CHOPIN AS COMPOSER AND PIANIST: STYLISTIC SOURCES

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I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work, and that all sources used have been acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

Although he was, and is, regarded as one of the foremost virtuosos of the romantic tradition, Chopin considered himself to be apart from that tradition. In his own time, reviews and other reports of his playing and compositions never fail to mention the uniqueness of his style as pianist and composer. However popular he remains, almost 150 years after his death, it is difficult, if not impossible to grasp the extent of his uniqueness, and its precise nature. This thesis sets out to identify significant influences upon the formation of Chopin's style as pianist and composer, and to demonstrate ways in which these are manifested in his work. The writer seeks to confirm Chopin's own assessment of his position as being set apart from the mainstream tradition in his composition, his teaching, and his playing.

First, details of Chopin's musical education are examined: in particular the fact that it was primarily directed towards a career in opera composition. The significance of this education is demonstrated in several aspects of his subsequent career as a pianist-composer. First and foremost, the very fact that he was *not* trained (in the usual sense) as a pianist - that he was never subjected to the repetition of conventional pianistic formulae in the form of scales and exercices - must account to some extent for the very different patterns and textures that he was able to discover on the keyboard. The training he did receive appears to have been very rigorous, and perhaps somewhat conservative. Evident in the compositions is a firm grasp of the principles of counterpoint - a feature of his early training with Elsner. His high regard for the work of J.S. Bach is also apparent in the compositions, and it is suggested that Chopin in many ways adopted an eighteenth century attitude towards the composition of particular genres. This reliance on an older tradition is demonstrated also in Chopin's career as pianist and teacher, both in specific technical details and in his attitudes towards performance.

The influence of opera is readily apparent in Chopin's compositions, and in accounts of his playing and teaching. This thesis suggests that this influence is more far-reaching: that Chopin's style as pianist and composer is essentially vocal in its conception, and that this was in marked contrast to other composers of the time, whose aim was to emulate the larger palette of the orchestra.

The distinctiveness of Chopin's style has often been attributed largely to his Polish origins. This influence is also examined here, though in less detail. It is the writer's contention that this influence has, in general, overshadowed appreciation of the extent to which Chopin's style is based upon eighteenth century techniques and attitudes.

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PREFACE

The performance of music reveals to the player a dimension of the art that is inaccessible to the ordinary listener. Through the physical activity involved in playing a particular repertoire, the performer has a unique perception of some aspects of a composer's style, and it was this experience of playing Chopin's music that motivated my interest in this field. For pianists, each composer has their own set of physical or technical characteristics, but none is so distinctive in this respect as Chopin. The precise quality of the physical dimension that distinguishes Chopin's music from that of his contemporaries is difficult, if not impossible to convey in words; yet every pianist who has played this music knows that the sensation of playing Chopin is unique.

It is the aim of this thesis to investigate some possible sources of the elusive Chopin style, and to identify traces of these influences in the compositions, and as far as is possible from second-hand reports, in his playing and teaching. This study does not pretend to be complete or comprehensive. It is limited by the unavoidable dependence on secondary sources for much biographical information. Sources used were predominantly those written in English; while some French and German sources were consulted, it was not possible for me to consult documents written in Polish except where they have been translated.

An important source of information for this thesis has been Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger's *Chopin vu par ses élèves*. This work is an invaluable compendium of the diverse and widely scattered sources of contemporary evidence concerning Chopin's playing and teaching. Much of this information is found in journals, letters and other published and unpublished material where, more often than not, it appears as incidental to other matters. Eigeldinger's collation of this material is of incalculable value to scholars, even more so since its translation into English. I am grateful to Roy Howat, editor of this English translation, for the interest he has shown in this project, and for the musical perceptions he has shared with me. Nicholas Routley is responsible for awakening my interest in nineteenth-century performance practice, and many of the ideas offered in this thesis have their origin in the wide-ranging and sometimes intuitive knowledge he has conveyed to me. I am grateful to Emeritus Professor Peter Platt for his interest and encouragement, and for alerting me to Amy Moran's work on piano pedagogy in Paris in the early years of the nineteenth-century. I acknowledge the assistance of the Friends of the Canberra School of Music, who made possible a visit to Paris in 1991, Professor Michael Rogers, for his helpful criticism, and John Painter and Robyn Holmes for organising the six months of teaching relief that made the writing of this thesis finally possible.

PART ONE

BACKGROUND

1. Paris in the 1830's.

Arthur Loesser has compared the phenomenal rise in the popularity of the piano in Paris in the early 1800's to that of the automobile in the United States nearly a hundred years later:

> It was a rapidly improving mechanism put forward and adopted by the ascendant group of leading people; to own one, especially one of the latest models, was honorific: it was a badge of successful modernity. ... the individual who could triumphantly force the mechanism's full capacity became a special object of thrilled admiration. As racing drivers ... became heroes in the American earlier twentieth century, so piano virtuosos - those who could play fast and loud, make complicated turns and twists and leaps, and execute breath-taking successions of double notes - were made into heroes by Paris and then, obediently, by the rest of the European continent during the 1830's and 40's. Virtuosity on the piano became a heady sport, an auditor and spectator sport: the pianists were reckless-seeming acrobats on an improved implement; their every particular stunt ... was hailed with detailed joy and even fainted over.[1]

Loesser's view of the situation is amply supported by contemporary evidence. The pianist Wilhelm von Lenz referred to Paris as 'the navel of the earth';[2] in his *Musikalische Berichte aus Paris*, Heinrich Heine spoke of the number of pianists as 'a plague of locusts swarming to pick Paris clean',[3] and Cherubini deplored the phenomenon:

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[1] Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, section 4, chapter 12: 'The piano becomes a purpose in itself", pp. 348-49.

[2] Wilhelm von Lenz, *The Great Piano Virtuosos of Our Time from Personal Acquaintance*, p. 9.

[3] Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 9, p. 275.

> In 1822 when he was appointed director [of the Paris Conservatoire], he found no fewer than forty-one women and thirty-two men enrolled in the piano department. He described this number as 'abusive and pernicious', but despite his promise to 'curb the pianists', that number had greatly increased ten years later.[4]

As the pianists and piano teachers flourished, so did the piano makers and music publishers. Piano-making was a highly competitive industry. Firms like Érard and Pleyel competed vigorously with one another for the favours of the professional pianists, donating instruments and supplying publicity and even concert venues. Manufacturers were constantly streamlining production methods to keep up with the demand, and large amounts of time and money were invested in attempts to improve the instrument. Devices of all sorts to assist in the acquisition of piano technique were being invented and marketed.[5] Transcriptions, études and 'methods' added to the already large amount of piano music being written and published, and music journals which documented the phenomenon were flourishing. One such journal, *Le Pianiste*, lists no fewer than seventy professional pianists active at the time, among them 'Listz' and 'Mendelson', and many of these pianists were based in Paris.[6]

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[4] Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: the virtuoso years, 1811-1847*, pp. 162-3. Walker is quoting a letter from Cherubini to Viscount de la Rochefoucauld - the minister whose responsibilities included the Conservatoire.

[5] Perhaps the best example of this sort of thing is Kalkbrenner's *Méthode pour apprendre le piano-forté à l'aide du guide-mains*, op. 108, published in 1831 - the year of his offer to teach Chopin. The *guide-mains* consisted of an adjustable rail attached parallel to the keyboard; the fore-arm rested on this rail, thus ensuring that finger strength and independence was developed without dependence on the muscles of the arm. Kalkbrenner's invention was modelled on Logier's 'Chiroplast': a handrail that was supposed to maintain 'correct' playing position. One of the supposed benefits of Logier's original invention was that it facilitated group lessons.

[6] *Le Pianiste*, Paris, November 1833 to November 1835. The first issue gives a 'Chronology of Pianists' which is divided into four 'epochs'. The seventy pianists referred to in the text belong to epochs three and four. Beethoven, Hummel and others belong to epoch two, and pianists of Mozart's generation to epoch one. The misspelling of Liszt's name should not surprise us: Lenz (p. 8) claims the Parisians could not pronounce it, and that they 'never got any further with *Liszt* than *Litz*.'

In a letter to his family, Charles Hallé suggests that many would-be virtuosi earned a comfortable living giving piano lessons and thus perpetuating the phenomenon:

> Here in Paris, the most second-rate lessons are paid 5 frs. an hour, and good teachers easily get from 8 to 12 frs. a lesson ... Mainzer told me that four weeks ago he had been asked for a teacher for two pupils, who would have paid 12 frs. ... At the same time he told me they were rare as the competition was so very keen ... if, with the help of God and Kalkbrenner's aid, I should succeed in becoming a good pianist, I cannot fail, in this huge and wealthy Paris, to get more pupils and at a higher price ... you can calculate what a man like Chopin must earn who gives eight or nine lessons a day at 20 frs.[7]

As well as generating additional income, a reputation as a teacher guaranteed a market for études and methods, as well as acting as a kind of insurance against the day when the fickle public tired of them, or perhaps of virtuosos in general - many of these pianists had already witnessed extraordinary changes to the instrument in their own lifetime, and they must have wondered what developments the future might bring. The teaching of these virtuoso pianists was directed largely towards their own compositions, and apart from the captive audience they had in their pupils, the virtuosos found a ready market for their works, many of which were published also in simplified versions and advertised with such slogans as 'brilliant but not difficult'.[8]

This surge of interest in performance for its own sake created a distinction among composers that had not previously existed. In previous generations, composers often established their reputation through individual performance of their own compositions, but were then expected

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[7] *The Autobiography of Charles Hallé*, pp. 64-65; letter from Paris, dated October, 1836. Hallé is almost certainly exaggerating the number of lessons given daily by Chopin, for instance, see Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 6; also *Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin* , pp. 115, 126 and 214 for references to his limiting the amount of teaching he does (the first reference written early in 1833 implies that the five lessons to be given that day is rather a lot).

[8] Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, pp. 358-362. Especially interesting is Loesser's observation that Czerny's list of piano works '... reads like an encyclopedia of contemporary stage productions.'(p. 362)

to diversify into symphonic, chamber, operatic and choral music. While the antecedents for the keyboard-virtuoso composer are many (Couperin, Purcell, Bach, Scarlatti, Mozart and Beethoven, to name a few), the obsession with virtuosity in the first half of the nineteenth century admitted some into the profession whose keyboard skills far exceeded their ability as composers. These pianist-composers - Herz, Thalberg, Kalkbrenner, and so on - were known primarily as virtuosos, for whom composition was a necessary but secondary activity, and few of them had any interest in pursuing a career in composition further than repertoire for their own performance.[9]

These pianist-composers acquiesced in the popular trend for the dazzling, the picturesque and the tuneful, and revelled in the ability of the new instrument to emulate the orchestra's capacity for colour and extra-musical representation. Liszt's oeuvre reflects this attitude towards the instrument, and his transcriptions of orchestral works were the logical training ground for such an approach in original solo repertoire. But while the orchestra was an important model for new sonorities and textures, by far the most popular items on the pianists' concert programs were those derived from opera. In the inimitable words of Arthur Loesser:

> The gaudy flowering of the Paris *Opéra* coincided with the very period during which piano virtuosity broke out in its most exuberant foliage. ... To a significant extent, the piano virtuosos were able to apply some of the *Opéra*'s glory to themselves by composing and playing brilliant fantasies, medleys and variations on salient musical phrases of current grand-opera successes. The currency, luckily for them, was often of

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[9] This is not to suggest that it was not possible to have a foot in both camps. Those who had ambitions as symphonic or opera composers were unlikely to have their works performed if they were not already well known; thus it was still advisable to establish some sort of reputation as a performer before settling down to more serious work. In a letter to Elsner (Chopin *Correspondence*, pp. 103-4), Chopin pointed out that Meyerbeer, Ries and Spohr all had to establish their names as performers before their larger works were heard. Berlioz was surely unique among his generation in having no pretensions whatever to a virtuoso career - a fact which must explain in part the difficulties he had in obtaining performances of his works.

> considerable duration ... With an operatic hit-title on its program, a concert might even achieve a fraction of the *Opéra*'s social prestige.[10]

The phenomenal success of Paganini's debut in Paris in February, 1831 added fresh impetus to the virtuoso trend. Paganini's extraordinary virtuosity, the variety of musical 'effects', the novelty of his musical language and the nature of his showmanship with its strong visual appeal were both a revelation and a challenge to the pianists, who set about translating Paganini's style of virtuosity onto the piano. The extent of Paganini's influence is apparent not only in the literal transcriptions of his works (Schumann's op. 3 and Liszt's *Grandes études de Paganini*) and in the wider repertoire (for instance, Liszt's *Transcendental Études*), but also in the reciprocal attitudes of pianist and audience. Pianists learnt to exploit the visual aspect of performance: the rapid alternation of the hands in tremolo patterns, rapid leaps, the frequent crossing over of the hands, and so on, all contributed substantially to the audience's appreciation of a performance, and incidentally were the subject of many a caricature.[11]

Setting aside the undeniable aspects of showmanship and commercialism, the virtuoso school of the early nineteenth century nevertheless yielded a wealth of new piano textures, sonorities and techniques, whose significance for the development of later nineteenth and early twentieth century musical thought has yet to be fully recognised. The immediate and unprecedented popular appeal of these works, however, did not pass unchallenged. The composers were accused of shallowness, and of pandering to the public's taste for the picturesque at the cost of musical values. Because of this derogatory taint, critics do not necessarily concur on the membership of this virtuoso school, and most of its supposed members had their supporters as well as detractors. Charles Salaman wrote in 1901:

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[10] Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, pp. 358-359.

[11] See for instance the reproductions in Ernst Burger's *Franz Liszt: a chronicle of his life in pictures and documents*, pp. 86, 89, 281.

> It is, I believe, the fashion nowadays to speak of Thalberg as an overrated composer, and even to question his claim to the highest rank as a pianist. But, though Chopin in his own day, ignoring their intrinsic merits, may have regarded Thalberg's compositions as 'mere virtuoso music', Mendelssohn, on the other hand, had a most sympathetic admiration for him as a composer and executant. And, after all, Chopin, it is said, felt coldly towards the pianoforte works of the great Schumann.[12]

As the virtuosos became more adventurous and their audiences grew larger, the piano itself became larger, more resonant, and thus more resistant to finger pressure.The old technique of keyboard playing became increasingly inadequate for the demands of the new instrument, hence there evolved an increased interest in the mechanics of piano playing - the means of developing a 'technique' that could accommodate new excesses of speed, of dynamic range, and leaps of much greater distance. Mechanical devices intended to assist in the acquisition of this technique were invented; daily practice ideally consisted of as many hours as possible, and many of these hours were spent on exercises intended to develop the required strength and agility. Where previous methods focussed on general aspects of musicianship, the new school of thought was obsessed with speed, dexterity and strength. Carl Czerny was at the forefront of the new piano pedagogy in the 1820's, and his numerous volumes of études are a compendium of pre-Paganini virtuoso piano technique. A comparison of Czerny's studies with those of his pupil, Liszt, reveals the extent of the change that occurred in piano technique from 1820 to 1850.

Within only forty years the piano had changed dramatically from Mozart's five-octave instrument, with its wooden frame and small, leather-covered hammers into one with a range of six and a half octaves, iron tension bars to reinforce the frame, overstrung bass strings, double-escapement action, and felt-covered hammers. While the smaller domestic versions of the piano continued to thrive, there developed a new concept of the piano as an inhabitant of large concert halls, whose sound could fill the available space in more than one sense. Pianists educated on the

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[12] 'Pianists of the Past', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1901, p. 324.

old instruments to perform in salons were now required to fill a large hall with very different sounds from a very different instrument. Thus the gap widened between the amateur who played simpler music on a small, probably older piano at home, and the professional who was obliged to perform the latest, most difficult works on the new, much larger, heavier instruments. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the virtuosos should have placed such an emphasis on the acquisition of a new technique.

It was in this climate of rapidly changing attitudes and fierce competition that Chopin established a reputation as one of the foremost pianists of his generation, and yet he distanced himself from almost every aspect of the profession. He performed in public very rarely, and throughout his life preferred pianos with a light action and more intimate tone. He taught relatively few students, and he despised the notion of technique for its own sake. Unlike others, he did not set out to acquire the new technique, and indeed scorned the idea of 'practice', preferring to 'play'. He refused to pander to the public's preference for operatic fantasies and program music, and rarely employed explicitly picturesque effects, either in his compositions or in his playing. He won wide popular appeal, and was revered by the avant-garde, although his opinions on many musical matters were decidedly old-fashioned and even 'classical' in outlook. In many ways he was the antithesis of the popular virtuoso.

2. Chopin's education, 1810-1831.

What is known of Chopin's formal musical education suggests that it was directed towards a career in opera composition, rather than that of pianist-composer. From 1816[13] until 1822 he had music lessons with Wojciech Adalbert Zywny. He did not attend school, but was tutored at home until he was 13, when he entered high school and began lessons with Józef Elsner. In 1826 he left high school and entered the Conservatory as a full time student, where he studied harmony and counterpoint with Elsner for two years, and composition with him for one year. In 1829 he graduated from that institution with distinction. The sources give the impression of a young man - the only boy in the family - whose talent is recognised and fostered by his adoring family, and for whose education no expense or trouble is spared. After his graduation from the Conservatory, Chopin's studies were at an end; while there are references in the letters to the possibility of further study in Vienna, Berlin, Italy and Paris, there is no evidence to suggest that this study took place.

Little is known about the content of Chopin's study with Zywny and Elsner. According to Niecks, Wojciech Zywny had been pianist at the court of Prince Casimir Sapieha before settling down to teaching and composing in Warsaw.[14] To what extent Chopin's lessons with him were 'piano' lessons, as opposed to instruction in general musicianship, is unclear. According to Chopin's childhood friend, Julius Fontana, Zywny was Chopin's only piano teacher; he taught him only the first principles of piano playing, and Chopin's piano lessons ended when he was twelve.[15] Niecks expresses surprise on receiving information from an acquaintance of Zywny's,

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[13] According to the *New Grove* articles on Chopin (by Nicholas Temperley) and Zywny (by Zofia Chechlinska); in his monograph *Chopin,* Hedley claims it was 1817.

[14] Niecks, *The Life of Chopin*, vol. 1, p. 29.

