social and political agendas of the day; the other private and aloof, a stickler for proprieties and innately conservative in all social and political matters. Likewise their musical personalities: the one displaying, the other concealing. Yet for all the contrast, the starting-point was much the same, a world of post-Classical concert music firmly centred on the piano, and designed principally for performance in benefit concerts and salons. This was music designed to be popular, and happy to accept its commodity status. Its basic ingredients were a bravura right-hand figuration that took its impetus from the light-actioned Viennese and German pianos of the late eighteenth century and a melodic idiom, associated in its early stages with English and French instruments, that was rooted either in Italian opera, in folk music or in popular genres such as marches (including funeral marches), dance pieces, pastorales or barcarolles. It was the special achievement of Chopin and Liszt to elevate this popular idiom to a plane where it need concede nothing in stature to more prestigious private and epic musics, chamber and symphonic. But the key point is that they did this in very different ways. For Chopin, it was achieved through a unique blend

<sup>49</sup> Beethoven, according to Czerny, felt that the staccato manner was inappropriate to the nature of the piano. See Barth, *The Pianist as Orator*, pp. 42–3. See also note 34.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, in *Schriften*, vol. I, ed. T. W. Adorno (Frankfurt, 1955), p. 163.

<sup>51</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster (London, 1973; orig. edn, 1948), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> By 'canonised procedures', I have in mind especially octatonic and set theory, which have to some extent shaped the analytical agenda for early twentieth-century repertoires.

of the Classical and the post-Classical. His music remained firmly anchored in the brilliant style, but the components of the style were transformed through the agencies of Bach and Mozart. Not only did they influence him in precise technical ways; they represented the perfect embodiment of 'taste', Chopin's guiding aesthetic principle.<sup>53</sup> Throughout his life he adhered to an essentially Classical view of the musical work, rooted in the immanent, the real, even the rule-bound. At the same time he responded in his own, muted way to the spirit of an emergent Romanticism, rejecting an Idealist view of the musical work, but admitting compositional criteria derived unmistakably from Idealist values, and I include here notions of originality, subjectivity and nationality.

Liszt, on the other hand, elevated and transformed the ingredients of popular pianism by infusing them totally with a Romantic ideology. Either he adapted them to the demands of a 'transcendental' virtuosity, whose extravagant technical challenges were far removed in scope and nature from the more contained, nuanced technique favoured by Chopin; or he conflated them with a poetic idea, investing them with greater ambition by associating them with high-prestige literary or philosophical ideas. The category 'poetic' will be explored in a later chapter, but we should note here that it extended well beyond any specific literary or musical genre to embrace the concrete (epic) expression of that lofty Idealism to which the Romantics aspired, the attempt to elevate art to a powerful metaphysical status. In this sense it became part of Liszt's renovative programme for an instrumental music that might itself become the highest form of poetry through its association with a poetic idea. For Liszt, then, the piano was a channel; for Chopin a filter. And in narrowly technical terms, the contrast is no less explicit. Where Chopin separated out the bravura figuration and popular melody of the brilliant style in formal juxtaposition, allowing the first to become dense with information and the second to take on an ornamental character (where ornamentation grows from, and is integral to, melody), Liszt drew the two together in superimposition. Typically his figuration took on an explicitly decorative function, either colouring melody, as in those delicate background washes of sonority, or dissolving it, as in those cadenzas that periodically interrupt the flow. Meanwhile the melody itself, 'sweetening' or 'martialing' its post-Classical models, eschewed Chopin's cumulative ornamental variation in favour of a cross between character variation and thematic transformation, at times even adopting a kind of *cantus firmus* approach to repetition and form. These are generalisations of course, but they indicate that the polarity between the two greatest pianist-composers of the early nineteenth century extended to particulars of compositional technique.

At a deeper level, however, those polarities might well be reducible to something like a common denominator, one that draws the popular and the significant into a new accommodation and a new synthesis. It is tempting to invoke again the parallel with Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Here too the elements of sharpest opposition appear in retrospect to dissolve into something approaching a single statement, in this case essentially about defining a creative attitude to the past. Indeed the parallel could be taken one stage further. Just as

<sup>53</sup> At the end of his life Chopin compared Mozart and Beethoven in terms which spelt out clearly his commitment to order and balance, his rejection of extravagant rhetoric and theatricality: 'Where [Beethoven] is obscure and seems lacking in unity . . . the reason is that he turns his back on eternal principles; Mozart never'. See *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, ed. Hubert Wellington, trans. Lucy Norton (New York, 1948), pp. 194–5.

