



Virtuosity and the Musical Work

The Transcendental Studies of Liszt
Jim Samson

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This book is about three sets of etudes by Liszt: the *Etude en douze exercices* (1826), its reworking as *Douzes Grandes Etudes* (1837), and their reworking as *Douzes études d'exécution transcendante* (1851). At the same time it is a book about nineteenth-century instrumental music in general, in that the three works invite the exploration of features characteristic of the early Romantic era in music. These include: a composer-performer culture, the concept of virtuosity, the significance of recomposition, music and the poetic, and the consolidation of a musical work-concept. A central concern is to illuminate the relationship between the work-concept and a performance- and genre-orientated musical culture. At the same time the book reflects on how we might make judgements of the 'Transcendentals', of the Symphonic Poem *Mazeppa* (based on the fourth etude), and of Liszt's music in general.

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The *Transcendental Studies* of Liszt

JIM SAMSON



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In memory of my father

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Introduction

The signature on a musical score claims it, but that claim is not straightforward. This book will examine its nature and status in relation to the *Etudes d'exécution transcendante* by Liszt. It will further ask just what kind of musical work this is, how it relates to its two earlier versions, and even how we might begin to make judgements about it. The *Transcendentals* had a pre-history, well known in general outline. Liszt's youthful *Etude en douze exercices* was reworked as his *Douze Grandes Etudes* and they in turn were reworked as the *Etudes d'exécution transcendante*. The three sets of etudes, together with the symphonic poem *Mazeppa*, based on the fourth etude, make up the body of music addressed by this book. Naturally one of my aims is to examine the music itself. Perhaps the 'naturally' can no longer be taken for granted. Music analysis, the discipline where the specificity of music is most obviously celebrated, has been challenged by several, now-familiar anti-essentialist critiques: that closed concepts of a work, involving such notions as structure, unity, wholeness and complexity, need to be replaced by open concepts whose defining criteria are neither precise nor complete;¹ that what we analyse is a schematic structure which is bound to remain less than its realisation as a work;² that the work anyway is collectively authored;³ that its identity is unstable, shaped anew in multiple receptions.⁴ These critiques were salutary. As well as exposing the ideological roots of analysis and de-naturalising some of its assumptions, they opened music up to interpretative strategies that had already proved their worth in other disciplines. Yet they carried with them certain dangers, implicit in the change of 'root-metaphor' from organicism to contextualism.⁵ Homologies of compositional and contextual figures can of course be suggestive. But it is evident that they cannot do adequate

¹ Morris Weitz, 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15 (1956), pp. 27–35; also *The Opening Mind: A Philosophical Study of Humanistic Concepts* (Chicago, 1977), and chapter 4 of Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, 1992).

² See especially Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity*, trans. A. Czerniawski, ed. J. G. Harrell (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986; orig. edn, 1928).

³ See, famously, Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image – Music – Text* (London, 1977), pp. 142–8.

⁴ Classic texts in reception aesthetics are Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982) and Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London, 1978).

⁵ Naomi Cumming's term, in 'Analogy in Leonard B. Meyer's Theory of Musical Meaning', in Jamie C. Kassler (ed.), *Metaphor: A Musical Dimension* (Sydney, 1991), pp. 177–92.

justice to the notoriously elusive meanings of music. More often than not the quest for the plot that will enable the good fit is all too transparent. Worse still, the music may be not just over-interpreted, but appropriated by the politicised and predatory agendas of special interest groups.

I see every reason to value music's commonalities with other disciplines, provided that its specificities are also protected. Likewise, I accept the potency of enriching metaphors, provided that their status as metaphors is not in question. At root, though, I believe that a direct, close-to-the-text engagement with musical materials is likely to prove more revealing than the seductive hermeneutics of the 1980s and 1990s, and that such an engagement need not signal an undeconstructed formalist orthodoxy; on the contrary, it may provide the necessary ballast for a more thoroughly grounded, evidence-based hermeneutics. Accordingly, I will examine the music of all three sets of etudes in reasonably close detail in this book, though I recognise that conventional analytical approaches leave something of a shortfall in explication. In particular it is not obvious to me that existing methods can easily accommodate the concept of virtuosity that is so clearly prescribed by the etudes. Virtuosity brings into sharp focus the relationship between music's object-status and its event-status. It marks out a relational field in which text, instrument, performer and audience are all indispensable to defining significance. It draws the performer right into the heart of the work, foregrounding presentational strategies that are hard to illuminate through the familiar, pedigreed methods of music analysis. And it spotlights the instrument, elevating the idiomatic (the figure), a category much less amenable to analysis than theme, harmony and form.

