

The Potpourri as Gateway Drug to Classical Music (Improvisation)

Introduction

Since my student days historical improvisation has been my main research subject, with a focus on practical applications for melodic instruments. In the last few years I have been on expeditions outside of my usual, earlier performance habitat, venturing into the 19th century. First, I prepared a lecture studying around two hundred 19th-century instrumental methods for melodic instruments. In them, I argued, were hidden puzzle pieces of improvisational pedagogy, which through the lens of improvisation pedagogy for keyboard instruments could be used for learning improvisation on melodic instruments now. I found five key areas for improvisation: interpretative freedom, ornamentation, church music improvisation, 'Galant' improvisation (such as preludes, cadenzas, etc.) and free improvisation (or fantasy).

For my lectorate research project I focused on the free improvisation area, specifically the Potpourri. In the past this form was seen as the improvisation type for 'the masses'. Its use of famous melodies and its flexibility to move on in case of boredom or get the most juice out of a good moment, depending on the audience's reactions, makes it an interesting form for present day concerts as well. Furthermore, its simple, additive form and basis in fully written out or memorised material mean that this is a pedagogically fruitful starting point for musicians wanting to learn to improvise in a classical or romantic music style.

The research thus consisted of three parts. Part 1 was devoted to learning to improvise in a 19th-century style, getting to grips with the Potpourri form and analysing historical examples, methods and descriptions. Part 2 focused on translating this research into a pedagogy that could function as a gateway for musicians to make their first steps in classical music improvisation, but also be a challenging approach for more experienced improvisers handling various improvisation techniques at once. Part 3 was devoted to realising a concert format where the Potpourri is a gateway for an audience into classical music, with interactive elements and musical elements that adapt in situ to the situation.

This paper will mostly focus on the results of Part 1, starting with a definition and historical records, analyses and approaches. Part 2 and 3 are discussed in a brief research report at the end.

What is a Potpourri?

The term potpourri was originally used in the 18th century for collections of songs or instrumental music which were sometimes linked thematically yet more often unconnected pieces bundled together under this name. From the end of the 18th century the term is mostly connected to a collection of famous melodies, especially taken from operas. More often than not these melodies would receive one or more variations. It was a standard part of 19th-century orchestral and military repertoire. It might also include musical effects such as a post horn, earthquake, etc.¹

Potpourri is the word used by Czerny, but other designations were used as well, like Fantasia², Capriccio,³ Souvenir, Reminiscence, Beauties⁴ and Mélange, Hommage, Paraphrase, Rondo, Rondoletto, Variations, Divertimento, Nocturne many others.⁵

¹ Oxford Music Online, *Potpourri* (accessed 29-12-2025)

² Czerny, Practical Composition School

³ Vjdic, Roberta, *Carl Czerny, Fantasie als Potpourri* (2017)

⁴ The Harmonicon, p. ?

⁵ "Titles such as "Potpourri," "Reminiscence," and "Souvenir" became more common. These were based on

Czerny's description of the improvised Potpourri

Czerny's *Systematische Anleitung* was well-read already in the 19th-century.⁶ It is therefore the starting point of this discussion. Another description can also be found in Czerny's Practical Composition School.⁷

The Potpourri is a result of 'the desire of the public to possess the beautiful melodies of favourite Operas, tastefully and connectedly strung together.'⁸ Although, any melody that is loved by the audience can be used. The stringing together is an important element, as otherwise this process would result in a *Quodlibet*, which Czerny argues is apparently 'destitute of merit'.

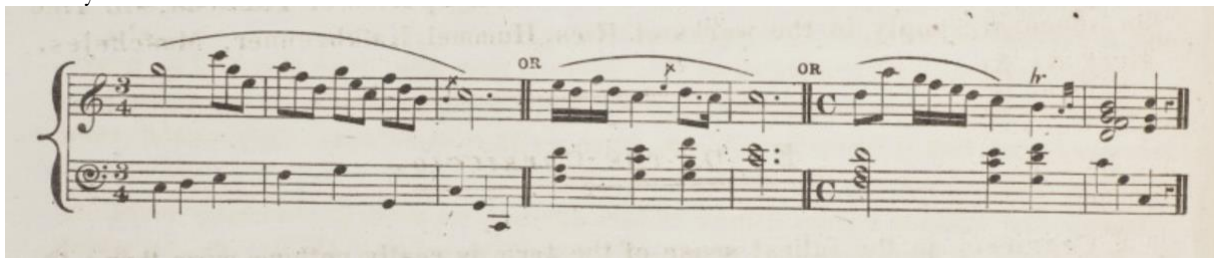
Fashion & audience

The Potpourri is also a very fashionable type of improvisation. As Dana Gooley points out, changing tastes in the 19th century result in the Potpourri's (or opera fantasia) dominance over the other larger fantastical forms, partly because of societal changes, where improvisation didn't take place anymore solely in a small private chamber with listeners 'in the know'. On the contrary, with the rise of the traveling virtuoso, concert halls were increasing in size, and a less intimate experience was the result. You didn't know every person in the room anymore, and so Czerny says that for this kind of situation the Potpourri is your best bet. Also, because the larger audiences resulted in less knowledgeable people and the Potpourri is a genre that uses more popular tunes and you can change tune in your improvisation whenever you feel like the audience isn't with you anymore. Strangely it is therefore at the same time a more intimate form as well, as the audience's presence and reactions influence the shape and content of the improvisation. You can also play with the meaning of the texts of the originals. There is no other type of improvisation which allows the performer to combine brilliant virtuosity, delicacy and elegance to reach a climax.

[Also, when improvising 'regular' fantasias, the performer might get too nervous or shy with a bigger audience and this may result in blocked creativity.]

Finally, Czerny also discusses how specific figuration can't be used in a Potpourri, because the audience would perceive it as stale and dated, and goes on to give (very simple) changes to update this figuration to the latest vogue.

Old style:



Same figuration updated to new style:

operatic or popular tunes of the time, and were popular with touring virtuosi." In Luca Maghi (p. 31)

⁶ For example, there is reference to it in Panzeron's harmony treatise ...

⁷ Practical Composition School, 87-89

⁸ Ibid. p. 87



Form

A The simplest format is one where each melody has some variations applied to it, but Czerny tells us that a theme can also receive a small development. The stringing together happens through pleasing modulations and pauses or cadences. Each of these connecting elements should be unique and not resemble the earlier or later ones. The liveliest melody should be left for the end to provide a vivacious conclusion.

