

TOCCATA CLASSICS

Alexandre BOËLY

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

IV SUITES POUR PIANO COMPOSÉES
DANS LE STYLE DES ANCIENS MAÎTRES, OP. 16:
SUITES I IN A MAJOR AND III IN C MAJOR
SONATE À QUATRE MAINS IN F MINOR, OP. 17
DEUX PRÉLUDES

Stephanie McCallum, piano solo
with Erin Helyard, piano duet

FIRST RECORDINGS

ALEXANDRE BOËLY: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

by Stephanie McCallum

> A perfect musical writer, a theoretician of method, Boëly had this bizarre originality of seeking to live in the past.
>
> Camille Saint-Saëns[1]

Around the luminaries of the early Romantic period of pianist-composers, there was a wider environment of musicians which nourished them. One such was Alexandre Pierre François Boëly (1785–1858), still half-remembered today as a fine composer of organ works, who has been largely forgotten as pianist-composer. Part of the reason may have been that he was more a piano pedagogue than high-profile piano-performer. His close colleague Pierre Baillot, one of the major French violin-teachers of the day, regarded Boëly highly as a teacher of the piano, calling him 'one of the best in Paris'.[2] More broadly, Boëly's pianistic style was founded on his reverence for the past rather than excitement about the future. He avoided exploration of the new pianistic possibilities that drew such strong attention to the works of Chopin, Liszt, Alkan and Brahms. Although his range of piano music is extensive and was much admired by some of his contemporaries, it focused on the cultivation of old forms and traditional musical virtues. Saint-Saëns, who regarded Boëly as the French Bach, praised his devotion to the style of the old masters, and the masterful fugues he produced in homage to this style.[3] He was valued as a refiner rather than a path-breaker. Posterity has largely accepted this view, and performance of his highly crafted pieces has languished.

[1] Cited in Georges Favre, 'La musique française de piano entre 1810 et 1830: l'Œuvre d'Hérold et de Boëly', *Revue de musicologie*, Tome 31, Nos. 89–92 (1949), p. 72.

[2] Brigitte François-Sappey, preface to *Alexandre Pierre François Boëly: Dix études Romantiques pour le piano extraites des Trente études*, Op. 6, Édition Henry Lemoine, Paris, 1988.

[3] Amédée Gastoué and Anselm Hughes, 'A Great French Organist, Alexandre Boëly, and His Works', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1944), p. 339.

Boëly was born in Versailles on 19 April 1785 to a court-musician father, Jean-François Boëly (1739–1814), who was noted for his spirited defence of the rules of counterpoint and his strong admiration for great musicians of the past, especially Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764). He acted as Alexandre's first teacher, embedding strong conservative musical values in his son. Boëly went on to study piano with noted composer-teachers Ignace Ladurner and Mme de Montgeroult.[4] He was admired as a pianist and had much success with his early publications of piano études and caprices. His dedications of his études to Friedrich Kalkbrenner (a fellow student at the Paris Conservatoire) and to the renowned Johann Baptist Cramer show affinity with a generation composing for the new piano, where the étude was emerging as a pianistic counterpart to the existing technical display genre for strings, the caprice. Boëly was first and foremost a pianist, but one with a real fondness for the music of earlier keyboard instruments. As such, he provides a link between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, as Brigitte François-Sappey suggests, created the most substantial body of French music for the fast-developing piano in France before the work of Alkan.[5] Boëly also occupied important positions as organist in Paris, first at Saint Gervais (1834–38) and later (1840–51) at the historic church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, introducing Bach's complex style to Paris against some resistance. His final years, though, were passed as a modest and hard-working piano-teacher and, despite the success of his early publications, and later his own financing of the publication of some works, about half of his piano music remained unpublished at his death. Along with this extensive but largely unknown output of piano music, there was also organ and religious music, for which he is still admired, as well as some chamber and vocal music.

My previous album of Boëly's piano music[6] included the first recording of the Fourth Suite of the *IV Suites pour Piano composées dans le style des anciens Maîtres*,

[4] Paul Fromageot, *Un disciple de Bach: Pierre-François Boëly (1785–1858)*, L. Bernard, Versailles,1909, p. 8.
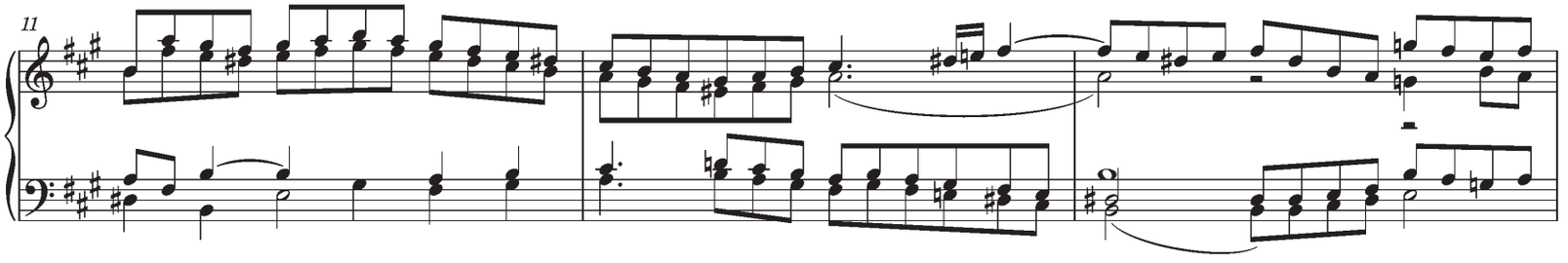
[5] Brigitte François-Sappey, *Alexandre P. F. Boëly 1785–1858: ses ancêtres, sa vie, son œuvre, son temps*, Aux amateurs de livre, Paris, 1989.

[6] Toccata Classics TOCC 0471.

Op. 16; this volume includes the two suites hitherto unrecorded.[7] The publication date for Op. 16 was 1854, a year after the manufacture of the beautiful Parisian Érard piano used on this recording. Érards were favoured by Boëly for their strength and richness of sound. Unlike Suite IV in F minor, included on Volume One, the other three suites closely mirror the forms and style of Bach's keyboard suites. The single exception is the Gigue (canon à l'octave) 10, concluding the C major suite, where an exact canon is maintained throughout the piece in an extreme example of 'le style sévère', where counterpoint becomes a central, almost obsessive, concern.

In Suite I in A major, the Allemande 1 and Courante 2 closely follow Bach's example, but the mostly consistent four-part textures sound thicker, often using parts in thirds and the added complexity of frequent imitative entries. *Legato* linkage stretches the performer's ingenuity in fingering and hand-sharing, and requires a more integrated use of the *legato* capabilities of the sustain pedal, which was of course unavailable to Bach. The Courante makes effective use of switching to a compound two-in-a-bar, against the prevailing three-in-a-bar: Ex. 1 shows bars 11–13.

