

THE ACCOMPANIMENT PATTERNS
OF THE NOCTURNES WRITTEN BY JOHN FIELD

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the accompaniment patterns in the Nocturnes written by John Field.

Written between 1814 and 1835, Field's Nocturnes are generally acknowledged to be foundational to the works of later Romantic composers, especially Chopin.

The method of study was to examine the accompaniment patterns with the following points as main considerations: expansion of the accompaniment patterns past the octave, the use of the damper pedal as being basic to the expansion, use of pedal points, the use of double line arpeggiated figures, and the use of non-harmonic tones.

The primary sources consulted for this study were John Field and Chopin, written by David Branson, and The Life and Music of John Field 1782-1837, Creator of the Nocturne, written by Patrick Piggott. Other important sources include A Short History of Keyboard Music by F. E. Kirby, and A History of Pianoforte Music, by Herbert Westerby.

BIOGRAPHY

John Field, pianist and composer, was born in Dublin, Ireland, on July 26, 1782. Both his father and grandfather were musicians, his father Robert playing the violin, and his grandfather, the organ and piano.

He received his early training in piano from his grandfather, with his father supervising his practice. Wanting young John to be a child prodigy, both men were very harsh with him, causing him to run away from home.

John was sent to Tommaso Giordani for lessons at the age of nine. Under Giordani's guidance, he displayed a great amount of talent and appeared in three 'Spiritual Concerts' in Dublin's Rotunda in 1792.

The Field family moved to Bath, England, in 1793, where Robert Field accepted the position as leader of the orchestra at the Bath concerts. Later that year they moved to London, where Robert was appointed a violinist at the Haymarket Theatre.

In London John Field was apprenticed to Muzio Clementi, from whom he received lessons. During his apprenticeship, Field was required to act as salesman in Clementi's London piano showroom. His duties included playing music for the customers and displaying the firm qualities of Clementi pianos. His apprenticeship lasted for seven years. After this time their relationship continued and Field worked in Clementi's showroom for a small wage.

During his stay in London, Field appeared in concert several times. His first performance was in 1794, when he played a Clementi sonata. In 1799, at the age of 15, he played a concerto of his own at the Haymarket Theatre. The review in the London Morning Chronical said of this concert and Field,

"Esteemed by the best judges one of the finest performers in the kingdom, and his astonishing ability on this occasion proved how justly he was entitled to the distinction, . . ."¹

In 1802, Clementi left for Paris on a business trip, taking Field with him. Although some sources claim that Clementi's main reason for taking him was to use him to display the pianos,² Piggott claims that Clementi had a genuine desire to further Field's artistic career.³ It is likely that Piggott's view is more correct, as Field did perform in Paris and received great acclaim by playing Bach and Handel fugues and works by Clementi.

They next went to Vienna, where it was originally intended for Field to stay and study counterpoint with Albrechtsberger. When the time came for Clementi to leave, Field was unwilling to stay behind. His dislike of Albrechtsberger's teaching combined with his lack of friends and money caused Field to tearfully beg Clementi to take him along. Much against his own desires, Clementi gave in to Field's demands, and the two began their journey to Russia.

They reached St. Petersburg in December of 1802, and Clementi immediately opened a piano showroom, where Field was obliged to act as salesman. Until this time the relationship between Field and Clementi had been quite friendly. But, due to the unexpected expense of Field's food and lodging during the stay in Russia, Clementi now resented his pupil. It is from this period of their relationship that the stories of Clementi's poor treatment of Field grew. Clementi refused to buy a heavy overcoat for either himself or Field, thinking

¹ David Branson, John Field and Chopin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), p. 3.

² Ibid.

³ Patrick Piggott, The Life and Music of John Field, 1782-1837, Creator of the Nocturne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 17.

It silly to buy heavy clothing which could not be used in England. Field was also restricted to a small budget for food and spent much of his time alone in his room while Clementi was teaching and taking care of business matters.