Stravinsky ‘reacted’, creatively yet ambivalently, to Schoenberg’s death in 1951, so Liszt reacted to Chopin’s death a century earlier (1849), and in several capacities: as critic, arranger and composer. In 1852 he published the first book-length study of the Polish composer, and its extravagant language set the compass-reading for later generations of myth-making, especially in France,<sup>54</sup> effectively translating Chopin from a figure of pronounced Classical sympathies into an archetypally Romantic ‘poet of the piano’. A few years later he arranged six of Chopin’s songs into a cycle, ensuring, as Charles Rosen rightly argues, ‘a considerable improvement on the vocal versions’.<sup>55</sup> Then, even more crucially, in the early 1850s he composed two polonaises, a mazurka, a *Valse impromptu*, the second ballade, and a berceuse. Here we have, in Alan Walker’s words, ‘a body of piano music in which Chopin’s personality continues to speak to us, as it were, from beyond the grave’.<sup>56</sup> All this in addition to *Funérailles*, based explicitly on the A $\flat$  major Polonaise, Op. 53. It was also in the early 1850s that Liszt composed the two sets of etudes, including the *Transcendentals*, that rework earlier material in light of a newly defined poetics of instrumental music. This was part of a more general reworking of selected earlier music. But it may also have been part of Liszt’s response to Chopin. And if so the timing is of particular interest, since Chopin’s death coincided with a determinate stage in Liszt’s evolution as a composer, amounting to nothing less than the establishment of a new creative agenda for himself and for his contemporaries. The shared genre titles would serve only to emphasise, then, the ambivalence in Liszt’s response, as he carefully measured the space that now separated his own aesthetic from Chopin’s, no less than from Czerny’s. A tribute, but at the same time a symbolic burial. *Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!*

## 2 PIANOS

Czerny and Chopin allow us to model the central significance of the piano to the early nineteenth century in two quite different ways. Czerny brings its social history into focus. Even more than Clementi, whose teaching he observed, admired, and learnt from, Czerny might be regarded as the first modern piano teacher, in that he cultivated the ‘player and practical musician’, developing performance as a highly specialised, professional skill, separated out from composition and from an all-round training in music. Czerny’s treatises emphasised the importance to the pianist of supplementary skills (the science of thorough-bass ‘ought not to remain unknown’), but the real point is that they were indeed supplementary rather than integral. His piano workshop provided a training for the budding virtuoso, a training that embraced everything from finger technique to dress and deportment. It involved a regime of practice that was positively industrial, a committed testimony to the power and efficacy of a bourgeois work ethic; ‘*Industry and practice* are the Creators and Architects of all that is great, good, and beautiful on the earth’.<sup>57</sup> For Czerny, anyone could be taught anything, provided the preparation were adequate and the will to learn were there. The

<sup>54</sup> Franz Liszt, *F. Chopin* (Paris, 1852).

<sup>55</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (London, 1995), p. 512.

<sup>56</sup> Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years 1848–1861* (London, 1989), p. 146.

<sup>57</sup> Carl Czerny, *Pianoforte School*, Op. 500, vol. 2, p. 115.

Czerny etude was the mainstay of a formidable pedagogical programme, a programme, we should note, whose tendency was towards conformity rather than individuality.

There was a wider context for this professionalisation of piano teaching. The rise of the conservatories, like the rise of commercially run theatres and concert-giving music societies, marked a change in the basic structures of musical life, associated with the consolidation of a mercantile musical culture. The piano, lodging itself in the public concert, the salon and the bourgeois home, was to become the single most potent symbol of that culture. It drew to itself both a modern technology that would in due course translate craft to industry, and a new social order that would translate economic success to cultural and political status. In the process it generated interconnected and increasingly specialised roles, all addressing the needs of a new kind of consumer. Piano manufacturer, publisher, promoter, critic, teacher, performer, composer: the interrelation between these roles is an intricate and complex dimension of the social history of the piano in the nineteenth century, and one still in need of adequate exposition. Initially a single musician might embrace all or most of them, and right through the nineteenth century, and beyond, several areas of duplication remained common. But from the 1830s the growing tendency was for such duplication to make room for a greater specialisation of function, and that in turn created a whole new set of vested interests, by no means easily harmonised. The piano, in short, found itself at the centre of, and perfectly epitomised, an immensely competitive mercantile culture, whose components and mechanisms differed essentially from those of a patronal culture. In particular a functional link was created between the vested interests of the amateur in the home and those of the celebrity touring virtuoso. The one depended on the other, albeit indirectly, through the ever expanding market for pianos, for published music, and of course for music instruction. The touring virtuoso drove this market, and the training of virtuosos accordingly became a highly specialised activity, carving a space for keyboard technique outside the general field of musical training.

