

SEDUCING PARIS: PIANO VIRTUOSOS AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY, 1820-48

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ABSTRACT

ALICIA CANNON LEVIN: *Seducing Paris: Pianos Virtuosos and Artistic Identity, 1820-48*
(Under the direction of Annegret Fauser)

Cultural, musical, and even erotic icons of the 1830s, pianists such as Franz Liszt and Fryderyk Chopin ignited Parisian audiences with their spectacular virtuosity, physical appearance, and flamboyant showmanship. Their audiences responded with a fanatical devotion like that lavished on modern-day celebrities, who owe their charismatic personae in some measure to the cultural paths blazed by these early Parisian idols of the keyboard. Indeed, from the period of Liszt's sojourn in Paris (1824-48) emerged influential attitudes and practices that shaped nineteenth- and twentieth-century musical life the world over.

In the early 1820s, virtuoso musicians flocked to Paris to establish their careers and their fortunes, directing their attention to the audiences that populated public concert halls. Pianists in particular began to craft their public images with the same care that they lavished on their art, self-consciously engaging with audience tastes, social context, and intellectual and musical ideals to project images that appealed to the audiences of musical Paris. The virtuosity of these musicians extended beyond the keyboard into social, practical, and ideological realms, and their activities influenced more than the immediate reception of their music: their larger-than-life exploits also shaped subsequent accounts of music history. This study examines how such virtuosos as Chopin, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Liszt, Marie Pleyel (the "female Liszt"), and Émile Prudent, constructed their identities and launched their careers in Paris. Drawing on a wide range of primary sources, including journalistic accounts,

personal papers, iconography, and archives records from concert halls and piano manufacturers, this dissertation investigates largely uncharted issues of concert life, gender, nationalism, and aesthetics in Parisian musical life.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

SEDUCING PARIS: PIANO VIRTUOSOS AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY, 1820-1848

On 6 April 1845, the witty *salonnière* and gossip columnist Delphine de Girardin published, as usual, her bi-weekly observations about the life of the upper crust in Paris. She wrote:

This week was the week of the pianists. Each day was designated for one of their names. One spoke of nothing but the piano, quality of sound, style and method; there were never-ending quarrels. Each defended his virtuoso. One of those evenings, when the discussions had reached a near-fury, an enlightened and capable judge ended them by this amusing definition which had everyone agree:

At the piano,
Thalberg is a king,
Liszt is a prophet,
Chopin is a poet,
Herz is a lawyer,
Kalkbrenner is a minstrel,
Madame Pleyel is a sibyl
Döhler is a pianist.¹

Captured in Girardin's commentary are the spirit of the spring concert season in Paris and the essence of the virtuoso experience. In 1845, as they did every year, the piano virtuosos of Europe descended on Paris to give concert after concert during the months of March and

¹ "Cette semaine était la semaine des pianistes: chaque jour a été désigné par un de leurs noms. On n'a parlé que piano, qualité de son, style et méthode: c'étaient des querelles à n'en plus finir. Chacun défendait son virtuose. Un soir, entre autres, que les discussions étaient arrivées presque à la fureur, un juge éclairé et compétent les a terminées par cette définition plaisante qui a mis tout le monde d'accord: au piano, Thalberg est un roi, / Liszt est un prophète, / Chopin est un poète, / Herz est un avocat, / Kalkbrenner [*sic*] est un ménestrel, / Madame Pleyel est une sibylle, / Dohler [*sic*] est un pianiste" (Delphine de Girardin, *Lettres parisiennes du vicomte de Launay*, ed. Anne Martin-Fugier [Paris: Mercure de France, 1986], 406). This article was originally published in *La Presse*, 6 April 1845.

April. Every spring, the music critics devoted their columns, usually reserved for opera reviews, to coverage of the public concerts that enthralled Parisian audiences. The piano-makers prepared their latest instruments, and music publishers issued opera fantasies on the current hits. And every spring, spectators came from all over the city to witness the dazzling feats of virtuosity that dominated conversations in the salon, in the newspaper, and even in the street. Indeed, hundreds, if not thousands, of European artists, writers, and musicians flocked to Paris in the 1820s and 1830s, searching for fame and fortune in the cultural life of “the capital of the nineteenth century.” Key figures of musical Romanticism, including pianists Fryderyk Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Marie Pleyel, singers Maria Malibran, Adolphe Nourrit, Giovanni Rubini, and Pauline Viardot, instrumentalists Auguste Franchomme and Niccolò Paganini, and composers Hector Berlioz, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Gioachino Rossini, and Richard Wagner, performed for French society during this period of intense socio-cultural engagement.

Girardin’s “enlightened judge” and his tongue-in-cheek summary of the raging salon debates illuminate perhaps the most fundamental aspect of the virtuoso craze that swept the July Monarchy. Not only did these pianists showcase pianos, techniques, and sonic experiments, but they also did so with fiercely individual *panache*. A musician’s professional success rested at least in part on his or her ability to meet both the cultural and the aesthetic expectations of Parisian society: to be “prophets,” “kings,” and “sibyls” as well as extraordinary musicians. Cultural, musical, and even erotic icons of the 1830s, pianists such as Liszt and Chopin ignited Parisian audiences with their spectacular virtuosity as well as their physical appearance and flamboyant showmanship. Their audiences responded with a fanatical devotion like that lavished on modern-day celebrities. All modern performers,

from Prince and Madonna to Ravi Shankar and Lang Lang, owe their charismatic personae in some measure to the cultural paths blazed by these early Parisian idols of the keyboard. Yet the fascinating relationship that exists between today's music-making and the context of mid-nineteenth-century Paris is largely absent from contemporary scholarship. My study illuminates the complex interrelation of social and musical cultures from which emerged the influential attitudes and practices that shaped nineteenth- and twentieth-century musical life the world over.

As the effects of the 1789 Revolution continued to resonate in French culture, social concerns focused on reforming the *ancien-régime* aristocracy to reflect contemporary political and cultural ideals.² Music performances provided a crucial catalyst in this process. Whether public concerts, exclusive salon *soirées*, or purely domestic events, they created a space in which individuals of different economic and social classes could mingle.³ The social element of musical events required the performers' attention as well; audiences of different class, gender, nationality, political affiliation, and musical preference invited musicians to assume a variety of roles, including teacher, virtuoso, composer, critic, Romantic hero/heroine, and socialite, to name just a few. Parisian music critics gradually gained authority with the concert-going public after 1789, debating issues of aesthetics, repertoire, and performance styles in daily papers and newly established music journals.

In this environment was born the paradoxical Romantic artist, a public figure who simultaneously required and rejected audience input. Though fundamentally dependent on

² William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna, 1830-48*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

³ For example, the salon provided a venue in which marriageable young women could be presented before potential suitors in a discreet, yet advantageous way through singing or playing the piano.

the financial support of both elite and bourgeois society, musicians created the illusion of independence from social and financial concerns to exemplify the intellectual ideals of Romanticism.⁴ The political and social climate of 1820s Paris enabled musicians for the first time to generate these illusions themselves through personal behavior, professional activities, and musical style and composition.⁵

The figure of the virtuoso pianist-composer stands out as a particularly intriguing player in the theater of Parisian musical life. Perhaps more so than any other, the pianist had the potential to interact with French audiences on a social level, for the instrument itself occupied a central position in non-public music-making as well. A symbol of luxury among the upper classes, the piano was favored by amateurs, connoisseurs, and the social elite, who hired virtuosos to teach, compose, and, above all, perform.⁶ The versatility of the instrument lent itself to most repertoire of the period, allowing the pianist to assume the roles of soloist, accompanist, and even an orchestra. Examining the careers of these virtuoso pianists facilitates the exploration of some uncharted areas of concert life, gender, patronage, and aesthetics in the musical culture of Paris between Liszt's debut of 1824 and the politically decisive events of 1848.

⁴ See Dana Gooley, "Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso as Strategist," in *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*, ed. William Weber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 144-45.

⁵ To be sure, canonical composers like Haydn and Beethoven certainly had artistic identities—but these identities were crafted largely by their critics, audiences, and historians; see, for example, Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

⁶ In the 1820s, technological advancements continued to transform the instrument, most notably Sébastien Érard's patent for the double-escapement action in 1821. Pianos were prohibitively expensive for lower bourgeois families, as the purchase of even a small instrument amounted to the annual salary of clerks and small shopkeepers; therefore, only the former aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie could afford to purchase the instrument; see Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

In this study, I confront the rich nexus of musical and cultural practices in nineteenth-century Europe and its legacy in today's popular culture by tracing the development of the Romantic piano virtuoso in the dynamic milieu of post-revolutionary Paris. Because the interaction of the piano virtuoso with Parisian society far exceeded that of any other musician, investigating the roles played by these entrepreneurial musicians (virtuoso, composer, pedagogue, impresario, critic, publisher, socialite, aristocrat) and the products that they sold (from musical scores to social favors) therefore offers a unique perspective on the transformation of French culture in the mid-nineteenth century as well as the influence of that culture on the development of modern musical life. Whether public concerts, exclusive parties, or domestic events, musical performances created a space in which individuals of different economic and social classes could mingle and in which *ancien-régime* institutions could be transformed to meet post-Revolutionary expectations and aesthetics. The ambiguous relationships between public and private spaces and between popular and high culture also allowed for the restructuring of musical life. My study exposes the symbiotic relationship of musico-cultural practices that emerge from the reception and commodification of the virtuoso.

Professional success in popular culture—whether the setting be nineteenth-century Paris or twenty-first-century New York—depends at least in part on the musician's ability to fulfill the expectations of his or her audiences not only by flaunting their musical skills but also by tackling practical business problems and ideological debates in a multifaceted social arena. Liszt, perhaps the greatest virtuoso of all, once declared in the spirit of Louis XIV: “*I am the concert.*” Behind the arrogance of his statement lies a grain of truth: for Liszt and the legendary pianists who converged on Paris, success required the performance of socio-

cultural components as well as musical ones. The 1820s witnessed the emergence of the virtuoso as a public figure. Usually male, foreign, and discovered as child prodigies, these figures took on many contrasting forms in the 1830s: from the sensitive poet to the flamboyant showman, the haughty aristocrat to the charming peasant, the international icon to the naturalized expatriate. By the early 1840s, the Romantic virtuoso had become a firmly established presence in Parisian social life, enabling French-born and female pianists, previously unable to overcome the foreign male stereotype, to appropriate and modify its characteristics in their bids for fame and fortune.

Because the strategies employed by virtuosos in presenting their music were intrinsically linked to the expectations of their audiences, I also examine the broader context of Parisian and European culture. It is impossible to overestimate the centrality of music in the cultural life of nineteenth-century Europe and especially in France; musicians and music-lovers interacted with the primary political and artistic figures of the Restoration and July Monarchy within the context of the salon and the public theater. Consequently, the practice of music is inextricably linked to contemporary intellectual movements, from theater and dance to literature and art, and from education and politics to economics and science. The discourses of Romanticism and nationalism, along with the shifting gender and class structures that characterized July Monarchy society, also reflect and are reflected in strategies and reception of musical performance. Furthermore, the self-titled “capital of the nineteenth century” attracted artists, scientists, intellectuals, and aristocrats from all over the world. By tackling the intersections of music and culture in this city, my study delves into the connected histories of nineteenth-century France and Western popular culture.

Methodology and State of Research

I approach these broader topics of nineteenth-century Parisian musical life through particularly striking episodes in its unfolding. As the work of Edward Berenson, Robert Darnton, Katharine Ellis, and Annegret Fauser demonstrates, “an approach to the past through one exemplary event or person” can yield fascinating results.⁷ A “thick description” of a single occasion may significantly enrich interpretation of its context on the one hand, “tracing the relationship of a particular event to its areas of wider significance,” while “allowing us insight into the forces which affected the figures at the center of the story” on the other.⁸ Nineteenth-century Paris lends itself particularly well to this kind of analysis. As the center of French social and musical life and the symbolic capital of Europe, Paris incubated a thriving musical culture that drew on contemporary cosmopolitan trends and, in turn, influenced the development of musical practices throughout Western Europe.⁹

Examining how individual pianists approached Paris through a micro-historical lens sheds light not only on each musician and his or her immediate Parisian context but also on the iconic figure of the piano virtuoso and the cultural factors that shaped and were shaped by it. Each chapter analyzes a specific event in Paris—such as Liszt’s 1824 debut or the confluence of virtuoso compositions following the premiere of Bellini’s opera *Norma*—from two perspectives. First, I investigate the strategies of the pianist/composer in addressing the

⁷ Edward Berenson, *The Trail of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 8. See also Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1984); Katharine Ellis, “The Fair Sax: Women, Brass-Playing and the Instrument Trade in 1860s Paris,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 124 (1999): 221-54; and Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

⁸ Ellis, “The Fair Sax,” 223.

⁹ On Paris as a cultural and political center during the nineteenth century, see Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

demands of the Parisian market before turning to the critical and popular reception of their work, identifying how cultural practices shaped the historiography of nineteenth-century music. While the subject is focused on music, I incorporate strategies from the fields of gender studies, reception theory, cultural studies, historical ethnography, and aesthetics to contribute to a cross-disciplinary scholarly discourse.

Historians William Weber and James H. Johnson have laid the foundation for this study in their work on the cultural history of nineteenth-century musical Paris.¹⁰ Weber's work examines audience constituency and concert programming to show how musical forums allowed class divisions to be redefined during the July Monarchy. Johnson identifies a shift in attitude concerning the purpose of music that occurred in France between 1770 and 1830, concluding that music's role in Parisian culture became increasingly independent of earlier social structures (i.e. aristocratic patronage). Both studies present historical narratives that weave together first-hand accounts, historical records, and secondary literature, but do not confront individual strategies of successful—or unsuccessful—figures.

Scholars have addressed the political and social climate of the Restoration and the July Monarchy, the institutions of Parisian opera and concert life, musical aesthetics of the early nineteenth century, and the individual careers of iconic musicians.¹¹ Essays concerning

¹⁰ James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*.

¹¹ François Furet, *Revolutionary France, 1770-1880*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Ralph P. Locke, "Paris: Centre of Intellectual Ferment (1789–1852)," in *The Early Romantic Era, Between Revolutions: 1789 and 1848*, ed. Alexander Ringer, 32-83 (London: Prentice Hall, 1990); Jean Mongrédien, *French Music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, 1789-1830*, ed. Reinhard G. Pauly, trans. Sylvain Frémaux (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996); Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Schirmer, 1996); Mark Everist, *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sounds of Modern Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and David Cairns, *Berlioz*, vol. 1: *The Making of an Artist, 1803-1832* (London: Cardinal, 1990); vol. 2: *Servitude and Greatness, 1832-1869* (1999).

aspects of musical life and major figures of the 1820s and 1830s reside in a major volume devoted to this period, edited by Peter Bloom.¹² This volume only hints at the breadth of a rich musical culture, while other studies address specific subjects with great detail, including the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, the Paris Conservatoire, French chamber-music societies, and Parisian musical criticism.¹³ Such in-depth research will provide a foundation for an investigation of larger cultural issues, including self-representation, virtuosity, improvisation, child prodigy, and gender.

A central concern of this dissertation is the historiography of the Romantic artist. As Jim Samson notes in his aptly-titled essay “Myth and Reality,” a fundamental problem of music biography stems from scholarly attempts to mediate between a composer’s “singular creative activity and the social existence of his music, building plural layers of receptional insight which have influenced the understanding of determinate groups at particular times.”¹⁴ Over time, a network of legends and anecdotes was woven around such famous figures as Chopin and Liszt by their contemporaries and later nineteenth-century biographers. The details of their mythologized biographies have not only crept into twentieth- and twenty-first-century accounts of music history, but have also shaped current views of the trajectory of

¹² Peter Bloom, ed., *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1987); and François Lesure and Joël-Marie Fauquet, eds., *La Musique à Paris en 1830-1831* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1983).

¹³ D. Kern Holoman, *The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, 1828-1967* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Joël-Marie Fauquet, *Les Sociétés de musique de chambre à Paris de la Restauration à 1870* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1986); Anne Bongrain, Yves Gérard, and Alain Poirier, eds., *Le Conservatoire de Paris, 1795-1995*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions du Buchet/Chastel, 1996-1999); Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834-80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jeremy D. Popkin, *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France, 1830-1835* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); and Mary Ann Smart and Roger Parker, eds., *Reading Critics Readings: Opera and Ballet Criticism from the Revolution to 1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Jim Samson, “Myth and Reality: A Biographical Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

musical development since the nineteenth century. Scholars have begun to deconstruct these myths, but the fact that the artists themselves were responsible for creating them often goes unacknowledged. A notable exception is Dana Gooley's 2004 monograph on "the virtuoso Liszt," which frankly assesses Liszt's strategic manipulation of social acquaintances, professional colleagues, and personal skills in pursuit of his career goals.¹⁵ Likewise, Jeffrey Kallberg situates Chopin's compositional strategies outside the romanticization that characterizes most approaches to his music, looking instead to issues of gender, genre, and nationalism.¹⁶

On the whole, the study of early- and mid-nineteenth-century pianism remains heavily influenced on the one hand by biographies, memoirs, and treatises that began to emerge in the nineteenth century, and by the pedagogical traditions surrounding the piano on the other. These documents perpetuate (deliberately or not) many of the myths that continue to cloud the study of July-Monarchy Paris.¹⁷ The return to primary source materials provides an essential point of departure for my dissertation, which allows me to question the foundation on which such apparently factual information is based. I turn therefore to the work of Katharine Ellis and Kallberg for a model of how to explicate cultural tropes associated with music and musical practices. Their studies serve as a gateway into the issues

¹⁵ Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Maiko Kawabata, "Virtuosity, the Violin, the Devil...: What Really Made Paganini 'Demonic?'" *Current Musicology* 83 (2007): 85-108.

¹⁶ Also relevant to my work is Kallberg's "Chopin in the Marketplace," a detailed study of variants in Chopin's published works that explores not only how simultaneous editions differ but also how these variants reflect Chopin's navigation of the music publishing business. (Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992])

¹⁷ See, for example, Alan Walker's three-volume biography of Liszt. While impeccably researched, Walker's interpretations often perpetuate the myths of Liszt's earliest biographers; see Walker, *Franz Liszt*, vol. 1: *Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983); vol. 2: *The Weimar Years, 1848-1861* (1989); vol. 3: *The Final Years, 1861-1886* (1996).

of how pianists may have constructed their public identities to fit a specific niche—and how their identities (or lack thereof) may have been represented and misrepresented for them in writings of the late July Monarchy. Two additional volumes, Gooley’s series of case studies centered on Liszt and his professional machinations and a collection of essays edited by Weber on the subject of “musician as entrepreneur,” also propose useful models for the examination of the careers of nineteenth-century artists.¹⁸

My study contributes new research on the careers and music of many significant figures of nineteenth-century French musical life, among them Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Émile Prudent, Sigismond Thalberg, and Pleyel. Though once touted as the finest performers and composers of the day, these musicians (for a variety of reasons) have since been exiled to the footnotes of other figures deemed more significant. Equally biased accounts of their exploits also reside in highly-colored histories of the piano.¹⁹ Pleyel’s absence from music history is particularly striking, for, as accounts of her playing demonstrate, Pleyel was one of very few women that participated in the public arena as a virtuoso pianist. As Ellis and Katherine Kolb Reeve have shown, the French critical reception of Pleyel’s musicianship suggests that her position in French musical life was similar to that of Clara Schumann in German-speaking lands.²⁰ A revision of her biography is long overdue. Lisa Yui’s 2005 dissertation has uncovered some details of Pleyel’s life, but they remain colored by assumptions about

¹⁸ Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*; and William Weber, ed., *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Among nineteenth-century sources, see Antoine Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres: silhouettes et médailles* (Paris: A. Chaix et Cie, 1878) and François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860-65). In the twentieth century, see Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); and Reginald G. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Technique*, 3rd ed. (New York: R. B. Luce, 1990).

²⁰ Reeve, “Primal Scenes: Smithson, Pleyel, and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz,” *19th-Century Music* 18 (1995): 211-35; and Ellis, “Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 353-85.

Pleyel's personality and femininity.²¹ Her status as a female virtuoso will also allow for a discussion of how gender factored into the creation of an artistic identity and a professional career.

My investigation of pianists' strategies of self-representation will engage with aesthetic issues specifically associated with nineteenth-century pianism, namely improvisation, genre, and virtuosity. The ways in which Chopin, Liszt, and Pleyel constructed their artistic identities will in part be illuminated by their published compositions and reports of their concert repertoire. For pianists, these issues were critical elements of a positive reception by Parisian audiences in the early nineteenth century. As yet, no comprehensive study of nineteenth-century improvisation exists, although several scholars have addressed individual facets of improvisatory practices.²² With regard to piano improvisation, these studies are only just beginning to extend beyond musical concerns, generally focusing on the physiological aspects of musical technique or connections in music theory.²³ Likewise, a study of the genre of the opera fantasy with regard to its socio-musical

²¹ Lisa Yui, "Marie Pleyel" (DMA diss., Manhattan School of Music, 2005).

²² See, for example, Valerie Woodring Goertzen, "By Way of Introduction: Preluding by 18th- and Early 19th-Century Pianists," *Journal of Musicology* 14 (1996): 299-337; and Shane Levesque, "Functions and Performance Practice of Improvised Nineteenth-Century Piano Preludes," in "Improvisation—Analytical, Theoretical, and Critical Approaches," ed. Steven Vande Moortele, special issue, *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 13 (2008): 109-116.

²³ Bruno Nettl, ed., *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). For recent approaches to the study of improvisation, see the proceedings of the 2007 meeting of the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory; selected presentations are published in "Improvisation—Analytical, Theoretical, and Critical Approaches," ed. Steven Vande Moortele, special issue, *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 13 (2008). The conference program illuminates fascinating parallels across culture and time, yet the proceedings illustrate how the study of improvisation remains confined to a theoretical, analytical approach. For similar approaches, see Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Jeff Pressing, "Improvisation: Methods and Models," in *Generative Processes in Music: The Psychology of Performance, Improvisation, and Composition*, ed. John A. Sloboda, 129-78 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). A lively discussion can also be found in philosophy; see Philip Alperson, "On Musical Improvisation," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984): 17-29; and "Improvisation in the Arts," ed. Garry Hagberg, special issue, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (2000).

context is long overdue. Only Charles Suttoni's 1973 dissertation approaches the genre as one worthy of scholarly analysis, in spite of the opera fantasy's central role in music consumption in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁴

Virtuosity in particular stands as an evasive concept. As Cécile Reynaud's fascinating exegesis of its historiography shows, its meanings shift from century to century, ranging from aesthetic values, musical practices, and compositional devices.²⁵ Exploring sources from Plato to the nineteenth-century French press, she analyzes how virtuosity could be at once a creative act and an abhorred gimmick. In his study of Liszt's *Etudes d'exécution transcendante*, Jim Samson addresses virtuosity as an aesthetic issue, creating an opposition between virtuosity and improvisation on the one hand and the concept of a composed work on the other.²⁶ The work of Gooley and Maiko Kawabata investigates the complex network of social and musical practices with which the performance and reception of virtuosity can be analyzed.²⁷ In this study, I continue such work by examining the sale of virtuosity, which required a virtuoso command of socio-cultural networks, expectations, and self-representation as well as musical performance.

²⁴ Charles Suttoni, "Piano and Opera: A Study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the Romantic Era" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1973). While studies of the opera fantasy are few and far between, the free fantasy has been examined by Kenneth DeLong, "J.V. Voříšek and the Fantasy," in *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference: St. Louis, 1988*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, 119-214 (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1988); Jesse Parker, "The Clavier Fantasy from Mozart to Liszt: A Study in Style and Content" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1974); and Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Cécile Reynaud, *Liszt et le virtuose romantique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006).

²⁶ Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Franz Liszt and his World*, ed. Christopher Gibbs and Gooley, 73-111 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Maiko Kawabata, "Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789-1830)," *19th-Century Music* 28 (2004): 89-107.

Musical Life and the Piano in Restoration and July Monarchy Paris

Perhaps the most significant character in this narrative is the city of Paris itself. I begin with the last decade of the Bourbon Restoration and conclude with the fall of the Louis-Philippe's July Monarchy in 1848, a particularly fruitful period during which the leaders of French Romanticism pondered over and published some of the most cherished literature, philosophy, art, and music of the nineteenth century. How and why so many chose Paris as their destination resulted from a confluence of socio-political factors that reinforced an already-existing belief: that Paris was the capital of Europe, and indeed, in the words of Walter Benjamin, of the nineteenth century.²⁸ The largest city in Europe, Parisian intellectuals circulated in a relatively free arena permitted by Louis-Philippe's philosophy of *juste-milieu* (middle-ground) governance. Its history of *ancien-régime* luxury, culture, and revolutionary fervor combined to give Paris the near-mythic aura of a political and cultural Mecca.²⁹

Virtuosos entering Paris for the first time found a musical community dominated by opera. Over the course of the three decades in question, this shifted from the Théâtre-Italien's presentations of Rossini and Donizetti in the 1820s to French grand opera mounted in the 1830s and 1840s by the Académie Royale de Musique.³⁰ For French composers, and foreign composers hoping to establish a career in Paris, mounting a successful opera was an

²⁸ See Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn, 155-76 (London: New Left Books, 1973).

²⁹ On Paris during the July Monarchy, see Lloyd S. Kramer, *Threshold of a New World: Intellectuals and the Exile Experience in Paris, 1830-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), esp. Chapter 1. On Paris as a symbol of culture and politics, see Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*. On the history of Paris, see Alistair Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); and Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

³⁰ Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whitall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); David Charlton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, eds., *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

essential element of gaining the respect of the press and attracting the interest of the public.³¹

The central focus on opera had major ramifications for touring virtuosos as well, regardless of what instrument they played, but especially for pianists. Audiences clamored for sheet music involving favorite operatic tunes and expected to hear opera excerpts at every musical event, which meant that pianists were called upon to accompany singers, improvise on popular themes, and publish opera-based music for an audience of amateur musicians.

Indeed, instrumental concerts rarely featured instrumental music alone. To present an appropriate spectacle, virtuoso pianists marshaled an orchestra, an opera troupe, and another soloist or two in their solo benefit concerts. These programs resembled those offered by the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire and other concert series organizations. The soloist's contributions to the concert program usually focused on his own compositions and, depending on his skills, often featured improvised or improvisatory acts. These concerts took place in several venues: most prestigious (and largest) were opera houses and major theaters, but pianists also performed in the halls of piano manufacturers, such as the Salle Pleyel, which opened in time for the spring 1831 season.³² Concert tickets ranged from four francs—a day's wage for an ordinary laborer—to twelve francs, and the composition of audiences varied accordingly.³³

³¹ Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

³² On virtuoso concerts and repertoire, see Kenneth Hamilton, "The Virtuoso Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, ed. David Rowland, 57-74 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and J. Barrie Jones, "Piano Music for Concert Hall and Salon c. 1830-1900," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, 151-75.

³³ On concert life in Paris, see Jeffrey Cooper, *The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris, 1828-1871*, Studies in Musicology 65, ed. George Buelow (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983); Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*; and William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Virtuosos also found that some of their most important work took place outside the public eye. The famous salons of Paris, ranging from lavish elite functions to homegrown familial gatherings, encompassed music-making of all kinds.³⁴ Here young women could demonstrate their refinement at the keyboard, virtuosos could offer glittering performances to attract future patrons, and musicians could experiment together with new music and new aesthetics. At the high end, access was restricted to invited guests, largely members of the leisure class with enough disposable income to dress fashionably, spend hours performing social rituals, and host parties for other members of the *Tout-Paris*. Often associated exclusively with the domesticity and the feminine, the salon was also an incubator of political and intellectual progress, providing a space in which ideas, musical or otherwise, could be discussed by members of both sexes.

The tantalizing exclusivity of the high-profile musical salon piqued the interest not only of the aristocratic members of society, but also that of the press, whose regular columns appeared in music and theater journals as well as daily newspapers. After decades of theater critics evaluating all spectacles, including concerts and operas, the specialist press—music criticism published by trained musicians and theorists—exploded in the 1820s with François-Joseph Fétis’s *Revue musicale* and newspaper columns by François-Henri-Joseph Castil-Blaze and Berlioz. The trend continued in the 1830s and 1840s with journals issued by music publishers, such as Henri Heugel’s *Le Ménestrel* (1833), Maurice Schlesinger’s *Gazette musicale de Paris* (1834) and the Escudier brothers’ *La France musicale* (1838).

³⁴ On social life in Paris, see Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Vie élégante, ou la Formation du Tout-Paris 1815-1848* (Paris: Fayard, 1990). On the musical life of the salon, see Elaine Leung-Wolf, “Women, Music, and the Salon Tradition: Its Cultural and Historical Significance in Parisian Musical Society” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 1996); and Myrian Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens: du salon au concert à Paris sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).

Schlesinger's journal united in 1835 with the *Revue musicale* to become the powerhouse *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* that dominated music criticism in Paris until its dissolution in 1880. Outside the realm of specialist journals, moreover, a lively discussion occurred in the *feuilletons* of most major papers and entertainment journals, including *Le Corsaire* and *La Pandore* in the 1820s, the *Journal des débats* and *Le Moniteur universel* in the 1830s, and *La Presse* and *Le Charivari* in the 1840s. Critics ranged from well-respected musicians (such as Berlioz) to famous theater critics (such as Jules Janin and Théophile Gautier) to social satirists (operating under equally satirical pen names).³⁵

Budding virtuosos had to work hard to be noticed. Indeed, making a splash in the bustling musical life of Paris required careful negotiation of the capital's institutions, patrons and press. Usually, after a period of circulation in the salon world, which served to drum up financial support and local notoriety, virtuosos sent carefully-worded press releases to these newspapers and tacked up posters to advertise their planned public concerts. Anyone could buy a ticket—and many did, ranging from the royal family and the leisure class to fellow musicians, the *dilettanti*, and curious people from around town. With luck, ticket sales would cover the costs of the concert—renting and heating the hall, arranging for instruments, printing music and programs, and covering any social favors needed to ensure a smooth and well-received performance. If successful, the press would praise one's virtuosity to the skies and, more importantly, demand another public performance for those who had missed the first. After a well-received debut season, virtuosos could leave Paris, secure in the

³⁵ Among many others, see Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, esp. Chapter 2 on the rise of the specialist music press; Kerry Murphy, *Hector Berlioz and the Development of French Music Criticism*, Studies in Musicology 97 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988); and Kerry Murphy, "La critique musicale dans les grands quotidiens parisiens de 1830 à 1839," *Revue Internationale de Musique Française* 17 (June 1985): 19-28.

knowledge that they had conquered the capital of the musical world. This meant that not only could they return to Paris to tap into its lucrative concert scene in the future, but they also could enter any other city in Europe and expect similarly royal treatment.

A capital of luxury and wealth, Paris was also a center for piano-building, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth-century. When Sébastien Érard returned from London (where he had fled after the 1789 Revolution), he brought with him a sheaf of new ideas for the instrument. Over the course of several decades, his pianos competed with those manufactured by the Pleyel and Pape firms to become the most innovative instruments in Paris. Many other piano-makers, including Henri Herz, also produced instruments for the French market. These technicians and inventors worked with pianists to produce bigger, louder, and more brilliant concert instruments as well as smaller and increasingly cheaper models appropriate for the home. To augment tone production, thicker wire was employed to hold increased tension, along with new compressed-felt hammer coverings to hide the undesirable effects of the attack. In 1808, the Érards patented a new mechanism designed to facilitate easier key repetition and articulation; a modified version of 1821, known as the double-escapement action, then provided the foundation for the development of the modern piano as we know it in the twenty-first century. They also began to use steel reinforcements in the instrument frame as early as the 1810s. Keyboard size increased from five-and-a-half octaves to seven octaves, and a plethora of pedals, including the sustaining/damper and the *una corda*, appeared to allow great control over tonal contrast and articulation.³⁶

³⁶ On the history of the piano, see Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*; and Rosamond E. M. Harding, *The Piano-Forte: Its History Traced to the Great Exhibition of 1851* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973). On French pianos, see René Beaupain, *Chronologie des piano de la maison Pleyel* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); and Beaupain, *La Maison Érard: Manufacture de Pianos, 1780-1959* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005). See also David Rowland, "Pianos and Pianists c.1770-c.1825," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, 22-39; and Rowland, "The Piano since c. 1825," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, 40-56.

Such advancements in piano technology had a profound effect on piano technique and approaches to playing the instrument.³⁷ In the early decades of the nineteenth century, pianists were trained in the late eighteenth-century “post-Classical” brilliant style of Clementi, Beethoven, and Hummel. This style, developed from harpsichord technique, featured crystal-clear figuration, finger-centric control, and limited engagement of the body. Throughout the nineteenth century, women continued to be taught to play in this appropriately restrained manner. But with the spread of the double-escapement action in bigger and louder pianos, a richer and fuller sound came into vogue as male virtuosos took advantage of the new instruments as well as their own particular strengths. In general, the increased string tension of nineteenth-century pianos required more energy from the finger than could be produced by pressing on the key from an eighteenth-century posture. Consequently, virtuosos adopted technical approaches that drew strength from the arm and shoulder. In the 1830s, piano music began to feature the orchestral textures, cross-keyboard leaps and abrupt changes in tone that were made possible by emerging instruments and corresponding technical approaches. Reports of piano technique of the 1830s and 1840s suggest that each player had his own method of handling the instrument and the music for it. For example, Chopin was famous for an updated Romantic version of the calm brilliant style, while Liszt used his whole body to carry out his virtuoso concoctions. More emphasis was

³⁷ On the relationship between technology and socio-cultural context, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 7-8. As is so often the case, the technological development responded to shifting cultural demands; as musical performance moved into bigger spaces, louder instruments were needed. As pianists experimented with the physical possibilities of piano technique and confronted the requirements of public concertizing, inventors met their demands with new instruments, which, in turn, inspired further experimentation and development along a path determined by cultural concerns.

also placed on the sustaining pedal, which was used to thicken textures and to create a new world of tone color.³⁸

In this milieu performed the central figures of this dissertation—Chopin, Kalkbrenner, Liszt, Pleyel, Prudent, and Thalberg—as well as literally hundreds of other pianists, who built their professional careers outside the spotlight of the press but who faced just the same social and economic rules. Chopin later remarked, “I don’t know where there are more pianists than in Paris—I don’t know where there are more jackasses and more virtuosos than here.”³⁹ Their stories contribute a vital perspective on the unfolding of musical practice in nineteenth-century France.

Overview of Chapters

Following this introduction, in which I have considered the state of research and historical context of nineteenth-century virtuoso pianism, Chapter 2 addresses the rise of the Romantic piano virtuoso through Liszt’s Parisian debut in 1824. I begin with a long-overdue reading of Liszt’s first concert, using correspondence, critical reviews, and archival records to examine how the young artist and his father achieved the financial and critical success that launched Liszt’s international career. A child prodigy and an unparalleled virtuoso, Liszt portrayed himself as the reincarnation of the eighteenth-century master composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. I argue that Liszt’s critics perpetuated and added to this illusion in order to position Liszt as the new leader of French music. The second part of the chapter engages with issues

³⁸ On approaches to the piano in France, see Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism*, rev. ed. (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1999).

³⁹ “Je ne sais s’il y a nulle part plus de pianistes qu’ici; j’ignore aussi s’il existe ailleurs autant de sottes gens et de virtuoses” (Chopin to Titus Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Correspondance de Frédéric Chopin*, ed. Bronislas Sydow [Paris: Richard Masse, 1953], 2:39; translation quoted from Tad Szulc, *Chopin in Paris: The Life and Time of the Romantic Composer* [New York: Scribner, 1998], 65).

that arise from the study of Liszt's early career: the web of socio-cultural associations surrounding the child prodigy and the cultural practice of improvisation.

Chapter 3 confronts the early 1830s, during which period the figure of the Romantic virtuoso became idealized in popular culture. In this chapter, I examine the relationship between the post-Classical master Friedrich Kalkbrenner and the Romantic poet Chopin. Although on the surface it appears that Chopin approached Parisian musical life with the goal of avoiding the virtuoso game, he nevertheless pursued the typical virtuoso avenues of public concerts, strategic publications, and social connections. I argue that he crafted his persona and career with significant help from Kalkbrenner and according to the same model of professional pianism that Kalkbrenner exemplified. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the strategies employed by Kalkbrenner in his own Parisian career before turning in the second part to Chopin's first year in Paris, his relationship to the older pianist (often oversimplified in secondary literature), and the fascinating way in which he bridged his private and professional lives.

Chapter 4 traces the processes by which virtuosos transcribed their performances for public dissemination and reproduction through virtuosic showstoppers based on popular operatic melodies. I focus specifically on adaptations of Bellini's *Norma*, one of the most popular operas of the 1830s, to analyze how pianists re-packaged both the opera and their own brands of virtuosity for mass consumption—much like the “cover songs” recorded today by pop artists. I argue in this chapter that the opera fantasy, despite its disreputable history, was an integral participant in the dissemination and reception of opera in the 1830s and 1840s. My study delves into the social meanings surrounding the production and consumption of musical scores in the nineteenth century. Analysis of these distinct yet

related works also illuminates how composers employed a limited palette of thematic material to create individual works that showcased their own virtuosity and appealed to their audiences.

By the 1840s, the piano virtuoso had become a familiar figure in European musical life, allowing newcomers to negotiate established tropes of pianistic virtuosity in their performances. Chapter 5 examines the problem of national identity in the debut of Émile Prudent. Born in France and trained at the traditionalist (and anti-virtuoso) Paris Conservatory, Prudent left the French capital to reinvent his credentials through isolated study and extensive concert tours outside of Paris. His return to Paris in 1842 afforded his critics the opportunity to claim a born- and trained-Frenchman as a cosmopolitan virtuoso and the *juste milieu* of French pianism.

In Chapter 6, I investigate the issue of gender in the career of Marie Pleyel, a native Frenchwoman and the only female pianist to compete successfully in Paris as an international virtuoso. Though she debuted in Paris during the 1820s, Pleyel, like Prudent, re-invented herself during a long absence from Paris and returned in 1845 to be crowned “the queen of the pianists” by French journalists. By foregrounding her physical appearance and programming masculine repertoire, Pleyel challenged the stereotype of the male virtuoso within the musical world as well as the boundaries of nineteenth-century femininity in France.

I conclude by considering the legacy of the virtuoso. Amidst the political and economic tumult that engulfed Europe in the late 1840s, the virtuoso tradition of the July Monarchy appears to have come to an end. Musicians headed eastward to Vienna, Berlin, and Weimar, while virtuosos in Paris changed their programming and presentation to meet

the changing expectations of Second Republic and Second Empire audiences and institutions. Yet many of the musical practices of the 1830s and 1840s, which emerged in response to virtuoso performance, remain intact in the twenty-first century. From child prodigies, such as Miley Cyrus and Michael Jackson, to full-fledged pop stars, such as Dolly Parton and Justin Timberlake, artists construct their careers with the same attention to cultural expectations and self-representation, and audiences receive them and their music with the same adoration and fascination.

Chapter Two

EXPLOITING “LE PETIT SORCIER”: LISZT’S PUBLIC IDENTITY AND THE MUSICAL POLITICS OF 1820S PARIS

When the twelve-year-old Franz Liszt arrived in Paris for the first time in December 1823, his virtuosity electrified and astonished French audiences. Over the course of four months, Liszt played his way to the forefront of the Parisian musical scene, emerging at the end of April with the extraordinary reputation that we still celebrate today. Although virtuosos and child prodigies of all kinds crowded the city’s salons and stages, Liszt and his father managed to create a public persona that captured the attention of both the spectacle-loving public and the musical elite. As the reincarnation of the great eighteenth-century prodigy Mozart, Liszt captivated his audiences and impelled his critics to address contemporary aesthetic concerns in print. Both Liszt and his critics had much to gain from each other: for Liszt, the financial and artistic success only available in Paris, and for his critics, a model for dealing with the hundreds of foreign performers and composers that challenged the dominance of French music in France. Together, Liszt and the Parisian musical press created a cultural paradigm that fused the brilliance of cosmopolitan musicianship with local Parisian practice of the 1820s into a prototype of French-based and internationally-recognized virtuosity.

My purpose in this chapter is twofold: first, to deconstruct the myths that surrounded Liszt’s debut in Paris by examining the strategies that he (and his father) employed in carving out a space for yet another child prodigy on the European musical stage; and second, to

investigate the concerns of French music critics of the 1820s as they are reflected in the early reception of Liszt's performances. To begin, I focus on the anatomy of Liszt's debut season in Paris, drawing from a plethora of hitherto unknown articles printed in Parisian journals to paint a clear picture of Liszt's activities and his critics' reactions to them. Because Liszt's personal and professional life revolved around Paris for the next quarter-century, his initial connection to the city's musical community is critical to the study of his later career.

Subsequent accounts of Liszt's first months in Paris often echo the excitement of his early audiences and critics, tacitly accepting financial success and artistic acclaim as the rightful acknowledgement of Liszt's legendary gifts.¹ Such a viewpoint, however, downplays the steps taken by Adam Liszt to present those gifts in an advantageous way, and ignores the independent integrity of Liszt's critics. Had Adam Liszt adopted another strategy in managing Liszt's debut tour, historians might indeed be writing a different tale. These accounts fail, moreover, to acknowledge that Parisian musical discourse of the 1820s did not spring up around Liszt. Rather, Liszt arrived in the charged arena of post-Rossini/pre-Beethoven aesthetics in which critics grappled in print with the ramifications of cosmopolitan influences on musical life in France.² Moreover, his strategy of self-representation in 1824 and the intense public response to it provided a model of presentation and reception through

¹ See, for example, other accounts by Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), and Derek Watson, *Liszt* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989).

² James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). The popularity of Rossini's music was at its height in the early 1820s, and Rossini himself, director of the Théâtre-Italien after 1824, was the focus of a massive debate in the Parisian press. Beethoven's music, however, had long since been introduced, but it failed to interest French audiences; only after François Habeneck launched the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in 1828 with the goal of championing Beethoven did his music take off in France. On Rossini in 1820s Paris, see Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sounds of Modern Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On Beethoven reception in France, see Beate Kraus, *Beethoven-Rezeption in Frankreich: Von ihren Anfängen bis zum Untergang des Second Empire* (Bonn: Beethoven-Haus, 2001).

which future virtuosos could construct their own paths to the Parisian stage as well as a standard against which French audiences could consider new performers.

In the second part of this chapter, I examine how the reception of Liszt's performances reflects the cultural climate of 1820s Paris. In spite of Liszt's significant presence in Parisian musical life, his debut has not yet been connected to the broader context of French musical politics. Most significantly, comparing Liszt to the idealized figure of Mozart allowed critics to articulate their experience of Liszt's playing in terms of an on-going musical debate. The growing affinity of Parisian audiences for music composed and performed by musicians from all over Europe threatened a perceived dominance of a French national school of composition. Invoking Mozart, by now a glorified and neutral figure in French musical politics, made it possible for critics to manufacture a way to consider Italian (and Rossinian in particular) and German influences without compromising their national identity. I will then turn to the less overt threads of child prodigy and improvisation.

Possessing unadulterated natural genius along with the ability to display it on command were key elements of the virtuoso profile; as a child and an improviser, Liszt met both criteria. Even as they intersected with conversations about Mozart, the discourses of prodigy and improvisation connected Liszt to the broader extra-musical context of French culture by comparing him to other public figures.

Liszt's Debut in Paris: Setting the Stage

Liszt's public debut concert in Paris occurred nearly two years after Liszt and his parents left their home in Raiding, Hungary (now Austria), in pursuit of musical instruction and performance opportunities for the young pianist. As early as 1819, Adam Liszt had begun

his search for a way to support his family during an extended stay in Vienna. There he hoped to obtain for his son further musical training (in particular, with Carl Czerny) and to expose him to the outstanding musical offerings of a capital city, planning eventually to tour the musical stages of Europe. After extended negotiations with Prince Nicholas Esterházy, Adam Liszt's employer, the father took a leave of absence from his duties in Raiding and arranged Liszt's first public concerts in the fall of 1820 in Ödenburg and Pressburg, Hungary (now Sopron, Hungary, and Bratislava, Slovakia, respectively). The profits from this concert—and the sponsorship of several noblemen who had attended the Pressburg concert—helped to support the next few years of Liszt's studies.³ The family's long-term finances nevertheless remained uncertain until Liszt's highly lucrative performances in Paris.

The family arrived in Vienna in the spring of 1822, where the ten-year-old Liszt immediately began lessons in piano with Czerny and in theory with Antonio Salieri. Approximately ten months later, on 1 December 1822, Liszt gave his first concert for the Viennese public. Although Czerny had counseled against the concert, Liszt's playing was greeted with great enthusiasm from audiences and journalists alike, which encouraged Adam Liszt to arrange several additional concerts in Vienna.⁴ By the spring of 1823, Adam Liszt judged his son adequately prepared to conquer new horizons, and the family left Vienna to tour Western Europe.

Alan Walker's account of Liszt's early career suggests that the eighteen months spent in Vienna served several purposes. First, the young pianist embarked on his first European tour an experienced musician, having spent at least six months performing for the notoriously

³ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 66-70.

⁴ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 64-71 and 85.

critical audiences in one of Europe's musical capitals. Adam Liszt had gained valuable experience as well: in navigating the Viennese concert circuit on his son's behalf, he had acquired practical skills in concert management that could be applied in other contexts. Father and son also had formed connections among the Viennese elite, rubbing shoulders with such formidable figures as Prince Klemens von Metternich, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Austria and a former ambassador to Paris. This connection later helped the Liszts to penetrate Parisian society. Liszt's lessons with Czerny and Salieri, their pedagogical value aside, symbolically linked him to the musical legacies of Beethoven and Mozart.⁵

Throughout his career as a performer and a composer, Liszt drew on his musical heritage to align himself with the Austro-German masters at the foundation of an emerging art-music canon.⁶ Furthermore, the positive reception of Liszt's playing by Viennese audiences provided a platform for the 1823 tour. Liszt had amassed enough money to finance the first stage of the tour and had earned a reputation as a child prodigy and pianistic phenomenon that preceded him wherever he went. Finally, the idea that Liszt channeled the spirit or talent of Mozart can be traced to remarks in the German-speaking press.⁷ The themes of prodigy,

⁵ Liszt's connection to Beethoven in Vienna during the early 1820s played an essential role in the development of his adult persona as an interpreter of Beethoven's music. The concurrent presence of Beethoven and Liszt in Vienna has complicated discussions of the most famous of Liszt's legends, dubbed the *Weihekuss*, or the kiss of consecration. While several variations on the story emerged from Liszt's biographers and personal correspondence, a common theme unites them. Beethoven encountered Liszt (in public or private), heard him play (or improvise), kissed him, and foretold a great future for the young artist. Scholars have found no solid evidence for their meeting. Nevertheless, the story reappeared throughout Liszt's life, symbolically tying him to his idol again and again. Liszt's proximity to Beethoven in the early 1820s lent plausibility to his story and was picked up by Parisian journalists as they tried to grapple with Liszt's performances of Beethoven in the 1830s and beyond. On the debate over the *Weihekuss*, see Allan Keiler, "Liszt and Beethoven: The Creation of a Personal Myth," *19th-Century Music* 12 (1988): 116-131; Keiler, "Liszt Research and Walker's Liszt," *Musical Quarterly* 70 (1984): 374-403; and Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 81-85.

⁶ This is an issue around which Liszt danced throughout much of his life, playing up his Hungarian nationality when it suited the situation or submerging it beneath his ties to Germanic traditions when he felt it necessary.

⁷ Mozart was mentioned in a review published by the *Augsburger allgemeine Zeitung* following one of Liszt's concerts in Augsburg; see Watson, *Liszt*, 15.

virtuosity, and Mozart that emerged from his reception in Vienna would also contribute to his Parisian identity.

Liszt's "Grand Tour" opened in Pest, Hungary, in May 1823.⁸ Then, with one eye trained on France and England, Liszt played his way through the German states and Belgium, eventually arriving in Paris on 11 December 1823.⁹ Within a few days, news had spread that the Liszts now resided in the French capital. Liszt's reputation as a spectacular pianist, established over months of well-publicized concertizing, attracted public attention before he played even a note. The evening daily newspaper *L'Étoile* announced his appearance in an article on 22 December 1823 and speculated about what Paris might expect from a pianist of such advertised talent.

Paris possesses at this moment a true phenomenon: it is a young Hungarian of eleven years named *Leist* [*sic*]. This child already possesses a talent of the first order for the piano...Friends of the arts must make wishes for this prodigy to be heard in public.¹⁰

The journalist also hinted at a possible comparison to Mozart on 22 December 1823: "Since Mozart, who astonished several European courts at the age of eight, the musical world has certainly seen nothing as surprising as the young List [*sic*]."¹¹

⁸ Liszt gave three concerts in Pest on 1 May, 19 May, and 24 May 1823. Adam Liszt positioned Liszt as a Hungarian prodigy by encouraging audiences to consider the potential glory that Liszt would bring to their country by advertising himself as a Hungarian in other European cities. Liszt even played the symbolic *Rákóczy March* at the 19 May concert; see Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 86-87. Liszt's nationality also served him well in Paris; most reviewers mentioned that he was Hungarian (many called him "the young Hungarian"), which is not surprising given that being foreign was a key element of the virtuoso profile.

⁹ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 92.

¹⁰ "Paris possède en ce moment un véritable phénomène: c'est un jeune Hongrois de l'âge de 11 ans, nommé *Leist*. Cet enfant possède déjà un talent du premier ordre sur le piano...Les amis des arts doivent faire des vœux pour que ce prodige se fasse entendre en public" (*L'Étoile*, 22 December 1823).

¹¹ "Depuis Mozart, qui étonna plusieurs cours de l'Europe à l'âge de huit ans, le monde musical n'a certainement rien vu d'aussi surprenant que le jeune List" (*L'Étoile*, 22 December 1823).

Upon their arrival in Paris, Adam Liszt immediately tackled the crucial task of finding Liszt an instrument on which to practice and to perform. He and his son first stopped at the shop of the most innovative piano builders in France, Sébastien Érard and his nephew Pierre.¹² Sébastien Érard, inventor of the recently-patented double-escapement keyboard action, was already well known in Paris and England, as were the firm's pianos. Érard apparently agreed on the spot to supply Liszt with practice instruments and to allow him use of the premises for private performances. The ensuing relationship between the Érard family and Liszt benefited both parties: Liszt had access to the best pianos in Paris, and the Érards had a rising virtuoso to showcase their latest inventions. Over the next fifteen years, the Érard family provided Liszt with pianos, both in Paris and abroad.¹³ In return, Liszt conspicuously advertised that he played Érard's instruments.¹⁴ By the mid-1830s, Liszt's brand of pianistic virtuosity had become synonymous with the sounds of the Érard piano.

Reports from the winter and spring of 1824 illuminate the early stages of what became a long-lasting and fruitful partnership between Liszt and the Érards. On 10 February 1824, Liszt gave a private performance in the Salle Érard, playing a new seven-octave grand piano—an instrument similar to (if not the same as) the piano he would use for the 7 March

¹² The stagecoach on which the Liszts traveled from Strasbourg (where they had been before coming to Paris) terminated in the Rue de Mail, the same street on which the Liszts' hotel and the Érards' piano shop were located; see Emile Haraszti, "Liszt à Paris: Quelques documents inédits (1)," *Revue Musicale* 17 (1936): 245-46. According to most accounts, Liszt's first meeting with Érard occurred the very afternoon of his arrival in Paris. This meeting is generally reported as a fortunate coincidence. The great lengths to which Adam Liszt went in order to secure the best possible situation for Liszt's performances, however, suggest that his decision to install the family at the Hôtel d'Angleterre may also have been motivated by its proximity to one of the most esteemed piano shops in Paris.

¹³ Sébastien Érard died in 1831, at which time his nephew Pierre Érard (son of Sébastien's brother and partner Jean-Baptiste) assumed responsibility for the business; see René Beaupain, *La Maison Érard: manufacture de pianos, 1780-1959* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 19.

¹⁴ Watson, *Liszt*, 16.

concert. Reviews of this performance linked the names of Liszt and the Érard firm in print for the first time.¹⁵ At the 10 February event, Liszt performed one of his own compositions, identified in *L'Étoile* simply as a “thème varié” for solo piano.¹⁶ Most likely, this became Liszt’s first Parisian publication, the *Huit variations pour le pianoforte*, issued in 1825 by the Érard publishing firm with a dedication to Sébastien Érard.¹⁷ As Walker’s analysis demonstrates, the scope and texture of the work accentuate the unique qualities of the Érard piano.¹⁸ A performance of this piece on 10 February would have showcased the instrument and honored Liszt’s sponsors. Later, as the response to the 7 March concert unfolded, the Érard pianos earned high praises from most critics, who lauded the rapid action and sonorous depth of Liszt’s concert instrument.¹⁹

With the pianos secured and a letter from Metternich in hand, the Liszts then approached the social and musical elite of Paris, for whom Liszt performed approximately thirty-eight times between his arrival in December 1823 and his departure in early May 1824.²⁰ Most of these performances occurred within the context of the salon and other private gatherings.²¹ Audiences included both men and women of the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie, and were generally restricted to the invited guests of the host. While each salon developed its own character according to the interests and tastes of its

¹⁵ *La Pandore* (11 February 1824), *L'Étoile* (11 February 1824).

¹⁶ *L'Étoile*, 11 February 1824.

¹⁷ The Érard publishing branch, *Mesdemoiselles Érard*, was run by Marie-Françoise and Catherine-Barbe Marcaux, nieces of Sébastien and Jean-Baptiste Érard.

¹⁸ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 105-106. Walker implies that Liszt did not compose this work—or any of his early publications—until after he had left Paris for the summer 1824 tour in London.

¹⁹ For example, see *Journal des débats* (23 March 1824), and *La Pandore* (11 February 1824).

²⁰ Metternich’s letter is reprinted in the original German in Haraszti, “Liszt à Paris,” 243-44.

²¹ See Chapter 1 for a further discussion of these institutions and their roles in Parisian musical life.

participants, many salons of the 1820s and 1830s prominently featured musical performances. For musicians recently arrived in Paris, gaining entrance to these elite venues was critical to achieving wider public success; although salon audiences were socially exclusive, the reception of new works and performers in salon performances could determine their destiny in the broader field of Parisian musical life. Performers and composers established valuable connections with potential patrons, which, as I shall explore in later chapters, allowed them to supplement their income with lessons, commissioned compositions, publication sales, and additional performance opportunities.²² Also among private audiences were members of the Parisian press, whose early reviews could make or break a fledgling career even before a musician's first public concert.²³

The Liszts' campaign for the support of the Parisian aristocracy was by all accounts a successful one. Within a few weeks, the young pianist was welcomed in the most elite circles of Paris, performing in the illustrious salons of the Duc d'Orléans, the Duchesse de Berry, and Madame Cresp-Bereytter. The first of Liszt's private performances occurred at a *soirée* given by the Duc d'Orléans (soon to become King Louis-Philippe in 1830) in celebration of New Year's Eve.²⁴ A few weeks later, he played in the salon of Cresp-Bereytter, a well-known Parisian amateur singer who hosted one of the most exciting and well-attended salons of the 1820s in which the current darlings of the French musical scene

²² Jeffrey Cooper, *The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris, 1828-1871*, *Studies in Musicology* 65, ed. George Buelow (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 88.

²³ See Chapter 1 on musical criticism in the nineteenth century.

²⁴ Haraszti, "Liszt à Paris," 246-47, and Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 96.

could be heard.²⁵ According to one witness, Liszt excited the “most lively enthusiasm with an improvisation in which he unfurled a power of spirit and execution difficult to imagine.”²⁶

Liszt also played for the annual showcase concert of the Société Académique des Enfants d’Apollon, a group devoted to the appreciation of the fine arts and literature, and music in particular. The Société’s secretary noted that Liszt’s inspiration sent the child “rushing to the keyboard,” where he improvised a fantasy based on a theme taken from the wind trio that had just been performed. Then, exhausted by his genius, Liszt stopped playing, and the audience immediately named him an honorary member of the group, for “in a moment, we saw renewed in him the miracle that nature had produced in Mozart.”²⁷ This performance elicited the first printed response to his playing, which appeared in the daily theater journal, *Le Corsaire*.²⁸ The anonymous review emphasized Liszt’s youth—calling him a “beardless pianist” and citing his age as “barely eleven years old”—as well his popularity: “if this marvelous child would give public concerts, it would certainly make all of Paris come running.”²⁹ The final line of the review incorporated the comparison of Liszt and Mozart that had first been introduced to Parisian readers in *L’Étoile*’s December notice: “he

²⁵ The daily entertainment journal *La Pandore* consistently announced and reviewed the programs of Cresp-Bereyter’s musical soirées. Among other young musicians, she also sponsored the pianist Charles-Valentin Alkan and the violinist Charles Bériot. She eventually opened a short-lived music school from 1830-1831.

²⁶ “Le plus vif enthousiasme dans une improvisation où il a déployé une force de génie et d’exécution difficile à concevoir” (*Le Corsaire*, 21 January 1824). Liszt was engaged to play at Cresp-Bereyter’s *salon* again in February but fell ill and cancelled the performance.

²⁷ “Il se précipite vers le piano...En un moment on voit se renouveler en lui le miracle que la nature avait opéré dans Mozart” (Maurice Decourcelle, *La Société académique des enfants d’Apollon (1741-1880)* [Paris: Durand, Schoenewerk et Cie., 1881], 137). The minutes from the January meeting are dated 24 May 1824.

²⁸ *Le Corsaire*, 15 January 1824.

²⁹ “Ce pianiste imberbe...À peine âgé de onze ans...Si cet enfant merveilleux donnait des concerts publics, il ferait certainement courir tout Paris” (*Le Corsaire*, 15 January 1824).

bears out the story that we had considered fantastical, that of the young Mozart, as astonishing at an age almost as tender.”³⁰ In the following weeks, over a dozen journalists weighed in on the subject, and each writer invoked Mozart to varying degrees in reviews, announcements, and other commentary.

Ignited by the early notices in *L'Étoile* and *Le Corsaire*, excitement over “le jeune Liszt [*sic*]” escalated in the two months preceding his first public concert as press reports of his talent tantalized a Paris eager to experience the latest musical novelty.³¹ Announcements read: “talk in the musical world has been of nothing but a young Hungarian named Liszt, aged 11 years, who revives at the piano all the prodigies operated by Mozart at the same age. We must hear him next Sunday in a public concert at the Salle Louvois.”³² Another critic recalled that “for two months, the only topic in the salons of the capital was a young Hungarian named Liszt who, at the age of eleven-and-a-half, placed himself in the rank of top pianists.”³³ When Liszt took the stage at the Salle Louvois on 7 March 1824 there awaited a large, eager audience composed of the social elite (who had heard him already in the salons) expanded for this concert to include “all that Paris holds of artists and distinguished music-lovers, and, moreover, a crowd of curious people.”³⁴ A formidable

³⁰ “Il réalise l’histoire qu’on avait pu regarder comme fabuleuse, du jeune Mozart, étonnant dans un âge à peu près tendre” (*Le Corsaire*, 15 January 1824).

³¹ *L'Étoile*, 11 February 1824. The French papers rarely managed to spell the Liszt name consistently. Just within the *L'Étoile* articles alone, the name was spelled “Lyszt,” “Listz,” and “List.”

³² “Il n’est bruit dans le monde musical que d’un jeune Hongrois nommé Liszt, âgé de onze ans, qui renouvelle au piano tous les prodiges opérés par Mozart au même âge. On doit l’entendre dimanche prochain dans un concert public à la salle Louvois” (*Le Courrier français*, 5 March 1824).

³³ “Depuis deux mois il n’est question dans le salons de la capitale que d’un jeune hongrois nommé Liszt, qui, à onze ans et demi, s’est placé au rang des premiers pianistes” (*Journal de Paris*, 9 March 1824).

³⁴ “Tout ce que Paris compte d’artistes et d’amateurs distingués; et, de plus, la foule des curieux” (*L'Étoile*, 9 March 1824).

contingent of at least a dozen music journalists also materialized, prepared to enter into the heated discussion over Liszt's style of pianism.

This concert represented the culmination of Adam's Liszt's efforts to launch his son's career in the Parisian spotlight. He had begun the complex process of organizing Liszt's debut public concert in Paris soon after their arrival. Performing for the elite and restricted audiences of the salon yielded valuable connections and monetary rewards, but, as Adam Liszt clearly recognized, a public concert provided a frame in which the musician could bid for widespread popularity and more substantial profit. The benefit concert, the most common type of public concert, was typically arranged by a musician (or group of musicians) for his or her own financial gain. The core of the audience consisted of the sponsor's family, close friends, and students, as well as the *salonnières* (for whose gatherings he or she had already performed) and journalists from a variety of papers.³⁵ While the expense of renting a hall and hiring an orchestra fell on the sponsoring musician, savvy programming and advertising could catapult profits above those earned in private circles despite the initial capital investment. Indeed, Adam Liszt's actions in the early planning stages of the concert betray his concern with turning a profit at minimal expenditure.

Adam Liszt took the first step of reserving a concert hall in early February. His choice, the Salle Louvois, was a logical one: not only was it a popular location for the debut performances of both French and foreign musicians, but with the use of the hall were included the impressive resources of its resident opera company, the Théâtre-Italien. This company, which in 1824 held the exclusive license for foreign-language opera in Paris, boasted one of the finest orchestras in Europe as well as a superlative troupe of Italian

³⁵ Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, 21-22.

singers, both contractually obligated to perform at benefit concerts held in the Salle Louvois.³⁶ As opera performances were scheduled for Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, the hall was an available and appealing location for concerts on the remaining nights of the week. The main hall held an audience of roughly twelve hundred spectators, which was filled on Sunday, 7 March with Liszt's audience, "a crowd as large as it was select."³⁷

To book the Salle Louvois, Adam Liszt appealed to the Ministry of the Royal Household and the Intendant of Theaters, the Baron de La Ferté, whose permission was required for all musicians giving public concerts. La Ferté's authority over the broad domain of public theater and concert life allowed Adam Liszt to propose that Liszt appear free-of-charge in April 1824 at another event under La Ferté's direction, the first of four *concerts spirituels* given during Holy Week, in exchange for the use of the Salle Louvois on 7 March. A descendent of the famous eighteenth-century Lenten concert series, the *concerts spirituels* consisted in the 1820s of three or four concerts mounted during Holy Week by various theaters in Paris. According to Janet Rittermann, Adam Liszt's proposal to exchange his son's musical services for a hall was not particularly unusual; in order to obtain the goodwill of the Minister (and ultimately his permission to give public concerts), many musicians also offered to perform for free at the *concerts spirituels*.³⁸ Only occasionally, however, were their requests granted; in this respect, Liszt's reputation as a novel child prodigy probably helped his cause.

³⁶ Haraszti, "Liszt à Paris," 248.

³⁷ "Une réunion aussi nombreuse que choisie" (*Le Drapeau blanc*, 9 March 1824). On the Théâtre-Italien's theater, see Nicole Wild, *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens au XIXe siècle: les théâtres et la musique* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1989), 229-32.

³⁸ Janet Rittermann, "Les Concerts spirituels à Paris au début du XIXe siècle," *Revue Internationale de Musique Française* 16 (February 1985): 79-94.

In a letter dated 11 February 1824, La Ferté confirmed that Adam Liszt had successfully negotiated for the use of the theater and instructed the theater's music director to accommodate him accordingly:

Monsieur le Directeur:

I have the honor to inform you that His Excellency the Minister of the Royal Household has, by decision today, granted the use of Salle Louvois to the son of M. Liszt, for him to give a Sunday evening concert there for his benefit, under the condition that he play for one of the *Concerts Spirituels*. In a letter written today, I have relayed this decision to M. Liszt, who must present himself to you so that you can confer together about the details relative to the execution of this concert.

The Intendant of the Royal Theaters,
Baron de La Ferté.³⁹

Thus, in one stroke, Adam Liszt eliminated the major expense of hiring a hall and orchestra and guaranteed a second opportunity for Liszt to perform publicly in April. The arrangement benefited both parties. La Ferté, undoubtedly aware of the stir surrounding the young pianist, perhaps saw an opportunity to buttress the flagging *concerts spirituels* with a famous name.

As François-Joseph Fétis later pointed out, the state-run institution once central to musical life in Paris suffered in the 1820s from poor management.⁴⁰ On 12 April 1824, Liszt fulfilled his part of the bargain with an improvisation at the first of the four Holy Week *concerts spirituels*, presumably realizing La Ferté's aspirations as well. Concert reviews indicate that an unexpected crowd appeared for this concert, in spite of its date (Monday concerts rarely

³⁹ Letter from the Baron de La Ferté to François-Antoine Habeneck, Director of the Royal Theaters, Paris, 11 February 1824, Archives Nationales, Paris, AJ¹³ 114. "Monsieur le Directeur: / J'ai l'honneur de vous informer que S. Exc. le Ministre de la Maison du Roi, a, par décision de ce jour, accordé la Salle Louvois à M. Liszt fils, pour y donner un dimanche soir un concert à son bénéfice, sous la condition qu'il jouera à un des Concerts Spirituels. Par lettre de ce jour je donne connaissance de cette décision à M. Liszt père qui doit se rendre auprès de vous, pour que vous confériez ensemble sur les détails relatifs à l'exécution de ce concert. L'Intendant des théâtres royaux, / Baron de La Ferté."

⁴⁰ François-Joseph Fétis, "Sur le concert spirituel," *Revue Musicale* 8, no. 8 (April 1827).

attracted big crowds) and position as the first of four concerts.⁴¹ Records show that ticket receipts tripled for the 1824 series.⁴²

At some point between 11 February and 1 March, the public benefit concert was scheduled for the evening of Sunday 7 March 1824, and the Liszts set about crafting a program that reflected both the typical variety of genres and styles of most early nineteenth-century French concerts on the one hand, and the specific concerns of a child virtuoso on the other. Posters and newspaper announcements advertised the program transcribed and translated in Table 2.1.

⁴¹ A review of the second *concert spirituel* published in *L'Étoile* specifically attributes the unusual crowd of the 12 April concert to Liszt's presence; see *L'Étoile*, 16 April 1824.

⁴² Rittermann, "Les Concerts spirituels," 84.

