THE LEFT-HAND ETUDES OF CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS:
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF STYLE AND SIGNIFICANCE

An Honors Project submitted by

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To Annaley, for being a supportive friend every day.

To my family, for understanding.
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Introduction

Unusual in its history and development, piano music for one hand alone is a relatively unknown genre for many pianists and other musicians. While such music is very practical for those pianists who are limited to the use of only one hand, it is functional for pianists of all ages and levels, whether or not they have incurred an injury. However, because of the seemingly large number of right-hand injuries to pianists, the most commonly found type of one-hand music is for the left hand alone. In addition to providing an opportunity for continued study in the event of an injury, left-hand music also develops technique for the pianist and challenges the composer in the limitations that it creates.

Surprisingly, there are numerous works available for the left hand alone. As the genre of left-hand music became more prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some of the better-known composers of the time, including Brahms, Ravel, and Scriabin, created their own left-hand pieces. In response, other lesser-known composers accepted the challenge of writing left-hand music as well. With so many composers adding to the left-hand repertoire, more pianists are now able to experience music for one hand, and the subject is gradually becoming less esoteric than in years past.

Among the many composers who produced music for one hand is Camille Saint-Saëns, a French pianist, organist, and composer whose works stem from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Saint-Saëns wrote more orchestral works than piano pieces, but he was quite renowned as a pianist during his lifetime, and most of his works for piano reflect his typical musical style. His *Six études pour la main gauche seule*, Op. 135, is his only composition for the left hand. Nevertheless, the work is
significant among the composer’s output, particularly through its neoclassical tendencies. In this work, Saint-Saëns has effectively placed the technical challenges of one-handed etudes within the stylistic context of a Baroque dance suite. In combination, these qualities make the pieces unusual in composition and deserving of further study and analysis.

This study will specifically discuss these six etudes for the left hand. It will present not only the general characteristics and history of left-hand music, but also the background of the Op. 135 etudes and an overview of the life, compositional style, and musical influences of Saint-Saëns. The crux of the project will include a detailed musical analysis of Op. 135, illustrating the significance of the etudes both individually and as a set.¹

¹ In addition, I will be presenting a thirty-minute lecture-recital in conjunction with my written project. For the lecture-recital, I will discuss each of the six pieces based on the analysis to follow, and I will perform five of the etudes in their entirety (omitting one due to time restraints). The lecture-recital will be approximately divided equally between performing the Op. 135 etudes and presenting an expanded overview of my project.
Origin and History of Left-Hand Music

Keyboard music for one hand dates back to the early 1700s. One of the earliest pieces for one hand is C. P. E. Bach’s *Klavierstück* in A major.² This piece, which resembles a gigue, is moderately easy and can be played by either the left hand or the right hand alone; if played by the left hand, then it is recommended to be played an octave lower (see Example 1).³


Many of the early one-hand keyboard pieces such as this example could be played on either the harpsichord or the organ. The first published left-hand piece written specifically for the piano comes from Ludwig Berger’s *Studies*, Op. 12, which were published in 1820.⁴

The expansion of the repertoire of one-hand piano music that followed can be linked to the invention and development of the modern piano. The damper pedal of the new nineteenth-century piano allowed notes to sound even after the keys had been released, a tool essential to most one-hand music. By using the damper pedal in an effective manner, a pianist could make music with one hand that sounded almost as continuous as that of two. Extended harmonies and chords that were unreachable with one hand could now be rolled and sustained with careful use of the pedal.

Surprisingly, there are more than 1,800 works for one hand, with the majority of those being for the left hand. Since many pianists are right-handed and would tend to injure their dominant hand more often, solo works for the right hand alone are not as common. From a compositional point of view, the strongest part of the left hand, the thumb, would best complement a melody on the top of a chordal texture, whereas the right hand’s strong point would emphasize the bottoms of chords. In many cases, voicing the upper notes of chords is more desirable. Leopold Godowsky, whose left-hand transcriptions of Chopin’s études are well-known, suggests that the left hand also has better command of the lower register of the piano, enabling it to produce more sonority and less percussiveness than the upper register. In addition to solo works for the left hand alone, there are also many chamber works and at least seventeen concertos for piano left hand with orchestra.

Injury to or the lack of usability of the right hand was likely the main inspiration for many of the twentieth-century left-hand piano works. For example, Paul Wittgenstein was wounded and lost his right arm during his service in World War I, but as a professional pianist, he refused to stop playing the piano. Wittgenstein found a limited amount of one-hand repertoire and wrote some music for himself, but he eventually decided to commission a number of works from various composers, most of these being concertos. Theodore Edel suggests that Wittgenstein must have known that he might achieve better success in commissioning concerto or chamber music since the orchestra could fill in the texture and harmony, thereby absolving the need for excessive creativity.

5 Patterson, 7.
on the composer’s part. Some of the better-known works commissioned by Wittgenstein include Ravel’s Concerto for the left hand, Britten’s *Diversions*, and Prokofiev’s Fourth Concerto.

Interestingly, a number of composers wrote left-hand music for themselves as they incurred particular injuries. For instance, Alexander Scriabin in his teenage years was knocked down while crossing a bridge, and his right collar bone was broken. During this period he practiced only with his left hand, and many of Scriabin’s later piano pieces which include complex left-hand writing can be traced to this early experience. Later, Scriabin was studying at the Moscow Conservatory when he decided to rent a summer house and relentlessly practice Liszt’s *Don Juan Fantasy* and Balakirev’s *Islamey*. As a result of the extreme and continuous practice, he developed tendonitis in his right hand, and his doctors predicted that he would never be able to play again. His Op. 9 *Prelude and Nocturne for the Left Hand* were written within two years of this injury. Even after he regained use of his right hand, Scriabin continued to play these pieces in concert.

Although many pianists have been forced to quit playing due to a permanent or long-term injury, some pianists have successfully continued their careers by exploring the left-hand repertoire. For example, Leon Fleisher developed focal dystonia in 1964 and was forced to alter his career as a touring pianist. Fleisher commented on his injury, “If you spend your life training to do a certain kind of activity and suddenly it is no longer

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9 Wittgenstein refused to play the Prokofiev Concerto and the composer never rearranged it for two hands, but it was eventually played by another one-armed pianist: Siegfried Rapp.
available to you, your life seems to come to an end.” In addition to teaching and conducting, Fleisher was able to continue performing on the piano through the use of left-hand music. Another well-known pianist, Gary Graffman, began to have serious problems with his right hand in 1967. After seeking medical attention, he was diagnosed as having a “weakness of the extensor muscles of the right ring and little fingers.” Graffman’s condition has since improved, but not to the point that he is able to perform with both hands. Interestingly, Graffman and Fleisher have performed together on occasion, even having one piece commissioned for the two of them.

Although injury is typically the main cause for the composition and performance of left-hand piano literature, other reasons also exist. Standard piano repertoire usually favors the right hand, allowing pianists to perform certain functions with the right hand that they may not be able to do as easily with the left, including quick passagework and voicing of melodic themes. Therefore, one may choose to study left-hand music to strengthen the technique of the left hand. For example, Moritz Moszkowski composed a set of twelve etudes for the left hand alone. The fourth etude of Op. 92 features continuous sixteenth notes and necessitates smooth and rapid thumb crossings in the left hand (see Example 2).

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16 Edel, Piano Music for One Hand, 3.
In addition, the “melody” must be voiced as indicated and shaped accordingly—two challenges that are not typically expected of the left hand. Other benefits to be gained from studying left-hand music include observing written fingering, learning monodic music, maintaining consistent rhythm in hands-together playing, pedaling, and developing more efficient hand movements.\(^{17}\) Additionally, learning pieces for the left hand can improve proficiency at sight-reading by giving the left hand adequate practice at finding chords, making large leaps, and being sensitive to fingering adjustments.\(^{18}\) Even for a pianist without an injury, practicing left-hand music can greatly develop the technical skills for that hand.

In addition to original compositions for the left hand, there are also many arrangements of familiar two-hand piano pieces that can be used as technical challenges

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\(^{17}\) Paula Coons Wong, “Piano Repertoire for the Left Hand Alone for the Beginner and Early Intermediate Student: A Survey of the Literature and a Discussion of the Benefits for Non-Disabled Piano Students” (M.M. report, University of Texas at Austin, 2003), 29-32.

for the left hand alone. One such arrangement is C. P. E. Bach’s well-known *Solfeggietto* (see Example 3). Scales and arpeggios in this piece must be articulated cleanly, and the challenging leaps must be tempered with a careful use of the pedal.¹⁹


Other pieces for the left hand were written as compositional challenges. Patterson says, “Some one-handed pieces were written just as a test of ingenuity for the composer and just because pianists can play with only one hand.”²⁰ A number of composers likely took the challenge of composing left-hand music to test their skills and to see how effective they could make one-hand music. This may be the case with Leopold Godowsky’s etudes as well. Godowsky pushed the limits of the capabilities of one hand and even gained a reputation as “The Apostle of the Left Hand.”²¹ Out of his fifty-two *Studies on Chopin’s Etudes*, twenty-two of the pieces are transcriptions for the left hand. Many of Chopin’s etudes have significant right-hand figuration. Thus, the challenge for Godowsky was to transfer that figuration to the left hand while maintaining the compositional intent of the original piece. For some of the transcriptions, the compositional challenge was simply to combine the melodic line and accompanimental

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²⁰ Patterson, 6.
figuration into an effective piece of music for one hand. Compare the following Chopin etude and corresponding Godowsky transcription in Examples 4 and 5.


