

# 11 | Women, Pianos, and Virtuosity in the Nineteenth Century

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In her 1880 memoir, the American pianist Amy Fay described the sheer virtuosity and professional ambition of the numerous young women pianists she encountered. Her account of a Sunday studio class at the Berlin Conservatory is particularly vivid:

Many of the girls play magnificently, and I was amazed at the technique that they had, at the artistic manner in which even very young girls rendered the most difficult music, and all without notes .... None of them had the least fear, and they laughed and chattered between the pieces, and when their turn came they marched up to the piano, sat down, as bold as lions, and banged away so splendidly!<sup>1</sup>

Nineteenth-century culture viewed piano-playing as a valuable and respectable accomplishment for a middle-class woman. Most such women made music within private domestic spaces, where pianism could function as an avidly pursued avocation, a mark of genteel accomplishment, and a pleasurable component of social gatherings. Depictions of women playing the piano in such contexts abound in literature (Austen, for example) and painting (Renoir, for example). Engaging with the piano involved navigating the porous boundaries between amateur and professional, and between public and private music-making: many women who did not earn a living from the piano commanded high-calibre performing and compositional skills. Thus Fanny Hensel, through her engagement with her family's semi-private *Sonntagsmusiken*, produced a weighty compositional oeuvre and took the spotlight as pianist.

However, many women became concert pianists and published composers. Fay identified several classmates aspiring to such careers who received enthusiastic support from prominent male teachers and colleagues, including Franz Liszt and Carl Tausig. Nancy B. Reich observed that the majority of women who became professional musicians – not only on the concert stage and at the composer's desk, but also in the teaching studio – came from families of modest means, in which it was taken for granted that women would engage in professional life. Many such families were part of an artist-entrepreneur class. Reich cites Clara Schumann – daughter of a piano teacher father and soprano mother – as a paradigmatic

example. By contrast, earning money from musical performance or composition ran counter to notions of female respectability held by socially elite families – Reich cites Hensel as a woman for whom such a career would have been ‘unthinkable’.<sup>2</sup>

Women seeking recognition as concert pianists navigated barriers, biases, and double-binds, their bodies and performing gestures coming under close scrutiny. Fay described a classmate as one of Tausig’s best students but regretted that her ‘frightfully ugly’ hands made her playing hard to enjoy, while Franz Grillparzer’s poem ‘Clara Wieck und Beethoven’ highlighted the seventeen-year-old pianist’s ‘white fingers’.<sup>3</sup> Audiences assessed how women pianists embodied ideals of feminine delicacy and grace; women transgressing these boundaries risked being seen as unfeminine, and yet any hint of coquettishness or girlishness could compromise a woman’s image as a serious artist.<sup>4</sup>

Women faced additional obstacles to publishing their compositions. In a foundational study, Marcia Citron has analysed how the structure of the nineteenth-century musical profession (from conservatory curricula limiting women’s access to theory courses to male domination of music journalism) disadvantaged women, particularly within the process of canon formation.<sup>5</sup> Nineteenth-century musical aesthetics was explicitly gendered: women were viewed as inherently less capable of composing in large-scale forms or mastering learned counterpoint, being supposedly better suited to shorter songs and character pieces, more capable of making music by way of sentiment than intellect, and more attuned to fine detail than to larger, sweeping structures. One 1848 review of Clara Schumann’s Piano Trio, Op. 17, articulated this stereotype:

Virtuoso offerings for one instrument or for voice, small musical sketches, *Lieder*, etc. – these would be designated the feminine domain of musical activity. Ladies elevate themselves to riper compositions only seldom, because capturing what the inner ear hears requires a power of abstraction that is given in preponderance to men. Clara Wieck belongs to the few who truly possess this strength.<sup>6</sup>

The highest praise a woman could gain as a pianist or composer was, as here, for a critic to proclaim that the supposed limitations of femininity did not apply to her. The spectre of sexist aesthetics haunted even the plaudits.

Even so, women pianist-composers found ways of carving out individual career paths and professional profiles. Their activities were as extensive and diverse as the larger panorama of nineteenth-century music; they feature in virtually every part of this story – not only as pianists and composers but

also as audiences, consumers, and pedagogues. No history of nineteenth-century pianism is adequate without conveying a vibrant role for women.

In this chapter we offer several case studies that illustrate the range of ways in which women pianist-composers exercised their creative agency, with examples drawn from across the nineteenth century. We aim at an 'integrated' history of these cases, emphasizing the extent to which women pianist-composers engaged with their broader musical worlds and highlighting their roles in histories that musicology has for too long rendered as all-male.<sup>7</sup> We hope our study will invite readers (particularly performers) to immerse themselves in a vital part of nineteenth-century music that tends to remain marginalized in concert life.

## From Miniatures to Chamber Genres

Fanny Hensel's description of her *Sonntagsmusiken* – exclusive musical gatherings at her family's home in Berlin – as 'a wonderful middle ground between a private and public entity' captures the blurred boundaries between salon genres and the concert stage in nineteenth-century piano culture.<sup>8</sup> Here we trace this thread outwards from piano miniatures to duets, sonatas, trios, and quintets, demonstrating the ways in which women pianist-composers brought aspects of the public world, particularly virtuosity, into these genres.

