

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND CAREER
OF LOUISE FARRENC

The Nonet in E flat for winds and strings, Op. 38 (1849), is an unusual work in Louise Farrenc's output. It is her only surviving chamber work without piano – her three symphonies and two concert overtures are the only other pieces in her catalog of forty-nine numbered works that do not use the piano – and it was composed for a nonstandard ensemble that combines the woodwind quintet (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn) with four orchestral string instruments (violin, viola, violoncello, and double bass) to create a large chamber ensemble of virtuoso soloists. Unlike the piano trio, string quartet, or even the Parisian salon quintet with double bass,¹ ensemble types that had generated dozens of works since the end of the eighteenth century, to the point that phrases like “piano trio” or “string quartet” indicated not just the ensemble of instruments or players, but a musical genre itself with specific compositional conventions and expectations, the nonet as such was new in the nineteenth century. Although it echoes earlier genres like the divertimento and serenade for winds or for winds and strings, or the “Harmoniemusik” of eighteenth-century aristocratic courts, Farrenc's Nonet belongs to an emergent nineteenth-century concert tradition of large chamber ensembles that had become popular in Paris at the beginning of the century. Septets, octets, and even diecettos (for ten instruments) with and without piano had become important centerpieces for some chamber-music concerts, where they provided a theatrical “hook” for audiences who wanted something that stood apart from the standard trios and quartets on offer at most such events. This specific instrumentation had only two precedents before Farrenc composed her work: the Nonet in F major, Op. 31, composed in 1813 by violinist Louis Spohr (1784–1859) at the request of his Viennese patron Johann von Tost, and the Nonet in A minor, Op. 77, by Farrenc's contemporary George Onslow

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(1784–1853), which he composed for performance by Paris’s Society for Classical Music in 1848.

Farrenc (1804–1875) was at the height of her career as a composer in 1849, riding a wave of critical and public acclaim for her symphonies and chamber music, as well as her solo piano compositions. Celebrated as a “learned” musician and composer of “serious” music, she had earned a reputation over the previous decade as one of Paris’s best composers of the *juste milieu*, or the “middle way” between the old and the new styles. How and why did her specific situation, and that of Paris’s chamber concert scene, lead her to write an esoteric work for wind instruments instead of, for example, a set of string quartets or a piano quartet at this juncture? How did this unusual piece capture the tastes and idiosyncrasies of Parisian audiences at this historical moment, leading it to be her most renowned work, destined to be performed and praised throughout her lifetime despite the challenges it posed (and still poses) to performers and concert organizers?

This handbook invites readers to enter into Farrenc’s musical world in order to explore the Nonet as a work that is simultaneously extraordinary, on the one hand, not only for its craftsmanship and its expressive potency but also by virtue of its unusual instrumentation, while on the other hand being wholly representative of the day-to-day musical culture of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. Chapter 1 begins by setting the scene with a description of Farrenc’s grand solo concert on March 19, 1850, when the Nonet was publicly premiered, so that readers less familiar with the concert conventions and culture of the period will have some sense of what it might have been like to hear this work in the original setting for which it was created. The chapter then recounts the series of events that led up to that performance and made possible the composition and presentation of the Nonet. Throughout the 1840s, Farrenc worked within a network of like-minded musicians (including performers, salonnières, and composers) to expand Parisian interest in instrumental music, especially in genres associated at the time with German composers and with “serious” compositional styles. Histories of music in Paris have tended to focus on musical theater, especially French and Italian opera, and on the culture surrounding virtuoso

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performers, with some discussion of developments in orchestral writing (focused, often, on Hector Berlioz's innovations) and instrument design. These professional activities generally took place in public venues and were often written about in music journals and newspapers, making them "visible" to modern scholars. Chamber music, however, occurred primarily at home and in the semi-private, semi-public space of the salon or the "house concert." A great part of its appeal was the intimate setting and feeling of being included in an event designed for a select few listeners. That setting also meant that it was the special purview of women musicians, who could participate without the stigma associated at that time with putting themselves on public display. During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Louise Farrenc and the circle of professional and semi-professional women performers, composers, and teachers to which she belonged sustained public interest in a growing canon of earlier chamber works from the eighteenth century, and they created or inspired new works that developed that style further. The role that women musicians played in creating an audience for "serious" chamber music in Paris at and after the middle of the century has not yet been fully acknowledged in music history. Even more surprising for modern readers, perhaps, is the role that music for winds played in bringing audiences to these concerts and making these events memorable for critics, thereby preserving them for modern musicians and historians.

