

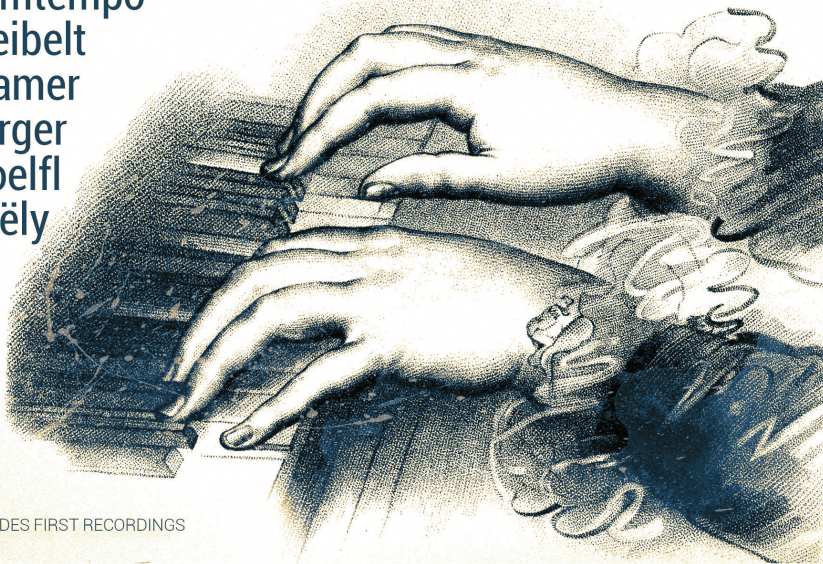
THE BIRTH OF THE ÉTUDE



Piano Studies

by
Montgérout
Bomtempo
Steibelt
Cramer
Berger
Woelfl
Boëly

Anna Petrova-Forster



INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

THE BIRTH OF THE ÉTUDE

by Anna Petrova-Forster

Anyone who has ever played an instrument can hardly do without the scales, exercises and études that prepare the fingers; every musician, professional or amateur, takes time to practise them. Some études seem dull, but others are very attractive, even beautiful, pieces which carry away performer and listener alike. Even as a student, I was impressed by the beauty of some of the first études to be written – they were in reality small, early-Romantic miniatures, their creators obviously free to follow their imagination.

It is difficult to say exactly when the word *étude* (*studio* in Italian) first appeared in the music literature,¹ although it was the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century that saw the publication of études for various instruments. Thus, in Paris in 1778, one finds the *Caprices & Airs variés en forme d'étude* for violin solo by Antonio Bartolomeo Bruni; his *Cinquante études pour le violon* appeared in 1795. Also in Paris around the turn of the nineteenth century Pierre-François Aubert published his *Études pour violoncelle*, and Jean-Baptiste Cartier, Pierre Gaviniès, Pierre Baillot and Rodolphe Kreutzer composed études for the violin. At the same time, Antoine Hugot wrote a series of études for flute. With the new instrument called the pianoforte, the increasing technical demands of the compositions being written for it aroused the desire for better training and the acquisition of new technical abilities. The appearance of travelling piano virtuosi also contributed to this development.

The Prague-born, Paris-based Antoine Reicha (Antonín Rejcha; 1770–1836) is the first composer known to have written a piano étude: his set of twenty

¹ J. S. Bach used the word *studio* in his manuscript of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in 1722.

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An early French edition of Cramer's studies

Études ou exercices pour le pianoforte, Op. 30, appeared in Paris in 1801.² Reicha's undeserved neglect means that the pianist and composer **Johann Baptist Cramer** (1771–1858) is more often considered to be the first to have written piano études. Cramer's first volume of studies came out in London in 1804 and included 42 pieces called *Studio per pianoforte*. In 1809, he brought out a second set of 42 studies, and in 1842 a revised edition with added metronome marks was published.³ From the very beginning Cramer's studies were appreciated. These days they are played mostly in the versions of Hans von Bülow, who edited and published only 60 studies out of the 82 that Cramer composed. The approach of Romanticism can be heard in many of these études. Sadly, it is only with this work that Cramer is remembered today, in spite of nine piano concertos,⁴ over 100 sonatas, chamber music and many piano pieces.



