

The Performance of Liszt's Etudes D'exécution Transcendante

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Abstract

In the process of playing Liszt's Études D'exécution transcendante, the performer will encounter various technical difficulties. This set of works provides diversified technical training requirements and plays an unprecedented role in the expansion and innovation of piano technology. This research takes the 11th Etude Harmonies du soir in Études D'exécution transcendante as an example. The research goal is to: 1) To combine analysis of musical technique with analysis of artistic content; 2) To understand the content of the work from a diverse perspective; 3) To explore the details of the performance of the work in the context of practice and provide performance guidance. In this study, literature review research, musical analysis and visualisation of acoustic parameters were selected according to the nature of the subject. The results of the study point out which techniques are used in the etudes and how these technical difficulties will be addressed. The analysis reveals that the techniques are layered and that through a high degree of conceptualisation and refinement they blend together surprisingly well to meet the requirements of artistic expression. The authoritative performer's version provides a reference for the performance of this exercise. According to the findings, the connotation and poetry of the music should not be neglected during the technique exercises. The article concludes with suggestions for rationalising and validating performance based on performance experience.

Keywords: Liszt; etude; technical difficulties; artistic values;

Introduction

Liszt's work has undergone three revisions. (Busoni,1957) believes they conveyed "a picture of Liszt's pianistic personality in seed, growth, and finally in self-clarification." Étude en douze exercices in 1826 was young Liszt's an attempt at composing music and Liszt's earliest original keyboard work. The Grandes Études in 1839 was a drastic adaptation of the former. Liszt began to conceive and revise it in 1837. At that time, Liszt's performance career was on the rise, and the pianist was emerging among the outstanding performers in Europe. This version reflects the "new" pianism developed by Liszt and his contemporaries such as Chopin and Thalberg at that time. Of course, its arduous skills and gorgeous display of dazzling skills are derived from the obsession of Paganini's dazzling technical style. (Samson, 2003) In the early months of 1851, Liszt spent a lot of time revising Grandes Études. A year later, Études D'exécution transcendante was published in Leipzig by Breitkopf & Härtel. This time, the modification has not changed much to the overall music. The basic theme melody, internal harmony structure, rhythm texture, etc. have been retained. However, through adjustments to the form and content of the music, the third edition was modified. It brings greater emotional unity and a more elegant poetry,

achieving a more harmonious balance between technicality and artistic pursuit.

Before the whole work, (Busoni, 1911) Liszt wrote "To Karl Czerny to express the gratitude and friendship of the students to the teacher", which shows that this is a kind of inheritance. Czerny is regarded as a composer without works. His creative field is basically concentrated in etudes. This kind of creation is not for art, but for the purpose of expressing art with more exquisite techniques. Different from Czerny's technical etudes, which are the first for training and the musicality is dilute, Liszt's etudes not only have the highest technical difficulty, but also have a strong literary atmosphere and artistic beauty. The dazzling technique, title and aesthetic value of the special etudes.

In this research, the 11th etude from the *Études D'exécution transcendante* is used as a case study for performance analysis. The 11th etude was titled in French *Harmonies du soir*, which means "Harmonious dusk". The technical configuration of this work is based on the need to highlight the artistic atmosphere, and fully express the tranquility and beauty of the sunset. But this did not reduce the technical difficulty of this work. On the contrary, in order to express various artistic scenes related to the title, a variety of rich techniques were used to make this etude full of technical interest.

Although there is a title to guide the audience's listening, Liszt's creation is not constrained by the title in the slightest, and the music is swayed like a wild horse: on the journey at dusk, there are churches, bells, lakes, mountains, and There are love memories and vows of young lovers, and the characters and scenery blend together, making the appearance of the work extraordinarily colorful. The characteristics of this work make us think of Chopin. Among his many "Nocturnes", some of the works just borrowed this name, and the content of his music has already surpassed and expanded into new spaces. In terms of technique, although this "Nocturne" style work is included in the etude, it seems more like a romantic piece. The music shows the beauty of sound and poetic beauty, rather than boring finger skills.