[15] Ibid., p. 31; Fontana's information is corroborated by Elsner's reference to Zywny as Chopin's piano teacher: '... you have the style of playing of Field although you took lessons from Zywny ...' (*Correspondence* p. 96). In the *New Grove* entry on Zywny, Zofia Chechlinska claims it was Zywny who discontinued lessons with Chopin,

that Zywny was not a pianist but a violinist,[16] and Nicholas Temperley describes him as 'a violinist of modest accomplishment'.[17] Perhaps Temperley is correct in his rather startling statement that 'Chopin seems to have taught himself how to play the piano'.[18]

If Chopin gained only the 'first principles' of piano playing from Zywny, then surely his training at the Conservatory involved further piano study? Niecks claims that the newly founded conservatory had a strong bias towards training in opera:

> The department of instrumental music not only comprised sections for the usual keyed, stringed and wind-instruments, but also one for instruments of percussion. Solo and choral singing were to be taught with special regard to dramatic expression. Besides these and the theoretical branches of music, the curriculum included dancing, Polish literature, French, and Italian. After reading the programme it is superfluous to be informed that the institution was chiefly intended for the training of dramatic artists.[19]

Chopin's mentor there was Józef Elsner, who was appointed rector of the conservatory in 1821, taught composition, and was director of the music section until it was dissolved after the 1831 uprising. He was well known in his time as a composer and as one of the first exponents of Polish nationalism in music. Chopin thought very highly of him, and he had enormous influence on Chopin's musical education, both in Warsaw and in the early years in Paris. Elsner's commitment

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feeling there was nothing more he could teach him. She also claims that Zywny was one of the most successful piano teachers in Warsaw.

16 Niecks, vol. 1, p. 30.

17 Nicholas Temperley, *Fryderyk Chopin*, The New Grove Early Romantic Masters I, p. 4.

18 Loc. cit.

19 Niecks, vol. 1, p. 72. The history of the Warsaw Conservatory in the period 1815-1830 is rather complex. It is possible that Niecks is referring to the conservatory during the time of its affiliation with the Dramatic School from 1815-1817. From 1821-1831 the Institute for Music and Elocution was attached to the Faculty of Sciences and Arts of Warsaw University (Elzbieta Gluszcz-Zwolinska, *The New Grove* article on Warsaw).

to the cause of a Polish national style in music no doubt shaped the ambition he harboured for his talented pupil.[20] While Chopin was studying with him in Warsaw, Elsner did everything he could to encourage Chopin's originality, but nevertheless insisted on a rigorous training in counterpoint - perhaps because he himself had been accused of not following the rules.[21] A rare insight into the content of Chopin's studies at this time is offered in a letter to Jan Bialoblocki, in October, 1826:

> ... I go to Elsner for lessons in strict counterpoint six hours a week. I follow lectures by Brodzinski, Bentkowski and others - in fact, anything to do with music.[22]

Whatever curriculum Chopin had studied at the Conservatory, it is quite clear that his studies were not centred on the piano - indeed it seems he did not take piano lessons at all. Piano studies were offered there, and Warsaw was certainly not lacking in virtuoso pianists,[23] but if Chopin took piano lessons, neither he nor his acquaintances ever made any reference to a piano teacher: a surprising omission, in view of the subsequent interest in Chopin's unique pianistic style. In addition, the technical training of pianists was by this time a significant field of music pedagogy. The virtuoso feats of Hummel, Moscheles, Herz, Kalkbrenner and others were admired all over Europe, and 'methods' and volumes of studies offered the secrets of the virtuoso

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[20] As early as 1814 Elsner had founded the Society for Religious and National Music, and had attempted to develop a Polish national style of opera. He composed 19 dramatic works in Polish, the last of which, composed significantly in 1831, was entitled *The Insurrection of a Nation* (Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, *The New Grove* entry on Elsner).

[21] For instance, Hedley (p. 16): 'Fétis did not consider that Elsner paid enough respect to the 'rules' ... Whether or not he observed the strict rules in his own work, there is no doubt that he was perfectly competent to teach them; but his greatest merit lies in the fact that he made no attempt to force Chopin to conform in these matters.'

[22] *Correspondence*, p. 10, letter of October 2, 1826. Chopin is being ironic here: Brodzinski was a writer, and lectured in literature. I have been unable to discover Bentkowski's field, but it was probably not music.

[23] Niecks (vol. 1, pp. 73-4) lists Carl Arnold, Wenzel W. Würfel, Franz Lessel and Heinrich Gerhard Lentz, all of whom were well known throughout Europe.

techniques to those who were willing to spend endless hours on what was often pianistic drudgery. Even if Warsaw was something of an artistic backwater, Chopin had opportunities to consult experts during his travels to Berlin and Vienna, and Elsner had plenty of contacts in western Europe.

Liszt's early career offers an interesting comparison with Chopin's, and shows far more concern on the part of his family for the systematic acquisition of pianistic skills. Adam Liszt was employed by Prince Nicholas Esterházy on his estate at Raiding. He took over a week off work in August, 1819, to look for employment for himself in Vienna and to introduce his son to Carl Czerny with a view to Liszt's future study with him. Czerny was impressed with the boy's playing, but Adam Liszt's search for work was apparently unsuccessful, for, on his return to Raiding, he petitioned the prince repeatedly for a transfer to Vienna. He was finally given a year's leave of absence and, despite funds which were donated towards Franz's musical education by a group of wealthy men, the Liszt family lived in Vienna in considerable poverty and financial uncertainty. According to Czerny's account of his lessons with Liszt, his first priority was to strengthen the boy's technique:

> For the first few months master and pupil concentrated on scales in all the keys ... on correct fingering, on strict rhythm and on tone production. All these things were instilled into his young pupil, according to Czerny, for the first time.[24]

Chopin visited Czerny in Vienna during his first visit there in 1829, but it seems that there was no question of Chopin having lessons with him; in fact, Chopin seems more than a little off-hand in his references to Czerny in letters home to Warsaw. Regarding his introduction to Count Morlacchi, Chopin refers to him as ' ... a splendid acquaintance which I value far above poor old

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[24] Alan Walker, *Liszt: the virtuoso years, 1811-1847*, p. 72. Walker is quoting from Czerny's *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, written in 1842, edited and annotated by Walter Kolneder, Strassburg, 1968.

Czerny's (hush!)'[25], and in a letter to Titus Woyciechowski, he reports: ' ... I am close friends with Czerny and have often played duets at his house. He is a kind fellow but nothing more.'[26] Admittedly, Chopin was by now in his nineteenth year, somewhat older than Liszt was on his introduction to Czerny; but had there been any intention of Chopin having a career as a virtuoso pianist, his family would surely have organised such an introduction earlier. Then, as now, the way to success in this field was most assured through affiliation with a piano teacher whose reputation was well established, and the family's concern for Chopin's education has already been noted.

Elsner's high ambitions for Chopin as a composer of Polish national opera explain several other oddities in Chopin's musical education. In 1827, in addition to his studies at the Conservatory, Chopin was apparently having private lessons in Italian.[27] His letters written during his travels of 1829-31 are full of his accounts of operas and singers that he heard, and in one from Vienna to his parents, he notes 'I spend most money on theatre visits ...'[28] If he were aiming for a career as a piano virtuoso, it is strange that his father voiced no complaint about his time being spent in this way rather than practising, and consulting the famous pianists he could have sought out - particularly as the Chopins were by no means wealthy and had received no financial assistance for these trips. Chopin's father was constantly reminding him to be careful with money. Furthermore, there are several references in Chopin's letters to introductions in Paris to the best-known opera composers of the day. In May, 1831, he wrote from Vienna to his parents:

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[25] *Correspondence*, pp. 29-30.

[26] Ibid. p. 33.

[27] Ibid., p. 12. In a letter to Jan Bialoblocki, Chopin refers to his Italian master coming to the house, but Chopin had a headache, so the lesson was cancelled.

[28] Ibid. p. 69

> I was up early today and played until two, then I went to lunch where I met my good friend Kandler, who, as you know, has promised me letters for Cherubini and Paer [in Paris].[29]

and on his arrival in Paris he wrote: 'Thanks to Paer who is Court Conductor I got to know Rossini, Cherubini, etc., Baillot, etc.' [30] Throughout these letters, Chopin refers to the established composers and performers of Vienna and Paris as friends and acquaintances, rather than as potential teachers.

Although Chopin performed in public in Vienna and Munich, as well as Warsaw, he makes no references to practising, but several references to playing for his own pleasure. In a letter to Titus Woyciechowski describing his time in Vienna in 1829, he writes:

> ...Three piano makers offered to send an instrument to my lodging. I declined, for my room was too small and those few hours of practice would not have been much use, especially as I was due to play in two days' time.[31]

The rather laconic tone of Chopin's letters stands in sharp contrast to Liszt's flamboyant enthusiasm. The following extract reveals not only Liszt's preoccupation with the study of piano technique, but also his determination to educate his mind as well. Liszt was determined to be no mere piano virtuoso. In 1832 he wrote to a pupil, Pierre Wolff:

> For a whole fortnight my mind and fingers have been working like two lost souls. Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber are all around me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them with fury; besides this, I practise four to five hours of

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[29] Ibid. p. 82.

[30] Ibid. p. 98.

[31] Ibid. p. 32

> exercises (thirds, sixths, octaves, tremolos, repetition of notes, cadenzas, etc.). Ah! provided I don't go mad you will find in me an artist! Yes, an artist ... such as is required today.[32]

Despite the success he received as a pianist prior to his arrival in Paris, it is clear from references in his letters that Chopin considered himself rather as a composer:

> They find it surprising that people like Kessler, Ernemann and Czapek can remain in Warsaw while I am there. But I have explained that I play merely for the pure love of music and do not give lessons...[33]

and, recounting to Titus a Warsaw concert where he played the E minor concerto and *Pot-pourri on Polish Airs*, he talks about how successful his compositions were, then says, as if by the way, 'The audience enjoyed my piano-playing ... ' [34]

When he passed through Wroclaw, he was persuaded to play at a rehearsal.

> At the rehearsal the Germans were surprised by my playing 'Was für ein leichtes Spiel hat er!'... but about the composition itself, not a word. Titus actually heard somebody say that I could play but not compose ... As my reputation is not yet fully established, they are surprised at me, but are afraid to show it. They don't know whether the composition was really good or whether it only appeared to be so.[35]

Regardless of Chopin's own intentions as to his future career, it seems that several eminent musicians considered him a 'finished musician' even before he reached Paris: a fact that must surely have influenced his later decision to abandon the prospect of opera composition in favour of a career as a pianist-composer. In a letter from Vienna on August 12, 1829, he told his

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[32] Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, pp. 173-4.

[33] *Correspondence*, p. 23. The fact that he appeared in Vienna without a fee further suggests that he appeared as a composer rather than an executant.

[34] Ibid. p. 60.

[35] Ibid. p. 62.

family that Blahetka considered him 'a virtuoso of the first rank, to be counted in with Moscheles, Herz and Kalkbrenner', and on August 19 he wrote:

> Yesterday Schuppanzigh reminded me that as I am leaving Vienna after such a brief stay I must return very shortly. I answered that I will come back here to study, whereupon the baron retorted, 'In that case there is no reason at all why you should come': an idea which others confirmed. ... They all refuse to look upon me as a pupil. Blahetka said that nothing surprised him so much as to find that I had learnt all that in Warsaw. My answer was that with Messrs Zywny and Elsner the greatest ass would learn.... [36]

It is worth noting here that Chopin mentions no other teachers.

Liszt's career at this point offers an interesting comparison. Liszt had certainly had a thorough grounding in piano technique during his two years of study with Czerny in Vienna, but his subsequent training seems not to have included piano lessons. Liszt and his father left Vienna in September, 1823, for Paris, where, in addition to continuing his successful concert career, it was intended that Liszt should study composition at the Conservatoire. Cherubini, director of that institution, refused to admit him on the grounds that foreigners were not permitted to enrol (presumably the same veto would have applied to Chopin).[37] Liszt studied privately with Anton Reicha (theory) and Ferdinando Paer (composition). Chopin, too, had assured his parents from Vienna that he had equipped himself with letters of introduction to Cherubini and Paer, but there is no reference to lessons having taken place. Liszt was considered by now a professional pianist: according to his father he played in public thirty-eight times between December 1823 and March 1824.[38] In 1826 he completed the *Études en douze exercises* which in a later revision became the

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[36] Ibid. pp. 23, 27. Blahetka was a prominent music critic and father of the pianist Leopoldine; the violinist Schuppanzigh had been a friend of Beethoven's, and leader of the quartet that first performed his string quartets.

[37] This veto on foreigners may well have been part of Cherubini's plan to 'curb the pianists'.

[38] Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, p. 96.

Transcendental Études. He had also composed an opera in 1824-25, *Don Sanche, ou le Château d'Amour*, which was performed in Paris in October, 1825. In the light of his son's growing interest in composition, Adam Liszt began to consider the possibilities of a career in composition for him. By 1827 his son was exhausted after some four years of constant touring and concert-giving. Adam Liszt wrote to Czerny: 'He knows no other passion than composing, only this brings him joy and pleasure ... I hope he may later burn his piano. '[39] Chopin, on the other hand, had been trained first and foremost in composition, and suggested to his parents the possibility of a virtuoso career only after his arrival in Paris. The cool response of his family and friends in Warsaw to the suggestion is the subject of the following section.

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[39] Ibid. p. 121.

3. Chopin's arrival in Paris, 1831.

Upon his arrival in Paris in the autumn of 1831, Chopin was faced with a dilemma. His family, and particularly his former teacher in Warsaw, Józef Elsner, were eagerly anticipating news of the advancement of his career as a composer of operas. The 21-year-old Chopin had as yet no income of his own and was well aware of the financial burden his travels were placing on the family purse. He was also uncomfortably aware of the high expectations his friends and family had of him: to play the piano and to compose for it was expected of a talented young student, but in Paris - the hub of musical Europe - his true destiny as the great composer of Polish opera was to be set in motion. His education thus far had all been directed to that end, and it could surely be only a matter of time before the genius of the young Pole would be recognised and fostered.

Chopin's attitude towards the career so carefully planned for him seems to have been, at best, ambivalent. Though he took every opportunity in his travels to attend the opera, seemed to genuinely enjoy the experience and wrote detailed reports of his impressions in his letters home, there is no evidence of his own work in the genre - not even so much as a reference to a plot or libretto. On the other hand, although he had already met with considerable success as a pianist, he had little or no formal training on the instrument, and showed no inclination for practice. What was he to do? His solution was to explain to his family and Elsner as best he could the extreme difficulties of entering the field of opera composition, and to offer them instead the promise of rigorous training as a virtuoso, with the famous Kalkbrenner as his teacher. Kalkbrenner seems to have been an astute businessman; in the same year his *Méthode* was published, he started a three-year training course for young teachers, and it was this course of study which he offered to Chopin.[40] Chopin's letter home announcing his intention provoked a flurry of letters from Warsaw

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[40] Paul Dekeyser, *The New Grove* entry on Kalkbrenner.

on the 27th November, 1831; his father, sister, and Józef Elsner all wrote on that day, expressing the same concern.[41] Nicholas Chopin wrote to his son:

> ... you know ... that the mechanics of piano-playing occupied little of your time, and that your mind was busier than your fingers. If others have spent whole days working at the keyboard you rarely spent an hour playing other men's music ... You have only just arrived; you say yourself that you can't yet hold your head up and show what you have in you. So wait a while - genius may reveal itself immediately to those who understand, but they may not perceive its lofty intention; so give them time to know you better and do not take upon yourself something which might only hold back your progress. I will say no more on the subject; I hope that as I write you will have already received the little extra allowance which I have sent ...

and Elsner:

> It was with great pleasure that I learnt that the leading pianist ... Kalkbrenner, received you so kindly. ... All the more then do I rejoice to hear that he has promised to reveal to you the secrets of his art. Nevertheless I am surprised that he fixes a period of three years in which to do it. Could he possibly decide, immediately after seeing and hearing you for the first time, how long you will require in order to absorb his method? Or that you must devote your musical genius simply to piano-playing, and your artistic endowment to the same species of composition?

Chopin's sister Louise was less circumspect. She reported Elsner as saying:

> 'They've recognised genius in Fryderyk and are already scared that he will outstrip them, so they want to keep their hands on him for three years in order to hold back something of that which Nature herself might push forward ...' ... Elsner does not want you to imitate anyone, and he expressed a correct opinion when he said: 'All imitation is as nothing when compared with originality. Once you imitate you will cease to be original. Although you may still be young your ideas may be superior to those of more experienced writers. You have inborn genius and your compositions are fresher and better: you have the style of playing of

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41 *Correspondence*, pp. 94-97 for these three consecutive letters.

> Field, although you took lessons from Zywny - so what does it all prove?' Besides, Mr Elsner doesn't wish to see you merely as a concert-giver, a composer for piano and a famous executant - that is the easy way and is far less significant than writing operas. He wants to see you in the role Nature intended and fitted you for. Your place must be with Rossini, Mozart, etc. Your genius should not cling to the piano and to concert-giving; operas must make you immortal.

Chopin's reply to Józef Elsner on December 14th reveals the extent of his discomfort with the situation. He flatters his teacher, puts the blame entirely on circumstances outside his control, stresses his own disappointment, and offers hope for some unspecified time in the future:

> In 1830 ... I dared to think to myself: 'I *will* approach his [Elsner's] achievement, in however small a measure, and if I cannot produce an opera like his *Lokietek*, perhaps some *Laskonogi* will come from my brain. But today, seeing all my hopes in that direction dashed, I am forced to think of making my way in the world as a pianist, postponing only to a later period the loftier artistic aims which you rightly put before me in your letter. To be a *great composer* requires enormous experience ...[42]

It must be remembered that at this time there was a clear distinction between 'composers', who wrote symphonic works, 'opera composers', and 'pianist-composers', whose works were viewed as an essential adjunct to their career as a virtuoso, but hardly significant in themselves. Paris was swarming with pianists. It is possible that Chopin's parents were concerned at the prospect of their son entering an already overcrowded profession, perhaps not so much for reasons of competition, as for the fact that the profession had become somewhat tainted with the accusations of charlatanism that had been levelled against so many of these virtuosos. No parent would wish their talented child to be subjected to the malicious gossip of the public: Paganini's private life was the subject of bizarre speculation, and the miserable and degrading end of John

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[42] Ibid. pp. 102-103. Elsner's *Lokietek* (a Polish king) was first performed in Warsaw in 1818; *Laskonogi* (skinny-legs) is the nickname of another Polish king.

Field's career must have worried Chopin's parents, particularly as comparisons were so often made between the two.

