

A STUDY GUIDE TO FRANZ LISZT'S *LA CAMPANELLA*¹

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Abstract

Everyone is familiar with Franz Liszt and believes that he is a musical genius. It is necessary to examine the composer's works in order to comprehend his inventiveness. This document delves into one of Liszt's most renowned compositions, *La Campanella* from *Grandes Etudes de Paganini, S. 141*. The goal of this study is to assist audiences and pianists in understanding this piece. An overview of Liszt's life and work is provided, as well as information on other composers who were associated with his work. The article also discusses the purpose of the composition, the historical context in which it was composed, how other works have had influences on Liszt's *La Campanella*, and the piece's influence on subsequent pianists. The article demonstrates the general formal structure of the work and assists students, instructors, and performers in the learning process of the etude by identifying technical difficulties that may arise when studying the piece and providing guidance on how to overcome such obstacles differently comparing to other articles that discuss on the same piece. Finally, the paper includes recommendations for effective practices.

Keywords: Liszt / Etude / Paganini / Piano / *La Campanella*

Introduction

Dr. Maykin Lerttamrab, the Professor of Piano from Chiang Mai University, who earned Doctor of Musical Arts in music performance from University of Oregon, and Master of Music in piano performance from Manhattan School of Music, has performed Franz Liszt's *Grandes Etudes de Paganini No. 3*, also known as *La Campanella*, since he was very young. The performance of the piece being played by Dr. Lerttamrab himself can be found in the social media channel

¹ This article is a part of the research paper 'A Study Guide to Franz Liszt's *La Campanella*'

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called [Youtube.com/@musicforklavier](https://www.youtube.com/@musicforklavier). The piece is one of the most famous works in the piano literature, yet only few people are able to understand in-depth and perform well. The reason is that the piece requires performers to have transcending piano technique in order to play it. Dr. Lerttamrab has written this research document as a guide for anyone who would like to master in playing this piece, which also provides the solutions for technical difficulty issues differently to articles that discuss on the same piece.

La Campanella is one of Liszt's most well-known pieces, however the themes were originally composed by Nicolò Paganini and were used in the fourth movement of his *Violin Concerto No. 2*.

Nicolò Paganini (1782-1840)

Nicolò Paganini was a talented violinist and composer born on October 27th, 1782, in Genoa, Italy. Paganini's father taught him how to play the mandolin and violin as a child. When his father discovered Paganini's musical ability, he chose to have his son professionally trained. Paganini started his violin studies under Giovanni Servetto and afterward with Giacomo Costa, the conductor of Genoa's theatre orchestra. Additionally, he studied composition with Francesco Gnecco. Paganini played the violin in church orchestras every week to help pay for the tuition. This experience allowed Paganini to hone his sight-reading abilities and perform with renowned vocalists such as Luigi Marchesi and Teresa Bertinotti.

Paganini began his career in 1801 as a member of the republican orchestra in Lucca. Paganini was then relegated to the orchestra's second chair. Due to his demotion, Paganini chose to leave the orchestra and pursue a career as an independent musician. He started doing concert tours in Italy, which brought him recognition and established him as a violin virtuoso. His violin ability was so incredible that many thought he had sold his soul to the devil to obtain it.

His *24 Caprices for Solo Violin* were published in 1819 and were deemed unplayable by experienced players. They were never meant for public performance; rather, they were designed as a series of exercises to be used in collaboration with musical works. What distinguished them from earlier exercises was their approach to musicality and virtuosity: technical elements of musical creation are not treated as separate exercises, but are integrated into the musical piece as a whole.

Paganini may have been afflicted with Marfan's syndrome. The presumption was made based on his height, long limbs, long fingers, and very extensible joints. These characteristics may have enabled Paganini to develop inhuman violin techniques.

Paganini composed *Violin Concerto No. 2* in 1826. The concerto's last movement is referred to as '*La Clochette*' or '*La Campanella*'. The movement employs the instrument 'triangle' to simulate the sound of a little bell. The bell effect serves as an ornament and also strengthen the violin's melodic lines. Additionally, it imparts a lovely gypsy-like color. This movement inspired Liszt to compose the '*Grande Fantasia de Bravoure sur La Clochette*'.

Paganini died in 1840 of an intestinal hemorrhage. The Church refused his corpse a Catholic burial in Genoa due to his widely reported connection with the devil. Paganini's corpse was eventually interred in 1876, with the assistance of friends and family, in a cemetery in Parma.