Research objectives

- 1) To combine analysis of musical technique with analysis of artistic content;
- 2) To understand the content of the work from a diverse perspective;
- 3) To explore the details of the performance of the work in the context of practice and provide performance guidance.

Research questions

- 1) What are the technical difficulties of this work?
- 2) How to better express the connotation of music based on the mastery of technique?
- 3) How to play better in details after analysing authoritative performance versions?

Literature review

Rosen (1995) believes that to understand Liszt's creation, one should start with his two collections of etudes, namely *Grandes Études de Paganini* (1851) and *Études d'exécution transcendentale* (1852).

Lang (2002) believes that if there is no piano, Liszt will not become Liszt: "Liszt regards the piano as part of his own existence. This young romantic swears: "Only when I do everything I do it is possible to do it, and after getting everything I can get, I will give up the study of piano performance." Liszt's degree of research on piano performance can be seen in his piano etudes.

Hou (2003) put forward the significance of performance aesthetics for the creation of Liszt etudes. Performance aesthetics runs through Liszt's playing career, and Liszt is a leader in this aspect in showing off his skills and exaggerating the atmosphere with his body. His excellent improvisation ability can follow his personal subjective emotions or the needs of the audience on stage to show a section anytime, anywhere, and use his exaggerated and exciting performance methods to drive the audience to immerse themselves in the excitement of the work. The image of the hero is shaped by Liszt through his personal growth experience, what he sees and hears, and incorporates all Liszt's emotions and understanding of this character.

Song (2006) believes that compared with Liszt's other etudes, *Grandes Études de Paganini* (1851) and *Études d'exécution transcendente* (1852) are more comprehensive and outstanding in artistic expression and technical application, and almost cover All Liszt's iconic dazzling techniques are therefore more representative. The author believes that through these two sets of etudes, the creative ideas and artistic expression of Liszt's piano etudes can be fully presented.

Tu (2011) starting from the characteristics of the Romantic era, Liszt's life and the creative background related to the work, through the music analysis of the work and the comparison of Paganini's original works, it reveals the art of Liszt's etudes to a certain extent Features, summarizes and expounds some technical essentials of performance.

Zhao (2016) through the analysis of Liszt's etudes' playing skills, several representative playing techniques are summarized. For example: according to different techniques, players need to train one by one, and experience relaxation in slow speed. Don't blindly pursue fast to demonstrate the superb technique, but also add emotional expression on the basis of technical training, which is more vivid on the piano. Describe the tone of the violin, and pay attention to the overall singing. The article also proposes solutions to the difficult points in performance techniques, such as octave techniques, long-distance interval jumping, vibrato, and wheel fingers.

The above papers start from the perspective of performance research or the connotation of the work. Through music analysis and analysis of the composition background and connotation, we can get a diversified understanding of Liszt's piano etudes, and use this to guide performance and teaching practice.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this paper is a qualitative one, taking a literature review, musical analysis and visual analysis of acoustic parameters, depending on the nature of the research in this study.

This study is based on the collection and collation of documentary materials, and

explores the issues in greater depth on the basis of the existing research on the subject. The main purpose is to analyse and collate the composer's biographical background, personal history and compositional style by combing through the currently available literature, and to further refine and summarize the composer's inner world and inner spirit based on previous research findings, in order to correctly restore the composer's creative intentions.

The use of traditional music analysis methods to analyze Liszt's music text will help to grasp the image of the music, interpret the connotation of the music, clarify its creative purpose and aesthetic value, and estimate the performance. There has been controversy about the guiding value of music analysis to music performance. Obviously, the more certainty the analysis brings, the less room for performers to play. This is a fact that many performers are not willing to accept lightly. (Rink, 2006) believes that performance is, to some extent, a unique analysis process of the work, a process of transforming the structure into a diachronic form. Based on this, he proposed the concept of "informed intuition", trying to connect the intuition that flashed in the artist's mind with the knowledge and experience behind it, so as to resolve the contradiction between the two. Based on this standpoint, this research uses music analysis as the basis and theoretical guidance of performance analysis, combining perceptual creation with rational thinking, inspiration and experience.