Chopin's family and teacher were not convinced by Chopin's argument, and Elsner in particular was not fooled by the carefully worded flattery, but what could he do? Chopin offered him a final reassurance in this letter before turning to more trivial news:

> I am firmly convinced that I shall not be an imitation of Kalkbrenner: *he* has not the power to extinguish my perhaps too audacious but noble wish and intention to create for myself a new world. And if I do work it will be in order to stand more firmly on my own two feet. It was easier for Ries, since he was known as a pianist, to achieve fame in Berlin and Frankfort with his opera *The Robber's Bride*; and Spohr too was long known as a violinist before he wrote his *Jessonda* and *Faust*. I am sure you will not refuse me your blessing when you know on what basis and with what enterprise I shall proceed.[43]

This was the only time in his life that Chopin showed any real interest in becoming a virtuoso; the enthusiasm was apparently short-lived, and undoubtedly strongly influenced by the atmosphere in Paris and Kalkbrenner's powers of persuasion. Predictably the idea of lessons with Kalkbrenner came to nothing, and by April 1833 the two had finally fallen out, for his father writes:

> I am also interested by what you say of Kalkbrenner's obvious insincerity - I see he has been the cause of your migraine and I am anxious for your sake. I feel it was very good-natured of you to give him a dedication [of the E minor concerto]. If he comes here I shall have very little desire to see him - I cannot hide my feelings.[44]

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[43] Ibid. pp. 103-104.

[44] Ibid. p. 116.

Later, when Lenz questioned Chopin about Kalkbrenner, he replied 'It was at the beginning of my stay in Paris.'[45] One suspects it was a relief to Chopin when, after initial problems, his virtuoso career began to develop, and the whole matter of opera composition was dropped altogether by his family. Elsner persisted for another three years before apparently giving in. His final reminder to Chopin has an air of desperation about it, and reminds us, as it was intended to remind Chopin, of the nationalistic aspirations that were so much a part of Elsner's hopes for his student. In abandoning opera composition, Chopin was not only failing to realise his talent, he was betraying his responsibility to his homeland:

> Everything I read or hear about our dear Fryderyk fills my heart with joy, but forgive my frankness - it is still not enough for me ... As I journey through this 'vale of tears' I would like to live to see an opera of your composition, which would not only increase your fame but benefit the art of music in general, especially if the subject of such an opera were drawn from Polish national history. ... As the critic of your Mazurkas stated, only an opera can show your talent in a true light and win for it eternal life. 'A piano work', says Urban [a German critic] 'is to a vocal or other instrumental composition as an engraving is to a painted picture.' This view is as correct as ever, although certain piano works, especially your own when performed by yourself, may be regarded as illuminated engravings.[46]

It is difficult to discern how Chopin felt about the career his family and Elsner had mapped out for him. Despite his obvious enjoyment of opera, and the obvious influence of *bel canto* in many of his piano works, there is nowhere any mention of his having plans to compose an opera. But it seems also that, apart from a short-lived enthusiasm for Kalkbrenner - which may in any case have been exaggerated for the sake of his parents - Chopin never intended a career as a virtuoso pianist, and was in many ways ill-equipped for the profession. This is borne out by his

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[45] Niecks, *The Life of Chopin*, vol. 1, p. 236n.

[46] *Correspondence*, p. 124. See also Elsner's letter of November 13, 1832 (p. 113), and a letter from the poet Witwicki of July 6, 1831 (p. 84).

lack of formal training, his few public appearances in this role, and his scathing remarks about the practice and teaching methods of the virtuoso pianists of his time. And yet he is regarded today as one of the most original pianists ever to have lived, and in his own time, was regarded as a pianist of the highest calibre.

Chopin's lack of formal training as a pianist sets him apart from his contemporaries, not only as a pianist, but also as a composer. In the course of their training, other pianists inevitably absorbed not only the repertoire, and the familiar keyboard patterns and all their common variants; they became acquainted also with a new mode of musical thought that was emerging and developing alongside the instrument that gave it expression. If Chopin 'rarely spent an hour playing other men's music', his acquaintance with the standard repertoire of the day must have been at best superficial. If he spent time improvising rather than practising the scales and arpeggios that saturated the 'brilliant' music of the time, it is hardly surprising that his fingers and his mind should eventually find their own, highly original mode of expression on the instrument.

PART TWO

SOURCES OF CHOPIN'S MUSICAL LANGUAGE

From the earliest descriptions, it is clear that Chopin's style of playing and of composing for the piano were regarded as quite distinct from the mainstream tradition. Nevertheless powerful stylistic influences are apparent in his compositions, and might be inferred also from reports of his playing. Chopin's rigorous, even rather old-fashioned musical education in Poland provided him with stylistic sources that were highly contemporary in application and yet drew much from older traditions. The emphasis on conventional compositional training gave him an awareness of the fundamental principles of contrapuntal voiceleading that remained with him all his life. The conservatism of his upbringing and the compositional focus of his training developed in him a scorn for the merely virtuosic, and an uncompromising regard for musical integrity. His projected career in opera promoted an appreciation for the eighteenth century ideal of the 'singing style' and the declamatory properties of even textless music, and the political climate of the time fostered an awareness of the folk tradition that was more authentic and more universally felt in Poland than it was in more politically powerful nations.

The influences upon the development of Chopin's musical style might be broadly summarised as follows:

1. Eighteenth-century tradition: Fux's codification of species counterpoint, the music of J.S. Bach, and the compositional tradition of the *Übung* or *étude*.

2. Vocal traditions, especially that of bel canto opera.

3. Polish folk music.

The question of 'influence' upon the development of any musical style is inevitably complex, and is particularly so in this case. Chopin's music is highly sophisticated and in general unprogrammatic; the composer was loath to 'explain' his music, and biographical clues are limited as so many details are missing from the documentation of the composer's life. Thus it is recognised that this list is by no means comprehensive,[47] it is an attempt to document broad categories of stylistic influence, as a preliminary to tracing the application of these elements in the music.

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[47] For instance, the influence of individual composers other than Bach, such as John Field, Mozart, Hummel, Clementi, Cramer, Bellini, and other Polish composers (eg. Elsner, Kurpinski, Szymanowska) is omitted from these broad categories, and is discussed in relation to other matters.

1. The eighteenth-century tradition

i. Chopin's training in counterpoint

It is known that Chopin had lessons in strict counterpoint for six hours a week in 1826,[48] and like others of his time, he maintained an interest in it throughout his life.[49] In 1841, while spending the summer working on various new compositions at Nohant [50] he wrote to Fontana, asking him to send, among more mundane items, both Kastner's and Cherubini's treatises on counterpoint,[51] and to 'please be quick about it.' Rare insight is given into his views on counterpoint, and indeed his philosophy in general, by a conversation recorded by the artist, Eugene Delacroix in his journal of April, 1849:

> I asked [Chopin] what establishes logic in music. He made me feel what counterpoint and harmony are; how the fugue is like pure logic in music, and that to know the fugue deeply is to be acquainted with the element of all reason and all consistency [*conséquence*] in music. ... Art is ... [not] what the vulgar think it to be, that is, some sort of inspiration which comes from nowhere, which proceeds by chance, and presents no more than the picturesque externals of things. It is reason itself, adorned by genius, but following a necessary course, and encompassed by higher laws. This brings me back to the difference between Mozart

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[48] *Correspondence*, p. 10. Letter of October 2, 1826.

[49] Richard Kramer discusses the contrapuntal inclinations of the previous generation in his article, '*Gradus ad Parnassum*: Beethoven, Schubert and the Romance of Counterpoint' (*19th-Century Music* vol. 11 no. 2, pp. 107-120); Mendelssohn's rigorous training in counterpoint is documented in Larry Todd's *Mendelssohn's Musical Education.*

[50] The *Tarantella* op. 43, *Polonaise* op. 44, *Prélude* op. 45, *Allegro de Concert* op. 46, *Ballade* op. 47, *Nocturnes* op. 48, and the *Fantasie* op. 49 (*Correspondence*, pp. 195-213).

[51] Cherubini's treatise, *Cours de contrepoint et de fuge*, was published in 1835, and dealt with strict species counterpoint along the lines of the work of Fux. This treatise was widely used at the time, by established composers such as Chopin and Schumann as well as by generations of students.

> and Beethoven. As he said to me, 'Where the latter is obscure and seems lacking in unity, the cause is not to be sought in what people look upon as a rather wild originality, the thing they honour him for; the reason is that he turns his back on eternal principles; Mozart never. Each of the parts has its own movement which, while still according with the others, keeps on with its own song and follows it perfectly; there is your counterpoint, *punto contrapunto* ' He told me that the custom was to learn the harmonies before coming to counterpoint, that is to say, the succession of the notes which leads to the harmonies.[52]

Chopin's attention to the horizontal dimension of music is apparent in the linear nature of much of his writing. A contrapuntal texture allied to the nineteenth century harmonic language will inevitably result in complexity of notation; Chopin's scores are by no means unique in this respect, as the following example shows. However, Chopin's practice differs from others of his time in one important respect: his concept of counterpoint is more closely allied to the strict Fuxian model in the predominantly step-wise motion of individual lines, in their continuity, in the careful separation of voices, and in their vocal, rather than instrumental style. While the linear nature of much of Schumann's writing is undeniable, he applies his understanding of counterpoint less rigorously and over shorter periods of time than Chopin does.

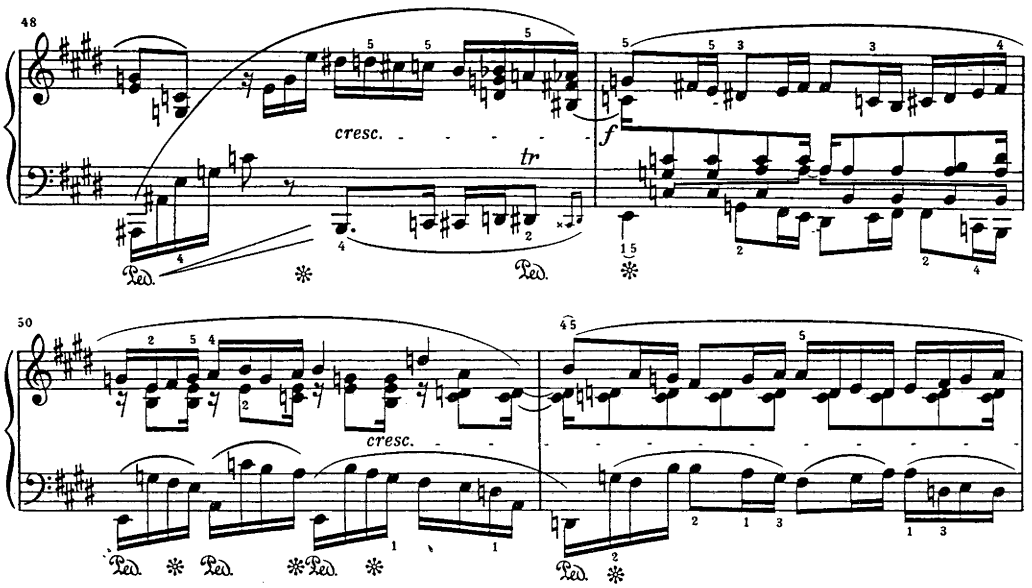
The excerpts given in Example 1 are each typical of the composer's practice, and show very different applications of the principles of counterpoint. While the Schumann extract (Example 1*b*) is undeniably contrapuntal - indeed, it demonstrates invertible counterpoint - Schumann does not observe strict continuity of line: he begins with five distinct parts, which merge into four on the

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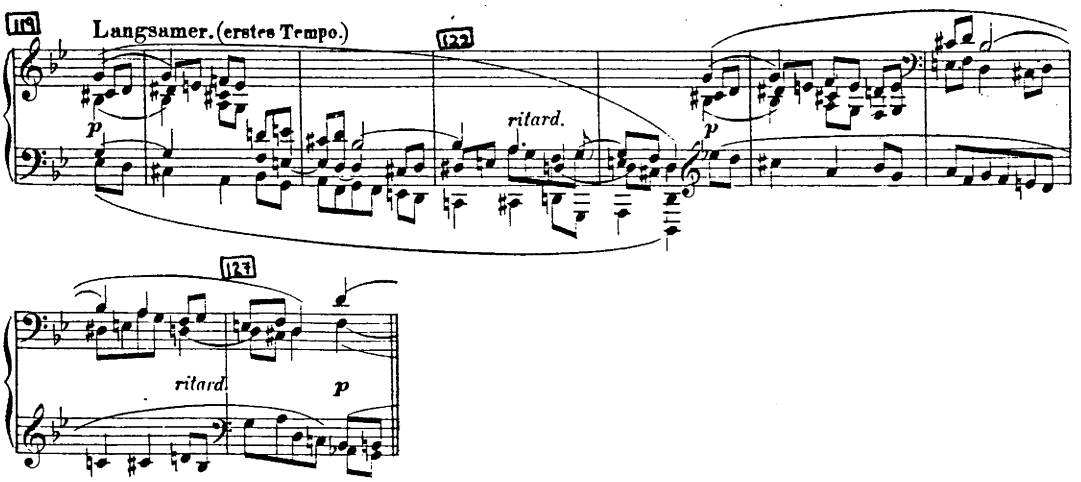
[52] Quoted by John Rink in 'Tonal architecture in the early music', *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson. Editorial insertions are Rink's.

Example 1

a. Chopin, Nocturne op. 62 no. 2, b. 48-52



b. Schumann, *Kreisleriana* no. 2, b. 120-127



second beat of bar 120, and into three on the third beat of the same bar. A fourth voice is reintroduced at the end of bar 122, which merges with another part in the following bar at the same time as the top line splits into two parts, briefly introducing a different fourth voice; the three-part texture continues to the end of the excerpt, although the voices are redistributed in the penultimate bar. Thus only the outer parts are completely continuous in this eight-bar segment, and even then the position of the top and bottom voices is transposed at bar 123 and they merge altogether at bar 127.

Continuity of line is more readily demonstrated in the Chopin example (Example 1*a*). Lines are more continuous within registers, and more distinctly separated, with no crossing over of parts. The only real disjunction occurs at bar 50, where the melodic interest in the lower voice shifts from bass to tenor, and the bass reverts to a more harmonic function. The Schumann score extract is at first glance more overtly contrapuntal: the lines certainly demonstrate more rhythmic independence and perhaps more distinctive melodic shaping, but the integrity of the individual parts is sacrificed; the lines are instrumental rather than vocal, and the dense chromaticism in all parts tends to impede a clear aural perception of linear motion.

Chopin's concern for the integrity of voice-leading extends even to the arpeggiated accompaniments of works such as the Nocturnes. This type of accompaniment is found in the piano works of many composers of the time, but again, Chopin's concept of linear motion is rather more strictly polyphonic than that of his contemporaries. Although it is unlikely that Chopin would have known Bach's Suites for Solo Cello (Schumann provided them with a piano accompaniment in 1853), the superficial resemblance between these and the accompaniment of the Nocturne op. 27 no. 2 is striking (example 2*a*, i and iii). On closer examination the implied voiceleading of the complex compound melody in the left hand of this Nocturne is as consistent as that of Bach's, though the movement is somewhat more predictable - it is after all an accompaniment (example 2*a* ii). Nevertheless Chopin's concern for the linear dimension here is quite apparent. What he is reported to have said of Mozart applies equally to his own works: 'Each of the parts has its own

movement which, while still according with the others, keeps on with its own song and follows it perfectly.'[53]

Example 2*a* shows the value Chopin places on the integrity of lines: each strand of the accompaniment is continuous, the motion is predominantly stepwise, the number of voices (only five) is consistent throughout, and each voice occupies the same place within the arpeggiated pattern. The Mendelssohn and Liszt examples (2*b* and 2*c*) show that their primary consideration is to provide an harmonic accompaniment, and that the movement of melodic lines within the arpeggiation is very much a secondary consideration. In both cases the arpeggiation is more straightforward, the lack of variety of contour reinforcing its primarily harmonic function. The textures are more dense, and the shifts of position occur not so much within individual voices as with the chord as a whole: for instance, at bar 27 of Liszt's 'Sonetto', the chord as a whole shifts down a third, and a similar shift occurs in the Mendelssohn example in bar 4 and elsewhere. Thus the voice-leading strands are less clear; in addition, the frequent doubling of voices - much less frequent in Chopin - gives an impression of harmonic support, rather than of contrapuntal texture. Chopin's concept of melodic strands existing at every level of his 'accompaniment' figures may be seen throughout the Nocturnes, and indeed wherever an arpeggiated pattern is found. While this practice is occasionally found in the work of his contemporaries, examples are isolated and not continued for any length of time.

Schumann's light-hearted portrait of Chopin in *Carnaval* opus 9 (1834-35) offers an interesting perspective on this question: the sparseness of the writing and the uniform texture are plausible imitations of Chopin's style. Less convincing are the melody and harmony, and particularly the straightforward nature of the arpeggiated bass (Example 2*d*). Schumann has yet to

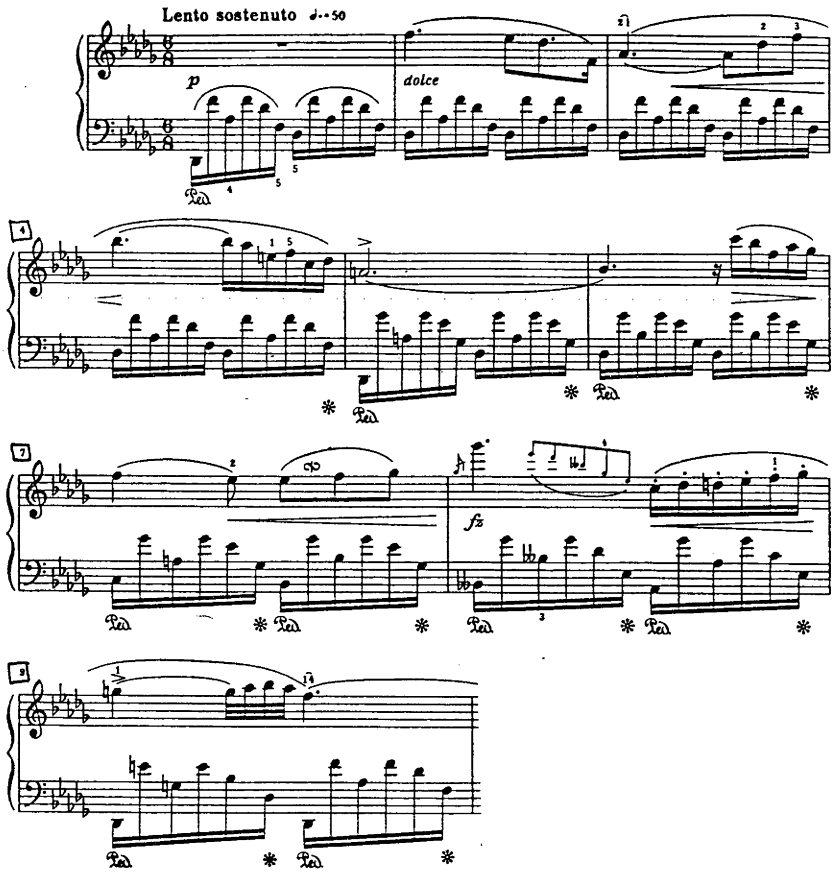
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[53] Loc. cit. The term 'compound melody' is used here in the sense that a single notated line might contain several melodic strands. The sonatas and suites for solo instruments by J.S. Bach are obvious examples, though the style is apparent also in the keyboard music from time to time - particularly the suites. This concept of 'compound melody' is borrowed from Chapter 3 of Allen Forte and Steven Gilbert, *An Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis*.