Each new melody must be as different as possible from the previous in terms of meter, tempo and character. If it is deemed good to start with a *dolce* melody, then this character should also come back at the end. In all other cases, the end should be virtuosic and slower movements should be brought to the fore in the middle of the improvisation. Another good option for the middle is a larger series of variations.

Interestingly, Czerny's own example of a Potpourri uses almost exclusively instrumental music, and uses various variation techniques, such as even Fugue, not seen in our other examples.

Knowledge and abilities

To be able to improvise Potpourris well, you must have a big repository of opera arias, ballet numbers, folk songs and other beloved songs, and processes discussed in the chapters on prelude, cadenza and fantasia. Melodies can be varied as exemplified in Czerny's chapter 7 or be used as a theme for fantastical development as exemplified in chapter 4. An important element here is to use the mould of various typical forms such as an Allegro, Waltz or Eccosaie. How these approaches can be applied to solo wind instruments and the oboe specifically has been discussed in my articles.⁹

Czerny strongly advises to prepare certain elements of your Potpourri improvisations. The more you do this, the less you will have to in the future.

⁹ Both articles of mine

Reviews with relevant information

As a next research topic I would love to find more references to actual improvisers in the 19th century, especially when they are improvising on melodic instruments, and especially when it comes to more fantasia-like endeavours. It is clear from methods and descriptions that at least soloists, but probably quite a lot of melodic instrumentalists would have improvised some ornaments and preludes, definitely cadenzas. However, when it comes to fantasias, the information is scantily visible. The following quotations are all from *The Harmonicon*, an English music journal from the early 19th century. No translations were needed.

The following review gives proof of a Potpourri (fantasia on various airs) performed by a cellist. Additionally, the 'humorous melodic tableau' is interesting as well, functioning more or less as a Potpourri, the two ideas could easily be combined! Melodic here also implies that there was no accompaniment, although this could also be to make distinction with a theatrical tableau.

OUR winter season was abundantly rich in concerts. Bernhard Romberg, the king of violoncellists, introduced himself to the public in the Hof-Opertheater, with two concertinos, a fantasia on Norwegian mountain airs, and a humorous melodic tableau, under the title of the Masked Ball, consisting of the following subdivisions. A. Introduction. B. Inclination for a dance. Tuning. Beginning of the dance. C. Dispute among the dancers. Peace and good order are enjoined. Tender endeavours at reconciliation. D. Music in the supper-room. E. Short interruption. Promenade in the Seufzer-Allee, 'Avenue of Sighs.' F. Crowding to the ball-room. Galoppade. Merry conclusion. Even those who are not particularly fond of the picturesque in music, could not help being pleased with the characteristic conception of the individual component parts of this medley, their ingenious combination into a consistent whole, and lastly, with the high skill and unique talent displayed by the master;
P. 202

This review shows that Potpourris were indeed improvised, although it concerns a pianist in this case.

All M. M[oscheles]'s peculiar merits were united in his extemporaneous fantasia, for which he had four themes of Mozart given to him by the audience. The most striking modulations blended with the most brilliant traits, that happy union and reunion of his subjects, in which Hummel also excels, the imposing dignity of his style, and an expression of lyrical feeling peculiar to himself, completed a combination of excellence that called forth the warmest marks of admiration from the delighted audience.
P. 10 [copied From the Musikalische Zeitung, about Moscheles]

The following concert programme shows that even oboists possibly played solo as well (no. 9), although in this kind of programme it's always hard to tell whether there was an accompaniment or not. Given that this was a vocal concert, at least an orchestral accompaniment is not likely.

SIXTH VOCAL CONCERT, Monday, March 18, 1833.

PART I.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Anthem, 'I will sing of thy power' | DR. GREENE. |
| 2. | Solo and Chorus, 'By the dark rolling' | M'MURDIE. |
| 3. | { Rec. 'Lo! here my love.' (Mr. Hawkins) }
{ Air, 'Love in her eyes.' <i>Acis and Galatea.</i> } | HANDEL. |
| 4. | Mass, 'Gloria in excelsis,' &c. | HAYDN. |
| 5. | Madrigal, 'So saith my fair.' (1580) | LUCA MARENZIO. |
| 6. | { Rec. 'Misera! dove son.' }
{ Aria, 'Ah! non so io.' } (Mrs. Bishop) | MOZART. |
| 7. | Glee, 'If o'er the cruel tyrant' | ARNE & GREATOREX. |
| 8. | Hymn to the Creator, (Solo, Miss C. Novello, and Chorus) | M. CHELARD. |
| 9. | Fantasia, Oboe. (Mr. G. Cooke) | G. COOKE. |

In relation with the above announcement (where G. Cooke is announced as the composer on the right), it seems likely that Nicholson improvised his Fantasia on the spot in the March 4 concert (see no composer mentioned at no. 10 on the left):

- The

Harmonicon,

VOCAL SOCIETY.

FIFTH VOCAL CONCERT, Monday, March 4, 1833.

PART I.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Full Anthem, 'O clap your hands' | O. GIBBONS. |
| 2. Glee, 'Blest pair of Syrens.' (Masters Howe and Hopkins, Spencer, Vaughan, and Bellamy) | J. S. SMITH. |
| 3. { Rec. 'This image.' MS. oratorio 'Daniel the Prophet' | } F. W.
HORNCastle. |
| { Air, 'Lives there a mortal.' (Mr. Phillips) | |
| 4. Hymn, 'O thou that read'st.' (Miss C. Novello, Terrail, Vaughan and Chapman, and Chorus) | NOVELLO. |
| 5. Duet, 'Forsake me not.' <i>The Last Judgment</i> . (Miss Shirreff and Mr. Vaughan) | SPOHR. |
| 6. Madrigal, 'Cynthia! thy song and chanting.' (1560) | G. CROCE. |
| 7. Air, 'Dulcissimum convivium.' (Mrs. G. Wood) | MOZART. |
| 8. Terzetto, 'Mandina amabile.' <i>La Villanella Rapita</i> . (Miss C. Novello, Hawkins, and E. Taylor) | MOZART. |
| 9. Glee, 'The Shades of the Heroes.' (Messrs. Hawkins, Fitzwilliam, Horncastle, Phillips, and Atkins) | T. COOKE. |
| 10. Fantasia , Flute. (Mr. Nicholson.) | |

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Here is another review in Germany of someone playing on a melodic instrument. Again it's not entirely clear whether this is without accompaniment.

