

An Analysis of W.A. Mozart's Sonata No. 18 in D Major, K.576, F. Schubert's Drei Klavierstücke No. 2, D.946, F. Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23, A. Scriabin's Prelude and Nocturne Op. 9, N. Kapustin's Concert Etudes Op. 40, Nos. 1 & 5, L. Vierne's Carillon de Westminster Op. 54 No. 6: Theoretic, Stylistic and Historical Background

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Abstract

The purpose of this manuscript is to supply extended program notes for a master's recital performed in partial fulfillment of a master's degree in April 2022. The pieces under discussion are W.A. Mozart's Sonata No. 18 in D Major, K.576, F. Schubert's *Drei Klavierstücke* No. 2, D.946, F. Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23, A. Scriabin's Prelude and Nocturne Op. 9, N. Kapustin's Concert Etudes Op. 40, Nos. 1 & 5, and L. Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster* Op. 54 No. 6. Included are full analyses of each piece performed, biographical information on each composer, and brief interpretive and performance-oriented suggestions.

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Chapter 1 - Sonata No. 18 in D Major, K.576

Biography of W.A. Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria to Leopold and Maria Anna Mozart in 1756.¹ The last of seven children, he was one of only two who survived, along with his older sister Maria Anna. The education of the two children was taken upon by Leopold Mozart who instructed them in literature, mathematics, dancing and many more subjects. Among these was music, for which Wolfgang Amadeus showed a talent from the early age of four. His first compositions were an Andante and Allegro (K.1a and K.1b) written at the age of five. In 1762 Leopold took his two children on a tour of Vienna during which they performed on the harpsichord in front of many nobles and dignitaries, including Maria Theresa, sovereign of Austria, and her consort, Francis I. The family was received well with great success and were praised by all. But this was just the beginning of Mozart's musical career.

Over the next decade, Leopold Mozart and his children embarked on five tours, travelling across Europe to France, England, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and more. They gave private concerts at all the noble courts including that of King George III of England. In these concerts, the two children performed on the harpsichord and organ, Mozart performing many of his own original works. The boy's skills were praised by many, and his reputation preceded him in the different tour destinations. Over the years of his travels, Mozart heard and met many composers, including Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and his younger brother, Johann Christian Bach, and often would use quotations from their works in his pieces. He was influenced in particular by J.C.

¹ Eisen and Stanley, "Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus", *Grove Music Online*

Bach, who became close friends with the Mozart family. Mozart continued to write music and produced numerous sonatas, Masses, concertos and symphonies. He often held concerts in which he, himself, performed and conducted. By the age of thirteen, he had already built a reputation in the local Salzburg area as a well-respected composer and performer, and around Europe, he was considered a famous musician.

In 1772, Mozart became a paid employee as Konzertmeister of the Salzburg court and composed music for the court as the duties of his position. He remained in Salzburg as a result of this for nearly five years, with the exception of one short sojourn to Vienna, and another to Munich. The first few years of this period were great years of composition for Mozart. He wrote many Masses, symphonies, concerti, divertimenti, and a quintet. But eventually his interest in life as a court musician began to fade. Both he and his father, Leopold, were dissatisfied with their positions, presumably, in part, because they did not agree with the Archbishop Colloredo, who held the highest position of authority over the two musicians. Mozart continued to compose church music suited to his position, but wrote much more secular music, both vocal and instrumental, for which he became known as a leading composer in the Salzburg area. Leopold Mozart, in the meantime, continued his search for better suited work for himself and his son, traveling to Vienna and Italy but with no success. Finally, in 1777, at the request of Mozart himself, the archbishop released both Leopold and his son from employment. Soon after, Mozart set out across Europe in search of a new position for the two musicians.

Accompanied by his mother, he travelled to Munich, Mannheim and finally Paris, staying for a time in each city and composing all the while. When he required after positions, he received many polite refusals, except for one offer of the organist post at Versailles which he declined. Unfortunately, while they were in Paris, his mother, Maria Anna passed away. After some more

time travelling, Mozart returned alone to Salzburg at the command of his father, who suggested a position of court organist which had recently become vacant. Satisfied with the promise of a higher salary, Mozart took the position and continued, as well, his previous duties of composing music for the court. This, however, was a short-lived reunion and after more arguments and dissatisfaction, he left the position and Salzburg for good.

Mozart was able to make a living in Vienna, teaching students, composing and performing. He became widely known as one of the finest pianists in the city, with one notable challenger to the title being Muzio Clementi, with whom Mozart had an impromptu duel at the court of Emperor Joseph II. Mozart was said to have won the duel, although he disliked Clementi after the event for many years. The composition of his opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* during this time earned him fame across Europe because of its great success. Shortly after its premiere, Mozart was wedded to Constanze Weber, whom he met during his brief stay with her family after his arrival in Vienna. In 1784 Mozart was at the height of his Viennese musical life and performed for royalty, ambassadors, and other nobility in both private and public concerts. His compositions were in high demand, and he responded with some of his greatest works, including many piano concertos, symphonies, quartets, quintets, and trios for strings and piano. He continued to compose operas in both German and Italian which were met with varying success and traveled to different cities across the continent for their premieres. After Leopold Mozart died in 1787 Mozart composed very few pieces for a period of several months.

In the last few years of his life, Mozart's finances grew increasingly unstable. He still earned money by teaching lessons and composing pieces. He completed several more operas which were well received, but not enough to stabilize his income. He insisted on dressing in the most expensive and luxurious clothes to keep up impressions of his social status but was greatly

in debt. In 1791 he was commissioned to write a Requiem which he worked on until his death. He was unable to finish the Requiem completely although sketches of the last movements have been found. He was buried in December in a common grave outside Vienna.

History and Analysis of the Sonata in D Major

The Italian word *sonata* can be literally translated to “something to be played, that is, simply an instrumental piece”.² Although sonatas throughout the Baroque and early Classical eras often proved to be very different forms, from Zipoli’s toccata-like works to Scarlatti’s one-movement sonatas, the term has come to describe a standard three (occasionally four) movement work with general structures applying to key and thematic material. This form of the sonata was helped into existence largely by C.P.E. Bach, who wrote sonatas having three movements, with the second being a “slow movement in a contrasting but related key”.³ He used themes and motives, developing and recapitulating them as is now the common form of a sonata. J.C. Bach advanced this evolution of the form further by using more variety within movements, departing from strictly binary form and writing minuets and rondeaus, particularly in the third and final movements of his sonatas. By the time Mozart began composing, the Classical sonata was well established as a form, of which the Sonata in D Major, K. 576, as will be discussed below, provides an excellent example.

The sonata, Mozart’s last, was written in 1789 in Vienna, only two years before the composer’s death. This sonata was one of six sonatas which were commissioned by the King of Prussia for Princess Friederike, and the only one that Mozart ever completed. In a letter to a

² Kirby, “Music for Piano, A Short History”, 66

³ Ibid. 82

friend, Michael Puchberg, Mozart mentions some “easy sonatas” that he was composing for the princess, presumably referring to K. 576, although this is a strange way to describe the piece, as it is widely known as perhaps the most technically demanding of all the composer’s piano sonatas. It is possible that, in this instance, Mozart was speaking about some other sonatas intended for the princess, which he started but did not complete. Despite what the composer may or may not have thought of the difficulty of this sonata, any performer would definitely have no doubts as to its technical prowess. The first and third movements contain many rapid scalar passages and arpeggios, as well as polyphonic passages, and even the slow second movement challenges the performer with a modulatory section of scales in numerous keys. Virtuoso elements are present in each movement of this sonata, making it a grand finale in the composer’s sonata genre.

The first movement of the sonata (*Allegro*) opens in a 6/8 meter with an immediate introduction of the main theme. The theme begins with a rising, arpeggiated D Major (I) chord, followed by ornamented, ascending half steps which end the first four-bar phrase on a half cadence. The second half of the main theme repeats the introductory arpeggio, this time on an E minor (ii) chord and finishing the eight-bar theme with a suspended imperfect cadence (see mm. 1-8 in Fig. 1.1). A reiteration of the main theme follows this cadence, marking the first use of polyphonic texture in the sonata. The arpeggio from the beginning of the theme is staggered over the space of two eight notes, with one hand continuing the theme in its original form and the other playing sixteenth note scalar patterns above (see mm. 9-15 in Fig. 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Theme 1 (mm.1-15)

Allegro Köchel Nr. 576

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The transition to the second theme begins on the pick-up to m. 28 with similar arpeggios followed by rapid descending scales offset by one eighth note. This brilliant, technical section is another example of polyphonic writing in the sonata. After the thirteen-measure transition, the second theme begins in the dominant key of A major. Offering an appropriate contrast to the heroic arpeggios of the first theme, the second starts with a *dolce* motive that rises and falls in stepwise motion (marked with red box). The theme occupies only four measures and, upon its reiteration, transitions to the closing material which brings an end to the exposition with sixteenth note scales and a legato version of the opening arpeggio on an A major chord (see Fig. 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Second theme and closing material (mm.40-58)

The development section of this movement continues the legato broken chord from the end of the previous section. The chords change from A major to A minor, and then to a dominant F^7 which leads to B^b major, the first key of the development. Throughout this section, Mozart uses elements of the first theme as developmental material, such as the sixteenth note scales and arpeggios, as well as continuing the polyphonic structures. The key changes from B^b major to G minor and finally $F^\#$ major before re-transitioning to the home key for the recapitulation.

