

Thought of romanticism and literacy of classicism: An analysis composition techniques of *Rondo Capriccioso Op.14* by Felix Mendelssohn



Xinwen Yan^a  | Jian Zhang^a  

^aCollege of Music, Henan University of Economics and Law, China.

Abstract Felix Mendelssohn, a prominent figure of the German Romantic period, is celebrated for his remarkable musical talent and creativity. Among his numerous acclaimed compositions, "*Rondo Capriccioso*" stands out as one of his most distinctive works. This study aims to deeply analyze the classical and romantic characteristics of Mendelssohn's "*Rondo Capriccioso*" to explore its musical essence and artistic value. The research methodology involves an extensive review of relevant literature and materials, combined with an in-depth analysis of the composition itself, including an introduction to the composer and the historical context of the work. The study examines the musical structure and shares insights into performance techniques. Findings reveal that "*Rondo Capriccioso*" showcases Mendelssohn's unique synthesis of classical and romantic music styles, as reflected in its structural layout, harmonic tonality, and innovative compositional techniques. This piece not only demonstrates Mendelssohn's continuation and development of classical traditions but also highlights his innovations and contributions to the romantic music genre. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the artistic depth of Mendelssohn's compositions, providing fresh perspectives and theoretical support for academic research in music, enriching the understanding of the Romantic era, and offering valuable insights for the performance practice of this work.

Keywords: music theory, Rondo Capriccioso Op14, felix mendelssohn, classicism and romanticism, cultural appreciation

1. Introduction

Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 14, is one of Mendelssohn's remarkable compositions, notable for its distinctive musical style and innovative techniques. This piece has had a significant impact on its contemporaries and continues to influence future generations. In the evolution of Western music history, the contributions of Mendelssohn and his exceptional works are substantial (Storr, 2015; Campbell, 2017; Zhang, 2023). He produced a rich body of compositions that have become cornerstones in the development of Western piano music, many of which remain widely performed. "*Rondo Capriccioso* in E minor" comprises two sections: a capriccio and a rondo. The piece is characterized by its lyrical and gentle melody, graceful and natural style, and absence of intense dramatic conflicts. Mendelssohn's unique approach blends the essence of classical elegance with romantic expressiveness, creating a composition that is both refined and opulent. This study aims to explore the deep interconnection between musical composition, classical literacy, and romantic thought, specifically within the context of Mendelssohn's "*Rondo Capriccioso*, Op. 14 (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Mendelssohn lived during the early 19th-century Romantic period, a time when music was increasingly moving beyond the constraints of classical forms and styles, embracing freer and more personalized modes of expression. Composers of the Romantic era sought to convey their own individual artistic emotions, often prioritizing emotional depth and personal expression. Mendelssohn's musical style stood out in this period for its distinctive blend of romantic sensibilities and classical rigor. He seamlessly integrated the emotional and expressive qualities of Romanticism with the structural discipline of Classical music, thus pioneering new directions in musical composition and expanding the creative possibilities of his time. *Rondo Capriccioso Op. 14*, is a notable piano piece composed by Felix Mendelssohn during his early years. Created in 1824, when Mendelssohn was just 15 years old, this work marked his initial foray into the realm of piano composition. Originally published in 1828 under the title "Etude," it was later revised and renamed "*Rondo Capriccio* in E Minor" in 1830 (Mang & Custodero, 2006; Liu, 2022; Jian, 2022).

This composition emerged during the 19th century, a period marked by the confluence and transformation of classical and romantic styles, coinciding with a golden era in German music history. During this time, musical creation increasingly moved away from the strict forms and conventions of classical music, embracing a freer and more personalized mode of artistic expression. Mendelssohn's work epitomizes this transitional moment, blending the structural clarity of classical music with the



expressive, emotive qualities characteristic of the Romantic period. Mendelssohn skillfully fused the structural precision of classical music with the expressive qualities of romanticism, crafting a distinctive musical style. *Rondo Capriccio Op.14* is imbued with a romantic atmosphere, celebrating the beauty of nature in vivid, lyrical terms. Through the seamless integration of music and poetic sensibility, Mendelssohn created a soundscape teeming with freedom, individuality, and vitality. Within this musical world, listeners can sense his profound love for life and his unwavering dedication to the art of music (Ng et al., 2022; Yang & Welch, 2023).

Despite the profound influence of *Rondo Capriccio Op. 14*, there exists a notable gap in understanding how Mendelssohn's compositional techniques within this piece contribute to both Classical literacy and Romantic thought. Existing research on *Rondo Capriccio Op. 14* tends to be superficial, primarily focusing on biographical details, the creative background, emotional expression, and performance techniques, while offering limited in-depth analysis of the music itself. Most studies, especially within domestic scholarship, remain at the level of basic musical analysis, addressing themes, form, structure, style, and performance aspects, and often providing only a cursory overview of the classical and romantic elements present in the music. Notably, there is a lack of specific analysis on how Mendelssohn's compositional techniques simultaneously engage with and reflect Classical principles and Romantic ideology (He & Sornyai, 2023; Juan et al., 2023).