Example 5. Godowsky: Etude in Eb minor, No. 3 from 22 Etudes of Chopin, mm. 1-2.

As if an exact transcription would not be challenging enough, Godowsky added more figuration to the original, thereby making the etude even more difficult. Because of the extreme demands on the left hand in these works, the fingerings that Godowsky suggests can be of considerable help to the pianist.22 Godowsky states the following:

Frequently I have been asked the reason for my writing for the left hand alone. Many seem to think it unwarrantable to narrow the piano, with its range comparable to that of the orchestra and the organ, to the limitations of one hand. They contend that, from the mechanical standpoint, the left hand is inferior to the

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right, and, from the artistic viewpoint, the limitations imposed by the use of only one hand seem calculated for the display of virtuosity. My answer, based on my own experience of many years, is that, from the physical aspect, the left hand is more adaptable to cultivation than the right.\textsuperscript{23}

Curiously, after composing multiple transcriptions for the left hand alone, Godowsky experienced a heart attack at the age of 60, resulting in the paralysis of his own right hand.\textsuperscript{24} His transcriptions comprise some of the most difficult left-hand music in the repertoire and are impressive from both a performance and a compositional standpoint.\textsuperscript{25} Other significant original left-hand piano works were written by Ferdinando Bonamici, Johannes Brahms, Charles Valentin Alkan, Franz Liszt, and Maurice Ravel.

Although music for one hand provides a unique outlet for composers and strengthens technique for pianists, it does create some difficulties. Compositionally, realizing full harmonies becomes difficult when only five fingers are available, so the texture of left-hand music may be sparse and limited. Next, in a homophonic texture, shaping melodic lines becomes much more complicated since the same hand is also functioning to provide accompaniment or a second melodic line.\textsuperscript{26} Third, pedaling must be used carefully to create a legato line and to provide harmonic support; however, an abundant use of pedal can be problematic when clarity is needed. In addition, fingerings must be chosen carefully, particularly if the piece presents any sort of challenging passagework. Although some composers, such as Godowsky, indicate their own choice of fingering in the score, others leave the responsibility of finding adequate fingering to the

\textsuperscript{23} Godowsky, 298.
\textsuperscript{25} The Chopin studies were published over a period of twenty years, with the first piece being published by J. Kleber & Bro. in 1894. The piece was entitled, “Etude, Op. 26, No. 6; arranged for the left hand,” dedicated ‘To my illustrious master Camille Saint-Saëns.’
\textsuperscript{26} Margaret Marsh, “Left Hand Solo Piano Literature” (D.M.A. diss., Northwestern University, 1983), 16.
Finally, a different physical approach to the piano must be taken with left-hand pieces. For instance, the large reaches and continual shifts of the body force the pianist to become moveable, and even balance on the bench may become an issue. Nevertheless, the difficulties of left-hand music are the very characteristics that give the genre its etude-like quality and make it so appealing.

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27 In his *Etudes* for one hand, Max Reger refused to label specific fingerings.  
28 Patterson, 8.
Saint-Saëns’ Compositional Style

Saint-Saëns was a French pianist, organist, composer, and music editor who lived from 1835-1921. He was a piano prodigy from the early age of three and was a natural at the instrument, giving concerts frequently and even offering any Beethoven sonata as an encore.²⁹ It is said that Saint-Saëns’ mother would often shut the piano lid at times when he was young for fear he would become obsessed with the piano. At the age of seven, he began piano lessons with Stamaty, a former student of Kalkbrenner.³⁰ Stamaty introduced him to a professor at the “Conservatoire” where Saint-Saëns was admitted at the early age of fourteen.³¹ His career as a touring pianist continued as he became older. In fact, Saint-Saëns was the first pianist in history to perform a cycle of Mozart piano concertos.³² It comes as no surprise that he began to compose music for the instrument. However, he is known more for his orchestral works than his pieces for solo piano, and his sole left-hand piano work, the Op. 135 etudes, is even less known and perhaps unheard of in many instances.

The whole of Saint-Saëns’ music, both orchestral music and that for solo instruments, tends to be conservative in nature. Saint-Saëns’ views on music did not coincide with the more progressive composers of the time, and he often looked back to the Classical and Baroque styles for inspiration. Consequently, he had respect for the music of J. S. Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven, among others. James Harding refers to Saint-Saëns’ interest in these composers as his “intimacy with vanished masters of the

³⁰ Kalkbrenner himself had a fascination with the development of the left hand, and it is not surprising that this quality of writing is also found in the student of his own pupil. Kalkbrenner even wrote a sonata pour la main gauche principale which includes an exceedingly difficult left-hand part.
Saint-Saëns’ appreciation of Bach may simply be due to the timing of his career. The complete works of Bach had just been published in the last half of the nineteenth century, so Saint-Saëns was able to explore all of Bach’s works, not only his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which had been published previously.34

Given his affinity for the forms of the Baroque and Classical eras, it could be said that Saint-Saëns was one of the first neoclassical composers.35 At the time of Saint-Saëns’ career, the term ‘neoclassic’ would not have been used to describe his music, but from a better vantage point of nearly one hundred years later, his compositional style in many ways reflects what we would now call neoclassic. Although this movement may not have originated with Saint-Saëns, his style influenced later composers of the neoclassic style, such as Maurice Ravel. Rey M. Longyear even contends that “he may…be considered the chief forerunner of the neo-Classic revival transmitted by his pupil Fauré to Ravel, and ultimately to others like Stravinsky and Piston.”36

The neo-baroque or neoclassic style seen in some of Saint-Saëns’ works can be conceivably traced to Saint-Saëns’ other ventures, for he also edited works of Rameau, Mozart, Beethoven, and Liszt.37 Perhaps Saint-Saëns’ neo-baroque style, seen particularly in the Op. 135 etudes, was inspired by the works of the Baroque composer Jean-Philippe Rameau. Certainly, editing Rameau’s works would have given him ample opportunity to study the Baroque style.

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If the majority of Saint-Saëns’ music can be classified as neoclassic, it is generally with regard to form only. Gilbert Chase says, “He regarded music as a formal combination of pleasing sounds; what he sought was purity of style and perfection of form.” In fact, the emphasis on form and clarity is what best characterizes his works. His music is known for “its neatness of form, its directness, and its brilliant virtuosity” and is therefore often accused of lacking emotion. Even his performing at the piano was seen as indifferent and, though technically impressive, lacking in emotion as well.

Concerning his style, it is a common misconception that Saint-Saëns remained strictly in the past and did not endeavor to integrate new musical ideas. In an article written before Saint-Saëns’ death, Pierre Lalo said, “If one seeks to define his artistic personality, one is promptly embarrased by contradictory qualities and defects.” Saint-Saëns wrote in many styles of music, and his compositions cannot be simply labeled as one style or another, even taking into account his neoclassic tendencies. Some of Saint-Saëns’ music features chromatic harmonies and interesting rhythmic elements such as syncopation—characteristics that would not typically be found in Baroque or Classical music. Paul Henry Lang says the following about Saint-Saëns:

Saint-Saëns is the perfect type of the eclectic musician of talent. His musical gifts matured on the study of the classics, but nothing in the new musical movements escaped his attention; he knew everything and used everything. Active in all branches of music, he was equally at home in all of them, for his positive, intelligent reasoning, and precise mind…always advised the creative musician in him.

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42 Paul Henry Lang, Music in Western Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1941), 928.
Saint-Saëns even ventured into the realm of program music on several occasions and was not opposed to the idea of programmatic music. As a result of the influence of Liszt, he was one of the first composers to introduce France to the symphonic poem with his works such as *Le Rouet d’Omphale, Phaeton,* and *Danse Macabre,* the last of which was later transcribed for the piano by Liszt himself.\(^{43}\) When questioned about the validity of the genre, Saint-Saëns emphasized that it is the actual music upon which everything is dependent, and “whether it be or not accompanied by a programme it will neither be better nor worse.”\(^{44}\) For Saint-Saëns, the music was the focus, and if the piece became programmatic, it mattered little.

