
TOCCATA
NEXT
FOUR HANDS ON STAGE
Opera and Symphony Conceived for the Keyboard
Ferdinand HILLER
Operette ohne Text, Op. 106
Ignaz MOSCHELES
Grande Sonate Symphonique No. 2 in B minor, Op. 112
Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard
1853 Erard piano
INCLUDES FIRST RECORDING

FOUR HANDS ON STAGE

Erin Helyard

In the nineteenth century, the piano was often asked to stand in for something else. Before sound-recording, four-hand piano-music provided access to the symphony and the opera within the domestic sphere, translating public genres into private sound. Most works were overtly what they claimed to be: transcriptions, reductions, souvenirs. The two compositions recorded here occupy far more ambiguous territory. Ferdinand Hiller's *Operette ohne Text* (Op. 106, 1864) and Ignaz Moscheles' *Grande sonate symphonique* (Op. 112, 1845) for piano duet are not arrangements of existing works, nor substitutes for absent originals. They are fully autonomous compositions that deliberately masquerade as genres normally encountered only in transcription – an opera without singers, and a symphony without an orchestra.

This ambiguity is not merely a novelty. Both works think orchestrally and theatrically from the outset, regarding the piano duet not as a 'reduced' medium but as a compositional engine in its own right. Moscheles' symphony unfolds with genuine symphonic weight and architectural seriousness; Hiller's operetta conjures overtures, ensembles, choruses and dramatic pacing with unique specificity, despite the absence of text or stage. In both cases, the piano does not imitate the orchestra or the theatre so much as absorb their logic.

The instrument itself is central to this transformation. Both composers admired the Érard piano – surely one of the finest technological achievements of the nineteenth century – which had the clarity, colouristic differentiation and *legato* capabilities that made possible a new kind of orchestral thinking at the keyboard. The capacity of the Érard to sustain density without opacity, and to project contrasting timbres within a single texture, enabled composers to imagine the piano as a medium capable of collective utterance, as singers and/or instrumentalists. These works are not merely playable on such an instrument; they are, in an important sense, conceived through it.

The pairing of Hiller and Moscheles also reflects a shared cultural position. Both composers were born into Jewish families and rose to the very centre of nineteenth-century musical life, moving with ease among figures such as Alkan, Chopin, Liszt, Mendelssohn and Schumann (two of whom were themselves Jewish). Yet their professional success unfolded within a social landscape that often required discretion, adaptation and mediation. Jewish identity in this period was rarely proclaimed in musical content, but it shaped the conditions under which music was made, circulated and received. As later commentators have noted, nineteenth-century composers often approached large public genres indirectly, allowing their expressive logic to migrate into other media rather than occupying those genres outright. This results of this generic migration can be heard, for example, in Schubert's song-cycles, with their strong affinities to operatic dramaturgy, or in Hummel's large-scale piano sonatas, where his ambitions are unmistakably symphonic. In the case of Hiller and Moscheles, however, their works resonate with a broader historical reality: these composers could lay explicit claim to the highest public genres (symphony and opera) while realising them through alternative media and settings (piano duet in concert or at home), allowing both musical forms and professional identities to be negotiated outside their usual institutional frameworks.

To hear and play these compositions today is therefore to encounter works that function in several ways at once: as major contributions to the piano-duet repertoire; as ambitious re-imaginings of symphonic and operatic form; and as reminders that nineteenth-century musical innovation often occurred not at the margins, but at the intersections between genres, between public and private spaces, and between cultural identities that were fully present yet rarely named.

Explicit discussion of Jewish identity is largely absent from the private diaries, correspondence and public-facing writings of many nineteenth-century Jewish musicians. Both Ferdinand Hiller and Ignaz Moscheles were baptised – Moscheles together with his wife Charlotte in 1832, and Hiller in 1840 – and yet baptism did not imply a clear-cut rejection of Jewish identity. For many musicians of this period, conversion functioned as a legal or professional accommodation rather than a cultural erasure, and its meanings varied widely from individual to individual. As Mark Kroll

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and others have observed, Berlin became a major centre of Jewish conversion in the early nineteenth century, particularly within the Mendelssohn circle.[1] A remarkable number of leading musicians and cultural figures – including Julius Benedict, Stephen Heller, Henri Herz, Ferdinand Hiller, Felix Mendelssohn, Jacques Offenbach and Sigismond Thalberg, as well as violinists such as Ferdinand David, Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst and Joseph Joachim – were born Jewish and later baptised. The same pattern extended beyond music to influential publishers and writers, including Ludwig Börne, Heinrich Heine, Adolf Bernhard Marx and members of the Schlesinger family. What united these figures was not a shared religious outlook, but professional prominence and Jewish birth; their responses to baptism varied widely, ranging from enthusiastic Christian commitment to private Jewish observance beneath a public Christian identity.