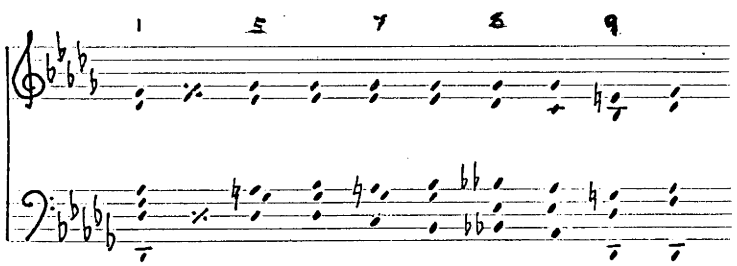
perceive the complex polyphony of Chopin's accompaniment figures. The deliberate confusion over the work's ending may well be a reference to Chopin's Mazurka op. 7 no. 5 (1830-31), which has the instruction *Dal segno senza fine* written under the final bar.

Example 2

a. i. Chopin, Nocturne op. 27 no. 2, b. 1-9



ii. reduction of b. 1-9

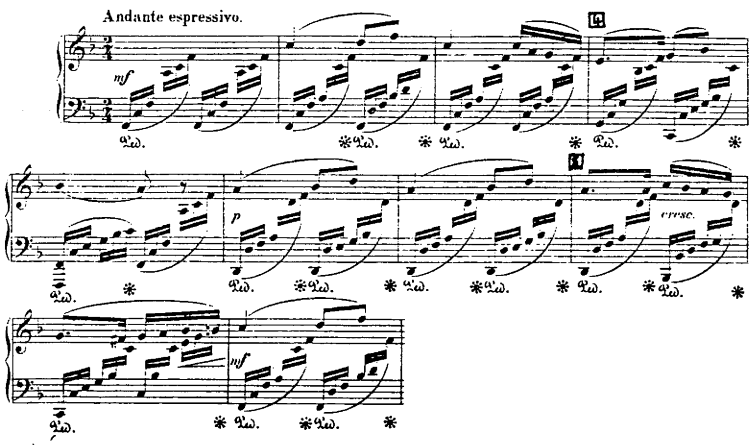


Example 2 (cont.)

iii. J.S. Bach, Suite for solo cello no. 1, Prelude, b. 1-3



b. i. Mendelssohn, *Songs without Words* book 7, op. 85 no. 1, b. 1-10

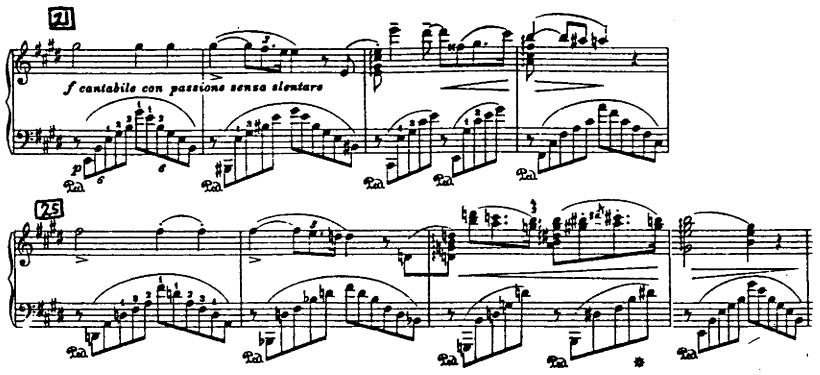


ii. reduction of b. 1-10

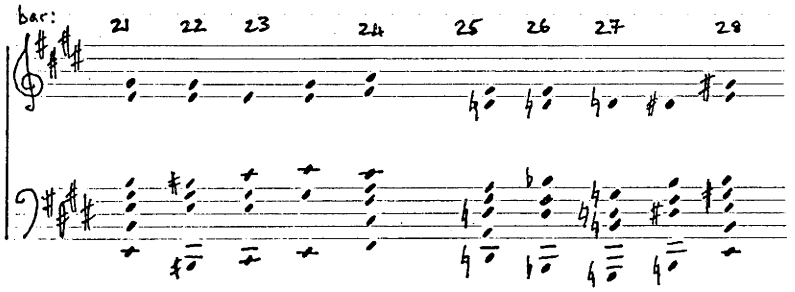


Example 2 (cont.)

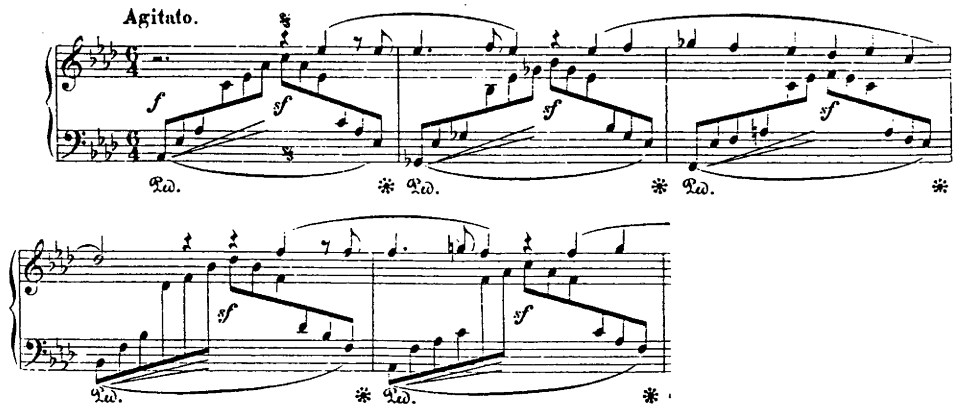
c. i. Liszt, *Années de Pèlerinage II*, 'Sonetto 104 del Petrarca', b. 21-28



ii. reduction of b. 21-28



d. i. Schumann, *Carnaval* op. 9, 'Chopin', b. 1-5



ii. reduction of b. 1-5



A lesser-known tribute of Schumann to Chopin suggests another misunderstanding on Schumann's part, and also reminds us that Chopin's regard for the rules of voice-leading extended beyond explicitly contrapuntal part-writing into the construction of melody itself. The subject of the third of Schumann's Four Fugues op. 72 (1845) closely resembles the opening of the first of Chopin's Three Études for the *Méthode des Méthodes* (1839):

Example 3

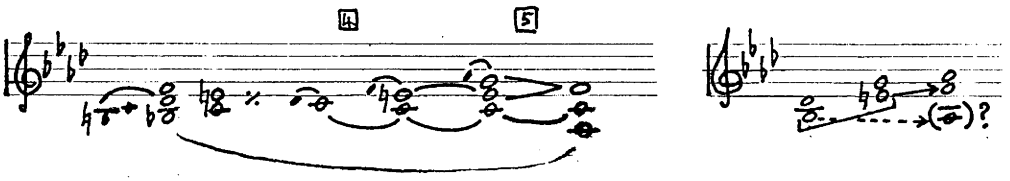
a. Chopin, Three Études for the *Méthode des Méthodes*, no. 1, b. 1-5



b. Schumann, Four Fugues op. 72, no. 3, b. 1-3



Chopin: Schumann:



The harmonic reduction of Chopin's theme shows its 'self-resolving' nature: in other words, implied harmonic tensions set up by the theme are quickly resolved according to the conventional treatment of dissonance. Schumann's alteration of Chopin's theme reveals other priorities: the augmented 4th between B-flat and E-natural is not completely resolved within the theme itself. It should be stated here that very many of Schumann's themes *are* harmonically self-contained, and that this instance of unresolved melodic dissonance is rather exceptional for him; his amendment of Chopin's original theme may have been necessitated by the demands of fugal writing, and he may have intentionally established harmonic tension in order to resolve it in the course of the work (as indeed he does in the final bars). But it is also possible that he attributed the unusual harmonic properties of the theme to Chopin's unconventional harmonic practice in general, without recognising that Chopin nevertheless does conform quite strictly to the conventions of voice-leading.[54] A survey of some of the more dissonant mazurka themes confirms Chopin's concern for resolution of dissonance within a melody, and his practice is not unlike that of Bach's in his treatment of melodic dissonance within his fugue subjects, as shown in Example 4*b*.

Example 4

a. i. Chopin, Mazurka op. 6 no. 1



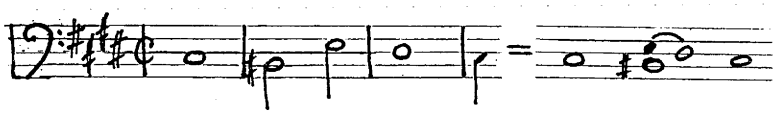
[54] Schumann can hardly be blamed for failing to identify immediately all the subtleties of Chopin's musical style; he himself freely admitted to not understanding all of Chopin's music, yet he was one of Chopin's most ardent supporters, and an influential one at that. Chopin's attitude to Schumann on the other hand was hardly charitable; he scorned Schumann's generous comments in the famous review of the *La ci darem* variations, and dismissed Schumann's music altogether.

Example 4 (cont.)

a. ii. Mazurka op. 68 no. 4



b. J.S. Bach, *Well-tempered Clavier I*, Fugue no. 4

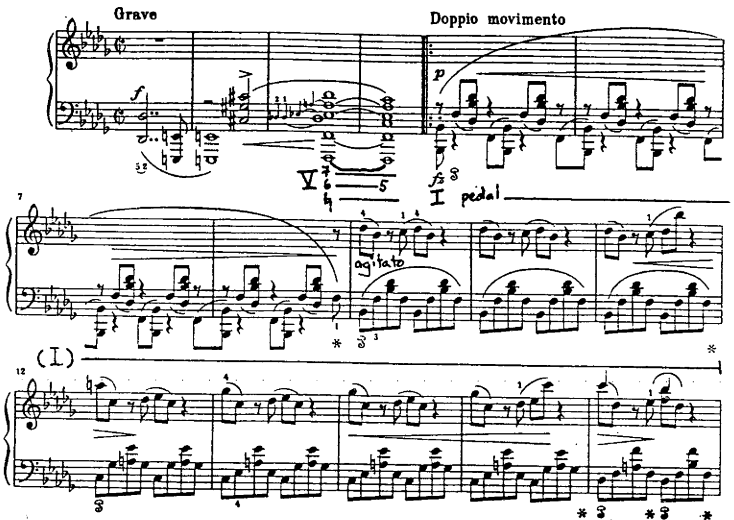


The point here is not that Chopin was superior in some way because he obeyed the 'rules', but rather that his priorities were different to those of his contemporaries. His works reveal a consistently linear approach that results in harmony of considerable originality and daring, and this emphasis on the horizontal dimension affects also the larger structural aspects of his compositions. A comparison of one of Chopin's most overtly chromatic works - the opening of his B-flat minor sonata (1839) - with the opening of Liszt's B-minor sonata (1853) reveals a crucial difference: like many of his generation, Liszt makes a virtue of a lack of immediate harmonic resolution in order to generate tension, and to provide the impetus for this large-scale work in the 'working out' of this tension. The dissonance in Chopin's work is more localised, and tension is generated by motivic repetition, rather than a rigorous working through to a point of relative repose. Although the opening of the Chopin Sonata appears highly dissonant, the diminished 7th/sharp 6th (D-flat/C-sharp) is quickly identified as a suspension (bar 3), which resolves immediately onto the 5th of the

dominant 7th chord. The tonic key is then established by a tonic pedal of several bars, and the motivic repetition begins (Example 5).[55]

Example 5

a. Chopin, Sonata in B-flat minor, opening



b. Liszt, Sonata in B minor, opening (* denotes diminished harmony)



[55] This is true in a sense even of the last movement of Chopin's Sonata, in which motivic repetition is taken to its extreme, and made inescapable by the unison octave texture and *sotto voce* dynamics throughout. Schumann was certainly not alone, in his time or ours, in finding this movement difficult to understand.

While others were concerned with dramatic juxtaposition of contrasting elements of melody, harmony and texture, and the working through of the tensions thus generated, Chopin concerned himself rather with the internal tensions generated by the interplay of strands of voice-leading, often within a uniform texture. Fundamental to Chopin's distinctive style is his preference for a vocal, rather than an instrumental model. His concept of counterpoint was entirely related to the possibilities and limitations of the human voice in the limited range of individual parts, in the stepwise motion, and above all in the careful distinction he maintains between individual voice types. His contemporaries modelled their work on the orchestra, and their concept of counterpoint is inclined to be instrumental rather than vocal in its chromaticism of individual lines, its dissonant leaps, and in the constant crossing over of parts. This instrumental concept dominated keyboard music of the time, and is seen particularly in the music of Schumann and Liszt. Chopin adhered to a vocal model even in his contrapuntal writing, and more than any other composer of his time, remained true to the fundamental principles of counterpoint laid down in the repertoire of the sixteenth-century, codified by Fux, and instilled into him by his teacher, Józef Elsner.

ii. The influence of J.S. Bach

Chopin greatly admired the music of J.S. Bach.[56] In his monograph on Chopin, Liszt referred to him as 'an enthusiastic student of Bach' and refers to 'les errements d'une école entiérement classique'.[57] There can be no doubt that Chopin had a thorough knowledge of the *Well-tempered Clavier*, and used it constantly in his own playing and in his teaching. Significantly for the composition of the Preludes opus 28 it was the only score he took with him to Majorca in 1838-39. He once told Lenz that his preparation for concerts was to play Bach for a fortnight - '...I do not practise my own compositions.';[58] and several students - Mikuli, Dubois, Mathias and Gutmann among them - recall that Bach was an integral part of their curriculum. Mme Dubois claims that, at their last meeting in 1848, Chopin told her to '*toujours travailler Bach - ce sera votre meilleur moyen de progresser.*'[59]

Chopin's enthusiasm for the works of J.S. Bach was by no means an isolated phenomenon at the time; it was shared by many of his colleagues, each of whom translated their enthusiasm into some aspect of their work. Mendelssohn's tribute might be found in his performances of Bach's works, in his Bach editions and transcriptions, his own Preludes and Fugues for piano and organ, and his numerous canons. Schumann also conducted choral works of Bach, he too grappled with canons and fugues (his efforts include six fugues on the B-A-C-H motive), and he provided accompaniments for Bach's sonatas for solo violin and for solo cello. Liszt frequently performed Bach's keyboard works (including the concertos) on piano and organ, transcribed a large number of Bach's works, and based several works on themes of Bach, including the B-A-C-H motive.

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[56] One of the earliest writers to explore this aspect of Chopin's music was the English musician, A.J. Hipkins, who heard Chopin play, and whose ideas are recorded in his daughter's edition of his memoirs: *How Chopin Played.*

[57] 'the manner of an entirely classical school'. Quoted in Niecks vol. 1, p. 30

[58] Lenz, *Great Piano Virtuosos of our Time*, p. 52.

[59] Niecks vol. 2, pp. 190, 107.

Chopin did not perform Bach in public, did not transcribe any of Bach's works, and though he certainly worked on counterpoint and fugues as exercises in composition, none was published during his lifetime.[60] But of all the nineteenth century tributes to Bach, Chopin's is by no means the least, for, although it is not often discernible in external trappings, Bach's influence might be seen in more subtle, internal aspects of his writing, playing and teaching.

Chopin's view of music as declamation could be derived not only from opera, but also indirectly perhaps from the baroque *Affektenlehre*. For instance, Mikuli's descriptions of Chopin's playing and teaching echo Forkel's description of J.S. Bach's playing:

> ...each note took the meaning of a syllable, each bar that of a word, each phrase that of a thought. It was a declamation without pathos; but both simple and noble. (Mikuli)[61]

> Chopin insisted above all on the importance of correct phrasing. Wrong phrasing would provoke the apt analogy that it seemed to him as if someone were reciting a laboriously memorised speech in an unfamiliar language, not merely failing to observe the right quantity of syllables, but perhaps even making full stops in the middle of words. Similarly, by his illiterate phrasing the pseudo-musician reveals that music is not his mother tongue but something foreign and unintelligible to him; and so, like that orator, he must relinquish all hope of his speech having any effect on the listener. (Mikuli)[62]

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[60] An incomplete Canon in F minor (1839?) was published in *Annales Chopin* ii (Warsaw 1948), and a Fugue in A minor (1841-2) was published in Leipzig in 1898.

[61] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 42. Source: Koczalski, *Frédéric Chopin*, Köln, 1936, p. 53.

[62] Loc. cit. Source: Mikuli, *Vorwort* to *Fr. Chopin's Piano-forte-Werke*, Leipzig, 1880, p. 4. Eigeldinger's comparison of Chopin's ideas with 18th century aesthetic theory is to be found largely in n.70, pp. 109-10.

> [Bach] knew how to introduce such variety to his performance that each piece, under his fingers, sounded just like a speech. (Forkel)[63]

The notion of textless music as a conveyor of quite specific, albeit abstract meaning had immense appeal for composers of the early nineteenth century. Beethoven employed it in the recitative passages in some of the piano sonatas (for instance in the first movement of opus 31 no. 2, and the Aria of opus 110) and again in the Ninth Symphony, where Schiller's Ode is 'heard' first in a textless instrumental version, complete with recitative. The paradox expressed in Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* is precisely that the music carries its own meaning: music can be a 'song' without a literal text. Mendelssohn and Chopin both exploit the lyrical qualities of song, but an imagined text to many of the *Songs Without Words* may well be strophic - that is, the melody may be equally suited to a number of different verses of the text, expressing a range of sentiments. With Chopin the connection between the melody and the imagined text is more specific: if the piece were a song or an aria, it would be through composed; the development of the melodic ideas and the lack of direct repetition, the dotted rhythms and repeated notes, the vocal phrase lengths, all lend a very specific character to the 'text'.[64] The lyrical quality of song is important to Chopin, but the meaning of the 'text' is uppermost in his mind.[65]

The cantabile ideal was similarly well recognised in the eighteenth century, and indeed it seems that, at least for some, it was inseparable from the notion of declamation. In the light of Forkel's statement quoted above, it is unlikely that J.S. Bach was referring only to the lyrical quality of singing when he wrote in his introduction to his Inventions and Sinfonias:

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[63] Ibid. p. 15n25.

