



The Concerto-Virtuoso Etude in the Work of Franz Liszt

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Abstract: This article examines in detail the piano etudes of the famous 19th-century Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, which are central to his work. Liszt's piano works form the methodological basis of the article. The article is intended for students or teachers of professional educational institutions.

Keywords: virtuoso pianism, European piano schools, Romanticism, Highest Performance, concert, caprice, traditional and innovative complexes.

The etude occupies one of the most important places in Franz Liszt's piano works. The great composer paid a tremendous tribute to this genre.

At the height of the flowering of virtuoso pianism in European schools (1830-1840), the professionalisation of learning to perform and the work of the champions of Romanticism, the *étude* first became an avant-garde genre that expressed the most contemporary performing strivings of the time. The etude was created in line with the rapid development of concerto and "brilliant" pianism, but it was also a teaching and instructional genre as well as an exploratory and experimental one. You can read about it in an article by A.Saidkhonov, which examines the entire evolution of the genre. There is probably no other genre in which the work of a composer, performer and teacher combined so profoundly and interdependently. And when these spheres are combined in the creative practice of one brilliant musician, as it was with Liszt, this unity and mutual dependence appear in a particularly clear and concentrated form.

The etudes stand out noticeably in the huge mass of Liszt's piano works. They vary in content and are vast in terms of the range of technical means used. The etude is one of the few genres in Liszt's oeuvre where the composer reached such stylistic and pianistic perfection. In the *études*, Liszt develops a new relationship with the instrument, opens up new possibilities and expressive tasks for the performer and creates new musical forms.

The composer created a extremely large number of studies, which in itself speaks volumes about the significance of this genre for him. These include 12 Transcendental Etudes (or Etudes of the Highest Performance), six etudes by Paganini's Caprices and some programme etudes, among which are Three Concert Etudes (Complaint, Lightness and Sigh), Two Concert Etudes (Noise of a Forest and Round Dwarf) among others. Liszt's *études*, as well as his chopines, are among the best of the composer's works. Liszt's etudes, just as Chopin's, are subordinate to the ideological and artistic idea.

Transcendental Etudes

Liszt's etudes are noticeably "scattered" in his creative path. The composer began working on his studies at an early age and continued this work intermittently for almost forty years. He wrote his first studies in 1826 and the last in the 1860s. During this period Liszt wrote twelve large sketches. Between the three versions of the twelve etudes, which in the final version (1851) were called Etudes

de transcendentalisation, 12 years passed between them. The other series of études, Paganini's caprices (6 études), concert (5 études with programme names) and one étude for improvement, called "In a rage", were composed later. The way of Liszt's études, especially taking into account the significant changes the composer made in the revisions of the twelve Transcendental Etudes, appears as a clear reflection of the stages in the evolution of the creative aspirations, composition method and pianistic principles of the maestro.

Liszt's études vary in terms of their creative tasks and the genre attributes they express. In terms of genre specificity and stylistics they are little isolated from his other works. On the contrary, they are immersed in the multi-genre world of his piano music, in particular as regards the programme, his compositional solutions and his pianistic stylistics. In the studies, Liszt gravitated, as in everything else, towards universalism, consistent expansion and variety in the genre field, which fully corresponded with the character of his nature.

Franz Liszt's Transcendental Etudes occupy a special place among the opuses of this genre. The history of Liszt's work on this opus is well known. The first version of the studies was made in 1826 under the title Jesuit Etudes. This was followed by a second version in 1838 which received the new title of Twelve Large Etudes. It was entirely different from the first, and in many respects was close to the latter, third version. Finally, the third version, made in 1851, gave the studies their present form and the final name Transcendental Etudes. The opus consists of 12 études, 10 of which have programme titles. The tonal movement of the études is structured in a quarto-quinto circle with the observance of the major/minor pairing principle.

To organise the movement in Transcendental Etudes, Franz Liszt uses both very traditional and innovative complexes declared in the aesthetic manifestos of his romantic contemporaries.

The first set includes texture, tempo, sonic dynamics, harmonic conjugation and metrical organisation. Since the composer considers the études as a cycle, these means extend to the entire opus, creating transversal dramaturgical and, consequently, semantic sequences.

The second set, above all, includes the method of generalisation through genre, which in the artistic text of the Romantics became a program-meaningful component of the organisation of the semantic series. Genres of everyday musical practice were often used by Franz Liszt as a semantic bearing subtext. In his art he paid great attention to dance genres. In Transcendental Etudes the main genre emphasis is the waltz. This genre is used in many of the pieces in the cycle. In addition to the waltz, march, song and a number of other genres become his own leitgenres.

The Transcendental Etudes show the evolution of form: from miniature to mid-order form and also represent the process of the artistic transformation of the sketch within one opus. With the help of the Transcendental Etudes, Franz Liszt managed to show the movement of the étude from an instructional genre to a highly artistic one. The tempo dramaturgy strengthens the general semantic orientation by the fact that towards the end of the cycle slow tempos become predominant, indicating more the character of the piece than the speed of its movement.