Among the most prominent musicians of the nineteenth century who grappled with these questions was Giacomo Meyerbeer. Born to the wealthy Beer family in 1791, he promised his dying grandfather Meyer Wulff that he would remain a faithful Jew, a commitment he later reaffirmed to his mother: 'please accept a promise from me [in my grandfather's name] that I will always live in the religion in which he died'.[2] Meyerbeer's journals document encounters with antisemitism, even at the height of his fame. In January 1841 he wrote: 'Departed for Heidelberg, where I arrived late in the evening. There, at a neighbouring table in the inn, I heard an instance of antisemitism directed against me personally, the first time in a long while'.[3]

Heinrich Heine articulated a different but equally resistant position. Writing of baptism, he observed: 'I do not regard it as important even symbolically, and I shall devote myself all the more to the emancipation of the unhappy members of our race. Still I hold it as a disgrace and stain upon my honour that in order to obtain an office

[1] Mark Kroll, *Ignaz Moscheles and the Changing World of Musical Europe*, Boydell and Brewer Press, Woodbridge (UK), 2014, pp. 320–23.

[2] Quoted in David Conway, *Jewry in Music*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. 165.

[3] Robert Ignatius Letellier (transl. and ed.), *The Diaries of Giacomo Meyerbeer*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Taeneck, NJ, 1999, Vol. 2, p. 32.

in Prussia – in beloved Prussia – I should allow myself to be baptised'.[4] Meyerbeer, in correspondence with Heine, lamented the persistence of discrimination despite conversion: 'what can one do? […] not all the waters of the bath of baptism can restore the little piece of foreskin which is robbed from us on the eighth day of our existence; and whoever has not bled from the operation on the ninth, will nonetheless bleed from it all his life long, even beyond death itself'.[5]

It is against this complex backdrop of artistic ambition and varied responses to Jewish identity that the career of Ignaz Moscheles took place. Born in Prague in 1794, his parents were the cloth-merchant Chaim Moyses and his wife, Klara Lieben. As a child he was known as Isaak. Formed in the musical worlds of Vienna, London and Leipzig, Moscheles occupied a position of unusual authority within nineteenth-century musical life: as a virtuoso pianist admired by Beethoven and others, as a central figure in the concert culture of London, and later as a senior professor at the Leipzig Conservatoire. His *Grande sonate symphonique* for piano duet stands at the intersection of these roles, embodying both his symphonic ambitions and his lifelong commitment to the piano as a medium capable of sustaining the scale, complexity and public address of 'serious music'. Robert Schumann wrote in 1836: 'Moscheles has maintained the dignity of the piano, while so many others lose themselves in empty pyrotechnics; he is one of the few who still really converse with the instrument'.[6]

This commitment to pianism certainly stemmed from Moscheles' early encounters with Beethoven, whom he revered. A chance meeting between the young composer and Beethoven at Artaria's music shop in 1810 he would remember as one of the highlights of his early years in Vienna. Beethoven thought highly enough of Moscheles to commission from him the piano arrangement of his opera *Fidelio*. Moscheles recounts later that Beethoven 'gave me many instructive hints and even played to me such parts as

[4] Letter of 17 December 1823 to Moses Moser, quoted in Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became German*, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp. 199 and 262, fn. 117.

[5] Letellier, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 32.

[6] Robert Schumann, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 4, No. 29, 8 April 1836, pp. 122–24.

he wished to have arranged in a particular manner for the pianoforte'.[7] Moscheles writes in his diary that he left the final manuscript with Beethoven with the words 'Fine mit Gottes Hülfe' ('Completed with God's help') written after the final bars. When Moscheles retrieved it after Beethoven had approved it, Beethoven had added his own inscription: 'O, Mensch, hilf dir selber' ('O, Man, help thyself'). This early engagement with cross-generic transcription, and with the greatest composer in Europe, certainly left its mark.

