

The Art of Recital Programming: A History of the Development of
Solo Piano Recitals with a Comparison of Golden Age and Modern-
Day Concert Programs at Carnegie Hall

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in the School of Music and the Graduate Faculty of
the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Musical Arts in Piano Performance.

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Date Defended: 24 August 2017

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Date Approved: 24 August 2017

ABSTRACT

The art of recital programming is a never-ending discovery, and rediscovery of hidden gems. Many things go in and out of fashion, but the core composers and repertoire played on piano recitals have remained the same. From antiquity to the twenty-first century, pianists have access to over tens of thousands original and arranged works for the keyboard, yet less than one-tenth of them are considered to be in the standard performance canon. From this, a fascinating question forms: why are pianists limiting themselves to such narrow repertoire? Many noted pianists of the twentieth and twenty-first century specialize in a certain composer or style. This is not to say that concert pianists are not playing other works. The typical programming of the “tour of styles” is so prevalent that within the last hundred years, the structure wavered little from the standard Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann set with their recitals.

My research concentrates on iconic pianists from two eras: the Golden Age and the twenty-first century. Because of its prestigious position in the classical performance world, this study will focus on solo recitals performed at Carnegie Hall. Since 1891, countless performances have been presented in the hall and it is still considered one of the most sought-after venues for concert pianists. Through the analysis of pianists and their repertoire from the Golden Age and modern-day, I demonstrate what has and has not changed in over a century of recital programming. The increasing specialization of one composer or style contributes to the mundane state of most modern day piano recitals. By tracing the evolution of the recital and examining iconic musicians’ repertoire choices, student-pianists of the twenty-first century could draw inspiration and bring back some of the lightness and charm from the Golden Age.

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Introduction

What to play on a piano recital? This notion of balancing repertoire that would appeal to a wide audience and the soloist's own artistic inspirations has always fascinated me. My first recollection of going to a public recital was Radu Lupu at the local university recital hall with an all-German program. I was eleven years old, sitting in my seat thinking "why are the pieces so long, and why am I not allowed to clap between movements?" As I got older and more familiar with the piano repertoire, I began to realize just how much music has been composed for the instrument. From the baroque to the twenty-first century, pianists have access to tens of thousands of original and arranged works for the keyboard, yet less than one-tenth of them are in the standard performance canon.¹ This begs the question: Why are pianists limiting themselves to such a limited repertoire? Many noted pianists of the twentieth and twenty-first century specialize in a certain composer or style. Angela Hewitt is considered to be a "Bach expert";² Richard Goode and his in-depth study of Beethoven Sonatas made him an authority on those works; and Radu Lupu is known for his interpretations of German romantic literature. This is not to say that concert pianists are not playing other works. The typical "tour of styles" programming is so prevalent that, within the last hundred years, the structure varied little from the model that Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann set with their recitals in the mid-nineteenth century.

The art of recital programming is a never-ending discovery, and rediscovery of hidden gems. Many things go in and out of fashion, but the core composers and repertoire played on piano recitals have remained the same. A conventional recital starts with a piece from the

¹ David Dubal mentioned in the preface to the second edition of his book *Art of the Piano* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995) that he included in his book the majority of pieces that he considers masterworks. These selected masterworks represent fewer than one hundred composers.

² Angela Hewitt has recorded almost all of J. S. Bach's keyboard works and has toured exclusively with the complete books of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

baroque era, followed by a German/Austrian composer from the classical era. A collection of works from the romantic era would be next, with something contemporary concluding the program. As pianist and musicologist Kenneth Hamilton noted, “To ensure a good attendance, all tastes ha[ve] to be catered for.”³ While this has rung true for the past 170 years, it is the Golden Age⁴ of piano playing that continues to influence and captivate pianists and audiences alike. Their attractiveness came from performing single movements from sonatas and transcriptions of excerpts from operas, ballets, and symphonies. Golden Age pianists followed the traditions of Liszt and other nineteenth-century piano virtuosos, putting together programs of carefully selected works to highlight their virtuosity and dazzle the audiences. Many also played their own transcriptions, while others took more liberties with pieces and did not always follow what the composer notated in the music. This more imaginative approach to recital programming is rare on today’s concert stage, and the possible reasons for the increasing fidelity to the score will be explored later in this document.

My research will concentrate on iconic pianists from two eras: the Golden Age and the twenty-first century. Because of its prestigious position in the classical performance world, this study will focus on solo recitals performed at Carnegie Hall. Since 1891, countless performances have been presented in the hall and it is still considered one of the most sought-after venues for concert pianists. In an interview with David Dubal, Alexis Weissenberg said, “a great concert hall is not only brick and stone. . . . In Carnegie Hall the electricity of previous performances is literally imprinted on the walls. When I walk on stage, I absolutely know that Rachmaninoff,

³ Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.

⁴ Most scholars date the Golden Age of piano from the turn of the twentieth century to about 1960. Jeffrey Johnson chose the dates 1913-1940 for his collection of *Etude* magazines. Noted pianists of this era include Moritz Rosenthal, Josef Hofmann, Ignacy Paderewski, and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Paderewski, Hofmann, Horowitz and Rubinstein were there before me.”⁵ Carnegie Hall has also digitalized all of their programs, facilitating research of this kind. ⁶

Louis Thurton Nicholas (1910-2005), a music critic for *The Tennessean* from 1951 to 1975 noted that “the piano recital goes on forever, it seems—with remarkably little change in program.”⁷ This comment still holds true today with one exception: more and more of the lighter, popular transcriptions are being left out. Composers such as Carl Maria von Weber, Giovanni Sgambati, Ignacy Paderewski and Moritz Moszkowski have fallen out of the performance canon of the late twentieth and twenty-first century. Aside from Liszt’s more hefty opera paraphrases such as *Don Juan*, *Norma*, and *Rigoletto*, other transcriptions of songs and arias gave way to original works by German, French, or Russian composers. Through the analysis of pianists and their repertoire from the Golden Age and modern-day, I will demonstrate what has and has not changed over the past century of recital programming. The increasing trend of specializing one composer or style contributes to the routine presentation of most modern day piano recitals. By tracing the evolution of the recital and examining iconic musicians’ repertoire choices, student-pianists of the twenty-first century could draw inspiration and bring back some of the lightness and charm from the Golden Age.

⁵ Alexis Weissenberg, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard: The World of the Concert Pianist* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 358.

⁶ All programs could be retrieved under “Performance History Search” on Carnegie Hall’s official website, www.carnegiehall.org.

⁷ George Kehler, *The Piano in Concert Vol. I* (Metuchen: NJ, The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1982), xxxiii-xxxiv.