This study carries significant implications for both music education and cultural studies. By examining the intersections of music making, literacy, and cultural appreciation, it offers valuable insights into how music can serve as a medium for intellectual and artistic enrichment. Furthermore, the findings can inform the development of music education curricula by guiding educators in integrating culturally relevant content, thereby enhancing students' literacy and cultural awareness. Through this exploration, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the intricate connections between music, literacy, and culture, particularly within the frameworks of Classical and Romantic styles.

1.1. Research Question

How do the compositional techniques employed by Felix Mendelssohn in "*Rondo Capriccio*," Op. 14, contribute to both Classical and Romantic styles, particularly in the contexts of literacy development and cultural studies appreciation?

1.2. Literature Review

Analyzing the compositional techniques within the framework of Classical literacy and Romantic thought in the works of Felix Mendelssohn involves placing his music within the wider context of music education, cultural studies, and literacy development. To grasp the importance of his contributions in these areas, it is crucial to examine the existing literature that explores the intersections of music, literacy, and cultural appreciation.

In the study of different performance versions of the same musical piece, Song (2024) employed literature review and comparative research methods to explore expressiveness in three different performers' renditions of Mendelssohn's Op. 14. This research examines the expressive aspects of the piece in performance and elucidates the significance of performance as a secondary creation in interpreting the work. He (2014), using Schubert's piano impromptus as a case study, analyzed aspects such as form structure, harmonic usage, and modality, discovering that elements of Classicism and Romanticism are, to a certain extent, interconnected. Shen (2024), in their master's thesis *The Fusion of Classical and Romantic Elements: A Case Study of Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso in E Minor, Op. 14*, primarily focused on the use of classical and romantic elements in the structure, themes, and rhythm of the composition. However, the study lacks a systematic analysis of the overall form structure and a comparison of stylistic differences in performance techniques.

In music education, scholars have highlighted the importance of integrating culturally relevant content into curriculum design to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes (Choksy et al., 2009). By introducing students to diverse musical traditions, educators can promote cultural awareness and appreciation, while also fostering critical thinking and creativity (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014). Within this educational framework, Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccio, Op. 14* serves as a rich example of cultural heritage, offering unique insights into the musical and literary traditions of its time.

Furthermore, research indicates that music composition significantly contributes to literacy development by stimulating linguistic processing, enhancing cognitive abilities, and encouraging emotional expression (Rauscher & Zupan, 2000; Mang & Custodero, 2006). Engaging in music composition involves critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-expression—skills that are fundamental to literacy (Barrett, 2012). Therefore, by examining Mendelssohn's compositional techniques, we can better understand the role of music composition in advancing literacy development and cultural appreciation.

In the realm of music composition techniques, Li Yi (2019) explores the fusion of classical and romantic elements within the piece. His analysis addresses the integration of these styles and provides specific performance suggestions tailored to different skill levels. Additionally, Zou Jiachun (2020), offers a comprehensive overview of the work's structure. It details Mendelssohn's compositional techniques, emphasizing the classical and romantic elements within the piece and examining how these techniques contribute to the overall form and structure.

As we delve into music composition, it becomes evident that the process transcends the creation of melodies and harmonies; it also serves as a medium for cultural expression and intellectual development (Huang, 2024). Liu Shiping focuses

on describing the compositional techniques that align with the classical structure and style of the piece. He provides an in-depth analysis of performance techniques, including the use of dynamic touch, tuning, octaves, and pedals (Liu, 2022). Additionally, Xu Jing (2023) published an article titled "Interpretation of Performance Techniques of Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccio* in E Minor" in the journal *Art Panorama*. This article offers a succinct overview of Mendelssohn's works, along with structural analysis and emotional expression, but places significant emphasis on interpreting performance techniques. Xu carefully analyzes the key points and challenges of performing the piece, offering detailed performance suggestions (Xu, 2023)

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Scope of Content and Time

This research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the compositional techniques employed by Mendelssohn in *Rondo Capriccio, Op. 14*. It will explore the intricacies of Mendelssohn's musical style within the framework of literacy and cultural studies, focusing on how his techniques contribute to literacy development and cultural appreciation. The study will primarily examine his compositions, using them as primary sources for analysis, in addition to comparing works by other composers of the same period, a comparative study was also conducted on other compositions by Mendelssohn in a similar style. This approach will provide insights into the specific techniques Mendelssohn utilized to evoke a sense of literacy and cultural appreciation among his listeners.

Furthermore, the study will explore the historical and cultural contexts surrounding both Classicism and Romanticism, shedding light on their significance within the broader landscape of Western music. By considering the socio-cultural influences on Mendelssohn's compositions, this research aims to contextualize his artistic choices and their impact on literacy development and cultural understanding.

