



Ellis, K. (1997). Female Pianists and their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris. *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50(2-3), 353-385.

Publisher's PDF, also known as Final Published Version

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

## **University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research**

### **General rights**

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pure/about/ebr-terms.html>

### **Take down policy**

Explore Bristol Research is a digital archive and the intention is that deposited content should not be removed. However, if you believe that this version of the work breaches copyright law please contact [open-access@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:open-access@bristol.ac.uk) and include the following information in your message:

- Your contact details
- Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
- An outline of the nature of the complaint

On receipt of your message the Open Access Team will immediately investigate your claim, make an initial judgement of the validity of the claim and, where appropriate, withdraw the item in question from public view.



---

Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris

Author(s): Katharine Ellis

Source: *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn, 1997), pp. 353-385

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [American Musicological Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831838>

Accessed: 25-05-2015 12:02 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*University of California Press and American Musicological Society* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the American Musicological Society*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris

KATHARINE ELLIS

In 1848, the journal *La France musicale* published a cautionary tale entitled *Le Démon de la mélomanie*, inspired by Balzac's novel *La Muse du département* of 1843–44 and written under the initials "C. V."<sup>1</sup> The story concerns the artistic delusions of an amateur woman pianist who disdains the prospect of a good provincial marriage and sets out on a doomed European concert tour of the kind undertaken by major virtuosi, trying, on the way, to market her compositions in a luxury edition of *oeuvres complètes*. Only later, when stranded in Italy, poverty-stricken and seriously ill, does she reflect upon the wisdom of her decisions. But the miraculous arrival of her fiancé (now town postmaster), bearing the news that she is the main beneficiary of her long-suffering guardian-uncle's will, ensures a happy ending. Marriage and provincial domesticity beckon. In an introduction to the tale, "C. V." explained its moral. While not blaming women in general for aspirations to fame, he counseled a healthy self-criticism that would lead to self-knowledge and the realization that artistic mediocrity was best kept private:

Earlier versions of this article were read at the Women in the Humanities Group of The Open University; graduate seminars at the University College of Wales, Bangor, and Royal Holloway, University of London; and at the British Musicology Conference 1996, King's College, London. I am grateful to all those who offered comments during these presentations, and especially to Nigel Bowles, Tim Carter, Ruth Solie, and my anonymous referees, whose detailed comments on earlier drafts were of particular help. Thanks are also due to the *Music and Letters* Trust and the Music Department at Royal Holloway for helping fund my research. A brief, related article focusing solely on the question of professionalism will appear in the proceedings of the conference "Professionalismus in der Musik" (Bad Köstritz, 22–25 August 1996), organized by the Fachgruppe für Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte der Musik in der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung.

1. *La France musicale* (henceforth *FM*) 11, nos. 2–4 (9–23 January 1848). Since so few women critics actively contributed to general music journals in mid-nineteenth-century France (only two are known, Lia Duport and Thérèse Wartel), I assume that "C. V." is male. Women were active in other sectors of the music periodicals market, however, especially educational journals and journals of religious music. Balzac's story forms the second novel of the section "Les Parisiens en province" in *La Comédie humaine*.

[*Journal of the American Musicological Society* 1997, vol. 50, nos. 2–3]

© 1997 by the American Musicological Society. All rights reserved. 0003-0139/97/5002-0003\$2.00

That which is laudable perseverance in the gifted elite takes on the character of deplorable obstinacy in second-rate people. This truth should be contemplated seriously by women who attempt to make the art of music their profession. Let them consult their inner selves before making a definitive decision. Let them question whether they really possess sufficient resources to show themselves to good effect. If they combine verve and inspiration with good taste and learning, they can move ahead with a confident step; but if they lack the qualities which make superior artists, common sense condemns them to renouncing a futile battle in which they would exhaust their delicate energies and find the sweetness of their character, their kindness of spirit, changed for the worse; they will be only too fortunate if, having pursued the unattainable, they can regain their hold on firm realities and the happy obscurity which they had disdained.<sup>2</sup>

The story ends: “Eugénie Bernard is now Mme Renaud. She is still a charming woman. She has not ceased to cultivate music, but does so only as a useful distraction. She is the first to laugh at what she jokingly calls her *musical skirmish*.”<sup>3</sup> Though lacking the scandal of pregnancy outside marriage that lies at the center of Balzac’s novel, or the altogether darker treatment of a similar theme in Virginia Woolf’s tale of the fictitious Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One’s Own*,<sup>4</sup> the lessons for young women with professional aspirations are laid out clearly enough. The topicality and historical importance of the story, however, lie not so much in its emulation of Balzac’s altogether wittier tale as in its application of his model to the subject of women playing and composing for the piano. Only four years earlier, there were too few prominent women pianists to make such a satire plausible. The only possibility would have been to apply Balzac’s model to female singers (indeed, “C. V.” mentions the pernicious influence of Cor-

2. “Ce qui est une persévérance louable chez des organisations d’élite, prend le caractère d’une déplorable obstination chez les intelligences ordinaires. Cette vérité doit être sérieusement méditée par les femmes qui prétendent faire de l’art musical une profession. Qu’avant de prendre un parti décisif, elles consultent leurs forces. Qu’elles examinent si elles possèdent réellement des ressources suffisantes pour se produire avec avantage. Si elles joignent au goût et à la science la verve et l’inspiration, elles peuvent s’avancer d’un pas ferme; mais si elles manquent des qualités qui constituent les artistes supérieurs, la raison leur prescrit de renoncer à une lutte stérile dans laquelle s’userait leur délicate organisation et s’altérerait la douceur de leur caractère, la bonté de leur âme; trop heureuses encore si, après avoir couru après des chimères, elles pouvaient ressaisir les réalités solides et le bonheur obscur qu’elles avaient dédaigné” (*FM* 11, no. 2 [9 January 1848]: 13).

3. “Eugénie Bernard est aujourd’hui M<sup>me</sup> Renaud. C’est toujours une charmante femme. Elle n’a point cessé de cultiver la musique, mais seulement comme une utile distraction. Elle est la première à rire de ce qu’elle nomme assez plaisamment son *échauffourée musicale*” (*FM* 11, no. 4 [23 January 1848]: 30).

4. An outline of the story, in which Judith commits suicide, is provided in Marcia Citron’s *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44. Balzac’s heroine, like “C. V.”’s, is brought back to her original social milieu at the end of the novel.

nié Falcon and Maria Malibran as role models). Despite Clara Schumann's visits to Paris in 1832 (during a cholera epidemic, unfortunately) and 1839, and the burgeoning of Marie Pleyel's career during the same period, the series of events that made pianism a credible vehicle occurred only in 1844–45: a sudden rise in concerto and recital performances by talented women, and Pleyel's return to Paris as an international soloist.<sup>5</sup>

This article argues that these years were crucial in the history of women's pianism in France. Male critics were forced into uncharted territory in which they had to develop critical rhetorics with which to evaluate the increasing numbers of professional female pianists participating in all the public arenas of Parisian concert life. Because of their status as interpreters primarily, rather than composers, women pianists not only challenged traditional ideas about the meaning of pianistic virtuosity, but were also central to the development of the keyboard repertory toward chronological and stylistic range on the one hand and historical specialization on the other. Compared with most of their male colleagues, however, women were at a disadvantage; they became caught in a web of conflicting ideas concerning the relative value of particular keyboard repertoires that were themselves gendered, either explicitly or implicitly. Aside from questions of repertory, criticism of the period was saturated with problematic notions of the use of the body, feminine attitudes (or otherwise) at the keyboard, and appropriate levels of acting in performance. It was a disquieted male gaze that beheld women's public display of that most appropriate female domestic accomplishment: playing the piano.

5. Marie Pleyel (née Moke, 1811–1875): most famous for deserting Berlioz and marrying secure money in the form of the piano manufacturer Camille Pleyel. She concentrated on contemporary music, her repertory reaching back only as far as Beethoven. Although she was well established as a pianist and teacher from 1830 on, the reception of her performances of 1845 in Paris marked a watershed in her career. It is significant that Pleyel was the only pianist named in "C. V." 's story: like Falcon and La Malibran, she, too, was regarded as an unfortunate influence on young women. The most extended biographical essay on Pleyel is still her entry by Rita Benton in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 15:10–11. The biographical sketches of pianists in the present article have been drawn up mostly from nineteenth-century archives, concert reviews, and obituaries, although Joël-Marie Fauquet's *Les Sociétés de musique de chambre à Paris de la Restauration à 1870* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1986) provided an invaluable starting point for lesser-known figures. The biographies of Massart, Mattmann, Szarvady, and Tardieu de Malleville are based on those in my *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: "La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris," 1834–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 255–61. For information on Clara Schumann's experiences in Paris in the 1830s, see Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985), 53 and 90–91. Most of the women pianists under discussion married and changed their names. For clarity, in this article I shall use the name by which each was best known—usually the married name—even if the review concerned antedates the artist's marriage.

## Historical context

Until the mid 1840s, the most conspicuous kind of pianist in Paris was the male composer-virtuoso, whose reputation was built largely around performances of his own virtuoso pieces—concertos, concerto movements, and operatic fantasies in particular. Narcissistic and competitive, he basked in the authority of both complete control over and ownership of his repertory. He adapted or revised his works in performance and composed in such a way as to emphasize his technical strengths and mask his deficiencies. Moreover, the performer fed the composer's narcissism by providing a reflection, through the fingers, of authorial thought.<sup>6</sup> Descriptions of audience reaction to such performances, especially those by Liszt and Thalberg, commonly dwelt on the element of conquest. A typical example is Joseph d'Ortigue's review of Thalberg playing his own "Moïse" Fantasy in 1837

6. Though much of the operatic fantasia repertory of Friedrich Kalkbrenner and Heinrich Herz (to name two of many) constitutes sets of patterned variations that emphasize the static and decorative, rather than the symphonic and developmental, its character, when played by its composer, remains masculine. Such repertory becomes feminized when watered down into pieces marketable to amateur ladies as "brilliant but not difficult." An advertisement, taken at random from the *Revue et Gazette musicale* (henceforth *RGM*) of 1837, illustrates the point. Maurice Schlesinger's new *Bibliothèque du jeune pianiste* was a collection of educational pieces on operatic themes by the virtuoso Charles Schunke. Schlesinger introduced the collection thus: "M. Charles Schunke, the famous pianist whose marvelous playing might lead one to think that he would compose only for first-rate pianists, has generously devoted his leisure time to *studious young people*. The *Bibliothèque du jeune Pianiste* is directed at the progress of young people: this collection is at once *easy, brilliant* and full of *melody*" ("M. Charles Schunke, le célèbre pianiste, dont l'exécution merveilleuse ne fait supposer que la composition de morceaux pour la première force, a bien voulu consacrer ses heures de loisir à la *jeunesse studieuse*. La *Bibliothèque du jeune Pianiste* est destinée aux progrès de la jeunesse: ce recueil est à la fois *facile, brillant* et plein de *mélodie*"). The first volume contained music based on the prayer from Rossini's *Moïse* and was entitled *Simple leçons aux jeunes filles* (*RGM* 4, no. 14 [1 April 1837], 116). The tradition of marketing variations on popular operatic themes to women as "brilliant but not difficult" pieces plays into a host of prejudices concerning women's character and abilities. First, the female pianist plays (is) a pale imitation of the authentic male original (Schlesinger's advertisement makes clear that the great Schunke is lowering his sights in writing *La Bibliothèque*). Moreover, in playing an arrangement that is "brilliant but not difficult," the female pianist gives the impression of displaying more technique than she really has. A lack of substance is thus obscured by brilliant surface detail that captures the attention. The idea of patterned stasis as feminized is explored by Lawrence Kramer in his study of Gretchen's music in Liszt's "Faust" Symphony. See his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 102–34, esp. 106–8. For a fine interdisciplinary study of detail as feminized, see Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987). Particularly relevant are her discussions of the how detail was feminized through comparison with the sublime in late eighteenth-century art and literature (pp. 17–22) and her analysis of Francis Wey's *Remarques sur la langue française au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1845) in relation to the masculine Hugo and the excessively detailed, feminized, and decadent Balzac (pp. 34–37).

