

Constructing a Versatile Virtuoso Persona: Anna Caroline de Belleville and Mediating the Competing Tastes of Critics and Audiences

PENG LIU

In a letter to his mother on June 28, 1833, Robert Schumann expressed his preference for two female pianists over all male virtuosos: one was his future beloved, Clara Wieck, and the other, Anna Caroline de Belleville.¹ This was not the first time that these two names had appeared together in Schumann's writings. One year earlier, in a review of Wieck's concert in Leipzig, Schumann discussed the pair in terms of their respective pianistic strengths and styles:

They cannot be compared; they are different masters of different schools. Belleville's playing is far more technically beautiful; but that of Clara is more passionate. Belleville's tone flatters, but only reaches

I would like to thank Michael C. Tusa and Alexander Stefaniak for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. I am also grateful to the editors for their efforts and the two anonymous readers for their constructive suggestions. The research for this article was generously supported by the University of Texas at Austin's COFA / Graduate School Continuing Fellowship and the American Musicological Society's H. Robert Cohen / RIMP Award.

¹ Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann, An Artist's Life, Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters*, trans. and abridged from the fourth edition by Grace E. Hadow, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1913), 1:56.

the ear; Clara's reaches the heart. The former is a poet, the latter poetry.²

Despite his declared preference for Wieck, Schumann's praise of Belleville indicates her high standing among early nineteenth-century pianists. In fact, critics often singled out Belleville, next to Leopoldine Blahetka, as the most popular female virtuoso of the early nineteenth century. In the entry "Deutschland (Musik)" in the *Damen Conversations Lexikon* (1835) Belleville and Blahetka are the only two female virtuosos in a short list of pianists who "have exhausted the field of virtuosity."³ While Blahetka gradually retreated from the public stage in the mid-1830s, Belleville's reputation continued to grow. In 1843 a critic proclaiming Vienna as an important place for cultivating musicians listed Belleville as one of the greatest musicians to make a career in the city, alongside Joseph Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Sigismund Thalberg, Franz Liszt, Carl Czerny, and Niccolò Paganini.⁴

Although a few modern biographical accounts provide a general introduction to Belleville's life and career, there has been no critical examination of her virtuosity within the context of early nineteenth-century performance culture.⁵ Drawing on periodicals, magazines, correspondence, memoirs, and contemporary writings, this article reconstructs Belleville's early career and illustrates her significance by examining her strategic programming, pianism, and reception. I argue that Belleville's reorientation of her public concert repertory in the mid-1830s, particularly her incorporation of works considered "classical" or "serious," enabled her to mediate the conflicting musical tastes of her audiences and critics, and to reinvent herself as pianist renowned not for a bravura style but for a versatile, eclectic virtuosity centering on the faithful interpretation of "serious" works. At a time when virtuoso composer-performers still dominated the public concert scene, Belleville's identity as an interpreter-performer was not only distinctive; it also anticipated

² Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1891), 29. Unless otherwise specified, translations are my own.

³ "Deutschland (Musik)," in *Damen-Conversations-Lexikon*, vol. 3, *Cordilleras bis Esel*, ed. Carl Herloßsohn (Leipzig: Volckmar, 1835), 152–55, at 154.

⁴ [Ferdinand Braun], "Correspondenz: Pariser Courier," *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* 3, no. 51 (1843): 214–15, at 214.

⁵ Silke Wenzel, "Anna Caroline de Belleville," in *MUGI: Musikvermittlung und Genderforschung: Lexikon und multimediale Präsentationen*, ed. Beatrix Borchard and Nina Noeske (Hamburg: Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, 2009), https://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/receive/mugi_person_00000061; and Uta Goebel-Streicher, "Belleville, Anna de," *Sophie Drinker Institut*, 2011, <http://www.sophie-drinker-institut.de/belleville-anna-de>, expanded in Goebel-Streicher, "Caroline de Belleville," *Musik in Bayern* 79–80 (2014–15): 61–93.

one of the most significant shifts in virtuoso performance culture of the nineteenth century.

Breaking from Programming Conventions

In the first half of the nineteenth century, composer-performers prevailed in the concert hall. Katharine Ellis observes that male virtuosos, who dominated public concert life in Paris until the mid-1840s, mostly built their fame by performing their own showy pieces. Through performances of their concertos, operatic fantasies, variations, rondos, and the like, Hummel, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Ignaz Moscheles, Henri Herz, and later John Peter Pixis and Thalberg were able to display their “technical strengths” and demonstrate their “complete control over and ownership” of their works.⁶

Some female virtuosos also played their own works in public. For example, Belleville frequently performed her own variations and rondos in the 1820s and early 1830s. Her early output, though limited in number, challenged the stereotypical view that women lacked the capability and creativity to compose.⁷ A review of a concert she gave in Prague during the Advent Season in 1820 praised the high potential of her compositional talents:

In variations of her own invention, written in a modest, modern taste, and especially calculated for her individuality, she showed promising abilities to compose, which will certainly flourish under skilled guidance for development and training, and so the opinion can be doubtlessly reaffirmed that the female sex is just as suitable for creating music as for performing it.⁸

The conclusion drawn in this positive review was, however, something of an anomaly. The institutional opposition to women as composers gave most female virtuosos little choice but to perform the large-scale virtuosic compositions of their male counterparts—typically concertos, variations, rondos, and fantasies.⁹ Before the 1840s such virtuosic works were standard fare for figures such as Blahetka, Clara Schumann, and Marie Pleyel.

⁶ Katharine Ellis, “Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 353–85, at 356.

⁷ There may be only four works with opus numbers written by Belleville before 1840: 6 Variations, op. 1 (ca. 1820); Introduction et Variations, op. 2 (ca. 1820); Sept Variations sur une Valse Viennoise, op. 3 (1820); and Rondeau, op. 4 (1821). Belleville published about 200 works during her lifetime, most of which were written after 1840, when she settled in England.

⁸ “Nachrichten: Prag,” *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 23, no. 5 (1821): 73–76, at 73.

⁹ For a discussion of the limitations female composers faced for publication, see Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), particularly chap. 3, “Professionalism,” 80–119.

Belleville toured most actively in the 1820s and 1830s before settling permanently in England. She gave at least 100 public concerts in Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, England, Poland, and Russia during these two decades, and she was often greeted with enthusiasm by music critics. During her visit to Düsseldorf in 1831, Belleville was received by Prince Frederick of Prussia and honored by his wife, Princess Louise, with the title “Chamber Virtuoso of Her Royal Highness” (“Kammervirtuosinn Ihrer königl. Hoheit”), which often accompanied her name in the press after it was conferred.¹⁰ Her distinctive brilliance also earned her another marketable nickname that indicated her prestige, “The Queen of the Piano” (“La Regina del Pianoforte”), bestowed by Paganini in 1831.¹¹

Prior to 1833 Belleville generally observed the programming conventions of the time, and her concert repertory comprised almost exclusively her own variations, as well as virtuosic works by contemporary composers such as Herz, Hummel, and Pixis (see table 1).¹² A close look at a characteristically titled “Vocal and Instrumental Concert” that she gave in Vienna on April 14, 1830, illustrates typical programming practices (see fig. 1).¹³ The opening number, Rossini’s *William Tell* overture, reflects the growing trend from the 1820s to start concerts with an opera overture rather than a symphony. Most of Belleville’s concerts opened with an overture by composers such as Luigi Cherubini, Beethoven, Carl Maria von Weber, Pixis, or Rossini. Only on a few occasions did a symphony by Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven open the concert. The overture was then followed by alternating performances from Belleville and her collaborating artists (both vocalists and instrumentalists), another standard format until around the 1850s, when the more homogenous solo recital gradually gained prominence. In this concert, Belleville performed Pixis’s piano concerto and an unspecified set of her own variations.

After Belleville’s Russian concert tour in 1832–33, her programs underwent some remarkable changes (see table 2), which revealed an aspiration to establish herself as more than a showy, popular virtuoso who amazed audiences with mere spectacle. First, Belleville does not appear to have played her own works in public after 1833. The last documented public performance of one of her own compositions was at a concert in

¹⁰ See, for example, “Notizen,” *Allgemeiner musikalischer Anzeiger* 3, no. 31 (1831): 123–24, at 123.

¹¹ “Miscellaneous,” *The Musical World*, n.s., 6, no. 124 (1840): 309–11, at 310.

¹² Compiled from concert reviews and programs, the list provided in table 1 of Belleville’s repertory is far from comprehensive but offers a general idea of her programming practice and repertory choices.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of concert and program convention in the first half of the nineteenth century, see William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

TABLE 1.
List of Belleville's concert repertory, 1820–32.

