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BRILLIANT
CLASSICS



VIRTUOSO PIANO ETUDES

ALKAN | BARTÓK | BORTKIEWICZ | BRAHMS | CAGE | CASELLA | CHAMINADE | CHOPIN | CLEMENTI
CZERNY | DEBUSSY | GLASS | GODOWSKY | GULDA | HELLER | HENSELT | HUMMEL | KAPUSTIN
LIGETI | LISZT | LYADOV | LYAPUNOV | MESSIAEN | MOSCHELES | MOSZKOWSKI | RACHMANINOV
RUBINSTEIN | SAINT-SAËNS | SCHUMANN | Scriabin | STRAVINSKY | TAUSIG | WILD

Virtuoso Piano Études

‘Studies are studies,’ Florestan preached to the Davidites, ‘one should learn something one did not know before’ (Schumann, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1834). Bach’s ‘honest’ Inventions and Sinfonias (1720–23) written for his son Wilhelm Friedmann – ‘by which amateurs of the keyboard ... are shown a clear way not only to learn to play cleanly in two parts, but also, after further progress, to handle three obbligato parts correctly and well; and ... to achieve a *cantabile* style in playing’ – rank among the first manifestations of the genre – their training ground still firmly applicable. Freeing the medium – distinguishing it from the educational methods and practice pieces that followed in the wake of Couperin’s *L’art de toucher le clavecin* (1716) and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach’s *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (1753), purging it of the didactics, ‘intellectual monotony’ and ‘half-true music’ associated with the pedagogy of Türk, Milchmeyer, Steibelt or Wieck, for many Czerny and Hummel too – took two generations. 1803: Cramer, Steibelt, Ries, Wölfl, Berger, Clementi, Kessler, Potter – ‘cultivation of hand and head’. 1827: Moscheles, Chopin – art and feeling, the ‘finishing lesson’. 1832: Schumann-Paganini – transcription-homage. 1834: William Sterndale Bennett, Lüders – caprice, the ‘genre picture’. 1834: Schumann – symphonic variation. 1835: Henselt, Moscheles, Taubert – the titled character cameo. 1838: Liszt-Paganini, Thalberg, Alkan – transcendentalism. 1851: ‘Transcendental Execution’ – mechanicals, musicality, art, emotion, caprice, symphonicism, epithets ... the programmatic, the suggestive, the impressionistic ... fantasy, rhapsody, poem, dream. ‘Transcendental’. Liszt’s appellation. Enshrining the monumental, the Herculean. Surpassing the norm, outside the limits of experience, beyond conceivable knowledge and comprehension.

In his teaching, Beethoven used Bach and held Cramer’s *Studio* (published 1803–10 and, according to Anton Schindler, considered by him ‘the most fitting preparation for his own works’) in high esteem, late in life annotating a selection of 21 numbers from the collection for his nephew Karl. Friedrich Wieck and his daughter Clara (Schumann) used, and copied, Cramer extensively. Robert Schumann admired him. And his model was essential to Chopin’s teaching in Paris, along with Clementi and Moscheles (and much later, too, to Busoni’s – *Klavierübung*, Part IV). Beethoven wanted to write a piano method, but didn’t. Chopin did – a terse *Projet de méthode* which, however, remained unpublished until after his death. During the 1830s, judging from Schumann’s copious reviews, the daughters of every household, ‘rich widows’ equally, wanted piano studies,

and innumerable composers were willing to oblige, though, befitting their often lesser creativity and lack of imagination, rarely with much to say. Bertini (approved of a hundred years later by Dohnányi) gets compared to ‘an insipid pattern ... we are consoled ... that such superficiality cannot long sustain itself in the world’. Kessler, a friend of Chopin’s, is accused of ‘mediocrity’. Thalberg says ‘nothing new’. The Dane Christoph Weyse, on the other hand, is admired, ‘ever searching for new lands’. Following the Everest grails of Chopin, Alkan and Liszt, the genre post-1850 was more or less to take three directions: the super-virtuosic *étude de concert* (of the kind largely represented in the present collection); the pre-college study (of the melodically appealing, elementary/intermediate/advanced Kreutzer/Löschhorn variety); the drill-method type focussing on finger-exercise mechanicals – what Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger calls ‘digital gymnastics and stubborn repetition’ (from Hanon and Kullak to the finger-knotting, finger-freeing exercise routines devised over a 200-year period, privately or otherwise, by Beethoven, Henselt, Liszt, Brahms, Philipp, Dohnányi, Gát, Timakin and others).

CD1 CARL CZERNY (1791–1857) *The Art of Finger Dexterity [Velocity] Op.740 (1844)*

‘The head and the chest should be upright, dignified and natural.’ Pupil and champion of Beethoven, the vastly influential teacher of Liszt, Thalberg and Leschetizky, ‘Vienna’s oracle in the manufacture of musical taste’ (Chopin), Czerny has never enjoyed much of a press. In the spirit of Mozart’s ‘mere mechanicus’ dismissal of Clementi, John Field wrote him off as an ‘inkpot’, the slur sticking down the generations, Schumann in particular being quite sour. For sure he was the drillmaster-supreme of Romantic pianism, packaging and copy-pasting notes of all shapes and sizes to discipline, extend and test. But machining semiquavers for breakfast, writing elegantly for the instrument, and not just in its upper registers (a common generalisation), wasn’t his only forte. Look beyond the covers of his works – getting on for 900 opuses, including 11 sonatas (anticipating the transformation and motivic techniques of Liszt and Wagner) and several finely crafted, lyrically expressive, viscerally orchestrated symphonies and concertos, and you’ll get some idea why Brahms and Debussy regarded him, why Stravinsky could speak of the ‘full-blooded musician’ within. A Bohemian/Moravian born in Vienna, he was, like his friend Ferdinand Ries, the civilised voice of the post-Napoleonic age, a citizen of the city to which Chopin came in 1830, a Biedermeier man whose music was about grace, etiquette and good breeding before off-the-shoulder lasciviousness; polite foursquare phrases before irregularity; of minor-keys grounded in Mozart and Haydn;

and *galante* majors aspiring to Beethovenian heroism (he gave the Viennese premiere of the ‘Emperor’ Concerto in 1812). The hormone-fuelled world of the Pamers, Strausses and Lanners touched him, but he never joined in. Addressing technique-specific areas of virtuosity in 50 studies, *The Art of Finger Dexterity* remains in the warm-up regime of concert artists from Russia and the Far East across Europe to the Americas and Australasia – a clever marriage of classical harmony, melodic half-lights, keyboard athleticism and niceties of articulation cloaked in waves of rhythm.

CD2 MUZIO CLEMENTI (1752–1832) *Gradus ad Parnassum Op.44*, Vol. III (1826) Remembered among the most noted and influential musicians of Classico-Romantic Europe, ‘the first of the great virtuosos’ (Harold C. Schonberg), taken up (like Czerny) by Horowitz, Clementi, born in Rome, spent the greater part of his life in London, working variously as composer, pianist, teacher (his pupils including Cramer, Czerny, Field and Meyerbeer), publisher (of Beethoven among others) and piano maker. He is buried in Westminster Abbey. Over a century ago, in 1900, Moscheles’s student Edward Dannreuther declared him to be ‘the first completely equipped writer of sonatas [representing the genre] proper from beginning to end. He played and imitated Scarlatti’s harpsichord sonatas in his youth, he knew Haydn’s and Mozart’s in his manhood, and he was aware of Beethoven’s in his old age’. Enjoying a long life, spanning the generations from Handel and Gluck to Berlioz and Liszt, he had an influence on Beethoven’s sonatas, and, ‘on account of his great, free form’, was admired by Brahms.

Published in three volumes between 1817 and 1826, in London, Leipzig and Paris, dedicated to Princess Sophia Wolkonsky, *Gradus ad Parnassum* – ‘The Art of playing on the/PIANO FORTE,/ exemplified in a series of [100] Exercises, in the/Strict [*sévère*] and in the Free [*élégant*] Styles’ – remains the iconic early-19th-century compendium upon which ‘the art of solid pianoforte playing rests’. Contemporary with the late Beethoven sonatas and quartets, the studies, as profound as they can be beautiful, mix ‘free’ technical work and fantasy, articulations and peculiarities of fingering, stylistically occupying a world between Classical purity, *gran espressione* and nascent Romanticism, with ‘strict’ canons and fugues as significant to the 19th-century baroque revival movement as anything in Beethoven, Reicha or the young Mendelssohn to come. A number of the *pièces*, all metronomised, are grouped into ‘suites’, 13 in all of varying length. The last five, from the third volume, are included here. IX, A major (66–70, including a four-part Fuga in A minor, 69, revised from an early sonata, Œuvre 1 No.5, 1780/81). X, E major (71–76, including a Double-Fugue

in E minor, 74, revised from the third fugue in Clementi’s Op.6, 1780/81). XI, G major (77–81, including an improvisatory Capriccio dramatically contrasted, 80). XII, D major (82–87, including a presto in D minor, 85, loosely reminiscent of the finale from Mozart’s A minor Sonata, K310). XIII, B major (88–92, including a four-part Fugata, 90).

Of the remaining numbers, 94, *Stravaganze* (Whimsical) is a gem at many levels, not least for its closing allegro flourish and its key changes moving by ascending major thirds, F–A–D_♯–F – 50 years later the tonal schemata of the scherzo from Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony. A good deal of *Gradus ad Parnassum* was written while Clementi was living at 1 High Row, Kensington Gravel Pits – these days 128 Kensington Church Street, Notting Hill, but then an 18th-century rural village retreat west of London. In something like *Stravaganze* one might almost fancy him sitting at his square piano in the music room, hands idling then urging across the keyboard, ‘one of the most vigorous old fellows of 70 that I ever saw’, as Moscheles remembered.

CD3 STEPHEN HELLER (1813–1888) *Melodic Studies Op.45* (1844) Hungarian-Jewish, Stephen [István] Heller, an exact contemporary of Alkan, was born in Pest. As a boy in Vienna he studied with Czerny (briefly, his fees were expensive) and Anton Halm, through the latter meeting Beethoven and Schubert (he was 13 at the time of the former’s death). In 1838 – having come under the wing of Schumann, who published his reviews in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* – he settled in Paris, writing influentially for the *Gazette musicale* and befriending Chopin, Liszt, Berlioz and (especially) Charles Hallé among others. His students included Isidor Philipp, from 1893 to 1934 head of piano at the Paris Conservatoire and from 1921 to 1933 head of piano at the Conservatoire américain de Fontainebleau. Late in life his sight began to fail, allegedly, urban legend has it, because of his addiction to black cigars and visits too many to 157 rue Saint-Honoré – À La Civette. Standing, it’s been claimed, somewhere between Teutonic Romanticism and Gallic Impressionism, his best known studies are largely the product of his earlier period – though one last big collection, addressing expression and rhythm, Op.125, appeared in 1868. Dedicated to Émilie Lacoste, the 25 studies comprising Op.45 – preparatory to *L’art de phraser Op.16* (1840) – cover aspects of legato/staccato touch, dynamics, fingering and pedalling. Student-friendly titles were added by later editors, the original German edition containing nothing. A point of ‘unique’ musical interest in the weighty closing pre-Brahmsian C minor study is its interpolation of the opening of the C major first study, ‘creating a sense of closure to the opus’ (Larissa Marie Kiefer).

Progressive Studies Op.46 (1844) Thirty studies, preparatory to Op.45. Heller's études may not aspire to the meridian of Chopin's, less still the consularism of Liszt's. But in their confiding mix of the Schumannesque and the Parisian, their avoidance of the solely formulaic, their prioritising of musical, expressive, poetic values, their gentle bewitchment (for instance the A flat, No.27), they form an important, often richly imaginative, bridge, neither simple nor simplistic, between studio and the borderlands of the concert stage. Hippolyte Barbedette (1876) considered that in their course Heller 'desired to combine the *utile* with the *dulce* ... His are small lyrical poems, apart altogether from any educational purposes. He wished to compose beautiful pieces, in every rhythm, and with every possible harmony ... avoiding all that was not absolutely necessary to the expression of his thoughts'.