(the year of the great keyboard battle with Liszt), which makes clear how a quasi-sexual possession of the audience was an integral and necessary part of the performance:

All the way through this piece, you should have seen the public ready to yield to its emotion, holding itself in check in order not to miss a single note, a chord, of this sublime performance; you should have heard these shudders run through and dwell a moment in all parts of the hall, then die away; the audience was gasping for breath, frantic, and seemed to be waiting impatiently for the last chord, so that it could allow the enthusiasm which was oppressing it to burst out.<sup>7</sup>

The sexual imagery centers on issues of control: control of the audience by the performer, barely maintained self-control among the listeners themselves, and control over the music by the composer himself. Furthermore, given the fiercely competitive state of the piano-making industry in the 1840s, the entire experience suggests a celebration of technology, itself the expression of a desire to control nature.

What place was there for women within such a system? At first sight, the answer appears stark: few women were able to conform to the virtuoso-composer paradigm because few composed. Women had limited opportunities to be trained in composition, either in Paris or elsewhere in Europe. The same was true of professional prizes, gateways to a career. The Paris Conservatory barred women from competing in the Prix de Rome until 1903, when government pressure forced the institution to change the rules of eligibility.<sup>8</sup> Earlier French composers such as Louise Farrenc and

7. "Il fallait voir le public, pendant la durée de ce morceau, prêt à céder sans cesse à son émotion, se domptant lui-même pour ne pas perdre une note, un accord de cette exécution sublime; il fallait entendre ces frissonnements courir et se prolonger dans toutes les parties de la salle, et s'éteindre aussitôt; l'auditoire était haletant, éperdu, et semblait attendre impatiemment le dernier accord, pour laisser éclater un enthousiasme qui l'oppressait" (*RGM* 4, no. 12 [19 March 1837]: 97).

8. The debates aroused by the first challengers of this male bastion are discussed by Annegret Fauser in "La Guerre en dentelles: Four Women, the Prix de Rome, and French Cultural Politics," a paper read at the Sixty-first Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, New York, November 1995. Against a backdrop of male disparagement of women's mental capacity for composition, the wider implications of restricted access to professional training in Europe and America were outlined pithily by Alice Stone Blackwell in *The Woman's Journal* of 29 August 1891: "When women have had for several centuries the same advantages of liberty, education, and social encouragement in the use of their brains that men have, it will be right to argue their mental inferiority if they have not produced their fair share of geniuses. But it is hardly reasonable to expect women during a few years of half liberty and half education to produce at once specimens of genius equal to the choicest men of all the ages." Quoted in Judith Tick, "Passed Away Is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870–1900," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 325–48,

Louise Bertin studied privately. Farrenc, who worked almost exclusively in large-scale forms, was unique in carving out a reputation as a fine, if conservative, symphonist and chamber music composer. Bertin concentrated on opera, though her career was fatally wounded after the politically influenced failure of her *La Esmeralda* at the Opéra in 1836.<sup>9</sup> Women who wrote salon pieces and romances faced weaker institutional opposition and often pursued highly successful careers as composers specializing in “lesser” forms. Loïsa Puget was one such, writing over three hundred romances, many of which she sang herself; for the piano, her counterpart was Joséphine Martin,<sup>10</sup> who composed a host of salon pieces that were always warmly welcomed in the press. The composition of virtuoso operatic fantasies or concertos was, however, a different matter.<sup>11</sup>

The question of whether women were capable of mental creativity was crucial in their reception as composers and performers; indeed, it was an issue that affected women artists in all fields. In 1863, Jules Sandeau, fighting for the right of female writers to be accepted as members of the Académie française, half-jokingly accused them of complicity in perpetuating the myth that women lacked intellectual power and creative genius. They were, he argued, complicit because they published too little to counter male

---

at 334. Forty years later, Ethel Smyth argued exactly the same point in her *Female Pipings in Eden*:

Face this truth; that because of what has been our position hitherto in the world of music, *there is not at this present moment (1933) one single middle-aged woman alive who has had the musical education that has fallen to men as a matter of course, without any effort on their part, ever since music was!*

Imagine then our feelings when people whip out their binoculars, sweep the landscape, and announce that so far, strange to say, no advancing army of eminent women composers is to be descried on the horizon.

Quoted in *Women in Music*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates, rev. ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 286.

9. The only substantial work on Farrenc is still Bea Friedland's *Louise Farrenc (1804–1875): Composer, Performer, Scholar* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980). For information on Bertin, see Denise Lynn Boneau, *Louise Bertin and Opera in Paris in the 1820s and 1830s* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1989).

10. Joséphine Martin (dates unknown; died after 1896): immensely popular solo pianist who played her own salon compositions to great acclaim. She was taught by her father and by Pierre Zimmermann. Her repertory extended from the Viennese classics to the latest works of Liszt, Doehler, Thalberg, and Prudent.

11. For broader discussions of the problems facing aspiring nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women composers, see Citron's *Gender and the Musical Canon*, especially her section on the problem of confidence in creativity, 54–70. Tick, Citron, and Jeffrey Kallberg have recently addressed the issue of the devaluation of “smaller forms” and their perceived suitability for women in contrast to the masculinized forms of sonata and symphony. See Tick, “Passed Away Is the Piano Girl,” 336–38; Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 130–32; and Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 40–45. Tick's discussion of what she terms the “sexual aesthetics” of composition is particularly important, not only for women composers but also for women interpreters.



claims that literary creativity was beyond them.<sup>12</sup> It is easy to see how women pianists might be similarly accused. Between 1828 and 1870, no female soloist played a work of her own at the prestigious Société des Concerts; few men played anything else. With the exception of Joséphine Martin, female pianists in Paris made their reputations as interpreters of—or vessels for—the creative products of men. As such they reinforced a gender stereotype that called for women to renounce an individual authorial voice but allowed them, like St. Cecilia, to transmit the lofty inspirations of others: “Cecilia . . . played the organ, but she did not compose organ symphonies.”<sup>13</sup> Yet this very renunciation of authorship turned women’s choice of pianistic repertory into a serious issue. During a century in which the cult of the work gradually superseded the cult of the performer, interpreter-virtuosos participated in the process of defining a hierarchy of works and convincing a sometimes skeptical public of the lasting value of historical repertoires.

The years 1844–45 provided a series of revelations for male critics, heralded by Louise Mattmann’s performance of the first movement of Beethoven’s Third Piano Concerto at the Société des Concerts on 11 February 1844.<sup>14</sup> Then, the following year, came the “reign of the women,” as it was dubbed on numerous occasions in *Le Ménestrel*. Critics ran out of superlatives to describe the playing of Marie Pleyel; she was, they noted, at the head of a rapidly growing phenomenon—the female concert pianist:

The year 1845 will mark the beginning of a new era.—It is the [repeal] of the Salic Law in the art of the piano!—already a formidable battalion threatens the all-powerful bearded ones: Mme Pleyel is at their head, then the pianist of the queen of the French, Mme Catherine de Dietz,<sup>15</sup> Mlles Mattmann,

12. Jules Sandeau, “Réponse de Monsieur \*\*\*” (1863), reprinted in *Les Femmes et l’Académie française*, ed. François Fleutot (Paris: Editions de l’Opale, 1980), 57.

13. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, eds., *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 1.

14. Louise Mattmann (1826–1861): a child prodigy “discovered” by the duchess of Orléans in 1837 and taught by Friedrich Kalkbrenner. She became renowned for her performances of Beethoven, playing his concertos and Mozart’s K. 466 with the Société des Concerts’ orchestra. She concentrated mainly on chamber work, especially with Jules Armingaud, Pierre Maurin, and Charles Lebouc, for whose concerts she acted as resident pianist in 1855–60. There are no known compositions except a cadenza to Mozart’s K. 466.

15. Cathinka von Dietz (dates unknown): Bavarian pianist, pupil of Kalkbrenner. She made her Paris debut on 7 February 1836 at the Salle Pleyel with the first movement of Hummel’s Concerto in A Minor and Kalkbrenner’s staple debut piece—his Grand Duo in D for two pianos, Op. 128—with Thalberg. Her career revolved around placements at royal courts. By 1840 she was pianist to the queen of Bavaria; the following year she played at the French court and was appointed pianist to the queen of the French in 1845. She composed salon pieces, played regularly for Queen Victoria, and was reported to have written an oratorio for which Queen Victoria accepted the dedication. Her pianistic style was Classical, firmly within the Kalkbrenner tradition. She sometimes published under her married name, Mackenzie von Dietz.

Bohrer,<sup>16</sup> Farrenc,<sup>17</sup> Masson,<sup>18</sup> Joséphine Martin, Loveday,<sup>19</sup> Wartel,<sup>20</sup> etc., a ravishing constellation that will easily prevail over a sex which in general has nothing ravishing about it.<sup>21</sup>

16. Sophie Bohrer (1828–before 1866): daughter of Antoine Bohrer. Her career in Paris was short. By 1848 she was in St. Petersburg, and I have found no references to her in the Paris press after this date. With a near-perfect virtuoso technique by the age of seventeen, she was renowned for a prodigious memory, supremacy in the playing of Bach fugues, and an ability to match her style to that of the composer in question. In 1845 she was tipped to take Pleyel's place as the finest pianist of her day.

17. Victorine Farrenc (1826–1859): daughter of Aristide and Louise Farrenc. After study with her mother, she went to the Paris Conservatory, winning first prize in the women's piano class of 1844. Her career was cut short by illness.

18. (Louise-)Agláé Massart (née Masson; 1827–1887): pianist and teacher. Trained at the Paris Conservatory, she was a renowned interpreter of Beethoven: Berlioz called her "Appassionata" Sonata "perfection" in a letter of 14 March 1861 (letter 2542 in *Hector Berlioz: Correspondance générale*, ed. Pierre Citron, 6 vols. to date [Paris: Flammarion, 1972– ], 6:210–11, at 211). She premiered Léon Kreutzer's piano concerto of 1861. In 1845 she was appointed pianist to the duchess of Nemours. After her marriage to the Belgian violinist Lambert Massart, her household became a major meeting place for musicians, especially Berlioz in his final years. Both taught at the Paris Conservatory. Aglaé took Louise Farrenc's post after the latter's retirement in 1872, but appears to have started her appointment only in 1875. Her chamber involvement was mainly with the Armingaud/Jacquard Quartet (from 1860), for whom she shared the job of resident pianist with Ernst Lübeck. There are no known compositions.

19. Clara Loveday (dates unknown; presumably British): pupil of Amédée Méreaux, and better known in England than in France. Her solo repertory tended to be restricted to contemporary virtuoso works, though from 1838 to 1840 she was resident pianist for the Alard/Chevillard Quartet (their first since the founding of the ensemble).

20. Thérèse Wartel (née Andrien; 1814–1865): pianist, teacher, composer, and critic. She was educated at the Paris Conservatory, after which she joined the staff as an accompanist and teacher of solfège. Renowned as an interpreter of Beethoven and as a chamber pianist, her book on Beethoven interpretation—*Leçons écrites sur les sonates pour piano seul de L. van Beethoven* (Paris: E. et A. Girod, 1865)—was warmly received in the Paris musical press. All her compositions are for solo piano. For more information and a work-list, see my article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, ed. Julie Ann Sadie and Rhian Samuel (London: Macmillan, 1994), 486–87.

21. "L'année 1845 marquera une nouvelle ère.—C'est l'avènement de la loi salique dans l'art du piano!—déjà un bataillon formidable menace la toute-puissance de la barbe: Mme Pleyel en tête, puis la pianiste de la reine des français, Mme Catherine de Dietz, Milles Mattmann, Bohrer, Farrenc, Masson, Joséphine Martin, Loveday, Wartel, etc., pléiade ravissante qui l'emportera sans peine sur un sexe qui en général n'a rien de ravissant" (unsigned, *Le Ménestrel* [henceforth *Mén*] 12, no. 18 [30 March 1845]: [2]). Clara Schumann's name is conspicuously absent. The *loi salique* denied the right of female succession to the thrones of, among other countries, France and Spain. My translation of "la reine des français" as "the queen of the French" reflects the author's use of the feminine version of an epithet coined by Louis-Philippe in order to distance his regime from that of Louis XVI, who was the "king of France."