Interestingly, it is frequently said that Saint-Saëns did not value the music of Liszt. On the contrary, he greatly admired Liszt and even dedicated his Third Symphony in C minor to the composer.\(^{45}\) Watson Lyle says that when Liszt was unpopular in Paris, Saint-Saëns “exerted himself energetically to combat the derogatory influence.”\(^{46}\) Some of the elements of Saint-Saëns’ style can be traced to the music of Liszt, such as his formal approaches and, at times, displays of virtuoso brilliance. He was influenced by and approved of Liszt’s music because “Liszt combined innovation with a respect for the past.”\(^{47}\)

Despite the fact that his own works can be brilliant, virtuosic, and programmatic at times, Saint-Saëns did not agree with the opinions of many fellow French progressive composers. He was often critical of the music of his contemporaries, such as that of

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{47}\) Fruehwald, 170.
Debussy, d’Indy, Strauss, and Franck. In a letter to his student and eventual friend Gabriel Fauré, Saint-Saëns wrote the following comment discussing his opinion of a work by Claude Debussy:

I recommend you look at the pieces for two pianos, *Noir et Blanc* [sic] which M. Debussy has just published. It’s unbelievable, and we must at all costs bar the door of the Institut against a man capable of such atrocities; they should be put next to the cubist pictures.\(^{48}\)

Saint-Saëns’ view on Debussy’s compositions was indicative of his own approach, for he did not appreciate the impressionistic style. Intriguingly, several of Saint-Saëns’ works were later transcribed for two pianos by Debussy.\(^{49}\)

Saint-Saëns’ piano music is similar in style to the whole of his music, with some works exhibiting neoclassical qualities and some being more Romantic in style. The neoclassical style is particularly evident in the Op. 135 etudes that will be discussed later in this paper. Also, his piano pieces tend to be more light-hearted than serious and full of emotion. Some of his prominent solo piano works include *Allegro appassionato*, Op. 70, *Album pour piano*, Op. 72, and *Thème varié*, Op. 97. Although not initially intended for the piano, many of Saint-Saëns’ orchestral works were later transcribed for the instrument by other composers. In addition to the *Danse Macabre* transcribed by Liszt, there is also the “Wedding Cake” waltz transcribed by Benfeld and *Le Carnaval des Animaux* transcribed by Garban.


Background of Etudes

The repertoire of piano music in general is full of “studies” or etudes in various forms, encompassing a wide variety of composers and eras. An etude, by definition, exploits a technical or musical challenge and thereby functions as a tool for developing technique and musicianship. Since the purpose of studying the composition is to gain control over an evident challenge, the etude develops a distinct mood or character that it typically retains throughout the entire piece. Sabina Ratner suggests, “As the etude generally emphasizes a single technical problem, a certain consistency or unified character results.”

Etudes vary in length and difficulty, depending on the composer’s intent. They can be short and repetitive exercises, or they can be long, complex studies. In whatever form the etude appears, however, it normally maintains a single character. Edith Crawshaw asserts, “An etude proper, be it only a mechanical exercise or a characteristic piece, is distinguished from all other musical forms by the fact that it is invariably evolved from a single phrase or motif, be it of a harmonic or melodious character, upon which the changes are rung.”

While this simple definition remains the same for most etudes, the genre of the etude seems to have evolved throughout its existence in length, style, and even purpose.

In one of its early forms, the etude functioned solely to exploit a technical challenge, such as scalar runs, thirds, or articulation. Czerny’s etudes are such as these (see Example 6).

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50 Ratner, 145.
Through his *School of Velocity*, *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, and other collections of exercises, Czerny presents etudes to assist the piano student in his or her quest to conquer certain challenges of the piano. However, these etudes would not be likely to appear in a piano recital. They are studied, but typically not performed. Etudes like these by Czerny were intended to help a student master a particular technical challenge which he or she could then integrate into his or her repertoire music.

As the pianoforte became the instrument of choice, the popularity of the etude increased as well. Peter Felix Ganz says, “Pianoforte etudes became the main vehicle of the early nineteenth century to insure technical prowess of professional and amateur alike so that they might perform with best results on that new keyboard instrument that had superseded both clavichord and harpsichord around the turn of the century.”52 Realizing the capabilities of the newer instrument, pianists committed themselves to acquiring more skill. It is no coincidence that the composition of piano etudes reached its pinnacle during the nineteenth century.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, there appears to be a shift toward etudes more appropriate for concert performance such as those of Chopin (see Example 7) and, in particular, Liszt. Ratner affirms, “Chopin’s *Etudes*..., true character pieces, combine

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high artistic quality with technical difficulty, and created the concert étude designed for both study and concert performances."\textsuperscript{53}


Etudes still contained challenges of technical development for the pianist, but many now offered a performance opportunity as well, often with the intent of impressing an audience. With the age of Paganini and Liszt, virtuosi became revered by others. The étude, though already in existence as a form, became a medium for such virtuosi to display their talents to an audience.

Following the trend established by other nineteenth-century composers of piano works, Saint-Saëns explored the genre of etudes as well. Saint-Saëns wrote three sets of piano etudes: Op. 52, Op. 111, and Op. 135. Each set contains six etudes and requires a wide assortment of technical skill. Angelina Ngan-Chu Au says of these pieces, “Ranging from moderate to virtuosic in levels of technical difficulty, the études of Saint-Saëns, which constitute a significant part of the composer’s piano output, are demonstrative of

\textsuperscript{53} Ratner, 145.
distinctive pedagogical intent, a formal refinement, and versatility, as well as the musical
elegance and finesse typical of his style.” It is important to note that Saint-Saëns’
neoclassical approach to form is evident in most of these etudes in their titles, form,
harmonic language, and texture.

The first two sets of etudes, Op. 52 and Op. 111, are each entitled “Six études
pour le piano,” yet these etudes masquerade in the form of other well-known genres such
as preludes and fugues, waltzes, and toccatas. Even with these labels, however, the etudes
are aimed at developing particular techniques. For instance, in the prelude and fugue
from the Op. 52 set, the prelude consists entirely of alternating sixths in one hand while
the other hand plays a melody (see Example 8).


Besides merely executing the rapidly alternating dyads, another difficulty lies with the
indication that the piece should be played legato. Other technical demands of the Op. 52
and Op. 111 sets of etudes include “ease of mobility throughout the keyboard (wide
leaps), rapid alternation of hands, octaves, scales, arpeggios, consecutive thirds and

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54 Angelina Ngan-Chu Au, “The Piano Etude in the Nineteenth Century: From the Acquisition of Facility to Demonstration of Virtuosity” (D.M.A. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1999), 82.
sixths, … cross rhythms and hemiola.” These works exhibit some of the virtuosic qualities that are found in much of Saint-Saëns’ piano music—qualities that most likely stem from his own experience on the concert stage.

The last set of etudes Saint-Saëns produced, which is the focus of this study, is entitled *Six etudes pour la main gauche seule* and was written in February 1912 during the composer’s winter visit to Egypt. This is Saint-Saëns’ only piano work for the left hand, and like many composers of left-hand music, he wrote the pieces for a friend who was in need of piano music for the left hand. However, there exists some degree of ambiguity regarding which friend Saint-Saëns had in mind. Saint-Saëns dedicated Op. 135 to Caroline de Serres, his friend and occasional duet partner, whose right hand was temporarily immobilized after surgery. Robert Casadesus, a French pianist of the twentieth century, claims, however, that Saint-Saëns wrote the Op. 135 etudes for students of Louis Diémer, a friend of Saint-Saëns from the Paris Conservatory. Regardless of their compositional intent, the etudes were clearly dedicated to de Serres.

Although Donald Patterson labels these etudes as “difficult,” the actual score at first glance appears to be at an intermediate level. The performer must then take into account that the difficulty lies in the ability to play the work with only one hand. The Op. 135 etudes are not virtuosic in the traditional sense of Saint-Saëns’ music, or even that of the Romantic era. In fact, these etudes do not appear to be as challenging as some of the two-hand pieces from Saint-Saëns’ Op. 52 and Op. 111 sets of etudes. Their

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55 Ratner, 151.
56 Ibid., 157.
58 Dean Elder, “‘Une Bavardage’ with the French Pianist and Composer Robert Casadesus,” *Clavier* (March 1971), 11.
59 Patterson, 146.
classification as etudes results simply from the fact that they are to be played with the left hand alone. Patterson says, “[The Op. 135 etudes] require more than adequate pianistic skill, but are not as difficult as some of the most challenging left-hand repertoire.”

Indeed, in comparison to other works by Godowsky or Alkan, the Saint-Saëns etudes are not as complex, but they nevertheless are an excellent study of left-hand music. It is an acknowledgment to the quality of this work that Ravel studied the pieces as he planned for his own left-hand concerto, now better-known than this set by Saint-Saëns.  

