

VIOLIN ETUDES OF THE 19TH CENTURY IN THE ASPECT OF THE EVOLUTION OF PERFORMING MASTERY

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SUMMARY. The article examines the role and significance of violin etudes of the 19th century in the evolution of European performing art. The contribution of the figure of N. Paganini and his creative work in the process of transition between the eras of classicism and romanticism has been determined. It has been noted that the artistic and aesthetic views of the Genoese virtuoso, which significantly exceeded the capabilities of his contemporaries, reoriented the didactic material. On the example of the etude collections of P. Rode and J. Dont – representatives of schools of various musical arts – it has been found that the opuses of the educational direction usually reflect the real state of performance of a certain historical period, the complex process of coexistence of the established tradition and innovations, reassessment of ideas about the semantic and technical potential of the violin.

Keywords: violin etude, violin performance, 19th century, 24 Caprices in the Form of Etudes op. 22 by P. Rode, Etudes and Caprices op. 35 by J. Dont.

Introduction

The 19th century was a period of significant evolutionary transformations for violin art and performance in particular. The amount of the accumulated information turned into the quality of new ideas, means of expression, playing techniques. Despite the ramifications of its structure in terms of specializations, schools, traditions, styles, etc., musical art is a holistic phenomenon, therefore meaningful changes made by a person-artist in any of its components resonate with other of them. In this sense, it is impossible to pass by the

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figure of N. Paganini and his multi-vector creative activity, which gave an impetus to the re-evaluation of the existing ideas about the artistic and technical capabilities of the violin. The power of his talent influenced related performing areas, such as the piano one in the persons of F. Liszt and A. Chopin; N. Paganini became a kind of symbol of instrumental virtuosity of the era of romanticism as a whole. The outstanding Genoese played the role of an innovator, relying on the existing theoretical and practical basis, built by more than one generation of predecessors. In his creative work, he imitated not only the experience of Italian musicians. Even in his youth, he was impressed by the playing of the Polish violinist A. Duranowski; after getting acquainted with *Arte del Violino* by P. Locatelli, N. Paganini discovered new horizons of performing and compositional creativity². In addition, N. Paganini's concertos are influenced by the style of G. Viotti, R. Kreutzer and P. Rode, whose compositions the Italian virtuoso performed in his youth³. The beginning of the era of romanticism was characterized by a certain overload of music with certain techniques, which quite often came to the fore. It is not by chance that certain times of the first half of the 19th century are associated with the art of virtuoso performers. However, the essence of N. Paganini's contribution lies in expanding the horizontal and vertical limits of the instrument's coloristic capabilities while preserving the priority of the musical content which they serve. An important difference between the Genoese and other virtuoso contemporaries was the "integrity" of the nature of his expression: the physiological structure of the body, talent, temperament, personality multiplied by favorable external conditions for his activity ultimately determined a harmonious unity of N. Paganini and his creative work. For these reasons, his playing of his own compositions was always more successful than the performance of P. Rode's or R. Kreutzer's pieces, although the Italian violinist tried to personalize them.

The evolutionary "leap" created a natural conflict between the tradition formed over many decades and the innovations introduced by N. Paganini. He began performing his 24 Caprices op. 1 as early as 1802 (completed in 1817, and first published in 1819), while 7 years before that (1795) J. Haydn had finished his Symphony No. 104, four years later (1806) the Violin concerto by L. Beethoven was played for the first time, and the premiere of *The Freeshooter* by C. Weber would take place only in 1821. The re-evaluation

² Maiko Kawabata, *Paganini: the "demonic" virtuoso*, Boydell Press, 2013, p. 4-5; Philippe Borer, *The twenty-four Caprices of Niccolò Paganini: Their significance for the history of violin playing and the music of the Romantic era*, Diss. University of Tasmania, 1995, p. 9, 85, 92.

³ Taras Yaropud. "Innovation of Niccolò Paganini as composer-violinist and performance interpretation of his instrumental works." *Humanities Science Current Issues*, 6(35), 2021, p. 76.

of artistic and aesthetic ideas required time for their introduction into musical everyday life, the identification of ways to master them, that is, for the crystallization and establishment of new knowledge and experience as an integral tradition. The talented contemporaries (H. Ernst, H. Vieuxtemps) and followers of N. Paganini “in spirit” (H. Wieniawski, P. Sarasate) took over the baton from him and moved in the vanguard of violin performance art, while other musicians needed a “guidance” of a practical nature, which various opuses of etudes and caprices for violin became. Later, they were joined by another tool for skill development – an exercise.