[64] Although he is arguing a different point, Jim Samson incidentally illustrates this with his demonstration of the melodic variants in the Nocturne op. 62 no. 2 in the chapter 'Bel Canto' in *The Music of Chopin*, pp. 94-96.

[65] This idea is discussed more fully and illustrated in Section 2 of Part One: 'The Vocal Model'.

> Honest Method by which the amateurs of the clavichord ... are shown a clear way, not only (1) to learn to play cleanly in two parts, but also, after further progress, (2) to handle three obligate parts correctly and well; and along with this to obtain not only good inventions [ideas] but to develop the same well; above all, however, to achieve a cantabile style in playing and at the same time acquire a strong foretaste of composition.[66]

Telemann stated: 'Singen ist das Fundament zur Musik in allen Dingen ... wer auf Instrumenten spielt, muss des Singens Kündig seyn.'[67] C.P.E. Bach refers constantly to the need to develop a cantabile style: for instance,

> The whole approach to performance will be greatly aided and simplified by the supplementary study of voice wherever possible, and by listening closely to good singers.[68]

The cantabile keyboard style was continued by Mozart, Clementi and Hummel. Eigeldinger points out that Beethoven was aware of it, and that, according to Schindler, he

> ... heard from Clementi how the latter, after much experiment and research towards positive rules of musical performance, had finally found the solutions in the art of singing. As a singer himself, he sought to carry the rules of prosody right down to the smallest phrases in instrumental music.[69]

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66 J.S. Bach, *Inventionen, Sinfonien*, Henle Urtext edition.

67 'Singing is the basis of everything in music ... anyone who plays an instrument must know something of singing.' Quoted in Jonathon Bellman, 'Chopin and the cantabile style' (*Historical Performance*, vol. 2 no. 2, 1989, pp. 63-71).

68 C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, p. 39.

69 Eigeldinger *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 111n.77. He is quoting from Schindler's *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven*, Leipzig, Reklam, 1973, pp. 468. Chopin's use in his teaching of Clementi's studies has been noted elsewhere.

Schindler's reference to 'the rules of prosody' suggests that, for Beethoven, the cantabile style certainly meant far more than merely a 'singing' quality, and that the implied 'text' of the music was of great importance. Mikuli's descriptions (quoted above) of Chopin's playing make it quite clear that Chopin shared, at least with J.S. Bach and Beethoven, this more literal understanding of 'cantabile'.

The influence of J.S. Bach is manifested in many subtle ways in Chopin's compositions. Chopin's use of counterpoint has already been demonstrated; his emulation in the Études and Preludes of Bach's textural explorations, and the notion of the étude as a compositional study (expressed in J.S. Bach's words quoted above) are discussed in the following section. Of interest here is Chopin's adaptation of the structural model presented by the Preludes of the *Well-tempered Clavier*, and applied in his own Preludes opus 28.

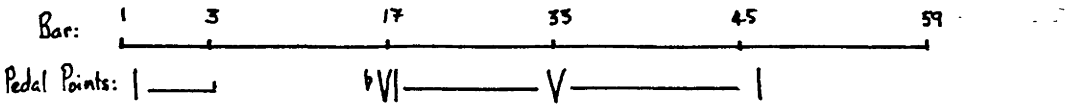
Underpinning many of Chopin's Preludes are long pedal points, that serve to establish tonality at the beginning, to bring the strands of polyphony together at the final cadence point, and incidentally to enhance or dispel tension. Many of Bach's Preludes begin with a short tonic pedal point, and end with a long dominant pedal, often preceded by a short pedal on the submediant, and followed by a tonic pedal. The initial pedal of course establishes the key, the submediant prepares the dominant and begins the point of greatest tension - the withholding of the tonic. The final tonic pedal re-establishes the key and resolves the accumulated tension. While dominant, tonic and other pedal points abound in almost every Prelude in op. 28, the B-flat major and D-minor Preludes of op. 28 perhaps come closest to Bach's practice. In the examples below, the pre-dominant, dominant and tonic pedals flow directly from one to another, and the pedal device is used to direct the motion powerfully and conclusively towards the final chord.[70]

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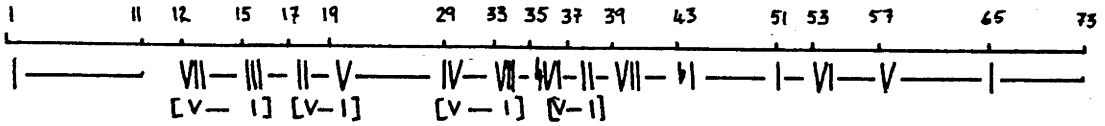
[70] John Rink expands upon the strong sense of tonal architecture in Chopin's work in 'Tonal architecture in the early music', *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson, pp. 78-97.

Example 6

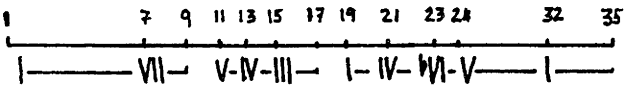
a. Chopin, Prelude op. 28 no. 21



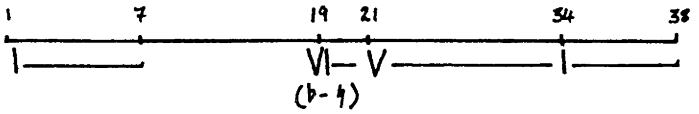
b. op. 28 no. 24



c. J.S. Bach, *Well-tempered Clavier I*, Prelude no. 1



d. Well-tempered Clavier I, Prelude no. 2



e. Well-tempered Clavier I, Prelude no. 23



In addition to his use of dominant-tonic pedal points at endings, Chopin uses them freely in other places as well. Very many of the Preludes and Études are constructed substantially of long pedal points: for instance, in the Étude op. 10 no. 9 only 11 bars out of 67 are *not* based on a pedal point; with the exception of only two bars (37-38) the Prelude op. 28 no. 24 is based entirely on pedal points of at least 2 bars in length (most are much longer), and the extraordinary *Berceuse* op. 57 might be considered to be based entirely on a tonic pedal.

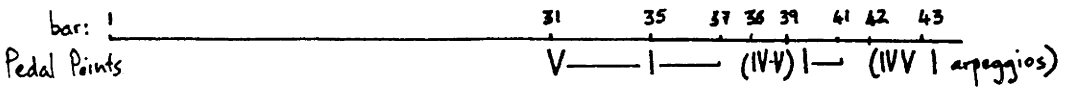
Mendelssohn and Schumann were at least as familiar as Chopin with the work of J.S. Bach, but were inclined to express their admiration for him in the external features of their works, rather than their internal construction. Both composers make use of pedal points but rarely employ pre-dominant and dominant pedals in the way Bach and Chopin do at endings, and only rarely use long pedal points as the basis for a work's construction. None of the Preludes of Mendelssohn's Six Preludes and Fugues op. 35 employs pedal points at the ending in quite the way that Bach does: several of them end with a tonic pedal point, but this is never directly preceded by a dominant pedal. The following examples show how, where there is a dominant pedal, it does not form part of the cadence, but is rather preparation for the cadence (see Example 7 below).

Schumann's practice is very similar to Mendelssohn's. Of all his works, the *Bunte Blätter* op. 99 most closely resemble the Preludes of J.S. Bach (and Chopin) in their brevity and the monotextural nature of many of them. Particularly close to the model is the 'Präludium' in B-flat minor, which may well have been consciously modelled on the *Well-tempered Clavier*, Chopin's opus 28, or both (it was written in 1839 - the same year Chopin's Preludes were published). Schumann's Prelude ends with a tonic pedal, but is not directly preceded by a dominant pedal: there is a two-bar pedal on the dominant several bars earlier, but it is followed by further cadential preparation before the final tonic. Of all the pieces in op. 99, this is the only one which is not explicitly sectional in its construction, and this sectional nature of many of Schumann's works is bound to impede the effect of finality given by a long dominant,then tonic, pedal. For instance, the second of the 'Albumblätter', also from opus 99, consists of three statements of essentially the

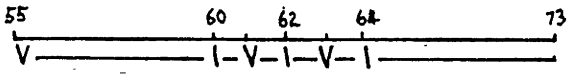
same material. The first two sections end with a dominant pedal leading to the tonic chord, but the material is then pursued further. The piece ends with a tonic pedal point, preceded simply by a dominant chord. It seems likely that the monotextural nature of Chopin's Études and Preludes and the fact that most of them are one-part forms rather than sectional, are contributing factors in Chopin's more extensive use of pedal points in these works.

Example 7

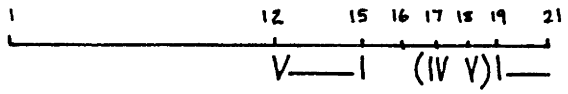
a. Mendelssohn, Six Preludes and Fugues op. 35: i. Prelude no. 1 (1837)



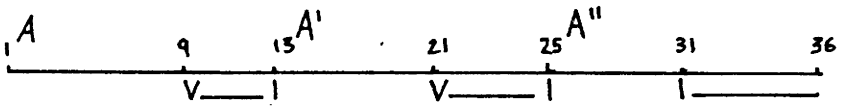
ii. Prelude no. 3 (1837)



b. Schumann, *Bunte Blätter* op. 99: i. 'Präludium' (1839)



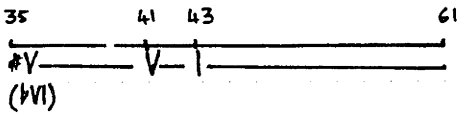
ii. 'Albumblätter' no. 2 (1838)



It is difficult to compare Liszt's practice with regard to pedal points in this context, as there are so few short, monotextural works written during the virtuoso years. An interesting exception is the third *Consolation* (Example 8 below). The work makes extensive use of long pedal points; the dominant pedal is preceded by a pedal on the flattened 6th (or more literally the raised 5th), and followed directly by the long final tonic pedal.

Example 8

Liszt, *Consolation* no. 3, b. 35 - end



Liszt's profound respect for Bach's music is apparent in very many of his works, but his different interpretation of the style reveals much about the differences in his and Chopin's attitudes towards the piano. Liszt's *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* Variations (1862) show the depth of his understanding of many aspects of Bach's style. Like Chopin's Preludes and Études, the work might be seen as a study in textures, though of course it is a single work, along the lines of the 'Goldberg' Variations, or the organ variations of Bach. Liszt is rigorous in his application of the passacaglia principle used by Bach himself, both in the original *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* cantata no. 12, and in the Crucifixus of the B-minor Mass. Liszt's Variations are a fine example of the improvisation practice (albeit notated!) of the baroque, and the work ends with a statement of one of Bach's Chorales. But it is clear from this work that Liszt's understanding of Bach goes far beyond the limitations of 'clavier' sound and technique: it is derived rather from his appreciation of the much larger palette of the organ works.

Example 9

Liszt, *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* Variations.

a. bars 252-55; 267-70; 282-85



b. bars 15-21



c. bars 330-33



For Liszt, the possibilities of the piano were seemingly infinite: he had amply demonstrated its potential to emulate orchestral, vocal and even choral effects in his numerous operatic and symphonic transcriptions, and in his *Transcendental Studies*, it is not just technique which is transcended, but the instrument itself. It is hardly surprising then, that Liszt should conceive of Bach in terms of the organ rather than the piano, particularly given his considerable acquaintance with the organ repertoire. Liszt's Variations are characterised by dramatic textural and registral change, and many of the textures seem to be direct imitations of organ sonority. Liszt's use of the extreme low register of the piano is remarkable in this work, as is his use of thick chords, octaves, the gradual accumulation of sonorities, and a low, throbbing tremolo (Example 9*a*). It is easy to imagine how the frequent sharp contrasts in texture and dynamics might be enhanced by a change of registration on the organ: for instance the contrast of the low rumbling in bars 15-17 (exaggerated by the pedal marking) with the sparse polyphony of the following bars (example 9*b*). The apparent stylistic confusion of the lush, almost operatic setting of the chorale at the end dissipates once the organ analogy is recognised (example 9*c*).

iii. Chopin's concept of the étude

All the established piano teachers of the time composed volumes of études for the development of specific aspects of technique. Younger composers such as Schumann, Liszt, Thalberg and others intended their 'concert études' not only for the development, but also the public display, of 'technique'. For Chopin, mechanical technique was nothing more than an end to a musical means, and this attitude is exemplified in his Études. There is ample evidence to suggest that Chopin saw these not as pedagogical tools or display pieces, but as musical works in their own right. In his teaching, according to Mikuli, he 'entrusted' his own Études 'only to the most advanced students'; Mikuli also claims that Chopin's own and Field's Nocturnes also figured to some extent as études.[71] The reports of other students indicate that Chopin favoured Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* and *Préludes et Exercices* and above all, Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* for systematic study.[72] The large number of works in strict polyphonic style in Clementi's *Gradus* supports the notion that Chopin's view of technique was inseparable from other aspects of musicianship; his own knowledge of the *Well-tempered Clavier* and the influence of the polyphonic style on his compositions has already been explored. In contrast to Liszt, Thalberg, Herz, Kalkbrenner and others of the virtuoso school, Chopin did not write 'concert études' with descriptive titles: he performed his Études as he did his Preludes, Nocturnes, Mazurkas, and so on, in 'brackets', placing emphasis on their combined textural variety and musical effect rather than their technical difficulty.

The general stylistic features of Chopin's études and preludes also demonstrate his conformity to an eighteenth-century view of didactic works, which did not separate technique from musical value. Didactic works of the first half of the eighteenth century are groups of works that,

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[71] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, pp. 60, 61.

[72] See the section on Curriculum, ibid., pp. 59-61.

as a set, explore the possibilities posed by a particular instrument and/or genre; Bach's *Clavierübung* and Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercisi* [73] fall into this category, and although the works within them certainly pose technical difficulties, they are in no way of a lesser musical quality than other works they composed. Similarly, the musical value of Chopin's études is at least comparable to that of his other works: it might even be argued that the very nature of the genre drew from Chopin some of his most characteristic and imaginative writing: as Donald Tovey suggests, they 'are the only extant great works of art that really owe their character to being Études'; and Jim Samson claims: 'Chopin [conquered] virtuosity on its home ground, and in doing so [lifted] himself clear of the surrounding lowland of mediocrity.' [74]

Chopin's études, then, are generated at least as much by musical, as by technical considerations, and might be considered as exercises in compositional ingenuity, only incidentally providing exercise also for the fingers. As J.S. Bach wrote in the preface to the *Inventions*: '...to achieve a cantabile style in playing and at the same time acquire a strong foretaste of composition.'[75] Simon Finlow has identified the fundamental compositional problem posed by the étude as being the codification and deployment of a particular figuration into motivic form, which then generates the musical impetus of the work.[76] The compositional task thus becomes quite

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[73] Bach's *Clavierübung* was most certainly known to Chopin; Mikuli suggests that he may also have been acquainted with the work of Scarlatti (Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 136 n.142). Schumann included J.S.Bach in a list of the 'most important' writers of études, along with Chopin, Clementi, Cramer and Moscheles (Finlow, 'The twenty-seven études and their antecedents', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, p. 51)

[74] Both quoted in Finlow, 'The twenty-seven études and their antecedents', pp. 50-51.

[75] J.S. Bach, *Inventionen, Sinfonien*, Henle Urtext edition.

[76] Finlow, 'The twenty-seven études and their antecedents'. This element of Finlow's more broad-ranging argument has been distilled over several pages, drawing especially from the sections on 'Passagework, figuration, keyboard technique' and 'Harmony, texture, integrity'. Finlow points out (p. 62) that Czerny puts forward in his *School of Practical Composition* the idea that 'the determinate idea' should form the basis of a well-written étude.

sophisticated: the distillation of a motive that in its construction offers sufficient tension and interest to be the sole generating force of the composition. There can be little doubt that Chopin recognised this challenge in his études: they are explorations of musical texture, along the lines of J.S. Bach's textural explorations in the preludes of the *Well-tempered Clavier*. The Preludes opus 28 (1839) reveal a similar preoccupation, and will be at times considered alongside the Études in the following discussion.

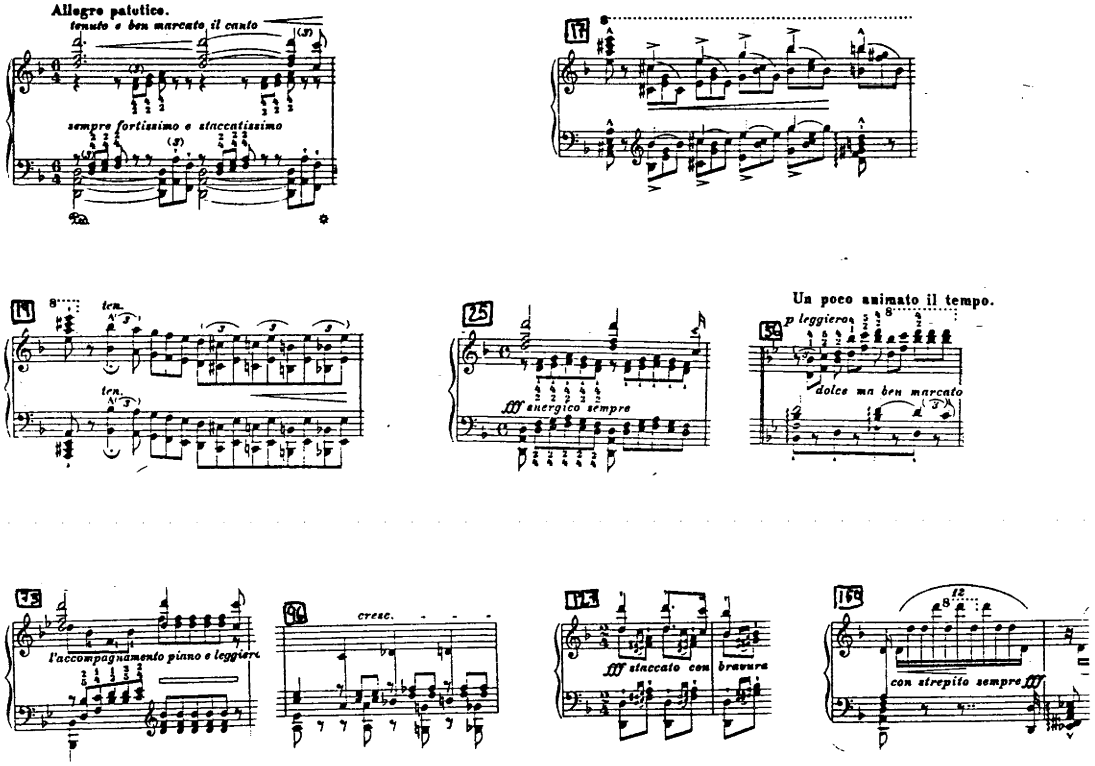
All but four of these 27 études and the 24 preludes are mono-textural,[77] exploring a single musical idea; in this sense they conform also to the baroque aesthetic principle of affects - *Affektenlehre*. This practice stands in sharp contrast to that of Liszt, for whom textural contrast was a primary means of dramatic expression, both on a small and a large scale; the variety of textures found in all of the *Transcendental Études* (1837 and 1851) is apparent even in the early 1826 studies (*Étude en douze exercices*) on which they are based. Liszt too is exploring texture, but through the principle of melodic or motivic variation; Chopin seems to be exploring the potentialities of texture from within the limitations posed by a single texture. As a result, most of the individual pieces are on a smaller temporal scale than Liszt's, and they seem to be exercises in the refinement of compositional technique almost as much as they are works intended for performance. Compare for instance the variety of textures within Liszt's *Grandes Études no.* 4 (titled *Mazeppa* in the later version) with one of the least explicitly mono-textural études of Chopin, his op. 25 no. 4 (Example 10).