Table 2.1: Liszt's Concert Program of 7 March 1824⁴³

<p>Symphonie d'<i>Haydn</i> (Symphony by Franz Joseph Haydn [performed by Théâtre-Italien orchestra])</p>
<p>Grand concerto du piano, en <i>si</i> mineur, composé par <i>Hummel</i>, exécuté par le jeune LISZT (Grand concerto for piano in B minor [op. 89], composed by Johann Nepomuk Hummel, performed by the young Liszt)</p>
<p>Air italien, chanté par Mlle CINTI (Italian aria, sung by Mlle [Laure] Cinti)</p>
<p>Thème varié, à grand orchestre, composé par CZERNY, exécuté par le jeune LISZT (Theme and variations with orchestra [op. 14], composed by Carl Czerny, performed by the young Liszt)</p>
<p>Duo italien, chanté par M. PELLEGRINI et Mlle CINTI [Italian duet, sung by Giulio Pellegrini and Cinti]</p>
<p><i>Improvisation</i> sur le piano, par le jeune LISZT (Improvisation at the piano, by the young Liszt [on “Non più andrai” from Mozart’s <i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>])</p>
<p>Suivi (<i>vu l’indisposition de M. Bordogni</i>) du 3e acte de <i>Romeo e Guilletta</i>, opéra de M. Rossini; <i>Actrices</i>: Mmes Pasta et Cinti (Followed (due to the indisposition of Bordogni) by the third act of <i>Romeo e Guilletta</i> [<i>sic</i>], opera by Rossini [<i>Giulietta e Romeo</i>, in fact composed by Zingarelli]; <i>Actresses</i>: Giuditta Pasta and Cinti)</p>

The program reflects the common practice of early nineteenth-century programming, which incorporated a variety of musical and dramatic events within a single concert. Liszt's concert opened with a symphony by Haydn, then alternated vocal and instrumental works, and finally concluded with an opera scene from the Théâtre-Italien repertory.⁴⁴ In general,

⁴³ A copy of the concert poster is held by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, in the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Affiches Typo par lieux, Théâtre Royal Italien (Salle Louvois), March 1824.

⁴⁴ It is unclear from press notices and the program whether the orchestra performed a complete symphony or just a movement or two. It was common practice to perform excerpted movements of a symphony at such a concert, or to separate movements of a symphony with other acts.

benefit concerts showcased several instrumental and vocal performers in addition to the beneficiary. Instrumental musicians typically performed free of charge with the expectation that the beneficiary would return the favor in the future, while singers were usually drawn from the resident opera company.⁴⁵ Because Liszt's concert took place in an opera theater, the participation of members of the resident opera troupe was included as part of the theater booking.⁴⁶ Had the Liszts elected to give the concert in a theater that did *not* house an opera company, special arrangements would have been made to import professional singers from somewhere else—unless Liszt opted to rely on amateur musicians.⁴⁷ For the 7 March concert, Liszt was the sole instrumental performer and was joined only by those affiliated with the Théâtre-Italien orchestra and opera troupe, thereby incurring no performance debts to other soloists. This arrangement allowed his father to maintain complete control over Liszt's future performances.

The concert featured in the first part four instrumental works in alternation with vocal pieces. Liszt performed two works with the orchestra—Hummel's B minor concerto (1821) and a set of variations by Czerny—and then took the stage for a solo improvisation. Three stars of the Théâtre-Italien company provided the vocal component: Laure Cinti, Giuditta Pasta, and Giulio Pellegrini. Again, the choice of the Salle Louvois paid off. Liszt shared the stage with more than just the members of the theater's resident troupe; he performed next to several of the most famous singers in Europe, including Pasta, long since recognized by

⁴⁵ Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, 22.

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Mark Everist for clarifying this point. In lieu of benefit concerts, opera singers were occasionally allowed to offer a performance of an opera for their own benefit.

⁴⁷ Letters from the Intendant of Theaters to the Director of the Académie Royale de Musique suggest that singers regularly petitioned to perform in other private or public benefit concerts (Archives Nationales, Paris, AJ¹³ 111-114).

critics as the leading soprano of Italian opera. The charismatic Pasta had arrived in Paris in 1821 to premiere principal roles in works by Rossini and Donizetti.⁴⁸ Cinti, a young French soprano at the start of what would become a long and distinguished career, was already a star in Paris, particularly famous for her portrayal of Rossinian heroines.⁴⁹ The second part of the concert consisted of operatic scenes performed by the cast of the Théâtre Italien, which featured again Cinti, Pasta, and Pellegrini. Newspaper advertisements indicate the singers had planned to present Paisiello's one-act comic opera *Nina, o sia La pazza per amore*, then in production at the Théâtre-Italien with Pasta in the title role. At the last minute, another company member's illness precipitated the replacement of *Nina* with the third act of Niccolò Zingarelli's *Giulietta e Romeo*—another vehicle for Pasta's voice in the troupe's 1824 repertoire.⁵⁰

Although the repertoire of the concert participants and a need for a diverse program to please the French audience probably dictated these choices, it was nonetheless carefully choreographed to lead from introductory offerings to the exceptional and spectacular finale. For example, the evening progressed from typical concert fare, a Haydn symphony and an unspecified Italian aria, to the exceptional offerings of Liszt's concert: his own solo

⁴⁸ Kenneth Stern, "Giuditta Pasta," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2000), 19:212-13.

⁴⁹ Cinti[-Damoreau] was one of the few non-Italian singers to stay in the troupe of the Théâtre-Italien when Rossini assumed directorship in December 1824. See Austin Caswell, "Mme Cinti-Damoreau and the Embellishment of Italian Opera in Paris: 1820-1845," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 28 (1975): 459-92.

⁵⁰ This change was clarified by *Le Courrier français* (9 March 1824). The playbill itself advertised a non-existent opera on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, composed by Rossini. Where the mistake originated—and indeed, whether it was a mistake at all—is impossible to identify. Rossini's star was at its spectacular height in Paris of 1824, and it is entirely possible that the promise of a Rossini opera would attract otherwise disinclined spectators. Zingarelli's opera, however, was part of the company's repertory in 1824, and they had in fact already presented this act from *Giulietta e Romeo* in late February at a concert to benefit an orphanage; see *L'Étoile*, 24 February 1824.

improvisation and an opera scene featuring the famous Pasta. In their reactions to the concert, most writers focused on these two points of the program. At the same time, a distinction between ensemble and solo performances surfaces as the forces in the instrumental works diminish from full symphony to solo piano and the vocal ones expand from solo aria to full operatic ensemble (with orchestra).⁵¹

Also fascinating is the way in which the instrumental works shift from composed music to extemporaneous playing, focusing the program on the creative act of improvisation that so entranced audiences of the nineteenth century. Under the baton of its regular director, Jean-Jacques Grasset, the Théâtre-Italien orchestra opened the concert with an entirely composed work; as an exasperated critic noted, “it appears to have been decided that the opening to all musical solemnities will eternally be a symphony by Haydn.”⁵² Liszt’s first contribution to the concert, Hummel’s B minor concerto, was also a written-out composition, but one punctuated by solo passages that capture the tradition of improvised cadenzas. From Hummel’s prescribed cadenzas, Liszt moved to the more fluid form of Czerny’s orchestrated variations and finally concluded his part of the program with a solo improvisation on Mozart’s “Non più andrai” from *Le nozze di Figaro*.

The program’s focus on Liszt’s improvisation reflects typical 1820s programming practice: other improvising pianists, such as Hummel and Ignaz Moscheles, almost always ended their public concerts with solo improvisations. Just as reviews of Hummel and Moscheles tended to focus on their improvisations at the expense of their compositions, so

⁵¹ Since the orchestra probably remained on the stage for duration of the concert, the opera scene was likely performed with minimal staging, if any.

⁵² “Il paraît décidé que l’introduction de toutes les solemnités musicales sera éternellement une symphonie d’Haydn” (*Le Courrier français*, 9 March 1824). Grasset conducted the Théâtre Italien orchestra from 1804-1830.

too did Liszt's critics generally gloss over his interpretations of the Hummel and Czerny in order to discuss his improvise finale. Unlike the Viennese critics, who preferred Liszt's performance of composed works, the French unequivocally embraced Liszt's style of improvising as evidence of his prodigy and employed it as a major point of comparison between Liszt and Mozart.⁵³ After this concert, Liszt's position as one of Europe's premiere pianists and improvisers went unchallenged.

Although reviews often concentrated on Liszt's improvisation, his performances of the Hummel and Czerny pieces were equally critical to Liszt's claim to the title of virtuoso.⁵⁴ Programming Hummel's most recently composed concerto as a child placed Liszt unequivocally among the piano virtuosos exemplified by Hummel while also inviting comparisons between his playing and that of the senior musician. Hummel (and Czerny as well), a major proponent of what is commonly termed the post-Classical brilliant style, was among the first to produce music to meet the demands of a public hungry for this new style of virtuosity.⁵⁵ Like other performing virtuosos of this era, such as Moscheles and Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Hummel stood as a model and as competition for the young Liszt. Furthermore, he too passed through Paris in the spring of 1824, presumably moving in the same circles as Liszt and also performing in the Érard salon.

Even though Czerny himself was unknown as a performer in Paris, his concert works were immensely popular with French audiences in the 1820s. His orchestrated variations provided Liszt with a second opportunity to demonstrate his facility at the keyboard and to

⁵³ On the Viennese reception of Liszt's 1823 concerts, see Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 78-80.

⁵⁴ Both works had already been heard at the 10 February 1824 concert in the Érard hall. They were also featured on various concerts in Vienna and Munich.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19-20.

electrify his audience with brilliant figurations. Although the program does not specify which of Czerny's works Liszt played, it was most likely an orchestrated version of his opus 14; two music publishers' catalogues (Pleyel in 1824 and Petit in 1826) list Czerny's opus 14 as "Variations brilliants, exécutées par le jeune Litz [*sic*]." ⁵⁶ It was also typical of child prodigies and young women to program works by their famous piano teachers. Liszt's invocation of his most recent teacher (and the only one known internationally) added another layer of authority to his performance and contributed to his image as a child prodigy.

Finally, Adam Liszt also controlled ticket distribution and ticket prices. According to custom, free tickets were probably sent to Liszt's most outstanding patrons as well as to members of the musical press. Those left to secure their own seats found that tickets did not come cheaply, a situation that apparently provoked some discussion in Parisian circles. In an effort to stall the "rumor circulating that the seat [prices] would be considerably increased," the *Gazette de France* printed the prices (7.50 to 12 francs) listed on the concert poster. ⁵⁷ These figures were significantly higher than those charged for opera performances at the Théâtre-Italien, which were offered in the Salle Louvois for between 1.50 and 7.50 francs. Benefit concerts in the same space commanded a higher price, however. For example, Charles Philippe Lafont, one of the most esteemed French violinists of the early nineteenth century, presented a concert at the Salle Louvois on 25 January 1824 for the same prices as

⁵⁶ See facsimiles reprinted in François Lesure, ed., *Cinq Catalogues d'éditeurs de musique à Paris (1824-1834): Dufaut et Dubois, Petit, Frère, Delahante-Erard, Pleyel* (Geneva: Minkoff Reprints, 1976).

⁵⁷ "Le bruit ayant couru que les places seraient considérablement augmentées, nous nous empressons d'en faire voir la fausseté, en donnant les prix d'après le programme même" (*La Gazette de France*, 2 March 1824). It is entirely likely that Adam Liszt (possibly aided by Sébastien Érard) had included this information in press releases and asked journals to print it along with his announcements of the upcoming concert.

Liszt.⁵⁸ According to William Weber's calculation, which places most concert tickets in the five-to-ten-franc range, prices for benefit concerts held at the Salle Louvois therefore exceeded the going rate by only a slight margin.⁵⁹ The Liszts realized a profit of approximately 4,700 francs from the concert, and Adam Liszt immediately set a fee of one hundred francs for Liszt's future appearances.⁶⁰ Liszt's profit in this one concert exceeded by more than one-and-a-half times the annual income of an average lower middle-class artisan, which was roughly 3,000 francs.⁶¹

Liszt as Mozart: The Critic's Perspective

The critical reaction to the 7 March concert reveals the extraordinary nature of the event. Though members of the musical press published their lively thoughts on a regular basis in daily and weekly journals, most columns were devoted to opera reviews. Individual benefit concerts were rarely granted more than a cursory announcement (printed anywhere from one day to one week in advance) and the occasional follow-up notice (ranging from a few sentences to two or three paragraphs) in one or two journals.⁶² Liszt's debut concert, however, was preceded by unusually detailed announcements and later formed the subject of

⁵⁸ Lafont's program was similar in scope to Liszt's, right down to the opening Haydn symphony and the concluding opera act starring Pasta. Prices announced in *Le Moniteur universel* were the same as those quoted six weeks later for Liszt's concert. See *Le Moniteur universel* (24 January 1824) and *Le Corsaire* (25 January 1824).

⁵⁹ Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, 34. Later in his career, of course, Liszt's ticket prices would go for double the going rate, or even more.

⁶⁰ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 98-101.

⁶¹ Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, 28.

⁶² These notices can generally be found under the rubric of "Revue musicale" in the theater and opera reviews that appeared in the *feuilleton* columns of major newspapers, although the initial announcements occasionally appear in the "Faits divers" column on the ultimate or penultimate page of the paper. In the 1820s, two major exceptions to this rule are the reviews printed in the daily theater and entertainment journals, *Le Corsaire* and *La Pandore*, both of which reviewed celebrity benefit concerts on a regular basis.

at least ten major articles published within three weeks of the concert.⁶³ This kind of extensive coverage was highly unusual; although theater journals (such as *Le Corsaire* and *La Pandore*) occasionally reviewed instrumental concerts, daily newspapers did so only on special occasions. Yet journalists from all major papers in Paris attended Liszt's concert, some probably with free tickets sent by Adam Liszt, and they published their impressions in such widely-circulated papers as the *Journal des débats*, *Le Moniteur universel*, and *La Gazette de France* as well as in theater journals.

Without exception, Liszt's critics judged his concert to be an overwhelming success. They also, to a man, invoked the child prodigy Mozart to describe aspects of Liszt's concert: his musical prowess, his physical characteristics, his biography, and, most importantly, his potential career as a composer. For audiences and critics of the 1820s, Mozart provided an effective framework for discussions of Liszt's musicianship, not only because Liszt could (and did) present himself as a Mozartian prodigy, but also because Mozart occupied a unique position in Restoration musical politics.⁶⁴ Both the figure and the music of Mozart definitively entered musical life in Paris around the turn of the nineteenth century, as the publication of biographies in French coincided in 1801 with Ludwig Lachnith's adaptation of *Die Zauberflöte* as *Les Mystères d'Isis*.⁶⁵ These volumes recount the idealized adventures of

⁶³ In fact, only one other non-operatic musical performer was covered by the press during the spring of 1824 with any regularity. Over the course of two months, the adult pianist Maria Symanowska (on tour from Moscow) gave four benefit concerts, which received reviews in several papers.

⁶⁴ Belinda Cannone, *La Réception des opéras de Mozart dans la presse parisienne (1793-1829)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991), 38.

⁶⁵ Lachnith's *Les Mystères d'Isis* (1801, Opéra) was a synthesis of *Die Zauberflöte* with elements of *Don Giovanni* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, translated into French and structurally altered to appeal to French audiences. It was preceded in 1793 by the failure of a French version of *Le nozze di Figaro* (*Les Noces de Figaro*, Académie Royale de Musique). Early Mozart biographies in France include Théophile-Frédéric Winckler's *Notice biographique sur Jean-Chrysostome-Wolfgang-Théophile Mozart* (Paris: J.-J. Fuchs, 1801); and a translation of the anecdotes published by Friedrich Rochlitz in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1798, Carl Friedrich Cramer, *Anecdotes sur W. G. [sic] Mozart* (Paris: C. F. Cramer, 1801).

the “eternal child” Mozart, including the Mozart family’s visit to Paris in early 1764. As some older Parisians apparently still remembered, the seven-year-old musician had charmed the French aristocracy with his seemingly effortless technique and fanciful improvisations.⁶⁶ In his 1801 biography, Théophile-Frédéric Winckler claimed that Mozart’s gifts made him “an artist who, having attained the greatest degree of development at a very tender age, remained always a child in all other aspects of his life.”⁶⁷ Jean Mongrédien suggests that the development of the Mozart legend in France stemmed from the glamour associated with the child Mozart; this “glamour” remained a yardstick for judging his achievements throughout his life.⁶⁸

Even as they accepted such an idealized version of Mozart’s life, audiences and critics in France only gradually engaged with his music during the early decades of the nineteenth century. While operas, symphonies, and even chamber works by Mozart were programmed with growing frequency after 1800, his music did not become part of the standard repertory until the later 1810s.⁶⁹ The first two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed intense debate among music critics and musicians over the merits—or lack

⁶⁶ The review published by *L’Étoile* actually referenced “two amateurs, who had heard Mozart at the same age. Whatever marvels they tell of it, and which no one doubts, it is not possible to believe that they surpass those that we are happily witnessing today” (“Deux amateurs qui aient entendu Mozart, au même âge. Quelques merveilles qu’ils en racontent, et dont personne ne doute, il n’est pas possible de croire qu’elles surpassassent celles dont nous sommes aujourd’hui les heureux témoins” [*L’Étoile*, 11 February 1824]).

⁶⁷ “Comme artiste, avoit atteint le plus grand degré de développement dans un âge très tendre, est toujours demeuré *enfant* dans tous les autres rapports de la vie” (Winckler, *Notice biographique*, 26).

⁶⁸ Jean Mongrédien, “La France à la découverte de Mozart ou le véritable enjeu d’une mythification (1791-1815),” in *Mozart, origines et transformations d’un mythe*, ed. Jean-Louis Jam (Paris: Lang, 1994), 73.

⁶⁹ The Théâtre-Italien, established in 1806 as the only troupe permitted to perform Italian operas in its original language, premiered the original *Le nozze di Figaro* (1807), *Così fan tutte* (1809), *Don Giovanni* (1811), and *La clemenza di Tito* (1816). For more on the Théâtre-Italien, see Janet Johnson, “The Théâtre italien and Opera and Theatrical Life in Restoration Paris, 1818-1827” (Ph.D. diss, University of Chicago, 1988); and Jean Mongrédien, *Le Théâtre-Italien de Paris, 1801-1831: chronologie et documents*, 8 vols. (Lyon: Symétrie, 2008). Although these original versions attracted generally favorable reviews, audiences preferred the translated versions presented at the Opéra; see Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 184.

thereof—of Mozart’s musical style. On the one hand, critics blamed the “development of the orchestra and of harmony, inspired by Germany” for “the disappearance of melody, which had been the only *meaningful* element in music capable of *imitating Nature* and speaking to the human heart,” a position reflective of French musical aesthetics (and national antipathy toward things German) in the early part of the century.⁷⁰ On the other, Mozart’s rich harmony and classical proportions were regarded by Fétis and the progressive musical elite as the pinnacle of musical development.⁷¹ The aesthetic debate about Mozart’s music continued into the 1820s, but it cooled off after 1823 as critics turned their attention to the more immediate threat of Rossini’s blatantly nationalist agenda.⁷² In comparison to Rossini and the growing French craze for Italian opera, Mozart and his music were simply less controversial.

When Liszt arrived for the 1824 season, the music and figure of Mozart functioned as a positive element of French critical discourse and musical practice after nearly two decades of debate—an established point of reference within Parisian musical life. In the flurry of articles that appeared during Liszt’s debut season, even short reviews made passing references to Mozart, while longer ones pointed out correspondences between the two biographies, praised Liszt’s musicianship, and speculated over his future career. Surface-level similarities in biography and physical appearance, noted by the press and perhaps cultivated by Adam Liszt, allowed the metaphor to take root immediately. Walker argues that Adam Liszt had obviously recognized the parallels between the Mozart children and his

⁷⁰ Jean Mongrédien, *French Music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, 1789-1830*, trans. Sylvain Frémaux, ed. Reinhard G. Pauly (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996), 340.

⁷¹ Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834-80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90-91.

⁷² Mongrédien, *French Music*, 337.

own family before leaving Vienna in the spring of 1823. In 1763, Leopold Mozart had launched his family on a “Great Western Tour,” which lasted over three years and took the family through various German cities, Brussels, Paris, London, and back again.⁷³

On their own journey, the Liszts literally retraced the Mozart family’s path through Germany to Paris, stopping in Munich, Augsburg, Stuttgart, and Strassburg (now Strasbourg, France). As Walker notes, “the fact that Adam followed a similar route...should not surprise us. People were beginning openly to compare the young Liszt to Mozart, and it was typical of Adam to try to symbolize that fact publicly.”⁷⁴ Once in Paris, Adam Liszt continued to take advantage of his son’s prodigiosity by, for example, shaving off one year from his age and encouraging the child to compose an opera.⁷⁵ Just as the Mozart children and countless others had done, Liszt played the salon circuit for several months before offering his first public concert nearly sixty years to the day after Mozart’s public debut on 10 March 1764. Liszt’s solo improvisation on “Non più andrai,” the culmination of the program, further intensified the connection by almost literally bringing Mozart onstage with him.

Such associations with Mozart had significance on several levels. First, it elevated the young Liszt as a performer. By advertising his son as Mozart’s reincarnation, Adam Liszt encouraged audiences to see him as a child prodigy of a heightened caliber, unique in comparison to other young virtuosos such as Charles-Valentin Alkan or Ernest Dejazet, also

⁷³ Maynard Solomon, *Mozart: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 43-54.

⁷⁴ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 89.

⁷⁵ Most reviews referred to Liszt as an eleven-year-old prodigy, even though he had passed his twelfth birthday in October 1823. Adam Liszt may have planted this misinformation. No direct evidence supports or contradicts the charge that he lied about Liszt’s age. It is entirely plausible, however, that, like the fathers of child prodigies before him, he deliberately subtracted a year from Liszt’s age in order to increase the value of his son’s talent. It is also possible that the mistake originated in the press. Whatever its source, the mistake was never corrected, and Adam Liszt seemed to have allowed the factual error to continue unchecked.

active in Paris in the early 1820s. Second, a Mozartian prodigy was far more valuable than an ordinary child pianist. The Liszt family stood to reap a hefty profit from Liszt's benefit concerts and salon appearances, and given the family's uncertain financial situation, this was probably one of Adam Liszt's central purposes in bringing his son to Paris.⁷⁶ A less generous critic faulted him publicly for exploiting Liszt's talent, which Adam Liszt denied in a strongly worded letter to the editor of *La Pandore*.⁷⁷

Finally—and most importantly—a link to Mozart could help to establish Liszt as the legitimate heir to a Western musical tradition. The family's Hungarian roots gave Liszt an Eastern exoticism, a quality that he used later in his career to develop a cosmopolitan European identity. But for a young musician in 1820s Paris, a connection to a Western lineage could stabilize his foreignness.⁷⁸ With the emergence of a canon based on specifically German music, a position in the line of great Viennese composers whose works formed the foundation of this canon (Mozart, Beethoven) would be helpful for Liszt if he (or his father) harbored any ambition of becoming a composer. Musical and aesthetic alliances with the Austro-German tradition as a young pianist would grant him credibility both now and in the future.⁷⁹ At the same time, Liszt's national origin remained an important part of his public identity for his Parisian critics, who regularly referred to him as a Hungarian.

⁷⁶ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 119. Although Liszt had brought in some considerable sums during the “Grand Tour,” it was never enough to set the family up comfortably for more than a little while, especially since Adam Liszt had broken ties with the Esterházy family and could no longer rely on them for financial support.

⁷⁷ *La Pandore*, 18 and 19 March 1824.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of Liszt's campaign as a cosmopolitan personality, see chapter 3 in Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Although Liszt might have used his ties to the Esterházy family to construct a closer relationship to Haydn, he did not.

⁷⁹ James Deaville, “The Politics of Liszt's Virtuosity: New Light on the Dialectics of a Cultural Phenomenon,” in *Liszt and the Birth of Modern Europe: Music as a Mirror of Religious, Political, Cultural, and Aesthetic Transformation*, ed. Michael Saffle and Rossana Dalmonte, 115-42 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003).

For critics, comparing Liszt to Mozart initiated a flexible conversation that addressed their own concerns in a way that made sense to their readers, be they amateur or professional music consumers. Behind passionately enthusiastic descriptions of the 7 March 1824 concert lurk the concerns of French music journalists, whose questions, like Liszt's own identity, were also shaped by the presence of Mozart within this context. The main points of congruency between Liszt and Mozart—prodigosity, pianistic virtuosity, and improvisation—engendered the three main sites of discussion. The construction of Liszt as a child virtuoso who, alone among his contemporary rivals, was worthy to be compared to the ultimate child prodigy, Mozart, had already begun in mid-January, with the short aforementioned reference in *Le Corsaire*'s review of the Société Académique des Enfants d'Apollon concert. Just two months later, however, the reviewer for *La Pandore* opened his review with a much bolder statement: "A Hungarian, aged eleven years, has just revived in Paris the wonders that the celebrated Mozart let shine before all of musical Europe during his childhood."⁸⁰ The critic for the *Journal des débats* reported that Liszt triggered a public frenzy akin to the excitement previously generated by Mozart: "he recalls the wonders of Mozart's childhood," a comment that also hints at Liszt's performance of musical feats specifically associated with Mozart.⁸¹ Others referred to Liszt with nicknames that emphasized his age and his connection to Mozart. For example, in one article, both Liszt and Mozart were dubbed "petits sorciers," or "little sorcerers." In another, Liszt became the "prodige imberbe," the beardless prodigy, an epithet quoted from a review of Mozart's 1764

⁸⁰ "Un Hongrois, âgé de onze ans, vient de renouveler à Paris le prodige dont le célèbre Mozart a rendu témoin dans son enfance toute l'Europe musicale" (*La Pandore*, 11 February 1824).

⁸¹ "Il rappelle les merveilles de l'enfance de Mozart" (*Journal des débats*, 23 March 1824).

debut.⁸² Liszt's reviewers also remarked on the dissonance between his physical youth and his maturity as a musician and a performer, yet another connection to Mozart as well as a way to enhance the value of his prodigious talent. As I shall discuss, the vocabulary with which Liszt's critics tied his performance to Mozart intersected with the contemporary discourse about child prodigies.

Having established Liszt as a Mozartian child prodigy, most critics then turned to his virtuoso technique and his improvisations. Like Mozart, Liszt stood at the forefront of an emerging keyboard tradition. Both pianists, therefore, were instrumental in the development of new technical approaches to the keyboard, which consequently changed how music was composed for it. It was Liszt's solo improvisation, however, that irrevocably tied his early reception in Paris to Mozart. For early nineteenth-century musicians, successful improvising was supposed to result from dazzling technical skills on the one hand and natural inspiration on the other. According to one contemporary music treatise,

To improvise with success in music, it is advisable to be deeply initiated in the resources of the art; it is necessary to be an absolute master of the instrument on which one improvises, to possess a soul which is easily fired up and a great presence of spirit, in order that there be unity in a piece created in this manner.⁸³

Jim Samson has traced this combination of skill and Romantic inspiration to the idealized conception of Mozart's effortless creation (perpetuated by overlapping perceptions of

⁸² Liszt was referred to as "le jeune Liszt" in *La Pandore*, "le petit sorcier" in *La Gazette de France*, and "le prodige imberbe" in *Le Constitutionnel*.

⁸³ "Pour improviser avec succès en musique, il convient d'être profondément initié aux ressources de l'art; il faut, en outre, être maître absolu de l'instrument sur lequel on improvise, posséder une âme qui s'exalte aisément et une grande présence d'esprit, afin qu'il y ait de l'unité dans un morceau créé de cette manière" (Léon Escudier and Marie Escudier, *Dictionnaire de musique théorique et historique* [Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1854], s.v. "Improviser").

Mozart's innate ability to improvise and to compose without revision) popular in the early nineteenth century.⁸⁴

By emphasizing the duality of skill and genius in his improvisation, Liszt's critics confirmed his unusual position. His choice of a melody from *Le nozze di Figaro* further magnified the connection with Mozart. As a critic for *La Gazette de France* exclaimed: "Liszt traverses the keyboard not only with precision and speed, not only with an intelligence, an imperturbable composure: but he composes, *he improvises!*"⁸⁵ A writer in *Le Moniteur universel* attempted to capture the experience of Liszt's improvisation:

once seized, this motive never again left the improviser; it found itself sometimes in the thunder of the violent bass, sometimes in the delicate exquisiteness of the high notes; exposing itself, disappearing in turn and constantly supported by a harmony rich, varied, imitative, but nevertheless bearing with it, whether by its beauty or by its profusion, both the character and the proof of the improvisation.⁸⁶

The *Journal de Paris* also praised Liszt's improvisations because they reflected "a rich imagination, and a profound knowledge of accompaniment, fugue, and counterpoint."⁸⁷

Liszt's facility at the piano and his ability to improvise led critics to speculate over whether he would become a composer. More specifically, they asked, would Liszt be the one to carry on the work left unfinished at the great Mozart's premature death?

⁸⁴ Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*, 14.

⁸⁵ "Liszt parcourt le clavier non seulement avec précision et vitesse, non seulement avec une intelligence, un aplomb imperturbables; mais il compose, *il improvise!*" (*La Gazette de France*, 9 March 1824).

⁸⁶ "Une fois saisi, ce motif n'a plus abandonné l'improvisateur; il se retrouvait tantôt dans les tonnerres d'un basse foudroyante, tantôt dans les exquis délicatesses des notes élevées; s'offrant, disparaissant tour à tour et constamment soutenu par une harmonie riche, varié, imitative, mais cependant portant avec elle, soit par ses beautés, soit par sa profusion, même le cachet et la preuve de l'improvisation" (*Le Moniteur universel*, 12 March 1824).

⁸⁷ "Une connaissance profonde de l'accompagnement, de la fugue et du contre-point" (*Journal de Paris*, 9 March 1824).

Because Liszt's improvisations and his grasp of musical materials correlated so closely with the French conception of Mozart's own musicianship, some critics suggested that Liszt had been sent to finish Mozart's work or, practically speaking, that he was fated to become the "next" Mozart, the great composer of his generation. "Dear child," entreated *Le Corsaire*, "pursue your career, but reflect on the great tasks imposed on you if Heaven has destined you to succeed the greatest musical spirit honored in Europe."⁸⁸ The critic Martainville argued that Liszt was literally Mozart's reincarnation. "I am convinced that the soul and spirit of Mozart was passed into the body of young Liszt: it is Mozart himself; never has the identity manifested itself by such obvious signs: same father; same prodigious talent in childhood and in the same art."⁸⁹ Liszt's father encouraged the connection between the composer Mozart and the future composer Liszt by publicizing his son's plans to compose an opera.⁹⁰ At least one critic remarked upon this endeavor, citing Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne* as the only other example of an opera composed by a musician of Liszt's age.⁹¹ Later, this operatic endeavor would provide critics with the opportunity to answer the question of whether Liszt was indeed Mozart's heir.

At first glance, the construction of Liszt as the reincarnation of Mozart appears to be an early manifestation of Liszt's opportunism: he and his father had much to gain from

⁸⁸ "Aimable enfant, poursuis ta carrière, mais songe que de grands devoirs te sont imposés, si le ciel t'a destiné à recueillir la succession du plus grand génie musical dont l'Europe s'honore" (*Le Corsaire*, 9 April 1824).

⁸⁹ "Je suis convaincu que l'âme et le génie de Mozart sont passées dans le corps du jeune List: c'est Mozart lui-même; jamais l'identité ne s'est manifestée par des signes plus évidens; même patrie, même talent prodigieux dans l'enfance et dans le même art" (*Le Drapeau blanc*, 9 March 1824).

⁹⁰ The project in question was almost certainly *Don Sanche, ou Le Château d'amour*, which was eventually staged in Paris on 17 October 1825.

⁹¹ Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne* (1768) was mentioned off-hand by a few critics. The opera had been performed only once (if at all) in Vienna, and the music therefore would not have been familiar to Parisian audiences and critics. They may have been somewhat familiar with the subject of the opera, as it was supposedly a parody on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1752 opera *Le Devin du village*. No direct musical comparison was made at this time between Mozart's *Bastien* and Liszt's *Don Sanche*.

convincing French audiences that Mozart did indeed live on in Liszt's talent. Nevertheless, their gambit could not have worked without the underlying framework of Mozart reception in France, or without the cooperation of Liszt's critics. Why this specific framework may have been so successful is another question altogether. All too often, Parisian journalists pandered to their readers, employing highly exaggerated rhetoric to idealize figures popular with their audiences. Such writing enhanced the reputation of the Parisian musical scene and also flattered the elite socialites who had patronized these artists in the first place. Suggesting that their latest treasure would turn out to be the next Mozart could easily have been a ploy to sell more papers.

Music critics were also heavily invested in the current state and future progress of French music, which, in the 1820s, was in a state of flux. The propensity of Parisian audiences for a cosmopolitan mix of Italian opera and Germanic symphonies fueled debates over national styles of composition and performance, all framed within the broader context of the debate over Romanticism versus Classicism, or, as Janet Johnson describes it, the Ancients versus the Moderns.⁹² The gradual aesthetic acceptance of Mozart's music, first by audiences and then by critical discourse, was but a symptom of this larger phenomenon. Liszt's debut in Paris occurred at an important juncture in the argument; as critics discussed the future direction of French music, the young, talented, and ambitious pianist arrived with a Mozartian twinkle in his eye. His undeniably cosmopolitan programs appealed hugely to popular audiences, while his virtuosity and potential as a composer attracted the attention of the musical elite. Such a broad impact on Parisian musical life required a response. The

⁹² See Janet L. Johnson, "The Musical Environment in France," in *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*, ed. Peter Bloom, 20-37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

construction of Liszt as Mozart's successor, indeed as Mozart reborn, created a space in which new musical ideals could be considered without compromising the political, disciplinary, or national affiliations that were at risk in conversations about Rossini. By focusing primarily on Liszt as a French Mozart, Parisian critics tacitly accepted the aesthetic implications of his music. In this way, Liszt allowed Parisian critics to contemplate a cosmopolitan music for the future without actively rejecting the central concerns of French music.

Commodifying the Child Prodigy

A crucial component in Liszt's self-representation as Mozart was the intersection of his age with his talent, a combination that allowed Liszt to tap into a pre-existing discourse about the child prodigy. Though he was well into his twelfth year—significantly older than the seven-year-old Mozart—Liszt was still young enough to be constructed as this special brand of virtuoso.⁹³ On the one hand, this tactic opened an excellent pathway into Parisian concert life, for not only did the French love virtuosos, but they seemed to be particularly fascinated by child prodigies. Underpinning the city's long history of venerating virtuosos and child prodigies, on the other hand, was a concurrent discourse of Romantic genius specifically related to children. This provided in the 1820s an ideal location for the intersection of musical interest in Mozart and social fascination with the child.

Exceptional children have a long, albeit somewhat checkered history in Western society. Over the course of hundreds of years, historians have recorded extraordinary tales of

⁹³ On Mozart as an inspiration for later child prodigies, see Dominique Haufater, "Être Mozart: Wolfgang et ses émules," in *Le Printemps des génies*, ed. Michèle Sacquin, 73-85 (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale/Robert Laffont, 1993).

child mathematicians, chess players, musicians, poets, and athletes, whose astonishing feats of virtuosity belie their young ages. Prior to the seventeenth century, children inhabited the “margins of society,” where exceptional abilities were likely to be stigmatized as manifestations of the devil’s work.⁹⁴ Although prodigal adolescent and pre-adolescent figures began to appear in literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, wisdom, talent, and authority remained tied to advanced age until the mid-eighteenth century.⁹⁵ In his essay on children in Western society, George Boas examines the development of what he called the “cult of childhood,” identifying Rousseau’s treatise on education (*Émile, ou De l’Éducation*, 1762) as the starting point of a fundamental shift in social attitudes toward childhood and children.⁹⁶ Whereas most Enlightenment thinkers continued to treat adulthood as the age of reason, Rousseau idealized childhood as a state of naturalness, an attitude that later fed into Romantic ideas about genius, art, and nature.⁹⁷

In the early nineteenth century, social institutions began to frame childhood and children as resources to be cherished. For example, Napoleon’s standardization of elementary education after 1802 was supported by the doctrine of the “cult of domesticity,” which emphasized the importance of domestic life and its role in shaping the morals of children.⁹⁸ In this social context, the Romantic emphasis on the “image of artistic as hero and the belief in genius” dovetailed with the belief that artists possessed “special intuitive

⁹⁴ Michel Postoureau, “Enfants prodiges, enfants du diable,” in *Le Printemps des génies*, 30-31.

⁹⁵ Postoureau, “Enfants prodiges,” 32-33.

⁹⁶ George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: Warburg Institute, 1966).

⁹⁷ Boas, *The Cult of Childhood*, 29-34 and 72-73.

⁹⁸ Éric Mension-Rigau, *La Condition de l'enfant, XIXème-XXème siècles* (Paris: Mairie de Paris, Direction de l'action sociale, de l'enfance et de la santé, 1999), 2-8.

gifts and/or messianic powers”⁹⁹ to create what José-Luis Diaz has called the “sacralization of young genius.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the child prodigy emerged as a special kind of virtuoso, one that channeled the expression of nature through the pure state of childhood. On a less spiritual level, this ideology manifested itself in everyday life as Parisian audiences clamored over virtuosos, and child virtuosos in particular.

In the 1820s, French journalists enthusiastically welcomed an influx of child prodigies. A parade of pre-adolescent virtuosos had preceded Liszt’s arrival, captivating French audiences with their incandescent feats that were recalled in reviews of Liszt’s concert. “We live in the time of child marvels,” asserted one writer, recalling other child virtuosos, such as the thirteen-year-old French singer Euphémie Boyé and the eight-year-old English pianist George Aspull, who had performed for Paris earlier in 1823.¹⁰¹ Other competitors in 1824 included the violinist Camille Sivori, aged six years, the “infant” singer Léontine Fay, and the young pianist Anna de Belleville. Another writer mused over the growing ranks of child prodigies that populated Paris in the early nineteenth century:

The decade that has just passed will furnish more than a page to the history of famous children. On the stage, in our orchestras, in our concerts, in our salons, everywhere we have seen ten- or twelve-year-old virtuosos. This is doubtlessly the compensation of providence. With so many men today that could pass as children, it is only right that some children pass as men.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Kerry Murphy, “Liszt and Virtuosity in Paris in the 1830s: The Artist as Romantic Hero,” in *Essays in Honour of David Evatt Tunley*, ed. Frank Calloway (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1995), 92.

¹⁰⁰ José-Luis Diaz, “L’Enfant prodige entre Lumières et romantisme,” in *Le Printemps des génies*, 138.

¹⁰¹ “Nous vivons au temps des merveilles enfantines” (*Le Diable boiteux*, 1 March 1824).

¹⁰² “Les dix années qui viennent de s’écouler fourniront plus d’un page à l’histoire des enfans [*sic*] célèbres. Sur la scène, dans nos orchestres, dans nos concerts, dans nos salons, partout nous avons vu des virtuoses de dix ou douze ans. C’est sans doute une compensation de la providence. Tant d’hommes aujourd’hui pourraient passer pour des enfans, qu’il est juste que quelques enfans puissent passer pour des hommes” (*Le Courrier français*, 9 March 1824). The final sentence may well be a critique of Louis XVIII and his ministry, which were seen as too cautious and ineffectual.

The Romantic-era virtuoso could be deified or demonized, based on how his virtuosity was perceived by audiences and the press. Self-representation, of course, was key. By remaining aloof from business affairs and emphasizing the links between his creativity and his life experiences, a virtuoso could maintain the image of inspired artistic genius. But if this façade was damaged by too much public exposure or by blatant self-promotion—if a virtuoso was seen to have “amplified spectacle-making, technical skill, and self-promotion to the point that a performance no longer conveyed something or represented something”—scathing accusations of shallowness and insincerity could relegate him to the ranks of opportunistic, self-aggrandizing charlatans and common tricksters.¹⁰³ Such accusations could be avoided through the careful mediation between social expectations, individual strengths, and the demands of entrepreneurial musicianship.

The same problem also faced child virtuosos and their handlers. In particular, three criteria for maintaining the illusion of the child prodigy emerge from Liszt’s reception in Paris. First, the age of the child was crucial, in terms of his or her apparent physical age and intellectual and emotional development. A child near adolescence, for example, could frame himself as a child prodigy by behaving in an infantile manner or lying about his age. Second, it was imperative that the child appear aloof from the practical aspects of professional musicianship. Most child prodigies operated under the guidance of a parent or guardian. This arrangement was obviously a practical one: most children did not travel alone in an adult society, and concert management required at least some degree of tact and maturity. More importantly, the parental figure was available to protect his charge from accusations of

¹⁰³ Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris During the Age of Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 294.

exploitation or greed—leaving the child untouched by such material considerations.¹⁰⁴

Finally, the spectacular flawless execution expected from the virtuoso was also expected from exceptional children—if anything, the most successful child virtuosos out-played their adult counterparts by contrasting their adult performance with their childlike demeanor.

For Liszt, the French reception of his Mozartian profile depended on his ability to construct himself as a child prodigy according to contemporary expectations while also showcasing his unique skill set. To begin, Liszt's physical appearance and stage presence contributed to the perception of him as a child despite the fact that he was already twelve years old—around the age that the transition into adulthood was seen to begin for French children.¹⁰⁵ His behavior onstage struck more than one critic as particularly childlike. “It is all that he can do to extend his little arms to the two opposite extremities of the keyboard; his little feet barely reach the pedals.”¹⁰⁶ Another journalist noted that “he is not led to the piano, he rushes there; they applaud for him, and he is amazed; the applause redoubles, so he rubs his hands together and this childish distraction elicits peals of laughter.”¹⁰⁷

Second, Adam Liszt apparently brought his excitable son to the stage: “he appeared, led by his father.”¹⁰⁸ His father's presence onstage at this moment seems unnecessary, especially if Liszt was, as *Le Corsaire* described, running to the piano in delight.

Furthermore, during his eighteen months of public performances across Europe, reports

¹⁰⁴ Yet even this protective relationship could backfire, if the parent played too prominent a role (Friedrich Wieck comes to mind).

¹⁰⁵ According to Mension-Rigau, this corresponded with the age at which children experienced the Catholic sacrament of communion; see Mension-Rigau, *La Condition de l'enfant*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ *Le Drapeau blanc*, 9 March 1824.

¹⁰⁷ “On ne le conduit pas au piano, car il s'y précipite; on l'applaudit, et il s'étonne; les applaudissemens redoublent, alors il se frotte les mains, et cette distraction enfantine fait partir des éclats de rire” (*Le Corsaire*, 9 March 1824).

¹⁰⁸ “Il a paru, conduit par son père” (*Le Courrier français*, 9 March 1824).

indicate that Liszt did not suffer from such stage fright that he would require his father's help. On the contrary, most accounts of Liszt's performances around this period indicate that he seemed remarkably immune to nerves.¹⁰⁹ For the audience, however, Adam Liszt's presence further supported the image of his son as a child. Post-revolutionary politics, modeled after the patriarchal family, placed the father in a position of benign authority.¹¹⁰ The appearance of an authority figure cast Liszt in the dependent role of a child, guided by his father, rather than in the independent role of an adult. Yet *La Pandore* still charged Adam Liszt with unfairly milking his son's talent for profit, a blow that glanced off the father's armor without tainting the son's aura of prodigy.¹¹¹

Finally, in their discussion of Liszt's childlike appearance and his mature command over the piano, Liszt's critics without exception were astonished by his ability to overcome the limitations that usually hinder children. The review in *La Gazette de France* paints a particularly vivid picture of a "petit garçon" rising to the occasion:

Imagine, if possible, a little boy of at most twelve years, well-proportioned, blond, with regular features. See him present himself at once with both grace and candor. He greets the audience, transfers his attention to the orchestra that surrounds him, and, with an air of intelligence, fixes it on Mr. Grasset, leader of this large and well-disciplined militia, before sitting. The tutti begins. Liszt, distracted, notices some friend in the second loge; suddenly his face lights up, he waves. However, the young beneficiary counted the measures: his turn approaches and he is no longer a child.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ For example, the review in *Le Courrier français* (9 March 1824) comments on this.

¹¹⁰ On fatherhood in nineteenth-century France, see *Histoire des pères et de la paternité*, ed. Jean Delumeau and Daniel Roche (Paris: Larousse, 2000).

¹¹¹ See *La Pandore* (18 March 1824) for the anonymous slap at Adam Liszt; see the same journal on 19 March 1824 for Adam Liszt's indignant response.

¹¹² "Qu'on s' imagine, s'il est possible, un petit garçon douze ans plus, bien pris dans sa taille, blond, le traits réguliers. Voyez-le se présenter avec grâce et candour tout à la fois. Il salue le public, reporte son attention vers l'orchestre qui l'environne, et, d'un air d'intelligence, fixe un moment, avant de s'asseoir, M. Grasset, le chef de cette milice nombreuse et bien disciplinée. Le *tutti* commence. Liszt distrait, aperçoit quelque ami dans une loge des secondes: aussitôt sa figure s'anime, il fait un signe. Cependant le jeune bénéficiaire a compté *les mesures*: son tour approche et ce n'est plus un enfant" (*La Gazette de France*, 9 March 1824).

In his review, the critic deliberately describes Liszt as a child. He begins by depicting Liszt's presence on stage in terms that specifically point to his immaturity, calling him a "little boy" and pointing out his attractive features and blond hair, both images that conjure up the childlike and angelic. He then enhanced the dramatic event by throwing the innocent child in relief against the forbidding military orchestra. Finally, if there were any doubt left, Liszt blew his own cover by waving at a friend—during the introduction to his concerto no less. The moment his fingers touched the keys, however, transformed him from a child to an adult. Once Liszt began to play, his tender age dissolved under the technical perfection and intellectual acumen with which he played his instrument. The critic concluded that Liszt was "free from fear, he knows neither arrogance nor smugness; he is *natural* and as if in his element...Liszt transcends childhood and youth."¹¹³ The writer for the *Journal des débats* agreed, declaring that "Liszt must be judged as a man; he does not need the concessions that one ordinarily makes to composers and pianists of his age."¹¹⁴

Liszt's experience as a child prodigy had a tremendous impact on his future career. Not only did it frame his ability to conjure up Mozart, but it also influenced, as Cécile Reynaud argues, how the next decade of Liszt's career unfolded in Paris.¹¹⁵ He created an unparalleled sensation in Parisian musical life, perhaps a much larger one than if he had been too old make use of the child-prodigy discourse. Expectations only mounted as he returned to Paris again and again, both on the part of French audiences, who looked forward to bigger

¹¹³ "Exempt de crainte, il ne connaît pas davantage la morgue ou la suffisance; il est *naturel* et comme dans son élément...Liszt franchit l'enfance et la jeunesse" (*La Gazette de France*, 9 March 1824).

¹¹⁴ "Liszt doit être jugé comme un homme; il n'a pas besoin des concessions que l'on fait ordinairement aux compositeurs et même aux pianistes de son âge" (*Journal des débats*, 23 March 1824).

¹¹⁵ Cécile Reynaud, *Liszt et le virtuose romantique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), 213.

and better fireworks from their favorite prodigy, and on the part of Liszt himself, who sought each time to re-enact the overwhelming experience of his first season. Reynaud suggests that the crisis point of 1828 and 1829, after the death of Adam Liszt (and thus Liszt's childhood), was caused in part by Liszt's uncertainty about how to construct himself as an adult. As I shall discuss, this process had already begun for him in 1825 by Parisian accounts of Liszt's first (and only) opera.

Improvisation as Cultural Practice

Even as Liszt's critics used his improvisation to argue that he represented Mozart reborn, they also connected his performance to other improvising figures currently in vogue in Paris. They dubbed him the "Sgricci of the piano" and the "little living Componium," specific references to high-profile virtuoso phenomena of the 1820s: the great Italian poet Tomasso Sgricci and Diederich Winkel's "Componium," a double-barreled orchestrion. Today, Sgricci has been largely forgotten, and Winkel's mechanical masterpiece now resides (minus a number of its parts) in a Brussels museum. But with Liszt, they were among the most exciting and controversial virtuoso acts to be seen on the Parisian stage in the winter of 1824. Although the three performers exhibited their virtuosity in unique and individual ways, each included improvisation in his arsenal of skills. The child prodigy Liszt wove fantasies at the piano with hands possessed by the spirit of Mozart, while Sgricci improvised thrilling five-act tragedies in Italian verse. And the Componium, billed as the "mechanical musical improviser," defied logic by producing original variations with no apparent help from its operator.

Liszt, Sgricci, and the Componium converged on Paris in the winter and spring of 1824, where their public performances attracted large, multi-faceted crowds (see Table 2.2 for a timeline of the 1823-24 winter/spring concert season). They also drew the attention of a very lively and very opinionated press, many of whom published detailed reviews of all three. From these reviews emerges a fascinating commentary on musical and cultural aspects of improvised performance in the early nineteenth century. Despite the differing ages, disciplines, and levels of sentience of the three figures, the critical reception refers to a common practice. Liszt and Sgricci, both of whom were male, foreign, and human, captivated Parisian audiences using similar strategies. Several interrelated concerns arise from the reception of their public performances: first, the crucial nature of the audience's participation; second, the dichotomy of creative genius versus learned skills; and third, the authenticity of the improvised act. Together, these issues establish a framework—a practice of improvisation—within which Winkel's presentation of the Componium as an improvising musical instrument can be placed.

Table 2.2: Timeline of 1823-24 Concert Season in Paris

Late Nov 1823:	Componium arrives in Paris
11 Dec 1823:	Liszt family arrives in Paris
16 Dec 1823:	Componium debut public concert (Wenzel Pavilion, Rue de l'Échiquier) Daily concerts hereafter at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.
2 Feb 1824:	Examination of Componium by Biot (Académie des Sciences) and Catel (Académie des Beaux-Arts)
7 Feb 1824:	Certification of Componium as improvising machine by Biot and Catel published in <i>Journal des débats</i>
10 Feb 1824:	Liszt private concert, improvisation on unknown theme (Érard salon)
7 Mar 1824:	Liszt public benefit concert, improvisation on Mozart's "Non più andrai" (Salle Louvois)
14 Mar 1824:	Sgricci public performance, improvisation on "Bianca et Capello," (Salle des Menus-Plaisirs)
25 Apr 1824:	Sgricci public performance, improvisation on "Mort de Charles I," (Salle Louvois)

Regardless of their expertise, the hundred of virtuosos swarming Western Europe often incorporated spontaneous acts into their performances, from musical improvisation to sleight-of-hand to blind-folded chess matches.¹¹⁶ In Paris, improvisation was lionized in the press as the ultimate form of virtuosity. "Of all the operations of the spirit," rhapsodized one journalist, "true improvisation is the most extraordinary."¹¹⁷ Indeed, behind most reviews of improvised performance in Paris stands the conviction that the hallmarks of virtuosity, "precision, elegance, energy, heat, [and] feeling," unite in improvisation to create a

¹¹⁶ On the many varieties of virtuoso spectacle in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, see Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso*.

¹¹⁷ "De toutes les opérations de l'esprit, l'improvisation véritable est la plus extraordinaire" (*Journal de Paris*, 15 March 1824).

“completely poetic and celestial language that comes and speaks to the soul.”¹¹⁸ Carl Fernow, whose landmark treatise on improvisation appeared in 1806, elevates improvisation in much the same way: because it is the most direct way of witnessing inspiration and creativity, improvisation offers an experience superior to any other artistic performance.¹¹⁹

As keyboard performers had done since the sixteenth century, Liszt featured improvisation in his performances throughout his life. By the nineteenth century, improvisation had become what Czerny called the “special obligation and crown of distinction for the keyboard virtuoso.”¹²⁰ Liszt and his father correctly identified the skill as a critical component of the virtuoso’s arsenal; if Liszt was going to challenge the top virtuosos of the 1820s, he would have to prove himself as an improviser as well as a technician. Sgricci also stood at the forefront of a celebrated group of improvisers: traveling poets whose virtuosity resided specifically in their ability to improvise verse in a variety of languages. These figures combined the rowdy public nature of the Renaissance marketplace entertainer with the exclusive aristocracy of the eighteenth-century salon-performer to become in the early nineteenth century acknowledged professionals whose performances commanded serious respect and equally serious revenue from tickets.¹²¹ After his debut in Arezzo in 1816, Sgricci’s fame spread to the other European capitals, and over the next ten

¹¹⁸ “Précision, élégance, énergie, chaleur, sentiment, le jeu de cet enfant réunit toutes les qualités qui ont fait la renommée des plus grands pianistes; mais le fini parfait de son exécution disparaît pour les personnes qui ont le bonheur de le voir improviser. Il n’y a plus ni clavier, ni cordes qui occupent l’attention: c’est un langage tout poétique et tout céleste qui vient parler à l’âme” (*L’Étoile*, 11 February 1824).

¹¹⁹ Angela Esterhammer, “The Cosmopolitan *Improvvisatore*: Spontaneity and Performance in Romantic Poetics,” *European Romantic Review* 16 (2005): 158. See also Carl Ludwig Fernow, *Römische Studien*, vol. 2 *Über die Improvisatoren* (Zürich: Gessner, 1806).

¹²⁰ Carl Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte* op. 200, trans. Alice Mitchell (New York: Longman, 1983), 1.

¹²¹ Esterhammer, “The Cosmopolitan *Improvvisatore*,” 157.

years, he toured through France, England, and Italy to great acclaim.¹²² Like other *improvvisatori*, Sgricci improvised on subjects provided by his audiences in genres ranging from short poems to full-length five-act dramas. These performances were comprised of the latter: five-act tragedies that lasted up to two hours and that featured a cast of several characters, all improvised and acted by the unflagging Sgricci.¹²³ In Paris, his public performances were given in the same venues used by visiting virtuoso musicians; like Liszt, Sgricci rented the Salle Louvois for at least one of his *séances*. See Figure 2.1 for an advertisement of Sgricci's 25 April 1824 performance.

Figure 2.1: Advertisement for Sgricci's performance of 25 April 1824
(Archives Nationales, Paris, AJ¹³ 120)

SALLE LOUVOIS.
Demain Dimanche 25 Avril 1824,

**IMPROVISATION
D'UNE TRAGÉDIE,
PAR
M. SGRICCI.**

PRIX DES PLACES :	
Stalles,	10 fr.
1 ^{er} Balcon,	20
1 ^{er} Loges, 2 ^e en face et d'avant-scène, et avant-scène	20
4 ^e tra-de-chamée,	18
3 ^e Loges de côté et Loges du rez-de-chamée,	15
Orchestre et 1 ^{re} Galerie,	12
2 ^e Balcon,	10 fr.
3 ^e Loges,	10
2 ^e Galerie,	8
3 ^e Balcon,	6
Parterre et 5 ^e Galerie,	5
Amphithéâtre,	5

Suivre pour la location, rue Grange-Batelière, ancien hôtel Choiseul, n. 5, et chez M. Sicaire, rue St-Honoré, n. 556, où l'on pourra se procurer des billets d'avance.
LES BUREAUX S'OUVRIRONT A SEPT HEURES. — ON COMMENCERA A HUIT HEURES PRÉCISES.
C. BALLARD, Imprimeur du Roi, rue J.-J. Rousseau, n°. 8.

¹²² Alberto Basi, *Tommaso Sgricci: poeta tragico estemporaneo* (Cortona: Calosci, 1990).

¹²³ Sgricci was the only actor in his performances, although he may have incorporated a musician as did some of his contemporaries. For example, Esterhammer describes a performance in which a violinist and a poet improvised in tandem, the musician providing “mood music” (Esterhammer, “The Cosmopolitan *Improvvisatore*,” 154-55).

The critical reception of these two figures illuminates a fundamental component of the practice of improvisation—what literary critic Angela Esterhammer calls the “reciprocal generation of affect on the side of both audience and performer.”¹²⁴ Simply put, the participation of the audience in an improvised performance was—and is—as vital as that of the performer. The dual responsibility is both exposed in the social construction of an improvised event and embedded within the cultural values that shaped it. In most cases, the artist or impresario requested from the audience a subject or theme for the improvisation; the audience complied—usually by contributing several suggestions, from which one was chosen at random by a member of the audience. The routine simplicity of this procedure, however, belies its significance to the parties involved. The degree to which audiences participated in the process of choosing the subject greatly interested Sgricci’s critics, who often devoted a significant portion of their columns to vivid accounts of the pre-improvisation ritual. In one case, the writer used almost the entire article to portray the drama of pre-performance events. On the one hand, these descriptions provide a fascinating view of Parisian social politics, revealing that usually high-price tickets-holders seated in the *parterre* would suggest themes, that high-ranking women could draw the theme from the proffered vase and announce it to the audience, and that appropriate subjects had to encompass a wide range of emotion and action without attracting the censor’s wrath.

On the other hand, as Liszt explained some fourteen years later in an open letter to the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, this ceremony also heightened the audience’s interest in the performance.

Those who proposed motives engaged to a certain extent their self-esteem; the adoption or rejection of their motives becomes a matter of triumph for one, of pique

¹²⁴ Esterhammer, “The Cosmopolitan *Improvvisatore*,” 156-57.

for another, of curiosity for all. Each is desirous of hearing what the musician will make of the idea that was imposed on him.¹²⁵

In other words, with the improvising artist onstage, the typical distraction of Parisian audiences gave way to a more attentive curiosity: as one of Liszt's critics wrote, "the moment of the improvisation had arrived, and interest had more than doubled."¹²⁶ Most likely, the chatter and social activity that usually ran counterpoint to public performances subsided to a lower level.

Liszt's perception of a change in listening posture points to the deeper implications of Esterhammer's notion of improvisation as a participatory experience.¹²⁷ The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed a shift in listening behavior that intersected with the Romantic reverence for genius and the act of creation: eventually, respect for the artwork and its creator silenced theater- and concert-going audiences.¹²⁸ Through improvised performance, the composer's process of channeling inspiration into words or music lay open to spectators, who were fascinated by what Fernow called the "moment of creative enthusiasm."¹²⁹ The opportunity to witness genius in action was of course part of what made improvisation so seductive. Liszt's critics and Sgricci's exclaimed over their "rare and

¹²⁵ "Ceux qui ont proposé des motifs ont engagé jusqu'à un certain point leur amour-propre; l'adoption ou le rejet de ses motifs devient un sujet de triomphe pour l'un, de dépit pour l'autre, de curiosité pour tous. Chacun est désireux d'entendre ce que le musicien fera de l'idée qu'on lui a imposée" (Franz Liszt, "Lettre d'un bachelier ès-musique à M. Lambert Massart," *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 5, no. 35 [2 September 1838]).

¹²⁶ "Après un intervalle rempli par un morceau de chant, le moment de l'improvisation était arrivé, et l'intérêt était plus que doublé" (*Le Moniteur universel*, 12 March 1824). On the behavior of Parisian concert-going audiences, see Cooper, *The Rise of Instrumental Music*, 97-101, and Johnson, *Listening in Paris*.

¹²⁷ Esterhammer, "The Cosmopolitan Improvisatore," 156-7.

¹²⁸ See Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 270-80.

¹²⁹ Fernow, *Römische Studien*, 2:304.

marvelous abilities” to throw aside the music stand, to abandon the written text, literally to perform “inspiration.”¹³⁰

Even as he “gave himself up to his genius,” though, the performer depended on his physical body and its capacity to voice instantaneously the products of his inspiration.¹³¹ This dependence generated another kind of excitement for the audience: fascinated as they may have been by the creative act, they were also acutely aware that a single misstep could cause the improviser to fall flat on his face. Esterhammer claims that the “rush of adrenalin felt by both performer and audience is one of the attractions of improvised performance, then as now.”¹³² Here technical virtuosity both enhances the expression of genius and the danger posed by its demands. The more skilled the improviser, the further he can push the limits of his improvisation, but the further he reaches, the greater the chance that he might fail. Thus, when such superstar virtuosos as Liszt and Sgricci took the stage, the tension was high indeed—but then again, so were ticket sales. Public displays of improvisation invited the audience to witness the performer reach his greatest inspiration while they held a collective breath against his failure.

This juxtaposition of creative genius and physical expression also provided a framework for the discussion of improvisation as a performance skill. Although overwhelmed at times by the emotional or spiritual power of Liszt’s and Sgricci’s performances, critics generally admitted that inspiration alone did not produce such effects. Technical mastery—in Liszt’s case of the piano, in Sgricci’s the language—was an essential

¹³⁰ “Une faculté si rare et si merveilleuse” (*Le Courrier français*, 8 March 1824).

¹³¹ “S’est livré à son génie” (*Le Drapeau blanc*, 9 March 1824).

¹³² Esterhammer, “The Cosmopolitan *Improvvisatore*,” 157.

element of improvisation.¹³³ One critic noted: “We have indeed observed, at numerous hearings, that the passages which most gripped the audience are precisely those that demand the most grace, elegance and finish of execution.”¹³⁴ The improviser also needed to be schooled in the rules of composition. Most contemporary treatises indicate that “true improvisation” consisted of spontaneous and simultaneous composition and performance,¹³⁵ a viewpoint echoed by Liszt’s critics, who praised the “profound knowledge of accompaniment, fugue, and counterpoint” evident in his improvising, and by Sgricci’s, who marveled at his ability to be “at once both author and actor.”¹³⁶ In the end, however, neither technical virtuosity nor compositional prowess sufficed; genius and inspiration alone could ignite the performance. “Genius, assisted by study, produces beautiful tragedies: a great actor appears in the brilliance of his own genius,” wrote a theater critic.¹³⁷ Or, as another put it: “Nature revealed to [Liszt] the secret of the combination of chords; habit familiarized him with their workings. The inspiration of song is in his head, the science of counterpoint in his fingers.”¹³⁸

¹³³ Many previous and contemporary essays on keyboard playing also reflect this idea. See, for example, C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949), especially Chapter 7, pp. 430-45; and Czerny, *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*.

¹³⁴ “Nous avons même observé, à plusieurs reprises, que les passages qui ont exercé le plus d’empire sur l’auditoire, sont précisément ceux qui demandent le plus de grâce, d’élégance et de *fini* dans l’exécution” (*L’Étoile*, 9 Mar 1824).

¹³⁵ Most music dictionaries published in France in the 1820s and 1830s take as a starting point Rousseau’s entry on improvisation in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Veuve Duchesne 1768), which defines musical improvisation as the simultaneous composition and performance of a musical piece.

¹³⁶ “Une connaissance profonde de l’accompagnement, de la fugue et du contre-point” (*Journal de Paris*, 9 March 1824); “à la fois auteur et acteur” (*Le Courrier français*, 8 March 1824).

¹³⁷ “Le génie, secondé par l’étude, produit de belles tragédies; un grand acteur se montre avec éclat dans le génie qui lui est propre” (*Le Courrier français*, 8 March 1824).

¹³⁸ “La nature lui a révélé le secret de la combinaison des accords; l’habitude l’a familiarisé avec leur marché. L’inspiration du chant est dans sa tête, et la science des contrepoint dans ses doigts” (*Le Moniteur universel*, 12 March 1824).

The high esteem placed on improvised performance and its revelation of “true genius and inspiration” was often accompanied by questions about the authenticity of a given performance. Consequently, critics often included in their reviews a verdict on whether the improvisation had actually been improvised. In the 1824 reviews, they relied on two kinds of support. First, writers cited the precautions taken to eliminate what one critic called “the suspicions of conspiracy and fraud” as well as the improviser’s track record as an honest performer.¹³⁹ For example, at one event, the organizers apparently sequestered Sgricci, as was customary, and then established a committee of honorable men of letters to approve the suggested topics, ostensibly to subvert any previous arrangement. Sgricci’s critics seemed to appreciate this double safeguard, convinced by the extra security and his stellar reputation that there had been no foul play. Though such an elaborate ceremony did not take place at Liszt’s debut concert, it may well have occurred in the private salon setting. Furthermore, his standing as an improviser was amplified by his habit of “spontaneously” improvising at unexpected moments and his ability to incorporate recently-heard themes (after a performance by another musician, for example) into his improvisation.¹⁴⁰ Second, critics relied on their own observations of the performance to support their arguments. Like several of his colleagues, one of Liszt’s critics claimed that it was impossible to mistake improvisation for prepared music. “A practiced ear would never be confused between

¹³⁹ “Toutes les mesures sont prises, dit-on, pour éloigner ce qui donnerait lieu à des soupçons de fraude et de compérage, et M. Sgricci improvisera une tragédie sur un sujet *donné* et non déjà *improvisé*” (*La Pandore*, 25 April 1824).

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Liszt’s unscheduled improvisation at the Société Académique concert on a theme heard at the concert (*Le Corsaire*, 21 January 1824).

hearing a studied piece or a true improvisation: the latter has a free path, directed by whim, and that one recognizes easily by the total ignorance of the thing that is going to follow.”¹⁴¹

But were Liszt’s fantasies really “created and performed impromptu?”¹⁴² Were Sgricci’s tragedies indeed “calculated almost with the speed of light?”¹⁴³ According to their critics: absolutely. Yet, as the critic François-Joseph Fétis later pointed out, it is impossible to tell. He regretfully announced that “there are few examples of real improvisation; often what one gives as such is nothing but the filling of a framework prepared in advance and into which one enters fixed ideas.”¹⁴⁴ In the end, the question was not whether the performer was spontaneously creating music or poetry but whether his audience was convinced that he was. A Liszt critic’s final judgment illustrates this point quite clearly: “This improvisation,” he asked, “was it prepared? It seems impossible to me to believe that.”¹⁴⁵

Within this context of improvisation, the Dutch inventor Winkel presented his Componium as an improvising machine to Parisian audiences. After eight years of experimentation, Winkel revealed his latest masterpiece to the world in the winter of 1823-24. His Componium was the first of its kind: a mechanical organ that in addition to performing orchestral scores, could improvise variations on any melody. A savvy

¹⁴¹ “Une oreille exercée ne saurait se tromper en écoutant un morceau étudié ou une improvisation véritable: cette dernière a une marche libre, dirigée par le caprice et que l’on reconnaît facilement à l’ignorance totale du trait qui va suivre” (*Journal de Paris*, 9 March 1824).

¹⁴² “Faire et exécuter impromptu un morceau de musique” (Daniel Castil-Blaze, *Dictionnaire de musique moderne* [Paris: Au magasin de musique de la lyre moderne, 1825], s.v. “Improviser”).

¹⁴³ “L’improvisateur doit, en effet, calculer, presque avec la rapidité de l’éclair, les ressources que présente son sujet, dessiner un plan, tracer l’action, inventer des incidents, et veiller à ce que le style soit élevé, nourri” (*Journal de Paris*, 15 March 1824).