Later, some in Beethoven's circle maligned Moscheles in the conversation books that Beethoven used to communicate with others when his hearing had deteriorated. 'This Jewish kid Moscheles is making a big stir in London – I can hardly understand it', writes one interlocutor.[8] Later, Schuppanzigh writes: 'The Jew Moscheles is here again; the Jews are making a terrible fuss [over him]'.[9] Beethoven's questions or responses are not known, but certainly the two maintained a good relationship. In 1823, Beethoven loaned Moscheles his Broadwood piano, and in his final years Moscheles acted as an intermediary, securing vital financial support from the London Philharmonic Society – an intervention that earned Beethoven's gratitude and a promise of a new symphony.

Moscheles had extremely close relationships with the major piano-builders of his day and possessed strong opinions about the development of piano technology, as numerous accounts in his diaries and correspondence attest. Although Clementi's pianos were Moscheles' favourites in the late 1820s (he preferred the ease of playing 'repeating notes, skips and full chords' on them because of 'Clementi's more supple mechanism'[10]), Érard's instruments gradually won his affection. In 1828 Érard presented Moscheles with an expensive new grand piano, the playing of which granted Moscheles 'many pleasant hours'.[11] He still had criticisms: 'the tone of the higher notes is somewhat

[7] Ignaz Moscheles (ed.), *Life of Beethoven*, Henry Colbourn, London, 1841, Vol. 1, Preface, pp. xii-xiii.

[8] Karl-Heinz Köhler and Dagmar Beck (eds.), *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig, 1983, Band 3, Hefte 23–37, p. 225, f. 7r.

[9] Quoted in Kroll, *op. cit*., p. 329.

[10] Ignaz Moscheles, *The Life of Moscheles, with Selections from His Diaries and Correspondence*, edited by Charlotte Moscheles, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1873, Vol. I, p. 65.

[11] Letter to Schlesinger, 16 August 1839, quoted in Kroll, *op. cit*., p. 198.

dry, and I find the touch still too heavy'.[12] In 1853 Érard presented Moscheles again with his latest model. This time Moscheles was delighted and wrote in his diary:

> It has the power of an organ and the softness of a flute, with a touch light enough even to satisfy me. As for the lovely case, I think of Schiller's words: 'In dem schönen Körper muss auch eine schöne Seele wohnen' ['In a beautiful body a beautiful soul must dwell']. Really I can act upon it as upon a stringed instrument, and slowly spin out the tone as upon a stringed instrument, and that, too without using the loud pedal; as for the soft pedal I do not require it to produce a pianissimo, and can rely solely on my touch. No wonder I celebrate the new arrival by inviting all my friends to hear it.[13]

The Érard piano used in this recording is from the exact same year as Moscheles' model: 1853.

Moscheles wrote only two 'symphonies'. The first was an orchestral work in C major: his Op. 81 (1829). Any nineteenth-century composer who ventured into the symphony inevitably had to contend with Beethoven's overwhelming legacy and the comparisons it invited. The reception of Moscheles' symphony was muted: it was 'too long', 'deficient in melody', 'too laboured', 'mediocre' and lacked 'unity of design'.[14] Schumann wrote in his diary: 'my opinion of it: without genius, imagination, melody, even beautiful harmonic flow and rhythm are lacking – don't write a second one, Moscheles!'[15] Some of these criticisms must have made an impression, as Moscheles' wife Charlotte wrote that 'although he made some [orchestral] attempts [… he] saw clearly that the piano was always his peculiar and legitimate field. He there confined himself chiefly to pianoforte compositions, and not infrequently introduced into these great orchestral effects'.[16]

His second 'symphony' was exactly that: an original composition with orchestral effects for four hands at the piano and termed *Grande sonate symphonique*. It was

[12] Charlotte Moscheles (ed.), *Recent Music and Musicians as Described in the Diaries and Correspondence of Ignatz Moscheles*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1873, p. 146.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 374.
[14] The reception of this symphony is discussed in Kroll, *op. cit*., pp. 78–81.
[15] Georg Eismann and Gerd Nauhaus (eds.), *Robert Schumann Tagebücher*, Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 335.
[16] Charlotte Moscheles, *op. cit*., p. 175.