The essential difference between these types of instructional material lies in their orientation. The exercise is aimed at forming, consolidating, and developing the playing apparatus, more precisely, the muscular and auditory sensations of a certain technique, therefore its typical features are the obligatory multiple repetition of certain rhythmic-intonation formulas and usually the absence of clear dramaturgy and emotional coloring. The etude or caprice, on the contrary, is a full-fledged musical composition that has a complete form with a content, although, often, very simple. In other words, the etude simulates a real playing situation involving one or more types of techniques. Unlike collections of exercises that appeared much later in the 19th century, etudes had already been widely represented in violin literature even before N. Paganini. Some of them, such as *Études ou caprices* by R. Kreutzer, became an integral part of the development of the technique of both hands. Almost every violinist on the way to becoming a professional “encounters” piece from this opus. At the same time, it is a “child of its time”, and therefore the playing situations modelled in its pieces are oriented towards the relevant tradition of the era of classicism. The technical passage in the concerto by G. Viotti or P. Rode is the unfolding of a horizontal line, while for N. Paganini it is a carrier of emotional color aimed at revealing the fullness of the sound of the entire register space.

To satisfy the mobility of the “sensual palette” of the new romantic style, violinists had to obtain suitable material for practice, which would allow them to master one or several types of technique holistically: to develop muscle-auditory automatism in connection with the color content determined by the musical form and genre characteristics. The etudes of the 19th century (including 24 caprices of N. Paganini) together with a few samples from the previous periods make up an anthology of a complex of violin expressive means and, at the same time, become a kind of “guide” for its gradual mastery; the entire history of evolutionary transformations is reflected in them. For these reasons, in some opuses the features of a mature romantic style can be quite clearly traced, in others – only hints, with a strong position of the traditions of classicism. P. Rode and J. Dont are among the authors of

collections representing the outlined directions. Although their opuses have repeatedly become the objects of research⁴, the consideration of the place and role of these compositions precisely from the point of view of historical processes and the development of performance as a whole is still not fully revealed. To back up the statements put forward, let us briefly analyze some of the legacy of these composers.

Results

The 24 Caprices in the Form of Etudes op. 22 (1819) by P. Rode (1774–1830) is one of the fundamental opuses in the training of a professional violinist. The content and time of creation of the collection is a vivid example of the reflection of creative transformations on the pages of a musical composition. P. Rode, on the one hand, was the bearer of the classical tradition (inherited from his teacher G. Viotti), on the other hand, he was a supporter of the trends of the coming era. His violin concertos became a reference point for the young N. Paganini, who also highly appreciated P. Rode's playing. The French violinist himself was familiar with the 24 caprices of the Genoese virtuoso. The influence of R. Kreutzer's (a colleague at the Paris Conservatory) collection on P. Rode's opus should not be overlooked either, in the approach to the gradual complication of the material and its structuring. It is also worth noting the role of tonality in the cycle of the French violinist – the author presents all 12 major-minor pairs, which to some extent distinguishes P. Rode's opus from others.

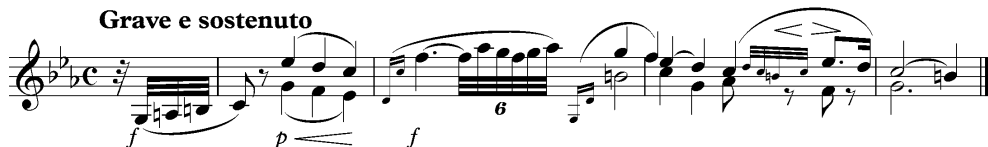
The 24 Caprices in the Form of Etudes are more moving compositions; several of them are written in the rather lively tempos of Vivo (No. 10), Vivace (No. 15), Vivacissimo (No. 17) and Presto (Nos. 18, 22). Against the background of the fast-paced narrative in Nos. 2, 8, 10, 18, 22, where the predominance of general forms of movement emphasizes obvious parallels with baroque and classical concertos, the romantic beginning can be seen in interspersed *fp*, *fz*, as well as in a mobile change of dynamics.