The recapitulation reprises the main theme followed by a polyphonic section of alternating right- and left-hand scales which serve as a transition to the second theme. The second theme returns to the tonic key of D major and is longer this time than in the exposition,

repeating the full theme twice. The coda begins with a transition-like section which is taken from the first transition to the second theme in the exposition, descending scales that are set off by one eighth note. This section, however, does not lead to the next theme but instead closes the piece in a similar manner as the end of the exposition, except in the key of D.

The second movement of the sonata (*adagio*) is in A major and follows an ABA form. The theme begins in the first measure with an A major chord and becomes a simple but meditative melody. The main theme is introduced through a sixteen-bar period with four equal phrases. The primary motive begins with the first, second, and fourth phrases, but each time moves to a different harmony, uniting the A section without becoming repetitive.

Figure 1.3 Movement 2, mm. 1-17



Following the tender and poignant A section, the troubled B section moves to the key of F# minor. The section begins with repeated minor thirds in the left hand, accompanied by a seemingly confused and wandering pattern which incorporates the use of sixteenth rests on downbeats, creating an unstable feeling. Following a surprising two measures in D major, the section turns to a brief transitory passage, featuring six measures of rapid ascending and descending scales, each in a different and unrelated key. This passage ends with a reprise of the

F# minor theme which uses similar transition content to arrive back in A major for the return of the first theme. This theme is repeated exactly as stated in mm. 1-16, and then the music seamlessly unfolds into a coda that features the second theme, but in the key of A major.

The third and final movement (*Allegretto*) is in the key of D major and is in sonata form. It is a playful movement in 2/4 time and is full of brilliant passages of sixteenth triplets and arpeggios. The first four bars of the main theme feature a two-measure long motive that is then repeated up a whole step, creating a question that is awaiting a reply. The answer promptly follows with another short sequence which ends in a half cadence, completing the eight-bar theme. The “question” of the theme is then repeated, accompanied by sixteenth-note triplets descending to a low D and continuing in the right hand as the “answer” completes the second eight-bar phrase.

Figure 1.4 Movement 3, Theme 1 (mm.1-16)

The transition begins in m.26 with a version of the main theme played in the left hand, now in the dominant key of A major. Rather than the four-measure question followed by an

answer of the same length of the original theme, this version is complemented by a short, plaintive motive in the high register of the right hand, adding a sense of instability to the previously confident theme. The “question” motive becomes a sequence which rises, ever seeking its answer, until it reaches a dominant E⁷, arpeggiated in the same triplets until it finally reaches the key of A major.

The second theme begins on the second beat of m. 50 with a descending A major scale in the left hand, harmonized by two-note chords in the right. This descending motive is repeated with ornaments for the second four measures. This theme is much shorter than the first theme, and immediately after its introduction it merges with a transitory section of alternating arpeggios which moves the key back to D major for the beginning of the development.

Figure 1.5 Movement 3, Theme 2 (mm. 50-64)

The development section begins on m. 65 in a somewhat odd fashion with the exact return of the full sixteen-bar first theme. But instead of transitioning to the key of A major, it uses the same transition version of the theme as seen in the exposition to move to F major. Using variations of this same theme, the key changes to G minor, then briefly travels through B minor, E minor, D major and finally a prolonged A major to lead to the recapitulation. Beginning on m. 117, the recapitulation does not immediately reprise the first theme but moves instead to the transition between the first and second themes. This is the third time that this transition theme has been used, this time in the home key of D major. After the return of the second theme in the tonic key, the first half of the main theme appears one last time as the start to the closing material.

This third movement is unusual because of different placements of the first theme. The second time it is heard is the beginning of the development, while it is missing from its place in the recapitulation. It is almost as if Mozart went straight to the recapitulation but remembered in the middle that he had forgotten the development section! The placement of the theme at the end serves as a final reminder and ties the movement together with a similar beginning and ending. Oddly enough, this joyful, energetic movement ends with three sparse D major chords, almost an underwhelming ending to a brilliant sonata.

Performance Suggestions

Mozart's Sonata in D Major is a brilliant masterpiece full of polyphonic passages and virtuosic technical demands, and, as such, it is important to highlight these features in a performance of the work. One of the first instances of virtuosity in the piece falls in the transition between the two themes in the exposition of the first movement. Beginning in the pickup to m.

28, a passage about six measures long features fast scales set off from each other by an eighth note, enhancing the fast technical figures with a polyphonic quality. It is important, when playing this passage, to keep the two lines clear and as two separate voices so that the nature of the offset effect is not confused.

Figure 1.6 Passage from Movement 1, m.28



There are multiple sections in the entire piece which have similar connotations—the musicality must not be lost in the virtuosity. For the most part, Mozart avoids virtuosity in most of his works and relies on a simplistic tone and song-like melody to showcase emotion and beauty. This simple tone must not be lost even in the fast technical passages that can be found in this sonata, such as the above-mentioned. The advice of Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda can be taken in regard to attaining this quality, especially their writing on the importance of “lightness of touch” on modern pianos. “To make legato scales as clear on a modern instrument as on a Mozart piano, one must often play non-legato...”⁴. This technique will avoid muddling in fast passages and keep the crystal clear, but also simplistic quality that Mozart is so well-known for.

⁴ Badura-Skoda, “Interpreting Mozart”, 147

Chapter 2 - Drei Klavierstücke, D. 946, II. Allegretto

Biography of Franz Schubert

Franz Peter Schubert was born in Vienna to Franz Theodor and Elisabeth Schubert in 1797.⁵ His parents had both immigrated to Vienna from their home countries (his father was from today's Czech Republic) so although the composer was Viennese by birth, he was not by ancestry. Franz was the second youngest out of five children, all that survived past infancy out of fourteen. Franz Theodor Schubert was a schoolteacher and taught at a school which was on the ground floor of the building his family lived in; his children later attended this school, Franz included. The Schuberts were great enjoyers of music, and their children all took music lessons after school hours. Franz first took piano lessons from his older brother, but soon surpassed him and continued to learn on his own. Other music lessons that he received included vocal studies with Antonio Salieri, violin from his father, and organ and counterpoint from the parish organist. Already composing songs and piano pieces from a young age, Franz exhibited a great musical talent that was noticed by all his family and instructors.

After passing an audition to an elite choir, Schubert received the privilege of free admission to a high-quality boarding school in Vienna, the Imperial and Royal City College. He studied there for five years and played in the student orchestra, becoming acquainted with many classic works by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. During these years he learned of the poetry of Goethe and Schiller in which he had a great interest and was able to attend many operas, including Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Equipped with these further studies in music, Schubert continued composing; his compositions from the age of thirteen are his earliest surviving works

⁵ Brown, Sams, Winter, "Schubert, Franz", *Grove Music Online*

that remain today. His early style is reminiscent of the styles of Beethoven and Mozart, whose works he studied and played so much. As Schubert grew more and more interested in composing, his time became preoccupied with it and as a result, his grades in his other studies fell and he left the school in 1813. Although he loved composing, he knew that he could not support himself with just that, so he enrolled in a course to become a teacher, while taking composition lessons from Salieri. When he did not pass all the final tests with high enough marks, his father enlisted him as an assistant at the school in which he still taught. During this year, Schubert completed many works, including his first mass as well as his first opera. But his most lucrative period of composing came from the end of 1814 to the beginning of 1816. His own personal style finally emerged with the completion of nearly 150 songs, using poetry from Goethe, Mayrhofer, Ossian, and many more. He also wrote two string quartets, two symphonies, two more masses, and multiple *Singspiele*. In the next year he composed another 110 songs, more symphonies and masses, and some sonatas for violin and piano. The young composer slowly began to gain recognition in Vienna; 1818 marked the first public concert in which one of his works was performed and soon after one of his songs became his first work to be officially published. His music had been performed before by a private orchestra but up until this time his music had remained relatively unknown to Viennese music critics.

After a period of unrest caused by his teaching duties and a strained relationship with his father, Schubert received the opportunity to travel to the Esterhazy estate in Hungary (today in Slovakia) to tutor the two daughters of the count. He enjoyed the months that he spent there and, for a time, was more cheerful and composed several duets for piano. But the low spirits returned, Schubert feeling that he was an outsider at the estate, and he moved back to Vienna, living with a friend rather than his family due to worsening relationships with them. He continued composing

many works such as his quintet known as “The Trout” which was a commissioned piece. By 1821 his vocal music had become very popular in Vienna and his other works were often performed and published as well. He could finally support himself with the money he was making from his compositions. Schubert’s lifestyle consisted mainly of sitting at his desk and writing for hours, and often drinking in the evenings; his friends described his behavior as growing increasingly moody and antisocial, and often indulging in sensuality. It can be assumed that during this period the composer contracted syphilis which became a life-long suffering to him. Despite his new-found social status in Vienna, Schubert often had to decline invitations due to his failing health.