CD4 JOHANN NEPOMUK HUMMEL (1778–1837) 24 *Études Op.125 (1833)*

'The body must be held upright, neither bending forwards nor sideways.' Contemporary and friend of the great – Beethoven to Goethe – a man who transitioned from pre-Revolution Europe through the Napoleonic wars and Congress of Vienna to Biedermeierism, embracing Classical galanterie and Romantic bel canto fioritura along the way, Hummel was born in Pressburg (Bratislava). A Habsburger with a knack of turning out a good tune or a memorable cadential flourish, equally brilliant as executant and orchestrator, central to the development of modern pianism, he spent much of his life in aristocratic employ, with appointments at Eisenstadt (serving the Esterházy court in succession to Haydn), Stuttgart and Weimar (campaigning for copyright protection).

He studied with Mozart, Clementi, Haydn and Salieri. He taught Thalberg and Henselt, and, had his fees been affordable, would have done so Liszt. He influenced Chopin and Schumann. Czerny admired his playing, teasing performer and listener alike with 'novel and dazzling difficulties', wooing with 'intimate and tender expression'. Pedagogically, his *Complete Theoretical and Practical Course of Instruction on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte* (1828), selling thousands of copies within days of publication, remains key to any study of early-19th-century pianism, ornamentation and fingering. A teacher believing in internalised musicality before externalised prescription, complexity before accessibility, 'correctness of performance,' he noted, 'relates to the mechanism of playing, as far as it can be indicated by musical notation. Beauty of performance supposes everything nicely rounded off, and actually suited to any given composition, and to every passage in it; it includes whatever is tasteful, pleasing, and ornamental [...] What relates to beauty

and taste in performance will be best cultivated, and perhaps, ultimately most easily obtained, by hearing music finely performed, and by listening to highly distinguished musicians, particularly singers gifted with great powers of expression.'

Published in Vienna, the 24 studies Op.125 follows a circle of ascending fifths (sharps followed by flats), each major key paired with its tonic minor. On the occasionally dry side, they largely traverse a succession of crafted routines. Schumann sensed they were the work of a composer past his best, his powers no longer 'flowing in harmony' (Eusebius), music come 'a few years too late' (Florestan). 'That which charms youth so greatly that the beauty of a work causes the fatigue of mastering it to be forgotten – the loveliness of imagination – is utterly wanting.' One at least, the fifth in D major, albeit in humbler, less glittering dress, suggests Chopin – the first of his Op.10 set published the same summer Hummel was writing his. The C sharp minor, No.16, glimpses mysteriously starry orbs. No.22, in B flat minor, is musingly introverted – old flowers fading on a table. Valedictory thoughts darken the last, the F minor, the master hanging up his gloves, old companions gone.

IGNAZ MOSCHELES (1794–1870) 24 *Studies Op.70 (1825–26)* 'My chief objection to innovators is that they aspire to go *beyond* Beethoven, and altogether dethrone Mozart and Haydn ... Lesser lights like ourselves will be buried under the ruins of tottering temples ... who knows if we shall not some day or other be dug up like Herculaneum and Pompeii?' Moscheles – born in Prague to a cultured German-speaking Bohemian-Jewish family – lived for many years in London, playing his concertos under the aegis of the Philharmonic Society, conducting Beethoven's 'Eroica', 'Choral' and Missa Solemnis, and teaching at the Royal Academy of Music. In 1846, at the invitation of Mendelssohn, he left London to join the Leipzig Conservatory founded three years earlier. A 'true man of the transition' (Harold C. Schonberg), the archetypal classico-romantic, open-minded to the end, he pianistically advanced the road from Weber, Clementi and Field to 'the four modern heroes, Thalberg, Chopin, Henselt and Liszt', reaching the twilight of his life, as he put it in his memoirs, 'quietly feeding on the toccatas and fugues of old Bach'. In his heyday he was considered a rival to Hummel, Kalkbrenner and Herz, admired for his 'incisive brilliant touch, wonderfully clear, precise phrasing, and close attention to ... accentuation' (George T. Ferris). His roll-call of students included Brassin, Dannreuther, Ganz, Grieg, Joseffy, Litolff, Michałowski, Marie Pleyel and Thalberg. Issued in London in 1827, with Henselt undertaking

an edition for the St Petersburg Conservatory decades later, the 24 ‘characteristic pieces’ making up the pre-Chopin Op.70 collection are described on the original title page as ‘finishing lessons for advanced Performers’. Most are of brisk, *brillante* nature. But Nos 4, 9, 10, 16, 17 and 20 are slower and more expressively weighted. All the major and minor keys are acknowledged, though not in any logical sequence. The young Mendelssohn particularly liked them, writing to the composer in January 1829: ‘your splendid studies are the finest pieces of music I have become acquainted with for a long time – as instructive and useful to the player as they are gratifying to the hearer.’ ‘I flatter myself,’ Moscheles reflected in later life, ‘that my *Characteristic Studies* ... might hold their own as bravura pieces ... but not one of my colleagues plays them in public.’

Grand Characteristic Studies Op.95 (1836–37) Dedicated to the playwright and critic Friedrich Rochlitz, Moscheles’ second book was intended to be ‘for the higher development of Style and Bravoura’. ‘There are difficulties in them,’ he wrote, ‘which only a master can overcome. Thalberg, Liszt, all such players will find their work cut out for them.’ Moscheles played some of them in London at the end of the 1830s; likewise Liszt (unspecified) at his Philharmonic Society concert, 8 June 1840. 3: *Contradiction*, a moto perpetuo in D flat, admired by Mendelssohn and Schumann. 4: *Juno*, a maestoso in A major, one of the first of the set to be composed. 6: *Bacchanal*, a Schumannesque outing in C, robust and manly, here and there suggesting Alkan-like chordal voicings and Liszt transcription style. Triumphally elating. 9: *Terpsichore*, D major, light staccato attack, the rapid semiquaver repetitions showcasing Sébastien Érard’s double-escapement action.

CD5 CARL TAUSIG (1841–1871) *2 Concert Études Op.1* (published 1871) Born in Warsaw, Polish-Jewish, Tausig died young, from typhoid. He studied with his father, a former student of Thalberg, and then Liszt, whose favourite pupil he became. Admirer of both Wagner and Brahms, he enjoyed a formidable reputation, combining a reportedly stronger technique than Liszt’s with the intellectual capacity and Beethovenian vision of his friend Hans von Bülow. He favoured a quiet, still disposition at the keyboard, given to neither display nor flamboyance, intent on perfection and clarity of execution – a former-day Michelangeli one fancies. In his book *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time* (1872) the critic Wilhelm von Lenz left a portrait of the man in all his strengths, the ‘infaillibler triumphator’ of the concert grand. The pair of Concert Études, in F sharp and A flat, are strikingly of their own personality and independence, the font of virtuoso writing

to come (Russian school not least), owing little or nothing to Chopin or Liszt. Tausig dedicated them to the Polish pianist Maria Kalergis-Muchanow – patroness, lover of the poet Cyprian Norwid, student of Chopin, friend of Liszt.

MORITZ MOSZKOWSKI (1854–1925) *Étude de virtuosité in F Op.72 No.6* (1902) ‘After Chopin, Moszkowski best knows how to write for the piano, [he] embraces the whole gamut of piano technique’ (Paderewski). German-Jewish composer–pianist of Polish descent, for a time married to the younger sister of Cécile Chaminade. His was a riches-to-rags story, wealthy before the Great War – holding court in rue Blanche and teaching at the Paris Conservatoire – penniless afterwards. Among his students were Perlemuter, Beecham, Hofmann and Landowska. Dedicated to Alexandre Michałowski, the sixth of the Op.72 Studies, popularised by Horowitz, is a tour de force of purling right-hand triplets and subtly ‘orchestrated’ left-hand detail, a high-wire no-safety-net spin on a certain E flat Impromptu, Schubert’s, lurking barely disguised beneath the surface.

ADOLF VON HENSELT (1814–1889) *12 Études caractéristiques Op.2* (1837–38) Delicately imaginative, a man of ‘dignified, simple carriage’ but frail and suffering from stage fright, the ‘Nordic bard’, Henselt, born in Schwabach, Bavaria, studied in Munich with Josepha von Fladt (a former student of Abbé Vogler), in Weimar with Hummel, and in Vienna with Simon Sechter. He settled in St Petersburg in 1838, becoming Court Pianist the next year. Following John Field, together with Dubuque in Moscow, he was to radically influence and shape the Russian piano school, then in a nascent stage of its development. Principal among his students was Nikolai Zverev, the teacher of Igumnov, Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Siloti. Like Schumann and Liszt, Rachmaninov held him in the highest esteem. Wealthy and connected (created a hereditary peer by the Tsar in 1861, appointed to the Russian Privy Council in 1879), Henselt effectively ceased composing and concertising by the late 1840s, withdrawing from public life while still keeping an open salon for his immediate inner circle, Bach and the Bible ever on the piano. Von Lenz saw him aristocratically ‘midway between Liszt and Chopin ... in a way, the connecting-link between their contrasting natures ... a “Germania” at the piano. Henselt is German in everything, in production and in reproduction ... the only artist among the great pianists who is Liszt’s equal – although in the specifically subjective domain he belongs to a more specialized sphere.’

Henselt wrote two books of 12 studies each, Opp. 2 ('caractéristique') and 5 ('salon'). Lenz calls them 'poems', 'real "Songs without Words"'. Schumann wrote of the Op.2 cycle, dedicated to Ludwig I, the King of Bavaria, as 'love songs' – 'and in an elegant golden inscription [the 'troubadour'] writes above each one the meaning of his griefs and raptures'. In French, not German – 'for we must acknowledge that chivalry, gallantry, and what may be termed manly coquetry, never comes with a better grace than from French lips' – yet, curiously, contrasting the German and English editions, absent from the 1838 Paris printing. Henselt's parlance and treatment of the instrument is indelibly his own. But reminiscences of Cramer, Clementi and Hummel, ideas in common with his contemporaries – Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin – are for the finding.

1: 'Storm, you will not fell me'; 2: 'Think a little about me, who thinks always about you'; 3: 'Fulfil my desires'; 4: 'The repose of love'; 5: 'Stormy life'; 6: 'Were I a bird, to you would I fly'; 7: 'It is the youth who has golden wings'; 8: 'You attract me, you carry away, you engulf'; 9: 'Love's youth, celestial delights; ah, you fly away, but the memory stays with us'; 10: 'As the stream pours out into the sea, so my love, my heart awaits you'; 11: 'Do you sleep, my life?'; 12: 'Full of sights, of memories. Restlessly, alas, my heart beats'. Rachmaninov gloried in the feathered skies of the sixth – pianistically speaking, Henselt's *Feux follets*.

ANTON RUBINSTEIN (1829–1894) '*Great Étude in C Op.23 No.2 (1849–50)* The fire and brilliance, the arrogant audacity of a 20-year old, silencing competitors and critics. Transcendental, tender, triumphal. Founder of the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, cutting an epic Beethovenian figure, Rubinstein was by a long way the most elemental of the 19th-century Russian lions, the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick wrote in 1884, who 'plays like a god [yet can change], like Jupiter, into a bull'. Power and tone, a free-wheeling imagination, indulging in fantasy and liberty, were central to his dream. High-priest of the high-Romantic iron-framed concert Steinway, he used his feet as expressively as his fingers: 'the pedal is the soul of the piano' he was fond of saying. 'Russians call me German, Germans call me Russian, Jews call me a Christian, Christians a Jew. Pianists call me a composer, composers call me a pianist. The classicists think me a futurist, and the futurists call me a reactionary. My conclusion is that I am neither fish nor fowl – a pitiful individual.'