composed in Paris in 1845, dedicated to Louis Philippe I and first played at court there with Moscheles' daughter Emily. Unlike his first symphony, this work was received much more favourably. *The Musical World* in London noted that 'the scarcity of original pianoforte duets is proverbial [and the] appearance […] of a work like the present, from the pen of one of the most deservedly eminent composers and pianists of the day, will be hailed with universal pleasure'.[17] The *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in Leipzig was more effusive:

> One recognises immediately, in the very first bars, that the composer's intention was to create a solid and substantial work. And substantial it is from beginning to end! […] The sonata is written in that style which accords honour to four-hand playing; for this reason alone the designation 'symphonique' is justified. But also through the broad conception of the movements, through the themes and their interconnections and relationships to one another, it has acquired a character that carries it over into the domain of the symphony. […] the fourth movement is the one for which we feel the greatest sympathy. The interpolated chorale, 'Lob, Ehr' und Preis' ['Praise, Honour and Glory'], lends it something of grandeur; the technical treatment of the theme is highly artful and effective, the imagination was vividly active, the feeling animated and heartfelt: how, then, could the result fail to be the intended one? […] it is as though one were casting a glance into the romantic world of more recent tone-poems; indeed, we associate this movement less with the composer's earlier period than with his present one, and we count it among the most beautiful works he has produced in his long activity as a creative artist.[18]

Moscheles' chorale resembles 'Lob, Ehr' und Preis' only in its cadential gestures, suggesting not quotation but a deliberately elusive chorale idiom. As in Mendelssohn's symphonic practice, the effect is one of chorale without textual or melodic anchoring – familiar in affect, yet apparently original. This use of chorale in the final movement of the *Grande sonate symphonique*, however, does invite comparison with Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* (Symphony No. 2), completed only a few years earlier. In both works, the

[17] *The Musical World*, 20 June 1845, p. 288.

[18] *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (Leipzig), Vol. 26 (January–June 1847), pp. 41–42.

chorale functions not as a confessional statement but as a structural and rhetorical emblem, associated with collective affirmation and public address. Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* famously integrates symphony and cantata, culminating in chorale-based movements that articulate thanksgiving and moral elevation through the shared language of Lutheran hymnody. Moscheles' treatment is necessarily instrumental and pianistic, and yet the impulse is comparable: the chorale emerges as a stabilising presence within a large-scale architectural design, lending the work an imposing sense of culmination. That Moscheles should do this is hardly surprising given his closeness to Mendelssohn. As a trusted mentor, collaborator and, later, colleague at the Leipzig Conservatoire, Moscheles was deeply attuned to Mendelssohn's musical thinking. Their shared engagement with chorale material reflects not only personal affinity but a broader cultural stance, in which composers of Jewish origin could claim participation in the most public and historically charged strands of German Lutheran musical tradition.

Moscheles' early work as a transcriber for Beethoven and his intimate command of both piano and orchestra are brought together here in a four-movement work of exceptional scope and dense motivic treatment. A slow introduction labelled *Andante patetico* 13 immediately simulates the orchestral sound of *tremolando* strings and divided brass. The *Allegro agitato* that follows is a nervous and tightly argued movement, with suggestions of braying horns and stentorian trombones: Moscheles brings back the opening *Andante* before a coda that combines the two major thematic groups. An *Andante espressivo* 14 combines delicate effects for both soft and loud pedals with a long cantilena for the *primo* performer. The texturally contrasting 'sections' of the orchestra are heard most clearly in this movement through the four hands of the performers on a straight-strung piano such as the Érard. The *Scherzoso alla tedesca antica* 15 was praised by the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* as a masterfully graceful construction,[19] unique in its kind and marked by a cultivated, classically poised humour rather than overt comedy. The finale 16 is the most modern, as reviewers testified: it evokes not only the orchestra but a large chorus and even the organ, in the grandeur of the finale chorale.

[19] *Ibid.*

The emergence of the chorus at the conclusion of Moscheles' *Grande sonate symphonique* points beyond orchestral thinking toward the realm of song. This idea was pursued with particular radicalism by Charles-Valentin Alkan, whose piano works of the 1850s and 1860s openly claim the symphony, concerto, song and even choral rhetoric for the keyboard alone. Moscheles was acquainted with Alkan's work and attended his early Paris performances, while Hiller maintained a close and sustained correspondence with him. In this context, both of the works recorded here can be heard not as isolated curiosities but as part of a shared nineteenth-century preoccupation with the capacity of the piano to suggest singing, drama and ensemble. Where Moscheles builds toward choral resonance within a symphonic frame, and Alkan asserts orchestral and vocal genres outright at the piano, Hiller places theatrical gesture and operatic imagination at the centre of his conception, treating the keyboard as a stage.