Over the later years of his life, Schubert was greatly affected by this disease. He went through phases of health and sickness and as a result rarely went out or was seen in his previous social circles. Despite his condition, the composer continued writing, producing multiple operas, a song cycle, and some quartets in the year 1823. In 1824 his health grew worse, but nevertheless, he accepted a second invitation to the home of Count Johann Esterhazy to tutor his daughters. While residing there, he wrote many more pieces for piano duet, most likely for his two piano students to play. But the stay did not last long, and he soon returned to Vienna and moved back into his family’s house. A brief respite from his sickness was granted to Schubert in the year 1825, in which he felt so well that he was sure he must be cured. He traveled through Austria with some friends on a holiday which was to be one of the last periods of true happiness in his life.

Although his symptoms and pain returned eventually, Schubert spent the last years of his life composing and producing some of his greatest works such as *Die Winterreise* and the “Great” C Major Symphony. The composer also wrote several piano trios, his impromptus for

piano and the *Drei Klavierstücke*. When his health began to worsen yet again, his doctor recommended that he move into his brother Ferdinand's home, where he continued to compose at a great rate even as his body was failing him. Franz Schubert died in November of 1828 and was buried in Währing cemetery, at his own request, next to Beethoven.

Analysis of Drei Klavierstücke Allegretto

Schubert wrote his "Three Piano Pieces" in 1828, the year he passed away. They remained unedited and unpublished for many years after his death until, in 1868, they were discovered by Johannes Brahms, who anonymously titled and published the works under Schubert's name⁶. The three pieces bear a similarity to Schubert's *Impromptus* and were maybe intended to be given the same title, had Schubert lived long enough to do so. Each of these three pieces contains the epitome of Schubert's style—beautiful, song-like melodies, moments of intense passion and emotion, as well as daring harmonies and progressions. The first and third works of the opus are in ternary form, exploring and developing contrasting material. The second stands alone in its rondo form, presenting an ABACA format.

The aria-like main theme begins in E-flat major, in a 6/8 meter. This theme bears a song-like quality consisting of a melody written in mainly thirds, accompanied by a moving left hand playing broken chords in eighth notes. The entire section is in a binary form with a short closing section. The first part is an irregular nine measures, consisting of one four-bar and one five-bar phrase. The second part contains sixteen measures with four separate phrases, developing the main theme and using similar textures in the melody and accompaniment. The closing material

⁶ Kirby, "Music for Piano", 154

uses a version of the main theme, slowly dying away into three solemn E-flat chords followed by a second inversion G chord in the lower register of the piano, hinting at the ominous B section.

Figure 2.1 A Section



The B section uses the low register introduced at the end of the A section, already presenting a contrast from the peaceful, mid-register first theme. The section is in binary form and begins in C minor, the relative minor of the home key. Rather than a melodic theme, this section creates a dark and dramatic mood with undulating fifths and octaves in the bass register of the piano. The right hand continues the pattern of thirds from the first section, playing thirds in the middle C register, beginning with a repeated pianissimo C minor chord which becomes a

trill on the lower neighboring third. This intense texture is interrupted by sforzando G major chords, interrupting the 6/8 meter with a feeling of three beats per measure. The second section escalates to a higher register, switching roles in each hand so that the left hand takes over the repeated chords and the right hand playing frantic chords. The intensity builds using rising sequences until it reaches a climax in the high register of the piano. Following this climax, the music returns to the low register, coming back to the material at the beginning of the section. The C minor motive is repeated but this time it is in C major and played up an octave, creating a heavenly and serene contrast to the dark mood of the section. The section ends with a transition back to the home key for the return of the main theme.

Figure 2.2 B Section



The C section brings a complete change to the first part of the piece. The time signature changes to cut common time (although the general pulse remains the same) and the key becomes A-flat minor. Unlike the other sections this one begins in the high register of the piano. The

melody is played in the right hand amid repeated chords, alternating between the melody and the accompaniment with the right hand. The left hand accompanies this with a low A-flat octave followed by a repeated fifth in eighth notes. This section is in a rounded binary form and is longer than the first two sections. In the second part of this segment, the key changes to B minor for an agonized and emotional second theme to the C section. The right hand plays just the melody in octaves, giving it a more striking effect than the first theme, and the left hand continues the octave down beat while adding more filled-out chords repeated on eighth notes. After eighteen measures, the key transitions back to A-flat minor for a reprise of the first theme of the C section.

Figure 2.3 C Section



The final return of the A section plays through with no repeats and ends with a final E-flat major chord, closing the piece in the low register of the keyboard.

Regarding Interpretation

As in all of Schubert's music, the *Drei Klavierstücke* contains a plethora of contrasting themes and melodies. In the piece discussed above, the returning theme of the rondo contrasts with each episode in between, but also must be played differently each time it is heard. If the same interpretation is used for each of its reiterations, the sense of development gained from the B and C sections would be absent from the entire piece. The main theme, like the main character of the narrative, goes through different events and emerges slightly changed from each one.

Its first appearance plays an introductory role to the piece, setting the key and time signature as one might set the scene for a coming tale to be told. This theme must be simple and unimposing, allowing the listener to enjoy the melody for itself, not using dramatic rubato or dynamic changes any more than marked in the score. The pure simplicity of the melody assists in creating a dramatic contrast when the dark, brooding B section presents the first obstacle of the narrative. When the theme returns after this episode, it now represents a character that has been through some hardship and therefore cannot have the same innocence as its first appearance. When performing this section, the pianist must be careful to retain the original character of the theme while also reflecting the previous section, maybe through a softer, more reserved tone.

The second episodic section brings the piece through many different changes in key, time signature and even registration. It contains a story of its own, with emotions ranging from frantic to poignant and finally to despair. After such an encounter, the main character of the narrative emerges for its final appearance, changed yet again by the events of the C section. The pianist can choose how the story of this piece ends, whether it be resigned and sorrowful, or hopeful for

the future. However, one chooses to interpret this theme, it is important to show, through the repeated melody, the development that the piece has undergone.

Chapter 3 - Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23

Biography of Fryderyk Chopin

Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin was born on March 1, 1810, in Żelazowa Wola (near Warsaw), Poland.⁷ When he was still a baby, his parents moved to Warsaw where he spent the majority of his childhood years. Chopin's father, Mikołaj Chopin, was a well-respected middle-class gentleman, who saw to it that his four children, of whom Fryderyk was the second, received a good education in music, literature and morals. The family lived near by a school in Warsaw and so as a boy Chopin came into contact with many different classes of Polish society through his encounters with professors and friendships with the students, many of whom were of similar social status to the Chopins. He also was known in the aristocratic circles because of his already recognizable talent as a pianist, and he performed regularly at salons and palaces of Polish nobles. As early as the age of seven, Chopin was composing short pieces, some of which were published, and was described as a "musical genius" in newspapers. During this time, he studied with Wojciech Żywny, later with Józef Elsner, and eventually entered the High School of Music in 1826. In this school he studied music theory and composition, piano and organ. But much of his piano technique was self-taught, a fact which affected his later methods of teaching and playing, which were unique compared to his contemporaries.

Chopin graduated in 1829 and traveled for a short time to Vienna where he performed in two concerts that were received with great enthusiasm. When he returned to Poland, the young musician found the music-related social life in Warsaw to have lost its intrigue and longed for the rich, cultural glories of larger cities in Europe such as Vienna and Paris. Consequently,

⁷ Samson, "Chopin, Fryderyk Franciszek", *Grove Music Online*

Chopin embarked on a tour of Europe with a close friend and schoolfellow with Vienna as his first stop. However, soon after their arrival they heard news of political unrest in Poland due to an uprising which would become the Polish-Russian War. Chopin's friend immediately returned to Poland, leaving the composer alone in the foreign city away from his homeland. Although Chopin had considered returning to Poland, he ultimately decided to remain in Vienna, but his sense of nationalism grew stronger, and he composed his first nine Mazurkas during this time. Besides these few compositions, Chopin had little success in Vienna, partly due to a growing negative attitude toward Poles, and finally left the city, traveling to Munich, Stuttgart, and finally Paris.

In Paris, Chopin found himself at home immediately. Soon after his arrival, he came into contact with many different pianists who were organizing a concert season, and through one of them was able to perform his first concert in Paris. His performance was received well and soon he was in popular demand as a performer and a teacher. Teaching piano lessons became his primary source of income since his new reputation enabled him to charge his students expensive amounts. His methods were unique, and therefore more highly sought after. As a performer, Chopin's fame grew steadily, although he avoided large concerts and retained his old habit of playing in salons and in front of small groups. His compositions during this period were largely mazurkas, nocturnes, and etudes in which he refined and perfected his pianistic style. His works were published across Europe and were received with great enthusiasm by all. Chopin was finally able to live the life and routine that he had hoped to find when he first left Poland.