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60 Ibid., 146.  
Analysis of Op. 135

In addition to the fact that they are etudes for the left hand, Saint-Saëns’ Op. 135 set shares some similarities with the Baroque dance suite. Most obvious of these similarities is the structure of the set and the titles of the individual movements. A suite from the Baroque era generally has five to six movements. Typical movements in the keyboard suite are the allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue, with one or more optional movements, such as a bourrée, minuet, or gavotte, often appearing before the gigue. Also, a prelude is occasionally included as the first movement of the set. Similarly, the Op. 135 set has six movements. The customary Prélude is found at the beginning while the Gigue and the Bourrée—other typical Baroque movements—are included as well. In addition to these three, the fugal movement and the piece in perpetual motion also reflect neo-baroque textures and compositional style. Only one of the pieces, the Élégie, seems to deviate from the Baroque style.

According to Marie Stolba, “The movements of a [Baroque] suite contrast in meter and tempo, but all movements are in the same key, and most are in binary form.”

Here, the Op. 135 etudes are again similar to a typical suite, although there is some degree of disparity. The movements are generally in a meter corresponding to their Baroque counterparts, although the Bourrée has a somewhat unusual meter of 2/2. The tempos of the movements are also similar to Baroque movements, such as the moderate prelude and the faster gigue. While a suite would likely have one key for all of the movements (although one movement may be in the parallel key), there is some variation in the Op. 135 etudes. With the exception of the Élégie, all of the movements are in a closely related key. The Prélude, Alla Fuga, and Gigue are all in G major, but each

modulates several times. It is significant that the Prélude and the Gigue begin and conclude the set, respectively, and function to reinforce the key of G major. The Bourrée is in the parallel key of G minor. The Moto Perpetuo movement seems unusual for its key of E major. Nevertheless, E major is the chromatic mediant to G major and still seems to fit loosely in the key structure of the set. The Élégie is the only movement that is abnormal. In the key of D-flat major, this movement does nothing to assist the organization of keys in Op. 135. In fact, it has a tritone relationship to the original key of G major. However, since this movement also does not assume the Baroque style of the other movements, the lack of a corresponding key relationship is not surprising. It may simply be the “free” movement of the piece, in which Saint-Saëns explored a more Romantic style and different sounds. The inclusion of the Élégie connects the Baroque style of the other movements to the nineteenth-century style during which Saint-Saëns composed. Regarding formal structure, binary form is not used consistently in all of the movements as would be typical in many dance movements of a Baroque suite. Saint-Saëns’ treatment of form in these etudes will be presented in greater detail in the following discussion.
Prélude

Although the prelude as a movement in a Baroque suite was not part of the established order, it was not uncommon to find a prelude at the beginning of a suite. As the opening to a suite, the prelude reveals the nature of the suite and establishes the tonal center. The Prélude of Op. 135 follows these expectations: it clearly establishes the tonic key of G major for the set and also exhibits some of the neoclassical characteristics to be found in the subsequent pieces.

The form of this piece is simple: ABABA. The same material recurs with slight variation throughout the piece and is divided by two sections of connecting material. The harmonic progression is not complex, and the key remains in G major for the entire piece. The two links function not to transition to a new key, but to return to the main theme. The first measure consists of the following pattern seen in Example 9:


The arpeggios on beat 1 stretch more than two octaves and are unreachable with a single hand. Therefore, the damper pedal should be used slightly with the arpeggios to maintain the harmony. The sixteenth rest allows the hand to move position in order to hold the half note with the thumb while the other fingers are free to play the thirds. The thirds should be played detached, giving the effect of two layers even though only one hand is playing. This pattern is repeated with some variance throughout most of the piece.
A tonic-dominant-tonic progression is formed in mm. 1-5, firmly establishing the key, then the harmony changes to E minor in mm. 6-8. In m. 6, the intervallic pattern also changes by using sixths instead of thirds on beats 2 and 3, and measures 8-9 completely omit the held half note in favor of the following pattern seen in Example 10:


In this measure, the eighth notes cannot be played while holding the quarter notes, so each beat should be pedaled separately.

In measures 10-13, the held half note returns, but is now followed by six sixteenth notes instead of three eighths, as seen previously (see Example 11).


In these measures, the sixteenth notes are both above and below the half notes, rather than just below, so the measures must be fingered carefully, with the second or third finger on the half note. As with the previous thirds, the sixteenth notes here should also be detached.
The climactic point in the first section of the piece occurs in m. 14. The dynamics finally reach *forte*, and in measures 14-17, both the articulation and the rhythmic pattern change. The half note with eighth notes is now replaced by a combination of two held quarter notes with four sets of sixteenth-note triplets above and below the quarter notes (see Example 12).

![Example 12. Saint-Saëns: Prélude, Op. 135, mm. 14-17.](image)

In contrast with earlier statements of the theme, the triplets are to be played legato rather than detached.

A link occurs throughout mm. 18-24. In m. 18 and the first beat of m. 19, there is a linear arpeggio on the dominant harmony of the key. The following measures consist of a sequential-like pattern with each beat made up of a quarter note with an underlying sixteenth note triplet. The harmony is simple, with only an accidental (E-flat) added occasionally. In mm. 19-21, there is a repetition of the following progression: iv-iii°-I-ii°-vii°-V-vi, all in first inversion. The second statement changes only the last chord to a minor iv chord. The broken chords in mm. 22-23 alternate between diminished seventh chords and either a dominant chord or some form of the subdominant. A diminuendo is
indicated in m. 22, then *molto ritardando* is indicated in m. 24, leading to a return of the main theme. An authentic cadence is outlined in m. 24 before returning to the tonic and the original tempo in m. 25.

Although m. 25 begins a clear restatement of the beginning of the piece, there is some modification. In combination with the half note, there are no thirds, but instead there is a return of the detached sixteenth notes from measures 10-13 (see Example 13).


![Example 13](image)

This pattern continues through m. 28. In mm. 29-32, the sixteenth notes continue but now should be articulated differently: legato rather than detached. There is a crescendo from measure 29-31, but each time the slurred sixteenth notes appear, there is a slight decrescendo within the overall phrase.

Another transition section consisting of sequential patterns happens in mm. 33-39. In mm. 33-34, a dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythmic combination is used on each beat with a second layer of almost continual sixteenth notes underneath (see Example 14).


![Example 14](image)
Though this is not a thick texture, the layers allow a series of chords to emerge on E minor, D major, C major, B minor, and A minor. Sixths and thirds then appear as alternating sixteenth notes from m. 35 to beat 1 of m. 37. On each half-beat, the pattern moves up one step on the G major scale. Beat 2 of m. 37 to beat 2 of m. 39 is a linear texture that should be smoothly connected. The transition finally ends in measure 40 with a ritardando and a chordal IV-V-I cadence back to the main theme again.

In m. 41, the theme briefly returns with the detached sixteenth notes but is found in a much lower register than the original theme. However, the piano dynamic is maintained from here until the pianissimo at the end of the piece. As the end of the piece arrives, the mood changes in mm. 44-47 with a thinner texture and more legato, linear arpeggios. Each measure changes the arpeggios slightly to imply a different harmony: vii\(^{7}\)/bIII, vii\(^{7}\)/V, V\(^{7}\), and IV\(^{6/4}\). The piece ends with three rolled tonic chords and a fermata sustaining the third and final chord.

As the prelude of Op. 135, this movement’s main purpose is to establish the nature of the set as a whole. It is a playful movement full of simple harmonies and interesting rhythmic elements. The Prélude has a somewhat thin texture but contains multiple layers and requires precise articulation. The limited use of the pedal and abundance of sequential material is indicative of several of the movements to follow. Even considering the texture, sequences, and light use of pedal, the Prélude may not be seen as neo-baroque by itself. However, as part of this set of etudes, it functions much in the same way as a prelude from a Baroque suite and thus presents a convincing opening to the neo-baroque set.
**Alla Fuga**

The second etude of the set, entitled “Alla Fuga” (“in the style of a fugue”), is similar to a fugue but not strictly a fugue in the Baroque meaning of the term. However, since the similarities are overwhelming and the piece is clearly structured in imitative counterpoint, it can be analyzed in the same way as a fugue of J. S. Bach. Thus, in the following analysis, the familiar labels such as subject, answer, countersubject, and episodes will be referenced as appropriate. In addition, the subject in this particular fugue is presented in both stretto and inversion (see Table 1).

Table 1. Op. 135 Alla Fuga overview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Subject—G major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>Answer (tonal)—D major, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Countersubject, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>Inverted subject, fragmented, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free material, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-25</td>
<td>Sequential episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-28</td>
<td>Subject, shortened—E minor, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Stretto] Inverted subject, shortened, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-34</td>
<td>Episode, based on subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-38</td>
<td>Free material, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject, no pickup—Bb major, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38-42</td>
<td>[Stretto] Answer, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free material, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43-50</td>
<td>Free material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>Episode based on subject—Bb major, C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-68</td>
<td>Chromatic transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-76</td>
<td>Subject—G major, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedal point on D, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-80</td>
<td>Pedal point on D, upper voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Episode based on subject, lower voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-90</td>
<td>Transition—Modulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-110</td>
<td>Subject in stretto (fragmented), both voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broken chords and arpeggios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cadences—G major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fugue follows the main key of the set: G major. The fugue begins with a quarter rest, although the listener will hear the subject beginning with the quarter-note pickup into m. 2. The subject begins in the middle register, an octave below middle C, and is four measures long. Most of the subject is to be played with a detached articulation (see Example 15).