Composer	Title	Date and Location of Belleville's First Performance	Number of Performances
Belleville, Anna Caroline	Variations (unspecified; opp. 1–3) ^a	1820, Vienna	15
	Fantasy (improvisation)	1828, Munich	3
Chopin, Frédéric	Variations on “Là ci darem la mano,” op. 2	1830, Vienna	1
Czerny, Carl	Variations (unspecified)	1825, Paris	1
Eberl, Anton	Variations (unspecified)	1816, Augsburg	1
Herz, Henri	Variations de bravoure sur la romance de <i>Joseph</i> , op. 20	1829, Vienna	5
	Variations concertantes sur la tyrolienne favorite de <i>La fiancée</i> , op. 56	1831, London	1
Herz and Charles Philippe Lafont	Grandes variations sur une marche favorite de <i>Guillaume Tell</i> , op. 50	1832, St. Petersburg	1
	Variations (unspecified)		6 ^b
Hummel, Johann Nepomuk	Duo Concertante for Piano and Violin (unspecified)	1832, Liverpool	1
	Rondo brilliant, op. 56	1818, Vienna	2
Herz and Charles Philippe Lafont	Septet No. 1 in D minor, op. 74	1822, Paris	2
	Piano Concerto No. 2 in A minor, op. 85	1830, Warsaw	5
	Piano Concerto No. 5 in A-flat major, op. 113	1830, Berlin	2

(continued)

TABLE 1. (*continued*)

Composer	Title	Date and Location of Belleville's First Performance	Number of Performances
Kalkbrenner, Friederich	Piano Concerto No. 2 in E minor, op. 85	1829, Vienna	5 ^c
Moscheles, Ignaz	Variations sur un thème de Händel, op. 29	1819, Vienna	1
	Souvenirs d'Irlande, op. 69	1832, Liverpool	1
Pixis, Johann Peter	Grandes variations sur un thème favori de l'opéra <i>Le barbier de Séville</i> de G. Rossini, op. 36	1829, Vienna	2
	Piano Concerto in C major, op. 100	1830, Vienna	3
	Variations (unspecified)		3 ^d
	Concerto (unspecified)		3 ^e
Ries, Ferdinand	Piano Concerto No. 2 in E-flat major, op. 42	1820, Prague	1
	Piano Concerto No. 3 in C-sharp minor, op. 55	1820, Vienna	1 ^f
	Concerto (unspecified)		2
Wilms, Johann Wilhelm	Piano Quartet in C major, op. 22	1816, Augsburg	1

^a Reviews rarely provide details of the specific variation sets performed. By 1820 Belleville had composed three sets, opp. 1–3.

^b There are six counts of Belleville performing unspecified sets of variations by Herz in concerts between 1830 and 1832. These were likely further performances of the works named here.

^c This number includes two performances of an unspecified concerto by Kalkbrenner in 1830 and 1831.

^d Belleville gave three performances of unspecified variations by Pixis in the period spanning 1828–31.

^e Belleville gave three performances of an unspecified concerto by Pixis in 1830 and 1831.

^f Belleville gave two performances of an unspecified concerto by Ries in 1821.

FIGURE 1. Belleville's farewell concert in the Theater am Kärntnerthor, Vienna, April 14, 1830, *Theaterzettel (Oper und Burgtheater in Wien)*, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=wtz&datum=18300414>.



Moscow in 1833. She played her Sept Variations sur une Valse Viennoise, op. 3, composed in 1820, which according to the critic Vladimir Odoyevsky “raise[d] the value of her wonderful talent” but did not contain anything ingenious.¹⁴ Second, the bravura, virtuosic works by Herz and Kalkbrenner, though still present, were no longer a major component of her repertory; she rarely performed them after 1835. Third, Belleville embraced a new repertory that represented the most fashionable pianism of the period spanning the late 1830s through to 1850: opera-based fantasies by Thalberg. These represented some of the most cutting-edge virtuosity in the 1830s and 1840s, showcasing Thalberg’s three-hand technique and his distinctive *legato cantabile* style, which evinced a lyricism that differentiated itself from the bravura virtuosity of the earlier generation.¹⁵

Most importantly, Belleville’s new repertory also favored what some of her contemporaries considered as “classical” or “serious” pieces; Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto now became her most performed work.¹⁶ She

¹⁴ [Vladimir Odoyevsky], “Otvét G-nu Gil’fu,” *Severnáïa pchela*, September 30, 1833, 883. The anonymous critic is identified in Dmitrii Shumilin, “Peterburgskie gastroli Anny Karoliny de Bel’vil’-Uri,” *Muzыkal’naïa akademiïa* 3 (2018): 167–74, at 172, <https://mus.academy/articles/peterburgskie-gastroli-anny-karoliny-de-belvil-u>.

¹⁵ Thalberg’s three-hand technique features a melody in the middle register, mainly played by two thumbs, decorated by arpeggios, scales, and other figuration in the treble and bass, producing a textural effect as if three hands were playing; it was first introduced in his *Don Juan* Fantasy, op. 14, and later refined in the *Moses* Fantasy, op. 33. See Kenneth Hamilton, “The Virtuoso Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Piano*, ed. David Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57–74, at 58.

¹⁶ Belleville’s performance of Beethoven’s works occurred much earlier. While studying with Czerny in Vienna, Belleville frequently visited Beethoven’s house where she was a favorite, often playing for him his “divine adagios” (e.g., the first movement of the Piano Sonata No. 12 in A-flat major, op. 26) with “her inimitable touch.” William Gardiner, *The Music of Nature* (1832; repr., London, J. H. Wilkins & R. B. Carter, 1840), 236.

TABLE 2.
List of Belleville's concert repertory, 1833–39.

Composer	Title of the Work	Date and Location of Belleville's First Performance	Number of Performances
Belleville, Anna Caroline	Sept Variations sur une Valse Viennoise, op. 3	1820, Vienna	1
Beethoven, Ludwig van	Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor" in E-flat major, op. 73	1833, St. Petersburg	6
	Choral Fantasy, op. 80	1836, Amsterdam	3
	Piano Sonata No. 29 "Hammerklavier" in B-flat major, op. 106	1837, Cologne-Bonn-Aachen	1
Chopin, Frédéric	Mazurka (unspecified)	1839, Norwich	1
Döhler, Theodor	Nocturne (unspecified)	1839, Norwich	1
	Fantaisie et variations de bravure sur une cavatine d' <i>Anna Bolena</i> , op. 17	1839, Norwich	1
	Grande fantaisie et variations sur des thèmes favoris de <i>Guillaume Tell</i> , op. 28	1839, Norwich	1
Hérold, Louis Ferdinand	Piano Concerto No. 2 in E-flat major, op. 26, I. Allegro Maestoso and II. Andante	1839, Norwich	1

(continued)

TABLE 2. (continued)

Composer	Title of the Work	Date and Location of Belleville's First Performance	Number of Performances
Herz, Henri	Fantaisie et variations sur la marche d' <i>Otello</i> de Rossini, op. 67	1833, St. Petersburg	5 ^a
	Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, op. 74	1835, unknown	1
	Variations Brillantes di Bravura sur le trio favori du "Pre aux Clercs," op. 76	1838, Paris	1
Hummel, Johann Nepomuk	Piano Concerto in B minor, op. 89	1836, Amsterdam	1
	Piano Concerto No. 5 in A minor, op. 85	1830, Berlin	1
	Septet No. 1 in D minor, op. 74	1822, Paris	2
Kalkbrenner, Friederich	Fantasia (unspecified)	1833, St. Petersburg	1
	Piano Concerto No. 2 in E minor, op. 85	1829, Vienna	1
	Piano Concerto No. 3 in A minor, op. 107	1834, Vienna	2
Mendelssohn, Felix	Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor, op. 25	1839, Paris	2
Pixis, Johann Peter	Brilliant rondo on the favorite air "Hurrah for the bonnets of blue," op. 106	1833, Moscow	1
Schubert, Franz	Ständchen, D. 889(arr. Franz Liszt)	1839, Norwich	1

(continued)

TABLE 2. (continued)

Composer	Title of the Work	Date and Location of Belleville's First Performance	Number of Performances
Strauss [I, Johann ?]	"Les Souvenirs de Vienne" for piano and violin	1839, Norwich	1
Thalberg, Sigismond	Grande fantaisie et variations sur <i>Don Giovanni</i> , op. 14	1837, Brussels	2
	Fantaisie sur des thèmes de <i>Moïse</i> , op. 33	1839, Paris	3
	Grande fantaisie et variations sur <i>Norma</i> , op. 12	1839, Brighton	1
	Etude (unspecified)	1839, Norwich	1
	Grand Fantasia on "God save the Queen," op. 27	1839, Norwich	1
	Diversissement sur un thème de l'opéra <i>The Gypsy's Warning</i> , op. 34	1839, Norwich	1

^a All five performances happened in 1833–34.