Chapter 2, the heart of the book, takes readers through the Nonet movement-by-movement to show how Farrenc used her intimate knowledge of Parisian tastes and her familiarity with the repertoire and conventions of Classical and Romantic music to negotiate changing expectations of listeners and musicians at the mid-century. The Nonet and Farrenc's other chamber works created a bridge between musical traditions that would make possible later innovations in instrumental music by the likes of Gabriel Fauré and César Franck. The analysis in Chapter 2 highlights the playful interactions and dialogue that make the Nonet engaging for performers and listeners, as well as Farrenc's innovative approach to form and structure that mark the Nonet as a consummate work of compositional craft and ingenuity. Chapter 3 concludes the

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Handbook with a discussion of the Nonet's reception and legacy by exploring the ways in which it and Farrenc's other chamber works formed a foundation for critical acclaim in the composer's lifetime but were ultimately forgotten by later generations who were all too happy to push aside composers of the middle decades, characterized as too beholden to a German or Viennese classical past, in their rush to support a nascent French nationalist tradition in the last quarter of the century.

Before turning to the Nonet, though, we should consider how Louise Farrenc came to be one of the most celebrated pianist-composers of mid-century Paris and the roles that Paris's early nineteenth-century musical culture, its institutions, and the people associated with them played in her development as an artist and musician. The discussion that follows draws upon earlier scholarship by Bea Friedland, Catherine Legras, and Christin Heitmann, while also offering for the first time English translations of important reviews and responses to Farrenc and her music published during and after her lifetime as well as new analysis of these in the context of Paris's complex musical culture.² However, the available record of Farrenc's life remains frustratingly incomplete and scattered at the time of this writing, as Heitmann noted twenty years ago in her book on Farrenc's chamber and orchestral music.³ Bea Friedland's 1980 book (based on her 1975 dissertation) remains the best biographical source and the only one in English, but it contains errors and omissions awaiting correction. Louise Farrenc's (documented) surviving correspondence includes just eighteen letters in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, but Heitmann also cites twelve letters preserved in various German and Austrian archives. None of these are currently available to the public online or in published/translated editions (and they are not provided in full in either Friedland's or Heitmann's book). Revelations like these indicate that a more thorough search for sources among Aristide and Louise Farrenc's known contacts is still needed in order to get a complete picture of the couple's life and work. In the meantime, the information we do have about Louise Farrenc and her career entices us to learn as much as we can about this fascinating composer.

The Virtuoso Pianist-Composer of the 1820s–1830s

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Born in 1804 into a family of artists employed by the French crown, or the French government during France's Republican years, Jeanne-Louise Dumont grew up in an artistic community housed together in apartments owned by the state nearby to the Sorbonne. She initially studied piano with a family friend, and when she showed a precocious talent for solfège and composition in addition to performance, she was allowed to study privately with composer Anton Reicha, who was employed as a professor of counterpoint and harmony at the Paris Conservatoire du Musique, or Conservatory. Her family's devotion to art and craftsmanship alongside its relatively secure middle-class status meant that Jeanne-Louise had opportunities and support to pursue her craft professionally, unlike women born into more elevated social strata, such as Fanny Mendelssohn, or women born into lower status without the financial resources or time to pursue further studies. Because Jeanne-Louise was the younger of just two children and her parents were securely middle-class, she likely had few if any household duties and did not need to earn an income as a child laborer, maid, or governess to help support her family. In this way, we could say that she grew up in a sort of social "sweet spot" for artistic development. At the same time, her parents seem to have had no expectation that she would take up the life of a touring virtuoso, as many young musicians (men and women) did in the early nineteenth century, often with prompting from teachers and/or family members who sought to capitalize on their status as prodigies (such as Clara Wieck Schumann and, to a lesser extent, Carl Maria von Weber). Rather, Louise studied with local teachers and took full advantage of Paris's thriving music culture to gain further knowledge of contemporaneous musical tastes and traditions. According to a biographical sketch published in 1866, she consulted with pianists Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Nepomuk Hummel about her technique as a young woman, but there's no evidence to suggest that she studied formally with either of them.⁴ (Both artists spent significant time in Paris during the 1820s, and Hummel became a family friend and professional colleague;

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Louise's husband Aristide Farrenc published many of Hummel's compositions in the 1830s.)