The history of piano miniatures has traditionally been framed as an all-male endeavour, foregrounding such names as John Field, Felix Mendelssohn, and Fryderyk Chopin; recent studies have brought attention to women's rich contributions in this area.<sup>9</sup> Referring to piano miniatures as 'salon pieces' conveys one important aspect: the genre sold well with amateur pianists. At the same time, character pieces could serve the professional needs of touring concert pianists, men and women. For example, during the 1890s Cécile Chaminade turned away from the large-scale forms she had explored earlier and produced a wave of short piano pieces and songs. Citron notes that she may have been dissatisfied with the Parisian reception of her large works – including some patronizingly sexist rhetoric in reviews. But Citron also argues that her shift represented a calculated professional move. After her father's death, Chaminade and her mother needed income. Chaminade responded by undertaking concert tours and composing in highly marketable genres. As Citron notes, recital performances could stimulate sales of these pieces.<sup>10</sup> Chaminade's character pieces capture her range as a composer: from the

lightweight 'Scarf Dance', Op. 37, no. 3, to the multi-layered textures and virtuosic outpourings of 'Automne', from 6 Études de concert, Op. 35, no. 2. Chaminade was far from the only woman to contribute to the nineteenth-century efflorescence of études for practice-room and concert stage. Like such male contemporaries as Chopin, Liszt, Czerny, and Moscheles, they capitalized on intertwined facets of piano culture: the vogue for systematized piano practice resources bearing the imprimaturs of famous virtuosos, and fascination with pieces creatively exploring the capabilities of the piano and the pianist's technique. Louise Farrenc's approach in her Thirty Études, Op. 26, stands out for its interweaving of virtuosity and didacticism; the coverage of all minor and major keys, together with the encyclopaedic treatment of pianistic textures and techniques, recalls J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Hensel's *Das Jahr*, H-U 385, represents an intricate essay in the genre of character-piece cycle. This set of pieces depicting the months of the year exemplifies not only Hensel's craft, but also her wide-ranging artistic interests. Like all of Hensel's piano music, *Das Jahr* went unpublished during her lifetime. The finished set exists as an intriguing manuscript (available in facsimile) in which Hensel coordinated different art forms to create a multifaceted cycle.<sup>11</sup> For each piece, Hensel selected a poetic epigraph (ranging from Goethe to chorale texts) and a different colour of manuscript paper, while her husband, the painter Wilhelm Hensel, added illustrations. Subtle thematic and tonal interconnections tie the work together, with citations of chorale melodies marking Easter, Christmas, and the New Year. Within this larger structure, individual pieces conjure a wide range of pianistic figurations and references, from the quasi-improvisational fantasy of January, through the ebullient march of August, to the snow flurries of December.<sup>12</sup>

Women's creative engagement with the piano extended into music for four hands. Here the blurring of boundaries assumes a visual dimension in which, in the words of Adrian Daub, 'hands and bodies interlock and interweave'.<sup>13</sup> Such qualities can be heard (and seen) throughout Hensel's *Drei Stücke zu vier Händen*. The first piece, Allegretto, fluctuates between the lyrical style of her 'songs without words' and a dynamic exploration of the textural possibilities of four-hand music. Memorable moments range from the passing of the theme from the Primo part to the right hand of the Secondo part (bar 13), as the Primo glides into the upper registers with arpeggiated filigree, to the instances of hand-crossing in the central section, where fragments of the theme in the Primo part overlap with the chordal accompaniment in the Secondo. The second piece, marked Allegro molto,

takes the interweaving of hands and bodies to greater extremes, in an idiom capturing the stormy qualities of the mood discussed later in this chapter in connection with Hensel's C minor Sonata. In contrast to the softer beginnings of the outer pieces, here the opening theme evokes a full orchestra in the parlour through its bold chordal textures, dotted rhythms in overture style, tremolo figurations, octave unisons, and angular melodic lines – creating an impression of magnitude, both aurally and physically. A similar fusion of the intimate and the public permeates Clara Schumann's March in E flat for Four Hands, one of her last compositions, penned in 1879 as a golden wedding anniversary gift for Julius and Pauline Hübner. 'There were no good ideas about a gift from them', Schumann disclosed in a diary entry of May that year, 'and then it occurred to [her eldest daughter] Marie that I could compose a march for them and weave Robert's "Grossvater und Grossmutter" duet into it ... I went to work on it and after a few days, it succeeded'.<sup>14</sup> As with Hensel's pieces, so Schumann's duet slips between contrasting pianistic modes, encapsulating both the intimate and the social aspects of the genre. At one end of the spectrum is a vigorous style foregrounding hands and body equally. The piece begins thus, with the solo statement of the heraldic march, heard first in the Primo part, quickly expanding outwards into a texture of symphonic dimensions. Alongside this are moments striking a more wistful tone, as in the central section, where the march recedes into the background and a lyrical theme moves into the foreground. The mixing of moods recalls the ethos of the song on which the central section is based, 'Familien Gemälde' from Robert's *Vier Duette*, Op. 34 no. 4, notably its final stanza: 'Sie sahn uns an und dachten | Der schönen Vergangenheit; | Wir sahn sie an und träumten | Von ferner, künftiger Zeit' ('They looked at us and thought of their happy past. We looked at them and thought of distant days to come').<sup>15</sup> That Schumann weaves this song into the duet imbues it with multiple layers of meaning, not only in celebration of friendship, but also perhaps as a nostalgic reflection on her own circumstances, her connection with Robert, and her return to composition after a long hiatus.