Born to a prosperous Jewish family in Frankfurt am Main in 1811, Ferdinand Hiller grew up at a moment of profound cultural transformation. Frankfurt, still shaped by Enlightenment ideals and newly porous to artistic exchange, attracted writers, musicians and intellectuals from across Europe. Hiller's parents quickly recognised his musical gifts, encouraging a thorough education in violin, harmony and counterpoint, and supporting his early public debut at the age of ten. This combination of security, cultivation and openness to the wider world would remain characteristic of his career.

A decisive stage in Hiller's formation came in Weimar, where he studied with Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Mozart's pupil and one of the most influential musical figures of the age. From Hummel, Hiller absorbed a classical sense of proportion and clarity, alongside an intimate understanding of the piano. These lessons were deepened during his Paris years (1828–36), when letters of recommendation granted him entry into the most important salons of the city. There he moved among Berlioz, Cherubini, Chopin, Kalkbrenner, Liszt, Meyerbeer and Rossini, forming friendships that placed him at the centre of European musical life. Financial independence allowed him to pursue composition, performance and teaching without immediate institutional constraint. Operatic success proved elusive – his stage works repeatedly failed to secure lasting footholds – whereas his achievements in oratorio, orchestral music, chamber music and

Ferdinand Hiller

piano repertoire were more substantial and widely respected. As Mendelssohn's deputy in Leipzig in the early 1840s, and later as Kapellmeister in Düsseldorf and Cologne, Hiller became an influential musical administrator, founding orchestras, directing festivals and shaping conservatoire training. Cologne in particular became the centre of his mature activity, where he combined compositional output with pedagogy, journalism and cultural leadership.

It is within this context that Hiller's recollections of Ignaz Moscheles acquire significance. Hiller first encountered Moscheles as a child in Hamburg and remained in contact with him over many decades, later visiting him frequently in Leipzig and preserving their correspondence. His writings portray Moscheles ('the Jewish pianist from Vienna'[20]) as a figure of moral steadiness: dignified, restrained, resistant to sensationalism and serious in his artistic aims. Hiller emphasises Moscheles' command of pianistic tradition from Bach to Hummel, his orchestral imagination at the keyboard and his refusal to trade depth for spectacle, even at the height of virtuoso fame. Placed between the reception of Hiller's *Operette ohne Text* and the culmination of Moscheles' symphonic thinking for four hands, this personal testimony helps illuminate what unites the two composers most deeply: a shared belief that the piano could bear the weight of a kind of serious musical thought more usually associated with the public genres of opera and symphony.

Hiller's *Operette ohne Text* is conceived not as a loose suite of character pieces, but as a fully articulated operatic dramaturgy translated into pianistic terms. Its succession of movements follows a recognisably theatrical logic, drawing on conventions familiar from German Romantic opera and the *opéra-comique* culture Hiller absorbed during his formative Paris years. What is remarkable is not merely the presence of operatic types – romances, choruses, ensembles, marches – but the consistency with which they are deployed to suggest dramatic pacing and scene-by-scene progression all without recourse to text, singers, or stage.

[20] Ferdinand Hiller, *Erinnerungsblätter*, DuMont-Schauberg, Cologne, 1884, p. 103.

The 'Ouverture' [1] functions as a theatrical curtain-raiser. Its layered entries and cumulative build-up suggest the gradual assembling of an orchestra with the sounds of horns first in the *secondo* performer followed by the full sound of the orchestra as the full range of the piano is used to generate the illusion of a public space. The opening 'Romanze des Mädchens' [2] introduces a female voice: an operatic romance in the tradition of the reflective solo number, shaped by *cantabile* melody and restrained accompaniment. It is followed abruptly by a 'Polterarie' [3], a term already laden with meaning. In nineteenth-century usage, *Polterei* implies noise, commotion, even violence – a crowd-scene rather than a character portrait. Hiller here evokes the operatic 'tumult ensemble', in which individual identities are momentarily submerged within collective motion.

