The Virtuoso as Subject

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The Reception of Instrumental Virtuosity, c. 1815–c. 1850

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INTRODUCTION

There is hardly a better way to begin a book on the reception of instrumental virtuosity in the 19th century than to quote Sir George Grove's succinct yet rich encyclopaedic 1889 article on the matter:

> A term of Italian origin, applied, more abroad than in England, to a player who excels in the technical part of his art. Such players being naturally open to a temptation to indulge their ability unduly at the expense of the meaning of the composer, the word has acquired a somewhat depreciatory meaning, as of display for its own sake. *Virtuosität*—or virtuosity, if the word may be allowed—is the condition of playing like a virtuoso.
>
> Mendelssohn never did, Mme. Schumann and Joachim never do, play in the style alluded to. It would be invidious to mention those who do.[1]

That Sir George begins by highlighting the Continental otherness of virtuosity (the term and/or the practice), by defining it as a "term of Italian origin, applied more abroad than in England", may be read as symptomatic of virtuosity's low standing in Europe's late-19th-century critical opinion, stemming from its alleged threat: the "temptation to indulge [the virtuoso's] ability at the expense of the meaning of the composer". Virtuosity is being posited here as inherently inimical to *Werktreue*, the guiding ideal of later 19th-century performance practice (and not just 19th-century)—the conception of musical performance as the most faithful possible *interpretation* of composer's intentions as they are (supposedly) contained in the work performed; in due course, there will be more to say about this. Virtuosity has a "somewhat depreciatory meaning", Sir George tells us, though he does exonerate Clara Schumann and Joseph Joachim—two of the most respected and anti-virtuosic virtuosi of his time.[2] One only wishes he had succumbed to the temptation of mentioning those who do

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[1] Sir George Grove, "Virtuoso", in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1889), IV, 313.

[2] Indeed, Wieck and Joachim have been credited for helping facilitate the historic shift from virtuosity to interpretation; see Beatrix Borchard, "Botschafter der reinen Kunst: Vom Virtuosen zum Interpreten—Joseph Joachim und Clara Schumann", *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis* 20 (1996): 95–114. Chapter Two addresses that shift in detail.

"play in the style alluded to"; unfortunately, Victorian politeness got the upper hand.

By no means was Grove's negative opinion on virtuosity idiosyncratic, or short-lived, at least in the domain of music lexicography. For instance, some 50 years later, Eric Bloom wrote in his *Everyman's Dictionary of Music* that virtuosity is "[t]he manner of [musical] perf[ormance] with complete technical mastery", but "is often used in a derogatory sense, suggesting that no other quality of interpretation is displayed by the perf[ormer]".[3] Another 15 years on, Willi Apel and Ralph T. Daniel took a similar position in their 1960 edition of the *Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music*, defining "virtuoso" as a "performer who excels in technical ability" and adding that the "term is sometimes used as a derogatory reference to one who excels in technique only, lacking comparable understanding and musical taste".[4] Clearly then, 50 years after Sir George had warned his British readers of the dangers of virtuosity, the sentiment that had guided him was still alive—the fear that in its sheer technical display, virtuosity threatens proper musical expression or, in other words, that the virtuoso overshadows the composer and his intentions, the proper subject of musical composition and performance.

A look at late-19th- and 20th-century Continental sources reveals no major differences. Thus Ernst Büchen's 1953 *Wörterbuch der Musik* invokes no lesser an authority than Richard Wagner to sound the "fatal overtone" of virtuosity:

> Only where technical, manual dexterity becomes an end in itself, the term "virtuosity" assumes a fatal overtone. "In truth, there are different virtuosi; there are among them real, indeed great artists; they owe their reputation to the most ravishing performances of the greatest masters' noblest musical creations." (R. Wagner)[5]

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[3] Eric Bloom, "Virtuosity", in *Everyman's Dictionary of Music* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1946), 645.

[4] Willi Apel and Ralph T. Daniel, "Virtuoso", in *The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 333.

[5] Ernst Büchen, "Virtuoso", in *Wörterbuch der Musik* (Wiesbaden: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), 553: "Nur da, wo das Technische, die Spiel- u[nd] Kehlfertigkeit Selbstzweck ist, erhällt der Begriff der Virtuosität einen fatalen Beiklang. ‚In wahrheit, es gibt andere Virtuosen; es gibt unter ihnen wahre, ja grosse Künstler: sie verdanken ihren Ruf dem hinreissenden Vortrage der edelsten Tonschöpfungen der grössten Meister' (R. Wagner)". (All translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.)

We will be returning to Wagner, too; at this point, suffice it to note that by specifying that there are some *exceptional* virtuosi, who indeed are true, great artists, Wagner clearly implies that many of them are not. Those virtuosi who in Wagner's and presumably Büchen's view do not qualify as "great artists" are not mentioned (perhaps it would have been "invidious" to do so, to paraphrase Sir George Grove), but the deprecating implication is clear enough.

Earlier German sources transmit similar sentiments, sometimes in a considerably more explicit and assertive fashion. Thus the influential aesthetician Gustav Schilling's *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften, oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* of 1835–42, a milestone of German 19th-century music lexicography comprising six volumes and a supplement, contains a lengthy—and mostly scathing—entry on *Virtuos* (virtuoso). While Schilling does admit—grudgingly—that without virtuosity the enjoyment of music would scarcely be possible, most of the entry is an explicit attack on what he perceives as the empty "mechanical" display of modern virtuosity:

> We know well that this is happening especially in our time and that the brilliance of our instrumental music in particular is but that aspect of virtuosity, in which an abundance of semi-skilled mechanical dexterity exposes itself.[6]

Consequently, Schilling tells us, only seldom do modern virtuosi attain true artistic greatness:

> In fact, one must admit that even the most accomplished masters extremely rarely achieve a truly artistic production and that the whole value of their efforts rests in a greater overcoming of the mechanical.[7]

Old masters, such as Beethoven, Schilling concludes, would be astonished, were they to see what had become of their creations in the hands of a Viotti or a Clementi. But as Schilling asserts, it would not be a desirable

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[6] Gustav Schilling, "Virtuos", in *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften, oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* (Stuttgart: Franz Heinrich Köhler, 1840), 781: "Wir wissen wohl, daß in neuerer Zeit dies besonders geschieht, und der Glanz unserer Instrumentalmusik vornemlich nur ist derjenige Theil der Virtuosität, in welchem sich eine Unsumme mechanisch angelernter Geschicklichkeiten offenbart".