Johann Baptist Cramer

Cramer's Étude No. 26 1 in G sharp minor from the first set is omitted from Bülow's edition, although the singing right hand and the interesting holding of harmony notes in both hands makes it a beautiful, melodious piece and a useful study for *legato* playing

² Recorded by Henrik Löwenmark on Toccata Classics TOCC 0243. Reicha's *Études de transition*, Op. 31, published in 1802, are not fully worked-out compositions: they are 44 short examples, three to eight bars in length, of how to modulate from C major to every other major and minor key, and vice versa. Op. 31 does, however, include two fantasies.

³ Muzio Clementi (Cramer's teacher) claimed that in 1817 Cramer stole his idea of publishing a new genre, the 'studio', in 1801. Clementi asserted that he shared the idea of writing piano studies with Ignaz Pleyel, a pupil of Cramer's, and was certain that Pleyel, being Cramer's friend, revealed the plan to Cramer, who took the opportunity of Clementi's absence from England to publish his own studies. It is difficult to establish how true these claims might be.

⁴ Cramer's piano concertos are at last attracting the attention of the microphones in the series of 'The Classical Piano Concerto' being recorded by Hyperion, Nos. 1, 3 and 6 on CDA68302 (2020) and Nos. 4 and 5 on CDA68270 (2019). The performers are Howard Shelley and the London Mozart Players.

and the achievement of a singing tone. The Étude No. 77 in D major [2], from the second set, could also be called a nocturne.

In his book *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time*, Wilhelm von Lenz recalls a meeting with Cramer in Paris in 1842 and the latter's astonishment at Lenz's delight with his études: 'Those are exercises, do you play such things for pleasure?'. When asked about the *legato* in one of them, Cramer said: 'We were not so particular, we did not consider that of great importance, these are only studies.'⁵ For Wilhelm von Lenz Cramer's playing was dry and without any *legato*, the man himself old, sad and slightly soured – and yet in the same year another witness, Auguste Gathy,⁶ described Cramer as

an extremely friendly, lively, and self-content gentleman of seventy years of age, who played, to the greatest surprise of his visitors, with perfect beauty of touch and fullest control over fingers and keyboard alike.⁷

Only one year later, in 1805, Leduc in Paris published 50 Études, Op. 78, by **Daniel Steibelt** (1765–1823).⁸ Another French edition, by Mme Duhan et Compagnie, followed in c. 1808–9, and a German one by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1809. In some of his études Steibelt uses the same, motifs and the same technical passages as Cramer, a recycling which has sometimes been seen as signalling a lack of original ideas. But while working on this project, I realised that Steibelt's aim was to show his capacity for better musical ideas based on similar motifs and technical challenges. Many of Steibelt's études could



Daniel Steibelt

⁵ Wilhelm von Lenz, *Die grossen Pianoforte-Virtuosen unserer Zeit aus persönlicher Bekanntschaft*, B. Behr, Berlin 1872, p. 31 (English translation, as *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time*, by Philip Reder, Kahn & Averill, London, 1983).

⁶ François Servais Auguste Gathy (1800–58), Belgian writer on music and translator.

⁷ Felix Ganz, *The Development of the Etude for Pianoforte*, Ph.D. dissertation, Evanston, Illinois, 1960, p. 144.

⁸ Eight more are included in his *Méthode de piano*, published in 1809.

be called caprices or preludes. For example, a comparison between Steibelt's Étude No. 3⁹ and Cramer's Op. 30, No. 5, despite relatively similar passages, shows that Cramer's piece is indeed meant to be a study, whereas Steibelt's is a short Romantic piece.

The same theme – from the third variation of the 'Air & five variations' in Handel's Third Suite in D minor, HWV428, was borrowed by both Cramer and Steibelt as the basis of one of their studies: in his Étude Op. 30, No. 41, Cramer changed the tonality to E major, whereas Steibelt in his Étude No. 26 in D minor [4] 'assumed the same key, and almost the same notes as Handel. Steibelt's is the better study of the two after all, which will go far to excuse his appropriation of Handel's property', as stated by the anonymous author of an article on Handel in *The Musical World* in 1847.¹⁰ One can only agree with him.