The visual analysis of acoustic parameters can capture more details that cannot be captured by the human ear. It can also present the art of sound in music performance in a visual map mode, providing a digitized evidence for aesthetic and auditory experience. Before making certain valuable judgments and classifications in music performance research, there are often too many important details to be discovered by researchers; it is based on the discovery, experience, analysis and interpretation of these details that constitute It gave us the most direct and effective understanding of music performance. (Yang, 2007)

Findings and Discussions

Music analysis findings

At the beginning of *Harmonies du soir*, After several echoes of the low A-flat in the left hand and the colourful chordal phrases of the right hand, the opening of the piece leads to the presentation of the theme in bar 10, which begins the first passage of intensive technical use. The melody of the theme appears in the high notes of the left-hand in bar 11, combined with various chords played by the left hand with accentuated thumb tones, a type of melodic chord compound technique. The right hand is supplemented by intervals of fifths, octaves and tens, and in bar 14 the right hand glides across fifteenth, forming a glissando technique incorporating a big jump, as if a few crystals of daylight were passing over the warm melodic body of the left hand. 16 shows the first use of the alternating chord technique in the whole piece, with a strong chromaticisation of the chords and the left and right hands in a superimposed position. It is not easy to play with precision because of the large span of the right hand chords. This is followed by a new technique in bar 17, where the two hands play together in different spans of four-note disintegrating chord slides, the left and right hands working in tandem to gently glide across the large expanse of keys, the highs and lows of the tone shining as if they were reflecting each other on the surface of a scaly lake, serene and beautiful.



Figure 1. Bars 10-17 of *Harmonies du soir* (1852)¹

At the beginning of bar 58 is a soft, graceful and affectionate passage in the middle of the piece. The technical use of this meditative passage remains relatively complex. The section consists of two voices, a melodic line in the upper voice and a large span of chordal accompaniment in the middle and lower voices. The melodic line in the upper voice is played by the 4th and 5th fingers of the right hand, while the 1st and 2nd fingers of the right hand work with the left hand to play the accompaniment of the chord glissando.



Figure 2. Bars 57-61 of *Harmonies du soir* (1852)

After a soft and contemplative middle section, the piece reaches a technical climax dominated by chordal techniques. This contrasts sharply with the reverie of the first section and the meditative middle section. But in terms of technical use, they are in the same vein. Bar 80 begins this magnificent technical synthesis of chords. The use of technique here is similar to the opening of the piece in that it invokes a variety of techniques, and the rich variety of techniques creates a strong sense of artistic form and a depth of artistic beauty on many levels. What is even more remarkable is the synthesis of techniques adopted here for the right and left hands. The left hand's sextet corresponds to the four chords of the right hand, and the effect of the three against two makes the left hand seem more urgent, with a sense of dislocation and rhythm that brings a deep sense of unease and hidden agitation to the surface of the score,

¹All scores in this study were taken from: Zoltán Gárdonyi & István Szélenyi.(1970).Neue Liszt-Ausgabe. Serie 1, Band 1. Budapest: Editio Musica, Plate Z.5411. URTEXT EDITION.

where the mood begins to rise.



Figure 3. Bars 81-84 of *Harmonies du soir* (1852)

In the climactic passages of the piece, the various techniques show off their energy. In bar 115, the right hand swings and chords, and the left hand and a low octave jump lead to a wave-tossing chromatic octave complex upwards. This leads directly into the expansive pouring of bar 116. Measure 116 uses a highly complex technique, with both hands playing octave chords together, which combines octave technique and chord technique.



Figure 4. Bars 113-117 of *Harmonies du soir* (1852)

The exercises are rich in the types of techniques used, including the combination of intervals and melody, chord interlacing techniques, octave arpeggio techniques, arpeggio techniques with large spans of broken chord glissandos, large jumps of pentatonic chords across 9 degrees, large spans of alternating hands with melodic tones, and many more. In this exercise, Liszt's mastery of pianistic technique can be seen in its unique use of artistic situations, artistic images and artistic expressiveness, which, together with the artistic conception and aesthetic sensibility of the work, build its unique artistic appeal.