With the 'Jägerchor und Ensemble' [4], the operatic reference becomes explicit. The hunting chorus was among the most recognisable topics of early nineteenth-century opera, associated with masculinity, ritual and communal identity – most famously in Weber's *Der Freischütz*. That Hiller's number later circulated independently in a Viennese arrangement for men's chorus with three horns, complete with a newly supplied text, confirms how fully its operatic identity was understood to be encoded in the original piano version: the 'original' chorus was already there, latent.

A second lyrical axis is formed by the 'Romanze des Jünglings' [5], symmetrically balancing the earlier romance with a young male lead, followed by a 'Duettino' [6], where the conversational textures and heightened agitation suggest encounter, negotiation or emotional friction. Here the piano duet functions quite literally as dialogue, with musical gestures shaped as responses, interruptions and overlaps. The dramatic centre of gravity arrives with the 'Trinklied mit Chor' [7], a number rooted in long-established comic-operatic convention. Drinking songs with chorus were channels for social excess and bodily humour, and Hiller exploits this tradition fully. He pushes it further with a notorious *Katzenjammerlichamente* – a mock-lament whose hybrid title combines the German *Katzenjammer* (a hangover, literally 'cat's wail') with an Italianate *lamento*.

At this point a 'Marsch' [8] functions like a sudden change of scene. Beginning as if heard from a distance, it advances slowly into the foreground, cutting across the

drunken chaos with the arrival of external order – an operatic device familiar from comic and semi-serious stage works, where the march signals a shift in social frame and dramatic stakes. The subsequent 'Terzett' 9 restores ensemble complexity, allowing three imagined voices to interact simultaneously, before the 'Frauenchor' 10 redirects attention to the operatic idea of a female chorus. A 'Tanz' 11 follows, reintroducing communal movement and social play, and the work concludes with a 'Schlussgesang' 12 that functions as a true operatic finale and quotes the overture in an elegant formal move. Significantly, the cycle ends with 'chorus' rather than abstract instrumental closure, reaffirming the operatic orientation of the work.

From its first appearances in the mid-1860s, Ferdinand Hiller's *Operette ohne Text* provoked a strikingly consistent response across different musical centres: listeners and critics immediately recognised its operatic ambition and yet struggled to situate it comfortably within existing performance contexts. The work was not really misunderstood; rather, it was understood too clearly as something that both claimed and withheld opera.

A Cologne notice from the earliest performances describes how its overture and succession of arias, ensembles and choruses 'allow the imagination wide scope to improvise a dramatic action', praising the piece as a product of 'genuine artistic humour' and recording unanimous and enthusiastic applause.[21] Here, the absence of text was not perceived as a lack but as an invitation: the piano was understood as a theatrical medium, capable of prompting imagined drama without supplying it. Later English criticism makes explicit just how far this theatrical imagination could extend. Writing in 1875, a reviewer singled out the *Operette ohne Text* as the most extreme expression of Hiller's belief in the capacity of music to represent definite situations and sensations. As evidence, the writer points to the *Katzenjammerlichamente* – a term he glosses as evoking 'the unpleasant sensation vulgarly known as "hot coppers", or, in more polite language, the disagreeable nausea consequent upon a drinking bout'.[22] That such a scene

[21] *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung*, No. 22, 27 May 1863, p. 173.

[22] *Monthly Musical Record*, 1 April 1875, p. 53. 'Hot coppers' referred to the dry mouth and throat that a hangover can bring; the sufferer would then 'cool his coppers' by allaying his thirst.

could be so graphically suggested without text or stage action was offered as proof that Hiller had carried representational ambition 'to the extreme verge', implying that no situation lay beyond the expressive reach of music.

Elsewhere, however, this very specificity generated unease. Writing from Paris, Charles Beauquier described the *Operette ohne Text* as charming and favourably received, and yet he remarked that it 'hardly fits into a concert',[23] a judgement echoed in Berlin, where the work was said to struggle to sustain dramatic tension across its length,[24] despite receiving respectful applause and careful performances. It appears to have been performed as a chamber work as well as a concert piece. The British Jewish composer Charles Salaman, for example, remembered Hiller playing it with Clara Schumann in concert, and with himself in smaller gatherings.[25] An English review from 1864 questioned whether the succession of 'imaginary scenes' could generate the unity implied by the title, while nonetheless acknowledging the elegance of individual numbers – especially the overture and the terzetto – and valuing the work as an original contribution to the piano-duet repertoire that demanded sensibility and expressive power rather than virtuosity.[26]

From a very different ideological position, Edward Dannreuther – writing later from within a Wagnerian critique of the Mendelssohn–Schumann tradition – cited Hiller's *Operette ohne Text* as a telling example of operatic desire displaced into instrumental form: an 'opera' invoked but withheld, its theatrical energies redirected rather than denied.[27] That such a work could serve simultaneously as an object of admiration, irritation and polemic underscores how clearly its premise was grasped. Taken together, these responses reveal a reception history shaped less by misunderstanding than by productive friction. Audiences and critics recognised that Hiller had written neither a transcription nor a genre parody but an original work that adopted operatic categories.