During the years that he spent in Paris, Chopin became close friends with many other Poles who also lived in the city, relying on them as reminders of his homeland. During a visit to his parents in Karlsbad, Germany, he visited a certain Wodziński family who were acquainted

with his father and immediately became infatuated with their young daughter, Maria. He spent some extended time with the family the next year during which his love for the girl grew, and he proposed to her the night before his departure. After a long year of restlessness and waiting, the family finally gave an answer to his proposal—a letter from Maria’s mother rejecting his offer. In the dark time of loss following this unfortunate event, Chopin met with an author who wrote under the pen name George Sand. He had met her once previously and had not had a good impression of her during their brief acquaintance, but despite his once unfavorable opinion of her, he fell in love with her and she with him. The two became lovers and were in a relationship for the next nine years. Chopin traveled extensively with George Sand and spent many summers at her manor in the countryside. He suffered through some months of serious illness in 1838 but was eventually able to recover his strength. During his time of convalescence, however, he composed his 24 Preludes. Chopin’s relationship with Sand provided some stability and family-life in his busy schedule and he was able to keep up a steady habit of composing, writing more mazurkas and nocturnes and completing his B-flat minor Sonata. But the happy times as George Sand’s lover were not to last for the composer. After a period of tension between Chopin and Sand, partly involving Sand’s children and disagreements between the two as a result of certain matters, the couple separated in 1845.

This separation was especially hard on Chopin and his life was greatly affected by it. He continued teaching as usual and even played some concerts in Paris. But in 1848 The February Revolution in France and the requests of a Scottish student of his prompted him to travel to London and Scotland where he performed a few recitals and was received by high society. During this journey, Chopin’s health weakened suddenly, and he became very ill. He returned to Paris at the recommendations of his doctors and spent his final months surrounded by friends, as

well as his sister who travelled to visit him and the daughter of George Sand, with whom he had been very close. The famed composer passed away in October of 1849.

The Ballade as a Genre

Historically, a “ballad” has been known commonly as a story or heroic tale, often written in verse with a refrain. These poetic narratives can be found throughout history in all cultures, bringing history and myth alike to life through their descriptive words. The ballad as verse contained romance, tragedy, despair and victory—all elements that can be found in any artistic work of the Romantic era, and thus were very popular during the 19th century. Ballads have been set to music in the past, with the words being put to a melody along with an instrumental accompaniment, but, until the “Ballades” of Chopin, a ballad and an instrumental solo had never been considered as two compatible genres.

Although Chopin had no real predecessor in his use of the ballade genre, there are some similar types of works that came before his new invention. While no other composer had attempted to create a narrative piece, the character piece was a genre that came close to the idea of bringing a scene or image to life. A Bohemian composer, Tomášek, wrote pieces such as these called “eclogues” and “rhapsodies”, the latter being larger scale works. Tomášek wrote about his rhapsodies, “I saw and heard them declaiming long passages from Homer’s *Iliad* and sending everyone into a state of enthusiasm”⁸. This statement from the composer shows that he meant for his pieces to illustrate a narrative through the music, without the assistance of words. In this way,

⁸ Kirby, “Music for Piano”, 183

it can be said that Tomášek had a similar idea to Chopin's, but his pieces were in no other way comparable to the monumental Ballades that Chopin later wrote.

In writing the ballades, Chopin imitated the traditional strophic form of verse and refrain that was common in many poetic ballads. While his works do not all conform exactly to this form, the outline can be used to distinguish sections and themes in the ballades. Although the ballade was an entirely new genre, and therefore did not have any constraints regarding form, many have distinguished a loose sonata form in them, comparing the development of contrasting themes to the exposition and development sections of the traditional sonata. Chopin's interpretation of the verse and refrain is free but does not leave its inspiration unrecognizable. In each of his ballades, a main theme is continuously repeated throughout the piece, carrying the role of the refrain, but does not always appear the same way and is often in a different key or setting than in its introduction. In this way, Chopin enables the narrative to flow more continuously, without interruptions in the telling of the tale.

"The Ballades are in narrative form but without a program: if there ever was a program that inspired them..., it is no longer relevant for their understanding."⁹ Chopin's ballades have often been speculated to have been based off epic poems by poet Adam Mickiewicz, but there has never been any solid proof to this theory, and Chopin himself never mentioned any inspiration behind the works. The music speaks for itself, bringing the listener along an epic journey full of romance, heartbreak and despair.

⁹ Rosen, "The Romantic Generation", 322

Analysis of Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23

Published in 1836, the first ballade is the first of a genre, and therefore has no preceding works with which to be compared. On the other hand, there are three later ballades written by Chopin, but these do not bear enough resemblance to each other that one distinct “ballade form” can be determined from studying them. It can be said about the first ballade, and not necessarily the other three, that the form bears a resemblance to the Classical sonata in that it presents two themes in related keys which develop and evolve throughout the duration of the piece. But, just as there are details which point toward Chopin’s use of sonata form, there are also many which highlight just how removed from the traditional form the ballade is.

The piece begins with a seven-bar introduction—an arpeggiated Neapolitan chord played in parallel octaves which wanders and turns until it reaches a cadence, a $I^{6/4}$, which leads into the first theme. This introduction sets the scene for the story that is about to be told. It is in a different meter and tempo than the rest of the piece and initially does not give much indication as to the key that is to come. In m.8, the meter switches to 6/4 and, following a tied B-flat from the final chord of the previous measure, the theme begins on beat three of the measure. A low D marks the downbeat while the actual theme begins on the second eighth-note with an arpeggiated $V^{4/2}$ chord in the home key of G minor. This is followed by one of the main motives of the piece, which reappears in many versatile forms, a descending half-step. The beginning $V^{4/2}$ chord repeats itself, this time moving to a lower, but ascending half-step. The fact that this theme always begins on an upbeat, as well as the use of the half-step motive, creates a lilting, dancelike quality that also has an aspect of longing.

Figure 3.1 Introduction and first theme



The theme continues to develop until it reaches the first major cadence in m.35, a perfect authentic cadence in G minor. This cadence leads to a new section, also in G minor, which serves as a transitory theme. This theme brings the half-step motive to a new level of importance, as it is used in both the right and left hand (fig. 3.2). With this theme, the tempo and intensity of the music gradually rises until it reaches a climax in m. 56 with large arpeggios spanning the entire register of the keyboard. These arpeggios eventually become an F major chord and dwindle in intensity until they are a simple repeating fourth and fifth, leading to the second theme.

Figure 3.2 Transitory theme



The F major harmony reveals itself to be the ii of the new key, E-flat major, as the second theme begins with a ii-V-I harmonic progression. The theme is written as a simple but beautiful melody that imitates a barcarolle. Its simplicity is marked by the lack of filled out chords in either hand—the right hand plays the one-line melody occasionally harmonized with a single other note. Meanwhile, the left hand plays a one-line moving accompaniment in quarter notes which outlines the harmonic progression but also has a freedom to it, reminiscent of Baroque counterpoint.

Figure 3.3 Second theme



The closing material that follows the second theme is comprised of twelve measures of alternating arpeggiated I and V⁷, still in the key of E-flat major. This transitions to the key of A minor, in which the main theme appears for the second time as the refrain. The lilting quality of the theme remains the same, but the pedal E in the bass gives it a tense, anticipatory quality that was not present at the beginning of the piece. Using the half-step motive, ascending in octaves, the theme rises quickly in intensity until it reaches a majestic reprisal of the second theme, this time in A major. This theme carries none of its previous introspective qualities and is now played in glorious octaves with full chords in both hands and a large span of the keyboard.

Figure 3.4 Return of second theme

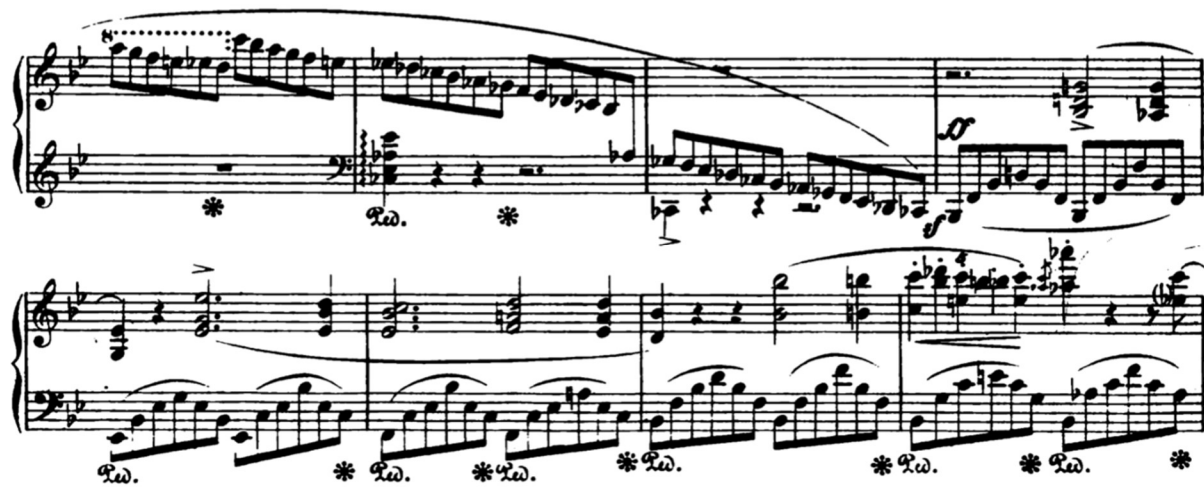


Three sets of climbing octaves bring the section to its climax as the left and right hand play low E[#] and high B natural octaves, creating a dramatic tritone. From this pinnacle the music comes crashing down to a low, brooding ostinato in m.126, lasting for four measures. This begins what could be called, in the loose sonata form version of this piece, the development. After a chromatic rise that brings the key back to E-flat major, a section similar to the first

transition theme (fig. 3.2) arrives, with the rising and falling half-step motive in the left hand and an ornamental accompaniment in the right. This version of the theme, however, is more static and repeats the same two chords for the majority of the eight-measure segment, before moving to a turbulent chromatic scale that rises and falls as the intensity of the music also rises once again. Following dramatic wide-spanning arpeggios, the section reaches a climax on a high G minor chord, hearkening for a moment back to the original key of the piece, before a long descending scale which arrives in E-flat major for the final reprise of the second theme.