Review of Literature

There is ample research on orchestral concert programming, demonstrating that factors such as patronage, venue, and audience have influenced the repertoire being performed in an orchestral setting. The League of American Orchestras tracks all symphonic literature that has been performed since 1970, as well as other relevant statistics since the 1940s.⁸ Similar types of organized data could be found for operatic literature and productions from the Metropolitan Opera Guild.⁹ On the subject of piano recitals and programming however, the research and data collection is much more scattered and subjective.

Performance venues such as Carnegie Hall and other concert halls have their own archives and the University of Maryland now houses the International Piano Archives, which includes an extensive assembly of recordings, scores, programs, etc.¹⁰ However, *The Piano in Concert* remains the only printed collection of primary source material on piano recital programs. George Kehler compiled this two-volume anthology of recital programs from concert pianists, mainly from the nineteenth and twentieth century. In these volumes Kehler also provides some biographical information about each pianist and a brief history of the development of the piano recital.

Kenneth Hamilton wrote an informative and insightful book answering many of the questions posed in the opening paragraph of this document. In *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance*, he presented musical trends from the perspective of the romantic era by examining first-hand accounts from pianists and audiences from the nineteenth to twentieth century. Hamilton touched on subjects such as concert decorum, performance

⁸ The League of American Orchestras official website: <http://www.americanorchestras.org>.

⁹ The Metropolitan Opera Guild official website: <https://www.metguild.org>.

¹⁰ For more information visit <https://www.lib.umd.edu/ipam>.

practice, and the obsession with note-perfection. However, his study does not go into detail in regard to specific pianists and their programs after the 1980s.¹¹

Music critic Harold C. Schonberg wrote books and reviews about performers who played from the standard canon. His books *The Glorious Ones* and, to a greater degree, *The Great Pianists* look at trends in performance practice and history through biographies of famous concert artists.¹² Another significant source on piano performers and literature is *The Art of the Piano* by David Dubal. In two parts, the first section introduces pianists from the mid-eighteenth century to prominent performers of the early twenty-first century. The second section is a compilation of canonic piano literature and a list of recordings Dubal believes to represent such repertoire.¹³

Interviews of selected pianists provide some insight into their repertoire choices and performance interpretations. The pianist and pedagogue Adele Marcus interviewed eight pianists, all established and well-known when the book was written. Published in 1979, *Great Pianists Speak* touches on many relevant subjects, in addition to the “how-why-what” of piano playing.¹⁴ David Dubal’s *Reflections from the Keyboard* is also a valuable source of first-hand accounts of pianists on piano playing. In his own words, this is a “history book, a document for the music lover of the way in which late-twentieth-century pianists view[ed] their world.”¹⁵

Finally, to gain an understanding of programming trends and changes in reception, William Weber’s book *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from*

¹¹ Hamilton traces the start of the Golden Age all the way back to Franz Liszt. He mentions a few of the contemporary pianists like Marc-André Hamelin, but only in passing.

¹² Harold C. Schonberg, *The Glorious Ones: Classical Music’s Legendary Performers* (New York: Times Books, 1985); *The Great Pianists* (New York: Simon and Schuster, INC., 1987).

¹³ See footnote 1.

¹⁴ Adele Marcus, *Great Pianists Speak with Adele Marcus* (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1979), 7.

¹⁵ Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, xxvii.

Haydn to Brahms covers such topics from the late eighteenth century to World War I.¹⁶ William Weber examines historical evidence of how musical trends changed in major cities due to political events and sheds light on the reasons that caused the decline of “miscellany” concerts,¹⁷ the rise of classical repertoire in orchestral concerts, and the emergence of the promenade or “pops” concerts.

Evolution of the Piano Recital

The idea of a solo piano performance did not become the norm until the romantic era. Franz Liszt completely changed the concert scene when he presented his *monologues-pianistiques* and the term “recital” appeared in advertisement for Liszt’s performance in London on June 9, 1840.¹⁸ In the fifty-four documented recitals Liszt gave between the years 1838 and 1848, he frequently performed works by Bach, Beethoven, and his contemporaries—a remarkable shift from the previous two generations of pianist-composers.¹⁹ It was very common for performers to have joint concerts featuring a variety of genres. Arias, solo compositions, and chamber music were all part of a conventional program²⁰. Even the famous violinist Nicolò Paganini shared the stage with illustrious singers of the day. Liszt also performed the standard programs and had joint concerts with other instrumentalists and singers, but more and more started to focus on himself as a composer and interpreter of other people’s works. In the June 9,

¹⁶ William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Weber describes miscellany concerts as ones that contain a mixture of performance ensembles and genres.

¹⁸ Weber, *The Great Transformation*, 160.

¹⁹ The term “recital” only refers to solo performances, whereas “concert” will be a general term applied to any form of performance with any number of performing forces. The fifty-four recitals are based on collected programs in George Kehler’s *The Piano in Concert Vol. I*.

²⁰ A program published in the London *Times* on January 22, 1790 is typical of the era and included original piano compositions by Clementi and Haydn, as well as chamber music by Pleyel, various vocal pieces, and symphonic works arranged for the piano.

1840 concert in the Hanover Square Rooms, London, Liszt performed a solo recital consisting of his own transcriptions and original works. This was the first time the word “recital” appeared to describe this type of solo performance, and the program was as follows:

L. van Beethoven: “Scherzo,” “Storm,” and “Finale” of *Sinfonia Pastorale*

Schubert-Liszt: “Serenade” and “Ave Maria”

Hexameron: Fantasia with Variations on the air, “Suoni la tromba”, from *I Puritani* by Chopin, Thalberg, Liszt, Czerny, Döhler and Pixis

F. Liszt: *Tarantella* and *Grand Galop Chromatique*²¹

Even though Liszt would play an occasional work by Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, or Chopin, the bulk of his recitals consisted of his own transcriptions and original compositions. He would also take requests from the public, improvising on the suggested melodies, and thus keeping with the trends and fashions of the time.

As mentioned above, Liszt did perform some Beethoven sonatas, especially the later sonatas, but even then he was aware of the venue in which he presented them. Regarded as the more “severe” of Liszt’s repertoire, the sonatas would be played in bigger German or Austrian cities preferably with large percentage of connoisseurs in the audience. His performance of Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier*, Op. 106, in 1836 was successful, but in a subsequent public concert in 1842, Liszt only played two of the four movements.²² On the other hand, Clara Schumann’s programming around the same time seems more traditional by comparison. She abandoned transcriptions, instead focusing on promoting works by her husband Robert Schumann and interpreting past German composers. This change was not instantaneous. Hamilton observed that Clara Schumann slowly incorporated the complete Sonata in F Minor

²¹ Kehler, *the Piano in Concert*, 764.

²² *Ibid*, 57.