¹⁴⁴ “Il y a peu d’exemples d’improvisations réelles; souvent ce qu’on donne comme tel n’est que le remplissage d’un cadre préparé à l’avance, et dans lequel on fait entrer beaucoup d’idées arrêtées” (François-Joseph Fétis, *Musique mise à la portée de tous le monde*, 3rd ed. [Brandus and Co., Paris, 1847], 386).

¹⁴⁵ “Cette improvisation, était-elle préparée? C’est ce qu’il m’est impossible [*sic*] de croire” (*Le Corsaire*, 9 March 1824).

businessman at heart, Winkel followed the footsteps of human virtuosos and took the machine first to Vienna, and then to Paris. Met at first with skepticism and later with awe, the Componium's performances effectively tapped into the contemporary obsession with improvisation.

Winkel set up shop at an exhibition hall in the Rue de l'Échiquier in December 1823, where the Componium stayed until 1826, giving two formal concerts a day. Though interest eventually waned, the instrument initially drew crowds that included curious members of the press, influential musicians such as Rossini and Habeneck, and the French royal family. In short, the Componium did not improvise according to the contemporary conceptions of the term, but its critics—and audiences—chose to believe that it could. John van Tiggelen's detailed study of the instrument reveals that the machine was prepared in advance with a theme and seven composed-out variations, all divided into two-bar segments.¹⁴⁶ As the machine played, the segments were heard in a seemingly random order that was in reality determined by chance—much like the dice games popular in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁷ Because the theme consists of arpeggiated triads that echo the simple underlying harmony, it lacks a distinctive contour that would disrupt the prevailing illusion of the improvisation.

The score diagram in Example 2.1 approximates the working of the machine (which is pictured in Figure 2.2). Notated here are the first fifteen measures of the theme and the seven composed-out variations. Each of the eight parts was divided into two-measure segments as indicated by the vertical lines. Half of the segments were placed on one barrel,

¹⁴⁶ Philippe John Van Tiggelen, *Componium: The Mechanical Musical Improvisor* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Supérieur d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art, 1987).

¹⁴⁷ On dice games by Haydn and Mozart, see Stephen Hedges, "Dice Music in the Eighteenth Century," *Music and Letters* 59 (1978): 180-87.

half on the other—as indicated by the horizontal line. As the barrels rotated, the machine played one two-bar segment at a time, alternating between the two barrels. Measures 1 and 2 from Variation 2, for example, might be followed by measures 3 and 4 from the Themes, measures 5 and 6 from Variation 3, and measures 7 and 8 from Variation 7. A possible iteration of the “improvisation” is indicated in Example 2.1 by the boxes. What results from the constant switching between variations may not be considered a coherent musical work by nineteenth-century standards; that lack of coherence, however, makes it impossible for the ear to anticipate what might come next, thereby feeding the impression that the machine is actually improvising.



Figure 2.2: The Comptonium in 2007
(Photograph by Alicia Levin, Musée des Instruments de Musique, Brussels)

The image displays a musical score for a 16-voice ensemble, organized into two columns of eight staves each. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Several passages are highlighted with black boxes, and a 'Nuptial' section is indicated with a bracket. The score is divided into sections labeled 'Variation 1' through 'Variation 7', and a 'Dance' section. The music is written in 4/4 time and features a variety of musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 2.1: Transcription from the Componium’s “Improvisation” barrels, mm. 1-15

Like his instrument's improvisations, Winkel's successful placement of the instrument within the existing discourse of improvisation in Paris was probably the combination of careful planning and chance. From the first, journalists mistakenly reported that the Componium could improvise on themes offered by the audience, a claim sufficient to kindle the crucial audience response. Furthermore, Winkel allowed the machine to be examined by members of the Institut de France—one an expert in science, the other in fine arts. The two scholars affirmed in a widely published letter that the machine did in fact improvise, observing that “the person who might know best its mechanical construction could not predict at any moment the chords that its fantasy will suggest.”¹⁴⁸ Their report acknowledged the technical science employed by the Componium without compromising its capacity to create. And although one astute journalist at the *Le Moniteur universel* argued that the mechanical nature of the Componium meant that it could not channel creative inspiration and therefore did not improvise, Winkel's Institut letters and the inaccurate eyewitness accounts published by other writers effectively convinced the French public to hear the Componium as improvisations.

Although the Componium's illusion can be penetrated quite easily, I do not contend that all improvisation should be investigated for its authenticity. Suggesting that Liszt was not capable of improvising, for example, is not productive, as his biography overflows with anecdotes about his impromptu performances, and neither his contemporaries nor his biographers question whether these performances could have been staged. But there is always that possibility. Consider, for example, the case of Kalkbrenner. An internationally-

¹⁴⁸ “La personne qui connoît le mieux sa construction mécanique ne sauroit prévoir à aucun instant les accords que sa fantaisie va lui suggérer” (*Journal des débats*, 7 February 1824).

known virtuoso, Kalkbrenner was also famous for his improvisations, and, on at least one occasion, supposedly lamented that since Hummel's death, he was the only living pianist who could practice this "true" art. During a *tête-à-tête* with Adolph Bernhard Marx, he made this claim again and then improvised a piece on the spot, stunning his listener with the beauty of his invention. Later, a packet of music from Kalkbrenner arrived for Marx, and among the scores was Kalkbrenner's long-published work *Effusio musica*—a veritable transcription of his "improvisation."¹⁴⁹ Granted, this incident is one of the unsubstantiated tales that dogs Kalkbrenner in histories of the piano, but it illustrates exactly the point on which Liszt, Sgricci, and Winkel staked their careers: improvisation lay in the imagination of both the artist *and* the beholder, and a convincing improvisation was worth as much as, or even more than, a "true" one.

"Le Petit Sorcier" Reconsidered

After his superlative first season in Paris, Liszt and his father departed at the end of April to tackle the London stage. For the Liszts, the rewards from just four months in Paris were numerous: a hefty profit, a sky-rocketing reputation as one of Europe's premier virtuoso pianists and improvisers, and the groundwork for future Parisian concerts and the production of Liszt's opera, to name just a few. The glamour of his Parisian triumph stayed with Liszt through his subsequent tours of London, the French provinces, and, eventually, the rest of Europe. With his prodigious talent and cosmopolitan flair, Liszt now possessed a convincing public identity that placed him at the forefront of a new generation of piano virtuosos.

¹⁴⁹ Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 119.

For Liszt's critics, the outcome of his first season in Paris is more difficult to measure. While Liszt acquired a platform of fame and fortune on which to build his career, what, if anything, did his critics take away from the concert of 7 March? Having fought to establish Liszt as a Mozart for the nineteenth century and a figurehead for French music, how could the critics capitalize on his success? Without Liszt in residence in Paris, did the "petit sorcier" really offer anything of substance or value to their cause? The aesthetic debate over cosmopolitan music could and did continue to rage under the auspices of new operas and new performers. Yet the process of electing Liszt as the new head of French music was set into motion in March 1824 and left unsatisfyingly unresolved without Liszt in town to prove himself worthy of such a title. It was not until October 1825, when Liszt's first and only opera was presented by the Académie Royale de Musique, that the question of his status as a Mozartian composer was definitively answered.

Liszt returned to Paris for a second triumphant concert season in the winter and spring of 1825 that included a solo benefit concert on the most prestigious stage in Paris, that of the Académie Royale de Musique (hereafter, Opéra).¹⁵⁰ But the path to obtaining recognition as a serious musician and composer in nineteenth-century Paris lay not in presenting electrifying virtuoso performances at the Opéra, but rather in mounting a successful opera there.¹⁵¹ In an effort to help his son achieve this level of artistic stature, Adam Liszt had set him to composing an opera as early as 1824. Liszt had only barely finished the music when, in July 1825, he was asked to submit his work for immediate review by the Département des

¹⁵⁰ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 111.

¹⁵¹ On French grand opera and its significance to Parisian musical life, see Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whitall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Beaux-Arts. After perusing the opera, the committee quickly communicated its enthusiasm for the work to Adam Liszt on 10 August 1825:

I have the honor to tell you, Monsieur, that the music jury, having heard the score to the opera *Don Sanche* by M. Liszt, decided in its meeting of 6 August that the score had passed. As a result of this decision, nothing prevents the administration from moving quickly to the staging of this work, and I invite you to work toward that with no delay.¹⁵²

The opera, entitled *Don Sanche, ou Le Château d'amour*, is a one-act work on a libretto by Emmanuel Théaulon and De Rancé, two minor figures on the French literary scene during the Restoration. They produced an “opéra-fée” of love and intrigue adapted from a medieval-era story originally penned by the eighteenth-century writer Claris de Florian. Apparently anticipating some criticism for the mélange of unrelated scenes that constitute the plot, Théaulon and De Rancé prefaced the published libretto (Paris: Roulet, 1825) with a claim that their work was intended specifically to “offer scenes of all the imaginable possibilities to the young prodigy to whose talent we owe the score.”¹⁵³ Rehearsals began in early October, starring the renowned tenor Adolphe Nourrit in the title role. The premiere followed on 17 October 1825.

In spite of the administration’s enthusiasm for the work, *Don Sanche* closed after only four performances. For years after the opera’s brief life, the manuscript was thought to be lost, only to be rediscovered by Liszt biographers who, in their attempt to save Liszt from

¹⁵² Letter on behalf of the Vicomte de la Rochefoucauld to Adam Liszt, Paris, 10 August 1825, Archives Nationales, Paris, AJ¹³ 115. “J’ai l’honneur de vous prévenir Monsieur, que le Jury musical ayant entendu la partition de l’opéra de Don Sanche par M. Litz, a décidé dans sa séance du 6 août que cette partition était reçue, en conséquence de cette décision rien ne l’oppose à ce que l’administration s’occupe promptement de la mise en scène de cet ouvrage, et je vous invite à vouloir bien y faire travailler sans nul délai./ J’ai l’honneur d’être Monsieur votre très humble serviteur / Pour M. le Vicomte de la Rochefoucauld.”

¹⁵³ “Fournir à l’enfant étonnant à qui nous en devons la partition, des scènes dont la variété pût offrir à son talent les moyens de se montrer sous ses divers aspects.” Their comments are underscored by a sense of curiosity on the part of the authors—as if they were throwing out challenging and disparate themes for an improvisation and were anxious see what the improvising genius would come up with. I am grateful to Tim Carter for pointing this out.

himself, sought to distance him from the work by questioning its authorship. Émile Haraszati claimed that the opera and its orchestration in particular too closely resembled the style of Liszt's teacher Ferdinand Paër for it to be his own composition.¹⁵⁴ Yet as Walker points out, Liszt likely composed *Don Sanche* well before beginning his studies with Paër, and the overture may in fact have been premiered in Manchester, England, in June 1825. Walker concludes instead that any likeness stems from the possibility that Paër oversaw Liszt's work on the orchestration and that in spite of its flaws, Liszt's authorship cannot be questioned.¹⁵⁵

With only one exception, reviews of *Don Sanche* panned the opera, albeit to varying degrees.¹⁵⁶ In the words of one critic, "this first try by the young German pianist, whom one has so often compared to Mozart because of the precocity of his musical talent, was a very mediocre work."¹⁵⁷ Criticism focused first on the opera's poorly-constructed libretto and second on Liszt's failure to create a coherent and expressive musical complement for it. The *Journal des débats*, for example, mercilessly mocked the libretto and its authors before finally admitting that the musical effort was simply did not live up to the hype: "the audience coldly listened to a cold composition, lacking in fire, eloquence, originality...There was not a single piece that aroused true applause."¹⁵⁸ Although the public demanded Liszt's

¹⁵⁴ Émile Haraszati, "Author Despite Himself: The History of a Mystification," *Musical Quarterly* 33 (1947): 515.

¹⁵⁵ Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 115-16.

¹⁵⁶ The only positive critical review of this opera was published in *La Gazette de France* (19 October 1825), and even this article was a half-hearted attempt to excuse the attempts of a youngster whose opera clearly did not meet the high standards of the Opéra.

¹⁵⁷ "Ce premier essai du jeune pianiste allemand, que l'on a si souvent comparé à Mozart pour la précocité de son talent musicale, était un ouvrage très médiocre" (*Le Corsaire*, 18 October 1825).

¹⁵⁸ "Le public a écouté froidement une composition froide, dénuée de feu, de verve, d'originalité...Il n'y a pas eu un seul morceau qui ait excité de véritables applaudissements" (*Journal des débats*, 19 October 1825).

appearance at the conclusion of the opera—a demand made out of politeness, according to a few critics—the overwhelming consensus was that Liszt’s music did not do the sorry libretto any justice.¹⁵⁹

The main themes from the reception of Liszt’s debut concert in 1824 reappeared over eighteen months later in the *Don Sanche* reception. First, every critic referred to and in many cases re-evaluated Liszt’s previous status as Mozart with devastating results. In general, the French musical community concluded that Liszt was not a prodigy in composition and therefore did not qualify as a true child prodigy or as Mozart’s reincarnation. In *Le Courier français*, the critic suggests that “one must perhaps congratulate Franz Liszt on having created mediocre music at an age at which it is almost impossible to do anything good.” He adds: “Mozart is the only one whose childhood prodigies cannot be denied.”¹⁶⁰ Another critic questioned whether it had ever been reasonable to expect such genius from Liszt, suggesting that the librettists “wanted to provide the young Liszt with the means to develop on our premiere lyric stage the musical genius of another Mozart...another Mozart! Why would wise men permit Liszt to compromise his brilliant reputation so soon?”¹⁶¹

Second, Liszt’s status as a child prodigy was re-configured by some critics. As previously discussed, an aura of perfection was essential to the success of a child prodigy; when Liszt revealed himself on the operatic stage, the perceived deficiencies of *Don Sanche*

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, the reviews in *Le Constitutionnel* (19 October 1825) and *Le Courier français* (24 October 1825).

¹⁶⁰ “Il faut peut-être féliciter Franz Liszt d’avoir fait une musique médiocre dans un âge où il est à peu près impossible d’en faire de bonne. Mozart est le seul qui n’ait point démenti les prodiges de son enfance. Mais Mozart a vécu vite: il est mort *de vieillesse* à trente-six ans” (*Le Courier français*, 24 October 1825).

¹⁶¹ “Ils ont voulu faciliter au jeune Listz [*sic*] les moyens de développer sur notre première scène lyrique le génie musical d’un autre Mozart...Un autre Mozart! Pourquoi des gens sages...ont-ils permis si tôt au jeune Listz [*sic*] de compromettre la brillante renommée” (*Le Constitutionnel*, 19 October 1825).

exposed his weakness as a composer—a fatal flaw in any child prodigy. His aura was breached by negative criticism; already nearing the age at which he would no longer be considered a child, he now became an ordinary adolescent at nearly fourteen years old. As one journalist regretfully pointed out, “Nothing is more rare than to see such precocious talents keep their brilliance and vigor for a long time. Developing our abilities too quickly soon taints the source.”¹⁶² Most critics agreed that while Liszt’s effort was impressive for someone of his tender age, it simply was not reasonable to expect “a work without defect” from a thirteen-year-old composer.¹⁶³ Though some in fact faulted Adam Liszt for allowing his son’s immature opera to be heard in public, others condemned Liszt outright: “we are far from wanting to discourage Mr. Liszt, but we owe it, however, to the truth, to say that his first production offers no indication of future genius.”¹⁶⁴

In a final shift of perspective, several of Liszt’s critics advised the young pianist to postpone his dreams of becoming a composer where they had once encouraged him to develop the compositional ability implied by his improvising. Underlying their suggestions is the conclusion that Liszt had pushed too hard and too fast as well as a fear that he might even lack true artistic genius—an inference based on his failure to portray adequately the emotions of his libretto. Instead, “the young Liszt is a good schoolboy who knows, it is true,

¹⁶² “Rien n’est plus rare, au surplus, que de voir les talens si précoces conserver long temps leur éclat et leur vigueur. Le développement trop rapide de nos facultés en tarit bientôt la source” (*Le Courrier français*, 24 October 1825).

¹⁶³ “Une œuvre sans défaut” (*La Gazette de France*, 19 October 1825). Reviews of the opera often confuse Liszt’s age. He was thirteen at the time of submission to the Opéra, and the premiere occurred just a few days before his fourteenth birthday, which occurred on 22 October 1825.

¹⁶⁴ “Nous sommes loin de vouloir décourager M. Listz [*sic*], mais nous devons pourtant à la vérité de dire que sa première production n’offre aucun indice d’un génie futur” (*Le Corsaire*, 18 October 1825). A few days later, the same journal published a second review, probably written by the same critic who claimed that he had needed a second hearing of *Don Sanche* in order to properly judge the opera. This time, with score in hand, he focused on the positive elements of Liszt’s music, blaming the poor libretto and Liszt’s youth for its inadequacies.

many things that one would not ordinarily know at thirteen, but who knows and does at thirteen probably all that he will know, all that he will do at forty.”¹⁶⁵ According to another, “Liszt must study for a long time yet, and especially wait for the development of his emotions. Would that he be content today with wrestling the most skillful pianists in Europe.”¹⁶⁶ *Le Constitutionnel* also warned Liszt that his genius would only arrive in its own time and that for the present, Liszt ought to focus on his strengths of improvising and playing the piano.¹⁶⁷

Thus, despite the auspicious beginning in the spring of 1824, Liszt ultimately failed to prove to his critics that he truly was Mozart’s successor—a failure from which I contend he was never able to recover in the eyes of the Parisian establishment. Without an operatic success, Liszt was relegated by French critics to the top of a long roster of piano virtuosos whose artistic activities were limited almost entirely to their instrument. For Liszt, this became a symptom of the polarization of virtuosity and creativity that he spent the rest of his life to trying to repair, not least by replacing Mozart with Beethoven as his guiding figure.¹⁶⁸ As for his critics, the debate about French musical identity had been indelibly shaped by their conflation of Mozart with Liszt in an idealized prototype of the virtuoso composer. Whether or not Liszt was the actual embodiment of this construction, his cosmopolitan performance

¹⁶⁵ “Le jeune Liszt est un bon écolier qui sait, il est vrai, plus de choses qu’on n’en sait ordinairement à treize ans, mais qui sait et qui fait probablement à treize ans tout ce qu’il saura, tout ce qu’il fera à quarante” (*Journal des débats*, 19 October 1825).

¹⁶⁶ “Liszt doit étudier long temps encore, et surtout attendre le développement des passions. Qu’il se contente aujourd’hui de lutter avec les plus habiles pianistes de l’Europe” (*Le Courrier français*, 19 October 1825).

¹⁶⁷ *Le Constitutionnel*, 19 October 1825.

¹⁶⁸ On Liszt and his conception of virtuosity as a creative process, see Cécile Reynaud, *Liszt et le virtuose romantique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), 251-54.

and their decision to embrace it influenced the French debate on musical aesthetics for the next twenty years.

Chapter Three

BETWEEN SALON AND STAGE: KALKBRENNER AND CHOPIN

To open his romanticized tale of Fryderyk Chopin's Paris years, Tad Szulc paints the portrait of a fully-formed pianist and composer who arrived in the dark autumn of 1831 prepared to conquer the "capital of the nineteenth century."¹ Szulc's biography promulgates one of the classic stereotypes regarding Chopin's highly mythologized life and career: barely twenty-one years old, Chopin had already matured as a composer and a pianist, and he confronted Parisian society with skill and confidence supported by sheer musical genius.² As the story goes, he was immediately befriended by one of the reigning Parisian pianists, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, who offered to guide Chopin in a three-year course of technical study. Secure in his God-given talent, Chopin politely refused Kalkbrenner's condescending proposal, but, in the interest of diplomacy, he dedicated his E minor Piano Concerto to the self-appointed master of the Parisian piano world. He then went on, as Szulc continues, to

¹ Tad Szulc, *Chopin in Paris: The Life and Time of the Romantic Composer* (New York: Scribner, 1998).

² I consult Szulc's text not as a rigorous study in Chopin biography, but rather as an example of how such rigorous studies are transformed into dramatic stories for widespread consumption. For more conventional scholarly approaches to Chopin's biography, see Adam Harasowski, *The Skein of Legends Around Chopin* (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1967); Arthur Hedley, *Chopin* (London: Dent, 1974); Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin, As a Man and Musician* (London: Novello, 1902); and Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Schirmer, 1997). On the challenges of Chopin biography, see Samson, "Myth and Reality: A Biographical Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Samson, 1-8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

undertake “the process of reinventing himself as Frédéric Chopin, the virtuoso darling of Paris salons and genius composer of the exploding Romantic Age.”³

He did so with great success. Like the team of Franz Liszt and his father Adam, Chopin had some practice in penetrating the social circles of major European cities. And what he may have lacked in concert-management experience, he made up with ambition and talent. Even without pre-existing connections to Parisian society, Chopin was quickly absorbed into the fabric of French musical life, due in large part to his social connections (especially those resulting from a letter of introduction to Ferdinand Paër), his well-received public debut concert of 26 February 1832, and his ability to act a part, in this case that of the fashionably soulful Polish exile. Within a year of his arrival, Chopin had conquered the pianistic capital of Europe and arranged what appears now to have been an ideal life for himself: a steady income from teaching, time for composing, and, best of all, no need for giving concert tours. In the shop-worn narrative of Chopin’s Parisian career, the aforementioned exchange with Kalkbrenner, today a minor figure in music history, appears to be nothing but a blip on the screen. I will argue to the contrary, however, that Kalkbrenner should be reconsidered as a key influence on the development of Chopin’s Parisian persona.

In this chapter, I turn from the strategies employed by a child prodigy to those of a young adult virtuoso. As I have shown in Chapter 2, Liszt’s public image incorporated the social and musical fascination with the child, the Romantic fixation on genius, creativity, and virtuosity, and the dominance of the piano, all to great effect. As the 1820s progressed, other young virtuosos also drew from this prototypical image to craft their approaches to the French stage. Some—such as pianists Léopold de Meyer and Sigismond Thalberg, and violinist Niccolò Paganini—embraced the public aspect of the virtuoso and consequently

³ Szulc, *Chopin in Paris*, 24.

built their careers around extensive concertizing and public spectacle. Other virtuosos developed their profiles to emphasize others aspects of professional musicianship while still maintaining their status as virtuosos through careful interactions with the Parisian public. I explore in this chapter a specific subset of this virtuoso figure that emerges clearly in the case of Chopin. This type eschews the spectacle of public performances in favor of private teaching, intimate salon performances, and isolated composition, thus projecting the mystique of the Romantic virtuoso.

Attempting to reconstruct the path by which Chopin developed his self-representation forms a complicated exercise due to his identity's ephemeral nature on the one hand and its codification in scholarship on the other. Liszt's journey to becoming "le petit sorcier" was splashed all over the newspapers in stories that can be substantiated by surviving letters and other paraphernalia from Liszt's life. In Chopin's case, however, his public identity comprises activities that he pursued behind closed doors (in the salon, in the teaching studio, in solitary composition) and about which little documentation exists. What Chopin chose *not* to do in the public spotlight leaves frustratingly inadequate evidence of his professional tactics. What did he want from his career? Did he achieve it? And does it matter? To find a place for himself in Paris, Chopin developed a mode of self-presentation that depended in large part on a demonstrated antipathy toward public performance. He so convincingly acted the part—a role which, as I will discuss, located him among the most hallowed composers of the nineteenth century—that it has become nearly sacrilegious to question whether it could in fact have been a façade.

My purpose in this chapter is not to determine what was or was not authentic about Chopin's persona, but rather to examine some elements that may have contributed to his

approach to self-representation.⁴ Like every musician arriving in Paris, Chopin faced a unique set of musico-cultural circumstances to which he had to adapt. He was able to find his place, I argue, at least in part, through Kalkbrenner's guidance and example. Therefore, to begin, I will investigate the little-known career of Kalkbrenner, with a special focus on his strategies in Parisian musical life. With a diverse set of social and musical connections—to the Conservatoire, the salon world, and the international publishing network, to name just a few—Kalkbrenner occupied an influential position in French concert life that has yet to be acknowledged in contemporary scholarship. I will then turn to Chopin's approach to Paris and in particular how his relationship with Kalkbrenner may have shaped his professional strategies. Although Chopin never became a long-term student of Kalkbrenner, the older pianist had a tremendous impact on Chopin's entry into Parisian musical life, and the strategies that shaped Chopin's career resemble those employed by Kalkbrenner. Neither, for example, spent more than four cumulative years on the concert circuit—a relatively short period in comparison to most virtuosos of the 1820s and 1830s. Furthermore, both pianists were also touted as extraordinary composers and teachers, and a significant part of their musical income came from publishing their compositions in France and abroad.

In the months following Chopin's introduction to Parisian society, Kalkbrenner offered his support to the younger pianist not only as a teacher, but also as an example of how to forge a place for himself in the demanding musical arena of the early July Monarchy.

⁴ An expanding body literature considers the strategies of self-representation by a variety of artists; see, among others, the essays in *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*, ed. William Weber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Jeanice Brooks, "'Noble et grande servante de la musique': Telling the Story of Nadia Boulanger's Conducting Career," *Journal of Musicology* 14 (1996): 92-116; Annegret Fauser, "*La guerre en dentelles*: Women and the Prix de Rome in French Cultural Politics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 83-129; and Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 136.

Though of different but overlapping musical generations, both pianists managed to position themselves among the top virtuosos of Europe by limiting their public concerts and international concert tours in favor of salon performances, publishing, and teaching. Among other key elements of Chopin's success, for example, Kalkbrenner may have facilitated what would eventually become the enormously fruitful partnership between the Polish pianist and the French piano manufacturer Camille Pleyel. Exploring their relationship entails a re-reading of Chopin's correspondence with his family in Warsaw during the early months of his life in Paris. Although the initial letter in which Chopin described his first impressions of Paris and Kalkbrenner's offer has been lost, his family's reflections on his words provide some insight into this critical step of the young pianist's career. When viewed from this angle, the careers of both Kalkbrenner and Chopin illuminate an easily overlooked aspect of virtuosity and professional musicianship, namely the symbiotic relationship between the salon and the public stage.

“A Musician of the First Order”: Kalkbrenner's Career

Now a shadowy figure in the landscape of nineteenth-century music, Friedrich Wilhelm Kalkbrenner (1784-1849) was once an internationally-known pianist and composer respected by his peers as a genuinely gifted musician.⁵ As a teenaged pianist, he out-played his competition at the Paris Conservatoire; as an adult, he stood as a pillar of French musical society as well as a pianistic and pedagogical icon throughout most of Europe. He likely

⁵ Published sources on Kalkbrenner's life and music include Hans Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner: Wirkung und Werk* (Hamburg: Verlag der Musikalienhandlung K.D. Wagner, 1983); and articles in Antoine Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres: silhouettes et médaillons* (Paris: A. Chaix et Cie, 1878), 98-107; François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860-65), s.v. “Kalkbrenner (Frédéric-Guillaume)”; and Paul Dekeyser, “Kalkbrenner, Frédéric,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2000), 13:328-30.

acquired the skills that contributed to his lucrative musical career from the influence of his father, the composer and musician Christian Kalkbrenner (1755-1806). A trained pianist, violinist, and singer, Christian Kalkbrenner earned a living through a series of *Kapellmeister* positions in various German cities, including Berlin and Kassel, where Friedrich Kalkbrenner was born in 1784.⁶ As was the case in many musical families, Christian Kalkbrenner acquired training for his son at an early age, first in Kassel and later in Naples, where the family settled after he had accepted a post there in 1796.⁷

Only one year later, political aftershocks stemming from the French Revolution forced the Kalkbrenner family to flee Naples; this time they headed for Paris, where the senior Kalkbrenner found a position as the choir director at the Opéra.⁸ The move to Paris also allowed the young Kalkbrenner, who by now had exhibited his potential as a pianist, to enroll at the new national Conservatoire de Musique. His residency there from 1799 to 1801 culminated in double prizes in piano and composition in the Conservatoire's eighth annual *concours*.⁹ According to François-Joseph Fétis, Kalkbrenner could have taken the *premier prix* during his first year at the Conservatoire, but regulations prohibited a student in his first year from doing so.¹⁰ Consequently, he was granted a second-place award in 1800 before winning the two first-place prizes in 1801.

⁶ For more on Christian Kalkbrenner, see François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Kalkbrenner (Chrétien)."

⁷ Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 6. On Kalkbrenner's childhood and early education, see pp. 1-8.

⁸ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 99.

⁹ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 99.

¹⁰ Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Kalkbrenner (Frédéric-Guillaume)."

As a student at the Conservatoire, he studied piano with Louis Adam and François Nicodami and harmony with Charles-Simon Catel.¹¹ Both Adam and Catel penned instructional methods that embodied the Conservatoire's pedagogical philosophy and shaped standardized musical education in France for several decades.¹² Little is known about Adam's playing, but his *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* of 1805 suggests that his approach to the piano was informed by his knowledge of the harpsichord.¹³ Although his role in Kalkbrenner's education has been down-played by later historians, it is likely that Adam at least encouraged the qualities of clarity and precision which were later hailed as the hallmarks of Kalkbrenner's playing.

Following his studies at the Conservatoire, Kalkbrenner stayed in Paris for the next two years and began to make a name for himself as a teacher and composer. In 1803, however, he left France for the period of about two years.¹⁴ Some decades later, Antoine Marmontel attributed this voyage to the typical virtuoso desire to share his talent with the whole continent and to search for inspiration in listening to the great foreign masters (while also comparing their playing to his own).¹⁵ Indeed, it was during this period that Kalkbrenner solidified his status as a virtuoso pianist, a reputation that stayed with him throughout his career. The nineteen-year-old Kalkbrenner played his way through Germany

¹¹ Dekeyser, "Kalkbrenner, Frédéric," 328-29.

¹² Charles-Simon Catel, *Traité d'harmonie* (Paris: Conservatoire impérial de musique, 1802); Louis Adam, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* (Paris: Conservatoire impérial de musique, 1805).

¹³ According to contemporary biographies, Adam was largely self-taught; see Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Adam (Louis)." On Adam's pedagogy, see Beatriz Montes, "La Méthode de Louis Adam: tradition et avenir de l'école française de piano," in *Le Conservatoire de Paris, 1795-1995*, ed. Anne Bongrain and Alain Poirier (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1999), 2:41-53.

¹⁴ On Kalkbrenner's first period away from Paris, see Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 9-18.

¹⁵ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 99.

in order to reach Vienna, where he spent some months studying composition with the aging Joseph Haydn, and, more importantly, listening to the artistry of Muzio Clementi.¹⁶

Fétis later recorded Kalkbrenner's engagement with Clementi's playing as a critical moment in the German pianist's career.¹⁷ Exposed to Clementi's approach to the piano, Kalkbrenner was apparently inspired to reform his own technique. Clementi was, by that time, known as one of the founding fathers of the piano-forte, a reputation probably advertised by Clementi himself in his efforts to sell his firm's modern instruments.¹⁸ As a composer and teacher, Clementi borrowed the tenets of good harpsichord playing—namely crystal-clear bravura runs and finger-centric movement—and adapted them for the new instrument. Over the course of his career, he worked with a number of the post-Classical generation's leaders, including Jean-Baptiste Cramer, Jan Dussek, John Field, and Henri Herz; whether he deserved it or not, later historians positioned Clementi as the head of an English school of piano and ascribed some of its early development to his interest in technique and instrument-building.¹⁹

¹⁶ On Kalkbrenner's studies with Haydn, see Horst Walter, "Kalkbrenners Lehrjahre und sein Unterricht bei Haydn," *Haydn-Studien* 5 (1982): 23-41.

¹⁷ Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Kalkbrenner (Frédéric-Guillaume)."

¹⁸ The question of how Clementi constructed himself as the head of a school of piano-playing requires further inquiry. Although he is recognized as one of the first composers for the modern piano, more recent studies have shown this to be a fiction. His strategies of self-representation effectively blurred the circumstances surrounding his early career as a pianist and piano-maker and ought to be untangled.

¹⁹ On Clementi's career, see *Muzio Clementi: Studies and Prospects*, ed. Roberto Illiano, Luca Sala, and Massimiliano Sala (Bologna: UT Orpheus, 2002).

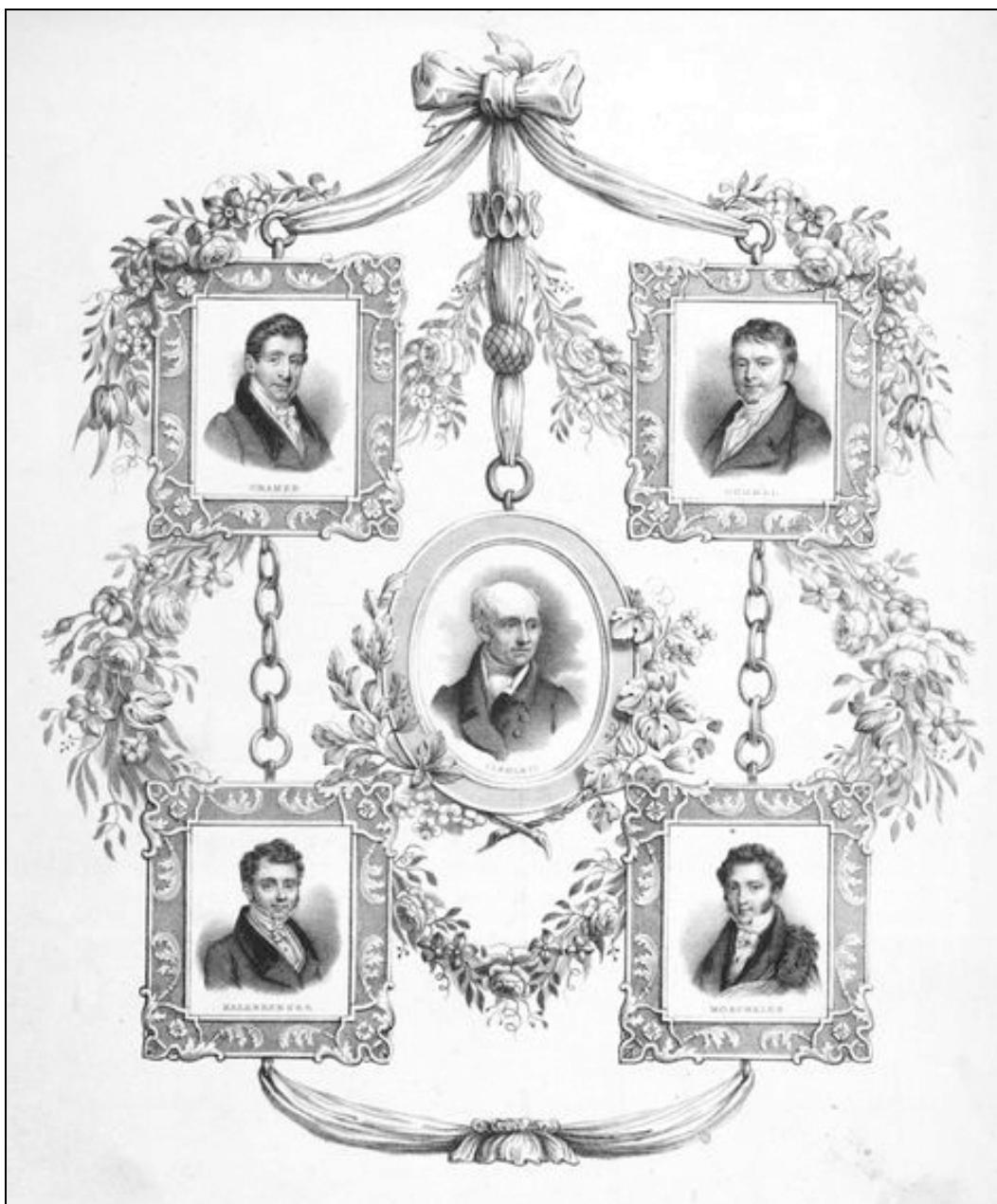


Figure 3.1: The Clementi School of Piano
(New York Public Library, Music Division, Joseph Muller Collection of Music and Other Portraits)

Clementi is pictured in the center, surrounded by his disciples: Jean-Baptiste Cramer (upper left), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (upper right), Friedrich Kalkbrenner (lower left), and Ignaz Moscheles (lower right). This genealogy supports Clementi's position as the father of modern piano-playing as well as Kalkbrenner's position among his devotees.

The symbolic potential of Clementi's legacy proved to be a powerful inspiration for Kalkbrenner. Not only did he re-vamp his own piano technique, but he also took it upon his shoulders to ensure the development and continuation of the Clementi "school" of pianism. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, as Franz Liszt and his cohorts blasted through the sonic and technical possibilities of Sébastien Érard's new seven-octave instrument, Kalkbrenner began work on a technical manual that exemplified the principles of the post-Classical brilliant style as promulgated by Clementi, Cramer, and Field. This style was well-suited to the light action and crystalline sound of the Pleyel pianos, which resembled Clementi's English-style pianos more than other French models. Published in 1831, Kalkbrenner's *Méthode pour apprendre le piano-forte à l'aide du guide-mains*, op.108, was decidedly old-fashioned in comparison to the newer technical approaches employed by the current stars of the piano scene. As such, it also reflected the contemporary approach to teaching women which can be most clearly seen in the treatise of Kalkbrenner's teacher Adam. Originally used for the Conservatoire's male piano classes, Adam's *Méthode* was reassigned in 1818 for use in the women's classes. This shift is consistent with the broader cultural trend that cast Baroque- and Classical-era music (along with the graceful finger-centric technique used to play it) as women's music; it also prefigured the feminization of Kalkbrenner's presence in the Parisian musical scene after 1824.²⁰

Fétis's entry on Kalkbrenner in his *Biographie universelle des musiciens* describes the pianist's mature, post-Clementi performance style and identifies the widely-circulated and much-advertised *Méthode* as a practical guide to acquiring Kalkbrenner's best features, including "this equality...this independence of the fingers...this brilliant left hand which, for

²⁰ Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Adam (Louis)."

some time, have been considered the principal qualities of his talent of execution.”²¹ Among others, Fétis nominated Kalkbrenner as the head of a piano school, the main principles of which emerged from both his playing and his teaching. This school was acknowledged as “the last development of Clementi’s [school]” and the “continuation of Clementi, the creator of the modern piano school.”²² Much in the same vein as Clementi’s model, Kalkbrenner’s brand of pianism emphasized a still body, a relaxed forearm, and fingers that remained very close to the keys. As Fétis put it, “all his means are contained in the free and independent action of the fingers and in the destruction of all effect borrowed from the muscular force of the arms.”²³ While this approach facilitated the development of equality between the hands, it nonetheless limited the “production of varied accents by the instrument.”²⁴

In prescribing exercises to promote exactly these qualities, Kalkbrenner’s *Méthode* offered the quintessential recipe for the technical approach known as *jeu-lié*. Associated mainly with pre-Beethovenian repertoire, the *jeu-lié* style was a “legato contrapuntal technique” that allowed only a limited range of dynamic expression and required almost no movement of the arms or torso.²⁵ It was ideally suited for the performance of Baroque and

²¹ “Cette égalité...cette indépendance de doigts...ce brillant de la main gauche qui, depuis lors, ont été considérés comme les qualités principales de son talent d’exécution” (Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Kalkbrenner [Frédéric-Guillaume]”).

²² “Comme le dernier développement de celle de Clementi” (Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Kalkbrenner [Frédéric-Guillaume]”); “Continueur de Clementi, le créateur de l’école moderne du piano” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 100).

²³ “Tous ses moyens sont renfermés dans l’action libre, indépendante des doigts et dans l’anéantissement de tout effet emprunté à la force musculaire des bras” (Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Kalkbrenner [Frédéric-Guillaume]”).

²⁴ “Les résultats de cette doctrine de toucher du piano ont été pour Kalkbrenner une admirable égalité, une parfaite aptitude des deux mains, le brillant et l’élégance, mais en même temps elle a donné des limites plus étroites à la production d’accents variés par l’instrument” (Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Kalkbrenner [Frédéric-Guillaume]”).

²⁵ Katharine Ellis, “Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 366. On gendered repertoire, see especially pp. 363-366.

Classical music on the piano, in which controlled sentimentality and textural clarity were prized elements during the nineteenth century. Performers could produce subtle expressive effects without exaggeration from a physically decorous position, a position that was, in 1831, the only socially acceptable option for female pianists.²⁶ Indeed, many of Kalkbrenner's students were women, and his *Méthode*, with its accompanying hardware and études, was undoubtedly geared for consumption by elite female amateurs. Some of his female students pursued careers as public musicians—most notably the internationally-celebrated Marie Pleyel as well as the local talent Catherine de Dietz—but many did not, choosing instead to give concerts in the semi-private Pleyel salon or in entirely closed locations.²⁷

However brief, Kalkbrenner's interaction with Clementi at a pivotal moment in his career also allowed him and his later biographers to construct his career in a way that distanced his playing from the Paris Conservatoire.²⁸ In the early decades of the Conservatoire's existence, its goal of producing excellent singers and functional pianist-accompanists resulted in a thoroughly anti-virtuoso program.²⁹ At the time of Kalkbrenner's enrollment at the turn of the century, association with the Conservatoire may have been helpful to his career as a touring virtuoso—opening doors in major musical centers and lending some credibility to his name. In the later 1820s and beyond, however, a narrative of

²⁶ This style also corresponds to the piano's position as a chamber instrument in the late eighteenth-century. The expressivity and nuance produced by *jeu-lié* playing was effective in small, intimate spaces (which were the only appropriate venues for female performance), but its subtlety was lost in larger concert halls.

²⁷ On the career of Marie Pleyel, see Chapter 6.

²⁸ This trend is evident in the work of both nineteenth-century writers Fétis and Marmontel and twentieth-century historian Nautsch.

²⁹ Cécile Reynaud, "Une vertu contestée: l'idéal de virtuosité dans la formation des élèves des classes de piano au Conservatoire de Musique (l'époque Cherubini)," *Le Conservatoire de Paris: regards sur une institution et son histoire*, ed. Emmanuel Hondré, 109-121 (Paris: Association du Bureau des Etudiants du CNSMDP, 1995).

artistic independence replaced the theme of aristocratic patronage and symbolic tradition. Thus pianists hoping to achieve the stature of international virtuoso constructed their biographies in a way that emphasized their originality and natural talent rather than their connections to pedagogical institutions.

A classic example of this narrative is Liszt's tale of self-discovery in the backwoods of Hungary. His sudden emergence as a child prodigy was followed by a tumultuous teacher-student relationship with Czerny and capped off by Cherubini's supposedly spiteful refusal to allow him entry at the Paris Conservatoire.³⁰ Liszt's later repudiation of his father's blatant opportunism in marketing his son around Europe allowed his early life and his eventual success as a virtuoso to be interpreted as the rightful triumph of Liszt's natural talent over the material circumstances of musical pedagogy and the commercial market.³¹ For virtuoso pianists who did acquire their skills from conservatories or well-known Parisian teachers—Kalkbrenner, Charles-Valentin Alkan, Marie Pleyel, and Émile Prudent among them—their stories inevitably hinged on a critical meeting with a famous pianist whose playing inspired them to reform their own technique and pianistic approach.³² For Pleyel and Prudent, it was the great (and rarely criticized) Sigismond Thalberg. For Kalkbrenner, it was the equally important figure of Clementi, whose exalted position (merited or not) was removed by geographical distance as well as time. This made him a more exotic and less pedestrian reference-point than the ever-present and strongly ideological Conservatoire.

³⁰ See Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 39-43. Although the rules of the Conservatoire then forbade the acceptance of foreign students in the piano classes, Walker suggests that Cherubini could have bent them and chose not to out of spite.

³¹ See Chapter 2.

³² For Liszt, it was a combination of a childhood experience with Beethoven and an adult encounter with Niccolò Paganini that resulted in his technical and compositional transformation of the early 1830s.

I do not suggest that Kalkbrenner himself intentionally engineered the transformative meeting with Clementi for the purpose of re-casting his musical pedigree. Rather, the interpretation of Kalkbrenner's biography in this way most likely happened later in his life—no earlier than the late 1820s, and probably even later. Kalkbrenner occupied a unique place as an unusually active representative of past traditions within the milieu of modern Parisian virtuoso pianism, and his story was probably “corrected” by contemporary rhetoric in order to justify his powerful position.³³

In 1804, Kalkbrenner went back to Paris, where he spent the next ten years composing and teaching.³⁴ By the time he moved to London around 1814, he had published a sizeable body of piano-focused works, including two piano quartets and several groups of piano sonatas.³⁵ Kalkbrenner's compositional output increased in London, as he continued to build a solid career in composition and pedagogy largely outside of the spotlight of public concerts. He also hobnobbed with the “grandes familles anglaises,” who in turn entrusted the musical education of their children to him.³⁶ When Camille Pleyel, the heir to the Pleyel publishing and manufacturing firm, visited the city in 1815, he found a warm reception from Kalkbrenner, whose guidance helped him to navigate the British musical community. Likely an acquaintance of the Pleyel family from his earlier days in Paris, Kalkbrenner further developed a professional relationship with the young Pleyel that eventually helped to pave

³³ Curiously, Kalkbrenner's studies with Haydn are never emphasized in accounts of his career. This is particularly odd given the popularity of Haydn's symphonies with Parisian audiences especially in the 1820s.

³⁴ On Kalkbrenner's first long sojourn in Paris, see Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 19-23.

³⁵ For the most complete works-list available for Kalkbrenner, see Nautsch, *Frederich Kalkbrenner*, 211-42.

³⁶ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 99.

his way back to Paris in 1824.³⁷ At that time, he became a partner in the Pleyel piano manufacturing firm, which, according to Fétis, “soon reached a great prosperity” due to Kalkbrenner’s “considerable investment, his advice, his artistic influence, and his social relations.”³⁸

Only at the end of his decade in London did Kalkbrenner again decide to reignite his performing career. Although he had certainly performed in private settings throughout his sojourn in London, a series of concerts in 1823 and 1824 represents his first real effort to create a profile there as a public virtuoso performer.³⁹ His performances in Britain capitalized on the success of his published music and on his brilliant presence in London society, elevating him to the ranks of the greatest virtuosos of the period—which comprised Hummel, Moscheles, and, of course, the child prodigy Liszt. His tour included concerts in London, Berlin and Vienna, as well as cities in Scotland and Ireland, and ended in Paris in 1824, where he stayed until his death in 1849.⁴⁰ Although he performed fairly regularly in Paris until the late 1830s, Kalkbrenner never embarked on another concert tour and left Paris for only short periods at a time.

Already an internationally acclaimed pianist as well as a local celebrity, Kalkbrenner found Paris to be a highly lucrative arena for someone with his skill set and ambitions. As Marmontel pointed out, Kalkbrenner had made periodic trips to Paris during his sojourn in

³⁷ On Camille Pleyel’s experience in London (and his initial meeting with Kalkbrenner), see Rita Benton, “London Music in 1815, as Seen by Camille Pleyel,” *Music and Letters* 47 (1966): 34-47.

³⁸ “Par les sommes considérables qu’il a versées, ses conseils, son influence d’artiste et les relations sociales est bientôt parvenue à une grande prospérité” (Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Kalkbrenner [Frédéric-Guillaume]”). Benton implies that Kalkbrenner returned to Paris in 1824 for the purpose of becoming Pleyel’s partner; see Benton, “London Music,” 45. It is unclear from Pleyel’s letters to his parents whether this was his first meeting with Kalkbrenner.

³⁹ Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 42-43.

⁴⁰ On Kalkbrenner’s concert tour of 1823-24, see Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 43-55.

London, presumably to visit friends, but these visits also had had the useful effect of maintaining ties to the city's musical community.⁴¹ Upon his permanent return, he flourished as a musician and as a musical personality in a city where he was awaited by "the most brilliant clientele and the highest esteem that always accompanies a great artist whose personal distinction equals his talent."⁴² By 1828, the German pianist Wilhelm von Lenz, who was traveling to Paris especially to study with the great Kalkbrenner, noted that the virtuoso had acquired "all the elegances" (including the *Légion d'honneur*) available to pianists.⁴³ Kalkbrenner pursued the typical avenues available to professional musicians: performing in a variety of venues, composing and publishing opera fantasies for a wealthy amateur audience, and maintaining an elite private teaching studio. His pre-existing social and musical connections and what must have been some considerable personal wealth contributed to further activities: hosting his own musical salon, advising the Pleyel manufacturing firm, and sitting on the *concours* juries at the Paris Conservatoire.

Although he has since faded from accounts of music history, Kalkbrenner was immortalized by French writers in the decades after his death as a major figure of French musical life during the Restoration and July Monarchy. Fétis called him the "head of a school of pianists," renowned for having cultivating many excellent students including Marie

⁴¹ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 99.

⁴² Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 100.

⁴³ "Kalkbrenner était chevalier de la Légion d'honneur et fermier général de toutes les élégances permises au piano" (Wilhelm von Lenz, *Les Grands Virtuoses du piano: Liszt—Chopin—Tausig—Henselt, souvenirs personnels*, trans. and ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, Series Harmoniques, ed. Jean-Michel Nectoux [Paris: Flammarion, 1995], 44).

Pleyel, “the most beautiful talent produced by France.”⁴⁴ And in Marmontel’s hall of fame, Kalkbrenner stood as a “musician of the first order, remarkable composer, model for becoming a virtuoso, head of a school, and transcendent teacher.”⁴⁵ Along with the general admiration for his musicianship, though, came a healthy dose of criticism for what was apparently seen as tremendous arrogance and grasping materialism. Among his contemporaries, Marmontel, Heinrich Heine, and Clara Schumann recorded anecdotal accounts of Kalkbrenner’s personal flaws, ranging from a certain “narrowness of spirit” to outright rudeness to his equally talented and esteemed colleagues.⁴⁶ Such tales inevitably reappear in more recent histories of the piano, the only literature in which Kalkbrenner regularly appears. Harold Schonberg, among others, included Kalkbrenner in his pantheon of “great pianists” but recounted only unflattering (and largely unsubstantiated) stories about Kalkbrenner’s inflated ego and blatant commercialism.⁴⁷ Kalkbrenner thus appears as a cartoonish figure who forced his son to perform memorized “improvisations” and who flippantly dismissed the accomplishments of his brilliant colleague Moscheles.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ “Devenu chef d’une école des pianistes, il a formé plusieurs élèves distingués parmi lesquels on remarque madame Pleyel, le plus beau talent qu’ait produit la France” (Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Kalkbrenner [Frédéric-Guillaume]”). Fétis’s account of Pleyel’s talent, of course, is probably colored by their long-standing friendship; nonetheless, he echoes Marmontel and other contemporary writers in naming Pleyel (not Stamaty or even Osborne) to be Kalkbrenner’s most important student.

⁴⁵ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 104.

⁴⁶ “Certaines étroitesse de caractère” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 104-106).

⁴⁷ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). On Kalkbrenner’s character, see pp. 118-121. See also Reginald G. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Technique*, 3rd ed (New York: R. B. Luce, 1990), 131-32. Neither of these studies presents rigorous scholarly inquiry. Yet they are fascinating examples of how piano history and piano technique has been (and continues to be) transmitted. I cite them not as sources of historical data but rather as representatives of how and why Kalkbrenner has been denigrated in music history.

⁴⁸ For the anecdote about Kalkbrenner’s son, see Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 118. On Kalkbrenner and Moscheles, see Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 104-105.

This caricature of Kalkbrenner was related at least in part to his close ties with the world of women's music. As a prominent figure in the salon, a famous teacher of women pianists, and a proponent of *jeu-lié* playing, Kalkbrenner crafted his Parisian identity around the most easily feminized aspects of nineteenth-century pianism and, as a result, sacrificed some of his credibility as a virtuoso. At several points in his career, Kalkbrenner did teach male pianists who went on to have significant musical careers—among them the French pianist Camille Stamaty (professor at the Conservatoire, instructor of Louis-Moreau Gottschalk and Camille Saint-Saëns) and the Irish virtuoso George Osborne. But in 1828, when von Lenz arrived in Paris, he found that Kalkbrenner had become the “Mona Lisa of the salon piano”—a teacher of women and a prominent figure in the feminine domain of the salon. Like many others, von Lenz identified Liszt as the pianist of the future, and he turned his steps away from Kalkbrenner's door.⁴⁹ Kalkbrenner, however, maintained a high profile in Paris during his lifetime, largely through his standing with a major sub-group of French music consumers: women of the leisure class.

Kalkbrenner's professional strategies did not focus solely on women, nor was his involvement in the feminized salon the only reason why he was later ridiculed as a pianist and composer. He made several key mistakes that resulted in the death of his reputation soon after he himself died. First, his professional strategies were far too transparent: by paying too much attention to the bottom line, Kalkbrenner appeared opportunistic and pragmatic instead of idealistic and inspired. Second, he composed music which was popular with contemporary audiences but was later excluded from the Austro-German canon—namely in the genre of opera fantasy. But perhaps, Kalkbrenner's most fatal error lay in offering

⁴⁹ “Le *Joconde* du piano de salon” (Lenz, *Les Grands Virtuoses*, 44).

guidance to a young and inexperienced musician who would eventually eclipse him as one of the nineteenth century's most beloved figures.

Kalkbrenner's Strategies in Paris

Compared to other pianists encountered in this study, Kalkbrenner stands as a chronological exception. Older than those who became the Romantic virtuosos of the July Monarchy, Kalkbrenner belonged to a post-Classical group of pianists that included Moscheles, Field, and Hummel rather than Chopin, Liszt, and Thalberg. Born twenty to thirty years earlier than the "Romantic Generation," Kalkbrenner and his contemporaries received their musical training in a world that still included the harpsichord as a household instrument and that revolved around significantly different socio-musical structures and expectations.⁵⁰ Yet their careers foreshadowed what would become common practice for new professional musicians in the 1820s and 1830s, as those musicians born in the last quarter of the eighteenth century sought to adapt to the changing social conditions of early nineteenth-century Europe.

Kalkbrenner's departure and return to Paris took place at a fascinating stage in the history of the city's musical life. Paris in 1814 had only begun to embrace Mozart's operas and had not yet encountered those of Rossini, whose *L'Italiana in Algeri* (produced at the Théâtre-Italien in 1817) marked the start of an aesthetic revolution. By 1824, the French musical landscape had been transformed by Liszt's recent debut and the ongoing debate over Italian opera.⁵¹ Kalkbrenner had to find a way to employ his personal resources to carve out

⁵⁰ David Rowland, "Pianos and Pianists c.1770-c.1825," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, ed. Rowland, 22-39 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ See James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

a place for himself in the shifting climate of Restoration and July Monarchy Paris. To begin, he had to approach Parisian society in 1824 from a very different angle than could Liszt or, later, Chopin. Like both the child prodigy and the young adult, Kalkbrenner was preceded by reports from abroad about his performances and the popularity of his compositions, but he was uniquely surrounded by his reputation as a former resident of the city. A popular international icon, he was also a familiar figure to Parisian musical circles.⁵²

From the success of his campaign in Paris, it is evident that Kalkbrenner had at his disposal from the beginning an extraordinarily broad base of connections. This group probably was comprised of friends and colleagues from his first decade in Paris as well as of new associations and acquaintances made in London and abroad. Ranging from Conservatoire professors to music journalists and from aristocratic *salonnières* to other professional musicians, Kalkbrenner's network of social contacts allowed him to pursue a number of avenues upon his return. Kalkbrenner also seemed to have amassed a considerable personal fortune before arriving in Paris, which facilitated his involvement in the city's musical activities. For one thing, he apparently made a significant investment in Pleyel's piano-building firm around the time that Camille Pleyel took over direction of the company in 1824.⁵³ He also hosted a well-attended musical salon, gave extravagant formal parties, and prided himself on his dress and comportment, all markers of elite Parisian socialites. When he acquired this wealth is unclear, but given the lavish society in which he circulated in London, it may have resulted from his activities there. Another factor may have

⁵² The reputation of his father as composer and choir director may also have contributed to Kalkbrenner's reputation in Paris.

⁵³ It is unclear exactly when Kalkbrenner entered into partnership with Camille Pleyel, but accounts generally agree that it happened within a year of his return to Paris. See Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Kalkbrenner (Frédéric-Guillaume)."

been his published compositions. By the early 1820s, Kalkbrenner's scores were sold all over eastern and western Europe. If his correspondence with his publishers in the 1830s is any indication, Kalkbrenner was a perfectionist when it came to keeping his books and did not hesitate to claim due payment.⁵⁴

Indeed, Kalkbrenner's approach to Parisian musical life can be framed as a series of money-making ventures. First, his collaboration with the Pleyel firm—begun in the mid-1820s—had the potential for long-lasting profit. Although his role in the company has been almost completely erased from twenty-first-century French accounts of the company's history, Kalkbrenner may have acted as Camille Pleyel's partner from as early as 1825. Over the course of the next ten years, the Pleyel pianos rivaled those crafted by Érard as the most outstanding instruments in France. The details of Kalkbrenner's involvement with the firm remain unclear, but the general picture of his activities in the late 1820s and 1830s nevertheless illuminates the reciprocal relationship between him and the Pleyels.⁵⁵ On the one hand, Kalkbrenner offered at least some of the financial capital needed for the firm to keep up with their innovative rivals Érard and Pape. He also brought the full force of his reputation and its selling power as well as a knowledge of English pianos (on which Ignace Pleyel had based his early models) and English piano technique. As a celebrated virtuoso and an active teacher, Kalkbrenner could potentially influence piano sales by advertising his piano of choice publicly. And advertise them he did, by performing regularly on Pleyel instruments, arranging for his students to give concerts in the Pleyel salon and probably

⁵⁴ See various letters to Maurice Schlesinger and others located in Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes*, esp. nos. 1-8, 20, 22, and 23, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

⁵⁵ Kalkbrenner is almost completely absent from French histories of Pleyel company: for example, the firm history published on the Pleyel-Wolff website (<http://www.pleyel.fr/histoire-pleyel-200.php>, accessed 10 December 2008) does not mention his collaboration with Camille Pleyel, nor does the historical overview of the company in René Beaupain, *Chronologie des piano de la maison Pleyel* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

recommending that they practice on Pleyel pianos. Dubbed the firm's "house pianist," he gave the inaugural concert at the new Salle Pleyel on 1 January 1830.⁵⁶

Such a partnership, on the other hand, also benefited Kalkbrenner. As a partner in the long-established firm, he was certainly entitled to a percentage of sales profits. Probably more significant, however, was the money that he did not spend on instruments and renting concert halls. Not only were the Pleyel rooms available for Kalkbrenner's own concerts, but they were also frequent sites for his students' concerts—particularly those given by women pianists who preferred to restrict entry to their performances through exclusive ticket sales. Third, the Pleyel publishing company provided a home for some of his publications, including several editions of the much-lauded *Méthode*.

A second financially motivated maneuver on Kalkbrenner's part revolved around the publication of his teaching method and its supplementary materials. After spending six or seven years establishing an elite private studio and publicly claiming several local celebrities (including Marie Pleyel and Stamaty) as his students, Kalkbrenner packaged his now-renowned pedagogical philosophy in an affordable textbook. Dedicated to conservatories across Europe, the *Méthode* was accessible to a much broader Parisian audience than his high-priced lessons had been, and it quickly gained in credibility and popularity.⁵⁷ Within ten years, the text had been translated into English, Italian, and German, and at least six editions were released over the course of three decades.⁵⁸ Kalkbrenner's own pupil Stamaty

⁵⁶ Robert Palmieri, *The Piano: An Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), s.v. "Pleyel, Ignace-Joseph (1757-1831)."

⁵⁷ The dedication reads "Aux Conservatoires de Musique d'Europe."

⁵⁸ While dated examples of each separate edition are unavailable, Kalkbrenner's comments in an 1836 letter indicate that the copyright and patent on the whole system required renewal every five years. Kalkbrenner to Azévédo, Paris, 28 March 1836, Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes* no. 22, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

used the *Méthode* as a teaching tool well into the 1850s, reportedly employing Kalkbrenner's exercises in the education of his virtuoso students Gottschalk and Saint-Saëns.⁵⁹

Kalkbrenner's strategy for marketing his *Méthode* was a savvy one. Not only did he sell his advice and wisdom in the text's short exercises and helpful hints, he also sold a "substitute teacher" along with the volume. This "substitute" was a rail (called the "*guide-mains*" or "hand-guide") that ran from one end of the keyboard to the other intended to immobilize the pianist's wrists. The *guide-mains* reinforced Kalkbrenner's insistence on independent movement of the fingers and served as a physical aid for those who perhaps could not (or at least chose not) to pay for piano lessons. The *Méthode*, of course, could be used with or without the *guide-mains*, thus ensuring its widest possible circulation in France and abroad. Supplementary etudes (opp. 126 and 143) to reinforce the *Méthode*'s lessons were published separately in 1835 and 1839 across Europe. The German edition, published by Kistner in Leipzig, included a second volume of easy four-hand pieces as well as twelve supplementary etudes.⁶⁰ Kalkbrenner was not the only musician to craft such a multi-pronged approach to pedagogical commerce; Johann Bernhard Logier invented the Chiroplast in 1814, and Herz patented his Dactylion two decades later in 1835, both accompanied by appropriate instructional manuals and etudes.⁶¹ Unlike his contemporaries, however, Kalkbrenner developed a three-year course of study, designed to attract students of varying skill levels and set to begin just after the publication of the *Méthode* in late 1831.

⁵⁹ Gerig, *Famous Pianists*, 135-36.

⁶⁰ See the works list in Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 226. The four-hand pieces may also have been published in Paris, although no extant copy has been located.

⁶¹ Kalkbrenner's *guide-mains* was essentially a simplified version of Logier's Chiroplast. On mechanical piano aids, see Gerig, *Famous Pianists*, 125-28.

While the course was only available to local students (with enough money to pay for it), the rest of Kalkbrenner's pedagogical materials could also be adapted for international sale.

All the while, Kalkbrenner continued his career as a composer, carefully tailoring his music to the interests of Parisian consumers. Throughout his career, the piano occupied a central position in most of his compositions; even his orchestral works featured piano solos in most cases. The published works dating from the years before his 1824 return to Paris are strikingly different in genre from those published later. In the earlier part of his career, Kalkbrenner composed mainly chamber music and piano sonatas, genres commonly employed by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century composers. While his later output included a few similarly-constructed pieces (including a set of piano and string quintet and a set of piano sonatas), he turned his efforts almost exclusively to creating music based on operatic themes or popular songs. The post-1824 Paris publications included new genres for Kalkbrenner: opera fantasies, variations and rondos for piano and orchestra, and even a few vocal *romances*, all genres that became immensely popular with Parisian concert-going audiences in the 1820s and later.⁶²

By publishing music aligned with the desires of Parisian music-lovers, Kalkbrenner catered to his potential fans while also participating in the shaping the musical taste in France.⁶³ Like his colleagues, he provided new (and technically accessible) opera-based compositions to his theater-loving public. He also took advantage of other popular figures in Paris. One such strategy involved collaborating with another musician to create a duet that

⁶² An avenue of further study might consider how Kalkbrenner's shift from multi-movement chamber and solo works to single-movement melody (opera)-based genres coincided with (and indeed participated in) the aesthetic shifts in the 1820s. Without further access to pre-1824 compositions, I cannot support this hypothesis.

⁶³ I explore how opera fantasies intersected with public experience in Chapter 4.

featured both their instruments: say, for example, the *Fantaisie brillante* for piano and violin composed on themes from Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* by Kalkbrenner and the famous violinist Charles Lafont.⁶⁴ Another strategy resulted in composition of pieces that celebrated well-known musicians, such as his *Variations brillantes sur une Mazourka de Chopin*, op. 120. The dedicatees of his compositions, moreover, comprise a veritable roster of the Parisian musical and social aristocracy. Kalkbrenner's piano compositions were hugely popular and, more importantly, were reviewed frequently in music journals such as the *Revue (et Gazette) musicale de Paris*, *Le Ménestrel*, and *Le Pianiste*. Journalists, including even the powerful and opinionated Fétis, placed some of Kalkbrenner's music among the finest examples of contemporary composition.

A crucial element of Kalkbrenner's compositional strategy was his approach to the international publishing market. In the first decade following his graduation from the Paris Conservatoire, most of his works were initially published only by local French firms. By the mid-1810s, around the time that he relocated to London, Kalkbrenner's compositions began to appear simultaneously in both the London and Paris markets. Eventually, after the concert tours of 1823 and 1824, he was able to market his new works in a variety of music centers, arranging publication of first editions in London and Paris as well as Vienna, Leipzig, Bonn, and Berlin. Like many other professional musicians whose livelihood depended at least in

⁶⁴ This was the *Grande fantaisie brillante pour piano et violon, sur des motifs des "Huguenots"* published in Leipzig in 1838 by Breitkopf und Härtel; see Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 230. Another such example is the *Duo pour piano et violon sur "La Juive"* by Kalkbrenner and the violinist Heinrich Panofka, published by the same in 1843. Both were reviewed in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 10, no. 29 (16 July 1843) along with two of Kalkbrenner's solo works with a note demonstrating that all four pieces had been published by a powerful group of French publishers: Prillip, E. Troupenas, Schlesinger, and Pleyel. Without surviving examples of the French scores (or records from the publishing firms), it is impossible to determine which firm published which piece. If nothing else, this puzzle demonstrates an interesting facet of publishing music in Paris: most composers rarely published exclusively with one particular firm. Such exceptions as Chopin and Liszt (who tended to publish with only one publisher at a time) were rare.

part on publishing their music, Kalkbrenner had to address the confusing (and sometimes conflicting) copyright and publication laws of several different countries. In short, the copyright laws differed from one country to another, and therefore separate but simultaneous registration in each location was required in order to maintain control of the work.⁶⁵ As Jeffrey Kallberg notes in his discussion of Chopin's publication strategies, simultaneous publication in multiple locations had two main benefits: one, the composer realized a greater profit by publishing and marketing the work in several countries, and two, it helped to curb unauthorized (and often error-ridden) publications based on an original edition. The composer's level of involvement in such an endeavor could vary, ranging from personally corresponding with a foreign publisher to hiring a foreign representative to handle negotiations to funneling all scores and contracts through a local French publisher.⁶⁶

Few of Kalkbrenner's letters survive; of these, a handful deals with the publication of his music by Maurice Schlesinger in the early 1840s. Although limited, these letters do offer a glimpse of how Kalkbrenner handled the issues of local and international publishing after several decades of experience, two of which were centered in Paris. Schlesinger, a major player in the Parisian musical world, operated the French branch of a German publishing company that had issued first editions of works by Beethoven, Berlioz, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Meyerbeer.⁶⁷ Three things become clear from Kalkbrenner's letters to Schlesinger and other publishers concerning the publication of several pieces in 1841 and 1842. First, Kalkbrenner was apparently annoyed by Schlesinger's financial management: in at least

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 162.

