

Rediscovering the Unsung Piano Études:
A Pedagogical Analysis of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's *Eight Übungsstücke* and
Agathe Backer Grøndahl's *Six Concert de Études Op. 11*

by

Ka Hou Chan

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Baruch Meir, Co-Chair
Hannah Creviston, Co-Chair
Kay Norton

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ABSTRACT

History has long been stamped with the name of Carl Czerny in the domain of piano pedagogy, due to the substantial number of didactic piano exercises that Czerny produced. As a result, Czerny's "canonic" pedagogical works have overshadowed other unrecognized piano études. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the cultivated form of concert études entered the output of almost every pianist-composer, and yet traditionally, attention in piano pedagogy has centered on études by Czerny, Burgmüller, Liszt, Schumann and Chopin. More recent research pays tribute to études by other composers, such as Clementi, Cramer, Hummel and Moscheles.

The current lack of documentation and analysis of piano études written by female pianists is undeservedly a great loss to pedagogy and keyboard literature. Not only do these études give modern musicians a glimpse into the pianism and professionalism of the earliest accomplished women pianists, but the varieties in their études also form a comprehensive training method that ranges from the intermediate level to the advanced level. The virtuosity and brilliance of the advanced études deserve to be considered in league with other long-standing piano études that have already been glorified and performed throughout history.

The purpose of this pedagogical study is to shed light on these hidden treasures of études which are invaluable pedagogical resources. To concisely demonstrate the varieties of pianistic techniques, this analysis will focus solely on two collections of études: *Eight Übungsstücke* (1823) by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805 – 1847), and *Six Concert de Études Op. 11* (1881) by Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847 – 1907).

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use excerpts from the two works (in the section of pedagogical analysis in this document). Their dedication to music of women composers reminds me one of Fanny Hensel's sentences in her letter, that her simple but ultimate wish was "to see my best works appear in print."¹

¹ Quoted in Eugene Murray Gates, "The Woman Composer Question: Four Case Studies from the Romantic Era," (ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, University of Toronto), 1992: 106.

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CHAPTER 1

ÉTUDES RECONSIDERED: A BRIEF DISCUSSION

The Original Meanings of *Étude*

The French word *étude* arouses controversies in terms of its definition, classification and function. First, an ambiguity was created by different linguistic terms that represent the same genre: “*study*” in English, “*übung*” in German, and “*esercizio*” in Italian were the earliest titles being extensively used.² These terms seem to imply the didactic and repetitive nature of *exercises*. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French term *étude* (derived from the Latin root of “*studium*”) emerged and was widely adopted to imply a musical work that was denoted as “a short, instrumental piece devoted to the practice of some technical formula. Its purpose is to offer the player a certain technical problem in its various aspects and in a musically coherent form.”³

Nevertheless, tracing the definitions from both historical and modern sources can only provide limited and partial understanding of the genre, as the aesthetic of *étude* (or any keyboard study) was interpreted almost contradictorily across centuries of music-making. The question mainly centers on whether an *étude* is an artistic piece with a performing function or a soulless exercise with a practical, domestic role.

A glimpse of selected literature of earlier keyboard studies prior to the nineteenth century will provide insight into the original meaning and aesthetic. English composer Henry Purcell (1659 – 1695) published *A Choice Collection of Lessons for the*

² *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Study,” accessed 24 May, 2022.

³ Peter Felix Ganz, “The Development of the Etude for Pianoforte” (PhDdiss., Northwestern University, 1960), 11.

Harpsichord or Spinnet in 1696.⁴ Bearing the title of “*Lessons*”, this collection consists of keyboard suites that contain preludes and Baroque dances, such as sarabandes and minuets.⁵ Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti (1685 – 1757) wrote *30 Essercizi per gravicembala (30 Exercises for Harpsichord)* in 1738. These exercises were grouped under the categories of sonatas, as they were written in the exact same form and style as his other hundreds of sonatas.⁶ French composer François Couperin (1668 – 1733) published a significant keyboard treatise *L’art de toucher le Clavecin (The Art of Playing the Harpsichord)*, in which the preface states that the contents (including ornamentations, keyboard techniques and numerous preludes) are aimed to help students to understand “the taste and style suited to this instrument.”⁷

Indeed, keyboard studies have been titled according to loose and unsystematic practices, yet this diversity unveiled a fact. These keyboard studies were essentially musical pieces. Whether titled *essercizi*, *lessons*, or another name, none of the keyboard studies were dry or soulless exercises. These musical pieces were meant to be a genre that fulfilled both an instructional function as well as an artistic expression, cultivating both the physical and expressive growth of pianists. The touch, the taste and the style of keyboard playing are all parts of the technique. To quote Couperin’s own phrase, these qualities are all part of “*The Art of Playing*.”⁸

⁴ Yanjing Gu, “A Pedagogical Guide to Kapustin’s Eight Concert Etudes, Op. 40” (PhDdiss., West Virginia University, 2019), 27.

⁵ *Lesson*, deriving from the French term “*leçon*.”

⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Study,” Accessed 24 May, 2022.

⁷ François Couperin, translated by Anna Linde, *L’art de toucher le clavecin* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1978).

⁸ François Couperin’s own title of *L’art de toucher*.

Furthermore, the earliest German keyboard works that bear the title “*Übung*” also suggest deeper musical meanings. Johann Kuhnau wrote in the preface of his own *Clavier-Übung* (1689) that this “keyboard practice” is written as an attempt “to refresh the *soul* that has been exhausted by other piano studies.”⁹ Johann Sebastian Bach wrote a total of four volumes of *Clavier-Übung* which contain many of his important keyboard works such as the *Six Partitas* and the immortal *Goldberg Variations*.¹⁰ In the preface of *Clavier-Übung II* (1735), consisting of the well-known *Italian Concerto* and the *French Overture in B minor*, the composer himself stated that these works are written with an aim to prepare “for those lovers of the edification of the *soul*.”¹¹

That the word “soul” that has appeared twice in the two prefaces quoted above is not accidental. Many of these keyboard works, such as the *Goldberg Variations*, are the most monumental manifestations of musical profundity ever found in keyboard literature. Bach’s own phrase, “edification of soul,” expressed his hope to explore equally the spiritual and musical depth found in these *Clavier-Übung* in addition to the technique and mechanism of keyboard playing. Indeed, the earliest keyboard studies that bear the titles such as *study*, *übung*, or *essercizio* mean more than just *exercises* or physical trainings – the artistic and musical significance within these works undoubtedly transcends what the titles imply.

⁹ Andrew James Talle, “J. S. Bach's Keyboard Partitas and Their Early Audience” (Harvard University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing), 28.

Translated from “...den von andern Studiis ermüdeten Geist an dem Claviere wiederum zu erfrischen suchen.”

¹⁰ Robert Schumann considered J.S. Bach’s *Clavier-Übung* the starting point of the genre.

¹¹ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Six Partitas & Overture in French Style*, edited by Hans Bischoff (Prague: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1942), 3.

Translated from “Denen Liebhabern zur Gemueths-Ergoetzung verfertiget von” by Alexander Lipsky.

Exercises in the Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century, the popularization of public concerts urged professionalization in piano pedagogy. In response to these pedagogical needs, a distinctive genre of keyboard studies emerged which was not categorized with a name, but contained purely didactic exercises with utilitarian functions. These works can be called instruction manuals. For instance, the *40 Tägliche Studien* op. 337 (1834) written by Carl Czerny contained short daily exercises that required repetition and Czerny described them as “assiduous practices of all the most often-recurring difficulties.”¹² Similar preparatory works that comprise repeating five-finger exercises include Aloys Schmitt’s *Vorbereitende Übungen* op. 16 (1820) and Charles-Louis Hanon’s *The Virtuoso Pianists* (1873). Franz Liszt’s challenging three-volumes of *Technische Studien*, S.146 (1873) remain as the definitive models of this genre, with repetitive exercises that covered fundamentally all technical aspects and difficulties for piano. It took him six years to complete the whole collection. Another two collections that compare to the massiveness of Liszt’s *Technische Studien* were Henri Herz’s *Méthode Complète de Piano, Op.100* (1830) and Johann Nepomuk Hummel’s *Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel* (1827), which were described by Hummel himself as “a course of instruction, adapted to the present newly commenced epoch of this instrument.”¹³ Johannes Brahms’s *51 Übungen für das Pianoforte* (1893) are scarcely utilized due to its difficulty. The fifty-one exercises in this collection (with strict fingering rules) demonstrated countless

¹² Carl Czerny, *40 Tägliche Studien Op. 337*, edited by Giuseppe Buonamici (New York: G. Schirmer, 1897), i.

¹³ Johann Nepomuk Hummel, *Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel* (Vienna: Tobias Haslinger, 1827), x.

innovations in perfecting techniques, setting the highest challenges for pianists. This work reflected Brahms's philosophy as a pedagogue, as he bluntly wrote:

I have no patience with the pianist who growls because of a few new technical difficulties. Shall progress stop because of a few hard nuts to crack? ... hands and fingers [in this collection] are used in a new way. The new idiom requires greater strength, freedom, and independence of fingers than the traditional classical piano technique.¹⁴

Brahms's strict demands on the performer's level of piano technique (such as independence and strength of fingers) motivated him to devote himself to this pedagogical work that took decades to be completed. While the technical studies mentioned above continue to prevail in piano pedagogy today, Hélène de Montgeroult's *Cours complet pour l'enseignement du forte piano (Complete Course for Teaching the Pianoforte)* is forgotten and remains obscure. As a celebrated French pianist, Montgeroult was appointed as the first-ever female *Professeur de Première Classe* (First Class Teacher) at Paris Conservatoire in 1795 (the year when the school was established). Montgeroult's *Cours complet pour l'enseignement du forte piano* contains 972 short studies (with text and technical drills) and 114 short studies that fit in concert programs. From a personal viewpoint as a pianist, the comprehensiveness of the writings and the foresight of this massive pedagogical work surpasses all other instruction manuals and wholly deserves to be re-published in today's world.¹⁵ French historian Jean-François Marmontel acclaimed this work to be "an important resource of musicianship... applying the art of singing to playing the piano."¹⁶

¹⁴ Hang-Fong Au, "Johannes Brahms' 51 *Uebungen fuer das Pianoforte*: An Analytical Study of Pianistic Techniques in Brahms' Piano Literature" (University of Houston, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003), 98.

¹⁵ The current publication was published back in 1820s.

¹⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Montgeroult, Hélène-Antoinette-Marie de Nervo de," accessed 24 September, 2022.

As the aesthetic of virtuosity was prevailing among the European public concerts, these types of technical studies flourished as an inevitable response to the technical evolution and pianism. However, this type of work, serving as a preparatory method with a “warm-up” quality, could only satisfy the purpose of acquiring physical perfection and foundation in an offstage setting. Composers began to seek a form that could incorporate the virtuosity in a musically coherent structure – *concert études*. The idea of concert études became clear and was later the ideal form for the genre. Its appearance finally distinguished a *study* from an *étude*.

Concert Études as Art Form

More keyboard studies were written at the turn of the nineteenth century, promising the evolution of techniques and pianism. From Muzio Clementi’s *Gradus ad Parnassum* (“*Steps Toward Mastery*”) through études composed by Johann Baptist Cramer, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Ignaz Moscheles, and Carl Czerny, up to the études by Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin, and Robert Schumann, keyboard studies arrived at their most elevated moment.¹⁷ Études became the preferred term at this point due to two main factors: first, the French influence of Parisian composer cycle; and second, the growing aesthetic of perceiving the étude as a piece of *art* to differentiate from the machine-driven exercises.

However, this phenomenon was complicated by the fact that most studies were given the title of *étude*, and yet the writings were still inclined to be mechanical. These

¹⁷ Claudia MacDonald, “Schumann’s Piano Practice: Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal,” *The Journal of Musicology* 19, no. 4 (2002): 559.

“études” still focused on dry scales and arpeggios and lacked harmonic varieties and melodic interest. This evoked composers’ awareness to re-negotiate the aesthetic of the étude, for which the concepts of technique and virtuosity must be involved in the discussion.

First, the original meaning of the French word *étude* denoted “the work of mind, to know, to deepen something; in-depth examination of something.”¹⁸ The absence of physicality in this definition, along with the key word of “mind” echoed Robert Schumann’s famous aphorism on the importance of “heart and head” in interpreting music:

What do we mean by being *musical*? You are not so when, with eyes painfully fixed on the notes, you struggle through a piece... but you are musical when, in playing a new piece, you almost foresee what is coming; when you play an old one by heart; in short, when you have taken *music* not only into your *fingers*, but into your *heart and head*.¹⁹

The metaphysical facets of the *heart and mind* in piano playing are explicitly articulated by Schumann as indispensable qualities to have for the sake of *being musical*. The importance of *mind* (in Schumann’s own term *Seelenzustände*²⁰) was also mentioned again in Hans von Bülow’s famous adage: “One does not play the piano with one’s hands. One plays the piano with one’s mind.”²¹ Schumann further explained the danger of executing purely mechanical exercises in piano practice:

How may one become musical in this sense? Dear child, the principal requisites, a fine ear and a swift power of comprehension, come, like all things, from above. But this foundation may and must be improved and enlarged. You cannot do this by shutting

¹⁸ *Larousse.fr: Encyclopédie et Dictionnaires Gratuits en Ligne*, s.v. “étude,” accessed 24 May, 2022, <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/%C3%A9tude/31591>

¹⁹ Reginald R Gerig, *Famous Pianists & Their Technique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 207.

²⁰ Holly Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought: from E.T.A. Hoffmann to Arnold Schoenberg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102.

²¹ Quoted in Reginald R Gerig, *Famous Pianists & Their Technique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), xi.

yourself up all day like a hermit, practicing **mechanical exercises**, but by a vital, many-sided musical activity...²²

Schumann's own sentences here should not suggest that he was an anti-mechanism pedagogue, as his early passion on finger techniques with an apparatus machine leading to physical injury is no secret in history. Then, how is the truism of *being musical* related to our discussion of the *étude*? In fact, Schumann was among the first to state his expectation that *études* need to *be musical*. He condemned the prominence of mechanical *études* that were brought to the literature and wrote in a September 1839 *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* article that this type of *étude*-writing should cease.²³ In addition, Schumann took Chopin's *études* as the benchmark of *concert études* and the future of the genre, that retained both technical prowess and musical imagination:

No one will dispute how much Clementi and Cramer [in his *Etudes en 42 exercices doigtés dans les différents Tons, 2 volumes*] derived from [Bach]. From that time up to Moscheles [*Studien, Op. 70*] came a break. Perhaps it was the influence of Beethoven, who, hostile to everything mechanical, inclined more to pure poetic creation. With Moscheles and to an even greater degree in Chopin [*Twelve Etudes, Op. 10*], from then on, along with an interest in the technical one in unrestrained imagination also ruled.²⁴

Robert Schumann's discussion on the genre of the *étude* in his own journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, urges musicians to rethink and revolutionize the aesthetics of the piano *étude*. August Kahlert, a music critic, agreed with Schumann's perspective, and criticized focusing solely on *fingerfertigen* in *études*, or "invention [that] comes from the fingers, not the spirit."²⁵ Schumann's praise of Chopin's twenty-four *études*, "virtuosity here [in Chopin's *études*] becomes poetic," was no exaggeration, but a pertinent

²² Ibid., 207.