[7] *Ibid.*: "Dagegen aber muß man freilich auch von den ausgebildetsten Meistern bekennen, daß sie sich nur äußerst selten zu einer wahrhaft künstlerischen Production erheben, und der ganze Werth ihrer Leistungen hauptsächlich nur in einer größeren Ueberwindung des Mechanischen besteht".

kind of astonishment: "older masters would be astonished, but not very pleasantly astonished, if they saw what had become of their noble, beautiful art".[8]

But when one turns to earlier, 18th-century sources, a remarkably different picture emerges. The earliest known lexicon to address virtuosity is Sébastien de Brossard's *Dictionnaire de musique*, first published in Paris in 1703. Although Brossard does not include an entry on virtuosity or virtuoso/a,[9] he does address these terms in an article on *virtu* (*virtù*), their common Italian etymological root. However, his broad and neutral explanations of the terms are very far from our, or even Grove's or Schilling's, usage:

> In Italian, this is not only that habitude of Soul which makes us agreeable to God and causes us to act according to the rules of right reason, but also that superiority of genius, skill, or competence that causes us to excell, either in the theory or the practice of the fine arts, over those who apply themselves as much as we.
>
> It is from this that the Italians have formed the adjectives *VIRTUOSO* or *VIRTUODIOSO* (in the feminine, *VIRTUOSA*), which often serve even as nouns for naming or praising those to whom Providence has deigned to give that excellence or superiority. Thus, according to the Italians, an excellent painter or a skillful architect is a *VIRTUOSO*: but they give this beautiful epithet more commonly and more specifically to excellent musicians, more often to those who apply themselves to theory or composition of music than to those who excell in the other arts. Thus, to say simply in their language that a man is a *VIRTUOSO* is nearly always to say that he is an excellent musician. Our language only has the word *ILLUSTRE* which can correspond roughly to the Italian's *VIRTUOSO*; the word *VIRTUEUX* has not yet been given this meaning, at least not in serious speech.[10]

Clearly then, by Brossard's time—the beginning of the 18th century—virtuosity had received its association with music (though Brossard does mention other, non-musical meanings), but not quite the association with

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[8] Schilling, "Virtuos", 782: "[Ä]ltere Meister würden erstaunen, aber auch nicht sehr angenehm erstaunen, wenn sie sähen, was aus ihren edeln, schönen Kunst geworden ist".

[9] Throughout the book, *virtuoso/virtuosa* and *virtuosi/virtuose* will be used to distinguish between male and female performers.

[10] Sébastien de Brossard, "Virtu", in *Dictionary of Music*, trans. Albion Gruber (Henryville, Ottawa, and Binningen: Institute of Medieval Music, Ltd., Institut de Musique Médiévale, S.A., and Institut für Mittelalterische Musikforschung, GmbH, 1982; first edition: Paris, 1703), 223–24.

musical performance, which it has for us, since he primarily associates it with music theory and composition. More significantly, Brossard shares none of Schilling or Grove's anxiety and suspicion discussed above—for him virtuosity is, quite simply, excellence.

Brossard's lexicon was the first large-scale dictionary of musical terms, but it was accompanied in close chronological proximity by another two equally important publications: Tomáš Baltazar Janovka's *Clavis ad thesaurum magnæ artis musicæ* (1701) and Johann Gottfried Walther's *Musikalisches Lexikon oder musikalische Bibliothek* (1732). According to James B. Coover, these three lexicons mark the beginning of modern music lexicography.[11] Whereas Janovka does not discuss virtuosity, Walther's entry on "virtu" follows Brossard's, though Walther stresses the innovative aspect of virtuosity, in theory and performance alike: "Virtu [*ital.*] means one's musical skilfulness to excel over many others, either in theory or in practice".[12] The two major English sources of the time present a similar picture: James Grassineau's entry on "virtu" in his *Musical Dictionary* of 1768 is little more than an English translation of Brossard,[13] whereas Ephraim Chambers defines virtuoso in his 1786 *Cyclopædia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* as "an Italian term, lately introduced into English, signifying a man of curiosity and learning; or one who loves and promotes the arts and sciences".[14]

In its meaning and reception, then, virtuosity clearly underwent a substantial change from its neutral inception in Brossard's *Dictionnaire* to Schilling's and Grove's critiques—from proficiency and excellence in music theory, composition, or other fields, to technical mastery in musical performance, prone to empty technical display and a wholesale lack of expressivity. To be sure, one should not take dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and lexicons as entirely transparent sources of objective knowledge: lexicographers typically seek to establish and impose knowledge as much

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[11] James B. Coover, "Dictionaries and Encyclopedias of Music", *Grove Music Online,* ed. Deane Root, 2001, www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

[12] Johann Gottfried Walther, "Virtu", in *Musikalisches Lexikon oder musikalische Bibliothek* (Leipzig: Wolffgang Deer, 1732), 638: "Virtu [ital.] bedeutet die jenige Musicalische Geschicklichkeit, vermöge welche jemand für vielen andern, entweder in der Theorie, oder in der Ausübung, etwas ungemeines zum Voraus hat".

[13] James Grassineau, "Virtu", in *A Musical Dictionary* (London: J. Robson, 1769), 330.

[14] Ephraim Chambers, "Virtuoso", in *Cyclopædia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, ed. Abraham Rees (London: Printed for J. F. and C. Rivington, 1786), IV, 1136–37.

as to transmit it. But this change in the understanding and reception of virtuosity was a phenomenon wider than music lexicography: toward 1800 and beyond, virtuosity encountered more and more suspicion and hostility across the board, particularly in the then-burgeoning music journalism.[15] Therefore, the rising hostility against virtuosity seen in 19th-century music lexicography was only a reflection of a more general tendency.

To document that tendency and construct a historical interpretation and understanding of it is the purpose of this study.

A Selective Survey of Modern Scholarly Literature on Virtuosity in Reception

"Virtuosity ought to be a subject for today", writes Jim Samson in *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt.* Samson goes on to list a number of compelling reasons why we should bother with virtuosity:

> It brings into focus key questions about the relation of performance to text, and therefore about the limits of what we can usefully say about musical works without reference to their performance—to the act of performance. It spotlights the performance, undervalued in music history […] And also the performer, an individual pursuing personal fulfilment of one sort or another, but also a participant in the larger practice, with unspoken and unwritten obligations and responsibilities.[16]

Samson is indeed right that performance has been undervalued in music history and, one might add, in musicology as well. Of course, as Samson is

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[15] Owen Jander, "Virtuoso", *Grove Music Online,* ed. Deane Root, 2001, www.oxfordmusiconline.com: "With the flourishing of opera and the instrumental concerto in the late 18th century, the term 'virtuoso' (or 'virtuosa') came to refer to the violinist, pianist, castrato, soprano etc. who pursued a career as a soloist. At the same time it acquired new shades of meaning as attitudes towards the often exhibitionist talents of the performer changed. In the 19th century these attitudes hardened even more". The rising hostility to virtuosity in the late 18th century is also surveyed in Michael Stegemann, "Tugend und Tadel, Gedanken zum Phänomen der instrumental Virtuosität", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 143.4 (1982): 10–16; Christian Kaden, "Zwischen Gott und Banause: Der soziale Ort des Virtuosen", in *Musikalische Virtuosität*, ed. Heinz von Loesch, Ulrich Mahlerts, and Peter Rümenhöller (Mainz: Schott, 2004), 50–62; and Cécile Reynaud, "Misère et accomplissement de l'art dans la virtuosité romantique", *Romantisme : Revue du dix-neuvième siècle* 128 (2005): 3–17.