Ex. 1
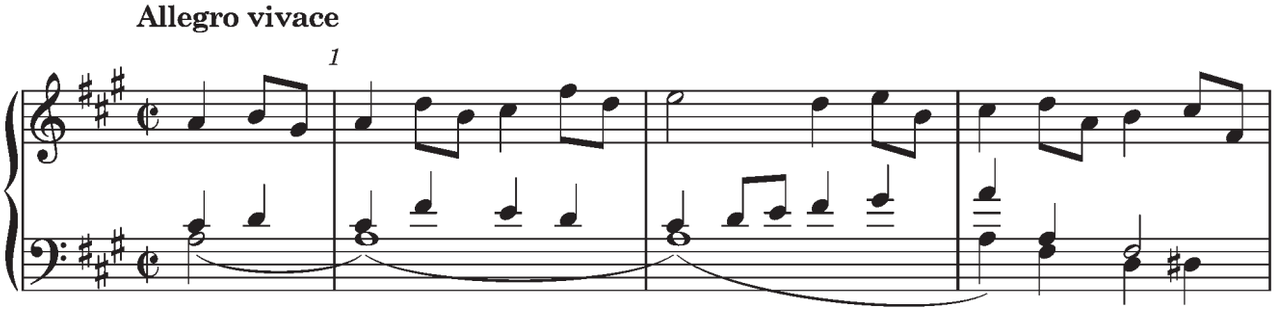


The expansive arioso lines of the Sarabande 3 contrast with the previous density of counterpoint and with the following rustic cheerfulness of the Bourrées 4. The first Bourrée maintains three parts rather than Bach's normal two, recalling the mainly three-part texture and opening drone bass of the A major second Bourrée of Bach's A minor 'English' Suite, BWV807. Ex. 2(a) gives the first three bars of Boëly's first Bourrée and Ex. 2(b) the first two of the second Bourrée of the Bach.
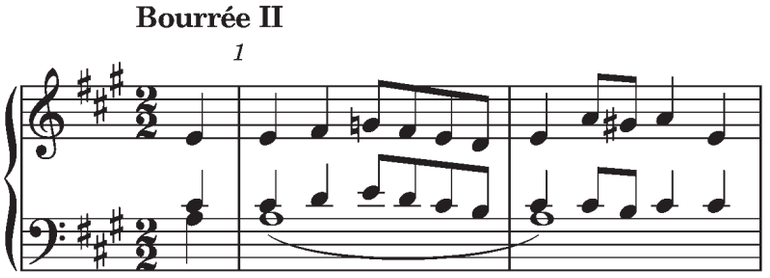
[7] A recording of Suite No. 2 in D minor is available on the double album *Boëly: Un Versaillais à Paris*, performed by Jacqueline Robin on a modern piano (Arion ARN 268778, released in 2008).

Ex. 2

(a)
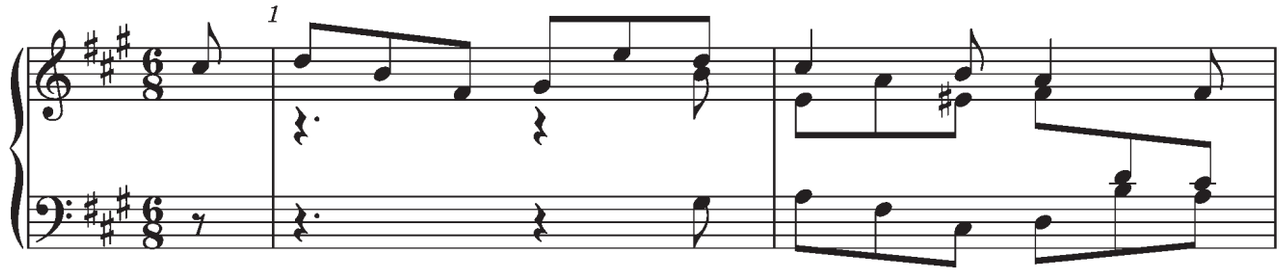


(b)
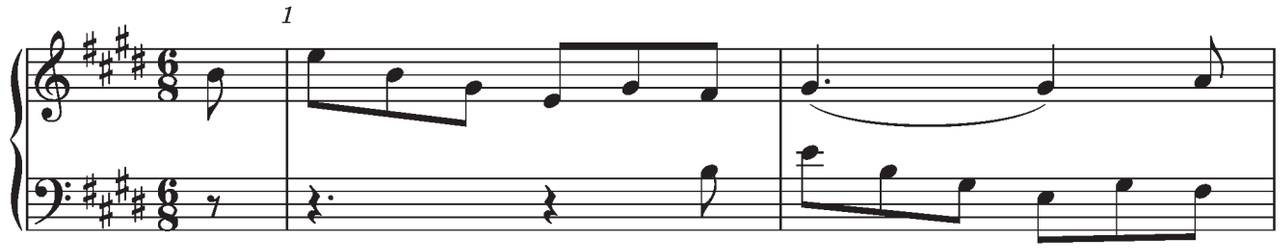


Boëly's second Bourrée, in the tonic minor key, has a running voice hovering around stable, repetitive three-part bass chords. The closing Gigue 5 recalls the melodic shape and two-part imitation of the Gigue in Bach's E major 'French' Suite, BWV817, but thickens the texture with an added inner part, filling out the harmony. Ex. 3(a) gives the first two bars of the Boëly and (b) the first two of the Bach.

Ex. 3

(a)

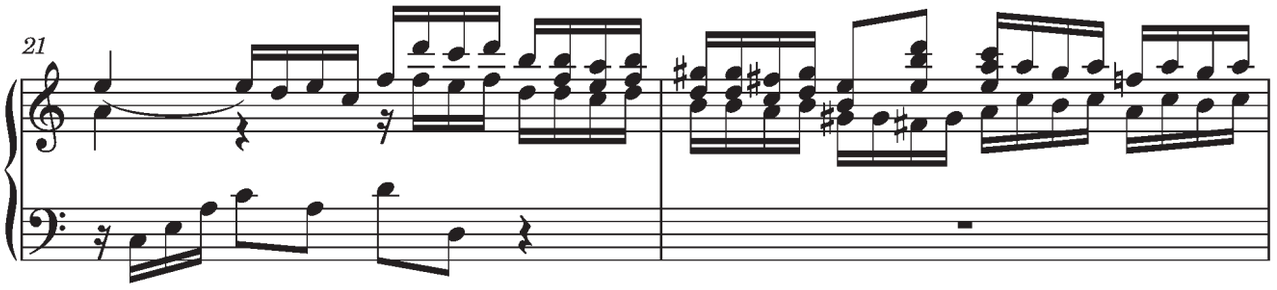


(b)
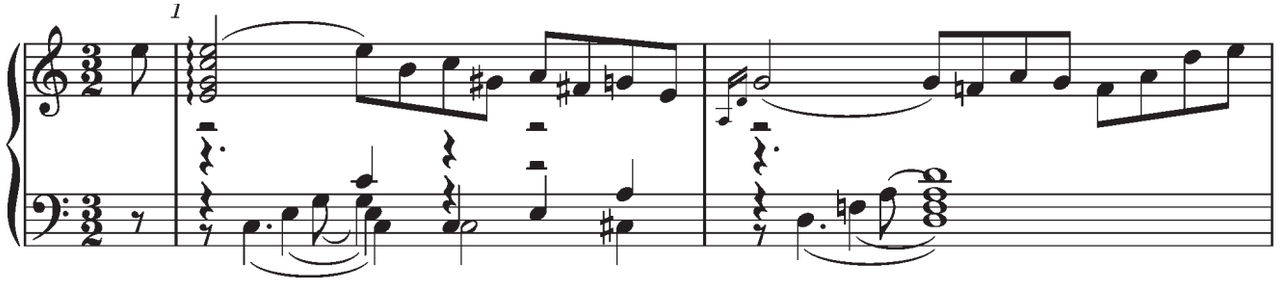


Suite III in C major opens with an Allemande [6] of the calmness and simplicity often associated with this key. In the second section, a contrasting moment of drama moves briefly to the upper register only and introduces interesting parallel textures of 6/3 chords, involving consecutive fourths for the right hand as the music passes through the relative minor key: Ex. 4 shows bars 21 and 22.