Visual analysis of sound parameters Findings

Authoritative versions of the performance recordings allow performers and learners to quickly understand the work and build up an appropriate performance concept. Three pianists from different countries and eras, all renowned interpreters of Liszt, have been selected for this performance. They have conquered the ears of professional critics and listeners with their different interpretations of the same piece.

Table 1. Pianists and Recordings' information²

Pianist	Arrua.C	Bolet.J	Trifonov.D
Recorded	1976	1985	2015
Nationality	Chilean	American Cuban	Russian
Label & Catalogue	Philips, No: 4164582	Decca, No: 4146012	DG, No:94795529.
Work length of <i>Harmonies du soir</i>	00:08:50	00:10:45	00:09:29

Claudio Arrau (1903-1991)

Was born in Chile. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century. He is a piano master with a wide range of repertoire. Since From 1913 to 1918, Arrau studied under Martin Krause , a famous teacher of the Leipzig Music School and a direct disciple of Liszt. Although Arrau has only studied under Krause for 6 years, this learning experience has a significant impact on Arrau's lifelong piano performance practice, making him the core of romanticism An excellent interpreter of the track.

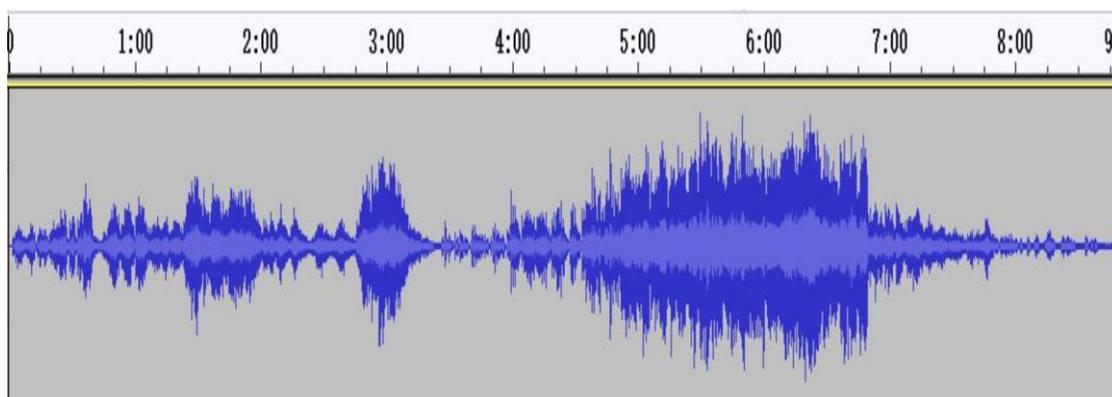


Figure 5. Audio Waveform Graph (Arrau's recording)³

The audio waveform diagram of the entire *Harmonies du soir* played by Arrau took 8 minutes and 50 seconds. From the waveform diagram, it can be seen that the contrast between the strengths and weaknesses is very obvious. On the whole, the performance of the presentation section and the middle section are relatively soft, while the emotional climax section of the whole song obviously fluctuates in intensity, and the octave and arpeggios continue to push the mood of the music to a high point.

Although Arrau's playing speed is the fastest among them, but the music does not sound rushed. The alternation of the left and right hands is very calm. While playing a full tone, the melody has a distinct sense of progressiveness. It embodies the personal qualities of the piano master of being calm and majestic. Under the influence of his own musical concept, the music he plays is implicitly internal, simple, restrained, and stable. His clear phrase lines, sharp

² The information in this table was gathered by the author from the classical music recording website: Presto Music [<https://www.prestomusic.com/classical>] and the classical music magazine: Gramophone.

³ All audio waveform graphs in this article were analyzed by the author on the audio analysis software: Sonic Visualiser.

accents, and changes in themes and motives all give People are deeply impressed.

Jorge Bolet (1914-1990)

Is a Cuban-born American piano player. One of the last representatives of the great romantic piano tradition. He studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, and also a student of Liszt's outstanding student Moriz Rosenthal. He pointed to his skillful skills, and his slender and rich timbre amazed the audience. Bolet received the ALS Medal (Medal of Honor of the American Liszt Society) for his excellent interpretation of Liszt's works. He was also the only winner in 1988.