This version of the second theme, returned to its original key, once again carries a different mood than in its first introduction. It is victorious and celebratory as if a foe had just been overcome. The right hand plays the theme in chords while the left hand accompanies with uncontrollable arpeggios. The closing material that followed the first version of this theme returns, more energetic than its predecessor, and serves as a transition back to G minor.

Figure 3.5 Final Reiteration of second theme



With the return of G minor comes the final refrain, or the final feature of the main theme. Though in its original key, this theme is marked as *meno mosso* and has a pedal D in the base, similar to the second refrain. This theme is pianissimo and foreboding, a stark contrast to the joy

of the previous section. It arrives at a climax in a passionate explosion of parallel sixths which come crashing down to the beginning of the coda.

The coda is given the instruction *Presto con fuoco* and marks the first time since the beginning of the piece that the meter is changed, going back to the common time that the introduction opened with. It begins with descending repeated inversions of the G minor chord, always beginning of the upbeat to the second beat of the measure. After the initial downbeat, the left hand gives the impression that the downbeat is on the second beat of each measure, assisting the right hand in creating an unstable meter.

Figure 3.6 Beginning of Coda



Eight measures into the coda, a fiery section of virtuosic leaps and arpeggios whi rise and fall to climaxes many times before a chromatic scale leads the piece to the final pinnacle of emotion. Two G melodic minor scales along with a short hint of the first theme assist in the build-up to a *fff* tritone, consisting of a high octave E in the right hand and a low octave B-flat in the left, a reminder of the similar tritone earlier in the piece. The two hands play chromatic octaves in contrary motion until they meet in the middle of the keyboard and descend a final time to an ultimate G octave.

Figure 3.7 End of Coda and Ballade



Interpreting the Ballade

Chopin's Ballades are all known for their dramatic climaxes and virtuosic passages filled with arpeggios, scales and large chords. It is easy when playing these passages to become immersed purely in the technicalities and playing them accurately, rather than on the music that is contained in them. Because of this, it is common to hear sections, such as the coda, played almost harshly—with perfect accuracy, but with little regard to the musical lines. In the middle of the coda, the melodic lines are clearly marked by quarter notes amid the eighth notes. These can be brought out by using the thumb to play them and by playing the supporting eighth notes with a lighter touch. The phrasing of the measures must be planned around these lines as well, which will help the arm not become too tired by playing on every note with equal intensity.

Figure 3.8 Coda (mm. 216-224)



Accounts of Chopin's playing can give further indications as to how over emphasis of virtuosic sections should be avoided. From the recollections of his student Karol Mikuli, we learn that Chopin "gave a noble, manly energy to appropriate passages with overpowering effect—energy without roughness..."¹⁰ In other words, the pianist used the proper amount of intensity that the music required, but not so much as to give it a harsh quality. By using musicality and correct phrasing, the virtuosic passages will not be too technical. Before focusing on merely the notes of a difficult figure, careful attention must be given to the musical lines in each section.

¹⁰Eigeldinger, "Chopin, Pianist and Teacher", 56

Chapter 4 - Prelude and Nocturne for the Left Hand

Biography of Alexander Scriabin

Aleksander Nikolayevich Scriabin was born in Moscow, Russia, in 1872.¹¹ His father, Nikolay Aleksandrovich, was a lawyer and interpreter, and his mother, Lyubov' Petrovna, was a pianist and composer. Scriabin's mother died less than a year after he was born, and his father soon after went to live as an interpreter in Constantinople, so the young boy was raised primarily by his aunt. Scriabin received his first piano lessons from her, was able to improvise and play by ear as early as the age of five, and was soon composing short works of his own. When he was 11, he began to take piano lessons from Georgy Konyus and to study classics such as Chopin and Mendelssohn, as well as composition. He later studied with Sergei Taneyev as well as Nikolai Zverev, who taught Rachmaninoff and Goldenweiser at that time also. When he injured his right arm in an accident, Scriabin began composing more and wrote some of his first serious works.

In 1888, the young pianist entered the Moscow Conservatory and quickly became one of its top piano students. He was a competitive student and often attempted great achievements such as learning the entirety of Beethoven's sonatas. Even when he injured his right hand again, this time due to over-practicing, he continued playing with his left hand and developed a very strong technique which can be seen in the left-hand parts of many of his works. During this time Scriabin suffered from bouts of anxiety and nervousness which lasted for much of the next decade of his life. He graduated from the conservatory in 1892 with a Small Gold Medal (Rachmaninoff received a large one). The same year he met a publisher who agreed to publish some of his works, although Scriabin received no part of their profit. However, he continued

¹¹ Powell, "Skryabin, Aleksandr Nikolayevich", *Grove Music Online*

composing, writing his first piano sonata and some mazurkas, from which he received some profit, the next year. For a time, Scriabin had no real occupation, having been deemed unfit for military service, and spent much of his time drinking with his friends, a bad habit that would last for years. In 1894, he entered into business with another publisher, Mitrofan Belyayev, who not only published Scriabin's compositions, but also arranged for him to travel and perform in St. Petersburg and throughout Europe. During these travels he wrote many of his Op. 11 Preludes.

Scriabin continued traveling, composing, and performing over the next few years. His relationship with Belyayev degraded over time, mostly because the young composer struggled to complete pieces within the time limits his publisher gave him, but the two continued their business together. In 1897 he married a pianist, by the name of Vera Ivanova Isakovich, who joined him in his travels and often performed joint concerts with him, until her first pregnancy. In 1898 Scriabin was able to procure, with the help of Belyayev, a position as a professor at the Moscow Conservatory. His work teaching at the conservatory was enough for him to support his new family and, additionally, gave him time in the summer to continue composing. He composed his first two symphonies, although their performances were not well received at their premieres, and his piano concerto, which he performed himself. Discouraged by the poor reception of these works, Scriabin resigned from the conservatory in 1902 and turned his time solely to composing, beginning work on his third symphony the same year his fourth child was born. During this time, the composer started reading philosophy and Greek mythology, and also joined a Philosophical Society in Moscow.

In 1903, Scriabin became involved in an affair with the sister of a friend, a young girl named Tat'yana. The works that he published during his time with her are full of the emotion and sensuality that was a part of his life at this time. Unfortunately, he soon fell into hard times,

when his long-time partner, Belyayev, passed away. The money he had been receiving from his published works stopped arriving regularly and Scriabin's financial situation quickly degraded. He decided to move with his family to Switzerland in 1904, although his wife Vera soon left him after finding out that he had arranged for Tat'yana to come live in a nearby village. Scriabin completed his third symphony the next year, which was received with just slightly more enthusiasm than his first two. This symphony was one of the first works to contain hints of the composer's "new doctrine", which was the phrase that Scriabin used to refer to his growing mysticism. The troubles that he was having with his publishing company came to a head and he cut off business with it altogether, leaving himself with no means of income or of publishing his compositions. But, out of desperation, he soon negotiated his way back into the good graces of the publishers in Belyayev's company and was able to resume business as normal.

Scriabin began experimenting with colors and music, assigning colors to different keys per his synesthesia, and wanted to create a work using these experiences. He shared his ideas with Rachmaninoff and Rimsky-Korsakov, who were members of a Russian publishing company, Edition Russe de Musique, that Scriabin had also been invited to join. Inspired by this desire to write a work enhanced by the metaphysical, he further discussed these theories with a group of Theosophists whom he met upon his recent move to Brussels, Belgium. Many of the ideas he obtained from these discussions, as well as from some reading that he did, he assumed into his own doctrine and methods.

Meanwhile, the composer once again ran into problems with his publishing companies and found himself in need of funds. His friend, Rachmaninoff helped him to arrange a series of concerts in Russia, to which Scriabin had returned in 1909, which helped him pay his bills until he was able to patch up the relationship with one of the companies again. His music was finally

well-received in his home-country and he was able to make a lucrative profit for the next few years, performing his works or having them conducted. He traveled with Tat'yana through Europe often, and, on one of these trips, was visited by Stravinsky who gave his piano sonatas great praises. Scriabin continued performing in London and St. Petersburg with great popularity until, in 1914, he became ill with an infection caused by a boil on his upper lip. He finally passed away from blood poisoning incurred by this infection on April 14, in Moscow.