ANATOLY LYADOV (1855–1914) *Études* The fastidious unhurried man from St Petersburg who taught Prokofiev and had been a contender to write Diaghilev's *Firebird*, Lyadov confined himself to a life of modestly-boned, wirily muscular cameos, nostalgic boudoir miniatures, and beautiful cadences – though his late tone-poems for orchestra, befitting student days under Rimsky-Korsakov, suggest a capacity for other things. The five independent studies of his catalogue are Chopinesque feuilletons, craftsmanship, contour, phrasing and figuration uppermost, testing a pianist's equipment and imagination. With his idiomatic, velvety understanding of the instrument, what might a set of 12 have been like? 1: Op.5, A flat major (1881): right-hand extension, left-hand melody, dedicated to Balakirev. 2: Op.12, E major (1886): fours-against-threes, dedicated to Nikolai Lavrov. 3: Op.37, F major (1895): fives-against-twos, dedicated to Barbe Ouspensky. 4: Op.40 No.1: C sharp minor (1897), dedicated to Schulz-Evler: double-notes. 5: Op.48 No.1: A major (1899), dedicated to Siloti: double-notes.

CD6 FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849) 'You should, so to speak, mould the keyboard with a velvet hand and feel the key rather than striking it!' Chopin's 27 epochal studies, untitled, span a period from his post-Conservatoire days in Warsaw, through his travels across a Europe in turmoil, to his arrival in Paris, stage of his greatest triumphs and consummation as a creative artist. They stop short of the George Sand era. 'Forget you're being listened to, always listen to yourself.'

12 *Études Op.10 (1829–32)* 'A big *Exercice en forme* in my own manner', dedicated to Liszt: 'a son ami F. Liszt'. 1: C major. Bachian in origin, Chopinesque in origination, a romanticised baroque chorale essaying harmonic distinct from vocal melody, unlocking 'the kingdom of technique' (the American critic James Huneker). 2: A minor. Staccato bass, legato right-hand chromatics for the third, fourth and fifth fingers. 3: E major. Arguably Chopin's most illustrious melody – descendant of the Adagio from Field's Fifth Concerto. Originally marked vivace. 4: C sharp minor. A technically spectacular, inventively extraordinary display of two-part polyphony. 5: G flat major. The composer in *Gradus ad Parnassum* mood, witty and teasing, the black-note pentatonics ready to trip up even the most consummate of *Klavier* eagles. 6: E flat minor. Fatalistic melancholy, obsessed with inner semitones. 7: C major. A double-note toccata. 8: F major. Rapid right-hand harmonies against a left-hand motif. 9: F minor. At one level stretching the left-hand, at another encapsulating the urgent and the wistful. Said to have been

written for Moscheles. 10: A flat major. 'He who can play this study in a real finished manner may congratulate himself on having climbed to the highest point of the pianist's Parnassus' (von Bülow). 11: E flat major. Widely-spread broken chords. A 'guitar ... dowered with a soul', the 'sigh' of sundown (Huneker). 12: C minor. A *cri de bravoure*, subject of much anecdotal speculation associated with Nikolai P's crushing of the Warsaw Uprising, 6–8 September 1831.

12 Études Op.25 (1832–36) Dedicated to Countess Marie d'Agoult – friend of Chopin, George Sand and the literati, companion of Liszt. 1: A flat major. 'Imagine that a [wind-blown] Aeolian harp possessed all the scales, and that an artist's hand struck these with all kinds of fantastic, elegant embellishments [...] and you will have some idea of [Chopin's] playing [...]' We felt as though we had seen a lovely form in a dream, and, half awake, we strove to seize it again' (Schumann). 2: F minor. Purling 'quiet-hand' triplets. 3: F major. The cleverness of this number, compositionally, is its circular tonal trajectory, from F to B major to F. 4: A minor. Disquietening syncopations, heightened staccato/legato contrasts. 5: E minor. Caprice and poetry (the broad-chested *maggiore* melody of the middle section. 6: G sharp minor. Will-o'-the-wisp right-hand thirds, expressive left-hand melody/accompaniment. 'With the Schumann Toccata [this] stands at the portals of the delectable land of double-notes' (Huneker). 7: C sharp minor. Minor key elegy, major-key yearning. Autumn storms, winter calms. 8: D flat major. Double-sixths. 9: G flat major. Light-action octaves. 10: B minor legato octaves double and single, heavy-duty yet songful. 11: A minor. 'Open-air music, storm music [...] processional splendour. Small-souled men, no matter how agile their fingers, should avoid it' (Huneker). 12: C minor. One of the great tone-poems, of Titanic climax and heroic chorale.

3 Nouvelles Études (B130, KK IIb/3) Berlin edition (1839) 'Composed expressly' for the final part of the *Méthode des Méthodes de Moscheles et Fétis*, comprising advanced studies, 'de perfectionnement', by Heller, Henselt, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Thalberg and others. 1: F minor. Rhythmic duality, running motion (eights-against-sixes). 2: A flat major. Rhythmic duality, chordal motion (sixes-against-fours). 3: D flat major. Legato (upper) / staccato (lower) articulation in the same hand (RH).

CD7 ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856) Symphonic Studies Op.13 (1834–37) These 'studies' in advanced composition, bravura pianism, unspecified scene painting, 'character' depiction, wandering from 'pathétique' to 'symphonic', had a complex genesis – bound up with the Davidsbündler or Davidites, Schumann's imagined army of musicians and radicals in the pages of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* waging war against the ignorants and arrogant, Establishment and Philistines, of the day ... as well as his own alter-egos, Florestan and Eusebius: Florestan, the impulsive quick man of passion and action; Eusebius, the melancholic, spiritual dreamer. The arpeggiated minor-key Thema comes from a flute melody by Baron Ignaz von Fricken, the natural father of 'Fräulein Ernestine' (briefly Schumann's fiancée before being jilted in favour of Clara Wieck). The breadth of what Schumann does with it – emphasising (romantically) self-contained incident above (classically) spiraling variation momentum – is far-reaching. From the sonorously evocative, orchestral paraphrasing of II and the Paganini-esque fantasy of III; through the purposeful canonic chording of IV, the thunder of VII (E major) and IX, the impressionism of VIII and the unforgettably humming murmur and climax of XI (G sharp minor); to the tight, incisive patterning of V and X. Schumann's original intention was to close with a 'proud triumphal procession'. In the event, struggling, he came up with something quite different. A gold-plated Anglo Saxon scena in the tonic major, D flat, drawing on Marschner's *Ivanhoe* opera, *Der Templer und die Jüdin* (1829), honouring, it seems, the work's English dedicatee, William Sterndale Bennett. What happens to this melody and its dotted-rhythms, how the initial Thema is re-introduced by way of counter-subject, how romantic cliché is applied and re-fashioned, the knock-out *fff* B flat sidestep of the last page, consolidates the whole in an exultant blaze of glory. 'Proud England, rejoice'. This performance combines Clara Schumann's standard 1862 edition (amalgamating the 1837 printing and revised 1852 finale) with the five supplementary variations edited by Brahms in 1873, variously interspersed.

6 Études after Paganini Caprices Op.3 (1832); 6 Concert Études after Paganini Caprices Op.10 (1833) Paganini of Genoa, Knight of the Golden Spur, Court Virtuoso to Franz I of Austria. Gambler, drunkard, lover, showman. A cadaverous, Mephistophelean presence. *The* supreme driving, inspiring, charismatic power of the early Romantic age before whom all felt silent, 'a miracle which the kingdom of art has seen but once' (Liszt). Schumann heard him in Frankfurt, Easter Sunday 1830. Pre-dating Liszt's six *Grandes Études* (1838–51), his slant on the *Caprices*

for solo violin Op.1 (completed in 1817), passingly duplicating Liszt's selection albeit of drastically different pianistic conception, was on the one hand of the Germanically worthy arrangement variety (Op.3), on the other of the 'free' concert type to give 'the impression of an autonomous piano composition' (Op.10). Op.3 is based on Caprices Nos. 5, 9 [*La chasse*], 11, 13 [*Devil's laughter*], 19 and 16; Op.10 on Nos. 14, 6 [*Trill*], 10, 4, 2 and 3.

CD8-9 FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886) 12 *Transcendental Études* S139 (1851 version)

'Études of tempest and dread, études for at most 10 or 12 of this world's players' (Schumann). 'About Liszt's pianoforte technique in general it may be said that it derives its efficiency from the teaching of Czerny, who brought up his pupil on Mozart, a little Bach and Beethoven, a good deal of Clementi and Hummel, and a good deal of his (Czerny's) own work. Classicism in the shape of solid, respectable Hummel on the one hand, and Carl Czerny, a trifle flippant, perhaps, and inclined to appeal to the gallery, on the other, these gave the musical parentage of young Liszt. Then appears the Parisian Incroyable and *grand seigneur* – "Monsieur Lits" ... Later, we find him imitating Paganini and Chopin, and at the same time making a really passionate and deep study of Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Berlioz. Thus gradually was formed the master of style whose command of the instrument was supreme, and who played like an inspired poet' (Dannreuther, 1911).

Sailing the spring tide of Romanticism, Liszt's studies, Busoni believed, should be 'put at the head of his pianoforte compositions'. They 'would place [him] in the rank of the "greatest" pianoforte composers since Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Alkan, Brahms'. In their pages, he intimated, are to be met 'the Mephistophelian and the Religious: he who acknowledges God does not value the Devil less – the sentimental and the inspired' characteristic of Liszt's art as a whole. 'Here he casts a magic spell and there bewitches, here his aim is to awaken feeling, there to stimulate imagination.'

Defining modern piano technique, pre-occupying Liszt from 'childhood to manhood', the death of Weber to the Great London Exhibition, unfolding 'a part of his musical autobiography in public' (Alan Walker), the *Studies of Transcendental Execution* inscribed to Carl Czerny, 'from his pupil in gratitude, esteem and friendship', exist in three versions: Op.1, mid-1820s (core), 1837 (complexification), 1851 (clarification). Telling a tale of infinite selection and metamorphosis, retention, rejection and recasting, the legend of the double-escapement concert grand from straight-strung wood frame to cross-strung iron waiting for 1853 and the Bechstein-Blüthner-Steinway

power revolution, all three – acknowledging Kessler's Op.20 studies dedicated to Hummel (c.1825): 'years ago, my dear sir, I worked a good deal on your beautiful études' – follow the same distinctive key pattern of *falling* fifths, majors (C to D flat) paired with relative minors.

1 *Preludio*, C major. 'Less a prelude to the cycle than a prelude to test the instrument and the disposition of the performer after stepping on to the concert platform' (Busoni). 2: [*Fusées* (Rockets)], A minor. 'Paganini devilries' (Busoni). 3: *Paysage* (Landscape), F major. 'An étude only by courtesy,' Ernest Hutcheson maintained, 'a study, if you will, in legato and portamento ... but essentially a lyric that might have come from the *Années de Pèlerinage*.' 4: *Mazeppa*, D minor. There are three Mazeppas – the one of history, the one of imagination ... and Liszt's. Iván Stepanovich (c.1646–1709), voice and deed of Ukrainian Resistance. Legend says that at the court of the Polish king he loved the young wife of a Polodian count. His punishment was to be lashed naked to a wild unbroken stallion, whipped and sent galloping across the plains, east in the eye of the rising sun, 'flying with the winds [...] like a globe of fire'. For three days man and beast raced, the horse meeting death, Mazeppa a band of Cossacks. The Mazeppa of imagination, of 19th-century poets, painters and musicians, is a freer figure – a Romantic, a man of perennial youth in search of love and liberty, possessed by power, burnt by passion. Liszt's Mazeppa was one such, pictured principally through his Hell Ride, Desolation, Salvation and Kingship. For 50 years, like Faust, Dante, Rome, Mephisto, the gypsies, he consumed the composer. 5: *Feux follets*, B flat major. One of the supreme tests of *leggerissimo* articulation, clarity of voicing, rhythmic finesse and scherzando élan at the hushed end of the dynamic spectrum, the music attaining *fortissimo* for only two-and-a-half bars, operating otherwise in mainly the *piano* or *pianissimo* dimension. According to rural lore, will-o'-the-wisps – the ghost lights or 'corpse candles' sometimes seen glimmering in the damp air at dusk or during the dark hours – were malignant impish spirits leading travellers to their doom. That, or the tumbling souls of the stillborn and the unchristened lost between heaven and hell. 6: *Vision*, G minor/major. Darkened by echoes of 'Dies Irae', a study in basaltic sounds and regal pianism. 7: *Eroica*, E flat major. A Valhalla march key-specific to that tradition from the 'Eroica' to *Ein Heldenleben*, the 'Emperor' to the Rachmaninov Étude-tableau and the Medtner Dithyramb. 8: *Wilde Jagd* (Wild Hunt), C minor. The Wild Hunt of northern peoples. Phantom horsemen, creatures of the night, demons of ill-omen racing the sky. The form of the piece alludes loosely to a sonata design without repeats, the 'reprise' omitting