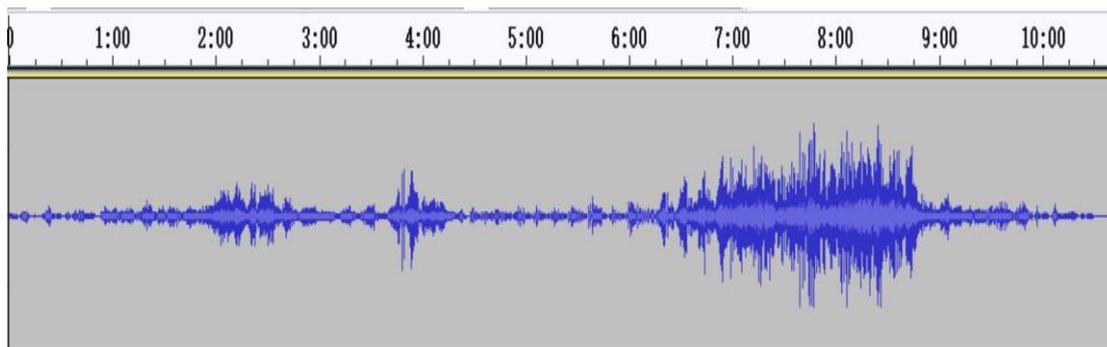


Figure 6. Audio Waveform Graph (Bolet's recording)

The audio waveform of the entire *Harmonies du soir* performed by Bolet took 10 minutes and 45 seconds, which was nearly two minutes slower than Arrua's interpretation. From the waveform diagram, the velocity amplitude is the smallest among the three versions, and it is the last to have a large amplitude change, and the previous one has always been a smaller amplitude. Nevertheless, bolet can clearly hear the subtle changes in the phrase while listening, and he has made rich timbre changes and emotional contrasts in a relatively weak overall strength.

In terms of speed and strength, Bolet's performance is undoubtedly the slowest and softest. For Bolet, only by being slow can the details be polished to perfection, and the details of the music can be perceived and understood by the listener. His soft and clear keystrokes, beautiful timbre, and endless fascinating sound structure in his imagination are all amazing. After listening carefully, it is not difficult to find his grasp of the phrases, harmony and rhythm, and the logic of "personal thinking".

Danill Trifonov(1991-)

Is a Russian pianist. He started to study music at the age of 5. From 2000 to 2009, he studied at the Russian Gnesin's Academy of Music. Since 2009, he has been studying in the Sergey Babayan class at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He is good at playing Liszt. He won the Best Instrumental Solo Album of 2018 with *Transcendental*, a double album of Liszt's works that marks his third title as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist.

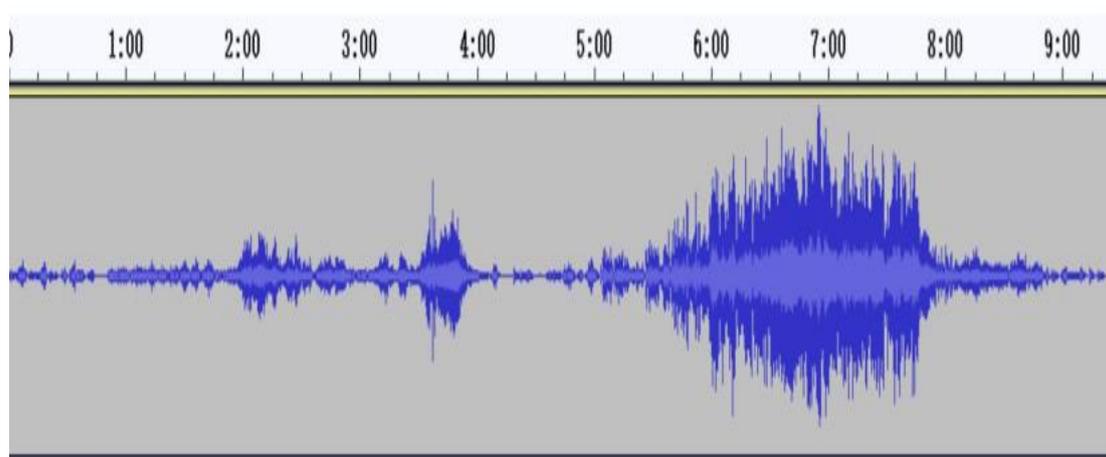


Figure 7.Audio Waveform Graph (Trifonov's recording)