Steibelt was the first composer to write studies fully in octaves, and one of them (No. 22 in C minor) can be heard in a performance of mine on YouTube.¹¹ The other two – No. 31 [3] in A minor and No. 30 [8] in C major – are presented here. There are broken chords and passages for both right and left hands in No. 33 in D minor [5] and in No. 10 in G major [6]. Steibelt's Étude No. 11 [7] in E flat major shows some parallels with Mendelssohn's *Song without Words*, Op. 38, No. 2.

Steibelt's Étude No. 24 in F minor [9] will probably sound different on a period instrument than on a modern piano. There is a dialogue between both hands when played on an old instrument, as the basses are much lighter. One can, though, achieve another interesting effect on a modern grand, with the left hand producing waves of sound, over which the melody in the right hand can sing.

Like Steibelt, the Austrian composer **Joseph Woelfl** (1775–1812) was one of the first piano virtuosos and travelled a good deal, settling variously in Hamburg, Paris and, finally, London, where he died. His *Practical School for the Piano Forte*, Op. 56, in two

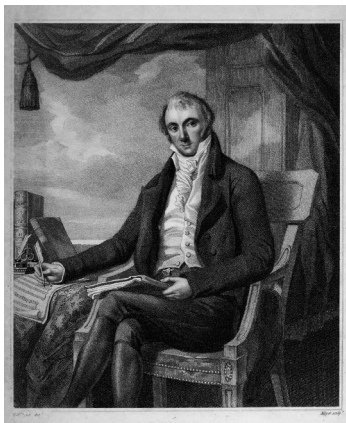
⁹ Recorded for the Bulgarian label Gega in 2013, on GD362.

¹⁰ *The Musical World*, 2 January 1847, p. 2.

¹¹ At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14pjjqHcdT8>. Reicha's Étude, Op. 30, No. 9, in C minor, is also written for octaves, but not to such an extent.

volumes,¹² was finished at the end of 1810, after he had taken up residence in London. It consists of 50 études, their special fingerings pointing to the fact that Woelfl had an enormous span (he was over six feet tall).¹³ Some of them are small, delightful, appealing early-Romantic pieces, like the Étude No. 41 in F minor [10] and No. 18 in D minor [11], their elegance reminiscent of Vienna – No. 15 in E flat major [12] even of Schubert.

The compositions of the French **Hélène de Montgeroult** (1764–1836) are now being rediscovered and are played more often today than in the two centuries since her death. Her three-volume *Cours complet pour l'enseignement du Forté-Piano conduisant progressivement des premiers éléments aux plus grandes difficultés* contains 114 études. It is difficult to fix the exact date of their composition. According to Jérôme Dorival, her first biographer, the method was published around 1816 but composed much earlier,¹⁴ although some commentators date it as late as 1822. It is quite possible that she began to work on it during her time as a teacher at the Paris Conservatoire (end-1795 to 1798). The first volume contains scales and exercises; the second and third volumes are dedicated to the études, which give a fascinating insight into her technical, pianistic and musical demands as a teacher. I was impressed by the richness of her musical ideas and the detailed explanations of the technical challenges and the aims she wanted to achieve with every étude.



Joseph Woelfl, in an engraving from 1811, just after he had completed his *Practical School for the Piano Forte, Op. 56*

¹² Recently republished by Apollon Musikoffizin in Bonn.

¹³ The physical descriptions of Woelfl suggest that he may have had Marfan syndrome.

¹⁴ *Hélène de Montgeroult: La Marquise et la Marseillaise*, Symétrie, Lyon, 2006, pp. 223–34.

Her Étude No. 110 in A major [13] recalls Cramer's Étude No. 77 and could likewise be called a nocturne. Was it composed before or after Cramer's étude? The difficulty of the accompaniment in the left hand can be ascribed to the unusual fingering, which requires a very large hand on a modern instrument but would be played much more easily on the pianofortes of the period. The accompaniment should be played *legato*, keeping the exact movement rigorously maintained, leaving to the right hand the expressive *cantabile*.¹⁵

Madame de Montgeroult's Étude No. 78 [14] in B major requires the crossing of hands, with the melody given to the left hand. Montgeroult states in her prefatory comments: 'If singing well is the biggest difficulty on all instruments, you could almost despair of defeating it on the Forte-Piano which deprives the faculty of supporting sounds'. She insists on 'the singing phrase', which must always dominate the accompaniment.