In any case, what I described as a 'direct, close-to-the-text engagement with musical materials' need not constitute analysis at all, except in a very informal meaning of the term. I do not really intend the detailed examination of music in this book to bolster those well-seasoned ideologies of unity and hierarchy that have been central to music analysis as a discipline. Rather it will be allied to, and will support, critical evaluations of some of the major topics of early nineteenth-century music history, or that at least is my hope. One might characterise this larger ambition as an attempt to place the music within a larger cultural setting. Yet that would not entirely cover it. It would be more truthful to acknowledge that the three sets of etudes were chosen partly because they seem to demand this larger topical approach; indeed the ordering of the components within my bipartite title is significant in this regard. Liszt's recompositions do after all highlight a number of topics that are lodged somewhere close to centre stage in the instrumental repertoires of the early nineteenth century. I aim to expose and explore these topics, and in so doing to arrive at useful historical generalisations about the Romantic age in music, and about the special significance of the piano in its characterisation. Moreover, I find it attractive that the topics venture into several specialised corners of our disciplinary field, allowing for points of contact between researches in historical musicology, music theory, and music aesthetics, and within those broad categories between performance studies, genetic analysis and critical hermeneutics. With any luck the three sets of etudes will form a kind of linking thread, forging connections across a range of approaches as well as a range of topics, and in ways that are neither narrowly analytical nor cloudily sociological. The major topics will

come into focus as the book unfolds. But it will be helpful at this stage to formalise them, and even to label them.

A composer–performer culture. This topic, exposed in general terms in chapter 1, is the background presence that informs much of my discussion of the *Etude en douze exercices* in chapter 2. I am not concerned here to present a conventional social history as the backcloth against which to discuss these fairly simple pieces, but rather to demonstrate how a repertory can reveal the practice of which it is a part. This involves recovering something of the practice of early nineteenth-century pianism, a performance-orientated rather than a work-orientated practice, and that means filtering out habits and values that are deeply ingrained in our way of thinking today. Everyone knows that the past is unavailable to us, but by examining the ecology that made possible Liszt's youthful composition we may begin to broaden our understanding of its authorship, and in so doing make room for the 'intention' of its text, to borrow Umberto Eco's useful formulation.⁶ What interests me here is the intersection between individual and collective creativity, especially as registered through musical materials. An obvious effect of theory-based analysis has been to emphasise musical structures at the expense of musical materials. I hope that by homing in on materials, a category I will explore in chapters 2 and 4, I will not only illuminate the shared culture to which the work contributes, a culture that was less inclined to separate text and performance than we are today, but also allow for some informed speculation about the listening strategies of the historical (early nineteenth-century) subject. To generalise wildly, I suspect that contemporary audiences might well have focused rather more on the material content of a repertory, a content that freely crosses the boundaries of individual works, than we do today. They might have heard, in other words, a succession of familiar genre markers, tonal types, expressive gestures, idiomatic figures and the like, where we tend to focus rather more on work character – on the integration of elements rather than the combination of materials. It is likely, too, that the contemporary listener would have been much more aware of the basis of these materials, or many of them, in popular genres. Our present age may need to rediscover the obvious in this respect.