Just as women pianist-composers incorporated a wide-ranging stylistic palette into miniature genres, so the same is true of their approach to large-scale 'classical' forms – the solo sonata and multi-movement chamber works. In this context, they not only combined virtuosity with exploration of large-scale form but also situated their music in dialogue with the emerging canon of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century 'classics'. Hensel's contributions offer a rich case in point.<sup>16</sup> An early example, composed in February 1824, is her *Sonata o Capriccio* in F minor, H-U

113, a one-movement piece recalling Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata in F minor. Here, as Angela Mace Christian observes, Hensel 'reimagined the dark, thickly voiced, theme' of Beethoven's first movement in a piece fusing sonata elements with the improvisatory style of the capriccio.<sup>17</sup> Hensel similarly engages with the past while pursuing new pathways in her three-movement Piano Sonata in C minor, H-U 128, composed a few months later. Its web of references includes a 'C minor mood' familiar from the works of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Hensel distinguishes herself through formal innovation and 'harmonic richness that stamps [the] work as anything but conventional'.<sup>19</sup> Examples range from the 'imaginative excursion' to the remote key of G flat major within the secondary theme, to the canonic treatment of the main theme in the coda, which imbues the closing material with a learned aura. Hensel's fluid approach creates the impression, as a contemporaneous critic observed apropos her *Lieder*, that 'here fantasy is permitted a freer reign [sic], the form applied in broader strokes'.<sup>20</sup>

Like Hensel, Chaminade foregrounded an enterprising approach to formal and generic paradigms in her 1895 Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 21. Though she rarely performed the piece in public,<sup>21</sup> Chaminade asserted her presence within the world of virtuoso pianists in the dedication to the composer and pianist Moritz Moszkowski (later to become her brother-in-law) and through the piece's stylistic language.<sup>22</sup> The opening thirty-five bars capture in microcosm the pianistic soundworlds encountered throughout. The impassioned theme, first heard in the lower registers, opens out into a display of pianistic brilliance, before giving way to a fugato (see Example 11.1). Chaminade thereby demonstrates, alongside her virtuosity and commitment to the ambitious sonata genre, command of a venerable idiom considered a hallmark of the serious composer. The juxtaposition of the virtuosic and learned permeates much of the movement, especially the coda, bars 195–211, where a fragment of the fugal theme returns amidst scalar passages in octave unisons and arpeggiated figuration. The formal innovation similarly takes its cue from the fusion of 'old' and the 'new'. If the C minor tonality and *Allegro Appassionata* marking conjure the ghost of Beethoven, Chaminade strikes out on her own pathway in her handling of sonata form. Citron suggests that Chaminade's approach, particularly in the secondary theme, might be read as 'resistance' to nineteenth-century ideas about gendering of themes in sonata form, in that Chaminade presents the secondary theme as 'a diffuse gesture that will not let itself be a tonal Other'.<sup>23</sup> Much of this freedom stems from Chaminade's flexible approach to tonality,

Example 11.1 Cécile Chaminade, Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 21, first movement, bars 29–52

29 **Con fuoco**

31 *sf*

33 *fff*

36 **Tranquillo** *mp marcato*

41 *mp marcato*

*ped.* \* *ped.* \*  
*ped.* \*  
*ped.* \* *ped.* \* *ped.* \*  
 \*

whereby the secondary theme passes freely through keys, notably the relative major (E flat) and the submediant (A flat), rather than being confined to one region.

## Example 11.1 (cont)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, starting at measure 45, features a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth-note patterns, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. Dynamic markings include 'cresc.' (crescendo) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte). The second system, starting at measure 49, continues the piece with similar textures and dynamics, including a 'marcato' marking. The notation includes various articulations and phrasing slurs.

Women additionally demonstrated compositional and pianistic enterprise in chamber music with piano. Virtuoso pianist-composers throughout the century found piano trios, quintets, and other such works to be versatile vehicles that were suitable for the salon as well as the concert stage, and that invited engagement with both cutting-edge virtuosity and classical paradigms. One example is Hensel's D minor Trio, Op. 11, composed during the winter of 1846–47 as a birthday gift for her sister, Rebecka, and premiered on 11 April 1847 at one of her Sunday soirées. This piece, written in the final months of her life, brings together the strands of Hensel's creative output – the virtuosic, the intimate, and learned – in a novel four-movement framework replacing a scherzo with two inner Lied-like movements. Though her death prevented her from publishing the piece, contemporary critics heralded it as a significant work: 'We [find] in this trio', one observed, 'broad, sweeping foundations that build themselves up through stormy waves into a marvelous edifice. In this respect the first movement is a masterpiece, and the trio most highly original'.<sup>24</sup> The metaphor of 'stormy waves' is particularly pertinent to the opening movement, which evokes a 'wave-like motion' in three distinct ways:<sup>25</sup> first, the swirling figuration that emerges from the depths of the piano; secondly, the undulating contours of the main theme, rising and falling in tandem with the left hand of the piano part; and thirdly, the octave doubling between violin and cello, which adds urgency while reinforcing the physicality of the writing. These features situate the movement between the intimacy of chamber music and the awe-inspiring forces of the sublime. In other, contrasting moments, the textures evoke the more intimate 'song without



words', notably the first movement's secondary theme and the third movement's opening. The finale reinstates the virtuosic style of the opening movement, ushered in by a cadenza that draws the concerto genre into the movement's web of references and evokes Hensel's ability as an improviser.