It is worth emphasising that the practice I am describing here – the practice of pianism – resists easy assimilation into the grand narratives, based on style systems and notional traditions, of more conventional histories. Indeed my use of the term ‘practice’ is calculated. I borrow it very largely from the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who argues for a separation between the interests of a practice, with its own setting, history, tradition, values and ideals, and those of an institution, structured in terms of power and status.<sup>58</sup> For music historians this is a valuable distinction, even if we decide in the end that the separation is less clean than MacIntyre suggests. Thinking in terms of practices allows us to build the performer – the act of performance – centrally into the historical study of a repertory, and also to register something of the quest for personal authenticity that is promoted by a practice, often in opposition to the institutions that lodge it. Indeed it is sometimes tempting to imagine a history of music which starts from practices rather than composers, works and institutions. Such a history, it need hardly be said, would embrace multiple, often overlapping, practices, each with its institutions, its sub-practices, its enabling agencies, its repertory, its ethos. In the early nineteenth century, for instance, it would encompass the French salon, the English

<sup>58</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London, 1981).

subscription concert, the German choral association, and the Italian opera company. To reduce these monolithically to a single 'movement' of cultural history would be challenging, to say the least.

On the other hand, our alternative history might seek ways of venturing beyond the descriptive in order to attempt bolder, more reductive interpretations. It might, for instance, take the operatic voice, the violin, and the piano as respective starting-points for a narrative which locks together contextual and compositional readings of the tonal tradition. Each of these instruments generated a range of practices sufficiently broadly-based to dominate music's social history at particular times, and in particular places. The instruments themselves became both social components and social agents. At the same time each of them generated vast repertorial cycles, and these cycles in their turn profoundly changed the stylistic history of music through performance-led compositional innovation, fashioned above all by an idiomatic imperative. The piano, of course, takes up the rear in this cyclical history, and there is a real sense in which it retraced many of the well-worn paths of the operatic voice and the violin. Like them it established its own institutions and its own taste-publics, and like them it built its own armoury of idiomatic devices, partly in response to the demands of those taste-publics. Moreover, it arrived at many of these devices by borrowing unashamedly, and then transforming, figures originally associated with the voice and the violin.

Elsewhere I have suggested that in taking a long view of the practice of pianism, we might propose a three-part structural history: pre-recital, recital and post-recital ages.<sup>59</sup> Needless to say, these structures are simplifications. Yet they remain suggestive, and they usefully draw a line between the early nineteenth-century pianism I have been describing and the age of the recital. For it is the institution of the recital that must surely provide the essential reference point for any social history of pianism. Of course there was a lengthy period of induction from Liszt's 'musical soliloquies' or 'monologues' in the late 1830s (concerts 'out of the ordinary run', as he himself put it),<sup>60</sup> to the consolidation of modern programming in the late nineteenth century, a development associated especially with Anton Rubinstein. But the underlying impulse was clear. The recital consolidated a larger tendency within middle-class culture towards stable, settled structures, all of them designed to confirm and authenticate a new status quo. It presented a forum for canon formation, where an 'innocent' repertory, initially centred on Bach, Scarlatti, and the so-called 'Viennese classics', might be manipulated to ideological ends through a massive investment in the musical work, and in its greatness. In short, the rise of the recital formalised the rise of the work. Accordingly, it was the adequate interpretation of the work, involving a careful balance between a liberal realisation of the self and a contractual acknowledgement of collective norms and inherited knowledge – between, in Adorno's phrase, the 'self and the forms' – that provided the ethos underlying pianistic practice during the age of the recital.<sup>61</sup> At risk of forcing the point,

<sup>59</sup> 'The Practice of Early-Nineteenth-Century Pianism', in Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 110–27.