the ‘first subject’ (otherwise drawn upon in the ‘development’ and ‘re-transition’). 9: *Ricordanza* (Remembrance, Souvenir), A flat major. ‘The impression of a bundle of faded love letters from a somewhat old-fashioned world of sentiment’ (Busoni). 10: F minor. ‘The title *Appassionata* would well suit’ (Busoni). Yet music, too, sharing something with the restless climate of Chopin’s F minor Study Op.10 No.9 (1829, inscribed to Liszt) and Schumann’s *In der Nacht* Op.12 No.5 (1837). 11: *Harmonies du soir* (Evening Harmonies), D flat major. Flowers fading like incense, sounds and perfumes in the air, a tormented heart, a sad beautiful sky spread like a vast altar before the drowning sun, Baudelaire’s *Harmonie du Soir* post-dated the title and publication of Liszt’s third version by five years. Yet, sharing the heady air of an epoch, poem and music seem inexorably wedded. Liszt, Baudelaire cherished, the ‘singer of everlasting Delight and Anguish, philosopher, poet and artist’. 12: *Chasse-neige* (Snow Plough, Whirls of Snow), B flat minor. ‘The noblest example, perhaps, amongst all music of a poetising nature – a sublime and steady fall of snow which gradually buries landscape and people’ (Busoni). A sunless winter panorama the bleaker by its choice of key (Henselt’s favourite ‘Russian’ one), involving all the black notes of the instrument.

6 *Grandes Études de Paganini S141* (1851 version) Chopin, Schumann, Moscheles, Henselt ... Liszt. Liszt ‘the handsome and fascinating *enfant gâté* of the salons and ateliers – “La Neuvième Merveille du monde”’ (Dannreuther). Liszt the émigré teacher turned *Claviertiger* turned mesophoric transcendentalist. The pale aspirant who at 20 generated ‘all the passions at the keyboard – terror, fright, horror, despair, love brought to delirium’, whose lessons were ‘a course in musical declamation’, who preferred revolution and strife to law and order (Madame Auguste Boissier, Paris, 1831–32). Protagonist of Bach fugue and the studies of Bertini, Clementi, Czerny, Kalkbrenner, Kessler, Mayer, Moscheles, Zimmermann. The conquerer of the flowing mane and straight posture who at 30 overwhelmed Russia, ‘a brilliant, passionate, denomic temperament, at one moment rushing like a whirlwind, at another pouring forth cascades of tender beauty and grace’ (Vladimir Stasov, St Petersburg, 8 April 1842). Liszt, the North Star of empires and horizons.

Two versions – S140 (1838) and S141 (1851) – exist of the *Paganini Studies*, dedicated to Clara Schumann. Pianistically, the ’38 text – ‘uncommonly interesting’ to Moscheles, preferred by Sacherell Sitwell – all but defies. The clarified ’51 re-working encourages. In their dazzle and notation, embellishments and illusions, their explosion of technique and texture, neither leaves any doubt of Liszt’s quest to become the unconquerable Paganini of the ebonies-and-ivories. In his ‘third party’ review (*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1839), Schumann observed that while his own

arrangements were ‘intended to bring out the poetic side of the composition more, those of Liszt, without ignoring its poetry, rather aim at placing its virtuosity in relief ... Very few will be able to master them; perhaps only four or five in the world.’ Paraphrasing, Humphrey Searle in 1952 suggested that if Schumann was nearer to the *notes* of the source, Liszt was closer to the *spirit*.

Overall, the six 1851 studies address (loosely) a range of technical issues. 1: arpeggios, scales, tremolos. 2: octaves, descending scale ornaments. 3: repeated notes, leaps, trills. 4: arpeggios, hands alternating, double-note scales. 5: double-notes, glissandi. 6: contrasted applications. The piano galaxy as it was by the middle of the 19th century. 1: *Preludio & Étude*, G minor (Caprices Nos. 5, 6). 2: E flat major (Caprice No.17). 3: *La campanella* (The Bell), G sharp minor. (Rondo-finale of Paganini’s Second Violin Concerto, 1826). 4: E major. (Caprice No.1, incorporating a quotation from Locatelli’s Caprice No.7, *L’arte del violino* Op.3, 1733). Visually, this remarkably restrained study is audacious, written out on just a single treble staff – the *spiccato* breath of a fluttering bird. 5: [‘La Chasse’ (The Hunt)], E major. How Schumann and Liszt treated Paganini’s ascending *feu d’artifice* runs in the A minor episode focusses the differences of daring between the two men. 6: A minor. ‘He who is able to master these variations, and in such an easy, sportive manner that they glide past the hearer – as they should – like the scenes of a marionette show, may travel securely round the world, to return crowned with the golden laurels of a second Liszt–Paganini’ (Schumann).

2 *Concert Études S145* (c.1862–63) Liszt wrote these final ‘art’ studies in Rome as a contribution to Lebert and Stark’s *Grosse theoretisch-praktische Klavierschule*. He dedicated them to his former Weimar pupil Dionys Pruckner (1834–1896) – the first person other than himself to play the E flat Concerto, Jena 12 January 1855. 1: *Waldesrauschen* (Forest Murmurs), D flat major. Vivace, 4/4. ‘We hear the wind rising softly, caressing the leaves as it moves through the forest. The murmuring sounds swell, die away again, then grow stronger and louder until the wind shakes the branches of the mightiest trees and spreads havoc all around. Next it takes to careering wildly, whistling through the leaves; only to die away again at the end to the merest whisper’ (Tilly Fleischmann). 2: *Gnomensreigen* (Round-Dance of the Gnomes), F sharp minor/major. ‘A lively contrasting scherzando of wayward spirits’ (Searle). A gossamer study for alternating hands, late cousin to *Feux follets*.

***La leggierezza S144/2* (c.1848)** The second of Liszt’s three Concert Studies or *Caprices Poétiques*. Within its F minor triplets, sixths and quiet-hand runs lie echoes of Chopin.

LISZT/BUSONI *6 Grandes Études de Paganini, after S141* (1916–23) Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) edited the Liszt studies in 1911. His amplified/enriched version of the revised 1851 Paganini set was published integrally in 1925 (*Klavierübung*, Book X, December 1923–January 1924). Apart from adding titles to Nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 – Tremolo, Andantino Capriccioso, Arpeggio, La Chasse, Tema e Variazioni – he left himself free to change or even re-compose the text. *La Campanella*, for instance, goes back partially to Liszt’s earlier *Grande Fantaisie de bravoure sur la Clochette de Paganini S420* (1831–32). No.6 – the ubiquitous A minor Caprice – is described as a ‘free arrangement’. No.2 refers briefly to the 1838 original.

CD10–12 CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN (1813–1888) *12 Études in all the minor keys Op.39 Nos. 1–7* (published 1857) Franco-Ashkenazi Jewish, contemporary of Wagner and Verdi, friend and neighbour of Chopin, man of mystery and enigma, dreamer of the fantastic, creator of future worlds out of antique pasts, Classical ghosts and Romantic wraiths, dedicatee of Rubinstein’s Fifth Concerto, Alkan was one of the great minds of 19th-century Paris. ‘Among his immediate contemporaries,’ Wilfrid Mellers opined, ‘he is closest to Berlioz, who also “does coolly the things that are most fiery”’; it may be the fusion of this aristocratic French poise with Jewish cabalistic fervour that defines Alkan’s unique savour – simultaneously wry and visionary, acrid and sumptuous, religious and Mephistophelean’ (*Times Literary Supplement*, 16/22 October 1987). Alkan may have composed almost entirely for the piano – but his music (as von Bülow recognised) traverses a range of sonorities, a cosmos of textural spacings and extremes, a span of melodic dialogues and chordal balances as brilliantly lit and theatrically charged in their associative imagery as anything orchestral. More than once he aspires to spheres uncannily Mahlerian in their vision of innocence and wisdom, of the beautiful and the celestial, the pastoral, the worldly, the imploring, the grand, the bold, the bizarre.

A Bible of super-technique to place beside Liszt and Chopin, ordered in falling fifths (*cf* Kessler Op.20, Liszt *Transcendentals*), the Twelve Études Op.39 were published in Paris in 1857, dedicated to Fétis, elder statesman of the Gallic Establishment, Director of the Brussels Conservatoire. Incorporating orchestrally allusive genres – *Symphony* (Nos. 4–7), *Concerto* (8–10), *Overture* (No.11) – together with a pianistically celebrated closing variation sequence (*Le Festin d’Esopé*), the cycle is aflame with creative innovation, imaginative resource and ever-expanding keyboard

invention. In its 275 pages it ‘charts a voyage of discovery as tortuous and craggy as a Himalayan ascent; yet he who undertakes it will be rewarded with a panorama as awe-inspiring as any to be discovered in the piano literature of the 19th century’ (Ronald Smith).

1: *Comme le vent* (Like the wind), A minor. High velocity demisemiquaver triplets. 2: *En rythme molossique* (In molossian rhythm), D minor. ‘The dour, harsh, heavy brutality of ... rhythm is magnificently expressed’ (Sorabji). ‘A motivic minuet [propelled] by a ponderous rhythmic cell’ (William Alexander Eddie). 3: *Scherzo diabolico*, G minor. A Mephistophelean film noir recalling (Nelly Akopian-Tamarina suggests) the Brahms of the E flat minor Scherzo Op.4, published three years earlier.

4–7: *Symphony*. Proposing a ‘progressive tonality’ of keys descending darkly from C to E flat minor, the ‘Symphony’ is an orchestrally imagined yet orchestrally untranslatable work of heroic pianistic power, the four movements notably inter-woven and linked. Acknowledging the rhythmic variation and cellular style of Beethovenian precedent more than the overt aural signposting of Lisztian metamorphosis, the first, third and fourth movements, for example, all grow organically out of the same motif rising stepwise from tonic to mediant. In the Menuet and Finale, following anticipations in the first and second movements (the main theme of the latter retrograding the ascent), this pattern is expanded to include the minor sixth of the scale. 4: *Allegro*, C minor. Big-boned in a pre-‘Brahmsian’ way. 5: *Marche funèbre*, F minor. An urgent rather than slow march (88 steps to the minute), remembering Weber (*Konzertstück*, Second Sonata) in its *sostenuto* melody/*secco* accompaniment texture, and beckoning Mahler (First Symphony). 6: *Menuet*, B flat minor. With its Beethoven energy/Brucker swing, this is removed from the courtly dance of measured etiquette French royalists pre-Bastille would have known, the scherzo from Chopin’s *Funeral March* Sonata a recurrent backstage presence. 7: *Finale*, E flat minor. Tornado-like, without repeats or *ritardandi*, this sweeps all before it, a tour de force mixing octave-study, toccata, ‘spectral double counterpoint’ and wisps of chorale, Beethoven dance (*Prometheus–Eroica*) in the wings. ‘A tragic, wild ride,’ imagined Raymond Lewenthal, ‘not to Hell ... but already in Hell’.