Allegro non troppo

On beat 2 of m. 5, the answer begins along with a countersubject. The answer, as expected, is written in the dominant of D major, a fifth above the original subject. Although the answer appears to be a real answer, the first note of the answer is written only a fourth above the subject, so the answer is tonal. Compare the following two examples of tonal and real answers in Examples 16 and 17.

Example 16. Real answer (not used in *Alla Fuga*).
Both the answer and the countersubject maintain the detached articulation. The countersubject is comprised of continual, detached eighth notes without any deviation.

In m. 9, brief fragments of the subject enter in an inverted form. The inverted subject fragments are accompanied by free material. Following this, an episode occurs from m. 14 to m. 25. The episode consists of two different sequences. The first sequence in mm. 14-21 combines a scalar run of sixteenth notes with descending eighth notes (see Example 18).


The second sequence (mm. 22-25) includes staccato eighth notes in stepwise motion and eighth rests in the lower voice, while the upper voice consists of legato eighth notes in larger intervals. The last note of the upper voice in each measure is tied across the bar line, creating a suspended dissonance between the two voices (see Example 19).
The goal of these sequential episodes is to modulate to the relative minor. This is achieved in m. 25, at which point the subject recurs, now in the newly established key of E minor.

At m. 25, the transposed subject begins in the upper voice but is shortened to two measures. Almost simultaneously, in m. 26, the inverted subject begins in stretto in the second voice, but this statement is also shortened. An episode based on the sixteenth-note fragment of the subject begins at m. 29. The measures alternate with an ascending pattern in the upper voice followed by a descending pattern in the lower voice (see Example 20).

The two voices exchange the pattern at each measure in this episode. At m. 35, the episode finally takes the fugue to the bIII of the key—B-flat major. The change to B-flat is unusual not only because it is far removed from the tonic key of G major, but also
because the preceding chord progression does not clearly lead into B-flat major. In m. 34, the harmonic progression implies a cadence into the dominant of D major, so the shift to B-flat major is both unprepared and unexpected within the typical key structure of a fugue.

The subject is stated in m. 35 by the lower voice with no upbeat in the lower middle register of the piano (see Example 21).


![Example 21](image)

The subject is complete in this instance, but the upper voice contains free material instead of a countersubject. At m. 38, the subject appears in the upper voice in stretto, overlapping for one beat and accompanied by free material. The countersubject appears modified in mm. 41-42 with free material in the upper voice in mm. 43-50.

On beat 2 of m. 50, another two-part episode appears. The first part of the episode is clearly based on the subject, but this time the subject theme is in octaves—both voices, but for only 2 beats (see Example 22).


![Example 22](image)
This section modulates to C major in m. 54 and is followed by a sequence which includes a pattern of sixteenth notes resembling the second measure of the original subject (see Example 23).


After a chromatic transition, the episode finally concludes by returning to the tonic at m. 69. The subject returns for the final portion of the fugue and is first found in the octave below middle C, with a pedal point on D in the lower voice. The pedal point continues as the subject is repeated in A minor. The dominant pedal point then moves to the upper voice as fragments of the subject are repeated sequentially in the bass, eventually modulating to the bVI of the tonic key—E-flat major—at m. 81. Interestingly, this key is related to the earlier key of B-flat through a tonic-dominant relationship.

A nine-measure transition back to G major follows and consists of free material. In m. 90, a Codetta-like section presents the final appearances of the subject. Fragments of the subject emerge in stretto; first in the low register of the piano, then moving up toward the higher register (see Example 24).
The fragments of the subject are followed by four measures of broken chords with the progression: IV-vi-vii°/V-I\(^6/4\). An extension then offers four measures of tonic arpeggios leading to the final cadence. The fugue leaves the two-voice texture and incorporates a series of four-voice, quarter-note chords, including a perfect authentic cadence in G major (see Example 25).

The fugal style of this piece forces the pianist to focus on not one but two melodic lines, and thus is an excellent study for the left hand. The various lines support the improvement of finger independence in the left hand.\(^63\) The pianist must be in complete control to give a musically convincing and sensitive presentation of the polyphonic texture. This movement is essential to classifying Op. 135 in the neoclassical style.

Without the fugue, the similarity of this set to an eighteenth-century suite may be questionable, although the validity of such a comparison would still be strong.
Moto Perpetuo

In accordance with its title, “Perpetual Motion,” the third etude of Op. 135 consists of continual sixteenth notes in linear form. While the intervals between the notes change throughout the piece, including some occasional large leaps, the sixteenth notes continue from beginning to end without pause. The piece consists of four-measure phrases with only three exceptions. There is no traditional melody, so the variety of the piece is found in the changing harmonies within each phrase. However, the construction of chordal harmonies is limited by the linear texture of this etude. The harmony must be analyzed across multiple beats and cannot be confined to a single beat. Melodic sequences frequently appear to provide the suggested harmonic progression.

The piece begins in the key of E major. While this particular key may seem unusual since the main key of the set is G major, it is not extraordinarily strange, for E major is the chromatic mediant of G major. Interestingly, the key structure of Moto Perpetuo resembles that of Alla Fuga, the second etude of the set. In Alla Fuga, the key structure is as follows: G major, B-flat major, C major, G major, E-flat major, G major. Moto Perpetuo uses the following keys: E major, G major, B minor/D major, E major, C major, E major. The key structure is summarized in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alla Fuga</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Bb</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Eb</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moto Perpetuo</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>B min/D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Alla Fuga and Moto Perpetuo key comparison.
Although the tonic keys in these pieces are different, a pattern exists between the two. Note the shaded areas in Table 2. The first group of shaded keys is each a minor third above the tonic key of each piece. This is followed by two different keys (C major in *Alla Fuga* and B minor/D major in *Moto Perpetuo*). After another return of the tonic key, both pieces shift down a major third, observed in the second shaded area in Table 2. These keys represent a tonic-dominant relationship with the first shaded area. Finally, each piece then naturally ends in the tonic. It is striking that Saint-Saëns used similar key patterns in both of these pieces through third relationships and tonic-dominant connections.

*Moto Perpetuo* is labeled “Doux et tranquille—*sans vitesse et très également*” which means “soft and quiet—without speed and very equally.” Accordingly, the dynamic marking is *piano*, and although the piece should be played legato, the score indicates that pedal should not be used. Without the pedal, the primary challenge of the piece becomes connecting the linear texture without placing unnecessary accents on any particular notes. Thus, to play the notes “equally” is the difficulty found throughout this etude.

The form of the piece is not remarkable in any sense: similar material is repeated in various keys and is linked by transitional material in between. An ‘A section’ from the beginning recurs in the middle and at the end, giving the piece a type of rounded form. If a formal structure can be found for this etude, it would resemble the following loose organization seen in Table 3:
Table 3. Form of Moto Perpetuo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary theme</th>
<th>m. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental material</td>
<td>m. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return of primary theme</td>
<td>m. 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental material</td>
<td>m. 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return of primary theme</td>
<td>m. 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>m. 117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the form is rather ambiguous because there are no clear cadence points in the piece, and the sections seem to move from one phrase to the next without pause. Since the formal structure is so blurred, labeling the sections of this piece becomes problematic.

In addition to the variety created through the shifting tonal centers, the intervals (thirds) presented at the beginning of the etude are not consistent. Although the sixteenth-note rhythm is continuous, the order and size of the intervals change during the piece (see Example 26).


Later in the etude, intervals expand to include sixths and sevenths, as seen in Example 27.
The entire piece consists of four-measure phrases with only three exceptions. The phrases are evident due to the melodic activity and the direction of the intervals. The three exceptions to the four-measure phrases occur at mm. 63-64, mm. 107-108, and at the end of the piece. In the first two of these instances, the phrases are extended to six measures. At m. 63, the additional two measures function as the end of a modulation to C major (see Example 28).


At m. 107, the extra two measures lead into a closing section. Each time the standard four-measure phrase structure is disrupted in this piece, the phrase is extended at a point of repose, such as a transition to a new section or the end of a section.

Although the pattern of linear notes continues until the end, harmonic variety is found in the transitions and modulations into new keys. The first modulation occurs in m. 21, when the key shifts to G major, the primary key of the set (see Example 29).
Another modulation occurs in m. 33 as the piece changes to B minor. The material in this section resembles a transition with a series of sequential broken arpeggios. Following a two-measure crescendo, the material from the A section returns again, but this time in the key of D major.