(“Appassionata”), Op. 57 by Beethoven in her programs during the 1830s. The last movement was tested first, probably due to the fast and virtuosic nature and, when that was met with favorable reviews, she added the second movement, finally performing the whole sonata in 1837.²³ This act of offering a complete, multi-movement work with no breaks in between was considered very daring. Chopin even interspersed lighter pieces and trivial vocal works in between the movements of both his piano concertos during the year 1830 at the Warsaw National Theater. The concert program given by Clara Schumann on September 24, 1836 was typical of the early nineteenth century:

Overture

Vocal Quartet Ensemble

Pixis: Second and Third Movement from the Grand Concerto, Op. 100,
presented by Clara Wieck

Compositions for solo piano in historical order:

J. S. Bach: Fugue (C#)

Beethoven: Finale of the Great Sonata, Op. 57

Chopin: Nocturne (F#); Great Concert-Etude

Vocal Quartet Ensemble

H. Herz: Latest Bravura Variations, Op. 76²⁴

In this mixed program, the middle section is all solo piano with works by other composers in historical order. Clara Schumann was an avid composer herself, and her own transcription of Johann Peter Pixis’ Piano Concerto in C Major makes an appearance towards the beginning of this program. In the 1860s, even Carl Tausig interspersed virtuosic transcriptions

²³ Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 55.

²⁴ Kehler, *The Piano in Concert Vol. II*, 1185.

with more serious works, and by 1890, Hans von Bülow arranged his entire solo program in chronological order according to composer, a format that looks very similar to modern-day concert programs. Pianists started to present programs dominated by Austro-German composers. By Busoni's time in the early twentieth century, it was considered a "throwback to the past... [to] give a recital of his own works."²⁵

This shift from the composer-pianist to the interpreter-pianist could be linked with the awareness of music history. As scholars in the mid-nineteenth century began to examine music from the past, the idea of historical performance and reconstructing the composer's original intent became concerns for performers. Pianists started to concentrate on a certain style of playing or specific composer, their specialization influenced by developments in musicology and music theory. Monumentalizing composers and creating a standard canon are also contributing factors in both the mixed and the specialized recitals. Along with musicology, effort is put into finding the "correct" way of playing a composer's piece, as performance practice became more and more prevalent in the twentieth century.

To fully understand the changing trajectory of the piano recital, one must look at broader movements in the study of musical arts. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth century, musicologists showed continuous interest with the evolution of music history. Increasing sentiments of German nationalism fueled this fascination with Austro-German composers and made musicians reach far beyond the influences of Italian music all the way to the Ancient Greeks. Critics like Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904) believed that although Bach and Handel mark the beginning of music history, it really started with Mozart and "reached its summit" in

²⁵ Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 60.

Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms.²⁶ His study on aesthetics and writings about absolute music remain a valuable source even today. In the nineteenth century, music history became a discipline in Austro-German universities, under the leadership of music historians such as Guido Adler. Adler, unlike Hanslick, specialized in composers of the first Viennese School: Haydn, Mozart, and, later in Adler's career, Beethoven. He pioneered research on renaissance sacred music and examined the relationship of music and society, taking an evolutionary approach to study the development of Germanic music. Johann Sebastian Bach was another composer that rose to prominence during the romantic era. The Bach revival, started with Felix Mendelssohn in the 1820s, continued well into the 1950s. Many societies formed with the sole purpose of compiling and publishing complete editions of unabridged works of the composer. From the Bach-Gesellschaft that came up with the BWV catalogue numbers to the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* published by Bärenreiter, this has become the standard for other musicologists in the early twentieth century. A definite, complete version of a composer's work would be akin to installing an unearthed ancient artifact in a museum. Although scholars in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries are engaging with a greater variety of composers, genres, and issues, the concern with preserving musical monuments and determining the "urtext" edition is still influential in this field.

William Weber believes that the modern-day concerts form a "specialized world" with members that look to "an intelligentsia of critics, master teachers, scholars, concert managers, and radio announcers on classical music stations."²⁷ The "specialists" are influenced by the more traditional field of academia. That in turn impacts the concert etiquette, and to a greater extent,

²⁶ Geoffrey Payzant, trans, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the revision of the Aesthetics of Music* by Eduard Hanslick (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), xvii.

²⁷ Weber, *The Great Transformation*, 26.

the music being performed in the concert halls. Before the twentieth century, the concert scene was very different. There were diverse social etiquettes and expectations for the aristocratic and bourgeois audiences. People did not only go to see the show, they also went to be seen. Conversations were often carried out while performers were still on stage, and it was not uncommon for people to leave their seats and move around.²⁸ In today's concerts, one is expected to sit through the whole piece quietly, withholding applause until the very end of the work.

This contrast in etiquette can also be seen in the performance repertoire. Weber identifies and explains many opposing ideas in terms of the popular and general versus the elite and esoteric.²⁹ Today, the distinction between "pop" music and "classical" music is very simple for the modern audience. But within the "classical" repertoire, there is also the divide between absolute music and the programmatic. Opera overtures and famous arias are more accessible by the general public than Brahms or Mahler symphonies. The same split can be seen in piano music. By 1850, Liszt was performing solo programs consisting largely of his opera transcriptions, while Clara Schumann was focusing on works by other composers and showing skill as an interpreter of serious music. However, even with the more conservative and solemn nature of Schumann's recitals, Kenneth Hamilton believes that the private concerts that started her concert career still demanded the "now-ignored skills of preluding and improvisation."³⁰

The venue at which recitals were given also affected the type of pieces being performed in the nineteenth century. Public concerts mostly took place in theaters or halls, with a large but loud and distracted audience, so serious repertoire did not fit too well for these types of

²⁸ Weber, *The Great Transformation*, 17.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 36.

³⁰ Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 21.

performances. The smaller concerts held in patrons' homes or instrument makers' halls, were great for exposure but again, the performer was not the main focus for the audience. Charles Hallé, a contemporary of Franz Liszt and a serious pianist, for he was the first one to perform all Beethoven's sonatas in England, recounted an amusing incident in his autobiography. His friend remarked that he was glad Hallé did not play like Alexander Dreyschock, for the latter pianist "plays so loud, *et cela empêche les dames de causer*" (he made it difficult for the ladies to talk).³¹ The best place for a pianist in the nineteenth century to explore serious repertoire and build a reputation was at the most intimate setting, in the homes of musical connoisseurs. At salon concerts, a more daring and intellectual program could be performed, but as Hamilton pointed out, it was still important to cater to all tastes to ensure good attendance.