3 *Grand Études for two hands, separated and reunited Op.76* (1838–40) A Jovian manifesto of keyboard technique, resource and invention, the Trois Grandes Études, in spite of their late opus number, are an early creation, contemporary with the first version of Liszt's *Paganini Studies*. Ronald Smith claims that they 'alone establish Alkan as the rival, if not indeed the peer, of Liszt as the joint architect of transcendental piano technique'. From Liszt and Thalberg to Busoni and Sorabji, there is nothing like them in the repertory. 1: *Fantasy*, A flat major (left-hand). A magical world of sounds, cadences and dreams. Busoni played it in Berlin in 1908. Ravel, too, knew it. 2: *Introduction, variations and finale*, D major (right-hand). Classically disciplined, romantically incandescent, long, this takes the right-hand to stratospheric summits of experience. No puissance course of more testing endurance can be envisaged. 3: *Étude*, C minor (both hands). From jump steeplechase to flat sprint, separate to united hands, a presto of terrifying muscular/psychological adjustment. Could Chopin have known its hurtling *piano* and hairpinned monody when writing the finale of his *Funeral March Sonata*?

12 *Études in all the minor keys Op.39 Nos. 8–12* (published 1857) 8–10: *Concerto*. 'Arguably the most stupendously resplendent pianistic creation of the 19th century' is how Adrian Corleonis describes the Alkan Concerto. 8: *1^{re} partie*, G sharp minor. A 29-minute first movement, classically modelled (with intricately conceived tutti and solo textures demarcating a Prelude-Exposition-Ritornello-Middle Episode/Development-Recapitulation-Coda design). 9: *2^e partie*, C sharp minor. A chilling central lament of anguished dialogue and bleak recitative, of pounding hammer-blows to the heart. 10: *3^e partie*, F sharp minor. A stamping, boots-and-spurs finale where court and ghetto, polonaise and Jew dance, Parisian ladies and Hungarian horsemen entwine in exultant delirium. Its totality, its quasi-orchestral suggestion, its delicacy no less than its power, is quite extraordinary. 11: *Overture*, B minor. Signing off the 'orchestral' concert within the Op.39 cycle, this is a tripartite structure, severely rhythmic, with an extended hunting-style 'apotheosis of the dance' 6/8 coda in the major. 12: *Le Festin d'Ésope* (Aesop's Feast), E minor. Twenty-five variations and coda on an archaic 16-bar binary theme, each half closing in the tonic. Which of Aesop's fabled life-forms cross these pages the composer leaves to our reverie. 'Give your imagination free play and do not feel any more scruples about confining it to creatures of the Aegean than Alkan did about using a tune distinctly more Semitic than Hellenic on which to base this flight of fancy. Magic carpets care nothing for geography' (Lewenthal).

12 *Études in all the major keys Op.35* (completed 1847) Admired by von Bülow, the Op.35 Studies, like the larger-scaled Op.39 set, follow a tonal circle of falling fifths – from A to E via the tritonal aphelion of E flat major. Mark Viner writes: Perhaps the most enigmatic figure in the history of music, let alone the 19th century, Charles-Valentin Alkan remains one of the most intriguing and alluring [not to say reclusive] names among the pantheon of pianist-composers. As a pianist, he must have been in possession of an almost frightening command of the instrument and it was reputed that he was the only pianist before whom Liszt felt ill-at-ease to perform. 1: *Allegretto*, A major. The brevity and character of this étude, with its rolled chords and airy open textures, is suggestive of a prelude. 2: *Allegro*, D major. This is fashioned primarily from a three-note triplet figuration, first staccato then legato, which chases its tail with copy-cat oscillations. 3: *Andantino*, G major. This yields a wealth of harmonic piquancies through the shimmering textures of its opening pages, which give little heed of the turbulences to come. 4: *Presto*, C major. A scintillating will-o'-the-wisp, that has to be the most taxing tremolo étude ever conceived. 5: *Allegro barbaro*, F major. Perhaps the most well-known étude of the set which, more than half a century ahead of its time, remains one of the most striking conceptions in the entire piano literature. Ronald Smith has suggested that Bartók may have become acquainted with it through Busoni, inspiring him to compose his own *Allegro barbaro* in 1911. 6: *Allegro moderato*, B flat major. The carefree opening theme, delicately lilting in graceful skips across the keyboard, sounds, perversely, like the simplest thing in the world while untold perils plague the performer, giving little respite.

7: *L'incendie au village voisin* (Fire in the neighbouring village), E flat major. One of Alkan's few works which function along the lines of a programmatic free fantasy/tone poem. 8: *Lento appassionato*, A flat major. One of the undisputed jewels of the set ... ['An exquisite garden scene, a love duet accompanied by softly plucking lutes ... in a fabled land of griffins, fountains and unicorns' (Lewenthal).] 9: *Contrapunctus*, C sharp major. Nothing could come as more of a shock after the cosy romanticism of the preceding number than the monstrous opening of this study. It is, like much of Alkan's music, quite unlike anything else. 10: *Chant d'amour – Chant de mort: Et quando expectavi lumen, venit caligo* (Song of love – Song of death: And when I looked for light, darkness came), G flat major. Like the seventh of the set, this is the only one to bear a descriptive title and is similarly structured. 11: *Posément* (Sedately), B major. ['The middle voice becomes ... an upper or lower voice in turn, in a way that only variety of shading can make it perceptible to the ear' (von Bülow).] 12: *Étude de Concert: Technique des octaves*, E major. A bravura 10/16 [prospect] calculated to bring an audience to its feet.

CD13 CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921) ‘The Victor Hugo of music,’ Nicolas Slonimsky wrote once, ‘apostle of clarity and immediacy of communication [whose works] endure in posterity despite their essentially neutral aesthetic quality’, Saint-Saëns was an elegant, fluent writer – ‘I compose like an apple tree produces apples’ – whose admirers included Rossini, Liszt, Gounod, Ravel, Honegger and Proust. Berlioz, too – who opined that the *only* thing he possibly lacked was inexperience. He was not without detractors, though, his dislike of Debussy spurring particularly bad feeling. ‘Just as there are many mansions in our Father’s house,’ he mused in his *Musical Memories*, ‘so there are many in Apollo’s. Art is vast. The artist has a perfect right to descend to the nethermost depths and to enter into the inner secrets of the soul, but this right is not a duty ... the rose with its fresh colour and its perfume, is, in its way, as precious as the sturdy oak.’

6 *Études Op.52* (1877) ‘Tone quality by the finger only, a precious expedient that has become rare in our days.’ Saint-Saëns was as much legendary pianist as organist. He studied with Camille-Marie Stamaty, pupil and assistant of Kalkbrenner, *maître suprême* of the ‘light, fluent’ 19th-century French school. Op.52 was the first of three books of studies – testing technique, idiom, style and *jeu perlé* playing. 1: *Prélude*, C major, the emphasis on bravura. For Édouard Marlois, student, friend. 2: *Pour l’indépendance des doigts* (For the independence of the fingers), A minor, *malinconico* in mood. For Wilhelm Krüger, teacher and salon virtuoso, professor of piano at the Stuttgart Königliches Konservatorium für Musik. 3: *Prélude et Fugue*, F minor. Double-note Prelude, nuances of Mendelssohnian baroque and Brahmsian peroration in the three-part Fugue. For Anton Rubinstein, conductor of the premiere of Saint-Saëns’s Second Piano Concerto, Paris 13 May 1868. 4: *Étude de rythme*, A flat major. Twos-against-threes, redolent of Chopin’s A flat Nouvelle étude. For Constance Pontet. 5: *Prélude et Fugue*, A major. Legato prelude – the verticalisation of broken chords; four-part fugue. For Nikolai Rubinstein, founder of the Russian Musical Society and Moscow Imperial Conservatory. 6: *En forme de Valse*, D flat major. Saint-Saëns ‘brings to our artistic unrest a little of the light and sweetness of other times. His compositions are like fragments of another world’ (Romain Rolland). For Marie Jaëll, student, friend.

6 *Études Op.111* (1892–99) 1: *Tierces majeures et mineures* (Major and Minor Thirds), G sharp minor. An exacting essay in thirds for both hands, following on from the same-key study in Chopin’s Op.25. For Arthur de Greef, pupil of Brassin and Liszt. 2: *Traits chromatiques*, A minor. A lithe demisemi-quaver work-out, apparitions of winged Mendelssohn and succubi never far away. For Louis Livon, Marseilles Conservatoire. 3: *Prélude et Fugue*, E flat minor. Urgency pushes on the prelude, the Picardy third ‘ritardando’ at the end notated metrically (*cf* Brahms’s G minor Rhapsody); four-part organistic Fugue, legato and expressive. For Charles Malherbe, librarian at the Paris Opéra, musicologist, collaborator, friend. 4: *Les Cloches de Las Palmas* (The Bells of Las Palmas), G sharp Aeolian. A Gran Canaria tone-poem, warm with shivers of chill breeze at sunset, somewhere between Albéniz and Debussy. For Clotilde Kleeberg, German pianist, member of the Académie Française. 5: *Tierces majeures chromatiques* (Chromatic Major Thirds), D major. Yet another finger-twisting exercise in double-notes, ancestrally Chopin and *Feux follets*. For Édouard Risler, German pianist, pupil of Diémer, Klindworth, Stavenhagen and d’Albert. 6: *Toccata d’après le final du 5^e concerto*, F major, *molto allegro*. A high-wire display on themes from the third movement of the Fifth Piano Concerto, the ‘Egyptian’ (1896), with snatches of bar-room ragtime. Like the closing number of the Op.52 collection, the sort of visceral show-stopper that sends audiences hysterical and (were it ever selected) competition juries apoplectic, divided between heart and head, adulation and disapproval, young and old. For Raoul Pugno, Paris Conservatoire, pupil of Georges Mathias who studied with Kalkbrenner and Chopin.

6 *Études for the left-hand alone Op.135* (1912) Here we meet with the reportedly ‘boorish’ Saint-Saëns in neo-baroque mood, effectively writing a ‘harpsichord’ suite opening and closing in G major but with tonal/modal digressions – No.3 is in E major, No.4 in G minor, No.5 in D flat. Saint-Saëns’s correspondence confirms that he composed it for his close friend and duet partner Caroline de Serres (-Wieczffinski) [Caroline Montigny-Rémaury], who had had an operation on her right-hand in 1912. Glimpses of Couperin and Rameau, Scarlatti in the closing Gigue, catch the attention. The two-part Fugue (2) is resourceful and *brillante*; the Moto perpetuo (3) buoyant, equalised in touch, tranquil in mood; the Bourrée (4) loosely coloured with Grieg *Holberg* tints. Only the *Élégie* (5) is out of style, a piece of yearning high Romanticism, sending the piano – for Saint-Saëns in pre-Great War Paris an Érard by choice – into musing, nostalgic spheres of the spirit.

CD14 JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897) *Studies for Piano: Variations on a Theme of Paganini Op.35 (1862–63)* ‘The creator of immortal works, the singer of immortal songs, the first among the musicians of the present and one of the greatest masters of all peoples and times, the saviour, upholder, and guardian of German music, the worthy and equal successor of a Bach and Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann’ (Max Kalbeck, obituary). First performed by the composer in Zürich, 25 November 1865, the *Paganini Variations* – challenging Tausig’s pianism, admired by Liszt (‘[these] ‘Paganini caprices have more value than my own’) – consolidated the Schumannesque study-variation as a romantic duality. Based on the A minor Caprice from the Italian’s Op.1 (in deceptively simple guise, unlike Liszt’s presentation), the two self-contained but interconnected books comprise 14 studies each, tackling transcendental aspects of piano technique, mostly at high velocity. *Hexenvariationen* (Witch’s Variations) Clara Schumann called them. Where moments of respite come (Book I, vars xi-xiii; Book II, vars iv, xii-xiii – broadly reflecting the classical variation notion of relaxation before finale), they add up to some of Brahms’s most sensitively beautiful pages. As demanding mechanistically as Handel’s are musically or Schumann’s spiritually, Paganini’s were perceived by Tovey over a century ago to be ‘the most essentially brilliant set of variations that has ever taken its place among truly great works of art’. Outwardly, they pay court to the showman kings of the Romantic age. Inwardly, they attend to more lasting issues. Brahms the public virtuoso confronting Brahms the private composer is their paradox and fascination. ‘Brahms and Paganini! Was ever so strange a couple in harness? Caliban and Ariel, Jove and Puck. The stolid German, the vibratile Italian! Yet fantasy wins, even if brewed in a homely Teutonic kettle ... These diabolical variations, the last word in the technical literature of the piano, are also vast spiritual problems. To play them requires fingers of steel, a heart of burning lava and the courage of a lion’ (Huneker, *Mezzotints in Modern Music*).