At m. 63, after a six-measure phrase, the piece modulates to C major. The opening four-measure phrase in C major is then repeated an octave higher with slight variation. Subsequently, in mm. 71-74, a four-measure descending phrase in B-flat follows (see Example 30).

Although there is no change in the key signature, the key has unquestionably shifted to B-flat major at this point.

A modulation from mm. 83-90 brings the piece back to E major at m. 91. This also serves as a retransition to the A section before the end of the piece. After the six-measure phrase from mm. 103-108, sequential patterns begin to form as the piece nears
the end. From mm. 109-116, the same two-measure pattern is repeated, but it descends with each occurrence (see Example 31).


![Example 31](image)

In mm. 117-124, a one-measure pattern, consisting of several wide leaps, begins a new sequence (see Example 32).


![Example 32](image)

Other than the final phrase, this is the only part of the piece in which pedaling is indicated. The intervals have become large enough that pedaling is necessary to create a smooth sound. The piece continues to conclude until the final five-measure phrase in mm. 145-149. This phrase reaffirms the tonic key of E major and ends with arpeggios leading into the high register of the piano (see Example 33).
Correct fingering in this piece is extremely important. Without use of the pedal, the pianist must rely on connecting the notes solely with finger legato. Also, due to the intermittent leaps in the piece, some unusual fingerings may be needed. Sheila Clagg-Cathey says the piece “helps pianists prepare the left hand for technical challenges in Mozart sonatas and Chopin etudes” and that “the composer’s choice of keys and use of accidentals helps students develop equal facility with black and white key finger crossing.”

Certainly, the piece serves to develop a much needed technique that the left hand does not typically have the opportunity to improve through the standard piano literature.

Example 33. Moto Perpetuo, Op. 135, mm. 144-149.

---

**Bourrée**

A bourrée is a lively dance in duple meter that was popular during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The bourrée has French origins and is similar to a gavotte, but is not as common or as well-known. Whereas the gavotte would frequently begin on the third beat, the bourrée is distinguished by an anacrusis on the second beat. Although the bourrée was not considered one of the standard Baroque dance movements, it was often included as part of the dance suite. Bach and Handel are two prominent composers of the time who chose to incorporate bourrées into some of their dance suites.

J. S. Bach used the bourrée in two of his French suites and two of his English suites for keyboard, as well as in other works. In the order of dances in Bach’s suites, the bourrée is an optional dance usually found before the gigue. In two of the four suites containing a bourrée, Bach follows the ternary form commonly found for the dance: Bourrée I, Bourrée II, repeat of Bourrée I. The second bourrée would complement the first with related thematic material but might appear in a different key—most likely the parallel major or minor key of the first bourrée or another closely related key.

While the bourrée was popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was not regularly found in Classical music, and is found even less frequently in Romantic repertoire. Chopin wrote two bourrées based on folk tunes, and Chabrier wrote the *Bourrée Fantastique*. However, these pieces are certainly the exception. They are not standard pieces from the repertoire and are only rarely heard. Saint-Saëns likely included this dance in his Op. 135 etudes because its neoclassical connotations complement the other Baroque-style works of this set. Even though the bourrée in this particular set still functions as an etude for the left hand, the piece retains some of the important
characteristics of a seventeenth-century bourrée, such as the anacrusis upbeat, lively tempo, and duple meter.

The Bourrée of Op. 135 is in the typical duple time with a “Molto allegro” tempo marking. While the tonic key is G minor, there are some sections in B-flat major and G major, and the piece eventually ends in G major instead of G minor. The form of the Bourrée can be summarized in the following diagram:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\hline
\end{array}
\]

In contrast with Baroque practice, there are not two bourrées in ternary form in the Op. 135 set. However, it is worthwhile to note that this piece as a whole can be considered to have a compound ternary form.\(^{65}\) The first grouping of A-B-A’ (mm. 1-61) can be considered one large section and is repeated with some variance after the contrasting C section. Both section A and section B can be further divided into smaller subsections of distinct material as seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Subsections of Bourrée.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>k*</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>8-21</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>30-41</td>
<td>41-49</td>
<td>49-61</td>
<td>61-109</td>
<td>109-117</td>
<td>117-129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*k = closing theme

\(^{65}\) Although the ABACABA-Coda form of this piece resembles a rondo, the piece does not include the typical transitional passages of a rondo followed by noticeable recurrences of the A section. The form may suggest a rondo, but the material within the sections clearly does not support such a theory.
Characteristically, the piece begins with a one-note anacrusis on the dominant note of G minor. This etude presents one of the most distinguishable melodic lines of any of the movements in the Op. 135 set, perhaps second only to the melody of the Élégie. The melody in the A section is usually accompanied by harmonic thirds (see Example 34).


The ‘a’ subsection of A lasts from m. 1 to m. 8, and the ‘b’ subsection begins with an upbeat in m. 8. Both of these subsections are similar in length and content and thus form a parallel period. In mm. 10-12, there is a series of 7-6 suspensions which culminates in a common chord modulation into the relative major—B-flat (see Example 35).\footnote{It should be noted that at the first beat of m. 11, the ‘iii’ chord could also be analyzed as a V\(^7\) chord if the E-flat is considered a chord tone and the following D is considered a non-chord tone.}

Example 35. Bourrée, Op. 135, mm. 9-12.

G minor: i i VII VI

B-flat major: vi V IV iii ii V\(^7\) I
Following a series of legato arpeggios and broken chords, subsection ‘b’ ends with a convincing cadence in B-flat major.

The first part of section B, at m. 21, employs a new melody, and the harmonic thirds are now with the melody instead of the accompaniment. The second subsection of B, from mm. 30-41, consists of eighth-note arpeggios with a marked melody and functions as a transition back to G minor (see Example 36).


The sequential patterns lead to a V7 arpeggio in G minor and a return to the A section.

When A returns at m. 41, the melody is an octave lower and is doubled in octaves. The accompaniment, however, remains in the original octave (see Example 37).


At m. 49, a closing theme (k) appears that resembles the original ‘b’ subsection with its use of suspensions. In this instance, the subsection begins with 2-3 suspensions, then the intervals gradually expand before the section finally ends in G minor.
At m. 61, section C begins, which significantly contrasts with the material from A and B in texture, dynamics, and melodic style. Section C has a thinner texture with only one measure of blocked dyads in the entire section (m. 74). A pedal point on G is present throughout, as seen in Example 38.


Even though the texture in C is thinner than in the A or B sections, the harmony is still apparent. There are no blocked chords in this section, but the monophonic texture implies a distinct harmonic progression consisting of mostly tonic and dominant harmonies. There are only two dynamic indications found in the entire section: \( pp \) in mm. 61-76 followed by a crescendo at m. 77 that eventually climaxes at \( mf \) in mm. 85-87; a decrescendo then brings the dynamic back to \( pp \) at m. 88. Section C ends at m. 109 at the return of the A section in the tonic key of G minor.

This recurrence of section A is only moderately varied from the original material. The 7-6 suspensions from the beginning return here, and the section ends again by cadencing in B-flat major. Section B returns at m. 129 but is an octave lower. The retransition is different at this point, with some changes in the harmonic progression, but the piece once again finds its way back to section A at m. 149. The final statement of A begins with octaves in the high register, but the accompaniment still remains the same. In this way, the accompaniment is the unchanging factor as the primary theme is modified.
throughout the piece. The closing theme previously seen in m. 49 returns at m. 157 but it is now in octaves as well (see Example 39).


Similar to the first closing theme, the octaves in mm. 158-160 consist of expanding intervals. At this point, the octaves must be pedaled to maintain the harmonies that are implied. (With only one hand, it is not possible to sustain the half-note octaves while playing the quarter-note octaves.) The doubling of the melody as the piece progresses gives it a fuller sound in the later occurrences of the A section.

The piece could effectively end on the first beat of m. 169, but Saint-Saëns chooses to include a Coda beginning on the second beat of m. 169. The Coda is based on the C section, bringing back the G pedal point as well as other similar material. The Coda closes with several measures of broken chord arpeggios, followed by four measures of simple dominant-tonic octaves (see Example 40).

Although the piece began in the key of G minor, it ends in the parallel major and thus adheres to the tonal scheme of the Op. 135 set.
While the bourrée was more associated with the Baroque era and was only rarely seen in the later Romantic period, the élégie (the title used for the fifth piece of the Op. 135 set) was found in many periods of music, including the Romantic era. As a genre, it even continued to be popular with composers in the twentieth century. In the Romantic period, during which Saint-Saëns composed the Op. 135 etudes, there are many examples of élégies composed specifically for the piano, including works by Grieg, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff. In the musical meaning of the term, the élégie is a sad and mournful piece expressing grief and lament, although it does not necessarily refer to the death of some person. The Élégie from Op. 135 fits this description well. Although the piece is in a major key, the nature of the melody and the chromatic chords underneath have a mournful tone or, at the least, a romantic and sentimental quality.