Louise Farrenc's two piano quintets, Opp. 30 and 31, also demonstrate the potential of chamber genres for pianist-composers. Farrenc composed the works in 1839–40, at an important juncture of her career: she had already made a name for herself as a composer of vocal music and virtuoso piano pieces and had given a well-reviewed concert at the Salon Pleyel. Marie Sumner Lott has shown how Farrenc strategically adapted the conventions of the quintet genre to present herself both as a virtuoso pianist and as a serious composer engaging with 'classical' paradigms.<sup>26</sup> She scored the quintets for piano, violin, viola, cello, and bass: at the time, quintets with this scoring (such as those by Hummel, Ries, and Cramer) tended to have three movements, concluded with rondos, and focused overwhelmingly on brilliant piano passagework. Indeed, Farrenc ends expositions and recapitulations with extended zones of piano passagework resembling what we would find at a similar juncture of a concerto. At the same time, the overall formal designs of her quintets distinguish them from similarly scored works and foreground her compositional engagement with the classical chamber-music tradition. Each includes four movements, and all begin and end with weighty sonata forms. Throughout, Farrenc crafts webs of quasi-conversational motivic exchanges, regarded as a hallmark of the 'serious' chamber-music tradition. To cite one example: in the first movement, the pianist begins the second theme alone. Just as he or she rounds off the first phrase, the strings enter to exchange transformations of the theme's salient motive with the pianist and ultimately yield a texture in which the strings overlay lyrical lines and one-bar snatches of the motive, while the piano provides a flow of arpeggiated accompaniment figuration. Farrenc went on to compose a substantial oeuvre of multi-movement instrumental works, including three symphonies and several chamber works for piano, strings, and/or winds.

## Concertos

Women pianist-composers contributed to the most overtly public-facing virtuoso genre, the concerto. Claudia Macdonald, in a study of concertos by Clara Schumann and Amy Beach, interprets these works as expressions of

compositional mastery, and shows how contemporary (male) critics tended to underestimate them.<sup>27</sup>

Schumann composed her Piano Concerto, Op. 7, while touring as the teenage phenomenon Clara Wieck. She began drafting the concerto in 1833, completing the three movements in reverse order. Her father, Friedrich, described the concerto as an important addition to her portfolio. At the time, she had published one set of virtuosic variations and several sets of character and dance pieces; the concerto represented her first multi-movement work.<sup>28</sup> Friedrich noted in a letter to his brother-in-law that he hoped it would enhance her reputation among connoisseurs ('Kenner').<sup>29</sup> She used the concerto as a calling card throughout the mid- and late 1830s. For example, during her 1837–38 Vienna tour – an event that sealed her international reputation – she anchored her second concert with her concerto.

Clara Schumann contributed to a larger trend whereby early and mid-nineteenth-century pianist-composers, including Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Weber, Liszt, and Robert Schumann, developed highly original approaches to the concerto's formal structure and solo-orchestra interaction. Scholars have identified her concerto as a model for Robert's Piano Concerto, Op. 54, and speculated that it might have influenced Liszt's Piano Concerto no. 1.<sup>30</sup> Clara Schumann's particular approach showcases her capacity for thematic invention and tonal surprise, as well as her attention to large-scale structural balance. In many ways, her concerto resembles a form of fantasy improvisation whereby the pianist spins a simple motive into a range of contrasting movements.<sup>31</sup> In the first movement, Schumann turns the forceful, march-like orchestral motto into the piano's richly ornamented primary theme. In the second, she chromaticizes the motto's ascending anacrusic gesture, using it to build a spacious melody in which sparingly deployed ornaments accentuate melodic peaks. In the third, she transforms the motive into a driving polonaise. Other passages of the concerto simulate spontaneous soloistic improvisation. As Macdonald notes, Schumann gives the first movement's second theme only the briefest tonal preparation, so that the pianist seems suddenly to seize and land upon the second key area. The first movement features an abbreviated sonata form: after the development, Schumann segues into the second movement in the remote key of A flat major. (Macdonald notes how Schumann balances this tonal leap by anticipating it at the start of the first movement's development.)<sup>32</sup> After the orchestra wends its way toward the dominant of A flat, Schumann gives the pianist a moment of time-stopping reverie – an unmetred *Eingang* that spreads a dominant chord across the keyboard. The transition between second and third movement

has the pianist circle three times through the salient motive, repeatedly juxtaposing A flat and the dominant of A minor and suggesting a rumination on tonal contrasts.