TABLE 3.
Belleville's public performances of Beethoven's Piano Concerto
in E-flat Major, op. 73, 1833–39.

Date	Location
December 18, 1833	St. Petersburg, Mikhailov Theater
April 5, 1834	Berlin, Königlichen Schauspielhaus
April 21, 1834	Dresden
Unspecified dates, 1834–35	Königsberg [now Kaliningrad], Königsberg Theater
April 21, 1836	Amsterdam
April 15, 1839	Paris, Erard's Salon

played it in concert first in St. Petersburg in 1833 and at least five more times before 1840 (see table 3). Her performance of Hummel's works also lent her repertory some gravitas, as indicated in a review of a concert she gave in England in 1831:

This young lady is a pianiste of the very first class, and she possesses a power of hand which is not frequently acquired by female performers. She is a perfect mistress of all the ingenious difficulties that characterize the productions of Pixis, Herz, Moscheles, and other composers of the present German school, and which unquestionably demand more of mere mechanical dexterity than the less glittering, but more solid compositions of Hummel.¹⁷

Belleville's continued performance of Hummel's works in the 1830s and 1840s made her one of "the most skillful interpreters of the learned school of Hummel," according to a French writer in 1848.¹⁸

The changes that Belleville made to her public repertory, particularly her uncommon embrace of Beethoven's music, prompt many questions. Did her actions reflect a general shift in virtuoso concerts, or her personal choices and tastes? And how did her repertory change affect her performance career? Czerny's candid and practical guidance for aspiring virtuosos regarding the selection of concert repertoire might provide some clues:

¹⁷ "Morning Concert," *Times*, August 6, 1831, 2.

¹⁸ "Manuel du Pianiste-Amateur," *La France musicale*, January 2, 1848, 10–12, at 12.

It lies in the nature of things, that a numerous and therefore a mixed audience must be surprised by something extraordinary; and the sure, nay, the only means is[:] finished bravura of style combined with good taste. In this sense even the choice of the piece, with which the player is to make his debut, must be a lucky one. It must agree with the newest taste, and afford the Artist opportunities for overcoming the most shewy difficulties, as well as for the execution of melodies and delightfully embellished *Cantilenas*...Should the Player have so far established his reputation, that the Public welcomes him, and listens to him with pleased and anxious attention; he may then by the choice of more serious and classical works, endeavor to satisfy the demands of a higher class of critics.¹⁹

Czerny divided audiences into two types: the general public and an elite, “higher class of critics.” He believed that a capable virtuoso could eventually manage to win the appreciation of both. Bravura pieces helped virtuosos demonstrate their mastery of cutting-edge pianistic skills and musical taste, and to establish their performance career with a solid ground of supporters. In contrast, the “more serious and classical works” (exemplified by Beethoven’s music) appealed to a smaller circle of elite critics and connoisseurs who located musical truth in the works of the “classical” masters.²⁰

Although it is unclear whether Czerny, as Belleville’s piano teacher, ever offered this advice to her specifically, the trajectory of Belleville’s virtuoso career closely mirrors Czerny’s guidance. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, Belleville’s repositioning of herself in the mid-1830s was at least

¹⁹ Carl Czerny, *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School*, op. 500, trans. J. A. Hamilton, 3 vols. (London: R. Cocks, 1839), 3:88.

²⁰ Czerny distinguishes the piano works in the brilliant style from those by Beethoven, which, although requiring “great power, much expression, and great volubility of finger,” should not “be executed in the brilliant style just treated of.” See Czerny, *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School*, 3:83. By the 1830s, the term “classical music” was increasingly and specifically identified with music by the first Viennese School: Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Daniel Hertz, “Classical,” revised by Bruce Alan Brown, *Grove Music Online*, accessed July 24, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05889>. Czerny’s side-by-side use of “serious” (“ernst”) and “classical” (“klassisch”) suggests that these two terms shared similar attributes. His emphatic contrast between bravura pieces and serious works is further evident in his categorization of his own oeuvre. In the first version of his autobiography, Czerny divided his 734 original works into four categories: “1/4 in the serious style, 1/4 suitable for public production, 1/4 for amateurs, and 1/4 for practical teaching.” The distinction between brilliant and serious was echoed by music critics in Czerny’s time (including Ludwig Rellstab and A. B. Marx, who are discussed later in this article) and gradually became the dominant discourse in music criticism in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this article, I use the terms “serious” and “classical” in a similar way to Czerny to reflect nineteenth-century perceptions of and assumptions about different types of music. Grete Wehmeyer, *Carl Czerny und die Einzelhaft am Klavier, oder Die Kunst der Fingerfertigkeit und die industrielle Arbeitsideologie* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1983), 75.

partly galvanized by criticism of her public concert repertory and proved an effective strategy to elicit favor from critics with “serious” tastes.

From Wunderkind to Brunhild: Belleville on the Rise

The early reception of Belleville was predominantly favorable and emphasized her flawless technique. She first gained public recognition as a *Wunderkind*, and the perfection she achieved at a young age was perceived as “one of the rarest phenomena.”²¹ She gave her first public performance at the age of ten on May 30, 1816, in Munich, where her family had recently moved, and was acclaimed by a large audience for her “assured and finished playing.”²² Certainty, precision, fluency, perfection, rarity, and astonishment are the most frequent words in her early concert reviews. Calling Belleville a *Wundermädchen* (wonder girl), a critic reviewing a concert in Augsburg in 1821 vividly expressed the amazement the young Belleville aroused in her audience:

Miss Belleville gave a concert [*eine musikalische Akademie*]; now you know the muse we worshiped. It is hard to talk about the performance of this miracle girl in prose, because her playing overflows with a bold imagination. Skill, the defeat of the most difficult things, precision, power, presentation, in short, this master, still blossoming at a very tender age, possesses every excellence to such a degree that one must doubt whether more excellent things could even be accomplished on the pianoforte in the above respects, whether the artist herself would still need to make any progress. A sound of applause and delight filled the room, and the following was heard from all mouths: we have never heard such a thing!²³

Many critics credited Belleville’s early achievements, in particular her technical prowess, to her teacher Czerny, with whom she studied in Vienna from the age of ten for three years (1816–19).²⁴ Her

²¹ “Nachrichten: Frankfurt am Mayn,” *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 24, no. 2 (1822): 23–27, at 23. As was the case with many nineteenth-century *Wunderkinder*, Belleville’s father Carl de Belleville played a significant role in orchestrating her early musical education and arranging concert tours. He accompanied her on tour until she married the English violinist Antonio James Oury in 1831.

²² *Baierische National-Zeitung*, June 1, 1816, 528. The review erroneously refers to Belleville as being nine years of age.

²³ “Miszellen: Nachschrift,” *Flora*, June 16, 1821, 386–87.

²⁴ According to Goebel-Streicher, Belleville’s father initially planned to have his daughter take lessons with Johann Andreas Streicher, but Streicher may have recommended her to Czerny and may still have taught her some counterpoint lessons from time to time. From 1829 to 1830, Belleville possibly studied with Streicher for one year. Goebel-Streicher, “Caroline de Belleville,” 67–68. Little information regarding Belleville’s previous musical training is available, but it seems that she studied with a cathedral organist during her early

apprenticeship with Czerny certainly curried favor with Viennese critics. A laudatory review of her farewell concert in Vienna in 1820 professed the belief that Belleville would win the public's favor everywhere and raise both her own and her teacher's reputations:

Miss Belleville gives us a fresh proof of how far talent and diligence can be brought under the care of intelligent teachers....If, on the one hand, we have to regret losing such a talented artist through her departure, then on the other hand, the thought must comfort us that, wherever she will now turn will be spread with her fame as well as that of our excellent teacher, to whom she owes her musical education.²⁵

Indeed, in the preface to his 1838 French version of Op. 500, Czerny provided a list of his successful students, including Belleville, Blahetka, Liszt, Thalberg, and Döhler, as proof of the reliability of his teaching principles.²⁶ In his 1842 recollections, Czerny acknowledged that Belleville's successful tours of Europe greatly augmented his fame.²⁷

Belleville's early stage persona as a *Wunderkind* was soon replaced by that of a warrior, largely due to the perceived masculinity of her performing style. Belleville often surprised her audiences with a powerful and firm attack rarely seen in female pianists of her time. A review of a concert she gave in 1830 in Warsaw even bluntly claimed, "Whoever heard Miss Belleville without seeing her would hardly believe that she was a woman; only the strength of her passion betrays her."²⁸ Belleville's stage character as an undaunted virtuoso was vividly presented in a German review in 1831, in which she was portrayed as a fearless and combative Brunhild:

In all newspapers you will have read about Miss v. Belleville; about the triumphs she has won on the battlefield of fortepiano. In Berlin she has given three battles or martial games, true assault-at-arms, where she took on masters of art. Years ago Madame Bagnolini defeated our fencing masters with the sword in her beautiful hand, but only to the extent that they defeated her in gallantry. This was not the case with Miss Belleville.

childhood in Augsburg before moving to Munich with her family. J. A. Maitland Fuller and Andrew Lamb, "Oury [née de Belleville], Anna Caroline," *Grove Music Online*, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.20602>.