<sup>60</sup> La Mara (ed.), *Letters of Franz Liszt*, vol. 1, p. 53. Liszt first used the term 'recitals' (note the plural) of his Hanover Square concert of 9 June 1840. On earlier occasions, he referred to 'monologues'. See *An Artist's Journey*, p. 181.

<sup>61</sup> For the background and context of Adorno's phrase, see Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, 1993), especially p. 16.

my structural history might propose a later *kairos* or point of perfection in the story of the recital, associated with some of the giants of the early twentieth century, just prior to the reification of interpretative forms associated with electronic media.<sup>62</sup> This would be the point, so the argument might run, at which the balance between ‘the self and the forms’ (between, in a way, the demands of the performer and those of the work) had been optimally achieved. Following it the practice entered a stage of qualitative change which I venture to describe as the onset of a post-recital age.

In light of this, we may return to the first stage of our structural history, the pre-recital age, taking us roughly speaking from the infancy of the public concert in the late eighteenth century through to the mid-nineteenth century. Here we are looking at the practice of pianism prior to that very pattern of music-making whose stability and integrity – I am suggesting – is currently threatened by mass culture. There is even a nice irony in this, for the rise of the recital effectively marked a socially elitist retreat from an earlier form of mass culture, or at least something beginning to approach it. Needless to say we should avoid the retrospective fallacy that would equate this pre-recital age with a pre-history of the recital. Indeed one reason for presenting the whole sequence over-schematically, as I am doing here, is precisely to try to do greater historical justice to the pre-recital practice. It is all too easy for the familiar culture of the piano recital, not excluding its ethical values, to obscure the less familiar culture of the benefit concert and the salon, and thus to compromise any attempts we make to engage with early nineteenth-century piano repertoires on anything like their own terms. We need a certain historical sympathy to appreciate fully that in the early nineteenth century the practice of pianism, insofar as it can be generalised geographically, functioned within a very different ecology, a very different configuration of agents and agencies. In particular it was a configuration not yet centred on the musical work and on its interpretative forms.

How, then, might we summarise the essential components of an early nineteenth-century pre-recital practice? For a start, the real home of the piano lay in performance sites (benefits, salons) that are no longer a part of our culture today. Likewise its key supporting agents, the piano manufacturer and the music publisher, were very different from those of today. Moreover, unlike their present-day counterparts, early nineteenth-century pianists had themselves to shoulder most of the entrepreneurial burden of planning their tours and ‘seasons’. Liszt himself described the ‘tiring and ridiculous effort’ involved; the artist ‘must beg an audience with His Highness the *Impresario* . . . he must present himself to the police commissioner . . . he must negotiate with the gentleman who distributes the posters . . . he must enquire after some errant soprano . . . He spends days and nights climbing staircases that reach as far as the eye can see, scaling boundless heights step by step.’<sup>63</sup> These remarks (and the further descriptions that follow them) nicely convey a sense of the mutual dependencies of roles and functions within the practice to which I referred earlier. Even more crucially, they hint that the focus of the pre-recital practice was not so much an object and concept

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth Hamilton takes the death of Paderewski as a convenient terminal point for the ‘virtuoso tradition’. See his chapter ‘The Virtuoso Tradition’, in David Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 57–74.

<sup>63</sup> *An Artist’s Journey*, pp. 86–7.

(the musical work and its interpretation), as an event (the performance). The repertory and programming practices reflected that distinction, with the borderlines separating categories such as composition, transcription and improvisation by no means clearly demarcated and the formulaic demands of conventional genres in competition with the individuality of the work.

The product of the pre-recital practice was not, then, an interpretation. An interpretation mediates the separate worlds of the composer and the performer, and although it may veer towards one or the other, it remains caught within their force-field. This separation was less obvious in the early nineteenth century, not least because a very high proportion of the pianist's repertory consisted of his or her own music, or alternatively of arrangements and transcriptions of music from other media. To a marked extent, then, there was an immediate identification of the performer with the music performed. The product was a performance rather than an interpretation, a presentation rather than a representation, an act rather than an acted-out concept. Where interpretation played a part its reference point was more to do with general styles than with individual works; it was a component of the product rather than the product itself. And that distinction is vital. A performance, after all, may exemplify or promote many things other than a musical work: a technique, an instrument, a genre, an institution, a direct communicative act. It was in the age of the recital that all of these, including the last, were subordinated to the claims of the work. The tendency of the pre-recital practice, in contrast, was to subordinate the creative to the performative. Moreover, it was a tendency mirrored in some of the values and priorities of the wider cultural world in the early nineteenth century. It is not possible to elaborate on this here, but one may at least offer the pointer that there are stories to tell about how the rise of journalism impacted on literary circles (and their publishing practices), and likewise about how the burgeoning of popular prints began to influence the formal culture of the visual arts.<sup>64</sup>