Ex. 4
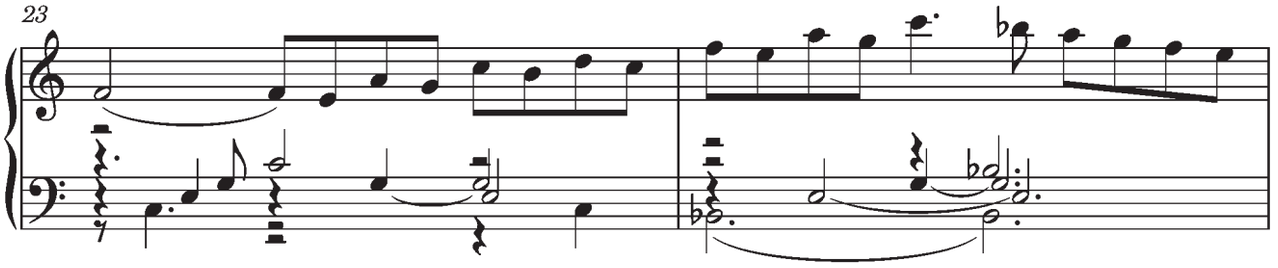


The Courante [7] contains chord-building through finger-sustain as a main feature (Ex. 5), with an unusual augmentation of this feature at a point of hemiola (Ex. 6: bars 23 and 24). Bach used this idea occasionally, usually at final cadence points. Here it provides more pervasive harmonic richness and density of texture.

Ex. 5
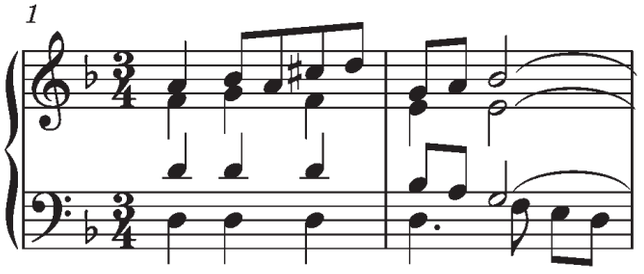


Ex. 6
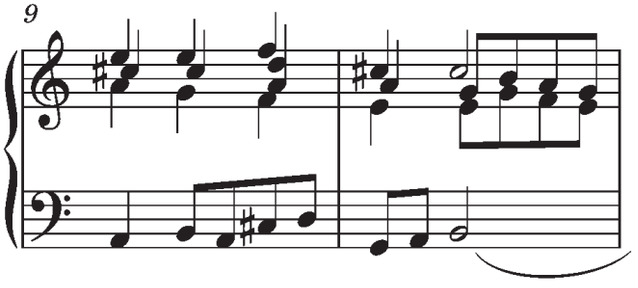


In the Sarabande from the D minor French Suite Bach brings in the richly expressive opening melodic line in the lower voice for the second section. Ex. 7(a) shows bars 1 and 2 and Ex. 7(b) bars 9 and 10 opening the second section.

Ex. 7

(a)
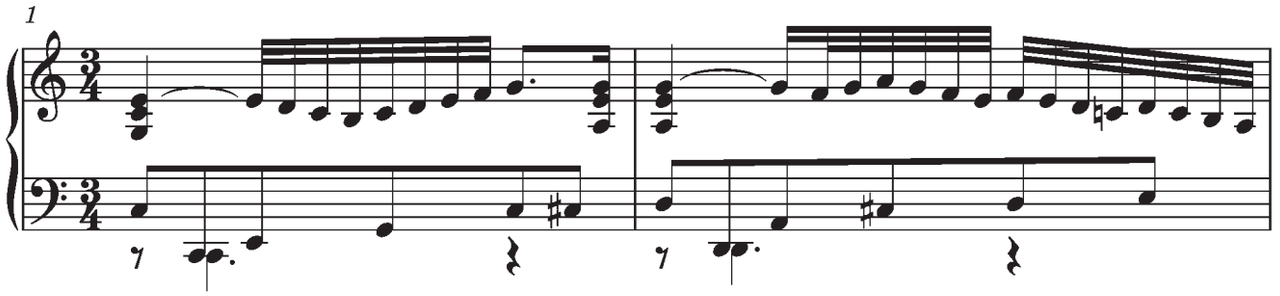


(b)
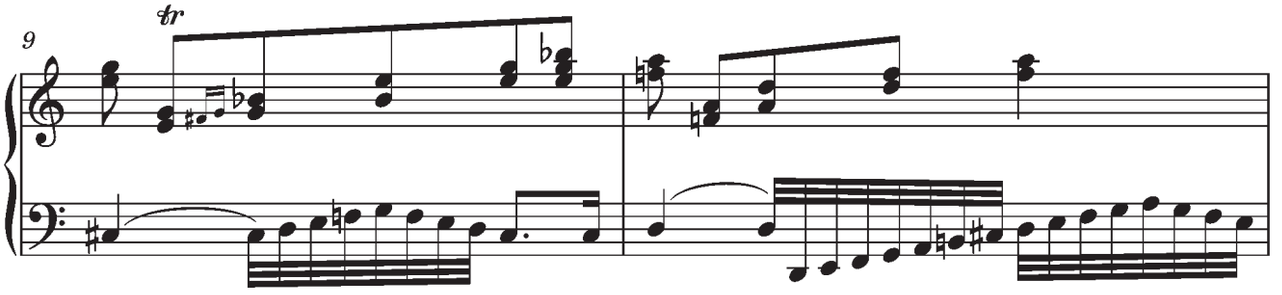


Boëly follows this process in his C major Sarabande 8, his spacious harmonic rhythm supporting a melody decorated profusely with runs in the upper part: Bars 1 and 2 (Ex. 8(a)) are later mirrored in the bass during intense exchanges in the second section, in bars 9 and 10, opening the second section (Ex. 8(b)).