SERGEI BORTKIEWICZ (1877–1952) *Études from Opp. 15 & 29 (published 1911, 1924)* What so many Russians created up to and beyond the Second World War was like some communal homage to the mansions, dachas and lands of their youth – faded photographs of grand balls and nested dolls, tsars and princesses, pistols-at-dawn, opera nights and summer estates, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky, firebirds and petrushkas. You hear it in Bortkiewicz’s music. You find it in Medtner’s

titles. You sense it in Rachmaninov’s playing. Phantoms of a vanished world, to borrow Nicolas Slonimsky’s phrase ‘psychologically [...] still in old Russia’. Bortkiewicz was born in Kharkiv, to a cultured Polish family of privileged background. He studied with Lyadov in St Petersburg and then with the alcoholic Alfred Reisenauer, a pupil of Liszt, in Leipzig. From 1904 he lived in Berlin, his contemporaries including d’Albert, Busoni and Scharwenka, and from 1922 in Vienna. Being on the wrong side of the cloth in the wrong place at the wrong time was the over-riding misfortune of Bortkiewicz’s life. Being a Russian in Berlin immediately before 1914, a White Russian in 1918, a Russian in Hitler’s Germany, a Russian in Soviet-secotred post-1945 *Third Man* Vienna, went tragically against him. An arch Romantic, he was a miniaturist but with the faculty to think big, and an ability to write for the piano in the grand manner. From ten *Études Op.15*, inscribed ‘A la mémoire de mon cher maître Alfred Reisenauer’ – 6: G sharp minor, sustained and harmonically valedictory, aromatically Scriabinesque; 10: E minor, furioso and pesante. From 12 [titled] *Études Nouvelles Op.29*, dedicated to Hugo van Dalen, friend, former pupil of Röntgen, Stradal and Busoni – 3: *La Brune* (The Brunette), C sharp minor, passionate; 6: *Le Héros* (The Hero), E flat major, forceful and proud.

ALFREDO CASELLA (1883–1947) *6 Studi Op.70 (1942–44)* Casella spent 19 years in Paris, studying at the Conservatoire with Fauré and Diémer (the Marmontel disciple who went on to teach Cortot and Robert Casadesus). He enjoyed the companionship of Ravel and Enescu, and befriended Debussy and Falla. A ‘necklace of studies’ (composer’s preface) written in memory of Chopin and Ravel, the Op.70 collection was dedicated to leading Italian pianists of the younger generation: Carlo Zecchi (student of Busoni and Schnabel); Armando Renzi (Casella, Pizzetti); Maria Luisa Faini (Casella’s assistant, who joined the Eastman School of Music in 1966); Marcella Barzetti (Schnabel, 11th to Gilels at the 1938 Ysaÿe Competition); Lya De Barberiis (Longo, Casella, Marguerite Long); Pietro Scarpini (Casella). In the manner of the Debussy *Études*, each addresses a particular technical/interval issue: 1: major thirds; 2: major and minor sevenths; 3: legato fourths; 4: repeating action; 5: fifths (*Omaggio a Chopin* [A major Prelude]); 6: presto semiquavers, articulation (*Perpetuum mobile [Toccata]*).

CÉCILE CHAMINADE (1857–1944) *6 Études de concert Op.35* (published c.1886) Chaminade, ‘Sainte Cécile’, was a gifted, accomplished French composer, pianist and recording artist (specialising in her own music) idolised from Britain to North America and Australasia – ‘perhaps the most successful woman composer in her lifetime’ (Sandra Crawshaw). Bizet admired her, and Le Couppey and Benjamin Godard taught her privately. But she paid a price for her gender. Firstly through her father’s unshakeable opinion that ‘girls of the bourgeoisie are intended to become [only] wives and mothers’. Secondly through the probability that ‘critical evaluations of her music through much of the 20th century were based more on gender stereotypes’ than independent musical reasoning (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Immaculately, sonorously cast for the instrument, the Op.35 Studies, dating from around the period of Saint-Saëns’s Third Symphony, are of the descriptive character variety à la Henselt. 1: *Scherzo*, C major. Mainly, but not only, *leggiero* double-notes. For Gustaw Lewita, Polish pianist who came to Paris and died young, buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery. 2: *Automne*, D flat major. Elevated lyric song, perhaps Chaminade’s best known piece. For Countess Hélène [Halina] Kryżanowska, a Paris-born pianist-composer of Polish blood-line, student of Marmontel at the Conservatoire. 3: *Fileuse* (The Spinner), E major. For Louis Livon. 4: *Appassionato*, C minor. Relentless bravura semiquavers. For Caroline de Serres (-Montigny) [Caroline Montigny-Rémaury], a former pupil of Liszt in Weimar, in later years Saint-Saëns’s duet partner. 5: *Impromptu*, F major. A nocturnal, decorative landscape, ‘with fantasy’. For Marguerite Lamoureux [Marguerite Chevillard], daughter of the conductor and violinist Charles Lamoureux, founder of the Concerts Lamoureux. 6: *Tarentelle*, D major. A gracious slant on the Chopin/Heller manner, bacchanalian Liszt left to others. For Marie Jaëll.

CD15 SERGEI LYAPUNOV (1859–1924) *12 Transcendental Studies Op.11* (1897–1905) A noted second generation New Russian Balakirev nationalist, Lyapunov trained at the Moscow Imperial Conservatory with Pabst and Klindworth (pupils of Liszt) and Taneyev (formerly Tchaikovsky’s student). He sought out Balakirev in the 1880s, and the following decade, at the request of the Imperial Geographical Society, spent time collecting folk songs with him and Lyadov. In St Petersburg he was head of the Free Music School and, under Glazunov’s rectorship, taught piano and composition at the Conservatory (1910–18). Following the Revolution, he emigrated to Paris in 1923, joining fellow Russians there like Prokofiev, Diaghilev, Chagall and (transiently)

Stravinsky. Intricate and exhilarating, his programmatic Transcendental Studies published in Leipzig in 1905, dedicated to the memory of Liszt – fusing Russian tradition and folklore, advanced pianism, and theatrical tone painting – continue Liszt’s cycle of falling fifths, majors paired with relative minors, F sharp to G. Their spiralling energy, dynamic, and heart-on-the-sleeve profiling is relentless.

1: *Berceuse*, F sharp major (1897–98). Shadowed by folk song, rubbed distantly by Field and Chopin. 2: *Ronde des Fantômes* (Dance of the Ghosts), D sharp minor (1897–98). A predominantly high-velocity two-part texture. 3: *Carillon* (Bells), B major (1901). ‘In the distance is heard the ringing of a bell, across the measured strokes of which come the sounds of a hymn. The ringing grows louder and louder and the church-chimes blend with the sounds of the principal bell. The solemn tones of the hymn alternate with the sounds of the bells, ending in a general majestic choral effect interspersed with the deep sounds of the great bell’ (Lyapunov). One of the delineating ‘bell’ scenes of the *via russe* from Mussorgsky to Rachmaninov – tonally magnificent, physically ecstatic. 4: *Térek*, G sharp minor (1900). ‘Through the rocks in wildest courses/Seethes the Térek grim of mood,/Tempest howling its bewailing,/Pearled with foam its tearful flood./At the mountain’s feet soft streaming,/Gentler grown its murmurs be,/And with greeting full of fawning/Speaks to the Caspian Sea’ (Lemontov, prefacing the score). A cameo of pictorial contrasts, instrumental allusions (flute, piccolo), and Caucasian/Borodinesque derivation (the Térek rises in Georgia). 5: *Nuit d’été* (Summer night), E major (1900). An expansive nocturne counterbalancing Liszt’s *Ricordanza*, with at least one motivic reference to Chopin (Fourth Ballade). 6: *Tempête* (Tempest), C sharp minor (1897). The earliest of the études to be written. 7: *Idyll*, A major (1901). A Russian pastoral scene, intimately suggestive, decoratively detailed. 8: *Chant épique* (Epic song). F sharp minor (1903). This *bylina* or Kievan soldier’s song, climaxing in abandoned dance, is based on one Lyapunov collected ten years before, ‘Iz-za lesu, lesu temnogo’ (Out of the woods, dark woods). 9: *Harpes éoliennes* (Aeolian harps), D major (1902). The aeolian harp, the harmonic harp, the spirit harp – an instrument from antiquity, the strings and other-worldly resonances of which are trembled into vibration by the wind. Following Chopin (Op.25 No.1; the introduction to the Polonaise Fantasy) and Liszt (*Chasse-neige*), Lyapunov fashions an *una corda* world of incessant 64th-note tremolos, flowering chords of harmony and wisps of melody floating on air. A piano fancier’s smoke rings. 10: *Lezghinka*, B minor (1903). A wild ‘Islamey’ dance from the Caucasus. ‘The woman moves

in a circle lightly, like a floating bird, her demure gestures challenging her impetuous partner ... with each successive round the tempo accelerates. The man encircles his partner, confidently and with grace ... catching hold of the ends of his long flying sleeves he throws his arms open, eager to embrace her. Scarcely touching the ground with the toes of his soft boots, he performs a complex rhythmic pattern with his feet. In full flight he drops on his knees and rebounds in the air ... The woman, glowing with suppressed excitement, now comes dancing closer to him, now moves away again' (Grigori Schneerson). B minor masculine, D flat feminine. 11: *Ronde des sylphes* (Dance of the sylphs), G major (1905). Lyapunov's *Feux follets*, a scherzando dazzle of gossamer double-notes and puckish leaps. 12: *Élégie en mémoire de François Liszt* (Elegy in memory of Liszt), E minor (1905). A statue in bronze and granite, thunderously grander than the man if that were at all possible, the Hungarian style cloaked in the key of the Fifth Rhapsody, the *Héroïde-élégiaque*. Here, through homage, rhetoric and half-quotation, stands palpably the godfather of Romantic Russian pianism, cloaked in all his darkness, diamonds and destiny. The demands – pianistically, 'orchestrally' – are phenomenal, the narrative commanding: Liszt, the 'brilliant, passionate, demonic temperament' (Stasov), Liszt 'the past, the present, the future of the piano' (von Lenz). Creator, pasticheur, poet, a stranger to reticence, Lyapunov must have been a wondrous player, one of the grand sound hunters of history. He premiered the cycle in St Petersburg, spring 1906.

CD16 SERGEI RACHMANINOV (1873–1943) *Études-tableaux* Opp. 33 & 39 (1911, 1916–17)
 'A composer's music should express the country of his birth, his love affairs, his religion, the books which have influenced him, the pictures he loves. It should be the product of the sum total of [his] experiences' (*The Étude*, December 1941). A vibrant outpouring of personal imagination, enigmatically combining the art-study tradition of Chopin-Liszt-Lyapunov-Scriabin with the narrative horizons of Mussorgsky, what stories the two books of *Études-tableaux* tell Rachmaninov kept largely to himself. He was a man who 'cared little for what we might call "physical" programme music [in the Strauss understanding] ... [but he] liked an external influence; he liked to be captivated or inspired by a picture or a poem, but the inspiration having been found he relegated the actual subject to the background and rarely revealed its identity' (John Culshaw). The first book originally omitted Nos. 3 and 4 (C minor, D minor), published posthumously in 1948. Sketches apart, the second book was the last music Rachmaninov completed in Russia.