This unsigned critic for *Le Ménestrel* named most of the key figures in women's pianism in 1840s and 1850s Paris, the others being Charlotte Tardieu de Malleville<sup>22</sup> and Wilhelmine Szarvady.<sup>23</sup>

But the “reign of the women” brought with it particular problems for critics who praised Liszt, Thalberg, Doehler, and others for the stereotypically masculine qualities of athletic bravura, interpretive and physical power, and showmanship. Such qualities were diametrically opposed to those prized in women—particularly married ones—for whom the legacy of the Napoleonic Code of 1804 exhorting them not to think, but only to believe, and denying them rights of individual expression or decision making, remained virtually unchallenged until the founding of the French feminist movement in 1858. A woman pianist performing operatic fantasies and other virtuoso pieces in Paris's concert halls provided a direct challenge to such behavioral codes by making a spectacle of herself. And although rituals of display have always been associated with the feminine rather than the masculine, French bourgeois mores, like their Victorian counterparts, ensured that any public performance by a woman raised questions about her personal conduct.<sup>24</sup> Those mores were not a product of the Napoleonic

22. Charlotte Tardieu de Malleville (née D'Arpentigny Malleville; 1830–1890): pianist and composer of piano miniatures. A pupil of Amédée Méreaux, from whom she may have derived her abiding interest in early music, she rarely played music by living composers. Most renowned as a Mozartian and as resident or guest pianist for Paris chamber societies, including the Maurin/Chevillard Quartet from 1855 to 1869, she also regularly organized four chamber concerts per year in the salles Sax, Pleyel, or Erard from 1849 to 1869.

23. Wilhelmine Szarvady (née Clauss; 1834–1907): pianist born and trained in Prague. She made her Paris debut in 1851, toured Europe as a soloist, and later settled in Paris. A champion of Schumann and Brahms, she also specialized in harpsichord music. Her breadth of repertory equaled that of Clara Schumann, with whom she formed a duet partnership. She was particularly respected for her fidelity to the composer's intentions and her ability to play in different styles. In the 1860s she published nine of her repertory of Baroque pieces (in three sets entitled *Trois morceaux de piano tirés des programmes de concert de Mme Szarvady, née Clauss* [Paris: J. Maho; Leipzig: Serff; London: S(ationers') Hall, 1863–64]). She played regularly with the Maurin/Chevillard Quartet from 1858 to 1863, and was resident pianist for the Müller Quartet on their visit to Paris in 1866.

24. The relationship between female traditions of display and the masculinized showmanship of virtuoso pianism is complex, and is best explained by reference to the recent work of Lucy Green. Arguing that female singing is a pursuit that affirms femininity (in both its guises—unthreatening and sexually dangerous) because the instrument and the body are a unity, Green posits that the feminine (i.e., the “natural”) in woman is “interrupted” by the presence of technology in the form of an instrument. Conversely, “those very qualities of instrumental performance which for the female performer are interruptive of her femininity are for the male player relatively affirmative of his masculinity” (Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 54; see also 24–26). Of all mid-nineteenth-century instruments, the concert grand piano was the most technology-driven; instrumental affirmation of masculinity was thus at its strongest in the piano and was epitomized in the gladiatorial combat of Liszt and Thalberg in 1837.

Code; rather, they were deeply entrenched from the time of Rousseau's *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*, in which his attack on actresses provided all the ingredients for later concerns about the sexual availability of a woman performing in public. Of particular importance is Rousseau's pitting of female modesty and domesticity (the true, natural woman) against female display (the aberrant woman), since women in the latter category bordered on hermaphroditism in their adoption of masculine behavior. More important for Rousseau than the deviance of such women was their potentially effeminizing effect on the men who shared their company or watched them on stage in roles where they outwitted men: "Unable to turn themselves into men, women turn us into women."<sup>25</sup>

The reception of nineteenth-century female pianists was complicated still further by their active and successful participation in a second male-gendered repertory: the Beethovenian sonata, concerto, and chamber tradition. In this case, their critical reception was colored not only by issues of gender, but also by a fundamental disagreement among critics about musical progress and value. Writers who supported the virtuoso strand within pianism—including such men as Oscar Comettant, Gustave Chouquet, and the critic and music publisher Léon Escudier—believed that pianism was following a linear path of artistic and technical progress at whose head stood the nineteenth-century virtuoso-composer. By contrast, critics who lauded Beethoven and the Viennese tradition—among them Maurice Bourges and Joseph d'Ortigue—rejected such simplistic notions of progress (and the "empty" virtuosity that went with them), instead supporting the idea that age did not lessen the musical value of a particular work. The conflict of these two ideologies found a curious battleground in reviews of women pianists who played works in either the "virtuoso" category or the "Beethovenian" one. Moreover, it underwent a further twist when women avoided such male-gendered genres and instead concentrated on repertory that was gendered feminine: the keyboard music of Beethoven's predecessors.

25. "Faute de pouvoir se rendre hommes, les femmes nous rendent femmes" (*Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* [1758; Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967], 195–96). Pages 113–16 and 166–82 contain the most important passages relating to women. Rousseau explores similar themes in *Emile, ou De l'éducation* (1762), in which he sets out his ideas regarding the proper education for boys and girls. Paul Hoffmann provides a broader study of Rousseau's attitude toward women in his *La Femme dans la pensée des Lumières* (Paris: Editions Ophrys, [1977]), 359–446. Rousseau's work still provides an important starting point for societal studies of hermaphroditism and sexual deviance. See Gilbert Herdt's "Introduction: Third Sexes and Third Genders," in his edited collection *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 21–81, at 35.

## The gendering of repertoires

The idea that women pianists should play different repertory from their male counterparts was institutionalized by the Paris Conservatory throughout the nineteenth century in the works selected for the end-of-year competitions in the men's and women's piano classes. The differences are at their starkest in the second half of the century. Beethoven was assigned to the men's class in 1863 (his first appearance in the repertory lists), 1876, 1880, 1886, and 1897 through 1900. The women's class was never given Beethoven. Instead, the required pieces for the same period consisted mostly of Chopin, with Haydn assigned in 1899 and Bach in 1898 and 1900. With the exception of an arrangement of a Mozart fugue in 1840 (from the Requiem), male students were never required to play the music of composers older than Cramer, Beethoven, and Hummel. The years from 1898 on, when two contrasting works were required, are particularly revealing. For the men, the constant was Beethoven; for the women, it was either Haydn or Bach.<sup>26</sup>

Conservatory practice in the selection of competition pieces merely provides institutional confirmation of a trend detectable several decades earlier in other contexts. In France, most of Beethoven's orchestral music had been implicitly gendered male by 1840. Following Hoffmann, sympathetic critics such as Berlioz and D'Ortigue regularly associated the Third, Fifth, and Ninth Symphonies with the terror of the sublime, itself a masculine category in opposition to the feminine category of beauty.<sup>27</sup> By the late 1850s, certain of the late piano sonatas (particularly Op. 111), string quartets, and piano trios were described in similar language, probably because by that time Beethoven's piano and chamber works had come to be regarded as miniature symphonies.<sup>28</sup> But the phenomenon of explicit

26. Constant Pierre, *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation: Documents historiques et administratifs recueillis ou reconstitués* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1900), 584–94.

27. Hoffmann's discussion occurs in one of his most famous essays: the review of Beethoven's Fifth, first published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of 4 and 11 July 1810. A translation is given in David Charlton, ed., *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: "Kreisleriana," "The Poet and the Composer," Music Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 234–51, at 237–38. For a discussion of the gendering of the beautiful and the sublime in pre- and early-Romantic thought, see Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, 2d ed. (London: The Women's Press, 1994), 107–13; and Schor, *Reading in Detail*, 17–22.

28. "A. S.," in *RGM* 25, no. 12 (21 March 1858): 96, noted that the piano sonatas needed only to be orchestrated to become true symphonies; and in 1847, Blanchard called the Quartet Op. 95 a chamber symphony (*RGM* 14, no. 49 [5 December 1847]: 394). The practice of calling Beethoven's piano sonatas and quartets symphonic as a means of eulogizing them reveals another aspect of the gendering of genres examined by Tick, Citron, and Kallberg (see above, n. 11).

gendering in the 1840s is most noticeable when it involves music categorized as feminine, as in Maurice Bourges's description of the *Pastoral* Symphony: "It is perhaps the only one in which the master revealed himself throughout as fine-grained, delicate, almost coquettish, without any explosion of energy. Thus, this work, where the Hercules of music wraps his club in floral garlands and seems to spin at Omphale's feet, admirably finished off a concert of an entirely feminine kind."<sup>29</sup> The later piano concertos were themselves dubbed "symphonic." They, too, shared in the masculinization of Beethoven to the point where Bourges could say, with surprised admiration, of Louise Mattmann's performance of the Fourth Concerto in 1845: "There are hardly any women capable of understanding and translating the works of the masters with such imagination, and particularly Beethoven's *concerto*, which is the equal of his finest symphonies."<sup>30</sup> In February 1848, Bourges contrasted the Conservatory's "feminine" program with the previous "masculine" concert, which included the *Eroica* Symphony and the Fourth Piano Concerto.<sup>31</sup> Beethoven's reviewers did not deny that his genius had a feminine side (the review of the *Pastoral* cited above indicates the perceived presence of delicacy and coquetry in other, "masculine," works); rather, it was the imbalance of gendered elements within particular works that drew so many of them—particularly those of the middle period—into the "masculine" category of the sublime.

At different times during the century, other repertoires came to be gendered feminine as well. Baroque music, Haydn, Mozart, and even Hummel were drawn into a stereotypically feminine world of decorative and sweetly plaintive expression, contrasting with the gigantic outbursts of Beethoven or the dazzling virtuosity of Liszt and Thalberg.<sup>32</sup> Haydn was, in the

29. "C'est peut-être la seule où le maître se soit montré d'un bout à l'autre fin, délicat, presque coquet, sans mélange d'explosion énergique. Aussi cette oeuvre où l'Hercule musical enroule sa massue de guirlandes fleuries et semble filer aux pieds d'Omphale, complétait-elle au mieux un concert d'un genre tout féminin" (*RGM* 15, no. 7 [13 February 1848]: 53). The "feminine" concert also included a Haydn symphony and arias from *The Creation* and *Così fan tutte*. Most astonishing here is the fact that Bourges seems not to realize that the myth of Hercules and Omphale is not about femininity but about Hercules's emasculation by a dominating woman. He disgraces his sex, seduced into exactly the role reversal against which Rousseau had argued in the *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*.

30. "Il n'y a guère de femmes capable de comprendre et de traduire avec tant d'intelligence les oeuvres des maîtres, et particulièrement le *concerto* de Beethoven, qui égale une de ses plus belles symphonies" (*RGM* 12, no. 17 [27 April 1845]: 132).

31. *RGM* 15, no. 7 (13 February 1848): 53.