[16] Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

well aware, the larger issue here is the focus on compositions (that is, works) as history, rather than performance as history in so much of modern musicology; in other words, Samson argues that musicology has for too long focused on composers rather than performers as agents of music history. And as this book goes on to show, not only does virtuosity's association with performance make it an object of study worthwhile to musicology, but it was also a major cause of the deterioration of virtuosity in critical opinion, conditioned precisely by the historical undervaluing of performance and focus on composition, which Samson notes. Also, as Chapter Three shows in particular, in the early and mid 19th century, virtuosity applied not only to performance, but to composition as well, with far-reaching consequences for the critical reception of music deemed virtuosic. For all those reasons and more, musicology would do well to heed Samson's call. However, it has yet to do so, since the volume of existing scholarship on virtuosity is surprisingly slim, given the magnitude and complexity of the issue.[17] In fact, the present volume is the first book-length study of the critical reception of instrumental virtuosity in general and not a study of a particular virtuoso and his compositional oeuvre (or a segment thereof) with a brief discussion of virtuosity (as in Samson's *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*), or a more general study of virtuosity in a number of cultural practices other than music, such as Paul Metzner's *Crescendo of the Virtuoso* and Susan Bernstein's *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, both of which are further discussed below. The existing scholarship on the reception of instrumental virtuosity *per se* is available in a dozen or so essays, articles, and book chapters, which are summarised below. The following survey is necessarily somewhat selective, inasmuch as it includes only studies of virtuosity *per se*, not those of individual virtuosi and their reception histories, such as, for instance, Samson's invaluable work on the reception of Chopin. But of course, such studies will be addressed, too, where appropriate, in the chapters that follow.

The major book-length study is Samson's *Virtuosity and the Musical Work*. The volume's subtitle suggests that it is focused on a repertory—Liszt's *Transcendental Studies*—but Samson's agenda is more ambitious:

[17] Heinz von Loesch briefly treats the matter in "Virtuosität als Gegenstand der Musikwissenschaft", in *Musikalische Virtuosität*, ed. Heinz von Loesch, Ulrich Mahlerts, and Peter Rummenhöller (Mainz: Schott Musik International, 2004), 11–16. In his interpretation, musicology has neglected virtuosity due to the latter's association with performance; in Chapter Two, we will see that that association certainly played an important part in the denigration of virtuosity in its early and mid-19th-century critical reception.

he covers topics ranging from the history of late-18th- and early-19th-century pianism, its cultural circumstances, to the complicated relationship between 19th-century virtuosity (and its reception) and Idealist philosophy. Samson's chief concern, though, belongs in the domain of 19th-century music aesthetics, more specifically the aesthetic problematic of the musical work concept and its complex relations with 19th-century virtuosity:

> I want to argue that as virtuosity meshed with a Romantic aesthetic, it generated a dialectical relationship with a strengthening sense of the autonomous musical work, involving taste and ideology as well as form and closure.[18]

Following Lydia Goehr's important claim about the "regulative" function and status of the work concept in Western music aesthetics starting around 1800,[19] Samson sets up his dialectic between virtuosity and the (perceived) aesthetic autonomy of 19th-century music (or the work concept as its proxy), whereby one challenges and even threatens to destroy the other. This dialectic, however, does not necessarily result in a synthesis:

> Virtuosity, narrowly associated with display and spectacle, could be viewed in certain quarters as detrimental to music, opposing rather than enabling true creativity. [...] This notion, the occlusion of meaning or reference, continued to resonate in nineteenth-century virtuosity [...] Indeed metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic issues all mingled in this polemic.[20]

Samson's conclusion that virtuosity "is a kind of immanent critique of the work-concept, the canon, and the idea of absolute music"[21] confirms that this is a dialectic without synthesis: virtuosity's sheer performativity and sensuous ephemerality put it at loggerheads with the aesthetic(ist) valorisation of interiority inherent in the notion of aesthetic autonomy and the work concept as its exponent. Consequently, this clash generates the "opprobrium that has so often clung to virtuosity", as "surplus or supplement, a surplus of technique over expression, detail over substance, even (implicitly) facility over quality".[22] In particular, this notion of "a surplus of technique over expression" will feature prominently in Chapters

[18] Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work,* 4.
[19] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1992), 89–119.
[20] Samson *Virtuosity and the Musical Work,* 69–70.
[21] *Ibid.*, 223.
[22] *Ibid.*, 85.

Two and Three. Crucially, Samson argues that virtuosity generates so much opprobrium because it challenges the aesthetic autonomy of music, by diverting one's attention away from the work and onto performance and by using (or abusing) music to win money and public approval for the virtuoso.

In her *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, Susan Bernstein similarly highlights the threat that virtuosity and the figure of the virtuoso pose to the purported purity of the aesthetically autonomous artwork:

> It is obstinately grounded in materiality and singularity. The virtuoso performance can never be dissociated from the time and space of its occurrence; it takes place in a foundational relationship to its instrument and is constituted by the physical contact with the stage, the audience, and the ambiance. The figure of the virtuoso emerges through the material details of clothing, personal appearance and charisma, name, fame, and money.[23]

Bernstein concludes that virtuosity thereby "both produces and exposes the mundane and material conditions of production—need, greed, egotism, and calculation".[24] According to Bernstein, the anxiety therefore is that the sheer materiality of virtuosity threatens to soil the pure interiority of the aesthetically autonomous artwork, but in reality it only unmasks the latter as a fallacy. Furthermore, as we have already seen in Schilling's attack on virtuosity, the virtuoso's self-display disturbingly uses the work as a mere prop, without forging an organic, expressive bond with its essence:

> In mere virtuosity, the effect is caused by mechanical instruments and techniques, not by the intended expression of a transcendent subject. […] The "bad" virtuoso practices empty mechanical techniques and mars the work he plagiarizes as he performs.[25]

This notion of music as "expression of a transcendent subject" will be very important throughout this study. Virtuosity is at best problematic, then, inasmuch as it seems irredeemably grounded in the body, the instrument, the physical, the particular. Worse still, it appears to subject the aesthetically autonomous art of music to an extraneous purpose, that of its own self-display; it thus violates the aesthetic autonomy of music, inasmuch as one of the defining prerequisites of aesthetically autonomous

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[23] Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 11.
[24] *Ibid.,* 13–14.
[25] *Ibid.*, 81.

music is that it be its own purpose. At the very worst, however, virtuosity involves no aesthetically autonomous music at all, in other words no interiority, and indulges in empty technical display for its own sake.