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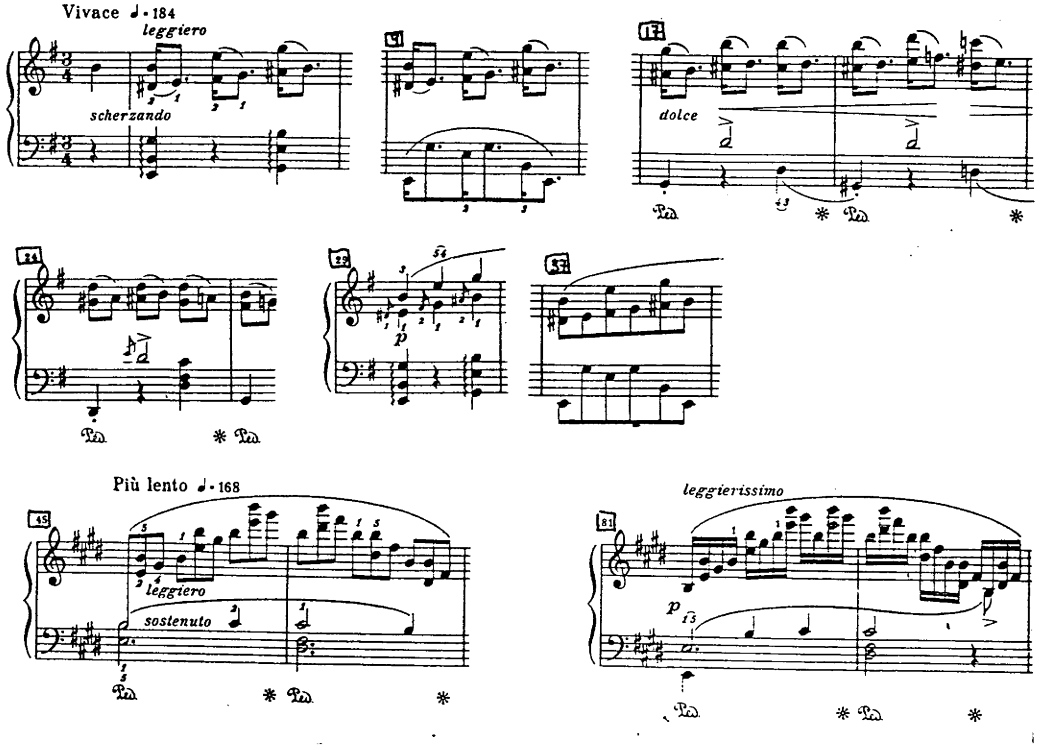
[77] The only exceptions are: op. 25 nos. 5 and 10, and op. 28 nos. 13 and 15. If a more literal interpretation of textural change is adopted, then op. 25 no. 4 might not be considered as 'mono-textural' because of the variety of figurative patterns that are presented; however this étude by no means falls into the same category as the other four exceptions to the rule, in that the alteration in texture does not occur just once as a contrasting middle section, but is rather the result of Chopin's seeming to adopt for once a more conventionally 'technical' approach, taking care to give both hands equal work to do. On the other hand, the 'turn' motive is pervasive in all sections of this study.

Example 10

a. Liszt, *Grande Études* (1837) no. 4, bars 1, 17, 19, 25, 56, 73, 96, 127, 150



b. Chopin, *Étude* op. 25 no. 5, bars 1, 9, 17-18, 24-25, 29, 37, 45-46, 81



Both works explicitly employ variation principle - common in the études of Liszt and unusual in those of Chopin, but compare the extent of the variation: in Example 10*b*, Chopin's variation consists of a change in the nature of the bass and/or a minor rhythmic variation of the established pattern. Despite the changes in surface texture, the principle of unity of motive (the dissonant appoggiatura in the alto of bar 1, and its tonal variant in the middle section) is very apparent here. Although some of the examples from Liszt's Étude are related thematically (Example 10*a*), there is no sense of textural continuity - in fact textural variety is a prominent feature of the work. This example demonstrates also the uniquely keyboard conception of Chopin's work: it is easy to imagine an orchestration of Liszt's *Étude*, and the symphonic poem *Mazeppa* was in fact based on the piano study; it is comparatively difficult to imagine an orchestral transcription, not only of this étude, but of any of Chopin's piano works.

If we adopt a pre-nineteenth century attitude to Chopin's études and preludes, then they appear not so much as a compendium of the elements of virtuoso technique, but rather as a compendium of textural possibilities of the instrument. They exemplify novelty of texture, style and technique, but within limitations established by the nature of the instrument itself. A further comparison with the Preludes of the *Well-tempered Clavier* is instructive here: we find a similarly striking variety of textures and styles within the set; nearly all of them are consistent in texture; no two are the same, yet all display the richest imagination, and all are distinctively keyboard in style - how many of these would transcribe successfully for orchestra? The *Well-tempered Clavier* demonstrates that, despite its huge repertoire, the possibilities of the domestic keyboard instruments of the time (clavichord and harpsichord) were by no means exhausted; in the same way, while others were looking beyond the keyboard for inspiration, Chopin's études and preludes breathed new life into conventional keyboard figurations.

2. The vocal model: the influence of opera in Chopin's compositions

The fact that Chopin's education was directed towards a career in opera composition was to have a profound impact upon his eventual career as pianist-composer. By the time of his arrival in Paris, the 21-year old Chopin was already well acquainted with contemporary opera, and had heard many of the best singers of the time. His letters to family and friends reveal a sophisticated appreciation of the genre, and significantly they reveal a fascination with aspects of operatic performance, rather than its composition.[78] This description of Sontag's singing occupies almost an entire letter to his friend Titus Woyciechowski:

> You have missed five of Mlle Sontag's concerts! [describes details of his acquaintance with her] ... She charms everyone by her voice which has not a very great range, for we usually hear it only between these notes:
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> 
>
> but it is extraordinarily cultivated. Her *diminuendi* are the *non plus ultra*, her *portamenti* wonderful, and her scales, particularly the chromatic scales, are unsurpassable. [He lists what she sang; gives her opinion of some young Warsaw singers] ... She has some entirely original ornamentation which is enormously effective, but in a different way from Paganini. Perhaps it is because her *genre* is smaller ...[79]

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[78] One of few references to compositional aspects of opera occurs in an early letter (June, 1826) with regard to Weber's *Der Freischütz*; the young Chopin refers to its 'extraordinarily *recherché* harmony (which particularly suits the German taste).' (*Correspondence*, p. 6).

[79] *Correspondence*, pp. 46-48; letter dated Warsaw, 5 June, 1830. Several other references in the letters around this time make it clear that Chopin had already heard Paganini in Warsaw, where the violinist gave ten concerts in May - July, 1829. Chopin's reference to Sontag's smaller 'genre' (she preferred concert performances to operatic ones) and the originality of her ornamentation is an interesting presage of Chopin's own later stylistic development.

Particularly after his arrival in Paris, he attempts to convey to his family and friends his excitement at encountering new operas and the top singers. In another letter to Titus, he devotes three long and detailed paragraphs to the subject:

> ... Never have I heard the *Barber* as last week with Lablache, Rubini and Malibran (Garcia), nor *Otello* as with Rubini, Pasta and Lablache; or again, *Italiana in Algeri* as with Rubini, Lablache and Mme Raimbeaux. Now, if ever, I have *everything* in Paris. You cannot conceive what Lablache is like! They say Pasta has gone off, but I never saw anything more sublime. Malibran impresses you merely by her marvellous voice, but no-one *sings* like her. ... Rubini is an excellent tenor. He sings true notes, never *falsetto* and sometimes his ornamental runs go on for hours (but sometimes his decorative passages are too long and he deliberately uses a tremolo effect, besides trilling endlessly - which, however, brings him the greatest applause). His *mezza voce* is incomparable. ...[80]

While Chopin's fascination with the art of singing may have been influenced by eighteenth-century tradition, it is to the singing in bel canto opera style that he constantly refers in his teaching. Chopin's interest in opera and the art of singing remained with him all his life, and it is not surprising to find strong elements of this interest in his compositions for piano. An interest in opera was *de rigeur* at the time, and the overflowing of the popularity of opera onto the concert platform has already been noted. But Chopin scarcely participated in those most widespread manifestations of the opera craze - the operatic transcriptions, fantasias and variations.[81] He confined himself to incorporating aspects of the lyric aria into his language, and largely avoided the other trappings of opera: the recitatives, ensembles and orchestral interludes that so penetrated the

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[80] Ibid. p. 100; letter dated Paris, 12 December, 1831.

[81] The few works Chopin composed in these genres are: Introduction and Variations on 'Je vends les scapulaires' from Hérold's *Ludovic* (1833); one variation on the March from Bellini's *I puritani*, contributed to the Hexaméron (1837); a Grand Duo for piano and cello on themes from Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1832); the Variations for piano and orchestra on Mozart's 'La ci darem' (1827) and a transcription of the accompaniment of 'Casta diva' from Bellini's *Norma* (c.1831).

work of other composers. While other composers attempted to emulate the large-scale dramatic concept of opera in their imitations of orchestral writing, sharp juxtapositions of musical styles and textures, interposed recitative passages, orchestral commentary, and so on, Chopin focussed almost exclusively on the intimacy of the aria, often ignoring its operatic context altogether.

Liszt's 'Sonetto del Petrarca' from *Années de Pèlerinage II* typifies the way other composers absorbed the influence of opera into their keyboard works. The main melody, initially in the low soprano range (bar 7) resembles that of an operatic aria in phrase length, ornamentation, syncopation, and in the rhythmic structure of the phrases which begin with long notes and end (most often with a falling cadence) with shorter ones, and so on. This melody is preceded by a rising chromatic sequence of syncopated chords (full orchestra?) that collapses into an adagio and solo (wind or vocal?) cadenza. After eight bars, a tenor voice appears, to be followed by a restatement of the initial melody an octave higher than the original register (Example 11).

Example 11

Liszt, 'Sonetto 104 del Petrarca', b. 1-10; b. 15-16; b. 21



Many of the 'A' sections of Chopin's Nocturnes share the melodic characteristics of operatic arias cited above,[82] but his treatment of them is quite different from Liszt's in this 'Sonetto'. Of all Chopin's twenty-one Nocturnes, only four (opp. 32 no. 2, 48 no. 2, 62 no. 1 and KK IVa/16[83]) have a clear introduction to the 'aria'; none of these introductions is more than two bars, and all are cadential formulae stated simply in chords in fairly close position. Once the melody and accompaniment texture is established it is in every case maintained throughout the first section. Furthermore, Chopin shows a more literal translation of vocal style. He resists octave doublings (Liszt, b. 38) and transpositions (Liszt b. 21),[84] and within these 'A' sections adheres to a soprano range that, in general does not extend below middle C, or above top C-sharp. In general the range of the 'A' section melodies is no more than two octaves, and in several cases is considerably less.[85] His accompaniments, for all their contrapuntal subtlety, are not obtrusive, and are unchanging in their texture, thus the focus is directed to the melodic line.

Occasionally Chopin continues the 'aria' throughout the Nocturne (most clearly in op. 9 no. 2 and op. 55 no. 2).More often though, the contrasting middle sections depart from the operatic model altogether, and move instead into a pianistic *moto perpetuo* (opp.15 nos. 1 and 2, op. 32 no. 2, op. 62 no. 2), a chorale-like texture (op. 15 no. 3, op. 37 no. 1), a barcarolle (op.

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[82] Perhaps closest to the operatic model are op. 9 no. 2, op. 15 no. 1, op. 27 nos.1 and 2, op. 37 no. 1, op. 48 no. 1, op. 62 no. 2, and the C-sharp minor Nocturne, KK IVa/16.

[83] Brown Index 49, in C-sharp minor, *Lento con gran espressione*, written in 1830.

[84] Octave doublings within the 'A' sections of Chopin's Nocturnes are to be found only in op. 27 no. 2, b. 18-21 (in a duet texture), op. 48 no. 2, b. 44-49, and op. posth. 72 no. 1, b. 10-12; octave transpositions are not found at all.

[85] For instance, op. 15 no. 1 and op. 9 no. 2 have a melodic range of only an 11th (excluding some pianistic fioritura in the latter); the maximum range among all the A sections is only 2 octaves, though occasionally fioritura might extend that range slightly.

37 no. 2) or even a mazurka (op. 27 no. 1, op. 48 no. 2, BI 49).[86] Thus he has translated the bel canto aria into the language of the keyboard, moving freely from it into other keyboard and vocal genres, but almost never in the Nocturnes attempting to emulate any other aspect of opera.[87] Indeed, despite his passion for the genre, instances of 'operatic' writing other than arias are rare in his piano works. The Prelude op. 28 no. 18, with its recitative and 'orchestral' interjections, is a notable exception, the style being, furthermore, sustained throughout this short piece; another exception is the implied recitative introduction to the Étude op. 25 no. 7. Other composers, especially Liszt, and even Beethoven in the late sonatas, used the recitative style much more frequently.

Chopin's resistance to the orchestral style of keyboard writing, and his preference for vocal models, may be seen throughout his work as composer *and* pianist and teacher. The reminiscences of his pupils and colleagues are a valuable record of Chopin's activities in Paris when he was at the height of his career and give some idea of his unique approach to the piano, in this and in other matters. Maria von Grewingk recalls:

> His playing is entirely based on the vocal style of Rubini, Malibran and Grisi, etc.; he says so himself. But it's a purely pianistic 'voice' that he uses to recreate the particular style of each of these artists, while they have other means at their disposal. ... True to his principle of imitating great singers in one's playing, Chopin drew from the instrument the secret of how to express breathing. At every point where a singer would take a breath, the accomplished pianist [...] should take care to raise the wrist so as to let it fall again on the singing note with the greatest suppleness imaginable. To attain this *souplesse* is the most difficult

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[86] Jeffrey Kallberg has discussed this aspect of Chopin's work - the implications of his mixing of genres - in 'The rhetoric of genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G minor' (*19th-Century Music* 11, 1988, pp. 238-61); see also Jim Samson's 'Chopin and genre' (*Music Analysis* 8, 1989, pp. 213-31).

[87] In the Nocturnes, apart from the brief introductions already mentioned, there is a small patch of recitative at the end of op. 32 no. 1, and another at the transition from the mazurka-like middle section to the return of Tempo I in op. 27 no. 1.

> task I know. But once you succeed in doing it, then you laugh with joy at the beautiful sound, and Chopin exclaims, '*C'est cela, parfait! merci!*'[88]

According to Mme Rubio, his constant refrain was '*Il faut chanter avec les doigts!*'; Friederike Streicher remembers that '*Il (ou elle) ne sait pas lier deux notes*' was his severest censure, and Mikuli refers to the pupil learning '... to recognize, love and produce the beautiful bound [*gebunden*] vocal tone and the *legato*.'[89]

The consequences of this vocal model are apparent throughout Chopin's compositions, but are particularly apparent in the Nocturnes: there is an emphasis on smooth lines, on finely shaped phrasing that emulates the text-related phrasing of the aria, and on breathing. The Nocturne op. 62 no. 2 (1845-46) offers a typical example.[90] This opening stanza is set entirely within a mezzo-soprano range; there is considerable variation of phrase-length, but the longest of them is well within a singer's capacity. The melodic intervals are all singable, and entirely characteristic of the bel canto style, with larger intervals used for expressive purposes. Most large or dissonant leaps occur between phrases, to give the 'singer' time for preparation (bars 6, 8, 14) or they occur at the beginning of phrases, most of which then tail off into stepwise motion.

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[88] Eigeldinger, *Chopin, pianist and teacher*, p. 45.

[89] Ibid pp. 45-46.

[90] Jim Samson offers a discussion of the melodic structure of this nocturne, and particularly the range of variation upon repetition of the eight-bar theme, in Chapter 5 of *The Music of Chopin*, pp. 94-96.

Example 12

Chopin, Nocturne op. 62 no. 2, b. 1-16



A comparison with an extract from Bellini's *Norma* reveals the accuracy of Chopin's translation of the characteristic phrase structure of the bel canto style. The long phrase at bar 21-23 of 'Casta Diva'(Example 13 below) is followed by two shorter ones beginning three quavers before the barline, leading to the (decorated) appoggiaturas at bars 24 and 25. The phrase structure, together with the appoggiatura and repeated notes at bars 4-6 of Chopin's Nocturne is almost identical. The appoggiatura at the end of the phrase is common in the bel canto aria and in Chopin's

Nocturnes ('Casta Diva' bar 22, Chopin bars 5, 6, 8, etc.) Typical also is the chromatic neighbour note decoration preceding the leap in bar 24 of 'Casta Diva' (bar 6 of the Nocturne), and certain melodic shapes: the decorated falling fifth at the end of the phrase ('Casta Diva' b. 16-17, 20-21, 22; Nocturne b. 5-6, 8-9), and the turn ('Casta Diva' b. 1, 2, 3, etc.; Nocturne b. 5-6, 7-8, 13). The rhythmic variety of the aria is emulated in Chopin's combination of duplets and triplets, the prevalence of dotted notes, and in the frequent use of syncopation, as if to imitate the flexibility between voice and orchestra. The extended syncopation at the end of the Bellini excerpt is not found in this Nocturne, but is used by Chopin elsewhere (for instance, in op. 55 no. 2, b. 17-19). The texture of the accompaniment of the operatic excerpt is, of course, to be found in many of Chopin's Nocturnes, if not this one; equally, the chordal accompaniment of op. 62 no. 2 is common in the operatic repertoire.