Methodologically, then, this first topic invites the examination of a cultural practice and its repertory. It is intriguing that the repertory of early nineteenth-century pianism is now eagerly embraced by the 'early music revival'. I accept that this can be genuinely revealing of the kind of sound-world the composer had in mind. But I would argue that placing Liszt's early *Etude* in the context of a cultural practice – both through an archaeological quest and an exercise in historical imagination – is likely to take us closer to original meanings than any attempt to reproduce that sound-world. At the same time I am alive to the dialogical nature of this larger enterprise. I have used the sub-titles 'recovered past' and 'active present' in chapter 2 to focus what I hope may be a productive dialogue (as opposed to a spurious fusion) between the historical Liszt and the present-day Liszt: between, in very rough translation, musical materials and musical structures. In the final part of the chapter I engage in a modest and informal analytical exercise both on the cycle as a whole and on some of its individual exercises. The premise underlying this analytical work is that a focus on form

⁶ Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Over-interpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, 1992).

and design, on a sense of work character and individuation, might usefully complement the quest for musical materials, which is my primary concern at this initial stage of the enquiry. At the same time I acknowledge that both these exercises – recovering materials and finding forms – are inescapably undertaken from the perspective of today’s world, complicating any dialogue we might establish between ‘now’ and ‘then’.

The concept of virtuosity. Virtuosity ought to be a subject for today. It brings into focus key questions about the relation of performance to text, and therefore about the limits of what we can usefully say about musical works without reference to their performance – to the act of performance. It spotlights the performance, undervalued in music history: the ‘extreme occasion’, as Edward Said described it.⁷ And also the performer, an individual pursuing personal fulfilment of one sort or another, but also a participant in the larger practice, with unspoken and unwritten obligations and responsibilities. As a very particular exemplification of the burgeoning field of performance studies today, virtuosity will be addressed in chapter 3, in relation to the *Grandes Etudes*. I recognise that the concept of virtuosity has no single congealed meaning, and that its manifestations have not remained invariant through music history; even its definitions, to say nothing of its connotations, have been subject to transformation. And I further recognise that the term should not be confined to music history. If the early nineteenth century was in some special sense an age of virtuosity, it embraced a broad spectrum of skill-based activities, encompassing formal culture, competitive games, culinary arts, public spectacles and even, as Paul Metzner suggests, criminal detection.⁸ And if Paris was in some special sense the ‘capital’ of virtuosity in the early nineteenth century, it was no doubt due to a rather specific set of socio-political circumstances that enabled the celebration of what has been aptly described as ‘public man’.⁹

I want to argue that as virtuosity meshed with a Romantic aesthetic, it generated a dialectical relationship with a strengthening sense of the autonomous musical work, involving taste and ideology as well as form and closure. Already in the late eighteenth century keyboard virtuosity had acquired those pejorative connotations of excess, artifice and kitsch that were associated with the virtuosity of the opera house. The language of contemporary criticism is revealing here. It suggests that the extremes of display and sentiment through which executants established their reputations with a larger public were considered if not morally suspect, then at least a violation of taste, itself an elusive quality, but one that often seemed to hinge on the status of individuality. Highly valued when kept within certain boundaries, individuality courted censure when it exceeded them, just as it courted popularity. And often it was a fetishism of the (mechanical) instrument that lay at the roots of both the censure and the popularity, with a consequent sense that the performance exceeded the work. Two subtexts of virtuosity are already suggested here: a surrender to mechanism, and the stigma of the gratuitous. They will be explored in chapter 3, as will a third subtext, the occlusion of reference. But for now we may note, more straightforwardly, the historical sequence described by Dahlhaus, in which the virtuosity of the first half of the nineteenth

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Musical Elaborations* (London, 1991).

⁸ Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1998).

⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge, 1977).

century is presumed to have made room for the affirmation of work character that typified its second half.¹⁰ Virtuosity, in short, gave way to interpretation. We may note, too, Lydia Goehr's similar, if more nuanced, observation of a shift in balance between two competing principles at work in the performance traditions of Western art music as a whole. She characterises them as 'the perfect performance of music' and 'the perfect musical performance', and together they form useful reference points for a study of early nineteenth-century virtuosity.¹¹ One might go a stage further, and suggest that there are covert values lurking in these categories, bearing on the canonising of some composers and the marginalisation of others.