There was a second sense in which the piano took on special significance in the early nineteenth century, and it was explicitly opposed to the mercantile culture I have just been describing. This second image of the piano highlights aesthetic rather than commercial values, though it is also possible to read it – at least partly – as a means of defining (elitist) social identities and confirming their boundaries. It is more readily associated with Chopin than with Czerny, and is indeed perfectly captured by many a contemporary account of Chopin's salon performances. Already by the 1830s, the piano was gaining ground as the ideal medium through which instrumental music might aspire to the condition of the 'poetic'. In this it touched an essential nerve of the Romantic movement in music. Like earlier keyboard instruments, the piano was of course privileged by its functional range (in a word, its capacity to combine melodic and harmonic roles), but unlike its predecessors it was also deemed to possess a remarkable expressive range and an unprecedented capacity for differentiation and nuance. Attempts to model the new pianism on expressive values represented by the operatic voice and the violin clearly signalled the ambition of the instrument as an agent of expression. There is scarcely a piano method of the early nineteenth century that fails to

<sup>64</sup> See Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt and Baudelaire* (Stanford, 1998), chapter 1.

direct aspiring performers to the opera house as the model for a *bel canto* style of playing, and an appropriate mode of ornamentation. In other words, the piano, paradoxically enough given the nature of its mechanism, became a symbol of the expressive aesthetic that lay close to the heart of an emergent Romanticism. It became the intimate medium through which the Romantic composer, privileged by his genius, could most clearly express himself, whether in improvisation or composition. Through a single instrument, he could make his commitment to subjectivity, translating rhetorical figure to ‘characteristic’ gesture, affective *scopus* to expressive *langage*.

This expressive competence was greatly enhanced by the perceived power of the instrument, even the instrument of the 1830s, and by its self-contained status. Indeed in one sense the rise of the piano recital celebrated precisely these qualities. It was a bold step for any pianist-composer to give a public concert without supporting artists, especially the ubiquitous singers, in the early nineteenth century. Liszt spelt out the novelty of it in a letter to the Princess Belgiojoso in 1839. ‘I dared, for the sake of peace and quiet, to give a series of concerts entirely alone, affecting the style of Louis XIV and saying cavalierly to the public, “Le Concert – c’est moi”’. For the curiosity of the thing, here is the programme of one of these soliloquies.<sup>65</sup> The piano could apparently say everything in its own terms, could contain its own meaning, could embody in itself (in its very name) the symbolic power of contrast. C. P. E. Bach had already privileged the keyboard in this respect: ‘the keyboardist, before all musicians, is especially able *all alone* to practise the declamatory style, that astonishingly swift flight from one affect to another’.<sup>66</sup> He could almost have been describing Chopin, communing with his instrument and independent of all other agencies, as he evoked in rapid juxtaposition the contrasted worlds of pastoral innocence and terrifying aggression in a performance of his second Ballade. The piano, in short, came to be viewed as nothing less than a universal medium of musical experience, capable of translating other musical worlds, including the world of an idealised past, into its own unified terms, ‘transfer[ing] them’, as Liszt said of Chopin, ‘into a more restricted but more idealised sphere’.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, through the resource of transcription, it could effect such translations literally. Again all this resonated with the Romantic ideology, and especially with the ‘autonomy character’ increasingly assigned to music following the rise of aesthetics. An all-important sense of privilege was beginning to attach itself to so-called ‘absolute’ music both in the philosophical aesthetics and in the music criticism of the early nineteenth century, and the piano was its embodiment. Representing as it did a self-contained functional and expressive world, the piano could encourage and promote an already developing sense of music as an art form closed off from the world around it, essentially separate and monadic.