⁴ Semi Yang, *Violin Etudes: A Pedagogical Guide*, University of Cincinnati, 2006, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=ucin1146083212 (Accessed 5 Sept. 2023); Mary Helen Tung, *The pedagogical contributions of Rode's caprices to Violin mastery*, Diss. University of Texas, 2001, <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/1673> (accessed 9 Sept., 2023); Daniel Kaplunas, *Pedagogical analysis of Jakob Dont's 24 Etudes and Caprices, Op. 35*, Diss. University of Georgia, 2008, https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/kaplunas_daniel_200805_dma.pdf (accessed 9 Sept., 2023); Daniella Greene, *A Pedagogical Analysis of Select Etudes from Jakob Dont's 24 Etudes and Caprices, Op. 35*, Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects, 2018, https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/703 (accessed 9 Sept., 2023).

The interaction of these components enables the realization of various emotional layers, although, often, the accentuation is aimed at highlighting the counterpoint voice hidden in the passage figurations. Sharp changes in the direction of the melody with the help of register jumps, arpeggiated moves and “cross” motifs, the presence of syncopated “beats” are not devoid of a virtuoso nature, but they are quite “restrained”, elegant. Similar features can be traced in the major Nos. 15, 17 and 21. The range of images is different, because techniques of sound production, such as *spiccato*, *martele* and *marcato*, involve the corresponding color content. In this sense, gracefulness acquires different sound colors and shades owing to the involvement of a non-homogeneous bow stroke palette.

A few etudes in moderate tempos are also worth attention, for example, *Andante* (No. 16), which is more focused on the trill technique. The author chooses material for work on it that is tonally contrasting with the general homogeneity of the texture: dotted rhythm, ligated passages, atmosphere of *dolce*⁵. The variability of the alternation and combination of these components allows the trill different semantic properties, which in some conditions resemble G. Tartini’s “Devil’s Trills” and in others – L. Beethoven’s Violin Concerto. Similar hereditary connections can be traced in No. 20. The composition of two sections unites different historical traditions. The first of them, marked by two voices with cadenza utterances-interjections, resembles the second movements of compositions or cadenzas of the baroque and classicism eras (see E.g. 1).

E.g. 1



P. Rode, 24 Caprices in the Form of Etudes op. 22, No. 20, m. 1-4.

The second, rapid, embodies the aesthetics of violin art of N. Paganini. Its structure is very simple: long ligated passages by thirty-seconds, formed with the help of repeated playing of one sound (in the spirit of *gruppetto*) and its movement along the sounds of the rhetorical figure of a “cross”, using only the G string (see E.g. 2).

⁵ It is interesting that the rhythmic-intonation structure of the motif of the opening phrase of this piece found an almost literal reflection in the main theme of the third movement of the Duet for violin and viola by L. Spohr, who, as it is known, was the successor of P. Rode’s compositional style.

Grave e sostenuto

sostenuto e forte; segue sopra una corda

P. Rode, 24 Caprices in the Form of Etudes op. 22, No. 20, m. 22-23.

At first sight, this is a typical exercise, like those that could be found later, for example, in the first book by H. Schradieck; its connection with R. Kreutzer's Ninth Etude is also quite tangible. At the same time, the conditions created by the composer ensure the meaning-making of the "fast" technique – it becomes the carrier of the sound image, while in the previously considered examples, one or another technique, regardless of its brightness or complexity of performance, "plays" for the general musical image; it is a "brick" in the general system of means.

A special place in the collection is occupied by two-movement compositions, of which there are seven in the opus. In this sense, the author pays tribute to the baroque tradition, because it is the first movement that is slow. However, the content of the cantilenas is more classical – they act as a kind of introduction, an "opera arioso" to the more active second section. In addition to tempo, long vocalized phrases, virtuosic movement in registers, *Cantabile* (from No. 1), *Adagio* (from No. 9) and *Arioso* (from No. 19) are characterized by ornate passages of the improvisational type. *Siciliano* (from No. 4) appears differently: the name characterizes the filling of the etude and the typical features of the corresponding dance – a sad atmosphere, a characteristic rhythmic pattern, a minor scale. *Adagio* (from No. 6) and *Adagio con espressione* (from No. 14) are close in this mood, but are more excited, which is manifested in impulsive passage figurations with small durations. The final *Introduzione* (from No. 24) stands separately with two contrasting themes. The first of them, determined with a clear dramatic beginning, is embodied in the form of chord moves, sharp dotted lines and short *staccato* arpeggios. It is contrasted with a second, refined and softer theme of ornate passages with the author's remark "sostenuto". The second movements of the outlined etudes are generally homogeneous in content. The selected play model and the corresponding visual characteristic are preserved throughout the caprice, sometimes changing their configuration.