DRESDEN.

On the 18th of November, M. Moliq, music-director to the Court at Stuttgart, played at the theatre some variations for the violin, of his own composition, upon Themes from Die Stumme, and upon Swiss airs. He is stated to combine in his playing, the best points of the German schools;

P 40

In the following review we see that some people were also resistant to the idea of the 'vagabond' air with variations at a formal concert:

*Mr. Nicholson's Fantasia was, we hardly need say, beautifully played; **but is an air with variations fit for such a concert?** The directors, however, we conclude, must sometimes give way, and, like other great men, be governed by existing circumstances.*

Here is a review that gives good reasons for why this approach wasn't as chic as others.

"A COMPOSER of the present day stands in no need of that divine spark which comes from above. All that is required now is, to place himself within a musical circle, composed of some thirty of the operas of Rossini, spread open for the facility of instant reference. It is true that he will find in these works much genius, much that abounds in beauty, grace, and vigour; but he will also meet with numerous passages, not to say whole motivos, which this master has had the address, by a thousand ingenious devices, such as embellishing, altering the movement, &c. &c., to appropriate to himself from others. The composer, therefore, who is thus seated in the midst of these volumes, may go to work without much apprehension, as he will here find brought into one focus all the scattered rays of beauty that he would have to collect, with no small labour, from hundreds of volumes. A ready artist need not

trouble himself much with the deeper studies of composition, as the public will give him sufficient credit for talent, if he do but possess the happy art of combinations, and can produce a piece of ingenious mosaic work.”¹⁰

Potpourri Analyses

Czerny’s text and example serve as a starting point for this research. As I have done in previous research, and as suggested by Czerny’s method’s set-up, I ... this with examples for melodic instruments. As in other chapters (e.g. the chapter on the monothematic fantasia), the example provided by Czerny doesn’t cover all possibilities. But in this case there is perhaps an additional need for scrutiny, as the example is in fact titled “Fantasie als Potpourri” and even, as Roberta Vidic argues, seems to blend the genres of the fantasia on several themes and the Potpourri. Of course there are always two sides of the coin, and thus this opens up the floor for more possibilities for our Potpourris.

For the purposes of this analysis, I have chosen Potpourris for solo melodic instruments. The aim is to improvise Potpourris (more or less) from scratch, and this is substantially easier when done alone. A case could be made that Potpourris with different instrumentations could still be useful in an analytical sense, however, there is an incredible wealth of such pieces, and the task would become too large for the time frame of this project.

In some cases, these have ad libitum piano parts that flesh out the harmony, but this does not negatively influence their value for this research.

This repertoire is meant for amateurs, so probably still only shows a glimpse of what is possible. In the following section I will discuss the various separate parts of a Potpourri and then how it comes together in the full form.

Form and general content

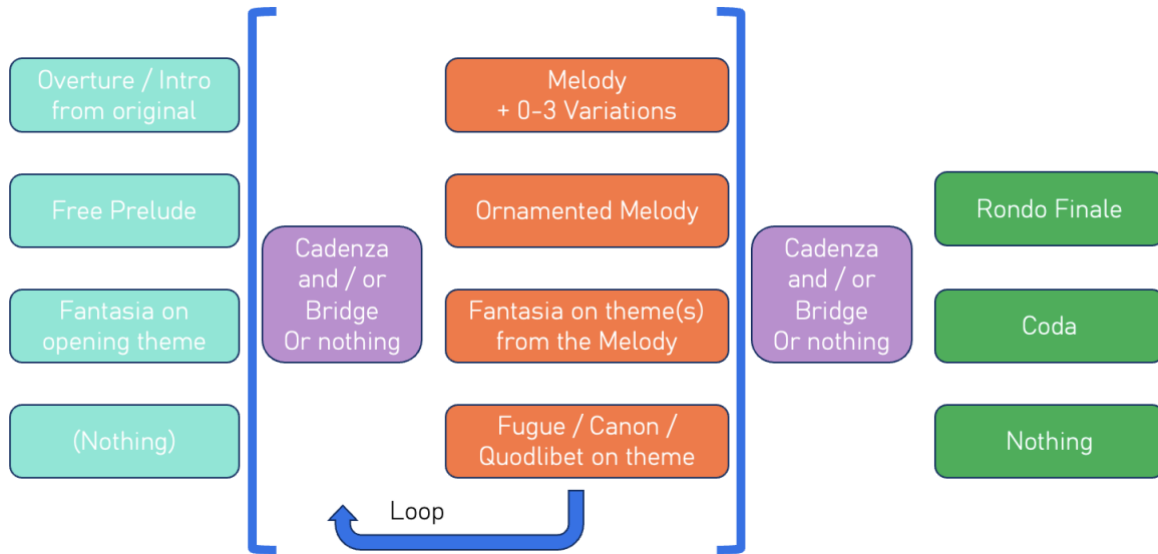
As noted before, Czerny’s Potpourri is a bit unusual. It starts with a free prelude, immediately followed by a Bach fugue (in which only a few bars ring true to Bach’s source material), after which we finally reach our first ‘melody’ with variations. A healthy bridge then takes us to some melodies by Gluck, unornamented, which leads to a fantasia section, seemingly not based on any source material. Although most of the following sections are melodies (with or without variations, as expected in a Potpourri), bars 209-235 are merely fast runs, perhaps loosely based on a harmonic groundwork of a melody? What’s more, Czerny invites us to extend this free passage even more. In other words, although the cyclical form of *melody-plus-variations, bridge, next melody* is there, a lot more variety can be used. As Czerny states, the form is mostly decided by the interaction with the audience and it makes sense to have a few tricks up our sleeves to surprise the audience with some other ideas. Personally, this comes as a great relief, as somehow the melody-bridge form feels quite constraining, especially when a melody or a variation doesn’t quite work out.