32. The gendering of Classical and Romantic as "feminine" and "masculine" respectively is both unstable and temporary, partly because of the strong "feminine" element in the Romantic concept of genius. As Battersby argues, although attributed to males only, the concept of genius itself implies the presence of "feminine" elements such as sensibility, which nevertheless continue to be derided in women (*Gender and Genius*, 3–5 and 10–11). By the fin de siècle, that "feminine" element of sensibility, expressed in music largely through increased

1840s, described as both “Beethoven’s wife” and “a gracious Vestal.”<sup>33</sup> Earlier in the century, he had already been typecast as “naive” and even “infantile.” The process dates back to 1810 and Hoffmann’s critique of Haydn’s symphonies, in which he emphasized their “childlike” quality in comparison with Beethoven.<sup>34</sup> Berlioz, influenced greatly by Hoffmann, was instrumental in making Haydn’s youthful style an object of scorn during the 1830s and 1840s. Haydn’s music was thus denied the dignity of full masculinity through its consistent association with two forms of undeveloped humans, women and children.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1850s we find a more general feminization of eighteenth-century music in a review by Henri Blanchard of a concert by Charlotte Tardieu de Malleville: “With the bouquet of fragrant and brilliant flowers which every pretty beneficiary carries with her onto the concert stage, Mlle de Malleville also always brings a bouquet of early works, spreading throughout the gathering a perfume of classic music which gives pleasure through the stylistic purity, the precision and the *brio* of her performing style.”<sup>36</sup> The stereotypical femininity of the image, relying as it does on the decorative and the sensual, effectively typecast her repertory as well as her performing style. Reviews of Baroque music in the 1860s continued the trend. Adolphe Botte wrote of the “adorable embroidery, the harmonic coquetteries”

---

chromatic harmony, was perceived by critics and composers alike as becoming dominant in both France and Germany. It became gendered pejoratively feminine—associated with decadence, malady, over-sophistication, and depraved female sexuality. Precipitated by Wagner, and in particular by *Tristan*, it was later epitomized in Strauss’s *Salome*. From this viewpoint, Classical (or neo-Classical) principles became idealized once more as evidence of health and vigor. The trend is well illustrated in Nietzsche’s comparison of Bizet and Wagner at the opening of *Der Fall Wagner* of 1888. See also Lawrence Kramer’s discussion of *Tristan* and “Ganymed” in relation to fin-de-siècle literary and artistic portrayals of women’s sexuality (*Music as Cultural Practice*, 135–75, esp. 141–47); Susan McClary’s interpretations of *Carmen*, Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony, and *Salome* in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 53–79 and 99–101; and Jennifer Birkett’s discussion of Wagner in *The Sins of the Fathers: Decadence in France, 1870–1914* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1986), 50–58. For a more general interdisciplinary discussion, see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de siècle* (London: Virago Press, 1992).

33. See Blanchard in *RGM* 14, no. 52 (26 December 1847): 421; and Bourges in *RGM* 15, no. 7 (13 February 1848): 52.

34. See Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 237.

35. Whether women are deemed biologically incapable of complete development (Aristotle) or are dissuaded from attaining it for social reasons (Rousseau and Kant) is, of course, irrelevant. By the standards of both philosophies, the true woman is undeveloped in comparison with the true man. The idea that women and children are undeveloped humans is stated explicitly in Heller’s views of 1852 on Wilhelmine Szarvady, quoted below.

36. “Avec le bouquet odorant et brillante dont la main de toute jolie bénéficiaire est armée en montant l’estrade des concerts, M<sup>lle</sup> de Malleville porte toujours aussi un bouquet d’œuvres rétrospectives répandant sur l’assemblée un parfum de musique classique qui plaît par la pureté du style, la précision et le *brio* de son exécution” (*RGM* 20, no. 11 [13 March 1853]: 93).

of a set of Handel variations that Tardieu de Malleville played in 1860.<sup>37</sup> The *jeu lié* technique of legato contrapuntal playing was itself gendered feminine, as a review by Gustave Chouquet of Francis Planté (one of the few men to dedicate himself to eighteenth-century repertory) illustrates:

In devoting himself exclusively to the music of the old masters, M. Planté has proved simultaneously his good sense and his courage; he has created for himself a distinctive aspect which one might reasonably have missed had he acted differently. A pianist of the *jeu lié* school, with a sweet sound, pearly tone, and suave style which is not penetrating, he has an entirely feminine tenderness and grace; his originality consists in playing the piano as though he were the best of Moscheles's disciples, and as though Liszt, Thalberg and Chopin had yet to reveal themselves to the world.<sup>38</sup>

From a late twentieth-century perspective, we can understand the *jeu lié* as the embodiment of the physical confinement of women, its feminizing quality so strong that a man is himself feminized when he employs it. The more general importance of the feminization of early keyboard music, however, lies in its concomitant loss of status at the hands of unsympathetic critics. This music was not in the same category as that of Chopin, whose predominantly "feminine" genius nevertheless produced compositions that transcended the feminine to enter the realm of the ideal.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, for critics who disparaged it, early keyboard music was "feminine" in Rousseauian terms: it was dry and reasoned, lacking emotional depth and the spark of genius.<sup>40</sup> Use of the *jeu lié* in performances of such music served merely to highlight these expressive deficiencies, since it allowed the pianist no outward exhibition of emotion through shoulder, arm, or elbow movement.

37. "Les adorables broderies, les coquetteries harmoniques" (*RGM* 27, no. 5 [29 January 1860]: 36).

38. "En s'appliquant exclusivement à l'interprétation de la musique des anciens maîtres, M. Planté a fait preuve de bon sens et de courage à la fois; il s'est créé une individualité que, vraisemblablement, on n'aurait pu lui reconnaître s'il eût agi d'une manière différente. Pianiste au jeu lié, aux sons doux, aux notes perlées, au style suave sans être pénétrant, il a des câlineries et une grâce toutes féminines; son originalité consiste à jouer du piano comme s'il était le meilleur des disciples de Moscheles, et comme si Liszt, Thalberg et Chopin en étaient encore à se révéler au monde" (*FM* 24, no. 4 [22 January 1860]: 41).

39. For a classic exposition of this view, see Maurice Schlessinger's review of a Chopin concert in February 1848, in which he likens the pianist to Ariel and a sylph, his music akin to that of Queen Mab. Nevertheless, his talent is "purely ideal . . . in which matter counts for nearly nothing" ("purement idéal . . . dans lequel la matière n'entre à peu près pour rien") (*RGM* 15, no. 8 [20 February 1848]: 58).

40. Rousseau's view of women's intellectual and creative potential appears most strongly in *Emile, ou De l'éducation* and in the *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*. In the latter, he writes: "These creations [i.e., women's writings] are as cold and pretty as women [themselves]; they have an abundance of spirit but lack soul; they are a hundred times more reasoned than impassioned" (trans. after Marcia Citron in "Women and the Lied, 1775–1850," in *Women Making Music*, ed. Bowers and Tick, 224–48, at 225).



### Modes of gendered critique

Even while still child prodigies, female pianists found their critical reviews encumbered by issues of gender. In March 1840, when fourteen-year-old Louise Mattmann made her Paris debut at the Salle Herz, the *Gazette musicale*'s critic Maurice Bourges was dazzled by her virtuosic prowess in Thalberg's "*Moïse*" Fantasy; he described her as playing "with the hands of a twelve-year-old and without the merest hint of a wrong note."<sup>41</sup> Yet he also dwelt on the frailty of her appearance, thus highlighting the extent of her technical command by implicitly juxtaposing it with her fragility: "Imagine a graceful child of twelve or thirteen at the most, frail and thin, whom one would believe ready to bend in the gentlest breeze, and whose tapered fingers threaten to break at the slightest pressure."<sup>42</sup> Bourges's vagueness with regard to Mattmann's age is typical of contemporary journalistic practice; since she was older than he suggests, however, he may be deliberately emphasizing the child, rather than the emerging woman, in his subject. His focus on Mattmann's frailty makes such an intention even more plausible.

Older debutantes could attract a different kind of attention to their appearance, though Henri Blanchard's review of Wilhelmine Szarvady's Paris debut of 1851 (she was fifteen or sixteen), at which she played Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata, is inordinately frank. After writing about the strengths of her technique, Blanchard commented on her appearance: "Her pink dress, in the style of Classical nymphs, revealed the entire naked length of a very pretty arm, something which, however, does not detract from the quality of her playing."<sup>43</sup> In print, such blatant examples of a roving eye are rare; female pianists were never criticized in the same terms as female dancers, for whom detailed comment on their physique was an occupational hazard. Nevertheless, Blanchard's observations reveal an attention to the physicality of women's playing that is almost entirely absent in reviews of male performers, except for comments related to power.

In the 1840s, critics were only beginning to struggle with the problems of judging a woman pianist playing gendered repertory. In later decades, several urgent questions surfaced repeatedly. How much of her femininity should a pianist retain, particularly when playing male-gendered music? If she gives Beethoven his virile due, is she also to be reprimanded for denying her sex? Conversely, is male-gendered music demeaned by "feminine" performance? If a woman confines herself to "feminine" music, is she

41. "Avec des mains de douze ans et sans la moindre fausse note" (*RGM* 7, no. 25 [26 March 1840]: 209).

42. "Imaginez-vous une gracieuse enfant de douze à treize ans au plus, frêle et mince, qu'on croirait prête à fléchir sous le plus léger souffle, et dont les doigts effilés menacent de se rompre au moindre contact" (*ibid.*).

43. "Sa robe rose, à la mode des nymphes antiques, laissait voir dans tout sa longueur et dans une complète nudité un bras fort joli, ce qui ne nuit point à son execution" (*RGM* 18, no. 4 [26 January 1851]: 67).

necessarily a lesser pianist than a woman who plays Beethoven and Liszt? Here, the “sexual aesthetics” of composition form the backdrop for debates about the “sexual aesthetics” of performance. Male performance of masculinized genres was so normal as to be effectively invisible and thus unworthy of comment, whereas female performance of the same music created a sense of “interruption” and thus immediately became problematic.

In 1844, when Joseph d’Ortigue described Mattmann’s range of tone color in Beethoven’s Third Piano Concerto as comprising both “male and mellow sounds,” he was paying her a compliment.<sup>44</sup> Yet within a decade there were complaints that women pianists had become too masculine. In 1852, Léon Escudier’s brother Marie stated that Szarvady had “a tendency to the exaggeration of power, which too often precludes grace and simplicity, that poetry of women.”<sup>45</sup> The impression of Szarvady as masculine persisted throughout her career. In 1875, Maurice Germa (writing as Cristal) compared her with the more seductively feminine Pleyel; for him, Szarvady was the George Sand of the piano.<sup>46</sup> In 1893, her talent was described (this time in glowing terms) as characterized by “grandeur and noble severity.”<sup>47</sup> Of younger pianists, two in particular regularly attracted disapproving gendered comment. According to H. Marcello in *La Chronique musicale* of 1875, the Russian Annette Essipoff lacked grace: “The talent of Madame Essipoff shines above all through its sureness and precision, at the expense of feminine grace, of which she is completely deprived.”<sup>48</sup> Marie Trautmann, later to marry the pianist Alfred Jaëll, attracted similar criticism.<sup>49</sup> Paul Lacome (signed “P. L.”) described her in

44. “Sons à la fois mâles et moelleux” (*FM* 7, no. 7 [18 February 1844]: 50).

45. “Une tendance à l’exagération de la force, qui exclut trop souvent la grâce et la simplicité, cette poésie de la femme” (*FM* 16, no. 6 [8 February 1852]: 52).

46. *La Chronique musicale* 8, no. 45 (1 May 1875): 129. For Henri Blanchard in 1845, Pleyel was “the coquettish pianist” and “the queen of seductive pianists” (“La pianiste au jeu coquet”; “la reine des pianistes séduisantes”) (*RGM* 12, no. 16 [20 April 1845]: 122). Here, “pianist” has become a feminine noun.

47. L. de Fourcaud, Arthur Pougin, and Léon Pradel, *La Salle Pleyel* (Paris: Librairies-Imprimeries réunies, 1893), 66.

48. “Le talent de madame Essipoff brille surtout par la sûreté et la précision, aux dépens de la grâce féminine dont elle est absolument dépourvue” (*La Chronique musicale* 7, no. 39 [1 February 1875]: 128). Anna Essipova [Annette Essipoff] (1851–1914): Russian pianist and teacher. She was taught by Leschetizsky, to whom she was married between 1880 and 1892. She graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory with the gold medal in 1870. During a subsequent concert tour she made her London debut in 1874 and her Paris debut the following year. From 1893 she was a professor of piano at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, counting Prokofiev among her pupils.

49. Marie Jaëll (née Trautmann; 1846–1925): pupil of Moscheles and Heinrich Herz, who judged her too good for the Paris Conservatory at the age of ten. After a European concert tour, however, she spent four months at the Conservatory in 1862, leaving with the first prize in the women’s piano class. Her repertory was wide-ranging, with Beethoven at its center (she played a complete sonata cycle at the Salle Pleyel in 1893). In 1866 she married

1866 as a performer who “treats her instrument with absolutely male energy. Grace and style,” he predicted, would “follow a little later.”<sup>50</sup> This last comment is particularly interesting, since it implies that Jaëll’s masculinity was a youthful indiscretion (she was nineteen at the time) and that she would eventually learn her proper role.