Times were sorrowful: Scriabin and Taneyev ('Moscow's musical leader', Rachmaninov's mentor at the Conservatory) had died a little over a year previously. Rachmaninov's father, too. Century defining: the murder of Rasputin, the Tsar's abdication and assassination, anarchy, Revolution. Grim: betrayal, killing, plunder, disease, the nobility of the realm (Princess Galitzine remembered in her memoirs) reduced to bartering their Bechsteins and Érards for sacks of potato and handfuls of flour. An English writer in 1922 noted that the great man 'bore still the marks of his mental torture and anxieties of the last months in Russia, before his escape ... The threatened disintegration of a great soul'. Five of the *Tableaux* were described by Rachmaninov in a letter to Respighi. Op.33 – No.6: 'a scene at a fair' (a lonely ocean, desolate birds, the Northern light veiled in *Dies irae* tones). Op.39 – No.2: 'the sea and seagulls'; No.6: 'the tale of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf'; No.7: 'a funeral march ... the singing of a choir ... a fine rain incessant and hopeless'; No.9: 'resembling an oriental march' (the martial and the motoric, tales and toccatas, dry ricochets and pugilist blows, rhythmic displacements, gilded carillons – favourite hunting grounds all).

CD17 ALEXANDER SCRIBIN (1872[71]–1915) *Complete Études* 'When Scriabin plays, there is no piano, only a beautiful woman, and he caresses her' (Konstantin Balmont). Championed by Safonov and Taneyev, Scriabin's place in the annals of Russian music is special: his, from the beginning, was a voice unusual and different. 'Through his innovations he forged completely new directions that shaped the course of 20th-century music. Like Wagner, he propounded the idea of a new synthesis in the arts ... a synthesis not of sound, word and drama, but of colour, light and ritual-mystic action ... a true representative [musico-philosophically] of the turn-of-the-century Russian intelligentsia, of the so-called Silver Age' (Valentina Rubtsova). He published 30 studies in all – prisms of technical address, 'mood picture' and tone-poem faceted out of the Chopin-Henselt-Schumann line, capable of Lyapunovian cragginess but happier, conveying more crystalline vistas. The three main collections are Op.8 (1894), Op.42 (1903) and Op.65 (1912).

Scanning the Op.8 cycle, the Slavonic melancholy of the final two studies – on the one hand *patetico* declamation, on the other spectacular power-house climax (despite originally closing *piano*) – encapsulate the character and breadth of Scriabin's late romanticism. There are plenty of conventional challenges tested unconventionally, for example the sixths and unsettling *maggiore*

thirds of Nos. 6 and 10, and the *ppp* octaves of No.9. But there is also a poetry of particular nuance, nowhere more beautifully apparent than in the barely touchable blue-white E major and yearning appoggiaturas of No.5. Young Pushkin and his Natasha are perhaps not far away. ‘The crimson summer now grows pale;/Clear, bright days now soar away;/Hazy mist spreads through the vale;/As the sleeping night turns grey;/The barren cornfields lose their gold;/The lively stream has now turned cold;/The curly woods are grey and stark;/And the heavens have grown dark’ (translated Andrey Kneller).

Op.42 brings together eight tricky but compulsive permutations, placing the art of aristocratic fingerwork at the service of Fabergé-tooled rhythm and song. 1: nines-against-fives; 2: twos/threes-against-syncopated fives; 3: prestissimo semiquaver triplets; 4: twos-against-threes; 5: 12/8 prelude; 6: fives-against-threes/four, *esaltato*; 7: threes-against-fours; 8: fives-against-threes. The ‘French “double linings”’ of Op.65 tackle major ninths (‘how depraved!’ Scriabin wrote from the Berner Oberland to his friend the music critic Leonid Sabaneyev), major sevenths (‘the last fall from Grace!?’) and perfect fifths (‘horrors!’). ‘What will the world say?’ The order he gives in his letter is 3, 1, 2.

CD18 LEOPOLD GODOWSKY (1870–1938) *Studies on Chopin’s Op.10 Études* (published 1899–1914) Godowsky, Polish-Jewish/American-naturalised, musician without peer. Largely self-taught, a protégé of Saint-Saëns, teacher of Smeternin, Dobrowen and Neuhaus, friend of Hofmann, Rachmaninov and Einstein, his were the standards others wanted to copy. His Berlin debut in 1900, in the city where Busoni was emperor – when he played Brahms’s First Concerto, the Tchaikovsky B flat minor, paraphrases on the Chopin studies, and Weber’s *Invitation to the Dance* – was sensational in the Lisztomanic understanding. Huge, chandeliered, opulent, Bohemian, his New York salon was a mecca of its time and place. Here, according to friends, you could hear the man, the transcendentalist, ‘the dramatist and colourist’, play and take risks he never allowed himself to do on stage. ‘He loved mental fireworks,’ Abram Chasins recalled, ‘and his beaming blue eyes sparkled, his pot belly quivered through the smoke of verbal battle ... He was the merciless mentor of every artist who played for him; his compositional style of piano writing influenced nearly every contemporary who wrote for the instrument, and especially Medtner, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, and Ravel.’

Godowsky’s 53 Chopin Studies, published in five books, take fingers and feet, mind and imagination, physicality and finesse, fitness, to the outer limits of possibility. Pianists prone to fall short or slip off the rails, however supremely drilled, understandably resist them. Contrasting previous masters, Godowsky doesn’t merely give us games and riddles. He adds preparatory exercises. And he clarifies through words. The aim, he says, ‘is to develop the mechanical, technical and musical possibilities of pianoforte playing, to expand the peculiarly adapted nature of the instrument to polyphonic, polyrhythmic and polydynamic work, and to widen the range of its possibilities in tone colouring. The unusual mental and physical demands made upon the performer ... must invariably lead to a much higher proficiency in the command of the instrument.’ ‘As the Chopin studies are, as compositions in étude form, universally acknowledged to be the highest attainment in the realm of beautiful pianoforte music combined with indispensable mechanical and technical usefulness, the author thought it wisest to build upon their solid and invulnerable foundation, for the purpose of furthering the art of pianoforte playing. Being adverse to any alterations in the original texts of any master works when played in their original form, the author would strongly condemn any artist for tampering ever so little with such works as those of Chopin.’ He comments on performance, execution, pedalling and metronomic issues, accepting that ‘under certain conditions ... more freedom [must be allowed] to the imagination and individuality of the player’. And he notes the ‘various forms’ he has brought to his re-working: (a) strict transcription; (b) free transcription; (c) cantus firmus treatment, ‘in which the text of the original study in the right-hand is strictly adhered to in the left-hand ... while the right-hand is freely [newly] treated in a contrapuntal way’; (d) free variation; (e) metamorphoses, ‘while the architectural structure remains intact’. His fingerings are a thesis on their own.

The 27 ‘fireworks’ after Op.10 performed here add up to a radical explosion, complexification and re-mirroring of Chopin’s thoughts, each element of the music, every aspect of a pianist’s technical equipment, analysed, re-aligned and re-applied. Hair-raisingly, a dozen are for just the left-hand, ‘the author [wishing] to oppose the generally prevailing idea that [it] is less responsive to development than the right’. Several are transposed, for example the left-hand versions of Nos. 1 (C to D flat), 3 (E to D flat), 7 (C to E flat), 8 (F to G flat), 9 (F to F sharp minor), 11 (E flat to A), and 12 (C to C sharp minor). Some are obsessed with the same source material costumed differently, most notably No.5 which goes through seven transformations – the second almost

exclusively on the white keys (transposed from G flat to C), the third a Tarantella in A minor, the fourth a Capriccio in A major, the fifth and sixth essaying left- and right-hand inversions respectively, the seventh for left-hand alone. No.7 is given toccata (C), nocturne (G flat), and left-hand (E flat) treatments. The first version of No.9, *Allegretto*, is transposed from F to C sharp minor; the second, *Mesto*, is in the style of the F minor étude from Op.25; the third (F sharp minor) is for left-hand. The closing G flat Badinage (Godowsky's Book V No.47) devastatingly combines the G flat numbers from Opp. 10 (No.5) and 25 (No.9). The *Ignis fatuus* ('foolish fire') subtitle of the phosphorescent A minor second version of No.2, dedicated to Moriz Rosenthal, spells a will-o'-the-wisp/*feux follets* association.

CD19 CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918) *12 Études* (1915) 'Any improvement of technique is an improvement of art itself' (Heinrich Neuhaus). For Debussy 1915 began with a 'jobbing' commission preparing an edition of Chopin's works for his Paris publisher, Durand. Written in Pourville near Dieppe (of Monet memory), working on a Pleyel *piano démontable*, the Études appeared in September, dedicated to the memory of Chopin (though Couperin was in the frame until quite late). 'You will agree with me that there is no need of making technique any sadder than it is, that it may seem more serious; and that a little charm has never spoiled anything. Chopin proved that, and makes this desire of mine very rash, I realize. And I am not dead enough yet not to know the comparisons that my contemporaries, confrères, and others, will not fail to make to my disadvantage.' Debussy's last work for the piano, they were described by his friend Robert Schmitz as 'a gift of his life-blood ... a sublimation and escape from intense physical and mental suffering'. In traditional étude manner, albeit with marked rhythmic and phraseological adventure, they cover a variety of technical issues besides an ironic 'peppery' nod in Czerny's direction and a variety of poetic, *prélude*-like interpolations – but, in exploring *verticalised* intervals, interestingly avoid seconds (horizontalised in the first), fifths and sevenths. Of fingering (pedaling too, virtually absent, even tempo occasionally), there are no indications: 'let us find our own fingering'. Such programmatic or mood subtexts as may or may not exist are left to individual perception. In a recent monograph, *Douze Études by Claude Debussy: A Pianist's View* (2016), Margit Rahkonen provides each with an elegant label. 1: 'Enjoy your exercises!'; 2: 'Underwater world'; 3: 'Ancient dances and melodies'; 4: 'Nocturne'; 5: 'Joy of living'; 6: 'Playful paws'; 7: 'The art of *jeu perlé*'; 8: 'An imaginary catalogue'; 9: 'Ragtime for percussion'; 10: 'The essence of piano sound'; 11: 'The afternoon of a nymph'; 12: 'Sound and silence'.

EARL WILD (1915–2010) *7 Virtuoso Études* (1954, rev. 1975) Speciality of the 19th-century gods from Constantinople to Columbus, St Petersburg to St Louis. Stratospheric province of the Golden Agers. Heritage of today's super-virtuosos. The piano make-over. Occasional worthies have resisted the genus. But rarely the great composers, ready lenders of their imagination and keyboard prowess to the fruit of others: Bach venerating Vivaldi; Liszt, man of field, stage and pulpit, hallowing Palestrina and Allegri, glorying Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, trumping Verdi and Wagner; Busoni sanctifying Bach. Nor the master players: Tausig, Godowsky, Pabst, Siloti, Lhevinne, Rosenthal, Rachmaninov, Friedheim, Grainger, Horowitz, Cziffra, Wild, Volodos, so many – caressing, singing and thundering their instruments into glittering, humming Catherine-wheels of fantastic illusion. 'As long as there are creative musicians who can improvise and imagine backgrounds and settings,' Earl Wild believed, 'the art of transcription will remain timeless.' Romantic Revivalist, jazz man, 20th-century American legend, showman, master of the Baldwin nine-footer, Wild had early exposure to George Gershwin (1898–1937) if no immediate affinity, hearing him in concert at the Syria Mosque, Pittsburgh, 'City of the Dirty Ermine'. Subsequently, enjoying the fees, he played and recorded *Rhapsody in Blue* with Toscanini, Paul Whiteman and Arthur Fiedler, to the adoration of audiences. Lush, dizzy and decorative, velvet, cigars and a bourbon for backcloth, his *7 Virtuoso Études*, recorded for RCA in 1976, are primarily 'studies' in technique, transcription and temperament, based on some of Gershwin's Broadway hits. All-embracing, all-demanding – yet, when needed, knowing the value of simplicity before excess. 1: 'Liza' (*Show Girl*, 1929) – 'not as free as either the Tatum or the Walter arrangement'. 2: 'Somebody Loves Me' (*George White's Scandals*, 1924) – 'wistful, but at the same time ... a little bit flirty'. 3: 'The Man I Love' (*Lady, Be Good!*, 1924) – originally for left-hand, 'far too difficult, I think, for what you get out of it'. 4: 'Embraceable You' ([1928] *Girl Crazy*, 1930, sung by Ginger Rogers in a routine choreographed by Fred Astaire) – 'reminds me of something written by Ravel – very sentimental and of that period'. 5: 'Oh, Lady Be Good!' (*Lady, Be Good!*) – 'a plump, sassy Southern Belle truckin' down the street on a hot day, swaying sexily in the sultry breeze'; 6: 'I Got Rhythm' (*Girl Crazy*, sung by Ethel Merman) 'vigorous and exciting ... a Toccata'; 7: 'Fascinatin' Rhythm' (*Lady, Be Good!*) – 'a driving perpetual motion ... terribly Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers' (in fact Adele Astaire in the original production), added in 1975. Platinum pianistics.