Several other scholars have contextualised the historical reception of virtuosity along similar lines. One of them is Erich Reimer, who explores the concept of "true virtuosity" from the viewpoint of German late-18th- and early-19th-century music aesthetics of expression: unlike vulgar mundane virtuosity, true virtuosity exists not for its own sake, but faithfully to express the spiritual content of the musical work.[26] Similarly, Albrecht Riethmüller discusses the historical reception of virtuosity through the dichotomy between virtuosity as a tool of musical expression and an autonomised virtuosity, that is, virtuosity out of control.[27] In her discussion of Liszt as a paradigmatic virtuoso, Cécile Reynaud interprets the later 19th century's hostility to virtuosity as the fear of the "literally diabolical dangers of an expressionless virtuosity that mechanizes music".[28]

Similar conclusions are made in "The Concert and the Virtuoso", an article that Richard Leppert co-wrote with Stephen Zank. Leppert situates the reception of Liszt, as paradigmatic of the shifting cultural status of virtuosity, in the context of the early-19th-century aesthetics of music:

> Liszt performed during a period when aesthetics as a field of philosophical inquiry was first defined and, so far as music is concerned, widely discussed in journals published throughout Western Europe. No small matter: for the first time in Western history, the cultural pecking order of the arts was rearranged so that music, formerly judged lesser than the textual and visual arts, was considered preeminent.[29]

Similarly to Samson, Leppert posits this aesthetic climate, with its valorisation of the introverted quality of instrumental music, as inherently hostile to virtuosity's radical exteriority and performativity. But in the

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[26] Erich Reimer, "Der Begriff des Wahren Virtuosen in der Musikästhetik des späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts", *Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis* 20: Virtuosität und Wirkung in der Musik (1996): 61–72.

[27] Albrecht Riethmüller, "Die Verdächtigung des Virtuosen", in *Virtuosen: Über die Eleganz der Meisterschaft—Vorlesungen zur Kuturgeschichte*, ed. Sigrit Fleiß and Ina Gayed (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2001), 101–24.

[28] Cécile Reynaud, "Berlioz, Liszt, and the Question of Virtuosity", in *Berlioz: Past Present, Future, Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Peter Bloom (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 109.

[29] Richard Leppert and Stephen Zank, "The Concert and the Virtuoso", in *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years with the Piano*, ed. James Parakilas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 253.

same paragraph he adds an important twist: "Music was the sonorous sign of inner life, and inner life was the sign of the bourgeois subject, the much heralded, newly invented, and highly idealized 'individual'".[30] Significantly, Leppert here posits the interiority of music, prized in early-19th-century music aesthetics as ineffable yet authentic, as a template of early-19th-century subjectivity, itself perceived as irreducible and free. In one of his guises, at least, the virtuoso also fascinates by virtue of being a model *par excellence* of this liberated subjectivity—"the literal embodiment of extreme individuality".[31]

Similarly, in *The Virtuoso Liszt*, Dana Gooley posits Liszt *qua* paradigmatic virtuoso, as a model of a radically free, heroic individuality:

> Virtuosity is about shifting borders […], the limits of what seems possible, or what the spectator can imagine. Once this act of transgression is complete, the border shifts, and the boundaries of the possible are redrawn. If the performer does not cross a new, more challenging one, he will no longer be perceived as a virtuoso […] Franz Liszt remains the quintessential virtuoso because he was constantly and insistently mobilizing, destabilizing, and reconstituting borders.[32]

"The virtuoso Liszt has, indeed", Gooley continues, "always served as a figure for fantasies of omnipotence: over pianos, women, and concert audiences".[33] We will be returning to this notion of virtuosic omnipotence (not least sexual), especially in Chapters Two and Four. Likewise discussing Liszt, James Deaville sees him as no less than a model of the (bourgeois) subject's political emancipation.[34] The virtuoso is celebrated, then—or rather fantasised about—as an omnipotent hero, because he accomplishes the seemingly impossible and performs the seemingly un-performable; he is everybody's more or less secret fantasy of free, unbound individuality.

That fantasy also lies at the heart of Paul Metzner's *Crescendo of the Virtuoso*, alongside Bernstein's *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century* the

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[30] Leppert and Zank, "The Concert and the Virtuoso".
[31] *Ibid*., 259.
[32] Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 1.
[33] *Ibid*., 2.
[34] James Deaville, "The Politics of Liszt's Virtuosity: New Light on the Dialectics of a Cultural Phenomenon", in *Liszt and the Birth of Modern Europe: Music as a Mirror of Religious, Political, Cultural, and Aesthetic Transformations*, ed. Michael Saffle and Rosanna Dalmonte (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003), 115–30.

only other book-length general discussion of 19th-century virtuosity. In places such as his assertion that 19th-century virtuosi "pointed the way to a new transcendence, not to a heavenly eternity but to an earthly future of ever-expanding possibility in which there seemed to be no limit to what the human body, including the brain, could be trained to do",[35] Metzner approximates Gooley's discussion of Liszt as paradigmatic of the public's heroicised perception of the virtuoso. But Metzner's interests cover a much wider field—19th-century Parisian virtuosity, broadly defined (in line with Brossard, it might be added) as technical excellence in almost any field whatsoever, performed and displayed before an audience.

This notion of performativity as inherent to virtuosity is certainly important; I have already tried to illustrate above its centrality to Samson's dialectic between virtuosity and the musical work concept, who correctly notes that "virtuosity needs to show itself—to present itself—in order to exist".[36] But Metzner posits it only as an aspect of what he sees as the new, self-promoting, free individual of revolutionary France and Europe; he views the virtuoso as the paradigm of that new individual:

> A trend toward increasingly unrestrained self-promotion developed almost imperceptibly in French, indeed Western, society over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. This trend became unignorable in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the virtuosos could be found in its vanguard.[37]

The emergence of what Metzner terms the "Romantic" individual is only one of the factors that he sees as facilitating the "crescendo of the virtuoso"; others include the proliferation of public spaces (also important for Samson) and the revaluation of technical and practical knowledge. The focus is on revolutionary Paris (roughly between 1789 and 1848), because it was there that all of those factors converged:

> [T]he cultivation of technical skill was encouraged by the appreciation in the value of practical knowledge, and that self-promotion was encouraged by the dissemination of the self-centered worldview, all of which took place during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries throughout the Western world but with particular intensity in Paris.[38]

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[35] Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris during the Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), 255.
[36] Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work,* 78.
[37] Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso*, 265.
[38] *Ibid.,* 2.