When we look at the melody instrument sample, quite a few Potpourris seem to consist of merely stringing together unvaried melodies.¹¹ In a way, form doesn’t come into play here and there seem to be few rules as to the length or amount of pieces. We can find almost every possibility, from a minimum of barely 2 different movements up to 50 different melodies, where a melody may sometimes only feature as a small bridge. The content is very varied as well. Rachel Becker’s thesis on opera fantasias shows that this was one of the most typical types of content for Potpourris, however, we also find Potpourris with instrumental music (Czerny’s example for instance), folk songs, anthems, or a mixture of all of the above.

¹⁰ Rules for composing fashionable music [In a Letter from Milan.], *The Harmonicon*, Part the first (London, 1833, William Clowes), 187

¹¹ Doppler, *Potpourris Album*; Charlier *Etude*; Steckmest?;

Next follows an overview of typical elements to be found in the various segments of the Potpourri, below one can see how these elements may interact. More detailed descriptions and examples of these elements will receive attention in their designated following chapters.



Many Potpourris will start with an introduction of some sort, most often with (part of) the opening Overture of the designee Opera. This will sometimes only be a few bars, and mostly it is quoted without any alteration other than shortening. Another often occurring introduction is a prelude-fantasia type on part of the opening thematic material, although the character may be very different. We might for example see a dramatic Overture in minor to a sweet Mozartian melody with variations as opening content.

As we saw in Czerny's example, it is also possible to open with a free prelude, where free means that it is unrelated to the following material. Rarely, a Potpourri will open without any introduction, and dive straight into the first melody.

The next section is the main part of the Potpourri: the melodies and their variations. As noted before, such melodies also appear without any variations, especially in amateur publications. An interesting distinction can be made between an ornamented version of the melody, and variations. Czerny shows two more options: imitations (like a fugue or using the theme in canon or quodlibet) and a fantasia on a theme, where mostly only part of the theme is used. On a side note, as sometimes suggestions from the audience result in not very melodic material, the fantasia-on-a-theme approach can be a saviour. Interesting as well is the way Devienne organised the form in his Potpererry, where a variation might not come directly after its original melody, but rather after another melody, bridge or cadenza.

Introducing or ending the before mentioned sections can be free cadenzas or bridges. A cadenza often appears at the end of a prelude. Bridges appear regularly, and as can be seen in Czerny's examples of monothematic fantasias as well, can sometimes be as long as the actual content itself! The ending sometimes consists of a small coda or a finale (either as the final variation or as an extra movement, perhaps a rondo finale, which Czerny refers to as an excellent ending for a fantasy), but often enough no extra material appears.

A melody or theme does not necessarily need to be used in its entirety. This is both the case for melodic variation in the main part of the Potpourri (monothematic fantasia on a theme) or in the introduction, where part of the theme, or even at times a single interval, will be developed into a larger prelude. Examples of this are the Necke Fantasia prelude quoted below in “Mixed forms”, the introduction to the Nicholson Potpourri (quoted below in the chapter on ornamentation) and in a more complex way in Camus’ prelude to his Caprice on airs from La Bohème.

Here is the opening of Nicholson’s prelude, where the dotted rhythm and upward fourth jump are thematic material that is varied and returned to, but much scalar cadenza-like figuration is used to go from one such instances to the next.



In the figure below you can see how Camus’ prelude consists of elements and variations on these from various movements (the Marziale, Andantino, Piu Lento and Vivace). Even the final cadenza is mostly based on an inversion of one of the main motifs. There are small changes, for example the way the Marziale is in minor (a typical alteration), the note lengths have slightly changed, and even the placement of the ornaments is slightly different. The Marziale theme leads into an answer in a changed dynamic based on the Andantino material (is the dynamic also indicating the change of theme?). The Marziale theme comes back in the major version started on the third degree of the key, a surprising idea. The continuation is possibly loosely based on a variation of the Lento, or perhaps more likely a play on motivic material from the Allegro and Vivace. In bar 9 we change modes and material is mostly based on the Vivace motifs, as can be seen in the second line of bars 11 and 12.

The musical score is divided into five systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#).

- System 1 (Measures 1-3):** Labeled "Prelude" and "Allegro". The treble staff starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a rising fourth. The bass staff has a piano (*p*) dynamic with triplet eighth notes. The tempo changes to "Marziale" in the second measure.
- System 2 (Measures 4-6):** Continues the "Marziale" section with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bass staff has a triplet eighth note.
- System 3 (Measures 7-9):** Labeled "Piu Lento". The treble staff has a piano (*p*) dynamic and features triplet eighth notes. The bass staff has a triplet eighth note.
- System 4 (Measures 10-12):** Labeled "Vivace". The treble staff has a piano (*p*) dynamic and features triplet eighth notes. The bass staff has a triplet eighth note.
- System 5 (Measures 13-14):** Labeled "inversion of andantino motif". The treble staff has a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melodic line with a final cadential flourish.

Mixed forms

Although not technically a Potpourri, Necke's Fantasia on "Oh Tannenbaum" gives an interesting example of mixing the above options. The first line offers a little fantasia on the opening theme of a rising fourth, finishing with a little cadential flourish in the two bars of the next line. We then get to our main melody, but it's in the wrong meter! The second phrase of the melody even already receives a variation, although still in the wrong meter. The final phrase is again in an unvaried format, but the 'ornamentation' occurs here through a change in dynamic (*f*) and through added accents. A final codetta of less than 6 bars leads us to the actual melody in the right meter (with the text printed under it for extra clarity). These final bars take ideas from motivic development typical of the opening thematic fantasia (the opening fourth is back), but also feel like a cadential bridge typically found at the end of a more open prelude.

„O Tannenbaum.“

Freudig. Hermann Necke, Op. 411.

O Tan-nen-baum, o Tan-nen-baum! wie treu sind dei - ne Blät - ter. Du grünst nicht nur zur

Melodic variation

Originally, I thought variation was the main technique applied in the Potpourri. But the various examples from both Czerny and the wind sample have shown multifarious possibilities. Beside variation, there is a distinction to be made with ornamentation, there is the earlier-mentioned fantasia on part of the theme and finally there are contrapuntal devices that could be applied to themes to vary them rather in combinatorial ways.

Ornamentation

Ornamentation has a few typical features to it. Although it can get quite wild, in general some notes will still be kept unornamented, for example arrival notes. We will also see much more use of ornaments with designated symbols, such as trills, mordents, vibrato and appoggiaturas. Ornamentation can at times also be very simple, such as in the example below from Devienne's Potperry.