The Élégie is what makes the Op. 135 set unique. Although the set as a whole appears comparable to a Baroque suite, this particular movement is the exception. The piece contains no neo-baroque characteristics but instead reflects a nineteenth-century Romantic orientation. More specifically, the Élégie distinguishes itself from the other five movements in the following ways: key signature, melodic style, texture, harmony, its expressive nature, and internal variety.

First, the key signature of the Élégie does not fit with any of the other movements of Op. 135. Although some of the movements are not in the main key of the set (G major), they remain closely related to that key. Moto Perpetuo is in E major, a third relation to G, and the Bourrée is in G minor, the parallel minor. The Élégie is in the key of D-flat major—a key far removed from G major.

Bartók, Busoni, and Reger are some twentieth-century composers who wrote élégies for the piano.
The melodic style of this piece also differs greatly from the other movements. Some of the movements do not have an extremely apparent melody, such as the Moto Perpetuo and the Prélude. The Gigue and Alla Fuga have more of a subject-like melody rather than a lyrical theme. The Bourrée has the most noticeable melody of these five, but even this melody is not as song-like in nature as the Élégie.

Related to the melodic style, the texture of the Élégie also differs from that of the other Op. 135 etudes. While some of the other etudes are polyphonic, the Élégie clearly has a homophonic texture: melody with accompaniment. Throughout most of the piece, the top note of the line is given priority. In addition, the texture is thicker in the Élégie, with many instances of dense chords or extended arpeggios. Such passages require a liberal use of the pedal, a technique that would be inappropriate in the other Op. 135 movements.

Harmonically, the Élégie is more associated with nineteenth-century practices than those of the Baroque or Classical periods. Some of the harmonies are chromatic and cannot be analyzed as part of D-flat major. For example, immediately after D-flat major is established, there is a C7 chord, an E major chord, and an F major chord in mm. 3-4; all of these harmonies are unusual in the key of D-flat (see Example 41).

In general, this etude is clearly the most expressive piece of Op. 135. Its Romantic characteristics are juxtaposed against the neo-baroque style of the other movements and are thereby accentuated. Most evident is the use of expressive markings within the score, such as the *espressivo* indication in mm. 13, 46, and 78 and the *molto tranquillo* marking in m. 88. The freedom of tempo is apparent even without any indication, and rubato can be applied throughout the piece.

The form of the *Élégie* is not unusual. Although at first glance the etude appears to have many sections, the piece can be simplified into an ABA form, with some modification at the return of A as seen in Table 5.

### Table 5. Form of *Élégie*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, theme 1</td>
<td>m. 1</td>
<td>Db major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A, theme 2</td>
<td>m. 13</td>
<td>Db major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition</td>
<td>m. 27</td>
<td>Modulating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>m. 30</td>
<td>A major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>m. 38</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition</td>
<td>m. 46</td>
<td>Modulating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A, theme 1 (modified)</td>
<td>m. 57</td>
<td>Db major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition</td>
<td>m. 70</td>
<td>Modulating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A, theme 2</td>
<td>m. 78</td>
<td>Db major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda, based on A</td>
<td>m. 88</td>
<td>Db major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noticeable contrasts exist between the larger sections of the piece. The A section is slow and expressive and in the tonic key of D-flat major. The B section is in A major and F major, and the more marked melody here is found in the lower register with arpeggios above. The tempo is faster in the B section, and the thematic material is more forceful and intense than that of the A section.
The A section has two themes, but they are both similar in character and feature long, lyrical melodic lines. The first theme is more chordal and is highly chromatic, as seen in Example 42. Although the thick chords in mm. 3-4 and mm. 7-8 are not typically found in D-flat major, the harmonic progression is based on an intervallic pattern of thirds. Compare the intervallic relationships within these two excerpts in Examples 42 and 43:

Example 42. Élégie, Op. 135, mm. 3-4.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
C & E & Ab & F \\
\uparrow M3 & \uparrow M3 & \downarrow m3
\end{array}
\]

Example 43. Élégie, Op. 135, mm. 7-8.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
A & Db & F & D \\
\uparrow M3 & \uparrow M3 & \downarrow m3
\end{array}
\]

The three chords in m. 3 have ascending major third relationships, while the last chord of m. 3 and the first chord of m. 4 share a descending minor third relationship. This same pattern is repeated sequentially in mm. 7-8, but it is altered in m. 11 (see Example 44).
The second theme of the A section consists of a sustained melodic line above descending arpeggios (see Example 45).

Between the A and B sections are several transitional phrases. The transitions may have some melodic qualities of their own, but they clearly function as a bridge between the various sections. The transitions are not repeated throughout the piece, however; Saint-Saëns uses new material with each one. The first A section finishes with a short transition beginning in m. 27 that employs quiet and simple chords. The transition ends on a V7 chord in D-flat but surprisingly moves to the B section in A major without any preparation. As stated previously, the B section contains fuller sounds through the use of octaves and accompanying arpeggios (see Example 46).
When considering that this section is meant for the left hand only, the writing seems almost virtuosic in nature. A longer transition follows from mm. 46-57 which contrasts with the first transition. The beginning of the transition has a descending bass pattern which is then repeated an octave lower. A series of triplet dyads follows, which emphasizes the intervals of a sixth and a fifth. In addition to modulating back to D-flat major, this passage functions as a subtle transition from the powerful B section back to the more subdued A section.

Finally, the first theme of the A section returns in m. 57, but is slightly modified from its first appearance (see Example 47).

Although the texture is more broken here, the harmony remains the same. A small transition occurs from mm. 70-77, followed by a slightly altered return of the second theme. The Coda begins at the *molto tranquillo* indication at m. 88 and is based on the chromatic first theme of A (see Example 48).
The variety exhibited in the Élégie between the larger sections and the smaller thematic ideas reveals a unique structural approach that is not present in the other five etudes.

If the use of a prelude, fugue, perpetual motion, bourrée, and gigue reflects the neoclassical attitude of Saint-Saëns, then the inclusion of an élegie perhaps reveals another facet of his style. In spite of his neoclassical tendencies, Saint-Saëns was influenced most directly by the Romantic era during which he composed, and the Élégie could be considered an overt rebuttal of any other stylistic claim.
**Gigue**

The final etude of the Op. 135 set is a gigue—yet another dance from the Baroque suite. A typical gigue is in binary form and uses compound meter, such as 6/8 or 12/8, but generally features triplet figuration. Since it is the final dance in a suite, the gigue is usually fast in tempo and very vigorous. A gigue is often imitative, and the beginning of a gigue may resemble that of a fugue through its use of subject-like material. In addition, the opening material is frequently found inverted in the B section of a gigue. A typical gigue found in J. S. Bach’s keyboard suites has most of these characteristics. The following in Example 49 is from Bach’s sixth French suite.

Example 49. J. S. Bach, French Suite No. 6, *Gigue*, mm. 1-3.

This example is in 6/8 compound meter with triplet figuration. The gigue is clearly imitative as the opening measure is repeated an octave lower. The dance as a whole is in binary form.

The Op. 135 *Gigue* has many similarities to its Baroque counterpart. The piece is in 3/8, and although this is not a compound meter, the meter is felt in one large beat per measure; thus, each measure can be heard as having triplet figuration. The tempo is “Presto” and remains fast for the entire piece. Even though the opening dynamics are relatively soft, the piece contains much energy and moves quickly. The accents within the piece add to the excitement and drive of the gigue. In contrast with the Baroque gigue,
this etude does not employ a subject-like entrance, nor does it use imitation, likely due to the limitations of using only one hand.

Unlike the traditional gigue, the form of this gigue is not in simple binary form. The piece contains many small thematic ideas which recur throughout the piece, either in part or in full. However, it is possible to group some of the smaller sections into three large sections, giving the etude a composite ABA form as seen below in Table 6.

Table 6. Gigue, overview of form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>mm. 1-20</td>
<td>G major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>mm. 21-31</td>
<td>B minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transition</td>
<td>mm. 32-38</td>
<td>Modulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>mm. 39-46</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>mm. 47-54</td>
<td>viiº/G, viiº/D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fragments of a</td>
<td>mm. 55-62</td>
<td>Modulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>mm. 63-70</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>dev. of a</td>
<td>mm. 71-79</td>
<td>Ab major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>mm. 80-87</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dev. of a</td>
<td>mm. 88-102</td>
<td>Modulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>mm. 103-110</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transition</td>
<td>mm. 111-118</td>
<td>Modulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>figuration</td>
<td>mm. 119-126</td>
<td>B major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>mm. 127-144</td>
<td>G major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>mm. 145-152</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>mm. 153-160</td>
<td>G major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>mm. 161-168</td>
<td>Ab major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>figuration</td>
<td>mm. 169-184</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coda (from a)</td>
<td>mm. 185-205</td>
<td>G major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the tonal center of Op. 135 as a whole, the key of the Gigue is G major. The key signature does not change at any point in the etude. However, there are several occurrences of temporary modulations within the piece, some of which are noted in Table 6. In several instances, a theme recurs in a different key. For instance, the opening theme
of the piece is in G major, but in m. 21, the same theme reappears in B minor. In addition, there are several examples of sequential material that moves through several keys. Even though the piece includes many temporary modulations, the gigue always returns to G major and thus reinforces the main key of the set as the concluding etude.