The following is an account of Field as related by Spohr in his Autobiography, which is in the form of reflections on past diaries:

In the evening I sometimes accompanied him after dinner to his large pianoforte warehouse, where Field was obliged to play for hours, to display the instruments to the best advantage to the purchasers. The diary speaks with great satisfaction of the technical perfection and the 'dreamy Melancholy' of that young artist's execution. I have still in recollection the figure of the pale, overgrown youth, whom I have never seen since. When Field, who had outgrown his clothes, placed himself at the piano, stretched out his arms over the keyboard, so that his sleeves shrunk up nearly to his elbows, his whole figure appeared awkward and stiff in the highest degree; but as soon as his touching instrumentation began, everything else was forgotten, and one became all ear.⁴

Clementi left Russia in 1803 and Field stayed behind, settling in St. Petersburg. With the help of Clementi, who introduced him to many influential people, Field established himself as one of the most highly esteemed pianists and teachers in Russia. As Field's popularity grew, students came from long distances and paid high prices for his lessons.

However, Field's success and financial freedom may have come too quickly for his own good. After being treated so strictly by his family and being kept on such short allowance by Clementi, he had difficulty keeping pleasure in moderation. He had a particular problem with alcohol, and his love affairs were the scandal of St. Petersburg.

In 1810, Field married Mademoiselle Percheron de Mouchy, one of his best pupils. Unfortunately, their marriage was not a happy one. The couple separated not long after the birth of their son, Adrien, in 1819.

⁴Louis Spohr, Autobiography (New York: DaCapo Press, 1969), p. 39.

Field moved to Moscow in 1822, and there continued his teaching and concertizing. His habits of intemperance had grown even worse, and his love affairs were now a matter of gossip in Moscow.

He went to London in 1832 to perform his own third Concerto with the London Philharmonic. Later that year he performed at the Haydn Centenary Concert. At both performances he received great praise. While Field was in London, Clementi died, and he attended the funeral at Westminster Abbey.

In December, 1832, Field began a European concert tour with two performances in Paris. He was received even more enthusiastically in Paris than he had been in London. After leaving Paris in February, 1833, he continued his tour through Brussels, Toulouse, Marseilles, Lyons, Geneva, Milan, Florence, and Venice. He ended his tour in Naples in 1834.

While sources agree as to the success of the tour in England, France, Belgium, and Switzerland, there is some disagreement among sources as to the success of Field's playing in Italy. But according to Branson, "The decline was not in performance but in health."⁵ Field's habits of intemperance coupled with the strain of the tour caused his health to fail.

In 1834, he was placed in a hospital in Naples, where he was operated on for a fistula. Nearly out of money, he was forced to remain in sub-satisfactory conditions for nine months until he was rescued by a generous Russian family passing through Naples who helped him to return to Russia.

On the return trip to Russia, Field stayed in Vienna with Czerny. As his health had improved, he was able to give three concerts at Vienna's Hof Theatre in 1835. He then returned to Russia.

Field's period of sickness was over until November of 1836 when he deve-

⁵Branson, John Field and Chopin, p. 9.

loped bronchial trouble and pneumonia, brought on by the severely cold Russian winter. He died January 11 (January 23, according to some sources),⁶ 1837, and was given a public funeral and buried in Wedensky-kirkhof in Moscow, where a monument was erected to his memory by his friends and past pupils.⁷

Field wrote almost exclusively for piano. His compositions include: eighteen nocturnes, seven concertos, four sonatas, and several miscellaneous pieces. Although he did write some chamber music for string quartet, it can be considered primarily piano solo with string quartet accompaniment.

Field's historic position as a composer can best be summarized by the following opinions: Liszt states, in his preface to Field's nocturnes, Schirmer edition,

Up to his time they had to be sonatas, or rondos, or something of the sort. Field was the first to introduce a style in no way derived from the established categories, and in which feeling and melody, freed from the trammels of coercive form, reign supreme. He opened the way for all the productions which have since appeared under the various titles of Songs without Words, Impromptus, Ballades, etc., and to him we may trace the origin of pieces designed to portray subjective and profound emotion.

Branson states,

If we cannot regard all his music in the same light today--his larger works especially have shortcomings which to audiences accustomed to expect continuity of thought and shapeliness of form rob them of much of their impact--his was still one of the few truly original minds. He not only invented the Nocturne . . . but brought into being, too, a whole new range of pianistic expressiveness and feeling . . .⁸

⁶ Piggott, The Life and Music of John Field, p. 98.

⁷ Branson, John Field and Chopin, p. 10.

⁸ Ibid.