⁶⁶ Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, 163-64.

⁶⁷ On Maurice Schlesinger, see Anik Devriès, "Un éditeur de musique 'à la toute ardente': Maurice Schlesinger" *Fontes Artis Musicae* 27 (1980): 125-36.

three letters, he mentioned the problem of late payments from the firm, or, in one case, wrote to Schlesinger in Moscow to inform him that “since you left for Moscow without paying me the honorarium for the piece on “Le Guitarrero”...I have drawn two vouchers against you, each for two hundred francs.”⁶⁸

Second, Kalkbrenner seems to have realized a healthy profit from the sale of his music—at least in the 1840s, and given the constant stream of publications throughout the 1820s and 1830s, this probably stands true for most of his career. In a request for payment in 1842, Kalkbrenner included a short tally of what was owed (along with a proposed schedule of disbursement): for two new pieces and a reprint of the *Méthode* published in early 1842, Kalkbrenner was paid 696 francs—a sizeable profit by contemporary standards.⁶⁹ And third, Kalkbrenner appears to have adopted different strategies in dealing with foreign companies. In one letter, concerned about matching up the Parisian and German copyright registration of his Fourth Piano Concerto, he offered to call on the Peters firm in Leipzig in 1835 in order to discuss the issue.⁷⁰ Another letter, this one from the first half of 1841, indicates that Maurice Schlesinger was also responsible for Kalkbrenner’s publications by the firm’s Berlin branch.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Kalkbrenner to Maurice Schlesinger, Paris, 3 10 July 1841, Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes*, no. 3, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. “Mon cher Maurice / Comme vous êtes parti pour Moscou sans me régler mes honoraires pour le morceau sur le Guitarrero et que moi même je prends mon vol jusqu’au mois d’Octobre, j’ai tiré sur vous deux bons, chacun de deux cents fr., l’un pour fin d’Aout et l’autre pour le 15 7bre vous me redevrez cent fr, qui serviront à acquitter les petites dettes que j’ai avec votre maison. / Adieu Monsieur le Cosaque / Fr. Kalkbrenner / le 10 Juillet 1841.”

⁶⁹ Kalkbrenner to Schlesinger, Paris, Wednesday evening [1842], Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes*, no. 8, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

⁷⁰ Kalkbrenner to Peters, Paris, 1 February 1835, Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes*, no. 20, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

⁷¹ Kalkbrenner to Schlesinger, Paris, date unknown, Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes* no. 1. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Without further documentation, no general conclusions can be drawn about what kind of profit Kalkbrenner earned from his publications or how his strategy for publishing music may have shifted over the course of his career. Like so many of his contemporaries, he published hundreds of compositions in many cities under a variety of labels; in Paris alone, no fewer than five firms issued Kalkbrenner's works within a span of thirty years. Yet this small sampling of letters reveals an involved businessman whose professional tactics were determined under case-by-case circumstances.

Finally, in addition to his composing and teaching, Kalkbrenner also managed his performances in Paris in a way that framed his virtuosity at minimal cost and effort. On the one hand, he seems to have avoided the arena of the public benefit concert to an unusual degree. At the height of their careers, virtuosos such as Herz, Liszt, and Thalberg programmed two or three benefit concerts as well as multiple performances on behalf of other musicians or organizations during a single two- or three-month visit to Paris. Kalkbrenner, however, appears to have organized only a handful of solo concerts for his benefit in Paris after 1824, most notably one in 1831 and the other in 1838.⁷² The latter was among his final public performances, if not the last one, as poor health in the last decade of his life interfered with regular practicing.⁷³

On the other hand, Kalkbrenner did perform at events to which tickets could be purchased by the public at-large on a regular basis. First and most frequently, Kalkbrenner participated in concerts sponsored by various Parisian music groups and institutions, such as the concert series of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, the concert series Athénée

⁷² On the frequency of Liszt's concerts, see Geraldine Keeling, "Liszt's Appearances in Parisian Concerts, 1824–1844," *Liszt Society Journal* 11 (1986): 22–34, and 12 (1987): 8–22.

⁷³ Nautsch, *Friedrich Kalkbrenner*, 99–106.

Musical, and meetings of the Société Académique des Enfants d'Apollon. He also performed at several spring *concerts spirituels* in the 1820s. And second, Kalkbrenner made cameo appearances at benefit concerts organized by his friends or students as well as a number of concerts organized for the benefit of the underprivileged.⁷⁴ His contributions to these events involved solo performances of his compositions, as well as performances with orchestras or chamber ensembles. For example, at a concert organized by the Pleyel company, he performed his own work for six pianos along with Henri Bertini, Camille Petit, Johann Pixis, and two additional unnamed pianists.⁷⁵

In general, Kalkbrenner was received by the Parisian press as a pianist unlike any other in Paris. This attitude seemed to be directly related to two issues: namely, Kalkbrenner's position as a representative of post-Classical brilliance and his popularity as a composer. Like most of his contemporaries, Kalkbrenner programmed his own music for each concert, a ploy designed to bolster his reputation as a composer (thus selling more music) and virtuoso. But because Kalkbrenner usually appeared for only one or two numbers on a longer program, he was rarely heard playing music composed by others in public settings.⁷⁶ Usually this strategy was well-received. Although most newspapers covered only extraordinary musical events (such as Liszt's much-anticipated debut), the music and entertainment journals usually included a line or two about the famous Kalkbrenner that tied

⁷⁴ Among others, Kalkbrenner performed at a concert "for the benefit of two orphans" on 4 February 1827, and a concert "for the benefit of a family of Spanish refugees" on 16 January 1831.

⁷⁵ See the review in *Journal de Paris*, 31 Dec 1827. The date of the concert was not specified, nor was it reviewed in more detail in another journal.

⁷⁶ This was not particularly unusual, although most virtuosos performed works by other composers (either past or contemporary) at some point. For example, a pianist might perform another's composition as a favor at the composer's benefit concert. Other programming approaches—perhaps pedagogical or experimental—might result in such performances as well; for example, Liszt, Chopin, and Hiller performed J. S. Bach's concerto for three keyboards on 15 July 1833 at the Conservatoire.

together the quality of his performance and the quality of his compositions. For example, a review of his final solo benefit concert in 1838 declared that:

In the midst of the shining talents of the modern school of pianists, Kalkbrenner has won a truly distinct place. He is perhaps of all the technicians the one who obtains from the piano the most beautiful volume of sound, and the purest sound; and in this, we place him above Thalberg himself... Let us make a final point: the author who wrote such vigorous concertos and so many brilliant and spiritual works is the same man who discovered three hundred different nuances in playing one note on the piano.⁷⁷

For this critic, the extensive subtleties of Kalkbrenner's playing resonated with the expressiveness (and quantity) of his compositions. Positioning Kalkbrenner above Thalberg, who had out-played and out-composed the competition only two years earlier, further supported the connection between the two musical tasks.⁷⁸

Fétis was also intrigued by Kalkbrenner's performances of his own music, because he appreciated how Kalkbrenner's compositions meshed with his pianistic strengths. Ten years earlier, in a review of a 4 February 1827 concert (given for the benefit of two orphans), Fétis congratulated Kalkbrenner as "hero" of a celebration featuring the finest of Parisian musicians:

Accustomed as we are to all the force of the pianists of the new school, it was interesting to hear the purest tradition of that beautiful Classical manner of Clementi, Cramer, and the great clavecinists of the last century. Thus the ease with which Mr. Kalkbrenner executed the most difficult features made the public believe that they

⁷⁷ "Au milieu des talens dont brille l'école moderne des pianistes, Kalkbrenner a conquis une place bien distincte. Il est peut-être de tous les exécuteurs celui qui obtient du piano le plus beau volume de son, et le son le plus pur; et en cela, nous le mettons au-dessus de Thalberg lui-même... Faisons un dernier rapprochement: l'auteur qui a écrit de si vigoureux concertos et tant de brillantes et spirituelles productions, est le même homme qui a découvert trois cents nuances différentes dans la manière d'attaquer la note du piano" (*La France musicale* 2, no. 1 [7 January 1838]).

⁷⁸ This also may hint at Kalkbrenner's relationship with the press. A good review could be courted by offering VIP treatment to journalists, beginning with free tickets. Given the frequency with which Kalkbrenner's students appeared in newspapers that rarely covered female performers—and the generally positive feedback that they received—I hesitate to read reviews of Kalkbrenner's playing without at least considering the possibility that he "encouraged" journalists to give him what he wanted.

were simple... The compositional merit of the concerto by Mr. Kalkbrenner added even more to the pleasure caused by his playing.⁷⁹

Again, Kalkbrenner is singled out as an exemplary pianist, and the description of his playing suggests that it was enhanced by the qualities of his composition, in this case one of his concertos. By no means was Kalkbrenner the only composing pianist to be discussed in these terms, as several others (including Chopin and Thalberg) received similar treatment from the press. Later in the nineteenth century, Oscar Comettant published a text in which he divided pianists into several groupings based on technical prowess, compositional talent, and pedagogical program. As a “virtuoso who composes,” or “pianiste-compositeur,” Kalkbrenner kept company with Moscheles, Hummel, Chopin, and Thalberg, all musicians who produced works with a “true musical value.”⁸⁰ Liszt, desperate to be taken seriously as a composer, did not make the cut, despite the fact that he composed far fewer opera fantasies (a genre detested by Comettant) than Kalkbrenner.

Kalkbrenner’s reputation as a performing virtuoso was augmented by his performances in the context of the salon, a musical space inaccessible to public audiences and rarely reviewed by music journals. While all pianists participated in salon life to some degree, anecdotal evidence suggest that Kalkbrenner took an especially active role in performing, accompanying, and socializing at various salons. A number of letters, addressed to various aristocratic women, explain Kalkbrenner’s absence from their salon gatherings,

⁷⁹ “Le héros de la fête était M. Kalkbrenner... Habitué comme nous le sommes aux tous de force des pianistes de la nouvelle école, il était intéressant d’entendre la tradition la plus pure de cette belle manière classique de Clémenti, de Cramer et des grands clavecinistes du siècle dernier. D’abord la facilité avec laquelle M. Kalkbrenner exécute les traits les plus difficiles, a fait croire au public qu’il s’agissait des choses les plus simples; le mérite de la composition du concerto de M. Kalkbrenner ajoutait encore au plaisir que causait son jeu” (*Revue musicale* 1, no. 1 [February 1827]).

⁸⁰ “Les ouvrages ont une véritable valeur musicale, et non celui qui barbouille d’insignifiants arrangements” (Oscar Comettant, *Musique et musiciens* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1862), 134).

suggesting that he valued these social connections.⁸¹ How often he accommodated requests for his presence at social events is impossible to determine, but his reputation as the “Mona Lisa of the salon piano” indicates that he appeared in such settings on a regular basis.⁸² Kalkbrenner also hosted his own salon for a number of years, at which musical performances were included.⁸³ While it is impossible to identify which kinds of performance took place there, it appears that Kalkbrenner used at least some salon evenings to explore newly-composed music. For example, in two letters to the cellist Norblin, Kalkbrenner invited him to participate in first readings of chamber pieces by himself and the French composer George Onslow.⁸⁴

With such a varied portfolio of interests and connections, Kalkbrenner occupied a central position in Paris, influencing and being influenced by socio-musical events that shaped the unfolding of July-Monarchy music-making. Regardless of whether he was well-liked by his contemporaries or whether his music had been (or could still be) valued, the case of Kalkbrenner illuminates the significance of strategy and professionalism in nineteenth-century music-making. His reputation as a great pianist-composer and his aristocratic status in Paris, though dismissed by historians of the piano, make him a much less unlikely model for Chopin than it may initially appear.

⁸¹ See various letters included in Kalkbrenner’s correspondence: Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

⁸² See footnote 49.

⁸³ On Kalkbrenner’s salon, see Anaïs Lebrun Bassanville, *Les Salons d’autrefois* (Paris: Brunet, 1866), 3:216-99.

⁸⁴ See Kalkbrenner to Norblin, Paris, date unknown, Kalkbrenner (Frédéric), *Lettres autographes* no. 25 and 34, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Chopin as Professional Virtuoso

Chopin embarked on the road that ultimately led to Paris when he left Warsaw for Vienna on 2 November 1830. Though he may have had “no inkling that he was leaving Poland for good,” as Jim Samson writes, he and his companion Tytus Woyciechowski did intend to travel through Europe over an extended period of time.⁸⁵ Perhaps recognizing the limits of a musical future in Warsaw, Chopin apparently believed that his career lay in Western Europe.⁸⁶ Political events led him on a more direct path to Paris than originally anticipated—instead of going from Vienna to Italy as intended, he ended up in Munich, and traveled to Paris on a passport that was supposed to take him to London.⁸⁷ Chopin was immediately transfixed by Paris and its lively cultural and musical offerings, and he soon wrote home to say that he expected to stay in France for at least three years.⁸⁸ Indeed, the trip to London was postponed for over fifteen years.

The convention in Chopin scholarship to interpret his life through the lens of his personality has resulted in the construction of Chopin as a poetic, isolated, and passionately nationalist genius who remained aloof from contemporary musical politics. This figure, as seductive today as it was during the July Monarchy, fails to account for the cultural expectations that shaped his experience as a professional musician. As a virtuoso, his status was not (and still is not) questioned; yet during his years in Paris, he eschewed public combat with contemporary competitors and engaged in only a few typical virtuoso activities.

⁸⁵ Samson, *Chopin*, 71. For more on Woyciechowski and his relationship to Chopin, see Pierre Azoury, *Chopin Through His Contemporaries: Friends, Lovers, and Rivals* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1999), 43-52.

⁸⁶ Samson, *Chopin*, 27.

⁸⁷ Samson, *Chopin*, 78-80.

⁸⁸ Chopin to Norbert-Alphonse Kumelski, Paris, 18/9 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, trans. and ed. Arthur Hedley (London: Heinemann, 1962), 93.

Perhaps, as his biographers would have us believe, he truly disliked the spotlight of public performance and abhorred the life of the virtuoso. He certainly appears to have dragged his heels at every turn: he delayed giving a public benefit concert in Warsaw for years after he had achieved local fame; the concerts planned for Vienna never materialized, and he organized only a few public concerts for adoring audiences in Paris and beyond.

Furthermore, his œuvre contains Polish-inspired mazurkas, waltzes, and polonaises instead of spectacle-oriented works based on operatic music. His only forays into the opera fantasy, in fact, took place either before or soon after his arrival in Paris, a noticeable lacuna for composer operating in a musical society that produced and consumed hundreds of piano works related to opera.⁸⁹

Along with his reputed preference for the intimacy of the salon and his unusual compositional style, Chopin's abstention from the traditional virtuoso arena and his atypical career path in Paris continue to be constructed simultaneously as the inevitable consequence of his personal life. The much-remarked delicacy of Chopin's pianistic style and physical appearance further magnifies this narrative. For instance, Samson argues:

A substantial income from teaching in Paris enabled Chopin to avoid the public concert and to restrict his appearances as a performer mainly to small gatherings of initiates in society drawing-rooms. From his earliest days in Warsaw he had been at ease in such circles, and his playing, with its discriminating sensitivity of touch, was best suited to them. His creative path reflected this. The limitation of the medium was in itself an eloquent credit, but within it we may note a progression from public virtuosity (the concert music of the Warsaw years) towards a mature pianism at once more intimate and more powerful.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Chopin's opera-based works include *Variations on 'Là ci darem'* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1827), *Grand Duo for piano and cello on themes from Meyerbeer's Robert le diable* (a collaboration with the virtuoso cellist Auguste Franchomme) (1831), *Variations brillantes on "Je vends des scapulaires"* from Hérold's *Ludovic* (1832), and an unfinished arrangement of "Casta diva" from Bellini's *Norma*. He also contributed a variation on the march from Bellini's *I puritani* to the Hexaméron collection (1837).

⁹⁰ On Chopin as "salon composer," see Samson, "Myth and Reality," 2.

Samson's approach posits Chopin's "creative path" as the virtuous one, almost as if he had transcended his surroundings and virtuosity altogether. Like many musicologists, he portrays Chopin as a true artist in a voracious commercial sea; though in possession of virtuoso skills, Chopin set them aside to pursue a nobler but less popular art.⁹¹ As such, Chopin remains protected from the twin stigmata of blatant opportunism and empty, pointless virtuosity, both charges leveled at Liszt and many of their contemporaries—Kalkbrenner, Herz, Bertini, and De Meyer to name just a few. In a sense, Chopin and Liszt represent two poles of the divisive debates about virtuosity in the 1830s and 1840s. The latter, who appeared to sell the electrifying combination of skill and spectacle that his audiences demanded, was condemned as a pandering fool, while the former, who seemingly ignored current trends in music, was deified for having risen above them.⁹²

I argue instead that the positioning of Chopin as an "anti-virtuoso" virtuoso has resulted in a skewed understanding of his activities as a professional musician. Whether or not Chopin may indeed have been better suited to salon performances and the composition of piano miniatures, he arrived at this type of career not out of moral or artistic superiority but rather out of practicality. After political events thwarted Chopin's plans for a concert tour through Western Europe, he discovered a niche in the Parisian salons for a pianist with a romantic past and a sheaf of melancholy Polish-sounding music to prove it. Furthermore, he found a mentor in the figure of Kalkbrenner, who had much to offer in the way of connections and practice advice. Chopin's deceptively "natural" version of the Romantic

⁹¹ Samson, "Myth and Reality," 1-8; see also Niecks, *The Life of Chopin*, 1:280-84; and Hedley, *Chopin*, 1-2.

⁹² On the construction of Liszt in twentieth- and twenty-first-century biography, see Deaville, "Liszt and the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton, 28-56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); on Chopin, see Samson, "Myth and Reality," 1-8.

virtuoso was in fact as constructed as the obviously public-oriented incarnations presented by most other keyboard lions.

It is clear that Chopin initially intended to pursue a career in the public spotlight and even identified himself as a virtuoso. His preparations for an international concert tour are relatively well documented during the period before his departure for Vienna.⁹³ During a short visit to Vienna to test the waters, he decided at the last minute to give a non-benefit concert at the Imperial Opera House. To his parents, Chopin noted: “I have made up my mind [to play]. Blahetka says that I shall be a sensation, for I am a virtuoso of the first rank.”⁹⁴ After a thorough success on 11 August 1829, he eventually returned to Warsaw to give his first large-scale public concert on 17 March 1830. The resulting acclaim and support from the Warsaw musical community would have provided a foundation for the advertising of future public concerts in Vienna and beyond. Chopin’s first concert tour was projected to begin in Vienna and continue on through Italy, and he intended eventually to wind up in Paris and London, where most concert tours culminated during this period. He also performed a healthy repertoire of virtuoso works of his own composition, including the *Variations on “Là ci darem”* (1827), the *Fantasia on Polish Airs* (1828), and his two concertos.

Yet his decision to give up the stage more or less is interpreted as the manifestation of his innate aversion to public life when in fact it may have been politics that pushed him off the path usually adopted by virtuosos. News of the rebellion in Warsaw had electrified Vienna soon after Chopin’s arrival there; local public opinion took Russia’s side, and some

⁹³ See Samson, *Chopin*, 23-33.

⁹⁴ Chopin to the Chopin Family, Vienna, 8 August 1829, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 23. Leopoldine Blahetka was a composer and pianist active in Vienna in the 1820s.

resident Poles—including Chopin’s companion Woyciechowski—returned home to participate in the revolt against the Russian government. With a weak Polish support group and a socio-political environment unfriendly to Poland, Chopin was apparently unable to mount the anticipated public concerts.⁹⁵ Lacking the advance publicity resulting from a major success in the musical capital of Vienna, he was faced with a critical question: would he be able to launch the planned concert tour based solely on his successes in Warsaw?

The Russian government refused his request for a visa to Italy, and instead sent him to London via Munich and Paris. Audiences in both London and Paris were accustomed to receiving traveling musicians at the climax of their concert tours, reading foreign musical reports and local advertisements to track the successes and failures of performers who were working their ways to the English and French capitals. In Paris, therefore, Chopin found a high-stakes playing field indeed: if he gambled on his virtuosity by displaying it in a public concert, a positive reception could swiftly throw his career into the international spotlight. But would Chopin be able to give a performance so stunning as to catapult him to the top of the elite pianists known to Parisian audiences? Few virtuosos from abroad had been able to captivate Paris without first spreading their wings in another major city; Liszt’s early success in Vienna and other German cities along with the resulting publicity, for example, was instrumental in his victory in Paris.⁹⁶ If Chopin failed to excite the French capital, his chances for recovery were slim. The challenge facing him, if he did indeed hope to pursue a career as a touring virtuoso, therefore involved penetrating the social and musical worlds of

⁹⁵ Samson, *Chopin*, 76-78.

⁹⁶ Exceptions might be native Parisian pianists, but as I argue, those pianists simply were not seen to operate on the same level as virtuosos like Liszt and Chopin.

Paris on the one hand, before dazzling them with his virtuosity in a public concert on the other.

This challenge, of course, was no different than that facing any other virtuoso new to Paris, but Chopin entered with the deck stacked against him. In spite of whatever talent he may have possessed or the compositions he had already published, Chopin had only a little practical experience in concert management, particularly in concert management in a foreign city with exceptionally convoluted local customs. And without a mentor—a father, a teacher, even a French friend—to navigate the more obviously professional (i.e. commercial) points, he ran the risk of appearing opportunistic to his judgmental audiences. Furthermore, as Chopin freely acknowledged, his playing was often criticized as too weak for large concert venues—potentially a serious problem for a virtuoso.⁹⁷ Chopin was also struggling to make ends meet; a stipend from his father had enabled him to travel, but living in Paris was expensive, and he had very little capital with which to rent a hall and hire a supporting cast. In his possession, however, lay the key to conquering Paris: a letter of introduction that eventually led him to the salon of Kalkbrenner, who took the young Chopin under his wing and helped to arrange his public debut concert in the Salle Pleyel on 26 February 1832, about five months after Chopin's arrival in Paris.

Tactics in Chopin's Parisian Debut

Nearly two hundred years after the fact, it is impossible to decipher exactly what kind of relationship Chopin and Kalkbrenner may have developed during the early days of their acquaintance. While today we might struggle to comprehend a conversation in which the

⁹⁷ See, for example, Chopin to Chopin Family, Vienna, 12 August 1829, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 25.

Kleinmeister Kalkbrenner suggested the three-year course of lessons to the brilliant Chopin, its actual substance is long lost, and any reconstruction will always be highly colored by time and historiography. Yet re-imagining their relationship will help to paint a clearer picture of Chopin's early tactics in capturing Parisian interest.

Chopin's first encounter with Kalkbrenner occurred long before the two pianists met in Paris. He had certainly engaged with Kalkbrenner's music, if not Kalkbrenner himself, as a teenager in Warsaw. As Halina Goldberg has shown, Kalkbrenner's scores, along with those of Dussek, Field, Moscheles, Weber, and others, were sold in Warsaw in imported French and German editions as well as in reprinted versions published by local firms.⁹⁸ A letter of 8 September 1825 confirms that Chopin possessed some music composed by Kalkbrenner, although he rarely practiced music by other composers.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the Chopin family's response to Kalkbrenner's practical advice suggests that the latter's music and reputation was known to them. Ludwika's effusive description of the older pianist indicates that she recognized Kalkbrenner's name and was probably acquainted with his music:

Kalkbrenner had filled me with admiration; I could see him in my imagination as a man such as I would to God all men were. I saw his nobility, moral superiority; in a word, if I myself had been concerned I would have signed a pact handing over to him *myself*, or even *you*.¹⁰⁰

Both Nicholas Chopin and Joseph Elsner, though clearly less impressed with Kalkbrenner's "moral superiority," also displayed some degree of familiarity with his status as a composer and pianist in their letters.

⁹⁸ Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 104-105.

⁹⁹ Chopin to Jean Bialoblocki, Warsaw, 8 September 1825, in *Correspondance de Frédéric Chopin*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Bronislas Sydow (Paris: Richard Masse, 1953), 1:36-39.

¹⁰⁰ Ludwika Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 95.

Chopin's letter of introduction to Paër proved to an extremely useful one. Not surprisingly, Chopin promptly sought him out upon arriving in Paris. According to Chopin, the former director of the Théâtre-Italien and the "court conductor" introduced the young Polish musician to such powerful figures as Luigi Cherubini, Pierre Baillot, and Gioachino Rossini.¹⁰¹ Paër was also responsible for bringing Chopin to Kalkbrenner's attention. Their first meeting seems to have occurred soon after Chopin's arrival, as Chopin's earliest letters from Paris (dated mid-November) single Kalkbrenner out as the premier pianist in France and suggest that the two had already become fast friends. "I am intimate with Kalkbrenner," he wrote to his friend Norbert-Alphonse Kumelski on 18-19 November 1831:

The leading European pianist, whom I am sure you would like. He is the only one whose shoelaces I am not fit to untie; all these people like Herz, etc.—I tell you they are mere boasters; they will never play better than he.¹⁰²

In a later letter to Woyciechowski (dated 12 December 1831), Chopin continued to sing Kalkbrenner's praises:

Just imagine how curious I was to hear Herz, Liszt, Hiller, and the rest—they are all nobodies compared with Kalkbrenner. I confess I have played as well as Herz, but I long to play like Kalkbrenner...It is impossible to describe his *calm*, his enchanting touch, his comparable evenness and the mastery which he reveals in every note—he is a giant who tramples underfoot the Herzes, Czernys and of course me!¹⁰³

Chopin's enthusiasm probably demonstrates a sincere admiration of Kalkbrenner as a pianist and as a colleague and kindred spirit. Kalkbrenner had obviously been a friendly face and by this point had already proven himself to be a useful contact. Among other things, Kalkbrenner must have offered his assistance in planning the public concert almost

¹⁰¹ Chopin to Titus Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 98.

¹⁰² Chopin to Kumelski, Paris, 18-19 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 93.

¹⁰³ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 98.

immediately, since the concert was initially planned for December—just three months into Chopin's Parisian stay. He also frankly assessed Chopin's playing, something that Chopin appeared to appreciate.¹⁰⁴

Kalkbrenner, too, apparently expressed equal delight upon meeting Chopin. After hearing Chopin play the piano, the younger pianist reported that Kalkbrenner compared his style to that of the Clementi school and wondered if Chopin had studied with John Field in particular. In so doing, he claimed ownership of Chopin's style by relating it to that of his own idealized master. This stylistic brotherhood laid the foundation for Kalkbrenner's famous proposition: that Chopin enroll in a three-year course with Kalkbrenner and his recently-published *Méthode*. Chopin himself suggested that Kalkbrenner saw him as the last hope for the continuation of the Clementi school, and he offered the lessons with the intention of transferring his knowledge to a willing recipient.¹⁰⁵ In a world enamored with Lisztian virtuosity, a pianist like Chopin was a rare find. At the same time, as he had produced thus far only a few notable students, unveiling a talent like Chopin to Paris would certainly have increased Kalkbrenner's standing as a pedagogue.¹⁰⁶ Less kind critics have attributed Kalkbrenner's diagnosis to the worst kind of professional jealousy, intimating that he would have purposely perverted Chopin's inherent talent in order to preserve his own superiority.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 98-99.

¹⁰⁶ Chopin gently disagreed with Elsner, who believed that his own explanation for Kalkbrenner's generosity was the right one. See Ludwika Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 95-96.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the account given in Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 120-21.

Whatever Kalkbrenner's reasons may have been for courting the younger pianist, Chopin appears to have considered the offer with some seriousness. As he later wrote to Woyciechowski, Kalkbrenner's personality was no reason to deny himself the opportunity to study with the master: "you must realize that if everyone without exception respects Kalkbrenner's talent, they can't stand him as a man—for he is not a bit hail-fellow-well-met with every imbecile and, believe me, he is superior to all the pianists I have ever heard."¹⁰⁸ At some point in November, he wrote to his father about the possibility of studying with Kalkbrenner and asked him for advice on how to handle the situation. Chopin's hesitation to enroll immediately in Kalkbrenner's class likely had several causes. One, as Chopin enthusiasts often emphasize, was his own sense that he simply did not require further guided study with another pianist.¹⁰⁹ Having reached the limits of Warsaw's piano teachers, Chopin had been practicing on his own for several years, and, as he mentioned on several occasions, he was concerned about maintaining what he saw as his unique abilities.¹¹⁰ Another reason may have been financial: until he began teaching and publishing in Paris, Chopin lived on a stipend from his father, and an unforeseen expense such as Kalkbrenner's music course would probably have required more money.¹¹¹ He may also have been swayed by the brilliance of Kalkbrenner's reputation. As Nicholas Chopin pointed out in his response to his son's query, it must have been "very flattering that Mr. Kalkbrenner has shown such

¹⁰⁸ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 99.

¹⁰⁹ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 98.

¹¹⁰ Chopin's lessons with Elsner (which continued through his teen years) focused on composition and harmony rather than piano technique.

¹¹¹ During the politically restless period of 1831 and 1832, money was apparently very tight for Parisian artists in general, and Chopin in particular. Several letters exchanged between Chopin and his family during the winter of 1832 make reference to his precarious financial situation; see *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 109-10.

friendship towards you.”¹¹² Finally, as Nicholas Chopin also reflected, Chopin was probably weighing the potential benefits of Kalkbrenner’s friendship: “To know famous artists, to converse with them and hear them play their own works and to profit by their experiences cannot but be of the greatest advantage to a young man who is trying to shape a career for himself.”¹¹³

In answer to his query about pursuing lessons with Kalkbrenner, Chopin received a packet of letters from Warsaw, which included messages from his sisters Isabella and Ludwika, his father Nicholas, and his former teacher Joseph Elsner. These replies reflect to some degree what Chopin had communicated to his family. The letter from Ludwika Chopin describes the somewhat comical fuss caused by Chopin’s missive: she herself gasping with pleasure at his descriptions of Kalkbrenner, the father proud of Chopin’s accomplishments but confused by Kalkbrenner’s implications, and the former piano teacher apoplectic with fury when eventually consulted by the family. Ludwika herself was in favor of the liaison with Kalkbrenner, but most of her letter recounts the negative reaction of Elsner, whom she was unable to persuade otherwise.

Nicholas Chopin’s diplomatic response indicates that Chopin conveyed a genuine interest in Kalkbrenner’s offer. He responded by reiterating his wishes for Chopin’s success and affirming his trust in his son’s judgment: “You know I have done all that lay in my power to encourage your talents and develop them, and that I have never put an obstacle in

¹¹² Nicholas Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 94.

¹¹³ Nicholas Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 94.

your way.”¹¹⁴ Then, he questioned whether a long course of study with Kalkbrenner would truly be in Chopin’s best interest:

I cannot imagine how, with the talents which he says he finds in you, he should believe it necessary for you to spend three years under his guidance in order to make an artist out of you and give you a “solid foundation.”...Taking everything into account, the period of three years baffles me.

In the end, Nicholas Chopin referred his son to Elsner’s letter for a second perspective and urged Chopin to defer his decision until he had developed a more complete strategy for Paris. In other words, he thought Chopin should wait until he could determine if Kalkbrenner’s tutelage was needed to make a success of his Parisian campaign.

I don’t wish to stand in your way, but I should be glad if you would postpone your decision until you have weighed the matter carefully, listened to advice and thought it over. You have only just arrived; you say yourself that you can’t yet hold your head up and show what you have in you. So wait a while—genius may reveal itself immediately to those who understand, but they may not perceive its lofty intention; so give them time to know you better and do not take upon yourself something which might only hold back your progress.¹¹⁵

Underlying the letter is the sense that Chopin could count on continuing emotional and financial support from the family regardless of his decision.

To Chopin’s family, Elsner apparently displayed his pique with what he interpreted as Kalkbrenner’s professional jealousy and outright arrogance. Ludwika Chopin quoted Elsner as having exclaimed that:

They’ve recognized genius in Fryderyk and are already scared that he will outstrip them, so they want to keep their hands on him for three years in order to hold back something of that which Nature herself might push forward...He is trying to speculate

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 94.

¹¹⁵ Nicholas Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 94.

on Fryderyk's talent—to claim at least that he is his pupil. But in spite of all his love of art his aim is to cramp his genius.¹¹⁶

Even accounting for some exaggeration on the part of Ludwika Chopin, Elsner may have felt that he had every right to be angry at Kalkbrenner's statement that his prized student needed a "solid foundation" in technique that required three additional years of study. But he managed to bury his resentment in his own letter to Chopin in order to give his former pupil some politically astute advice. To begin, he also acknowledged Kalkbrenner as "the leading pianist" in Paris and claimed to "rejoice to hear that he has promised to reveal to you the secrets of his art."¹¹⁷ Elsner then cautioned Chopin to question the three-year diagnosis: "could he possibly decide, immediately after seeing and hearing you for the first time, how long you will require in order to absorb his method?...I expect that when he comes to know you closer and better he will change his views."¹¹⁸ The letter concludes with a reminder that Chopin should strive to project his own artistic vision: "those things by which an artist...arouses the admiration of his contemporaries must come from himself, thanks to the perfect cultivation of his powers."¹¹⁹

Elsner's final comment also addresses the tricky task of professional strategy-making that faced his student: Chopin had to display an illusion of independence in a society that depended on reciprocal social interaction. He couched his concerns about Kalkbrenner not in terms of what the pianist might do to Chopin's playing but rather in terms of how forming a

¹¹⁶ Ludwika Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 95.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Elsner to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 96.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Elsner to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 96-97.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Elsner to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 97.

liaison with Kalkbrenner might affect Chopin's standing in public. "If he wishes to serve the general aims of our art by helping you with his artistic knowledge...then you must show your gratitude to him as his pupil."¹²⁰ In other words, Elsner reminded Chopin of the professional courtesy that would require him to acknowledge publicly Kalkbrenner's tutelage. While this approach could open some doors for Chopin, it would close others. As a student of Kalkbrenner, he might gain access to the Conservatoire (largely closed to foreign pianists) and attract a particular subset of students and patrons. But Elsner clearly felt that Chopin should adopt a strategy that emphasized his differences from the Parisian establishment. (He also criticized Kalkbrenner passively for what he saw as an attempt to use Chopin in furthering his own career: "So far as you are concerned, and also even Nidecki, I would never have thought of turning you into *my pupils*."¹²¹) By aligning his musicianship with Kalkbrenner's well-known, feminized and old-fashioned reputation, Chopin would forfeit some of the appealing foreign mystique that clung to his image.

Chopin declined Kalkbrenner's offer soon after receiving the letters from Warsaw. His letter to Woyciechowski of 12 December 1831 indicates that he conveyed his decision to the older pianist by explaining that "I don't want simply to imitate him, and three years is too long."¹²² In another letter to Elsner, he relayed the news that Kalkbrenner had re-evaluated his earlier position and admitted that Chopin did not require such a long remedial course. Unlike his former teacher, Chopin still felt that Kalkbrenner was acting on good faith: "*That* [Kalkbrenner's re-evaluation] should prove to you that a real virtuoso with a well-deserved

¹²⁰ Joseph Elsner to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 97

¹²¹ Elsner to Chopin, Warsaw, 27 November 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 97

¹²² Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 98.

reputation does not know the meaning of jealousy.”¹²³ Chopin’s response to Kalkbrenner served the purpose of refusing the lessons without rejecting his help altogether. His diplomacy created an ideal situation, for, as Chopin and Elsner recognized, Kalkbrenner could offer much more than piano instruction: as a major figure in Parisian musical life, he had the social and musical connections as well as a powerful public profile that could make or break a nascent career like Chopin’s.

Happily for Chopin, Kalkbrenner bore no visible grudge (lending some credibility to Chopin’s belief in his artistic altruism) and continued to support Chopin’s plans for a public concert. For a musician such as Chopin—new in town and with limited contacts—developing a concert could be complicated. He had to drum up a cast of musicians to support him: a difficult proposition because he lacked any favors to call in, and no social value had yet been ascribed to any reciprocal patronage that he might offer in return. He experienced particular trouble in hiring singers; he wrote on 12 December 1831 that Gioachino Rossini had been willing to lend his singers from the Théâtre-Italien, but that his partner Édouard Robert was not.¹²⁴ Chopin also needed to locate some kind of orchestra (either a full ensemble or a chamber group to accompany a concerto or two) and possibly an instrumentalist for a solo. The concert was initially scheduled for early December, but a series of delays caused by illness and tricky negotiations with the singers pushed the concert to late February.

¹²³ Chopin to Elsner, Paris, 14 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 103.

¹²⁴ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 100. This is somewhat misleading as Rossini was no longer the director of the Théâtre-Italien in 1831. He did nevertheless keep close ties with the troupe and may have offered his assistance to Chopin.

Enter Kalkbrenner, who arranged for the use of the Salle Pleyel free of charge and invited other musicians (the necessary singers, instrumentalists, and additional pianists) to participate in the program. With his support, Chopin's concert took shape. Musicians unwilling to extend themselves for a pianist yet untested in Paris might gladly appear in a concert to please the influential Kalkbrenner (or at least to perform alongside him). Paër and Kalkbrenner's friend Norblin also contributed their assistance. The program of the concert reveals the extent to which Chopin's successful debut depended on the input of Kalkbrenner and Paër. Most significantly, Kalkbrenner agreed to perform in the concert, bringing one of his more popular compositions as well as four other popular piano virtuosos to the stage. A concert program dated 16 January 1832 (one of the several postponed dates of the concert) lists Ferdinand Hiller, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, George Osborne, and Wojciech (Albert) Sowiński as participants in Kalkbrenner's *Grande Polonaise, précédée d'une Introduction et d'une Marche*, along with Chopin and Kalkbrenner. A December letter to Warsaw suggests that Mendelssohn was a later substitution; originally the French pianist Camille Stamaty was slated to perform with the group. Their connections to Kalkbrenner and Chopin are clear: both Stamaty and Osborne had studied with Kalkbrenner, Sowiński was a fellow Polish expatriate, and Hiller was a mutual acquaintance of both Chopin and Kalkbrenner. The *Grande Polonaise* itself was likely the same six-piano work performed to great acclaim in December 1827 with a different set of pianists.

Kalkbrenner and Paër's connections to the Conservatoire also secured a stellar ensemble to perform a Beethoven string quintet that included the violinists Baillot and Théophile Tilmant, violists Chrétien Urhan and Vidal, and the Polish cellist Norblin, who was a friend of Kalkbrenner's from the Athénée Musical. They were joined by several

singers from the Opéra as well as Henri Brod, the “celebrated oboist” from the Opéra orchestra, who performed a solo concerto.¹²⁵ Chopin added his E minor concerto and his variations on Mozart’s “Là ci darem” (both probably accompanied by the string quintet). The first, already well-received in Warsaw, demonstrated Chopin’s compositional ambitions; the second with its virtuosic scope capitalized on the current fascination with pianistic virtuosity as well as the critical dialogue over Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.¹²⁶

With such strong patronage from the local music establishment, what was Chopin able to achieve with this concert? His playing elicited a favorable review from Fétis in the *Revue musicale*, but he did not receive the typical virtuoso welcome from Parisian audiences or the press.¹²⁷ The concert hall was less than half full, due at least in part to fears about a possible cholera epidemic as well as high ticket prices.¹²⁸ Furthermore, unlike other highly-anticipated debut concerts, Chopin’s performance inspired only a few reviews. Other virtuosos swept the *feuilletons* with their performances—Theodor Döhler, Alexander Dreyschock, Liszt, Paganini, Pleyel, Prudent, Thalberg, and even Herz, to name a few. But Chopin’s concert failed to ignite a similar widespread interest. Beyond cholera and finances, it is equally likely that Chopin, in his inexperience and distaste for publicity stunts, simply did not present the promise of a virtuoso spectacle that managed to attract the attention of Parisian audiences.¹²⁹ The lack of attention from the daily press, for example, suggests that

¹²⁵ Chopin to Woyciechowski, Paris, 12 December 1831, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 99.

¹²⁶ On the reception of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in Paris, see Katharine Ellis, “Rewriting *Don Giovanni*, or, ‘The Thieving Magpies,’” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 119 (1994): 212-50.

¹²⁷ *Revue musicale* 6, no. 5 (3 March 1832).

¹²⁸ Samson, *Chopin*, 83.

¹²⁹ Samson, *Chopin*, 83.

either the general theater/entertainment writers (who did not necessarily possess much musical knowledge) were uninterested in his performance or, more likely, that they did not attend the concert. Even within the context of his rave review, Fétis echoed Varsovian and Viennese critics in their criticism of Chopin's playing: it was simply too soft for a big hall.¹³⁰ This problem continued to dog his performances in Paris through the 1830s.¹³¹

This is not to say that Chopin's debut concert was a flop. He did, after all, win over the music establishment—including Berlioz, Fétis, Kalkbrenner, and Liszt, all powerful figures in Paris—and he was able to launch himself as a fashionable teacher and composer shortly after. But that the event failed to ignite his career in a way that would have ensured his continuing success on the international concert circuit. As a virtuoso performer, it took him ten years to recover in Paris, and he waited fifteen years to launch a tour in England; as Samson points out, his performances were rarely considered successful in the press until the early 1840s, at which point I contend that his style of performance had become a noteworthy spectacle in its own right.¹³² What kind of career he may have wanted is impossible to determine, but one thing remains clear: by mounting a public concert, Chopin initially presented himself to Paris as a virtuoso. Although he decided to turn from that path almost immediately, that first point of entry colored the unfolding of his career in Paris.

The effort expended in mounting his debut concert also helped to crystallize Chopin's public identity in Parisian circles. This persona emerged from three main sources: one, Chopin's nationality (supported by his close ties with the Polish community in Paris and his composition in visibly national genres); two, Chopin's personality as a member of the leisure

¹³⁰ *Revue musicale* 6, no. 5 (3 March 1832).

¹³¹ Samson, *Chopin*, 84.

¹³² Samson, *Chopin*, 127-28.

class (crafted by his attention to fashion and manners); and three, his position as a virtuoso and composer whose genius taxed his frail body. Each of these features was displayed in Chopin's debut concert—from the emphasis on his nationality in the press and the large percentage of Polish compatriots in the audience to his meticulous style of dress and reserved mannerisms. The third aspect was especially reinforced by Chopin's physical appearance and his pianistic style, which was, as I have noted, very different from the typical bombastic virtuosity of the 1830s. In a fascinating twist, Chopin did not forfeit the title of virtuoso upon demonstrating that his playing was unsuitable for large concert venues. Instead, his performances seem to have become even more desirable *because* they could only be experienced in elite social settings.

With elements of his identity in place, Chopin turned his attention to finding a steady source of income. His strategies during this period resemble those employed by Kalkbrenner, and while no evidence suggest that Kalkbrenner was directly coaching Chopin on how to manage his career, it appears that some of the most rewarding gates for Chopin were opened by the older pianist. Like Kalkbrenner, Chopin relied on two main sources for his livelihood: teaching wealthy students and publishing his music. These topics have been thoroughly explored by other musicologists, namely by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger on Chopin's teaching and by Kallberg on Chopin's publications.¹³³ Eventually Chopin's reputation as an unorthodox teacher, the popularity of his compositions, and the high social value placed on his performances led to more students than he could handle. But to start, Chopin depended on Kalkbrenner's connections to find prospective employers. Letters from

¹³³ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ed., *Chopin, vu par ses élèves* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1970); and Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, esp. chapters 6 and 7.

Warsaw indicate that Chopin was anxious to begin teaching as soon as possible after the debut concert, and a major concern stemmed from whether Kalkbrenner would follow through with the promised contacts.¹³⁴ He did indeed, and Chopin in time developed a lucrative studio comprised primarily of wealthy amateurs.¹³⁵

In terms of publishing, Chopin likely required less guidance. While Kalkbrenner may have helped Chopin to navigate the French copyright system, these issues were not new to the younger composer. He had already begun to work with publishers in Warsaw and Vienna before arriving in Paris and thus had some experience in handling this aspect of the business. In a world of opera fantasies—like those composed by Kalkbrenner—Chopin turned out nocturnes, mazurkas, waltzes, and polonaises, genres that seem totally divorced from the context of Parisian popular music. But his approach simply exploited different social trends. The mazurkas and polonaises, for example, may well represent Chopin’s engagement with his national identity, but they also capitalized on the French sympathy for the Polish cause, providing a hint of the exotic and reinforcing Chopin’s own foreign status. As Kallberg argues, Chopin’s engagement with Polish nationalism took place on a cultural level in the mazurkas and polonaises, focusing on musical evocations of Polish customs, music, and language. Hungry for romantic stories, however, French critics interpreted these works as political narratives about the oppression of the Polish people.¹³⁶ Other genres took advantage of popular salon trends: the influence of the *romances* and opera arias emerges in

¹³⁴ See, for example, Nicholas Chopin to Chopin, Warsaw, 24 February 1832, in *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 109.

¹³⁵ In 1838, around the time that he formed his famous liaison with Georges Sand, Chopin curtailed his teaching—due to the toll on his health exacted by long days of traveling around Paris, or perhaps due to an increasingly secure financial position (thanks to Sand’s apparently generous support).

¹³⁶ Jeffrey Kallberg, “Hearing Poland: Chopin and Nationalism,” *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. Larry Todd (New York: Schirmer, 1990), 244-50.

the vocality of Chopin's nocturnes, and the popularity of dance surfaces in the waltzes.¹³⁷

The dedications published with Chopin's music also reveal his social calculations: this list, like those of most composers, is a who's-who of aristocrats, socialites, and prominent musicians involved in Chopin's life.

A final point of Kalkbrenner's influence reveals a long-hidden strategy employed by Chopin. As I have discussed, Kalkbrenner introduced Chopin to the Pleyel firm, which led to a lifelong association between the younger pianist and the Pleyel instruments. From his very first concert, Chopin and his signature touch were associated with the sound of the Pleyel piano, which was known for its unique soft quality (produced through use of the *una corda* pedal). To be sure, many of Chopin's compositions include passages that are particularly stunning when performed on a Pleyel, and his famously nuanced style was likely shown to its best advantage on an instrument with such a variety of dynamics.¹³⁸ Indeed, Chopin proudly announced his preference for the Pleyel over its competitors (especially the Érard) on more than one occasion, managing to sneer at his contemporaries whose bursts of virtuosity played better on the robust Érard instruments.¹³⁹ Consequently, for over a century, musicologists assumed that Chopin's relationship with the Pleyel firm was a symbolic one, similar to the liaison between Liszt and Érard discussed in Chapter 2. As Eigeldinger has recently discovered, however, Chopin may have been far more active engaged in selling Pleyel

¹³⁷ On the interplay between Chopin's music and the human voice, see David Kasunic, "Chopin and the Singing Voice: From the Romantic to the Real" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2004), esp. Chapters 1 and 3.

¹³⁸ Jean -Jacques Eigeldinger, "Chopin et la manufacture Pleyel," in *Chopin: Interprétations*, ed. Eigeldinger and Jacqueline Waeber, 89-106, *Recherches et Rencontres* 20 (Geneva: Droz, 2004).

¹³⁹ He reportedly claimed that "when I am somewhat indisposed, I play an Erard piano and I easily find a sound ready to hand. But when I am in form and feel strong enough to find my own sound, I need a Pleyel." This was reported by his student Maurycy Karasowski. ("Quand je suis mal disposé, disait-lui, je joue sur un piano d'Erard et j'y trouve facilement un son fait. Mais quand je me sens en verve et assez fort pour trouver mon propre son, il me faut un piano de Pleyel" [Eigeldinger, *Chopin, vu par ses élèves*, 34].)

pianos, receiving a ten-percent commission on the sale of at least one instrument.¹⁴⁰ Little surviving evidence illuminates this aspect of Chopin's work, but the few documents that do exist raise further questions about Chopin's business activities.

Questioning Chopin

When Kalkbrenner and Chopin died in 1849, both were eulogized with great aplomb by the Parisian musical world. Over time, one would become a scapegoat, known only for his worst transgressions as panderer and businessman. The other would be practically deified for opposite reasons. Why this happened was directly related to how they portrayed themselves and their music to their audiences. Kalkbrenner, who reached musical maturity at the turn of the century, adapted strategies from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to fit the milieu of July Monarchy Paris. His command of Parisian musical politics allowed him to perform in a way that highlighted his strengths as a pianist and composer—and the monetary rewards were great. Yet he never transcended the business of music-making, because he either lacked a compelling public identity to mask his professional tactics, or he constructed an ineffective façade that failed to protect him. The product of a transitional era, Kalkbrenner showed himself as a famous pianist, a beloved composer, a powerful figure, and a mercenary player.

Chopin, on the other hand, followed in some of Kalkbrenner's footsteps, but he replaced Kalkbrenner's habit of brazen self-promotion with an impenetrable veneer of his own making. His public persona rejected the overblown spectacle of virtuosity and, in so doing, what were later identified as the worst character flaws of his contemporaries. Over the course of his Parisian career, his professional tactics—which both shaped and were

¹⁴⁰ Eigeldinger, "Chopin et la manufacture Pleyel," 104-106.

shaped by his personality—convincingly supported the image of the delicate, introverted nationalist. In this chapter, I have examined Chopin’s early experiences in Paris with the purpose of peeking behind this façade. It is not only possible but also probable that Chopin was playing a role—a role so convincing that nearly two hundred years of music scholars have reinforced Chopin’s self-representation as historical truth. Consequently Chopin the professional virtuoso is a slippery figure who is lost in his extraordinary music and his compelling biography. Questioning how he constructed himself for Paris, however, adds a vital perspective to understanding Chopin’s music, his biography, and the context in which both were created.

As for Paris, the unlikely pairing of these two “salon” virtuosos exposes some aspects of a deeply-rooted dichotomy in conceptions of French music-making: the binary distinction between public and private spheres. Historically construed as opposites, the overlap between the intimate salon and the public stage thus fades, resulting in the application of ill-fitting values to the music and musicians that moved between them. Chopin and Kalkbrenner—like their contemporaries—freely passed between both worlds, and neither was criticized for it during his lifetime. It was only later, when the salon and its pet genre of the opera fantasy had become symbolic of the (detestable) consumer-driven music society of July Monarchy Paris, that value was assigned to musicians based on their interaction with it. For Kalkbrenner, *salonnier* and composer of fantasies, there was no hope, while Chopin’s involvement in the salon could be downplayed in the light of his compositions. Yet both were highly acclaimed musicians in the 1830s and 1840s—and for the same reasons. This false barrier between musical spaces has resulted in a historiography that both excludes vital figures (such as Kalkbrenner) and distorts the context in which canonized musicians (such as

Chopin) created their music. Recognizing the exchange of personnel and music across the salon and the stage will provoke more questions than it answers: about the unfolding of Parisian musical life, about the historiography of the virtuoso and virtuosity, and more importantly, about the resulting dichotomy between highbrow and lowbrow music that continues to shape music consumption in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Four

SELLING *NORMA*'S SECRET: PIANO VIRTUOSOS AND THE OPERA FANTASY

On 8 December 1835, just three short months after the composer's death, Vincenzo Bellini's tragic opera *Norma* arrived in Paris. Already successful in Italy, Vienna and London, the opera opened to clamoring audiences that had gone wild less than a year before over *I Puritani*, Bellini's smash hit composed especially for Paris in January 1835. Parisian critics and audiences seized this second opportunity to eulogize the much-loved composer and to reflect on Bellini's opus as a complete body of works, in spite of the fact that the yet-unknown opera *Beatrice di Tenda* would not be seen in Paris until 1841. In journals and daily papers, music critics savored what they believed to be the last of the Bellini operas and used *Norma* as a yardstick by which they could measure the composer's career. In the salons, musicians of all sorts performed excerpts from the opera, improvised on its themes, and recreated for themselves and their audiences the drama of the production. Amateur musicians could acquire their own scores from local music shops, many of which sold Bellini's music in a variety of forms.

In the three decades following the opera's 1831 premiere, French publishers issued hundreds of pieces based on themes from *Norma*. Beginning with Antonio Pacini's orchestral and piano-vocal scores (published in 1833 and 1834), the music of *Norma* flooded the Parisian sheet-music market, ranging in scope from piano-vocal excerpts to elementary

piano duets to outrageous virtuoso concoctions for almost any instrument.¹ While piano and voice are by far the most highly represented, composers also produced pieces for a staggering number of solo instruments, including the organ, violin, oboe, flute, clarinet, harp, mandolin, cornet, harmonium, guitar, cello, and horn, as well as duets, trios, and quartets for combinations of wind, string, and keyboard instruments. Most of these pieces were composed initially for Paris by its resident composers, although a number of them undoubtedly made their way to and from the thriving musical cultures of London, Leipzig, and Vienna.

Such a wealth of publications places *Norma* in a select group of operas whose music inspired an extraordinary number of related pieces in France. While most professional musicians (especially pianists) composed and published numerous works based on operatic material, only rarely does one opera appear among the works of nearly every major contemporary composer. Alongside *Norma* on the list of hit-parade operas are Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, and a handful of others—not necessarily the most popular or financially successful operas (though many of them were), but certainly those that excited some kind of heated critical dialogue in the press and challenged audience expectations. In the case of *Norma*, its premiere just after Bellini's death in combination with a familiarity with the story among French audiences and the general craze for Italian music seems to have catapulted the opera to the top of the charts.

In this chapter, I will focus particularly on the musical and social lives of works composed, published, and in many cases performed in public by the cadre of piano virtuosos

¹ A copy of the second piano-vocal edition is housed in the British Library; see Bellini, *Norma: Tragedia lirica avec accompagnement de piano* (Paris: Pacini, 1835). I have not yet succeeded in locating an extant copy of the first Pacini edition of the orchestral score.

that inhabited Paris in the 1830s and 1840s. Because the core repertory for both touring piano virtuosos and amateur musicians in the mid-nineteenth century consisted largely of opera-based pieces, these fantasies offer a glimpse of how these musicians interacted with their public and how music was disseminated in a pre-recording society. Opera fantasies composed for the piano are particularly significant, due to the centrality of the instrument in nineteenth-century musical life. As the most common denominator in music-making events, the piano served a wider sector of the population than did any other instrument.

Consequently, the operatic piano fantasy played a powerful role in the consumption and reception of opera music; while fantasies for other instruments participated in the same process, the piano fantasy was far more influential in the unfolding of Parisian musical life.

As scholars have noted, the nineteenth-century genre commonly referred to as the operatic fantasy poses a challenge in terms of its origins, its structure, and even its identity as a genre.² At best, the genre is briefly acknowledged in recent scholarship without any attempt at deconstructing its loaded historiography; at worst, scholars ignore or even denigrate its role in nineteenth-century concert life. My purpose in this chapter, therefore, is two-fold. I will first examine the genre of the opera fantasy and its complicated history and then explore the genre's social work using the *Norma* fantasies as a case study. While the musical attributes of the genre do merit much attention, what is most fascinating about the operatic fantasy (and thus far unexplored) is its deeply-rooted involvement in the Parisian experience of live musical performance. I argue that the thousands of opera-based pieces

² On the opera fantasy, see Charles Suttoni, "Piano and Opera: A Study of the Piano Fantasies Written on Opera Themes in the Romantic Era" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1973), 19-35; Jesse Parker, "The Clavier Fantasy from Mozart to Liszt: A Study in Style and Content" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1974); and Kenneth DeLong, "J.V. Voříšek and the Fantasy," in *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference: St. Louis, 1988*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1988), 191-214.

published for the Parisian market should not be viewed as passive consumer products to be purchased by an unthinking public, but rather as active agents in the musical life of the city. Regarded now as vulgar, unsophisticated, and disposable, these fantasies played a vital role in shaping musical taste by packaging music and musical experiences for amateur musicians and the opera-going public in an appealing and affordable way.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will employ the term “opera fantasy” broadly. In general, scholars such as Charles Suttoni attempt to describe pieces based on operatic themes in specifically musical terms. Just as their generic ancestors defied conventional analysis, however, opera fantasies exhibit a dizzying array of formal structure, melodic and harmonic development, and texture. Many are not even published under the title of “fantasy.” Suttoni’s parameters for the genre, which serve as a useful starting point, included the following criteria: “1) based upon one or more opera themes, 2) divided into rather well-defined sections, and 3) which may or may not contain variations on one or several themes within its structure.”³ He then notes that “the form is so variable that it is almost futile even to suggest a paradigm,” rendering at least two of his criteria ineffective as analytical tools.⁴ Such a definition also fails to capture the musical and social work performed by the opera fantasy. I will therefore base my discussion on three shared characteristics that approach the genre from a broader perspective: 1) opera fantasies are based on one or more opera themes, 2) they exist in published form, and 3) they exhibit a set of aesthetic values that may run counter to contemporary musical ideals but that embody the concurrent aesthetic characteristics of nineteenth-century French and Italian opera.

³ Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 35.

⁴ Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 35.

Origins and Historiography

The genre of the operatic piano fantasy invariably falls through the cracks in studies of nineteenth-century music. Its presence in mid-century virtuoso pianism rarely goes unmentioned, yet neither the music nor its practitioners have attracted much in-depth scholarly inquiry in terms of its historical significance or analytic possibility.⁵ With the exception of Liszt and his so-called mature fantasies (beginning with the *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, 1841), the opera fantasy often appears as a footnote or an aside in studies of the more “serious” topics of the nineteenth century.⁶ Two conditions have impeded the study of the genre. First, the concept of the “fantasy” itself is difficult to pin down, because it has over time been used to signify a variety of musical forms, performance styles, and modes of expression.⁷ And second, beginning in the late 1830s, scholars have systematically devalued its musical integrity and excluded it from the canon. Although approaches to the genre have shifted over time, musicologists have almost uniformly constructed the opera fantasy as a substandard musical product because it simply does not meet the aesthetic criteria of the musical canon.

⁵ Two exceptions include Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” and Parker, “The Clavier Fantasy,” both dissertations from the 1970s. The lack of attention to the genre in recent decades is telling.

⁶ Liszt’s transcriptions and fantasies have been treated a variety of perspectives; see Jonathan Kregor, “Franz Liszt and the Vocabularies of Transcription, 1833-1865” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007); Kenneth Hamilton, “Reminiscences of a Scandal—Reminiscences of La Scala: Liszt’s Fantasy on Mercadante’s ‘Il giuramento,’” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5 (1993): 187-198; and Michael Saffle, “Liszt and the Traditions of the Keyboard Fantasy,” in *Liszt the Progressive*, ed. Hans Kagebeck and Johan Lagerfelt, *Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music* 72 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 151-85.

⁷ Christopher D. S. Field’s article in the *Grove Dictionary* provides an excellent and thorough survey of the fantasy’s development. Depending on the time period and geographical location, the term “Fantasia” could be applied to fugues, improvisations, sectional forms, and through-composed organization as well as performance styles (for example, C.P.E.’s un-metered fantasies) and expressive connotations; see Field, et al., “Fantasias,” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2000), 8:545-58.

The keyboard fantasy has been thoroughly documented and explored from its earliest manifestations in the sixteenth century through its decline in twentieth-century musical practice.⁸ Historically rooted in the tradition of organ and harpsichord improvisation, the keyboard fantasy from the start included pieces based on entirely new thematic material as well as those based on pre-existing themes.⁹ Stylistic expectations ranged from unmetered virtuosic flourishes to rigorous fugal counterpoint.¹⁰ By the mid-eighteenth century, the fantasy had coalesced into a genre marked by a set of conventions that included “improvisation, virtuosity, and expressive breadth and freedom.”¹¹ The most significant of these characteristics was improvisation, which had been a defining feature of the genre since its inception; consider, for example, eighteenth-century definitions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, who describe the fantasy purely as the product of improvisation.¹² Other key elements included a variety of musical “ideas,” innovative

⁸ Among many others, see John Caldwell, *English Keyboard Music Before the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Dover, 1985); Catherine Coppola, “Form and Fantasy: 1870-1920” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1998); Matthew Head, “Fantasy in the Instrumental Works of C.P.E. Bach” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1995); and Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁹ For example, the practice of preluding at the organ involved improvisation on new ideas as well as the incorporation of relevant chorale themes; on the varied practices and challenges of this subject, see Arnfried Edler, “*Fantasie* and *Choralfantasie*: On the Problematic Nature of a Genre of Seventeenth-Century Organ Music,” *Organ Yearbook* 19 (1988): 53-66.

¹⁰ See Frederick Hammond, “Préludes non mesuré and the Tradition of Improvisation in French and Italian Keyboard Practice During the 17th and 18th Centuries,” in *Giacomo Francesco Milano e il ruolo dell'aristocrazia nel patrocinio delle attività musicali nel secolo XVIII*, ed. Gaetano Pitarresi, 145-56 (Reggio Calabria, Italy: Laruffa, 2001).

¹¹ Saffle, “Czerny and the Keyboard Fantasy,” 202-203. Dahlhaus argues that the fantasy eventually began to take on sonata-form principles in order to avoid falling into a boring harmonic cycle. Unlike the harmonically-closed forms of the variation and the rondo, therefore, the fantasy was a suitable large-scale alternative to the sonata in the nineteenth-century; see Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 137.

¹² See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1768). In his famous essay on keyboard playing, C.P.E. Bach touches on the fantasy only in the chapter on improvisation; see Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. by William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949).

modulations, and changes in texture and style, often intended to evoke a series of emotional states. A successful fantasy depended on the composer's ability to surprise the listener with the unexpected while adhering, of course, to the rules of proper harmonic development. Unlike the prescribed and predictable sonata, the fantasy played to the listener's fascination with *not* being able to anticipate what might happen next.¹³ Composers and improvisers thus could use the fantasy to demonstrate their mastery of Austro-German compositional theory in addition to their inventiveness.

For German and French theorists of this period, the keyboard fantasy therefore stood as a highly esteemed genre, not only because of its intellectual challenges, but also because, as Kenneth DeLong argues, the keyboard fantasy was “the form in which eighteenth-century ideas regarding the nature of musical genius and imagination were most clearly expressed, ideas that continued to hold sway into the early years of the nineteenth century.”¹⁴ As I suggested in Chapter 2, this was largely due to the fact that improvisation was considered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be the ultimate window into a musician's compositional process and the workings of his genius. This position continued to shape attitudes about improvisation and the fantasy well into the nineteenth century, even as the fantasy gradually morphed into a genre that could be either improvised or composed on paper.

The opera fantasy emerged as a distinct subset of the free keyboard fantasies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Annette Richards notes that “with public (published) improvisation increasingly intent on being impressive in large halls rather than

¹³ See Richards, *The Free Fantasia*, 71-72.

¹⁴ Kenneth DeLong, “J.V. Voříšek and the Fantasy,” 192.

expressive in small chambers,” the free fantasy was replaced by the virtuoso-oriented opera fantasies.¹⁵ As Jon Finson points out, the style of these works—namely complex figuration surrounding strongly-articulated melody notes—helped to create the illusion of sustained tone on the instrument, while also displaying the performers’ skills and the pianos’ uniquely expressive sounds.¹⁶ This shift coincided with an increased demand for affordable and accessible piano music for members of the leisure class. Also around this time, theorists such as Heinrich Christoph Koch, Anton Reicha, and Daniel Gottlieb Türk revealed in print that while improvising a fantasy was preferred, composing one in an improvisatory style was also possible.¹⁷ After all, as the ever-pragmatic Carl Czerny later remarked in the fantasy chapter of his composition treatise:

If it were possible immediately to commit to paper such improvisations as are made in propitious moments, we should possess the most complete works of this kind, particularly by such great masters as Beethoven and Hummel. But as this is, alas!, impracticable, the composer must endeavor, in writing such Fantasias, to approximate as closely as possible to the freedom of extemporizing.¹⁸

Composers looked to the fantasy as a large-scale alternative to the sonata and as a way to capitalize on the sky-rocketing popularity of opera and opera-based pieces.¹⁹ Furthermore, the cost of publishing music decreased at the same time as innovations in piano-building technology flooded the market with smaller and less expensive models. The more flexible

¹⁵ Richards, *The Free Fantasia*, 185.

¹⁶ Jon Finson, *Nineteenth-Century Music: The Western Classical Tradition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 114-15.

¹⁷ Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexicon* (Frankfurt am Main: A. Hermann, 1802); and Reicha, *Traité de haute composition musicale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Zetter, 1824-26). Instead, the fantasy was supposed to follow an unpredictable course determined on the spot by the composer’s ideas. On the aesthetic development and implications of this position, see Richards, *The Free Fantasia*, 75-81.

¹⁸ Czerny, *School of Practical Composition: Complete Treatise on the Composition of All Kinds of Music* op. 600, trans. John Bishop (London: R. Cocks, 1848), 1:82.

¹⁹ See Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 137.

genre of the fantasy allowed composers to capitalize on the public interest in opera by adopting pre-composed themes into inexpensive, appealing compositions for use in the home.

Like his contemporaries, Czerny located the fantasy in the domain of improvisation (in his *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte* op. 200) and in the domain of composition (in his *School of Practical Composition* op. 600).²⁰ Unlike other theorists, however, Czerny sought to provide specific instructions on how to create fantasies based on his own experience of improvising, composing, and publishing them. Most composition manuals published in the nineteenth century consist of either vague references to improvisational inspiration on the one hand or modulation “cheat sheets” and voice-leading guidelines on the other—neither of which sheds much light on what a fantasy could or should be.²¹ In contrast, Czerny’s treatises are peppered with musical examples that demonstrate his suggestions for formal construction, arrangement of thematic material, and aesthetic considerations. While it is unlikely that the intended audience of these treatises included the piano virtuosos who published the majority of opera fantasies found in the Parisian market, Czerny’s treatment of the fantasy nonetheless paints a fascinating portrait of contemporary practice. Not only does his analysis align with his own published fantasies, but it also encompasses the formal and aesthetic approaches of most other fantasies of his era. More

²⁰ Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*; and Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte* op. 200, trans. Alice Mitchell (New York: Longman, 1983).