Very many other aspects of the aria are to be found in Chopin's compositions, most consistently in the Nocturnes: the ornamentation, the ABA structure, and so on. This aspect of his composition has been examined in detail elsewhere, and need not be explored here.[91] What is of significance though, is Chopin's very literal translation of the vocal style. Other composers were equally fascinated by the opera, but adapted it more freely. Liszt's third *Consolation* is a rare example in his work of purely aria style, unmixed with recitatives or orchestral interjections. Though the melody is undeniably modelled on the bel canto aria, Liszt freely transposes it from soprano register to an octave above and below, so that the total range (excluding the more extravagant fioritura) covers nearly 4 octaves throughout the piece. Chopin's op. 9 no. 2, one of few Nocturnes entirely in the aria style, has a total 'vocal' range of less than two octaves, even including the pianistic fioritura (though excluding the coda).

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[91] For more detailed discussion of operatic influence in Chopin's work, see for instance Gerald Abraham, *Chopin's Musical Style*; Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin*, and W. Sandelewski, 'Les éléments du 'bel canto' italien dans l'oeuvre du Chopin', in *Chopin Congress*, ed. Lissa, pp. 230-35.

Example 13

a. Bellini, *Norma*, 'Casta diva' from Act 1, b. 16-27[92]



92 H.C. Wolff, *The Opera III*, pp. 82-83.

The vocal style was an important aspect not only of Chopin's compositions, but of his playing and teaching as well. It is seen most clearly in his concern for legato playing, and the quotations above are by no means isolated in their emphasis on this aspect of his art. For Chopin, the legato ideal extended beyond the more explicitly vocal works into every style and genre of his keyboard repertoire, and evidence of this is to be found not only in the melodic lines but even in the most characteristically keyboard textures. The technical implications of this aspect of his work will be explored below in Part Three.

3. The Polish folk tradition

Chopin's interest in folk music was apparent even in his childhood. As early as 1824, a report written by Fryderyk in the family 'newspaper', the *Szafarnia Courier*, tells how he promised three *sous* to a peasant girl if she would sing a mazurka again for him so he could write down the words.[93] In 1830 he reports to Titus that Mlle Sontag had consulted him about revising an arrangement by Prince Radziwill of a Ukrainian *dumka* that she was not altogether happy with.[94] Later in life, Chopin maintained an interest in folk-song, from his native Poland and elsewhere. In 1848 he reported that he had dined with Jenny Lind:

> ...afterwards she sang Swedish songs to me until midnight. This music has a distinctive character, just as ours has. We have something Slavonic; they have something Scandinavian - quite different from each other, and yet we are closer to them than an Italian is to a Spaniard.[95]

and in a later letter: '[Jenny Lind] sang me some Swedish songs most delightfully, just as Madame Viardot sings her Spanish ones.'[96] Chopin's interest in Polish folk music was encouraged during his adolescence by his parents and Elsner, no doubt because of his intended career in Polish national opera. All of Chopin's extant early works show a strong influence of Polish folk music, and this influence is explicit in many later works - most notably the Polonaises, Mazurkas and Songs - and implicit in other works.

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[93] *Correspondence* p. 2, report dated August 29, 1824. Chopin spent the summers of 1824 and 1825 in the village of Szafarnia. His letters to his parents in Warsaw took the form of the *Szafarnia Courier.*

[94] Ibid. p. 47.

[95] Ibid. p. 317; letter written during Chopin's London visit to Wojciech Grzymala in Paris, May 13, 1848.

[96] Ibid. p. 335; letter written from London, August 10-19, 1848, to his family in Warsaw.

Like Liszt, Chopin was aware of the publicity value of his exotic origins. After his performance in Vienna in 1829, he wrote to his parents:

> ... I improvised on a theme from *La Dame Blanche*. Then the stage manager begged me to choose another Polish theme ... so I selected *Chmiel*, which electrified the public, unaccustomed as it is to this kind of melody.[97]

During his second visit to Vienna, and wrote again of the popularity of Polish music in that city:

> ... I shall go to the theatre where there is to be a concert at which we shall hear Herz, that Jewish violinist who only just avoided being hissed off at Mlle Sontag's concert in Warsaw, and Döhler, a pianist who is to play works by Czerny. To end the concert Herz will play his own Variations on Polish Airs. You poor Polish Airs! You can't forsee what Jewish tunes you will be larded with - called Polish music in order to entice the public.[98]

While his reputation may indeed have been enhanced by his Polish origins, for Chopin his nationality was not a musical style to be consciously assumed from time to time, but rather a deep-seated element in his musical personality. During an era when Polish national identity was under constant threat, the distinctive musical style of the folk tradition was strongly promoted by Polish people of all classes, and was deeply significant for them. That Chopin abandoned a career in opera was difficult for his friends and family to accept, but the decision was made all the more problematical for Chopin because of the nationalistic hopes that were pinned on his future career. Opera was popular entertainment, as well as being a most significant musical genre: a great opera composer who also composed Polish operas could make a significant contribution to the cause of

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[97] Ibid., p. 24; letter from Vienna, Wednesday August 12, 1829. *Chmiel* is a wedding song from the Lublin district, south-east of Warsaw; Steszewski quotes the song in his article on Polish folk music in the *New Grove*, and notes that it has wide distribution (p. 31)

[98] *Correspondence* p. 82; letter from Vienna, May 28, 1831.

national independence. Chopin's failure to pursue a career in opera might therefore have been seen also as a denial of his duty to the nation. Seen in this light, Chopin's mazurkas and polonaises, and the explicit and implicit Polish characteristics of his musical style acquire a new significance. The nature of Chopin's adaptation of Polish folk elements has been examined elsewhere;[99] of interest here is the way in which elements of the folk melodies are absorbed into Chopin's compositional and pianistic styles.

Nicholas Chopin wrote to his son in November, 1831:

> ... you know ... that the mechanics of piano-playing occupied little of your time, and that your mind was busier than your fingers. If others have spent whole days working at the keyboard you rarely spent an hour playing other men's music ... [100]

This letter from his father confirms that Chopin did not spend hours at the piano practising scales and exercises and standard repertoire as other pianists did. Even in his youth, his time spent at the piano was devoted primarily to his own composition, and of all his works, an explicit folk influence is particularly prominent in these early ones.[101] Thus it could be postulated that, during his formative years as a pianist-composer, Chopin's fingers

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[99] The only detailed studies in English are Jim Samson's 'The Spirit of Poland', in *The Music of Chopin*, pp.100-119, and Adrian Thomas's 'Beyond the Dance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, pp.145-59. Abraham makes reference to Polish folk elements in *Chopin's Musical Style* , for instance, pp. 8-9, 13, 22-27, 60-62, 69-70, etc; see also K. Hlawiczka, 'Ein Beitrag zur Verwandschaft zwischen der Melodik Chopins und der Polnischen Volksmusik' (*Chopin Congress* ed. Lissa, pp. 176-184); Zofia Helman, 'Chopin's Harmonic Devices in 20th-Century Theoretical Thought' (*Studies in Chopin*, pp. 49-61); Zofia Chechlinska, 'Studies of the Chopin Melodic Design' (*Studies in Chopin*, pp. 62-76). Helman and Chechlinska list several additional studies in Polish.

[100] *Correspondence*, p. 94; letter from Nicholas Chopin, Warsaw, November 27, 1831.

[101] The list of compositions written before 1830 is dominated by Mazurkas (at least nine - several are lost), Polonaises (again, at least nine); in addition there is the *Rondo à la Mazur*, the *Fantasia on Polish Airs*, and the *Krakowiak Rondo*.

absorbed the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic inflections of his own translation of Polish folk music, rather than the standard keyboard patterns to be found in the scales, exercises and repertoire so assiduously studied by other young pianists. If this is the case, then the folk tradition is of great significance to the formation of Chopin's style as pianist and composer.

The proper training of a pianist, then as now, was considered to involve many hours of scales of various sorts, and exercises which were based upon these scale patterns. The training of Liszt was typical in this respect: his study with Czerny, at least for the first few months, '... concentrated on scales in all the keys ... on correct fingering...'[102] In the letter to Pierre Wolff quoted earlier, Liszt wrote: 'I practise four to five hours of exercises (thirds, sixths, octaves, tremolos, repetition of notes, cadenzas, etc.)',[103] and the first two volumes of his own 'Technical Studies' (1868-1871) consist entirely of exercises based upon the major/minor system.[104] The countless hours spent by most pianist-composers of the time on the reiteration of these scales and the keyboard patterns derived from them must have had a profound influence on their fingers and on their minds: once inculcated in such a way, it would be difficult for the fingers or the mind to conceive of other patterns.

It seems that Chopin was never subjected to this indoctrination; the essential patterns in his music are derived from some other source, and the most likely one is the folk music with which he was so preoccupied during his formative years. Chopin's fingers explored new patterns on the

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[102] Alan Walker, *Liszt: the virtuoso years,* p. 72. Walker is quoting from Czerny's *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, written in 1842, edited and annotated by Walter Kolneder, Strassburg, 1968.

[103] Ibid. pp. 173-4.

[104] Liszt's 'Technical Studies' were published for the first time in full in 1983 by Editio Musica, Budapest, ed. Imre Mezö. The first two large volumes consist of technical exercises in all the major and minor keys; the third volume contains twelve previously unpublished Études.

keyboard that were not rooted in conventional tonality, but were derived in part from the layout of the keyboard itself,[105] and from the melodic characteristics of Polish folk music. In his 'Sketch for a Method' Chopin gives as the basic five-finger position not the usual C - D - E - F - G, but E - F-sharp - G-sharp - A-*sharp* - B: in other words, the Lydian mode! As Eigeldinger puts it:

> Chopin [was the] pioneer of a revolutionary teaching concept, one radically dissociating piano apprenticeship from the basic principle of the theoretical *solfège* system. Giving precedence to physiological considerations (the hand) and physical ones (the keyboard), Chopin is in effect the first to emancipate himself from 'tyrant C', ruler of non-pianistic tonality.[106]

The mazurkas are the obvious place to look for characteristics of the Polish folk music tradition in Chopin's music. Discussion here will focus upon aspects of modality only, as it relates most closely to the question of fundamental keyboard patterns; other aspects of the mazurkas, particularly rhythm, were of at least equal importance to the formation of the mature Chopin style. Immediately apparent in the thirteen pre-1831 mazurkas[107] is their chromaticism, a slight preference for the minor mode (seven of thirteen) and a preference for the augmented second. While these characteristics might be expected in the minor mode, there is also a high incidence of chromatic inflection in those mazurkas in a major key, as the following examples show.

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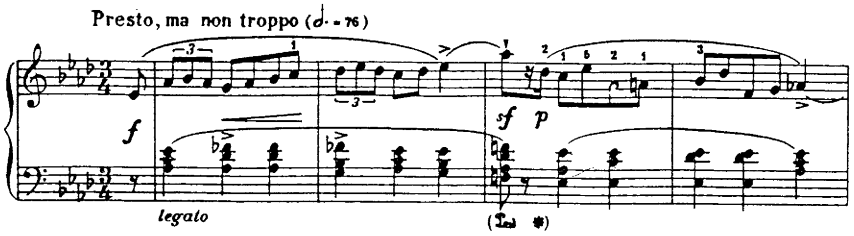
[105] This matter is discussed in detail in Part 3 below, in the section on Chopin's 'Method'.

[106] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher* p. 100n.30.

[107] The thirteen Mazurkas written before 1831 (the year of Chopin's arrival in Paris) are: op. 6 nos. 1-4; op. 7 nos. 2 and 4; op. 17 no. 4; op. 68 nos. 1-3; Kobylanska Catalogue IIa/2 (G major, no. 53 in the Polish edition), IIa/3 (B-flat major, no. 52 in the Polish edition) and IVa/7 (D major, no. 54 in the Polish edition).

Example 14

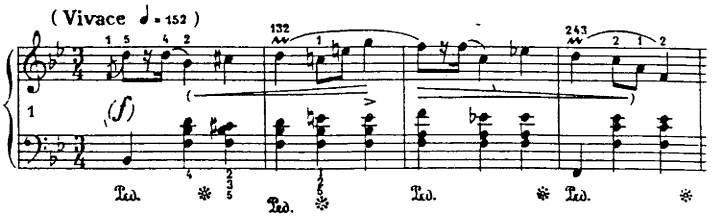
Chopin, Mazurkas: *a.* op. 7 no. 4, b. 1-4



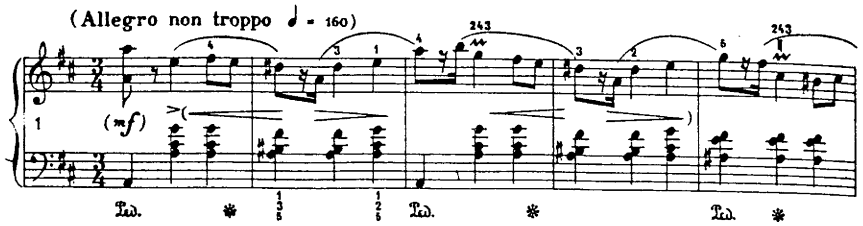
b. op. 68 no. 3, b. 1-4



c. KK IIa/3, b. 1-4



d. KK IVa/7, b. 1-5



The chromaticism is already apparent in the opening bars of Example 14*a* to *d*. The flattened 6th appears in the alto in bar one of *a*; the raised 4th in the tenor voice in bar 2 of *b*, and the raised 2nd and 4th in both remaining examples (in Example 14*d* the altered notes are based on the dominant rather than the tonic). The B-natural in bar 2 of 14*b*, and the E-natural in bar 2 of KK IIa/3[108] might be regarded simply as enhanced leading notes to the dominant (C and F respectively); however they are not supported harmonically (presumably by the chord of II), and the harmonic goal of the dominant is in each case only temporary. These raised 4ths may be fleeting, and may have other implications, but their introduction at the very beginning of these mazurkas certainly introduces an element of ambiguity.

Comparison with Chopin's total output of Mazurkas shows that these characteristics are sustained and even enhanced in the later works: of a total of fifty-eight, thirty are in the minor mode. Furthermore, a distinct preference for 'black' keys with three or more sharps or flats is apparent: twelve have three or more sharps, fifteen have three or more flats.[109] Frequently the chromaticism in these mazurkas is the result of an implied modal basis rather than of simple chromatic decoration.

In each of the following excerpts (Example 15) a degree of ambiguity is created by means of differing implications of tonic between melody and accompaniment. After a strong F major beginning in KKIVb/1 (Example 15*a*), the melody acquires a Lydian feel with the repeated B-naturals; the accompaniment, however, asserts F major at the cadence point (b. 16-17). In Example 15*b*, the tonic of B-flat minor is clearly implied by the accompaniment; however the dominant pedal of F draws the listener's attention to the G-flat of the melody: we catch a glimpse of the

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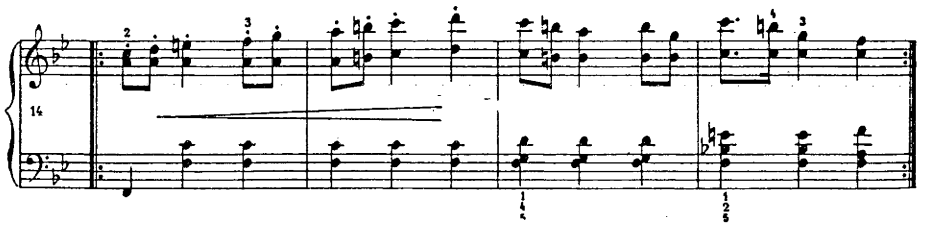
[108] 'KK' refers to the Kobylanska Catalogue of Chopin's works; this system is used where there is no opus number. (K. Kobylanska, *Rekopisy utworów Chopina: Katalog*).

[109] This characteristic is less apparent in the early Mazurkas as a whole, though it is very clear in the four of opus 6 (F-sharp, C-sharp, C-sharp and E-flat minors).

Phrygian mode, with its flattened supertonic, before returning some bars later to an unambiguous B-flat major. Similarly, in example 15*c*, confirmation of the local tonic of B-flat major is followed by acute ambiguity: considered in isolation, the melody perhaps implies alternating dominant (F) and tonic (B-flat) harmony. The addition of a drone bass on G-flat and its dominant of D-flat adds another dimension altogether. It is as if Chopin was attempting to retain at least some of the modal aspects of Polish folk music, but without compromising the diatonic framework of his language.

Example 15

Chopin, Mazurkas: *a.* KK IVb/1 (no. 56 in the Polish ed.), b. 14-17



b. op. 56 no. 3, b. 109-113



c. op. 7 no. 1, b. 43-53



It is comparatively difficult to find major or minor scales and scale patterns in these mazurkas, and despite the high level of chromaticism, even straight chromatic scales rarely extend beyond a 5th. Where apparent major/minor patterns exist, the focus tends to be the dominant rather than the tonic, and this focus is enhanced by the accentuation and by chromatic alteration - often of the 4th degree. The opening of op. 7 no. 1 (Example 16) appears straightforward enough, and is underpinned by simple I-IV-V harmonies; but it is difficult to hear the first bar as an anacrusis - indeed it is later given its own anacrusis (bar 12). The dotted rhythm, the rising bass (F *up* to B-flat) and the dynamic level point to 'F' as the focal point. Certainly the goal of the initial ascent is B-flat, but the dynamic level has dropped to *piano*, and the accent in that bar is on the last beat (D). The melodic contour falls away to its lowest point - the dissonant E-natural in bar 6; the process is repeated, and the first hint that B-flat is our ultimate destination is given fleetingly only in bar 12, and then more conclusively at the end of the section (bar 24).