Golden Age Pianists and Their Programs

The Golden Age was a period full of glitz, abandon, and "bold, brilliant, grand strokes."³² Greatly influenced by Franz Liszt and his contemporaries, Kenneth Hamilton described the "Great Tradition" as being largely lost in the late twentieth century, saying that "audiences can only hope to be granted a shimmering glimpse of it—like Sir Galahad of the Holy Grail—from the odd inspired performance by a dwindling handful of elderly pianists."³³ He also remarked that this tradition always seemed to be on the edge of extinction.³⁴ Vladimir Horowitz, being the last of the "Romantic" pianists, gave his last public concert on June 21, 1987 in Hamburg.³⁵

³¹ Charles Hallé, *Autobiography, with Correspondence and Diaries*, ed. Michale Kennedy (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), 100.

³² Moriz Rosenthal (in conference with R. H. Wollstein), "The 'Grand Manner' in Piano Playin," *Etude* (May 1937). Found in March Mitchell and Allan Evans, eds., *Moriz Rosenthal in Words and Music*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 6. Quoted from Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 5.

³³ Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁵ Both Kenneth Hamilton and Harold C. Schonberg used the term when describing Horowitz's playing style.

Contemporaries of Horowitz, like Shura Cherkassky or Jorge Bolet continued to play in the manner and present programs from the Golden Age, but they too, were in their twilight years in the late 1980s.

Moritz Rosenthal, one of Liszt's last pupils, died in 1946. Grouped with others mentioned above as the last "Romantic giants,"³⁶ Rosenthal's programming choices had the characteristics of the Lisztian school: specializing in repertoire from Beethoven on, Schubert and Mozart are rarely performed. Bach is played, but usually in a transcription by Liszt, Tausig, or d'Albert.³⁷ This recital program towards the end of his life in November 1938 shows his full extent as the Romantic pianist:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| C. M. von Weber: | Piano Sonata No 2 in A-flat Major, Op. 39 |
| F. Chopin: | Four Preludes, Op. 28 Two Mazurkas Etudes Op. posth. and Op. 10, No. 1 Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2 |
| Chopin-Liszt: | "Chants Polonaise," S. 480 |
| L. van Beethoven: | Piano Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57, "Apassionata" |
| F. Liszt: | "Au lac de Wallenstadt", S. 160 No. 2 from <i>Année de pèlerinage, première année</i> |
| Schubert-Liszt: | Soirée de Vienne, R. 252. |
| F. Liszt: | Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp Minor, with cadenza by Rosenthal ³⁸ |

Rosenthal was considered to be one of the "most stupendous technicians ever to touch a keyboard."³⁹ Josef Hofmann reflected that his younger self was so inspired by Rosenthal's

³⁶ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 141.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 291.

³⁸ Kehler, *The Piano in Concert vol II*, 1086.

³⁹ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 314.

playing that he went back home and “[pounded] the piano...for six hours daily, trying to imitate Rosenthal.”⁴⁰ Schonberg also compared his playing to a thunderbolt that is uncontrolled. The “grand manner” was apparently a favorite expression of Rosenthal’s. He used it to contrast his playing style of “grand concepts” and “grand enthusiasm” from the more “inhibited youngsters.”⁴¹ Despite his wild abandon at the piano, Rosenthal’s mature recordings yielded to more finesse and attention to a warmer sound.

With a popularity that today rivals, or even surpasses Franz Liszt’s, Sergei Rachmaninoff’s luscious harmonies and sweeping melodies place his works firmly in the performance canon. As a pianist, George Kehler said that Rachmaninoff’s manner had “the reserve of an aristocrat... of a very great and comprehensive soul.... [His] technical mastery was unbelievable; but one didn’t think about it very much because Rachmaninoff was so totally concentrated on musical intentions.”⁴² Harold Schonberg held Rachmaninoff’s pianism in very high regard. “When he played a Liszt transcription of a Schubert song, one immediately realized how unimaginative and unmusical most singers were.”⁴³ From his interpretations to his technical prowess, Rachmaninoff’s skill at the piano was unparalleled during his day except for Josef Hofmann. However, it did not come easily to Rachmaninoff. His family left Russia permanently in 1918, and it was not until then, at the age of forty-five and out of financial necessity, that the composer devoted himself to concertizing as a pianist. “Audiences were awed when this grave, stately, tall... unsmiling man, with his ... close-cropped head of hair (unlike the wild foliage that topped the heads of so many musicians of the day) walked quietly to the piano.”⁴⁴ There was

⁴⁰ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 314.

⁴¹ Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 5.

⁴² Kehler, *The Piano in Concert vol. II*, 1013.

⁴³ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 390.

⁴⁴ Schonberg, *The Glorious Ones*, 315.

also the lack of showmanship. He did not move his body, only using his fingers and forearms when he played.

All of this seems to set Rachmaninoff apart from the other pianists of the Golden Age. However, even though he was one of the rare twentieth-century composers to play solo public concerts consisting exclusively of his own compositions, he was also a great interpreter of other composers' works. While promoting his own music, he also performed what had become a "standard" Golden Age program: a mixture of serious Austro-German composers, his own original works, transcriptions, and something contemporary to the time. He performed the following program on January 18, 1921:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Bach-Busoni: | Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004 |
| R. Schumann: | <i>Papillons</i> , Op. 2 |
| L. van Beethoven: | Piano Sonata in E Minor, Op. 90 |
| F. Chopin: | Waltz in F Major, Op. 34, No. 3 Nocturne in F-sharp Minor, Op. 48, No. 2 Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, No. 2 |
| C. Debussy: | <i>Children's Corner</i> : "Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum," "Serenade for a Doll," "The Little Shepherd," "Golliwog's Cake Walk" |
| S. Rachmaninoff: | Two Preludes: G Major, Op. 32, No. 5; B-flat Major, Op. 23, No. 2 |

Later in his career, he added Rameau and Bach to his programs. In 1938, all of his concerts started with or included the Rameau Gavotte with six variations from his Suite in A Minor.⁴⁵ He also gave chronological "historical survey" concerts. His programs contained a great deal of variety and careful planning of alternating between serious and light pieces. A year before his death, at Carnegie Hall on November 7, 1942, he gave a performance that retained the balance of virtuosity and sensitivity:

⁴⁵ Data based on programs presented in George Kehler's collection.