The significance of recomposition. Arrangement, transcription and recomposition all raise basic questions about compositional process within nineteenth-century pianism. Before Liszt recomposed his own music, he transcribed and 'paraphrased' that of others. In a series of remarkable, and often under-valued, transcriptions or arrangements of everything from Berlioz and Beethoven symphonies to Schubert songs and Donizetti operas, he steered a dangerous and exhilarating path between commentary and tribute. It may be that the line separating categories such as arrangement, transcription and recomposition needs to be looked at in rather broader terms than the legalistic definitions of an analytical aesthetics,¹² and that a more flexible view of roles and motivations would not find an abundance of clear water between them, to borrow a party-political metaphor. In any event, there are issues that arise equally from all of them. One concerns the intersection between age-old processes of compositional borrowing, including self-borrowing, and a Romantic ideology that privileged the singular and the inimitable. Bach was certainly an important exemplary model for the nineteenth century in this respect, not only licensing arrangement and recomposition for an age of individuality, but providing a model for how any apparent incompatibility might be overcome; as Lawrence Dreyfus has potently demonstrated, Bach wrested from his pre-existent materials statements that were not just unique, but were registered 'against the grain' of the model.¹³ It is in any case reasonable to ask just where a line can be drawn between composition and recomposition, given that new creative thoughts usually amount to a restructuring of existing figures and systems. The question will be addressed in chapter 4 by way of a sideways glance at études by Chopin.

A further issue concerns the relationship between Idea and Form, and specifically if we can reasonably speak of an idea and its several forms. Here we might argue that, despite the difficulty in reconciling recomposition and the Romantic ideology, Liszt's cyclical returns to a common starting-point, by no means unique to the works studied here, belonged to a familiar enough Romantic trope, one in which cyclical return was a measure of difference rather than similarity.¹⁴ That trope, as common in literature as in music, allowed that

¹⁰ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989).

¹¹ Lydia Goehr, 'The Perfect Performance of Music and the Perfect Musical Performance', *new formations*, 27 (Winter 1995–6), pp. 1–22.

¹² For an example of the analytical approach, see Stephen Davies, 'Transcription, Authenticity and Performance', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28 (1988), pp. 216–27.

¹³ Lawrence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge MA, 1996), especially chapter 2.

¹⁴ See Rainer Nägele, *Echoes of Translation: Reading between Texts* (Baltimore and London, 1997), pp. 5–6.

an almost neo-Platonic authorial idea – privileged, inaccessible and embodying a central purpose and intention – might be multiply and imperfectly represented in the world of forms, including sounding forms. Compositional reworking invites an examination of the ‘idea’, of which (one may hazard) a performance, no less than a recomposition, might be a version. Despite Schoenberg’s attempts at elucidation, the musical ‘idea’ remains a slippery formulation, and one that is often difficult to separate from the piece *in toto*. Nonetheless, I will try to make some sense of it in chapter 4, invoking Liszt’s commentaries as well as Schoenberg’s. However we understand the idea and its forms, it seems clear that mechanisms of translation are central to this topic. We are encouraged to reflect on what is said and meant (the idea) as against the mode of saying and meaning (the presentation). Indeed where music is concerned, we are invited specifically to consider just what can constitute idea and object within a temporal, performer-dependent and symbolic art. There is of course a qualitative distinction in this respect between the recompositions of 1837 and the revisions of 1851 which resulted in the *Transcendentals*. These revisions will be the subject of chapter 5, which will also examine formal and tonal processes in this, the final, version of the etudes.

Music and the poetic. In 1851, Liszt added poetic titles to ten of the etudes, and at around the same time he turned one of them into a symphonic poem. These decisions need to be considered in light of his understanding of the category ‘poetic’, which considerably expands the familiar early nineteenth-century usage. Not only does the poetic signal music’s putative expressive powers; it places the status and dignity of music on the critical agenda. In chapter 6, which deals exclusively with the *Transcendentals*, Liszt’s understanding of the poetic will be examined in tandem with the idea of absolute music. Their rival claims (synthesised in Wagner and also in Liszt) echoed a central debate within the philosophical aesthetics of the early nineteenth century, and it can be argued that the all-important polemic of the 1850s, in which Liszt was heavily implicated, partly recycled that debate, albeit now addressing a rather different agenda (essentially about historicism and the constitution of the new). In light of this, it is tempting to invoke ontological questions associated with programme music, especially as Liszt went on to compose a symphonic poem based on the fourth etude. It is easy to demonstrate, of course, that his choice of titles for the *Transcendentals* (invoking Hugo, the medieval-gothic romance, the cult of nature, the dream-world of the artist) was fairly arbitrary, and then to conclude that their essential significance lies in the material and formal rather than the poetic domain. Yet, however randomly chosen, the title remains part of the piece. At the very least, it influences our listening strategies. Beyond that, it effectively supports and crystallises any existing tendencies of the music to exemplify a topic, genre or affective meaning, and for that reason it encourages excursions into the semiotics of music. Again we cut across the boundaries of the works, opening up their meanings through shared expressive codes. Again we call into question the singular nature of authorship. And again we are obliged to ask how this kind of poetic agenda has fared within the Western tradition.