This approach will provide a comprehensive view of how Mendelssohn's work reflects and contributes to the cultural and intellectual currents of his time. The research will thoroughly examine Mendelssohn's contribution to literacy development and cultural appreciation through the compositional techniques employed in his *Op. 14*.

2.2. Selection of Key Informants and Research Tools

In this study, we aim to explore the compositional techniques of Felix Mendelssohn within the context of both Classical and Romantic style, focusing on how these techniques contribute to literacy development and cultural appreciation. Our research objective is to analyze the intricate relationship between Mendelssohn's music composition, literacy skills, and cultural appreciation. By selecting three key informants, as detailed in Table 1, and employing research tools such as interview forms and observation forms, outlined in Table 2, we aim to gather comprehensive insights into the impact of Mendelssohn's compositions on literacy and cultural understanding.

Table 1 Selection of three key information.

Key Informant	Background and Expertise
Music Scholars and Experts	Specialization in Chinese music and composition techniques. In-depth knowledge of Mendelssohn's works
Professional Musicians and Conductors	Experience in performing and interpreting Mendelssohn's compositions. Familiarity with the practical application of composition techniques in musical performances
Music Educators and Pedagogues	Expertise in teaching composition and music theory, Experience in integrating composition techniques into music education curricula

Table 2 Research tools.

Research tools	Description
Interview Form	Specialization in Chinese music and composition techniques. In-depth knowledge of Mendelssohn's works
Observation Form	Experience in performing and interpreting Mendelssohn's compositions. Familiarity with the practical application of composition techniques in musical performances

2.3. Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase of this study, we will utilize qualitative methods to examine the insights obtained from interviews and observations with the three key informants. The interview transcripts and observational notes will be meticulously reviewed to categorize the responses and observations into thematic areas, such as the effectiveness of different composition techniques in enhancing literacy skills, the significance of Mendelssohn's compositions to both Classical and Romantic cultural traditions, and the implications of these findings for music education. This thematic analysis will allow us to draw connections between Mendelssohn's compositional approach and broader educational and cultural contexts.

3. Results



3.1. Mendelssohn's Composition Techniques

Mendelssohn's Op. 14 significantly altered the traditional layout of the rondo form characteristic of the Classical period. *Rondo Capriccio* Op. 14 is structured through a blend of capriccio and rondo, with the capriccio serving as an independent section that thoroughly sets the stage for the ensuing rondo. This is achieved both through the completeness of the form's structure and the expressiveness of the musical content. Mendelssohn treats the capriccio as a standalone musical introduction, which seamlessly transitions into and interweaves with the personalized rondo section. This innovative structural design highlights the composer's unique personality and infuses the work with a distinctive Romantic sensibility.

Moreover, the structural arrangement of the Rondo section in Op. 14 deviates from the classical tradition. Mendelssohn introduces a connecting phrase as an independent segment between the main sections and interludes, which enhances the contrast and differentiation within the structural layout. Additionally, the interlude arrangement, following an A-B-A-C-A pattern, is distinctively unique, with each section contrasting yet maintaining its independence. This combination of independent interludes and connecting phrases exemplifies Mendelssohn's Romantic style, showcasing his innovative approach to form and his ability to merge structural independence with cohesive musical expression.

3.2. Comparative Analysis of Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 14

After an in-depth analysis of Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso*, Op. 14, it is essential to compare it with other significant works from the same period to explore its uniqueness and stylistic characteristics. In particular, a comparison with Mendelssohn's own *Capriccio Brillant*, Op. 22 and Chopin's *Rondo in E-flat Major*, Op. 16 can provide a clearer understanding of Mendelssohn's innovations in form and emotional expression.

Capriccio Brillant, Op. 22, composed in 1832, was deeply influenced by the composer Weber. This work, written for piano and orchestra, showcases brilliant piano technique and orchestral accompaniment. Both *Capriccio Brillant* and *Rondo Capriccioso* reflect the lyricism and fantasy of Romantic music, featuring beautiful melodies and rich harmonies that emphasize emotional and musical imagery.

However, there are notable differences in their formal structure. *Capriccio Brillant*, Op. 22 comprises two movements in B minor, with an *Andante* first movement and an *Allegro con fuoco* second movement. The structure demonstrates a certain freedom and is not purely a piano composition. In contrast, *Rondo Capriccioso*, Op. 14 is composed of an *Andante* introduction and a *Presto* rondo section, forming a well-defined structure. It employs a rondo form with an ABACA pattern, where the alternation of main and episodic sections demonstrates Mendelssohn's innovation. The contrast between the introduction and the rondo part embodies a fusion of Classical sonata form and Romantic rondo form.