There are two contrasted representations here, even if at a deeper level we might identify the one as a precondition of the other; a mercantile culture does, after all, make possible a project of aesthetic autonomy. And if we argue that Czerny and Chopin draw us to one or the other of these two images of the piano, we might further argue that Liszt leads us to both – to

<sup>65</sup> Williams, *Portrait of Liszt*, p. 110.

<sup>66</sup> See Barth, *The Pianist as Orator*, p. 4, for further comment on this.

<sup>67</sup> Franz Liszt, *F. Chopin*, p. 32.

the ‘real’ piano of a mercantile concert life, and to the ‘ideal’ piano of a symbolic aesthetic universe. Again he himself put it succinctly, describing his efforts to ‘[steer] a course between the Ideal and the Real, without allowing myself to be overly seduced by the former, nor ever to be crushed by the latter’.<sup>68</sup> This quotation can bear closer scrutiny. In the first place it conveys a strong sense of the ethical choices and dilemmas faced by the participants of a pre-recital pianistic practice. I return to my earlier comments on the nature of a practice. As Liszt implies here, the practice demands of its participants the exercise of virtues as well as skills, and virtues are recognised as such in relation to an underlying ethos. It seems to me that Liszt’s quotation actually takes us close to the nature of that ethos for the pre-recital age. Rather than the balance between self-expression and established interpretative forms associated with the age of the recital, the pre-recital practice sought and cultivated a no less delicate balance between the mercantile and the aesthetic values of a developing instrument.

It may be interesting, in light of this tale of two pianos, to attempt some very broad, poster-like characterisations of the journey taken by Liszt through his three sets of etudes. In such an exercise in caricature, the *Etude en douze exercices* would portray him as the youthful pianist-composer, the brilliant prodigy, training in the most rigorous of all post-Classical workshops for a ‘typical’ career on the concert platforms of Europe. The *Grandes Etudes*, on the other hand, would present him as the archetypal Romantic virtuoso, parading and displaying his prodigious talent (and ego), while at the same time responding to that popular taste for the flamboyant, the acrobatic, and even the vulgar associated with the rise of ‘public man’. Finally, the *Etudes d’exécution transcendante* would reveal him as the pioneering composer-thinker, encapsulating through textural and formal simplification and through the addition of poetic titles a much grander vision: a music that draws together transcendental virtuosity and the poetic, while at the same time enacting a kind of withdrawal from the public arena. At this point the rhetoric invades the music. The musical differences between the *Grandes Etudes* and the *Transcendentals* are in some cases relatively slight, and are often motivated as much by pragmatism as by formal or programmatic imperatives. Yet those differences take on new significance in light not just of the titles but of the manifesto implicit in the titles.

These characterisations, distorted but indicative, point to a yet larger history. Like Liszt’s career as a whole, they describe a progression from pianist-composer to pianist and composer, and a related progression from the musical performance to the musical work. Of course the reality was nothing like so pat; more a shift in emphasis between co-existing elements. There was undoubtedly a new direction at (roughly) the mid-century, as the ‘virtuoso years’ made way for the ‘Weimar years’.<sup>69</sup> But there was also continuity. Underlying and bridging the change of agenda was a consistently intimate, almost symbiotic relation between composer and instrument, one characterised by a kind of thinking in sound, or better, intuiting in sound. For Liszt, as for Chopin, musical thoughts were pianistic thoughts, and it was this near-perfect equation of substance and idiom that inaugurated the great era of the piano. Whether displaying or communing, improvising or composing, Liszt thought

<sup>68</sup> *An Artist’s Journey*, p. 88.

<sup>69</sup> The periodisation is Alan Walker’s, describing volumes 1 and 2 of his three-volume biography.

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with his fingers at the keys, and he did so with a fluency as natural as breathing. ‘My piano is myself, my speech, and my life.’<sup>70</sup> The piano was in this sense his ‘premier langage’.<sup>71</sup> The display and the poetry, the trivial exercise and the significant work, the public concert and the private *réunion*: all were a part of the same process, the same intuiting in sound. So too were his many transcriptions from other musical worlds – opera, symphony, *Lied* – and even his ‘translations’ from worlds beyond music – literature, painting, nature. All of these were united in the instrument itself. And on this very fundamental level the two pianos were one.

<sup>70</sup> *An Artist’s Journey*, p. 45.

<sup>71</sup> See Sogny, *L’Admiration Créatrice chez Liszt*, p. 39.