


# Adele aus der Ohe

## *and the Lost 1895 Solo Recitals*

*By Grace Shepard*



**I**n the early spring of 1895, the musical world of New York City was anticipating an intriguing set of solo recitals. Scheduled for April 16 and 19, pianist Adele aus der Ohe (1861–1937) was planning to present two full-length piano recitals in the “Chamber Music Hall” (Rose Digital Archives) of what is now called Carnegie Hall. Already well-known to audiences, aus der Ohe’s successful performance career had earned her a reputation as one of the greatest pianists performing in the United States, alongside Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Josef Hofmann, Teresa Carreño and others. Her solo recitals in April 1895 were to be significant performances as they were trailblazing first instances of a woman performing a solo piano recital at Carnegie Hall.

Throughout her lifetime, aus der Ohe was considered a notable virtuoso, with descriptions as “The World’s Greatest Pianiste (sic)” (Los Angeles Times April 1, 1893) and “a true artist of very high rank.” (New York Times, February 12, 1895) A student of Liszt, her early musical ability led her to travel to the United States in the 1880s, where she enjoyed nearly incessant travel and notable performances. After her return to Berlin in 1906 (Leno 2012, 178–179) and death in 1937, however, aus der Ohe’s legacy was largely overlooked. As a result, the details of the two Carnegie Hall recitals were not as straightforward as I expected when I first began to research them. The unexpected discoveries that came to light are important to the history of piano performance and to the legacies of the pianists who

were early adopters of the solo recital in the United States.

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*Los Angeles Times*, April 1893

## The Programs

My research began with the printed programs, accessible digitally through Carnegie Hall’s excellent Rose Archives. They offered detailed information about what exactly aus der Ohe had planned. Both concerts would have lasted around 90 minutes, which was more or less standard for the time. (Shepard 2022) There are points of congruence with solo performances by her contemporaries, such as Paderewski, to be found throughout, but she distinguishes her musical choices in several unique ways. While aus der Ohe includes pieces by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Liszt, all of which were common presences on recital programs, she makes individual repertoire choices that highlight her as an important musical voice as well as technical virtuoso.

Concerning composers outside of the Romantic age, aus der Ohe highlights Baroque composers. She programmed unaltered Bach (in contrast to the many late Romantic Bach transcriptions that were common at the time) in the form of four movements from *English Suite No.3* and repertoire by the virtually unknown French Baroque composer, Claude-Louis Daquin, on April 16 (Shepard 2022, 75–76). With these repertoire choices, aus der Ohe shows a certain desire to remember and elevate Baroque composers in a way that

was not common by her contemporaries and shows a break from the musical trends of the 1890s, which privileged virtuosity in live performances.

The other notable departure from standard programming was the amount of time Adele aus der Ohe devoted to new compositions (Shepard 2022, 80–81). On April 16, aus der Ohe programmed a work by Anton Rubenstein (1829–1894). On April 19, aus der Ohe programmed works by Eduard Napravnik (1839–1916) and Alexander Iljinsky (1859–1920), both of whom were not well-known or established in 1895. Today, they are virtually unknown.

The April 16 program also includes what is perhaps aus der Ohe’s most individual choice in the form of her own composition. At the time she was performing, it was no small thing to perform a composition by a woman in public performance. Considering the issue of compositions by women in the 19th century, Kenneth Hamilton wrote, “It would have been regarded as bizarre for a woman to present herself as a significant composer...indeed, owing to the general skepticism about women’s faculty, female pianists such as Wieck and Marie Pleyel were among the first to confine their repertoire mostly to other people’s music.” (Hamilton 2008, 61) Since works by a woman were not universally accepted, aus der Ohe’s choice to perform her own composition must reflect a certain conviction and belief in her own work, which can serve as an important example, even today. As noted by LaWayne Leno (2012, 129), “Composing was a very important aspect of aus der Ohe’s life and she composed always.” This choice is one of the many things that defines these recitals as unique and important to music history.

From the programs alone, my research revealed a significant amount about aus der Ohe’s musical personality, her interests and how they contrasted other recitals of the time. The existence of the original programs was also an integral find, as they confirmed that the concerts were booked, planned and, presumably, the physical programs were handed out at the event. More than second-hand accounts, the Carnegie Hall programs were a strong foundation on which to continue my research further into the reality of these recitals.