An important role here is played by the variety of nuances, which quite often form the “question – answer” structure, and other elements of musical enrichment of the composition (sequences, syncopations, tonal deviations, etc.). The similar properties bring these sections closer to R. Kreutzer’s samples.

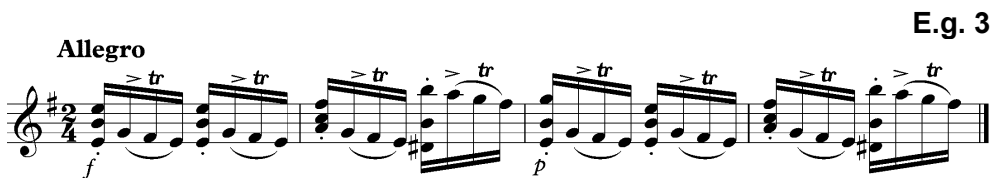
P. Rode, as an outstanding violinist of his time, involved various types of techniques of both hands in his caprices. The author harmoniously introduces double stops and chords, enriching their sound with various bow strokes; cantilenas are not devoid of improvisational fioritures. There are also quite spectacular solutions present, such as successive wide interval jumps (No. 21), polyphonic texture (No. 23), broken passage figurations in complex tonal conditions (No. 13), etc. It would not be a mistake to consider P. Rode’s opus a collection of artistic plays, because its content, when performed properly, overshadows the instructional component. It is impossible not to notice the presence of a romantic “spirit” in the pieces: dynamics, texture, palette of expressive means allows the author to convey various emotional states. At the same time, in this approach of P. Rode, a certain “caution” inherent in the classical school can be seen. The author uses the same techniques as N. Paganini. In the creative work of both the artists, they serve as the embodiment of figurative content, but P. Rode, unlike the Genoese, does not reveal their potential precisely as an independent carrier of semantic characteristics until the end. The music of the 24 Caprices in the Form of Etudes is elegant and decisive, calm, and refined, contemplative and brilliant, but all these features manifest themselves with aristocratic restraint. Although it is not the task of the article to compare the style of P. Rode and N. Paganini, understanding the differences allows us to understand the difference in the aesthetic ideas of the violinists: the attention of classical composers (G. Viotti, P. Rode, R. Kreutzer) “was attracted by the use of not so much ‘colors’ in the compositions, as that of the ‘lines’ <...> They are graphic artists, Paganini is a master of painting”⁶. An example of the established tradition of the post-Paganini period is another fundamental collection – the Etudes and Caprices op. 35 (1849) by J. Dont (1815–1888).

According to the tradition of the genre, each of the etudes contains one or more technical approaches. For example, Nos. 1, 4, 9, 23 are aimed at improving the skill of playing chords, while combining with other means of expression (in No. 4 – with *ricochet*, No. 9 – with trill, No. 23 – with *staccato*). Similar tasks can be traced in No. 10 (*saltando*) and No. 19 (*détaché*), where the consonances are laid out in an arpeggiated form. The purposefulness of compositions Nos. 2, 3, 5, 20 is based on the mobility of the fingers, the

⁶ Taras Yaropud. “Innovation of Nicolo Paganini as composer-violinist and performance interpretation of his instrumental works.” *Humanities Science Current Issues*, 6(35), 2021, p. 76.

change of the positions and the bow strokes of *détaché*, *spiccato*. The author does not neglect the complex legato stroke, which in Nos. 7, 17, 22 coexists with tasks for the left hand: strengthening the fingers, developing their dexterity, quality of transitions; in Nos. 8, 12, 14, 18 and 21 – with the technique of playing double stops. Several etudes focus on working on melismatic: No. 6 is dedicated to working on the mordent, and No. 15 – on the trill. No. 11 is interesting in its content, where you need to lead the melody in conditions of a mixed composition (with chords), which is necessary for the performance of polyphony. The final No. 24 – “Fantasia” – is noticeably different from the numbers of the collection. The diverse texture of the composition combines almost all the skills learned/improved earlier. According to D. Kaplunas, the work on this composition should be started after working out all the previous 23 etudes⁷.