In terms of harmony, *Capriccio Brillant*, Op. 22 makes extensive use of modulations and chromatic intervals, enhancing the music's color and expressiveness. In *Rondo Capriccioso*, Op. 14, the alternation between major and minor modes and parallel keys (E major, E minor, and G major) in the main and episodic sections not only provides a stark contrast but also reflects the lyricism of Romantic music. The harmonic writing in *Rondo Capriccioso* is more varied and bold, with chromaticism appearing in specific sections, such as rapid chromatic scale passages and chromatic ornaments.

Comparison between Mendelssohn's Op. 14 and Chopin's *Rondo in E-flat Major*, Op. 16, Chopin's *Rondo in E-flat Major*, Op. 16, composed in 1832, belongs to Chopin's early works. Its structure is a complex, compound rondo, including an introduction, main theme exposition, connecting sections, theme recapitulation, and a coda. In contrast, Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso* centers around a rondo form, with two occurrences of episodic material and repeated main themes. This structure maintains Classical rigor while integrating Romantic elements, resulting in a more multidimensional and flexible composition.

In Chopin's *Rondo in E-flat Major*, chromatic harmony and altered chords are frequently used to heighten tension. Additionally, distant modulations add to the harmonic complexity, with clear influences of Polish folk music and Romantic sensibilities. Comparatively, Mendelssohn adheres more closely to Classical harmonic progression and counterpoint, constructing his harmonies around the overall structure of the music. His approach is more logical and cohesive, while also incorporating Romantic emotional expression and innovative melodic treatment.

In summary, Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso*, Op. 14 stands out for its blend of Classical and Romantic elements, rich emotional expression, and dynamic color contrasts. Meanwhile, Chopin's *Rondo in E-flat Major*, Op. 16 is celebrated for its distinctive personal style and elaborate ornamentation. Both works are outstanding representations of Romantic piano music, each with its own unique characteristics.

3.3. Classicism Literacy in Harmonic Progression

In the Classical period, harmonic progressions typically followed a "tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic" pattern, which established a sense of order and predictability. Harmonic accompaniments during this era were characterized by their standardized and orderly nature. The use of non-chord tones was relatively minimal, resulting in harmony that was clear and concise. Additionally, the tonal structure of Classical music was relatively straightforward, with few abrupt key changes. When modulations did occur, they primarily involved relative major and minor keys or closely related keys, which shared many

common tones. This approach minimized strong contrasts and maintained a harmonic palette that was soft and charming. Overall, the music of the Classical period exhibited few dramatic shifts in harmony or modality, emphasizing regularity and balance as its defining features.

In the main section of the rondo, the composition adheres to the standard harmonic progression of "tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic." This creates a sense of stability and order, characteristic of Classical period harmonies. The harmony remains stable and clear, with minimal use of non-chord tones, aligning with the typical harmonic conventions of the time, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Harmonic Progression.

3.4. Romanticism thought in Harmonic Progression

Romantic composers frequently utilize distantly related keys and harmonic variations to enhance musical expression, with richer harmonic colors leading to stronger emotional impact. In Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccio*, Op. 14, the harmonic structure is notably diverse. The piece begins with a prelude in E major, transitioning to the rondo section in E minor. This alternation between major and minor keys, centered around the same tonic, and the downward tendency of the tonic, produce two distinct harmonic colors. This approach creates a sharp contrast between the melodic styles of the prelude and the rondo, highlighting the composer's innovative harmonic arrangement and the emotional depth characteristic of Romantic music.

In terms of harmony, the interlude in Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccio*, Op. 14 introduces musical material distinct from the main sections, with more pronounced key changes. During the Classical period, the dominant key was often used to modulate to the interlude. However, Mendelssohn diverges from this tradition. While the main section is in E minor, the first interlude modulates to G major, and the second interlude shifts to E major. This use of the mediant (third) relationship and the interplay of major and minor keys based on the tonic creates contrasting harmonic colors. Notably, similar harmonic strategies were employed by Chopin and Schubert, utilizing the third relationship to soften tonal conflicts, a hallmark of the Romantic style.

The transition to the second interlude, which changes from G major to E major, forms an arched harmonic structure. This structure, combined with the repeated return of the main theme, highlights the vividness of the main section and accentuates the contrast between the primary theme and the interlude. The main section's cheerful and bright dance-like character seamlessly blends with the free and whimsical melodies of the interludes, reflecting the lyrical essence of Romantic music.

3.5. The classical expression of composition techniques

Rondo Capriccio embodies the regularity and rationality characteristic of the Classical period, while simultaneously embracing the freedom and expressiveness of the Romantic period. This duality is closely tied to Mendelssohn's distinctive and personalized approach to composition. Many of Mendelssohn's works feature fresh and innovative musical elements, showcasing his unique musical style both in his compositional techniques and in his performance practices.