²¹ For example, in their piano methods published in Paris, neither Johann Nepomuk Hummel nor Friedrich Kalkbrenner shed any light on how one might acquire the skills needed for improvisation. Instead, both rhapsodize vaguely about freedom and delights of improvising; see Hummel, *Méthode complète théorique et pratique pour le piano-forte* (Paris: A. Farrenc, 1838); and Kalkbrenner, *Méthode pour apprendre le piano à l’aide du guide-mains* opus 108 (Paris: Pleyel, 1831). A contemporary publication by the harpist François-Joseph Naderman illustrates the voice-leading approach to teaching improvisation; see Naderman, *Dictionnaire de transitions pour s’exercer dans l’art de Préluder et d’Improviser tant sur la harpe que sur le piano* (Paris: Naderman, 1835).

importantly, it reveals some of the socio-musical assumptions that underpin the production and consumption of opera fantasies. If nothing else, the international popularity of his own fantasies attests to Czerny's ability to comprehend contemporary market demands and to translate them into a consumable musical product.

Underlying both treatises is Czerny's perception that the genre's purpose (whether based on opera themes or not) should be to provide entertainment. A radical move in the idealistic aesthetic climate of German and French Romanticism, Czerny's "wholehearted acceptance of *diversion* as a worthwhile musical goal" led him to draw several conclusions about how the fantasy could best appeal to the public while maintaining a high artistic standard.²² Though he never states it directly, it is clear that Czerny believed that the fantasies based on already-popular themes were the best way to meet audience expectations and to create well-crafted and aesthetically pleasing compositions at the same time. Deeply concerned with the fantasy as a composed-out performance, he charged the improviser/composer with choosing "pleasant, familiar tunes" and developing them into "piquant and glittering performances."²³

This task was a complicated one. In championing "the desire of the public to possess the beautiful melodies of favorite operas, tastefully and connectedly strung together," Czerny confronted the same problem facing his fellow opera-fantasy composers: the aesthetic opposition that existed between French and Italian opera and the emerging Austro-German canon.²⁴ Reconciling the melody-centered surface virtuosity that characterized popular opera

²² Michael Saffle, "Czerny and the Keyboard Fantasy: Traditions, Innovations, Legacy," in *Beyond The Art of Finger Dexterity: Reassessing Carl Czerny* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 210.

²³ Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*, 86.

²⁴ Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, 87-88.

tunes to a standard built around harmonic development was an intensely difficult proposition, and the centuries-old expectations for the fantasy only complicated the matter. How could the regular phrase rhythm and simple melodies of a Bellini opera be incorporated into a piece that featured the surprising (yet rigorous) modulations and changes of mood and texture expected from the fantasy?

The solution, Czerny argued, lay in adopting a flexible formal model. In the improvisation treatise, he outlines six possible forms for a fantasy:

- 1) “working out of a single theme in all the familiar forms of composition”
- 2) “in the development and combination of several themes into a total work”
- 3) “in genuine *potpourris*, or the intertwining of favorite motives through modulations, passage-work, cadenzas, without particular development of any single one”
- 4) “in variations in all customary forms”
- 5) “in improvising in strict and fugal style”
- 6) “in capriccios of the most free and unrestrained type”²⁵

In addition, any combination of these types of forms is also acceptable—a “miscellaneous” category. At this point in the improvisation manual, Czerny asserted that these approaches will work with any kind of theme, whether it be a new one invented on the spot or one already composed; regardless of its origin, the musical material should be manipulated according to the same rules of sound composition. In the later composition treatise, however, he addressed the problem more directly: a virtuoso, he claimed, “can evoke a greater refinement from even the frivolous products of popular taste and from even the most artless folk melodies while keeping his audience engaged throughout the performance with changes in tempo, meter, affect, and texture” by crafting his fantasy in the form of a *potpourri*.²⁶ In

²⁵ Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*, 3. Each category is unfolded in greater detail and with specific examples in subsequent chapters of the treatise.

²⁶ Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*, 87.

other words, the opera fantasy is neither “frivolous” nor “artless” if constructed properly, and a refined setting may in fact improve the aesthetic quality of its thematic material.

Indeed, the *potpourri* model underlies all of the *Norma* fantasies included in this study. Not only is the *potpourri*’s flexible form the most easily adapted for the thematic material at hand, but audiences also apparently responded well to the constant stream of new inventions and themes that it entails. To start, “two or three favorite themes are first selected, which differ from each other in respect to their time, character, and degree of movement.”²⁷ (A single theme may suffice for a shorter piece, or as many as four or five could be incorporated into one long work.) Then, to weave them into a coherent structure, Czerny prescribed the use of an introduction and variety of “connecting passages.” Furthermore, each theme must be treated differently—one might be in a “rondo style,” another in a “more free style,” and a third in variations.²⁸ To show off one’s “invention” and genius, composers should incorporate “brilliant figures” and “elegant embellishments” in the introduction and connecting passages. And finally, in both treatises, he urges composers to seek refined, tasteful, striking, and interesting ways of interweaving musical ideas.²⁹

Throughout both treatises, Czerny draws on the fantasy’s origin in improvisation, claiming that “the attainment of this art [of improvising fantasies] is thus a special obligation and crown of distinction for the keyboard virtuoso.”³⁰ The pianist’s “special obligation” for Czerny is partially an acknowledgement of the musician’s commitment to channeling artistic genius to the audience, but it also stands as a reference to what Czerny saw as the fantasy’s

²⁷ Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, 87.

²⁸ Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, 86.

²⁹ See Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, 86-87.

³⁰ Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*, 1.

most important job: providing entertainment. This position becomes especially clear in his presentation of the two main challenges of performing live improvisations: one, fascinating the audience with one's creativity and skill; and two, creating a piece that encompasses the fragmented interests of a "heterogeneous public."³¹ Both of these issues stem from the composer's unspoken contract with the audience: if they pay for entertainment—be it someone else's performance or their own—then they are entitled to receive it.³² The audience, moreover, should be provided with superior products that reflect an "accurate knowledge of that kind of elegance which is the style of the day."³³

French theorists, among them François-Joseph Fétis and Léon-Marie Escudier, rejected Czerny's approach to the opera fantasy and criticized contemporary composers for perverting what they saw as the profound art of the fantasy. In so doing, they laid the foundation for the exclusion of the opera fantasy from the canon and for the condemnation of the genre that persists in music scholarship even in the twenty-first century. This began in the early nineteenth century, when critics "blamed composers of modern fantasies for misjudging the limits between the private and the public spheres."³⁴ No longer bound by the intimacy of the former, composers produced fantasies that were not calculated to move the emotions of a few listeners, but rather to elicit the admiration of many.³⁵ For Fétis and Escudier, it was not the opera fantasy's virtuosic flair or sentimentality, but rather the

³¹ Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*, 86.

³² On the tensions between art and entertainment, see Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85-113.

³³ Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, 88.

³⁴ Richards, *The Free Fantasia*, 186.

³⁵ Richards, *The Free Fantasia*, 186.

elimination of the improvisatory aesthetic to which they objected. As Fétis wrote:

At its inception, the fantasy was a piece in which the composer gave himself up to all the flights of his imagination. No outline, no set path; the inspiration of the moment, of art, of science even, but hidden with care: that is what one found in the fantasy such as Bach, Handel, and Mozart knew how to create. But one hears nothing of this term today. Never has the fantasy been less true than what is found in the pieces that bear that name. All, excluding art and science, are ordered, affected, arranged over a outline that is always the same.³⁶

In Fétis's estimation, the improvisatory fantasy of the eighteenth century had been corrupted by the practice of composing what Czerny called "fantasies on known themes." "To hear one modern fantasy is to hear them all," Fétis claimed, "because they are all made according to the same model."³⁷ He blamed this defect on the trend to take another composer's idea as the main theme, which "is almost always the tune of a romance or an opera aria" and "is not part of the invention."³⁸ In other words, by basing a fantasy on someone else's music, the composer cannot treat it as he would his own idea, with an organic, imaginative path arising from its musical properties and his personal "invention." In 1854, Escudier also lamented the transformation of the fantasy from a genre in which one could employ "an endless number of harmonic pursuits, learned or daring modulations, passages full of fire, audacity, that they were not permitted to introduce into a regular piece" into "nothing but the paraphrase of a

³⁶ "La fantaisie, dans son origine, était une pièce où le compositeur se livrait à toutes les saillies de son imagination. Point de plan; point de *parti-pris* ; l'inspiration du moment, de l'art, de la science même, mais cachée avec soin, voilà ce qu'on trouvait dans la fantaisie telle que Bach, Handel et Mozart savaient la faire. Mais ce n'est point cela qu'on entend aujourd'hui par ce mot. Jamais fantaisie ne fut moins réelle que ce qu'on trouve dans les pièces qui portent ce nom. Tout, excepté l'art et la science, y est réglé, compassé, arrangé sur un plan qui est toujours le même" (François-Joseph Fétis, *Musique mise à la portée de tout le monde*, 3rd ed. [Paris: Brandus, 1847], 222-23).

³⁷ "Entendre une fantaisie moderne, c'est les entendre toutes, car elles sont toutes faites sur le même modèle" (Fétis, *Musique mise à la portée de tout le monde*, 223).

³⁸ "Sauf le thème principal, qui n'est pas même d'invention; car c'est presque toujours le chant d'une romance ou d'un air d'opéra qui en fait les frais" (Fétis, *Musique mise à la portée de tout le monde*, 223).

well-known air, a refrain that runs through the streets, that one varies in all manners.”³⁹

One hundred and fifty years later, Leon Plantinga’s brief summary of the fantasy in his 1984 text, *Romantic Music: A History of Music in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, illustrates how complaints from the nineteenth century still resonate in recent scholarship:

At the center of French musical life was the opera, and musicians of every sort contrived to share its glory. Even more than Paganini, the piano virtuosos specialized in musical embroideries on the most popular operatic tunes. They dazzled audiences in concerts or at resplendent salons with their fantasias, variations, rondos, and capriccios on favorite morsels from Rossini and Meyerbeer, and then sold their handiwork, very often in simplified form, for people to play for themselves.⁴⁰

Plantinga’s contextualization of the fantasy trivializes the genre as “handiwork” by associating it with the French salon and the commercial sheet-music market. While mid-nineteenth-century Paris may well have been a major center of musical activity, musicologists of the twentieth century have tended to subordinate French music to Austro-German traditions. This trend has faded in recent decades, yet engagement with French music and musical life remains fettered by century-old labels of frivolity and superficiality. The salon in particular often bears the brunt of such stereotypes in spite of recent studies demonstrating its significant role in the development of musical life in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Although it may be true, as Charles Rosen has remarked, that “a great deal of bad music was played in the salon,” the same music—good or bad—was also played in “public

³⁹ “Une infinité de recherches harmoniques, de modulations savantes et hardies, de passages pleins de fougue, d’audace, qu’il ne leur était pas permis d’introduire dans une pièce régulière...Ce n’est plus maintenant que la paraphrase d’un air connu, d’un refrain qui court les rues, que l’on varie de toutes les manières” (Léon and Marie Escudier, *Dictionnaire de musique théorique et historique* [Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1854], s.v. “Fantaisie”).

⁴⁰ Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 177.

⁴¹ On the salon, see Myrian Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens: du salon au concert à Paris sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); and Elaine Leung-Wolf, “Women, Music, and the Salon Tradition: Its Cultural and Historical Significance in Parisian Musical Society” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1996).

concerts, in the home, or in the opera house.”⁴² With a few key exceptions—Chopin’s compositions chief among them—the amateur versions of opera-based pieces played by and for the bourgeois and predominantly female salon audiences, however, have become symptomatic of the intellectual deficiencies of middle-class July Monarchy citizenship. Linking opera-based pieces to French musical life is not entirely unfair; the music on which these pieces are based can be traced directly to the stages of Parisian opera houses. But by relegating the fantasy to the Parisian salon and failing to confront its circulation in Europe, Plantinga and others reduce its value in comparison to the apparently more serious Germanic compositions of the same era.

Tying the opera fantasy to the commercial market is equally dismissive. Associated with crass, materialistic opportunism, composing music to meet the demands of amateur consumers has long been decried as pandering of the worst kind. The stigma attached to popular music by the art-music world continues to hold power even today. In the case of the opera fantasy, several key studies have sought to redress the historiographical bias against perceived opportunism on the part of otherwise productive composers.⁴³ Thus, in order to protect Liszt from his commercial indiscretions, Liszt scholars have argued that his mature

⁴² Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 384. He continues, “It is not clear whether there is, in fact, any such thing as salon music, or at least whether any satisfactory definition of such a genre can be found. It is, nevertheless a useful term only as long as we do not try to attach too limited a meaning or determine too nicely who listens to it.” Rosen’s point that “salon music” may not actually exist is an important one; the salon itself as a musical space expanded to include many still-shrouded forms of domestic music-making. Trying to determine what may have been performed in these spaces is nearly impossible; and drawing a distinction (as Rosen seems intent on doing) between music heard in the salon versus music heard in other spaces would create false categories.

⁴³ See, for example, Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially Chapter 1; and David Gramit, “Selling the Serious: The Commodification of Music and Resistance to it in Germany, circa 1800,” in *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*, ed. William Weber, 81-101 (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004).

fantasies were above all serious dramatic compositions.⁴⁴ But it is a difficult battle to fight, because the prejudice against musicians who were perceived as profit-driven entertainers was deeply rooted in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century music criticism. Carl Czerny, for one, was ridiculed by his contemporaries—Robert Schumann and François-Joseph Fétis among them—for his many publications aimed at the amateur pianists.⁴⁵ In Paris, Henri Herz was caricatured in prose as a “lawyer” by Delphine de Girardin to poke fun at his diverse business pursuits, which included selling pianos, lessons, and performances along with over a hundred novelty and amateur publications.⁴⁶ The growing stigma attached to virtuoso playing—which came to be interpreted as a form of commercial pandering after 1850—simply added fuel to the fire.⁴⁷ The powerful Romantic ideology of the noble creator immune to earthly concerns has continued to shape musicological rhetoric in the twentieth century as well, both in terms of nineteenth-century historiography and contemporary debates. Liszt, for example, was long marginalized in the musicological canon on the grounds of his seemingly commercial and shallow virtuosity; even today, country and rock musicians assert their musical authenticity by carefully framing their connections to the recording industry and

⁴⁴ This is particularly prevalent in the work of Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 314-15. See also Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 135-37, and Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 528 and 540-41.

⁴⁵ Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, trans. Fanny Raymond Ritter (London: William Reeves, 1887), 2:409-10.

⁴⁶ Delphine de Girardin, *Lettres parisiennes du vicomte de Launay*, ed. Anne Martin-Fugier (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), 406. This article was originally published in Girardin’s bi-weekly column “Le Courier de Paris” in *La Presse*, 6 April 1845. On Henri Herz and his professional strategies, see Laure Schnapper, “Bernard Ullman-Herz: An Example of Financial and Artistic Partnership, 1846-1849,” in *The Musician as Entrepreneur*, ed. William Weber, 130-44 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁴⁷ On virtuosity and its historiography, see Chapter 1.

commercial market.⁴⁸

These associations with French salons and commercial opportunism are misleading, unhelpful, and frankly destructive. Piano virtuosos performed opera-based improvisations and composed works to the delight of their English, Austrian, German, Russian, and even American audiences throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Their performances and their compositions piqued the interest of music publishers and consumers across Europe and the Atlantic, and many composers published their operatic fantasies in Paris, London, Leipzig, and Vienna. While Paris was the main source of both the published fantasies and the operas on which they were based, the Western musical scene, as Arthur Loesser points out, was utterly captivated by the music emerging from the French capital, be it in the form of opera productions, piano-vocal scores, or instrumental fantasies.⁴⁹

The negative light cast over the commercial market and virtuosity has excluded genres like the opera fantasy from musicological discourse for far too long, resulting in an incomplete picture of nineteenth-century musical culture. Richard Taruskin's monumental history of Western music, for example, omits the genre almost entirely, excepting a brief consideration of Liszt's *Don Juan* fantasy.⁵⁰ In his *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Carl Dahlhaus focuses on the fantasy only in its art-music incarnation: a large-scale alternative to the sonata in mid-century compositional practice. He tucks the opera fantasy away in a later

⁴⁸ On Liszt's precarious position in musicological scholarship, see James Deaville, "Liszt and the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28-56. For an example related to today's aesthetic discourse, see the introductory chapter in Diane Pecknold, *Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹ Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 361.

⁵⁰ On Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, see Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3:268-72. In the volume devoted to the nineteenth century Taruskin does not acknowledge genre's existence in sections on private music, salon music, and virtuosos; see Taruskin, *The Oxford History*, 3:63-69, 73-79, and 251-88.

chapter on the 1870s and 1880s under the section heading “Trivial Music.”⁵¹ As the “trivial music of an industrial age, competing with art music as a musical text printed in prodigious quantities,” the opera fantasy in Dahlhaus’s estimation lacked historical importance as well as musical value.⁵² Yet music based on operatic material constituted a large portion—if not the largest—of music published for the piano in Paris and across Europe and America.⁵³

Several scholars discuss the fantasy solely in relation to Liszt’s output, claiming, as Rosen does, that Liszt was “the only true master of the opera fantasy.”⁵⁴ This approach creates a false picture of what the genre looked like and how it functioned, because Liszt’s fantasies are most frequently exceptions to the rule. In his work on Liszt’s transcriptions and fantasies, Kenneth Hamilton examines the compositional elements of Liszt’s music as well as their social function and context. Yet he rarely places them within the broader context of the opera fantasy.⁵⁵ Neither Dolores Pesce’s article in the collection of essays *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music* nor Rosen’s *The Romantic Generation* do more than brush the surface of even Liszt’s contributions. This is mainly due to the organizing principle of both texts, which focus on individual composers, all of whom composed music since included in the Western canon and none of whom (except Liszt) wrote more than one or two fantasies if any at all.

Pesce’s failure to treatment of the genre with any depth is particularly notable, given

⁵¹ On the large-scale fantasy and virtuosity, see Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 137. See also his section entitled “Trivial Music,” 311-20, on various popular music genres transferred to the keyboard throughout the nineteenth century.

⁵² Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 319.

⁵³ Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 361.

⁵⁴ Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 528.

⁵⁵ See, for example, his article on Liszt’s fantasy on Mercadante’s *Il giuramento* and its performance at La Scala; Hamilton, “Reminiscences of a Scandal.”

the prevalence of the genre in piano sheet music sales and on concert programs in the nineteenth-century. She briefly addresses Liszt's contributions in a few short paragraphs at the end of the text, proclaiming their superiority as examples of Liszt's improvisation without interrogating the music or its context.⁵⁶ And in spite of his defense of "salon music," Rosen still condemns the opera fantasy as a "bastard genre," describing such pieces as "only strings of popular tunes arranged for virtuoso display."⁵⁷ In his analysis of Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, Rosen executes an abrupt about-face in order to depict Liszt's use of extreme virtuosity as a Mozartian representation of sexual domination in order to avoid condemning it as empty and trite.⁵⁸ Because the work in Rosen's estimation stands as Liszt's musical self-portrait, he is willing to argue for the artistic value of Liszt's fantasies in general. While Liszt may have been the first to approach opera-fantasy composition from a dramatic perspective (and that in itself is highly debatable), he was by no means the only pianist to drastically rework operatic material into an entirely independent and well-thought-out composition.⁵⁹

An important exception to scholarship of the last few decades is Suttoni's 1973 dissertation.⁶⁰ To date, it remains the most complete exploration of the genre during its heyday between 1830 and 1850. After a brief overview of origin of the opera fantasy, the

⁵⁶ Dolores Pesce, "Expressive Resonance in Liszt's Piano Music," *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 398-99.

⁵⁷ Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 528.

⁵⁸ See Rosen's analysis of the *Don Juan* fantasy; Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 528-541.

⁵⁹ Based on my study of the *Norma* fantasies alone, it is clear that this avenue of study has great potential. Already in the 1830s, some multi-themed fantasies exhibit dramatic unity. The texts of the tunes used in Moscheles's *Souvenirs*, for example, demonstrate a progression from reverent chastity to violent passion over the course of the piece.

⁶⁰ See Suttoni, "Piano and Opera"; and Kenneth Hamilton, "The Operatic Fantasies and Transcriptions of Franz Liszt: A Critical Study" (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1989).

nature of the term “fantasy,” and the function of the fantasy itself, he tackles the enormous body of music that constitutes the genre from an analytical perspective. His approach to coping with this generally disparate and disorganized genre is useful in that it brings to light typical formal structures and compositional devices, which are far more complex than one might expect from what Rosen called a “string of popular tunes.” Yet by limiting his study to the analysis of representative stylistic aspects of key opera fantasies, Suttoni left the door wide open for further study.

Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma*, and Paris

I turn now from the origins of the opera fantasy and its journey into disrepute to the case study of Bellini’s *Norma* and the fantasies that it engendered in the 1830s and 1840s. I begin by investigating the circumstances of the opera’s conception and premiere, which will allow me to position the *Norma* fantasies within its multi-faceted context of French opera reception, virtuoso pianism, and amateur music-making. After a few false starts, Bellini (1801-1835) essentially began his career as an internationally acclaimed composer of Italian opera with his 1827 opera *Il pirata*.⁶¹ A series of dramatic operas followed; with the exception of his last opera, *I Puritani*, all were collaborations with the poet and librettist Felice Romani, and all were composed for Italian audiences. In addition to generally positive critical reviews and public popularity, Bellini’s success was marked by his financial standing in the unsteady world of public entertainment. After *Il pirata*, Bellini was able to compose only operas commissioned for financially stable theater companies. He was also able to negotiate specific circumstances concerning personnel and staging, a luxury unavailable to

⁶¹ On Bellini’s life and career, see Stelios Galatopoulos, *Bellini: Life, Times, Music, 1801-1835* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2002).

most nineteenth-century opera composers who lived at the mercy of theaters directors and opera troupes.⁶² By the time of his death in 1835 at the age of 34, Bellini had established himself alongside Gioachino Rossini and Gaetano Donizetti as an international superstar of Italian opera.

The opera *Norma* arose from the collaboration of between Bellini and the librettist Felice Romani, with whom he had worked since 1827. Romani's source, a play by the French poet Alexandre Soumet, had been performed in Paris in the spring of 1831. Always in touch with the artistic trends in France, Romani suggested the story to Bellini and then spent the summer of 1831 adapting the play for opera.⁶³ Bellini and Romani worked together in the fall to produce an opera characterized by the poetic sensitivity and the dramatic unity for which Bellini was known.⁶⁴ Early announcements in Milan heralded a premiere in early December, but problems in rehearsal pushed the actual date to 26 December 1831.

In spite of Bellini's popularity in Milan, the immediate response to the 1831 premiere of *Norma* was less than enthusiastic, a reaction likely due to several factors. At the Milanese and Venetian premieres, critics remarked that both productions needed more rehearsal due to the difficulty of the music. They also noted that the structure of the opera was somewhat confusing. A writer for the Italian music journal *Eco* cited what he perceived as a problem with the first act: its ending with a trio between Norma, Pollione, and Adalgisa in place of the

⁶² Also contributing to Bellini's independence was the financial support offered by his lover Giuditta Turina.

⁶³ David Kimbell, *Vincenzo Bellini: Norma*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

⁶⁴ On Romani's collaboration with Bellini on the *Norma* libretto, see Galatopoulos, *Bellini*, 234-35. On Romani as a librettist, see *Felice Romani: melodrammi, poesie, documenti*, ed. Andrea Sommariva (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1996).

expected grand finale.⁶⁵ The report from Milan by the French correspondent for the *Revue musicale* concurred.⁶⁶ After a few performances, however, the quality of the production improved, and the Milanese audiences warmed up enough to mark *Norma* as a success rather than the failure that Bellini had initially feared it to be.

A chilly response also met the opera at its Venetian premiere, but it was soon replaced with enthusiastic acclamation as well. After a tour through major Italian cities (including Rome and probably Naples), *Norma* reached Vienna in May 1833 and London in June 1833, where Bellini assisted with the King's Theater production. Both productions earned critical success and instant popularity, possibly due more to the intense European interest in Italian opera than to particularly outstanding performances. After each premiere, reports from the *Revue et Gazette musicale*'s foreign correspondents carried the news—good or bad—to Parisian readers.⁶⁷ Consequently, readers of the journal were familiar with the opera as a dramatic production by the time it finally arrived in Paris.

Over two years later, Bellini brought *Norma* to Paris, where once again he intended to involve himself in the production. His death in September 1835 obviously meant that his supervising hand was absent from the December performance, but, as Hector Berlioz later remarked, Bellini had already worked his magic with French audiences.⁶⁸ Unlike his Italian audiences, who went wild over his first major opera, French audiences were slower to absorb

⁶⁵ For a translation of part of this review, see Kimbell, *Norma*, 14.

⁶⁶ *Revue musicale* 5, no. 49 (14 January 1832).

⁶⁷ On the Venetian premiere, see *Revue musicale* 6, no. 50 (12 January 1833). On the Viennese production, see *La Gazette musicale de Paris* 1, no. 7 (16 February 1834).

⁶⁸ Hector Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, ed. H. Robert Cohen and Yves Gérard (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1996), 2:498-99; originally published in *Le Rénovateur*, 16 July 1836.

the sound and style of Bellini's operas.⁶⁹ After *Norma*'s Milanese premiere in 1831, the *Revue et Gazette musicale* correspondent even claimed Bellini's music lacked the vigor and breadth required in the genre and concluded that because Bellini failed to produce a convincing first-act finale, then he "was lacking in great inspiration and is not suitable to write anything but little things in the French style."⁷⁰ Instead, Rossini's operas and his characteristically busy orchestral and vocal textures held center stage in Paris until Bellini had installed himself in Paris and composed an opera specifically for one of its theaters (*I Puritani*, for the Théâtre-Italien in January 1835).⁷¹

In a series of reflections published after Bellini's death, Berlioz suggested that the element of his music that made it so unique was the very reason why foreign audiences did not immediately take to it.⁷² According to Berlioz, Bellini's special genius lay in his ability to express the poetry of his libretto with great sensitivity, an approach resulting in a sound that the French at first found "pale, colorless, monotonous, lacking in harmony, in a word, behind the times."⁷³ Because most opera-going French citizens did not understand Italian, he argued, it was therefore impossible for them to fully appreciate Bellini's mastery. But, fortunately for Bellini, he arrived in Paris just as audiences were tiring of the "style

⁶⁹ Before Bellini's arrival in 1833, Parisian audiences had already heard *La sonnambula*, *Il pirata*, *La straniera*, and *I Capuleti e Montecchi*.

⁷⁰ *Revue musicale* 5, no. 49 (14 January 1832)

⁷¹ Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, 2:498; originally published in *Le Rénovateur*, 30 September 1835.

⁷² This includes article published in *Le Rénovateur* (30 September 1835), *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* (7 February 1836), *Journal des débats* (16 July 1836); reprinted in Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, 2:293-95, 397-401, and 497-503.

⁷³ "Pâle, décolorée, monotone, pauvre d'harmonie, en un mot fort en arrière de l'état actuel de l'art" (Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, 2:498; originally published in *Journal des débats*, 16 July 1836).

rossinien” as well as the mediocrity of current opera productions.⁷⁴

After months of supervising productions of his operas and circulating in the French high society, Bellini achieved his Parisian triumph with *I Puritani* in January 1835. Commissioned by the Théâtre-Italien (under the direction of Carlo Severini and Edouard Robert), the music of this opera does not depart drastically from Bellini’s earlier style, but the circumstances framing its debut—Bellini’s presence in France chief among them—elicited the overwhelming pleasure which only Paris was capable of producing. Seven months later, French eulogies ranked Bellini alongside Rossini and Donizetti as one of the greatest composers of Italian operas in history.

Although Paris was the last major European city to mount a production of Bellini’s *Norma*, the city had, in one sense, been the first to hear the story. The Théâtre de l’Odéon had premiered Soumet’s five-act play in verse entitled *Norma, ou L’infanticide* on 16 April 1831.⁷⁵ Though unknown today, Soumet was highly respected during his lifetime; a member of the Académie Française and part of Honoré de Balzac’s inner circle (Le Cénacle), he is perhaps better known for his contribution to the Académie Royale de Musique’s production of *Pharamond* in 1825 as well as for his collaborative role in the libretto for Rossini’s *Le Siège de Corinthe*. The text of Soumet’s *Norma* first appeared in print in 1831, published by J.-N. Barba.⁷⁶ Romani, who was actively interested by Parisian cultural life, obtained a copy and used to as the basis of his latest libretto.

Even though Romani significantly altered Soumet’s original text by considerably

⁷⁴ Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, 2:499; originally published in *Journal des débats*, 16 July 1836.

⁷⁵ The actual premiere of the dramatic play occurred on 16 April 1831.

⁷⁶ Alexandre Soumet, *Norma: tragédie en 5 actes et en vers* (Paris: J.-N. Barba, 1831). It appeared again in 1845 as part of a posthumous collection of the author’s complete works.

shortening the play and changing the ending, the story itself was been familiar to the French opera-going audiences of 1835. And so was the music.⁷⁷ The score of the opera arrived in Paris at least two years before the Théâtre-Italien's inaugural performance of 8 December 1835. Most likely, Bellini himself delivered the score when he relocated to Paris in 1833, either during his initial brief visit in April or upon his permanent establishment there in August.⁷⁸ He probably turned over the score to Pacini no later than August 1833, after supervising the London premiere of *Norma* as well as several other productions. He arrived in Paris on 20 August 1833 hoping to secure a commission for a French-language opera for the Académie Royale de Musique. The Théâtre-Italien offered a warmer welcome, however, and Bellini in the end composed his final opera (*I Puritani*) for that theater. He also oversaw the 1833-34 productions of *Il pirata* and *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* before his death on 23 September 1835.

Pacini, one of the most prolific music publishers in Paris known especially for his editions of contemporary Italian opera, released the first complete scores to the Parisian market in late 1833 or early 1834.⁷⁹ Pacini issued both orchestral and piano-vocal scores for *Norma* and advertised them as authoritative editions “reviewed and corrected by the composer.”⁸⁰ A second run of Pacini's piano-vocal edition, which can be dated to 1835 or

⁷⁷ The five acts of Soumet's play were trimmed to two, and instead of jumping of a precipice to her death, Norma climbs onto a pyre with Pollion.

⁷⁸ Bellini was almost certainly traveling with the score for *Norma* in 1833. He may have negotiated the publication of the piano-vocal score as early as April, during a brief visit to Paris en route to London where he supervised the English premiere of *Norma* as well as several other productions. He returned to Paris on 20 August 1833 to compose *I Puritani* and (most likely) to oversee productions of *Il pirata* and *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*; see Galatopoulos, *Bellini*, 285 and 338.

⁷⁹ As one of the major publishers of Italian opera music in Paris during the 1820s and 1830s, Pacini published, among others, orchestral and piano-vocal scores to operas by Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Mercadante.

⁸⁰ “Ouvrage revu & corrigé par l'auteur” (Bellini, *Norma: Tragedia lirica avec accompagnement de piano* [Paris: Pacini, 1835]).

1836, was probably intended to coincide with the opera's December production. Additional piano-vocal editions were published by Schonenberger, Launer, and others in the late 1830s and 1840s.⁸¹

Critical responses to the French premiere of the opera were invariably colored by the fact that Bellini had died unexpectedly at the relatively young age of thirty-four. Though slow to embrace Bellini's music, the Parisian musical community had eventually done so, and with great fervor. They mourned the composer with equal energy. In typical dramatic fashion, Berlioz proclaimed the "incontestable" truth that *Norma* was "the masterpiece of Bellini," and others followed suit.⁸² Not a single reviewer passed by the opportunity to eulogize Bellini by praising *Norma* as his best opera—even though, underneath such high praise, it is clear that they preferred *I Puritani*. But the circumstances surrounding the *Norma* premiere created an occasion momentous enough to minimize if not entirely overlook what were originally perceived as structural flaws. Instead, any negative criticism was directed toward the singers or various aspects of the production; on the whole, journalists reported a favorable reaction from the public. As Berlioz noted slyly, the composer's early (and tragic) death had certainly not hurt the cause of his music with Parisian audiences.⁸³

Overview of the *Norma* Fantasies

In the following examination of fantasies based on the music of *Norma*, I limit my study to

⁸¹ Among others, see *La Norma: opéra complet pour piano et chant* (Paris: Launer, c. 1840); *Norma* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1849); and *Norma: grand opéra en trois actes, partition chant et piano* (Paris: Mayaud, c. 1850).

⁸² "Il est incontestable que la *Norma* demeure le chef-d'œuvre de Bellini" (Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, 2:498; originally published in *Le Rénovateur*, 30 Sept 1835).

⁸³ Berlioz, *Critique musicale*, 499; originally published in *Le Rénovateur*, 30 September 1835.

those pieces published in France between the opera's world premiere in Milan in 1831 and the fall of the July Monarchy in 1848. This period encompasses the heyday of the opera fantasy in Paris; after 1848. I focus on two significant episodes in the interaction of the *Norma* fantasies and French musical life: first, those published around the time of the first Parisian production of *Norma* (1833-36), and second, those published in the early 1840s (1842-45). Fantasies in the first group, published in the mid-1830s, share several general characteristics: brilliant finger-centric figuration, amateur-level technical requirements, and distinct statements of thematic material. Those published in the early 1840s form an equally cohesive group: virtuoso-level difficulty, textures requiring arm-centric technique, and a developmental approach to thematic material. The musical characteristics of both groups illuminate the genre of the mid-nineteenth-century opera fantasy and contribute to an understanding of who may have consumed them and why.

The first group of *Norma* fantasies for solo piano (listed in Table 4.1) began to appear in Parisian music stores in late 1833 and early 1834. Most of the pieces listed here were specifically created for the Parisian market by composers then living in Paris. Two of the earliest works, however, were initially composed and published elsewhere. The first of the *Norma* fantasies to be published in Paris was only one of Czerny's *Norma* fantasies (*Introduction, variations et presto finale* op. 247), which appeared in Vienna in an edition by Anton Diabelli in 1832.⁸⁴ Originally the second in a series of three pieces based on Bellini operas, Czerny's fantasy was probably composed for the occasion of the Viennese premiere

⁸⁴ Czerny composed a second fantasy around the same time, also published in 1832 by Diabelli (*Deuxième Fantaisie sur les motifs favoris de l'opéra Norma de Bellini*, opus 247). I have found no version of this piece in a French publication, although it is entirely possible that it did appear in Paris, either in the Viennese edition or in a new Parisian one. The publication cited here, op. 247, was also available with optional accompaniment for string quartet.

of *Norma* in 1833. All three were then re-packaged for Paris in late 1833 or 1834. Similarly, Thalberg's *Grande Fantaisie et variations* op. 12 of 1834 (his first of three fantasies based on *Norma*) was simultaneously published in his home city Vienna as well as London and Paris.⁸⁵ Neither of these pianists had yet performed in Paris, but their pieces nonetheless made their way in the French publishers' catalogues.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ The Viennese edition was published by Haslinger in 1834. The London edition appeared around the same time, published by T. Boosey.

⁸⁶ Thalberg arrived for his first tour in Paris during the 1836-37 concert season.

Table 4.1: Selected *Norma* fantasies, published in Paris 1831-1836

Composer	Title	Publisher	Date
Billard, Edouard	<i>Fantaisie brillante pour piano sur Norma, musique de Bellini</i>	B. Latte	ca. 1833-34 ⁸⁷
Czerny, Carl	<i>Introduction, variations et presto finale sur un thème favori de l'opéra de Norma de Bellini pour le piano</i> (op. 247)	Richault	1833-34
Kalkbrenner, Friedrich	<i>Grande fantaisie et variations brillantes pour piano sur un chœur de la Norma de Bellini</i> (op. 140)	Prillip et C ^{ie}	1834
Farrenc, Louise	<i>Les Italiennes, 3 cavatines favorites de Bellini et Carafa, variées pour le piano</i> (op. 14): no. 1, <i>Cavatine de Norma</i>	A. Farrenc	1834
Thalberg, Sigismond	<i>Grande Fantaisie et variations pour le piano sur des motifs de l'opéra Norma de Bellini</i> (op. 12)	A. Farrenc	1834
Moscheles, Ignaz	<i>Souvenirs de Norma et des Capuletti et des Montecchi de Bellini pour le piano</i>	Schlesinger	1834
Hüntten, Franz	<i>Trois Airs italiens sur des motifs favoris de Mercadante, Pacini, et Bellini variés pour le piano</i> (op. 65)	Meissonnier	1834
Hüntten, Franz	<i>Le Premier Succès: deux morceaux faciles et brillants sur des thèmes de Bellini et Mercadante pour le piano</i> (op. 87)	Meissonnier	1836
Hüntten, Franz	<i>Les Fleurs d'Italie: trois airs variées et composées pour le piano</i> (op. 84)	Frère	ca. 1836
Bertini, Henri	<i>Dell'aura tua profetica, chœur de la Norma, musique de Bellini varié pour le piano</i> (op. 106)	Lemoine	1836

⁸⁷ The dating for this piece is inconclusive: although the Bibliothèque Nationale de France *depôt légal* stamp indicates that it was added to the collection in 1842, the publisher's plate number suggests that it may have been published around 1833 or 1834. Neither dating system is entirely reliable, although in most cases they reinforce each other. When the two do not agree, I have relied on dates approximated from publisher's plate numbers, rather than the *depôt légal* stamps, as they are more likely to reflect an accurate date of publication according to publisher's records.

By early 1834, with Pacini's newly available piano-vocal score on the shelves along with the fantasies by Czerny and Thalberg, Parisian pianist-composers had tackled the task of producing more fantasies on *Norma* for their music-hungry public. Over the course of the next three years, solo fantasies by Henri Bertini, Edouard Billard, Louise Farrenc, Franz Hüntten, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, and Ignaz Moscheles were published by a variety of music firms. At first glance, the level of technical skill required to read these pieces suggests that they were aimed at an amateur audience. The overall formal structures and approaches to thematic development that shape the fantasies further support this conclusion; most composers rely on transparent organizational strategies and surface-level ornamentation, making their fantasies appropriately accessible for a broad audience to parse and to practice.

After a period of several years, during which time the Théâtre-Italien regularly offered *Norma* to Parisian audiences, Paris-based virtuosos again turned to the music of *Norma* in the early 1840s. A second (albeit smaller) wave of fantasies appeared between 1842 and 1845 (see Table 4.2). Characterized by extreme length and outrageous technical challenges, this group of works includes fantasies by Liszt, Léopold de Meyer, and Émile Prudent as well as a two-piano work composed by Thalberg.⁸⁸ I include the Thalberg duet, because it exemplifies the aesthetic priorities and social function of opera fantasies composed for solo piano in the 1840s. In addition to the virtuosic scope of the physical technique, these fantasies also exhibit a more coherent sense of drama than do the earlier ones. For example, Liszt's *Réminiscences de Norma* is often labeled as one of his early endeavors in a new style of fantasy, in which he shifts focus from surface-level fireworks to the integration of those fireworks in service of compositional and narrative development. While this shift in

⁸⁸ Even though the two-piano fantasy was also published as opus 12 (the same opus number of Thalberg's solo fantasy on *Norma*), it is an entirely different piece.

aesthetic is obviously not unique to Liszt's *Norma* fantasy or to the *Norma* fantasies in general, it is nonetheless essential to acknowledge that Liszt was not alone in embracing this approach. The fantasies by De Meyer, Prudent, and Thalberg exhibit similar compositional approaches. In addition to their technical demands, the emotional and dramatic breadth of these later fantasies also requires more advanced analytical knowledge than do the earlier ones.

Table 4.2: Selected *Norma* fantasies published in Paris, 1842-1845

Composer	Title	Publisher	Date
Döhler, Theodor	<i>Petite Fantaisie sur deux motifs de Norma pour piano</i> (op. 40)	Schonenberger	1842
Thalberg, Sigismond	<i>Grand Duo pour deux pianos sur un motif de la Norma de Bellini</i> (op. 12)	Colombier	1842
Liszt, Franz	<i>Réminiscences de Norma</i>	B. Latte	1844
Prudent, Emile	<i>Grande fantaisie pour le piano sur Norma</i> (op. 17)	Bureau central de Musique	1844-45
De Meyer, Léopold	<i>Norma (Bellini), grande fantaisie pour piano</i>	Bureau central de Musique	1845

Thematic and Compositional Strategies

Two broad questions underpinning Suttoni's analysis serve as a useful framework against which to explore the musical means employed by most fantasy composers. He poses two questions as a point of departure: first, what kind of themes did composers choose, and second, how were those themes translated and employed at the piano?⁸⁹ In answer to the first, Suttoni observes that while it may be nearly impossible to quantify the themes found in

⁸⁹ Suttoni, "Piano and Opera," 6-7.

opera fantasies, the tunes most often utilized by composers were drawn from the most popular and well-known numbers in the opera.⁹⁰ This is hardly surprising in the context of commercial publication. Furthermore, these tunes exhibit little melodic or rhythmic complexity, because simple themes and textures allowed for more elaboration by the composer.⁹¹ Indeed, Czerny concurred in his *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation*, suggesting that themes most suitable for variation “have a lovely melody, few modulations, two evenly proportioned sections, and a distinct rhythmic profile.”⁹²

The themes found in the *Norma* fantasies illustrate this point quite clearly. The chorus “Dell’aura tua profetica” (sung at the opening of Act 1 by the Druids and Oroveso) appears to have been the most popular tune to be extracted for publication outside the opera, and it forms the basis of the majority of the fantasies discussed here. Another melody—from Norma’s aria “Ah! Bello a me ritorna,” also from the first scene of Act 1—appeared in a high percentage of fantasies as well. Like the various additional themes employed in fantasy composition, these two melodies resemble each other in their straightforward rhythms, unadorned melodic lines, and simple harmony (see Examples 4.1 and 4.2).

⁹⁰ Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 6-7.

⁹¹ Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 7-8.

⁹² Czerny, *Systematic Introduction to the Art of Improvisation*, 108.

Example 4.1: Bellini, “Dell’aura tua profetica,” mm. 1-8



Example 4.2: Bellini, “Ah! Bello a me ritorna,” mm. 1-8

In the few instances that Norma’s best-known aria “Casta diva” was transferred to the piano, the arrangements tend to be nothing more than a basic transcription of the vocal line, likely due to its highly ornamented melody.⁹³ Moscheles, for example, slightly reduces the melodic line (probably to eliminate the rhythmic complexity arising from Bellini’s elaborate

⁹³ A notable exception, as Suttoni mentions, is Léopold de Meyer’s over-the-top effort to ornament “Casta diva”; see Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 8n3.

and improvisatory-sounding theme) and adds in the left hand nothing more than a simplified arrangement of the orchestral score for harmonic support.

Example 4.3: Moscheles, *Souvenirs de Norma et des Capuletti et les Montecchi*, mm. 39-43



Suttoni's second question, about how operatic themes function as material for piano fantasies, is obviously far broader than his first; once a composer has chosen one or more themes, the possibilities for weaving them into a discrete work for piano are vast. Suttoni's parameters for inquiry—which include the general formal structure of fantasy, “alterations” or transformations of the theme in terms of line, rhythm etc, relation of function within the opera to function within the fantasy, the “key scheme” of the fantasy and its relation to the opera, and finally, the broad category of “musical techniques” with which the themes are treated—can be reduced to a few key issues.⁹⁴ First, most fantasies unfold according to variations on two or three basic structural plans. Second, the techniques employed to treat the themes range from simple transcription and ornamental variation in the 1830s fantasies to extreme thematic transformation or recomposition in the 1840s fantasies. And third, there is a noticeable shift away from the discrete sectional variations of the 1830s toward a narrative coherence that more obviously approximates, or comments on, the dramatic action of the

⁹⁴ Suttoni, “Piano and Opera,” 8-9.

opera in the 1840s.

The formal structures that emerge from the *Norma* fantasies generally follow two or three paths—which can be identified as elaborations of Czerny’s *potpourri* model. The adoption and subsequent unfolding of these models seem to depend on the composer and his or her intended audience; transparent formal structures are fleshed out by simpler technical demands, while extreme virtuosity is paired with more complex approaches to organization. One common approach is the one-theme *potpourri*, which usually consists of an introduction followed by a statement of the theme, several variations, and an extended finale. Louise Farrenc’s variations on “Dell’aura tua profetica” (published in a set of three pieces entitled *Les Italiennes*) provides an example at one end of the spectrum, as her crystal-clear formal organization matches the minimal technical demands of her figuration. Table 4.3 provides an outline of the work.

Table 4.3: Structural Outline of Farrenc, *Les Italiennes*, no. 1 “Cavatine de Norma”

Section	Introduction	Theme: Andante cantabile	Var. 1: Un poco più mosso	Var. 2: Espressivo e legato	Var. 3: Risoluto	Finale: Alla Polacca, moderato
Measures:	1-8	9-25	26-41	42-57	58-73	74-154
Character:	Improvisatory arpeggio, figuration	Melody with triplet accomp.	Allegro: 16 th -note scales	Lullaby: Broken chords, triplet rhythm	Military: arpeggios, staccato	Polonaise: Triple meter, arpeggios, scales, chords

After a brief introductory flourish to establish the key of C major, Farrenc presents the theme with the unembellished melody and bare-bones accompaniment. Each of the subsequent variations relies on a simple rhythmic or textural device to provide interest; variation one

uses scales (as shown in Example 4.4), variation two employs a gentle rocking triplet rhythm, and so on. The piece never departs from C major, relying on changes in tempo and texture to provide interest.

Example 4.4: Farrenc, *Les Italiennes*, no. 1 “Cavatine de Norma,” mm. 26-29



The finale, marked “alla Polacca,” is considerably longer than the previous variations and features a more brilliant texture, but the theme is never far from the surface, and the figuration remains accessible to the amateur player.

Based on the same theme as Farrenc’s variations and constructed according to a similar one-theme model (introduction, two variations, and extended finale, shown in Table 4.4), Kalkbrenner’s *Grande Fantaisie et variations brillantes* offers a more complex approach to form as well as physical technique.

Table 4.4: Structural Outline of Kalkbrenner, *Grande Fantaisie et variations brillantes*

Section	Introduction	Theme: Avec grandeur et force	Var. 1: Allegro	Var. 2: Brillante, etc.
Measures	1-55	56-75	76-95	96-203
Character	Improvisatory, unstable harmony, rapid changes in texture	Octave melody, triplet broken- chord accomp.	Triplet scales	See Table 4.5 below

In place of Farrenc's C-major arpeggios, Kalkbrenner presents a long introduction throughout which he teasingly foreshadows the theme "Dell'aura tua profetica." Example 4.5 shows one such passage from the introduction, in which the theme begins in its eventual home key of G major (m. 32), before it is immediately undercut by harmonic instability, *rubato*, and a brief escape into improvisatory *fioratura* in m. 37.

Example 4.5: Kalkbrenner, *Grande Fantaisie et variations brillantes*, mm. 32-40



Although it appears that Kalkbrenner used a larger canvas (his work is nearly fifty measures longer than Farrenc's) for fewer variations (two instead of four), he organized the second variation in four discreet sections that function like separate variations. The outline of this section is shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Structural Outline of Kalkbrenner, *Grande fantaisie et variations brillantes*, Variation 2, m. 96 to the end

	Brillante	Un peu plus lent	Molto adagio	Vivace	Coda
Measures	96-111	112-130	131-145	146-161	162-203
Character	G major, repeated notes	A minor, sweeping Alberti accomp.	B-flat major, grace-note arpeggios leading to single-note melody	G major, staccato, octaves	G major, octaves, RH figuration, staccato

Like the first variation, each section of the second variation is characterized by a shift in key and tempo as well as its own distinctive texture—ranging from repeated notes in the “brillante” section to sweeping arpeggios in the “molto adagio.” The scope of Kalkbrenner’s piece is considerably broader than that of Farrenc’s, especially in terms of harmonic development, textural variety, and technical demands; his fairly conventional approach to form complements his sophisticated yet conservative treatment of other musical elements.

De Meyer’s *Grande Fantaisie* of 1844, which also employs the one-theme model, is a sprawling virtuoso masterpiece with a complicated approach to structure that mirrors its outrageously difficult technical demands and bizarre harmonic twists. The formal outline, shown in Table 4.6, can be gleaned from sections marked in the score: an introduction, followed by a theme with a single variation.

Table 4.6: Structural Outline of De Meyer, *Grande Fantaisie*

Section	Introduction	Theme	Variation
Measures	1-35	36-85	86-370

While on the surface, his approach fits neatly into the Czernian *potpourri* model, the fantasy proceeds very differently than such simple sectional divisions might suggest.⁹⁵ In fact, the fantasy's capricious swirls of texture over repeated statements of the theme belie De Meyer's nods to conventional formal markings. This raises the question of whether the sectional markings were added later by a publisher, possibly in an effort to make the score more manageable for future consumers. In a landscape of large overarching sections, De Meyer only employs one melodic theme, but he changes his variation techniques unpredictably in order to control the dramatic unfolding of the work.

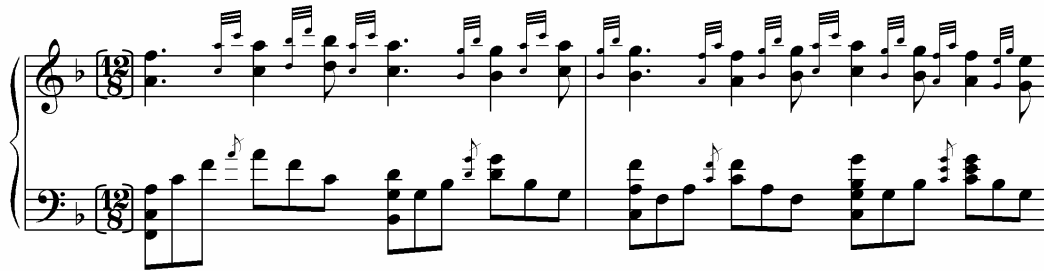
The piece opens with a 35-measure introduction in the key of B major. This section does not incorporate the improvisatory flourishes (virtuosic runs, repeated chords, unstable harmony, varying tempo, and cadenza-like writing) typically found in fantasy introductions. Instead, De Meyer varies a short, newly-composed melodic idea, using blocked chords, repeated quavers, and complex figuration over an arpeggiated bass. These brief statements preview some of the variation techniques (what I will refer to as "textures") that he uses in the extended variation section. Two such instances are shown in Examples 4.6-4.9.

⁹⁵ Czerny's use of the terms *potpourri* to refer to works with only one theme is somewhat misleading. His definition seems to imply that a *potpourri* uses two or more themes, yet he uses the term to mean one-theme pieces as well. For the sake of consistency, I have mirrored his usage of the term in my analysis.

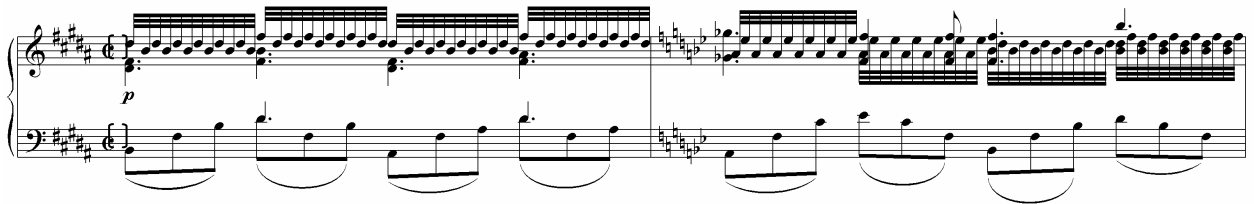
Example 4.6: De Meyer, *Grande Fantaisie*, mm. 24-25 (from introduction)



Example 4.7: De Meyer, *Grande Fantaisie*, mm. 146-47 (from variation)



Example 4.8: De Meyer, *Grande Fantaisie*, mm. 31-32 (from introduction)



Example 4.9: De Meyer, *Grande Fantaisie*, mm. 138-39 (from variation)



These examples demonstrate some elements of continuity across the fantasy and hint at the physical demands placed on the pianist. At the end of the introduction, De Meyer glides into B-flat major and presents the theme (“Oh! Di qual sei tu vittima”) in awkward-to-play blocked chords and octaves. A short improvisatory section at the end of the theme provides a transition into the long section marked “Variation” (see Table 4.7 for a partial diagram of this section).

Table 4.7: De Meyer, *Grande Fantaisie*, Diagram of Variation Section

Texture	A	B	C	B'
Measures	86-107	107-115	116-122	122-124
Meter and Key	9/8, triplet subdivision, B-flat major	Same	9/8, quadruple subdivision, B-flat major	9/8, triple subdivision, B-flat major
Notable Events	Includes 2 measures marked “Cadenza”		Reversal of texture in m. 118	Some unison scales
Character	Figuration-repeated notes/arpeggios	Melody in blocked chords over arpeggios in bass	Octaves accomp. By figuration (scales/arpeggios)	Figuration-scales and octaves

(Table 4.7, continued)

Texture	D	E	F	G
Measures	124-126	127-134	134-143	144-148
Meter and Key	9/8, triple subdivision Unstable key	9/8, triple subdivision F major	9/8, quadruple subdivision, F major	9/8, triple subdivision, F major
Notable Events	Modulation to F major	Previewed in introduction	Previewed in introduction	Previewed in introduction
Character	Unison scale pattern	Simple RH ornamentation	Quavers	Parallel sixths, grace notes

Throughout this section, De Meyer flips from one texture to another, often with little or no

warning, using standard tools of melodic variation. He juxtaposes intricate melodic figuration and giant handfuls of blocked chords, thundering tremolos and dance-like parallel sixths. These textural shifts generally occur at the end of each statement of the melody, but on several occasions, De Meyer also changes texture in the middle of a thematic statement as shown in Example 4.10.

Example 4.10: De Meyer, *Grande Fantaise*, mm. 120-27

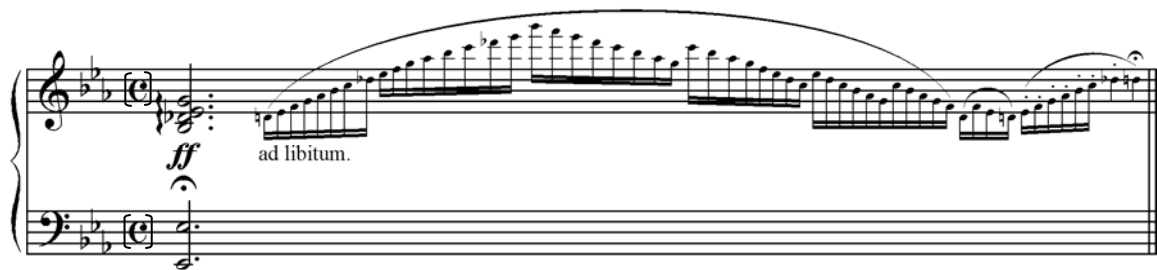
The musical score for Example 4.10, De Meyer's *Grande Fantaise*, measures 120-27, is presented in four systems. The notation is for piano, with a treble and bass staff for each system. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 12/8, indicated by a '12' over a '8'. The score features intricate melodic lines with many triplets and eighth notes. Dynamic markings include '8^{ma}' (octave) and 'Diminuendo'. The piece concludes with a final chord in the bass staff.

To add further variation, he changes the meter (moving between compound duple, compound triple, and simple duple meter), the key (from B-flat major to F major, B minor and finally B major again), and the beat-note subdivision (from triple to quadruple to duple). Only

occasionally do these changes line up with the starting or ending points of thematic statements. He also interposes new material spun from various parts of the theme and placed in the middle of a melodic statement or at the end. Not surprisingly, this score is difficult to parse; though comprehensible to the ear, the melodic thread is difficult to capture from a visual standpoint. De Meyer’s “mixed-variation” technique makes for an exciting performance, but it is as difficult to make sense of, a challenge further complicated by the clouds of notes that make up most of the piece.

Other composers adopt a multi-thematic *potpourri* model, which could be worked out in countless ways. As discussed previously, Czerny recommended the *potpourri* for several reasons, one of which was its expandability. It allows of an indeterminate number of themes to be yoked together according to the whim of the composer and his perception of what the audience might desire. Moscheles’s *Souvenirs de Norma et des Capuletti et des Montecchi*, for example, opens with a 38-bar introduction that hints at the themes to come before launching into the aforementioned straightforward version of “Casta diva” (see Example 4.3). An improvisatory cadenza (shown in Example 4.11) then serves as a transition into the second *Norma* theme, “Ah! Bello a me ritorna.”

Example 4.11: Moscheles, *Souvenirs de Norma et des Capuletti et des Montecchi*, m. 62



Moscheles continues in a similar vein, shifting from *Norma* to three successive melodies

from *I Capuletti e Montecchi*, linking each theme to the next via Czerny-like “connecting passages” of differing length and character.

In his *Petite Fantaisie sur deux motifs de Norma*, Theodor Döhler adapts two chorus numbers—“Non parti” and “Guerra, guerra”—for piano. Like Moscheles, he sets each theme separately and with a minimum of ornamentation. Döhler, however, does not connect the themes via improvisatory links. To ease the transitions between the short introduction and two following themes, he instead transposed Bellini’s material from their original keys in the opera (E-flat major and A minor) to the more closely-related keys of A major/minor and E minor. As in Moscheles’s *Souvenirs*, the formal clarity and amateur-level technique of Döhler’s *Petite Fantaisie* renders the piece easily comprehensible for most musicians.

In a similar approach, Edouard Billard combines at least five discrete themes in his *Fantaisie brillante* with minimal connecting material.⁹⁶ As the formal diagram in Table 4.8 demonstrates, Billard opens the fantasy with a brief introduction and then moves through a series of themes with contrasting characters and tempi with little ornamental elaboration.

⁹⁶ Billard is an example of the local Parisian pianist about whom very little is known, but whose music and performances contributed to the rich pianistic environment of the July Monarchy. He may have been a student of Henri Herz.

Table 4.8: Structural Outline of Billard, *Fantaisie brillante*

Section	Introduzione	Andante moderato	Andante maestoso
Thematic material	Sinfonia	Oh! Di qual sei tu vittima	Dell'aura tua profetica
Measures	1-15	16-32	33-60
Character	Improvisatory	Sweeping LH accomp., chordal melody	Triplet accomp., RH melody octaves

(Table 4.8, continued)

Section	Theme: Allegro moderato	Var. 1: Allegretto con leggerezza	Var. 2: no marking	Andante con espressione	Finale: Allegro
Thematic material	Ah! Bello a me ritorna			Mira, O Norma	Si, fino all'ore estreme
Measures	61-77	78-94	95-113	114-135	136-246
Character	RH melody, sparse LH accomp.	Scales, some figuration, very similar to theme	Triplet march rhythm	Triplet rhythm, melody in thirds	Duple meter, varied texture

After short statements of the lyrical “Oh! Di qual sei tu vittima” and the military “Dell’aura tua profetica,” he moves to “Ah! Bello a me ritorna,” which he uses as the theme for a short set of ornamental variations. A second andante interlude (based on “Mira, o Norma”) precedes the exuberant finale (based on “Si, fino all’ore estreme”) by way of a meter shift and a sequence of improvisatory flourishes (shown in Example 4.12).

Example 4.12: Billard, *Fantaisie brillante pour piano sur Norma*, transition from “Miro, o Norma” to finale, mm. 135-38

The musical score is written for piano in B-flat major, 8/8 time. It consists of four measures. The first measure is marked *p* and *Tempo*. The second measure is marked *sf* and *8va*. The third measure is marked *mf* and *8va*. The fourth measure is marked *f* and *8va*, with a *dim.* marking and the instruction *attaca subito il Finale.* at the end.

The minimal technical challenges, uncomplicated modulations from B-flat major to F major and back, and transparent organization reveal Billard’s fantasy to be a typical example of the 1830s fantasy. Together, the works listed in Table 4.1 are musically comprehensible and technically accessible to the amateur player, and each provides some degree of contrast or even surprise within a limited forum.

On the other end of the pianistic spectrum, Prudent’s nearly five-hundred-measure epic is also crafted around a multi-thematic model, but like the other *Norma* fantasies of the 1840s, it is far more complicated than fantasies composed in the 1830s. Elements of Czerny’s prescriptions can still be found in these pieces—for example, in the use of variations, in the prelude-like introductions, and in the use of connecting passages—but De Meyer, Liszt, Prudent, and Thalberg drew from a broader palette of compositional devices to craft longer pieces that are virtuosic in every sense of the word. Whereas fantasies composed in the 1830s are characterized by clear formal organization and easily-identified melodies, the later fantasies by De Meyer, Liszt, Prudent, and Thalberg feature blurred formal

boundaries, highly-developed thematic material, and subtle modulations—showing off both the technical prowess and the compositional ingenuity of their composers. As the diagram in Table 4.9 demonstrates, Prudent’s fantasy is centered around two sets of variations, one on the instrumental march that underscores the chorus number “Norma, viene,” and the other on the concluding chorus “Si, fino all’ore estreme.”

Table 4.9: Structural Outline of Prudent, *Grande Fantaisie sur Norma*

Section	Lento	Andante espressione	Più animato e come una tempesta	Grandioso	Più lento
Measure	1-88	89-107	108-161	162-230	231-466
Theme	Sinfonia?	New-composed		Norma, viene	Si, fino all’ore estreme
Character	G minor, unstable, improvisatory	G minor, filigree around melody	Unstable, rep. chords/ octaves	E-flat major, Variations	G major, unstable, Variations

The piece begins with an ominous, improvisatory introduction that hints at the opera’s overture and eventually settles in G minor. An expressive legato section (based on an newly-composed theme) follows, gradually intensified by cascades of chromatic octaves for the right hand and the tempo marking “Più animato e come una tempesta.” Another improvisatory and harmonically unstable section unfolds in a modulation to E-flat major. This resolves at measure 162, as the military march of “Norma, viene” emerges. Prudent varies this theme in a fairly standard fashion, gliding into a new texture at the conclusion of each melodic statement without disrupting Bellini’s pre-composed harmony. The main feature of this section appears in mm. 205-230, in which Prudent evoked the “three-handed” technique pioneered by Thalberg (as shown in Example 4.13).

Example 4.13: Prudent, *Grande Fantaisie sur Norma*, mm. 206-07



In the second variation set, Prudent employed a strategy much more like that used by De Meyer in his fantasy. Here the variations depart significantly from the original material, change texture and register without warning, and rest on a constantly-shifting harmonic base. Example 4.14 shows one such instance; before introducing the theme in its entirety, Prudent broke the theme into two-measure motives and pushed it through several textures (and key areas) in the space of just a few measures.

Example 4.14: Prudent, *Grande Fantaisie sur Norma*, mm. 240-46

The musical score is presented in three systems, each consisting of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *scherzando* tempo marking. It features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The second system includes a *ben legato e p* marking. The third system continues the melodic and harmonic development with various articulations and dynamics.

After approximately one hundred measures of tossing the theme and its opening motive around the keyboard, Prudent abandoned it in favor of the chromatic octaves and giant chords with which the piece concludes.

Analysis of the fantasies by Liszt and Thalberg reveal similar formal and thematic strategies as well as equally unique methods of employing them. After an improvisatory opening, Thalberg's solo fantasy moves to three virtuosic variations on "Dell'aura tua profetica," followed by a lyrical setting of the Act 2 finale, "Deh! Non volerli vittime" and a rousing virtuoso finale.⁹⁷ Liszt's fantasy is best known for the extreme recomposition of his themes as well as the combination of "Dell'aura tua profetica" and "Deh! Non volerli

⁹⁷ For an in-depth analysis of Thalberg's solo fantasy op. 12, see Suttoni, "Piano and Opera," 164-71.

vittime” at the climax of the work.⁹⁸ All together, these fantasies of the 1840s (along with Thalberg’s 1834 fantasy) illuminate as much about the individual composers as they do about the genre itself. On the one hand, they exhibit some features that strongly resemble those of the 1830s fantasies—namely the importance of the variation and the improvisatory passages. But, on the other hand, they also provide a fascinating look at vastly different approaches to composition and virtuosity. In De Meyer’s music, we can see the pianist’s large hands, capable of landing on chord after chord made up of four or five notes and stretching over the interval of a tenth. Prudent shows himself to be a master of octave scales and repeated notes. For Liszt, his use of Thalberg’s famous “three-handed” technique (in which the thumbs project a melody in the middle register surrounded by a swirl of arpeggios above and below) along with the combination of the two themes presented in Thalberg’s *Norma* fantasy hint perhaps at an ongoing rivalry between the two pianists. Liszt’s fantasy may further evoke the elusive style of Marie Pleyel, as he famously claimed it was “loaded and overloaded” with the technical exploits for which she was famous.⁹⁹ While it may be possible to look for the composers’ aesthetic and performative priorities in the 1830s fantasies, their choices seem more likely to illustrate the expectations or needs of future consumers. The later *Norma* fantasies foreground the individuality of their composers in an entirely different way, and, as I will explore in the next section, for entirely different reasons.

The Fantasy as Commodity

Whatever their musical construction, opera fantasies offered much more than musical notes

⁹⁸ Liszt’s *Norma* fantasy is analyzed in Kimbell, *Vincenzo Bellini: Norma*, 94-95 and 126-30. Liszt also issued a two-piano fantasy (an arrangement of the solo fantasy), but this was not published until 1874.

⁹⁹ The dedication was reprinted in *Le Ménestrel*, 12, no. 18 (30 March 1845); see Chapter 6, n91.

to those who purchased the scores. For composers and consumers, the commercial genre also created a space in which social rituals could be performed; from repaying social favors to advertising skills to debating cultural matters, pianist-composers, publishers, and audiences accomplished valuable tasks through the widespread sale and consumption of these fantasies.

Pianists who earned their livelihood by teaching and performing in Paris found it necessary to stay abreast of trends in popular music in order to keep up with the demands of their target audience: the upper-class Parisians who purchased sheet music and concert tickets and who employed pianists to perform in their homes and to give piano lessons to their children. The opera-centered climate of the July Monarchy (and indeed, all of the nineteenth century) made it easy to anticipate what music-lovers might want to hear in the salon or practice at home. Acquiring familiarity with past and current opera music was therefore a crucial part of achieving success in other musical forums. Most musicians and composers attended opera performances alongside their patrons, exposing themselves to new music, supporting fellow performers, and seeing and being seen at the most important social and musical events of the season.¹⁰⁰ Many also attended a variety of salons; whether focused on music or not, musical performance was almost always included at high-profile salon gatherings. Staying up-to-date with the latest in opera music could pay off in a number of ways. In the salon, an ambitious pianist might jump at the opportunity to accompany an aristocratic amateur singing a favorite aria or to show off his improvising skills by inviting his audience to supply him with a theme. One salon performance might lead to future

¹⁰⁰ As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, musicians worked together to mount benefit concerts. Singers contracted to perform (possibly free of charge) on behalf of a pianist, for example, could expect that pianist to attend opera performances given for the singers' benefits.

performances at another salon, catch the attention of a wealthy patron looking for a piano teacher, or encourage an aspiring pianist to look for the pianist's compositions at his or her local music shop.