²⁵ "Concert der Fräulein Belleville, den 1. November 1820, im kleinen Redouten Saal," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den Österreichischen Kaiserstaat* 4, no. 90 (1820): 718–19.

²⁶ Carl Czerny, *Méthode complète ou école du piano*, op. 500, 2 vols. (Paris: S. Richault, 1838–39), 1:1.

²⁷ Carl Czerny and Ernest Sanders, "Recollections from My Life," *Musical Quarterly* 42 (1956): 302–17, at 313.

²⁸ "Wiadomosci Kraiowe," *Gazeta Warszawska*, June 28, 1830, 1635–36, at 1636.

She triumphed like Brunhild, her opponents were not allowed to shy away from her, and like the heroes of the Nibelungenlied, they might be happy if they got away with their lives. We do not want to argue that there is no Sigurd in the world to wrest the palm from her; but she wields her weapon with fire, strength, and grace, like a Chlorinde or Marfisa, and if she is not invincible, she nevertheless remains a heroine.²⁹

Identifying Belleville with Brunhild highlighted the masculinity valued in the nineteenth century, and male critics often employed this rhetorical strategy to praise female pianists, as demonstrated by recent scholarship on female virtuosos like Clara Schumann and Marie Pleyel.³⁰

The perceived masculinized showmanship of Belleville's performances freed her from comparison only with female pianists. As early as 1821 the fifteen-year-old Belleville was acclaimed as "one of the finest virtuosos on the scene by virtue of the technical proficiency, security, and precision of her playing," and was believed to be "worthily striving toward the goal that Hummel and Moscheles achieved."³¹ By 1832 Belleville had assumed her place alongside her most distinguished male contemporaries; one critic notably asserted that "her play is free from all unnecessary adornment [*Schminken*]; she surpasses Mr. Kalkbrenner in taste and Mr. Moscheles in skill."³² Her remarkable playing even invited comparisons with Paganini. In 1832 William Gardiner, an English hosiery manufacturer and music critic, noted that "from the rolling thunder of the bass, she will perch upon the altissimo notes, with such neat distinctness, as to elicit points of light similar to those witnessed in the performance of Paganini."³³ Gardiner was clearly not alone in drawing parallels with the celebrity violinist. A year earlier, Belleville's father declared on her behalf that "she does not wish to be compared with Paganini, but only counts on the indulgence of the public, and assures that she feels wholly delighted through their applause without comparison."³⁴ Yet, comparisons with Paganini undoubtedly cemented her reputation as one of the most prominent virtuosos in the bravura style.

²⁹ "Correspondenz und Notizen: Aus Berlin," *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, January 17, 1831, 95–96, at 95.

³⁰ Žarko Cvejić, "Feminine Charms and Honorary Masculinization/De-feminization: Gender and the Critical Reception of the Virtuose, 1815–1848," *New Sound: International Magazine for Music* 46 (2015): 23–38.

³¹ "Miszellen: München (Rückblick)," *Baierische National-Zeitung*, May 1, 1821, 274–76, at 275.

³² "Miscellen: St. Petersburg," *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*, September 15/27, 1832, 841.

³³ Gardiner, *The Music of Nature*, 236.

³⁴ "Buntes aus der Zeit: Aus der musikalischen Welt," *Wiener Theater-Zeitung* 24, no. 37 (1831): 150.

"Amazons" and "Piano-Tumblers": Criticisms of Belleville's Early Virtuosity

Favorable remarks about Belleville's virtuosity contributed to her growing popularity with audiences across Europe. Her perceived overemphasis on technique and her almost exclusive devotion to performing "showy" pieces, however, incited attacks from an emerging group of critics holding a different set of musical values and tastes. The attacks, which ranged from scattered comments in concert reviews to a lengthy, multi-round debate in a Russian newspaper, notably came from across Europe. Although they remain marginal in the overall reception of Belleville's early career, it is nonetheless important to foreground them here for two reasons. First, these critiques of her bravura style, early concert repertory, and perceived lack of soulful expression and emotional depth can help us understand why she subsequently embraced a new mode of virtuosity. Second, this early critical discourse contributed significantly to the increasingly ambiguous, and later disparaging, attitudes toward virtuosos and their attendant music, leading to the eventual reevaluation of musical genres in the early nineteenth century.³⁵ The aesthetic values underlying these critical voices thrived in the performance discourse of the second half of the century and ultimately achieved a hegemonic status.

One line of attack aimed at Belleville's pedagogical lineage. A review of a poorly attended concert in Warsaw in 1830 criticized her for exuding a whiff of school practice (here referring to Pixis's piano concerto in C major, op. 100), as well as for frequent, sharp accents that failed to "disguise the shortcomings of the composer with masterful performance."³⁶ The critic attributed Belleville's failure both to her underdeveloped style and to the "outdated school" she represented, "a school not distinguished by taste and elevated diction."³⁷ The "outdated school" may be what German music theorist Carl Friedrich Weitzmann generally categorized as the "brilliant style," or, more specifically, the "later Viennese Pianoforte School" founded by Czerny, which "aimed at effect through *sound* rather than *sense*, and sought to win applause and appreciation less for the composer than for the virtuoso."³⁸ Therefore, the "outward show" in the music of this school, "superseded warm-hearted simplicity and noble sincerity in composition, until the Romanticists following Beethoven again raised the inner meaning to the place of honor, and awarded the palm only to that

³⁵ For a discussion of how the symphony and its attendant values gradually became superior to virtuosic genres, see Dana Gooley, "The Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75–111, at 75–80.

³⁶ Z. W., "Wiadomosci Krajowe," *Kurjer Polski*, June 17, 1830, 961–64, at 961.

³⁷ Z. W., "Wiadomosci Krajowe," 961.

³⁸ Carl Friedrich Weitzman, *A History of Pianoforte-Playing and Pianoforte-Literature*, trans. Theodore Baker (1863; repr., New York: G. Schirmer, 1894), 128.

Virtuoso having the power of expressing the poetical idea of the composer most clearly and intelligently.”³⁹

Weitzmann’s preference for musical works with romantic, sincere, and poetic expression over those focused on bravura technique was widely shared when his book was published in the 1860s, an era in which the aura of virtuosity had already been supplanted by interpretive performance culture. His musical taste found its roots, however, three decades earlier with a small group of elite critics. These critics generally held a dismissive attitude toward showy repertory. For example, in an 1831 review of Herz’s *Variations de concert sur une marche favorite de Guillaume Tell* de Rossini, op. 57, Ludwig Rellstab, a tough-minded Berlin music critic, openly expressed his distaste for Herz’s music, particularly its taxing technical demands. He likened the performance of such a virtuosic work to horse racing, a challenge he deemed emerging pianists such as Belleville and Blahetka—whom he notably described as “Amazons”—competent enough to take on:

The taste is different. We do not love the compositions by Herz, but others worship them. The *juste milieu*, which plays such a large role now, probably would be the best here....Meanwhile, however, in one respect Mr. Herz keeps himself very far from the *juste milieu*, that is, in regard to finger difficulty. He strikes not only on the extreme left, but also on the extreme right, namely on the piano, since he lets his fingers walk up and down to both ends of the piano. To stroll? That would work. But he rather lets them [pianists] do a horse race instead, where one has to be prepared for the utmost danger....The connoisseur knows for sure that every hussar can ride in this way, and they know a better and more challenging skill. It is the same with the piano. There are now not only hussars, but also Amazons, such as Miss de Belleville and Miss Leopoldine Blahetka; they rush down Herz’s variations with equestrian speed. There can be nothing more welcome for them than a new piano race for both hands.⁴⁰

Rellstab’s dismissive opinion reflects a larger agenda against showmanship in piano performance, particularly in Berlin, where the virtuoso culture was counteracted by the work-centered culture led in the 1830s by such critics as Adolf Bernhard Marx.⁴¹ The growing clash of musical tastes in Berlin was also explicit in Felix Mendelssohn’s writings. In explaining to Moscheles why he did not attend Belleville’s well-received

³⁹ Weitzman, *History of Pianoforte-Playing and Pianoforte-Literature*, 128.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Rellstab, “Überblick der Erzeugnisse,” *Iris im Gebiete der Tonkunst* 2, no. 16 (1831): 61–63, at 63.