Development of the Piano

Since Bartolomeo Cristofori's (1655-1731) first piano model was invented in 1709, the Pianoforte has evolved. Several innovations in the construction of the pianoforte occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century, including John Broadwood's (1732-1812) iron wire, Alpheus Babcock's (1785-1842) metal-frame piano (1825), and Jean-Henri Pape's (1789-1875) felt hammers (1826), all of which resulted in the development of a variety of new technical and expressive possibilities. Liszt, in particular, was influenced by Sebastian Erard's (1752-1831) invention of the double-escapement mechanism. When a note was repeated, the double-escapement mechanism allowed the hammer of a piano to swiftly return to the string.

This enabled faster and more delicate note repeats and a rapid sound, encouraging the growth of virtuosity in the nineteenth century by virtuosos like Liszt. The virtuoso possibilities created by the 'double-escapement mechanism' prompted Liszt to develop and perform his *Grandes Etudes de Paganini, S. 141*. These Etudes feature fast sections, extremely flashy and rapid fingering, and demand a high level of practical expertise and performing technique from the pianist. Thus, performance technique affected the evolution of the piano, and performers needed increasingly complex methods as new piano mechanisms became available and audience expectations grew.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Franz Liszt (1811-1886), the Hungarian pianist, was well-known not just for his handsome appearance but also for his virtuosity. Later in life, he transformed himself into a composer, a teacher, an arranger, a conductor, and a symbol of virtuoso. He was born in Raiding, Hungary on October 22nd, 1811, and outlived everyone else in his generation. Other composers from

his generation include Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), and Hector Berlioz (1803-1869).

According to Liszt himself, while Liszt was a child, he met Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). Beethoven requested that the young Liszt perform one of Bach's Fugues, and Liszt amazed Beethoven with his performance by transposing the fugue into any key Beethoven requested on the spot. Beethoven then kissed Liszt on the forehead in an act of affection.

Since he was seven years old, Liszt had an exceptional ability to play the piano. He began composing at the age of eight and gave his first concert at the age of nine. When he was ten years old, he studied in Vienna with Carl Czerny (1791-1857), one of Beethoven's disciples, and Antonio Salieri (1750-1825). Adam Liszt (1776-1827), Franz Liszt's father, who worked as a steward in the Esterházy household, recognized his son's talent and decided to accompany the young Liszt to Vienna in order for him to learn from the great masters.

Hector Berlioz, Nicolò Paganini, and Frédéric Chopin were three musicians who affected Liszt's musicality. From Berlioz, Liszt learned the notion of "Thinking Big," including achieving dynamic extremes, maximum color, and orchestral sonorities. Whatever Berlioz accomplished with the orchestra, Liszt attempted to accomplish with the piano. Liszt even transcribed many of Berlioz's orchestral compositions for solo piano². Liszt was moved by Paganini's performance, which prompted him to pursue further research into transcendental techniques and showmanship. He was so taken with Paganini's music that he arranged six of the composer's *Caprices for solo violin* as solo piano works. *Grandes Etudes de Paganini* is the title of the album that contains those six solo compositions. Liszt had learned from Chopin that piano performance could incorporate both lyricism and bravura. The instrument is capable of producing both powerful, harsh tones and delicate, soft tones. The decoration may be practical rather than just ornamental.

In 1839, Liszt abandoned the concert format. The conventional concert format had a variety of different musicians performing on a single program. Liszt established the modern concept of the "solo recital" in order to avoid having to share the program with anybody else.

Liszt grew exponentially as a pianist, but his progress as a composer was slightly delayed. The majority of his early works have been lost to time. Between 1829 and 1834, he was occupied with the transcription of numerous sources. After 1835, he began writing piano compositions that would become part of the repertory.

² Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 199.

Liszt met Marie Catherine Sophie, Countess d'Agoult (1805-1876) in 1834. She subsequently abandoned her husband and fled to Switzerland with Liszt. They had three children; two died in infancy, while Cosima, born in 1837, eventually married Hans von Bülow (1830-1894), Liszt's first big pupil, and abandoned him for the composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883). In 1844, Liszt separated from the Countess.