Mendelssohn was profoundly influenced by classical music, particularly the works of Bach and Beethoven, whose creative methods he studied meticulously. His unique insights into classical piano works resulted in the frequent incorporation of classical elements in his compositions. In his music creation, the influence of Bach is especially evident; Mendelssohn's compositions often exhibit a strong sense of logic and structure. As a master of polyphonic music, Bach's works are characterized by impeccable counterpoint and rhythmic precision, qualities that are also reflected in Mendelssohn's use of counterpoint techniques.

In the theme melody of the rondo section, Mendelssohn employs a canon-style thematic statement and counterpoint techniques, showcasing his classical influences. For example (see Figure 2), the melody can be divided into two parts: the theme and the answer. The higher register presents the theme first, followed by the lower register, which enters with a descending octave modulation of the upper part. However, the composer introduces variation by altering the answer, extending the note durations to maintain auditory interest and avoid monotony.



Figure 2 The theme melody of the rondo section.

The second melody is a complete imitation of the first, adhering to traditional canon techniques. In contrast, the third melody in the upper register can be seen as a reflective imitation of the answer material, while the lower register reflects the theme material. This sequential interplay creates an auditory effect where familiar melodies reappear with variations, reminiscent of the shadowing technique. This approach not only introduces new material but also reflects the polyphonic characteristics typical of Baroque music, demonstrating Mendelssohn's mastery in integrating classical techniques with a fresh romantic expression.

3.6. The romantic expression of composition techniques

Mendelssohn's "Capricious Rondo in E Minor" represents a unique blend of programmatic music and absolute music, transcending conventional genre boundaries. While Mendelssohn did not include a textual narrative, the use of the term "capricious" as an attributive to "rondo" signifies a melodious, intricate, and deeply evocative musical journey. The word "capricious" serves to convey the composer's intent, offering performers and listeners alike a broader canvas for imaginative interpretation. This approach aligns with Mendelssohn's adherence to the principle that "music is a non-semantic art," thereby guiding the audience's and performers' imaginations to explore and understand the work beyond literal meanings.

This concept is echoed in the remarks of late Romantic German composer Richard Strauss, who observed that "Only when the author of programmatic music is, first and foremost, an imaginative and skilled musician, can programmatic music become a true work of art." Through this piece, Mendelssohn achieves a delicate balance, blending the evocative power of programmatic elements with the purity and structural integrity of absolute music, thus enriching the listener's experience and expanding the interpretative potential of the work.

In addition to the title "Capricious," Mendelssohn employed numerous musical expression terms throughout "Capricious Rondo in E Minor" to articulate the emotional nuances of the piece. These terms serve as valuable guides, enabling performers to capture and convey the intricate emotional landscape embedded within the composition. For instance, expressions such as *espressivo* (expressively soft), *leggiero* (lightly), *con anima* (with spirit or passion), *tranquillo* (calmly, quietly), and *dolce* (softly, gently) provide detailed instructions that shape the interpretation of the music.

By integrating these specific musical terms, Mendelssohn not only aligns the performers' interpretations with his artistic vision but also enriches the music's expressiveness, making the emotional shifts more vivid and the overall experience more dynamic. These terms allow performers to explore a wide range of expressive possibilities, making the music both clear in its intent and rich in emotional variety, thereby offering performers a vast canvas for imaginative and nuanced interpretation.

Mendelssohn's personalized creative technique is also evident in his incorporation of folk music elements. In the rondo section of "Capricious Rondo in E Minor," there is a notable connection to the structure of European folk circle dances. In these dances, the chorus is repeated consistently while the lead section varies with each iteration. Similarly, the rondo form's development is based on the principles of repetition and thematic development. The structure of the rondo in this piece follows a five-part format: ABACA. Theme A appears three times, providing a familiar anchor, while the contrasting interlude sections (B and C) each introduce new material. The alternating pattern between the main theme and the distinct melodies of the interludes creates a dynamic interplay, offering both repetition and variation. This approach not only reflects Mendelssohn's romantic sensibilities but also showcases his ability to blend the structured classical form with the fluidity and expressiveness of folk traditions.

In terms of tonality, musical mood, writing logic, and texture, there is a clear contrast between the interlude and the main part of "Capricious Rondo in E Minor." The interlude introduces a romantic melody line, characterized by its lyrical and expressive qualities. For example, in Interlude 1, the melody stretches and wanders, evoking the sense of a smooth and fresh poetic painting. This lyrical style is in stark contrast to the lively dance-like character of Main Part 1. In this section, the melody is predominantly carried by the right hand, while the left hand uses a low, columnar triad as the accompaniment texture. The

inner voices fill the texture with clear and defined layers, enhancing the contrast between the fluid romanticism of the interlude and the rhythmic, structured dance quality of the main theme. This interplay of contrasting elements enriches the piece, highlighting Mendelssohn's skill in blending classical form with romantic expressiveness.