- Bach-Rachmaninoff: Partita No. 3 for Solo Violin in E Major, BWV 1006: Prelude,
Gavotte, Gigue
- L. van Beethoven: Piano Sonata in D Minor, Op 31, No. 2, “The Tempest”
- F. Chopin: Polonaise in C Minor, Op. 40, No. 2
Ballade No. 4 in F Minor
Nocturne in F-sharp Major, Op. 15, No. 2
Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 39
- S. Rachmaninoff: *Four Etudes-tableaux*, Op. 39: B Minor, E-flat Minor, A Minor, D Major

Rachmaninoff saw Polish pianist Josef Hofmann as the greatest living pianists, along with himself.⁴⁶ Wildly popular even in his youth, Hofmann made his concert debut at the age of seven. Four years later, a review published in the December 1887 issue of *Musical Times* said that Hofmann was so popular that “throughout the country [England] the record is the same; in not one place that young Hofmann visited was there anything like apathy shown towards him, and in the aggregate it is said he drew larger numbers of people to his Recitals than any other living pianist has done, Rubinstein not excepted.”⁴⁷ Hofmann’s command of the piano and technical brilliance rivaled that of older artists and the programs he played were very demanding. His tour in the United States between November of 1887 to February of 1888 was so strenuous that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had to intervene and stop the concerts⁴⁸. After an eleven-year hiatus, Hofmann returned to the States. In March of 1898, he presented two completely different programs a week apart at Carnegie Main Hall:

March 3, 1898 / First Program

J. S. Bach: Prelude and Fugue in D Major, BWV 532

⁴⁶ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 392.

⁴⁷ “Master Josef Hofmann’s Recitals,” *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 28, no. 538 (1887): 727-28.

⁴⁸ Schonberg, *The Glorious Ones*, 296.

- L. van Beethoven: Piano Sonata in A Major, Op. 101
- F. Mendelssohn: Three *Lieder ohne Worte*: A Minor, F Major, C Major
 “Spinnerlied”
- J. Hofmann: *Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme*
- F. Chopin: Nocturne in E Major
 Three Preludes, Op. 28: No. 3 in G Major, No. 11 in B Major, No. 19 in E-flat Major
 Polonaise in A-flat Major, Op. 53
- Schubert-Liszt: “Gretchen am Spinnrade” and “Erlkönig”
- A. Rubinstein: Barcarolle No. 2 in A Minor
- F. Liszt: *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6 in D-flat Major*
- March 11, 1898 / Second Program
- R. Schumann: Piano Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 11
- Chopin-Liszt: Two *Chants Polonais*, S. 480
- F. Chopin: Etude in G-flat Major
 Piano Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58
- J. Hofmann: Berceuse
Etude for the Left Hand Alone “Legende”
- P. Tchaikovsky: Romance in C-sharp Minor
- R. Wagner: *Die Walküre*: “Magic Fire Music”
- A. Rubinstein: *Contredanse*

The programs above are only a glimpse of the massive repertoire he amassed. As a favorite of the Russian tsar, he had full access to the country’s railroads and gave twenty-one concerts in 1912. During that period, he played a total of 255 different works, never repeating any piece.⁴⁹ Hofmann was very controlled for a Romantic pianist. “His tone perpetually unforced and

⁴⁹ Schonberg, *The Glorious Ones*, 298.

singing, never losing control... His rhythm never faltered [and] his ideas about music were clear and uncomplicated. He was the coolest of the Romantic pianists...the perfect pianist.”⁵⁰ His interpretations were not limited however. A piece would not be played the same way twice and he said that “in every art form, expressive greatness is not achieved consciously... The performance must be intuitive—otherwise it is worthless.”⁵¹

The last “Giant” of the Romantic pianists was Vladimir Horowitz. He had a very unique technique that other young pianists envied and tried to emulate. What they cannot copy was his style of playing. Deeply seated in Lisztian/Romantic traditions, he took liberties in rearranging or reinforcing notes already written on the pages, often coming up with his own cadenzas or passagework, especially in virtuosic pieces. He presented pieces that drew the public in, and “looked with scorn on programs that contained only three Beethoven or Schubert sonatas.”⁵² Horowitz also made his own transcriptions, the most well known being the *Variations on a Theme from Carmen*. Through his long performing career, Horowitz’s playing underwent noticeable changes, but his repertoire choices remained the same. The following is his November 15, 1929 concert in Carnegie Hall.

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|---------------|---|
| J. Brahms: | Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5 |
| S. Prokofiev: | Gavotte and <i>Suggestions diaboliques</i> , Op. 4, No. 4 |
| C. Debussy: | <i>L’isle joyeuse</i> |
| F. Chopin: | Polonaise in C-sharp Minor, Op. 26, No. 1 Impromptu in A-flat Major, Op. 29 Waltz in E-flat Major, Op. 18 |
| F. Liszt: | <i>Réminiscences de Don Juan</i> , S. 418 |

⁵⁰ Schonberg, *The Glorious Ones*, 300.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 302.

⁵² *Ibid*, 416.

Forty-six years and a day later, on November 16, 1975, he performed the following program:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| R. Schumann: | <i>Blumenstück</i> , Op. 19 Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 14 “Concert sans orchestra” (1853 version) |
| S. Rachmaninoff: | Prelude in G Major, Op. 32, No. 5 <i>Etude-tableau in E-flat Minor</i> , Op. 39, No. 5 |
| F. Liszt: | <i>Valse oubliée No. 1 in F-sharp Major</i> <i>Années de pèlerinage, première année, Suisse</i> : “Au bord d’une source” |
| F. Chopin: | Waltz in A Minor, Op. 34, No. 2 Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20, No.1 |

Besides standard show pieces, Horowitz was also a promoter of contemporary music. He premiered Samuel Barber’s sonata in 1950 and performed pieces by Poulenc such as the *Novellette* in C Major and *Intermezzo* in D-flat Major. Lesser played nineteenth-century composers such as Clementi and Czerny were often on Horowitz’s program and it is largely thanks to him that there are still recordings of these works.

After Horowitz’s death, this opulent style of Romantic piano playing was kept alive by a few pianists. Hailed as “a genuine musical descendant of Godowsky, Hofmann and Horowitz,”⁵³ Cuban-American pianist Jorge Bolet excelled in repertoire spanning the Romantic period. Bolet extended the “grand manner” into the 1980s. Unlike most of the modern-day pianists, he has the one thing that Horowitz and the ones that came before possess: the ability to combine the composer and the interpreter into a synthesis that explored ideas in between the notes. Bolet was not a purist in concert. He would often alter the score by adding octaves and composing mini-cadenzas. In an interview with famed pianist and pedagogue Adele Marcus, he said that “if music is the art of communication between two human beings by means of musical sound,

⁵³ Schonberg, *The Glorious Ones*, 71.

there's nothing deader than a written piece of music...[The] writing down of a piece of music accounts for fifty per-cent of a performance. The other fifty per-cent is what the performer is able to read into that piece of music and how he can interpret it."⁵⁴ Coming into recognition later in life, Bolet's series of concerts in New York City during the 1970s was met with powerful reviews. For his February 25, 1974 Carnegie Hall concert, the *New York Times* said that Bolet's playing is an "evocation of true grand manner" and that he "opened up an old-fashioned area of incredible brilliance".⁵⁵