The required qualities of “feminine” performance are clearly spelled out in a review of Louise Mattmann’s performance of Hummel’s Septet in D minor in 1860, in which Gustave Chouquet repeated many of his comments of the previous month regarding Francis Planté:

What pleases me in Mme Mattmann’s playing is that she does not seek to draw more sound from the instrument than her physical capabilities allow; her playing could be fuller, but it is sweet, even, limpid, and feminine: to play like a woman is a grace—it is an attraction that too many women pianists now disdain. I congratulate Mme Mattmann for having remained of her own sex and for showing herself faithful to the fine traditions of the *jeu lié* and of Hummel’s great school.<sup>51</sup>

Mattmann’s fidelity to the performance traditions of a feminized music earned her qualified praise. Chouquet’s estimation of her playing became barbed the following month, however, when she chose a male-gendered work that he felt was emotionally beyond her, the “Moonlight” Sonata: “In choosing Beethoven’s Sonata in C# Minor she has mistaken, I think, the nature and extent of her talent. Her swift and light fingers are made for graceful music, for suave and sweet melodic lines, and not for desolate sadness, for the somber and terrible declamations of Juliette Gucciardi’s unfortunate admirer.”<sup>52</sup> Emphasis on finger technique as a way of indicating

---

the pianist Alfred Jaëll and from 1869 studied composition with Franck and Saint-Saëns. She published substantial compositions and major pedagogical works, and is still a celebrated figure in her native Alsace.

50. “Traite son instrument avec une énergie toute virile. La grâce et le style viendront plus tard” (*L’Art musical* [henceforth *AM*] 6, no. 20 [19 April 1866]: 156).

51. “Ce qui me plaît dans M<sup>me</sup> Mattmann, c’est qu’elle ne cherche pas à tirer de son instrument plus de son que ses forces physiques ne lui permettent d’en obtenir; son jeu pourrait peut-être avoir plus d’ampleur, mais il est doux, égal, limpide et féminin: jouer en femme, c’est une grâce, c’est un attrait que trop de femmes pianistes dédaignent aujourd’hui. Je félicite M<sup>me</sup> Mattmann d’être restée de son sexe et de se montrer fidèle aux belles traditions du *jeu lié* et de la grande école de Hummel” (*FM* 24, no. 9 [26 February 1860]: 102).

52. “En choisissant la sonate en *ut dièse mineur* de Beethoven, elle s’est méprise, je crois, sur la nature et la portée de son talent. Ses doigts rapides et légers sont faits pour la musique de grâce, pour les chants suaves et doux, et non pour les désolantes tristesses, pour les déclamations sombres et terribles de l’amant malheureux de Juliette Gucciardi” (*FM* 24, no. 13 [25 March 1860]: 147–48). The sublimity of the “Moonlight” Sonata’s opening movement was consistently emphasized by reviewers. One of the earliest examples is that of Berlioz in *Le Rénovateur* of 17 February 1835, where he describes an audience listening to it: “Every one of us trembled in silence, crushed with respect, religious terror, admiration, and poetic pain”

emotional superficiality was a ploy reserved almost exclusively for reviews of women pianists. By denying any expressive power in Mattmann's playing and concentrating on the physicality of her fingers, Chouquet presented her not as an artist but as a mere technician, for whom mastery of the superficial and decorative could (and ought to) be her greatest aspiration.<sup>53</sup> In this respect it is significant that, in his description of the fictitious and ill-fated Eugénie Bernard's pianistic talents, the author of *Le Démon de la mélomanie* mentioned only her technique: "Without being first-class, she had agile and well-trained hands."<sup>54</sup>

The misogynistic emphasis on the distance between women's aspirations to perform male-gendered works and their capacity to do so reached its height in the private writings of Stephen Heller. In 1852, Heller wrote to his confidant Jean-Joseph-Bonaventure Laurens of a recital given by Wilhelmine Szarvady. His devastating critique—uncensored by the traditions of gallant journalism—was aimed not only at Szarvady but at women in general, whom he viewed as incapable of genuine artistic achievement, even in the more acceptably feminine guise of transmitter, rather than creator, of artistic revelation:

She has charming fingers but, whatever her admirers say, she lacks a great deal. In spirit and in naturalness and truth of expression, she plays like a child and like a woman, neither of which will amount to much in matters of art. Among most women musicians there is something precious which they mistake for grace, something affected which they mistake for expression, and a manner of playing specific to them which they mistake for originality. Basically, they prepare, launder, iron, and fold their talent as one would a pretty bonnet, an elegant piece of underwear, or any other piece of clothing; and nearly all the female virtuosos are only more or less competent milliners, who coif and dress and enfeeble poor authors as they please. Really, I can hardly

---

("Chacun de nous frissonnait en silence, écrasé de respect, de religieuse terreur, d'admiration, de douleur poétique"). The pianist was Liszt.

53. From a comparison of reviews, it is clear that Mattmann's approach to Beethoven was more emotionally detached than that of her fellow Kalkbrenner pupil Marie Pleyel. Nevertheless, in the context of other critiques of Mattmann, Chouquet's harshness appears extreme, pandering to established prejudices regarding women's lack of emotional or intellectual depth. His barbed use of "quick" and "agile" is reminiscent of the scene in George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (also of 1860) in which Mr. Stelling tells Tom, in the presence of Tom's sister Maggie, that girls have "a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they can't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow." Eliot's description of the children's reactions is characteristically perceptive of social mores. Tom is delighted by Stelling's verdict: "As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified: she had been so proud to be called 'quick' all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom" (*The Mill on the Floss*, ed. A. S. Byatt [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979], 220–21).

54. "Sans être de première force, elle avait la main exercée, agile" (*EM* 11, no. 2 [9 January 1848]: 13).

restrain a smile when I hear all the elegant plebs of salon society expounding on the profundity, the originality, the genius of such florists and dressmakers the seams of whose style come apart, whose expression is affected, and who give themselves the airs of an inspired prophetess translating the oracle of such Gods as Beethoven, Mendelssohn, etc.<sup>55</sup>

Women, then, should not be so foolish as to attempt the public interpretation of works that are beyond their comprehension; they necessarily devalue such music and reveal their own pitiable lack of self-knowledge. No other critic in Paris showed such a marked tendency to misogynistic essentialism. Yet, as Henri Blanchard pointed out a few years earlier, women had little choice but to play such music if they wished to be taken seriously: “To give themselves more weight, more credit, they all declare themselves priestesses of the cult that the artistic world dedicates to Beethoven.”<sup>56</sup> Such metaphors of prophetesses and priestesses abound, reinforcing the idea of woman as vessel for divine truth, serving the cult of the work. For Heller, however, Szarvady was a false prophetess; since she did not understand, she had nothing to offer but a travesty of interpretation.

For critics who tried to raise the profile of particular women pianists, a common tactic was to minimize the impact of their femaleness or, indeed, to elevate them to the status of honorary men as a mark of professional

55. “Elle a des doigts charmants mais, quoi qu’en disent ses admirateurs, elle manque de beaucoup. Elle joue, quant  l’esprit et quant  l’expression vraie et naturelle, comme une enfant et comme une femme, lesquelles en fait d’art ne seront jamais majeures. Il y a dans la plupart des femmes musiciennes quelque chose de mignard qu’elles prennent pour la grace, quelque chose d’affecte qu’elles prennent pour de l’expression, et une maniere de dire qui n’appartient qu’ elles et qu’elles prennent pour de l’originalite. Au fond, elle[s] appretent, blanchissent, repassent et ploient proprement leur talent comme on fait d’un joli bonnet, d’un legant canezou ou de toute autre piece de toilette; et presque toutes les virtuoses feminines ne sont que des modistes plus ou moins habiles, qui coiffent et affublent les pauvres auteurs  leur guise. Vraiment, j’ai peine souvent  reprimer un sourire en entendant s’exclamer toute cette plebe legante des salons sur la profondeur, sur l’originalite, sur le genie de pareilles fleuristes et couturieres au style decousu,  l’expression affectee, et qui se donnent des airs d’une Pythonisse inspiree en traduisant l’oracle des Dieux tels que Beethoven, Mendelssohn, etc.” (Stephen Heller to J.-J.-B. Laurens, 14 January 1852, in *Stephen Heller: Lettres d’un musicien romantique  Paris*, ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger [Paris: Flammarion, 1981], 199). The letter is particularly useful as a contextual document, enabling a more sophisticated interpretation of Heller’s public statements, such as that regarding Mattmann, discussed below. Heller does not represent the majority view regarding Szarvady’s playing. I have found her accused of affectation in only one of several dozen reviews between 1851 and 1897. More representative is Leon Gatayes in *Le Menestrel* of 1852: “This admirable artist . . . has all the qualities of genius and talent; elegance and grace, power and verve, inspiration, profound feeling” (“Cette admirable artiste . . . a toutes les qualites du genie et du talent; legance et grace, puissance et verve, inspiration, sentiment profond”) (*Men* 20, no. 4 [26 December 1852]: 3).

56. “Pour se donner plus de poids, plus de credit, elles se declarent toutes pretresses du culte que dans le monde artistique on rend  Beethoven” (*RGM* 16, no. 50 [16 December 1849]: 394).

respect. In 1853, Henri Blanchard went to some lengths to explain how an apparent absence of politeness might give an appropriate indication of the artistic stature of Wilhelmine Szarvady (nee Clauss).

Suppressing the title “Mademoiselle” in the case of this pianist, even calling her simply “La Clauss,” is to dignify her, to bestow upon her a kind of artistic superiority over those who emulate her. This reminds me of the words of the officer who, with a presumption and attitude worthy of a Gascon, told his comrades: “Today I am dining with Catinat.” “It seems to me that you might say ‘with Mister Catinat.’” observed the illustrious host, who by chance was standing just behind the young soldier. “But why?” [came the reply.] “Does one say Mister Alexander or Mister Caesar?”<sup>57</sup>

Blanchard was forced to take an example from an entirely male world in order to justify his endeavor. By shifting the emphasis of her gender-specific title, he aimed to enhance Szarvady’s status and to assuage the demeaning effect of “Mademoiselle.” Charles Bannelier provides another example. In 1873, when Aglae Massart organized a concert for her pupils in the Salle Erard, he referred to her as “the excellent professor, who to her disciples is as much a father as a master.”<sup>58</sup>

The problem of a woman’s authority as a performer was intimately connected with her physical attitude at the piano and the element of acting (with its implications of insincerity or calculation) involved in public performance. The appropriate nature of a woman’s stage presence—her body language, facial expressions, and other outward signs with which she communicated to the audience her inward engagement with the music—had to be addressed. The range of deportment at the keyboard from the 1830s to the Franco-Prussian War encompassed the stillness and restricted arm movement of Kalkbrenner and his pupils (including Camille Stamaty, Saint-Saens, and Mattmann), and the gestural freedoms initiated, but later increasingly rejected, by Liszt. For Henri Blanchard, writing in 1845, any performance necessarily included an element of calculated acting (he uses the words “pantomime” and “mimologie”); otherwise, the sincere performer risked losing the control necessary to project an interpretation. His comments, later developed in reviews of Sophie Bohrer and Marie Pleyel, were addressed initially to the young singer Mlle Mondutaigny:

57. “Supprimer la qualification de mademoiselle pour cette pianiste, [d]e meme l’appeler tout simplement la Clauss, c’est la dignifier, lui reconnaître une sorte de superiorite artistique sur ses emules. Cela rappelle le mot de cet officier qui disait  ses camarades avec un accent et une presomption gasconne: Je dine aujourd’hui chez Catinat. —Vous pourriez dire, il me semble, chez M. de Catinat, lui fit observer l’illustre amphytron, qui se trouvait par hasard derriere le jeune militaire. —Pourquoi donc? Est-c[e] qu’on dit M. Alexandre ou M. de Cesar?” (*RGM* 20, no. 9 [27 February 1853]: 77).

58. “L’excellent professeur, qui est pour ses disciples autant un pere qu’un matre” (unsigned, *RGM* 40, no. 19 [11 May 1873]: 150). Retrospectively, the possessive pronoun becomes deliciously ambiguous in the French original.