Colinette au bois

Co-li-net-te au bois s'en a l la en saut-il - lant par ci par la, ta la de ri de ra ta la de ri de ra, un bieu mon-sieur la ren-con - tra fri - se par ci, pou-dre par la, ta la de ri de ra, ta la de ri de - ra, Fil-lette ou cou-rez vous com' - ca Mon-sieu'jm'en

I have discussed several aspects of ornamentation in my article on oboe improvisation, but Nicholson's Potpourri still shines some new light on the matter. We can see how many elements are the stereotypical ornaments, such as the turn, trill, appoggiatura and vibrato; more in use than in the examples in my oboe article. Especially when these ornaments accumulate, such as in bars 8 and 9. At the same time there are these long, cadenza-like ornaments that occur throughout the melody, in this short piece already 4 times. This is definitely an interesting addition to the toolbox. In Nicholson's Flute method we can see that these predilections are carried even further, occurring in a greater density than in this example. This approach is also a great solution for melodies that are a bit fast, or upon reception from the audience not quite clear harmonically, as most of the ornamentation sticks very closely to the main notes.

The image displays a musical score for Nicholson's Potpourri, comparing the original melody with an ornamented version. The score is presented in two staves: the top staff is labeled 'original' and the bottom staff is labeled 'ornamented'. The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat. The ornamented version includes various ornaments such as trills, turns, and appoggiaturas, as well as long, cadenza-like ornaments. The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a bar number (7, 12, 16, 20).

Variation

The variation approach is different from ornamentation in that it is often applied more throughout, and often will focus on a certain figuration or rhythmical motif that is retained throughout. Figuration will often be more accompanimental as well, examples of which can be seen in my article on 19th-century oboe improvisation.

Fantasia

Using elements of the melody in more fantastical ways doesn't happen so often, but is suggested by various examples. Charlier's Etude based on Wagner excerpts sometimes uses a single motif

combined with that of another opera to construct sequential phrases. As far as I can see in the original trumpet parts these motifs don't appear in this exact way and thus these 'variants' are purely the result of Charlier's tinkering with these fragments to create a greater, fantastical whole out of them. Similarly the Tristan sextuplet figure in the 5th line doesn't quite appear that way, but is varied here to form a bridge (an approach we will revisit in the later chapter on bridges and cadenzas).

The musical score consists of five staves of music. The first staff is marked *f fieramente* and contains motifs from 'RIENZI' and 'LOHENGRIN'. The second staff is marked *moins fort* and contains motifs from 'LOHENGRIN' and 'RIENZI'. The third staff is marked *p* and contains motifs from 'LOHENGRIN' and 'RIENZI'. The fourth staff is marked *f* and contains motifs from 'LOHENGRIN' and 'RIENZI'. The fifth staff is marked *p* and contains motifs from 'LOHENGRIN' and 'RIENZI'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *molto espressivo*, and includes the text 'poco a poco eres - - en - - do'.

Similarly, in Czerny's case it's not always easy to tell whether he simply quotes a melody and then builds a bridge towards the next theme, or that this sometimes rather extensive bridging is a fantasia movement of its own accord. The Bach Fugue (where only the beginning five bars are actually Bach), and the Gluck and Beethoven quotations (which develop into a free fantasia and final coda respectively) are examples of this.

The free fantasia itself is an interesting aspect as well; does this mean that Czerny suggests we can use such elements in our Potpourri as well, or is this simply, as Roberta Vidic suggests, a result of the hybridisation of two genres Czerny is experimenting with here?

Similarly, in Ciardi's Capriccio "Sopra delle Melodie del Verdi" the second movement's provenance is a mystery. The first melody (as shown earlier in the prelude section) clearly quotes the opening of the Opera. The second movement seems a kind of fantastical piece, or even an etude, perhaps on a motif, but I haven't been able to find out what it is based on. It must however be based on something in Verdi's 'melodies', given that so far we have only had one melody, and Ciardi clearly states in the title that there is at least more than one. Is this then some kind of fantasia on a harmonic progression, or a wild ornamentation and elaboration of a theme hidden under a wilderness of 16th notes?



Finally, Nicholson seems to use the final song in his Potpourri as the basis for a Finale Rondo, a typical device in fantasia improvisation. The motivic material in the song is the (sometimes loose) basis for the material in the ‘couplets’.

Contrapuntal devices

Finally, Czerny advises us to use contrapuntal devices like canons, fugues and quodlibets as well. We also know that improvisers like Hummel were commended for being able to do this, so it wasn't only a fictive description.¹³ These devices and textures are typical of keyboard instruments. Obviously, at least on the oboe, I cannot play more than one note at a time as a melodic player. Previously I have shown how imitation could be feigned on such instruments, for example in my research into Telemann Fantasias¹⁴.

Such textures and approaches could perhaps be used here as well. Czerny gives us a relatively big sample of possibilities in using a theme in canon and as Quodlibet. Below is an example of an option of using a theme in canon on my instrument compared to Czerny's example. A few intervals are surprising in two-part counterpoint, such as the unprepared 9th in bar three, which also doesn't really resolve. I avoid these in the compound version for one oboe (third line) by repeating the previous consonant note first (see bar 5 for example).

Newer to me and as far as I can tell new in the entire repertoire is applying this concept to the Quodlibet approach. Finding two melodies that are both distinct enough, easily enough adaptable to a similar harmonic outline, not too large in range to be able to still put them into different ranges of the instrument, not too similar that they melt into one another, etc., was difficult. A combination that worked (relatively well) was Jingle Bells and Saint-Saëns' The Swan. The difference in feel of the two melodies, the difference in range and movement and some of the long notes or resting points all contribute to this success. I also found it useful to start off with

the first melody for it to be clearly in the listener's mind, and only then to introduce the intricacies of hearing both divided over time.

In the example below the two top lines show the original melodic material for reference, the third line shows the aggregate quodlibet result.

Even the second couplet of Jingle Bells is started for one bar by itself (bar 9) to indicate that the melody is indeed going on. Saint-Saëns' melody is then introduced on the main beats in bar 10. Timing (as in my previous Telemann experiments) is essential to show the movement of the different voices. In bar 12 the first beat is for Jingle Bells, because arriving there melodically from the previous melodic impetus helps us follow the different lines.