Although twice recorded,¹⁶ the études of the Portuguese composer and virtuoso pianist **João Domingos Bomtempo** (1775–1842) are hardly known today. They were published, together with his *Elementos de Musica e methodo de tocar Piano Forte*, Op. 19, by Clementi in London in 1816. The front



*A portrait assumed to be
of Hélène de Montgeroult,
by Louis-Philippe-Joseph Girod
de Vienne, baron de Trémont*

¹⁵ For her Étude No. 38 she explained the meaning of 'tempo robato' (literally, 'stolen time') – the left hand keeping the rhythm, the right hand having the melody slightly delaying or eventually anticipating, still keeping the balance between the two hands. Probably the first composer to use the term *rubare il tempo* was Pier Francesco Tosi in 1723.

¹⁶ By Nella Maissa, first released on LP (as 11C 051-40589) on His Master's Voice/Discotheca Básica Nacional in 1982, and then on CD by Strauss Portugalsom (sp4134) in 1997; and by Sofia Lourenço on the Portuguese label Numérica (NUM 1104) in 2009.

page describes his method as an ‘*Obra composta e oferecida à nação portuguesa*’ – composed for and dedicated to the Portuguese nation. The son of an Italian musician based in Portugal, Bomtempo spent many years in Paris and London; later, back in Lisbon, he was the founder of the Philharmonic Society and appointed director of the newly created Conservatoire of Music. His method is representative of the technical preparation and the requirements for pianists at that time, and the challenges in the études address the problems identified in his method. No. 7 in B flat minor [15] is another example of crossing hands and a singing left hand. In No. 5 in E major [16] the thirds in both hands in both parts of the piece – it begins *Largo con molto express.* and continues *Allegro agitato* – are combined with the requirement of *Molto espressivo*. Étude No. 11 in G minor [17] is intended to improve octave technique.



João Domingos Bomtempo

The German composer **Ludwig Berger** (1777–1837) is now remembered only as the teacher of Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn. He was a student of Clementi, and a friend of Cramer and Steibelt, and at the time a well-known composer and pianist in his own right. Today, though, apart from a handful of recordings of piano music and some songs, Berger’s works are hardly known. He started to teach very early, and left two sets of études. The first of them – the 12 Études, Op. 12 – were probably written in Russia, where he lived as a teacher from 1806 to 1812. They were published by Clementi in London around 1816 and dedicated to William Collard, Clementi’s business partner, although No. 8 [21] was separately published by Hofmeister in Leipzig a year earlier. The 15 Études, Op. 22, which were dedicated to count Wolf de Baudissin, a Shakespeare translator, diplomat and writer, came out at the end of 1836, although their creation

spanned a considerable period: No. 1 was composed in 1822 and the last one was dated 1836. Berger also wrote two free-standing études, Nos. 28 and 29, which were published after his death. Both the Op. 12 and Op. 22 sets appeared in successive editions until 1920; a century later, they seem to have been completely forgotten. In his book *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, Larry Todd goes so far as to write: ‘Berger composed [...] piano sonatas and nondescript études reminiscent of Clementi’.¹⁷ I can hardly agree: in my opinion Berger’s études were way ahead of his time – it was with good reason that Schumann wrote of them: ‘Both volumes are worthy of the highest recognition and ask respect and love from us’.¹⁸ This opinion is all the more telling when one considers that Berger’s études are meant for large hands and that Berger, having very small hands, could span only an octave (the equivalent of a seventh now, since piano keys were then narrower), and even that with difficulty – indeed, he injured his hand while trying to enlarge his span. Both of Berger’s sets contain an étude for the left hand alone (No. 9 in Op. 12 [22] and No. 6 in Op. 22) – probably the first études to be composed for a single hand.