Composing music that appealed to the public could lead to further revenue in several ways. First, the pianist could perform opera fantasies for any occasion, thereby advertising both his pianistic and compositional skills. Second, because most pianists also maintained a teaching studio, they had a small captive market for amateur-level compositions. Students often studied works by their teachers, likely purchasing the sheet music from the publisher. While composers did not receive royalties from each copy sold, they did receive a flat rate from the publisher based on the volume of the each print run. Demonstrating a demand could only help a composer's position in future negotiations. Furthermore, student performances, in public or private settings, could also advertise a musician's skills as a composer and as a teacher. Children and young women almost always crafted their benefit-concert programs to include at least one of their teacher's compositions. Although no records exist to indicate how often this may have happened in private household concerts or even in the salon, it probably did; one of the advantages to paying for a fashionable teacher like Chopin or Kalkbrenner was, of course, the right to flaunt it in society. Finally, personal exchanges of sheet music and sheet-music recommendations among acquaintances could only increase a pianist's value as a performer, composer, and teacher.

The example of Kalkbrenner's *Norma* fantasy offers a glimpse of how performing, composing, and teaching could overlap within the restricted world of the Parisian salon. A review of the 1834 publication appeared in the pedagogical journal *Le Pianiste*. This short-lived journal was edited by Charles Chaulieu and Jules Delacour, former students of the

Conservatoire, and it seems to have been aimed at amateur pianists looking for basic music theory, a little music history, and some advice on what and how to practice. Thus, the critic evaluated Kalkbrenner's fantasy from a unique perspective; unlike the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, this journal ranked new compositions according to its own weighted system. The review indicates that the fantasy was marketed to amateur players and young pianists—confirming that Kalkbrenner did indeed set his students to practice his compositions.¹⁰¹ Its difficulty, however, drew some criticism: “the final *prestissimo* is only playable by those who can hold their breath for a long time.”¹⁰² Obviously a fan of Kalkbrenner's music, the critic added that “it is difficult for Kalkbrenner to create a bad piece” even though he found its technical challenges to be more appropriate in a concerto.¹⁰³ The review concluded by citing a rumor that Kalkbrenner would be performing the *Norma* fantasy at some point in the near future. An assessment of the work reveals an easily-parsed musical structure under flashy surface figuration. Although the piece might require diligent practice from a student, the brilliant texture is constructed from a handful of repetitive figures that, once mastered, allow the piece to take flight without too much struggle. Yet the exciting flourishes provide an opportunity for an aging virtuoso like Kalkbrenner (who was by 1834 nearing the end of his performing career) to give a convincing virtuoso performance.

Establishing a consumer profile is a complicated exercise. Unlike the composers—

¹⁰¹ On Kalkbrenner's multi-faceted approach to pedagogy, see Chapter 2.

¹⁰² “La finale *prestissimo* n'est jouables que pour les personnes qui ont la respiration longue” (*Le Pianiste*, April 1834).

¹⁰³ “Au total, comme il est difficile à Kalkbrenner de faire un mauvais morceau, nous dirons seulement, comme le fils d'une savant critique: ‘En fait d'airs variés, j'aime mieux un concerto’” (*Le Pianiste*, April 1834). The genre of concerto was considered a vehicle for virtuosity in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the concerto and its ties to virtuosity, see Konrad Küster, *Das Konzert: Form und Forum der Virtuosität*, Studienbücher Musik 6 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1993).

who acted largely for the same set of reasons—no existing records document who may have purchased the scores, let alone why. In his re-imagining of the “social life of scores” in nineteenth-century England, James Davies confronts exactly this problem: without the benefit of additional documents to explain the significance of each individual score, envisioning the life of musical copies requires “interpretations of commerce” and “musical discussions of [the score’s] varied social meanings” instead of focusing on specific details of its physical life.¹⁰⁴ I adopt this approach in my attempt to envision the consumption of opera fantasies on a broad scale.

To begin, the published scores themselves, both as printed artifacts and as musical texts, shed some light on their prospective audiences. The remaining title pages, for example, offer a few clues. The pricing of these pieces, usually between five and ten francs, points to a social group with a budget for discretionary expenses: probably the same group of aristocrats and wealthy bourgeois that hosted salons, attended operas and benefit concerts, and hired expensive music teachers.¹⁰⁵ The dedicatees of the *Norma* fantasies, moreover, are largely women, both married and unmarried, often bearing aristocratic names. See Table 4.10 for a list of known dedicatees.

¹⁰⁴ James Davies, “Julia’s Gift: The Social Life of Scores, c.1830,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131 (2006): 291.

¹⁰⁵ I do not have sale prices for each fantasy included in this study—mainly due to the fact that only about half of the scores were preserved with their front covers (on which the price was printed). Based on the prices cited for other fantasies published contemporaneously, one fantasy cost a little less than did a single concert ticket to see its composer in person.

Table 4.10: Known Dedications of the *Norma* Fantasies

Name of Dedicatee	Composer
Pierre Wolf	Bertini
Mlle Marie de Grammont	Billard
Mlle le Cointe	Czerny
Mlle Laure Duperré	Farrenc
Mme la Duchesse d'Orléans	Kalkbrenner
Mme Marie Pleyel	Liszt
Mr. le Comte Léopold de Boisdenemets	Prudent

Sometimes these names appear in music journals, such as the exceptional Marie Pleyel (*dédicatrice* of Liszt's 1844 fantasy), but more commonly, their families can only be found in July Monarchy census records or in the footnotes of the nineteenth-century history books.

The musical attributes of the 1830s fantasies—and their technical approaches in particular—suggest that they were geared largely toward female pianists. With the exception of Thalberg, the other composers adopted a technical approach that embodies the tenets of the *jeu-lié* school of keyboard playing.¹⁰⁶ Farrenc's variations provide some insight into what would have been considered a suitable approach to composition for (and in this case, by) a woman. The piece proceeds with four ornamental variations, all of which exhibit a restrained approach to the keyboard. Farrenc employs scales and ornamental turns (finger-centered passagework) to provide surface interest. Even in the final variation, which is significantly longer than the others and by far the most musically complex, its technical demands remain within the bounds of an amateur player and hardly require the pianist's hands to leave the keyboard. While Farrenc's biographer Bea Friedland interprets this

¹⁰⁶ Even Thalberg's fantasy, which is considerably more difficult than any of the other 1830s examples, can be adapted for a less virtuosic and physical technique. On *jeu-lié* playing, see Katharine Ellis, "Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 363-66.

“restraint” as a sign of Farrenc’s elegant, anti-virtuosic, and therefore laudable approach to the instrument and fantasy-writing, it is much more likely that she composed this piece (and several others like it) to appeal to the amateur female pianist.¹⁰⁷ Many other composers—from the esteemed Kalkbrenner to the obscure Hüntten—also produced pieces that resemble Farrenc’s technical approach.

Although it is likely that the 1830s opera fantasies were deliberately composed to be appropriate for female performance, it would be unhelpful to claim that they were only purchased by women or for this purpose alone. Certainly aspiring male pianists, especially those of the leisure class, would have perused them as well, and for a variety of reasons. As a study aid in practicing the piano, as a form of private and public entertainment, and a mode of displaying one’s social status, the opera fantasy could function on a deeper level as a key element in the dissemination and appreciation of opera. Thomas Christensen has argued that piano-vocal opera scores and four-hand transcriptions of orchestral music were crucial pathways through which music was transmitted to the leisure class and through which modes of reception and performance were transformed during the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸

Functioning in a similar role, opera fantasies supplied ready-made interpretations of the operatic score to the same audience. Just as the piano-vocal score “served an indispensable pedagogical role in the musical literacy of many bourgeois musicians,” so too did the

¹⁰⁷ Bea Friedland, *Louise Farrenc, 1804-1875: Composer, Performer, Scholar*, 2nd ed., *Studies in Musicology* 32, ed. George Buelow (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 14-17; see pp. 100-105 on Farrenc’s *Les Italiennes*.

¹⁰⁸ See Thomas Christensen, “Public Music in Private Spaces: Piano-Vocal Scores and the Domestication of Opera,” in *Music and the Cultures of Print*, ed. Kate van Orden, 67-93 (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); and Christensen, “Four-Hand Piano Transcription and Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Musical Reception,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52 (1999): 255-98.

fantasy.¹⁰⁹ Even in the face of the genre's limitations (not the least of which include the reduction of a full orchestral score to just one or two instruments as well as a total divorce from the visual spectacle so integral to nineteenth-century operatic experiences), bringing opera music into the private sphere via the piano remained the most affordable way to transmit the experience of opera for the majority of French citizens throughout the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ Prior to the advent of cheap mass printing of sheet music, the experience of opera had been largely limited to those who could afford to attend live performances. The piano-vocal score, and by extension the opera fantasy, brought opera music (albeit in distilled form) to private households; in so doing, however, such media delivered the music to a much larger public than ever before had access to it.¹¹¹

As Christensen points out, engaging with opera through the sheet-music reductions in the privacy of the home fundamentally changed how nineteenth-century audiences experienced opera, much in the way that the publication of libretti shaped the experience and evaluation of opera in the eighteenth century.¹¹² In the nineteenth century, audiences were armed not only with libretti and newspaper reports, but also now with ideas about how the music sounded and how it ought to be sung. And when they left the opera house, the contents of the music rack allowed audiences to relive and in a sense re-create what they had witnessed. Scholars have long since acknowledged that music criticism shifts according to

¹⁰⁹ Christensen, "Public Music in Private Spaces," 83-84.

¹¹⁰ As Christensen points out, ticket prices meant that opera audiences through the nineteenth century consisted mainly of members of the leisure class; see Christensen, "Public Music in Private Spaces," 84.

¹¹¹ Christensen employs Jürgen Habermas's argument about the paradoxical bourgeois public/private sphere in the early nineteenth century to demonstrate the connection between public and private music-making; see Christensen, "Public Music in Private Spaces," 86.

¹¹² Christensen, "Public Music in Private Spaces," 86.

what information is available and when; so too does the musical experience change for the viewers.¹¹³ That such tangible reminders were readily available and affordable created the space for a widespread conversation. Just as movie-going audiences in the twenty-first century view trailers, read reviews, and purchase DVDs in order to participate in a cultural conversation about the art of film, the nineteenth-century opera-going public could engage with the music in an entirely unprecedented way.

The *Norma* Fantasies in Paris

These issues can be seen in the *Norma* fantasies. In the early 1830s, they could provide a preview of an opera yet-unknown in Paris—almost like a nineteenth-century movie trailer. Simple presentations of thematic material whetted the appetite for the opera to come, while also preparing the audience for what they would actually hear at the performance. Overall, the 1830s fantasies appear to have been composed for an amateur audience; they could have been played—or at least fumbled through—by anyone with basic piano skills. If nothing else, because these early fantasies so clearly stated the operatic themes, a consumer with only note-reading skills could even sing through the line.

No direct evidence can tie the opera fantasy to the reception of the opera, but one thing is clear: the French critical reaction was strikingly different from those printed by the Italian and Viennese presses. Expectations developed from singing vocal excerpts or reading through a fantasy played an integral role in shaping how consumers experienced opera. Such advance musical knowledge in combination with memories of the opera's dramatic forerunner by Soumet and four years of reports from other cities meant that Parisian

¹¹³ Christensen, "Public Music in Private Spaces," 86.

audiences could have formed well-educated opinions about the opera if they so chose. Certainly Bellini's success with *I Puritani* and his recent death impacted how audiences received the opera and how critics perceived its idiosyncrasies. Yet reports of *Norma*'s premiere in Milan and Venice depicted audiences left cold and confused by Bellini's music, whereas in France, critics noted that the crowds seemed to love it. Advance familiarity with the plot and important musical themes may have helped Parisian listeners to make sense of Bellini's dramatic decisions.¹¹⁴ Or, perhaps knowing some of the music gave them something to hang on to—a few favorite tunes to enjoy amidst others that were forgotten after the show.

After the premiere, the same scores provided a souvenir of a memorable production—both in its physical presence on the music rack and in its role as an aid in the recreation of the operatic performance at any moment. Capitalizing on the popularity of the opera, pianists continued to compose and publish *Norma* fantasies for literally decades after the premiere. Hüntten in particular managed to eke out an extraordinary number of compositions based on just this opera, publishing five distinct pieces for solo and duo piano between 1834 and 1837. Thalberg ran a close second with three fantasies within the span of about twenty years.¹¹⁵ Even more astonishingly, Hüntten's pieces appeared with three different publishing firms, which leads to two general conclusions. First, there must have been an intense public demand for the music of *Norma* in the years surrounding its premiere, likely incubated in the salon and fueled by performances of the opera itself. And second, Hüntten, his colleagues in

¹¹⁴ For example, Bellini's unorthodox decision to end the first act with a trio rather than the expected chorus may have initially confused his Italian audience and annoyed his Italian critics, but four years later, Bellini's Parisian critics skipped over the trio to discuss Bellini's œuvre as a whole.

¹¹⁵ The third *Norma* fantasy was published in 1856 as part of Thalberg's *Décameron*, a set of short fantasies intended to demonstrate how to compose fantasies. Studying how Thalberg's instructions mesh with contemporary practice would be a fascinating project in the future.

Paris, and their publishers recognized this demand and apparently mobilized their energy and musical resources in order to meet it. While Hüntten's works are little more than arrangements of the piano-vocal score, their sheer number indicates that Parisian buyers exhibited some desire to perform, listen to, or at least own the music of *Norma*.

By the late 1830s, the immediate interest in acquiring *Norma* scores had apparently waned. Few, if any, new fantasies on *Norma* were published in Paris between 1838 and 1842; fantasy composers instead turned to newer subjects. Yet the opera remained ensconced in Parisian musical life, as the Théâtre-Italien revived *Norma* for the 1838-39 season and again in 1840-41. Then, in 1842, another wave of *Norma*-based works appeared in the Parisian market, this time the sprawling, multi-thematic, and outrageously virtuosic pieces that were performed in public by touring virtuosos. Whereas the 1830s fantasies were clearly intended to be accessible to the amateur player, the later pieces are unashamedly difficult and virtually inaccessible to anyone but their composers and other professional virtuosos. These virtuoso *tours-de-force* could perhaps be simplified for sight-reading or divided into more manageable excerpts, but they are on the whole too long and too physically demanding to be intended for mastery by the typical opera-fantasy consumer (male or female) of the 1830s. The emergence of these fantasies in the Parisian market during this period invites some inquiry. What then did the fantasies of the 1840s represent in the sheet-music market? To whom were these compositions marketed and for what purpose? And however popular *Norma* may have been with French audiences in 1835, why did it experience such resurgence among piano virtuosos in the early 1840s?

In his investigation of the Hofmeister printing of Liszt publications, James Deaville

demonstrates that “the difficulty of a piece of Liszt...did not hinder its sales.”¹¹⁶ As he points out, data suggests that consumers instead purchased Liszt’s compositions as souvenirs of his performances even if they could not themselves tackle the music with any hope of mastering it.¹¹⁷ Conversely, his study also indicates that those scores that did *not* sell many copies correspond with pieces that Liszt did perform in public. The *Norma* fantasies of the 1840s seem to coincide with major events on the Parisian stage—not in opera productions, but rather in extravagant concerts given by piano virtuosos. For example, the French pianist Prudent thrilled audiences across the country with his Thalbergian finesse in 1841 and 1842. As I shall discuss in Chapter 5, his first tour of the French provinces culminated in several Paris concerts in the February and March of 1842. To drum up even more local interest, Prudent asked his much-publicized mentor Thalberg joined him on stage to perform the two-piano fantasy on themes from *Norma* composed by none other than Thalberg himself. This impractical work, which required two separate pianos and two first-class virtuosos, was published in the same year by Colombier. Unlike Thalberg’s first *Norma* fantasy of 1834, this score specifically referred to Prudent’s concert, advertising on this frontispiece “as performed by the author and Prudent at the Théâtre-Italien.” See Figure 4.1 for this image.

¹¹⁶ James Deaville, “Publishing Paraphrases and Creating Collectors: Friedrich Hofmeister, Franz Liszt, and the Technology of Popularity,” in *Franz Liszt and his World*, ed. Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 260-61.

¹¹⁷ Deaville, “Publishing Paraphrases,” 260-261.

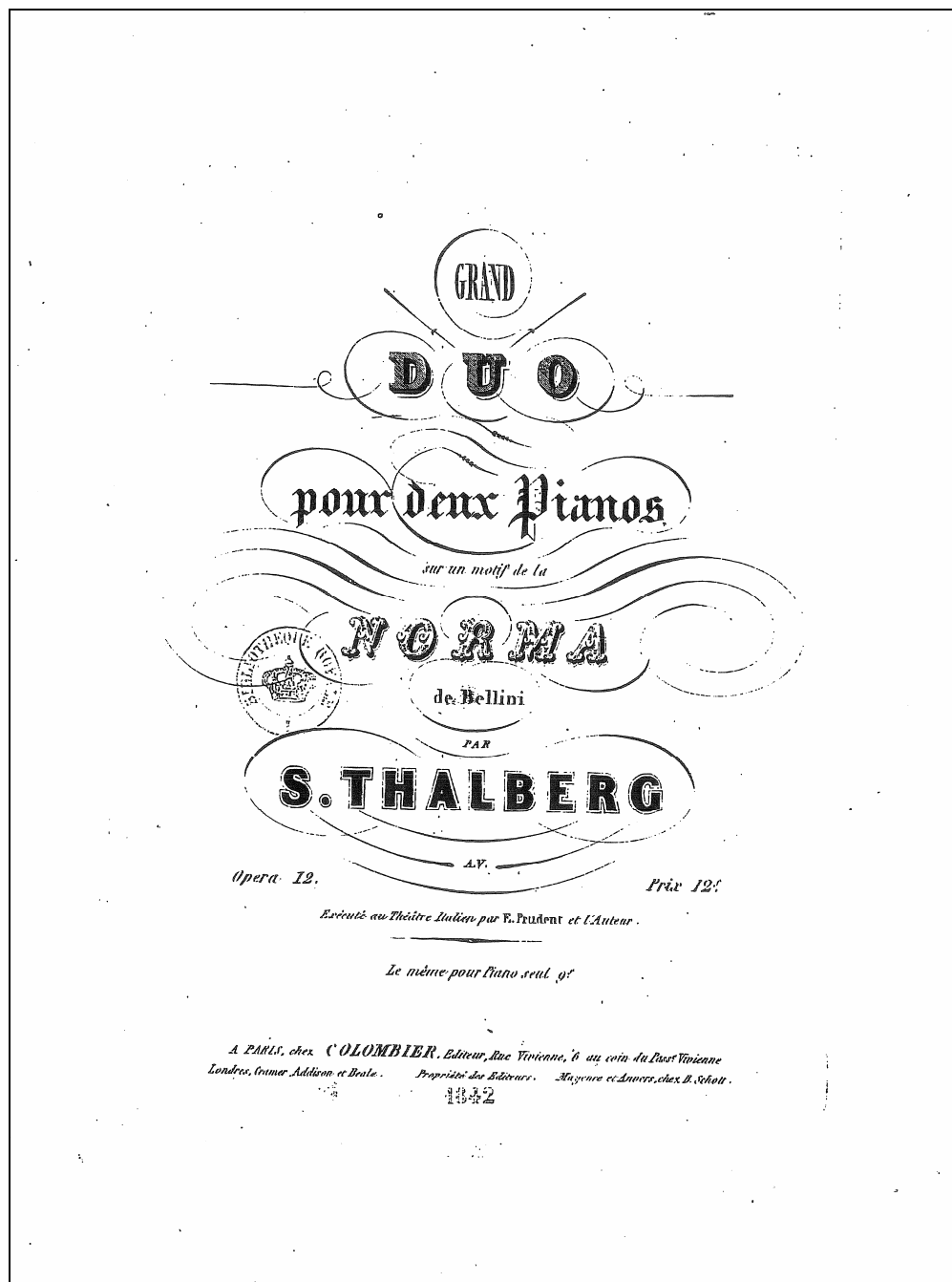


Figure 4.1: Frontispiece from Thalberg's *Grand Duo* on themes from *Norma* (published in Paris by Colombier in 1842; held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Département de la Musique)

Prudent's own *Norma* fantasy was published two years later and became one of his most popular works. He himself performed it on programs during his concert tours in 1844 and 1845. Likewise, Léopold de Meyer's *Fantaisie de Norma* appeared in the same year as one of his legendary concert tours. Dubbed the "hurricane" of the piano, De Meyer was famous in the press for his rough physical approach to the instrument; cartoon caricatures published in the newspapers reinforced the apparently wild spectacle of his performances. His fantasy's crashing fistfuls of notes in the unwieldy key of B major seem to capture the exploits of his concert tours in the early 1840s and may have fueled discussions about his "Russian" style, acquired during a long stay in St. Petersburg during the 1830s.¹¹⁸ Two years later, Liszt's *Réminiscences de Norma* of 1844 intersected with another exciting performance. Liszt dedicated the piece to the deliciously scandalous Marie Pleyel, who performed it on the occasion of her triumphant return to the Parisian stage in 1845. As I shall discuss in Chapter 6, the erotically-charged preface that accompanied the published score helped to frame Pleyel's highly-anticipated homecoming.

As souvenirs of memorable performances rather than pedagogical tools, the virtuoso-level fantasies of the 1840s still served multiple socio-musical purposes. First, like the commemorative posters, T-shirts, and coffee mugs of the twentieth century, the fantasy could be owned. After purchase, the published score could be arranged on the music rack as a decorative object or brought out to enhance retellings of the concert event—a tangible item to accompany or even to improve memories.¹¹⁹ This function could be augmented by the

¹¹⁸ Girardin, *Lettres parisiennes*, 406-08.

¹¹⁹ On musical scores as memory aids, see Davies, "Julia's Gift," 287-309. On the cultural network surround the idea of reproduction, see Susan Lambert, *The Image Multiplied: Five Centuries of Printed Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings* (London: Trefoil Publications, 1987), 13-33.

music printed on its pages. Although out of reach of all but the most skilled pianists, an amateur player might open the score to sightread or even master short sections, thereby reconstructing the performance, albeit in reduced form. Music-lovers who had never heard it before might do the same in an effort to imagine what hearing Prudent or De Meyer might have been like in person. Finally, and perhaps most intriguing, was the tantalizing promise of the score. Liszt's performance, captured on paper, could yield the secrets of his famous virtuosity. The prospect of simply possessing it—along with possibility of unraveling the secret—might be tempting indeed. Whatever their reasons, be they commemorative and/or musical, consumers of the 1840s virtuoso fantasies purchased much more than a too-difficult score.

How *Norma* came to be an appropriate subject for such virtuoso fantasies in the 1840s, up to a decade past its French premiere, stemmed from the social work performed by the 1830s pieces. The opera fantasies written in the years surrounding *Norma*'s much-anticipated production in Paris significantly impacted the opera's reception by familiarizing audiences with Bellini's music and prolonging experiences of the production for several years after the premiere. Subsequent productions, along with the plethora of early fantasies and the critic's fascination with Bellini's "masterpiece," helped to fix *Norma* as a standard point of reference in Parisian musical culture. It thus became available for repackaging by piano virtuosos who aimed to captivate their audiences through unimaginable feats of virtuosity presented in a comprehensible form. The familiar music, story, and local history of *Norma* provided an ideal vehicle.

In this chapter, I have used *Norma* as a lens through which to peer into the foggy worlds of private-domain music-making on the one hand and professional strategizing on the

other. Some of my conclusions may be supported by further case studies, and others may not be, because this opera and its subsequent life in Parisian musical life are entirely unique to its time and place. Some may exhibit a similar dichotomy between pieces composed in the 1830s and 1840s, while others may follow a similar path (unfolding from simple teaching tools to the complex souvenirs) over a period of time. Further exploration is needed to determine whether the genre continued in the direction that the *Norma* fantasies suggest. And most importantly, how assumptions about musical value and musical taste shape approaches to music in nineteenth-century France must be questioned.

For the pianist-composer, the opera fantasy provided an arena for compositional growth and exploration as well as an important form of advertisement and profit. It is impossible to determine to what extent composers invested their creative energy in composing these opera fantasies. The shorter and less demanding *Norma* fantasies published in the mid-1830s also exhibit simpler formal structures and more transparent textures than those published in the 1840s. Are they inherently unsophisticated and inferior to their more complex successors? In all their simplicity, the 1830s fantasies measure up to the criteria that underpinned the Italian opera themes on which they are based, which favor comprehensibility, surface interest, and melodic integrity. Certainly the later works, with their shocking twists of harmony and skillful motivic manipulations, more clearly embody the aesthetic requirements of the musical canon, but for this musical field, they remain tainted by their association with French and Italian opera.

There is much more to be gleaned from these scores. I offer a brief analysis of only a small percentage of opera fantasies, in order to shed some light on how July Monarchy opera looked from the piano. A broader study might indeed illuminate more fully this fundamental

aspect of opera reception, piano composition, and virtuoso strategy. Until the stigma attached the opera fantasy is lifted, however, our understanding of French (and indeed Western) music of the nineteenth century will remain incomplete.

Chapter Five

STRATEGIES OF THE *JUSTE MILIEU*: PRUDENT AND THE VIRTUOSO PROFILE

The first time the French pianist Émile Prudent (1817-1863) approached the virtuoso arena in Paris, he knocked politely at the door, clutching his hard-won prizes from the Paris Conservatoire. But without fanfare or publicity to support his claim, Prudent's attempt went unnoticed by audiences currently enthralled with Franz Liszt, who had recently begun to appear again in public after several quiet years of study. In 1835, the inexperienced eighteen-year-old Prudent, talented as he may have been, simply could not compete with the Hungarian icon, whose new adult persona thrilled his fans with its strength, masculinity, and sex appeal. Yet Liszt and his "comeback" of 1835 did not discourage Prudent from pursuing a career as a virtuoso; rather, he provided a model after which Prudent could re-frame his professional strategies and conquer the Parisian stage.

In the mid-1830s, the figure of the Romantic virtuoso was perhaps most clearly embodied by Liszt, but the major elements of this iconic persona were also presented by nearly every virtuoso who crossed the Parisian stage. Fryderyk Chopin had arrived in 1831, and then, in 1836, came Sigismond Thalberg, followed by Theodor Döhler in 1838, Alexander Dreyschock in 1839, and Léopold de Meyer in 1841, among many others. These male pianists were all from abroad, and they advertised their talents as the product of individual genius and inspiration. Prudent, a Frenchman who had lived in Paris for nearly ten years and excelled at the now-famous bastion of French musical education, the Paris

Conservatoire, did not fit the profile.¹ But neither did the pre-comeback Liszt, who in the late 1820s had been assimilated into the fabric of Parisian musical life with an identity that had been created for him at the age of twelve.

Liszt's process of reinventing himself as an adult provides a striking parallel to the case of Prudent. Romanticized accounts of both pianists' biographies follow a narrative of self-imposed exile and triumphant return.² Liszt, shattered by the death of his father (and the loss of his first love) and exhausted by the traveling circus of his childhood, stopped giving benefit concerts between 1829 and 1834; Prudent, unable to find enough work to support himself, left Paris entirely in 1836. Inspired by the playing of other virtuosos (in Liszt's case, Niccolò Paganini; in Prudent's, Thalberg), both pianists practiced in seclusion for several years. These periods of isolation served as a point from which they could re-launch their careers. For Liszt, whose status as a virtuoso went unquestioned given his background and previous exposure in Paris, his time away from the spotlight allowed him to metamorphose from Mozart's reincarnation into Beethoven's spiritual heir.³ For Prudent, his absence from Paris allowed him to approach the capital city from a more conventional standpoint; a long concert tour in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the French provinces created momentum and distance, and his well-publicized relationship to Thalberg erased the stamp of the Conservatoire.

¹ On the Conservatoire and the French musical tradition, see Laetitia Chassain, "Le Conservatoire et la notion d' 'école française'," in *Le Conservatoire de Paris, 1795-1995*, 2 vols., ed. Anne Bongrain and Alain Poirier (Paris: Buchet/Castel, 1999), 2:15-28.

² This narrative resembles the archetype of the Romantic hero, who eschews society (either by choice or ostracization) in pursuit of the sublime; see Katharine Ellis, "Liszt: The Romantic Artist," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2-4 and 6-10.

³ I do not suggest that Liszt was entirely absent from the Parisian stage during this period; he in fact appeared at least once per season, but these performances took place at events sponsored by other musicians or concert series; on Liszt's activities in the early 1830s, see Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 129-205.

In this chapter, I examine the construction of Prudent's re-entry into Parisian musical life. Prudent's failure to launch a virtuoso career in 1835 and his subsequent triumph in 1842 illuminate on the one hand the stereotypical figure of the virtuoso while demonstrating on the other how it could be re-imagined by an aspiring pianist. As a male pianist, Prudent could manipulate his personal circumstances to project an image that more closely resembled those of pianists whom he had seen succeed in the past. To begin, I address Prudent's early career as a student at the Paris Conservatoire and the challenges he faced in igniting his virtuoso career in Paris. This leads to an investigation of his strategies in developing and deploying a more typical profile during his comeback season of 1842. I then turn to the reception of his public persona by French critics. While Prudent was universally acclaimed as a pianist, the responses to his profile depended on the nationalist and aesthetic agendas of his critics, most of whom chose to view Prudent as the ideal French combination of Liszt's virtuosity and Thalberg's elegance. My purpose in this chapter is thus to restore another forgotten figure to the history of Parisian music-making and to investigate how the issue of nationality played into the construction and reception of virtuoso pianism.

Prudent's Conservatoire Years and Early Career

The details of Prudent's life prior to his studies at the Conservatoire are frustratingly elusive.⁴ His œuvre, which consists largely of opera fantasies and various virtuoso crowd-pleasers, rendered him a minor (and in most cases nonexistent) character in histories of nineteenth-

⁴ Published sources on Prudent's life include an article in François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860-65), s.v. "Prudent (Émile Beune)"; and a chapter in Antoine Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres: silhouettes et médaillons* (Paris: A. Chaix et Cie, 1878), 61-69. See also Oscar Comettant's comments on Prudent's compositions in his *Musique et musiciens* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1862), 142-51.

century French music. Very little was recorded about Prudent's life, and even less about his family background and his life before his enrollment at the Conservatoire in July 1826. An obituary published in *L'Univers illustré* by the esteemed journalist and dramatist Albéric Second offers some insight into the early years of Prudent's career. Though he writes with an exaggerated flair, Second's claim to have known Prudent well seems legitimate; the two were born in Angoulême within a few months of each other and later moved in the same circles in Paris.⁵ Even later biographical accounts (such as the entry in François-Joseph Fétis's *Biographie universelle des musiciens* and a chapter in Antoine Marmontel's *Les Pianistes célèbres*) seem to have drawn from Second's obituary of 1863. Prudent himself left little insight; no personal writings and only a few laconic letters survive.⁶

Born in the French town of Angoulême in 1817, Prudent was adopted as a child. During his childhood, his foster father worked in Angoulême as a piano tuner. Second suggests that Prudent in fact may have been trained as a piano tuner from childhood, although no evidence corroborates this statement.⁷ Not long after Prudent's ninth birthday, the family relocated to Paris, where he began his studies at the Conservatoire in solfège with Edmond Larivière and Félix Le Couppey.⁸ In 1829, he won a second prize in sight-reading (*lecture musicale*). At the same time, he also pursued piano lessons, first in the preparatory

⁵ *L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 (4 June 1863). Other obituaries lack the detail of Second's account; for more general accounts of Prudent's career, see *La France musicale* 24, no. 20 (17 Mai 1863); and *L'Art musical* 3, no. 25 (21 Mai 1863).

⁶ Most of Prudent's existing letters are held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Lettres autographes, Prudent (Émile).

⁷ *L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 (4 June 1863).

⁸ Larivière was a pianist and harpist who studied at the Conservatoire not long before Prudent. He taught solfège in 1826 and 1827 while studying harp with the renowned harpist François-Joseph Naderman. Le Couppey also taught solfège during his years as a piano student. Later he became professor of solfège, and then professor of piano.

class of Laurent, an adjunct professor charged with developing the technique of students who hoped to study piano in one of the more prestigious studios of the Conservatoire.

In 1828, the renowned pedagogue Pierre Zimmermann accepted Prudent in his studio despite Prudent's apparently mediocre talent. Among the earliest pianists admitted to the Conservatoire, Zimmermann had studied piano with François-Adrien Boieldieu and took the *premier prix* over Friedrich Kalkbrenner in 1800. Two years later, he won another first prize, this time in harmony. He returned to the Conservatoire in 1816 as professor of piano, eventually leading classes in counterpoint and harmony as well. As such, he trained the most illustrious French pianists and composers of the mid-nineteenth century, among them Charles-Valentin Alkan, Louis Lacombe, Marmontel (who was later appointed to his retiring teacher's position), Joséphine Martin, Ambroise Thomas, and, of course, Prudent.⁹

As Zimmermann's student, Prudent competed in the annual August *concours*, winning the second prize in 1831 and finally the coveted first prize two years later. Not yet sixteen years old and possibly planning to pursue a career as a composer, Prudent continued his Conservatoire studies for another year or two, this time taking classes in harmony and counterpoint. As François-Joseph Fétis noted, however, he never distinguished himself in any subject but piano and eventually left the Conservatoire in 1835 without having competed in the *concours* as a composer.¹⁰ Later writers, Fétis among them, depicted Prudent as an uninteresting pianist and musician at this point in his career—perhaps a commentary on the Conservatoire's pedagogical program as well as on Prudent's musicianship. Marmontel went so far as to claim that “nothing in him presaged one of the privileged natures called to the

⁹ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 194-203.

¹⁰ Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Prudent (Émile Beune).”

first rank among famous artists.”¹¹ Whether justified or not, the contention that Prudent lacked both technique and genius provided a platform on which his transformation in the late 1830s could be built.

The death of Prudent’s father in 1832 (from the same cholera outbreak that clouded Chopin’s debut concert) may have spurred Prudent to embark upon what Marmontel called “the militant life of the artist” around 1834 out of necessity.¹² Marmontel’s use of the word “militant” connotes the active, self-promoting campaign waged by professional musicians. All accounts agree that he soon experienced the worst difficulties of professional musicianhood.¹³ Regardless of what Prudent’s career objectives may have been, a public concert was the first step for anyone wishing to establish himself as a professional musician. If he planned to become a local teacher and salon performer—in the same vein as Zimmermann or Henri Bertini to name just two examples—giving a concert was the most direct way to forming the necessary connections with the leisure class who could employ him. Their patronage would support his career in Paris and could even possibly provide a gateway to an international touring career. Unable to attract enough students to make a living (and possibly contribute to the upkeep of any surviving family), Prudent resorted to “faire des bals”: the unglamorous life of a pianist-for-hire, playing waltzes and quadrilles for the entertainment of the Parisian elite.¹⁴ These engagements were somewhat lucrative—twenty francs for a long evening’s worth of music—but not enough to support a family or

¹¹ “Rien en lui ne faisait présager une de ces natures privilégiées appelées à prendre rang parmi les artistes célèbres” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 61).

¹² “Il entra dans la vie militante d’artiste et y eut de pénibles débuts” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 62).

¹³ In addition to Second’s obituary (*L’Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 [4 June 1863]), see Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Prudent (Émile Beune)”; and Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 62-63.

¹⁴ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 62.

finance a professional career.¹⁵ This life was also probably unsatisfying to the budding composer.

In hindsight, it is clear that Prudent's troubles stemmed from several sources, among them his failure to mount a successful public concert, his reputation as a pianist (or lack of one), and finally, his status as a Parisian resident. Second claimed that Prudent was "consumed with the desire to make himself heard in public" around the end of 1834, and he supposedly assisted Prudent in planning the event.¹⁶ Although the precise date of the concert is unknown, Prudent's first debut concert probably took place sometime during January and March 1835, as he would have recognized the winter and spring seasons as the most popular time of year for instrumental concerts.¹⁷ Yet without some kind of artistic or financial capital in his possession, he was unable to create the necessary public event that would make his name known to the elite social circles whose attention he craved. According to Second, "the audience went somewhere else," in spite of the notices published in several papers, and the ticket sales did not even cover the costs of the concert.¹⁸ This approximate date places Prudent's debut sometime during the season in which Liszt re-emerged into public concert life. It also means that within a year of his failure to launch "the militant life" of the concertizing artist, he was supposedly possessed by the inspiration to abandon Paris by the appearance of Thalberg in late 1835.

¹⁵ The daily wage for tradesman in Paris fell between three and five francs per day. Thus Prudent may have earned in one evening as much as some earned in a week. But without knowing how many gigs he played in a week or even a month makes it impossible to guess at what his salary actually may have been; see Lloyd S. Kramer, *Threshold of a New Work: Intellectuals and the Exile Experience in Paris, 1830-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 28.

¹⁶ "Était dévoré du désir de se faire entendre en public" (*L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 [4 June 1863]).

¹⁷ Second also mentioned that the concert was advertised in the journal *Chérubin*, which ceased publication in March 1835.

¹⁸ "Le public alla autre part" (*L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 [4 June 1863]).

Prudent's status as pianist probably did little to help attract an audience to his concert or students to his studio. No reports of his performances exist from this period, but it is possible that the mediocre Conservatoire student made his debut as a lackluster graduate who had been trained as a functional accompanist-pianist, not as a specialist in pianistic fireworks. As a winner of the *premier prix*, Prudent performed inappropriate music for a virtuoso pianist in the highly-publicized annual laureate concert; at the event that could have introduced him as a virtuoso, he appeared onstage with the winner of the women's *premier prix*, Mademoiselle Pascal, to perform a four-hand piece by Czerny, the "Concertante pour le piano sur une barcarolle vénitienne."¹⁹ The program printed in Constant Pierre's documentary history of the Conservatoire suggests that a small group of three singers (one female, two male) may have sung a vocal part of this piece. If so, Prudent cast himself in the subordinate role of the accompanist as well as a performer of women's music—neither of which were desirable labels for a future virtuoso, and neither of which contributed to a successful public benefit concert as a soloist.²⁰

Finally, Prudent also battled a less visible problem in the arena that celebrated almost exclusively virtuosos from abroad: his standing as a local pianist. Although Paris was teeming with French and French-trained pianists, only rarely did they rise to the level of public prestige and virtuoso repute of their foreign counterparts. And Prudent was recognizably French, because his adoptive family hailed from a city in what is now the

¹⁹ *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation, documents historiques et administratifs*, ed. Constant Pierre (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1900), 971. A review in *Le Pianiste* fails to mention the vocal part of the piece, however; see *Le Pianiste*, December 1833. I have not yet located a copy of the score.

²⁰ While Czerny's music was not explicitly feminized during this period, it was associated with a conservative pedagogical approach to the piano. Czerny himself was considered by the French establishment (including Fétis) to be a decent composer but lacking in true genius; see David Gramit, "The Rise and Fall of 'Considerable Talent': Carl Czerny and the Dynamics of Musical Reputation," in *Beyond the Art of Finger Dexterity: Reassessing Carl Czerny*, ed. Gramit (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 236-38.

province of Poitou-Charentes in southwestern France. Any benefit from his extra-Parisian origin was nullified by the fact that he had come to Paris and entered the Conservatoire at such a young age. Whatever his origins, Prudent reached adulthood in the capital city and possessed the manners and habits of a Parisian man.²¹ Most problematic of all was his connection to the Conservatoire, which represented the national French musical heritage and provided an easily-identifiable source for Prudent's knowledge. Unlike the exotic virtuosos from abroad, Prudent was an ordinary Conservatoire laureate. Whether his playing "sounded" French was not the issue at this time; he simply lacked the profile and the momentum that would allow him to construct an appealing public face from *within* the Parisian musical world.

Prudent must have become cognizant of these issues quickly, either in the process of preparing his first public concert or soon after. His actions—leaving Paris for six years, traveling and performing abroad, and cultivating a reputation as the *continueur* of Thalberg—point to a nuanced understanding of contemporary musical politics. This plan of attack also indicates that Prudent was aiming for a career in the limelight; like other successful professional musicians, he crafted a public persona that met contemporary expectations while showcasing his unique skill set. While Fétis and Marmontel attribute Prudent's retreat from Paris to a desire to reform his playing according to Thalberg's model, their attitudes are more reflective of what Prudent advertised upon his return to Paris than any knowledge of his activities before and during his absence.²² On the one hand, it is entirely likely Prudent wanted or needed time and space to reform his piano technique. The

²¹ This may have included his dress and appearance (most men wore stylish hats and kept carefully trimmed facial hair), cigar smoking, and manners of walking and eating; see Kramer, *Threshold of a New World*, 32-33.

²² Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. "Prudent (Émile Beune)"; and Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 62-63.

state of his finances may also have dictated that he leave Paris in order to accomplish this. But, on the other hand, he needed time and distance if he was to re-approach Paris and be taken seriously as a virtuoso. Whatever his reasons for leaving, doing so allowed Prudent to return as a newcomer, arriving to conquer the city as if for the first time.

The Construction of Prudent, “Continueur de Thalberg”

The figure of Thalberg is ubiquitous in both the reception of Prudent’s concert and later biographical accounts of his life. From his supposed influence on the younger pianist’s style to his presence on the very stage of Prudent’s concert, Thalberg and his own public persona shaped at least in part the reception and codification of Prudent as a virtuoso. During his lifetime, Thalberg (1812-1871) was hailed as one of the greatest pianists that Europe had ever seen.²³ Among other things, he was especially renowned for his “singing tone” as well as his exquisite compositions, which were held up by Fétis as a model of artistic vision and elegant virtuosity.²⁴ After his death, however, Thalberg’s compositional and technical contributions soon dissolved under charges that he had been nothing more than a shallow trickster and a bad composer.²⁵

A student of Hummel during his teens, Thalberg launched his career in 1830 with a tour of England and Germany. After several years of criss-crossing Europe in the 1830s, he

²³ On Thalberg, see Ian G. Hominick, “Sigismund Thalberg (1812-1871), Forgotten Piano Virtuoso: His Career and Musical Contributions” (DMA diss., Ohio State University, 1991); and E. Douglas Bomberger, “The Thalberg Effect: Playing the Violin on the Piano,” *Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 198-208. See also a chapter in Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 157-67.

²⁴ See Fétis’s articles in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 4, no. 17 (23 April 1837) and no. 20 (14 May 1837). Fétis saw Thalberg as the founder of a new school of pianism and Liszt as the ultimate representation of one that was ending.

²⁵ Bomberger, “The Thalberg Effect,” 198.

came to Paris in 1836 and overwhelmed French audiences and critics with his tremendous virtuosity on the one hand and his spectacular compositions on the other. In particular, Parisian audiences went wild over his fantasy on themes from Rossini's opera *Moïse et Pharaon* in which he first deployed his famous "three-handed" playing. As Dana Gooley argues, Thalberg's real appeal was not actually the technique of projecting a melody from the middle register while swirling arpeggios covered the rest of the keyboard; rather, it was his ability to imitate the vocal qualities of contemporary Italian opera singing.²⁶ It was this approach that led his contemporaries to proclaim him the head of a new pianistic school and inspired other virtuosos to imitate him.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century histories of the piano define Thalberg exclusively in terms of Liszt.²⁷ To some extent, this comparison stems from the discussion surrounding Thalberg's 1836 debut in Paris, and indeed from his concerts throughout Europe; virtuoso-loving audiences flocked to both pianists' concerts not only to experience their musical performances but also to engage in the debate over which pianist was better. The so-called "duel" of 1837 (in which Liszt sought to challenge Thalberg's position as a top performer and composer) stands as the most notorious example of their rivalry, but the two were often placed in opposition to each other in the press due to their very different playing styles and their very different relationships with Paris.²⁸ A favorite of the opera-loving dilettantes, Thalberg presented a much calmer, less "Romantic" profile, which critics such as Fétis interpreted as a sign of his superiority. Unlike Liszt, whose performances involved the

²⁶ Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24-29.

²⁷ Among others, see Bomberger, "The Thalberg Effect"; Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 183-90; and Reginald G. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Technique*, 3rd ed. (New York: R. B. Luce, 1990), 173-76.

²⁸ For a fascinating cultural reading of the famous event, see Chapter 1 in Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*.

physical manifestation of internal passion and musical drama, Thalberg was cool and collected in his enjoyment of the sound itself.

Thalberg's public persona reflected this same kind of detachment. While Liszt seemed to draw no line between his personal and professional exploits, Thalberg appeared to maintain a reserved and dignified façade at all times. Marmontel later described him as a "man of breeding, endowed with that native distinction which does not always stand in for the best education. The look is proud, the smile fine and benevolent, the head high, carried back like that of a true gentleman."²⁹ In spite of his good breeding (and convenient rumors that he may have been the illegitimate son of an Austrian prince), Thalberg's persona was no less constructed than that of any other virtuoso, but, like Chopin's, it possessed an impenetrable veneer. Although he never resided in Paris for longer than a few months at a time, Thalberg was a favorite with French audiences, and he returned year after year to give concerts there.

It is unclear where the legend that Prudent left Paris in response to hearing Thalberg may have originated, but it probably came from Prudent himself upon his return to Paris in 1842. In his 1863 obituary, Second attributes Prudent's departure to his frustration over the results of his own public concert of 1835.³⁰ And while the reception of his 1842 concerts certainly covered his resemblance to and relationship with Thalberg, this particular story was not reported at that time; only the critic for *Le Ménestrel* even mentioned that Prudent had gone away.³¹ Both Fétis and Marmontel, in their discussions of Prudent's career, nonetheless

²⁹ "Un homme de race, doué de cette distinction native que ne replace pas toujours la meilleure éducation. Le regard était fier, le sourire fin et bien veillant, la tête haute, portée en arrière comme celle d'un vrai gentleman [*sic*]" (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 166).

³⁰ *L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 (4 June 1863).

³¹ *Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 15 (13 March 1842).

pointed to Thalberg's debut performances in 1836 as the straw that broke Prudent's quadrille-playing back.³² Marmontel wrote,

It was in the days of the enthusiasm aroused by Thalberg, in the days of his great successes, that Prudent had the courage to withdraw to the provinces in order to give himself up in meditation to a persevering labor of acquiring the steadiness of mechanics, the warm and colorful execution, which since then have characterized his playing, and also, to tell the truth, to appropriate the seductive qualities of the new master whom he had taken as a model.³³

How Prudent presented himself as the “continuateur de Thalberg,” as one critic called him, depended largely on two related points: first, the rumors swirling around him that he was Thalberg's heir, and second, the sound of his playing.³⁴ Prudent's tactics in hustling attention from Parisian society and the press had been noted by more than a few people, and they apparently had not been received well on all fronts. Escudier prefaced his remarks about Prudent's musical performance on 10 March 1842 by refuting strongly charges that he had “bought his fame with lies, intrigue, or money” and claiming instead that “he won it by his intelligence and his talent.”³⁵ At least some of these rumors involved Prudent's connection to Thalberg, to which the critic from *Le Ménestrel* alluded. Prudent had, he wrote, “perfectly studied the style of Thalberg, whom he had made his banner.”³⁶ Most likely, Prudent either sounded like the iconic pianist, or he played to audiences and critics

³² Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, s.v. “Prudent (Émile Beune),” and Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 63.

³³ “Ce fut à l'époque de l'enthousiasme excité par Thalberg, à l'époque de ses grand succès, que Prudent eut le courage de se retirer en province afin de s'y livrer dans le recueillement à un grand travail persévérant pour y acquérir la sûreté de mécanisme, l'exécution chaleureuse et colorée, qui depuis ont caractérisé son jeu, et aussi, disons-le, pour s'approprier les qualités séduisantes du maître nouveau qu'il avait pris pour modèle” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 63).

³⁴ *Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 9 (30 January 1842).

³⁵ *La France musicale* 5, no. 11 (13 March 1842).

³⁶ “Parfaitement étudié le style *Thalberg*, dont il fait aujourd'hui son drapeau,” (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 15 [13 March 1842]).

who were primed to hear him as such. He himself also encouraged the connection by composing music that incorporated standard hallmarks of Thalberg's music and adopting Thalberg's calm posture at the piano.³⁷

The benefits of attributing an advertised transformation of Prudent's playing to the influence of Thalberg were numerous. From a professional standpoint, Thalberg was one of the most successful virtuosos to penetrate European circles without arousing negative controversy; celebrated as one of the greatest performers and composers of his generation by the musical elite of Paris as well as general concert-going populace, Thalberg was a recognizable and respectable figure for an aspiring virtuoso to invoke in public. Furthermore, both Thalberg's style of composition and his mode of performance possessed distinctive qualities that were easily identifiable by anyone who had heard him perform—his use of the “three-handed” texture, say, his calm posture at the piano, or his ability to invoke the sound of the human voice. By cultivating a few basic similarities, Prudent could frame himself as a Thalbergian artist. And Thalberg himself was apparently open to young pianists doing just that; he could increase his own standing as a man of noble character (a key part of his public persona) by lending a hand to less experienced players. Just as he had endorsed Döhler in 1838, by appearing with him onstage in Paris, so too did he participate in Prudent's re-entry by arranging reciprocal performances of his *Grand Duo* on Bellini's *Norma* at their respective benefit concerts.³⁸ The nature of their collaboration is unclear; they may have met

³⁷ In particular, Prudent incorporated the “three-handed” texture into numerous works, including the works that he performed on his 1842 benefit concerts (the *Lucia* fantasy and *Souvenirs de Beethoven*).

³⁸ Blanchard mentioned a collaboration between Döhler and Thalberg in the former's break-through concert in 1838; see *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 5, no. 16 (22 April 1838). This kind of cooperation among virtuosos was not unique to Thalberg or to Paris. Liszt, for example, appeared with Marie Pleyel on the occasion of her Viennese debut, and his comments imply that he had done so before for other artists; Liszt to Marie d'Agoult, Bratislava, 19 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult Correspondance*, ed. Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 457.

in Brussels or Amsterdam, or mutual acquaintances may have introduced them upon Thalberg's arrival in Paris in March 1842.

How Prudent remodeled his playing during his self-imposed exile is difficult to imagine without descriptions of his playing before 1842. I argue that the more fruitful question is not the nature of his musical development but rather in whether it even mattered if or how Prudent had changed. The possibility that his playing improved after years of hard work is irrefutable; he may have been a flawed pianist in his late teens, and it would be unreasonable to suggest that his style and technique remained static during the six years of his absence. The story that Prudent sequestered himself in order to transform his playing, however, also matches a powerful narrative in musical biography: nineteenth-century accounts of many musicians, be they singers, instrumentalists, or composers, feature a period of seclusion from which the artists emerged as their most creative and sublime selves. Along with that of Prudent, this thread can found in the biographies of Hector Berlioz, Liszt, Maria Malibran, Paganini, and Marie Pleyel, to name just a few.³⁹

When Prudent left Paris in 1836, his identity as a professional musician and a pianist required major adjustment. As a French citizen, a Parisian resident, and a Conservatoire laureate, Prudent was operating at a serious disadvantage. Not only did he lack the tantalizing foreignness of his competition, but he also bore the all-too-familiar stamp of state-sponsored music education. Prudent was far from alone in this; many other French pianists,

³⁹ On Liszt, see Walker, *Franz Liszt: Virtuoso Years, 1811-48*, 129-39. On Berlioz, see David Cairns's account of Berlioz's "idle period" in Italy after winning the Prix de Rome; Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 474-85; on Malibran's long stay in North America and eventual return to Paris, see Howard Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of the Singer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 43-44. She only became famous as a *prima donna* after her return in 1827, due to the growth and maturation of her voice and style during her absence. According to legend, Paganini practiced from a prison cell before he stormed the Parisian stage in 1831; see Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris During the Age of Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 125-26.

such as Alkan, Marmontel, and Camille Stamaty, never found a way to compete directly with the virtuosos from other countries that flooded the French capital.⁴⁰ Prudent, however, managed to adopt the right strategy at the right time, thus ensuring his success in France and beyond. On a surface level, his strategy was simple: he distanced himself from Paris by going into exile in his ancestral home of Angoulême, and he shed the Conservatoire's influence by constructing himself according to the model of the great Thalberg.

For Prudent, the need to create distance from Paris grew out of his decade-long residency and, to a lesser extent, his French nationality. Successful virtuosos in the 1830 were almost always from abroad, which gave them three main advantages. First, foreign cachet could be employed in crafting one's public personae; in the cosmopolitan society of Paris, a fascinating exotic façade could be extremely appealing. Chopin's Polishness was a crucial element of his constructed identity throughout his life; in Paris, for example, the influence of the French sympathy for the Polish cause in the early 1830s impacted Chopin's entry into Parisian musical life.⁴¹ For De Meyer, his (too-close-to-home) Belgian origin was utterly subsumed by his long voyages in Russia in the French reception of his playing. Lesser-known virtuosos from Alexander Dreyschock and Theodor Döhler to George Osborne and Louis Moreau Gottschalk were always identified as foreign—be it German, Irish, or Creole—in the press. For some individuals, the issue of nationality connected to a larger

⁴⁰ The case of Henri Herz offers a fascinating counter-example: a Viennese pianist who arrived in Paris only to remake himself as a Frenchman. In so doing, he opened up some doors (particularly in the salon world) but thus was never taken seriously as a virtuoso. Although he was known as one of Paris's finest pianists, he was also mocked for his relentless stream of popular compositions as well as a variety of money-making schemes. Herz did, however, pursue a lucrative touring career as a virtuoso outside of Paris.

⁴¹ On the significance of Polish politics and his own Polish nationality in Chopin's Parisian debut, see Jolanta T. Pekacz, "Deconstructing a 'National Composer': Chopin and Polish Exiles in Paris, 1831-49," in "Nineteenth-Century Pianism," ed. James Hepokowski and Lawrence Kramer, special issue, *19th-Century Music* 24 (2000): 163-68.

cultural network and had a major impact on the French reception of their playing; for others, just being non-French seemed to suffice.⁴² In the case of Prudent, his nationality did not seem to pose a problem for most of his critics, who either ignored the fact that he was French or simply referred to his roots in the French provinces as if it were another country entirely.⁴³

Second, pianists coming from other countries usually toured Western Europe and the French provinces en route to Paris. The trail through Vienna, various German cities, and the French provinces provided Paris-bound virtuosos with experience in concert organization as well as a running start into the French capital. They usually burst into Paris on a wave of momentum from long tours in Europe, often with months of rave reviews preceding them. Offering not only their unique brands of virtuosity but also foreign accents and tales of faraway lands, virtuosos arriving in Paris found an atmosphere that welcomed the whirlwinds of cosmopolitan excitement in which they traveled. Those who failed to approach Paris in this way found it much more difficult to drum up excitement around their playing. Stephen Heller, for example, embarked on a concert tour initially intended to sweep through Germany to Paris, but illness delayed him for several years in Augsburg. By the time he finally made it to Paris, he had lost the glitter of his earlier performances, and was at a loss as to how best to conquer Parisian society.⁴⁴ Even Liszt, assimilated into the fabric of Parisian musical life in the 1820s, found it necessary to retreat for several years in order to re-emerge with a burst of publicity as the adult post-Paganini superstar of 1835.

⁴² On the cosmopolitan interests of Parisians, see Kramer, *Threshold of a New World*, introduction and Chapter 1.

⁴³ On the construction of Paris and the provinces as separate arenas, see Stéphane Gerson, "Parisian Litterateurs, Provincial Journeys and the Construction of National Unity in Post-Revolutionary France," *Past and Present* (May 1996), 156-57.

⁴⁴ On Heller's life and career, see Stephen Heller, *Lettres d'un musicien romantique à Paris*, ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 1-42.

Finally, coming to Paris from somewhere else allowed virtuosos to downplay or entirely erase the influence of their childhood and adolescent training. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, many biographies instead referred to a fleeting encounter with an iconic figure whose impact inspired the young virtuosos to approach their craft from a fresh angle. For the adult Liszt, it was the twin figures of Beethoven (whom he had met briefly as a child) and the violinist Paganini (who played a completely different instrument). Others tapped Muzio Clementi, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and, later on, Thalberg. Replacing early lessons with rigorous teachers with a narrative of independent study inspired by an icon foregrounded the individuality and natural genius that characterized the Romantic artist in France.⁴⁵

Prudent's movements after leaving Paris in 1836 can only be approximated, but he clearly made an effort to move outside of Paris and outside of France, the end result being his increased profile as a cosmopolitan (if not foreign) performer. Some accounts specifically mention that he first went back to Angoulême, where, while practicing obsessively and “with such ardor,” he also met and married his wife.⁴⁶ After a period in Angoulême, Prudent spent two years teaching piano in Nantes followed by an unspecified period of time in Brussels and Amsterdam.⁴⁷ Most likely, Prudent had moved whatever family he had left back to their home in Angoulême, where the family name might have been known in musical circles due to his father's piano-tuning business and then departed later on an extended concert tour. Reports in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* indicate that he gave concerts in Tours (in March or

⁴⁵ On the individuality of the Romantic artist, see Kerry Murphy, “Liszt and Virtuosity in Paris in the 1830s: The Artist as Romantic Hero,” in *Essays in Honour of David Evatt Tunley*, ed. Frank Calloway (Nedlands, Australia: University of Western Australia, 1995), 92. See also Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 82-83; and Katharine Ellis, “Liszt: The Romantic Hero.”

⁴⁶ “Avec une telle ardeur” (*L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 [4 June 1863]).

⁴⁷ *Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 9 (30 January 1842).

April 1840) and Rennes (in December 1840), possibly en route from Angoulême and Nantes to Brussels and Amsterdam.

These excursions had the overall effect of distancing Prudent from his previous identity as a Parisian student and allowed him to approach the city's musical life from abroad. He shed his Paris-centered person and replaced it with a cosmopolitan profile that more closely matched those exhibited by other virtuosos. Prudent's absence from Paris and his activities in Belgium, Holland, and the French provinces also contributed to a sense of arrival when he did return—a “splash”—that he simply could not have produced from within the city.

Prudent's Parisian Campaign of 1842

The unfolding of Prudent's return to Paris mirrors the debut seasons of other contemporary virtuosos new to Paris. He arrived in December 1841 or January 1842 and immediately tapped into pre-existing socio-musical worlds. At least three identifiable circles were open to him, and there may have been others. First, a number of Prudent's acquaintances from his years at the Conservatoire had remained in Paris to build (or continue) their careers, among them Lacombe, Marmontel, Thomas, and Zimmermann. He also re-established contact with individuals such as Second, with whom he had fraternized before his departure. Second in fact claimed to have been one of the first to hear his friend's reformed playing.⁴⁸ And finally, Prudent apparently had connections to Léon and Marie-Pierre-Pascal Escudier, proprietors of the journal *La France musicale*. Though its origins are unclear, this

⁴⁸ Second describes in his obituary Prudent's arrival in his rooms to unveil the results of his labor. Prudent apparently performed his newly-composed fantasy on *Lucia*, destined to become one of his most popular works; see *L'Univers illustré* 6, no. 264 (4 June 1863).

relationship was crucial to Prudent's Parisian campaign and his subsequent successes. *La France musicale* competed with Maurice Schlesinger's *Revue et Gazette musicale* and Henri Heugel's *Le Ménestrel* during the late 1830s and early 1840s. The Escudiers' patronage, splashed across pages of *La France musicale*, reached a significant audience of music-lovers and contributed significantly to the publicity surrounding Prudent's 1842 concerts.

Within weeks of his arrival, Prudent plunged into the flow of Parisian concert life (see Table 5.1 for a summary of his concert appearances during the 1842 season).

Table 5.1: Prudent’s Concert Appearances in Paris, January to April 1842

Late Dec/Early Jan:	Prudent returns to Paris
27 Jan 1842:	<i>La France musicale</i> concert (Salle de St-Honoré)
10 Mar 1842:	First public benefit concert (Érard salon)
21 April 1842:	Thalberg’s public benefit concert; Prudent joins Thalberg for 2-piano fantasy on <i>Norma</i> (Théâtre-Italien, Salle Ventadour)
28 April 1842:	Second public benefit concert; Thalberg joins Prudent for 2-piano fantasy on <i>Norma</i> (Érard salon)

His first publicized appearance took place at a concert sponsored by the Escudiers’ journal. Held on 27 January 1842, the concert elicited the first printed reviews of Prudent’s playing. According to the review of the concert printed in *La France musicale*, this performance was Prudent’s first public appearance in Paris. Though not a major event in Prudent’s career, the concert engendered a tremendous amount of discussion in *La France musicale* due to some problems with reserving a hall. This situation offers a rare view of the non-benefit public concert in which so many pianists participated. The purpose of the concert was apparently to provide musical entertainment for subscribers of *La France musicale*. The vague wording of the concert announcements point toward its exclusivity: not until one week before the concert was the location actually disclosed (referred to previously as “the hall that we have chosen”), and tickets were restricted to two per subscriber.⁴⁹ Initially scheduled for 13 January 1842, the concert was delayed several times, mainly because the number of subscribers had quadrupled. The original location (Salle Herz) was too small due to an influx of last-minute subscriptions, which resulted in some subscribers being denied their supplementary tickets—an apparently unacceptable insult.

⁴⁹ “La salle que nous avons choisie” (*La France musicale* 5, no. 4 [23 January 1842]).

Eventually, however, a move to a hall in the Rue St-Honoré resolved the problem. On 27 January 1842, an impressively large group of 130 musicians performed a varied program for an audience of over five thousand: an unusually large event.⁵⁰ The program included movements of Rossini's *Stabat mater* (then in performance at the Théâtre-Italien), two Weber overtures (from *Oberon* and *Der Freischütz*), several vocal pieces sung by prominent opera singers, and two solo piano works by Prudent. His contribution to this program consisted of his *Souvenirs de Beethoven* and his fantasy on Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Both are extravagant virtuoso works that appeared on Prudent's programs for many years, including his spring benefit concerts. The especially popular *Lucia* fantasy was reprinted several times by the publishing arm of *La France musicale* and had sold over two thousand copies by the time of Prudent's death in 1863.⁵¹

The 27 January 1842 concert worked its magic for Prudent: notices appeared in at least three journals, introducing his name to the public and situating him next to Thalberg in the spotlight. Two of these journals, *La France musicale* and *La Presse*, printed superlative reports of his playing: "a ravishing manner...the marvelous execution made thunderous applause explode."⁵² Both mentioned the excellence of his playing ("a young pianist of the highest merit") and the attractiveness of his compositions ("the most ingenious variations").⁵³

⁵⁰ *La France musicale* 5, no. 11 (13 March 1842).

⁵¹ Founded in 1840, the Escudiers' publishing firm grew out of this journal. It was eventually renamed "Bureau Central de Musique," and it continued as such until 1882 when the company was dissolved and its catalogues split between several other firms; see Anik Devriès and François Lesure, *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1979). On the popularity of Prudent's *Lucia* fantasy, see Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 63. Several of Prudent's compositions were published by the Escudiers in the 1840s.

⁵² "Une manière ravissante...une exécution merveilleuse ont fait éclater des tonnerres d'applaudissemens" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 5 [30 January 1842]).

⁵³ "Jeune pianiste du plus haut mérite" (*La Presse*, 31 January 1842); "Des variations les plus ingénieuses" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 5 [30 January 1842]).

The Escudiers specifically incorporated a reference to Thalberg in their description of Prudent's compositions. A third journal, *Le Ménestrel*, commented on a notice printed in an unspecified daily paper (probably *La Presse* or *Le Commerce*, the two daily papers that printed reviews of Prudent's playing), accusing its editors of being "quick as lightening to shine the spotlight on unknown celebrities" and thus over-exaggerating Prudent's talent.⁵⁴ In particular, the critic at *Le Ménestrel*, resentful of circulating rumors about Prudent's challenge to Thalberg, wrote that the "*prudent* artist" should discount such "extravagant ovations."⁵⁵ This statement presented readers of the musical journal with a challenge: to evaluate Prudent for themselves.

A week later, *La France musicale* announced that this process had already begun, thanks, of course, to their illustrious concert. "The success that Mr. Émile Prudent obtained at the last concert of *La France musicale* had an impact in the salons of Paris. This pianist is in vogue in the *grande monde*."⁵⁶ In the week following the Escudiers' concert, Prudent apparently performed at an exclusive *soirée* given by "one of our richest bankers...Mr. F."⁵⁷ He also played at his former teacher Zimmermann's salon (well-known as a musical hot-spot) and in the private Pleyel salons.⁵⁸ With these appearances, Prudent had laid the groundwork for a public benefit concert. He had attracted attention in the Parisian musical world and made essential contacts with journalists to advertise his concert and with wealthy

⁵⁴ "Prompt comme l'éclair à faire jaillir des célébrités inconnues" (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 9 [30 January 1842]).

⁵⁵ "L'artiste *prudent*...extravagantes ovations" (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 9 [30 January 1842]).

⁵⁶ "Le succès que M. Émile Prudent a obtenu au dernier concert de la *France musicale*, a eu retentissement dans les salons de Paris. Ce pianist est en vogue dans le grand monde" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 6 [6 February 1842]).

⁵⁷ "Un de nos plus riches banquiers...Monsieur F." (*La France musicale* 5, no. 6 [6 February 1842]).

⁵⁸ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 63.

socialites to attend it. Prudent's first public benefit concert was accordingly scheduled for 7 March 1842. In so doing, Prudent followed (probably unknowingly) the path of the young Liszt: arriving in December, giving a high-profile concert in January, and scheduling a solo benefit concert for 7 March.

Two weeks before the projected solo benefit concert, Prudent again performed in a public arena, this time at a benefit concert for the singer Manuela Rossi-Caccia. The concert took place at the Opéra-Comique in the Salle Favart. Escudier again lauded Prudent's efforts: "Émile Prudent is one of the most extraordinary pianists to appear in a truly long time; all that one could require of clarity, elegance, energy, sentiment, nobility, this artist possesses it to the highest degree."⁵⁹ He also advertised Prudent's approaching concert and advised readers that they would be able to judge for themselves should they attend.

Indeed, Prudent's concert would have been highly anticipated by Parisian audiences, not only because of his growing reputation but also because it was strategically located at the beginning of the spring concert season. As journalists remarked every year, March and April found Parisian audiences feverish and overwhelmed by the excitement caused by the arrival of virtuosos and the pianists in particular. A writer for *Le Ménestrel* complained that

It would be difficult for us to follow closely this myriad of concerts of which the posters today cover the walls of Paris...The concert fever has reached such intensity that Mr. Érard could no longer resist the constant solicitations of the pianists and reopened his salon in the Rue de Mail.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ "Émile Prudent est un des pianistes les plus extraordinaires qui aient paru depuis bien long temps; tout ce qu'on peut exiger de netteté, d'élégance, de force, de sentiment, de noblesse, cet artiste le possède au plus haut degré" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 9 [27 February 1842]).