Ex. 8

(a)
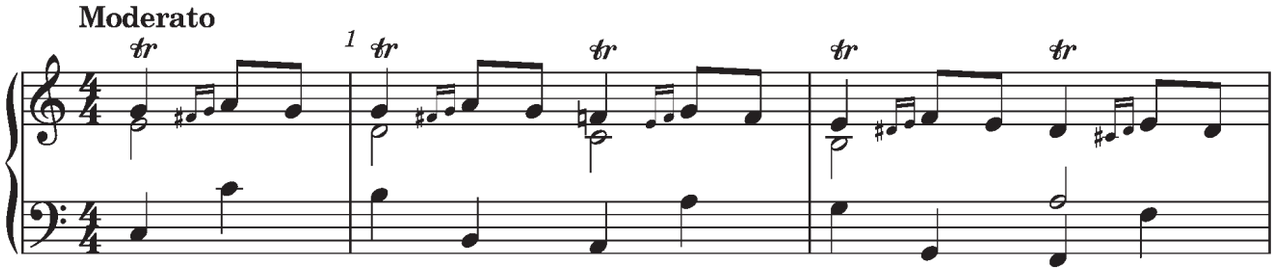


(b)
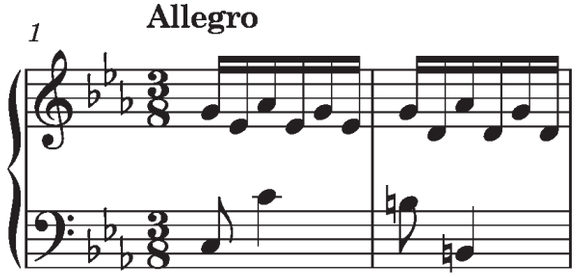


Textures are strongly contrasted in the *Moderato* Gavotte 9 in common time and its central *Allegro* section in $\frac{3}{8}$. Both Gavotte and *Allegro* reverse the lead voice of the texture in their second sections, as in the previous Sarabande. Trills accompanied by octave leaps dominate the Gavotte – Ex. 9 has bars 1–3 – whereas the *Allegro* takes the idea of the octave leap and swings it in a syncopated short–long rhythm under a new related melodic idea in the tonic minor: Ex. 10 shows bars 1 and 2.

Ex. 9
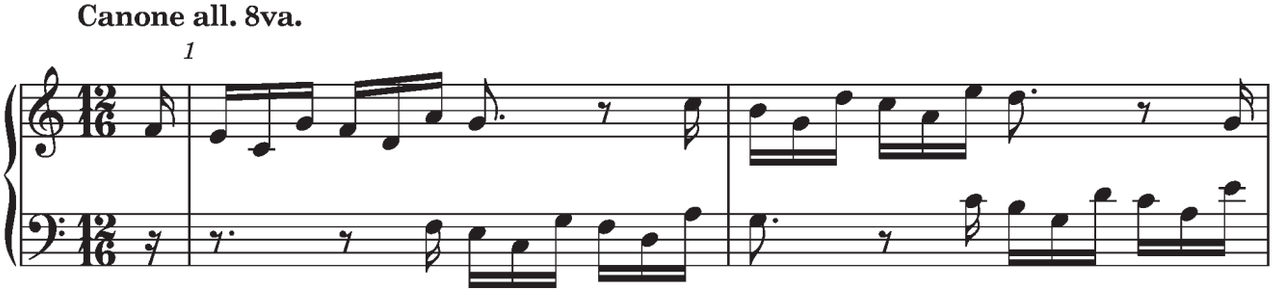


Ex. 10
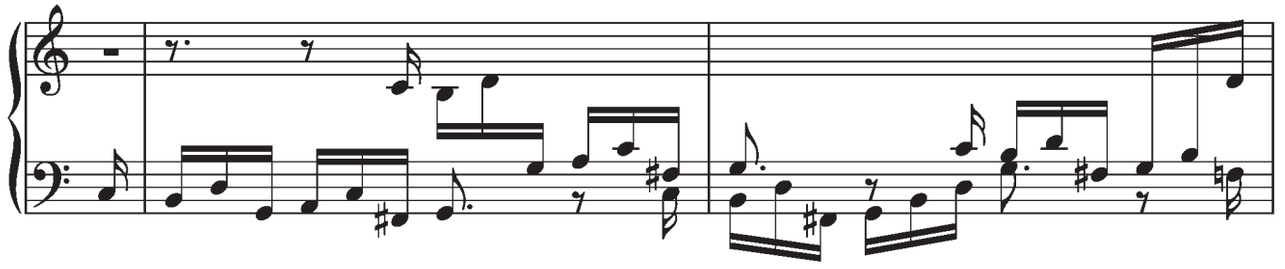


The concluding gigue 10 is an exact two-part canon at the octave, the upper voice leading, and with the normal 'answer' in the dominant continuing within the same line rather than in a separate voice (Ex. 11 has the first two bars). The second section (Ex. 12 has its first two bars) has the lower voice leading with an inversion of the subject, so that, when the main subject returns in the tonic after a period of modulation (Ex. 13 has bars 45 and 46), the beginning of the recapitulation (indicated by the arrow) differs from the opening by the voice-leading being reversed. This mesmerising effect manages to retain interest and variety within these strict compositional limitations and requires dynamic pianistic nuance to heighten the audibility of the counterpoint.
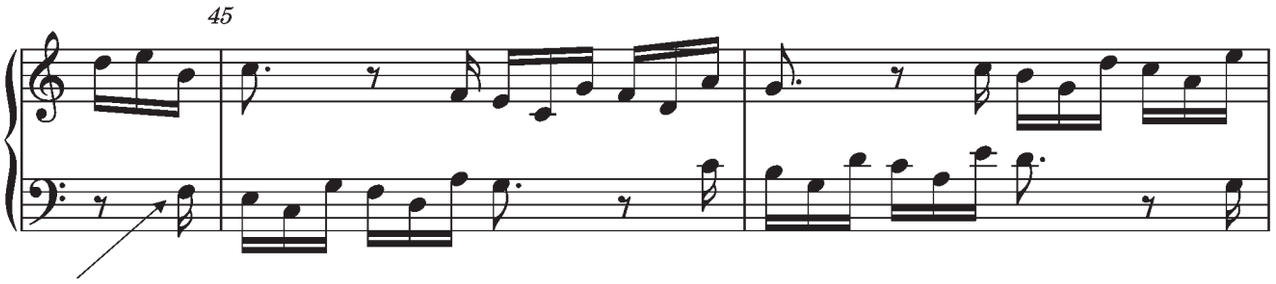
Ex. 11



Ex. 12



Ex. 13



In his final years Boëly completed two sets of 24 Pieces (later published as '*pièces faciles*'): Op. 20,[8] passed to his publisher Richault[9] in January 1857, and Op. 22, his last publication, sent in October 1858,[10] shortly before his death on 27 December that year. The French musicologist and critic Marie Bobillier (1858–1918), writing under the pseudonym Michel Brenet, edited and published 41 pieces from various sets by Boëly through Éditions Maurice Senart, including this pair of contrasting preludes in a publication entitled *Œuvres célèbres et transcriptions classiques*. These Preludes are short pieces of consistent texture – miniature versions in the style of the Preludes from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. There are two Preludes in Op. 20, and seven in Op. 22, of which Prelude No. 9 in D minor 11 is included here. Melancholy flowing semiquavers in an often-sequential pattern at the half-bar are accompanied by slow-moving crotchets and long, tied basses similar to organ pedals.