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'The Swan', contains a series of rests. The middle staff, labeled 'Jingle Bells', and the bottom staff, labeled 'Quodlibet in one melody', both contain the same melodic line: a sequence of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4, C5) followed by a dotted quarter note (B4), a half note (A4), and another eighth note (G4). The music is in 4/4 time.

The second system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'S', contains a series of rests. The middle staff, labeled 'JB', and the bottom staff, labeled 'Q', both contain the same melodic line as in the first system. A rehearsal mark '8' is placed above the first staff at the beginning of the system. The music is in 4/4 time.

Bar 13 is solely devoted to The Swan; this both helps resolve a later harmonic issue between the parts and gives The Swan more space in the listener's aural space, at the latest now, in retrospect, realising what other melody has been painted. In the Quodlibet version I have sped up the melody to make room for the entrance of Jingle Bells, which otherwise, despite the difference in octave, doesn't quite register as the continuation of that song.

The next part was very tricky (see below). After starting the final strain of Jingle Bells' A part, I wanted to use the faster moving upward scale from The Swan. Although the two melodies technically fit together more or less, keeping the rhythmical and melodic identity intact in both parts proved difficult. Especially bar 16 is still a little bit clunky because of the melodic jump of a third into an unprepared, implied 7th. I think in this version every move from one to the other part comes just in time to retain the semblance of the two melodies co-existing. Another strange solution comes in bar 17, where Saint-Saëns goes to the E rather than resolving to the expected C, also clearly the expected outcome of the very much needed (simplicity of the) tenor cadence. Problematically, the following section of Jingle Bells was very difficult to combine with something else from The Swan. I found the final section of The Swan to be the best option, as it has quite a few long notes and is harmonically not very adventures (as The Swan's continuation after the opening section goes into some other keys which don't work well with Jingle Bells, such as e minor, with its D# leading tone).

The image shows a musical score for three parts: S (The Swan), JB (Jingle Bells), and Q (Quodlibet). The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at bar 14 and ends at bar 18. The second system starts at bar 19 and ends at bar 25. Part S has long notes, while JB and Q have more active, rhythmic lines. There are triplets in the Q part in bar 16.

In this section I chose rather to alternate between the two pieces, finding spaces when either of the melody has a longer note (see bars 19-25). I think this section works out nicely. When aware of the two melodies happening, this can be followed clearly. This leaves bar 17, where I felt some kind of connection with and from The Swan was needed, so that it would lead naturally into the final section of the melody, but also not feel like Jingle Bells was too much in focus. I thus opted for a sort of cadenza working in two extra bars of The Swans material, which comes at a logical place for it, bridging between the A and B section of Jingle Bells. More work in developing these and finding happy coincidental matches will be needed. As Czerny suggests some sections can be prepared for a performance, this is definitely one of those.

Bridges, Cadenzas and Modulation

These elements are about as typical as they can get. Often cadenzas are simple as we can find in methods for instruments, but cadenzas in virtuoso opera fantasias and some of the publications focused on cadenzas alone can be much more virtuosic. A variety of these has been printed in my oboe article. Here is an example from Devienne's Potpourri.



Bridges are an area of development akin to the motivic work we have seen in the prelude and fantasia on a motif elements.

We already saw an interesting example in Charlier's etude of Wagner excerpts. In Neumann's Amusement we can see a simple way in which the concatenation of a simple motif combined with a chromatic rise sequence can lead to the next section. It also connects wonderfully with the mini cadenza at the end of the previous section, which also uses the main element of the bridge for part of it, but is otherwise (logically) freer.



The bridge can also morph into the next motivic material more smoothly. Here is an example from a violin fantasia on Halka by Adolfson.

Allegro molto.

mf
Agitato from Overture

ff
Comes later in 8ths first

f
repeating material that's not literally repeated like this in the OG

f
BRIDGE! New material!

Mod to bridge

f Next idea! *ff*

An important trait of the bridge is modulation. Both because certain melodies or ideas will work especially well in a certain key, and because, as Czerny states several times in his method, harmonic surprises are an important element of the fantasia and its subgenre the Potpourri. I have spoken about the possibility of wilder modulations on melodic instruments as well in my two already mentioned articles. In general I follow Drouet's theory, that on a wind instrument one should try to change only one accidental per bar (or harmonic rhythm) as to give the ear enough time to really experience them.

Below we can see some examples from Charlier's Etude (potpourri of Wagner themes) in which several surprising modulations take place, even the sudden modulation that Drouet advised against.

Sudden enharmonic modulation, where we seem to be modulating to B major (normal after E major) but Charlier uses a B sharp as arrival point, respelled in the next note as a C natural, after which the melody continues as if C major had always been our destination.



Last line, p. 46, Charlier: Enharmonic spelling of B sharp turns the next section into C major.

A similar idea is used here, although the arrival note itself is at least expected, but instead of D flat we get a C sharp.

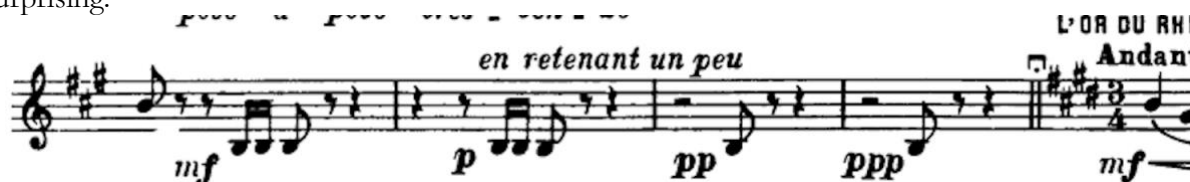


Here we find a sudden modulation, shifting up half a tone from A minor to B flat minor without preparation.



First line, p. 47, Charlier: Sudden modulation from a minor to b flat minor

Another idea is a common tone modulation. On wind instruments the easiest way to do this is by drowning out all the other material and simply leaving a dramatic single note repeated with rests, resetting our aural landscape. Of course in the following case the resulting modulation isn't so surprising.



Penultimate line, p. 46, Charlier

Finally we can simply sequence a motif by half step, cycling through many harmonic contexts and thus causing a loss of orientation in the listener and giving us the opportunity to 'fall out of the vortex' wherever we want.