In Mendelssohn's Op. 14, there is a masterful blend of beautiful, smooth melodies and virtuosic technical passages. The piece prominently features elements such as scales, double octaves, tremolos, and octaves, all of which contribute to the romantic charm of the work (Dominik, 2011). These virtuosic elements not only highlight the technical prowess required for performance but also enhance the emotional expressiveness characteristic of Romantic music. This is particularly evident in the Coda section, where ascending double octaves drive the piece to its climax. The intensity of the music builds dramatically, shifting from soft *pp* (pianissimo) to powerful *ff* (fortissimo), capturing the essence of Romanticism and delivering a powerful, emotionally charged conclusion, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3 Music intensity marker.

3.7. Challenges and Practical Suggestions for Performance Techniques in Two Styles

During the Classical period, composers like Haydn and Mozart emphasized finger-tip technique in their piano works. In the opening five bars of the rondo section of Mendelssohn's Op. 14, staccato and legato alternate frequently, especially when dealing with single notes and double staccato. Here, it is essential to ensure a clean, precise, and full-bodied tone with elasticity. This staccato passage is primarily performed using finger-tip technique with relatively soft force, where the fingers guide a slight wrist movement. This emphasizes coordination between the fingers and wrist, producing a controlled and articulate sound.

In contrast, Romantic works emphasize more on finger-pad technique for expressive purposes. In the introduction of Op. 14, for instance, in the first three bars, the right hand plays a sequence of chords marked pianissimo (*pp*), with crescendo and decrescendo symbols (< >), and terms like *simile*. These nuances suggest a delicate, ethereal quality. When performing such passages, using the finger pads allows for a gentler touch and smoother transitions, creating a warm and dreamy tone. The finger muscles should be relaxed, with stable control over dynamics and phrasing. Unlike the grainy texture of finger-tip articulation, the finger-pad technique yields a more sustained and evocative sound, aligning with the expressive demands of Romantic music, a technique frequently found in works by Chopin, Schumann, and Debussy.

Regarding octave technique, Mendelssohn uses it dramatically towards the end of the piece, where alternating octaves in both hands are marked with a fortissimo (*ff*), expressing intense personal emotion and a powerful sound effect. To perform octaves effectively, the wrist should remain relaxed, with the metacarpal joints providing support and a slight forward push from the lower back for power. Care should be taken to prevent stiffness in the forearm. Grouping the notes into sets of six can facilitate a smooth transition between forceful engagement and relaxation, giving the sound a penetrating quality without strain.

For scale and arpeggio passages, as seen in the latter half of the rondo section, Mendelssohn incorporates rapid scales and arpeggios that demand endurance from the performer. Unlike the Classical approach, where each note often has a distinct and crisp articulation, here the flow must be continuous and seamless, capturing the Romantic ideal of a sweeping, uninterrupted musical line. The initial note in each phrase should be given a slight emphasis, with the wrist's natural momentum carrying through the rest, while the fingers maintain independence and agility.

3.7. Application of Research Findings in Practical Teaching

Initial Exploration: In the first stage, guide students to develop a preliminary understanding of the piece's style by analyzing its overall structure. This introductory approach helps students form a foundational perspective on the composition, fostering an initial familiarity with its mood and character.

Detailed Analysis: The second stage involves a deeper analysis of harmonic structure, form, and compositional techniques. With *Rondo Capriccioso*, focus on highlighting how Mendelssohn integrates Classical and Romantic elements. This stage prepares students for performance by identifying the stylistic nuances that exemplify the fusion of these two musical traditions.

Preliminary Performance and Sound Evaluation: In the third stage, students attempt an initial performance, paying attention to the physical sound produced. Building on their understanding from the first two stages, they can work on refining tonal expression, making detailed adjustments to convey the distinct colors of the music.

Inner Voice Melody: Highlighting the inner voice melody is a notable compositional technique used by Mendelssohn, as well as Classical composers like Weber and Beethoven. In the first connecting passage, the right hand must maintain the primary melody while also expressing the inner voice with a lyrical quality. In teaching, remind students to control the touch and pressure to ensure that the inner voice flows smoothly without overpowering the main melody.

The blend of Classical and Romantic elements in this piece makes it an ideal material for exploring musical style evolution and comparative analysis in a teaching context. *Rondo Capriccioso* retains significant pedagogical value in modern music education, serving as an effective resource for teaching students about stylistic contrast and interpretive techniques. Utilizing multimedia tools in the classroom can further enhance students' understanding of the composition, as well as improve their musical literacy and performance skills.

3.8. Utilization of Primary Sources

Using "*Rondo Capriccioso Op. 14*" as the primary source for analysis offers a rich and authentic foundation for understanding Mendelssohn's composition techniques within the Classical and Romantic styles. By immersing in this singular piece, researchers can gain direct access to Mendelssohn's artistic vision and creative process. Through a meticulous examination of the musical elements present in the composition, such as instrumentation, melody, harmony, and structure, insights emerge regarding the intricate ways Mendelssohn weaves together cultural themes and emotional narratives. This focused analysis allows for a deeper appreciation of how Mendelssohn skillfully balances the precision of Classical music with the emotive expression of Romanticism, revealing the composer's unique approach to integrating these two stylistic periods.