Jeanne-Louise's early years coincided with the "Napoleonic" wars that eventually engulfed the entire European continent and spilled into colonial holdings and disputed territories in North Africa, the Middle East, and North America. Despite the turmoil occurring on the larger world stage, the situation in Paris was relatively secure, in part because the city and its artistic institutions served Bonaparte's mission to project imperial authority and the efficiency of centralized power in the capital. Indeed, the Napoleonic years offered Paris's middle and upper classes a renewed sense of stability and luxury after the violence of the Revolution and its aftermath, and this led to increased opportunities for local musicians. The first decades of the century saw a return of opulent church music, which had been banned during the revolutionary era, and grand theatrical productions that celebrated a triumphant national French identity and revolutionary valor.⁵ After Napoleon's abdication and final defeat in 1815, the Bourbon Restoration brought émigrés back to France; many musicians who had fled to cities like London or Vienna returned to Paris, where they now founded schools, factories for instrument making, publishing houses, and concert series. The music industry flourished in Paris during the 1820s, driven in part by the "Rossini craze" that generated a wave of new compositions, arrangements, parodies, and souvenir editions of excerpts from the Italian operas being performed at the Théâtre-Italien and at other theaters throughout Paris's suburbs. Rossini himself spent the years 1824–1829 in the capital, where he not only led new performances of Italian favorites but also created French versions of his recent works and composed new operas specifically for the French stage, such as the opéra comique *Le Comte Ory* in 1828 and *Guillaume Tell* in 1829. He brought Giacomo Meyerbeer to Paris in 1824 to stage that composer's heroic opera *Il Crociato in Egitto*. During the 1830s, Rossini, Meyerbeer, and Daniel Auber developed a new operatic style ("French Grand Opera") that would have a far-reaching impact throughout Europe and North America for the next several decades.

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Jeanne-Louise developed her musical instincts and compositional skill in this climate of sumptuousness, in which lavish opera productions coexisted with simpler sentimental romances by popular composers like Loïsa Puget (1810–1889) and August Panseron (1796–1859), and an expanding culture of virtuoso salon and concert performances brought these two modes of expression together for an adoring public. Her early compositions show her to be an inventive creator of popular virtuoso works, well versed in the dominant piano styles and genres of her day, but not a slavish imitator of others. In 1821, when she was seventeen years old, Jeanne-Louise married the flutist, composer, and publisher Aristide Farrenc (1794–1865), who would prove to be a supportive partner and collaborator on musical projects. Aristide encouraged his wife to continue her studies with Reicha, to publish her compositions (her early works were published by his firm), and to perform publicly. Louise Farrenc, as she would be known from then on, published one of her own compositions for the first time in 1822, when Aristide's firm issued her *Variations brillantes* on a theme by Aristide, Op. 2. By 1825, she had published a series of quadrilles – a social dance popular in the parlors and salons of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century – based on melodies from popular operas of the early 1820s. (Aristide Farrenc's firm published them without opus numbers in 1825; they paraphrased melodies from C. M. von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Meyerbeer's *Il Crociato in Egitto*. Around 1830 she also published a set of quadrilles on national airs.⁶) In the next fifteen years, she would compose and publish over twenty solo piano works in the virtuoso style, mostly sets of variations and rondos. About half of these were based on popular opera melodies being heard in Paris's theaters and salons at the time, including Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and *Zelmire*; Bellini's *Il Pirata*, *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, and *Norma*; Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*; George Onslow's *Le Colporteur*; Weber's *Euryanthe*; and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. The majority of Farrenc's piano compositions in these years were issued in simultaneous editions by Aristide's firm in Paris and by various international publishers: J. Duff in London, Peters in Leipzig, Simrock in Bonn,

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Aible in Munich, and Böhme in Hamburg. In this decade, Farrenc also made arrangements of popular works by pianists Henri Herz and Franz Hüntten, primarily for German publishers. These arrangements gave her further insight into the virtuoso techniques of her day, which she would then use in her own compositions, in addition to building her reputation with publishers and audiences. Her original compositions published in the 1830s often bore dedications to important patrons and performers in Farrenc's growing network of French musicians; the majority of these honor other women, mostly pianists. Farrenc dedicated two works to the salon hostess and piano teacher Sophie Pierson-Bodin (1819–1874), who was her only dedicatee to receive multiple dedications: the *Variations sur une galopade favorite hongroise*, Op. 12 (1833) and the *Trente Études dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*, Op. 26 (1839). Farrenc also dedicated her *Variations brillantes sur la cavatine d'Anna Bolena de Donizetti*, op. 15 (1835) to the composer and pianist Leopoldine Blahetka (1809–1885), a child prodigy who had established a virtuoso career in Vienna, then gave several tours throughout Europe in the next two decades; she and her family moved to France in 1830. Farrenc's dedications of her published works to fellow professional women musicians like these, as opposed to wealthy amateurs, helped her to build and sustain a network of professional women in Paris and its environs. That ever-expanding network would support and sustain her throughout her career, and she would use it to lift up other young women, including her pupils, over the next several decades.