The musical work. As these topics are introduced successively, they bring into increasingly sharp focus not just questions of authorship, but also of work character. Here my concern is with the work-concept in nineteenth-century music, by which I (and others) mean the assumption that a musical culture is manifest first and foremost in, and is indeed regulated

by, self-contained musical works. This topic has been much debated,¹⁵ and it will bear somewhat on the argument of chapter 7, which looks at multiple versions of *Mazeppa*. Since these versions take us from 1826 to 1874, they naturally raise again the issue of authorship, and in particular the extent to which an authorial voice can formulate and sustain its identity through contextually and temporally separated utterances. They also invite us to reflect on the tension – even the opposition – between a gradually strengthening sense of the work as an object of contemplation, independent of contexts, and a performance- and genre-orientated musical culture, to which the work-concept posed something of a threat. My five topics might be regarded in one sense as progressively mediating this opposition, which arguably boils down to a developing opposition between the musical performance and the musical work. At the same time it seems fairly clear that the strengthening of the work-concept was in part a political development, allied not only to the development of a middle-class culture but more specifically to German nationalism and its cultural triumph. The legacy of this remains with us today, and inevitably colours any attempt we make to evaluate Liszt's achievement. I will address his reputation in chapter 7, and I will ask specifically if in the face of so many contingencies there is any room left for an aesthetic judgement of his music. This is tantamount to asking if the aesthetic has standing in our modern world.

¹⁵ For a rehearsal of the arguments surrounding the work-concept, see the chapters by Lydia Goehr and Reinhard Strohm in Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* (Liverpool, 2000).

Chapter One



Ecology by numbers

3 TIMES 12 ETUDES

In 1827, when Liszt was sixteen years old, a volume of twelve exercises, almost certainly composed in the early months of the previous year, was published by Boisselot in Marseilles. Its full title was *Etude pour le piano en quarante-huit exercices dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*, Op. 6, and it was therefore intended as the first of four volumes. The other three were not composed, though it has been suggested that a recently uncovered piece in F♯ major may have been destined for No. 13.¹ The work was issued simultaneously by Dufaut et Dubois in Paris, where Liszt and his father had been based since December 1823, shortly after his course of lessons with Czerny came to an end.² Liszt's (or Boisselot's) use of 'étude' as a collective term for a group of exercises has attracted attention in the Liszt commentaries. In fact it was a common enough practice in the early history of the genre, though already somewhat outmoded in 1827.³ By 1839, when the work was reissued by Hofmeister in Leipzig, the usage had completely died out, and its demise is reflected in the double plural of the German publisher's confused and confusing title, *Etudes . . . en douze exercices*, Op. 1.⁴ In the preface to his edition of the work, Busoni pointed out that this opus number indicated that the *Etude* was the first work of Liszt to have been published in Germany.⁵ The title page of the Hofmeister edition has a rather curious vignette depicting a child in a cradle, together with the explanatory, and apologetic, note: 'Travail de la Jeunesse'. It was published without permission, a form of 'piracy' that was common enough in the nineteenth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

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

¹⁸ This is located in the Weimar archive (D-WRGs J 23).

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

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

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

3 COMPOSERS

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

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

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

²¹ Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, p. 91.

Ecology by numbers

Table 1.1 *The 'Transcendental Studies' and Mazeppa: chronological table*

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

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

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

²⁴ Williams (ed.), *Selected Letters*, p. 401.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³³ ‘Recollections from my Life’, p. 315.

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

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