"The Age of Revolution validated virtuosity", he concludes.[39]

But that validation is only part of the story—for this was an age that was at once fascinated with virtuosity and profoundly suspicious of it, at times even overtly hostile to it: the self-sustained virtuoso, unfettered by aristocratic patronage,[40] may have played into the cherished bourgeois values of (financial) independence and entrepreneurship rather nicely—as Maiko Kawabata aptly put it, virtuosic "hero-figures compensated for the seeming emptiness of everyday experience"[41]—but he could just as well be seen as *no more* than an entrepreneur and at that, an entrepreneur in music, the one commodity in capitalism that was supposed to be impervious to entrepreneurship;[42] evidence of this we have already seen in some of those 19th-century encyclopaedic entries presented above. And this hostility was not confined to music dictionaries and encyclopaedias of the time; in fact, in the 1830s, Paris was a hotbed not only of virtuosic stardom, but also of increasingly assertive polemics against it. Gooley, for instance, goes so far as to call the 1830s "the most intense period of anti-virtuosity backlash in the history of instrumental music".[43]

The studies discussed above are primarily focused on the role of early-19th-century music aesthetics in generating hostility toward the figure of the virtuoso. But aesthetics was only one context for the assessment of the virtuoso: the other, perhaps larger context was precisely the early-19th-

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[39] Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso*, 291.

[40] Though, according to David Gramit, not so much in Germany as in France and England: "in the German states dozens of court musical establishments, from the tiniest ecclesiastical court to the royal establishments of Berlin or Vienna, continued to provide livelihoods for numerous German musicians well into the nineteenth century"; see David Gramit, "Selling the Serious: The Commodification of Music and Resistance to it in Germany, circa 1800", in *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*, ed. William Weber (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 83. Gramit credits the survival of aristocratic patronage in Germany for the rise of the notion of music's aesthetic autonomy in German and not in French or English thought.

[41] Maiko Kawabata, "Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789–1830)", *19th-century Music* 28.2 (2004): 106.

[42] *Cf.* Gramit, "Selling the Serious", 81: "it cannot be denied that considering the concept of musical entrepreneurship in relation to the realm of classical music creates an uneasy association. Whereas entrepreneurship is inevitably connected with the worlds of commerce and marketing, the very notion of the classical is seen to imply that here, at least, the music is freed of such base associations and employed to loftier ends transcending the temporally limited and the material".

[43] Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt,* 13.

century individualism that Metzner so un-problematically celebrates, the valorisation of the heroic, bourgeois individual and his (for it was always a he—more on that in Chapter Four) allegedly boundless powers. In fact, just like virtuosity, that individualism provoked as much fascination as it did fear and anxiety. And even though none of the studies of virtuosity discussed so far make this their prime concern, their authors are all manifestly aware of it. Samson's book is a case in point: despite his focus on music aesthetics and the work concept, he gestures toward this issue in a number of places. He tells us, for instance, that the virtuoso "stood for freedom, for Faustian man, for the individual in search of self-realisation—free, isolated, striving, desiring".[44] But then at the same time, this was a risky game: "Highly valued when kept within certain boundaries, individuality courted censure when it exceeded them, just as it courted popularity".[45] And Richard Leppert, too, draws a similar conclusion: "The virtuoso was a troublesome paradox: he was the literal embodiment of extreme individuality, but one that ran risk of exceeding the demands of bourgeois decorum, reserve, and respectability".[46] In his take on virtuosity and subjectivity, Bruno Moysan likewise focuses on the ambivalent status of the virtuoso as an embodiment of both extreme individuality and lack of rational control.[47]

Only Dana Gooley has addressed this problematic status of virtuosity with regards to subjectivity in substantial detail. In "The Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century", Gooley surmises a number of possible reasons for the opposition to instrumental virtuosity so prevalent in German criticism at the time, among them the vested interests of the entrenched class of music professionals in German cities and towns and a certain "small-town mentality" in their hostility to (by definition) foreign, itinerant virtuosi. But, seeking to account for "the extremely fervent and moralistic tone of much anti-virtuosity rhetoric", Gooley focuses on "a preoccupation with the solo virtuoso as a positive or negative model of selfhood", which he diagnoses in much of this body of criticism.[48] In a move comparable to what this study will do, Gooley brings German Idealist philosophy, that is, more precisely, Hegel's aesthetics of

[44] Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work,* 75–76.
[45] *Ibid*., 4–5.
[46] Leppert and Zank, "The Concert and the Virtuoso", 259.
[47] Bruno Moysan, "Virtuosité pianistique: Les écritures de la subjectivité", *Romantisme: Revue du dix-neuvième siècle* 128 (2005): 51–70.
[48] Dana Gooley, "The Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century", in *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. Christopher J. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 76–77.

performance and conception of subjectivity (much more on that in Chapter One below), to bear on the contemporary reception of instrumental virtuosity, noting that Hegel's "ideas are echoed in the essays on virtuosity" he chose to discuss. Gooley asserts that a "common critique of virtuosity […] was the charge of excessive egotism […] philosophically minded watchdogs faulted virtuosity for its glorification of the 'kleines Ich', the individual with no representation in the social or aesthetic object".[49] The point of contention with Hegel is that the virtuoso, with his unrestrained performance of individuality, lapses into what Hegel diagnosed as "atomicity", in his opinion the most dangerous tendency of modernity, whereby individuals care only for their most selfish, immediate interests, entirely disregarding those of the community to which they belong (e.g. their estate, town, and, finally, the state). By contrast to that perceived "atomicity" of the subject of modernity, Hegel theorises the social as the only truly free subject: one who understands that he (Hegel explicitly reserves real, "actual" subjectivity for men) may only realise his essence and freedom in a mutually respecting communion with other subjects. Hegel will duly put his understanding of free subjectivity to work in his political philosophy—but more on that in Chapter One. As for musical performance, the true Hegelian performer is therefore the one who realises that he is only a part of a larger whole (a chamber ensemble, an orchestra; also, of the work being performed) and not the only "subject" around. And the virtuoso, stealing all the limelight and putting himself at the centre at the expense of everybody and everything else, clearly appears to be in violation of that precept.

That the virtuoso's embodiment of extreme individuality was a risky business is manifest in the case of Liszt, the paradigmatic embodiment of virtuosity. Thus, reflecting on the wide variety of public personae that Liszt wore during his short but eventful virtuoso career (over 1,000 recitals over the course of ten years)—"interpreter of 'classical' works, German patriot, Hungarian patriot, man of letters, the composer-pianist, the artist as aristocrat, as prophet, as humanitarian, or as revolutionary"[50]—Gooley notes that Liszt strove for universality, but only ended up assuming a number of seemingly incompatible guises,[51] which, in the eyes of the public, at times likened him—pejoratively—to a "chameleon".[52] Pointing to the disturbing suspicion of emptiness behind all those guises,

[49] Gooley, "The Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity", 99.
[50] Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt,* 14.
[51] *Ibid*., 264: "He tried to mean everything, only to end up meaning a multitude of things".
[52] *Ibid*., 12.