[23] *Leipziger Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, No. 20, 16 May 1866, p. 161.

[24] *Leipziger Musikalisches Wochenbuch*, Vol. 1, No. 27, 1 July 1870, p. 427.

[25] Charles Salaman, 'Pianists of the Past', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 170, No. 1031, September 1901, p. 329.

[26] *The Athenaeum*, No. 1900, 26 March 1864, pp. 444–45.

[27] Chris Walton (ed.), *Richard Wagner's Essays on Conducting: A New Translation with Critical Commentary*, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, UK/University of Rochester Press, New York, 2021, p. 93.

The *Operette ohne Text* asks the piano to carry overtly theatrical situations – including, quite literally, drunken excess and its aftermath – without recourse to words or stage. The work is an opera conceived for the imagination, and its reception history thus mirrors its aesthetic strategy. It asks the piano to bear the weight of operatic thinking, and its listeners – whether delighted, perplexed or sceptical – were compelled to reckon with that demand.

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 *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.

In 2018 he was recognised with a Music and Opera Singers Trust Achievement Award (MAA) for contribution to the arts in Australia. In 2022 he was an Artist in Residence at the Melbourne Recital Centre and in 2024 was Artist in Residence with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In 2023 he was named Limelight's Critics' Choice Australian Artist of the Year. He is an Associate Professor at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.
http://erinhelyard.com

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, the 'Alps and Himalayas of pianism' (Hugh Macdonald), the demanding complexities of Boulez, Xenakis or Ferneyhough, the poetic miniatures of Schumann or a previously undiscovered Beethoven bagatelle, 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 a large number of 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 other French masters, renowned and neglected, including Erik Satie, Alexandre Boëly (Toccata Classics TOCC 0471), Albéric Magnard and Guy Ropartz (Toccata Classics TOCC 0326).

She was a founding member of the contemporary-music ensemble AustraLYSIS and the Sydney Alpha Ensemble and has performed with the Australia 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, 2022) a duo flute-and-piano disc with Laura Chislett, *100 Years of Australian Flute Music* (Wirripang 2025) 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 latter in *Limelight* (February 2020) noted 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'. A second volume of Boëly is in preparation.

Photograph: Brett Boardman

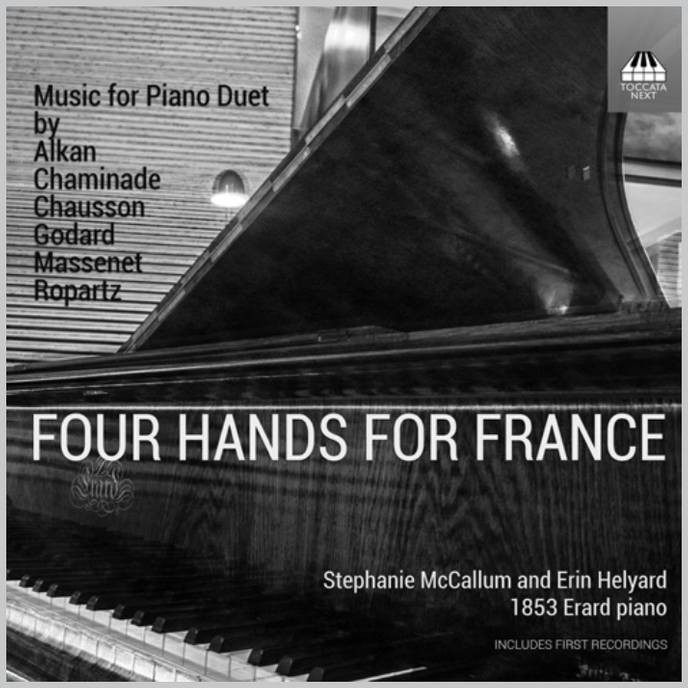
Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard in duo

Formed in 2014 to explore duo repertoire on historic keyboard instruments, the McCallum/Helyard duo has performed in concert in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and London. Their first album, on the Dutch label TRPTK, *Le Prophète* (2016), attracted warm reviews, a critic for *Early Music* writing of their 'breathtaking performances': 'Overall, this is no doubt one of the most riveting discs I have heard all year and I rate it five stars for performance, choice of repertory, instruments, recording quality and presentation (stylish and engaging liner notes)'.