⁶⁰ "Il nous serait difficile de suivre à la course toute cette myriade de concerts dont les affiches couvrent aujourd'hui les murs de Paris...La fièvre des concerts a pris tant d'intensité, que M. Érard n'a pu résister plus long-temps aux instantes sollicitations des pianistes, et a rouvert son salon de la rue du Mail" (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 15 [13 March 1842]).

Among that crowd of pianists was Prudent, whose concert took place in the Érard hall on 10 March 1842, a few days later than initially advertised.⁶¹ A review in *La France musicale* claimed that “everywhere was packed, the rooms, the foyer, and the hallways; we were piled on, barricaded, and heated to thirty degrees above zero.”⁶²

Prudent offered a program stocked with Parisian favorites: a wide variety of music and a cast of popular resident artists (see Table 5.2 for the program).

⁶¹ He may have gone to Lille for a performance in early March. According to one report, he had been invited to perform at a concert for the benefit of the *prima donna* Giuditta Pasta in early March; see *La France musicale* 5, no. 9 (27 February 1842).

⁶² “Tout était comble, les salons, le foyer et les corridors; on était la entassés, barricadés et chauffés à trente degrés au dessus de zero” (*La France musicale* 5, no. 11 [13 March 1842]).

Table 5.2: Prudent's Concert Program of 10 March 1842⁶³

Air de <i>l'Ambassadrice</i> (Aria from <i>L'Ambassadrice</i> by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, sung by Rossi-Caccia)
Deux ravissantes romances de Labarre, <i>Dors, mon Jésus</i> et <i>l'Anneau de Madeleine</i> (Two romances, "Dors, mon Jésus" and "L'Anneau de Madeleine," by Théodore Labarre, sung by Louis Ponchard)
<i>Merci, Monseigneur</i> , Chansonette de Labarre (Song, "Merci, Monseigneur," by Labarre, sung by Marie Potier)
Solo de violoncelle (Cello solo, performed by Émile Rignault)
Deux morceaux d'un très beau quatuor composé par M. Ch. Dancla (Two movement of a string quartet by Charles Dancla, performed by the Dancla brothers)
Performed by Prudent: Trois études (Three etudes [possibly from his 6 <i>études de genre</i> op. 16, 1844]) Un caprice (Caprice [unknown]) Le trio de <i>Guillaume Tell</i> , transposé pour le piano (Trio from Gioachino Rossini's <i>Guillaume Tell</i> , transcribed for piano) La fantaisie sur LUCIA (<i>Grande fantaisie</i> on Donizetti's <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>)

The roster of performers neatly encapsulated Prudent's performance experience in Paris thus far. It included the Opéra-Comique troupe singer Rossi-Caccia, for whose concert Prudent had performed and by whom he was now owed a favor. The other singers also came from the Opéra-Comique, indicating that Prudent may have developed some kind of relationship with the director of the troupe (François-Louis Crosnier) or at least with the singers.

Crosnier's permission (and possibly that of the Département des Beaux-Arts) would have been necessary for these singers to perform outside their contract with the Opéra-Comique.

⁶³ Summarized from the report published in *La France musicale* 5, no. 11 (13 March 1842). The order of the program is unclear from this review.

Rignault and the Dancla brothers had performed at the *France musicale* concert in January. All were well-known figures in Paris and regular participants in local concerts.

The concert was hailed as a success by critics, who penned reviews that introduced Prudent as a legitimate virtuoso, positioned him among Liszt and Thalberg (usually with an emphasis on Thalberg), and paved the way for future public appearances in Paris and beyond. With the sole exception of *Le Ménestrel* (whose editorial board clearly resented any comparison to Thalberg but held out hope for Prudent's future improvement), reviews again praised Prudent's musicianship, technique, and compositions. Most elevated Prudent to the "rank of top pianists" in spite of his relative inexperience in Europe.⁶⁴ *La France musicale* described with rhetorical flourish how Prudent converted the audience's almost skeptical curiosity about this relatively unknown pianist into enthusiasm for his playing:

His name is unknown to everyone; one remains on guard, one strains the ear, one listens, and after ten minutes of the most astonishing execution, one is transported, one applauds, one applauds again, and Émile Prudent is proclaimed one of the most extraordinary pianists of the time.⁶⁵

With such a resounding success under his belt, Prudent found himself with enough capital and public interest for another benefit concert. This was eventually planned for the end of April, an unusually long interval between concerts. The delay may have been due a number of reasons, including previously-booked halls during the concert season or possibly other commitments on Prudent's part. Furthermore, Thalberg had arrived in Paris sometime in March, and the two pianists had embarked on a joint project. Thalberg had recently

⁶⁴ "Au rang des premiers pianistes" (*Le Charivari*, 14 March 1842).

⁶⁵ "Son nom est inconnu de tout le monde; on se tient sur ses gardes, on tend l'oreille, on écoute, et après dix minutes de l'exécution la plus étonnante, on est transporté, on applaudit, on applaudit encore, et Emile Prudent est proclamé un des plus extraordinaires pianistes de l'époque" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 11 [13 March 1842]).

composed a virtuoso extravaganza for two pianos, his *Grand Duo pour deux pianos sur un motif de la Norma de Bellini* opus 12 (published by Colombier in 1842), which he and Prudent presented to the French public together, first at Thalberg's benefit concert of 21 April 1842, then a week later at Prudent's second benefit concert on 28 April 1842.⁶⁶

Much less was reported about this concert, aside from the fact that Thalberg had appeared to reciprocate Prudent's performance of his *Grand Duo* on 21 April 1842. Rave reviews followed, but they are brief and give the distinct impression that any doubts about Prudent had been resolved. This could be due to the fact that Prudent had waited over six weeks to give the second concert, and the debate simply may have run out of steam. Furthermore, Thalberg had just given two concerts within approximately two weeks of each other; given the critics' ongoing fascination with his playing, and their one-dimensional comments after Prudent's second concert, it seems that they were simply caught up in Thalberg's whirlwind. The excitement over Prudent had dissipated since 10 March. Whatever the reason may have been, Prudent's second benefit concert elicited high praise but little specific coverage in the press.

Virtuoso of the *Juste Milieu*? Issues in the Critical Reception

From short notices in *La Charivari*, *Le Commerce* and *Le Courrier des théâtres* to longer articles in the music journals in *La France musicale*, *Le Ménestrel*, and *Revue et Gazette musicale*, Prudent's virtuosity of 1842 was discussed and debated quite broadly. Two related points emerge: first, Prudent's cosmopolitan profile was ignored by some and questioned by

⁶⁶ As I discuss in Chapter 4, this published version of the score acted as a memento of the grand spectacle of Thalberg extending his hand to Prudent in fraternity. The frontispiece reads "exécuté par l'auteur et Prudent au Théâtre-Italien"; see page 205 in Chapter 4.

others; second, his connection to Thalberg, while accepted at face-value by less-involved critics, seemed to enable those who foregrounded his Frenchness to position Prudent as the leader of an alternative (and for Escudier in particular, French) school of virtuosity.

In the presentation and reception of a virtuoso's public persona, there is rarely a significant discrepancy between the two. For example, as I discussed in Chapter 2, both Liszt and his critics constructed Liszt as Mozart's reincarnation, albeit for different reasons. Chopin's self-representation emerged seamlessly from the interplay of context and personal circumstance. In general, reception of virtuoso performances directly corresponds to how individual virtuosos represented themselves on stage and off. In the case of Prudent, however, critics interpreted his artistic identity in a way that fundamentally changed it. To launch his career as a virtuoso in Paris, Prudent revised his profile to appear more cosmopolitan, less French, and not at all Parisian. And by projecting a kinship with Thalberg through pianistic, biographical, and compositional references, he replaced his connections to the Conservatoire with a more standard virtuoso trope. Prudent's critics, however, reflected back a pianist who was suitably cosmopolitan but inherently French, and whose musicianship combined the best qualities of Thalberg's style and the style of his polar opposite Liszt.

The response of Prudent's attempt to create distance from Paris varied. From a professional standpoint, he was able to approach Paris from abroad, which allowed him to enter the city's musical life from a completely new angle and with very few questions about whether he had the right to be there. In this respect, his strategy was successful; without a "splash," the fashionable *Tout Paris* and the musical press may have failed to notice him a second time. Furthermore, some reviewers simply did not engage with the issue at all. Most newcomers to Paris were labeled by their nationality—"un pianiste hongrois" or "le pianiste

d'Allemagne," for example—but the majority of Prudent's reviewers simply did not refer to his nationality. Their omission could reflect some element of Prudent's strategy, as it occurred mainly in journals that printed only short advertisements and/or brief wrap-up notices.⁶⁷ Their words were probably lifted from press releases penned by none other than Prudent, who had obvious reason to minimize his origins; if not, the absence of "français" may indicate that it simply was not part of the discussion.

In other journals, Prudent's nationality opened the door either to skepticism, as in *Le Ménestrel*, or to celebration, as in *La France musicale*. The critics at *Le Ménestrel* were decidedly negative about the comparisons being drawn between Prudent and Thalberg; obviously supportive of the older pianist, they were quick to point out that while Thalberg had conquered all of Europe, the French Prudent had only proven himself in Nantes and the Francophone city of Brussels.

This artist just spent two years in Nantes, where he taught piano with distinction. Then he went to Brussels and obtained honorable successes there too; but from these honorable successes to the universal admiration that Thalberg inspires in the musical respect, it is almost as far as from Nantes to the North of Europe, in the geographical respect.⁶⁸

On the surface, the problem appears to be Prudent's inexperience, but underlying that point is the issue that he had barely ventured beyond the borders of his native France. In *La France musicale*, Léon Escudier confronted head-on Prudent's Parisian background:

If a pianist had nobly won the right to be heard before the Société des Concerts' audience, it is truly Mr. Prudent; everyone knows the successes that he has had this winter in Paris. It is true that Mr. Prudent is neither German, nor Russian, nor

⁶⁷ See articles printed in *L'Écho français* (20 and 25 April 1842) and *Le Courrier des théâtres* (11 March 1842).

⁶⁸ "Cet artiste vient de passer deux années à Nantes, où il professait le piano avec distinction. Puis il s'est rendu à Bruxelles et y a obtenu également des succès honorables; mais de ces succès honorables à l'admiration universelle qu'inspire Thalberg sous le rapport musical, il y a presque aussi loin que de Nantos [sic] au Nord de l'Europe, sous le rapport géographique" (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 9 [30 January 1842]).

English, nor Italian. He is quite simply French, and, furthermore, a student of the Conservatoire.⁶⁹

According to Escudier, Prudent would have been an ideal candidate to perform at this concert, because members of the flagship Société des Concerts du Conservatoire orchestra were required to prove their French nationality and their current or prior involvement with the academy.⁷⁰ As a French Conservatoire laureate, Prudent could be claimed as a French pianist, and, as such, a superior alternative to non-French competitors Liszt and Thalberg. Positioning Prudent as the ideal middle ground was clearly Escudier's agenda in 1842. In its early years, *La France musicale* championed Italian music, a topic often excluded from the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, but hints of its later passionately nationalist program emerge in such cases as Prudent's. In the 1850s and 1860s, both *La France musicale* (under the direction of Marie Escudier) and a new journal, *L'Art musical* (under the direction of Léon Escudier), would become increasingly focused around the promotion of French music.⁷¹

The reception of Prudent as a Thalbergian virtuoso divided journalists into two camps. On one side were a handful of critics who simply presented Prudent as a brother or heir to Thalberg. These notices responded to press releases (probably written by Prudent) that advertised his upcoming benefit concert on 28 April 1842 with the special appearance by Thalberg. Most were enthusiastic about their reciprocal performances of Thalberg's *Grand Duo*. In the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, Henri Blanchard praised their "fraternal combat" and

⁶⁹ "Si un pianiste a conquis noblement le droit de se faire entendre devant le public de la société des concerts, c'est bien M. Prudent; tout le monde connaît les succès qu'il a eus cet hiver à Paris. Il est vrai que M. Prudent n'est ni allemand, ni russe, ni anglais, ni italien. Il est tout bonnement Français, et de plus, élève de Conservatoire" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 14 [3April 1842]).

⁷⁰ D. Kern Holoman, *The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, 1828-1967* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 24.

⁷¹ On *La France musicale*, see Devriès and Lesure, *Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français*, s.v. "Escudier."

pointedly noted that he preferred to see two pianists working to a joint purpose—possibly a dig at Liszt’s notorious challenges to Thalberg in 1836 and 1837.⁷² Even Berlioz admitted that his initial skepticism about Prudent’s gambit had been unfounded after hearing the duo at Thalberg’s concert:

Mr. Prudent had committed, in his second concert, the apparent imprudence of playing a duet for two pianos with his Majesty Thalberg the First, but he displayed in this audacious struggle enough talent that several listeners might be excused for asking, at hearing of diverse well-cast traits: “From whose hands did that come?”⁷³

Le Ménestrel printed the only blatantly critical article about Prudent’s playing, apparently in response to claims (made by Prudent or other journalists) that Prudent was the new Thalberg. To begin, the editors published the 30 January 1842 article questioning the current rumors that Prudent could compete with Thalberg. After the first concert, a much more pointed review appeared. While this journalist agreed that Prudent was a “skilled pianist” with a “very beautiful execution,” he did not find that Prudent’s style could be compared to Thalberg’s.⁷⁴

There is breadth, brilliance, and solidity in his manner; his playing is generally clear, but it lacks something in articulation and often in well-chosen and well-placed nuances...He acquired a remarkable technical execution...but it remains to him in the future to create for himself an individuality and to listen to and to perform a lot of music.⁷⁵

⁷² “Ce combat fraternel” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 9, no. 18 [1 May 1842]).

⁷³ “M. Prudent avait, au second concert, commis l’apparente imprudence de jouer un duo pour deux pianos avec sa majesté Thalberg 1er, mais il a dans cette lutte audacieuse déployé assez de talent pour que quelques auditeurs fassent excusables de demander, à l’audition de divers traits bien lancés: ‘De quelles mains part celui-là?’” (*Journal des débats*, 26 April 1842).

⁷⁴ “L’habile pianiste...une fort belle exécution” (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 15 [13 March 1842]).

⁷⁵ “Il y a de la largeur, du brillant et du solide dans sa manière; son jeu est généralement net, mais il manque peut-être d’articulation et souvent de nuances bien senties et bien placées...Il a acquis une exécution mécanique remarquable; mais il lui reste désormais à se créer une individualité, et à entendre et à faire lui-même beaucoup de musique” (*Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 15 [13 March 1842]).

In part, he blamed Prudent's isolation for the defects in his playing and diagnosed him with the need for experiencing more music in order to create a more unique and interesting sound.

After the second concert, *Le Ménestrel's* critic rendered his final judgment:

Here then is Mr. Prudent decidedly classified, not only among artists of talent, but that which is more difficult, among well-known talents. It is now only a question of supporting this position. We believe that with some work and perseverance, a little more softness in the execution...Mr. Prudent must shine one day in the rank of our top pianists.⁷⁶

Some critics—namely in *La France musicale*, the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, and *Le Charivari*—took Prudent's surface resemblance to Thalberg one step further by positioning him as the head of a new school. This is most clearly expressed by Escudier's reviews in *La France musicale*. After Prudent's concert on 10 March, for example, he wrote:

How to give you an idea of this pianist's execution? He brings grace together with the most perfect purity, and power together with the secret of the most arduous difficulties; he is neither Liszt nor Thalberg, he is PRUDENT; this is to say that he has a style of execution all his own.⁷⁷

Escudier then continued with a more detailed discussion of Prudent's style, which emphasized Prudent's ability to combine the best qualities of Liszt ("these indefinable *tours de force*") and Thalberg ("these songs so varied, so melodious, so tender").⁷⁸ His program throughout the 1842 season centered around the argument that Prudent was the ideal virtuoso by virtue of his extraordinary talent and his nationality. Unlike fellow Conservatoire

⁷⁶ "Voilà donc M. Emile Prudent décidément classé, non seulement parmi les artistes de talent, mais, ce qui est plus difficile, parmi les talents reconnus. Il ne s'agit plus maintenant que de soutenir cette position. Nous croyons qu'avec du travail et de la persévérance, un peu plus de moëlleux dans l'exécution, des nuances mieux senties, et surtout en tâchant de se créer un individualité, M. Prudent doit briller un jour au rang de nos premiers pianistes" *Le Ménestrel* 9, no. 22 [1 May 1842]).

⁷⁷ "Comment vous donner une idée de l'exécution de ce pianiste? Il réunit à la grâce la pureté la plus parfaite, et à la puissance le secret des difficultés les plus ardues; il n'est ni Liszt, ni Thalberg, il est PRUDENT; c'est dire qu'il a un genre d'exécution à lui" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 11 [10 March 1842]).

⁷⁸ "Ces tours de force indéfinissable; quand on a entendu ces chants si variés, si mélodieux, si tendres" (*La France musicale* 5, no. 11 [10 March 1842]).

laureates Alkan, Marmontel, and Stamaty, Prudent had increased his cosmopolitan profile by leaving town. This gave critics, Escudier in particular, the opportunity to consider him as a Frenchman without damaging his virtuoso credentials. And after twenty years of foreign virtuosos ruling the Parisian stage, Escudier was more than ready to exalt in the dominance of the national school, which combined the best of France and the best of the rest of Europe.

Similar comments about Prudent's ability to unite seemingly opposing skills stand out from the other two journals as well. In *Le Charivari*, we read:

This young artist has created, so to speak, a new path in his art; he has made the piano sing almost like a cello. His talent, like that of certain other famous pianists, does not reside entirely in the energy and agility of his articulations...in the middle of the accompaniment's embroideries, the song stands forth always clean, vibrant, smooth.⁷⁹

In other words, amid the Lisztian tumult shone Prudent's Thalbergian vocality. Blanchard chimed in as well, marveling at how Prudent makes the piano "a brother in melody to the king of instruments by his legato style" (a clear reference to Thalberg's vocality) and "son of the orchestra by his harmonic power" (an equally clear reference to Liszt's famed ability to create an orchestral sound at the piano).⁸⁰

All three of these reviewers couched their comments in a way that resonated with a central political and aesthetic concept of the July Monarchy: the *juste milieu*, or the middle ground. The catchword of Louis-Philippe's regime, the *juste milieu* in politics represented the ideal balance of power between absolute monarchy and popular rule.⁸¹ Although some

⁷⁹ "Ce jeune artiste a créé pour ainsi dire une nouvelle voie dans son art; il est parvenu à faire chanter le piano presque à l'égal d'un violoncelle. Ainsi son talent, comme celui de certains autres pianistes célèbres, ne réside pas tout entier dans la vigueur et l'agilité des articulations...au milieu des broderies de l'accompagnement le chant se détache toujours net, vibrant, suave" (*Le Charivari*, 14 March 1842).

⁸⁰ "Frère en mélodie du roi des instruments par le style lié, et fils de l'orchestre par la puissance harmonique" (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 9, no. 18 [1 May 1842]).

⁸¹ Martyn Lyons, *Post-Revolutionary Europe, 1815-1856* (New York: Macmillan, 2006), 128-31.

scholars question whether the July Monarchy actually attempted to achieve it, the phrase itself was familiar to intellectuals of the 1830s and 1840s, thanks to the political commentary and pointed caricatures published in newspapers.⁸² *Juste-milieu* philosophy rejects excess and extreme in favor of compromise and moderation, which in aesthetic terms, was translated by statesman François Guizot as the mediation between “classic form” and “romantic coloration and themes.”⁸³ The music critic Fétis, who was strongly influenced by the aesthetics of *juste-milieu* philosopher Victor Cousin, also argued for a balance between the past styles and the present innovation.⁸⁴ A nationalist tone colored the writings of both Fétis and Cousin, calling for respect for French traditions and the character of French art.⁸⁵ For Fétis, this invoked elements of eighteenth-century Classicism (elegance, proportion, and moderation) and elements of contemporary music theory (especially chromatic harmony and extended form).

⁸² Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution, 1815-1848* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 324-25.

⁸³ Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution*, 275.

⁸⁴ Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834-80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33-45.

⁸⁵ On Cousin’s writings, see James W. Manns, *Reid and his French Disciples: Aesthetics and Metaphysics* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 59-107. On national affinity, see p. 105.

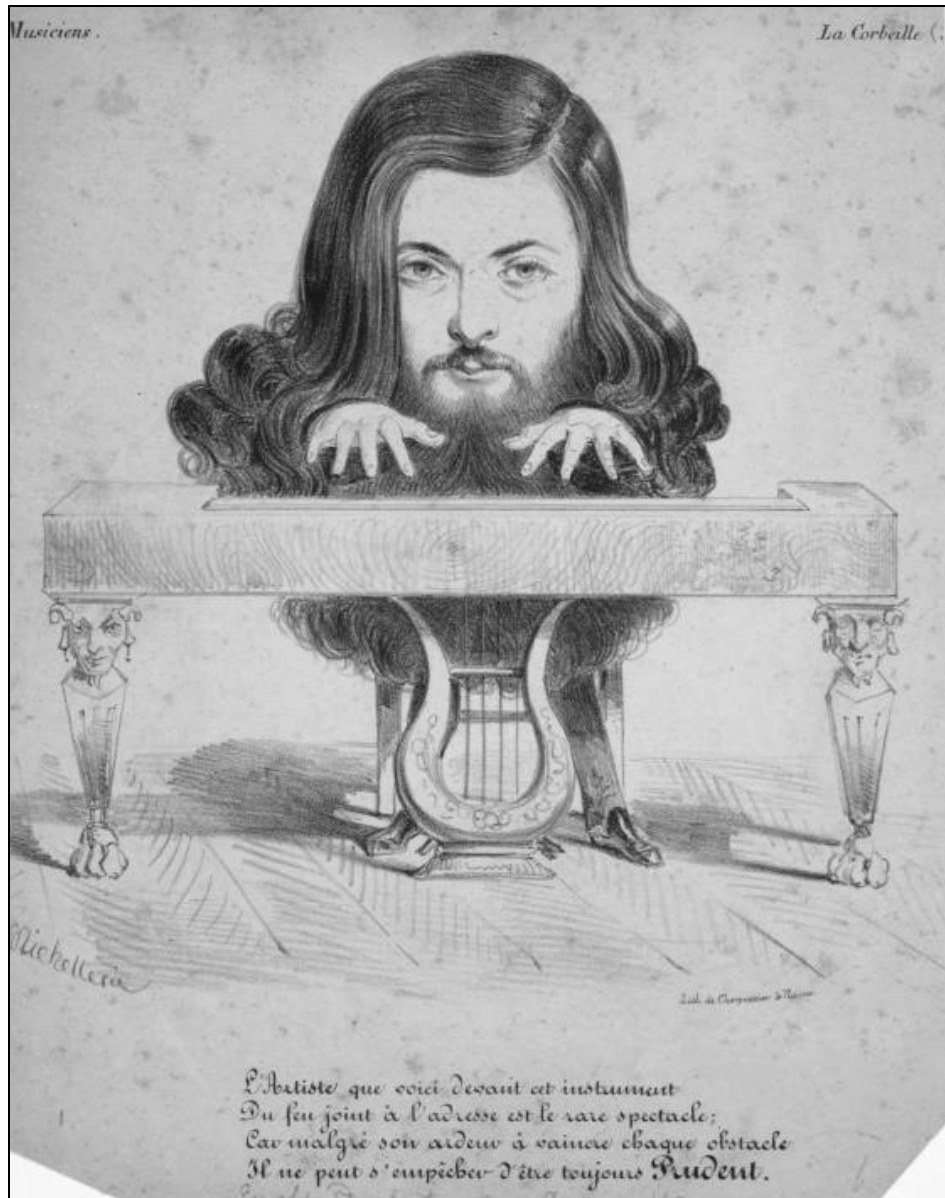


Figure 5.1: Prudent at the Keyboard
 (New York Public Library, Music Division, Joseph Muller Collection of Music and Other Portraits)

This sketch originally appeared in the fashionable journal *La Corbeille*. The inscription reads: “The artist who here before this instrument / Joins fire and skill is the rare spectacle; / Since in spite of his ardor to vanquish each obstacle / he cannot help but always be Prudent” (L’Artiste qui voici devant cet instrument / Du feu joint à l’adresse est le rare spectacle; / Car malgré son ardeur à vaincre chaque obstacle / Il ne peut s’empêcher d’être toujours Prudent). Although the date of this publication is unknown, it nonetheless resonates with the *juste-milieu* rhetoric of Prudent’s critics.

In this context, Prudent's personal brand of virtuosity offered a fascinating *mélange* of *juste milieu* possibilities for his critics to consider. His playing suitably bridged the seemingly incompatible styles of Liszt and Thalberg, both in terms of sound—combining orchestral power with operatic vocality—and in terms of presentation—combining fiery Romantic passion with aristocratic reserve. Later in his career, Prudent would be depicted as a great bear of man playing in a refined way on the piano: a Lisztian (Romantic) approach smoothed out through a Thalbergian (Classical) presentation. This portrait is also evident in the sketch pictured in Figure 5.1. Better yet, Prudent provided a compromise between the international virtuoso and the French Conservatoire pianist; received as a cosmopolitan performer—in the same vein as Liszt and Thalberg—Prudent surpassed his competition in the opinion of these critics, because he alone was also French. This was a significant step for French critics, who long since found themselves immobilized by the polarization of the reactionary program of the Conservatoire (nationalism) and the overwhelming popularity of the international virtuoso (cosmopolitanism); or, if considered in political terms, the opposing excesses of the aristocratic establishment and the unruly public.

Over the next two decades, the 1842 positioning of Prudent as a *juste milieu* virtuoso influenced conversations about his pianism and his compositions. In the 1850s, for example, Prudent's compositions were found to combine virtuosity with integrity and introspection—more appealing to the public than Beethoven but more musically sound than the so-called gratuitously virtuosic opera fantasies to which so many critics objected.⁸⁶ In 1862, Oscar Comettant commented at length on Prudent's ability to bridge so many extremes in his style and composition. Prudent, he wrote, “possesses to a supreme degree the qualities which

⁸⁶ Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 155.

constitute in everything the genius of our nation. For this reason, he won the beautiful title of French pianist.”⁸⁷ Comettant continued by discussing point-by-point Prudent’s attributes as a French composer, employing vocabulary associated with eclecticism (Cousin’s philosophy) and the *juste milieu*.

These initial reactions to Prudent’s virtuosity, which positioned him in 1842 as a superior alternative to foreign pianists Liszt and Thalberg, suggest that Prudent’s critics had already begun to evaluate whether he might become a figurehead for French virtuosity and composition in the future. As a representative of the *juste milieu*, even long after Louis-Philippe and his administration had evaporated, Prudent allowed French critics to address what became an increasingly urgent task: defining the strength and superiority of French music and French composers in the constant battle against outside influences. In the 1850s, the threat of Italian music had been resolved—or at least again subsumed by anxieties about German music. French music journals, particularly those run by the Escudier brothers, adopted a militantly nationalist position in order to fight what seemed to be the never-ending battle about national style and the canon. And Prudent, although he appears to have had very little control over or involvement in this discussion, seemed happy to give his critics what they wanted. His compositions published in the 1840s and 1850s, which were all for piano, mixed the opera-based works popular with French audiences with the more abstract genres of the etude, caprice, and *concerto-symphonie*. This, along with his mixed Liszt/Thalberg, virtuoso/composer style, allowed his critics to consider him an exemplary French composer.

On the surface, Prudent’s career after 1842 proceeded much like those of virtuosos, such as Thalberg, who continued to perform in France even after the virtuoso craze had

⁸⁷ “Possède au suprême degré les qualités qui constituent en toute chose le génie de notre nation. Par cette raison, il a conquis ce beau titre de pianiste français” (Comettant, *Musique et musiciens*, 142).

diminished around 1850. He achieved what he presumably had hoped: a sustainable career as a touring pianist and composer. For the next twenty years, he concertized throughout Europe as a sought-after, highly-acclaimed virtuoso, whose performances were as popular as his compositions. Much like Liszt, Chopin, and his other virtuoso colleagues, Prudent had accomplished this through a combination of strategy and good luck. There was an opening in Paris for a French virtuoso, and critics identified Prudent as a good match for the position. But it may not have happened if he had not been able to re-frame his virtuosity to more closely match the typical virtuoso profile, which, by the late 1830s, was easily identifiable by his sex, national origin, and individuality. By leaving Paris and claiming the Austrian (non-French) Thalberg as his idol, Prudent was able take the Parisian stage by storm in a way that his colleagues—chief among them Alkan—had thus far failed to do. As I shall consider in Chapter 6, not only Prudent benefited by his successes: they also provided an opening through which other French pianists could enter the virtuoso arena in Paris.

Chapter Six

“ONE PIANO AND ONE PIANIST”: GENDER AND EXCEPTIONALITY IN MARIE PLEYEL’S TRIUMPH OF 1845

On the first of April 1845, the pianist Marie Pleyel threw down her gauntlet to the elite piano virtuosos who prowled the stages of Paris. By the time she left town one month later, she had swept the field in what one critic called the “*tournoi pianistique*,” becoming in effect the first woman to compete successfully in Paris on the same level as Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin, Sigismond Thalberg, and the other internationally-acclaimed virtuosos so beloved in Europe.¹ How she accomplished this feat offers insight into Parisian musical life in the 1840s, where gender and national identity continued to play powerful roles in the construction of any artistic career. As I have shown in previous chapters, a triumphant virtuoso demonstrated extreme technical skill, and he was usually a man from abroad, distinguished by his carefully crafted identity as, for example, the Romantic Pole languishing in exile or the dashing cosmopolitan Hungarian. To penetrate the ritualistic, gendered world of virtuoso pianism in Paris, Pleyel constructed a public persona that established on the one hand a valid claim to the title of virtuoso through performance choices and public presentation, while, on the other, navigating the restrictive social codes that prescribed her behavior as a woman. In this arena, the sheer exceptionality of musical skill associated with the foreign, male virtuoso in 1840s Paris

¹ *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 19 (6 April 1845).

presented Pleyel with a framework within which to celebrate publicly her own exceptionality as a female French-born virtuoso.²

Pleyel's approach to the Parisian stage in 1845 and the subsequent reception of her playing illuminate key aspects of both the figure of the piano virtuoso and the social and musical contexts that shaped it. My purpose in this chapter is threefold: first, to restore Pleyel to the history of nineteenth-century musical life; second, to investigate her strategies as a professional musician with a specific focus on how she dealt with the issue of her sex; and finally, to examine how her virtuosity was received by her Parisian critics. Once ranked among the top performers and pedagogues in Europe by her peers, the former "queen of the pianists" and her career have since been reduced to historical gossip and rendered irrelevant to studies of mid-nineteenth-century music. As my examination of her career will show, Pleyel's strategies of self-representation throw into relief the gendered structure of musical life during the nineteenth century and therefore contribute a vital perspective in the study of July Monarchy France. As a pianist, Pleyel earned the enthusiastic admiration of her critics, but as a woman, she challenged their entrenched views of virtuosity, musicianship, and femininity.

² On the rhetoric of exceptionality in the context of women artists, see the introductory chapter in Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

From “Mademoiselle M.” to Madame Pleyel: Pleyel’s Musical Career

A close reading of the events in the spring of 1845 brings into focus an intriguing musician who made a significant contribution to French nineteenth-century music, but whose story has languished in the footnotes of music history since her death in 1875.³ Today, Pleyel may be known best as the woman who so cruelly broke Hector Berlioz’s heart and caused him nearly to forfeit the Prix de Rome, or as the shadowy lover who may have come between Chopin and Liszt.⁴ Pleyel’s overall approach to the concert stage, in which her femininity played a role, at first glance seems to validate Berlioz’s caricature of a scheming flirtatious woman, and it eventually led scholars to discount and even ignore her presence in mid-nineteenth-century musical life.⁵

Yet her international performing and teaching career spanned over fifty years, and she interacted on equal professional footing with many iconic artistic figures of the nineteenth century. Born in Paris in 1811, Camille Marie Denise Moke studied with a succession of

³ Published sources on Pleyel’s life and musicianship include:

1) English language studies, namely Rita Benton’s entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2000), 19:923; and Lisa Yui’s recent study: “Marie Pleyel” (DMA diss., Manhattan School of Music, 2005); 2) nineteenth-century biographies, including an entry in François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860-1865), s.v. “Pleyel (madame Marie-Félicité-Denise)”; and a chapter in Antoine Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres: silhouettes et médaillons* (Paris: A. Chaix et Cie, 1878), 70-78; and 3) biographical studies of Hector Berlioz, particularly David Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist, 1803-1832* (London: Cardinal, 1990); and Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

⁴ See Berlioz’s famous account of the end of his romance with “Mademoiselle M.”: Berlioz, *Memoirs of Hector Berlioz from 1803 to 1865*, ed. Ernest Newman, trans. Rachel Holmes (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 125-32. Also, a vaguely suggestive passage in one of Liszt’s letters is often employed as proof of an assignation between Liszt and Pleyel—in Chopin’s apartment no less—and as a possible reason for the growing coolness between Liszt and Chopin in the later 1830s. Liszt to Marie d’Agoult, Vienna, 9 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d’Agoult Correspondance*, ed. Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 448 and 449n7.

⁵ This one-dimensional view of Pleyel appears even in some feminist scholarship. In her biography of Clara Schumann, for one, Nancy Reich paints Pleyel as a flashy and shallow coquette to emphasize Schumann’s serious (and therefore more admirable) approach to the concert stage and to music in general; see Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 254 and 276-78.

well-known, locally based pianists, all of whom hailed from the pianistic school of post-Classical brilliance.⁶ Identified from an early age as a prodigy, she first studied with Jacques Herz, who, like his famous younger brother Henri, specialized in teaching wealthy amateurs, namely women and children. Pleyel then worked with Ignaz Moscheles in the early 1820s and with Friedrich Kalkbrenner beginning in 1824. Like the Herz brothers, both Moscheles and Kalkbrenner were fashionable teachers in Paris as well as popular figures on the concert stage. In the 1820s, both men occupied positions among the top virtuosos in Europe, but it was as a student of Kalkbrenner that Pleyel became known in Paris and Brussels, where she made her debut with a “grand concert vocal et instrumental” at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie on 3 October 1825.⁷ The program included typical virtuoso fare of the 1820s: a concerto by her teacher as well as two unidentified works, a fantasy and a set of variations.⁸ This program resembles Liszt’s debut concert program of 1824 in several major respects, right down to announcing her pedigree by performing a work composed by her teacher and offering a variety of vocal and instrumental works.⁹ She did not, however, improvise as Liszt did, because it would have been inappropriate for any woman, especially a young one, to do so in public. Though few descriptions of her playing exist from this period, her repertoire—mainly works by Kalkbrenner and Hummel—and later accounts of her technique

⁶ For the sake of consistency, I will refer to Camille Moke by her married name, Marie Pleyel, which was the name she used professionally during most of her career. I adopt this approach from Katharine Ellis, “Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 353-85.

⁷ Ernest Closson and Charles Van den Borren, *La Musique en Belgique du moyen age à nos jours* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1950), 412.

⁸ Closson, *La Musique en Belgique*, 412.

⁹ On Liszt’s 1824 concert, see Chapter 2.

suggest that her approach to the keyboard reflected the finger-centric, *jeu-lié* pedagogy of her teachers.

In Paris, Pleyel appeared mainly behind closed doors until the spring of 1828, at which time she gave an exclusive semi-private concert in the Salle Pleyel in February and performed in one of the *concerts spirituels* during Holy Week in early April.¹⁰ By late 1829, she was working as a private piano tutor for various well-off Parisian families and in Madame Daubrée's Institut Orthopédique, an elite school for physically handicapped girls located in the fashionable Marais neighborhood.¹¹ Here she met both Ferdinand Hiller and Berlioz, to whom she became engaged in 1830.¹² The engagement was famously broken when she married the much-older piano manufacturer Camille Pleyel on 5 April 1831.¹³ During her marriage, Pleyel continued to teach privately in Paris, although she appeared only rarely in organized concerts.¹⁴

Four years later, the marriage ended when Camille Pleyel applied for and obtained a legal order of separation in the third quarter of 1835.¹⁵ The two remained separated until his death in 1855. No direct documentary evidence exists to illuminate the circumstances

¹⁰ On the 1820s *concerts spirituels* in Paris, see Janet Rittermann, "Les Concerts spirituels à Paris au début du XIXe siècle," *Revue Internationale de Musique Française* 16 (1985): 79-94.

¹¹ Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, 121-24.

¹² Benton, "Pleyel, Marie," 923. I have deliberately chosen not to engage with Berlioz's account of his relationship with Pleyel. Berlioz biographers (see n3, this chapter) have thoroughly pressed the issue, revealing plenty of reasons to exclude Pleyel from music history on Berlioz's behalf. However badly she may have treated him, one unfortunate youthful love affair is no reason to condemn Pleyel's entire career.

¹³ Benton, "Pleyel, Marie," 923.

¹⁴ Benton, "Pleyel, Marie," 923. This is hardly surprising, given that married women in France seldom performed in public.

¹⁵ Like most sources, Yui suggests that that Marie, not Camille, Pleyel was at fault for their estrangement; see Yui, "Marie Pleyel," 65.

surrounding their marriage. How Camille Pleyel had come to marry a young woman half his age and engaged to another man, only to pursue a separation from her after four years, remains a mystery.¹⁶ The prevailing story, promulgated largely by Berlioz biographers, lays the blame at the door of Marie Pleyel's mother, who supposedly bullied her daughter into marrying the wealthy pillar of Parisian musical society, and at the feet of Marie Pleyel herself, who from the start apparently chose to be unfaithful to her husband.¹⁷ If, as historical gossip would have us believe, Camille Pleyel's tolerance for his wife's infidelities ended after one of her many lovers beat her publicly in the street, then Marie Pleyel may indeed have found herself unwelcome in Paris and virtually penniless in the fall of 1835.¹⁸ But she did not break off all contact with the Pleyel family even after her departure from Paris, and the couple was never legally divorced. Camille Pleyel's sister, for example, attended Marie Pleyel in May 1845 when she returned to Brussels on the occasion of her mother's death. When Camille Pleyel himself died in 1855, his estate was eventually settled on Marie Pleyel and her daughter.

Shortly after the break with her husband, Marie Pleyel, accompanied by her mother, left Paris and embarked on three years of travel in Germany and Belgium. She performed very little during this period and apparently not at all in public, rendering her movements difficult to trace. By November 1835, she and her mother had reached Berlin, where Fanny

¹⁶ A common link between Marie Pleyel and Camille Pleyel was Friedrich Kalkbrenner, who may have introduced the pair. (No documentary evidence supports a claim that Kalkbrenner engineered a match between his student and his business partner, but, as Marie Pleyel's teacher, he is the most likely person to have arranged her early concerts in the Pleyel salons and to have presented her to Camille Pleyel. On Kalkbrenner's relationship with the Pleyel firm, see Chapter 3.)

¹⁷ See for example, Cairns's account of the Moke-Berlioz engagement; Cairns, *Berlioz*, 1:125-32.

¹⁸ For a translation of a letter from Meyerbeer to his wife in which he describes the scene, see Yui, "Marie Pleyel," 65n11.

Hensel heard her play, most likely in a private salon-like setting.¹⁹ Because Pleyel did not launch her full-scale campaign as a virtuoso until 1840, and because no mention of her playing appears in the local press in 1835, it is improbable that she gave a public concert in Berlin (or elsewhere) at the time. From Berlin, Pleyel made her way to Hamburg with her mother, where the two lived for at least the next two-and-a-half years. Belgian census records of 1846 indicate that she gave birth to a daughter called Marie Moke in Hamburg on 5 October 1836.²⁰ Around the end of 1838, Pleyel settled in Liège, Belgium, before embarking on a yearlong concert tour through Western Europe.

Very few accounts mention Pleyel's musical activities between 1836 and 1839. One exception, Alexandre Dumas's colorful memoirs of his travels in Belgium (*Une aventure d'amour*, 1860), offers an explanation of her whereabouts.²¹ The episode about Pleyel appears to be highly exaggerated, rendering Dumas's text an obviously questionable source of information. The disparate and difficult nature of sources for this female virtuoso, however, makes Dumas's memoirs a refreshing, if biased, alternative to Berlioz's. Dumas depicts Pleyel as an anguished and starving artist, whose severe financial troubles deprived her of a piano and consequently the means to earn a living or, more importantly, to exercise her musical gifts. As fate (and Dumas) had it, Pleyel encountered a Hamburg musical instrument dealer, who invited her to try his pianos. She improvised a piece inspired by her

¹⁹ Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn, Berlin, 18 November 1835, in *Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, ed. Marcia J. Citron (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1987), 192.

²⁰ While the paternity of Pleyel's daughter is not specified in Belgian records, the deliberate correction of the child's name from "Marie Pleyel" to "Marie Moke" confirms that she was not the child of Camille Pleyel. See census records for 1846 housed in Brussels, St-Josse-ten-Noode, Maison communale. Yui suggests that the wealthy German merchant George Parish, long-time friend of Liszt and paramour of Pleyel, was the father; see Yui, "Marie Pleyel," 66-67.

²¹ Alexandre Dumas, *Une Aventure d'amour* (Paris: Plon, 1985), 30-32. For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Yui, "Marie Pleyel," 76-78.

suffering, which moved the shop owner to subsidize two concerts, the profits from which saved Pleyel from starvation and in effect restored her genius to the world. Dumas's romanticized approach aside, his portrayal of Pleyel as financially insolvent and musically inactive is indeed plausible, particularly as there is no record in the press of any concerts (public or private) dating from this period.

In January 1839, Pleyel arrived in St. Petersburg, where she gave several concerts over the course of eight or nine months. These performances marked the beginning of a thirteen-month concert tour in Europe that included also Leipzig, Dresden, Vienna, Liège, and Brussels (see Table 6.1 for the itinerary of this tour). The St. Petersburg stage of the tour laid a crucial foundation for her future success in Germany and Vienna, and eventually Paris. First, Pleyel accumulated approximately 50,000 rubles from her public concerts, enough money to finance the rest of the tour and to support her family in luxury for several years.²² Second, she met Thalberg in St. Petersburg, an encounter that seems to have been significant to her success in Germany and beyond. Not only did she hear his playing, but she also competed with him in the press. This was her first public showdown with a male virtuoso, and she emerged from it as the victor—much as she would do in Vienna and Paris later. This contest is an indication that Pleyel was successfully operating on a similar level as other international superstars as early as 1839. At the end of her sojourn in St. Petersburg, J. S. Guillaou, the music critic for the French-language weekly paper *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, pronounced her to be a finer musician than Thalberg and his equal in technique

²² Liszt to d'Agoult, Bratislava, 19 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult Correspondance*, 457.

as well.²³ According to Liszt, news of her triumph over Thalberg accompanied her through the rest of the tour.²⁴

Later, Antoine Marmontel pointed to this period as a pivotal moment in her development as a musician, claiming that “during the long period of her travels in Germany and Russia, the frequent hearing of Liszt and Thalberg exercised a decisive effect on her style.”²⁵ The influence of Liszt’s bravura and Thalberg’s sound quality transformed Pleyel into one of the “masters of modern virtuosity.”²⁶ Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, projecting such a transformation was a commonly-employed method of achieving artistic independence from the Parisian musical establishment. Both Kalkbrenner and Émile Prudent re-cast themselves as virtuosos by immersing themselves in the performance and technique of another virtuoso—for Kalkbrenner, it was Muzio Clementi, for Prudent, Thalberg as well—and reforming their own technique and sound in seclusion. In the case of Pleyel, as I suggest below, this gambit was an important element of framing oneself as an international public virtuoso.

²³ *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, 12 September 1839.

²⁴ Liszt to d’Agoult, Bratislava, 19 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d’Agoult Correspondance*, 457.

²⁵ “Pendant la longue période de ses voyages en Allemagne et en Russie, l’audition fréquente de Liszt et de Thalberg exerça une action décisive sur son style” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 73).

²⁶ “Maîtres de la virtuosité moderne” (Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 73).

Table 6.1: Pleyel's Concert Tour 1839-40²⁷

St. Petersburg
Arrival: January 1839
Concerts: 4 concerts between January to early September
Leipzig
Arrival: 25 October 1839
Concerts: 26 October, 5 November, 7 November
Dresden
Arrival: Mid-November
Concerts: 16 November, 25 November
Vienna
Arrival: 2 December 1839
Concerts: 12 December, 17 December, 5 January 1840

The concert tour continued to Leipzig, Dresden, and Vienna, where Pleyel proceeded to give a series of well-attended and well-received concerts. In Leipzig, she met Friedrich Wieck and Robert Schumann (whose generous account of Pleyel's presence in Leipzig elicited a jealous response from Clara Schumann, herself on tour in Paris).²⁸ She also reconnected with Liszt in Vienna, incurring the wrath of Liszt's mistress Marie d'Agoult by demanding Liszt's aid in navigating Viennese society. After the Vienna concerts of December 1839 and January 1840, she returned to Liège for a final concert before moving with her mother and daughter to Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, a fashionable suburb of Brussels.²⁹

²⁷ These dates are drawn from reviews in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, and the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. In some cases, specific concert dates were not printed in available sources.

²⁸ Yui, "Marie Pleyel," 80-86.

²⁹ Brussels was, in a sense, home to the Moke family, although Pleyel herself had not yet lived there. It was her father's city of origin, and he had resided there throughout most of his daughter's life. In 1840, Pleyel settled with her daughter in a home around the corner from her parents; see census records for 1846, Brussels, St-Josse-ten-Noode, Maison communale.

With the momentum of her critical and financial successes in St. Petersburg and Vienna behind her, the next logical step for Pleyel would have been to press on to the French provinces, and eventually Paris and London. She may have planned to do just that. In a letter of late summer 1840, Liszt referred her “Paris projects and concerts in the Rue du Mail” and assured her that she would have “an enormous, complete success” if she were to perform there immediately.³⁰ But for reasons unknown, Pleyel did not embark on the Paris tour until late 1844. Instead, she appears to have restricted her musical activities to local concerts in Brussels and other nearby Belgian cities during the early 1840s. During this period, she established her status as a Belgian citizen and was granted permanent residency in Brussels in 1842.³¹

The long tour of 1839-40 resulted on the one hand in financial security for the Moke-Pleyel family and in a solid musical reputation for Pleyel herself on the other. Her concerts in St. Petersburg alone had yielded enough funds for the family to live well for several years in Saint-Josse-ten-noode, where the census lists Pleyel as a separated (but not divorced) women of independent means. She may well have postponed the Paris tour until she needed to augment her savings. And in terms of her career, the first tour had already established Pleyel as an international piano virtuoso and a rival of such iconic figures as Thalberg and Liszt. This reputation, magnified by favorable reports of her personality and physical appearance, provided a base for future concert tours.

When Pleyel launched the second concert tour in late 1844, her reputation as an outstanding virtuoso preceded her. This tour was most likely scheduled to sweep from

³⁰ Liszt to Marie Pleyel, Paris, December 1840, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult Correspondance*, 679. “Que deviennent vos projets de Paris et vos Concerts rue du Mail?...Vous aurez un succès énorme, complet.”

³¹ See census records for 1846, Brussels, St-Josse-ten-Noode, Maison communale.

Brussels to Paris in time for the spring concert season in 1845, and then to London for the summer season.³² Such a schedule would have landed Pleyel in both cities for the high points of the French and British concert seasons. A letter of early April 1845 suggests that Pleyel did not plan to stay in Paris after her public concerts in April: “I do not believe that I will be here in a month,” she wrote to the French diva Laure Cinti-Damoreau to explain that she would be unable to perform on Cinti-Damoreau’s behalf in May.³³ After performing two of three scheduled concerts in Paris, Pleyel returned briefly to Brussels to attend her mother’s funeral in early May of 1845.³⁴ From Brussels, she then traveled to Bonn, where Liszt had invited her to perform at the Beethoven memorial festival on 13 August 1845. Pleyel’s role in Bonn was a major one: she performed Weber’s *Konzertstück* at the festival’s final concert, at which the royal family was present and at which Liszt’s *Festkantate* was premiered.³⁵ During the fall 1845 and winter 1846, Pleyel gave several concerts in Brussels before departing in May 1846 for London, where she engineered a success that rivaled her triumph in Paris the year before.

This second group of concert tours took place at a crucial moment in her career as a piano virtuoso. Although the first concert tour of 1839-40 had been well received by local

³² This was a common strategy for touring musicians, as the high point of the French concert season occurred in the spring, followed by the high point of the English season in early summer.

³³ Pleyel to Laure Cinti-Damoreau, Paris, Friday evening, Pleyel (Marie), Lettres autographes, no. 11, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. “Je ne crois pas être ici dans un mois, ainsi il ne me sera pas possible de jouer dans le concert dont vous me parlez.”

³⁴ Her mother died on 30 April 1845 in Brussels. Pleyel had already performed two public concerts at the Théâtre-Italien, 1 April and 15 April. A third may have been scheduled for later that month; a letter postmarked 16 April 1845 and addressed to the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, informed its director Louis Mathieu that she would be performing the Mendelssohn G minor concerto and the Weber *Konzertstück* at an unspecified concert in the future (Pleyel to Mathieu, Paris, 16 April 1845, Pleyel [Marie], Lettres autographes, no. 12, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; “Monsieur / Je jouerai le concerto de Mendelssohn-Bartholdy et le morceau de concert de Weber. / Agréez je vous prie mes salutations. / M Pleyel”).

³⁵ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt, Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 417-26.

critics and her concerts were often reported internationally, only the stages of Paris could bestow the ultimate in financial reward, critical prestige, and social capital that crowned the virtuosos of Europe.³⁶ Furthermore, 1845 proved to be an opportune time for her to return to Paris as two recent publications had brought her name back into circulation. Liszt had published his *Réminiscences de Norma*, a virtuosic fantasy dedicated to Pleyel, in January 1844. Shortly thereafter, his flirtatious dedicatory letter appeared in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* on 4 February 1844, rekindling Parisian memories of both her personality and her playing.³⁷ As the anonymous critic for *Le Ménestrel* commented later, “the uncommon dedication with which Franz Liszt preceded his piece on *Norma*, far from reducing opinions [of her], finished setting up Madame Pleyel as an enchantress who could really captivate our hearts.”³⁸ Not one to be outdone, Berlioz had already published the first installment of his novella *Euphonia, ou La ville musicale* on 14 January 1844. Over the next six months, readers of the *Revue et Gazette musicale* followed the adventures of a coquettish female musician obviously modeled on Pleyel. More than likely, informed readers of the journal would have known precisely to whom Berlioz was referring.³⁹

³⁶ The *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, for one, reported on Pleyel’s concerts in Vienna, Brussels, and other cities during the late 1830s and early 1840s. On Paris as a center of European musical activity, see Ralph Locke, “Paris: Centre of Intellectual Ferment (1789–1852),” *The Early Romantic Era, Between Revolutions: 1789 and 1848*, ed. Alexander Ringer, 32–83 (London: Prentice Hall, 1990); and Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁷ *Le Ménestrel* 11, no. 10 (4 February 1844). The score itself was published by Schott, another of Pleyel and Liszt’s mutual friends.

³⁸ “La singulière dédicace dont Franz Liszt fit précéder son morceau de la *Norma*, loin de ramener les opinions, acheva de poser Mme Pleyel comme une enchanteresse qui pouvait bien captiver les cœurs” (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 19 [6 April 1845]).

³⁹ For a reading of Berlioz’s attitude toward Pleyel in his critical writing, see Katherine Kolb Reeve, “Primal Scenes: Smithson, Pleyel, and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz,” *19th-Century Music* 18 (1995): 211–35.

Most immediately, her triumph in Paris contributed to the success of her London visit in 1846 and to her concert tours in Western Europe over the next few years. In the long run, Pleyel's international stature also probably allowed her to dictate her own terms for future performances throughout Western Europe. After the Paris and London tours of 1845-46, Pleyel returned to Brussels to take up a position at the Conservatoire Royal de Belgique. Under the direction of her longtime friend and advocate François-Joseph Fétis, Pleyel headed the women's piano division from 1848 until 1871, just four years before her death. She continued to perform abroad well into the 1860s and gave her last concert in Brussels just a few months before she died on 30 March 1875.

Gender, Identity, and Strategy

Because Pleyel's life has long been viewed by scholars through the lens of her relationship with Berlioz, his one-dimensional caricature of the heartless coquette dominates historiographical representations of Pleyel. She was, however, a consummate professional, with an approach to self-representation that was far more nuanced than Berlioz's reductive portrait would have us believe. Reports of her beauty and graceful social manners certainly did nothing to advance her cause; when combined with the temptress label applied in Berlioz scholarship, it might be easy to brush off Pleyel's career as the result of a woman manipulating her physical assets in order to achieve professional success. And certainly Pleyel used such assets to her advantage, but I argue that there is much more to the overall picture. Although a scarcity of primary documents does obscure some aspects of her life and career, a savvy businesswoman nevertheless emerges from contemporary correspondence and published criticism; like those of her contemporaries, Pleyel's perceptive grasp of

musical politics contributed as much to her success as did her pianistic skills or her beauty. In no area is this more obvious than in the way she construed her greatest potential liability—her gender—as the exceptional quality that enabled her to succeed where most other women and men failed.

As an instrumental virtuoso performing in public, Pleyel unequivocally challenged the social codes that proscribed feminine musicianship in France. Women pianists, especially married ones, usually remained behind closed doors, performing in the appropriately domestic domain of the *salon*, with a repertoire consisting largely of pre-Beethovenian composers.⁴⁰ Those who chose to perform in more public settings faced the challenge of gender-specific criticism, which, as Katharine Ellis has shown, interpreted such performances in terms of feminine display and modesty.⁴¹ While playing the piano corresponded to some tropes of feminine decorum, any show of excess crossed the line of acceptable behavior.⁴² Public benefit concerts, whose very purpose centered on the visual spectacle of excessive skill, left women pianists dangerously exposed to the public eye. Consequently, few women succeeded or even tried to succeed as public virtuosos in Paris before Pleyel paved the way in 1845. The young Sophie Bohrer, tapped by French critics to become Pleyel's successor, disappeared off the concert circuit before she could take advantage of precedent set by Pleyel. Others, such as Louise Farrenc, Louise Mattmann, and

⁴⁰ On women pianists, see Katharine Ellis, "Female Pianists," 353-85. On women as performers and composers, see Chapters 2-5 of Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the gender codes of mid-nineteenth-century France, see Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁴¹ Ellis, "Female Pianists," 355.

⁴² On women performers, including the differences between singers and instrumentalists, and amateurs and professionals, see Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, Chapters 2-5.

Clara Loveday, stayed out of the spotlight, performing in salons, intimate concerts, or as supporting cast in public concerts organized for the benefit of other (male) musicians.

Clara Wieck Schumann perhaps came the closest to Pleyel's status in her second Paris tour of 1839, but she was never lauded by the press in the same way as her French rival. Schumann's approach to the Parisian stage rested mainly on her pianistic strengths; without an equally persuasive social presence, she failed to ignite the interest of the *Tout Paris*. Because the public personae of virtuosos fed off their private lives as well, women were often at a disadvantage. A spicy scandal or two could enhance a man's box-office draw, but for a woman, a hint of impropriety could attract the wrath of moralizing critics. Schumann's straightforward approach, while appropriately demure, paled in comparison to Pleyel's intriguing profile which blended past and foreign worldliness with exquisite Parisian behavior. Though her social transgressions were numerous—a failed marriage, an illegitimate child, and questionable liaisons with other men—time and distance had reduced the intensity of Pleyel's scandalous conduct in Paris during the early 1830s.⁴³ In 1845, she seems to have behaved more modestly, both on stage and in society, even as she benefited from the draw of her fascinatingly racy reputation.

This kind of mediation strongly characterizes Pleyel's approach to self-representation. On the one hand, she regularly crossed the line of appropriate female behavior in her personal and professional lives. On the other hand, Pleyel was careful not to push the envelope too far, challenging social expectations in some respects but conforming to them in others. To Paris in 1845, for example, she presented a nearly cookie-cutter virtuoso profile—

⁴³ Whether Parisian audiences were aware of Pleyel's daughter in 1845 is unclear. They met her in person in 1855, when the singer "Mademoiselle Marie Pleyel" arrived in Paris with her mother, Madame Marie Pleyel, to give a concert less than six months after the death of Madame Pleyel's estranged husband.

international, independent, and tantalizingly exotic—but embodied in the form of an elegantly-mannered woman. Although she defied some social codes by performing in public, her conduct remained within the bounds of mid-century propriety. With these aspects of her public persona in place, Pleyel had room to extend and redefine her role as a woman in the male-dominated world of virtuoso pianism.

While Pleyel's return to Paris in 1845 provides a particularly rich example of her mode of self-representation, her tactics were developed from her experience on the public stage (and the critical reception of it) at earlier moments of her career. Before discussing the 1845 Paris concerts, therefore, I turn to two previous episodes in her musical career, her performances in Paris in the later 1820s and in Vienna in 1839, to illuminate how Pleyel carefully mediated between her professional goals and abilities as a pianist and the gendered expectations of nineteenth-century European critics and audiences. She did so by adapting her presentation to the specific circumstances of her own age and social status as well as the time and place of her performances.

In the 1820s, Pleyel was received in public as the talented and beautiful teenaged student of the renowned Kalkbrenner, although her playing was only rarely discussed in public forums.⁴⁴ According to the few daily and theater journals that did mention her playing, Kalkbrenner scheduled one major performance each spring for his prize student between her Brussels debut in 1824 and her marriage in 1831. Like his own appearances, these performances took place either in the context of the *concerts spirituels* or in private concerts in the salons of the Pleyel and Pape piano firms. Few of these concerts earned more than a brief note in the press. With only a few words from her critics to analyze, it is

⁴⁴ As Ellis points out, it was more acceptable for unmarried women to perform in public, but even those performances were restricted. See Ellis, "Female Pianists," 355.

impossible to make any claim about Pleyel's professional strategies in 1828. Nevertheless, a handful of short reviews present the rare sight of Pleyel as a pianist in the 1820s, one that pre-dates (and contradicts) Berlioz's better-known portrait of the early 1830s.

One of Pleyel's first performances in Paris was given at an event on 17 April 1825 in the Pape salon. In a rare burst of publicity, the daily entertainment journal *La Pandore* advertised the program as well as her upcoming performance at the concert. This particular concert seems to have been organized to celebrate the opening of Jean-Henri Pape's new shop in the Rue de Valois. In addition to three pieces to be performed by Pleyel, the program was studded with contributions from the major icons of French music, including Théâtre-Italien stars Laure Cinti[-Damoreau], Giuditta Pasta and Giulio Pellegrini and virtuoso violinist Charles Bériot. Like most young pianists, Pleyel programmed her teacher's compositions; new to Kalkbrenner's studio, she included a fragment of one of his concertos as well as a duet by her former teacher Jacques Herz (who performed it with her at the concert) and a set of variations by either Jacques or Henri Herz.⁴⁵ Most of the review concentrated on the other artists, but Pleyel earned a measure of praise for her "sure, clear, and sparkling technique," and the reviewer predicted a successful future for the young pianist.⁴⁶

Another occasion, her February 1828 concert in the Pleyel salon, generated a few, more specific lines in both *La Pandore* and Fétis's nascent *Revue musicale de Paris*.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ The initial notice for the concert appeared in *La Pandore* (9 April 1825). The program for this concert was printed on 16 April 1825, and a review was published on 19 April 1825. The program lists a four-hand work by Jacques Herz and a variation set by Henri Herz; the review attributed both pieces to Jacques Herz.

⁴⁶ "Mlle Camille Moke a une exécution sûre, nette, et brillante" (*La Pandore*, 19 April 1825).

⁴⁷ The larger concert hall (now commonly referred to as the Salle Pleyel) did not open until 1830. Pleyel performed in a smaller room or hall at the Pleyel shop, which offered a more intimate and easily-restricted setting for her concert.

1828 concert, to which attendance was (as for most concerts in the Pleyel, Pape and Érard salons) likely restricted to invited guests, was given for the financial benefit of Pleyel. In addition to a solo played by the pianist, the program featured two chamber works (accompanied by Pleyel) and several vocal pieces, all performed by high-profile musicians. The review published in *La Pandore* depicts a “young and very pretty person, of a very remarkable talent.”⁴⁸ Her three appearances in the concert were judged as excellent, in that “three times she merited all the acclaim by the lightness, the taste, the nuance and the steadiness of her execution.”⁴⁹

The *Revue musicale* account discusses the young pianist in more detail, attributing the strengths of her performance to the influence of Kalkbrenner. Again, a program loaded with Kalkbrenner’s compositions invited her audience and critics to associate her performance with her much-acclaimed instructor. In his article, the *Revue musicale* critic illuminates the connection:

A musical evening of a very rare sort, that is, composed of good, well-played music, took place last Sunday in the salons of Pleyel...It was given for the benefit of Mademoiselle Moke, the young distinguished pianist, who owes her beautiful manner to the advice of Mr. Kalkbrenner.

The beautiful septet by Hummel, a duo for piano and horn, composed by Mr. Kalkbrenner, and *grandes variations* by the same author formed the instrumental part, and supplied Mademoiselle Moke with the opportunity to receive much applause merited by her sparkling execution.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ “Une jeune et très jolie personne, d’un talent fort remarquables” (*La Pandore*, 26 February 1828).

⁴⁹ “Trois fois elle a mérité tous les suffrages par la légèreté, le goût, les nuances et la sûreté de son exécution” (*La Pandore*, 26 February 1828). As was often the case, this writer was likely a theater critic who also covered instrumental concerts, which might explain why the review focused not on Pleyel but on the vocal part of the concert, which was provided by Henriette Sontag and other singers from the Théâtre Italien.

⁵⁰ “Une soirée musicale d’une espèce fort rare, c’est-à-dire composée de bonne musique bien exécutée, a eu lieu dimanche dernier dans les salons de MM. Pleyel et Cie, rue Cadet, no. 9. Elle était donnée au bénéfice de Mlle Moke, jeune pianiste distinguée, qui est redevable de sa belle manière aux conseils de M. Kalkbrenner. / Le beau septuor de Hummel, un duo pour piano et cor, composé par M. Kalkbrenner, et de grandes variations du même auteur, formaient la partie instrumentale, et ont fourni à Mlle Moke l’occasion de recevoir beaucoup d’applaudissemens mérités par sa brillante exécution” (*Revue musicale* 1, no. 5 [26 February 1828]).

Not only is Kalkbrenner credited with the positive aspects of Pleyel's playing, but he is also praised for having composed the "good music" that allowed her to give such a critically successful concert. Two of her three contributions to the concert, including the only solo piece, were Kalkbrenner's compositions. Therefore, even though Pleyel was technically the primary soloist, artistically she played a secondary, mediating role to Kalkbrenner's lead. In deference to her age and sex, two of the three pieces that she performed were in fact pieces for chamber ensemble pieces, a setting that protected her in some degree from the public gaze.

For a young pianist—and a young female pianist, at that—a connection to a central figure like Kalkbrenner could be very important to any future career in Paris. Having trained at the Conservatoire and taught independently in Paris for a decade, Kalkbrenner was extremely well-connected to both the Parisian social elite and the musical world of the 1820s and 1830s.⁵¹ He also appears to have had an extraordinary relationship to the press. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, a period during which instrumental concerts were marginalized and often ignored by music and theater critics, Kalkbrenner's own concert appearances almost always earned some commentary, and, even more surprisingly, so did the concerts of his female students. For Pleyel, a claim to Kalkbrenner's tutelage and repertoire distinguished her from other amateur pianists of her age and gender. Furthermore, Kalkbrenner may have acted as a stand-in paternal figure for Pleyel, whose own father resided during the late 1820s not in Paris but in Brussels. As I have shown in Chapter 1, the presence of an adult chaperone to take care of professional details was a key element in the success of most child prodigies in the 1820s. In the highly sexist milieu of mid-nineteenth-

⁵¹ On Kalkbrenner's self-representation and position in Parisian musical life, see Chapter 2.

century French society, it was unthinkable for a woman, particularly one of Pleyel's age, to display herself to the public eye without some kind of chaperone—usually a male one.⁵² In 1832, for example, Clara Schumann's father was an essential part of her initial entry in Parisian musical society, even in spite of his aggressive and ineffective social manner.⁵³ Where Schumann was marked as the daughter of the German pedagogue Friedrich Wieck, Pleyel was presented as the "élève de Kalkbrenner."

As a young, unmarried woman, Pleyel followed a set of appropriate social rules in the 1820s. Eleven years later, as she began the extended 1839-40 concert tour, she had moved into a different category; married (albeit separated) and older, Pleyel could take a more active role in the arrangement of her concerts without incurring suspicion. A particularly illustrative incident, narrated by Liszt in a letter to Marie d'Agoult, emerges from the arrangement of the December 1839 and January 1840 concerts in Vienna. Liszt's account, while certainly colored by its intended audience, offers a behind-the-scenes perspective on Pleyel's concern over her gender and her eventual method of dealing with it. Pleyel, arriving on 2 December 1839 in Vienna, found that Liszt had overwhelmed the city with his virtuosity in several recent concerts. Upon learning that Liszt was still in town, she immediately sought his counsel. "I advised her strongly not to delay being heard in public," Liszt wrote. But Pleyel had already formed "an opinion diametrically opposed to mine—saying that she wanted to wait until I leave for Pest."⁵⁴ Her strategy in delaying the concert was not to avoid a comparison to Liszt; after all, she had recently routed Liszt's greatest rival Thalberg in St.

⁵² On the performances of child and teenaged prodigies, see Chapter 1.

⁵³ On the Wiecks' Parisian experience in 1832, see Reich, *Clara Schumann*, 29-32.

⁵⁴ Liszt to d'Agoult, Bratislava, 19 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult Correspondance*, 457. "Je lui conseille fortment de ne pas tarder à se faire entendre en public... Elle me quitte en étant d'un avis diamétralement opposé au mien—disant qu'elle voulait attendre que je parte pour Pesth."