Prelude and Nocturne for the Left-Hand, Op. 9

In 1891, Scriabin injured his right hand while practicing virtuosic piano music at the Moscow Conservatory. It was the second injury to that hand that he had incurred, although the first was from an unrelated accident, and, as a result, he was not able to use it to play for some months. Not to be deterred by his temporary handicap, the pianist and composer continued to play and compose music for the left hand. He developed excellent technique in the usually weaker hand, as can be seen in much of his music, including the virtuosic middle section of the nocturne. Although he eventually recovered from the injury, it still occasionally bothered him from time to time. He composed the Prelude et Nocturne Op.9, written in 1894, during such a bout of discomfiture and had it published the following year. It became extremely popular, especially among his American audiences.

The Prelude is a short piece in C[#] minor with an ABA form and 3/4 meter. Despite the simplistic form, the piece contains much complexity regarding harmonic progression and emotional content. The A section begins with what seems to be an A major chord but upon closer inspection, it can be found that the melody centers around A while the chord below it is a C[#] minor chord, with the A functioning as a non-chord tone. This melody contains a motive which

is used throughout the piece—a dotted eighth note and sixteenth note followed by a quarter note. The melody of the first two measures is repeated a half step down to complete the first full phrase. The second four-bar phrase of the A section begins on a D major chord with a leaping minor sixth on the same rhythmic motive from the first phrase. The phrase ends with a half cadence and a continuous pulsing G[#] in the bass keeps the momentum moving into the B section.

Figure 4.1 A Section

The musical score for the A Section is written for piano in 3/4 time, D major (two sharps). It is marked *Andante*. The score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system includes a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking. The third system includes a forte (*f*) dynamic, a decrescendo (*dim.*) marking, and ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The notation shows a mix of chords and moving lines in both hands, with some notes marked with 'x' to indicate specific articulation or emphasis.

The B section involves the rhythmic motive and also employs a melodic motive of leaping octaves. It begins with an octave on A, then rises to C[#], and finally D natural for the emotional climax of the piece. The upward direction of the melody is accompanied by a constant crescendo until a forte is reached and the octave D is alternated with a B[#], always hovering around the tonic but never resolving. The section ends without a satisfactory cadence, instead

moving downward from the B[#] by steps until an A is reached, preparing for the return to the A section and the original melody.

Figure 4.2 B Section



The A section returns and is extended by four measures, ending on a C[#] minor chord for what seems to be the end of the piece, but is followed by four more measures of closing material, at the end of which is a cadence closing with a C[#] major chord instead. This chord serves as a connection between the Prelude and the Nocturne, as it is enharmonic with D-flat major, the key of the Nocturne.

The Nocturne is also in an ABA form, although it is longer and more complicated than the simple Prelude. The theme is a soaring melody in 6/8 with a sentimental longing, demonstrated by its leaping intervals followed by slow chromatic descent. Contained in the first eight measures, this theme spans two four-bar phrases that do not repeat any material. The melody begins as a single line accompanied by wide sixteenth note arpeggios, and later becomes filled out with more chords as it increases in tension. In the second eight measures, the theme is repeated in a more dramatic fashion with tenths being added to the single line and octaves to the

accompaniment. The second phrase of the theme, however, is not dramatized and is merely repeated verbatim, albeit with a half cadence in A-flat major to close out the section.

Figure 4.3 A section of Nocturne (mm.1-8)



The B section begins abruptly with an E-flat played on the last sixteenth note of the preceding measure and held with a fermata. The B theme does not have as much melodic content as the first, relying instead on rising chromatic lines of full chords and building intensity. It begins in A-flat minor and then repeats the chromatic motive in D-flat minor. At the climax it moves to a brief F-flat major harmony before a pedal E-flat anticipates a cadence in A-flat major. The height of intensity in the climax is represented by chords and octaves alternating between the high and low register of the keyboard, giving the impression of a call and response between two separate entities. The A-flat cadence does not signal the end of the section however, as it transitions into a virtuosic cadenza in the highest register of the keyboard, a passage difficult to

play with the awkward positioning of the left hand. The cadenza finishes with a trill on B double-flat and then A-flat before returning to the main theme.

Figure 4.4 B section (mm. 17-27)

The main theme returns in much the same fashion as its first introduction. However, in the second eight bars, when the theme is repeated and developed, it abruptly changes key and finishes with a cadence in D-flat major, the first authentic cadence of the piece. From this cadence, a coda begins with a final reprise of the main theme an octave lower than the original

bearing a solitary and meditative quality. The end of the theme does not have a solid cadence but, instead, launches into a second cadenza consisting of arpeggios and trills which rise higher and higher until reaching a pinnacle on four repeated notes (D, E-flat, E natural, F) and finally dying out on a solitary high A-flat. The final four measures of the piece are marked *ad libitum* bringing the piece to a close with four different arpeggiated chords, each searching for a resolution, and finally an arpeggiated D-flat major chord which rises and then falls to a low, widespread chord of the same harmony.

Figure 4.5 Final four measures and cadence



Performance Suggestions

Since the Prelude and Nocturne are performed with the left hand alone, there are some issues that arise from the restriction of the arm. In the Prelude, these issues are minor, since the piece is written mainly in the middle register of the piano. But in the Nocturne, there are many instances where the performer is required to reach chords in the lowest and highest register of the piano. Reaching the low chords is not difficult with the left hand, but the quick jumps to the chords in the upper register in the middle section can prove to be difficult (see fig.4.4). The cadenza immediately following is played almost completely in the very highest notes on the piano, and requires the left arm to be crossed over the body which is an awkward position to play in.

In order to play these sections smoothly and without discomfort, the position of the body at the piano is very important. The bench should not be centered as usual but moved slightly closer to the right end of the piano, since the left arm has a longer reach on its own side of the keyboard. This will assist in the sections where the left hand has to reach across the body for extended periods of time. For the huge intervals between consecutive chords, the performer must make sure to have the feet placed in a wide stable stance on the floor to enable him to quickly lean to the opposite ends of the piano. With the right foot being on the pedal for the majority of these sections, the stabilizing role falls to the left foot which must be firmly planted in a position that will help the body keep balance.

Chapter 5 - Concert Etudes, Op. 40, Nos. 1&5

Biography of Nikolai Kapustin

Nikolai Girshevitch Kapustin was born in Horlivka, Ukraine in 1937. His first introduction to music was as a child through piano lessons from his mother. As a young boy, he had a natural talent for playing the piano, as well as for composing--his first piano sonata was completed when he was only thirteen. When he was fourteen, his family moved to Moscow, where he was able to start taking piano lessons from Avrelian Rubakh, a pupil of Felix Blumenfeld. He studied classical piano for a time, but, at the age of sixteen, he became interested in jazz after listening to the radio broadcast “Voice of America” which played music by artists such as Nat King Cole and Louis Armstrong.¹² Kapustin’s teacher, Rubakh, agreed to help his student study jazz and, immediately, the young pianist knew that the music was meant for him.

After four years of studying with Rubakh, Kapustin entered the Moscow Conservatory, where he studied with Alexander Goldenweiser. According to Kapustin himself, when he played the Don Giovanni Fantasy by Liszt at his audition, Goldenweiser said to Rubakh, “Where did you find such a pianist?”¹³ While at the conservatory, Kapustin played in the big band, and founded a jazz quintet. He did not learn much from Goldenweiser, as the old pianist was in his 80s at the time and was not as capable as he had once been, but he continued to teach himself how to compose, as well as improving his piano technique. He graduated from the conservatory in 1961, playing Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 2 at his graduation recital. Soon after, he joined the big band conducted by Oleg Lundstrem, who had studied with Duke Ellington.¹⁴ He

¹² Bose, “Crossing Over”

¹³ Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin, Russian Composer of Classical Jazz”, *Fanfare* Vol. 24, No. 1

¹⁴ “Nikolai Kapustin 1937-2020”, *Schott Music*

composed his first piano concerto for this ensemble and performed it himself at the premiere. His style combined his classical roots and his jazz studies, using classical structures to write new jazz music. Kapustin never considered himself a jazz pianist, as he didn't like to improvise, and much preferred composing to performing.

From the 60s onwards, jazz was becoming much more commonplace in the Soviet Union, after being prohibited by Stalin, so Kapustin's music was well received by his audiences, who were eager to consume the now-fashionable jazz style. Despite this, he remained relatively unknown as a composer in Russia. He continued performing with various big bands on television and radio, composing works at the same time. In 1977 he took a position in the State Symphonic Film Orchestra. While under this employment, he finished his second piano concerto, following which success he was invited to become a member of the Union of Soviet Composers. Soon after, at the start of the 1980s, he stopped performing in public, although he would record his own music from time to time, and started composing full-time.