And, according to Westerby,

In other words, the Irishman, John Field, initiated the Romantic Movement in pianoforte music--his compositions were the direct predecessors of the smaller lyrical pieces of Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Schumann.⁹

⁹Herbert Westerby, The History of Pianoforte Music (New York: DaCapo Press, 1971), p. 96.

THE PIANO

The piano went through many changes and improvements during the 1700's and the 1800's. It is because of these changes that the development of a style such as Field's was possible.

One of the most important changes in the piano, in relation to Field's nocturnes, was the addition of the damper pedal. Adam Beyer is reported to have used the damper pedal as early as 1777.¹ Seven years later it was patented by Broadwood, a London piano builder.² However, the damper pedal at the time of Field did not have the sustaining power of its modern counterpart, and could be held down for longer periods of time without blurring the passage.³

Also important was the invention of the iron frame. Around 1800, piano builders began placing metal bracings to support the wooden piano frames. Next came the compensation frame, around 1820, composed of tubular braces and plates. In 1825 an American, Alpheus Babbcock, invented the single cast iron frame. However, this frame did not come into general use until the second half of the 1800's.

Because of the added strength of the iron frame, builders were able to extend the range of the piano from five octaves in Mozart's time, to six

¹Eric Blom, ed., "The Pedal," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (5th ed.; 1954), Vol. 6, p. 607.

²Albert E. Wier, The Piano, Its History, Makers, Players and Music (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 34.

³Piggott, The Life and Music of John Field, p. 110.

octaves in Beethoven's last years. Eventually, a full seven octaves were reached in the time of Chopin and Liszt.⁴

Other changes in piano building include cross stringing, a larger sound board, and an improved escapement. Cross stringing and the larger sound board both improved the tone quality and allowed for more volume and dynamic contrast. The improved escapement made it possible for notes to be repeated more quickly.

The piano of Field's day, although going through many recent improvements, was still quite different from the piano of modern times. The early nineteenth century piano had a pure, transparent tone, a more limited sonority, and a relatively easy action compared to a piano of today.⁵

⁴ John Ogdon, "The Romantic Tradition," in Keyboard Music, ed. by Denis Matthews (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 209.

⁵ Piggott, The Life and Music of John Field, p. 105.

THE ACCOMPANIMENT

The accompaniment patterns of Field's nocturnes show the influence of the past as well as provide a foundation for later composers. They also show the influence of the recent improvements on the piano itself, especially in regard to the increase in resonance and the use of expanded accompaniment patterns through the use of the pedal.

The influence of the late Classical composers, such as Clementi and Beethoven, is obvious in Field's music. Both Clementi and Beethoven use an Alberti-type bass figure in their music. But, where Clementi almost always keeps the bass note within the handspan, as does Beethoven, Field dissociates the bass note of the figure quite frequently, making the use of the damper pedal necessary to keep the accompanying figure intact.

Example 1, from the Clementi Sonata, Op. 37, No. 3, shows the typical Alberti bass. Each figure lies within the handspan.

Ex. 1.



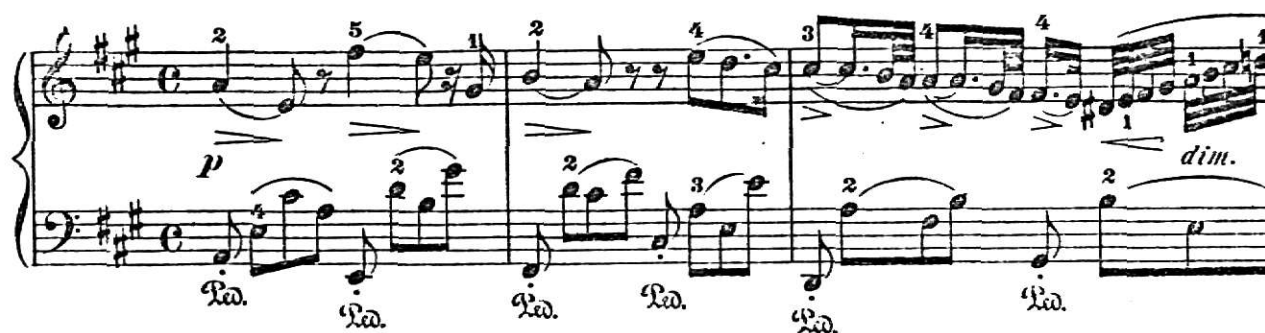
Example 2, from the Beethoven piano Sonata, Op. 110, shows an accompaniment with considerably more activity in the bass line. As in the example above, each accompaniment figure is well within the handspan.