In dissecting "*Rondo Capriccioso*," researchers uncover nuanced techniques employed by Mendelssohn to convey the spirit and essence of both Classical and Romantic styles. This focused analysis allows researchers to elucidate the specific compositional choices that contribute to the piece's overall impact and significance within literacy development and cultural appreciation. By examining these choices, one can better understand how Mendelssohn's integration of structural clarity and emotional depth not only defines the aesthetic qualities of the work but also enhances its educational and cultural value, offering a richer understanding of the broader musical landscape of his time.

Furthermore, by grounding the analysis in a single composition, researchers can delve deeply into the nuances of Mendelssohn's artistic expression without the distraction of disparate sources. This focused approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the composition's intricacies, enabling researchers to uncover hidden layers of meaning and symbolism within the music. Utilizing "*Rondo Capriccioso*" as the primary source for analysis provides a unique opportunity to gain a profound understanding of Mendelssohn's compositional style and its broader implications for literacy development and cultural appreciation. This concentrated study not only illuminates the distinct qualities of Mendelssohn's musical language but also enhances our appreciation of the cultural and educational impact of his work.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of literacy composition techniques in the Classical and Romantic styles of composer Mendelssohn has yielded valuable insights into the intricate relationship between music composition, literacy development, and cultural appreciation. This study aligns with existing research in music education and cultural studies, underscoring the importance of integrating culturally relevant content into curriculum design to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Choksy et al., 2009). By examining compositions that blend Classical and Romantic elements with contemporary techniques, this research deepens our understanding of how music can serve as a powerful tool for intellectual and artistic enrichment (Dominik, 2011). This exploration not only enriches our comprehension of Mendelssohn's artistic contributions but also highlights the broader implications for music education and cultural studies.

Through a multidimensional approach that integrates insights from music education, cultural studies, and literacy development, this study illuminates the role of music composition in fostering literacy and cultural appreciation. By examining Mendelssohn's composition techniques—such as instrumentation, melody, harmony, and cultural symbolism—researchers have revealed how music can profoundly enhance cultural understanding and appreciation. This analysis not only showcases the transformative power of Mendelssohn's work but also highlights the broader impact of music in enriching educational and cultural contexts (Bennett, 2001; Jian, 2022)

The utilization of "*Rondo Capriccioso*" as the primary source for analysis has provided researchers with a rich and authentic foundation for understanding Mendelssohn's composition techniques within both Classic and Romantic style. By

immersing themselves in this singular piece, researchers have gained direct access to his artistic vision and creative process, enabling a deep exploration of the nuances of his writing styles. This focused analysis has uncovered hidden layers of meaning and symbolism within the music, further elucidating the specific compositional choices contributing to the piece's overall impact and significance within literacy development and cultural appreciation.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of music as a transformative force in enhancing literacy skills and fostering cross-cultural awareness and appreciation. By analyzing Mendelssohn's composition techniques, researchers have illuminated how music composition can evoke emotions, tell stories, and convey cultural narratives (Verhoef & Ravignani, 2021; Zou, 2020; Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, the findings of this research may inform curriculum development in music education, helping educators incorporate culturally relevant content to enhance students' literacy skills and cultural awareness (Yang & Welch, 2023).

Overall, this study underscores the importance of music as a universal language capable of transcending cultural barriers and conveying complex emotions and ideas. By examining the intersection of music composition, literacy development, and cultural appreciation within both Classic and Romantic style context, this research contributes to a deeper appreciation of the profound connections between music, literacy, and culture.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

Henan Province Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Project.