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Bach-Busoni: | Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004 |
| F. Chopin: | Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 28 |
| J. Strauss-Tausig: | "Man Lebt nur einmal," Op. 167 <i>Nouvelles soirées de Vienne</i> : "Nachtfalter," Op. 157 |
| J. Strauss-Schulz-Evler: | Arabesques on <i>The Beautiful Blue Danube</i> |
| Wagner-Liszt: | Overture to <i>Tannhäuser</i> |

The review for this recital ends with the sentence "The dead past lived once again under Mr. Bolet's fantastic fingers" as he performed four encores, three of which were "forgotten pieces": Boris de Scholezer's Etude de concert, Moszkowski's "La Jongleuse," and Anton Rubinstein's Etude in C Major, Op. 23, No. 2 ("Staccato Etude").⁵⁶

Despite the glittery exterior of the period and the similarity in programming, these pianists all have their individual style when it comes to piano playing. Underneath the flashy virtuosity, they preserve the integrity of Romantic piano playing and continue to dazzle the listener through the precious recordings we are very fortunate to possess.

⁵⁴Jorge Bolet, as told to Adele Marcus, *Great Pianists Speak*, 84.

⁵⁵Mel Taub, "Bolet's Romantic Pianism Evokes Giants of the Past," *New York Times*, February 27, 1974.

⁵⁶Taub, "Bolet's Romantic Pianism".

Modern-Day Pianists and Their Programs

Scholars and critics in the latter half of the twentieth century lament the disappearance of Romantic pianism.⁵⁷ With the specialization and division in academia discussed in previous paragraphs, as well as the emphasis on “correctness,” it is increasingly difficult for pianists to keep the traditions of the Golden Age. More and more pianists are interpreters with an interest in “historically accurate” performances, which leads them to focus only on what is written on the score. This is especially evident in performances of Austro-German composers such as J. S. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. Period instruments became more popular, and scholar/pianists like Paul Badura-Skoda and Malcolm Bilson have lectured extensively on subjects of historical performance and interpretations.⁵⁸ In an interview with David Dubal, pianist and writer Charles Rosen was asked about playing on the fortepiano. His answer might seem surprising, as Rosen believes that “it is in terms of [Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven’s] achievements that the musical vernacular can best be defined.”⁵⁹ He draws upon historical evidence when examining works by these three composers in his book *The Classical Style*. On the other hand, Rosen was a pupil of Moritz Rosenthal, and retained some Romantic tendencies both in his recital programming and interpretations.⁶⁰ “Personally,” Rosen said to Dubal, “I think it is a mistake to try to limit the composer’s imagination to the instrument he had in his house while he was composing.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Harold Schonberg, Kenneth Hamilton, and David Dubal have all made references to the disappearance of Golden Age piano playing.

⁵⁸For further reading on performance practice, Paul Badura-Skoda and his wife Eva Badura-Skoda wrote several books on the interpretation of keyboard music composers: *Interpreting Mozart: The Performance of His Piano Pieces and Other Compositions*, (New York: Routledge, 2008). *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Sandra P. Rosenblum also wrote an insightful book about performance practice. *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), xi.

⁶⁰ Earlier transcriptions of Liszt were often on his program and he would also play transcriptions by Rosenthal.

⁶¹ Charles Rosen, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 303.

Composers of the past were often inspired by their instruments. Even though they did compose away from the keyboard occasionally, it was the composer themselves who premiered their works. Even when the split of the composer and the interpreter started in the mid-1800s, pianists were still arranging, transcribing, and improvising. Now with so many technological advancements, composers can write away from an acoustic instrument and rely solely on a computer or software. There is a disconnect between the act of composing and performance. It is not mandatory for pianists to take composition classes and composition students in universities are only required to be “proficient” in an instrument. This causes many problems when the compositions are performed by other musicians. Stephen Bishop-Kovacevich says he do not play much contemporary music because of the immense technical and reading problems. “It might as well be played by a computer,” he said to David Dubal, “the rewards are not in proportion to the effort.”⁶²

Pianist Richard Goode does not play any contemporary music in recital nor does he play typical Golden Age virtuosic pieces. He specializes in German music, particularly Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann. His recording of the complete Beethoven sonata was nominated for a Grammy in 1994 and he continues to lecture and perform these works. Goode is a representative of the scholar-pianist coming out of the Germanic music history and research tradition. The *New York Times* review of his Beethoven recordings say that Goode’s artistry comes from integrity and consistency: “There has been something almost audacious about his steady refusal to conform in either his stage appearance or his programming to the expectations of ... a thrill-seeking public.”⁶³ In one of his earliest Carnegie Hall recitals on February 21, 1966,

⁶² Stephen Bishop-Kovacevich, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 59.

⁶³ Michael Kimmelman, “Richard Goode Has Done It His Way (and Beethoven’s),” *New York Times*, December 5, 1993, sec. Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/05/arts/recordings-view-richard-goode-has-done-it-his-way-and-beethoven-s.html?pagewanted=all>.

he presented a program consisting of Schubert's Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959, Mozart's Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 533/K. 494, and Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6. It was much later in his career that he became comfortable playing works of Bach and Chopin. Goode disclosed to Dubal that it took him a year and a half to achieve a certain flexibility in Mazurkas. He feels that when playing Chopin in public, the directness of the moment is always felt.⁶⁴ His opinions on Ignaz Friedman's recordings of Chopin Mazurkas shows how Goode views altering notes: "I think he goes overboard sometimes, things like the added tenths in the bass—it sounds circusy to me."⁶⁵ On March 15, 2017, Goode presented a recital of only Bach and Chopin:

J. S. Bach: *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II*: Prelude and Fugue in F-sharp Minor, G Major, A Minor, B Major

Partita No. 6 in E Minor

F. Chopin: Nocturne in C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1

Mazurkas in C Major, Op. 24, No. 2; A-flat Major, Op. 59, No. 2; F Minor, Op. 7, No. 3; B-flat Minor, Op. 24, No. 4

Ballade No. 3 in A-flat Major, Op. 47

Nocturnes in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 1; E Major, Op. 62, No. 2

Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, Op. 60.

Like Liszt and other pianists saving more serious music for "connoisseurs" in salon concerts during the nineteenth century, Goode's repertoire caters to a particular audience. They are the ones who submit to higher intellectual authority⁶⁶ and would be disappointed with opera excerpts and flimsy bravura because they have conceived a "high idea of German musical taste and cultivation."⁶⁷ Goode holds firm that "it's not the piano but the composer who speaks," and dubs

⁶⁴ Richard Goode, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 189-190.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 190.