CD20 IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971) 4 *Studies Op.7* (1908) In character, harmony, rhythm and texture, these ‘Ukrainian’ pieces, written in the weeks following the death of Stravinsky’s teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, recall the Scriabin/Rachmaninov manner, in the main retrogressively more romantic and less abrasive in imagery than the Igor of the Diaghilev ballets to come. Their pianism suggests something of his prowess at the keyboard (he premiered them). He dedicated the set to four close friends in St Petersburg: respectively Etienne [Stepan] Mitusov (the future librettist of *Le Rossignol*); Nicolas Richter (who first played the early F sharp minor Sonata); and Rimsky-Korsakov’s sons, Andrei and Vladimir, best men at his wedding to his cousin Katya in 1906.

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945) *Three Studies Op.18* (1918) Concert outings transitioning away from the Gallic model (even if Ravel prowls in the second), closer to the Lisztian one of Bartók’s training (in Budapest with István Thomán). 1: hand expansion, rapid (classically) alien intervals (disjointed chromatics) doubled at the double-octave (and not only, leading to progressive dissonance), ostinato impulse. 2: hand contraction, patterns mirroring each other in inversion, an undine world of water and glints of light reflecting off quartz, malignant apparitions at nightfall. 3: brilliant, athletic, breaking down barriers and language yet with a pervasive sense of anchorage generated by the serialised eight-note ‘row’ at the start. Though it eventually ‘beds’ in 6/8, the time-changes are irregular and complex – an ongoing endorsement, widely shared, of Debussy’s argument in the early 1890s that ‘rhythms are stifling [they] cannot be contained within [metrically repetitive] bars. It is nonsense to speak of “simple” and “composed” time. There should be an interminable flow of them both without seeking to bury the rhythmic patterns.’

OLIVER MESSIAEN (1908–1992) 4 *Études de rythme* (1949–50) 1: *Île de feu I* (Island of Fire I) Dedicated to the Ring of Fire people, Papua New Guinea. Papuan music, Indian raga, bird voices. 2: *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* (Mode of Values and Intensities) In this severe study 36 notes are divided into three 12-tone series, each of ‘a specific duration [24 values], intensity of attack [12 types], and dynamic level [seven] associated with each of its pitches’ – the higher the pitch the shorter the value, the lower the longer. ‘It is astonishing to what an extent the appearance of this composition influenced European music of the 50s [the 500-copy first edition selling out within three and a half years]. It was admired as one of the first totally serialised pieces (although

it is not, in fact, serialised in all its aspects), and it became the rallying point for the “total serialism” of the Darmstadt regulars [the Stockhausen, Nono, Boulez generation]’ (Paul Jacobs) 3: *Neumes rythmiques* (Rhythmic Neumes). Rhythms and refrains, plainsong, poetic feet. 4: *Île de feu II* (Island of Fire II). Oceania, the Orient, the Occident fused in vulcan flame.

GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923–2006) *Études pour piano, Books I & II* (1985, 1988–94) Hungarian-Jewish, studied with Ferenc Farkas, Pál Kadosa, Sándor Veress, Pál Járdányi, Lajos Bárdos, one of the seismic shapers of post-1945 music. ‘I hope these new harmonies will work, but I’m not sure. We will see. You know, I have no confidence in myself ... I know I should, but I don’t. I’m basically doing all I do in the most amateur way, just trying to realise something that I imagine in my ear, in dreams. I use techniques, of course, but I forget them after writing and I have no overall scheme or permanent procedures. People of my generation truly believed that music could be explained and structured in a pseudo-mathematical way, but I never believed that’. Ligeti wrote three books of studies, 24 in all, between 1985 and 2001, coincident with studying Conlon Nancarrow’s music for player piano and the rhythmically arresting music of central Africa. Covering all aspects of technique and creativity, bordering ‘on the superhuman in the mental and physical demands made on the performer’ (Toros Can), they yield an extraordinary cosmos of edifices, images and extremes beyond extremes. Meetings and crossings, subterranean valleys, rainbows of splintered glass, violent, torn-apart dynamics (up to eight *forte*), whispered rustles (down to eight *piano*), desolate voices, babbling ‘tongues’, registers confrontationally apart, voids of deep space, seeds of life viewed backwards and forwards, the linears and verticals of sound, time suspended, time hurtling on. George Benjamin speaks of ‘sensations of flight, weightlessness, spiralling freefall ... a magical world of illusions and mirages’ (*Guardian*, 23 February 2007). Historically, they arguably stand in succession to Liszt and Debussy. But not experientially, nor pianistically. They surge across oceans, defying frontiers, beckoning the *galaxías kýklos*. In ways compulsively rhythmic, ultimately melodic. Ligeti may have had doubts about himself (what composer doesn’t), but his internal clock and inherent ‘rightness’ of action was uncanny, Beethovenian almost. Breathed, breathless, the tension never drops for an instant. ‘I almost always associate colours, form and consistencies with sounds, and vice versa also associate all acoustic sensations with form, colour and material properties. Even abstract terms such as quantity, relationships, coherences and processes appear to me to be sensualised and have their place in an imaginary space.’

Book I Nos. 1–3 are dedicated to Boulez; No.6 (a ‘tempo fugue’ embracing influences from Chopin to sub-Saharan polyrhythms) to ‘my Polish friends’ in the post-Stalin Warsaw Autumn gatherings. 1: ‘Disorder’ (Hungarian sourced, right-hand white notes, left-hand black); 2: ‘Open Strings’; 3: ‘Blocked Keys’; 4: ‘Fanfares’; 5: ‘Rainbow’; 6: ‘Autumn in Warsaw’. Book II No.9 is dedicated to Kagel, Nos. 10 and 12 to Pierre-Laurent Aimard, No.11 to Kurtág. 7: ‘Galamb Borong’ (‘a dialogue between Balinese music and the Western classical canon’ [Amy Bauer]; ‘an artificial Balinese name for imaginary Balinese gamelan music’ [Can]); 8: ‘Metal’; 9: ‘Vertigo’; 10: ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’; 11: ‘In Suspense’; 12: ‘Intertwined’; 13: ‘Devil’s Staircase’; 14: ‘The Endless Column’.

CD21 NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN (b.1937) *Concert Études Op.40* (1984) Born in the turbulent Donetsk Oblast of eastern Ukraine, Kapustin studied with Avrelian Rubakh (a student of Felix Blumenfeld) and at the Moscow Conservatory with Goldenweiser, graduating in 1961. Post-Stalin, the Cultural Thaw of Khrushchev’s 50s saw him acquire a reputation as a jazz pianist, arranger and composer, working as a member of the Oleg Lundstrem Big Band – though he’s claimed that, in the conventional understanding, he was ‘never really a jazz musician. I never tried to be a real jazz pianist, but I had to do it because of the composing. I’m not interested in improvisation – and what is a jazz musician without improvisation? All my improvisation is written.’ Taken up in Japan and the West, a model for present-day younger Russians, his ‘mean-pianism’ studies are full-blooded showcase affairs, stunningly laid out for the instrument and sophisticated in vocabulary, cadence and rhythmic muscularity. Consummate technique, variety of colour and approach, and just a little humour sets their manic big-top/pianola world brightly alight. It’s not New York jazz, Gershwin-Wild, but, countering the Brezhnev/Andropov temperature of its day, it must have been a breath of ever so slightly risqué air down Petrovka Street.

FRIEDRICH GULDA (1930–2000) *Play Piano Play (Ten Exercises for Yuko)* (1971) From Argerich, Abbado and Harnoncourt to Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock. The Musikverein and Carnegie Hall to Birdland. Bach, Beethoven and Chopin to jazz, Fatty’s Saloon and DJ Pippi and the Paradise Girls. Fritz of the Bucharian Kippah – contradictory artist, cross-over man, ‘Dead Eye Fred’. ‘Many people consider my very existence a scandal. It’s scandalous when someone constantly does things that ordinarily shouldn’t be done. You don’t play Mozart or Beethoven and go to a jazz club two hours later. I don’t lead a normal life. There are some things that I just don’t do, although everyone else does. Anyone who thinks and lives as I do is a constant scandal. And when certain events make that obvious, then it’s obvious, that’s all. Basically my whole life is a scandal.’ *Play Piano Play* was written for Yuko Wakiyama, Gulda’s Japanese second wife whom he married in 1967. Exuberant, moody, crazed, big-boned, lascivious, nerve-ends charged, the ten ‘exercises’ are designed to explore and develop a feeling for blues, rhythm, ballad, stride, walking bass, pop rhythms, Latin-American, swing and lead-sheet/improvisation/fills, now and again paraphrasing classical ghosts from Gulda’s repertory. Demanding, cool, anything but self-effacing. ‘Just as Bach wrote out his [“honest”] improvisations and ornaments as a pedagogical tool for his students to learn [baroque] style, so the exercises in Gulda’s *Play Piano Play* serve the same purpose. To learn style – jazz style’ (Jovanni-Rey de Pedro). ‘The long road to freedom.’

JOHN CAGE (1912–1992) *Études Boreales* (1978) Cage wrote these chance-operation studies (for cello and/or piano) as a companion to his *Études Australes* (piano, 1974–75) and *Freeman Études* (violin, 1977–80). For the piano part, Cage used a star chart of the northern sky – Antonín Bečvář’s 1962 *Atlas borealis 1950.0* – to determine, under *I Ching* influence, where on the instrument the performer is to play, beat or generate sound (keyboard, frame, strings), in practice creating a 22-minute percussion happening: the percussionist Michael Pugliese was first to find a way to perform these studies, the original dedicatee, the Cincinnati pianist Jeanne Kirstein, deeming them unplayable.

CD22 PHILIP GLASS (b.1937) *Études for Piano, Book I* (1994) Philip Glass – the Beat Generation boy from Baltimore, obsessed with Schubert and Schoenberg, born to Lithuanian-Jewish immigrants, who, come the early 60s, Cuba over, Vietnam omnipresent, made it to Paris (via Chicago, the Juilliard, Aspen, plumbing, taxi-driving) to study with Nadia Boulanger, living the bohemian life in a Montparnasse studio around the corner from Samuel Beckett. Happening by one day, Ravi Shankar – pre-Beatles, ‘pretty much unknown’ – opened his eyes. ‘I did a remarkable, intuitive thing ... I took the music I had written down [for him] and I erased all the bar lines. And suddenly, I saw something which I hadn’t seen before, which was that I saw the patterns ... he didn’t use bar lines ... when I took the bar lines away, I saw the flow of the rhythm’ (*Red Bull Music Academy Daily*, 5 February 2014). Self-proclaimed ‘Jewish-Taoist-Hindu-Toltec-Buddhist’, dividing opinion, prolific beyond reasonable, less, in his opinion, a ‘minimalist’, more a composer of ‘music with repetitive structures’. ‘What does your music sound like? It sounds like New York City.’ Commissioned by the conductor Dennis Russell Davies, the *Études* date from the period of Glass’s Second and Third Symphonies, between the operas *The Voyage* and *The marriages between zones three, four and five*. ‘Cast: Piano’, lyrically meditative, lengthy, they return us to the unsullied major and minor alphabet of Czerny and friends, ‘within the framework of a concise form,’ Oliver Binder says, exploring ‘sonorities ranging from typically Baroque passagework to Romantically tinged moods’.

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