THE ETUDE: FROM INCEPTION TO PRESENT

Ruby Wang, (Roger L. Miller)
Department of Music

What is an Etude? How significant is its role in a pianist's essential repertoire? How has its meaning and form evolved over time? This thesis will discuss how the Etude has served as a genre of music with which the student can gain technical skill and further examine its evolution from a basic technical exercise into a concert masterpiece. It will analyze how the initial definition and understanding of the Etude developed over different musical eras through the works of various composers. It will also explore works that were not necessarily titled Etudes but were still intended to be a technical study for the pianist. Works from the Baroque period to that of the Classical, Romantic, and 20th century will be examined. It will discuss the works of major composers who contributed to the development of the Etude such as Johann Sebastian Bach, François Couperin, Domenico Scarlatti, Muzio Clementi, Johann Burgmuller, Carl Czerny, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Frédéric François Chopin, Franz Liszt, Camille Saint-Saëns, Claude Debussy, Oliver Messiaén, Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Béla Bartók, and Sergei Prokofiev. Research will include studying each composer's life, the background or circumstance under which he composed each work, and examine specific works that served as a stepping stone in the evolution of the Etude. There will also be appendices for reference material. The thesis will establish in conclusion how the Etude, regardless if they were actually titled Etude and whether they were solely played as a study or a concert piece, has served its purpose in helping the developing pianist master keyboard technique by achieving greater strength and control at the keyboard.