It is paired with a brisk F minor Prelude, No. 2 from *12 Pièces caractéristiques*, Op. 34, 12, a collection of *Préludes, Fugues, Canons et Pièces dans le style sérieux*. Here the semiquaver movement is all off the beat after rests. The harmonic accompaniment bounces in quavers, also separated by rests, until the arrival at the climax, and at the close, of two long basses, grounding the breathless quality of movement.

Boëly played viola in the Sauzay string quartet, and its members were frequent dedicatees of his works. Julienne Sauzay, the dedicatee of the *Sonate*, Op. 17, for four-

[8] Recorded on TOCC 0471.
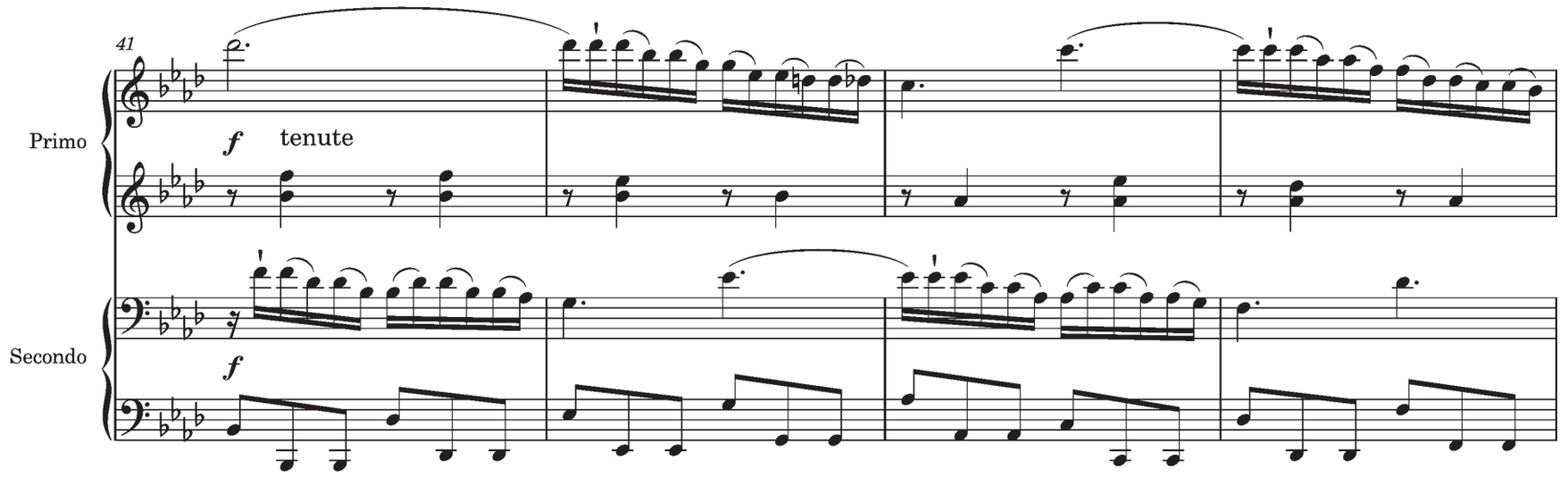
[9] The company was founded by Charles Simon Richault (1780–1866) in 1805 and traded as Simon Richault; on the death of its founder, his son, Guillaume Simon, renamed the enterprise Richault et Cie; after Guillaume's death, in 1878, his own son took over. It was sold to Costallat in 1898. It remained a hugely important Parisian publisher throughout the nineteenth century.

[10] François-Sappey, *op. cit*., p. 337.

hands piano, played second violin to the first violin of her husband, Eugène. Other members of the quartet sometimes included the famous cellist, Auguste Franchomme, dedicatee of Chopin's Cello Sonata. The relationship of the piano duet to the string quartet is emphasised by a later work which Erin Helyard and I have also recorded: the *Quatuor-Sonate à quatre mains*, Op. 31,[11] which is an arrangement of a now-lost string quartet.

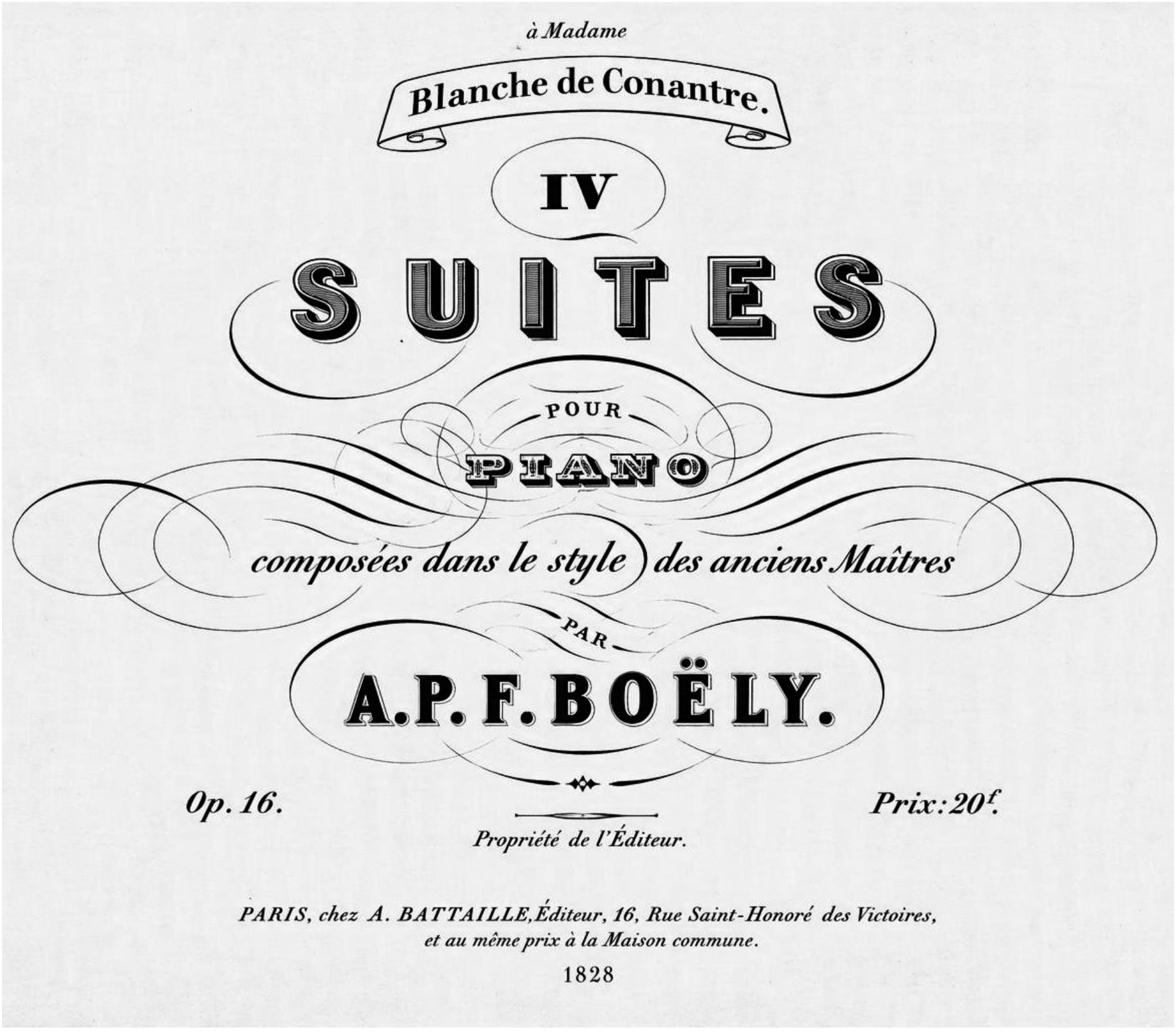
With a dedication 'à Madame E. Sauzay', the *Sonate à quatre mains* in F minor, Op. 17, (composed c. 1829 and published in 1856) is described by Georges Favre as one of Boëly's most perfect works.[12] The opening *Allegro moderato* 13 has Boëly taking advantage of four hands to thicken sequential passages with thirds, sixths and octaves and imitative entries, giving richly cascading descents of classically shaped two-note slurs. In the development, Boëly unleashes these figures in response to two questioning phrases derived from the opening theme (Ex. 14 has bars 41–44), culminating in four-part intensity in the rising reply.