Ex. 2.



In Example 3, from the Field Nocturne, No. 4, on the other hand, each figure is out of the handspan. From the standpoint of execution, the hand shifts positions in each figure. This implies the use of the pedal.

Ex. 3.



Another way in which Field dissociates the bass and makes the use of the damper pedal necessary is in the span of his block chords. At the time of Beethoven and Clementi, the span of block chords was usually within the octave,

well within the handspan.

Example 4, from the third movement of the Clementi Sonatina, Op. 36, No. 5, shows chords representative of those found in Clementi's sonatinas. The span is easily within the reach of the hand.

Ex. 4.



Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 81a, entitled "Das Lebewohl. Les Adieux," is shown in Example 5. Although the chords are much fuller than those in the preceding example, they are still well within the reach of the hand.

Ex. 5.



In Field's block chords, the range is frequently expanded so that it is larger than the average hand can reach at once, usually about a tenth, making the use of the damper pedal necessary.

Example 6 is from Field's Nocturne, No. 10. It shows chords typical of

those found in Field's nocturnes. In this example, the left hand must execute the total chord, due to the range of the right hand melody and the consideration of tempo, *Andante con moto*. As the range of the chord is larger than the average handspan, the chord would need to be rolled, necessitating the use of the damper pedal.

Ex. 6.



The range of the chord was further expanded by later composers, such as Brahms. The finale movement from Brahms' piano *Sonata*, Op. 5, is shown in Example 7. The range of the block chords is expanded much further in this example than in the previous one.

Ex. 7.

The musical score for Example 7 is in B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including slurs and a fermata. The left hand (bass clef) plays extremely wide block chords, some of which are marked with a damper pedal (Ped.) and a fermata. The dynamic marking *sostenuto poco* is present. The score is divided into measures by bar lines, with some measures containing multiple chords. The range of the chords is significantly wider than in Example 6.

The damper pedal was vitally important to Field's music. Not only was it used to connect widespread chords, but it was also used to achieve a particular sonority or effect, which could not be achieved without its use.

Example 8 is taken from Field's Nocturne, No. 14. The smooth legato effect intended for this passage would be impossible to execute without the use of the damper pedal.

Ex. 8.



The use of the damper pedal to achieve a particular sonority was carried further by many later composers, including Liszt. Example 9 is taken from Liszt's Sonnetto 104 del Petrarca, from Années de Pèlerinage, Italie. The expanse of the first chordal figure with its appoggiatura as well as the cadenza which it precedes are made both practical and effective through the use of the damper pedal.

Chopin's nocturnes, written between 1827 and 1846, are quite similar to Field's, both in style and in the techniques used. Both use a widespread and undulating accompaniment figure.

Ex. 9.

Field's Nocturne, No. 5, is shown in Example 10. The accompanying triplet figures contain leaps of as much as a tenth.

Ex. 10.

Example 11 is taken from Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 27, No. 1. It is quite similar in style and concept to the previous example, both consisting of widespread arpeggiated chords.

Ex. 13.

8

dimin.

3 1 2

Pedal points have been used quite frequently by composers, both before and after Field. Example 14 is taken from Field's Nocturne No. 3, and shows the use of the tonic pedal point on the a-flat in the bottom voice.

Ex. 14.

sempre e legato

In many of his nocturnes, Field uses a double line arpeggio figure. This figure was used and expanded by later composers such as Chopin, Liszt, and others.

Example 15, from Field's Nocturne No. 10, shows the use of the double line arpeggiated figure. Excluding the bass note, these figures fall into groups of two, and can be executed without the hand changing positions.

Ex. 15.



Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 48, No. 1, shown in Example 16, represents an expansion of the double line arpeggiated figure from what was shown in the previous example. Not only have octaves been added to the bass, but the figure itself has been lengthened. But, excluding the bass notes, the figure still lies within a single hand position.

Ex. 16.



Example 17 is from Liszt's Sonnetto 104 del Petrarca, from Années de Pèlerinage. It shows an even further expansion of the double line arpeggiated figure from what was shown in the two previous examples. This passage requires the left hand to shift hand positions for each group of two slurred notes.

Ex. 17.

8

molto appassionato

ff

Ped.