# Adele aus der Ohe



## Preparation for the Performance

Beyond the repertoire and the printed programs, it was important to consider the practical steps aus der Ohe took to train for the recitals. Throughout her career as a performer, aus der Ohe was a consistently well-prepared and considerate musician. Writing to one of her students later in life, she wrote, “To play in public is also a thing that will be practiced. So work as hard and as conscientious as you can.” (Leno 2012, 210)

With the Carnegie Hall programs in 1895, there was also the added importance of the venue, the soloistic nature of the performances and the fact they were in New York City. While not as established as Vienna or Paris, New York City was widely considered the epicenter for music in the United States and frequently heard the most virtuosic of performers in public and private settings. As a seasoned performer, aus der Ohe realized these solo recitals would be significant, and she set about preparing for them just as she would later recommend to her student.

On February 12, 1895, the *New York Times*'s column, entitled “The Social World,” announced that Adele aus der Ohe was due to perform solo works on Mr. Bagby's Musical Morning program. In “an extremely interesting programme...at the Waldorf,” aus der Ohe performed a Toccata and Fugue by Bach, arranged by Tausig, a Barcarolle by Rubenstein, “Spinning Song” by Mendelssohn, and “Tarantella di bravura” by Liszt. (*New York Times* February 12, 1895)

From the reported repertoire in the article, it can be concluded that aus der Ohe was preparing for the two recitals she was planning to give at Carnegie Hall. The Bach-Tausig and the Rubenstein were included in the projected April 16 recital. She also planned to play other pieces by Mendelssohn and Liszt in April on both Carnegie Hall concerts, and she is clearly preparing by programming those composers in February.

In addition to her solo preparations, aus der Ohe also appeared as a soloist with orchestra until April 6, (*New York Times* April 6, 1895) when she played the Tchaikovsky concerto. Maintaining such considerable amounts of varied repertoire at such a high level of execution suggests that Adele aus der Ohe's addition

of solo recitals was intentional and reflected her professional desires as well as her role as a main soloist in the United States.

From these pieces of evidence, we can ascertain that aus der Ohe was ready and prepared to play by the time the dates of the Carnegie Hall recitals came in mid-April. With both the repertoire and the pianist ready, it would follow that the next notices in the newspapers would include recounting of the performances. However, as I searched through newspaper archives, I found something that challenged the conclusive evidence already proven about the recitals and whether they took place.

## Unexpected Developments

On April 14, 1895, two days before the recital dates, the *New York Times* advertised the performances, listing some of her repertoire. (*New York Times*, April 14, 1895) Tickets were listed at “\$1.50 Reserved Seats” and “\$1.00 General Admission.” In today's American dollar, the equivalent is approximately \$47.00 and \$33.00, respectively. (Friedman, n.d.)

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*New York Times*, April 14

Then, the day before the first recital, the “Theatrical Gossip” section of the *Times* included the announcement that “the two piano recitals announced by Adele aus der Ohe...have been indefinitely postponed on account of...illness.” (*New York Times*, April 15, 1895) The day of the first recital, April 16, the *New York Sun* (1895) further confirms the cancellation and adds an update on the potential makeup recitals, writing that “if sufficiently recovered, she (aus der Ohe) purposes to give the recitals sometime in May.”

—Adele Aus der Ohe Ill.—The two piano recitals announced by Adele Aus der Ohe for to-morrow and Friday have been indefinitely postponed on account of the illness of the artist.

*New York Times*, April 15

I searched the Carnegie Hall Archives and the *New York Times* and the *New York Sun* archives with hopes that there would be evidence confirming the performances happened at a later date. Unfortunately, there was nothing more to be found. Upon contacting Carnegie's archives, it was further confirmed they currently do not have any record, other than the programs, that confirmed the performance of the recitals at any other date. Considering the new findings and the intense scheduling of aus der Ohe's performances after April 1895, it is likely the recitals never took place.

## Lasting Significance

As I considered what importance my research held in light of the cancellations, there were several points that came to mind. Despite the lack of performances, the provenanced programs stand as important examples of recitals planned during the development of the solo piano recital in the 1890s. Considering the lack of divergent musical voices in the early years of solo piano recitals, they also exist as important proof for a woman's musical expression. Concerning Adele aus der Ohe's personal output, these recital programs also represent a comprehensive view of her musical preferences, abilities and ambitions.

While I had initially intended to find evidence of first-hand accounts of the performances, what I did uncover is perhaps equally important. It is just as important to know that Adele aus der Ohe was not the first female pianist to give a solo recital at Carnegie Hall, as it would be to know she was the first. It is important because, among the other connotations, it means we can now give credit to Teresa Carreño as the first woman to give a full solo recital in 1897. At the same time, we can recognize the pioneering role that Adele aus der Ohe played for concert pianists and for the establishment of the solo recital and its canonic repertoire.

Research exists to create clearer representations of the past and those representations can and should take many different, unexpected

forms. While findings might completely change your understanding of a topic, that is also why we undertake the process: to learn.

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