Schumann's evocation of fantasy staged an important part of her pianistic persona: improvisation (then a necessary skill for any professional concert pianist) was one of her trademarks. In 1832, a reviewer described her generating an extended improvisation on a given theme – this feat, he wrote, showed that she was more than a 'mere' prodigy with skilled fingers. Other reviews noted that she occasionally performed long improvisations throughout that decade.<sup>33</sup> More frequently, Schumann improvised preludes to and transitions between the character pieces she performed, a practice she continued for the rest of her career. Schumann's concerto – by evoking her improvisatory practice in a written-out work belongs to a substantial tradition of composed-out fantasies (including Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fantasy and Liszt's 'Dante' Sonata). Within this larger framework, Schumann positions herself on the cutting edge of piano virtuosity, creating numerous opportunities to display facility, expressive nuance, and sheer power. In the first movement she spotlights the intense physicality of the pianist's virtuosity.<sup>34</sup> Schumann matches the martial forcefulness of the orchestra's opening theme with double octaves that surge from the lowest to the highest ranges of the keyboard, peaking with full-fisted chords and octaves cascading down the piano. Such writing pushes the piano to its sonorous limit. By contrast, the slow movement presents an intimate soundworld unprecedented in the concerto repertoire. Schumann silences the orchestra altogether, evoking a lyrical piano miniature. Only a solo cello joins the piano to carry the melody at the rounding of the movement's ternary form. Schumann accentuated the movement's intimate quality by designating it a Romanze, a genre characterized by its wistful, introspective style. Across the concerto, she demonstrated her mastery of contemporary pianistic styles. The polonaise-finale adopts a dance style popular in current piano repertoire, perhaps capitalizing on the splash Chopin was making with his evocations of Polish dances. The extended zones of passagework in the first and third movements reveal her immersion in the post-classical concertos of Hummel, Kalkbrenner, and Chopin. Against chugging, motoric accompaniments she performs the kind of figuration that gave piano showpieces of this time their 'brilliant' sound – kaleidoscopically shifting patterns that highlight the piano's pinging, stratospheric upper reaches.

Like Schumann, Amy Beach composed her Piano Concerto in C sharp minor, Op. 45, to serve her needs at a turning-point in her career. Adrienne

Fried Block, detecting biographical resonances, has suggested that the piece ‘embodies the central problem of [Beach’s] life – between her desire for a public career on stage and the desire of those she loves to keep her “at home” or at least working in private rather than in public space’.<sup>35</sup> Her husband, Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, was one such figure who urged her to abandon the stage and devote her time to composing. After his death in 1910, Beach returned to the stage, using her concerto as a signature vehicle. She took the piece on tour to Europe, performing in Leipzig, Hamburg, and Berlin (1913), then across the United States, with performances in Los Angeles (1915), Chicago (1916), St. Louis, Boston, and Minneapolis (1917). Reviews of the concerts, particularly in the American press, positioned Beach as a ‘special presence – the foremost woman composer of her day’.<sup>36</sup> Edward C. Moore of the *Chicago Journal* (1916) described it as both a display of compositional mastery and an effective showpiece: ‘the composer evidently gave much care and thought to the construction of the work. Its working out is painstaking, its balance between solo instrument and orchestra is excellent; it is not too long, it is perfectly clear. From a structural point of view it is entirely praiseworthy.’<sup>37</sup>

At the broadest level, Beach’s formal innovation is demonstrated in the inclusion of four movements, the last two performed *attacca* – a design recalling the architecture of Brahms’s Concerto no. 2 in B flat major, Op. 83, which similarly includes a scherzo as the second of its four movements. Striking in the first movement is Beach’s distortion of formal boundaries and points of arrival, as in the lack of textural punctuation between the end of the development and the onset of the recapitulation, or the way in which the recapitulation begins not with a clear return to the tonic, but rather with a restatement of the principal theme in the dominant. Yet, as Macdonald suggests, the movement retains an element of ‘accessibility’ through the varied repetition of the ‘easily remembered principal theme’.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to Schumann’s Concerto, where the piano takes centre stage throughout, Beach’s first movement presents the piano and orchestra in a tense dialogue – to borrow Beach’s own words, they ‘vie with each other in the development of the two principal themes, of which the second is songlike in character’.<sup>39</sup> Beach establishes this dialogic interaction from the outset, where the sombre main theme, first heard in octave unisons in the piano part, is subsequently passed to the orchestra (bars 69–86) while the piano takes up a new countertheme, before it returns to the piano with elaborated chordal accompaniment. These exchanges continue until the soloist moves into the foreground with what Beach called a ‘richly worked out cadenza’ towards the end of the movement.

Hints of a possible narrative in the concerto come not only from Beach's own commentary on the piece, but also through the allusions to her songs. This cross-fertilization between song and instrumental music – aligning her approach with that of such contemporaries as Gustav Mahler – may suggest layers of quasi-programmatic references for those familiar with the poetic texts. A poignant example occurs in the Scherzo, which takes inspiration from Beach's 'Empress of Night', Op. 2 no. 3 (1891), set to a text by her husband and dedicated to her mother. Beach reworks the vocal line of the song in the orchestral texture and surrounds it with 'perpetuum mobile' figuration in the piano part. The Largo, which Beach called a 'dark tragic lament', draws another song into the concerto's frame of reference, her 'Twilight', Op. 2 no. 1, also set to a text by her husband. The mood of this poem – with its emphasis on 'the darkening cloud of mist', 'the shadows of the past' – is mirrored in the movement's mournful theme that grows in intensity as it is passed between the orchestra and soloist. Not until the Finale does the promise of life, intimated at the end of the song, become a possibility. This movement, described by Beach as 'a bright vivacious rondo', foregrounds pianistic virtuosity as it dances along in waltz-like style.

### **Customizing Their Scripts**

Women pianist-composers exercised compositional agency beyond the publication of standalone works. Their musical culture prized performers for reverent, revelatory interpretation: the imagined ability to enter into the mind of the composer or illuminate the supposed inherent essence of the work.<sup>40</sup> And yet, pianists and audiences saw no conflict between this ideal and practices that allowed (indeed expected) performers to add to and alter other composers' works. Even within what we might classify as 'interpretations' of musical works, pianists routinely acted as composers. They could thereby stage their distinct approaches to pianism and subtly or significantly shape how audiences encountered a composition. When audiences heard women pianists perform works by other composers – most often male contemporaries or forebears – they often heard them in original customized or reworked versions. Some such customizations we can access as published musical scores. Others remain unrecoverable, tantalizingly indicated in written accounts. Collectively, they invite us to recognize a fluid boundary between interpretative performance and compositional reinterpretation, and they complicate our notion of a stable, fixed musical work or authoritative composer.