²³ Claudia MacDonald, "Schumann's Piano Practice: Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal," *The Journal of Musicology* 19, no. 4 (2002): 560.

²⁴ Ibid., 560.

²⁵ Alexander Stefaniak, "Clara Schumann's Interiorities and the Cutting Edge of Popular Pianism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70, no. 3 (2017): 740.

description.²⁶ Each Chopin *étude* displays a specific technical facet, which is the virtuosic essence of an *étude*, while the inner musical contents maintain the narrative quality and vibrant color palette of tone poems.

However, *concert études* that stand as an art form incorporating the fashionable sense of *character pieces*, developed as the new dominant genre before Chopin's *études*. Marie Bigot, a well-respected French pianist and teacher of Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, wrote her *Suite d'études* in 1818, consisting of six *études*. The writings highly reflect keyboard genres from the *Baroque* period, such as dances, sonatas, and toccatas.²⁷ Polish pianist and composer Maria Szymanowska published her *Vingt exercices et preludes* in 1820, in which the title perfectly depicts the writings in this collection: some pieces suggest aspects of virtuosic "exercises" and influenced later composers. For instance, the ending of no. 18 from the set clearly influenced the ending of Chopin's *étude* in A-flat major (op. 25 no. 1). The continuous figure in No. 15 from the set clearly is reminiscent to the well-known *Prelude* in C minor, BWV 847 by J.S. Bach.²⁸ Clara Schumann wrote her *Étude* in A-flat, WoO 4 in 1832, and yet, this was never published during her lifetime. The surviving autograph of this short work was published in 2010. The writings of this *étude* challenge pianists' ability to balance voices in *legato* motion, and the strong sense of pastorage and nostalgia within the music itself make it reminiscent to a *nocturne* or *prelude*.

²⁶ Xiao Chen, "Seeking the Meaning of Virtuosity: The Integration of Technical Mastery and Musical Artistry in Piano Training" (University of California, Los Angeles: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017), 21.

²⁷ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Bigot (de Morogues) [née Kiené] Marie," accessed 24 September, 2022.

²⁸ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Szymanowska [née Wołowska], Maria Agata," accessed 24 September, 2022.

Starting in the 1830s, concert études became a popular genre and medium for pianist-composers to showcase their pianism. In addition to Chopin's twenty-four études (*opus 10*, in 1832; *opus 25* in 1836), one must not ignore Louise Ferranc, an important French pianist and pedagogue who was appointed as Professor of Piano at Paris Conservatoire in 1842. Ferranc was arguably the second woman professor in any European conservatories (after Hélène de Montgeroult in 1795). During her professorships which spanned over thirty years, Ferranc composed four major sets of études: *Trente études dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*, Op. 26 (1839), *Douze études brillantes*, Op. 41 (1858), *Vingt études de moyenne difficulté*, Op. 42 (1855), *Vingt cinq études faciles*. Among all Ferranc's highly virtuosic and technically challenging études, her first collection of études, op. 26, was chosen by the Paris Conservatoire to be mandatory repertoire for all piano students. French music critic Maurice Bourges wrote about Ferranc's études in 1840 (*La revue et gazette musicale*) that they were "not only to develop technique but also to mould taste."²⁹ At the same time, Kate Loder's distinctive *Keyboard Studies* (Book 1 and Book 2) were published in 1852 and 1853. A British pianist, composer and pedagogue, Loder was a true virtuosic pianist whose playing was once described as having "almost the power of [Sigismund] Thalberg himself" in 1844, and in the same year, Loder was appointed as the first Professor of Harmony at Royal Academy of Music.³⁰ Her 24 *Keyboard Studies* were written in all twenty-four major and minor keys and covered wide range of pianistic techniques. The creative characters,

²⁹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Ferranc family," accessed 24 September, 2022.

³⁰ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Loder family," accessed 24 September, 2022.

colors and brilliance found within these two sets deserve the titles to be named études, reminiscent to Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* for the quality of lyricism.

Adolf von Henselt's *Twelve Études Caractéristiques, op. 2* (1838) are often ignored in today's piano world and yet this set of études always appeared in the concert tour program of pianist Clara Schumann, who was dubbed as the "true priest of art and piano" and was disgusted by any mechanical work.³¹ Clara Schumann described Henselt's études as "music and melodies... and enrapturingly beautiful, so compelling for the heart."³² Robert Schumann praised Henselt's études as perfect models of étude-writing that portray the necessary, three-dimensional structure: charming melodies, brilliant figuration, and inner emotional connections.³³ The evocative titles embedded with each étude further depicted their programmatic quality. For instance, Henselt's *étude* op. 12, no. 4 was marked with a title note, "*Si oiseau j'étais / A toi je volerais! – Were I a bird, I would fly to you!*"³⁴

One must also not forget about French composer and pianist Cécile Chaminade, who can be safely deemed to be the most prolific composer of this genre (See Appendix A). Among her fruitful outputs of concert études, her *Six Études de Concert, op. 35* was the most well-known: each étude received a descriptive title such as "*Automne*," "*Appassionato*," or "*Tarentelle*". Chaminade created a unique world of concert étude in that each work does not target just one technical facet, but multiple difficulties. The virtuosity and emotional depth found in her études set a quintessence of the genre. Franz

³¹ Given by Eduard Hanslick in his *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien* of 1869.

³² Translated in Alexander Stefaniak, "Clara Schumann's Interiorities and the Cutting Edge of Popular Pianism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70, no. 3 (2017): 732.

³³ *Ibid.*, 732.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 733.

Liszt used explicit titles in his *Études d'exécution Transcendante* to indicate how études transcend finger execution. Schumann described the work as “studies of *Sturm und Drang*, for, at the most, ten or twelve players in the world.”³⁵ Not only do these études mark the height of the unimaginable possibility of piano techniques, but they also confirm the extramusical contents of études as program music. For example, étude no. 4, *Mazeppa* evoked Liszt’s inspiration from Victor Hugo’s 1828 poem, *Les Orientales*.³⁶ The virtuosic passages and figurations in étude no. 5, *Feux Follets*, vividly depict the image of ghostly light.

The effect of Niccolò Paganini’s violin virtuosity was further embodied in concert études for piano when Brahms published his *Variations on a Theme by Paganini, op. 35* (1863) preceded by Liszt’s *Grandes études de Paganini* and Schumann’s *Etudes after Paganini Caprices*. Brahms later added the title of *Studien für Pianoforte* to these variations – seemingly ambivalent, but that was Brahms’s attempt to combine technical difficulties with the art of variation-writings. (Brahms also incorporated musical pieces such as the *Waltz* in Book II). It is no doubt that Brahms’ creativity stemmed from the momentous *Étude Symphoniques* (1834) written by Robert Schumann, a work the composer himself described as “intensely *emotional* variations... existing purely for its own sake.”³⁷ Schumann’s earlier two attempted titles for this work, *Études en forme de Variations*, and *Étuden im Orchestercharakter von Florestan und Eusebius*, exemplified

³⁵ Translated in Alexander Stefaniak. “Robert Schumann, Serious Virtuosity, and the Rhetoric of the Sublime,” *The Journal of Musicology* 33, no. 4 (2016): 450.

³⁶ Marina A. Ledin, “Franz Liszt: *12 Etudes d'exécution Transcendante: Program Note*” (Naxo: Encore Consultants, 1997), 1.

³⁷ Robert Schumann, *Symphonic Etudes op. 13: Versions 1837 and 1852* (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2006), translated and edited by Ernst Herttrich: X.

his attempt to evoke two things: the extramusical contents of *Florestan* and *Eusebius* as well as the concept of “orchestra” in a concert étude. This work fulfills Schumann’s utmost outlook that a true étude preserves both performing virtuosity and inner profoundness with equal supremacy.

While Liszt, Brahms, and Schumann’s études remain the “standardized” works in this genre, some equally important and virtuosic concert études written by accomplished pianists are unsung. Polish keyboard player Wanda Landowska is remembered as an influential harpsichordist who championed and contributed to the revival of performance practice on harpsichords. Landowska’s *Étude Caractéristique*, op. 4 was published by the major publisher *Enoch & Cie* in 1901 (which was within the first year she arrived in Paris).³⁸ Landowska designed multiple layers in this short étude within the texture that is highly chromatic, which created pianistic challenges in this musical piece. Venezuelan pianist and composer Teresa Carreño composed three substantial *Caprice-Études* in the early 1900s. These three études contain one of the highest virtuosities and deepest musical profundity in the genre.³⁹ The narrativity and variety of passages written in Carreño’s études indeed project what the title implies and what Michael Praetorius described as a keyboard capriccio – ‘*phantasia subitanea*.’” The writings in these études also project an orchestral effect on the keyboard. German pianist Sophie Menter, a highly successful pianist during her lifetime and the first female professor at Saint Petersburg Conservatory, was publicly called by Franz Liszt himself as his “only legitimate piano daughter.” Menter once expressed her insecurity as a composer and wrote of herself of

³⁸ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Landowska, Wanda," accessed 24 September, 2022.

³⁹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Carreño, (María) Teresa," accessed 24 September, 2022.

having ‘miserable talent for composing.’⁴⁰ Yet, her two concert études, op. 8 and op. 9, proved her humbleness. In these two études, both the unimaginable technical challenge and the tremendous musical poetry that are unearthed can fully rival Chopin’s étude writings.

This outpouring of concert études in the nineteenth century persisted in the next century, maintaining a special and authoritative place in the piano repertoires. In a representative sampling of concert études written by prominent composers such as Debussy, Rachmaninoff, Scriabin and Ligeti, the genre continued to lose its center as a result of each composer’s unique creativity and craftsmanship. A few other important études written by female composers were neglected and ought to be included in this representative sampling. American composer, singer and pianist Mana-Zucca Cassal composed her *Étude d’Hommage* in 1918. The work itself manifests an amalgamation of elements from jazz and classical music, deserving a unique and central place in the genre, in addition to the current popularity of jazzy *Eight Concert Études* written by Russian composer Nikolai Kapustin. American composer Louise Talma was known by her opera *The Alcestrad*, that was premiered and staged in 1962 by Oper Frankfurt, making her the first American woman composer to have an opera premiered by a leading European opera house.⁴¹ Talma wrote *Six Études for Piano* in 1954. The rhythmic variety and complex contrapuntal writings in this set make these six études challenging piano literature appropriate for concert setting. Within the kaleidoscopic world of the contemporary études, one unique “language” was never forgotten: that is, certain aspects of pianistic

⁴⁰ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Menter, Sophie," accessed 24 September, 2022.

⁴¹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. " Talma, Louise," accessed 24 September, 2022.

techniques were emphasized throughout that held the work together, without undermining the existence of various characters and narratives.

Brief Epilogue

The complication of defining the *étude* centers on the dualistic nature of it: should it be perceived as a functional work or an artistic work? This question has led to endless controversies and even the meanings of virtuosity and technique naturally must be involved in the conversation. Believing that the functionality of *études* outweighs the artistic side would result in false understanding. Likewise, if one believes that the purpose of the *étude* is to perfect certain facets of techniques, then one must also confess that every substantial piano literature has equal technical value and importance. In fact, the true concept of *technique* is both vague and broad; technique can be as simple as one's physical capability in interpretation or it can be as complicated as Robert Schumann's viewpoint that "*being musical*" is part of the technique (metaphysical quality). Nadia Boulanger famously said: "music is technique."⁴² From J.S. Bach's "edification of soul" in his *Clavier-Übung* to Robert Schumann's statement that "the cultivation of a feeling for interpretation and performance goes hand in hand with the study of technic," musical profoundness in *études* has never been denied.⁴³

The pursuit of technical perfection and mechanical training at the turn of the nineteenth century shadowed the artistic side of *études* for a short period. However, the later fashionable preferred use of the term, along with the revolutionary writings that

⁴² Gerig, 1.

⁴³ Claudia MacDonald, "Schumann's Piano Practice: Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal," *The Journal of Musicology* 19, no. 4 (2002): 535.

surpass the superficiality of finger works, liberated the true meanings of the étude as a self-contained art. Indeed, some works lean towards a piano *study* that intrinsically focuses on the priority and functionality of training techniques. As such, they possess less musical interest. Yet, a multi-faceted understanding of the aesthetic of étude is needed so that the art and the technical values are both appreciated. The quintessence of this genre is to unearth the technical boundaries of pianism within a musical and artistic realm. Hence the birth of the concert étude which, without rejecting its functional nature, manifested the most ideal form of this genre, connoting what Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “[Art] is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process.”⁴⁴

On the other hand, the current chapter aims to gather and include the études written by female composers within the context and discussion of the genre. In Table A, a list of études written by female composers is provided, summarizing our discussion above and documenting the cornucopia of stylistically diverse études written by female composers that technically range from intermediate to advanced level. Hélène de Montgeroult’s *Cours complet pour l’enseignement du forte piano (Complete Course for Teaching the Pianoforte)*, as its title implies, stands as one of the most comprehensive instruction manuals that challenge the long-standing magisterial position of Liszt’s *Technische Studien*. Louise Farrenc contributed four collections of études with a well-rounded array of difficulties. Études written by Kate Loder, Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann represent technically less-demanding works that champion both intermediate-

⁴⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, trans. by John Cumming, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 137.

level pedagogical pieces and concert pieces with their charming and melodious characters. Marie Bigot and Maria Szymanowska revived the Baroque *clavier-übung* with their unique dance-études. Agathe Backer Grøndahl, Cécile Chaminade and Sophie Menter defined the quintessence of concert études by their virtuosic and artistic writings that project story-telling and narrative quality. Helena Gnesina and Grażyna Bacewicz carved out special places in the twentieth century études with their sophisticated and idiomatic piano writings that showcase the bravura facet of pianism, fitting the tonal languages of the time. On the other hand, Manna-Zucca Cassel's *Etude d'Hommage* strikes our ears with a jazzy and lively style that offers us another charismatic piano étude to be performed on stage.