*Ludwig Berger – portrait by his friend,
the painter Philipp Otto Runge*

While I was practising the first étude of Op. 12, in C major [18], I had the feeling that I was already familiar with it – only later did I realise that the broken chords, the stretching of the right hand, its movement and the harmonies reminded me of Chopin’s C major Étude, No. 1 of the Op. 10 set. Berger’s C minor étude, No. 3 [19], is in octaves and requires strength and energy. No. 4 in D major [20] is clearly a song without words: the accent here is on singing tone and *legato* playing. Another piece for *legato* playing and stretching is No. 8 in B flat minor [21]. The étude for the left hand alone, No. 9 in

¹⁷ Larry R. Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, p. 37.

¹⁸ Robert Schumann, *Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Philipp Reclam, Leipzig, 1888, p. 84.

G minor [22], is in two parts; the second, in G minor, contrasts with the lyrical first one, in G major. The Étude No. 11 is also in G minor [23] and shows clear parallels with Steibelt's étude No. 11 [7].¹⁹ Two études from Op. 22 – No. 3 in C minor [24] and No. 1 in A minor [25] – fascinated me with their Brahmsian passion and intensity. Once more, large hands are required. Even more stretching and large hands are demanded in No. 14 in B major [26], which should be played *cantabile* and *legato*.

As far as I am aware, Berger's name cannot be found in any of Chopin's biographies, and yet, in one of his letters, written in Dresden in 1835 (the addressee has not been identified), Berger mentions his études and a meeting with Chopin:

Ten days ago the very famous Chopin from Paris came here. He is a pleasant and very talented young pianist and composer. I hastened to meet him, and he was so gracious as to play me several of his works that are distinguished by brilliant ideas, although some of them have far-fetched novelties here and there, but they compare favourably with the works of many other fashionable composers. He fully plays in the current fashion genre, i.e., it slows down too often, and with too many pedals, which makes some places fuzzy, but by the way, with great skill, speed, fire and grace. Invited by him, I was, as you can imagine, so impudent as to play, with rather invalid fingers, some of my studies, which seemed to him too serious, because he approved only the Gigue and some random pleasant places, which I understand well, the purpose of his struggle and aspirations is to receive applause from the great and noble, as well as the approval of a young, beautiful society that easily sacrifices everything deep for amusement, and he mentioned how small is the chance that such works might please the world around him.²⁰

Berger's études have influenced many musicians over the years, among them Felix Mendelssohn, Otto Nicolai, Robert Schumann and Wilhelm Taubert; indeed, Schuman

¹⁹ Curiously, Hélène de Montgeroult's Étude No. 96 (in A major) uses almost the same theme as Steibelt and is based on the same structure.

²⁰ Dieter Siebenkäs, *Ludwig Berger: sein Leben und seine Werke unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seines Liedschaffens*, Meisenburger, Berlin, 1963, pp. 241–42.

insisted that ‘they should be learned by heart by students.’²¹ It is a pity that they are forgotten today.

The music of **Alexandre Boëly** (1785–1858) has enjoyed renewed attention in recent years, in recordings,²² if not in the concert hall. Boëly left three sets of études. The first of them, *Trente Caprices ou Pièces d’étude pour le piano*, Op. 2 (1816), was dedicated to Marie Bigot, herself a composer and pianist. Boëly’s *Trente études*, Op. 6²³ (1830), were dedicated to Wilhelm Kalkbrenner, another pianist-composer; and the dedicatee of the *Quarante études*, Op. 13 (1846), was Johann Baptist Cramer. All the études were published long after their composition. Only a small selection of 20 études from Opp. 6 and 13 has been reprinted in a modern edition – by Brigitte François-Sappey in 1988.²⁴ She finds that the Étude, Op. 6, No. 30, in D major [27], shows ‘pale harmonies’. Personally, as a performer, I am very fond of it, not least because of the difference between the beginning and the more dramatic middle part. Étude No. 3 in F major [28] is a fluid and easygoing, lighter piece.

Among the other composers to write études at the beginning of the nineteenth century were Muzio Clementi, Carl Czerny,²⁵ Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Wilhelm



Alexandre Boëly

²¹ Robert Schumann, *Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Band 2, Philipp Reclam, Leipzig, 1888, p. 11.

²² One such is the recital by Stephanie McCallum on Toccata Classics TOCC 0471.

²³ The original publisher of the Op. 6 études was Richault, not Pleyel, as claimed by François-Sappey in her edition (*10 études romantiques extraites des Trente études*, op. 6, Henry Lemoine, Paris, 1988, preface).