Ex. 14



[11] On *Four Hands at Home*, Toccata Next TOCN 0031.
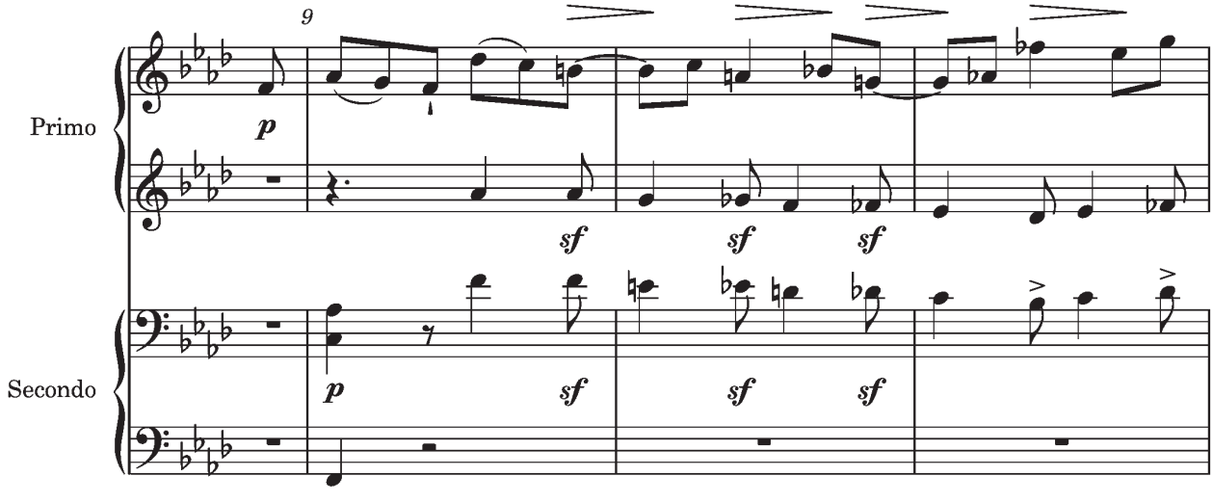
[12] 'cette remarquable sonate, une des plus parfaites sans doute de toute l'œuvre du musicien': Favre, *loc. cit.*, p. 72.



The front cover of Boëly's IV Suites pour Piano composées dans le style des anciens Maîtres, *Op. 16*
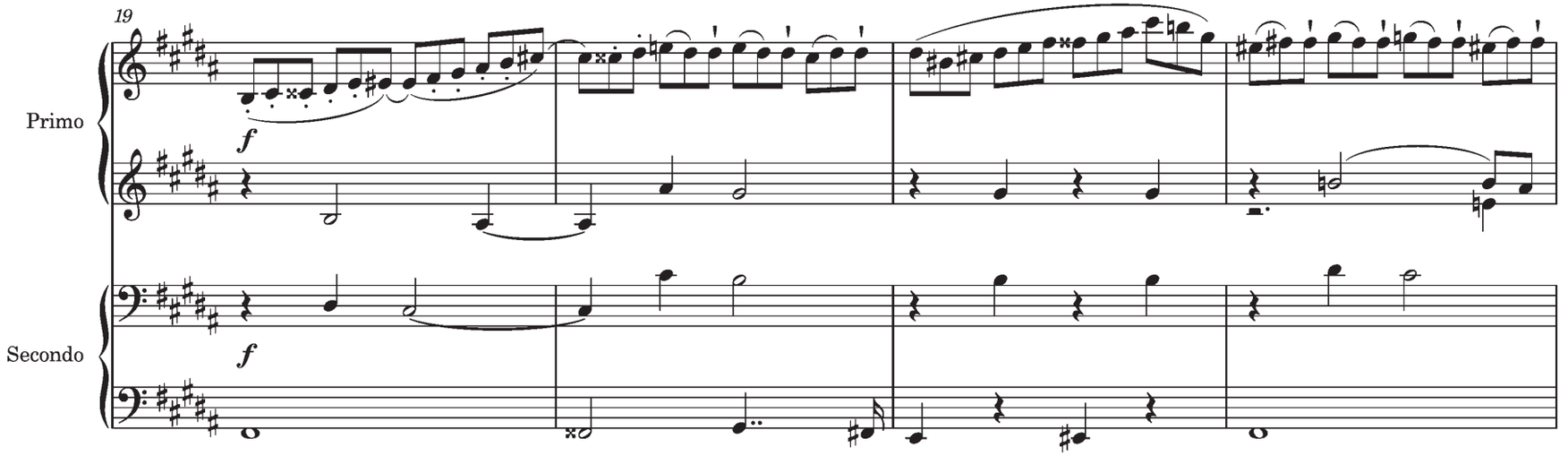
The compound time in this first movement features play with cross-rhythms and syncopations (as bars 9–11 in Ex. 15 show), unlike the more straightforward dance-rhythms of the $\frac{12}{8}$ *Giga Finale*.