Table A: Representative List of Études by Women Composers
(In Chronological Order of the Composition)

Marie Bigot (1786 – 1820)	<i>Suite d'etudes</i> (1818)
Hélène de Montgeroult (1764 – 1836)	<i>Cours complet pour l'enseignement du forte piano</i> (1820)
Maria Agata Szymanowska (1789 – 1831)	<i>Exercices et Preludes</i> (1820)
Fanny Mendelssohn (1805 – 1847)	<i>Eight Übungsstück und Etuden</i> (1823)
Clara Schumann (1819 – 1896)	<i>Etude in A-flat major, WoO 4</i> (1831-32)
Louise Farrenc (1804 – 1875)	<i>30 études dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs, Op. 26</i> (1839)
	<i>Douze études brillantes, Op. 41</i> (1858)
	<i>Vingt études de moyenne difficulté, Op. 42</i> (1855)
	<i>Vingt cinq études faciles, Op. 50</i> (1859-63)
Kate Loder (1825 – 1904)	<i>Twelve Studies Book I</i> (1852)
	<i>Twelve Studies Book II</i> (1853)
Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847 – 1907)	<i>Six Études de Concert, op. 11</i> (1881)
	<i>Three Études, op. 22</i> (1888)
	<i>Three Études de Concert, op. 32</i> (1895)
	<i>Three Études de Concert, op. 47</i> (1901)
	<i>Two Études de Concert, op. 57</i> (1903)
	<i>Two Concert-Études, op. 58</i> (1903)
Cécile Chaminade (1857 – 1944)	<i>Étude Symphonique, op. 28</i> (1890)
	<i>Six Études de Concert, op. 35</i> (1886)
	<i>Étude Mélodique, op. 118</i> (1906)
	<i>Étude Pathétique, op. 124</i> (1906)
	<i>Étude Romantique, op. 132</i> (1909)
	<i>Étude Humoristique, op. 138</i> (1910)
	<i>Étude Scolastique, op. 139</i> (1910)

Laura Netzel (1839 – 1927)	<i>Two Études de Concert, op. 52</i> (1895)
Wanda Landowska (1879 – 1959)	<i>Étude Caractéristique, “En Route,” op. 4</i> (1901)
Teresa Carreño (1853 – 1917)	<i>Caprice-étude no. 1, op. 4</i> (unknown) <i>Caprice-étude no. 2, op. 6</i> (unknown) <i>Caprice-étude no. 3, op. 7</i> (1905)
Sophie Menter (1846 – 1918)	<i>Étude, op. 8</i> (published in 1910) <i>Étude, op. 9</i> (published in 1910)
Manna-Zucca Cassel (1884 – 1981)	<i>Étude d’Hommage</i> (1918)
Benna Moe (1897 – 1983)	<i>Three Instructive Studies, op. 6</i> (1918) <i>Three Instructive Studies, op. 9</i> (1923)
Louise Talma (1906 – 1996)	<i>Six Études for Piano</i> (1954)
Grażyna Bacewicz (1909 – 1969)	<i>Ten Étiud na Fortepian</i> (1956)

CHAPTER II

FANNY HENSEL, NÉE MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY (1805-1847)

A Concise Discussion on Her Life and Reception

I'm afraid of my brother at age forty, as I was of Father at age fourteen – or, more aptly expressed, desirous of pleasing you and everyone I've loved throughout my life. And when I know in advance that it won't be the case, I thus feel rather uncomfortable. In a word, I'm beginning to publish... I've done it of my own free will... I hope I won't disgrace all of you through my publishing, as I'm no *femme libre*.⁴⁵

- Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn, Berlin, July 9th, 1846

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's life as a gifted and prolific German composer has been recognized and documented by scholars and musicologists ever since the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Throughout Mendelssohn's comparatively short life, she was relentlessly reminded and warned by her father Abraham Mendelssohn, both in a well-known letter and equally direct words, that music could only be an “ornament” but not a true profession of her life as a female, and her “real calling,” as expected by Abraham, was to be a housewife.⁴⁷

Fanny Mendelssohn's own diaries and letters provide direct information on how a nineteenth-century female musician with immense genius might feel ambivalent toward gender expectations and how she might have struggled between her various roles and natures. First, she was a dutiful daughter of the Jewish Mendelssohn family, a family with a high-class status and a long tradition of highly educated philosophers and artists.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Marcia J. Citron, *Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Pendragon Press), 1987: 349 to 351.

⁴⁶ In this chapter, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel will be referred to as Mendelssohn before her marriage, and as Hensel after her marriage. Her father, brother, and husband will be referred to by their first names.

⁴⁷ Eugene Murray Gates, “The Woman Composer Question: Four Case Studies from the Romantic Era,” DMA diss., University of Toronto (Canada), 1992. ProQuest (NN78821): 88.

Abraham Mendelssohn's letter to Fanny Hensel on July 16, 1820, when Fanny was fifteen years old.

Second, she was the elder sister of Felix Mendelssohn, who was the chosen one in the family to receive complete support towards his musical professionalism. Third, she was an innate artist who was blessed with rare musical talent and had so much to say in her music that urged her to write them down as manuscripts throughout the years, knowing that these manuscripts might never get published. Only in 1846, one year before her death, did Mendelssohn decide to start publishing her music as encouraged by her musician friend Robert von Keudell and the sincere invitations from a major Berlin publisher, Bote & Bock.⁴⁸ When Mendelssohn decided to start publishing her music, she finally became, as she always deserved to be, a *femme libre* in its true sense.

Abraham's discouragement of his daughter's professionalism in music was not merely a family expectation, but a result of the entrenched social oppression and negativity concerning women's artistic creativity in the nineteenth-century public sphere. Mendelssohn's dilemma regarding her identity as a musician was complicated by many factors. The truth was that she received the same standard of early education (including languages, literatures, arithmetic and music) as her brother Felix, who was four years younger than she, which naturally gave her the initial impression that this equal education and excellency were encouraged by her father. They both started to take piano lessons first from their mother Lea Mendelssohn, followed by piano and compositional studies with renowned pedagogues in Europe such as Franz Lauska, Carl Friedrich Zelter, Marie Bigot, and Ludwig Berger.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁹ Angela Mace Christian, *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Hensel [née Mendelssohn (-Bartholdy)], Fanny Cäcilie," Accessed 26 June, 2022.

Evidence has shown that the entire family acknowledged her talent from the beginning. Her mother, a highly educated pianist, assured that Fanny “has Bach-fugue fingers” after the first piano lesson.⁵⁰ Her father heard the 13-year-old Fanny’s playing complete preludes from J.S. Bach’s *Well-Tempered Klavier*, fully memorized in home performance, yet grasped another opportunity to remind Hensel: “Do not forget you are a female, so you can forget about taking this [performance] up publicly” on July, 1817.⁵¹ This represents a crucial moment in Fanny’s life as this statement abruptly forced her to realize that her privilege in education would not lead to a true musical career.

It is certain that Fanny’s pianism surpassed her brother Felix. Their teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter wrote to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1816 that “he (Abraham Mendelssohn) has adorable children, and his oldest daughter could give you something of Sebastian Bach. This child is really something special (*etwas verschniegelt*).”⁵² In 1822, the year before Fanny Mendelssohn started writing the two volumes of *Übungstücke* (1823), composer Edouard Devrient commented on both Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn’s playing: “I found his (Felix’s) playing astonishing in technical execution and musical assurance, but it was not yet equal to that of his older sister Fanny.”⁵³ In the years 1822 and 1823, Hensel started to write a few lieder. As a gifted pianist at the ambitious age of 18, Hensel intuitively attempted to explore substantial genres such as the piano sonata,

⁵⁰ Sarah Rothenberg, “‘Thus Far, but No Farther’: Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel’s Unfinished Journey,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (1993): 691.

⁵¹ Quoted in Sheila Hayman, “A Fanny Mendelssohn Masterpiece Finally Gets Its Due,” *The Guardians*, March 8, 2017.

⁵² Quoted in David Conway, “Jewry in Music: Jewish Entry to the Musical Professions 1780–1850,” (Proquest Dissertation Publishing, University of London), 2008: 216.

⁵³ Rothenberg, 690.

her Piano Quartet in A-flat major in 1822, as well as her surviving cadenzas for Beethoven's concerti that were written in 1823.⁵⁴

Although the lack of direct sources, such as her personal diary or letters regarding her *Eight Übungstücke*, has resulted in challenging research on its background, speculations for the genesis of this collection can be persuasively made. First, Mendelssohn was a student of Ludwig Berger at that time, who came from the so-called Clementi school, known for its contribution to keyboard studies.⁵⁵ Second, at the age of eleven, Mendelssohn took piano lessons with the renowned pianist Marie Bigot in Paris in 1816. Bigot's unique *Suite d'Etude*, which was mentioned in Chapter I, served as a model for Hensel to explore the genre of *études* as another female pianist. Third, when Hensel was discouraged from seeking a career as a concert pianist, writing a set of *übungstücke* was a creative way to share her virtuosity and technical mastery on the keyboard, since each *übungstücke* demonstrated innovative perspectives on piano playing. Notwithstanding the fact that the Mendelssohn's family had started the tradition of "Sunday Musicales" home concerts in 1823, Hensel could not perform music of her own, but only virtuosic works by other composers.⁵⁶

The year 1823 was also the time of her growing acquaintance with Berlin's royal court painter, Wilhelm Hensel (1794 – 1861). Their courtship was not supported by Fanny's mother, Lea, at the beginning:

When Wilhelm left in 1823 for a five-year trip to Italy to study the masters and finish his artistic education, Lea Mendelssohn forbade any correspondence between her 19-year-old

⁵⁴ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Hensel [née Mendelssohn (-Bartholdy)], Fanny Cäcilie," accessed 26 June, 2022.

⁵⁵ Angela Regina Mace, "Fanny Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and the Formation of the Mendelssohnian Style," (Proquest Dissertation Publishing, Duke University), 2013: 162.

⁵⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Hensel [née Mendelssohn (-Bartholdy)], Fanny Cäcilie," accessed 26 June, 2022.

daughter and Wilhelm, for fear that he would return from Italy a Catholic. The topic was broached in a rather unpleasant scene in May 1823, a few months before he left. He had told Fanny at some point earlier about his interest in the religion; assuming she had conveyed that information to her parents and assuming their tacit blessing by their silence on the subject, Wilhelm was caught off guard when Lea brought it up in casual conversation. The reaction from Lea and Abraham was apparently much less congenial than he had hoped, with Lea declaring that if he did convert, she would make every effort to persuade her daughter to break any engagement.⁵⁷ (Angela Regina Mace, *Grove Music Online*)

This incident offers a vivid background to the period when *Eight Übungstücke* was written. It was during this time that the courting couple was anticipating a long-distance relationship for five years and the blessing of her family was in question due to their age gap and religious barrier. Each *Übungstücke* in the collection can arguably be treated as Mendelssohn's musical diary, as each work was marked with an exact date of writing. In *Übungstücke* No. 5 in E-flat minor, which is dated on June 5th, 1823, Hensel added a subtitle of "*Im Regen*" (*In the Rain*), which might be considered to convey an inward depression and melancholy. The whole collection of *Eight Übungstücke* arguably serves multiple purposes: first, as Fanny Mendelssohn's pedagogical outputs on her technical discovery as a virtuosic pianist; second, as her "musical diaries" to express her emotions and thoughts; and finally, as a stimulus to her inner aspiring urge to potentially become a great pedagogue, though this cannot be fully verified without any written documentation.⁵⁸

Fanny Hensel had a prolific output of *lieder* in her lifetime (approximately three hundred songs), perhaps due to her loss of self-conviction in writing larger form of works. As she sharply wrote in her letter in 1835 to Felix, "my lengthy things die in their

⁵⁷ Quoted in *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Perhaps further evidence will be discovered in Hensel's diaries with regards to her ideas on being a teacher.

decrepitude. I lack the ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the needed consistency. Therefore, Lieders suit me best.”⁵⁹ Her sense of inferiority, considering her “lack of ability” in writing lengthy genres, might be partly rooted from the harsh criticism that was given by Felix to her cantata and string quartet. In 1831, Felix commented on Hensel’s cantata’s draft:

How the Devil can you try to set your Horns in G so high... Don’t you know that one must obtain a license to write such low Bs in the oboes, and that it should be used only in really special cases, such as for witches or terrible pain.⁶⁰

In 1835, Felix again wrote a detailed criticism of Hensel’s quartet and especially, that her fantasy-like and avant-garde key modulations were problematic. Felix had high respect for traditional form and concluded his letter with “please send me something nice, otherwise I will think you have struck me dead as a critic.”⁶¹ In fact, the directness of these honest and unadorned criticism partially reflects the intimacy between Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn’s musical and compositional exchange.

Both Felix and Abraham persuaded Hensel to focus her writing on her “pretty little things,” meaning her *Lieder*. It is also known that Felix published some of her songs with his own name, notably the op. 8 and op. 9.⁶² Fanny Hensel’s simple wish was to share her music, knowing that her authorship would be absent. In 1829, Hensel wrote in her diary in April that “I played my Easter Sonata,” which was a substantial sonata that

⁵⁹ Quoted in Marcia J. Citron, *Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Pendragon Press), 1987: 174.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Angela Regina Mace, “Fanny Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and the Formation of the Mendelssohnian Style,” (Proquest Dissertation Publishing, Duke University), 2013: 144.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 212.

she wrote in A major.⁶³ She mentioned vividly her sonata again in a letter to Felix on August 26 in the same year:

But dear Felix, that you, in the Atlantic, played selections from my *Easter Sonata* on a Broadwood, would be infinitely grotesque, if it were not – if it were not so absolutely wonderful. I amuse myself with it all week long.⁶⁴

The manuscripts for this sonata were lost for many years. In fact, in 1970, the collector Henri-Jacques Coudert discovered and arranged them for a recording attributing the sonata to Felix Mendelssohn, based on the written signature of “F. Mendelssohn” on the manuscripts. Only in 2010 did musicologist Angela Mace Christian unearth convincing evidence that this sonata was actually written by Fanny Mendelssohn. This was doubted by Coudert in the first place, stating that “it’s a masterpiece... very masculine, very violent.”⁶⁵ The case of *Easter Sonata* again elicited the gendered ideology that devalued and denied women composers’ artistry in creating masterpieces. The rediscovery of *Easter Sonata*, appearing in the name of its true author, challenged and redefined the embedded canon in music: any “larger genre,” such as sonatas, can be created by any composer, regardless of gender.