The majority of his works were written for solo piano, including 20 piano sonatas, 6 piano concertos, 24 Preludes, 8 Concert Etudes, as well as some concertos for other instruments and some chamber music. His style continued to fuse jazz rhythms and harmonies with classical forms, in pieces such as his Suite in the Old Style, Op.28, a suite of Baroque dances in the jazz style. Despite the composer's amazing and continuous output, the name "Kapustin" remained unknown internationally until the early 2000s, when some of his works were recorded on CDs by Steven Osborne and Marc-Andre Hamelin. These recordings garnered much interest and slowly Kapustin's works began to be featured in piano recitals around the world and interviews with the newly popular composer were highly sought after. Kapustin, who was a very private man, was reported as being uncomfortable with the attention and said "...to be famous isn't important. I

don't want to become famous.”¹⁵ Even after his death in 2020, more of his works are still being uncovered by pianists and are being recognized for the genius of their composer.

Eight Concert Etudes, Op. 40

Kapustin wrote his Eight Concert Etudes in 1984. Using his classical piano training and his love for jazz, the composer created a fusion of the two—producing a set of etudes that are technically demanding enough for any classical pianist but that have a vibrancy and playfulness that only jazz can contribute. The virtuosic character of these etudes raises them to the level of those of Chopin or Liszt—each etude contains technical challenges such as thirds, arpeggios, fast passages, alternating fifth and sixths, and more. Unlike the traditional Romantic etudes, however, each etude is not restricted to a study of one specific technique but combines many different technical challenges. Kapustin uses numerous jazz styles in the eight etudes, ranging from stride to boogie-woogie to elements of cocktail jazz music.

The combinatory character of these etudes makes them ideal etudes for musicians who want to transition from style to the other. A classical pianist with no jazz experience might learn them as an introduction to the jazz style, as there are classical techniques used with jazz harmonies and rhythms. Certain jazz traditions, such as the long-short “Swing” eighth notes and the improvisatory nature of select sections, can be found in the etudes and are thus good gateway pieces into the jazz style for pianists who are unfamiliar with it.

¹⁵ Anderson, “Nikolai Kapustin”

Analysis of Etudes No. 1 and 5

The first etude in the set is titled “Prelude” and is given the tempo marking “quarter note=144” with the description “*Allegro assai*”. Its form consists of two contrasting themes and an improvisatory middle section creating the scheme ABBACBA. The A theme is a joyous exclamation beginning with two definitive A-flat octaves in the bass which return at intervals to serve as a pedal. The right-hand plays rising offbeat octaves which culminate in the second measure on C-flat major chords and after which the music descends rapidly, only to repeat the sequence again in the next two measures. The second four-bar phrase develops the theme, adding new harmonies and a more rhythmically constant left-hand accompaniment. After eight measures, a playful transitory section of mid- to low-register chords and arpeggios moves the tonal center from A-flat to C major, the key that the piece is written in.

The B theme is less imposing than the introductory fanfare of the piece—it begins as a light and quirky melody interspersed with skips and jumps that alternate with interjections from the left hand. The initial motive repeats twice in the first four measures, following with four measures of a sort of answer to the first half of the theme.

Following the first instance of the second theme is an eighth measure transitory section of unrelated improvisatory material that eventually escalates to the second appearance of the B theme. The second version of the theme begins much more forcefully than the original appearance. The first two measures are played up an octave with supporting chords with a constantly moving accompaniment, but the theme soon returns to the quiet, curious version of the theme and continues in this manner for the remainder of the reiteration. Using a *stretto*-like interruption, the A theme returns before the final measures of the B theme are completed. This theme is in a different key than the first time it is heard, beginning instead on a low G octave and

rising to an F major chord in the second measure. This A theme is shorter than the first, lasting only four measures before moving to a short transitory section reminiscent of the one following the first iteration of the theme.

The transitory section lasts only for two measures and ends on a half cadence with a G¹³ chord. This leads to the beginning of the C section which is mainly improvisatory material. The section consists of a wandering right hand which flits through different harmonies in sixteenth notes punctuated by sparse supporting chords in the left hand. After eight measures the left hand becomes more constant, and the music eventually rises and crescendos to a climax which is an outburst of the B theme. Using opposite ranges of the keyboard and a compelling rhythmic accompaniment, Kapustin writes this as the third and most exciting version of the theme.

Following theme B, the A theme reappears for a final time as well, representing the climax of the entire piece. This is in the same key as the second A theme, emphasizing a G major tonality. The theme repeats twice, the second time up an octave accompanied by full chords and octaves in the left-hand. A four-measure section of closing material involving a rapidly escalating series of octaves coming to a pinnacle for the two outermost C octaves on the keyboard.

The fifth etude is entitled “Joke” in Russian, but has been translated in many editions as “Raillery”. It is marked as *Vivace* with the quarter note equaling 192. The D major piece is in an ABA form and utilizes the 12-bar blues harmonic scheme from jazz tradition. Following an abrupt *fortissimo* chord in the two outer registers of the piano, the left hand begins a consistent eighth note pattern which is continued for the majority of the piece. An eight-measure introduction precedes the main theme which consists of the main motive of a triplet followed by a longer held note, the duration of which varies. The 12-bar blues pattern repeats twice, the

second time abandoning the triplet motive and using inverted chords and octaves in a rising and fall pattern, usually avoiding the strong beats of the measure.

After the first two instances of the blues pattern, the harmonic structure in the left hand becomes more varied, straying from the I-IV-V harmonies. The right hand becomes more improvisatory and alternates between descending patterns of chords and triplets. In m. 57 the A section comes to a close on a D major cadence and a brief introduction of four measures leads into the B section. The B section is in the boogie-woogie style, with dotted eighth and sixteenth note rhythms in the left hand and triplets in the right. Kapustin once again utilizes the outermost registers of the keyboard for this section, as the left-hand plays octaves in the bass and the right hand plays an ostinato of thirds five octaves higher. In the middle of the B section is a short segment of chords played on swung eighth notes. This is worth noting since the rest of the eighth notes in the piece are to be played with a straight rhythm, per Kapustin's own recording. The episode lasts only four measures but does not revert to the same B theme. The section following uses a different pattern in the left-hand and features a two-on-three ostinato for two measures before transitioning back to the A section.

The return of the A section begins with a short introduction and a reprise of the 12-bar blues form, but without the original triplet motive in the melody. This melody bears a greater resemblance to the second 12 bars of the A section, with more chords and changes in register. This is followed by a coda section which introduces new material over the ever present left-hand

rhythmic ostinato. The coda material repeats twice, the first time in a D major tonality, and the second time in G major. The introductory section from the B theme reappears here but leads instead to a final cadence in D major.

Interpretation Suggestions

When performing Kapustin's Etudes, or any of his works, it is crucial to consider their jazz influences and background. The many jazz styles and traditions that he uses must be observed and played accordingly by the pianist. In the event that a classical pianist is unaware of certain stylistic nuances that would be common to a jazz technique used, the pianist should consult performances of similar jazz works as references to the correct method.

In the fifth etude, there are techniques used which are not marked in the score but should be played according to the expectation of the style. The walking bass that accompanies nearly the entire piece should not be played staccato or non-legato but with a legato, driving touch, as is played in the boogie-woogie style. If the bass line is played too lightly, it will not provide the stable support that is needed to complement the improvisatory right-hand.

Another section of the same etude contains a brief change from the style of the boogie-woogie bass to eighth notes played with a swung rhythm. This section serves as a contrast to the very consistent and unstoppable bass line and provides a bit of a breather for the listener. If the section is played with straight eighth notes, the contrast is not present and the repetitive bass line can become too prevalent. This change of rhythm can be observed in Kapustin's own recording of these Etudes, which can be found on YouTube, and is therefore a legitimate interpretation of the section.

Other stylistic elements from the jazz influences of these works can be found throughout the score, although they are not all notated. Using recordings, especially Kapustin's own, as references is a very useful method to learning these pieces in the correct style.

Chapter 6 - Carillon de Westminster

Biography of Louis Vierne

Louis Vierne was born in Poitiers, France in 1870.¹⁶ Although he was born blind with a congenital cataract, he received an operation at the age of seven which partially restored his sight. He was never able to see clearly but he could distinguish vague images and shapes. He studied piano from the age of six, which became easier when he learned to read Braille. His uncle, an organist and composer heard him play and predicted that he would “study with Franck and become a great organist”.¹⁷ In 1880 the Vierne family moved to Paris, where Louis was able to hear César Franck play for the first time and this profound experience inspired him to build a career playing organ.

Beginning in 1881 and for nine years after, Vierne boarded and studied at the Institution des Jeunes Aveugles, a school for young blind students. He continued his music studies there, taking piano, violin and organ lessons, and eventually counterpoint lessons with Franck, himself. Vierne was also able to attend Franck’s organ class at the Paris Conservatoire where he became a full-time student in 1890. Unfortunately, less than two months after Vierne enrolled, Franck passed away, much to the distress of the young organist. Franck was replaced at the Conservatoire by Charles-Marie Widor, another organist-composer. Vierne became Widor’s assistant, often helping teach his classes and substituting at the church where Widor was the organist. Later, when Widor moved to a different position, he was replaced by Alexandre

¹⁶ Smith, “Vierne, Louis”

¹⁷ Arahamian, “Louis Vierne, 1870-1937”, 430

Guilmant and Vierne continued as Guilmant's main assistant. His first organ symphony, written in 1898, was dedicated to Guilmant. Some of Vierne's most noteworthy pupils during this time were Marcel Dupré and Nadia Boulanger. In 1900, Vierne was unanimously selected as titular organist at Notre Dame, a title which had not been awarded since 1772. This success marked a high point in Vierne's life, although many tragedies were to befall him in future years.