The Transcendental Etudes synthesise all of the best achievements of the Romantic composers of the first half of the 19th century. Franz Liszt summarised not only his own results from the preceding period, but also many of those developed by Chopin and Robert Schumann which helped to bring the genre of the étude to the pinnacle of authorial development. The creation of the cycle of études, in which the most capacious and characteristic Romantic imagery formed the core of the drama, brought the étude to the pinnacle of the author's stage of development. Franz Liszt created the standard of a fundamentally new concert étude, enriched by the variety of its texture and highly artistic imagery. For the first time in the history of the genre, the programme nature of the Romantic model was used, which finally transformed the instructive genre (in the past) into one of the components of the genre system of the 19th century high artistic tradition, capable of bearing profound philosophical meaning much like sonata cycles.

The Grand etudes on Paganini

Like many other composers (Schumann, Brahms and later Rachmaninoff), Liszt had the idea of transmitting the perfect technique of the Italian violinist to the piano, not copying the violin techniques but recreating them in accordance with the specific nature of his instrument. The Grand Etudes on Paganini (first edition – 1838, final – 1851) are dedicated to this, among which the most popular are No3 (Campanella in gis-moll) and No6 (a-moll). Both etudes were written in variation form. The pieces in this cycle have no programme titles. As the basis for the thematic material of these études, Liszt chose some caprices from Paganini's famous cycle for solo violin («24 Capricci per il violino solo, dedicati agli artisti»). He stopped at No 1-5-6-9-17 and 24, and also used the rondo theme from Paganini's Violin Concerto No 2 (h-moll).

Liszt heard Paganini in 1831 in Paris, whose playing stunned him: «*What a man, what a violin, what an artist! Oh God, what anguish, what misery, what suffering express these four strings!... And his expression, his way of phrasing, and finally his soul*». Paganini's influence on Liszt manifested first and foremost in the fact that he felt the need to revise his creative baggage and immersed himself in his work with passion, perfecting his pianistic technique; his mind and fingers at the time, in Liszt's own expression, «work like two convicts».

Liszt completes the cycle of etudes on Paganini several years after his first acquaintance with the violinist.

The composer, experienced in the genre of transcription, showed how the source material was transformed and how the possibilities of the piano were used. The latter was expressed in an innovative approach to the instrument, breaking with stereotypes and established traditions and transforming textural formulas that had become habitual and hackneyed. In one of his letters Liszt wrote: «*The arrangements of large instrumental and vocal works that exist to this day are indicative of how little pianists know how to use all the means the piano has*». In this respect, Liszt was very much like Paganini. His pianism was just as unfamiliar to musicians brought up on classical values as Paganini's violin manner.

Having begun his intense concert activities at the end of the thirties, Liszt displays an indomitable virtuoso temperament at this time, pushing the instrument to its limits, not to mention the performer's abilities. «The «Grand Etudes on Paganini» 1838, in comparison with the 1851 edition, are staggering in their combination of pianistic difficulties and overloaded texture.

The concert etudes

Alongside these two collections, Liszt also had other programme studies with significant content. Thus the poetic structure is inherent in «Forest Murmurs», which contains images of nature favoured by the Romantics, and «Dance of the Gnomes», which anticipates Grieg's fairytale and fantastical pieces (both composed around 1863).

Let's take a look at one of Liszt's most striking concert études – the Des-dur Concert Etude – which was composed around 1848. This was the turn of the «Wandering Years» and of the Weimar period, an extremely active creative era that was marked by the creation of a huge number of works in the most diverse genres – from operatic fantasies and song transcriptions to the partial work of «The Faust Symphony» and «The Dante Symphony» and both piano concerti. By this time the main features of Liszt's creative work had come together: a gravitation towards concrete figurativeness, an innovation of expressive means in the field of texture, timbre, harmony, form and thematic development. A great deal of space was also devoted to work on etudes.

From the point of view of music and art, virtuoso, the cycle «Three concert etudes» occupies a special place: As-dur – «Il lamento» («Complaint»), f-moll – «La leggierezza» «Lightness», the so-called («Chromatic etude») and Des-dur – «Un sospiro» («Sigh»). The first etude, in our opinion, is the least successful; its thematicism is poorly expressive and, therefore, quite conventional. The second étude is full of unpretentious elegance: without claiming to have any great depth, it is expressive in its fluent and sliding movement. The main theme sounds sad and heartfelt at the beginning, and then (in major) it becomes lighter and more energetic. The chromatic scale-like

passages should be played very lightly, with a special 'jeu perle' technique. Correspondingly, the fingers should be extremely light and flexible, as if passively descending on the keys with slightly tangible pressure. With this technique, the sliding movement of the hand can achieve the desired sonority (so called beadwork).

We know that in Liszt's original piano works we can encounter a wide range of musical images: at one pole there is sublime exaltation, sometimes theatrical, often reaching genuine grandiosity; at the other pole there is demonism, sarcasm. We meet intimate lyricism and sensual ecstasy in the lyrics. Picturesque and lively nature alternates with pious detachment from worldly life. The Des-dur etude has no extremes, it is harmonious in its choice of musical imagery: noble and pure lyricism with majesty and virility, there is also something connected with musical painting.

Conclusion: Liszt's etudes, like Chopin's, occupy a unique place in piano literature. They amaze and impress with the organic synthesis of the vivid artistic idea with the original means of implementation, where every technical method is poeticised, where artistic and technical tasks reach an unprecedented unity and height.

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