The ‘a’ subsection in G major begins with a monophonic line of broken staccato eighth notes interspersed with a one-measure slurred sixteenth-note figure (see Example 50).


Both the broken chords and the figure seen in m. 7 return often throughout the piece. The texture becomes slightly thicker as blocked chords appear in mm. 16-20, but there is no imitation as might be expected (see Example 51).

At m. 21, the ‘a’ subsection returns but in the unexpected key of B minor (see Example 52).

Example 52. *Gigue*, Op. 135, mm. 21-24

The return of ‘a’ in this key is slightly modified but still convincing. Only the monophonic beginning of ‘a’ is presented, however, and the chordal texture found at the end of the original ‘a’ is absent. Instead, there is a transition into new material consisting of several tied suspensions (see Example 53).


The transition ends with a vii°/III chord leading into the next subsection of sequential material.

The A section continues at m. 39 with the second thematic idea (b), which consists of a quick upward arpeggio followed by three detached eighth notes (see Example 54).
This subsection has a sequential harmonic pattern: the first two measures are in B major, while the second two measures are in E minor, a fifth down from B. The pattern then moves up a half step with two measures in C major followed by two measures in F major, thereby maintaining the fifth relationship.

At m. 47, the ‘c’ subsection functions to modulate to the dominant key of D major: the harmony in mm. 47-50 is vii\(^{7}\)/G major, and in mm. 51-54 it is vii\(^{7}\)/D major. With each harmonic change, broken chords move down the keyboard before ascending again (see Example 55).

Example 55. *Gigue*, Op. 135, mm. 49-52.

In addition, the passage also features a hemiola effect. Each set of two eighth notes is slurred together, causing a slight accent to be heard on every other beat. In this way, the triplet feel is suspended; instead, the notes are now heard as groups of two.

Fragments of the ‘a’ subsection return at m. 55 in D major, then in C minor and C major. The ‘d’ subsection at m. 63 is different in character than the previous sections—it is more lyrical. Throughout the eight-measure sequence, two voices are distinguished...
from each other by their respective articulations. Although the two voices overlap, the lower voice is detached while the upper voice is slurred. It is important to note that in this instance of ‘d,’ the eighth notes move in an upward direction (see Example 56).


At m. 71, a developmental subsection signals the arrival of a new large section—B. At this point, most of the thematic material of ‘a’ returns, but it is now in the key of A-flat major (see Example 57).


The more lyrical ‘d’ subsection recurs at m. 80, but it is more extended than before. In addition, the articulation has changed, for the whole passage is legato. Finally, while this material progressed upward at m. 63, the pattern now moves down (see Example 58).
As stated earlier, in the B section of a Baroque gigue, the subject would often be found inverted. This change in direction, then, may be Saint-Saëns’ way of conforming to the Baroque compositional practice.

The staccato eighth-note motive from the beginning of the A section is further developed at m. 88 (see Example 59).

For the next several measures, the development follows a circle of fifths progression: F-sharp major at m. 88, B major at m. 90, E major at m. 94, and A major at m. 98.

The hemiola ‘c’ subsection returns at m. 103. The pattern still moves down and then up, but the harmony is now primarily vii\(^7\)/A and vii\(^s\)/D. A modulatory transition similar to the transition in section A occurs here and leads directly into eight measures of figuration from mm. 119-126 (see Example 60).
All of this brisk figuration emphasizes B major before making an unexpected shift back to G major. At m. 127, the A section returns but is now inverted and is partially in octaves. The sequential ‘b’ subsection follows at m. 145 and maintains the dominant-tonic relationship by using the following broken chords: D major—G major; E major—A major.

The ‘d’ subsection returns for a third and final time at m. 153. It is important to note that this statement of ‘d’ combines the material of the two previous statements. In this occurrence, the pattern begins by moving up but then also moves down (see Example 61).

Another directional change occurs when the ‘c’ subsection appears for the last time at m. 161. The hemiola rhythm returns as expected, but the broken chords move up first, then down. At m. 169, figurational patterns appear but are different from those seen in mm. 119-126. Here, the figuration is more contracted in range and is grouped into two-measure figures instead of one long ascending figure. In addition, the dynamics of the
first set of figuration utilized only one long crescendo, but the second set of figuration uses a smaller crescendo and decrescendo with each figure. Compare the figuration found in Examples 60 and 62.


Just as the first set of figuration functioned as a transition to the return of A, this figuration functions as a transition to the Coda at m. 185. The Coda is clearly based on section A, in particular the beginning ‘a’ theme. The piece ends with rapid descending eighth notes based on the motive heard at the beginning.

With regard to meter, tempo, and its monophonic opening, this etude resembles a Baroque gigue and therefore contributes to the neo-baroque nature of this set. However, the simple binary form of a typical Baroque gigue is not present in this piece. The loose linking of smaller sections adds a more modern structure yet provides greater unity to the piece as a whole. Even though the gigue in this set of etudes has some neo-baroque qualities, it could not be mistaken with an actual gigue of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Saint-Saëns’ concluding etude evokes a Romantic quality of freedom through its treatment of form, even as it reminisces on ideas of the past.
Conclusion

Although there are several advantages to playing left-hand music, the difficulties created by the use of only one hand are great, both for the performer and for the composer. The attraction of any piece of left-hand music must lie in the sonorities that are created or the challenges that are posed. While playing with only the left hand is somewhat virtuosic in itself, the pieces are limited in that capacity. In fact, the compositional style of the music is sometimes defined by these limitations. It is impossible to produce the sonorities of two hands by using only one; however, it is entirely possible to capture the same beauty of two-handed music by using only one hand. Therefore, as with any piano piece, the success of a piece for the left hand alone depends upon the musician and his or her ability to be expressive even with such limitations.

Saint-Saëns’ Op. 135 etudes are unique beyond their restriction to one hand. The set’s neoclassical style is its most significant feature. The work is similar to a Baroque suite through its use of dance titles, traditional formal structures and key relationships, linear textures, and general compositional style. Brian Rees comments on Saint-Saëns’ use of the Baroque style in his compositions:

When Saint-Saëns wrote preludes and fugues in the form in which Bach had established them, it was his aim to make known the greatness and potentialities of this particular vehicle of expression. When he re-created the old dance forms and suites of the eighteenth century, it was a kind of homage to the refining graces of that period, in which music had become sophisticated.68

Saint-Saëns’ fascination with Baroque music likely contributed to the style of the Op. 135 set.

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Despite the overall neo-baroque style of the Op. 135 set, the etudes exhibit Romantic characteristics as well. The simple inclusion of an élégie is the strongest contradiction to the neo-baroque features. Also, the harmonies in some of the movements are rather progressive and may not normally be associated with the style of the Baroque era. The form of most of the pieces is complex, and the sections are only loosely connected at times. There are no pieces in simple binary form as would be expected in a Baroque suite. Finally, the genre of etudes is more associated with the Romantic period than with any other musical era, and while these etudes should not be classified as concert etudes, they hold more weight than an etude of the ‘exercise’ type.

Surprisingly, the Op. 135 etudes are not well known. Their infrequent appearance in recitals may be associated with the neglect of Saint-Saëns’ piano music in general, or it may simply be attributed to the one-handed challenge of the etudes. In any case, it is unfortunate that such a treasure of piano music has seemingly been lost to the current generation of pianists and piano teachers. Although the etudes at times can be difficult to play due to the large extensions and awkward fingerings, they are pedagogically invaluable for the development of the left hand.

The Op. 135 etudes may not be the most musically satisfying piece of music from the Romantic period, or even from the body of works that Camille Saint-Saëns produced. However, their worth both as left-hand pieces and as neo-baroque etudes gives them an important place in the piano repertoire. The unusual attributes of the set of etudes distinguish it from other nineteenth-century pieces. As left-hand etudes, the Op. 135 set challenges the technical capabilities of the pianist; as neo-baroque pieces, the set connects the stylistic ideas of two eras of music history. Saint-Saëns skillfully combined
both old and new practices in such a way that the limitations of one hand are hardly noticeable. The set cannot be considered a piano masterpiece on the scale of a Mozart concerto or a Beethoven sonata, but it should not be compared to other piano works in such ways. The simplicity and freshness of the set are what make it so striking. Without any doubt, the Op. 135 etudes should be valued as a distinctive piano work from the undervalued composer—Camille Saint-Saëns.
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