Apart from his duties as the organist at Notre Dame, Vierne continued to teach at the Conservatoire for many more years as assistant to the main organ professor, though he was not paid for his work in the position. In 1911, when Guilmant died, he hoped to be given the position after his years of work in assisting it but was passed over for Eugene Gigout. Vierne was bitterly disappointed by this decision made by Gabriel Fauré, the director of the Conservatoire. Not long after, Vierne suffered the tragedy of the loss of his son and brother (who had been the main copier of Vierne's scores) in World War I, and began experiencing depression, along with poor health and worsening eyesight. He spent some time in Switzerland undergoing a treatment for his eyes and did not return to Paris until 1920, when he began suffering from acute neuritis in his right arm. Vierne's great technical abilities and improvisation skills had greatly diminished by this time, although his fame as a composer was growing. In 1926, he was once again overlooked for the position of organ professor at the Conservatoire, this time in favor of Marcel Dupré, which dealt a crushing blow to Vierne. He continued performing however, because of his poor finances, and undertook several tours across Europe and even to America throughout the 1920s. Reviews written of his performances during the last years of his tours were enthusiastic, despite the obvious decline in the organist's abilities.

Throughout the last ten years of his life, Vierne suffered from continued depression and financial difficulties, using cigarettes and sleeping pills to survive. His monetary struggles were

such that, in 1931, he was given a grant that had been created by the city of Paris to aid artists in need. In 1937, Vierne was to play a concert with his former pupil, Maurice Duruflé, at the cathedral of Notre Dame, despite his failing heart. During the concert, as he was about to begin a piece, he suffered from a heart attack and died there at the organ. As he collapsed, according to eyewitnesses, his foot fell onto the low E on the pedal, marking the last note he would play in his lifetime.

Background

The piece *Carillon de Westminster* is one of Vierne's *24 Pieces de Fantaisie*, a collection of character pieces written by the composer in the years 1926-7. The inspiration behind this particular work is the chime of the clock named "Big Ben" in London. This chime is sometimes called "Westminster Quarters," hence the name of the piece. The tune was suggested to Vierne for improvisation at a recital in 1924, by his friend, an organ builder, Henry Willis III, to whom the piece was dedicated. The improvisation must have been a good one, as Vierne wrote the piece as part of his set of 24 works three years later.¹⁸

The "Westminster Quarters" consists of four notes, B, E, F[#], and G[#] centered around the key of E major. The chimes ring every quarter of an hour, the number of sets matching how many quarters of an hour have passed; each time the notes are arranged in a different order. Vierne's piece is written in the key of D major, and therefore features each of the notes a whole-step lowered.

¹⁸ "How Louis Vierne was inspired..." BBC Music Magazine

Analysis

As *Carillon de Westminster* was originally an improvisation, there is no strict form that follows, and it resembles a theme and variations rather than any other scheme. The registration is detailed at the beginning of the piece, along with instructions throughout the score of when certain stops should be added. With each variation, more stops are added, building up to the majestic climax at the finale.

The piece begins on the Swell with a pulsing rhythmic motive, outlining the 9/8 meter with alternating eighth note and sixteenth notes played in fourth and fifth intervals in the higher range of the manual. The melody enters below the accompaniment in the middle range of the Choir division with the four notes played in descending order. The pedal punctuates this motive with a fifth descending from A to D. The first section continues in this way, with the sparse melody accompanied by a constant ostinato and brief interjections in the bass.

Figure 6.1 Introduction of theme

The musical score for the introduction of the theme is presented in two systems. The first system is labeled 'MANUELS' and 'PÉDALE'. The 'MANUELS' staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 9/8 time signature. It begins with a pulsing rhythmic motive of alternating eighth and sixteenth notes in fourth and fifth intervals, marked 'R. Sw. pp'. The 'PÉDALE' staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a descending melody of four notes (A, G, F, E) and a fifth descending from A to D, marked 'P. R. Ch. Sw.'. The second system continues the same musical material. The 'MANUELS' staff continues the pulsing motive, and the 'PÉDALE' staff continues the descending melody. The score is written for a carillon, with the 'MANUELS' staff representing the manual and the 'PÉDALE' staff representing the pedal.

The first variation on the theme begins in m. 35. The melody is now played an octave higher on the Great division, with the accompaniment continuing on the Choir. The pedal plays dotted quarter notes as a counter melody, giving a polyphonic quality to the sound. This section reaches more complex harmonies in the accompaniment and also contains the first major crescendo and *forte* in the piece, as the section rises to a climax before transitioning to the next variation. The second variation (m. 66) brings a new character to the theme with the key changing to B-flat major, as the melody moves to the pedal. The right and left hands play sixteenth note patterns in contrary motion on the Swell, with small crescendos and decrescendos at the end of every phrase.

The third variation (m. 96) brings the first big change to the piece. The meter changes to 6/8 and the theme takes on a hurried tone as the four-note motive is played in eighth notes in the left hand. The pedal punctuates this with urgent pulses of an F[#] in the bass, and the right hand plays a version of the original accompaniment pattern from the beginning of the piece. The key is unsteady and ambiguous and continuously modulates upwards, although the F[#] pedal continues all the while. The section reaches a climax when the right hand, which previously took the melody from the left, begins playing rising and falling scales over a moving pedal line and tied chords in the left hand, all while more stops are added to the registration, aiding the build-up to the final variation.

Figure 6.2 Third variation

The musical score for the third variation consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, with the registration 'P. R. Ch. Sw.' indicated above it. The middle staff is in bass clef and contains a series of eighth notes, with the registration 'G. P. R. G. Ch. Sw.' indicated below it. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a series of eighth notes, with the registration 'Ped. G. P. R. # Ped. G. Ch. Sw.' indicated below it. The score is written in 6/8 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

For the glorious final variation, the key and the time signature revert to D major and 9/8 and the four-note motive is played in its original form. The melody is played by the right hand which is simultaneously added to the accompaniment by playing broken thirds along with the longer held notes of the motive. The left hand holds a continuous A pedal which lasts almost the entirety of the section, as well as arpeggiated chords. The pedals play a countermelody similar to the one played in the first variation. Interspersed throughout the section are small four-bar segments in 6/8 meter in which the pedal plays the motive in eighth notes and the right and left hands play accented chords on every large beat in the measure. The second time this occurs, the segment becomes closing material, leading to a D major chord under which the pedal plays the final reiteration of the theme in sixteenth notes, barreling towards the end of the piece where the final D chord brings the motion to a crashing halt.

Figure 6.3 Final variation

The musical score for the final variation is presented in three systems. The first system includes a woodwind part (labeled 'G. Anches Ch. Reeds') and a piano part. The piano part features a continuous A pedal in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The second system continues the piano part. The third system includes a woodwind part (labeled 'Ped. Anches Ped. Reeds') and a piano part. The piano part features a continuous A pedal in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The tempo is marked 'Tempo' and the weight is marked 'pesante'.

Performance Concerns

Due to the nature of the *Carillon de Westminster*, there are several factors which can make the performance of this piece difficult. The first involves registration, which, depending on the instrument used, can be a large issue or one that is easily remedied. The registration given at the top of the score by the composer lists a specific number of stops to be used in the *Positiv* division, on which the main theme is played at the start of the piece. The problem that arises from this is that many organs do not have the same range of stops available as the French organ that Vierne would have composed this for, which can often result in the *Positiv* having too weak a sound for the requirement of the piece. This can usually be remedied by playing the opening theme on the *Great*, rather than the *Positiv*, although this also causes the need of further manual changes later on in the piece.

Another concern that might afflict the performer of this piece is a myriad of awkward or even impossible fingerings required. Some passages would constitute the need for a very large and flexible hand to be played as written, and, too many organists not possessing such hands, are close to impossible to play. Some of these sections can be worked around by substitution or by reaching a finger down from a different manual to compensate for a wide interval, but there is one section in the final variation which does not have an easy solution. In m.133 there is a figure which requires the left hand to play an arpeggio while also holding a pedal note with the fifth finger (See fig. 6.4). The stretch of the hand that would be necessary to reach all of the notes of the arpeggio while still holding the pedal note is impossible for most hands to play without injury.

Figure 6.4 Fingering Concern (second and third beats)



A possible solution to this issue is to simply rearrange the notes in the figure. Since the purpose of the arpeggio is simply as an accompaniment which cannot be heard clearly among the other lines occurring simultaneously, this does not present any big problems as to the part-writing of the figure. The first arpeggio, which consists of the notes (pedal A), D, F[#], A and B, can be inverted so that B is the bottom note, which reduces the span that the hand would have to stretch considerably. This does not change the quality of the chord, merely the order of the notes, and is almost indiscernible, even to a listener who is familiar with the original score. The second arpeggio can be rearranged in the same fashion. It is not known if Vierne himself was able to play this measure but, regardless, it is acceptable to make these necessary changes when performing the piece.

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