Petersburg. Rather she suggested “that the public would like this kind of modesty” and would interpret it as a respectful gesture to the legendary pianist, who was soon to leave Vienna for a concert tour in Pest.⁵⁵ Indeed, any male pianist newly arrived in town would have been expected to enter combat with Liszt by immediately scheduling a public concert; failure to do so would likely have resulted in accusations of cowardice or inferiority. But for herself, Pleyel evidently thought it better to defer to Liszt, tacitly acknowledging his dominance as a male virtuoso and placing herself once again in a secondary role.

After some consideration, however, Pleyel adjusted her strategy to accommodate Liszt’s suggestion—with an important modification that still allowed her to showcase her feminine modesty. She approached Liszt a second time, asking him to direct her publicity in Vienna and agreeing to take his advice about scheduling the concert immediately. She then requested that he accompany her to the piano at her concert, an idea that Liszt resisted but finally agreed to at the last minute—if for no other reason than that Pleyel had already advertised his presence, and it would have reflected badly on him if he failed to appear. “I told her *No*,” he wrote, “due to the air of patronizing that I would give myself—an air that I hate intensely.”⁵⁶ In the second concert, Liszt again “patronized” Pleyel by joining her in a performance of Henri Herz’s four-hand fantasy on themes from *Guillaume Tell*. Whether Liszt truly felt put upon is hard to say—it is entirely possible that his version of events were colored by a desire to keep the peace with d’Agoult.

⁵⁵ Liszt to d’Agoult, Bratislava, 19 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d’Agoult Correspondance*, 457. “Le Public lui saurait bon gré de cette façon de modestie, etc.”

⁵⁶ Liszt to d’Agoult, Bratislava, 19 December 1839, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d’Agoult Correspondance*, 458. “Je lui dit *Non*—à cause de l’air de protection que je me donnerai par là—air que je hais souverainement.”



Figure 6.1: Marie Pleyel in Vienna, 1839
(Engraving by Joseph Kriebhuber, New York Public Library, Music Division, Joseph Muller Collection of Music and Other Portraits)

This image was produced at some point during Pleyel's stay in Vienna. Copies may have been available for purchase at local shops, according to custom. The portrait depicts a wealthy woman, dressed in current high fashions, and it hints at the beauty to which nearly every one of Pleyel's critics referred.

For Pleyel, Liszt's patronage was a desirable commodity, and in the end, her gambit paid off. Her first two Viennese concerts were hugely popular, and the press praised Pleyel's musicianship as well as Liszt's generosity to a fellow artist. Pleyel's third concert was scarcely attended—no coincidence, according to Liszt, as he had left town for a concert in Pest and was unable to exercise his celebrity on Pleyel's behalf.⁵⁷ The foreign affairs correspondent to the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* cast Pleyel as demure woman who scheduled her concerts at the urging of “her most excellent brother in poetry.”⁵⁸ He added: “Is this not one of the most interesting stories of today: Liszt opening the gates of the Viennese salons to Madame Pleyel?”⁵⁹

Pleyel's return to Paris in 1845 required an even more careful approach. Though a talented pianist, she did not, as a woman and a native Parisian, possess two major elements of the profile presented by most virtuosos who had succeeded in France. In spite of her *émigré* parents, in the early 1830s Pleyel was a Parisian woman, and one married to a Frenchman at that. Furthermore, having studied in Paris with well-known teachers, Pleyel lacked a third component, the “natural” development of her talent away from the influence of an established pedagogical tradition. Whereas most virtuosos could claim to be child prodigies who had received lessons only after their genius had emerged, Pleyel studied from early

⁵⁷ Liszt to d'Agoult, Presbourg, 23 January 1840, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult Correspondance*, 498 and 500n4.

⁵⁸ “Son excellent frère en poésie” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 6, no. 71 [26 December 1839]).

⁵⁹ “N'est-ce pas là une des histoires des plus intéressantes de ce temps-ci: Liszt ouvrant les portes des salons de Vienne à madame Pleyel?” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 6 no. 71 [6 December 1839]). The journalist's remark about this “interesting” story suggest that he was referring to some rumor circulating in Paris or Vienna concerning Pleyel and Liszt. Liszt's letters about his meetings with Pleyel, addressed to the notoriously jealous d'Agoult, are decidedly vague but confirm nothing.

childhood with a distinguished line of Paris-based teachers.⁶⁰ Obviously this stereotype does not account for all pianists; the French pianist Charles-Valentin Alkan, for example, even studied at the anti-virtuoso Paris Conservatoire—but such exceptions remain few and far between.⁶¹

The two public benefit concerts of April 1 and April 15, 1845 marked the culmination of a process that had essentially begun with Pleyel's departure from Paris ten years earlier. Nearly a decade of living and performing abroad had helped create for her a profile that more closely aligned with the standard public virtuoso identity. For one thing, ten years abroad blurred the edges of her lifelong association with Paris. The family's Belgian origin, the relocation of her mother to Brussels, and Pleyel's decision to establish her domicile there, distanced her from her earlier Parisian identity, and her critics picked up on it. The critic for *Le Ménestrel* spoke of her as a Belgian "treasure" and referred to her arrival as a "visit," not a return,⁶² while in *Le Charivari*, Pleyel was described as "nearly Parisian and pretty much Belgian."⁶³

Furthermore, Pleyel's popularity among foreign audiences and long stays in faraway cities like St. Petersburg added the essential ingredient of international success. As Henri Blanchard noted in the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, Pleyel was not only the "queen of the

⁶⁰ Liszt's early career in Paris demonstrates this stereotypical presentation. After spending his formative years in the backwoods of Hungary, he studied in Vienna with Carl Czerny, who sought to tame his untrained habits. Eventually Liszt arrived in Paris only to be turned away from the Conservatoire by Luigi Cherubini.

⁶¹ On the Conservatoire's stance toward virtuosity, see Cécile Reynaud, "Une vertu contestée: l'idéal de virtuosité dans la formation des élèves des classes de piano au Conservatoire de Musique (l'époque Cherubini)," in *Le Conservatoire de Paris: regards sur une institution et son histoire*, ed. Emmanuel Hondré, 109-21 (Paris: Association du Bureau des Etudiants du CNSMDP, 1995).

⁶² "Les dilettanti belges ignoraient le trésor" (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 [30 March 1845]).

⁶³ "Presque Parisienne et à peu près Belge" (*Le Charivari*, 31 March 1845).

piano” in France and Navarre, but also in “a thousand other places.”⁶⁴ As the central music publication in Paris, this journal had been reporting on Pleyel’s concerts since 1839. Her foreign exploits, therefore, would have been somewhat familiar to regular readers, making her a recognizable but somewhat mysterious figure. She had come back to Paris, claimed Blanchard, to test her mettle in the high-stakes game of music-making in the French capital, in order to see “what would be the difference between the admiration and crowns of Paris, and those heaped on her in all the [other] capitals of the musical world.”⁶⁵

Another key factor in the French reception of Pleyel’s concerts was a perceived transformation in her musicianship and technique. Pleyel’s critics pointed out that she was no longer the same pianist that they had known in the 1820s. Whether the change was for the better depended on the listener. As Berlioz put it:

Her talent had taken, according to some, an extraordinary development for several years, this was something phenomenal, unbelievable; it had diminished, said the others, and had neither strength nor color. I believe that both are exaggerations. Madame Pleyel already possessed a finished talent eighteen years ago; it has not changed character.⁶⁶

Berlioz himself acknowledged no difference whatsoever: to him, Pleyel’s style, though well-formed, maintained the same superficial character that it had acquired for him after their separation in the early 1830s.⁶⁷ In general, however, most reviewers seemed to find her

⁶⁴ “La reine du piano de France et de Navarre, et de mille autres lieux” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 16 [20 April 1845]).

⁶⁵ “Quelle serait la différence de l’admiration et des couronnes parisiennes, avec celles dont on l’a comme accablée dans toutes les capitales du monde musical” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 14 [6 April 1845]).

⁶⁶ “Son talent avait pris, selon les uns, un développement inouï depuis quelques années, c’était quelque chose de phénoménal, d’incroyable; il avait diminué, au dire des autres, et n’avait ni force ni couleur. Je crois à l’exagération de tous. Mme Pleyel possédait déjà un talent fait, il y a dix-huit ans; il n’a pas changé de caractère” (*Journal des débats*, 16 April 1845).

⁶⁷ See Reeve, “Primal Scenes,” 211-35.

much improved. Regardless of the critic's stance, what stands out from these reviews was not the nature of Pleyel's musical development, but rather her persona as an independent performer. In the 1820s, Pleyel had been known as the student of Kalkbrenner; by 1845, her talent belonged to Madame Pleyel alone.

To craft a success in 1845, Pleyel built on these elements of her identity as a virtuoso by once again taking an active role in the arrangement of her concerts. A key aspect of her campaign in Paris involved identifying points of interface between her public identity as a virtuoso and her private life as a woman. Thus, while some of her letters maintained a thoroughly professional tone—for example, in her correspondence with the royal household regarding their failure to pay for reserved tickets to her concert—others took on a more intimate tone.⁶⁸ During a later visit to Paris, she sent a suggestive missive to one of her critics along with tickets to one of her concerts and offered him a private “long moment” during which she would preview the concert program for his enjoyment.⁶⁹ To Berlioz, virtuoso pianists (and especially Pleyel) were particularly obvious in their professional strategies: “it seems that it is for some a question of life or death, so much that they employ

⁶⁸ Extended correspondence between Pleyel and the Minister of the Royal Household reveals that the royal family reserved boxes at both public concerts but failed to pay for them before she left Paris. Pleyel wrote several letters confirming that the tickets would be available to the royal family. Letters between interior bureaucrats referencing her requests for payment suggest that she corresponded further from Brussels; see Archives Nationales, Paris: F²¹ 1048.

⁶⁹ Pleyel to unidentified, Paris, 6 January, ML 2920, no. 15, Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, Brussels. “J’attendais la bonne visite que vous aviez bien voulu me promettre, pour vous remercier de votre très gracieuse souvenir dans le feuilleton de Samedi. Vous seriez bien bon de ne pas oublier que je demeure hôtel des Italiens rue du Choiseul et que j’y suis toujours à 4h. / Mon concert aura lieu *Samedi* 17, chez Érard voulez vous avoir l’extrême obligeance de l’annoncer comme vous seul savez annoncer les artistes? Je voudrais bien vous jouer *pour vous* ce que je compte jouer dans mon concert. / Pourriez-vous trouver un long moment pour m’écouter?” (“I was waiting for the kind visit that you had promised me, to thank you for your very gracious souvenir in Saturday’s paper. You would be so good not to forget that I live at the Hôtel des Italiens, Rue du Choiseul, and that I am always there at 4 p.m. / My concert will take place on Saturday the 17th at the Érard salon. Would you be extremely obliging and publicize it as you alone know how to publicize artists? I would very much like to play for you that which I plan to play in my concert. / Could you find a long moment to listen to me?”).

strategic schemes to arrange their plan of attack and to keep the advantages of the field.”⁷⁰

Blanchard also recognized her efforts, but cast them in a more positive (and less mercenary) light by arguing that her performance would be impossible to fake. “Do you believe,” he asked,

that she would not have been able [inspired] to sing or play the piano...when she had the idea to give several semi-intimate evenings for the press, who must have found themselves overly compensated by several modest seats that the beautiful and illustrious beneficiary gladly sent them for attending her concerts?⁷¹

A City Dancing on a Volcano: The 1845 Concert Season in Paris

In 1845, the spring concert season in Paris culminated as always with an explosion of public concerts offered in March and April by the most famous pianists in Europe. By most standards, the 1845 season was particularly dazzling: child prodigy Louis Moreau Gottschalk gave his first concert in late February, followed by the legendary Charles-Valentin Alkan in early March. By the first of April, international superstars Léopold de Meyer and Thalberg had arrived to give a series of concerts one after another over the course of several weeks.

Armed with a revised pedigree and an international reputation, Pleyel arrived in Paris late in 1844 to launch the next phase of her career. She spent the first few months of her stay in Paris doing what most traveling virtuosos did upon entering a new city: establishing (or in Pleyel’s case, re-establishing) a network of social contacts. For these musicians, success in the musical world of Paris depended on their ability to anticipate and fulfill the

⁷⁰ “Il semble qu’il s’agisse pour quelques une de la vie ou de la mort, tant ils emploient de combinaisons stratégiques pour disposer leur plan d’attaque et se réserver les avantages du terrain” (*Journal des débats*, 16 April 1845).

⁷¹ “Croyez-vous qu’elle n’aurait pas pu chanter ou jouer sur son piano... lorsqu’elle eut l’idée de donner quelques soirées musicales semi-intimes à la presse, qui a dû se trouver trop récompensée par quelques modestes places, que la belle et illustre bénéficiaire a bien voulu lui envoyer pour assister à ses concerts?” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 16 [20 April 1845]).

expectations of their audiences both on stage and off.⁷² Making contact with central social figures was crucial to infiltrating Parisian society: by connecting with the exalted circles of the *salon* world, musicians could advertise their talents by performing at private gatherings. In this venue, they also met journalists, whose reports could make or break their careers and other wealthy socialites who might commission new compositions, schedule further performances, and hire them as music teachers. Public benefit concerts generally occurred at the end of a musician's tenure in Paris—for pianists, usually in March or April. Given at the expense and for the profit of the sponsoring musician, these concerts provided the chance to kill three birds with one stone: first, to repay social debts with free tickets for patrons, students, and journalists; second, to play for a large paying crowd, thus upping the performers' prestige and bank accounts; and third, to display their virtuosity to the world after months of tantalizing promises in the semi-private closed environment of the *salon*.

Although Pleyel's reputation as a virtuoso had preceded her, she nonetheless had work to do in Paris. The pianist and pedagogue Antoine Marmontel later noted that she had been away from Paris for so long that no one remembered her and that the initial response to her playing was rather cold.⁷³ Over the course of the winter, Pleyel performed often for private salon gatherings, gave at least two semi-private concerts, and reached out to other artists also in Paris. In a letter dated 21 December 1844, for example, she regretfully canceled a Sunday afternoon performance at the home of the Baron de Trémont, claiming physical exhaustion from too much playing: "you know that on Wednesday I was already

⁷² On the importance of the salon to the careers of professional musicians in Paris, see Elaine Leung-Wolf, "Women, Music, and the Salon Tradition: Its Cultural and Historical Significance in Parisian Musical Society" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 1996); and William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna Between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

⁷³ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, 75.

concerned with my finger which had upset me for two days; the fatigue that I felt Thursday night in playing some music for some good friends showed me the complete impossibility of playing three notes.”⁷⁴ Regardless of whether Pleyel truly found herself incapacitated—a number of her surviving letters mention either poor health or injury—three performances in the span of one week testify to a busy schedule. A wealthy aristocrat with a keen devotion to the arts, Trémont was also a key contact point for Pleyel as she integrated herself into the musical life of the city: in another letter, she agreed to meet with one of Trémont’s musical protégées and requested that he arrange for her to listen to the young prodigy Arthur Kalkbrenner, the son of her former teacher and a pianist in his own right.⁷⁵

Pleyel’s relationship with Trémont—and probably several other key patrons—existed prior to her return in 1845. Even if the broader expanse of French audiences did not remember her, Pleyel had maintained contact with her former life in Paris. The friendship with Trémont dates from before her marriage: in an informal letter of August 1830, for instance, she wrote to give him news of the death of a mutual acquaintance (the double-bass player Dejazet), whom she had once heard perform in Trémont’s salon.⁷⁶ The long arm of her close friend Fétis, reaching from Brussels to his extensive network in Paris, may also have been exercised on Pleyel’s behalf, along with the social influence of her acquaintance Jules Janin, the head theater critic at the *Journal des débats*. Even Liszt had urged her to

⁷⁴ Pleyel to Trémont, Paris, 21 December 1844, Pleyel (Marie), *Lettres autographes*, no. 10, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. “Vous savez que mercredi j’étais déjà préoccupé de mon doigt que me faisait souffrir depuis deux jours; La fatigue que j’ai éprouvé jeudi soir en faisant de la musique pour quelques bons amis me met dans la complète impossibilité de faire trois notes.” On Trémont and his interaction with musical circles in Paris, see J.-G. Prod’homme and Theodore Baker, “The Baron de Trémont: Souvenirs of Beethoven and Other Contemporaries,” *Musical Quarterly* 6 (July 1920): 366-391.

⁷⁵ Pleyel to Trémont, Paris, 10 January 1845, Pleyel (Marie), *Lettres autographes*, no. 9, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

⁷⁶ Pleyel to Trémont, Paris, 27 August 1830, Pleyel (Marie), *Lettres autographes*, no. 18, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

perform in Paris in 1841 and offered his aid, telling her that it would be “a little affliction for your friends not to help you with anything.”⁷⁷ Also among her network of acquaintances were the celebrated soprano Cinti-Damoreau, the poet Victor Hugo, and the influential music critic Pier Angelo Fiorentino.

As spring and the season of public benefit concerts approached, Pleyel’s performances became more high profile. She gave two concerts in the hall of piano-maker Jean-Henri Pape, one on 26 January and the other on 24 March.⁷⁸ While these events were closed to the general public, they were nonetheless attended by “the high-fashion elite of the musical world” and were reviewed by the top music journalists in Paris.⁷⁹ The first concert, discussed by Blanchard in the *Revue et Gazette musicale*, confirmed that she was a “pianist without peer, rivaling Liszt and Thalberg.”⁸⁰ The concert and Blanchard’s review also paired Pleyel’s brand of pianism with the distinctive quality of Pape’s instrument. In a city that was home to nearly as many piano-makers as it did virtuosos, the choice of a piano was an aesthetic statement. Chopin’s sound had long been linked to the silvery Pleyel piano, Liszt’s to the powerful Érard. The Pape instrument occupied a sonic middle ground—not as brash as the Érard, but more brilliant than the Pleyel. As Blanchard put it, Pape’s piano was possessed “of a strong mechanism, of a powerful and sweet voice in the middle register,

⁷⁷ Liszt to Pleyel, Paris, December 1840, in *Franz Liszt, Marie d’Agoult Correspondance*, 679. “Une petit affliction pour vos amis de n’avoir à vous aider en rien.” Although Liszt was not in Paris for the 1845 season, it is possible that he lent his support from afar. Pleyel sent his mother two complimentary tickets for one of her concerts, perhaps as a friendly gesture toward the Liszt. See her letter to Anna Liszt, Paris, Sunday morning, Pleyel (Marie), *Lettres autographes*, no. 13, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. The letter is only partially dated, but it was written from the Hôtel des Etrangers in the Rue Vivienne, where Pleyel lived in 1845.

⁷⁸ I calculated these dates based on references to days of the week mentioned in the criticism.

⁷⁹ “L’élite de la haute fashion du monde musical” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 5 [2 February 1845]).

⁸⁰ “La pianiste sans pair, rivalisant Liszt et Thalberg” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 5 [2 February 1845]).

delicate in the upper, deep and distinct in the low.”⁸¹ Although she performed on a Pleyel instrument in the public concerts, reviews of her playing echo the versatility ascribed to the Pape piano, positioning her in a stylistic middle ground as well: a performer as strong and exciting as Liszt, yet as poetic and soulful as Chopin.

Pleyel’s second private concert in the Salle Pape functioned as a strategically-placed teaser for her first public benefit, which took place at the Théâtre-Italien just one week later on 1 April. In a handful of short articles, Pleyel’s reviewers praised her artistry, urged readers to attend her upcoming concert, and laid out the terms by which she would be judged. While some raised an eyebrow at this “pretty woman’s caprice,” others cast Pleyel as an agent of change.⁸² “The abyss of revolutions is about to reopen; a dynasty of pianists rises up at the horizon.”⁸³ All acknowledged that this would be no ordinary concert, for at stake was not only Pleyel’s career, but also the established order of virtuosos in Paris. “The year 1845 will mark a new era,” proclaimed the critic at *Le Ménestrel*:

It is the repeal of the Salic law in the art of the piano!—Already a formidable battalion threatens the omnipotence of the beard: Madame Pleyel at the head, then the pianist of the queen of the French, Mme Catherine de Dietz, Mlle Mattmann, Bohrer, Farrenc, Masson, Joséphine Martin, Loveday, Wartel, etc. a ravishing constellation that will easily prevail over a sex which in general has nothing ravishing about it.⁸⁴

⁸¹ “Au mécanisme fort, à la voix puissante et douce dans le médium, aérienne à l’aigu, pompeuse et distincte dans le grave” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 5 [2 February 1845]).

⁸² “Un caprice de jolie femme” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 14 [6 April 1845]).

⁸³ “L’abîme des révolutions est prêt à se rouvrir; une dynastie de pianistes s’insurge à l’horizon” (*Le Charivari*, 31 March 1845).

⁸⁴ “L’année 1845 marquera une nouvelle ère.—C’est l’avènement de la loi salique dans l’art du piano!—déjà un bataillon formidable menace la toute-puissance de la barbe: Mme Pleyel en tête, puis la pianiste de la reine des Français, Mme Catherine de Dietz, Mlle Mattman, Bohrer, Farrenc, Masson, Joséphine Martin, Loveday, Wartel, etc., pléiade ravissante qui l’emportera sans peine sur un sexe qui en général n’a rien de ravissant” (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 [30 March 1845]).

Not only did this “battalion” of women present a looming threat to male virtuosos, but this critic also goes on to point out that the epitome of masculine virtuosity, Liszt himself, had acknowledged its existence.⁸⁵ Did Pleyel’s sex limit the bounds of her talent, asked Parisian music critics, or would it allow and even enable her to surpass her male counterparts? A writer for the satirical journal *Le Charivari* dramatically highlighted the importance of her public performance by likening Paris to “a city that dances on a volcano; this volcano is a grand piano. The twelve *arrondissements* tremble like twelve octaves. What will it be after the first of April, the day when Madame Pleyel gives her concert at the Italiens?”⁸⁶

Gender and Exceptionality in Pleyel’s 1845 Paris Reception.

The issue of gender is unavoidable in the French critical reception of Pleyel’s playing—be it the early semi-private performances or the public benefit concerts in April. By throwing her hat into the virtuoso ring, Pleyel contested the men who dominated it and created a conundrum for Parisian critics who relied on established gender norms to frame their accounts about female musicians. As Ellis points out, no appropriate vocabulary existed in the 1840s with which male critics could discuss female piano virtuosos. Qualities praised in male pianists, among them “athletic bravura, interpretive and physical power, and showmanship” were “diametrically opposed to those prized in women,” namely modesty and

⁸⁵ *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 (30 March 1845). Liszt did so, he claimed, in the 1844 dedication to Pleyel published at the front of his *Réminiscences de Norma* and reprinted in *Le Ménestrel* 11, no. 10 (4 February 1844). See n91 in this chapter for the text and translation of the dedication.

⁸⁶ “Une ville qui danse sur un volcan; ce volcan est un piano à queue [*sic*]. Les douze arrondissemens frémissent comme douze octaves. Que sera-ce après le 1^{er} avril, jour où Mme Pleyel donne son concert, aux Italiens!” (*Le Charivari*, 31 March 1845).

physical restraint.⁸⁷ In the case of Pleyel, though, the usual language employed to judge female pianists was unsuitable for the task at hand. Pleyel's audiences—critics included—were clearly willing to accept her as a virtuoso on par with Liszt and Thalberg. If they had wanted to deny her a position among the top pianists in Europe, it would have been easy to accomplish. Instead, established critics like Blanchard and Théophile Gautier initially raved about her playing, an indication that they were willing to entertain the notion that a woman might indeed belong on the public stage. To consider her in the masculine terms of virtuosity, however, would have been both musically and socially inappropriate—and probably detrimental to her future career. Consequently her critics employed a complicated mélange of double-edged metaphors that consider Pleyel in terms of masculine virtuosity while still evaluating her femininity. The resulting reviews of her concerts alternately praise her musicianship and undermine it through references to her sex, revealing as much about the critics' confusion in the face of a convention-defying performance as they do about Pleyel's strategies.

With the exception of Berlioz, Pleyel's critics offered positive reviews of her performances. Gautier, in his music column for the daily paper *La Presse*, adopted a positive stance on women pianists in general and Pleyel in particular. His reviews enthuse over the extraordinary effect of Pleyel's playing on both her audiences in general and himself in particular, and seem, at first glance, to delight in her musicianship. Reviews by the unsigned critic for the weekly music journal *Le Ménestrel* follow in a similar vein. And in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, the bi-weekly powerhouse aimed at the Parisian musical elite, Blanchard also supported Pleyel and frankly admired both her playing and her approach to performance, which he recognized as a finely-tuned effort. The anonymous critic for the

⁸⁷ Ellis, "Female Pianists," 361.

satirical artistic journal *Le Charivari* commented only rarely on the musical aspects of Pleyel's performances, focusing instead on the excitement of her challenge to other pianists in Paris, specifically Liszt. During the years of Liszt's spectacular concerts, articles in *Le Charivari* had slyly poked fun at his ego, his hair, and his energetic performance style, a critical standpoint that underscores the journal's reception of Pleyel: the music critic(s) of 1845 praised her demeanor and tone through sarcastic references to Hungarian pianists and other ugly men. Berlioz adopted the only overtly negative position in his remarks in the political newspaper, the *Journal des débats*. In lieu of discussing her performances, he instead questioned why anybody would listen to her playing in the first place.

While Pleyel's performances in the private sphere minimally challenged the social codes that governed feminine musicianship, her public concerts in April 1845 posed a more serious problem. With these concerts, Pleyel definitively crossed the line of traditionally acceptable behavior for female pianists. She emerged from the private sphere to play—not once, but twice—for a large paying audience and on the same public stage as her male counterparts. No longer protected by the restricted access to the salon, she was exposed to the eyes of anyone who paid for a ticket. As her male rivals had done for decades, Pleyel booked the Salle Ventadour, the theater then occupied by the Théâtre-Italien opera troupe. The Théâtre-Italien had long provided a friendly home for traveling virtuosos; whereas Pleyel was by no means the first or the only woman to play in such a venue—Bohrer for one gave a concert there later the same week—she was, nevertheless, one of only a handful.⁸⁸

Pleyel programmed a fascinating mix of musical works over the course of the two concerts that confronted head-on Parisian expectations about female performance. For the 1

⁸⁸ The Théâtre-Italien troupe permanently moved to the larger Salle Ventadour in 1841 after a brief stay at the Salle d'Odéon. It had previously occupied the Salle Louvois, where Liszt had made his debut.

April concert, she crafted a superlative program that consisted of explicitly masculine repertoire (see Table 6.2). This included typical virtuoso fare: two concertos (by Mendelssohn and Weber respectively) as well as several major solo works based on popular operatic material and composed by contemporary keyboard lions Liszt, Theodor Döhler and Prudent.⁸⁹ Several unspecified pieces performed by the orchestra and singers from the Théâtre-Italien troupe rounded out the mixed program.

Table 6.2: Works Performed by Pleyel on 1 April 1845⁹⁰

Concerto de Mendelssohn avec grand orchestre (Piano Concerto [no. 1 in G minor, op. 25] by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy)
Quatuor de <i>Don Pasquale</i> de Prudent (Quartet from <i>Don Pasquale</i> [by Gaetano Donizetti], transcribed by Prudent)
<i>Norma</i> de Liszt (<i>Réminiscences de Norma</i> by Franz Liszt, [dedicated to Pleyel])
Andante de <i>Dom Sébastien</i> de Dohler (Andante from <i>Dom Sébastien</i> [by Donizetti], transcribed by Theodor Döhler)
Tarentelle [<i>sic</i>] de Rossini (“La danza: tarantella napoletana” [from <i>Les soirées musicales</i>] by Gioachino Rossini, [transcribed by Liszt])
Concerto de Weber à grand orchestre (<i>Konzertstück</i> [in F minor, op. 79] by Carl Maria von Weber)

⁸⁹ The gendered implications of music by Mendelssohn remain contested. While some of his keyboard music (and therefore all of it, some may argue) was indeed associated with the feminine salon, some of his large-scale works were championed by male performers. Critics clearly wrote about Pleyel’s performance of the concerto as a sign of her masculine control—regardless of how Mendelssohn was typically received in France.

⁹⁰ *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 (30 March 1845).

While these pieces were clearly aimed to meet the spectacle-oriented goal of virtuoso concert programming, Pleyel's program lacked one significant element: unlike her contemporaries who composed and performed their own virtuosic showstoppers, she solely interpreted works composed by others. Featured on the program, for example, was Liszt's fantasy on Bellini's *Norma*, a piece dedicated to Pleyel and "loaded with brilliant and extraordinary claims" that were designed specifically for her own special pianistic skills by its male composer.⁹¹ Thus, in spite of her unconventional repertoire, she took the role of interpreter, appearing as a vessel for masculine creativity, and her critics freely praised her technique and expression without censoring her choice of repertoire.

That is, until her second concert of 15 April. Again, *Le Ménestrel* advertised the program for the second concert (15 April) two days in advance, and Pleyel filled the Salle Ventadour with her admirers. Unlike the first concert, the 15 April event focused almost

⁹¹ Liszt's letter of dedication was reprinted in *Le Ménestrel*, 12, no. 18 (30 March 1845).

"Madame, / Voici, chère et ravissante collègue, une fantaisie toute chargée et surchargée d'arpèges, d'octaves et de ces termes lieux communs, prétensions brillants et extraordinaires, dont beaucoup d'autres de nos collègues, fort peu ravissans d'ailleurs, nous *assomment* et nous *assassinent* depuis bien long-temps, à tel point que nous en avons tous *pardessus les oreilles*. / Néanmoins, telle est la magie de votre *personne* et de votre *talent*, que pour peu que vous ne dédaigniez pas de parcourir ces quelques pages de réminiscences avec von *inimitables doigts*, je ne fais aucun doute qu'elles ne paraissent neuves et ne produisent le plus magnifique effet. / Schott, que notre ami commun Berlioz compare un tant soit peu ingénieusement à la Belle au Bois Dormant, car certes il ne dort guère quand il s'agit de publier *un tas de bonnes ou mauvaises choses*, est entièrement de mon avis à cet égard. / L'auteur et l'éditeur réclament donc humblement votre patronage pour cette composition fort *composite*, et la mettent à vos *pièdes et entre vos mains*: celui-ci en vous priant de la faire entendre souvent au public, et moi, en vous demandant d'être plaint quelque peu de ne pas mieux savoir employer mon temps qu'à écrire *toutes sortes de fadaïses*. / Mille hommages toujours renouvelés. / Weimar, janvier 1844 / F. Liszt" ("Madame, / Here, my dear and *ravishing* colleague, is a fantasy loaded and overloaded with arpeggios, octaves, and those dull commonplaces supposed to be brilliant and extraordinary, with which many of our other colleagues, not very ravishing besides, have been bludgeoning and assassinating us for a long time, so much so that we're all up to our ears in it. / Nonetheless, such is the magic of your personality and talent that, if you are willing to go over these few pages of reminiscences with your matchless fingers, I have no doubt that they will seem new and will produce the most magnificent effect. / Schott, whom our mutual friend Berlioz likens quite ingeniously to the Sleeping Beauty, for certainly he scarcely sleeps when it is a question of publishing a mass of good and bad things, agrees with me in this instance. / The composer and publisher therefore humbly request your patronage for this extremely mixed composition, laying it at your feet and in your hands: the latter begging you to let the public hear it often, since it will never tire of admiring you, and I asking to be pitied a little for not knowing how to spend my time better than by writing this sort of banality. / Many renewed regards, / Weimar, January 1844. F. Liszt"); see Walker, *Virtuoso Years*, 389-99n21.

exclusively on Pleyel (see Table 6.3). According to the *Ménestrel*'s preview article and the critical reviews that followed the concert, Pleyel took the stage with just one singer, the bass Hermann-Léon, and his accompanist to provide some variety.⁹²

Table 6.3: Works Performed by Pleyel on 15 April 1845⁹³

Sonnambula de Thalberg (<i>Grande caprice sur les motifs de la Sonnambula de Bellini</i> [op. 46] by Sigismond Thalberg)
Grand adagio de Hummel ([“Larghetto e cantabile” from the <i>Fantasie</i> in E flat major, opus 18] by Johann Nepomuk Hummel)
Lucie de Liszt (<i>Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor</i> by Franz Liszt)
Marguerite au rouet de Schubert (“Gretchen am Spinnrade” by Franz Schubert, [transcribed by Marie Pleyel])
Tarantelle de Rossini ([“La danza: tarantella napoletana” from <i>Les soirées musicales</i>] by Gioachino Rossini, [transcribed by Liszt])
Grandes variations de Dohler sur <i>Guillaume Tell</i> [sic] (<i>Grandes variations sur Guillaume Tell</i> by Theodor Döhler)
Nocturne et méditation sur le Moine de Meyerbeer (<i>Nocturne et méditation</i> , on “Le Moine” by Giacomo Meyerbeer, by Marie Pleyel)

While Pleyel's program lacks the diversity of performing forces that characterized her earlier concert, it showcased other aspects of her musicianship. The technical virtuoso had

⁹² Hermann-Léon performed the following songs: “L'Âme de purgatoire,” text by Casimir Delavigne and music by Marie Pleyel; “Les Hirondelles,” text by Colny l'Hôtelier and music by Félicien David, and “Le Lévite” text and music by Joseph Vimeu; see program in *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 20 (13 April 1845).

⁹³ *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 20 (13 April 1845).

predominated in the 1 April concert, but in the second program, Pleyel put herself forward as a more nuanced and complete player and, more importantly, as a composer in her own right. In order to extend her success of 1 April, Pleyel did not disappoint admirers of her virtuosity: not only did she perform three additional operatic fantasies, but she also included the Liszt-Rossini tarantella, which she had already played twice for her enthusiastic audience of 1 April. To these brilliant fantasies, Pleyel added her own solo arrangements of two songs (Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade" and Meyerbeer's "Le Moine") and the slow middle section from Hummel's *Fantasie* opus 18 (1805). The latter was probably the "larghetto et cantabile" section of Hummel's Fantasy in E flat major, opus 18 (1805), later published (in her arrangement) by Heugel.⁹⁴ Although Pleyel's arrangements of the Schubert and Meyerbeer songs no longer exist—they were never published and perhaps never even written down—these pieces departed significantly from the aesthetic exemplified in the flashy virtuoso works and displayed another side of her playing. Pleyel's critics noted the change in direction, ("the beneficiary does not content herself with the glory of the performer, she put forth two pieces of her composition, which, by the way, seemed to us to be of a color truly grave and truly somber") and suggested that she must have wanted "to see if the dark suited her well."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Pleyel's "Andante extrait de l'Opus 18 de Hummel pour piano" was published in the late 1840s by Heugel. (The plate number of the available printed score does not allow for more specific dating.) It is less an arrangement than transcription with slightly embellished ornamentation. Her version largely adheres to Hummel's score, with only a few major exceptions, where she extends fioratura and cadenza-like passages. See Yui's appendix for a reprint of the score (Yui, "Marie Pleyel," 142-50).

⁹⁵ "La bénéficiaire ne se contente pas de la gloire d'exécutante, elle a fait entendre deux morceaux de sa composition, qui, par parenthèse, nous ont semblé d'une couleur bien grave et bien sombre. C'est sans doute un caprice de jolie femme qui a voulu essayer si le noir lui serait bien" (*Le Charivari*, 23 April 1845). See also Blanchard's remarks in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 16 (20 April 1845).

This program presented a much more serious challenge to convention, for although Pleyel drew from the more typically feminine repertoire of Schubert and Hummel, she took dangerous liberties by improvising filigree around Hummel's adagio and performing her own compositions. Blanchard's review of the second concert plainly frames his unease with Pleyel's public display of creativity. While he commends her performance of the Schubert and Hummel pieces, praising her "sort of dreaming poetry" and "exquisite, perfect style," he does not credit her with any independent creativity.⁹⁶ Instead, Blanchard couches her contributions in terms of "translation" and "embroidery," both appropriately feminine skills that helped her to elucidate the male composers' "secondary thoughts, inherent in the spirit of the work."⁹⁷ Likewise, the critic for *Le Charivari* flippantly dismissed this program as "no doubt the whim of a pretty woman."⁹⁸

Was Pleyel's programming strategy effective? Her apparently flawless performance of works composed by men on 1 April enabled her critics to overlook that she had programmed an evening's worth of music generally deemed inappropriate for female public performance. In this case, the risk paid off: Pleyel's efforts to frame herself as a public virtuoso protected her from negative gendered criticism. The response to the second concert program was less forgiving, for although she integrated pieces by pre-Beethovenian (and therefore more acceptable) composers with contemporary virtuosic works, she also exhibited

⁹⁶ "Une sorte de poésie rêveuse...D'une style exquis, parfait" (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 16 [20 April 1845]).

⁹⁷ *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 16 (20 April 1845). On the gendering of these terms, see Katharine Ellis, "Berlioz, the Sublime, and the Broderie Problem," in *Hector Berlioz. Miscellaneous Studies*, ed. Fulvia Morabito and Michela Niccolai, 29-59, Ad Parnassum Monographs 1 (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2005).

⁹⁸ "C'est sans doute un caprice de jolie femme" (*Le Charivari*, 23 April 1845). Most of this review, which is quite short, centers on the feminine qualities of her playing: charm, pleasantness and delicacy. The writer also hints that she must have been feeling ill at this concert, citing her depressed attitude and strange program as evidence.

evidence of her own creativity. Whereas Parisian critics were willing to search for a way to engage positively with a woman who played like a man, they reverted to more stereotypical rhetoric that condemned a woman who attempted to create like one.

Indeed, the problems of Pleyel's gender and her multifaceted challenges to assumptions about female performance were not easily resolved by her critics after either concert, resulting in a complicated *mélange* of contradictory and double-edged metaphors that considered Pleyel in terms of a male virtuoso while still evaluating her femininity. In most reviews of the first public concert, for example, critics invoked military imagery to illustrate the spectacle of Pleyel onstage with the orchestra. "The *tournoi pianistique* began in the Salle Ventadour," proclaimed *Le Ménestrel*. "In the midst of a thousand candles, a tremendous orchestra marched under the direction of Tilmant...The queen of the pianists advanced proudly on her steed."⁹⁹ He went on to reveal that Pleyel's "steed" was nothing less than a Pleyel piano, an instrument worthy of such a warrior queen. In *La Presse*, Gautier marveled at Pleyel's calm demeanor in the face of such a daunting task: "To be inspired in a theater under the fire of a great artillery of lorgnettes, face to face with the white and black keys, is a truly a far more difficult miracle."¹⁰⁰

Pleyel opened the concert with the Mendelssohn concerto, a piece unknown to Parisian audiences, which required her to wrest control of the piece from the orchestra in the first few bars of the first movement. The presence of concertos on the program was expected from a male virtuoso, despite the strain on their finances and the limited availability of good

⁹⁹ "Le *tournoi pianistique* a commencé dans la salle Ventadour...Au milieu de mille bougies, un orchestre formidable se déroule sous la direction de Tilmant...La reine des pianistes s'élance fièrement sur son coursier" (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 [30 March 1845]). Théophile (Alexandre) Tilmant was the conductor of the Théâtre-Italien orchestra from 1838-49.

¹⁰⁰ "Être inspirée dans un théâtre sous le feu de la formidable artillerie des lorgnettes, face à face avec des touches blanches et noires, est un miracle bien autrement difficile" (*La Presse*, 7 April 1845).

ensembles, but it was highly unusual in a benefit concert for a woman to pit her virtuosity against that of an orchestra.¹⁰¹ The conventional masculinist narrative of the soloist in battle with the orchestra further heightened Pleyel's femininity and exceptional achievement. The critic for *Le Charivari* exclaimed at how she "wrestled with the large orchestra,"¹⁰² while the *Ménestrel* critic enthused that there was "nothing more beautiful to see and hear than Madame Pleyel dominating the Italiens's orchestra."¹⁰³ By the time she closed the concert with Weber's *Konzertstück*, a Lisztian warhorse of epic proportion, Pleyel had apparently convinced her audience that she could—and should—enter into combat with the orchestra.¹⁰⁴ "The pianist-lioness, the artist-queen, the musician-poet, came anew," wrote Blanchard. "Marching in the strength and freedom of her talent, greeting with an affectionate dignity her most fervent adorer whom she loves above all, this audience."¹⁰⁵ At the same time, no one forgot that she was a woman. Announced the *Charivari*: "Liszt was conquered in this evening. This hairy Samson of the piano has met a different Delilah."¹⁰⁶ This entertaining

¹⁰¹ One notable exception in 1840s Paris was Louise Mattmann, who played Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 3 at the Société des Concerts in 1844. This was not, however, a benefit concert, and it is unclear how much she had to say about the programming. Mattmann's career was different from Pleyel's in that remained centered in Paris, performing with the Société des Concerts and specializing in chamber music; see Ellis, "Female Pianists," 359n14.

¹⁰² "Elle a lutté avec un nombreux orchestre" (*Le Charivari*, 6 April 1845).

¹⁰³ "Rien de plus beau à voir et à entendre que Mme Pleyel dominant l'orchestre des Italiens" (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 19 [6 April 1845]).

¹⁰⁴ On the cultural network surrounding Liszt's performances of Weber's *Konzertstück*, see Dana Gooley, "Warhorses: Liszt, Weber's 'Konzertstück', and the Cult of Napoléon," *19th-Century Music* 24 (2000): 62-88.

¹⁰⁵ "La pianiste-lionne, l'artiste-reine, la musicienne-poète, est venue de nouveau... marchant dans la force et dans la liberté de son talent; saluant avec une dignité affectueuse son plus fervent adorateur, qu'elle aime avant tous, ce public" (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 14 [6 April 1845]).

¹⁰⁶ "Liszt a été vaincu dans cette soirée. Ce Samson chevelu du piano a rencontré une autre Dalila" (*Le Charivari*, 6 April 1845). This may also be a reference to Liszt reception of the 1830s, which fetishized Liszt's hair. I am grateful to Jeffrey Kallberg for pointing this out.

jab at Liszt calls Pleyel's honor into question. Had she defeated Liszt fairly in battle, or had she duplicitously tricked him into submission with her feminine wiles?

Although Liszt himself was not present in Paris at the time, critics compared the two pianists on several points, including technique, musicianship, and stage presence. This allowed critics to elevate Pleyel as an honorary male virtuoso (thus supplying a suitable vocabulary with which to discuss her) and to criticize Liszt at the same time by implying that a woman had out-played him. For instance, Blanchard's comments on Pleyel's performance of Weber's *Konzertstück* are complimentary, particularly emphasizing the emotional depth of her interpretation of "this musical poetry that assaults all the senses at once."¹⁰⁷ As he pointed out, the piece and its program were very familiar to Parisian audiences—namely because Liszt had been performing it all over Europe for nearly fifteen years. In the context of the Liszt reception, which concentrated almost exclusively on the military aspect of the work's program and on Liszt's improvisatory interpolations, Blanchard's praise for Pleyel's well-rounded interpretation can also be read as an implicit criticism of Liszt's very different rendering of the work. Although Pleyel likely left off the fireworks for which Liszt was known, the military metaphors (discussed above) employed by most critics indicate that they chose to position Pleyel's version of this piece and the Mendelssohn concerto in the light of masculine playing and interpretation.

Another key concept for several critics—and another comparison to Liszt—arose from a recent column published in *La Presse* by the socialite and gossip columnist Delphine

¹⁰⁷ "Cette poésie musicale qui frappe tous les sens à la fois" (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 14 [6 April 1845]).

de Girardin.¹⁰⁸ Girardin had humorously caricatured the piano virtuosos of Paris by naming their most outstanding features, and her characterizations appeared in reviews of many virtuosos that season, as they captured in a word the essence of the pianists' public identities. The reclusive Chopin, for example, was labeled a poet, the powerful Thalberg a king, the businesslike Henri Herz a lawyer, and the violent De Meyer a hurricane. Pleyel, the only woman on the list, was characterized by Girardin as a "sibyl" (*une sybille*), a woman of antiquity who possessed the supernatural powers of divination and prophecy.¹⁰⁹ This label was a direct tie to Liszt, whom Girardin had named a "prophet." Framing Pleyel as the female equivalent of the prophet also positioned her as the female version of Liszt, a remark echoed in other reviews.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, framing Pleyel as the female equivalent of the prophet positioned her as the female version of Liszt, which was a high compliment by most accounts.¹¹¹ In fact, the question of Pleyel surpassing Liszt runs through much of the 1845 reception, although it was exploited more often to attack Liszt than to flatter Pleyel. On the other hand, the label of "sybille" also resonates with a common theme in sexist criticism; women were often cast as priestess-like figures in order to emphasize their position as interpreter or intermediary between the music (created by a male composer) and the audience.¹¹² Furthermore, the sibyl was usually depicted as a wild, unkempt, and anti-social figure, typical charges thrown at women who defied social norms.

¹⁰⁸ *La Presse*, 25 February 1845. Girardin's column, published under the pseudonym "Vicomte de Launay," appeared twice a month in this paper. Her husband, Émile Girardin, was the editor of *La Presse*.

¹⁰⁹ Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Administration du grand dictionnaire universel, 1866-77), s.v. "sybille."

¹¹⁰ *Le Charivari* (30 March 1845), and *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 (30 March 1845).

¹¹¹ *Le Charivari* (30 March 1845), and *Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 18 (30 March 1845).

¹¹² See Ellis, "Female Pianists," 353-61.

The *Ménestrel* reviewer criticized Girardin's use of the term, suggesting that the designation was vicious and that she herself was sexist: "you dare to apply such a nasty name to a woman of so charming! That is hardly gallant, Vicomte, and you would make us almost believe that you are not for your own sex."¹¹³ As an alternative, he suggested that she call Pleyel "a fairy, a fairy with a magic wand, and you will be in the right."¹¹⁴ While Gautier (Girardin's colleague at *La Presse*) did adopt the term "sybille," others eschewed it in favor of a more expressive but equally problematical vocabulary. Terms like enchantment, transformation, and magnetism abound to explain how she herself was "transfigured" during her performances and to depict her "electrifying" effect on her audiences. On the surface, this terminology sets Pleyel apart from her female colleagues by crediting her with a level of inspiration and power usually reserved for men. At the same time, it also reveals the troubled relationship between composer, audience, and performer if the latter was female.

Gautier (Girardin's colleague at *La Presse*) took full advantage of the ambiguous "sibyl" metaphor. His review of the first concert opens with a rhapsodic depiction of Pleyel as a beautiful, calm sibyl before degenerating into a confusing mix of highly gendered comments disguised as praise. Emphasizing her femininity from the start, he sketched her stance at the keyboard. Pleyel, he wrote:

gives herself up with the least contortion. Her posture at the piano is one of the most correct. She holds herself perfectly straight, in an attitude in which the most austere teacher would find nothing to correct; her arms behave independently and her hands

¹¹³ "Vous osez appliquer un si vilain nom à une aussi charmante femme! Ah! C'est bien peu galant, vicomte, et vous nous feriez presque croire que vous n'êtes pas de votre sexe" (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 19 [13 April 1845]).

¹¹⁴ "Dites plutôt que Mme Pleyel est une fée, une fée à la baguette enchanteresse, et vous serez dans le vrai" (*Le Ménestrel* 12, no. 19 [13 April 1845]).

land on the ivory and ebony of the keyboard without those movements more worthy of the prestidigitators than of the artists so popular this month.¹¹⁵

To praise her refined approach to the instrument, Gautier slyly pokes at the famously physical pianist Léopold de Meyer, who was also performing in Paris during March and April 1845. This may also be a reference to Liszt, whose full-body approach was often mocked by those who preferred a more dignified Kalkbrennerian posture. The *Charivari* critic concurred: “Let us say too that a remarkably pretty head is perhaps more agreeable to see above the piano stand than a bearded profile; movements always elegant and gracious are better suited to seduce than muscular contortions.”¹¹⁶ He added that he preferred “a simple white dress to a Hungarian *pelisse*,” simultaneously feminizing Pleyel and insulting Liszt.¹¹⁷

After gushing over her performance, Gautier turned to his primary concern: her control over the audience. To explain how she “electrified” her public, he invoked the science of animal magnetism, a form of hypnotic psychotherapy then popular in France.¹¹⁸

Mme Pleyel is a magnetic pianist. Her own playing fascinates her and plunges her into a sleep-walking state. The keys that she touches gush out in currents to the exhalations which, shining through her fingers, re-climb the length of her arms and win her heart and head. The experienced impression spreads through the room,

¹¹⁵ “Mme Pleyel se livre à la moindre contorsion. Sa tenue au piano est des plus correctes. Elle se tient parfaitement droite, dans une attitude où les professeurs les plus austères ne trouveraient rien à reprendre; ses bras agissent seuls et ses mains retombent sur l’ivoire et l’ébène du clavier sans ces mouvemens plus dignes de prostidigitateurs que d’artistes si fort à la mois aujourd’hui” (*La Presse*, 7 April 1845).

¹¹⁶ “Disons aussi qu’une tête remarquablement jolie est peut-être plus agréable à voir au-dessus d’un pupitre de piano qu’un profil barbu; des mouvemens toujours élégans et gracieux sont plus propres à séduire que des contorsions musculeuses” (*Le Charivari*, 6 April 1845).

¹¹⁷ “Une simple robe blanche à une pelisse de magnat hongrois” (*Le Charivari*, 6 April 1845).

¹¹⁸ On mesmerism, see Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), and Sarah Hibberd, “‘Dormez donc, mes chers amours’: Hérold’s *La somnambule* (1827) and Dream Phenomena on the Parisian Lyric Stage,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16 (2004): 107-132.

carried by sound vibrations, and the artist, in turn, exercises on the audience the magnetism that the art exercises on her.¹¹⁹

Both parties find themselves at risk in this scenario. While Pleyel is (and should be) controlled by the music, her control over the audience presents a problem, because it extends from the mediation of the music through her body. This places the audience in the dangerous position of subordination to a woman—and an unstable, “sleep-walking” woman at that. Male virtuosos, who were permitted to channel inspiration, regularly invoked and even required this dynamic to achieve a successful performance; for female pianists, however, such control had always been forbidden. To grant such power to Pleyel without also criticizing her, Gautier looked to a higher power, the music itself:

When the spirit of music seizes the great artist, there takes place in her a true transfiguration: her features seem illuminated by an internal light; her eyes sparkle and pass from the green of the most limpid sea to the most blazing azure blue; her mouth takes a vague smile, like a sleeping mouth which smiles at dream-visions.¹²⁰

Here Gautier employed sexual imagery to create a portrait of a woman held in thrall by the masculine “l’esprit de musique.” He emphasized the intensified color of her eyes and the intimate bedroom smile on her lips, and implied that Pleyel yielded herself to the dominating force of the music—a standard image of feminine subjugation to male creativity and power. To conclude, just in case his readers had missed his point, Gautier further noted that all the positive qualities of her playing are related to “the body of a beautiful woman: grace, purity

¹¹⁹ “Mme Pleyel est une pianiste magnétique. Son propre jeu la fascine et la plonge dans le somnambulisme. Des touches qu’elle frappe, jaillissent des courans à des effluves qui, pénétrant par ses doigts, remontent le long de ses bras et gagnent son cœur et sa tête. L’impression éprouvée se répand dans la salle, conduite par les vibrations sonores, et l’artiste, à son tour, exerce sur le public le magnétisme que l’art exerce sur elle” (*La Presse*, 7 April 1845).

¹²⁰ “Quand l’esprit de la musique s’est emparé de la grande artiste, il s’opère en elle une véritable transfiguration: ses traits semblent illuminée par une lumière intérieure; ses yeux étolent et passent du vert de mer le plus limpide au bleu d’azur le plus foncé; sa bouche prend un vague sourire, comme une bouche endormie qui sourit aux visions du rêve” (*La Presse*, 7 April 1845).

of style, finesse, and, so to speak, the smoothness of execution form the contours, the skin, and constitute beauty.”¹²¹

Blanchard’s review also focuses on this point of Pleyel being dominated by the music while simultaneously dominating her audience:

Her eye is as inspired as it is inspiring; her talent is pleasant and sweet at the same time as energetic. When, in her beautiful hands, she amasses storms that burst into tumultuous effects on the keyboard, her look is calm and serene because it dominates these tempests of difficulties which are always followed by a rain of melodic pearls that shine, mingle amid the streams of limpid harmony, and seducingly dazzle the most well-trained musical intelligences.¹²²

His review juxtaposes the feminine qualities of pleasantness, sweetness, and serenity with masculine qualities of energy, violence, and, most importantly, control. For Blanchard, Pleyel is inspired by the music, but she successfully conveys that inspiration to the audiences without losing control of herself or the performance. “Seduction” in this case refers to the way in which a performer connects with his or her audience. As Blanchard had argued in previous editorials, this skill alone was responsible for the success of a performance, because audiences required some kind of physical clues from the pianist in order to understand his or her interpretation. This was, he acknowledged, a particularly difficult skill for women to develop, and he ascribed Pleyel’s success to her ability to adopt Liszt’s performance style to her own gender; avoiding Liszt’s habit of excessive movement of the limbs, Pleyel guided

¹²¹ “Au corps d’une jolie femme: la grace, la pureté de style, de finesse, et pour ainsi dire le velouté de l’exécution, forment les contours, l’épiderme, et constituent la beauté” (*La Presse*, 7 April 1845).

¹²² “Son œil est inspiré comme il est inspirateur; son talent est suave et doux en même temps qu’énergique. Quand, de ses belles mains, elle amoncelle les orages qui éclatent en tumultueux retentissements sur le clavier, son regard est calme et serein, parce qu’il domine ces tempêtes de difficultés auxquelles succède toujours une pluie de perles mélodiques qui scintillent, se mêlent aux flots d’une harmonie limpide, et séduisant, éblouissent les intelligences musicales les plus exercées” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 5 [2 Feb 1845]).

her audience using hand gestures.¹²³ Therefore, in crowning Pleyel the “queen of the seducing pianists,” Blanchard was not reducing her to a sexy women but rather promoting her to the highest rank of pianists, male or female. At the same time, though, in suggesting that she had imitated Liszt, Blanchard minimized her achievement.

For most critics, Gautier and Blanchard among them, the conflicting issues of femininity and control were impossible to resolve in their discussions of Pleyel’s concerts. Nevertheless, underlying these reviews was the presumption that she was successful—that her concerts were extraordinary musical events—not only in spite of her sex, but because of it. Wrote Gautier: “Mme Pleyel, and this is, according to us, one of her greatest merits, gives her sex to the pieces she performs; the feminine secret sees itself there even in the violence, has something better connected, smoother.”¹²⁴ Again, a double-edged compliment emerges: Pleyel is labeled as a successful female pianist, but at the expense of the masculinity of the music she was performing. Blanchard simply abandoned the effort to categorize Pleyel in terms of gender: “this is more than a man, more than a great artist, this is more than a pretty woman; she has no sex when she is at the piano.”¹²⁵ In his view, Pleyel “seduces” by devoting herself utterly to the music, bypassing the limits of her gender in the process.

Pleyel’s critics grappled with her virtuosity and her femininity in individual ways, yet together their responses paint the picture of an exceptional woman who simultaneously transgressed and confirmed the gendered rules of virtuoso pianism. Nineteenth-century

¹²³ *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 5 (2 Feb 1845). On Blanchard’s argument concerning *pantomime*, see Ellis, “Female Pianists,” 374-78.

¹²⁴ “Mme Pleyel, et c’est, selon nous, un des ses grands mérites, donne son sexe aux morceaux qu’elle exécute; le cachet féminin s’y reconnaît même dans la violence, a quelque chose de mieux lié, de plus onctueux” (*La Presse*, 7 April 1845).

¹²⁵ “C’est plus qu’un homme, qu’un grand artiste, c’est plus qu’une jolie femme; elle n’a pas de sexe quand elle est au piano” (*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 12, no. 5 [2 Feb 1845]).

French society, according to art historian Mary Sheriff, allowed and, to some extent, required the presence of such women because exceptionality by definition demarcates the rule.¹²⁶

Gautier's vivid picture of a woman possessed by the spirit of male creativity could also serve as a warning that excessive melomania could be inappropriate conduct for other young women.¹²⁷ If Blanchard argued that Pleyel performed well in spite of her sex, Théophile Gautier believed she played well *because* of her sex—which was far more dangerous. And to answer Berlioz, who dismissed Pleyel as “Liszt *moins* Liszt,” or Liszt without his creative fire, the *Charivari* critic announced: “She came, she played, she conquered. Liszt is dead, long live Madame Pleyel.”¹²⁸

In reality, however, both Liszt and Pleyel survived the volcano of 1845. And while the *Charivari* painted the picture of a musical landscape reduced by Pleyel's extraordinary talent to only “one piano and one pianist,” the virtuosos of Paris did not, in fact, disappear.¹²⁹ If anything, Pleyel's success opened a door for other female pianists who, like herself, did not fit the traditional virtuoso mold. As a woman and a Paris-born, Paris-trained pianist, the young Camille Moke could not tap into the French virtuoso craze in the 1830s in order to launch an international career. Only after recreating her identity to project some aspects of a public virtuoso did Pleyel manage to reconcile her femininity with her virtuosity, effectively

¹²⁶ Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*, 4.

¹²⁷ See, for example, “C.V.”'s story, “Le Démon de la mélomanie” published in *La France musicale* 11, no. 2-4 (9-23 January 1848).

¹²⁸ “Elle est venue, elle a joué, elle a vaincu. Liszt est mort, vive Mme Pleyel!” (*Le Charivari*, 31 March 1845).

¹²⁹ “Pleurez violons, gémissiez flûtes, soupirez trombones, grondez contre-basses, lamentez-vous ophycléides; il n'y a plus ni flageolets, ni hautbois, ni cors, ni altos, ni instrumens [*sic*], ni orchestre, ni rien; il n'y a qu'un piano et qu'une pianiste. Mme Pleyer [*sic*] *for ever*” (“Weep violins, moan flutes, sigh trombones, grumble contra-basses, lament ophicleides, there are no more flageolets, nor oboes, nor horns, nor instruments, nor orchestra, nor anything; there is only one piano and one pianist. Madame Pleyel *for ever*”; *Le Charivari*, 31 March 1845).

carving out a space for other women pianists to enter the public stage in Paris. Pleyel's triumphant return to Paris may have been a personal victory in her own history, but the challenge she issued to the gendered structure of Parisian society opened a much larger chapter in the musical life of the "capital of the nineteenth century."

Chapter Seven

VIRTUOSO

In the 2006 film *The Prestige*, two young illusionists are challenged by their mentor to discover the secret of a crippled master whose frailty belies the superhuman strength required by his act. After much observation and debate, they conclude that the master is not crippled at all; rather he plays the part of a hunchback during every moment of his public life, creating an elaborate, impenetrable illusion against which his act appears astounding, impossible, even magical. The young magicians marvel at the master's brilliant trick, and as the film unfolds, they emulate him, literally living their own illusions until the line between life and art dissolves. Such is the special power and obligation of the virtuoso: to hide the calculator behind cascades of arpeggios, to deny long hours of rehearsal in favor of improvisatory flourishes, to transform the monotony of real life into fascinating, glittering theater—all for the benefit of the audience.

The audience, however, is no passive receptacle, but rather a dynamic performer with an equally vital task: to believe in the illusion. If both parties fulfill their part of the bargain, virtuoso performances can become the stuff of legends. But if—like Dorothy Gale—they look for the man behind the curtain, the illusion will surely dissipate under charges of fraud and trickery. Without the audience's energy to sustain it, the magic falls flat. In the Paris of Louis-Philippe, whose watchword of moderation and compromise slowly but surely drained the fun out of public life, audiences chose to drink in the excesses of the concert stage. They

demanded bigger and better illusions, and their virtuosos responded with outrageous musical acts, scandalous personal exploits, and dramatic public events. Even today, tales of the July Monarchy's glory days continue to light up the pages of music history, the string of dazzling feats, incandescent skills and legendary duels as captivating now as they ever were.

In late February 1848, French citizens once again took to the streets in battle for their freedom. Louis-Philippe, the *juste-milieu* "citizen-king" of an increasingly stultifying administration, fled to England, and the Second Republic sprang up to take his place. In the tumultuous years that followed, the piano virtuosos gradually disappeared from the salons and concert-halls of Paris. Some still rounded through Paris on their concert tours, but they no longer dominated the stages, salons, and imaginations of their once fervent audiences. The end of Liszt's performing career in late 1847 and his subsequent relocation to Weimar in 1848 along with the deaths of Chopin and Kalkbrenner in the following year conveniently correspond with the period of socio-political unrest around 1848, but the crowd of virtuosos had already begun to thin out in the mid-1840s. Hopeful young prodigies, such as César Franck, Louis-Moreau Gottschalk, and Camille Saint-Saëns, found it almost impossible to tap into the Lisztian channels of prodigiosity, while even the keyboard lions of the 1830s, including Henri Herz, Léopold de Meyer, and Sigismond Thalberg, deserted Paris for the greener pastures of North America after 1845.¹

The demand for expert pianists in Europe did not disappear, however. Rather the 1850s and 1860s witnessed a shift in the musico-cultural expectations and definitions of

¹ On the American tours of Herz, De Meyer, and Thalberg, see R. Allen Lott, *From Paris to Peoria: How European Piano Virtuosos Brought Classical Music to the American Heartland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). On Gottschalk's alternative career path, which led through Europe, North American, and South America, see his memoirs, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

virtuosity that called for a new type of artistic persona and different kinds of performance. Once inextricably tied to improvisation and creativity, virtuosity became on the one hand an acquired skill required for the interpretation of canonic works, and, on the other, a tool to be employed by the composer in service of a higher musical ideal.² Virtuoso concerts gradually metamorphosed from flashy programs dominated by the pianist's own opera fantasies and pre-planned hijinks into performances of established repertoire in a more reverent atmosphere.³ A pianist's arsenal of virtuoso skills was now employed to craft inspired performances of the music of Beethoven, Chopin, and Schumann, rather than to electrify audiences with his own compositions. In spite of the lifelong fight spearheaded by Liszt, the practice of virtuosity lost its power as a creative compositional act, and over the course of the next century, virtuoso pianism settled into the practices that we witness on today's stage.⁴

Yet the outrageous public personae, flamboyant performances, and sex appeal of the virtuoso remained intact, even as the musical world that shaped them splintered. So did the larger by-products of July Monarchy music-making and its historiography, including the cult of the genius, the dichotomy between art and popular musics, the conceptualization of the performer as hero and genius, and the notion of "art for art's sake." These elements continue to shape musical experience in the twenty-first century. In his 1975 film *Lisztomania*, Ken Russell cast The Who's legendary lead singer Roger Daltrey in the role of Liszt. The film, while over-the-top to the point of absurdity, nonetheless exploits the trope of virtuosity from

² Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 137.

³ On changes in concert programming, see William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ For an in-depth analysis of this process, see Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

which both Liszt and Daltrey drew in the construction of their public careers. As Daltrey/Liszt, dressed in a flashy green tuxedo and surrounded by screaming women, thrashes around through a performance of the *Fantasy on Hungarian Folk Themes*, the scene evokes the fanatical crowds that have welcomed iconic performers Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Madonna, Garth Brooks, U2, and the television program *American Idol*. In this world, we also find child prodigies, in the form of Charlotte Church (who sang classical-pop arias at age ten), Miley Cyrus, and the Jonas Brothers, as well as Chopin-esque poets, such as John Mayer and Norah Jones. Even “classical” artists perpetuate these characters: we have the sexy idols (Joshua Bell, Leonard Bernstein, Hillary Hahn), the outrageous Lisztians (Martha Argerich, Lang Lang), and the introspective dreamers (Andrea Bocelli, Glenn Gould), to name only a few. Whether on the stages of concert halls, nightclubs, or public stadiums, whether in performances of string quartets, jazz improvisations, rock songs, or the American national anthem, these musicians inhabit a world not nearly as far from that of Liszt and his cohorts as one hundred and fifty years would make it seem.

Nor do the audiences of these international icons behave in a very different manner. Splashed across the headlines, from the *New York Times* to *Billboard Magazine*, are interviews, rumors, and breaking announcements, all focused on the private lives and professional exploits of the latest musical sensations. And for sale in many establishments, from coffee shops to high-end music stores, are CDs, T-shirts, novelty ties, and wall posters signed by a favorite artist. As audiences, we choose to believe that country star Alan Jackson really is a “small-town Southern man” or that the “Three Tenors” sang together as brothers in art. Maybe he is; maybe they did. But in the process, they sell literally millions of concert tickets, CDs, and anything else that audiences will purchase in order to take home a taste of

the glamour of the music and the musician—just as Liszt sold his music, his portrait, and ticket upon ticket upon ticket to his concerts.

In searching for the men and women behind the nineteenth-century legends, we scholars fall prey to the same ingrained vocabulary of disappointment and awe that polarized the professional careers of these musicians. Once past the illusion, we blame Thalberg for the ease with which his three-handed façade can be analyzed and blast Liszt for posing as a Hungarian without actually speaking the language. Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* can be reduced to opiate-induced hallucinations, while Rossini's once-thrilling dramas are tainted by the fortune they earned. These over-simplified conclusions resonate with the aggressive agenda of the critics and scholars who first sought to penetrate July-Monarchy music-making, and they have reduced their subjects to caricatures.

In this dissertation, I have sought to restore a middle ground to the study of virtuosity by replacing the loaded terms of “hero” and “charlatan” with that of “professional.” Doing so has yielded new and unexpected definitions of virtuosity and virtuoso. Behind electrifying performances and superhuman skills, we find hard-nosed businessmen and -women analyzing the pulse of popular culture, developing strategies to meet audience expectations, constructing networks, and marketing their skills, music, and personalities. The potential for continuing this study is vast. I have taken the first steps in identifying and restoring crucial figures to the history of nineteenth-century music; many more linger in the wings, each with a unique perspective to enrich what has already been discovered. What of the hundreds of pianists that passed through Paris or emerged from the Conservatoire without attracting the notice of the press? The fabric of daily music-making is woven from such individuals, about whom so little is known. Furthermore the music of this period, thus far deleted from the

canon and shunned by scholars, holds many clues: to the expectations and demands of the nebulous group of bourgeois music-lovers, whose disposable income financed the sheet-music industry as well as to the virtuosos and their performances. Finally, the rich musical and cultural practices in nineteenth-century Europe and their legacy in today's popular culture remain largely uncharted in contemporary scholarship. Investigating the pathways to and from the vibrant musical worlds of the nineteenth century can only serve to illuminate the flourishing musical culture in which we live today.

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