Line 7, p. 47, Charlier: Chromatic sequence obscuring harmonic context

Report

Research

The research turned out to have many interesting aspects relating to what is specifically good on my instrument (the oboe), thematic development other than variations (as shown by e.g. Czerny, but also some of the wind examples (see above)) and the manifold options present in Potpourris themselves.

This collided perfectly with the opportunity to write two articles based on shorter presentations I had already given before. The first article has recently been published in the book *The Historical Oboe. Current State of the Research, Contemporary Practice and Perspectives*. In this article I discuss how a combination of 19th-century method books (and etudes) for the oboe and improvisation pedagogy for other instruments can be combined to formulate an improvisation pedagogy relevant for oboists today. In it many relevant aspects of my Potpourri research are discussed, such as the improvisation of preludes, cadenzas, variations and ornamentation as well as a small start into fantasia improvisation.

The second article I did was for the Chigiana Journal of Musicological Studies and focused on a specific type of fantasia improvisation: the monothematic fantasia. In the article I discuss different devices for developing a theme as divulged by Czerny, and how these can be found or found in translation in solo fantasias for wind instruments. Thus, these elements can then be transferred to an improvisation practice. The basic elements of Potpourri improvisation are discussed in this article as well, with a focus on mono-thematicism. The publication of this article is imminent.

In the above text I discuss approaches to Potpourri and try to give a first view of what people wrote at the time about melodic improvisers and the Potpourri.

Teaching

The teaching aspect was relatively straightforward as I have quite some experience in this area. It was interesting to see that every student thought it was eventually easier than they had expected. Sometimes the timeframe was a bit too small to try and do all the elements justice, but this can be helped easily.

The elements in teaching are:

- *Learn to make simple variations on Twinkle Twinkle*
 - = *rhythms*
 - = *tempo / meter*
 - = *small melodic variations*
 - = *harmonic variations*
 - = *form variations*
- *Pick another song that you know and try to apply simple variations to it too*
- *Add a small bridge (from written examples, or a small scale with trill) and connect*
- *Improvise a prelude on a motif*
- *Put all those things together and keep experimenting*

Students said that it was eventually easy to improvise variations. They were especially surprised and charmed by the possibility of improvising bigger forms with several moveable objects in them. It was clear how one could continue with these ideas.

A few tips I received were to give an overview of the form and options on paper, for my examples to show both an extremely simple option and a more complex one, and to get students to also imitate the literal simple example that I give.

Furthermore, here are some videos that explain the processes involved in the teaching through the lens of my own process ([LINK](#)).

An interesting side-effect of my research occurred in some of my other teaching. For example, for a recorder ensemble course I wrote a Potpourri on Mozart themes (based on the courses' theme). It was both a great way for me to process some of my ideas about Potpourri, as well as an interesting way to get students to process Mozart's music and understanding thematic development, variations and the formal organisation of what seemed initially to be a random collection of bits and bobs to them.

In a workshop at the Young Talent Recorder Class in The Hague we wanted to do a piece based on one of the songs in the method book, so all kids could join in. This yet again invited the usage of the Potpourri techniques. Even though officially it wasn't a Potpourri (no other themes), all the techniques used in it were based on my research, but now also brought into other styles, like Baroque and Minimal.

I learned that the Potpourri can be an excellent vehicle for other pedagogical means as well. Additionally it gives the possibility of leaving out parts of the piece that are too hard or that students are not inspired by.

Performance

Originally, I had planned to organise performances with different approaches to Potpourri to test how a written Potpourri from the 19th century, a written one by me on 'modern themes' and an improvised version would compare.

Unfortunately, I ran out of time to do this. Several factors contributed to this. The first and foremost was that I wanted to do this on an oboe from the 19th century, which is substantially different from my other oboes. Practising this instrument led to some progress, but not enough to be able to comfortably play it, let alone improvise on unknown material and be virtuosic. This practice did not lead to a result that I thought would make it possible for me to do a 15-minute solo concert.

Additionally, the expert I had wanted to use to set up the experiment in the end turned out not to have much expertise in this field.

In thinking more about this and exchanging with colleagues, several flaws appeared as well. For example, the audience will naturally feel like something improvised is more impressive. It wasn't entirely clear what I would measure either: I was interested in whether improvising a Potpourri on themes from the audience would be better than the other two options. A blind test is not possible, because the audience needs to be the same audience that gave me the themes. Also, it proved difficult to find a suitable original 19th-century Potpourri for solo wind that was not either too long in terms of stamina, too hard for my instrument, not interesting enough or not clearly enough a Potpourri. In this case, the written, 19th-century doesn't stand a chance anyway.

Notwithstanding these issues, I have improvised a few Potpourri in concerts and experimented with this approach at two lectorate events. At one concert I left the basic material choice to myself, but allowed the audience to choose with cards what would happen to the original material (different types of 'movement' that they could choose).

At the lectorate event on the 14th of November I did ask the audience for themes and improvised on them, which was relatively successful. I experimented with a performance in which the audience was able to put songs they liked on cards. This way I thought I would have more response, as asking the audience during a performance puts additional stress on them. We sang the original and learned the basics of variation with the audience, in order to get the audience to really remember the song when it would appear in the Potpourri. Because of my fears of not

managing, I had not told the audience what was on the other cards, but used them for some of the other parts of the Potpourri. Some elements were based on possibilities prepared in advance, like variations on a Mozart aria.

In a conversation with Cristiano Viviani, I realised that I wanted to take the audience more on a journey so that more of the Potpourri could be a shared experience. This led to a concept in which the audience and I are getting to know the basic materials more together. I will share what's on the cards (I still think this is a good system) with the audience and pick some of the ones I can do immediately to start off singing bits together and showing how these themes could be turned into a simple Prelude or Cadenza. I will learn at least one song with the audience together. After they have done some singing, they will hopefully be happy to sing this song for me altogether, jogging the communal memory of this song. Another additional option is to have a song play on Spotify and learn it together from there. Finally this will lead to a Potpourri in which all or at least some of these elements come together in a longer improvisation. Eventually, I want to develop this into a format in which several types of improvisation are shown on these audience suggestions, thus travelling through time and musical styles with the audience. This becomes a project in which the audience is much more aware of what improvisations are based on. Not only is this 'historical', but this also increases their involvement in and appreciation for the improvisations. Meanwhile they pick up some ideas from Music and its history. This is for me the ideal of what music performance could become in the future.