⁴¹ Laure Spaltenstein, “‘Meisterwerke hören’ oder ‘sich hören lassen’: Zum Verhältnis von Werk, Aufführenden und Publikum im Konzertleben Berlins um 1830,” *Musiktheorie: Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 28 (2013): 311–24.

Berlin concert in 1832, Mendelssohn expressed his contempt for an unspecified set of overplayed variations by Herz and, like Rellstab, referred to the piece's performers in athletic terms, describing them as "piano-tumblers":

But why should I hear those Variations by Herz for the thirtieth time? They give me as little pleasure as tightrope walkers or acrobats: for with them at least there is the barbarous attraction that one is in constant dread of seeing them break their necks, though they do not do so, after all; but the piano-tumblers do not as much as risk their lives, only our ears; and that, I for one will not countenance. I only wish it were not my lot to be constantly told that the public demand that kind of thing. I, too, am one of the public, and demand the very reverse.⁴²

Although such virtuosic pieces, "so rich in tricks of force," helped demonstrate the "prodigious agility of [Belleville's] fingers and her extraordinary aplomb," as a French reviewer commented of her performance of Herz's Othello Variations in 1834 in Berlin, they "will never be able to produce anything but a mediocre effect on a public acquainted with true productions of art."⁴³ Indeed, Belleville's perceived technique-oriented virtuosity, rooted in these bravura pieces, easily exposed her to two central criticisms: egotism and emotional superficiality.⁴⁴ To some critics, this flashy or mechanical music served to foreground performers' self-indulgence by showing off their skills but failed to establish a deep connection between performers and audiences.⁴⁵ As a reviewer noted of a concert by Belleville in 1825, virtuosic pieces "seem to be more for the glory of the performer than for the audience."⁴⁶ In addition, the sole focus on displaying technical mastery often prevented virtuosos from

⁴² Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, ed. and trans. Felix Moscheles (1888; repr., New York: B. Blom, 1971), 30.

⁴³ "Correspondance Particulière," *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, April 27, 1834, 137.

⁴⁴ The existing criticism of Belleville's emotional superficiality does not necessarily preclude the perception and recognition of her emotional depth by other critics. One such example is a review of a concert she gave in Vienna in 1830, which noted:

We always recognized Miss v. Belleville as an excellent artist; her skill, her perfect mastery over the technical aspect of art, was always fully appreciated by us. This, however, is a quality that she shares with many in the cultivation of this instrument that is presently so widespread. But today we noted with the keenest interest that the inner consecration to art, its actual life and understanding, the deep feeling, the warm expression of the actual feeling, of the secret spirit of the tones in the artist's mind, flourished much stronger than the last time we heard her. Her playing breathed an intimacy, a glow, which had to arouse attention.

"Musik," *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode*, May 8, 1830, 450–51, at 451.

⁴⁵ Regarding the discussion of performer's character and its relationship to the public audience, see Gooley, "Battle against Instrumental Virtuosity," 88–94.

⁴⁶ "Miscellen: Aus Paris: Beschl.," *Flora*, April 28, 1825, 269–70, at 269.

entering into the deeper realm of soul and spirit. To solve this issue, a reviewer of an 1831 concert in Frankfurt called for virtuosos to perform “classical” works by Mozart, Beethoven, and even Hummel, which could “transfigure them artistically.”⁴⁷ Turning to Belleville, the reviewer warned that as long as she performed only “ordinary things,” she would appear superficial, for “one cannot know whether she deserves the name of a true artist.”⁴⁸

A Turning Point: Belleville’s Russian Tour, 1832–33

Criticism of Belleville’s bravura style continued and intensified in 1832–33 during her Russian tour, which ultimately prompted the changes to her programming and approach to virtuosity. Belleville’s visit to Russia was a part of a long and strenuous concert tour across Europe soon after her marriage to Antonio James Oury in 1831. In August 1832 the couple arrived in St. Petersburg by way of Berlin, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. During her extended stay in Russia, Belleville gave at least six public concerts in St. Petersburg and at least five in Moscow, which met with great success and considerably boosted her reputation. From 1826 to 1840 Belleville was the seventh most mentioned foreign musician in the Russian press, in which her name appeared twenty-nine times, following Paganini (99), Henriette Sontag (76), Mozart (44), Meyerbeer (42), Beethoven (39), and Rossini (38).⁴⁹ Her presence in the press reflected the warm reception accorded her by Russian audiences. A review of her fourth concert in St. Petersburg, at which she played her own compositions for the first time in Russia along with Kalkbrenner’s second piano concerto in E minor, portrayed a stirring scene:

During the fourth concert of Madame de Belleville-Oury last Wednesday, we had the opportunity to meet this famous, brilliant pianist as an excellent composer: at the end of this evening, so rich in musical delights, she played variations of her work on something like a quiet Viennese waltz. We will only say that the impression it made on a large audience was extraordinary. Touched, fascinated by the brilliant beauty of this sweet and at the same time majestic composition, the audience hardly allowed the glorious virtuoso to finish the variation, showering her with exclamations: bravo, bravissimo—and filling the hall with long-

⁴⁷ “Virtuosen,” *Flora*, March 13, 1831, 345–47, at 346–47.

⁴⁸ “Virtuosen,” 347.

⁴⁹ Gerald R. Seaman, “Moscow and St Petersburg,” in *Early Romantic Era: Between Revolutions, 1789 and 1848*, ed. Alexander L. Ringer (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), 236–58, at 255. Seaman’s figures are drawn from T. N. Livanova, *Muzykal’naia bibliografiia russkoi periodicheskoi pechati XIX veka*, vol. 2, 1826–1840 (Moscow: Gos. Muz. Izdat., 1963).

lasting applause. This enthusiasm reached the highest degree at such a brilliant and extremely difficult finale that was played out in all its changes with the signature ease and serenity that distinguishes our lady virtuoso, in a word – à la Belville [*sic*]! The Kalkbrenner Concerto in E minor had been played here three or four times before and was not appreciated, but after it had been played by Madame de B. many people in the concert hall asked Mr. Paez, is it possible to get one in his store?⁵⁰

Despite these indications of her popularity, Belleville still faced challenges in Russia. Her very first public concert in St. Petersburg in 1832 was undercut by an unresponsive and out-of-tune piano, which may partially explain the audience's "ordinary and so often ambiguous applause."⁵¹ A music critic even suggested that this unexpected circumstance may have resulted from the jealousy of local pianists who "bribed the tuners to distune the instruments just before the beginning of the concert."⁵² This alleged conspiracy was not a groundless suspicion. In a letter to Johann Baptist Streicher, one of the best-known Viennese piano makers, Belleville mentioned a possible local conspiracy against her and complained about a lack of profit:

92

There has been a lot of heckling against me here (i.e., the piano masters only); they feared that I would settle down here, but they are wrong. I can tell that they harmed my concerts by preventing their students from attending. What pettiness? I have no reason to be very happy with Russia. People had portrayed this country as a country of gold and silver, but that is not the case. Talent here is a secondary thing, it's almost always mediocrity with a successful plot, real talent is only appreciated by very few people. I got what I wanted, the court overwhelmed me with kindness. I always had the greatest success in appearing in public. It is true that the profit has not been as great in total as I would have wished, but I believe no artist will do better. I'm therefore happy to go back to my homeland.⁵³

⁵⁰ "Kontser'ty," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, November 15, 1832, 1133. All Russian excerpts are translated by Marina Anitskaya.

⁵¹ "Kontser'ty," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, September 20, 1832, 917. Another reason for this somewhat indifferent reception of her first concert might have been the choice of repertory, specifically Pixis's concerto. An anonymous reviewer, identified as Vladimir Odoyevsky, noted that the concerto, "due to its complexity and, so to speak, *incomprehensibility* of its composition, differing by the most unexpected transitions from one tone to another and filled with so-called *dissonances* that recently make up the necessary luxury of musical ideas, was not quite liked." [Vladimir Odoyevsky], "Muzykal'nye Novosti: Forte-p'ianistka i skripach," *Severnaia pchela*, September 23, 1832, 1–2.

