

Adam, Jean-Louis (1758-1848): Summary of Writings

A virtuoso pianist and composer of Alsatian origin, Jean-Louis Adam (1758-1848) settled in Paris and helped establish the French school of fortepiano through his work at the national Conservatory. He taught piano there for almost half a century (1797-1842), before his son, Adolphe Adam (1803-1856), joined the teaching staff. During that time, he composed two successive methods that would educate a dynasty of pianists, including his disciples Friedrich Kalkbrenner and Henry Lemoine.

According to the author, the second, [*Méthode de piano du Conservatoire \[...\] adoptée pour servir à l'enseignement dans cet établissement \(1805\)*](#), contains "many texts [*sic*] in which the general principles of the art of touching the piano are applied." (letter from J.-L. Adam to M. Quérard, 30 June 1826). Adam's finely detailed pedagogy is founded in an aesthetic of grace and naturalness, drawing on the power to "charm and move" (p. 150), the same power that Denis Diderot attributed to music. Advice on posture, playing (attacks, dynamics, articulation, the resonance of ornaments) and fingering is given alongside adapted exercises. Excerpts from sonatas and ballets are also drawn from the works of J.-S. Bach, Gluck, Mozart and Beethoven, while orchestral transcription at the piano is described as "a source of great enjoyment" (p. 227). A revised version of the method was published in 1844 (Paris: E. Troupenas) and expanded to offer contemporary excerpts, but did not include music by Chopin.

This modest collection of public writings is supplemented by a few surviving letters of institutional tenor, addressed to Cherubini, the director of the Conservatory, and Zimmermann, Adam's successor at that institution. Today's pianists and scholars of aesthetics can draw from the elements of piano technique and the art of moving the listener transmitted in Adam's methods which differ from those that emerged in the 1830s (Kalkbrenner, Herz) and which were increasingly oriented towards the "mechanical" aspects of performance.

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Further reading

- Adam, Jean-Louis, [*Méthode de piano du Conservatoire \[...\] adoptée pour servir à l'enseignement dans cet établissement*](#) (Paris : Imprimerie du Conservatoire impérial de musique, an XIII [1805] ; fac-simile Genève : Minkoff éditions,

1974).

- *Nécrologie Louis Adam* (Paris : Impr. de E. Duverger, 1848).
- Place, Adelaïde de, « Jean-Louis Adam » dans J.-M. Fauquet (dir.), *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIX^e siècle* (Paris : Fayard, 2003), p. 15.

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