Ex. 15
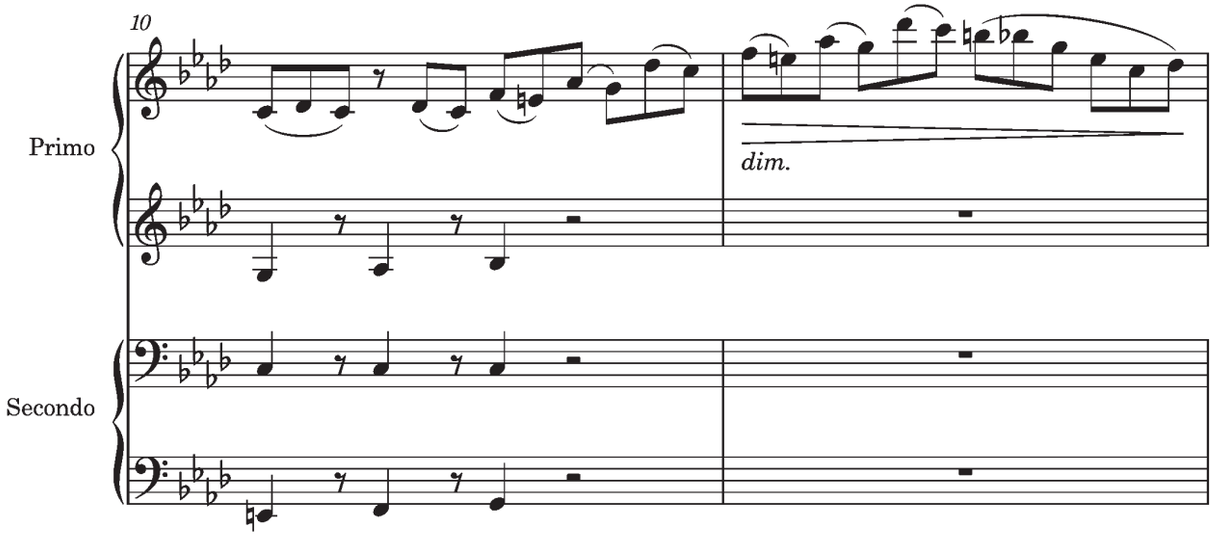


The coda of the first movement establishes a sense of urgency and drama which is dispelled by the gentle sweetness of the following *Adagio* 14 in A flat major. In a section briefly lifted into the key of B major, there are some chromatically nuanced and expressive moments initiated by a *portato* sign for the singing upper line (Ex. 16 shows bars 19–22) leading to a deeply felt climax with wide leaps in the linear movement as it modulates back to the recapitulation.

Ex. 16



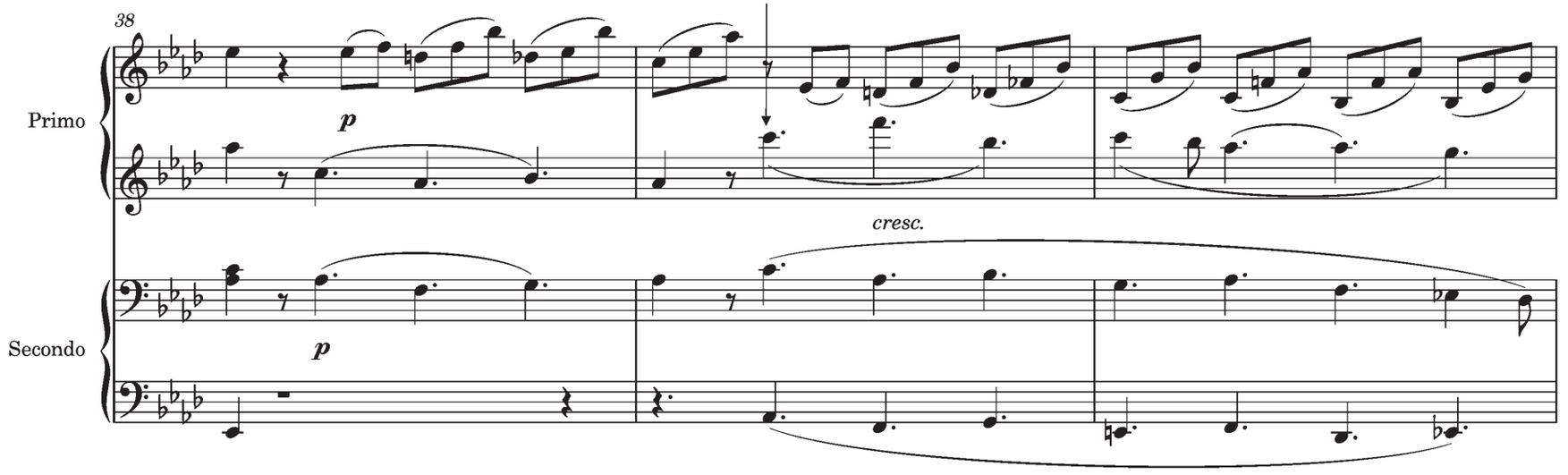
A brief and mysterious *Tempo di menuetto* 15 returns to F minor with the tonic major for the imitative Trio section before the substantial, contrapuntal *Giga Finale* 16. These two movement-titles return to the world of the *anciens maîtres* already explored in the solo suites recorded here. Although the term 'gigue' leads one to expect compound time and imitation, this movement is an extended sonata form, modulating widely throughout. It displays a range of characters, from serenity and wit, through moments of dark storminess, to a delightful gaiety with the charm of surprise as it switches between ideas. Cross-rhythms appear briefly as detailed articulations in one of these subtle returns to the principal idea (Ex. 17: bars 10 and 11).

Ex. 17
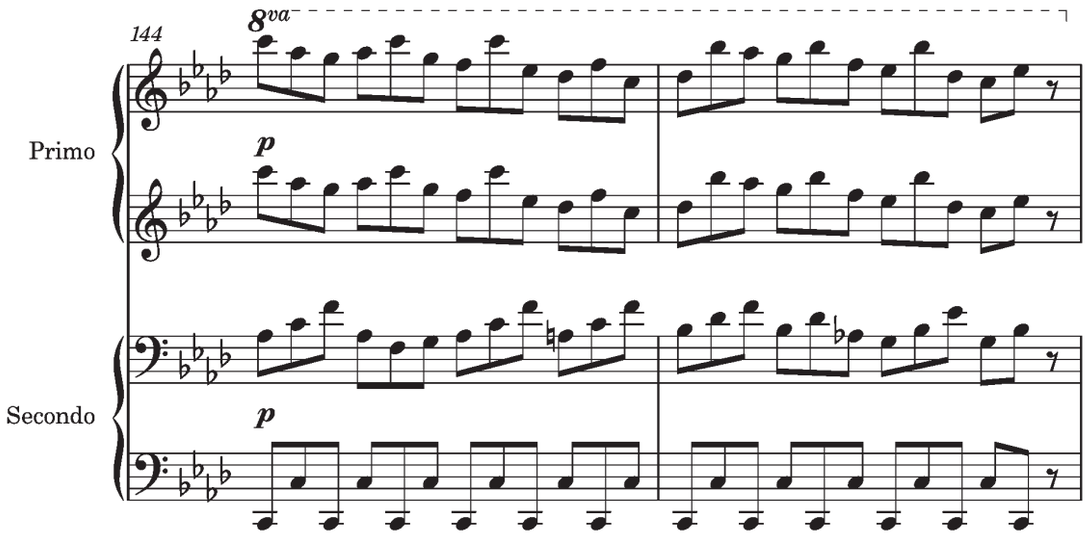


Playing 'upside down' where the left hand plays a passage higher than the right (a skill Boëly would have deployed as an organist) is apparent in the tricky hand-crossing notated in the *Primo* part for each second-subject appearance (as in Ex. 18, with bars 38–40; the arrow indicates the 'upside down' moment).

Ex. 18



An effective pedal point over a pulsating bass ends the exposition. It is twice as long on its second appearance (Ex. 19: bars 144–45), elaborating three lines of flowing gigue quavers over the fixed bassline. After emphatic *rinforzandi*, the extended drama culminates in an *Adagio* trill, pausing before the final return of the theme, to complete this spirited work.