Four Hands for France, their first Toccata Next recording on this 1853 Érard piano (TOCN 0007), was well received by the critics. Writing for *Fanfare*, James Harrington found it 'a refreshingly original program of French piano duet pieces. […] McCallum's booklet essay is a model of what I like best, great notes on each work with musical examples included where appropriate. The piano restorer, technician, and tuner are all given credit for the exceptional jobs they did on the Érard. The recording itself is state of the art. If French piano duet music from Fauré, Bizet, Debussy, and Ravel appeals to you, there is no reason not to add this disc to your collection. It will remain on my active listening stack for the foreseeable future'. For the website MusicWeb International, William Kreindler went further: 'The only word for the performances of Stephanie McCallum and Erin Halyard is "perfection". […] In terms of musicianship, coordination of performance, and sympathy for the repertoire, this recording is a stand-out and I can easily imagine the composers themselves applauding it if they were here today'.

Writing on the website WTJU of their second album, *Hour Hands at Home* (Toccata Next TOCN 0031), featuring music by Moscheles, Wagner, Mendelssohn, Horsley, Boëly and Holmès, Ralph Graves felt that 'Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard make a great team. They play with one accord, and the music benefits. […] The pair bring out the Romantic expression in these works, without over-doing it'.

The ‘Four Hands’ Series on Toccata Next



TOCN 0007

‘The only word for the performances of Stephanie McCallum and Erin Halyard is “perfection”. […] In terms of musicianship, coordination of performance, and sympathy for the repertoire, this recording is a stand-out and I can easily imagine the composers themselves applauding it if they were here today.’

—William Kreindler, MusicWeb International

TOCN 0031

‘Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard make a great team. They play with one accord, and the music benefits. There were times when I couldn’t tell if one or two people were playing. The pair bring out the Romantic expression in these works, without over-doing it. An interesting audio recreation of a time gone by. And a revival of some sadly neglected repertoire.’

Ralph Graves, WTJU

Recorded on 8 and 9 November 2025 at Recital Hall West, Conservatorium of Music, Sydney
Piano: Érard, 1853
Piano technicians: Frits Janmaat (restoration), Curtis Wilkinson (technician and tuner)
Recording engineer: Jonathan Palmer
Recording producer: Ralph Lane OAM
Editing: Ralph Lane OAM and Stephanie McCallum
Mastering: Bob Scott

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Erin Helyard and Stephanie McCallum

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

Booklet essay: Erin Helyard
Cover design: David M. Baker (david@notneverknow.com)
Typesetting and layout: Kerrypress, St Albans

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

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FOUR HANDS ON STAGE

Ferdinand HILLER
1811–85
***Operette ohne Text*, Op. 106** (publ. 1864)* **45:49**

1	No. 1	Ouverture	7:39
2	No. 2	Romanze des Mädchens	3:43
3	No. 3	Polterarie	2:54
4	No. 4	Jägerchor und Ensemble	3:41
5	No. 5	Romanze des Jünglings	3:01
6	No. 6	Duettino	2:39
7	No. 7	Trinklied mit Chor	4:02
8	No. 8	Marsch	3:41
9	No. 9	Terzett	3:13
10	No. 10	Frauenchor	4:06
11	No. 11	Tanz	4:20
12	No. 12	Schlussgesang	2:50

Ignaz MOSCHELES
1794–1870
***Grande Sonate Symphonique* No. 2**
in B minor, Op. 112 (1845)** **33:15**

13	I	*Andante patetico — Allegro agitato*	10:30
14	II	*Andante espressivo*	6:21
15	III	*Scherzo alla tedesca antica* (*Allegretto*)	5:00
16	IV	*Andante patetico — Allegro con brio*	11:24

TT **79:05**

Stephanie McCallum (primo) and Erin Helyard (secondo),
1853 Érard Piano

* FIRST RECORDING
** FIRST RECORDING
ON A PERIOD PIANO