References

- Barrett, M. S. (2012). Music education and the development of creativity: A review of literature. *Psychology of Music*, 40(1), 102–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735611408993>
- Bennett, T. (2001). The cultural sciences. In B. Turner (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (pp. 193–209). Blackwell Publishers.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Campbell, P. S. (2017). *Music, education, and diversity: Bridging cultures and communities*. Teachers College Press.
- Campbell, P. S., & Scott-Kassner, C. (2014). *Music in childhood: From preschool through the elementary grades* (4th ed.). Schirmer. Choksy, Cooper M J ,Mace R A . (2011). *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*[M].Taylor and Francis:03-22.
- Choksy, L., Abramson, R., & Gillespie, J. (2009). *World music: A global journey* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Dominik A .(2011). Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. His life. His music.*MUSIKFORSCHUNG*,64(1):80-81.
- Edward B J ,John P . (2019). Alternative Paths, Phrase Expansion, and the Music of Felix Mendelssohn[J].*Music Theory Spectrum*,41(2):187-217.
- Guo, F. (2018). Mendelssohn's "Capriccio Rondo": An Analysis of Performance [Master's thesis, Henan University].
- He, P. (2014). *Fusion of Classical and Romantic Elements* [Master's thesis, Fujian Normal University].
- He, X., & Sornyai, P. (2023). Cultural Studies and Heritage Education of Nanyin Performance Art in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 11(4), 141-150. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.11n.4p.141>
- Huang, Y. (2024). Cultural Harmonies: Exploring Compositional Techniques and Cultural Fusion in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. *Pacific International Journal*, 7(1), 216-221. <https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v7i1.558>
- Jian, Z. (2022) Sustainable Engagement and Academic Achievement Under Impact of Academic Self-Efficacy Through Mediation of Learning Agility—Evidence From Music Education Students. *Front. Psychol.*13:899706. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.899706
- Juan, L., Jirajarupat, P., & Yinghua, Z. (2023). The Transmission of Guqin Musical Instrument Knowledge Literacy and Its Reflection Study in Guizhou Province, China. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 11(2), 22-29. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.11n.2p.22>
- L., Abramson, R., & Gillespie, J. (2009). *World music: A global journey* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Li Yi. (2019). *Musical Analysis and Performance Interpretation of Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccio in E Minor"*, Master's Thesis,
- Liu Shiping. (2022). *Analysis and performance techniques of Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccio"*[D]. Master's degree thesis of Tianjin Conservatory of Music.
- Long, S. (2007). *Research on Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" and Its Application in Teaching* [Master's thesis, Capital Normal University].
- Mang, J. A., & Custodero, L. A. (2006). Arts integration in the curriculum: A review of research and implications for teaching and learning. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 107(1), 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.3200/AEPR.107.1.25-32>
- Michael J C ,R. A M . (2011). *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy:A Research and Information Guide*[M].Taylor and Francis:05-03.DOI:10.4324/9780203876077.
- Ng, D. T., Ng, E. H., & Chu, S. K. (2022). Engaging students in creative music making with musical instrument application in an online flipped classroom. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(1), 45-64. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10568-2>
- Qian, Z. M. (2009). *Analysis of the musical and performance characteristics of Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words and its teaching significance*. Shanghai Conservatory of Music.
- Ren, H. (2016). Study on the texture and layering of Chopin's Rondo in E-flat Major, Op. 16. *Journal of Kaifeng Educational College*, 36(12), 236–237.



- Shen, W. N. (2024). The Fusion of Classical and Romantic Elements: An Analysis of Mendelssohn's "Capriccio Rondo in E Minor, Op. 14" [Master's thesis, Taiyuan Normal University]. <https://doi.org/10.27844/d.cnki.gtysf.2024.000109>
- Song, X. Y. (2024). Comparative study of expressiveness in the performance of Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 14. Nanchang University. <https://doi.org/10.27232/d.cnki.gnchu.2024.003020>
- Storr, A. (2015). *Music and the Mind*. Simon and Schuster.
- Tang Wenhao. (2020). A brief analysis of Mendelssohn's "*Rondo Capriccio*". *Drama House*, (11): 53-54.
- Verhoef, T., & Ravnani, A. (2021). Melodic universals emerge or are sustained through cultural evolution. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 668300. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.668300>
- Xu Jing. (2023) On the Musical Characteristics of Classical and Romantic Periods. *Journal of Hexi University*, 1672-0520
- Yang, Y. (2022). Interpretation of the compositional characteristics of Chopin's Rondo in E-flat Major, Op. 16. *Yellow River Sound*(12), 52–54. <https://doi.org/10.19340/j.cnki.hhzs.2022.12.022>
- Yang, Y., & Welch, G. (2023). A systematic literature review of Chinese music education studies during 2007 to 2019. *International Journal of Music Education*, 41(2), 175- 198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02557614221096150>
- Yuan, Y. (2023). An exploration of a three-stage progressive piano teaching method: A case study of Mendelssohn's Venetian Boat Song in G Minor. *Art Education*, (07), 76–79.
- Yunkun, L. (2024). The Impact of Music Education on the Quality of Talent Cultivation. *Transactions on Comparative Education*, 6(1), 72-77. <https://doi.org/10.23977/trance.2024.060110>
- Zhang Shu. (2023). Musical analysis and performance interpretation of Mendelssohn's "*Rondo Capriccio*". *China Nationalities Expo*, 1007-419802
- Zhang, S. (2023). Synthesizing Eastern and Western Musical Idioms in the Context of the Piano Concertos with the Traditional Chinese Orchestra: An Analytical Study of Selected Works, with Performance Considerations [Doctoral dissertation] University of Northern Colorado.
- Zou Jiachun. (2020). Musical analysis and performance techniques of Mendelssohn's "*Rondo Capriccio*". *Northern Music*, (16): 98-99.