Audio waveform diagram of the entire *Harmonies du soir* played by Trifonov in 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Regardless of the processing speed or dynamics, Trifonov's performance is the most average of the three versions. It can be seen from the waveform diagram that there are only two obvious dynamic fluctuations in the first half of the music. After the 5th minute, the music gradually reaches a climax.

Compared with the stronger dynamic fluctuations of the Arrau version and the relatively gentle dynamic processing of the Bolet version, Trifonov maximized the contrast of the dynamics before and after the music. The calm and softness in the early stage is for the shock of the emotional outburst to be more shocking. However He has excellent control over the tone and the strength of keystrokes. In this etude, he expresses the dusk scenery depicted by the music in a tender but powerful way.

Discussions

A comprehensive analysis of the technical and artistic aspects of the work in the text reveals that these difficult finger techniques often create a good sense of form when used in an integrated configuration. They appear in different forms in different passages of the work, allowing the work to develop a good sense of structural unity due to the presence of these techniques. It is clear that the use of technique also plays a role in the overall construction of the work. From a certain point of view, there is a profound artistry in the combined configuration of these dazzling techniques in the work, and the artistic effect of the whole work is released by the mutual construction of these techniques. In contrast to those who would distinguish between technical and artistic works, or who would argue that the exercises are simply exercises in technique. This paper argues that the technical use of the work cannot be separated from the artistic conception of the work, but rather that these techniques enable the artistic conception of the work to be better presented.

In addition to analysing the technique and artistic conception of the work, the authoritative interpretations of three performers are analysed in order to provide future performers with a clearer and broader interpretation of the work. In the training of this work, attention is paid to the development of a sense of overall structure and emotional control. It is important to develop a sense of structure and emotional control in the performance of this work, and to anticipate the structure and mood of the performance while looking deeply into the context of the work. In practice, this will be combined with the technique to give full expression to the work. The climax of the work (bars 80 to 142) is a work that makes extensive use of Liszt's specialised octaves and chords, and in this powerful

passage we can judge the way in which it is played in terms of speed, intensity and mood. From a technical point of view alone, each finger needs to have sufficient and balanced power, and only then can it cope with the artistic expression of the various techniques in the music, in order to reflect the multi-layered timbre, achieve the desired acoustic effect and express the profound artistic connotations. This piece is a moody piece, slow and melancholic overall, so attention should be paid to the speed at which the keys are played. It is also necessary to pay due attention to the power of the keystroke, using a moderate speed and full power. It is also important to pay attention to the angle at which the keys are played, and to some extent to the Liszt touch, which means that the angle between the fingers and the keys is small, and that the fingers are straightened out to reach the deepest part of the keyboard. However, active and passionate passages require fingers perpendicular to the keyboard, a decisive touch and a moderate downward force. A sensible and skilful touching technique plays a key role in successfully presenting the artistry of the piece with dramatic effect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through the discussion in this article, a lot of technical information can be provided for the performer. The full and reasonable use of this information will help the performer to show the artistic charm of the work in depth. At the same time, it can also help performers to provide clear learning and practice ideas. Beginner performance and further development of teaching. This article conducts an in-depth study of music works from a new perspective, and rethinks some controversial theories and concepts. I hope that through the continuous in-depth research of this subject, more discoveries can be obtained and more questions can be answered.

Liszt's piano etudes have infinite charm. These works highlight the important role of piano technology in the works, and have contributed a lot to the development of piano technology. Innovation, there will always be gains and losses, but the process of progress cannot be without innovation. Liszt's piano technological innovation has set an excellent example for explorers who are advancing on the artistic road. Liszt's technical works are deeply artistic and will become a topic worthy of continuous exploration for researchers.

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