Fanny Hensel’s compositional outputs were less prolific after her marriage to Wilhelm Hensel in 1829 and even more so after the birth of their son, Sebastian, in 1830, as she bore the responsibility of running the household and raising her son. Nonetheless, she never ceased her natural roles as composer and pianist. Hensel maintained a salon musical life with her *Sonntagsmusik* for her circle of musical friends and she kept playing

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Sheila Hayman, “A Fanny Mendelssohn Masterpiece Finally Gets Its Due,” *The Guardians*, March 8, 2017.

and composing in a rather private setting with the support of her husband. As she wrote in 1846, her endless musical thoughts and the will to share (publish) them were “the true basis of our [composer] existence and salvation.”⁶⁶ After the death of Abraham Mendelssohn, Felix expressed his thoughts in a letter to Lea, their mother, in 1837, with regards to Fanny’s wish to publish her music:

She [Fanny] is too much all that a woman ought to be for this. She regulates her house, and neither thinks of the public nor of the musical world, nor even of music at all, until her first duties are fulfilled. Publishing would only disturb her in these... to encourage her in what I do not consider *right*, is what I cannot do.⁶⁷

In fact, Felix’s opinion here could exaggerate Fanny Hensel’s victimization from a modern perspective and thus, it requires further explanation. Felix’s self-interpretation on Hensel’s priority as a woman, and his wish to “speak” for her that house regulation was her first responsibility, was an obstinate notion that was rooted in their childhood and the expectations of upper-class Berliners. Indeed, it is a highly restrictive and problematic view that “art is not for women” (to quote Hensel’s own words in her diary) in today’s world.⁶⁸ Yet both Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn grew up in this environment and were instilled with this societal expectation. Felix’s assertive judgment to say that publishing was not the “right” thing for Hensel was rooted in the nineteenth-century ideology and core of canon on composers. It had always been a patriarchal culture and women were expected to fulfill their feminine characters in which creating art was forbidden. Situating from Felix Mendelssohn’s point of view in the nineteenth century, Felix clearly

⁶⁶ Quoted in Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Marcia J. Citron, *Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Pendragon Press), 1987: 351.

⁶⁷ Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, edited by Paul Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, translated by Lady Wallace, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy From 1833 to 1847* (London: Longman, 1863) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50473/50473-h/50473-h.htm>

⁶⁸ Quoted in Marcia J Citron, “The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel,” *The Musical Quarterly*, no. 4 (1983): 571.

understood what potential negative attention could be brought to his sister if she were exposed to the society as a professional composer. For us living in the twentieth-first century musical world, it is not the right thing to discourage any woman composer from publishing; and yet for Felix, it was always the “right” thing for him to protect his sister in that moment.

With Felix’s established status as a highly celebrated and respected musician of that time, there was no fear of competition. In fact, Felix openly stated that: “if she [Fanny Hensel] resolves to publish... I am quite ready to assist her so far as I can.”⁶⁹ More importantly, a letter Felix wrote to Hensel after her first official publication in 1846 is often neglected in the story:

I send you my professional blessing on becoming a member of the craft. This I do now in full, Fance, and may you have much happiness in giving pleasure to others; may you taste only the sweets and none of the bitterness of authorship; may the public pelt you with roses, and never with sand; and may printer's ink never draw black lines on your soul – all of which I devoutly believe will be the case.⁷⁰

For Fanny Hensel, her romantic love with her husband Wilhelm, who always supported her musical creativity, and her intimate relationship with her brother as her dearest musical friend, were all the things that she held dear and cherished so much. Hensel’s music remained hidden during most of her lifetime, a frustrating fact to modern musicians and scholars. However, Fanny Hensel was a special human being who never reserved her unconditional love to her family, and a superb composer who never lost her positive and unique soul to her own music.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Gates, Eugene Murray. “The Woman Composer Question: Four Case Studies from the Romantic Era.” DMA diss., University of Toronto (Canada), 1992, ProQuest (NN78821): 103.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

CHAPTER III

A PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *EIGHT ÜBUNGSSTÜCKE UND ETUDEN*

(1823)⁷¹

Heft I

*All fingerings provided in the examples are mine.

The following pedagogical analysis will include comparative examples from other keyboard repertoire from the Romantic period and beyond. The chosen examples that were composed by male composers could cause false impression of taking these as a measure of greatness, while the purpose is entirely opposite.

First, the comparative discussion demonstrates Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's sensitivity on the trends of pianistic techniques, that these technical figures contained in her *Übungsstück* continue to thrive in the next hundred years. In addition, it reveals how Hensel's *Übungsstück*, as an obscure pedagogical work, deserves to receive the same attention as its better-known counterparts. The greatness of these eight *übungsstücke* can only be defined by the notes and the music itself. Therefore, the message in this chapter is to uplift Hensel's pedagogical ideas and musical voices, and to fight for justice in an artistic climate. That is, all great art deserves to appear in the highest palace equally.

⁷¹ Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, *Übungsstücke und Etüden Heft I* (Germany: Furore Verlag, 1996), 9 - 28. All subsequent examples from this work are derived from this source.

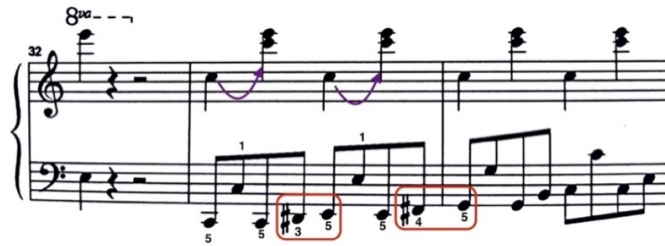
always emphasized the scale of B major for his pupils). The inevitable use of the thumb on the beginning B-flat goes against an old tradition as stated by Carl Czerny: “The thumb must never be placed on the black keys.”⁷² Undoubtedly, Czerny’s statement became an old-fashioned “rule” as piano writing evolved. This black-key pattern prepares pupils for future substantial repertoire that requires the thumb to play on a black key. Intriguingly, Chopin himself always used the thumb on the black keys without hesitation in musical passages.⁷³

Third, the red line here outlines the inner melodic materials that make this *übungsstück* musically coherent for pupils and connects the phrases together to create musical sense and direction. Fourth, the right-hand pattern in this example is consistent in range over an octave with up and down contour. This pattern is inventive in the way that it forces the swinging movement in the hand, wrist, and elbow, which is scarcely to be found in other similar genres. The use of the upper arm was a developing pianistic technique that served as the foundation of piano-playing for Romantic repertoire. On the other hand, this large span of more than an octave naturally enables students to explore a more open hand shape and experience the flexibility of the hand structure, instead of the traditional curved hand structure.

⁷² Quoted in Carl Czerny, trans. by J.A. Hamilton, *Letters to Young Ladies on the Art of Playing* (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., Franklin Square, 1851), 28.

⁷³ Reginald R Gerig, *Famous Pianists & Their Technique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 163.

Example 1.3 *Übungsstück* No. 1 (Heft I): mm. 32 – 34

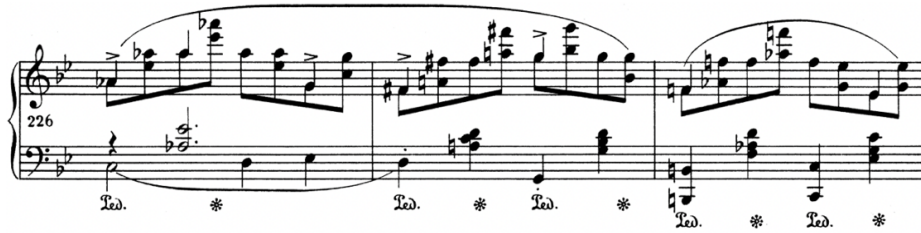


Example 1.3 exemplifies the middle section in this work that explores the left-hand patterns with identical shape. It has all the pedagogical benefits that were mentioned above. In addition, the seemingly awkward writing that is marked red in this example appears in other Romantic piano literatures. The inevitable fingering of 3-5 and 4-5 with the ascending motion naturally strengthens the power of the left-hand fifth finger.

In addition, the large jump in the right-hand accompaniment here reinforces the concept of an upper arm that swings from the left to the right in a down-up motion. Along with the left-hand pattern, this passage is highly challenging in the way that both hands need to fully experience flexibility in order to perfectly execute the notes with shape and direction.

To sum up, this *übungsstück* displays innovative knowledge of pianistic techniques, even from a modern standpoint, and it serves as a highly valuable pedagogical work that focuses on the proper movement of the wrist, elbow and arm. The technical facet that is dealt with in the right hand prepares for a foundation to technically execute the coda of Frédéric Chopin's Ballade No. 1 (Example 1.4).

Example 1.4 Frédéric Chopin: Ballade No. 1 in G minor, mm. 226 to 228⁷⁴



Übungsstück No. 2 (Heft I), *Allegro agitato*

The second *übungsstück* was written on May 16th, 1823. Bearing with the tempo marking of *Allegro agitato*, this 45-measure work is not long in its scope, but a constant sixteenth-note figuration holds the work together. The perpetual motion of this *übungsstück* tests one's finger endurance. However, what makes this *übungsstück* different from other works is how Hensel sets the work in G minor and starts with black keys.

Example 1.5 *Übungsstück No. 2* (Heft I): mm. 1



Example 1.5 demonstrates two possible fingerings of the first measure. These are not included in the original score but are provided here from a pianistic standpoint. The first is a common fingering moving from the thumb to the fourth finger in the right hand

⁷⁴ Frédéric Chopin, *Ballade in G minor Op. 23* (Kraków, Poland: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1949), 22.

(marked by red), but it can lead to disconnection between the two B-flats, especially for smaller hands. The second fingering is an optional solution that is friendly to smaller-hand players and is easier for legato connection, yet requires the weaker fingers to execute equal tones. This kind of awkward pattern is not uncommon in Romantic literature and challenges pianists' knowledge and instincts to figure out different fingering possibilities.

This type of large leap that sets up the following perpetual running passages reinforces the concept of wrist rotation in piano technique, especially for piano students with smaller hands, emphasizing that the wrist should always aid the movement from left to right (in this case), avoiding rigidity and stiffness for the non-stop passage. While finger independence is essential, flexibility is equally important. Again, this echoed Chopin's teaching style that whenever his students were playing running notes in lesson, he would constantly repeat the word "*facilement, facilement!*" (Easily, easily!)⁷⁵

Example 1.6 *Übungsstück* No. 2 (Heft I): mm. 19 – 21



In Example 1.6, not only does Hensel give the running sixteenth-note figuration to the left hand, but she continues to make sure the accompaniment line (right hand here) is painted musically with color. As seen in m. 20 in this example, the slur is more than just

⁷⁵ Reginald R Gerig, *Famous Pianists & Their Technique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 165.

tied notes; it also creates polyphonic texture and syncopation in the right hand. Both the rhythmic and melodic materials here build the tension and momentum to naturally correspond to the ascending left-hand movement. This brief polyphonic moment in the right-hand is not surprising in Hensel's music; as a talented pianist who performed the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier* at age 15, the polyphonic world of J.S. Bach was always in her mind.

Example 1.7 *Übungsstück* No. 2 (Heft I): mm. 43 – 45



In Example 1.7, the right-hand passage is written in a way that is pedagogically rewarding, whether conscious or not. In m. 44, Hensel presents three groups of patterns, in which the first two notes need accentuation (as circled in red, 3-4, 2-4, 3-5). The three gestures are creative combinations that are beneficial to the training of three fingers (3, 4, and 5). All in all, within the scoring of consistent sixteenth-note passages in this work, there are many technical and musical details that make this *übungsstück* a unique pedagogical work.

Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft I), *Presto

The third *übungsstück* dates back to August 6th, 1823. Written in the key of G major and with a time signature of 2/4, the rhythmic gesture that penetrates throughout the work is a sixteenth-note triplet figure in which all fingers in the right hand participate.

This work can be used to develop even greater velocity of finger action than the second *übungsstück* with a light, delicate and brisk tone (as seen in Example 1.8 of the expression of “*pp e leggiermente*”).

Example 1.8 *Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft I): mm. 1 – 2



Example 1.9 *Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft I): mm. 31 – 33



In Example 1.9, Hensel expands the work from *leggiermente* to a thicker texture, with the left-hand part now containing the running patterns with chordal writing in the right hand. Here the left-hand pattern is technically challenging for two reasons. First, in m. 31, the leap that expands over an octave requires agile movement of fingers and wrist. Second, the bass note here in the left hand is to be played by the fifth finger (pinky), which is naturally a weaker finger in resistance to the keys, especially on the black keys. Therefore, the left-hand pattern here is pedagogically beneficial to the training of the fifth finger for future substantial musical and technical challenges.

Moreover, in m. 32, the left-hand pattern requires the motion of all four fingers except the pinky. The two groups here, 3-4-3 and 1-2-1, not only strengthen the third finger in the downbeat, but comprehensively provide a gesture for all four fingers to actively participate. This example demonstrates how Hensel manages to offer a well-rounded gesture that gets all five fingers in the left hand to receive proper training within only two measures.

Example 1.10 *Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft I): mm. 71 – 73



In Example 1.10, the left-hand descending movement is a common triplet gesture and it allows the third finger to strike at every downbeat, which is of vital importance. The third finger is described by Czerny as “the weakest of all fingers.”⁷⁶ One reason for that can be easily suggested here: being the central point of the hand and the longest finger, the third finger easily hinders the equality of the five fingers, which necessitates proper practice to enhance its agility in rapid runs. The emphasis of the third finger prepares for a technical foundation to handle substantial Romantic repertoire such as the identical pattern found in the eminently difficult Liszt Piano Sonata (Example 1.11).

⁷⁶ Carl Czerny, trans. by J.A. Hamilton, *Letters to Young Ladies on the Art of Playing* (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., Franklin Square, 1851), 20.

Example 1.11 Franz Liszt: Piano Sonata in B minor, S. 178: mm. 650 – 652⁷⁷



The comparison between Example 1.10 and 1.11 demonstrates that the two identical left-hand patterns contain equal technical challenges. Hensel's *übungsstück*, written in sixteenth-note gestures, requires an even faster tempo and mobility in the left hand.

Example 1.12 *Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft I): mm. 89 – 91



In Example 1.12, the ending for this *übungsstück* exemplifies Hensel's étude-writing that differs from other études written in the same era by other composers. In m. 89, the contrary motion between hands is not new, but the right-hand arpeggiated pattern that is set against the left-hand descending patterns with irregular and asymmetrical intervals adds additional technical challenges to the coordination between two hands.

⁷⁷ Franz Liszt, *Piano Sonata in B minor, S. 178* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1983), 55.

Étude (Heft I), *Allegro Moderatissimo*

Titled as an *étude*, the fourth piece in the first volume was completed on February 20th, 1826, which was three years after the previous *übungsstück* and is the largest work in this volume in terms of its scope. In Example 1.13, the opening that is marked with *marcato e pesante* remains as the only expressive indication throughout the whole piece for tempo stability. However, the harmonic plan in this work makes this *étude* musically diverse and colorful.

Example 1.13 *Étude* (Heft I): mm. 1 – 4

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of an étude. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderatissimo'. The score is in 2/4 time. The right hand part begins with a rest in the first measure, followed by a series of chords in the second, third, and fourth measures. The left hand part begins with a series of chords in the first, second, third, and fourth measures. The instruction 'f marcato e pesante' is written below the first measure of the left hand. A red box highlights the interval between the notes in the fourth measure of the left hand.