⁶⁶ Weber, *The Great Transformation*, 101.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 103.

himself a “purist,” always trying to bring across the composer’s ideas without altering notes. In the same recording review of the Beethoven Sonatas, Kimmelman goes as far as to say that “Mr. Goode makes [the Aria of Op. 110] sound all the more tragic by keeping everything—as Beethoven intended it but one doesn’t always hear it—subdued.”⁶⁸

Murray Perahia is another pianist whose repertoire mainly consists of classical and early-romantic Austro-German composers. He admitted to Dubal that big concert halls intimidate him a little bit, since the pieces that he plays were meant for a much smaller space.⁶⁹ Perahia said that “[Robert] Schumann, with his mosaic-like and fragmented thought, is not for the big hall.”⁷⁰ Along with Mozart, Schubert and Chopin, the composers that flourished in the private salons can be found on almost all of Perahia’s programs. His Carnegie Hall debut recital on January 10, 1966 was just that: four Schubert Impromptus, Chopin’s Second Piano Sonata, and Schumann’s *Kreisleriana*. Beside these “standard” composers, Perahia does add variety to his repertoire, playing semi-bravura pieces by Rachmaninoff and Liszt. This is a program presented on April 10, 1989:

- L. van Beethoven: *Thirty-Two Variations on an Original Theme in C minor*, WoO 80
 Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major, Op. 81a, “Les adieux”
- S. Rachmaninoff: *Etudes-tableaux* in C Major, Op 33, No. 2; A Minor, Op. 39, No. 6; E-flat Major, Op. 39, No. 5; D Major, Op. 39, No. 9
- R. Schumann: *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, Op. 26
- F. Liszt: *Consolation in D-flat Major* S. 172, No. 3
 Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 in C-sharp Minor

⁶⁸ Kimmelman, “Richard Goode Has Done It His Way”.

⁶⁹ Salle Pleyel, where Chopin frequently played later in his career seated 300 before 1927. Even the hall that Liszt often gave concerts in, Saale der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, only seated 700.

⁷⁰ Murray Perahia, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 290.

In recent years however, Perahia's program have gone back to the classic masters he knows best. This change in programming is partially due to a serious hand injury he sustained in 1990. In an interview with *The Telegraph* in early 2000s, Murry Perahia disclosed that during the recovery period he decided to really focus on musical analysis. He said, "it seems to me you can't really be free and spontaneous in your playing unless you understand the rules of voice-leading and figured bass."⁷¹ In May 2017, he played the following program:

J. S. Bach: French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817

F. Schubert: Four Impromptus, D. 935

W. A. Mozart: Rondo in A Minor, K. 511

L. van Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

This program of only Austro-German composers really represents Perahia's concentration on more serious repertoire.

"I will tell you very fervently that Bach is my favorite composer. He is my god, and he always will be."⁷² Sir András Schiff remained true to his word. In the early 2010s, he began extensively programming Bach's keyboard works, culminating in all-Bach concerts in New York City. On October 30, 2013, he performed all six Partitas in Carnegie Hall, starting with No. 5 in G Major, followed by No. 3 in A Minor, No. 1 in B-flat Major, No. 2 in C Minor, No. 4 in D Major, and No. 6 in E Minor, in ascending scalar key pattern. Schiff's description of Bach's music is very interesting. "Bach gives practically no instructions at all. In a way he forces you to become the composer yourself."⁷³ Of course, Schiff was referring to the dynamics, articulation,

⁷¹ Ivan Hewett, "I Don't Really Have Any Technique'," *The Telegraph*, February 27, 2003, sec. Culture: Classical Music, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalmusic/3590418/I-dont-really-have-any-technique.html>.

⁷² András Schiff, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 317.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 317.

and ornamentation of the piece, but isn't this how Golden Age pianists interpreted and arranged their music?

Unlike Murray Perahia, Schiff plays some non-Austro-German composers. Janáček, Smetana, and Bartók can be found scattered among the German giants and in a peculiar program on May 2, 2012, Schiff gave a world premiere of a piece by German composer and clarinetist Jörg Widmann and a United States premiere of a piece by Hungarian composer and pianist György Kurtág. The whole program is as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| J. S. Bach: | Inventions in C Major, E Minor, G Major |
| B. Bartók: | <i>Gyermeknek</i> (“ <i>For Children</i> ”), BB 53, Book II: Selections |
| J. S. Bach: | Inventions in D Minor, F Major, A Minor |
| B. Bartók: | Three Burlesques |
| J. S. Bach: | Inventions in E-flat Major, G Minor, B-flat Major |
| J. Widmann: | <i>Zirkustänze</i> (“ <i>Circus Dances</i> ”) [World premiere] |
| J. S. Bach: | Inventions in E Major, B Minor, D Major |
| B. Bartók: | <i>Mikrokosmos</i> , Vol 6: Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm, BB 105, nos. 148-153 |
| J. S. Bach: | Inventions in F Minor, A Major, C Minor |
| L. van Beethoven: | Six Bagatelles, Op. 126 |
| G. Kurtág: | <i>Hommage à Bartók</i> : “Adieu, Haydée I,” “Adieu, Haydée II,” “Rituale, in Memoriam Strém Kálmán” [United States premiere,] “In Memory of a Pure Soul: Klara Schiff in Memoriam” [United States premiere] |
| B. Bartók: | <i>Out of Doors</i> , BB 89 |

When asked about how he viewed the audience, Schiff replied that no matter how big or how small the hall, he plays to the most sensitive, music-loving people. He never simplifies for an

audience. That, and the fact that he often programs serious, abstract music garnered him some negative reviews for a lack of drama in his playing. Schiff said, “Some critics confuse subtlety and understatement with lack of drama. I get very angry when I listen to exhibitionistic performers.... I admire what [Horowitz and Hofmann] can do instrumentally ... but I believe that I am not in that line. They are great instrumentalists but they are not great musicians, because the composer is secondary.”⁷⁴

The only active pianists today that are still carrying on the “Grand Tradition” would be Evgeny Kissin and Marc-André Hamelin. Kissin rose to fame very early when he performed both Chopin concerti at the age thirteen. His solo debut at Carnegie Hall was on September 30, 1990, and it was a highly-anticipated concert with a mostly romantic program.

R. Schumann: Variations on the name “Abegg”, Op. 1
Études symphoniques, Op. 13

S. Prokofiev: Piano Sonata No. 6 in A Major, Op. 82

F. Liszt: Liebesträume, R. 211; Notturmo No. 3
Rhapsodie espagnole, S. 254

F. Chopin: Waltz in C-sharp Minor, Op 64, No. 2

Allan Kozinn from the *New York Times* wrote in his review that even though “his extremely long fingers often looked as though they were flopping helplessly on the keyboard,” his “chord voicings and balances were carefully judged and flawlessly executed ... even in the loudest, speediest passages ... Mr. Kissin’s audience came to be dazzled, and did not leave disappointed.”⁷⁵ His virtuosity goes deeper than just fast, loud, showy passages. It is the highest level of technical skill, but it also needs to have purpose. Kissin quoted the Soviet music critic David Rabinovich as saying: “pianists like Richter, Gould, Michelangeli, and others have perfect

⁷⁴ Schiff, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 320-321.