In 1847, while performing in Kiev, Russia, Liszt met Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein (1819-1887). Prince Nikolaus of Sayn-Wittgenstein (1812-1864) was the princess's husband. They separated after a few years, and she lived alone on the Kiev estate. She convinced Liszt to devote himself entirely to composition, which meant abandoning his profession as a traveling virtuoso. Liszt settled in Weimar the following year, and the Princess joined in 1849.

With an orchestra at his disposal during the Weimar period, he began orchestrating his own works. He composed twelve symphonic poems, Liszt's new musical form. They are a single-movement orchestral program music. He also composed other large-scale works for an orchestra, including Faust Symphony and Dante Symphony, and a large-scale work for a piano and an orchestra, Totentanz³. Another Weimar period contribution by Liszt is the concept of thematic transformation, in which a theme is adapted to perform many functions while remaining recognizably the same theme throughout. This approach was applied to the monumental one-movement Piano Sonata in B Minor and Piano Concerto in E-flat Major⁴.

In 1886, Liszt died in Bayreuth, Germany, at the age of 74, of pneumonia, which he may have contracted while attending his daughter Cosima's Bayreuth Festival. Against his wishes, he was buried in Bayreuth's municipal cemetery.

Liszt was a renowned composer since he offered numerous brilliant ideas to the realm of music. He introduced transcending techniques to the piano; he founded the “solo recital” as a new sort of performance; he demonstrated a new method of conducting; he created new genres of symphonic music; and, finally, he wrote countless masterpieces for us to study.

Inspiration

In April 1832, Liszt had the opportunity to attend a concert featuring the renowned violinist Nicolò Paganini. It was a charity performance performed at the Opera House for cholera sufferers. Liszt received an epiphany after hearing Paganini's performance. Paganini had demonstrated that he was a violinist capable of playing the violin not only better than his competitors, but

³ David Dubal, *The Essential Canon of Classical Music* (New York: North Point Press, 2003), 248.

⁴ Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 201.

as well as it could be played. After the recital, Liszt played the piano for four to five hours every day, concentrating only on exercises. His objective was to develop a new kind of piano repertoire in which he could transfer some of Paganini's most stunning feats such as tremolos, leaps, glissandos, spiccato effects, and bell-like harmonics to the keyboard. To do this, he chose a selection of Paganini's notoriously difficult solo *Caprices* and set about replicating their intricate issues on the keyboard. In 1838, he published the first results of these efforts, *Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini*, S. 140. However, a more immediate effect of Paganini's influence was *Clochette Fantasy*, composed in 1832. In 1851, Liszt made the revision and called them *Grandes études de Paganini*, S. 141.

Dedication

Clara Schumann (1819-1896) met Franz Liszt in April and May 1838 in Vienna, towards the end of her concert tour. She had seen him previously in several salons on her concert tour in Paris in 1832, but the two had not met at that time. Liszt came to Vienna in April 1838 to perform a series of concerts, including one for the victims of the Pest flood. Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann stayed in the same hotel and also performed together privately and at soirées, including four hands. Clara entertained him with compositions of her own. As stated in a letter to Marie d'Agoult, Liszt was impressed: "Her compositions are truly remarkable, especially for a woman. They contain a hundred times more inventiveness and real feelings than all former and present fantasias by Thalberg". Clara Schumann admired Liszt's virtuoso abilities but, as a result of this respect, briefly doubted her own abilities. Later in her career, she developed a more critical attitude toward his unusual style of playing and, to a lesser extent, his lack of fidelity to the originals.

Liszt dedicated both *Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini* S. 140 and *Grandes Etudes de Paganini* S. 141 to Clara Schumann, owing to his deep admiration for her. While Liszt always praised highly Clara Schumann and promoted Robert Schumann's compositions, Clara's respect for Liszt diminished. They continued to perform together in Leipzig's Gewandhaus concert venue in December 1841, and Liszt's compositions were included in her programs until 1847. In June 1848, a break occurred: Liszt had been invited to a soirée at the Schumanns' Dresden home, but arrived two hours late and immediately referred to Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet as "typically Leipzig." While Robert Schumann (1810-1856) reestablished relations with Liszt following this event, Clara Schumann was upset. She had previously made critical statements about Liszt's compositions dating all the way back to 1839, as well as his stage behavior and exaggeration. In 1854, when Liszt sent her his Sonata in B minor,

which he had dedicated to Robert Schumann, she wrote in her diary: “Today, Liszt sent me a Sonata dedicated to Robert and some more pieces, together with a polite note. But those pieces are so creepy! Brahms played them to me and I felt really miserable ... This is only blind noise - no more healthy thoughts, everything is confused, one cannot see any clear harmonies! And, what is more, I still have to thank him now - this is really awful.”