Example 1.13 demonstrates the chorales in this *étude* that aim to develop students' ability in voicing and tone color. Hensel emphasized a walking pace with the tempo of *Allegro moderatissimo* which allows students to feel the weight of the upper arm and flexible wrist. In measure 4 of the example, the left-hand interval of a 9th (and later even an interval of a 10th) without the indication of arpeggio suggests the relatively big hand size of Hensel.

The overall texture of the chordal patterns in this *étude* reflects the identical passages found in Franz Schubert's *Impromptu* Op. 90 No. 1 (Example 1.14), written in 1827 (one year after this *étude*).

Example 1.14: Franz Schubert: Impromptu in C, opus. 90, no. 1 (mm. 22 – mm. 23)⁷⁸



No attempt is made here to suggest there is any direct relation between these two works; however, both Schubert's impromptu and Hensel's étude emphasize chorales with a pedagogical focus on tempo stability, requiring delicate voicing ability from the pianist. Hensel manages to combine these pedagogical values with musical interest in an étude.

The following two examples, Example 1.15 and Example 1.16, demonstrate the middle section from this étude and excerpts from Franz Liszt's transcription of Richard Wagner's *Isoldens Liebestod*.

Example 1.15 Étude (Heft I): mm. 51 – 53



Example 1.16: Franz Liszt's *Isoldens Liebestod*, S. 447 (mm. 650 – 652)⁷⁹



⁷⁸ Franz Schubert, *Impromptu in C, D. 899* (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1948), 6.

⁷⁹ Franz Liszt, *Isoldens Liebestod*, S. 447 from *Klavierwerke, Band 7* (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1917), 90.

While the scores of this comparison are not explicitly indicative, the chordal writing from both excerpts (marked with red) stems from the same technique. If we take a closer look at the fingering and patterns, we see that a *chordal legato* is needed here to connect the chord inversions. The patterns in both examples require appropriate fingering and legato motion from chord to chord to project the melodic direction. Both passages encourage the pursuit of finger legato in the top, as well as corresponding pedaling when finger legato cannot be achieved physically. To successfully interpret this type of chordal passage with *legato*, students should practice each chord slowly, knowing clearly what notes are to be held or released prior to the next chord.

Example 1.17 Étude (Heft I): mm. 145 – 149



Example 1.17 demonstrates many instances in this étude when Hensel incorporated contrapuntal imitation between voices to further stimulate the concept of voicing. The thematic entrances here in the example (marked with red) further create the sense of a choral singing quality, reinforcing the concepts of voicing to students. All in all, this étude stands as a distinctive work. Its pacing and texture are rare to find in an étude. It not only serves as valuable teaching material to improve the technique of voicing, but it also stands as an exquisite piece of music.

Heft II⁸⁰

*All fingerings provided in the examples are mine.

Übungsstück No. 1 (Heft II), *Larghetto*

The first *übungsstück* in the second volume was written on June 5th, 1823. The marking of “*Im Regen*” (In the Rain) not only leaves the impression that this work appears as Hensel’s musical diary, but also matches the nostalgic and soothing character of this work. In fact, from a pianistic standpoint, this work deserves the title of *étude* for its enriching harmonic language. The beginning (in Example 2.1) is striking in the way that the chromatic movement in the middle voice, decorated by the top long melodic line, is strongly reminiscent to Robert Schumann’s “*Zart und Singend*” from *Davidsbündlertänze* Op. 6 (Example 2.2)

Example 2.1 *Übungsstück* No. 1 (Heft II): mm. 1 – 2

Larghetto

The musical score shows the first two measures of the piece. The treble clef staff begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a chromatic descending eighth-note line: G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The bass clef staff begins with a half note G3, followed by a chromatic ascending eighth-note line: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. A red box highlights the first two measures of the treble clef staff, and a purple line connects the first two notes of the treble staff.

⁸⁰ Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, *Übungsstücke und Etüden Heft II* (Germany: Furore Verlag, 1996), 7 - 20. All subsequent examples from this work are derived from this source.

Example 2.2 Robert Schumann's "Zart und Singend" from *Davidsbündlertänze*: mm. 1 –

2⁸¹



In addition to the identical writings of chromatic ascending gestures in both examples (marked with red), both excerpts show important educational value: the two-voice texture in the right hand here develops students' ability to manipulate the balance of the two-voice layers. (Bach's fugues served the same function.) In Hensel's *übungsstück*, the key of E-flat minor and the tempo of *Larghetto* heighten the emotional content in this *übungsstück*. The key signature of six flats pedagogically enhances sight-reading challenges and benefits for students as well.

Example 2.3 *Übungsstück* No. 1 (Heft II): mm. 13 – 14



Another heuristic value of this *übungsstück* is the challenge of finding appropriate fingering in this thick texture. In Example 2.3, a fingering is provided here as a reference,

⁸¹ Robert Schumann, *Davidsbündlertänze*, *Op. 6* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1887), 22.

putting the top melodic line as the priority within this dense texture. The inevitable use of the same finger (finger number 2, marked with red circle) in the middle voice requires sliding motion to maintain the *legato* as well as the long note value in the top. Reusing the same finger in a successive manner often happens in Romantic literature and thus, this pianistic technique of sliding to the next note with the same finger and *legato* motion is essential to all pianists. This whole *übungsstück* should be pedaled throughout to achieve the sense of *legato* and lingering.

Example 2.4 *Übungsstück* No. 1 (Heft II): mm. 25 – 27



In addition, a narrative quality is presented in this work when the music modulates to E-flat major (Example 2.4): the sorrowful mood from the previous section of “*Im Regen*” turns to a new climate with hopeful comfort at this moment. The left-hand walking baseline here has its pedagogical value: the chromaticism within the contour needs to be interpreted musically, with dynamic fluctuation that responds to the harmonic tension and release. A slight use of *rubato* that answers to the right-hand long line is also needed. The overall texture in this *übungsstück* provides a platform for students to explore the craftsmanship in manipulating two lines simultaneously in the right hand with proper balance.

Übungsstück No. 2 (Heft II), *Allegro assai moderato*

The second *übungsstück* in the second volume was composed on July 9th, 1823. With regards to the tempo marking of *Allegro assai moderato* indicated, the *assai* here suggests a “rather moderate tempo within the *Allegro*.” Along with the key of G-major, Hensel sets the meter in 3/4, which naturally projects a dance-like character. As seen in Example 2.5, the left-hand pattern designed by Hensel is different from the traditional *Alberti-bass*.

Example 2.5 *Übungsstück* No. 2 (Heft II): mm. 1 – 3

Allegro assai moderato den 9. Juli

dolce e legato

5 1 3 2

This is a fresh figure that is rarely seen in other keyboard studies. The required fingering for this figure, 5-1-3-2, is technically more challenging than the original 5-1-3-1 due to the physiological nature of the five fingers. This is a work with an unsurprising texture, but this central figure makes the work unique. In addition, Hensel brings the difficulty of executing this figure to another level by expanding the intervals in Example 2.6.

Example 2.6 *Übungsstück* No. 2 (Heft II): mm. 16 – 17

16

The large leap within this figure (marked with red) requires agile hand movement and wrist rotation in which the trickiness makes this work beyond an “intermediate-level” keyboard study. The red arrow in the example indicates the wrist movement in the left hand, from the left to the right with a down-up motion. The right-hand melodic line maintains a steady pulse with long line. The steadiness and lightness in the melodic line necessitate a soft dynamic control in the left hand, which is technically challenging.

Example 2.7 *Übungsstück* No. 2 (Heft II): mm. 34 – 35



In Example 2.7, Hensel created yet another intervallic combination for the left-hand figures. This irregularity is pedagogically valuable as it provides different fingering groups such as 5-1-4-3 (marked in red), differing from the original fingering group of 5-1-3-2. The pattern also provides a variety of black-white key combinations for finger work that is educationally rewarding, especially when the left-hand pinky has to play a black key on the downbeat (circled with red).

Übungsstück No. 3 (Heft II), *Allegro ma non troppo*

The third *übungsstück* in the second volume was completed on September 2nd, 1823. The continuous figures, which are assigned to the right hand, are identical to the preceding *übungsstück*, as if both the second and the third *übungsstück* should be paired as a group.

Example 2.8 *Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft II): mm. 1 – 3

Allegro ma non troppo den 2. September 1823



As seen in Example 2.8, the shape of the right-hand figure is clearly based on the previous model, with a less technical challenge as the thumb (being as the strongest finger) is consistently used on the downbeat of the figure. The left-hand patterns are strikingly different from the former *übungsstück*: the beginning of the phrase with the thirty-second notes (circled with red) is not easy to execute, as this fast gesture needs to be lined-up with the sixteenth-notes in a clean manner. A pedagogical suggestion here is to ask students to practice the circled gesture slowly and continuously for a clean alignment between the two hands.

Example 2.9 *Übungsstück* No. 3 (Heft II): mm. 19 – 21



In Example 2.9, with regards to the right-hand patterns, Hensel switches the emphasized note from the thumb to the middle finger (circled with red) in this transitional passage. This reinforces the strength of the middle fingers and avoids the excessive use of the thumb as the accented note throughout the work.

Example 2.11 *Schluß* mm. 1 – 3

den 12. September 1823

Example 2.12 Sergei Rachmaninoff *Moment Musicaux* in E-flat minor, op. 16, no. 2:

mm. 1 – 2⁸²

Allegretto (♩ = 92)

pp *cresc.*

The two examples above (Example 2.11 and Example 2.12) demonstrate a strikingly identical comparison. As seen by the red markings, both works contain the same technical challenge: holding the octaves, while agilely executing the fast-running gesture with fingering 2 – 3 – 4. This gesture examines pianists' technical capability, requiring a high level of independence of each finger, as well as a physically adequate use of the wrist that corresponds to the finger movements. In other words, the wrist ought to go in *downward* motion at the octave, followed by a wrist rotation that finishes as a circle. In Hensel's *Schluß*, this gesture is maintained throughout with harmonic tension and release that holds this short two-page work together.

Example 2.13 *Schluß* mm. 7 – 10

⁸² Sergei Rachmaninoff, *Six Moment Musicaux*, (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1948), 295.



While the shape and the patterns are consistent in this last work of the set, Hensel never allowed monotony. In addition to her harmonic structure that creates a dramatic falling and rising effect (which is not the focus of this analysis), Hensel continued to design a work that is technically rewarding. As demonstrated in Example 2.13, different intervallic shapes of the inner voices are incorporated with leaps and chromaticism, and the various intervallic figures force all five fingers to quickly adapt to new hand shapes while maintaining the wrist rotation and holding the long half-note voice.

The pedagogical analysis above seeks to revive Hensel's forgotten musical voice and the hidden details, demonstrating how the set comprehensively covers a variety of pianistic techniques, reflecting the nineteenth-century trend of pianism and the instrumental change of that time. Even from a modern perspective, the musical and technical ideas presented in these works are unique and inventive.

CHAPTER IV

AGATHE BACKER GRØNDAHL (1847 – 1907)

A Concise Discussion of Her Life and Reception

In December of 1847, the same year that Fanny Hensel died, a baby was born in the small town of Oslo, Norway, who later became an iconic and influential Norwegian pianist and composer. Unlike her countryman, Edvard Grieg, her works have remained obscure in today's musical world. Agathe Backer-Grøndahl grew up in a family surrounded by an artistic atmosphere, having full parental support in learning music and painting, together with her three sisters. Grøndahl's musical talent was discovered when she was only three, actively sitting at her piano at home and composing her own petite melodies.⁸³ Grøndahl started her professional training at the age of 10, under the tutelage of the respected Norwegian composer Halfdan Kjerulf. After seven years of teaching her in Norway, Kjerulf, realizing Grøndahl's unique talent and potential, arranged Grøndahl's further musical studies in Berlin's *Neue Akademie der Tonkunst* under the guidance of the renowned professor Theodor Kullak.⁸⁴ However, Grøndahl's privilege in education repeats the case of Fanny Hensel, that her parents expected excellence from her musical studies, but discouraged any pursuit of her professional career that would be seen as "unconventional" at that time. In 1866, during her years of studying in Berlin, when she was thriving and progressing as an aspiring musician, she received a letter from her

⁸³ Cecilie Dahm, "Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847-1907)," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 51, no. 2 (2004): 192.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

first teacher Kjerulf, who addressed his opinion on Grøndahl's growing ambition in music:

Follow the common road of women... take your art with you as a delectable ornament by which you can light up your surrounding but do not leave the common way in order to become a concert pianist.⁸⁵

No one knew better about Grøndahl's immense talent as a musician, yet Kjerulf again represented the social constraint and ideological opinion that a private sphere was best for women's musical creativity. Grøndahl demonstrated her unwavering determination in a responding letter:

I do not understand how both you and my parents could object to the fact that I want to become what one calls a female artist... It seems to me that a beautiful, independent future for a woman can be found in the simple act of striving... for I love art so much that the desire to master it is indescribable.⁸⁶

From this letter, we can see the personality of another strong female musician who established her aspiration to be an independent female artist. Indeed, Grøndahl's capabilities as both pianist and composer demanded that music be more than just an "ornament" in her life.

Following her successful debut under the baton of Grieg, as well as a successful concerto collaboration with Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on Beethoven's *Emperor* concerto, her career as a concert pianist bloomed in Europe. From 1868 to 1890, she maintained a busy career as an internationally acclaimed concert pianist in demand throughout Europe, with overwhelmingly positive reviews from critics. Her playing in England, with recitals and debuts with the London Philharmonic, was described as having a "truly magic touch, mechanism, exquisite refinement of expression and passionate

⁸⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 191.

impulse governed by artistic reflection and self-control.”⁸⁷ While critics often suggested that Grøndahl should avoid “masculine” works by Schumann and Beethoven, Grøndahl’s strong personality and masterful pianism gave her the authority to ignore this “advice” and she often included works by Beethoven and Schumann purposely. Grøndahl’s recital programs, which attracted full audiences, often included Grieg and other contemporary avant-garde compositions, as well as her own works.⁸⁸ Grøndahl’s playing was often described as “masculine,” which also aroused a highly discriminatory criticism that was documented: “It is tempting to call it [Grøndahl’s playing] ugly, especially since she is a woman.”⁸⁹ And yet Grieg publicly appraised her playing and entrusted her with his piano composition premieres, seeing her as the perfect interpreter of his works.⁹⁰ George Bernard Shaw, described as possibly one of the harshest music critic in Europe, dubbed her as “Madame Schumann’s true successor,” and described her as “a great Beethoven player, a great Schumann player, a great Chopin player, and consequently, a great pianoforte player.”⁹¹

However, Grøndahl’s success and recognition as a female pianist did not follow a smooth path, which can be evidenced by the story of her acquaintance with the prominent pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow. In 1871, it was arranged that Grøndahl was to play for Hans von Bülow under the recommendation of Ole Bull (Ole Bornemann Bull,

⁸⁷ Quoted in "Agathe Backer-Grøndahl," *The Monthly Musical Record* 19, no. 224 (08, 1889): 184. <http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/agathe-backer-grondahl/docview/7072060/se-2>

⁸⁸ Erin Devik Hackel, “Agathe Backer Grøndahl: Her Life Through Letters,” *The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing: Jacksonville*, Vol. 60, Iss. 5, (May 2004): 445.