⁵² "Smes'," *Severnaia pchela*, October 17, 1832, 3.

⁵³ "On a beaucoup chahuté contre moi ici (c'est-à-dire les maîtres de piano seulement) ils ont craint que je ne reste, mais à tort cependant. Je puis dire qu'ils m'ont nui pour mes concerts en empêchant leurs élèves d'y assister! Quelle petitesse? Je n'ai pas lieu d'être très contente de la Russie on m'avait peint ce pays comme un pays d'or et d'argent, ce n'est pas le cas. Le talent ici est une chose secondaire, c'est la médiocrité presque toujours qui

Instead of projecting a Romantic world in which art is pursued without any material concerns, Belleville's letter depicts the down-to-earth concerns of a professional touring musician. More generally Belleville understood the need to adapt her performances to the changing demands of her audiences and critics. Therefore, when a lengthy debate about her performance style was published in *Severnaia pchela* (Northern Bee), the most widely read Russian daily newspaper aimed at the interests of "small gentry, low to middle-level clerks, and merchants," Belleville was quick to act.⁵⁴

This debate, which spanned from August through December of 1833, involved Joseph Guillou, a French flutist and composer who settled in St. Petersburg in 1831, and two anonymous critics. The first of these, who signed himself as "Lover of Truth and Music," can be identified as Vladimir Odoyevsky, a prominent Russian writer, philosopher, and music critic. The second, whose pseudonym was "Lover of Music and Cello," was in fact Prince Nikolay Borisovich Galitzin, an amateur cellist particularly known for commissioning Beethoven's three string quartets, opp. 127, 132, and 130.⁵⁵ The issues brought up in the debate are not entirely different from the earlier criticism of Belleville's virtuosity. What is remarkable, however, is the revelation that Belleville performed quite distinct repertory in public and private spheres, which partly explains her conflicted reception.

The fundamental question preoccupying the three critics concerned the kind of virtuosity that Belleville embodied. Guillou, who had heard her playing in France when she was younger, saw her as a first-class virtuoso who merged the qualities of emotion, brilliance, and loyalty in her playing. He particularly praised her gift for "making the keys speak," a talent which he claimed distinguished top-level artists from those who demonstrated only finger dexterity; the skill of expressive playing compensated for the imperfect mechanism of the piano and drew the audience deeper into the music.⁵⁶

Guillou's appreciation of Belleville contrasted sharply with Odoyevsky's opinion. While Odoyevsky acknowledged some positives in her playing—her strong touch of the keys and clean, smooth, fast, and

moyennant l'intrigue réussi, le vrai talent n'est apprécié que par très peu de gens. J'ai obtenu ce que je voulais, la cour m'a comblée de bontés j'ai toujours eu le plus grand succès en paraissant en public le profit n'a pas été aussi grand il est vrai en tout comme je l'aurai souhaité mais aucun artiste ne fera mieux je crois je suis donc aise de retourner dans ma patrie." Belleville to Johann Baptist Streicher, December 19, 1833, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriftensammlung, 126/96-4, <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC15538077>.

⁵⁴ Nurit Schlieffman, "A Russian Daily Newspaper and Its Readership: *Severnaia pchela* 1825–1840," *Cahiers du monde russes et soviétiques* 28 (1987): 127–44.

⁵⁵ The anonymous critics are identified in Shumilin, "Peterburgskie gastroli Anny Karoliny de Bel'vil'-Uri," 172.

⁵⁶ [Joseph Guillou], "Muzyka: Kontsert G-zhi Bel'vil'-Uri," *Severnaia pchela*, August 31, 1833, 777–80, at 778.

brilliant performance—he found Guillou’s praise, particularly of Belleville’s ability to make the piano sing, excessive. In the works she played in public—Pixis’s Brilliant rondo on the favorite air “Hurrah for the bonnets of blue,” op. 106 and Herz’s Variations de bravoure sur la romance de Joseph, op. 20, as well as Hummel’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Minor, op. 85 and Piano Septet No. 1 in D minor, op. 74—Odoevsky could barely identify the extraordinary singing tone commended by Guillou; instead, “with the exception of the first *cantabile*, everything else quickly flew past the attentive ears of music lovers and connoisseurs.”⁵⁷ For Odoevsky, Belleville neither stirred nor touched the heart; her talent amazed only the ears and eyes and could never outshine artists such as John Field, Charles Mayer, Franz Schuberlechner, and Carl Eduard Hartknoch.⁵⁸

Galitzin, in turn, deemed Odoevsky’s relegation of Belleville to no more than a nimble-fingered virtuoso to be biased and overly negative. Although Galitzin did not attend the public concert on which Odoevsky’s criticism was based, he often heard Belleville perform Beethoven at private concerts. A passionate admirer of Beethoven, Galitzin regarded expressive playing of his music as the real indicator of a pianist’s talent, as opposed to a facility for the works of Herz, Czerny, and other “jesters” of their kind. According to Galitzin, Belleville performed Beethoven’s music with “such a delicacy, such a feeling, and such a soul” that was heard neither from pianists in Russia nor abroad, and “even Beethoven himself would not have wished for a better performance.”⁵⁹ Galitzin asserted that none of the pianists with whom Belleville was negatively compared in Odoevsky’s article could match her expression of feeling in classical music, and singled out Field—Odoevsky’s inimitable favorite—for particular criticism, noting that despite playing admirably, Field only performed his own compositions, which did not reach the heights of Beethoven.

The divergent opinions of Odoevsky and Galitzin reflect not only differences in taste and aesthetic standards but also the fact that Belleville did not play the same repertory in private concerts as she did in public. As

⁵⁷ [Vladimir Odoevsky], “Muzyka: Otvet G-nu Gil’iu,” *Severnaiia pchela*, September 30, 1833, 881–84, at 883.

⁵⁸ Odoevsky’s defense of such pianists as Field, Mayer, and Hartknoch seems to have been complicated by his nationalist agenda, as all of the pianists mentioned made a successful career and lasting reputation in Russia. Odoevsky maintained that St. Petersburg and Moscow were the only places where “piano playing” is “so clearly and distinctly understood” and where one finds “so many admirers of this instrument.” Odoevsky, “Muzyka: Otvet G-nu Gil’iu,” 882. Toward the end of the review, Odoevsky’s preference for local pianos by Johann August Tischner—a German piano manufacturer who settled in St. Petersburg in 1823—over those by foreign makers (such as Streicher) similarly exudes a nationalist sentiment. Odoevsky, “Muzyka: Otvet G-nu Gil’iu,” 884.

⁵⁹ [Nikolay Borisovich Galitzin], “Muzyka: Otvet liubiteliu muzyki i pravdy,” *Severnaiia pchela*, October 11, 1833, 917–19, at 918.

Odoevsky observed, Belleville almost exclusively performed extremely brilliant and technically difficult compositions in public. Anyone attending one of her public concerts “would have heard a perfectly clear performance of the extraordinary difficulties of the modern school (which, though not classical, have their merits).”⁶⁰ The reason for Belleville’s exclusive devotion to these bravura pieces in public was deduced by Galitzin:

If Madame Belleville has played pieces of their composition [e.g., those bravura works by Herz, Pixis, and Kalkbrenner] in her concerts, she has probably done it in order to adapt herself to the local piano audience, which values finger technique above all else, but to my musical view and taste, this virtue has no value unless it is accompanied by a feeling that is the soul of music.⁶¹

Belleville clearly understood that bravura pieces would help her win favor with public audiences, whereas works with a “classical” or “serious” tone would satisfy the aesthetic needs of more scholarly audiences.⁶² Although a lack of information precludes the construction of a comprehensive list of her repertory in her private concerts in Russia, her letters and Galitzin’s essays prove that she at least played Beethoven’s Archduke Piano Trio and Emperor Concerto. These pieces reflected the musical taste of her audience, most prominently Galitzin, who is credited with the propagation of Beethoven’s music in Russia from the 1820s. As he recalled in 1845:

At all musical gatherings taking place at my home, nothing was performed but Beethoven in all his aspects. I had to endure lots of mockery, sarcasm, reproaches concerning the so-called Beethoven monomania. I was not embarrassed by this fact as I strived to acquaint our best artists and dilettantes with the latest pieces of art of the genius, who outstripped his age for many decades forward. My insistence brought fruits; hardly ten years had passed when Beethoven’s music, which was considered absurd and clumsy before, began to reign in the salons and concert halls of our capital.⁶³

⁶⁰ [Vladimir Odoevsky], “Muzyka: Otvet na otvet,” *Severnâia pchela*, November 2, 1833, 993–96, at 994–95.