Bernstein's conclusions can be interpreted as taking Gooley's insights to their logical outcome:

> This is why Liszt is *verkehrt*, inverted; there is no original presence behind his appearance, for his presence as Liszt consists precisely of his staged appearance. Liszt's art is not *composition*, expression in revelation, but performance: the organization and realization within time of the technical means of producing effects. […] he inscribes veritable expression into the dissimulating traits of the virtuoso performance.[53]

It is equally important to note that Liszt here appears as but an embodiment—albeit a paradigmatic one—of the virtuoso in general:

> Liszt presents a spectacle of alteration. His consistent inconsistency forms the very consistency of the virtuoso—an inconsistency determined by the oscillation between egotistic protrusion and transmissive self-effacement. Liszt's most disturbing trait is probably his ability to simulate the genuine with the same ease as he produces the hyperbolically artificial, that is, to manipulate both sides of the virtuoso's character.[54]

Facing an overwhelmingly wide array of guises, many of which seem mutually exclusive but still equally compelling, one finds it difficult to tell who the "real" Liszt/virtuoso is, Bernstein argues, or even if there was such a thing at all. Several other authors have drawn similar conclusions. Cécile Reynaud writes about "an expressionless virtuosity that […] in the end prefers as its genitor not the musician but the automaton".[55] Similarly, Kerry Murphy sees the virtuoso in 19th-century imagination as both a romantic hero and a symptom of that age's "cult of mechanization".[56] Finally, Pascal Fournier's doctoral dissertation is a study of occultist tropes in the reception of virtuosity, whereby the virtuoso is imagined—and feared—as a soulless body possessed and animated by the Devil.[57] Virtuosity, then, not only compromises the purity and freedom of the individual and the autonomous work of art as its model, but also challenges those very notions, threatening to expose them as false. In other

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[53] Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century,* 67.
[54] *Ibid.,* 112.
[55] Reynaud, "Berlioz, Liszt, and the Question of Virtuosity", 109.
[56] Kerry Murphy, "Liszt and Virtuosity in Paris in the 1830s: The Artist as Romantic Hero", in *Essays in Honour of David Evatt Tunley*, ed. Frank Callaway (Nedlands, Western Australia: Callaway International Resource Centre for Music Education, 1995), 94.
[57] Pascal Fournier, "Der Teufelsvirtuose: Eine kulturhistorische Spurensuche" (PhD diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, 2001).

words, its disturbing suggestion is that there is no interiority, that performative exteriority is all there is and that there is nothing behind it.

Interpreting the Secondary Literature and Going Beyond

So far, we have seen that by the late 19th century, the reception of virtuosity had undergone a substantial shift, from neutral acceptance in Brossard and other 18th-century sources, to explicit hostility in the likes of Schilling and Grove. We have also seen how modern scholarship has interpreted this change. Although the interpretations summarised above might seem quite heterogeneous to the casual observer, part of the argument advanced here will be that they actually share some substantial common ground. That common ground is twofold. Firstly, it has to do with the determination of this book's object of study: all of the readings discussed above, like the present study, address instrumental virtuosity only, and not the vocal virtuosity of opera. There are a number of specific reasons for this. The first is the fact that (vocal) virtuosity had been central to opera almost since its inception in early 17th-century Italy, whereas in instrumental music it only really came to the fore toward 1800, with the expansion of public concert life (more on which below). And although (vocal) virtuosity had generated hostility at least as early as Benedetto Marcello's *Il teatro alla moda*, his famous 1720 satirical pamphlet, as well as arguably spawned numerous attempts of opera reform later on in the century (Metastasio, Gluck), it was never so roundly condemned by the critical community as instrumental virtuosity was from the 1830s on.

Opera critics' greater tolerance for virtuosity brings us to the second main reason why contemporary scholarship (including this study) has focused on instrumental rather than vocal virtuosity: aesthetics. More precisely, the new romantic aesthetics of music, emerging around 1800 and discussed in Chapter One below, applied to instrumental music only, inasmuch as E. T. A. Hoffmann, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and, before them, even Kant, regarded only instrumental music as purely musical, free of text, staging, and other such extra-musical "admixtures", as Hoffmann called them. In other words, for Hoffmann and his colleagues, music was an abstract (and metaphysical) art of combining wordless sonorities in time and harmony. Therefore, to them it seemed obvious that only instrumental music was pure music, whereas vocal music was music *with* words, opera was music *with* words and *with* staging, etc.; Chapter One deals with this in detail.

Of course, the traditional segregation of opera from instrumental music in the consideration of aesthetics is problematic and warrants a study of its

own. For instance, regarding vocal music (including opera), one might well argue that the sung words, syllables, vowels, and consonants are, *qua* timbre, an integral and inseparable part of the sound of music, just as instrumentation and orchestration are among the key aspects of the sound of a symphony. Unless we actually deem music somehow separable from and independent of sound (as much of 19th-century aesthetics did; more on which below), no analytical study of music that disregards the actual sounds of music (*qua* timbre, for instance, in an orchestral work) should claim to be producing complete analytical readings of music. And as Chapter One shows in greater detail, early-19th-century aesthetics had no qualms about segregating instrumental music from other kinds of music and, moreover, emphatically posited music as independent from sound and thus also from performance. Chapters Two and Three show what consequences such a conception of music had on the valorisation of composition and performance in critical discourse and, by extension, on the critical reception of virtuosity. Briefly returning to opera once more, one might also read the rising hostility to instrumental virtuosity as an anxiety provoked by the perceived bleed-through of operatic theatricality and stardom into the supposedly sacrosanct domain of instrumental music.

Secondly, the common ground shared by all the readings of virtuosity discussed above, as well as this study, concerns the link between virtuosity and subjectivity. Most of the authors addressed above discuss it explicitly, in terms of the virtuoso serving as a model of free and enterprising bourgeois subjectivity. What distinguishes this book from those earlier studies is that I seek to interpret the hostility to virtuosity in much of its early- and mid-19th-century reception by linking the contemporary developments in the aesthetics of music to those in the conception of subjectivity. Of course, linking 19th-century aesthetics and subjectivity is hardly new; what is new, however, is the interpretation of early- and mid-19th-century critical reception of virtuosity built upon it, offered in this study. We will be returning to that shortly; but before that, we must spend some more time on the links between aesthetics (especially that of music) and subjectivity.