A fine musician, she sings with expression—perhaps too much expression. Not to conquer one's feelings in arts involving public performance is to expose oneself to the risk of failing to move one's listeners because one is too moved oneself. The art of making an impression on a public has much to do with that of coquetry: it demands a certain calculation, and Mademoiselle Mondutaigny is a pretty enough woman to indulge in such calculation, in defiance of her emotions.<sup>59</sup>

Katherine Reeve has recently discussed—in relation to Berlioz, Harriet Smithson, and Marie Pleyel—the dangers that Blanchard merely hinted at in this passage.<sup>60</sup> Berlioz's opinion of Smithson changed radically once he believed her unchaste. Instead of an actress identifying completely with Ophelia, she became “an ordinary woman, with an instinctive genius for rendering passions she has never felt.”<sup>61</sup> Concomitantly, Reeve argues that when Pleyel privately performed a Beethoven slow movement for Berlioz in 1830, he perceived her as being so involved in the music that she endangered her own emotional and physical health.<sup>62</sup> Once she betrayed him, however, he saw the newly married Mme Pleyel as metamorphosed into a coquettish performer, skilled at aping sincere emotion in the service of manipulating her audience, but incapable of attaining the depths of emotion or understanding that she acted out. The “calculation” of which Blanchard was to write had become a cardinal artistic sin, exposing the charlatanism of the performer concerned. As Reeve demonstrates, for Berlioz, the outward restraint of Liszt playing Beethoven in the 1840s represented the epitome of emotional sincerity in a performer: “In Berlioz's eyes, in short,

59. “Bonne musicienne, elle chante avec expression, avec trop d'expression peut-être. Ne pas assez dominer ses sensations dans les arts d'exécution instantanée et publique, c'est s'exposer à ne pas impressionner ses auditeurs parce qu'on l'est trop soi-même. L'art de faire de l'effet sur le public ressemble beaucoup à la coquetterie: cela demande un certain calcul, et mademoiselle Mondutaigny est assez jolie femme pour se livrer à ce calcul, en se défiant de ses émotions” (*RGM* 12, no. 5 [2 February 1845]: 37). Blanchard's comments find a later echo in Green's discussions of the centrality of the “mask” in defining the relationship between the performer and the audience (*Music, Gender, Education*, 21). While the performer presents him/herself as “self and mask,” the audience perceives “other and mask.” The “self,” in this case Mlle Mondutaigny, is thus protected even in the act of display.

60. See Katherine Kolb Reeve, “Primal Scenes: Smithson, Pleyel and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz,” *19th-Century Music* 18 (1994–95): 211–35.

61. Reeve, “Primal Scenes,” 222, quoting from Berlioz's letter of 13 May 1830 to Humbert Ferrand, letter 162 in *Correspondance générale* 1:327–30, at 328.

62. This reading is not the only possibility, however: although in his letter of 30 June 1830, Berlioz states that Pleyel's emotional interpretation makes it a “torment” to watch her as she plays, he refers to her at the outset as “a Corinne” when at the piano. Such reference to Mme de Staël's strong-willed heroine in the novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807) suggests that Berlioz is not so worried about Pleyel's health as he later claims. I am grateful to Janet Johnson for suggesting this alternative reading of Berlioz's letter (Berlioz, *Correspondance générale* 1:339).

[Pleyel] *shows* emotion but doesn't feel it, which makes her both frivolous and false; Liszt *feels* emotion but doesn't show it, which makes him noble, spiritual, manly, in control.<sup>63</sup>

Given the contemporary gendering of both excessive sensibility and coquettishness as female, a woman pianist displaying either quality (but the latter in particular) risked her reputation as a mature artist. Hence Heller's view of the "affectation" of women pianists. Later, in his review of Mondutaigny, Pleyel, and Bohrer in 1845, Blanchard used this very word to indicate the dangers of a woman overacting at the piano.<sup>64</sup> He was aware of the three categories that Reeve detects in Berlioz's mind: Mondutaigny had too much sensibility, Bohrer was a (successful) coquette who could put more emotion into her playing, and Pleyel, in contrast with Berlioz's view, surpassed even the mature Liszt:

Earlier, I spoke of modern pianists' miming; Madame Pleyel seems to have borrowed from Liszt's acting only that of his hands, which is not the easiest to imitate. But why speak of imitation? Madame Pleyel imitates nobody; she is calm at the piano: her eyes are almost constantly fixed on the keyboard; and when she raises them, her look has an unbelievable expression of audacity, of Mephistophelian irony, of scorn for all the difficulties with which she plays. . . . She is not painfully affected, she does not flutter around pleasantly to gain audience support; she conquers it, smiles imperceptibly to herself at such an easy victory, and her beautiful curved figure, immobile, impassive, does nothing to betray the prodigious work of her fingers: it is the highest musical poetry coming from a soul shaped by all the experiences of life, and which enjoys tossing the strangest seductions in your direction.

Can the art of piano playing go any further?<sup>65</sup>

The allure of Pleyel's performance as described by Blanchard was that it combined Berlioz's demand for controlled emotion with a sophisticated level of coquetry. Pleyel had her effect on the audience in mind, but not to the detriment of poetic interpretation, which she understood and felt sincerely. As a performer, her "manly" qualities of control were thus multiple, extending to her own emotion, her technique, and her listeners (including

63. Reeve, "Primal Scenes," 230.

64. *RGM* 12, no. 5 (2 February 1845): 38.

65. "Nous avons parlé plus haut de la mimologie des pianistes modernes; madame Pleyel semble n'avoir emprunté à la pantomime de Liszt que celle de ses mains, et ce n'est pas la plus aisée à imiter. Mais que parlons-nous d'imitation? Madame Pleyel n'imité personne; elle est calme au piano: ses yeux sont presque constamment fixés sur le clavier; et lorsqu'ils s'élèvent, son regard a une inconcevable expression d'audace, d'ironie méphistophélienne, de mépris pour toutes les difficultés dont elle se joue. . . . Elle n'est pas péniblement affectée, elle ne fait pas d'agréables minauderies pour capter les suffrages; elle les conquiert, se sourit imperceptiblement à elle-même de cette chose facile; et son beau galbe immobile, impassible, ne trahit point le prodigieux travail de ses doigts: c'est de la haut poésie musicale partant d'une âme façonnée à toutes les expériences de la vie, et qui se plaît à vous jeter les plus étranges séductions.

"L'art de l'exécution sur le piano ira-t-il plus loin?" (ibid.).



her critics). Blanchard's analogy of conquest was taken up in two other journals. An unsigned critic for *Le Ménestrel* wrote that there was "nothing so wonderful to see and to hear than Mme Pleyel dominating the orchestra of the Italiens";<sup>66</sup> for the critic "W. S.," writing for *Le Monde musical*, Pleyel's performance was simply an act of seduction:

As, bar by bar, Mme Pleyel let the piano keys speak, this expressive and inspired playing, so powerful and graceful by turns, this expansive and fine style gradually seduced every ear and every heart; before the end of the first piece, the whole hall had yielded to the irresistible power exercised by this beautiful and charming woman, who is at the same time one [*un*] of our finest pianists.<sup>67</sup>

The similarity of such reviews to that of D'Ortigue regarding Thalberg (quoted above) is striking, with the crucial difference that critics commented almost without exception on Pleyel's beauty, both as a woman and as a silhouette curved over her piano.

There is no doubt that Pleyel went out of her way to court such reviews. An undated letter, held at the Bibliothèque Royale Albert I<sup>er</sup> in Brussels, reveals her method of dealing with gentlemen of the press:

Tuesday 6 January

Monsieur

I have been waiting for the kind visit that you promised me, in order that I might thank you for your most gracious recollection in Saturday's *feuilleton*. You will be good enough not to forget that I live at the Hôtel des Italiens, rue du Choiseul, and that I am always at home at 4 p.m.

My concert is scheduled for *Saturday* 17th in the salle Erard; would you be very obliging and publicize it as only you know how to publicize artists? I should very much like to play *for you* that which I plan to play in my concert.

Could you find a long moment to listen to me?

I salute you, Monsieur, with affectionate regards.<sup>68</sup>

66. "Rien de plus beau à voir et à entendre que M<sup>me</sup> Pleyel dominant l'orchestre des Italiens" (*Mén* 12, no. 19 [6 April 1845]: [1]).

67. "A mesure que M<sup>me</sup> Pleyel faisait parler les touches du piano, ce jeu expressif et inspiré, si puissant et si gracieux tour à tour, cette large et belle manière séduisaient peu à peu toutes les oreilles et toutes les cœurs; avant la fin du premier morceau, la salle entière avait cédé à l'irrésistible puissance d'action qu'exerce cette belle et charmante femme, qui est en même temps *un* de nos plus grands pianistes" (*Le Monde musical* 6, no. 14 [3 April 1845]: [2]).

68. Bibliothèque Royale Albert I<sup>er</sup>, Brussels, ML 2920, letter 15:

"Mardi 6 janvier

Monsieur

"J'attendais la bonne visite que vous aviez bien voulu me promettre, pour vous remercier de votre très gracieuse souvenir dans le *feuilleton* de Samedi. Vous seriez bien bon de ne pas oublier que je demeure hôtel des Italiens rue du Choiseul et que j'y suis toujours à 4h.

"Mon concert aura lieu *Samedi* 17, chez Erard voulez vous avoir l'extrême obligeance de l'annoncer comme vous seul savez annoncer les artistes? Je voudrais bien vous jouer *pour vous* ce que je compte jouer dans mon concert.

"Pourrez vous trouver un long moment pour m'écouter?"

Pleyel thus offered this critic a private audience, tantalizingly described as “a long moment.” Was she offering him more personal attention than a private run-through of her program? It is difficult to conclude more than that the letter indicates the extent to which she was aware of the need to keep the male press on her side.

But the most astonishing aspect of Pleyel’s career was her ability to overlay the masculine on the feminine, and to attract male-gendered critiques that were entirely laudatory. That Pleyel was portrayed in the press as matchlessly combining masculine authority and feminine grace was partly the result of her decision to shock critics into treating her as an artist and not as a mere woman. To a man, the critics drooled in 1845, as they did on her sporadic returns to Paris, producing a body of criticism that is rare in its sexual rhetoric and its profusion of contradictory but admiring gendered references. Even Chouquet was impressed by Pleyel’s pianism. Immediately after reviewing Mattmann’s performance of the “Moonlight” Sonata in 1860, he discussed a concert by Pleyel, who had also played it that week. His ecstatically poetic prose contained not a hint of disparagement, and like those before him, he dwelt on Pleyel’s technical command, comparing her expressive range favorably with that of Liszt.<sup>69</sup>

As a critic for *L’Art musical* commented in 1863, Pleyel wanted to succeed where men had failed.<sup>70</sup> Among women pianists, she was exceptional in that she turned *herself* into an honorary man, rather than waiting for her critics to decide that such elevated status was appropriate. Toying with gender identities, she wrote letters in which she described herself to her recipient not as “une amie,” but as “un ami.”<sup>71</sup> As Henri Blanchard noted in 1845, “She is more than a man, than a great artist, she is more than a pretty woman; at the piano she has no gender, following the picturesque expression which she herself employs.”<sup>72</sup> Critical response reveals that Pleyel achieved the seemingly impossible, donning masculine identity, claiming that gender was irrelevant to art, and using the sexuality of her stage presence to break down male resistance. “W. S.”’s italicizing of “un” in his review of 1845 goes one step further, drawing attention to the masculinity of Pleyel’s seductive powers more emphatically than even the gen-

---

“Je vous salue Monsieur avec une affectueuse sympathie.

M. Pleyel”

69. *FM* 24, no. 13 (25 March 1860), 149.

70. “Cette admirable virtuose se plaît aux téméraires entreprises et recherche les triomphes difficiles. Elle a voulu réussir là où des hommes ont échoué” (*AM* 3, no. 9 [29 January 1863], 68).

71. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (henceforth *F-Pn*), Département de Musique, Pleyel, Lettres autographes, no. 21.