⁶¹ [Nikolay Borisovich Galitzin], “Smes’,” *Severnâia pchela*, November 8, 1833, 1014–15, at 1014.

⁶² For an account of how Clara Schumann similarly tailored programs to specific audiences, see David Ferris, “Public Performance and Private Understanding: Clara Wieck’s Concerts in Berlin,” *Journal of American Musicological Society* 56 (2003): 351–408.

⁶³ *La Presse*, October 13, 1845; cited and translated in Galina Petrova, “Ludwig Maurer and the Reception of Beethoven in St. Petersburg in the First Half of the 19th Century,” *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa* 5 (1999): 62–71, at 63.

For Belleville, performing Beethoven at private gatherings presented an opportunity for her to establish a close contact with Galitzin and thus the Russian court. These private performances were also pivotal in changing the direction of her public career, prompting her decision to perform Beethoven's Emperor Concerto at her final public concert in Russia. As she explained to Streicher:

I give my farewell concert on the 25th of this month, I think it will be very brilliant. The Empress will attend. I will perform Beethoven's Grand Concerto in E-flat major. We are enthusiastic about this piece, I performed it in company with Prince Galitzin (the one to whom Beethoven has dedicated quartets), he is a passionate music lover, and he and everyone asked me to play this concerto in public.⁶⁴

Belleville's receptiveness to programming suggestions was entrepreneurial, given that Beethoven's music was still not widely performed in Russia in the early 1830s. Before 1833 only a few of his major works had been presented in public, including the *Missa Solemnis* in 1824, the Fourth Symphony in 1827, the Second Symphony and Egmont Overture in 1828, the Choral Fantasy in 1829, the Coriolan Overture in 1831, and the Mass in C major, Eroica Symphony, and Pastoral Symphony in 1833.⁶⁵ Even in private, Beethoven's music was only heard by a very small elite circle, and during the 1840s and 1850s, "Beethovenism was not an infection covering the whole...society; on the contrary, this religion was the religion of a few people."⁶⁶ Belleville's decision to give the Russian premiere of the Emperor Concerto was particularly noteworthy given the variable reception the work had received outside of Russia. A critic reviewing the first public performance of it by Friedrich Schneider and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in November 1811 praised the work as "one of the most original, imaginative, effective, but also most difficult, of all the existing concertos."⁶⁷ Schneider's performance was highly successful "not only in terms of skill, clarity, safety, and delicacy, but also with regard to the soul, and perfect understanding of the meaning and purpose of the

⁶⁴ "Je donne mon concert d'adieu le 25 de ce mois, je crois qu'il sera très brillant. L'impératrice y assistera. J'exécuterai le Grand Concert de Beethoven en (esdur) on est enthousiasmé pour ce morceau, je l'ai exécuté en société chez le Prince Galitzine (celui auquel Beethoven a dédié des quatuors) c'est un Mélomane passionné, et lui et tout le monde m'ont prié de jouer ce concert en public." Belleville to Streicher, December 19, 1833, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriftensammlung, 126/96-4.

⁶⁵ Petrova, "Ludwig Maurer," 64-65.

⁶⁶ Quotation attributed to Herman Laroche, and cited in S. M. Popov, "Muzykal'naja žizn' Moskvj i Betchovene," in *Russkaja kniga o Betchovene* (Moscow: Gos. Izd. Muz. Sektor, 1927), 145.

⁶⁷ "Nachrichten: Leipzig," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 14, no. 1 (1812): 8-14, at 8.

composition, and in fact overall, as well as every single point in particular.”⁶⁸ A few months later, Czerny performed the work in Vienna; he, however, received an indifferent reception:

If this composition...failed to receive the applause which it deserved, the reason is to be sought partly in the subjective character of the [composer], partly in the objective nature of the listeners. Beethoven, full of proud confidence in himself, never writes for the multitude; he demands understanding and feeling, and because of the intentional difficulties, he can receive these only at the hands of the knowing, a majority of whom is not to be found on such occasions.⁶⁹

Although the work did not fall into oblivion—it was performed by both male and female pianists, including Thalberg in Vienna in 1833 and Mendelssohn in Leipzig in 1836—it was generally counted by performers as an “unappreciated” work because of its excessive length (the first movement was sometimes omitted in performance), extreme difficulty, and eccentricity.⁷⁰ Belleville, however, seems to have realized that performing such an esoteric work would be a powerful demonstration of her ability to interpret “classical” works and enable her to transcend accusations of mechanical virtuosity.

Although a risk, Belleville’s endeavor turned out to be successful. In the *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*, a critic described how her performance of Beethoven’s concerto “solve[d] the difficult task of excluding the listener, to the full extent, from all the richness of the beauties in this ingenious creation by the great master.”⁷¹ Guillou’s account of the same concert was also laudatory:

When she appeared, the lady virtuoso was met with unanimous applause—a proper tribute to a woman whose dignity was attacked in such an unfair way. The public of St. Petersburg, which is known for its excellent infallible taste, appreciates the true value of Madame Belleville-Oury’s performance....Beethoven’s magnificent Concerto (in E-flat major) produced a charming effect. This wonderful masterpiece was performed with a perfection that silences the most ardent criticism. An ordinary

⁶⁸ “Nachrichten: Leipzig,” 8.

⁶⁹ “Concert und Vorstellung drey berühmter Gemählde,” *Thalia*, February 19, 1812, 57–58, at 57; cited in Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Thayer’s Life of Beethoven*, rev. and ed. Elliot Forbes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 1:526.

⁷⁰ For example, a review in the *Zeitung für Theater, Musik und bildende Künste* in 1822 described this concerto as “full of the most moving passages, original and striking but often also bizarre and baroque phrases, which can be only produced by such profound and eccentric individuality as the genius Beethoven.” Cited in Stefan Kunze, ed., *Ludwig van Beethoven, die Werke im Spiegel seiner Zeit: Gesammelte Konzertberichte und Rezensionen bis 1830* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1987), 207.

⁷¹ “Concert,” *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*, December 20 / January 1, 1833, 1276.

pianist would have found a stumbling block in this elegant work, where the richness of thought and instrumentation competes with the main part in the power of captivation. Madame Belleville-Oury triumphed over this difficulty, to the general satisfaction of listeners worthy of the effort: they thanked her with a triple volley of applause. By performing this formidable concerto, Madame Belleville-Oury proved that her long-deserved place among the first pianists of our time belongs to her by all rights.⁷²

By overcoming the difficulty of Beethoven's concerto, Belleville did more than prove herself a worthy artist; she also succeeded in making Beethoven's music accessible to the general public, laying the foundations for her new incarnation as a faithful interpreter of "serious" music.

The Versatile Virtuoso: Belleville as Faithful Interpreter

Belleville's championing of Beethoven, along with works by Hummel, Chopin, and Mendelssohn (see tables 2 and 3), appeared to be a calculated response to criticisms of the commercial nature of conventional virtuoso concerts and was a significant forerunner of the shift toward "serious" repertory that became increasingly common in the 1840s.⁷³ Scholars have often credited the turn toward "serious" music to Liszt and Clara Schumann. Yet Liszt's first concerted attempt to program Beethoven did not occur until 1836, when he performed the Hammerklavier Sonata in Paris with the aim of elevating himself above his rival Thalberg.⁷⁴ Clara Schumann performed a few of Bach's fugues and Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata in the late 1830s, but did not embrace a more "serious" repertory until the 1840s, when she began to perform Robert Schumann's works more often in public.⁷⁵ Therefore, Belleville's performance of "serious" music as early as 1833 deserves more credit than it has heretofore received.

Indeed, Belleville's particular talent for interpreting "serious" music was recognized by music critics from 1833 onward. A critic comparing concerts by Moscheles and Belleville in Amsterdam in 1835 positioned the

⁷² Joseph Guillou, "Muzyka," *Severnãia pchela*, December 22, 1833, 1165–67, at 1165.

⁷³ Weber, *Great Transformation*, 159. The extent to which virtuoso concerts moved toward programming more "serious" music varies from city to city. Among the four cities Weber examines in his book, it seems that Paris and Vienna were leading forces in this new trend, followed by London and Leipzig.

⁷⁴ Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53. See also Dana Gooley, "Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso as Strategist," in *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914*, ed. William Weber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 145–61.