⁸⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 445.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 444.

⁹¹ Quoted in Cecilie Dahm, “Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847-1907),” *Fontes Artis Musicae* 51, no. 2 (2004): 195.

1810-1880), a famous Norwegian violin virtuoso and composer, and close friend of Bülow. Bull believed that Grøndahl, as an 24-year-old aspiring young pianist, should receive further guidance from Bülow on her developing career. However, Bülow curtly refused to hear her play or to receive her as student, while knowing that Grøndahl had traveled all the way from Norway to Italy and was waiting in the drawing room of his house. Without hearing her playing, Bülow already made an opinion in his letter that “she was too fair and played therefore but fairly.”⁹² Bülow recommended that Grøndahl study with Giovanni Sgambati instead.

Grøndahl continued to win admiration as a pianist during her performances in Europe, notably from the Austrian Minister and the renowned piano pedagogue Professor D’Allongaro, who after knowing that Grøndahl was referred to study with Sgambati, had a conversation with Bülow, which was documented by Hildegard Werner in a musical journal:

...the celebrated Professor D’Allongaro, expressed his astonishment at his [Bülow] not receiving such a pupil [Grøndahl]. ‘Then it was better that Sgambati should learn from this young lady than she from Sgambati,’ said D’Allongaro. This struck the capricious autocrat [Bülow], and at last it was arranged that she should go to him; and after playing some of Grieg’s compositions, the “fair hair” was stroked out, and in his well-known musical letters to the “*Allgemeine deutsche Musik-Zeitung*” he has amply repaid her for his first reception of the ‘Blonde.’ Dr. v Bülow, who is known to have but a poor opinion of the abilities of the fair sex in composition, has spoken of her as a lady composer of ‘undoubted skill and success’⁹³

Upon recommendation of Hans von Bülow, Grøndahl met with Franz Liszt in Weimar the same year, who after hearing her play her own and others’ compositions, cordially invited her to stay in his famous “Altenburg” at the center of the city for a few

⁹² Quoted in “Madame Agathe Backer Grøndahl,” *The Musical World, London* Vol. 69, Iss. 27 (Jul 6, 1889): 433.

⁹³ Quoted in Hildegard Werner, “Agathe Backer Grøndahl,” *Musical Standard, London* Vol. 36, Iss. 1284 (Mar. 9, 1889), 196.

months.⁹⁴ Artists lived, gathered, and performed together in Altenburg, and it was considered the highest echelon of the musical circles, where intellectual ideas could be exchanged. After that time, Grøndahl remained a frequent guest artist in the Weimar salon.

It is safe to speculate that Grøndahl's early success as a concert pianist and her acclaimed pianism somewhat overshadowed her reputation as a composer. Grøndahl wrote her *Scherzo for Orchestra* in 1869, at the age of only 22 when she was still a student in Berlin, and this ambitious orchestral work was well received by critics.⁹⁵ However, as was the case with other women composers in the nineteenth century, it was her output in songs (nearly 250) that received more attention. As a close friend of Edvard Grieg, it is no surprise that Grøndahl's songs were mostly premiered by singer Nina Grieg, the wife of Edvard Grieg. Grøndahl's first song was written in 1869, "Til mit Hjertes Dronning" ("To the Queen of My Heart"), which later became the most well-known among her vast output. One review was documented after the debut of this work: "Mrs. Nina Grieg's beautiful execution of four songs composed by Miss Backer was outstanding. These compositions, that in color and melody contained some of the same depth that characterizes Miss Backer's playing, promise much for her future as a female composer."⁹⁶ Grøndahl's prolific song output was set with texts mainly in Norwegian, German, Swedish and Danish.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ "Madame Agathe Backer Grøndahl," *The Musical World, London* Vol. 69, Iss. 27 (Jul 6, 1889): 433.

⁹⁵ Cecilie Dahm, "Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847-1907)," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 51, no. 2 (2004): 192.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Erin Devik Hackel, "Agathe Backer Grøndahl: Her Life Through Letters," *The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing: Jacksonville*, Vol. 60, Iss. 5, (May 2004): 444.

⁹⁷ Anna Hersey, "Beyond Grieg: Norwegian Art Songs," *The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing: Jacksonville* Vol. 72, Iss. 2 (Nov/Dec 2015): 233.

In addition, she composed over a hundred piano works, including many character pieces and concert études (the first set of which, Op. 11, is analyzed in this paper). A London concert review that addressed Grøndahl's piano work with a gendered perspective, was documented when she included her own *Piano Suite Op. 20* in her program: "...the distinguished pianist [Grøndahl] shines also brilliantly as a composer, judging from her *Suite*... both works (pianoforte solo) being remarkably original, attractive, and vigorous to a degree absolutely surprising in one so fair and feminine in appearance and manner, whilst the purely technical part shows the consummate musician in every bar."⁹⁸ This one single review within the scarce documentation gives us little of the overall reception of Grøndahl's piano works at that time, as audiences and critics often focused and reviewed her playing, overlooking her own works that were often included in the program.

The year of 1875 was an important one for Grøndahl, during which she married Norwegian vocalist and choir conductor, Olaus Andreas Grøndahl, an influential figure to the development of choral music in Norway. In the same year, both were invited by the Peabody Conservatory of Music (Peabody Academy at that time) to teach in the United States with professorships, yet the offers were declined as the couple refused to emigrate.⁹⁹ This point marks her next chapter of life, in which she worked to maintain roles of pianist, composer, wife and mother of her children, and yet, Grøndahl is an example of a female musician who successfully combined her domestic and artistic life.

⁹⁸ Quoted in "Agathe Backer-Grøndahl," *The Monthly Musical Record* 19, no. 224 (08, 1889): 184.

⁹⁹ "Madame Agathe Backer Grøndahl," *The Musical World, London* Vol. 69, Iss. 27 (Jul 6, 1889): 433.

In an interview with the famous British music critic, George Bernard Shaw, Grøndahl described her life after marriage:

She composes, she says, in the quiet of the evening when the day's work is done... 'What work?' I ask, astounded. 'Oh, all the things one has to do,' she [Grøndahl] replies: 'the house-keeping, the children, the playing, the three lessons I give every day to pupils.' I rise up in wrath to protest against this house, these children, these pupils swallowing up the ministrations that were meant for mankind; but she adds, 'it is as wife and mother that you gain the experience as an artist.'¹⁰⁰

Grøndahl's last sentence in this quote gives us a glimpse into her attitude and positivity about her life and arts, as well as her maturity in managing her extremely busy roles. Her life was not easy as she had suffered from illness since her childhood. In 1876, Grøndahl was forced to cancel all her concerts due to the outbreak of an unknown illness, and in the same year, her daughter was born and died only two months after. That tragedy was followed by the devastating news of the death of her father. Grøndahl had three sons later in her life: Nils, Anders, and Fridtjof. Fridtjof was the only one who followed his mother's path and became a pianist. Fridtjof once wrote and described his mother's stage fright, which gives us a fuller picture of Grøndahl as concert pianist:

To play at a concert was agony for her... for her it was close to a nightmare. While she waited to go on, no one could talk to her, she preferred everyone to disappear... completely concentrated on her music. To give her utmost, to try to reach perfection, that was her goal throughout life. Yet, she could live by what she later said to me: 'If you only know that you have done your best, then you can leave the rest to our Lord.'¹⁰¹

Starting in the 1880s, Grøndahl started to suffer from a hearing loss which later led to complete deafness in one of her ears. However, she did not give up her concert schedule during this time. For a short time in the 1890s, Grøndahl devoted herself fully to

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in George Bernard Shaw, and Dan H. Laurence, *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes* (New York: Dodd, Mead), 1981: 701-702.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Erin Devik Hackel, "Agathe Backer Grøndahl: Her Life Through Letters," *The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing: Jacksonville*, Vol. 60, Iss. 5, (May 2004): 446.

her compositions without any performances scheduled, but in 1898, she appeared in a festival in Burgen where Grieg insisted that she be the concerto soloist. After that, Grøndahl returned as a pianist to perform mainly in Northern Europe and this time she designed her programs with mostly her own piano works. Grøndahl became completely deaf in 1905 and devoted herself into teaching at home. Grøndahl wrote her last song, “Endnu et streif kun” (“One More Glimpse”) in 1907, which was set with simple texts regarding death and eternity, with the utmost simplicity and warmth in the music. Grøndahl died in the same year, yet her supreme romanticism and lyricism in both her songs and piano works stay forever; just as how Edvard Grieg wrote in his diary on remembering her music: “If a mimosa could sing, sound would stream forth from it as from Agathe Backer Grøndahl’s most beautiful, most intimate melodies.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² Quoted in Erin Devik Hackel, “Agathe Backer Grøndahl: Her Life Through Letters,” *The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing: Jacksonville*, Vol. 60, Iss. 5, (May 2004): 449.

CHAPTER V

A PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *SIX CONCERT DE ÉTUDES OP. 11* (1881)

*All fingerings provided in the examples are mine.

The following pedagogical analysis will include comparative examples from other keyboard repertoire from the Romantic period. The chosen examples that were composed by male composers could cause false impression of taking these as a measure of greatness, while the purpose is entirely on the opposite side.

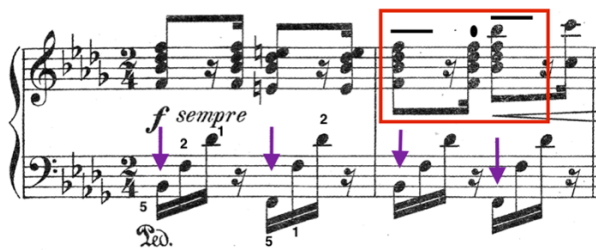
As reflected in her étude-writings, Grøndahl was influenced by her predecessors in the nineteenth century, such as Brahms, Liszt, Chopin, and Grieg, which was an inevitable result as these male composers' works prevailed in the musical world during Grøndahl's childhood. However, an in-depth analysis, studies and listening on Grøndahl's *Six Concert de Études Op. 11* permits an access to the individuality and uniqueness in her concert études. It is not only the amalgamation of the utmost Romanticism that she absorbed from all her predecessors that makes these études unique, but in this set of études, one can hear how Grøndahl, as a composer of prolific song output and virtuoso concert pianist, combine the characteristics of both piano music and vocal music into the genre of étude. The art concealed within Grøndahl's concert études deserve to be uplifted as an influential model for this genre, as the quality of these études can be argued to stand as the measure of piano concert étude. The following analysis and the comparative examples seek to increase the visibility of Grøndahl's études, however,

the greatness of her music can only be defined by the music itself, not by other piano works.

Étude de Concert No. 1 in B-flat minor, *Allegro con fuoco*

The first three concert études from opus 11 were dedicated to renowned German pianist and pedagogue Theodor Kullak. The first concert étude in this set is archetypal of the étude genre: the texture and layout remain the same throughout this short three-page work. That is, it focuses on one technical problem and is written in an overall consistent texture, without losing the narrativity or dramatic effect.

Example 3.1 *Étude de Concert* No. 1 in B-flat minor: mm. 1 – 2¹⁰³



In Example 3.1, the opening two measures of this work demonstrate chordal writing with dotted rhythms in the right hand, accompanied by steady and arpeggiated sixteenth notes in the left hand. There are various educational purposes and values here. First, the expanded gesture and large leaps in the left-hand figures allow a more open hand shape instead of a curved, rounded hand shape. The shape of this figure necessitates a strong foundation from the fifth finger in the left hand (purple arrow) to execute a strong downbeat. There are two main types of fingerings here: 5 – 2 – 1 and 5 – 1 – 2.

¹⁰³ Agathe Backer-Grødahl, edited by Carl Warmuth, *Six Etudes de Concert, Op. 11* (Oslo: Norsk Musikforlag, 1881)

All subsequent examples from this work are derived from this source.

The first type is traditional, allowing motion from the wrist to go from left to the right. The second type, 5 – 1 – 2, involves a crossing motion to transition above the thumb. Here, the technical task is to cross the thumb with an open hand shape, assisted by flexibility of the elbow.

On the other hand, the chordal pattern in the right hand is not commonly seen in other études. Set in the key of B-flat minor, the regularity here provides a platform to reinforce a firm hand structure for chordal playing, which is an essential facet in piano technique. The dotted rhythm demands careful attention: the articulation needs to be defined clearly as “long – short – long” (marked with red). The length of the eighth notes (long) should be accurately proportioned, the rest should be clearly observed; and the sixteenth note (short) is to be executed *non-legato*. To interpret the melodic phrase with a sense of direction within the chordal writings, one ought to approach the chords with proper voicing that brings out the top.

Two technical elements are critical in handling this blocked-chord writing: first, a quick transition from chord to chord; second, an agile adaptation to the various shapes of chords. Thus, the key of B-flat minor (containing abundant narrow black-keys) adds challenges to the perpetual mobility of the work (within the tempo of *Allegro con fuoco*). The difficulty of the dotted rhythm presented in the right hand here reminds us of Robert Schumann’s *Études Symphoniques Op. 13 (Variation VIII)*.

Example 3.2 Robert Schumann *Études Symphoniques Op. 13 (Variation VIII)*, mm. 1 –

2¹⁰⁴



Intriguingly, the same type of chordal patterns exists in Johannes Brahms's *Intermezzo* no. 6 from opus 118, in which the B-flat minor passage contains large leaps from chord to chord (Example 3.3, mm. 49, marked with red):

Example 3.3 Johannes Brahms *Intermezzo Op. 118, No. 6*, mm. 46 – 49¹⁰⁵



Both Brahms's and Grøndahl's chordal writings in the two examples above suggest the same type of sound projections: each chord should project acoustic depth and warmth. The musical purpose here is not about chordal virtuosity, but chordal melodies: the top-voice melodies create phrases in both works and therefore, there is always a melodic line within these chordal passages.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Schumann, *Études Symphoniques Op. 13* (Leipzig: Händel Breitkopf & Härtel, 1912), 238.

¹⁰⁵ Johannes Brahms, *6 Klavierstücke Op. 118* (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 2022) 20.

Example 3.4 *Étude de Concert No. 1 in B-flat minor: mm. 1 – 8*

Allegro con fuoco. Agathe Backer Grøndahl, Op. 41, N.º 1.

f sempre

Ped.

