

# MUSICAL REVIEW

*ANONYMOUS*

Published in *The Broadway Journal*  
March 15, 1845 (1, 11)

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University of Arizona Antebellum Magazine Edition  
Project  
March 29, 2015

**B**ertini's Method for the Piano-Forte. Published by Oakes, and sold by E.H. Wade, 197 Washington St., Boston

We gave a preliminary notice of this great work in our last number, since when we have looked through it attentively, for the purpose of judging of its value impartially; to the end that we might benefit the public, by displaying its merits or by exposing its faults. We say that we have looked into the work, and it gives us much more pleasure in being able to say, that the more we examined it, the more delighted we were with the beautiful simplicity of its construction, its lucid explanation, its natural and progressive arrangement<sup>1</sup>. Its system is purely inductive. Not as in the old instruction books, are unexplained symbols placed before the pupil to commence with at once; nothing is introduced, which does not follow in a natural and undeviating course<sup>2</sup>. To teach by the old books, pre-supposes some weeks of

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<sup>1</sup> In *A Progressive and Complete Method for the Piano-Forte*, Bertini takes teaching playing the piano in a step-by-step formation. "Piano-forte" means piano in Italian ("Pianoforte"). As is summarized in this review, it begins with introducing the basic five notes of the piano, and then proceeds in difficulty (Bertini, Henri).

<sup>2</sup> While it is unclear what specific books the writer(s) are discussing, there were other exclusively use their fingers without any other factor (arms, thought, and others) having a factor on their playing (Chen, Vivienne and Ling, Zhuping). The "Exclusive Finger Method" was rigid and calculated (Chen, Vivienne and Ling, Zhuping) which relates to what the writer(s) express in this review. Around the time of Bertini's "Method", many composers wanted and successfully did break this mold for a new, fluid method.

previous study of the theory, without the assistance of manual practice<sup>3</sup>. This is so much time waster, for the natural embarrassment, consequent upon placing the fingers for the first time upon the keys, will drive all previous non-practical study from the learner's mind, and will tend rather to retard, than to accelerate his progress. It is in fact twice learning the same thing. It is true that there are exercises of various kinds, which might be used with these exploded and very imperfect methods, and which most good masters availed themselves dry of, but these are unaccompanied by marginal directions, and from the dry uninteresting surface presented to the student's eye, are mostly looked upon with indifference, if not with disgust.

Our opinion upon these matters is the result of an experience of many years, during which time all kinds of methods have come under our notice. We have felt how utterly inadequate these were to fulfill the end for which they were intended, namely, to assist the master in explaining to the pupil, and to assist the pupil when absent from the master. Much that is necessary between master and pupil, can never be written down; it must be communicated orally, *but we conscientiously believe that Bertini has produced a progressive work near perfection as possible.*

It will be impossible, within the limits of our space, to enter into a full consideration of every portion of this important work, but we shall; from time to time, call the attention of our young readers to particular parts of it deserving their especial attention.

The work commences with a very clear and striking exposition of the key-board, or entire scale of the instrument. It is so clearly explained that the dullest mind can comprehend it.

The hands of the pupil are then placed upon the key-board, and the fingers are accustomed by slow degrees, to move equally in the natural position. Meanwhile, upon each page, the marginal directions are gradually preparing the mind of the pupil to receive understandingly the rudiments of the theory. The entire exercises upon time, are truly invaluable; they are clear, decided, embracing almost every variety, and being enforced both by theory and practice, cannot fail, if carefully digested, to make the pupil, in a short period, perfectly familiar with the subject.

The scales are here made a very important feature. They are treated in every position, and the fingering being carefully marked, their difficulties are rendered comparatively easy, and the results from a constant practice of them would be, certainty and firmness of touch and fingering, and a wonderful facility in reading at sight.

The studies are numerous, and form a very important portion of the work. They are in every key, and embrace nearly all the peculiarities and difficulties, that are to be met with in solos of moderate importance.

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<sup>3</sup> At this time in history, the piano was extremely popular. In the March 28, 1840 edition of *The Musical Magazine* an article entitled "Of the Pianoforte and the Age in which the study of it Should be Begun" positively introduces the teaching of the pianoforte. Ironically, it uses the method this review seems to despise; being the "Exclusive Finger Method".

We cordially recommend this work to all teachers, as the most comprehensive method now published, and as best assistant to their instruction, affording as it does, a certain means of strengthening the memory of the student between lesson and lesson<sup>4</sup>.

To parents, and to others who wish to commence the study of music, we earnestly recommend a perusal of this work, as we are sure that a mere glance at its contents, the simplicity of its arrangement being so evident, will convince them of its value, and of its superiority over every other method.

We hope yet to see it in general use, so satisfied are we of the benefits it will confer, and surely if any thing [sic] will tend to confirm the public confidence in it, some of the eminent men whose names are attached to the circular, who vouch for its excellence, will exert that happy influence [sic].

The public and the Profession owe a debt of gratitude to the enterprising publisher Mr. Oakes, for bringing forward this valuable and expensive work, and we earnestly hope that he will reap the reward of his public spirit.



#### EDITOR'S NOTE

This article focuses on Henri Bertini's "Method for the Piano-Forte", which is the basic method used in teaching how to play the piano. Henri Bertini was a well-known French composer in the antebellum period. Bertini was born in London in 1798, and returned to France with his family six months later ([bach-cantatas.com](http://bach-cantatas.com)). At the age of 12, Bertini's father sensed his son was a child prodigy of the piano and they went to the Netherlands so Bertini could further his studies on the piano ([back-cantatas.com](http://back-cantatas.com)). Over his prestigious career, Bertini composed over 35 works, wrote 20 books, and completed 500 studies on the piano. This includes *A Progressive and Complete Method for the Piano-Forte*, published in 1845 ([archive.org](http://archive.org)).

This study was reviewed in *The Broadway Journal* in a clearly positive light, stating that Bertini's method is much more concise and progressive than past ones (even though this study is 204 pages [[archive.org](http://archive.org)]). The "Method for the Piano-Forte" uses a systematic, step-by-step method of teaching one how to play the piano and it is still used in modern practices. It was one of the methods that broke away from the "Exclusive Finger Method",

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<sup>4</sup>This also attributes to the criticisms of the "Exclusive Finger Method" (Chen, Vivienne and Ling, Zhuping). In this method, the student had to focus all of their attention on their fingers, while in Bertini's method the steps add knowledge of the piano in increasing difficulty each time (Bertini, Henri).

which asked players to simply use their fingers sans connection to their arms or any other thoughts (people.vcu.edu). Sometimes, teachers would even put a coin on the back of the student's hand to force their focus on their fingers (people.vcu.edu). Overall, as the writer(s) suggest, Bertini's method is much more fluid and formatted in a easy-to-understand, step-by-step formula.

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