On the other hand, Liszt's admiration for Clara Schumann remained steadfast. He even organized a performance for her at Weimar, where she performed Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54, while Liszt conducted the Overture to Manfred, Op. 115, and Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120. In the same year, Liszt wrote a lengthy article about Clara and Robert Schumann, which was published in three issues of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. After 1856, encounters between Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann were exceptionally unusual, and the estrangement developed even more in the aftermath of the hostile attitudes of the “Brahmsians” and the “New Germans” in 1860. It was a philosophical disagreement amongst musicians over whether music should be abstract or depict a definite image. Liszt even attempted to organize a composers' organization around the novel, seemingly more advanced concept of “programmatic,” or descriptive composition. Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) is sometimes referred to be the standard bearer of the conservative “absolute” music school, with his first symphony called “Beethoven's Tenth” by critics. Clara Schumann, on the other hand, was persistently critical of the more advanced Liszt and Wagner.

Formal Structure - *La Campanella*

Paganini's last movement of *Violin Concerto Op. 7 No. 2* is a rondo in 6/8 meter with an ABACA formal structure. The rondo's first section A is organized in an internal ABA form based on two themes.

Liszt uses two themes from the A section, and therefore departs from the concerto's formal framework. Rather than that, he developed a new structure around variations on these two themes, complete with an introduction and coda. The coda's theme is drawn from the last passage of the A section.

1. Introduction: measures one through four
2. Section I - Themes A and B (measures 5-20 and 21-42)
3. Section II - Themes A and B (measures 43-78)
4. Section III - Themes A and B (measures 79-120)
5. Section IV - Theme A abbreviated in the absence of B (measures 120-128)
6. Coda (measures 129-139)

Technical Challenges - *La Campanella*

La Campanella is probably the most popular of the six pieces from *Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini*. It was originally written in A flat minor, but Liszt respelled it in G sharp minor enharmonically when he revised the work in 1851 to be part of the *Grande Études de Paganini*, S. 141. Its theme, entwined with virtually constant ornamentation and diabolical obstacles, has a fantasy-like atmosphere and bell-like sonorities that add to its appeal. Liszt requires great delicacy and color in the dynamics to convey the delicacy and color of the original piece. Rather than one of Paganini's *Caprice*, it is based on Paganini's *Concerto No. 2 in B minor Op. 7* for violin and orchestra. It is also the component on which this study report will be mostly centered.

Leaps

The section like measures 4-11 presents a difficulty in that it must demonstrate the melodic line, which is positioned at the bottom of the right-hand part's leaps, uninterrupted while the hand leaps over a considerable physical distance. These leaps require both strength and consistency in the sound production.

When practicing these leaps, it is suggested to softly drop the weight of the hand on the lower notes to emphasize the theme, and then release the weight and lightly touch the upper notes. Controlling weight transfer and hand movement is critical for producing an equal tone in both the higher and lower notes.

It is not recommended to jump with your hands in an arch-like motion or to abruptly alter the direction of your hand movement when leaping. At all times, the hand should be kept low, and its movement should be smooth and circular.



Figure 1 Leaps

Source: International Music Score Library Project, Edited by Edward Dannreuther

Repeated Notes

The repeated note passages like measures 50-59 should be practiced without immediately proceeding to the next set of repeated notes and to utilize that little break to prepare the hand octave position for the following series of repeated notes. It is important to practice emphasizing just the first note of each group and avoiding any other notes. The last note of the group should be brief and light, allowing the hand to quickly shift to the next position for the approaching group.



Figure 2 Repeated Notes

Source: International Music Score Library Project, Edited by Edward Dannreuther

Fingering

The suggested fingering from many editors including the source of the score that is used in this article in some passages such as in measure 77 is not well-considered. If the fingering is not suitable for the performer, then he or she is allowed to change as long as the new fingering helps improve the tone quality. In the example, the suggested fingering is based only on the fingering pattern used in a regular chromatic scale, which does not work well in this context. Each of the four descending notes should be grouped together in this section, with the fingering being 4, 3, 2, and 1 for each group. This fingering transforms this terrifying passage into a comfort.