Those links have been most compellingly discussed outside of musicology, by Andrew Bowie in his *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*—a key text for this book. Bowie's main claim is that the aesthetic autonomy of art and especially music served as a symbol for that of the subject, at a time when post-Napoleonic reactionary political repression and the economic repression of early capitalism were making the notion of subjective freedom seem increasingly tenuous. Supposedly autonomous and inherently worthy, art was thus meant to provide a model of existence

endowed with both freedom and absolute, not merely exchange value. In other words, Bowie's central claim is that the major thinkers of early-19th-century German Romanticism—Novalis, Hölderlin, Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, among others—conceived of art and especially of music as aesthetically autonomous and transcendental in order to provide a model of the autonomy of the human subject:

> The aesthetic product thus becomes a utopian symbol of the realisation of freedom: in it we can see or hear an image of what the world could be like if freedom were realised in it.[58]

Strictly speaking, Bowie's "aesthetic product" pertains to all kinds of aesthetic creativity, here understood as the production of objects or works without an immediate, material use-value. But the pride of place here belongs to the musical aesthetic product, because, as Bowie asserts, "[m]usic inherently has the potential to sustain aesthetic autonomy via its non-representational character".[59] In other words, music is seen as more autonomous than any other art, because it is non-representational: unlike painting or sculpture, it does not depend on an extraneous object of representation. Crucially then, music does not and cannot represent anything, and its interiority, though accepted as metaphysically existent, remains mysterious and ineffable. Thus in one of the strangest twists of Western philosophical aesthetics, what used to disqualify music, and especially instrumental music, as "pleasant nonsense" in the words of Johann Sulzer, or as a merely "agreeable art" in those of Kant—namely, music's non-representationality—after 1800 comes to elevate it as "the most romantic of the arts". Or, as Mark Evan Bonds put it: "Long regarded as a liability, the vague content of instrumental music was now seen as an asset".[60] But even more importantly, Bowie points, music thus reconceived, comes to symbolise the autonomous subject and its own ineffable interiority.[61]

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[58] Andrew Bowie, *Introduction to German Philosophy: From Kant to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 57.
[59] *Ibid*., 67.
[60] Mark Evan Bonds, "Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50/2–3 (1997): 387–420.
[61] In his *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* Bowie will forward an even more ambitious claim, that 19th-century thinking on freedom and subjectivity shaped not only the contemporary philosophical discourse of music, but also contemporary music itself: "Ideas about music and the most significant music itself both take on and create new meanings in relation to conflicting conceptions of *freedom*"; see

However, there is one more conclusion that Bowie fails—or refuses—to draw: that German philosophers' reliance on music as paradigmatic of the autonomous subject increased as the philosophical, political, and economic tenability of that subject diminished over the course of the 19th century. Two notable examples, the first of which will be discussed in detail below, are Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. As is well known, both thinkers centred their thought on a radical rejection of the free and self-identical subject of the Enlightenment and both elevated music above all the other arts, into a domain of its own. By contrast, the two other central figures of German Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, still subscribed to the notion of subjective freedom (albeit in very different ways, more on which below), whilst consigning music lower in their respective aesthetic hierarchies, below poetry in Hegel's case and in Kant's, below the visual arts. It is as though Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had a more urgent need for the aesthetic autonomy of music than either Kant or Hegel did, as a sanctuary from the bleak import of their own conclusions about human subjectivity.

Bowie's compelling demonstration, regarding Schopenhauer and Schelling, of the relevance of the 19th century's increasingly sceptical accounts of subjectivity to the contemporary apotheosis of music in philosophical aesthetics, along with the absence of a comparable apotheosis in those thinkers who still posited the subject as essentially free—Kant and Hegel—informs the project of this study. Since, as Bowie shows, the new philosophical conception of music as autonomous and transcendental came to the aid of an increasingly tenuous-looking free subjectivity by symbolising it (though not, as noted above, for those thinkers who still posited the subject as free), any perceived attack on such a conception of music was by extension also perceived as an attack on the free subject that such a conception of music was meant to symbolise. In other words, virtuosity grew suspect because it was increasingly deemed incompatible with, and threatening to, the idea of music as a transcendental and aesthetically autonomous art and via it, also to the notion of subjective freedom, which that philosophic conception of music symbolised. To put it another way, we might say that virtuosity was dreaded because it exposed the irreducible bodily grounding and social contingency not only of music, but also of the human subject. Virtuosity simply does not fit into Bowie's narrative of the rise of music in Idealist

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Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 171.

philosophy, because it takes music out of the realm of the autonomous and absolute and places it in that of contingent, embodied performance. By re-embodying music, as it were, virtuosity strips it of its potential to symbolise the increasingly embattled free human subjectivity. In effect, virtuosity grows obsolete due to its incompatibility with the new Romantic notion of music as abstract and metaphysical and siding with the old, Enlightened, and, as we will see in Chapter One, very Kantian view of music as bodily performance.

Of course, none of this means to suggest that other interpretations, such as Gooley's discussed above, are necessarily flawed or inadequate: such more "mundane" concerns as trying to keep one's job did probably play a big part in the hostility of German music professionals to virtuosi, as Gooley argues. But in referring to Hegel's conception of subjectivity, Gooley focuses not so much on those immediate causes of early and mid-19th-century hostility to instrumental virtuosity, the critics' vested interests and the like, as on the *terms* (philosophic, intellectual, aesthetic) of that hostility. The present study is in that limited regard somewhat similar to Gooley's effort, but with the crucial difference that it attempts to situate the many different aspects of the contemporary critical reception of instrumental virtuosity (not just the perceived "egotism" of virtuosi) within a wider conceptual framework of contemporary music aesthetics and philosophy of subjectivity.

Therefore, Metzner's reading of the virtuoso as a celebrated representation of the new, heroic, bourgeois individuality, or Leppert's warning that virtuosity was also viewed with revulsion because it overstepped the bounds of bourgeois propriety, are not the whole story; neither is Samson and others' exclusive focus on the rise of the work concept in the aesthetics of music. The present study does not pretend to be the whole story either, but seeks to complement those readings by positing that both virtuosity and the romantic aesthetics of music, with which virtuosity was perceived to be incompatible, should be seen within the larger context of the 19th-century crisis of free subjectivity: virtuosity, grounded in the body and dependent on the market, reveals the untenability of the philosophical conception of music as free and transcendent and via it, that of the utopian conception of the subject as essentially free, in contrast to its reality, then as now, of political and economic contingency. Simply put, virtuosity exposes the clash between philosophic, metaphysical conceptions of music and the historical-materialist concerns of the production and consumption of music as a cultural practice. The economic and commodified figure of the virtuoso squares neither with the free subject of Idealist philosophy nor with the