**Example 11.2** Amy Beach, Cadenza for Beethoven, Piano Concerto no. 3 in C minor, first movement, bars 52–68

The musical score is presented in four systems. The first system (bars 52-58) begins with a *lunga* marking and features a *f* dynamic in the bass clef and *pp* in the treble clef. It includes a trill (*tr*) and a fermata over a chord. The second system (bars 59-64) shows a continuous melodic line in the treble clef with a *rit.* marking. The third system (bars 65-68) is marked *a tempo* with a quarter note equal to 116 (♩ = 116) and features a *dolce* dynamic. The score includes various performance instructions such as *Ped.* and asterisks.

Original cadenzas for canonical concertos represented one high-profile, richly documented arena for such display. Although Beethoven's and Mozart's own cadenzas for their concertos became available during the nineteenth century, pianists continued to compose and publish their own. Amy Beach's cadenza for the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 3,

Example 11.2 (cont)

59

61 *accelerando poco a poco* - - - - - *pp*

64 *(accel)* - - - - - *p* *cresc.*

66 *(cresc.)* - - - - - *mf*

*Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \*

\* *Ped.* \* *Ped.* \*

published in 1888, illustrates the power of the cadenza to display a pianist’s approach to virtuosity and to add a daring gloss on the composer’s themes (see Example 11.2). Beach begins within Beethoven’s textural world; as the energy of the cadenza increases, however, she refracts Beethovenian themes through post-Lisztian virtuosic writing, culminating with a shattering presentation of the movement’s primary theme with full chords and double octaves

thundering across the keyboard. Beach thereby adds a new virtuosic peak to a performance of the concerto that exceeds the textural boundaries of the original work. The cadenza's tonal and thematic structure also add a new dimension to the concerto's larger form. Beach's treatment of the second theme veers from A flat into a series of sharp tonalities: G sharp minor, E major, A major, and C sharp minor. This section not only introduces a surprising tonal contrast but also an intermovement tonal link. Following the C minor first movement, the E major second movement surprisingly plunges into a distant tonality, un-hinted at thus far in the concerto. By adopting Beach's cadenza, the performer might enable a tonally sensitive listener to hear in the second movement the blossoming of a key lightly touched on in the final stages of the preceding movement.

The larger body of original cadenzas to canonical concertos presents numerous distinct displays of compositional and pianistic enterprise. Angela Mace Christian notes that Fanny Hensel, in her cadenza for Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 1, used figurational patterns drawn from his Piano Concerto no. 5 (the 'Emperor'). Hensel might thereby have invited the audience to recognize her wide-ranging knowledge of Beethoven's oeuvre. Her cadenza exists only as a manuscript held at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (but accessible in facsimile in Christian's study). Christian, noting that Hensel reapproaches cadential 6/4 chords five times over the course of the cadenza, suggests that she may have designed these junctures as springboards for improvisation. If so, the manuscript documents only a trace of what Hensel actually performed.<sup>41</sup> Clara Schumann's cadenza for the third movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 4 invokes themes from the first and second movements, creating a cyclic, summarizing moment new to the finale.<sup>42</sup>

Pianists often introduced solo pieces with improvised preludes or transitioned between them with improvised modulatory passages. Amy Fay described the practice as widespread among her colleagues, writing of a fellow student's performance at a group lesson: "Tausig called out her name – he scarcely got the words out before she said "Ja", to the great amusement of the class ... and ran to the piano. She sat down with the chair half crooked, and almost on the side of it, but she never stopped to arrange herself, but dashed off a prelude out of her own head, and then played her piece ... I think she will make a capital concert player, for she is always excited by an audience, and she has immense power."<sup>43</sup> Fay further identified Teresa Carreño as a masterly improviser of preludes, 'always striking into the key of the artist who preceded her on the programme, and modulating into the one in which her solo was written. I have never



known her to fail, so absolute is her sense of pitch.<sup>44</sup> Numerous sources – treatises, as well as published preludes and slow introductions to longer works – offer glimpses of this pianistic practice.<sup>45</sup> These notated scores, however, do not give us unmediated access to what pianists actually played, as Schumann acknowledged in 1895, when she wrote out a series of model preludes at the request of her children. Schumann cautioned that what she had notated could not fully capture an extemporized art.<sup>46</sup>

Women pianist-composers also made customized versions of solo works by other composers. Alicia Levin argued that Marie Pleyel, in her 1845 Paris concerts, used transcriptions to present herself as a compositionally empowered pianist who could put her own stamp on works by respected forebears and contemporaries. She performed transcriptions of Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' and Meyerbeer's 'Le Moine', as well as her version of the Larghetto e cantabile from Hummel's Fantasy, Op. 18 (billed as an Andante). Pleyel's song transcriptions are lost, and she may never have written them down. But the publisher Heugel released her version of the Hummel, 'as played by Mme. Pleyel at the Théâtre Italien'. Pleyel changed the cadenza-like runs and flourishes that end phrases and sections, taking Hummel's passagework to new extremes of brilliance. She adds notes so that flourishes move at ever more extreme speeds, span even wider swathes of the keyboard and hit even higher peaks. Pleyel thereby presented herself as a pianist who could surpass a celebrated virtuoso from a previous generation. The notated passagework in the Heugel score might have begun as heat-of-performance improvisation, and it is possible that Pleyel revised them for the publication. Levin shows that Pleyel's arrangements met with a complex reception. One Parisian critic dismissed her choice to programme them as the 'whim of a pretty woman'. Another described the arrangements as acts of 'embroidery' – a metaphor that feminized Pleyel's work – but also credited her with realizing the composer's 'thoughts' and the 'spirit of the work'. Certainly the Heugel publication attests that Pleyel's name, and the promise of experiencing the work as she played it, would have enticed consumers.<sup>47</sup>