²⁴ Henry Lemoine, Paris.

²⁵ Of the 1,000 works that Czerny composed, one third is dedicated to études.

Kalkbrenner, Joseph Kessler, Maria Szymanowska²⁶ and Marie Bigot, and many of their études have been recorded. And yet the only book on this vast subject is still Peter Ganz's Ph.D. dissertation, *The Development of the Etude for Fortepiano*, written in 1960. Six decades later, it is high time that a young musicologist took another look at this under-researched area of activity.

Anna Petrova-Forster received her first piano lessons at the age of six. After graduating as a soloist in the class of Professor Liuba Entcheva at the Sofia Music Academy, she entered Louis Hiltbrand's master-class at the Geneva Conservatoire, where she remained until his death. She obtained a second solo diploma at the Lucerne Conservatoire in Hubert Harry's class. For over two years she worked on various chamber-music programmes with Nathan Milstein in London. Anna Petrova-Forster has appeared on radio and television broadcasts as both soloist and chamber musician.

Her wish to rediscover the compositions of lesser-known composers from the past has led to recordings of music by such unfamiliar figures as William Baines, Sergei Bortkiewicz, Alexander Grechaninov, Josef Matthias Hauer, August Alexander Klengel and Daniel Steibelt.



²⁶ Maria Szymanowska (1789–1831) was a Polish composer and one of the first professional women virtuoso pianists. She toured throughout Europe before settling definitively in St Petersburg in 1827. She composed piano pieces, songs and some small chamber works. One of her daughters married the poet Adam Mickiewicz, but she is not thought to have been related to Karol Szymanowski.



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Piano: Steinway D

Booklet notes: Anna Petrova-Forster

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Hélène de Montgeroult, published with Volume One of her *Cours complet pour
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THE BIRTH OF THE ÉTUDE

JOHANN BAPTIST CRAMER (1771–1858)

- 1 Étude No. 26 in G sharp minor (publ. 1804) 2:40
- 2 Étude No. 77 in D major (publ. 1809) 2:46

DANIEL STEIBELT (1765–1823)

50 Études, Op. 78 (publ. 1805)

- 3 No. 31 in A minor 1:02
- 4 No. 26 in D minor 4:56
- 5 No. 33 in D minor 1:42
- 6 No. 10 in G major 1:46
- 7 No. 11 in E flat major 2:39
- 8 No. 30 in C major 1:24
- 9 No. 24 in F minor 2:38

JOSEPH WOELFL (1775–1812)

Practical School for the Piano Forte, Op. 56
(publ. 1810)*

- 10 Étude No. 41 in F minor 1:53
- 11 Étude No. 18 in D minor 2:59
- 12 Étude No. 15 in E flat major 4:01

HÉLÈNE DE MONTGEROULT (1764–1836)

Cours complet pour l'enseignement du Forté-Piano
(publ. c. 1816)

- 13 Étude No. 110 in A major 2:38
- 14 Étude No. 78 in B major* 4:06

JOÃO DOMINGOS BOMTEMPO (1775–1842)

Elementos de Musica e methodo de tocar Piano Forte, Op. 19 (publ. 1816)

- 15 Étude No. 7 in B flat minor 3:07
- 16 Étude No. 5 in E major 3:47
- 17 Étude No. 11 in G minor 1:18

LUDWIG BERGER (1777–1837)

12 Études, Op. 12 (publ. c. 1816)*

- 18 No. 1 in C major 2:06
- 19 No. 3 in C minor 0:58
- 20 No. 4 in D major 4:53
- 21 No. 8 in B flat minor 2:02
- 22 No. 9 in G minor, for the left hand 4:27
- 23 No. 11 in G minor 1:38

15 Études, Op. 22 (publ. 1836)*

- 24 No. 3 in C minor 1:53
- 25 No. 1 in A minor 3:10
- 26 No. 14 in B major 4:28

ALEXANDRE BOËLY (1785–1858)

Trente études, Op. 6 (publ. 1830)*

- 27 No. 30 in D major 4:27
- 28 No. 3 in F major 2:02

Anna Petrova-Forster, piano

TT 77:27

FIRST RECORDINGS