Appendix 1 – An overview of Forms

Czerny – Fantasie als Potpourri
 From Roberta Vidic' article

Takt	Motivik / Thematik	Tonart	Taktart und Tempo	Gattung
1–11		a-Moll	C Andante	Präludium (kurzes Vorspiel)
12–39	J. S. Bach, Fuge b-Moll BWV 891 (<i>Wohltemp. Klavier</i> Bd. 2)	a-Moll →E-Dur	3/4 Allegro moderato	Fuge im freieren Stil
+ eventuell Verlängerung der Durchführung				
40–75	Händel, aus der Suite <i>The Harmonious Blacksmith</i> HWV 430	E-Dur →c/C	2/4 Andantino	Variationen
+ evtl. zwei Variationen im brillanten und gebundenen Stil nach Takt 67				
76–83	[Passagen]	c/C	C Allegro molto vivo	
84–116	Gluck	c-Moll	C Meno allegro ma con agitazione	
116	[Passagen à la C. Ph. E. Bach]	E-Dur a/A	–	Freie Fantasie
117–124	Schluss	A-Dur		
+ verlängerte Fermate				
125–146	aus Haydn, Streichquartett op. 77/2, dritter Satz: Andante	D-Dur	2/4 Andante	
147	Adagio-Takt		Adagio	
+ eine Variation des Haydn-Themas »im gebundenen oder zierlichen Styl«				
148–190	aus Haydn, Sinfonie Nr. 99, erster Satz: Vivace assai, Schlussgruppe ... Mozart	B-Dur	C Allegro vivace	
191–208	Mozart, aus <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i> , I. Akt, Arie »Non più andrai«	C-Dur → B-Dur	C Allegro con anima	brillante Variation
209–235	schnelle Läufe			brillante Passage
+ eventuell Fortsetzung der Passagen, aber <i>diminuendo</i>				
235–242	Mozart, Fortsetzung			Variation, Schluss
243–277	Cherubini + Mozart (T. 256–265); Haydn (T. 271–276)	B-Dur	2/4 Allegretto grazioso	Quodlibet? bzw. »Contrathema«-Kombinatorik
277	Adagio-Takt			
278–341	aus Beethoven, Leonoren-Ouverture Nr. 3 op. 72b	A-Dur	Presto	Finale
+ eventuell Fortsetzung ab Takt 307 in Form eines kleinen Rondos				

Tabelle 2: Carl Czerny, *Fantasie als Potpourri* aus der *Anleitung zum Fantasieren* op. 200, Übersicht

Charlier – Etude 24

Bars	Motifs	Key	Meter / Tempo	Type

Appendix 2 – Overview of Potpourris for solo melodic instrument

Appendix 3 – Famous melodies used in Oboe Methods

Method	Year	Melody /Title	Composer	Tempo/Char	Meter	Key	Opera/ Work	Cadenza?
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843		Bellini					
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843		Mercadente	andante				n
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	air		moderato	C	g major	La Famille Suisse	fermata
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	ave maria	L Puget?	Religioso	2 4	f major		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843		Bellini	Moderato			Norma	
Girard - Petite Methode de hautbois	1866		Montagnard?	Allegretto	3 4	d minor		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843		Montagnard?	Allegretto	3 8	d minor b flat		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Priere Mon Rocher de	Duchambge?	Andante	6 8	major		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	St Malo	L Puget?					
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843		Masini	Andantino			Rives de la Mer	n
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	Cavatine		Andante	C	D major	Pirate	Fermata
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880	Cavatine		Andante	C	C major	Pirate	Fermata
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Cavatine		Andante	C	D major	Pirate	Fermata
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Aurora?		Grazioso	3 4	c major	Valse de Labitzki	
Girard - Petite Methode de hautbois		Cavatine	Donizetti	Moderato	2 4	D major	Anna Bolena	
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	Cavatine	Donizetti	Moderato	2 4	D major	Anna Bolena	
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Cavatine	Donizetti	Moderato	2 4	D major	Anna Bolena	
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Parisina?		moderato	C	D major		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843			Andantino	3 4	D major	Le Montagnard Émigré?	
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Barcarolle	Paneron	Allegretto				
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	L'ange de la montagne	L. Puget?	Allegretto	3 8	c major		
Girard - Petite Methode de hautbois			Donizetti	Allegretto	3 4	f major	L'elisire d'amore	
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843		Donizetti	Allegretto	3 4	f major	L'elisire d'amore	
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	tout pour toi		Grazioso	3 4	f major		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	duo	Bellini	Allegro			Norma	
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	je veux revoir ma patrie	Bruguere?	Maestoso	C	G major		
Küffner - Oboe-Schule			Weber	Allegro	2 4	C major		fermata
Küffner - Oboe-Schule			Weber	Andante	6 8	F major		
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	An Alexis		Andantino				
Miller - Methode de hautbois	1843	Air suisse		Allegretto				
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880		Donizetti	Allegro			L'elisire d'amore	?
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880		Donizetti	Alegretto			L'elisire d'amore	Fermata
Küffner - Oboe-Schule			Mozart	Allegretto Grazioso				
Küffner - Oboe-Schule			Mozart	Andantino				fermata x2
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880		Rossini	Allegretto			Cenerentola	
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880			andante	C	f major	si j'etais roi	fermataon final trill em
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880			andante	C	d major	si j'etais roi	fermata x2
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880			Allegretto	6 8	c major	si j'etais roi	fermata x3
Garimond - Methode elementaire	1880			Allegretto	2 4	a minor	Richard	fermata

Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	Souevnir du Mont d'or	Brod	Louré Allegretto	3 8	b minor (orig d minor)	Fantasia by Brod, probably not related to existing opera?)	variations
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	C'est des betises d'aimer comm ca		grazioso	6 8	f major		
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	O ma tendre musette		andante	6 8	g minor		
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	theme de carafa		Allegretto	2 4	F major	Carafa	
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	choir	Rossini	Allegro	2 4	C major E flat major	Donna del Lago	
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	Aria	Mozart	Moderato	C		Nozze di Figaro	
Bretonnière - Nouvelle Methode	1867	La cachucha		allegro	3 8	C major		
Girard - Petite Methode de hautbois	1866		Martini?	Andante	6 8	C major		
Girard - Petite Methode de hautbois	1866		Dalayrac	Andante	6 8	C major		