Ped.

Field makes use of non-harmonic tones in his accompaniments, as does Chopin. The use of non-harmonic tones was expanded by many later composers, such as Liszt.

Example 18 is taken from Field's Nocturne, No. 10, titled "Nocturne Pastorale." In this example, Field uses both an auxiliary or neighboring tone, and an appoggiatura.

Ex. 18.

4 5

2

2

1

AUX. APP. *mf*

3 1

Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 3, is shown in Example 19. It illustrates the use of appoggiatura, auxiliary or neighboring tones, and passing tones, as indicated in the example.

Ex. 19.

Agitato

f APP. AUX. APP. AUX. APP. AUX. P.L. AUX.

sempre legato

Example 20 is taken from Liszt's Rhapsody, No. 12. The use of non-harmonic tones in this example is much more extended than in the two previous examples.

Ex. 20.

ten.

1 1 2 1 2 3 1 2 1 1 2 3

SUMMARY

This study has attempted to examine the accompaniment patterns of the Nocturnes by John Field.

The compositional techniques and overall style found in Field's Nocturnes are foundational to the works of later composers. Important aspects of this style include the use of pedal points, non-harmonic tones, and single and double line arpeggiated patterns.

Table 1 contains a comparison of the prominence in the accompaniment of the single and double line patterns. Generally, the single line pattern was found more predominantly in the earlier nocturnes, opposed to the double line pattern, used more frequently in the later ones.

Field's use of the damper pedal allowed him to expand the range of the accompaniment pattern past the span of the average hand. Examples of this expansion occur in both the single and double line patterns, which are outgrowths of the Alberti bass, and in the block chords.

The performance of Field's Nocturnes presents several problems to the pianist. It is difficult for the modern performer to exactly duplicate Field's style of playing, due to the differences between the early nineteenth century piano and the modern one.

Correct use of the damper pedal is essential to the effectiveness of the Nocturnes in performance. Field is reported to have played the Nocturnes with a slight haze of pedaled tone. For the modern performer to achieve the same effect, pedal changes must be carefully planned.

Another performance problem presented by the Nocturnes is the necessity

TABLE I
 PROMINENCE COMPARISON OF SINGLE AND DOUBLE LINE
 PATTERNS IN ACCOMPANIMENT

Nocturne number	Single line				Double line			
	Extensively used	Moderately used	Occasionally used	Not found	Extensively used	Moderately used	Occasionally used	Not found
1	x							x
2	x						x	
3		x				x		
4	x					x		
5	x							x
6	x							
7		x				x		
8					x			
9	x						x	
10								
11	x				x			
12		x					x	
13					x			
14	x				x			
15								x
16					x			
17					x			
18					x			

of a constant, smooth legato. Many sources state that Field had a perfect, singing, legato touch, achieved by his practicing of exercises with a coin on the back of his hand. To achieve this effect on a modern piano, the pianist must carefully plan his fingering.

Field's Nocturnes are valuable not only as performance pieces, but also as teaching material. They are especially useful as preparatory studies for the nocturnes written by Chopin, containing many similar patterns and technical problems.

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The purpose of this study is to examine the accompaniment patterns in the nocturnes written by John Field. Written between 1815 and 1834, Field's nocturnes are generally acknowledged to be foundational to the works of later Romantic composers, especially Chopin.

John Field (1782-1837) was apprenticed to Muzio Clementi in 1793. He received lessons from Clementi and was required to act as salesman in Clementi's piano showroom. In 1802 Field accompanied Clementi on a business trip which took them to Paris, Vienna, and finally Russia. Clementi left Russia in 1803 and Field stayed behind, settling in St. Petersburg, where he established himself as one of the most highly esteemed pianists and teachers in Russia.

Field's music was greatly influenced by the piano of his time, which was undergoing many changes and improvements. One of the most important changes in the piano, in relation to Field's nocturnes, was the addition of the damper pedal. Also important was the addition of iron bracings to the wooden frames, which allowed builders to extend the range of the piano.

The accompaniment patterns of Field's nocturnes show the influence of the past as well as provide a foundation for later composers. Basic to the style of Field's nocturnes is the use of the damper pedal, which allowed him to expand the range of the accompaniment pattern past the octave. Other important features of Field's style include the pedal point, the double line arpeggiated figure, and the use of non-harmonic tones.