

**Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music
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**The Revolution of the Piano
at the Beginning of the 19th
Century**

DLA Thesis Abstract

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In the first half of the 19th century, the piano developed and spread to such an extent which was unprecedented before. Playing the piano became the fashionable and distinguished activity of the rising bourgeoisie. The piano factories, established one after the other, were mass-producing the more and more perfect instruments. Due to the growing facilities of the piano, composers were able to rely bigger and bigger as well as more and more varied roles on the instrument. A new piano technique was developed and an individual instrumental language was established, which was unique to the piano. The diverging antecedents and prerequisites of this process lay in the social changes, the industrial development, and the change in the role of arts and artists. In order to make clear what exactly the innovation is, it is essential to know what the instrumental and vocal traditions were like in the period under survey. The most important aim of piano development was to achieve the ability of singing-like playing. On the basis of its sound production, the piano cannot be classified as a real tune instrument, however, the approach of the same power of expression as that of the singing voice was in the centre of technical development and the changes in interpretation. Although the beginnings of instrumental tradition go back far in the past, already from the works of Bach and Scarlatti, keyboard pieces were organically, sometimes even directly built in the arts of romanticism. The composer geniuses of the late 18th century were creative piano virtuosos as well, so quite often their compositions – especially those of Beethoven – went beyond the limits of the given musical instrument. Paganini's success and original technique gave the next generation a boost that it was worth creating their own virtuosity. This was the musical background with which Schumann, Chopin and Liszt established their own instrumental world. Their new ideas were realised in etudes, finger-exercises (Liszt), and in representative concertos, which mostly demonstrated their ideas of virtuosity.

The main topic of my thesis is to examine what these technical elements are, where they might come from, how they are built up, how and in what way the composers affected each other, how much the way they treated the piano was similar to or different from each other. Being a practising pianist and a teacher, usually I only come across such findings in the subject which are confined to a limited and mainly typical spectrum of clichés. This is the reason why I have tried to look into the topic more thoroughly than usual, occasionally with the use of my own practical experiences as well – but

unfortunately still without exhausting the subject. From this point of view, the following musical pieces are of high priority: Beethoven's Sonatas, Czerny's Etudes, the Paganini Caprices, Schumann's Paganini Etudes, the Symphonic Etudes, the Toccata, Chopin's Etudes, Liszt's Finger-exercises, the Paganini Etudes, the Transcendental Etudes, the Concert Etudes, and the pre-impressionistic pieces (The Fountains of Villa d'Este, Years of Pilgrimage I. etc.). This was the time when sometimes a new piece of music could already be played on a new, further-developed piano. From the middle of the century on, this rapidity diminished, the piano became fully developed, and the era came to an end.

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