Figure 3 Fingering

Source: International Music Score Library Project, Edited by Edward Dannreuther

Hands Distribution

The passage in measures 91-94 is one of the most difficult sections in this piece, especially for pianists with smaller size of hands. Liszt places the melody to the right hand and embellishes with an octave and trill. For each group, it is suggested to utilize the fingering 1, 3, 5, and 3. However, the issue arises when the 3rd finger falls on the white key while the 5th finger lands on the black key inside the same group. This group compresses the space between the third and fifth fingers, causing discomfort for the performer. As a result, it is recommended to experiment with the fingering 1, 5, 3, and 5 in this type of group. Additionally, there are certain groups that may be played with the hand distribution. The left hand may take up the group's initial note, significantly relieving the strain built up on the right hand. The example below illustrates the suggestion.

The image shows a musical score for measures 91-94. Measure 91 features a right-hand melody with a trill and an octave, with a suggested fingering of 1, 5, 3, 5. The left hand plays a supporting bass line. Measure 93 shows a similar pattern with a suggested fingering of 1, 5, 3, 5. The score includes a watermark of Mahidol University and the word 'espressivo' in the right hand of measure 91.

Figure 4 Hands Distribution

Source: International Music Score Library Project, Edited by Edward Dannreuther

Repeated Octaves

The passages with repeated octaves are difficult because playing octaves consecutively depletes stamina. It is not recommended to perform the passages with the whole arm bouncing. The movement should be controlled only by the tips of the fingers, and the wrist should be relaxed to be able to follow the lead from the fingers.



Figure 5 Repeated Octaves

Source: International Music Score Library Project, Edited by Edward Dannreuther

Sequence of Rapid Octave Leaps

The coda is consisted of the left hand playing a sequence of octave leaps, which is very difficult. It is recommended to practice with a relaxed left hand and with eyes closed. The octaves, fortunately, are landing on the black keys. Because the black keys are raised above the white surface level and there are gaps between them, a pianist may utilize the keyboard's sense of touch to determine the precise octaves to play. To aid in the development of sense, keep the left hand in contact with the keyboard at all times. Additionally, it is important to examine which notes in the left hand land at the same time as the notes in the right hand, since the right-hand part does not follow the left-hand part rhythmically.



Figure 6 Sequence of Rapid Octave Leaps

Source: International Music Score Library Project, Edited by Edward Dannreuther

Conclusion

La Campanella is one of Liszt's most well-known compositions. Through this article, we learned how important the composer was to the world of music. Additionally, we've learned that the composition was dedicated to Clara Schumann as a token of respect for another great pianist. We know the composer's history and how Paganini's *Violin Concerto No. 2 Op. 7* had a profound influence on Liszt's own work.

Regrettably, despite the fact that *La Campanella* is a work of art worth studying, it was not warmly accepted. Audiences have unfavorable feelings towards transcription works because they lack original ideas. Additionally, they believed that Liszt made an excessive effort to impress the audience with technical difficulties rather than the music itself. They were unable to appreciate novel approaches to presenting the same music. They failed to see that the musical arrangement was a way of paying tribute to the composer of the original piece. Moreover, they overlooked Liszt's ingenuity in generating musical impact and his economical but effective show of skill.

However, there are pianists who are influenced by Liszt's idea of the transcription, specifically on *La Campanella*. *La Campanella* in different versions have appeared with added extra notes or even added one's own cadenza. One of the example is the pianist Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), who had played the piece in public many times with his own variant of the piece, and eventually published his own version.

Each of Paganini's Etudes emphasizes a certain technical skill while also posing a musical challenge that transcends the written page. It must be performed with a light touch in *Grandes Etudes de Paganini No. 3*, commonly known as '*La Campanella*,' in order to effectively execute lengthy reaches, precise leaps and jumps, and extended trills. To play this etude effectively, the pianist's muscle memory must be integrated with the physical topography of the keyboard. It is transcendental in value and deserving of study and performance. It has a variety of technical devices and is a real workout for both amateur and expert pianists.

While the etude has a strong resemblance to its source in the violin concerto, it delves into a world of pianism that distinguishes it as a work of piano virtuosity. Liszt's meeting with the renowned violinist sparked the creation of a piece that has remained a cornerstone of the piano repertory to this day.

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