aesthetic autonomy of music that was meant to symbolise it. Borrowing David Gramit's apt expression, we might say that virtuosity was castigated because it revealed the sad truth that even "serious music still needed to be sold".[62] Hence the constantly deteriorating critical reception of virtuosity throughout the 19th century and the critics' ultimately successful drive to marginalise the virtuosity of the kind practised by Liszt and his contemporaries. As the chapters below demonstrate, only if music aesthetics is viewed within the larger context of 19th-century philosophical thinking on subjectivity can we understand a number of prominent aspects of the contemporary critical reception of instrumental virtuosity: for instance, why 19th-century critics valued composition so much more than performance (including, of course, virtuosity), reconceptualised performance as interpretation of musical works, demanded originality but condemned idiosyncrasy, insisted on a never fully explained notion of expressivity and distrusted technique in virtuosic performance and composition alike, and preferred the clear-cut formal structures of earlier (and dead) composers' music and their old, "respectable" genres (e.g. the sonata and the fugue) to the new, more rhapsodic forms and genres of virtuosic music (e.g. fantasias, sets of variations, etc.). These are only some of the specific issues in the reception of virtuosity that, prior to this study, had not been explored or discussed in sufficient detail. The chapters below show how all of those lines of criticism conspired to bring the *Glanzzeit* of virtuosity to an end.

The Scope, Sources, and Methodology

The scope of this study is determined by key events in political history, the history of philosophy, and the history of music performance and criticism. Roughly, that scope covers the critical reception of virtuosity in three centres of European concert life: Leipzig, Paris, and London, as transmitted by the major music periodicals issued in those cities between 1815 and 1850. This section will explain the delimiting of the book's object of study to those few decades and geographic locales.

While, of course, virtuosity and virtuosi had existed long before 1815 (e.g. Corelli, Locatelli, and Tartini on the violin, C. P. E. Bach and his father on the keyboard, etc.),[63] the public kind of virtuosity practised by

[62] Gramit, "Selling the Serious", 90.

[63] For studies of 18th-century instrumental virtuosity, see Erich Reimer, "Die Polemik gegen das Virtuosenkonzert im 18. Jahrhundert. Zur Vorgeschichte einer Gattung der Trivialmusik", *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 30/4 (1973): 235–44 and

the likes of Liszt only became possible after 1815 and ended around 1850, when a number of virtuosi, including Liszt, Thalberg, and Chopin, retired or died. This was due to a variety of developments in political history and that of music performance and criticism. First, following three and a half decades of protracted turmoil, wars, and revolutions that had erupted in 1789, Napoleon's final defeat in 1815 restored political stability across Europe, albeit enforced with ever more stifling vigilance, especially in Central Europe and Restoration France. Nonetheless, the Congress of Vienna reanimated the concert scenes of major Continental centres, such as Vienna and Paris, as well as those of other cities, and provided relative freedom of travel across Europe's convoluted political borders, without which the careers of travelling virtuosi such as Liszt or Paganini would have been impossible. Also, the return of political stability in continental Europe enabled economic activity to resume there, including the construction of railways, which began in Belgium in 1835. The development of rail travel in Britain, Europe, and the United States enabled a larger stratum of the population to travel across long distances, as well as virtuosi like Liszt and Thalberg to tour not only the major centres, but also some more "exotic" places, such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Madrid and Lisbon, Bucharest, Istanbul and many smaller cities and towns across Europe and the Americas. Trains carried not only people, but also information, news, and ideas around, which enabled the burgeoning musical press (more on which below) to keep its readership abreast of musical life across Europe and even the Americas, not just that of their own towns and immediate surroundings. This in turn conditioned the emergence of a European-wide international critical opinion on music. None of these developments would have been possible only a decade or two before. Last but not least, the post-Napoleonic resumption of economic activity on the Continent enabled the piano makers of Vienna and Paris to resume their trade and develop technical improvements to their instruments, without which many of Liszt's feats would have been impossible: the facility of touch characteristic of Viennese pianos (Steiner and others), Érard's double escapement, and the sturdiness of Broadwood's designs.[64] The European-wide revolutions of 1848 were to disrupt that economic activity and political stability once more.[65]

Sylvette Millot, "Le virtuose international: Une création du 18e siècle", *Dix-huitième siècle* 25 (1993): 55–64.

[64] The important topic of the early-19th-century technological innovations in piano-making will be addressed again, in the context of Paris and London as the two main centres of 19th-century musical life in Europe. For more general information on the history of piano-building, see any of the following studies: Cyril Ehrlich,

But while it lasted, stability and prosperity (at least as far as the privileged classes were concerned) enabled an unprecedented expansion of musical life in a number of European capitals, first and foremost Paris, then London, and then to a lesser degree Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, and Saint Petersburg. What made Paris and London stand out were their sheer size, supported by wealth plundered from the respective colonial empires of Britain and France, and the expansion of musical life in those two cities beyond the traditional confines of royal and aristocratic palaces into the new public concert halls and semi-public salons, patronised by the ascendant bourgeoisie, equally rapacious for money and cultural prestige. For all those reasons, the present study is focused on the critical reception of virtuosity in the musical life of Paris and London, as transmitted by the music periodicals (more on which below) that were issued in those two cities between *c.* 1815 and *c.* 1850, as well as their coverage of major virtuosi's performances in other cities and towns. In addition, for reasons that are explained further below, we will also be looking at the coverage of virtuosity by two major music periodicals published in Leipzig at this time.

Despite London's superior wealth and France's chronic political instability, Paris indeed was "the capital of the 19th century", contemporary virtuosity included.[66] It was one of the world's largest cities, the capital

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Social Emulation and Industrial Progress: The Victorian Piano (Belfast: Queen's University, 1975) and *The Piano: A History* (London: Dent, 1976); David Wainwright, *The Piano Makers* (London: Hutchinson, 1975); David Grover, *The Piano: Its Story from Zither to Grand* (London: Robert Hale, 1976); Malou Haine, *Les facteurs d'instruments de musique à Paris au XIXe siècle: Des artisans face à l'industrialisation* (Brussels: Les Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1985); Dieter Hildebrandt, *Pianoforte: A Social History of the Piano*, trans. Harriet Goodman (London: Hutchinson, 1988); Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1990); Michael Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); and Erwin M. Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos: A Technological History from Cristofori to the Modern Concert Grand* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2001).

[65] More detailed discussions of early-19th-century socio-economic conditions and their impact on the history of music in that century may be found in a number of 19th-century music histories, for instance in Henry B. Raynor, *Music and Society since 1815* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1976) and Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

[66] On public concert virtuosity in Paris, see Jean Mongrédien, *French Music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism: 1789–1830* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996); Leppert and Zank, "The Concert and the Virtuoso"; Nigel Simeone, *Paris:*