As demonstrated in Example 3.4, Grøndahl's sophisticated design of the rise and fall in melodic contour transforms this étude into a concert piece: the initial motif of F – E – F is followed by an ascending contour that reaches D-flat (red arrow) and subsequently descends to the end of the phrase (m. 4, marked with red comma). The second phrase responds with another four-measure contour that gradually descends to C (now arriving at a half cadence), with a baseline movement that corresponds to the descending chromatic motion. This small detail is not groundbreaking material, yet it demonstrates how Grøndahl created gorgeous, song-like melodic content within stable rhythmic patterns. This rhythmic content of the opening of this concert étude can almost be described as Brahmsian, as the rhythmic design is strikingly identical to an excerpt found in the fourth movement of Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 2.

Example 3.5 Johannes Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 83 (4th mvmt.): mm. 1 – 5¹⁰⁶



Although the right-hand figures in this example are octaves (instead of blocked chords in the *étude*), the texture and rhythmic design here resemble Grøndahl's *étude*, based on the left-hand accompaniment as well as the right-hand dotted rhythm. The beginning motif, G – F-sharp – G, echoes Grøndahl's treatment (F – E – F) that sets up the following fluctuating melodic contour. The point here is Grøndahl's concert *étude* does not portray *empty virtuosity*. Within the compact structure and colorful harmonic palette, this *étude* displays a story-telling quality and is reminiscent to many other concert pieces.¹⁰⁷

Étude de Concert No. 2 in D-flat major, *Andantino grazioso*

Set in the key of D-flat major with a meter of $\frac{3}{4}$, Grøndahl explores the art of *cantabile* playing in the second concert *étude* of this set.¹⁰⁸ As demonstrated in Example 3.6, within the tempo and expression of *Andantino grazioso*, this work projects a nocturnal character and *bel canto* quality and it demands the pianistic skill of *legato* playing with expressiveness. The interval of a sixth is repeatedly used throughout the

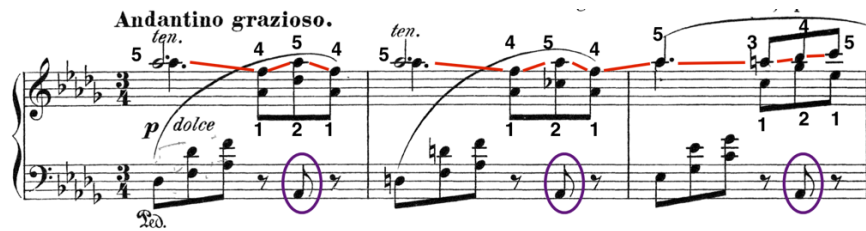
¹⁰⁶ Johannes Brahms, *Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 83* (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1910), 73.

¹⁰⁷ Harmonic content is not the emphasis of this pedagogical analysis.

¹⁰⁸ Other nineteenth-century piano *études* that focuses on the same technical facet include Chopin's opus 10, no. 3, and Liszt's Concert *Étude* No. 1, S. 144.

three layers of voices. The educational purpose here is to bring out the right-hand top voices using fingers 3 – 4 – 5 in a connected motion (marked with red). Grøndahl's detailed rhythmic design suggests a programmatic content in this nocturnal étude: the A-flat in the left hand (purple circle), followed by eighth-note rest, is reminiscent of an orchestral *pizzicato* from the strings section.

Example 3.6 Étude de Concert No. 2 in D-flat major, mm. 1 – 3



Example 3.7 Étude de Concert No. 2 in D-flat major, mm. 26 – 29

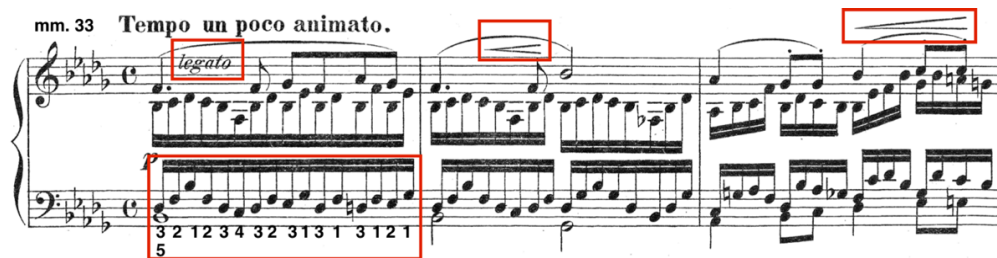


Within the regular phrasing structure of 4 + 4, Grøndahl ornaments the expressive melodic line (m. 26, red circle). As seen in Example 3.7, the mordent further depicts an operatic coloratura effect in the pianistic writing. The left-hand accompanying patterns, which feature large intervals, remain a consistent and simple gesture that requires a physical swinging motion.

The overall texture reflects Chopin's nocturnal style: the slow dance-like Barcarolle pattern in the left hand, creates a sense of calm, watery undulation. Meanwhile, the right-hand part occasionally emerges with cadenza-like passages that not

only project brilliance and virtuosity, but also improvisatory outpouring. The writing fits precisely what Chopin always explained to his students: the left-hand acts as a *maître de chapelle* (choirmaster) that “conducts” the steadiness of the pace, while letting the right hand to “wander about *ad libitum*.”¹⁰⁹ The difference is that in Grøndahl’s cadenza-like passages (Example 3.7 m. 28), the right-hand cadenza is organized into regularity by the grouping of sixteenth-note sextuplets, forming a rhythmically precise setting (red bracket).

Example 3.8 *Étude de Concert* No. 2 in D-flat major, mm. 33 – 35



The narrativity of this *étude* becomes clear when the nocturnal and songful atmosphere in D-flat major gives way to the next section in E-flat minor, beginning at measure 33. As seen in Example 3.8, within *Tempo un poco animato*, Grøndahl designed a thicker texture with four layers as a transition to a surging dramatic and tragic section with detailed expressive markings.

The shape of the sixteenth-note accompaniments in the middle voices (marked with red) in measure 33 not only underline the *animato* character of the melodies and build up the overall texture, but also serve a valuable educational purpose: the thick texture and the harmonic progression require a flexible flutter pedal to avoid muddy

¹⁰⁹ Related in Reginald R Gerig, *Famous Pianists & Their Technique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 165.

sounds. The patterns here encourage finger pedal from the left-hand pinky by holding the bass note B-flat all the way while executing the sixteenth-note contour with proper coordination. This creates a pianistic challenge in that the fingers must adjust to awkward intervallic distances within the black-key areas. The left-hand technical design, demanding pianist to hold the bass note while projecting the upper voice with legato, exhibits a similar challenge to one found in Brahms's *51 Exercises* that is notoriously known for its difficulty (Example 3.9).

Example 3.9 Johannes Brahms *51 Exercises*, 11a: mm. 1 – 2¹¹⁰



Example 3.10 *Étude de Concert* No. 2 in D-flat major, mm. 38 – 39



The escalation of drama eventually arrives at its pinnacle in m. 38 (Example 3.10). The climax is created by the forceful chords as well as the condensed intervallic clusters in the middle. The pianistic challenge is to create a proper balance between the layers, bringing out the chordal legato to make melodic sense and creating a crescendo effect from the accompanying figures.

¹¹⁰ Johannes Brahms, *51 Exercises for the Piano*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927), 15.

In measure 39, the right-hand chords require a quick release to execute the subsequent sixteenth-notes while holding the fifth finger (marked with purple). Meanwhile, the left-hand patterns also demand an agile release and transition to execute the substantial jump (marked with green). Overall, the writing demands coordination from the wrist, elbow and upper arm to produce powerful and energetic sound effects.

Example 3.11 *Étude de Concert* No. 2 in D-flat major, mm. 49 – 51

The image shows a musical score for measures 49-51 of 'Étude de Concert' No. 2. The score is written for piano, with a treble clef on the right hand and a bass clef on the left hand. The key signature is D-flat major (two flats). The right hand part features chords and sixteenth-note runs, with three accents circled in red. The left hand part features double-note patterns with fingering numbers 1-3 and 2-5 marked in purple. The piece is marked 'f' (forte) and 'accelerando'. The measure number 'mm. 49' is written at the beginning of the first measure.

The change of character in this work still implies a certain technical emphasis. The left-hand patterns throughout this work reflect Grøndahl's goal of training pianists to execute double-note playing (fingering alternation between 1-3 and 2-5, Example 3.11 marked with purple). The heavy use of this fingering set makes this work become almost an étude of double sixths. In Example 3.11, the accents (circled with red) are not indicated as prominent percussive accents.¹¹¹ Instead, these are agogic accents, mainly functioning to lengthen the duration of notes for musical emphasis. All the accents found in m. 49 create almost a rubato effect that prolongs the notes.

¹¹¹ Accents that suggest a percussive sounding are normally used in a consistent manner, driving the rhythmic momentum.

Example 3.12 Franz Liszt *Sonetto 123 Del Petrarca, Lento placido*, mm. 4 – 6¹¹²

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.12, Franz Liszt's *Sonetto 123 Del Petrarca, Lento placido*, measures 4-6. The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. It features a right-hand melodic line with octaves and a left-hand pattern of chords. A purple box highlights a triplet in the left hand at measure 5. The piece ends with a 'cresc.' marking.

If the first concert étude in this set displayed a Brahmsian effect, then this second étude reminds us of Lisztian writing (Example 3.12). In both the excerpts above, the right-hand melodic lines with octaves are contrasted with identical left-hand patterns. All in all, this étude not only demands a mature understanding of upper-arm engagement to create substantial dynamic change, but also masterful control in touch, nuance, and sound balance, especially when the texture becomes dense in the latter part of the work.

Étude de Concert No. 3 in G minor, *Andantino grazioso*

The tempo marking of *Allegretto Scherzando* fully depicts the humorous character of the third concert étude in this set to which a nickname of “*Humoreske*” can be legitimately given. With a *Scherzo* character, this étude technically demands a variety of touch and articulation. There are three main motivic figures that dominate the structure of this work.

¹¹² Franz Liszt, *Années de pèlerinage II, S.161* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1974), 26.

Example 3.13 *Étude de Concert* No. 3 in G minor, mm. 1 – 3

The image displays a musical score for the first three measures of 'Étude de Concert' No. 3 in G minor. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time. The right-hand part (treble clef) features a repeated motif of sixteenth-note triplets, which are circled in green in the first measure. The left-hand part (bass clef) has a similar motif, with notes marked with purple circles for staccato and red arcs for staccato-tenuto. A fingering suggestion is provided for the first measure of the right hand, showing the sequence of fingers: 4, 5, 4, 3, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3.

Example 3.13 demonstrates the first motivic figure, a repeated short motif that incorporates sixteenth-note triplets (green circle), signaling the lively character in this G minor work. Again, Grøndahl precisely indicates the intended articulation by her detailed markings. In the first three measures, every note in the left hand is articulated with *staccato* or *staccato-tenuto*. The marking almost makes a slur articulation (marked with red), but not a complete slur. The *staccato* in the bass note (purple circle) complicates the execution, as the upper note needs to be held slightly longer. The right-hand pattern responds with identical articulation between its two voices. The repeated motifs are taken over by falling chromatic triplets at m. 4 at the closure of the phrase, with *legato* motion. The fingering suggestion provided in the example reveals the technical challenge with the inevitable consecutive use of thumbs for the middle voice, to ensure the top voice can be interpreted with *legato* motion.

Example 3.14 *Étude de Concert* No. 3 in G minor, mm. 7 – 8



Example 3.15 Edvard Grieg *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16*, mm. 35¹¹³



The second main motivic figure (Example 3.14) presented in this étude is a dotted rhythm that reminds us of the famous excerpt from Edvard Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A minor* (Example 3.15). To achieve the effect of *leggiero* as indicated in Example 3.14, a pedagogical suggestion is given here to practice the right-hand pattern with *staccato* articulation (marked with red parentheses). While the performance practice of interpreting the dotted rhythm is to deliver short slurs (marked with purple), the use of *staccato* articulation on every note as preparatory practice ensures crisp cleanliness while maintaining a light touch in the final execution.

¹¹³ Edvard Grieg, *Piano Concerto Op. 16*, (New York: Schirmer, 1920), 6.

Example 3.16 *Étude de Concert No. 3* in G minor, mm. 10 – 12

Example 3.17 Edvard Grieg *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16*, mm. 41¹¹⁴

The third motivic figure incorporated in the work deals with the problem of double-third chromatic scales. In Example 3.17 (m. 12), Grøndahl provides the only fingering instruction in this set, which is the most idiomatic fingering option. Beyond the technical and educational value of playing thirds with *legato*, one must realize that the chromatic double thirds here (marked with red) serve as a brief transitional moment that gives a slight “breath” and space to prepare for the new section. Hence in m. 12, the chromatic double thirds should be interpreted with a subtle *ritenuto*, leading to the next section. In fact, Edvard Grieg used precisely the same treatment in his first piano concerto (Example 3.17).

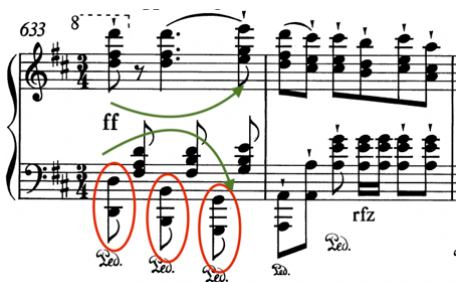
¹¹⁴ Edvard Grieg, *Piano Concerto Op. 16*, (New York: Schirmer, 1920), 8.

Example 3.18 *Étude de Concert* No. 3 in G minor, mm. 32 – 34



Within the overall *Scherzo* character, Grøndahl incorporated a short middle section with chordal writings that depicts a strong sense of triumph and a glorious mood. In Example 3.18, accent markings are used demanding that careful attention be given to the two spots without an accent (marked with red circle). The absence of any accent indicates Grøndahl's expectation that within the mood of *molto marcato* in this section, the sixteenth-note figures should receive melodious interpretation without accent. In other words, the most ideal touch here is to emphasize the downbeats without any harshness. The left-hand octaves shown in this example remind us of the ending of Liszt's *Rhapsodie espagnole*, S.254.

Example 3.19 Franz Liszt *Rhapsodie espagnole*, S.254, mm. 633 – 634¹¹⁵



Both excerpts exhibit a forceful *marcato* march with contrary motion between the two hands (green arrow). The underlying difficulty demands pianists' sensitivity and sophistication on the geography of the keyboard for an accurate execution of the contrary

¹¹⁵ Franz Liszt, *Rhapsodie espagnole*, S.254 (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1993), 53.

Norwegian folk materials. In addition, the “cello” here in the left-hand part reminds us of Chopin’s famous étude Op. 25 No. 7. The 2-against-3 polyrhythmic design of the opening renders a natural “tenuto” as if it projects a vibrato effect. To achieve Grøndahl’s note of “*sempre il basso espressivo*” in the left hand, special attention should be given to tone color and nuance without any note sticking out within the long legato line. The opening pedal ought to include the lowest bass B-flat before the beat in order to sustain the bass sound with warmth. While *una corda* is noted at the outset, Grøndahl constantly indicates and switches the use between *una corda* and *tre corde* for a variety of timbral effects.