72. “C’est plus qu’un homme, qu’un grand artiste, c’est plus qu’une jolie femme; elle n’a pas de sexe quand elle est au piano, suivant la pittoresque expression dont elle se sert elle-même” (*RGM* 12, no. 5 [2 February 1845], 38).

dered grammar of the French language could. Blanchard, of course, did the opposite, re-gendering the word pianist as feminine in order to make Pleyel the queen of “pianistes séduisantes.”<sup>73</sup> It is therefore not so much that Pleyel “has no gender,” as that she embodies maleness and femaleness together.

Yet that embodiment was not regarded as aberrant hermaphroditism—that is, she did not, by taking on male characteristics, cease to be a true woman. Her “manly” control did not make her “a kind of musical George Sand,” as Reeve suggests.<sup>74</sup> For several women artists, elements of hermaphroditism were essential to their careers. Within Pleyel’s lifetime, Sand and George Eliot both confounded their respective critics by blurring “the comfortable binary structure of sexual identity.”<sup>75</sup> Each of them cultivated a different kind of hermaphroditic mask: Sand with her smoking and cross-dressing; Eliot through her interest in science and politics, her almost overbearing seriousness, and the nature of her relationship with George Henry Lewes, who played the “supportive wife” to her genius. But far from being a protective mask that allowed greater freedom because it was never removed, Pleyel’s adoption of aspects of masculinity appears as a form of play in which the true function of the mask is to draw attention to and accentuate revelation of the woman underneath. Mask becomes masquerade.<sup>76</sup> It is no coincidence that handwritten cover sheets on collections of Pleyel’s letters in both Paris and Brussels refer to her as a fine pianist *and* a very pretty woman. Far from presenting a defeminized image as a means of gaining respect, Pleyel demonstrated (as she set out to do) that femininity was no impediment to artistry; therein lies the importance of her achievement. Her image conforms to the Romantic concept of genius as containing simultaneously the masculine and feminine elements of control and passion. Through her remarkable response to male difficulties in accepting a woman as a solo pianist, Pleyel secured herself a critical reception in which she was credited with exactly that masculinized but sensitive nobility with which Berlioz endowed Liszt. Even for a skeptic such as Gustave Chouquet she qualified as a poetic virtuoso whose authority was to be celebrated. But her escape from the gendered pigeonholing of which critics

73. See above, n. 46.

74. Reeve, “Primal Scenes,” 231 n. 55. After an early meeting between Sand and Chopin, Ferdinand Hiller recollected that Chopin remarked, “What an unsympathetic woman that Sand is! Is it really a woman? I almost doubt it” (“Quelle femme antipathique cette Sand! Est-ce vraiment une femme? Je suis prêt à en douter”) (quoted in Marie-Paule Rambeau, *Chopin dans la vie et l’oeuvre de George Sand* [Paris: Société d’Edition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1985], 36 n. 4).

75. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 60.

76. Teresa de Lauretis identifies the distinction between mask and masquerade thus: “The former is there to represent a burden, imposed, constraining the expression of one’s real identity; the latter is flaunted” (*Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis [London: Macmillan, 1986], 17).

were so fond was brought about in a manner that other pianists could not, or would not, emulate.

### Gender, interpretation, and canon

The question of willingness to conform to certain paradigms adds yet another issue to the analysis of gendered criticism among Parisian reviewers. The career trajectories of Mattmann, Tardieu de Malleville, Szarvady, Massart, and Wartel in particular bore little relation to those of the touring virtuoso. Soloists such as Szarvady and Mattmann, who had toured extensively while under twenty, soon established themselves as resident chamber pianists with the elite of Paris's string quartets and other chamber music societies, sharing their duties with an increasing number of like-minded male pianists, including Francis Plante, Charles Halle, and Camille Saint-Saens.<sup>77</sup> Mattmann was playing chamber music in public as early as 1841, when she was only fifteen. The interpretive demands of the chamber musician and the composer-virtuoso conflicted, and in the mid 1850s, when the latter began to take part in significant numbers as guests in chamber concerts, the disparity between their soloistic approach and the more traditional performance style of their colleagues became a cause for concern among critics, not least because a soloistic approach drew attention away from canonic works and toward the individual performer in question.<sup>78</sup> For critics who had argued that certain works of the Viennese tradition were canonic and that respect for the text was of supreme importance, proprietorial and modernized readings of chamber works represented an unwelcome invasion of the canon by the cult of the performer. Conversely, for critics who supported the virtuoso emphasis on individuality and delighted in the progress of technical accomplishment, such chamber repertory was perceived as the natural preserve of pianists whose technical and artistic means were limited. The large number of women pianists who played regularly with (all-male) quartet societies found themselves in the midst of an aesthetic conflict between theories of musical progress and theories of canonic worth, and between different critical interpretations of what constituted a laudable performance of a canonic work.

Considerations relating to the cult of the work extended to concertos and shorter orchestrally accompanied pieces by Mozart and Beethoven. When Delphin Alard played a Beethoven *Romanze* at the Societe des Concerts in 1849, Berlioz wrote a critique in which the abnegation of the

77. For information on the personnel and activities of Parisian chamber music societies from 1815 to 1870, see Fauquet, *Les Societes de musique de chambre*.

78. I have explored this aspect of 1850s chamber music in my *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 94–100.

virtuosic self in the service of the music became one of the violinist's greatest achievements:

Then Alard, leaving the second violins which he leads in the orchestra, came forward to play us a delicious instrumental romance by Beethoven. He played it, as he plays everything, with the soul of a great musician and the bow of a great violinist, without adding the merest hint of a note or an ornament or a trill, without seeking effect other than in the faithful reproduction of the author's thought—without, in short, correcting Beethoven. And it was in the midst of a triple round of applause that Alard returned to take his place among the second violins, proud as anything to have him at their head. What a second violin!!! . . .<sup>79</sup>

Berlioz elaborated a topos of performer as vessel that by the late nineteenth century had become a traditional means of minimizing women's creativity as both performers and composers. That he did so in a review of a male violinist did not threaten the feminine nature of that topos any more than Francis Planté's use of the *jeu lié* made it a masculine technique; it merely highlighted the Otherness of an interpretive tradition in which the cult of personality is suppressed in the service of the cult of the work. Alard presented himself as so far removed from the virtuoso tradition that he did not even appear as a guest performer. Instead, he merely swapped the role of orchestral musician for that of soloist and returned to his original place with complete ease.

For critics such as Maurice Bourges, whose allegiance to the Viennese canon was absolute, Louise Mattmann's playing of Beethoven in 1844 (the C-Minor Concerto) and 1845 (the G-Major Concerto) fulfilled the same criteria. He viewed her performance of the G-Major Concerto as the highlight of the Société des Concerts' season specifically because her unintrusive interpretations ensured that the works themselves remained the focus of attention.<sup>80</sup> Critics who did not share such a philosophy of interpretation in Beethoven took a different view, however. Stephen Heller's review of Louise Mattmann's performance of the C-Minor Concerto in 1844 reveals at once the other side of the critical coin:

A good and wise determination to present a Beethoven piano concerto has been rewarded with great success. . . . What pleased me about the talent of this young person is the simplicity, the modesty with which she played this

79. "Alard ensuite, quittant les seconds violons, qu'il dirige dans l'orchestre, s'est avancé pour nous faire entendre une délicieuse romance instrumentale de Beethoven. Il l'a jouée, comme tout ce qu'il joue, avec une âme de grand musicien et un archet de grand violoniste, sans y ajouter l'ombre d'une note, d'un ornement, d'un trille, sans chercher son effet à lui ailleurs que dans la reproduction fidèle de la pensée de l'auteur, sans corriger enfin Beethoven. Et c'est au milieu d'une triple salve d'applaudissements qu'Alard est retourné prendre sa place parmi les seconds violons, tout fiers de l'avoir à leur tête. Quel second violon!!! . . ." (RGM 16, no. 14 [8 April 1849]: 106).

80. RGM 12, no. 17 (27 April 1845): 132.

beautiful composition. Admittedly, she interpreted it in her own way, and in this way there was neither great profundity nor great warmth, in a word, nothing surprising. But since she did not want to comment upon the work (as a great artist ought), she naturally avoided the danger of misinterpretation; she confined herself to playing the concerto faithfully, loyally, letting the work speak for itself. And in all honesty, for this she should be praised.<sup>81</sup>

Heller wrote as a composer-critic antipathetic to the Conservatory's tradition of light virtuosity in solo appearances but sympathetic to the cult of the virtuoso itself. As illustrated in his ecstatic review of Charles Hallé's *Emperor* Concerto a few months later (also at the Société des Concerts), he felt that virtuosos should bring all their interpretive individuality to bear upon composers of Beethoven's stature, rather than wasting it on empty brilliance.<sup>82</sup> Heller thus found Mattmann's endeavor laudable but her anti-virtuoso attitude toward the work disconcerting. He damned with faint praise by describing her success in negative terms—she did nothing to spoil the work. Given Heller's level of misogyny, it is entirely possible that this review was kinder than his private opinion. Yet even when taken at face value, the combination of this view of Mattmann in 1844 and his letter regarding Szarvady in 1852 reveals the stark double bind into which he placed women soloists: unintrusive interpretation became an abdication of artistic responsibility, but individuality of interpretation became affectation.

Critiques of women as interpreters of keyboard music before Beethoven were conditioned by a further set of ideologies: first, the gendering of such music as feminine; second, positive evaluations that stressed its nature as potentially canonic and in need of public performance; third, negative evaluations that dismissed it as subprofessional repertory. Most of the pianists discussed so far performed contemporary virtuoso works in addition to the solo and chamber works of Beethoven, Weber, Mozart (to a lesser extent), and, in the case of Szarvady in particular, Bach, Rameau, and Scarlatti. They earned their reputations initially by playing male-gendered works. Those who did not—such as early-music specialists Marie Mongin<sup>83</sup> and

81. "Un grand succès a récompensé la bonne et sage détermination de faire entendre un concerto pour piano de Beethoven. . . . Ce qui m'a plu dans le talent de cette jeune personne, c'est la simplicité, la modestie avec laquelle elle a dit cette belle composition. Elle l'a interprétée à sa manière, il est vrai, et dans cette manière il n'y avait ni grande profondeur ni grande chaleur, en un mot, rien de surprenant. Mais comme elle ne voulait nullement commenter l'oeuvre (ainsi que doit faire un grande artiste), elle s'est naturellement préservée du danger de tomber dans le faux; elle s'est bornée à jouer le concerto fidèlement, loyalement, en laissant agir l'oeuvre elle-même. Et c'est pour cela qu'on doit la louer en toute conscience" (*RGM* 11, no. 7 [18 February 1844]: 53).

82. *RGM* 11, no. 15 (14 April 1844): 131–32.

83. Marie Mongin (1841–1931): pupil of Louise Farrenc at the Paris Conservatory; she won first prize in the women's piano class in 1859, playing the first movement of a concerto by Pixis. Thereafter, she specialized in early music and was the featured pianist in the Farrencs'

Charlotte Tardieu de Malleville—risked being relegated to strictly amateur status because of the perceived elementary technical demands of their chosen repertory.

In the same year that he wrote of Francis Planté as a Classical specialist, Gustave Chouquet disparaged Baroque music on the grounds that it demanded little in the way of technique and encouraged mediocrity.<sup>84</sup> A year later, in 1861, Oscar Comettant wrote an extensive article for *L'Art musical* on the state of music in France. A seven-installment chapter on pianists and piano music ranked musicians in order of professional competence according to the nature of their public activity.<sup>85</sup> At the top of the hierarchy Comettant placed “the virtuoso who composes”; second, “the virtuoso who does not compose” (including Theodore Ritter and Marie Pleyel, who, though respected, he regarded as incomplete artists); third, “the *fingerless* virtuoso, otherwise known as the Classical pianist”; fourth, “the accompanist.” Comettant’s charge against Classical pianists was that of charlatanism:

The fingerless pianist chooses little pieces for harpsichord or piano whose merit, of course, is beyond question; but which, from the point of view of difficulty of execution, are absolutely worthless.