The first mention in the press of Louise Farrenc as a performer comes from January 1828, when she and Aristide played in a soirée hosted by the piano manufacturer Jean-Henri Pape. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was common for instrument builders to host concert series in specially built recital halls or large salons at their homes or factories. These allowed them to build and maintain collaborative relationships with artists who would purchase and promote their instruments and to demonstrate the latest developments in instrument design and manufacture. Demonstrating the reciprocal relationship between builders and players of instruments, reviews of major concerts in these years frequently mention the

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piano builder who provided instruments for the evening's performance and praised new features that enhanced the sound. During her lifetime, Farrenc and her students would play at the Salle Pleyel, the Salle Érard, and the Salle Saxe, in addition to private salons and larger theaters. The program at Pape's soirée opened with a *Fantaisie* for flute and piano "composed and executed by Monsieur and Madame Farrenc," and Louise performed with Hieronymus (Jérôme) Payer a set of variations for two pianos (composed by Payer) in the concert's second half.⁷

Two years later, in July 1830, the Farrencs gave a major concert featuring works by their friend Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837), who also played an improvisation at the end of the concert. The announcement and subsequent review in the *Revue musicale* described the event as a concert "given by Mme Farrenc," probably because she appeared on the program as featured pianist in the ensemble work that opened the concert and as piano soloist later in the evening.⁸ The recurring columns "News from Paris" and "News from the departments" were typically unsigned, but the reviewer was probably François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871), who had founded the *Revue musicale* in 1827. Fétis served as both editor and head critic for the journal, and he wrote lead articles for it that presented his original research into the history of music and the science of sound. (In 1835, the *Revue musicale* merged with a musical newspaper published by Maurice Schlesinger, and the resulting *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* became one of the most important journals devoted to concert music in France until it ceased publication in 1880.) Fétis was a friend and colleague of Aristide Farrenc, who would work with him on musicological studies and historical concerts until Aristide's death in 1865.⁹ Fétis championed Louise Farrenc's orchestral compositions in Brussels after he moved to that city in 1833 to become director of the Royal Conservatory of Brussels.

The July 1830 review described Louise Farrenc's performance using language that would become common in discussions of her and her works over the next decade:

This young lady, who through serious studies acquired on the piano a very distinguished talent, was able to resist the frivolous taste which has made this

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instrument a mechanical one, where only the agility of the fingers is noticed, and the genius of the artist is not taken into account. She has followed [instead] the road traced by Hummel, Moscheles, Kalkbrenner and seems destined to obtain honorable successes there. She was justly applauded in an unpublished military septet by Hummel [Op. 114 published in 1831], as well as in a rondo and in an adagio by this master.¹⁰

The association of Farrenc and her music with “serious study” and with an apparent refusal to succumb to mere “frivolity” and “mechanical” virtuosic display would become an important aspect of her public persona. As with other women pianists of her generation, critics valued Farrenc’s adherence to a classical ideal of restraint and balance in her programming and performance, noting that she played with greater understanding and depth than lesser (usually unnamed) contemporaries.¹¹ Significantly, the Hummel Military Septet that was premiered on this concert is a mixed large-ensemble work for piano, flute, clarinet, trumpet, violin, violoncello, and double bass. Because it was a newly composed work by a popular and well-respected composer and because of its unusual and characteristic instrumentation – the interplay of trumpet and other winds suggested military bands for contemporaneous listeners, and Hummel used them to good effect with fanfares and other martial topics that capitalized on this association – the work made a strong impression on listeners and critics. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, chamber music concerts included works like this, at least in part, to capture the attention of Parisian audiences through novelty and variety of timbres. That the Farrencs recognized this useful aspect of wind chamber music already in their 1830 debut concert points forward to Louise’s engagement with wind players later in her career up to and beyond the creation of her Nonet.

A few days after Louise Farrenc’s successful 1830 concert, Parisians took to the streets to protest the July Ordinances, a set of restrictive laws enacted by Charles X’s government in an attempt to hold onto power despite increased opposition to its conservative policies from progressive representatives in the Parliament. The July Revolution, also known as the “Three Glorious Days,” established a new constitutional monarchy in France. The crown moved from the Bourbon family to the house