⁷⁵ Allan Kozinn, “Recital by Yevgeny Kissin, A Young Soviet Pianist,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1990.

technique, but the technique remains rather unnoticed beneath their musical ideas. But in Horowitz's case, his technique is meant to produce effect. This is technique's stylistic purpose."⁷⁶

His playing style has since matured and his repertoire has grown. While still dazzling, Kissin incorporates more traditional Austro-German composers as well as other lesser-played pieces. This November 6, 2015 concert shows his versatility as an artist, playing not only standard classical period repertoire, but also Spanish music.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| W. A. Mozart: | Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 330 |
| L. van Beethoven: | Piano Sonata in F Minor, Op, 57, "Appassionata" |
| J. Brahms: | Three Intermezzos, Op, 117 |
| I. Albeniz: | <i>Suite española</i> "Granada," Op. 47, No. 1, "Cádiz," Op. 47, No. 4 <i>Chants d'Espagne</i> : "Córdoba," Op 232, No. 4 <i>Suite española</i> : "Asturias," Op. 47, No. 5 |
| J. Larregla: | ¡Viva Navarra! |

Hailed as a "pianist who can play everything" by the *Chicago Tribune* and doing "acrobatics" at the piano by the *New York Times*, Canadian pianist and composer Marc-André Hamelin is the modern reincarnation of the Romantic pianist. John von Rhein, a music critic for the *Tribune* wrote: "In many respects he is a throwback to a golden age of the piano when legendary pianist-composers such as Sergei Rachmaninov... Moritz Rosenthal and Josef Hofmann dazzled audiences with their superhuman feats of derring-do at the keyboard, playing their own music along with the standard repertoire."⁷⁷ Despite all these rave reviews about his technical prowess, Hamelin does not like to be called a "virtuoso." He feels that the meaning of

⁷⁶ Evgeny Kissin, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 269.

⁷⁷ John von Rhein, "Pianist Marc-Andre Hamelin can play anything –just don't call him a virtuoso," *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 2016.

the word has changed in the modern day, and it has come to mean “mere musical athleticism” instead of using technique to achieve artistic aims. Hamelin’s compositions are also quite successful. He thinks it is essential and tremendously beneficial for pianists to compose. From the technically difficult *Triple Étude d’après Chopin* to *Pavane Variée*, Hamelin combines twentieth-century harmonic language and romantic pianism with influences as far back as the Renaissance period. His *Toccata on “L’homme armé,”* the commissioned piece for the 2017 Van Cliburn Competitions, uses the melody from a popular French secular song that was set into mass cycles by over forty composers, including Ockeghem and Dufay. This is his most recent solo recital at Carnegie Hall on January 20, 2016:

W. A. Mozart: Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545

F. Busoni: *An die Jugend*: “Giga” and “Bolero e variazione”

M. Ravel: *Gaspard de la nuit*

M. Hamelin: *Pavane Variée* [New York premiere]

F. Liszt: Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178

Of this concert, the *New York Times* dubbed the programming “delightfully perverse”, as it goes from the “unassuming” Mozart sonata to the two tour-de-forces of any pianist’s repertoire—Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* and Liszt’s B Minor Sonata.

Conclusion

The pianists in this document were chosen to reflect general trends in the Golden Age and modern day. Piano mega stars like Lang Lang and Yuja Wang were not included in this research due to their substantial success in this industry. Due to limitations of space, this document could only touch on a few of the many pianists from the Golden Age and present-day

as well as the program choices they made. Also, not all contributing factors to the seemingly divided concert world of the twenty-first century are discussed. One direction for further research would be to examine the programs performed at competitions and how these program choices suit the tastes of the judges and the general public. From Chopin and Rubinstein to Cliburn and Tchaikovsky, these competitions have propelled some of the most celebrated pianists to stardom. However, it can also limit some pianists' artistic development. To get ready for a competition, pianists often retain and reuse the same repertoire for years. The subjectivity of competitions also causes pianists to lose individuality and put more emphasis on note-accuracy and correct style. Jorge Bolet and Adele Marcus both agree that although the winners usually play everything equally well, there are others who can do the same.⁷⁸ What is missing is the personality, the charisma that the older generation pianists bring to the forefront. Another direction for further research would be to discuss programming of piano concertos. That too is affected greatly by competitions, since winners of major competitions seem to always perform Rachmaninoff's Second or Third Concerto, Prokofiev's Second or Third Concerto, or Tchaikovsky's First Concerto. Rarely do you hear a pianist win a competition with Mozart or Beethoven.

The piano recital, although maintaining a steady number, could use some refurbishing.⁷⁹ One way to make recitals more relevant and appealing to a wider audience might be the incorporation of arrangements from popular music of the day. Pianists could start reacquainting themselves with the art of improvisation and transcriptions based on known movie music and show tunes. More and more orchestras are putting film scores in their programs. Prominent symphonies such as New York Philharmonic, L.A. Philharmonic, and venues such as Royal

⁷⁸ *Great Pianists Speak*, 83.

⁷⁹ According to Carnegie Hall recital records, there is a slight decrease in solo piano recitals (20 to 13) from the 2015-2016 season to 2016-2017 season. The previous years from 1960-2016 all average around 20 concerts per season.

Albert Hall all presented concert series based on famous movie soundtracks like *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*. The piano duo Anderson & Roe performs and publishes their own arrangements of popular music, and the group 2Cellos released an album in March of 2017 of famous television and film soundtracks titled “Score” with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Incorporation of relevant music may attract a more varied audience base, but it is not the only way to revive the piano recital. Due to specialization in universities, most Piano Performance majors are not trained in composition. Students are thus graduating without having been taught to arrange and transcribe works. The more immediate and effective way to liven up a recital would be to draw inspiration from a wider selection of repertoire, starting with iconic pieces of the Golden Age. The nostalgia, accompanied with dazzling virtuosity and tuneful melodies are what makes this era’s music so approachable for the audience. “By being overly intellectual in their choice of programs, musicians often close their minds to some charming, and, in many ways, successful music.”⁸⁰ These wise words from Earl Wild are ever important to today’s artists. As a concert pianist, it is essential to keep the integrity of the composer intact, but it is also essential to have the imagination and charisma of the Romantic pianists. It is time to breathe some new life into the stuffy world of classical music and re-polish some of the glittery gems of the Golden Age.

⁸⁰ Earl Wild, as told to David Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 361.

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