Example 3.21 *Étude de Concert* No. 4 in B-flat major, mm. 31 – 33



The right-hand pattern brings the main pedagogical value of this piece: while the two fingering groups throughout the work (5-2 to 4-1 vs. 5-2 to 3-1) are consistent, it is challenging for pianists to carefully adjust to the various intervallic combinations and hand positions. In Example 3.21, three instances are outlined: the first group (5-2 to 3-1) is characterized by its large leap between the first interval (5-2) that urges stretching. The second group switches to a large stretch between fingering 1-3. The third group reverts to a big stretch of fingering 5-2 that is now paired with fingering 4-1. To achieve a successful interpretation, pianists should learn to execute agile adjustments adapting to various positions while maintaining a light touch for a transparent sound.

Example 3.22 *Étude de Concert* No. 4 in B-flat major, mm 22 – 24

Consideration should be given to the left hand as well. There are many instances when the melody in the left hand is joined by chords. The chordal playing should never obscure the continuity of the melodic phrase when the thumb needs to be consecutively used (Example 3.22). The touch here requires a caressing motion that reduces the directness into the keys and enhances the *legato* motion.

Example 3.23 *Étude de Concert* No. 4 in B-flat major, mm 37 – 42

The middle section of this work (starting at m. 38) begins with a modulation to G minor and a change of character. The original pastoral theme found in the left-hand “cello” part is now taken over by the right-hand with a rather tragic and sorrowful melody. In Example 3.23, a fingering suggestion is provided. In the left-hand arpeggiated accompaniment at m. 38, a consecutive use of thumb (marked with red) helps the smoothness of the fingering, yet the detached motion needs to be subtle and almost

unnoticeable under the pedaling (that is, to ensure the sound is acoustically connected).

At m. 40, an awkward hand position is required for the left hand to cross above the right hand (red circle). This remains, however, the preferred solution to maintain a proper melodic coherence.

Example 3.24 Étude de Concert No. 4 in B-flat major, mm 46 – 48



Prior to the return of the A section, the sorrowful theme subtly travels to a graceful transitional section (Example 3.24). The high register with sparkling sounds and the *staccato* articulation of the thirds both contrast with the harp-like *legato* arpeggios in the left-hand. The pianistic challenge is the contrasting articulations between hands (*legato* vs. *staccato*). This passage demands a light touch of *leggiero* in the right hand, which can only be executed with an extremely loose and flexible wrist, complicated by the coordination of left-hand *legato*.

Étude de Concert No. 5 in E-flat major, *Molto Allegro e con brio*

The fifth concert étude can easily be chosen as the most virtuosic and brilliant work in the set. Bearing the designation *Molto Allegro e con brio*, this technically challenging piece features endless driving momentum and a fast pace. The pianist will focus on the technical facets of repeated notes, voicing and octaves.

Example 3.25 Étude de Concert No. 5 in E-flat major, mm. 1 – 3



The repeated thirds in Example 3.25 penetrate most of the work and their proper execution at a high-speed demands pianists' sensitivity to the action and response of the keyboard hammers. A clear definition of *staccato* with loose wrist is preferred in interpreting repeated notes to avoid muddiness. The entrance of the top voice at m. 2 necessitates a rather non-legato touch (instead of *staccato*) to create melodic sense and direction. However, the repeated thirds in the middle voice demand the same crisp *staccato* touch with a softer sound to avoid any muddiness or overpowering of the top melodies. A strong, accented motivic cell is introduced at the outset of the work, reinforced by the meter of 12/8 in this work. The subsequent left-hand accompaniment (circled with purple) adds rhythmic variety to the repeated upper voices. In fact, the repeated-note writing can easily and convincingly remind us of the well-known passage found in Robert Schumann's *Études Symphoniques*.

Example 3.26 Robert Schumann *Études Symphoniques* Op. 13 (Étude IX), mm. 1 – 8¹¹⁶



¹¹⁶ Robert Schumann, *Études Symphoniques* Op. 13 (Leipzig: Händel Breitkopf & Härtel, 1912), 237.

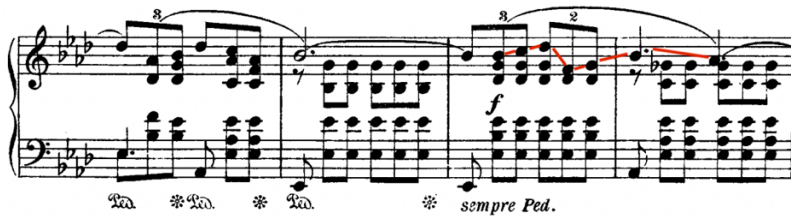
In both Schumann and Grøndahl's examples, the layers in the right hand create technical difficulty in that the top melodic line needs to stand out above the other voices. A preparatory practice suggestion can be made here for the right hand, which is to play the top voice with full *legato* motion, while executing the lower voices with *staccato* articulation in slow tempo. Despite the differences in meters between the two works, the tempo of interpretation ends up being the same rapid speed.

Example 3.27 *Étude de Concert* No. 5 in E-flat major, mm. 13 – 15



In Example 3.27, the right-hand melodic contour is outlined with red. This instance exemplifies how Grøndahl's design of falling and rising in her melodies always created a song-like quality, despite the fast pace. In fact, the first melodic contour in this example strikingly echoes the thematic melody found in Frédéric Chopin's Prelude Op. 28, No. 17 (Example. 3.28).

Example 3.28 *Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in A-flat Major, Op. 28, No. 17*, mm. 9 – 13¹¹⁷



In addition, Grøndahl creates a conversation between the two hands (Example 3.27). The left-hand pattern stems from the original motif, yet in a larger intervallic

¹¹⁷ Frédéric Chopin, *Preludes Op. 28*, (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1905), 28.

distance. The jump complicates the playing as the right-hand position remains stationary, contrasting with the big gesture and rotation demanded for the left-hand movement.

Example 3.29 *Étude de Concert* No. 5 in E-flat major, mm. 31 – 33



Example 3.28 demonstrates the middle section of this étude, consisting of a substantial octave passage that is highly virtuosic, modulating to the key of C minor with a contrasting mood. The technical challenge is the irregularity of the intervals in the left-hand octaves. In Example 3.28, specifically in the left-hand contour, intervals that are augmented fourth or larger are marked with green. Not only do these intervals create harmonic tension, but the irregularity of the distances in between each octave provides a challenging platform for pianists to perfect their sensitivity to the geography of keyboard in octave playing. A practice suggestion here is to practice in dotted rhythm. Another effective idea is to practice in groupings of 4 or 5, which breaks the original triple meter. Undoubtedly, practicing groups of 3 in triplets (as written) is the essential final step in the training process. All in all, the left-hand octaves always need to be played with a melodic direction, as they outline the texture and atmosphere of this section that is equally important to the right-hand chords. This concert étude emphasizes the technique of playing repeated notes with a flexible wrist and clean voicings, as well as octave playing with ease. The substantial octave passages differ from octave passages found in Chopin's *Étude in B minor*, op. 25, no. 10, or Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6*, in which the tempo is expected to be rapid. The octave passages in this fifth concert étude center on

the ability of playing octaves with a fully *legato* motion to create melodic and dynamic narratives, requiring complete understanding of wrist rotation to create an appropriate tone color.

Étude de Concert No. 6 in A Major, *Allegretto grazioso*

The sixth concert étude in A major, closes the set with an atmosphere of calm and beauty. In this three-page work (the shortest étude in this set), Grøndahl uses the same texture throughout the work, creating an enchanting musical piece with a hidden technical challenge.

Example 3.30 Étude de Concert No. 6 in A Major, mm. 1 – 3



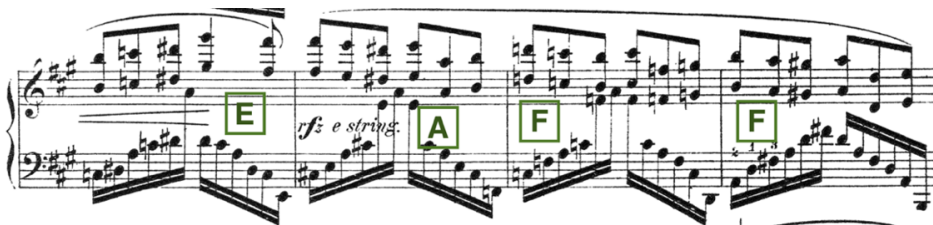
Grøndahl designed a rippling accompaniment pattern in the left hand, which is used throughout the work. This extended arpeggiation in the accompaniment requires full *legato* motion within a warm and soft background dynamic. The necessary softness in this left-hand pattern demands a flexible wrist and sensitive touch. The rippling accompaniments demand an open hand shape for the large leaps between notes, as well as secure knowledge in fingerings. Example 3.30 exhibits the texture of this étude and the different possible fingerings one might use. In the first measure, the large intervallic leap (circled with red) makes the original fingering of 2-3 not a universal option due to different hand sizes. The fingering (marked with green) provided in the example is

another option that avoids a large jump between the second and third finger, yet creates an awkward crossing in between the pinky and the thumb. However, the damper pedal is used throughout the work and, therefore, this deficiency leaves no negative effect. The rippling arpeggiation that penetrates the work creates many spots where the pianist is forced to use the pinky consecutively, such as the transition between measures 2 and 3 in the example. Again, there are always other possible fingerings (provided with green) that might allow better smoothness to the arpeggiation. In addition, Grøndahl writes the melody lines solely with octaves. This challenges pianists' sensitivity to the articulation of every octave to ensure there is no octave that sticks out, jeopardizing the long line in the melodic voice. One might easily imagine how the horizontal movement of the left hand in this work (with the arpeggiated ups and downs), paired with the octaves (vertical movement in its nature) in the right hand, creates a difficult task for any pianist to maintain superb control and manipulation of balance. The approach to each octave in the right-hand melodic lines demands the use of arm weight in order to create the long horizontal line, avoiding any direct attack. The floating and tender arpeggiation, along with the poetic right-hand melodies, strike our ears with a similarity to the opening bars of Chopin's popular *Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante* (Example 3.31).

Example 3.31 Frédéric Chopin: *Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante*, Op. 22,
mm. 6 – 9¹¹⁸



Example 3.32 *Étude de Concert* No. 6 in A Major, mm. 42 – 45



The ingenuity of Grøndahl's harmonic design is evident from Example 3.32, which exemplifies how a consistent texture can still arouse enchanting and arresting narratives in an étude. This short concert étude is constructed in the key of A major. Grøndahl forms a diverse color by moving around the tonal space in a constant manner. Not only do the drastic changes of key (Example 3.32) create a sense of wonder in the musical narrative, but they also offer pianists a test of their memory and quick adaptation to chord changes. Overall, this étude projects the quality of a romantic character piece and the soft rippling left-hand pattern throughout the piece internally demands superior technical proficiency from the pianists. The pedagogical analysis in this chapter aims to discover the hidden details and the uniqueness in Agathe Backer Grøndahl's *Six Concert de Études Op. 11*, which was marginalized in the genre of étude.

¹¹⁸ Frédéric Chopin, *Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante*, Op. 22 (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879), 1.

CONCLUSION

The first chapter of this research project traces the literature of keyboard études chronologically and reveals the dualistic nature of études, as a self-contained art and a technical work with functionality. On the other hand, I aim to gather and include the études written by female composers within the context and discussion of the genre. The historically gendered social context and ideology surrounding the piano formed a hierarchical canon in repertoire and art form. The genre of the étude, with a smaller scope, along with art songs and other piano genres such as nocturnes, has long been feminized in the western European tradition and unjustly considered as simpler, lesser genres with status of lower realms among all art forms. And yet no genre in music should be considered “simpler.” More research and analysis on specific études by women composers, such as Cécile Chaminade and Grażyna Bacewicz are being made and documented. And therefore, an effort needs to be made in gathering female composers’ études to provide an overview of their works, as well as their creative outputs and unmeasurable contributions in the literature of keyboard études. Thus, Table A was born and serves as the main contribution of this research to fulfill my aspiration.

On the other hand, through an in-depth pedagogical analysis of Fanny Hensel and Agathe Backer Grøndahl, the attempt of this project is to continue the path of bringing women’s études into the musicological discourse and the keyboard literature. The art and beauty concealed within these études has long been forgotten and marginalized from the mainstream classical musical culture due to the entrenched canonic formation in

repertoire. This document is only part of the process, rediscovering hidden great works involves a lengthy process and remains an ongoing task.

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's *Eight Übungstücke*, just like her many other manuscripts and autographs that have lain unheeded and unknown, were silenced for many years. Even in today's world, these two sets of *übungsstücke* are unrecognized and marginalized when they should appear as enriching pedagogical work for intermediate-level students, as well as performance repertoire. The pedagogical analysis in Chapter III seeks to revive Hensel's forgotten musical voice and the hidden details, demonstrating how the set comprehensively covers a variety of pianistic techniques, reflecting the nineteenth-century trend of pianism and the instrumental change of that time. Written in 1823, as a brilliant pianist at the age of 18, Hensel unsurprisingly displayed a perceptive, sensitive, and innovative understanding of the essential pianistic techniques one ought to possess. Even from a modern perspective, the musical and technical ideas presented in these works are unique and inventive. The rare quality of these works are that Hensel's technical ideas are delivered in a musically coherent form; thus, they serve as both intermediate-level pedagogical works and concert pieces. These precious manuscripts, being "covered with dust" for so long, deserve to resound in today's world.

The pedagogical analysis in Chapter V aims to discover the hidden details and the uniqueness in Agathe Backer Grøndahl's *Six Concert de Études Op. 11*. Words undoubtedly fail to fully unveil the music itself, as this set of études indeed possess the "unrestrained imagination," considered by Robert Schumann as the soul of the genre.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Claudia MacDonald, "Schumann's Piano Practice: Technical Mastery and Artistic Ideal," *The Journal of Musicology* 19, no. 4 (2002): 560.

The analysis in Chapter V includes musical examples and works that happened to be written by male composers, but it denies any intention to take male composers' works as the standard measurement. I strongly believe and agree that "the creative work should be accepted for what it is: a product of a subject's creativity, to be valued for itself, without comparisons."¹²⁰ The comparative discussion exists in the analysis only to reveal that these études are all like-minded and historically worthy works, and yet Grøndahl's études were unfairly isolated and ignored in the paradigm. Her concert études ought to be staples of our keyboard literature and the analysis seeks to contribute as an academic form of revival. Here, I wish to conclude my research paper by this sentence: May the inclusion of women in music history continue, so that we form a collective understanding of music, art, and culture.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 204.

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