⁷⁵ For a complete list of Clara Schumann's repertory, see <https://www.schumann-portal.de/chronological.html>, accessed June 28, 2022.

two pianists as opposites in terms of repertory, modes of virtuosity, and purpose:

Enthusiasts of the Classics, however, believed that they had to give priority to her [Belleville], who mostly only performed works by Beethoven, Hummel, Mendelssohn-Bartholdi [*sic*] and similar masters. They called her performance the tragic-dramatic one, whose sole purpose is the expression of singing, and that of M. Moscheles the declamatory-romantic, which seeks to achieve the formation and perfection of every single passage, indeed every note. From the latter we heard concertos, phantasies, etudes, etc. all of his own composition.⁷⁶

Belleville's interpretation of "serious" music was also commended by her admirer Chopin, who heard her perform several times.⁷⁷ He wrote to her on December 10, 1842, regarding his *Waltz in F minor, op. 70, no. 2*, which he had dedicated to her:

But what I should like would be to hear you play it, dear Madam, and to attend one of your elegant reunions, at which you so marvelously interpret such great authors as Mozart, Beethoven, and Hummel, the masters of all of us. The Hummel Adagio which I heard you play a few years ago in Paris at M. Erard's still sounds in my ears; and I assure you that, in spite of the great concerts here, there is little piano music which could make me forget the pleasure of having heard you that evening.⁷⁸

A critic writing in *Le Courier français* ahead of a concert in Paris in 1838 similarly welcomed the opportunity to hear Belleville interpreting "compositions of the great masters," emphasizing the rarity of such an event in the virtuoso world:

Madame de Bel[le]ville-Oury, whose first-rate talent we have already mentioned as a pianist, will give a concert on March 5 in the salons of Mr. Erard. We can be certain of hearing the compositions of the great masters translated on the piano by an interpreter worthy of them, because almost all the great pianists are men, and almost always they are composers at the same time as executants: with the result that the public

⁷⁶ "Aus Amsterdam," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 4, no. 41 (1836): 171–72, at 172.

⁷⁷ The first time Chopin heard Belleville perform was probably in June 1830 in Warsaw. Belleville was a fervent supporter and promoter of Chopin's music. As early as 1830, Chopin reported that she "played my printed Variations in Vienna, and knows one of them even by heart." Letter from Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, June 5, 1830, in Frédéric Chopin, *Chopin's Letters*, ed. Henryk Opieński, trans. E. L. Voynich (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1931), 93. She might also be one of the earliest pianists to have introduced Chopin's music to England. A review of a concert in London in 1840 notes that Belleville played a mazurka by Chopin, a name that was new to the reviewer. "Madame de Belleville Oury's Matinee Musicale," *Morning Post*, May 28, 1840, 3.

⁷⁸ Chopin, *Chopin's Letters*, 221.

hears an admirable command of the instrument, but rarely the music of the masters. We will be able to hear it at the concert of Madame de Belleville, and hear it especially rendered by an interpreter with all the delicacy and infinite variety of resources that distinguish a woman.⁷⁹

The author's use of the verb "translate" (*traduire*) is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates how the act of musical interpretation was understood in early nineteenth-century France. "Interpreter" and "translator" were used interchangeably in French reviews. Marie Pleyel was also characterized by a reviewer in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1847 as a "faithful translator" of Hummel's concerto, a term that reflects the work-centered performance aesthetic of the time.⁸⁰ In the 1830s and 1840s critics often referred to performers as "fidèles" (faithful) or "dignes" (worthy) and, according to Laure Spaltenstein, frequently emphasized "that they play [ed] the works exactly as the author would have intended."⁸¹ This valuing of the faithful reproduction, or translation, of the work as intended by the composer, and the associated minimization or even abandonment of the performer's subjective interpretation, was an opinion later adopted by German critics as well.⁸²

Belleville's skill at "translation" was most explicitly evidenced in Hector Berlioz's laudatory review of her concert at Erard's on April 15, 1839:

Mrs. Oury, upon performing a very fine Mendelssohn piano concerto, has proven that she possessed in the highest degree the qualities valued most by composers, those that make performers who are *faithful* to the fullest extent of the word; faithful to the letter, faithful to the spirit, to the traditions, to the passions, to the whims, to the inspiration and finally, to the entirety of the author's thought, without attempting to correct it, arrange it, civilize it, nor to embellish it with miserable ornaments, of which he did not abstain from using without excellent reasons, and that the interpreter is in no way invited to deliberate.⁸³

Berlioz's emphasis on Belleville's faithfulness as an interpreter of the composer, her accurate execution of and fidelity to the work, and her ability to articulate the "author's thought" was in fact rooted in early

⁷⁹ ED. M., "Revue Musicale," *Le Courrier français*, January 8, 1838, 3–4, at 4.

⁸⁰ Cited in Laure Spaltenstein, "Interpretation als treue Übersetzung. Zur Frühgeschichte eines vieldeutigen Begriffs," in *Rund um Beethoven: Interpretationsforschung heute*, ed. Thomas Gartmann and Daniel Allenbach (Berlin: Schliengen, 2019), 15–27, at 18.

⁸¹ Spaltenstein, "Interpretation als treue Übersetzung," 18–19.

⁸² Spaltenstein, "Interpretation als treue Übersetzung," 25–26.

⁸³ Hector Berlioz, "Feuilleton du *Journal des Débats*," *Journal des Débats*, April 18, 1839, 1–2, emphasis in original.

Romantic performance aesthetics. According to Mary Hunter, early Romantic thinking about the ideal, effective performance, exemplified in Hegel's discussion of music performance in *Aesthetics* (1818–29), stressed the performer's "total obedience" to the composer's intention and the performative genius of making the work "anew."⁸⁴ This resonated with later music critics' aspirations for an ideal virtuosity. Mid-nineteenth-century critics believed that instead of displaying physical feats, the virtuoso's task was to represent truth in "serious" music, particularly in "classical" works of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸⁵

As a work-based concert practice gradually superseded a performance-based one in the second half of the century, the so-called *Werktreue* ideal—"the principle of the performer's fidelity to the composer's presumed 'intentions' in a musical work"—gradually became the dominant paradigm for performance.⁸⁶ Carl Dahlhaus suggests that this shift led midcentury music critics to judge "virtuosity by the criteria of interpretation, rather than vice versa."⁸⁷ Current scholarship shows that the interpretative capabilities of virtuoso pianists such as Clara Schumann, Charles Hallé, Liszt, and Louise Mattmann were not widely appreciated until the 1840s.⁸⁸ As I have demonstrated above, however, reviews of Belleville's concerts suggest an earlier date of the mid-1830s for this new, critical dimension. Belleville's distinctive approach to virtuosity proved a significant barometer of changing performance practices and aesthetics. It also serves as a refreshing story of the professional agency of female pianists in the nineteenth century, a counter to the overriding narrative of the Romantic artist.

⁸⁴ Mary Hunter, "'To Play as if from the Soul of the Composer': The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58 (2005): 357–98, at 362–63. The discussion to which Hunter refers is in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Die künstlerische Execution," *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Werke*, vol. 3, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 219–20.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of an ideal approach to virtuosity by music critics like August Kahlert, Eduard Krüger, and Eduard Hanslick, see Alexander Stefaniak, "Clara Schumann and the Imagined Revelation of Musical Works," *Music & Letters* 99 (2018): 194–223, at 196–97, 212.

⁸⁶ Karen Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity: Joachim, Brahms, and the Politics of *Werktreue* Performance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66 (2013): 397–436, at 399. On the shift from event-based to work-based concert practices, see Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 134–41; and Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸⁷ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 138–39.

⁸⁸ Spaltenstein, "Interpretation als treue Übersetzung"; and Stefaniak, "Clara Schumann and the Imagined Revelation."

ABSTRACT

German pianist Anna Caroline de Belleville was one of the foremost virtuoso pianists in the 1820s and 1830s, deemed the “Chamber Virtuoso of Her Royal Highness” by Princess Louise of Prussia and “Queen of the Piano” by Paganini. Although a few modern biographical accounts provide an overview of her life and career, there has been no critical examination of her virtuosity within the context of early nineteenth-century performance culture. Drawing on periodicals, magazines, correspondence, memoirs, and contemporary writings, this article reconstructs Belleville’s early career and illustrates her significance by examining her strategic programming, pianism, and reception. I argue that Belleville’s reorientation of her public concert repertory in the mid-1830s, particularly her incorporation of works considered “classical” or “serious,” enabled her to mediate the conflicting musical tastes of her critics and audiences, and to reinvent herself as a pianist renowned not for a bravura style but for a versatile, eclectic virtuosity centering on the faithful interpretation of “serious” works. This course of action marked Belleville as a significant forerunner to the interpreter-performer pianists who came to dominate the virtuoso scene from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

102

Keywords: Anna Caroline de Belleville, virtuosity, women pianists, musical taste, interpretation, “serious” music