At the opposite end of the period under consideration, Sophie Menter customized other composers' works to foreground her signature power and verve. One example is her arrangement of the first and second divertimenti from Francesco Durante's 1747–49 *Sei Sonate*. Throughout, she retains Durante's quicksilver flow of figuration while adding octave passagework and layers of sonority that reflect her mastery of Lisztian pianism – Menter emulated Liszt, enjoyed a collegial rapport with the older, legendary pianist, and made his compositions central to her repertory. In her version of

the second divertimento, Menter turns Durante's single-handed arpeggios into rapid hand-crossings and makes his trills drive toward punchy bass octaves. Some of Menter's high-octane customizations remained unpublished, and she may not have notated them. For example, during her 1882 London concerts, a critic reported that when she performed Chopin's Waltz, Op. 34, no. 1, she omitted 'the last beautiful page' and substituted a 'loud' ending.<sup>48</sup> It is unclear exactly where Menter veered from Chopin's text; it seems she at least cut the last twenty-nine measures – in which Chopin lets one of the waltz's themes fragment and fade to a pianissimo – and instead ended with a display of sonorous power.

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While this chapter can only scratch the surface of women's engagement with the piano in the nineteenth century, we hope to have conveyed the breadth of their creativity as pianist-composers, whether in terms of their engagement with venerable traditions, their foregrounding of virtuosity, or their innovations in both miniature and large-scale genres. Thinking about their contributions to these areas carries wider implications for re-evaluating the history of piano music. To cite two examples: Hensel's *Das Jahr* offers an elaborate example of how piano cycles could fuse multiple sources of musical allusion and influences from other art forms, while Farrenc's piano quintets belong in any account of how composers adapted and reinvigorated classical paradigms within the chamber-music tradition and beyond. Of particular significance is the way all our case studies encourage us to rethink what it meant to be a composer in the nineteenth century, and to embrace an open view of musicianship in which performing, writing, teaching, and improvising are placed on an equal footing. In this spirit we offer an invitation to continue the conversation about women's multifaceted contributions to nineteenth-century piano culture, private and public.

## Further Reading

### Score Anthologies

- Hopkins, Nicholas, ed. *Women at the Piano: Solo Works by Female Composers of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Carl Fischer, 2019).
- Glickman, Silvia and Martha Furman Schleifer, eds. *Women Composers: Music Through the Ages* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996–2006, vol. 6 (*Composers Born 1800–1899: Keyboard Music*) and vol. 8 (*Composers Born 1800–1899: Large and Small Instrumental Ensembles*)).

## Recordings

- Isata Kanneh-Mason. *Romance: The Piano Music of Clara Schumann*. Decca 2850020 (2019).
- Neave Trio. *Her Voice: Beach, Clarke, Farrenc*. Chandos 20139 (2019).

## Books and Essays

- Ferris, David. 'Public Performance and Private Understanding: Clara Wieck's Concerts in Berlin', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 56/2 (2003), 351–408.
- Latham, Edward D. 'Gapped Lines and Ghostly Flowers in Amy Beach's "Phantoms", op. 15, no. 2', in *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Secular and Sacred Music to 1900*, ed. Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 229–42.
- Leppert, Richard. 'Sexual Identity, Death, and the Family Piano', *19th-Century Music*, 16/2 (1991), 105–28.
- Plantinga, Leon. 'The Piano and the Nineteenth Century', in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1–15.
- Raykoff, Ivan. *Dreams of Love: Playing the Romantic Pianist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

## Notes

1. Amy Fay, *Music Study in Germany: From the Home Correspondence of Amy Fay*, ed. Fay Pierce (Chicago: James, McClurg and Company, 1880), 21.
2. Nancy B. Reich, 'Women as Musicians: A Question of Class', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 125–46.
3. Fay, *Music Study*, 42.
4. For a study of this discourse, see Katharine Ellis, 'Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50/2–3 (1997), 353–85. On such stereotypes in Clara Schumann's reception, see Alexander Stefaniak, 'Clara Schumann and the Imagined Revelation of Musical Works', *Music & Letters*, 99/2 (2018), 204–7, 215–16.
5. Citron, *GMC*, especially Chapters 3 and 4.
6. J. C. Lobe, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 50/14 (5 April 1848), 232–4.
7. Joe Davies, 'Introduction: Clara Schumann in the Musicological Imagination', in *Clara Schumann Studies*, ed. Joe Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 7.
8. Fanny Hensel in a letter to Julius Elsasser, 6 May 1846, quoted in Lorraine Byrne Bodley, 'In Pursuit of a Single Flame: Fanny Hensel's "Musical Salon"', in *Women and the Nineteenth-Century Lied*, ed. Aisling Kenny and Susan Wollenberg (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 54.