Ex. 19





In a performing and recording career over four decades, **Stephanie McCallum** has become renowned for a pianistic practice based on refined control of sound, nuanced artistic instincts and fearless virtuosic control. Whether playing Alkan's monumental Op. 39 studies, the demanding complexities of Boulez, Xenakis and Ferneyhough or the poetic miniatures of Schumann, her performances are marked for their acute sense of colour, carefully moulded line and subtle interpretive insight.

A graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music under Gordon Watson and subsequently a student of the Alkan authority Ronald Smith, she gave what *The Times* described as 'an impressive debut' at the Wigmore Hall and developed a concert career in the UK and Europe. Her early recordings focused on nineteenth-century solo virtuosity and contemporary avant-garde and Australian works, and she has gone on to record an impressive catalogue of 22 solo albums and many ensemble discs. Described by *HiFi News and Record Review* as 'a formidable and insightful pianist', she has championed not only the music of Alkan, Liszt and Weber but many French masters, renowned and neglected, including Erik Satie, Alexandre Boëly (Toccata Classics TOCC 0471), Albéric Magnard (Tall Poppies TP081) and Guy Ropartz (Toccata Classics TOCC 0326).

She was a founding member of the contemporary-music ensembles AustraLYSIS and the Sydney Alpha Ensemble and has performed with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Elision and, as concerto soloist, with leading Australian orchestras, not least in Elena Kats-Chernin's *Displaced Dances*, which was specially written for her.

A recent release of newly composed *Preludes and Duets* by Aristea Mellos (ABC Classics ABCL0036D, 2022) a duo flute-and-piano disc with Laura Chislett, *100 Years of Australian Flute Music* (Wirripang WIRR 131) and a widely broadcast disc of solo piano music by Roy Agnew (Toccata Classics TOCC 0496), continue her work with Australian composers. A five-star review of the last of these releases in *Limelight* (February 2020) notes that 'McCallum brings her talent and virtuosity together with a keen sense for historical significance and enjoyment, on a disc that belongs in the collection of every connoisseur of Australian music'.

In recordings and performances exploring historic instruments, her 2018 album of piano music by Alexandre Boëly (Toccata Classics TOCC 0471) had Scott Noriega of *Fanfare* noting her as the 'perfect advocate of this music [….] her choice of Érard piano perfectly matches the sound of this music; and her playing is technically polished and musically convincing'.

Her partnership with Erin Helyard in four-hand repertoire began in 2014. Their first recording together on historic pianos was *Le Prophète* on the Dutch label TRPTK, TTK005 (2016). Following that success, they have gone on to produce a trilogy of discs for Toccata Next on the same 1853 Érard piano used in the first solo album of Boëly: *Four Hands for France* (TOCN 0007, 2021), *Four Hands at Home* (TOCN 0031, 2024) and *Four Hands on Stage* (TOCN 0042, 2026).

Erin Helyard has been acclaimed as an inspiring conductor and a virtuosic and expressive performer of the harpsichord and fortepiano. He graduated in harpsichord performance from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with first-class honours and the University Medal. He completed his Masters in fortepiano performance and a PhD in musicology with Tom Beghin at the Schulich School of Music, McGill University, Montreal. His monograph *Clementi and the Woman at the Piano: Virtuosity and the Market for Music in Eighteenth-Century London* was published by Oxford University Studies in Enlightenment in 2022. As Artistic Director and co-founder of the celebrated Pinchgut Opera and the Orchestra of the Antipodes (Sydney), he has forged new standards of excellence in operatic performance in Australia. The company won Best Rediscovered Opera (2019) for Hasse's *Artaserse* at the International Opera Awards in London. Pinchgut's opera film, *A Delicate Fire*, won Best Australian Feature Film at the Sydney Women's International Film Festival in 2021. Operas under his direction have been awarded Best Opera at the Helpmann Awards for three consecutive years (2015–17) and he has received two Helpmann Awards for Best Musical Direction: one for a feted revival of Handel's *Saul* (Adelaide Festival) in 2017 and the other for Hasse's *Artaserse* (Pinchgut Opera) in 2019. Together with Richard Tognetti, he won an ARIA and an AIR award for Best Classical Album in 2020. From 2006 to 2012 he was a central member of the award-winning Ensemble Caprice in Montreal. Since returning to Australia in 2014, he has collaborated with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Musica Viva and the Australian String Quartet. He has distinguished himself as a conductor in dynamic performances with the Sydney, Adelaide, Tasmanian and Queensland Symphony Orchestras, Opera Australia, ACO Collective, the Australian National Academy of Music and the Australian Haydn Ensemble. As a duo partner he has performed and recorded with Avi Avital, Melissa Farrow, David Greco, Stephanie McCallum, James Morley and Richard Tognetti.

Recorded on 21 January 2021 in Phoenix Central Park, Sydney (four-hand sonata), and on 1 June 2026 in The Church, Alexandria, Sydney
Piano tuner and technician: Curtis Wilkinson
Piano: Érard 1853 restored by Frits Janmaat, Amsterdam
Recording engineer: Jem Hoppe from Bob Scott Audio Design and Recording
Recording producer: Ralph Lane OAM
Digital editing: Ralph Lane and Stephanie McCallum
Mastering: Bob Scott Audio Design and Recording

Stephanie McCallum appears courtesy of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney.
Erin Helyard appears courtesy of Pinchgut Opera.

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Ralph Lane and Caroline Mackie for financial contributions to this recording project

In memoriam Ralph Lane (20 January 1947–30 July 2026), who contributed as producer and editor to Stephanie McCallum's solo recordings over the last three decades and to the Australian duet recordings of Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard

Booklet text: Stephanie McCallum
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ALEXANDRE BOËLY Piano Music, Volume Two

***IV Suites pour Piano composées dans le style des anciens Maîtres*, Op. 16** (publ. 1854)

Suite I in A major		**23:37**
1	I Allemande	5:43
2	II Courante	3:52
3	III Sarabande	4:52
4	IV Bourrées	6:03
5	V Gigue	3:07
Suite III in C major		**25:36**
6	I Allemande	5:55
7	II Courante	4:31
8	III Sarabande	4:34
9	IV Gavottes	5:24
10	V Gigue (canon à l'octave)	5:12

Two Preludes (rev. Michel Brenet)
24 Pièces, Op. 22 (1848–51)

11	No. 9 Prelude in D minor	2:43

***12 Pièces caractéristiques*, Op. 34** (1805–10)

12	No. 2 Prelude in F minor	1:05

***Sonate à quatre mains* in F minor, Op. 17** (c. 1829; publ. 1856)*		**22:28**
13	I *Allegro moderato*	6:57
14	II *Adagio*	4:32
15	III *Tempo di menuetto*	3:15
16	IV *Giga – Finale, Allegro*	7:44

TT **75:30**

Stephanie McCallum, piano 1–12
Stephanie McCallum, primo,
and Erin Helyard, secondo 13–16

FIRST RECORDINGS
EXCEPT * FIRST RECORDING ON PERIOD PIANO