These are pieces which he plays to his audience as one used to pronounce oracles; which does not prevent his audience from marveling at the *adorable simplicity* of these beautiful works, performed with a no less adorable simplicity.<sup>86</sup>

Comettant’s and Chouquet’s contention was that Baroque keyboard music and even the music of Mozart (whom Chouquet dubbed “the last of the harpsichordists” in 1864)<sup>87</sup> was subprofessional, and that participants in the burgeoning early music movement of the later nineteenth century were duping the public into attending amateur-quality performances on the grounds that the music itself was of supreme merit. The aesthetic of an

---

concerts taken from their anthology *Le Trésor des pianistes*. She occasionally acted as pianist for the Lamoureux Quartet from 1864 to 1866, and for the Lebouc séances from 1864 to 1869. Her career was dogged by illness from an early age. There are no known compositions.

84. *FM* 24, no. 15 (8 April 1860): 175.

85. *AM* 1, nos. 28–51 (13 January–21 November 1861).

86. “Le pianiste sans doigts s’est fait un choix de petites pièces pour clavecin ou piano, dont le mérite, d’ailleurs, est inattaquable; mais qui, sous le rapport de la difficulté d’exécution, sont entièrement nulles.

“Voilà les morceaux qu’il joue à son auditoire, comme on prononçait jadis des oracles; ce qui n’empêche pas cet auditoire de se montrer émerveillé de l’adorable simplicité de ces beaux ouvrages, exécutés avec une simplicité non moins adorable” (*AM* 1, no. 30 [27 June 1861]: 234).

87. “A quoi bon la série complète des concertos de Mozart? Est-ce pour déconsidérer l’auteur de *Don Giovanni*? Est-ce pour nous rappeler que Mozart pianiste n’est que le dernier des clavecinistes?” (*AM* 4, no. 14 [3 March 1864]: 108).

emergent canon came into conflict with a standard of professional competence which demanded that early keyboard music be prevented from moving from the private salon to the concert hall. In Léon Escudier's journal, women who specialized in such music were at particular risk of being dismissed as amateurs technically unable to exploit the full potential of their instrument. When Marie Mongin played works from the Farrencs' anthology *Le Trésor des pianistes* at a concert in 1862, Escudier wrote a sarcastic review of her playing that so incensed Aristide Farrenc that he quoted part of it in a letter to François-Joseph Fétis. Under the name Gamma, Escudier had written:

Pianists working on ancient music were in their element. It was Mlle Mongin who played all these musical curiosities. She excels in the fugal style; her agile and well-trained fingers conquered the difficulties of this kind of music; but you cannot ask for a full or velvety tone, or tenderness and passion, or the expansiveness of the great masters, from this useful pianist. She turns an excellent Pleyel piano into a dried-up instrument like a harpsichord.<sup>88</sup>

Here, Escudier turned excelling "in the fugal style" into an insult. Moreover, he reduced Mongin's interpretive artistry to the minimum, calling her merely "useful" and focusing upon expected professional qualities that she lacked. His comments on her finger technique—by now stereotyped as a means of emphasizing femininity in a performer, and almost identical to the description of the fictitious Eugénie Bernard in 1848—intensified the impression of superficiality: Mongin was capable of playing only on the surface of the keys and tackling only superficial music.<sup>89</sup> Many critics applauded pianists who could alter their style to suit different repertoires. Those pianists (however competent) who had only one repertory—and one deemed subprofessional—were unable to mitigate or answer charges of amateurism.

88. "Les pianistes qui travaillent dans le vieux étaient dans la jubilation. C'est M<sup>lle</sup> Mongin qui a exécuté toutes ces curiosités musicales. Elle excelle dans le style fugué: ses doigts agiles et exercés sont rompus aux difficultés de ce genre de musique; mais il ne faut demander à cette habile virtuose ni de beaux sons pleins et veloutés, ni la tendresse, ni la passion, ni l'ampleur des grands artistes. Elle fait d'un excellent piano Pleyel un instrument sec comme un clavecin" (*AM* 2, no. 48 [30 October 1862]: 377–78). Quoted with minor variations by Aristide Farrenc to F.-J. Fétis, 23 December 1862 (*F-Pn*, Département des Manuscrits, n.a.fr. 22870, no. 30).

89. Aristide Farrenc's estimation of Mongin could hardly have been further removed from that of Escudier: arguing that she was the only pianist capable of playing the repertory of *Le Trésor* in an appropriate style, he lobbied Fétis for her inclusion in the second edition of the *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, 8 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1860–65), writing her entry himself. As a female with no compositions to her name, she is almost unique in the dictionary. *F-Pn*, Département des Manuscrits, n.a.fr. 22870, nos. 28 (letter of 26 September 1862) and 32 (letter of 8/9 March 1863). The published article on Mongin was relatively detailed and had the added advantage of allowing Farrenc some free publicity for his anthology *Le Trésor des pianistes* (*Biographie universelle des musiciens* 6:173).



On her death in 1931, Mongin drew only the epithet “talented pianist and reputed teacher” in *Le Ménestrel*.<sup>90</sup> Tardieu de Malleville’s reception was similar: on her death in 1890, an unidentified obituarist for *Le Ménestrel* called her a “pianist of solid style,”<sup>91</sup> and *L’Art musical* referred to her as an exponent of “delicate virtuosity.”<sup>92</sup> The delicacy, limited scope for flamboyance, and apparent technical simplicity of available keyboard music up to and including Mozart rendered it easily disparaged by critics with little musical sympathy for the repertory itself. Despite widespread complaints when women tackled the professional, masculine repertory and themselves appeared too masculine, women who restricted themselves to feminine music had little chance to gain the kind of recognition that pianists such as Pleyel and Szarvady achieved.

The double bind within which most women pianists worked, and the fragility of their reputations, are neatly illustrated in a hostile review of one of Mattmann’s last public appearances, in April 1861, five months before her death. She played Mozart’s D-Minor Concerto, with her own cadenzas, at the Société des Concerts.<sup>93</sup> Léon Escudier’s brother Marie found the work regressive and perfectly suited to Mattmann’s technical limitations. Mozart’s piano works, he said,

are notable for the period in which they were written; but God forbid that we should have any more to do with this feeble and poverty-stricken instrument of old, for which the harpsichordists scribbled. To present us today with Mozart concertos other than as curiosities which are interesting to know about is to wish to deny progress and to condemn us to return to the Middle Ages. We shall be allowed the liberty of considering the Concerto in D Minor an unfortunate choice. Since it demands neither significant energy nor profound feeling, it suits Mme Mattmann’s talent well—an even and correct talent with the light and agile fingers of a learned and conscientious musician who is nevertheless an artist lacking warmth and originality. However, we owe her our sincere compliments for the style of her last-movement cadenza, made up of arpeggios, passagework with roulades and chromaticism, and trills; this cadenza had the double merit of being short and of being faithful to the spirit of the composer-pianist.<sup>94</sup>

90. “Pianiste de talent et professeur réputé” (*Mén* 92, no. 19 [8 May 1931]: 208).

91. “Pianiste de bonne école” (*Mén* 56, no. 23 [8 June 1890]: 184).

92. “La virtuosité-délicate” (*AM* 29, no. 12 [30 June 1890]: 95). An obituary by the critic Camille Bellaigue, one of whose piano teachers was a pupil of Tardieu de Malleville, was much more generous (*Mén* 56, no. 24 [15 June 1890]: 192).

93. Her cadenza to the first movement only was published by Duverger in 1862.

94. “Sont remarquables pour le temps où elles furent écrites; mais, Dieu merci nous n’en sommes plus à ce maigre et pauvre instrument d’autrefois, sur lequel avaient à s’escrimer les clavecinistes; et nous présenter de nos jours les concertos de Mozart autrement que comme des curiosités intéressantes à connaître, c’est vouloir nier le progrès et nous condamner à retourner au moyen âge. On nous permettra de ne pas trouver heureux ce choix du concerto en *ré mineur*. Comme il ne demande pas beaucoup de vigueur ni de sensibilité profonde, il convient

Despite the fact that she had played Thalberg's "Moïse" Fantasy at her debut in 1840, Mattmann, too, eventually fell foul of attitudes that saw no artistic merit in the playing of early music, and damned its exponents with accusations of routine superficiality relieved by neither the extremes of sensibility nor those of coquetry. It was into this rather stony "middle ground" of conscientiousness that many female chamber pianists fell in the eyes of their critics. Marie Escudier's opinion was countered, however, by references to the perfection and brilliance of her performance in both *Le Ménestrel* and the *Gazette musicale*, and by the actions of the Société des Concerts itself, which at a committee meeting of 30 April 1861 awarded medals of honor to Francis Planté, Pablo de Sarasate, and Louise Mattmann.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

The reception of women pianists in mid-nineteenth-century Paris reveals cultural tensions provoked largely by their differing expressions of non-conformity to the virtuoso-composer model. Critical opinion of women pianists was influenced not only by misogyny but also by ideological conflicts over the virtuoso as composer and the virtuoso as interpreter, the status and gendering of repertoires, and the appropriate attitude for a performer playing a canonic work. During decades when various sectors of the music profession—particularly chamber musicians, historians, and some critics—attempted to change the aesthetic by which performers were judged, a significant number of women pianists dedicated themselves to chamber work, to the Classical sonata and concerto repertory, or to specialism in early music. They were important participants in the extension of the idea of the cult of the work from orchestral and string chamber music, where it was better established, to keyboard music. Indeed, the number of women who found themselves professional space as chamber musicians and soloists in the 1840s through the 1860s was surprisingly large. Yet to critics who clung to older models of the composer-virtuoso, such women could never qualify as top-flight artists, particularly if they "let the work speak for itself" rather than "commenting upon it," to borrow Heller's words.

---

d'ailleurs au talent de M<sup>me</sup> Mattmann, talent égal et correcte, doigts légers et faciles, musicienne instruite et consciencieuse, mais artiste sans chaleur et sans originalité. Nous lui devons cependant nos compliments sincères pour le style de sa cadence dans le finale composée d'arpèges, de traits roulants ou chromatiques et de trilles; cette cadence avait le double mérite d'être courte et de rester fidèle à l'esprit du compositeur-pianiste" (*EM* 25, no. 15 [14 April 1861]: 116).

95. *F-Pn*, Département de Musique, Archives de la Société des Concerts, D. 17345 [6].

Such opposing modes of critique expose the perils of writing critical biography of performers—especially women—of the nineteenth century. Because there are relatively few documents relating to performers as opposed to composers, the press is a major source of information concerning a musician's repertory and pattern of professional activity. But use of the press alone to evaluate style and quality is problematic, and sound interpretation rests largely on a knowledge of individual critics' predilections. All the pianists discussed above were of professional calibre; they were not all of equal calibre. Their professional stature is attested not so much by press reports as by the fact that they were regularly invited to act as resident pianists for Paris chamber societies, some of whose members were widely acknowledged to be Paris's finest musicians. With the exception of Pleyel, they played out their careers in a professional space which lay between that of the salon musician and the touring virtuoso. A feminized space in that it involved interpretation, not composition, it was also a masculine space in which Beethoven's mighty works took pride of place. But inevitably, whatever their career aspirations, women pianists had to contend with gendered assumptions about their chosen repertories, their style of interpretation, and their physical attitude at the piano. Only Pleyel, who came closest to the male paradigm of the virtuoso-composer, is known to have actively sought to turn such assumptions to her own advantage and to have manipulated her own reception. Indeed, perhaps the most astounding aspect of the professional lives discussed here, and one worthy of further study, is the sureness with which Pleyel diagnosed and treated the male sexism surrounding her. Her breathtaking success in the 1840s, repeated on every return to Paris, was due to her self-advertisement as the embodiment of the impossible—the poetic, manly, coquette.

### Abstract

The sudden appearance of several female concert pianists in Paris in the mid 1840s forced male journalists to develop new critical rhetorics. Criticism of the period became saturated with problematic notions of gender, the use of the body, and levels of acting in performance. Because they were interpreters rather than composers, women pianists challenged traditional ideas about the meaning of pianistic virtuosity and were central to the enlargement of the concert repertory. In comparison with male colleagues, however, they were disadvantaged, caught in a web of conflicting ideas concerning the relative value of particular keyboard repertories that were themselves gendered.