9. See, *inter alia*, Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne', *Representations*, 39 (1992), 102–33.
10. Marcia J. Citron, *Cécile Chaminade: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1998), 10.
11. Fanny Hensel and Wilhelm Hensel, *Das Jahr: Zwölf Charakterstücke für das Fortepiano (1841); Faksimile nach dem Autograph aus dem Besitz des Mendelssohn-Archivs der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* (Kassel: Furore, 2002).
12. Marian Wilson Kimber, 'Fanny Hensel's Seasons of Life: Poetic Epigrams, Vignettes, and Meaning in *Das Jahr*', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 27/4 (2008), 359–95, at 363.
13. Adrian Daub, *Four-Handed Monsters: Four-Hand Piano Playing and Nineteenth-Century Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.
14. Quoted in Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann, Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985 [rev. ed. 2001]), 326.
15. Translation by Richard Stokes: [www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/525](http://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/525).
16. See further, Matthew Head, 'Genre, Romanticism and Female Authorship: Fanny Hensel's "Scottish" Sonata in G Minor (1843)', in Susan Wollenberg, ed., 'Fanny Hensel (née Mendelssohn Bartholdy) and Her Circle': Proceedings of the Bicentenary Conference, Oxford, July 2005, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 4/2 (2007), 67–87.
17. Angela Mace Christian, 'Hensel [née Mendelssohn (-Bartholdy)]', *GMO* (4), 'A Developing Composer, 1824–8'.
18. For broader context, see, *inter alia*, Jessica Waldoff, 'Does Haydn Have a "C-minor Mood"?', in *Engaging Haydn: Culture, Context, and Criticism*, ed. Mary Hunter and Richard Will (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 158–86.
19. R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 81.
20. Quoted in Todd, *Fanny Hensel*, 349.
21. Marcia J. Citron, 'Cécile Chaminade', in *The New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 244.
22. For wider discussion, see Susan Wollenberg, "'New Paths to Analysis": The Case of Women Composers', in *L'analyse musicale aujourd'hui – Music Analysis Today*, ed. Xavier Hascher, Mondher Ayari, and Jean-Michel Bardez (Le Vallier: Delatour France, 2015), 291–312.
23. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 154.
24. Quoted in Todd, *Fanny Hensel*, 338.
25. For more on such texture, see Camilla Cai, 'Texture and Gender: New Prisms for Understanding Hensel's and Mendelssohn's Piano Pieces', in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music: Essays in Performance and Analysis*, ed. David Witten (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 53–93, especially 76–82.

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27. Claudia Macdonald, 'Critical Perception and the Woman Composer: The Early Reception of Piano Concertos by Clara Wieck Schumann and Amy Beach', *Current Musicology*, 55 (1993), 24–55.
28. Marian Wilson Kimber, 'From the Concert Hall to the Salon: The Piano Music of Clara Wieck Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel', in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. R. Larry Todd, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 316–55.
29. Friedrich Wieck to Eduard Fechner, October 24, 1833, *Friedrich Wieck Briefe*, ed. Käthe Walch-Schumann (Cologne: A. Volk, 1968), 47.
30. See Stefaniak, *Schumann's Virtuosity*, 174–192; Stephen Lindeman, *Structural Novelty and Tradition in the Early Romantic Piano Concerto* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1999), 139.
31. Stefaniak, *Schumann's Virtuosity*, 178–82; Janina Klassen, *Clara Wieck-Schumann: Die Virtuosa als Komponistin* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1990), 104.
32. Claudia Macdonald, 'Critical Perception', 28, 31.
33. *Caecilia: Eine Zeitschrift für die musikalische Welt*, 14/55 (1832), 223–4; *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 2/20 (10 March 1835), 83.
34. Joe Davies, 'Clara Schumann and the Nineteenth-Century Piano Concerto', in Davies, ed., *Clara Schumann Studies*, 97–118.
35. Adrienne Fried Block, 'A "Veritable Autobiography"? Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-sharp Minor, Op. 45', *Musical Quarterly*, 78/2 (1994), 394–416, at 397.
36. Claudia Macdonald, 'Critical Perception', 50.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 41.
39. Beach's notes on the concerto are reproduced in Block, 'A "Veritable Autobiography"?', 412–13 (Appendix).
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41. Angela Mace Christian, 'Improvisation, Elaboration, Composition: The Mendelssohns and the Classical Cadenza', in *Mendelssohn Perspectives*, ed. Nicole Grimes and Angela R. Mace (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 223–48.
42. Stefaniak, *Becoming Clara Schumann*; Janina Klassen, *Clara Wieck-Schumann*, 183–4.
43. Fay, *Music Study in Germany*, 45–7.
44. Quoted in Margaret William McCarthy, *Amy Fay: America's Notable Woman of Music* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1995), 161.

45. See Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 101–38.
46. Quoted and translated in Valerie Woodring Goertzen's introduction to her edition, *Clara Schumann: Preludes, Exercises, and Fugues for Piano* (Bryn Mawr: Hildegard, 2001).
47. Alicia Cannon Levin, 'Seducing Paris: Piano Virtuosos and Artistic Identity, 1820–1848', PhD diss. (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), 276–87. For a facsimile of the Heugel score, see Lisa Yui, 'Marie Pleyel', DMA diss. (Manhattan School of Music, 2005), Appendix.
48. *Monthly Musical Record*, 12/139 (July 1882), 163.