The peculiarity of op. 35 by J. Dont, in contrast to P. Rode’s work, lies in an approach to the structure of each piece. Their structure follows the format of N. Paganini’s Caprices. Regardless of the approach, tempo, texture, the author organizes the form of the etude based on the principle of “core – development”, that is, a certain rhythmic-intonation formula, stated at the beginning, gets development without losing its key properties. It is known that this approach dates to the creative work of J. S. Bach and, in fact, is a feature of the instructional etude and even exercises in general, because the core in this case is the playing technique itself. For example, the entire material of No. 9 op. 35 by J. Dont is built on the repeated structures of one motif of four sixteenths, where the first is a chord, and the others form a ligated gradual descending movement with a trill interspersed in the middle (see E. g. 3).



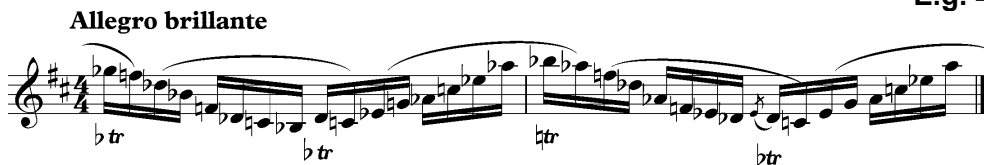
J. Dont, Etudes and Caprices op. 35, No. 9, m. 1-4.

Undoubtedly, a similar feature can be seen in R. Kreutzer’s etudes, but J. Dont, like N. Paganini, goes beyond the boundaries of “dry” training, positioning the technique as a meaningful element. In the process of

⁷ Daniel Kaplunas, *Pedagogical analysis of Jakob Dont’s 24 Etudes and Caprices, Op. 35*, Diss. University of Georgia, 2008, p. 7, https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/kaplunas_daniel_200805_dma.pdf (accessed 9 Sept., 2023).

revealing this potential, the author moves in two directions. The **first** is the use of tonal, dynamic and tempo variety. Unlike R. Kreutzer or P. Rode, J. Dont, choosing rather “light” keys at the beginning (19 of the 24 numbers in the collection have no more than two key signs), constantly deviates from them during the etude. Sometimes countersigns may appear before each note in 4/4 measure filled exclusively with sixteenths (No. 22; see E.g. 4).

E.g. 4



J. Dont, *Etudes and Caprices op. 35, No. 22, m. 24-25.*

In No. 2, the thematic core of one measure (2 motifs of 8 notes each) deviates 4 times into a new key within 4 measures (see E. g. 5) at one of the moments of development.

E.g. 5



J. Dont, *Etudes and Caprices op. 35, No. 2, m. 21-24.*

Dynamics, particularly its flexibility, is quite often determined by the musical material itself: the wave-like movement of the melody (Nos. 3, 17), textural heterogeneity (Nos. 12, 15), timbre parity (Nos. 5, 20), etc. The situation is similar with the tempo. The increased complexity of a certain fragment, the end of a phrase/section, tonal prerequisites, as well as the author’s remarks build natural zones of slowing down, speeding up, freezing, etc. All the above-mentioned elements make it possible to show the semantic variability of one technique. To reveal more colors of the palette, the author uses the **second** way – an attempt to reveal the full power of the involved technique, its boundary capabilities, “saturation”, including using a wide register and timbre range.

Conclusion

The present small analysis of the etude collections by P. Rode and J. Dont clearly demonstrates the trends in the development of performing traditions of the relevant time within the 19th century. P. Rode, whose compositions had a significant impact on N. Paganini's professional growth, got acquainted with the latter's creative work already as an established artist, teacher, and composer. J. Dont's youth and development as a violinist, on the contrary, coincided with the flowering of the Italian virtuoso's creative work. For these reasons, the caprices of P. Rode pay tribute to the classical school to a greater extent, although they do not reject the trends of the romantic style, which were fully reflected in the Etudes of J. Dont. In addition, the considered opuses to some extent reflect one of the features of any evolutionary transformation. P. Rode's collection can be considered the highest point of development of etudes of the classical era. These are full-fledged artistic plays with bright dramaturgy, in which the author harmoniously combines various techniques, skillfully introducing an instructional component. The legacy of J. Dont, on the contrary, is one of the first examples of didactic material of the post-Paganini period. Etudes by P. Rode and J. Dont have become indispensable companions of musicians on the way to mastering the skill, although they are only individual samples of the voluminous legacy in this genre. F. David, C. Beriot, H. Vieuxtemps, J. Hubay, J.-F. Mazas, E. Sauret, H. Schradieck and many other artists of the 19th century created their own collections of etudes and caprices, thus forming a powerful performance thesaurus – the basis of the mastery of a modern violinist.

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