Example 16

Chopin, Mazurka, op. 7 no. 1, b. 1-12



While it might be expected that the mazurkas should show strong elements of modality, this tendency is apparent also in other works. Eigeldinger has noted Chopin's overall avoidance of scale patterns, even in the Études, and cites the end of the *Barcarolle* op. 60 as a rare exception.[110] Close examination of this ending reveals procedures similar to those employed in the mazurkas: the positioning of this F-sharp major scale, with its strong sense of B as the starting and finishing point, is somewhat unusual. The harmonic implications beneath it are plagal (alternation of tonic and subdominant chords), and indeed, the dominant note is twice in this example avoided altogether (indicated with an asterisk). The implication of these factors - its unusual starting position and the avoidance of an important reference point - for the pianist is that the scale does not *feel* like F-sharp major, although the arrangement of black and white keys is certainly comfortable.

Example 17



A comparison of Chopin's use of scale patterns at the end of the *Barcarolle* with similar textures in the music of John Field, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt demonstrates the differentness of Chopin's language. The ending of Field's Nocturne in G major (1835) shows the conventional use of scale patterns reflecting dominant-tonic alternation above a tonic pedal. The initial D in the treble is established with a turn figure, and the subsequent figuration closely follows the simple harmonic movement of the bass (Example 18*a*). The harmonic framework is similarly

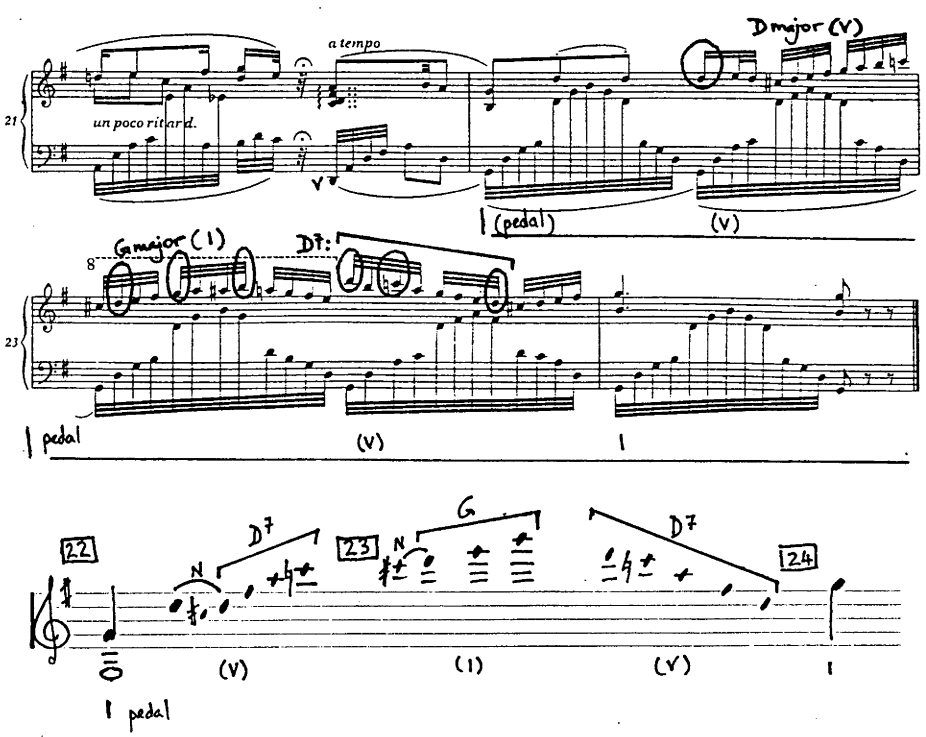
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110 Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 18n36: 'From all the evidence, Chopin avoids writing in scales. Among the rare works featuring scales are the end of the Impromptu op. 36 and the closing bars of the *Barcarolle* op. 60 ... the second theme of the finale of the Sonata op. 58, and ... the end of the fourth Scherzo op. 54.'

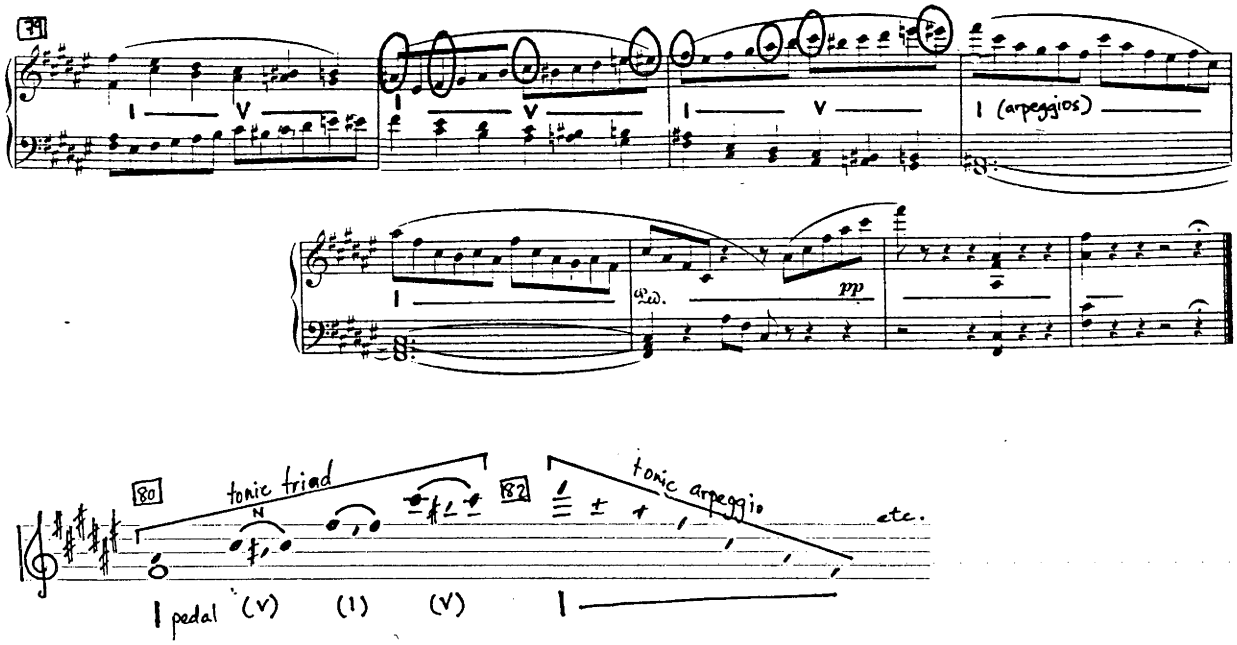
apparent in Mendelssohn's figuration (Example 18*b*): essentially a tonic pedal, the scale runs from F-sharp below middle C to the same note two and a half octaves above, and the only changes in direction are neighbour-note decorations which emphasise the tonic and dominant notes. Schumann's harmonic structure in Example 18*c* is more complex: again, the texture is underpinned by a pedal (on the dominant, B-flat); above this the middle register repeats the pre-dominant submediant chord with a chromatic appoggiatura. This resolves to the chord of the supertonic (bar 41); to the dominant in bar 42, and then to the tonic. The RH figuration strongly reflects its harmonic basis: essentially an F minor scale, it extends from C to C in bars 38 to 40, thus enforcing the submediant harmony; the neighbour note decoration in bars 39 and 40 further emphasise the note C. The line is then extended up to F for the supertonic harmony of bar 41, which is expressed horizontally with the C enhanced by D-flat (as it was in the middle register in bars 39-40). In the following bar, the pattern ends on the leading note D.

Example 18

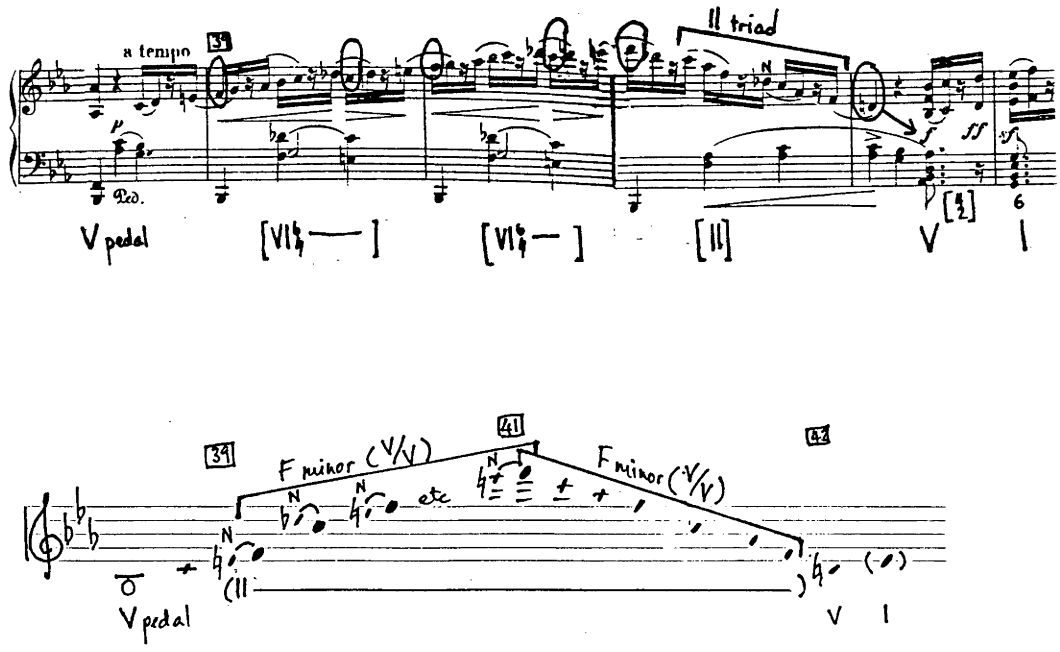
a. John Field, Nocturne in G major, b. 22-24



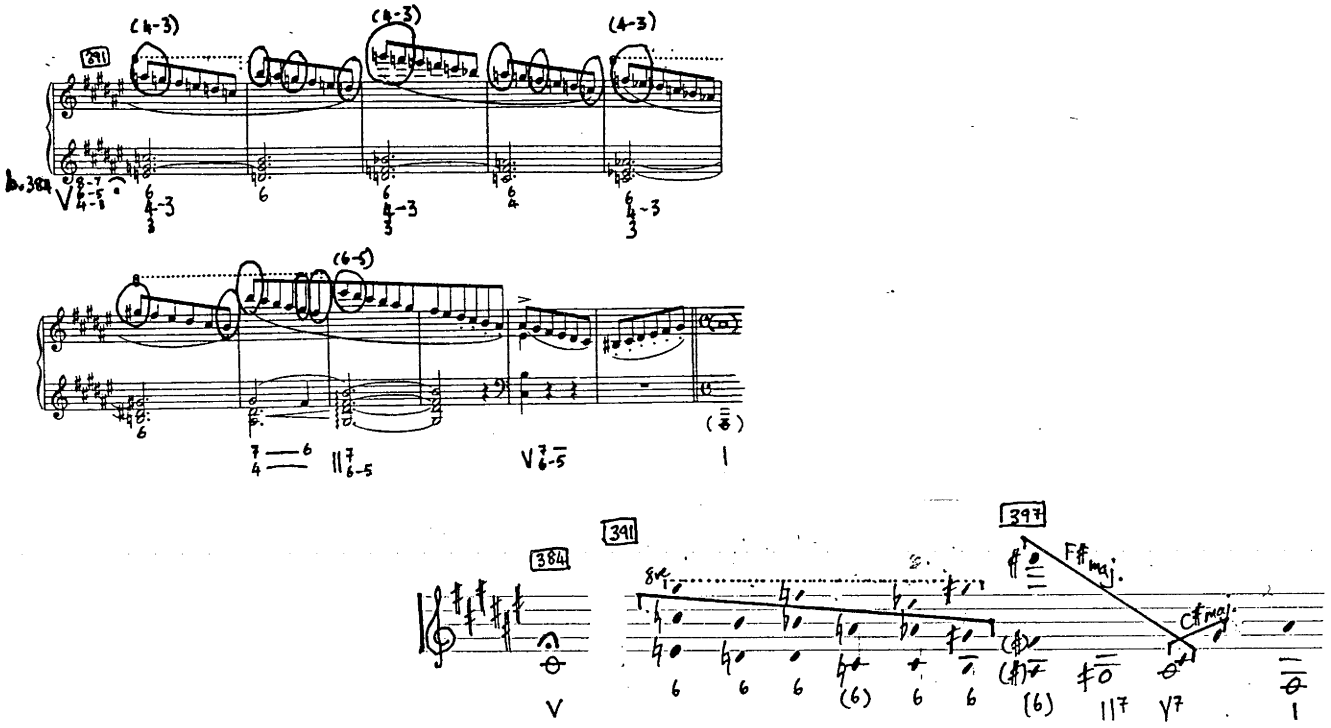
b. Mendelssohn, *Songs Without Words* book I, op. 19, no. 5, b. 79-86



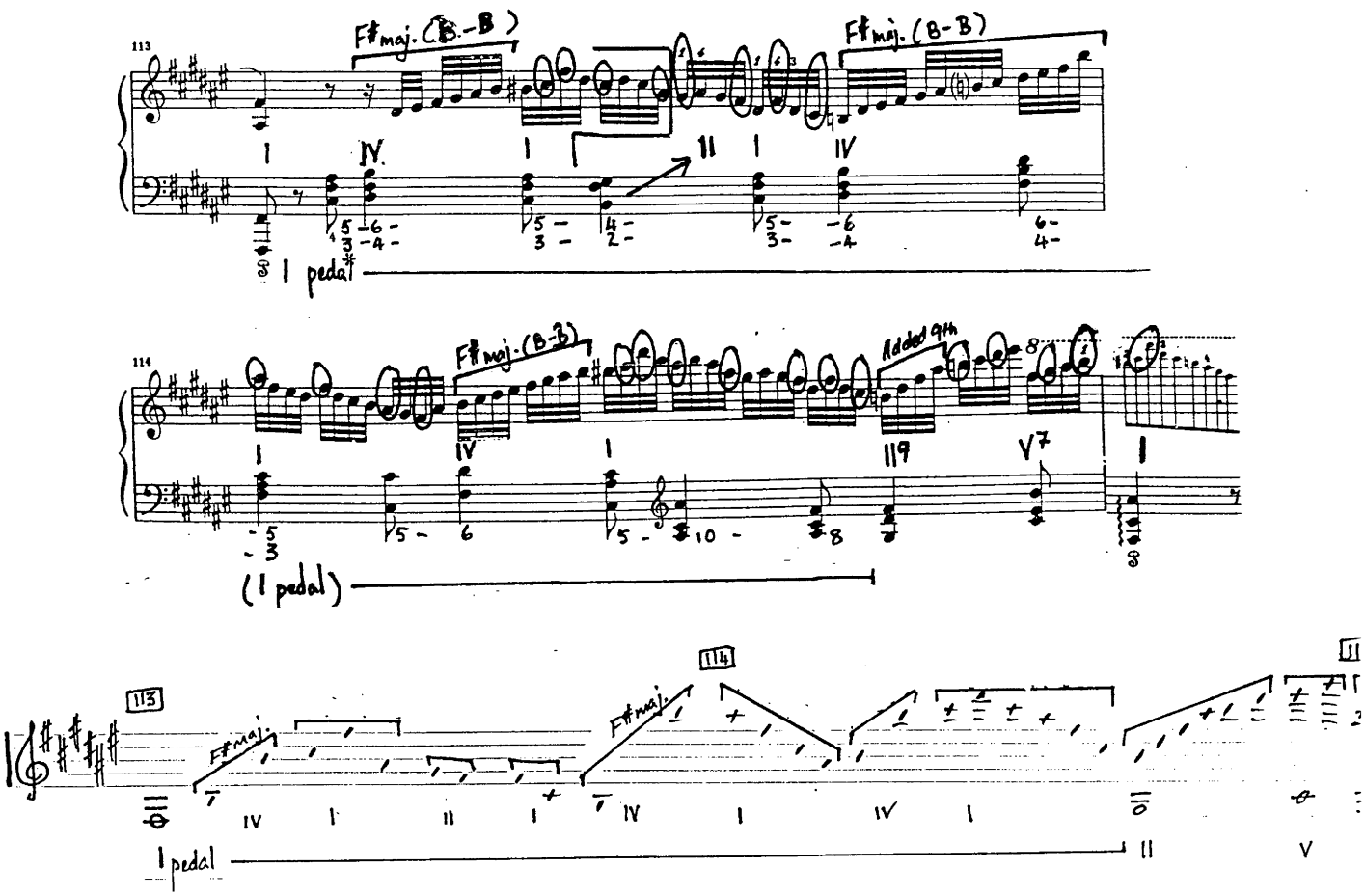
c. Schumann, Sonata no. 1 in F-sharp minor, op. 11, Finale b. 38-43.



d. Liszt, Sonata in B minor, b. 391-402



e. Chopin, *Barcarolle* op. 60, b. 113-end



The extraordinary writing of Liszt in Example 18*d* above shows a different interpretation of this basic texture. In this case, the driving force is not functional harmony, but a chromatic slide in the bass. The broad harmonic context is an extended cadence that begins with a 6/4 chord (bar 380) that is followed by the dominant (C-sharp in bar 388, not shown); example *d* shows the prolongation of this dominant by a series of chromatically falling triads in first inversion to the chord on the supertonic (bar 398), then a restatement of the dominant (bar 400) followed by the tonic(bar 402). The scale passages in the RH echo the falling line in the bass; they are not chromatic, but express the outline of the chromatic progression (Example 18*d*).

The voice-leading components of the above examples (18*a* to *d*) are relatively easy to identify and to express in the form of a reduction, and the strongly directional nature of both melodic figuration and harmony is readily apparent (see analytical graphs 18*a* to *d*). A similar reduction of the Chopin example (18*e*) yields a series of patterns in the RH which in their undulations have no strong directional sense. Although prominent notes of the patterns mostly, but not always, present notes of the underlying chords, the RH scale seems not to be driven by the harmony, but has its own motivation.

Chopin's concern for continuity of voice-leading has already been shown in another section; the extreme discontinuity of this graph suggests that it is a misreading of the score, and that the principle of compound melody is at work here.[111] The example of the arpeggiated accompaniments of some of the Nocturnes (analysed in the section above on Counterpoint) might provide a more plausible analytical model. It seems possible that, what is apparently an accompaniment to the melodic LH might be in fact a highly elaborate polyphonic overlay, consisting of several melodic strands. Chopin's scale passages are not shaped solely with regard to

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[111] The uncharacteristic lack of continuity of voices at the end of bar 114 (the F-sharp in the alto register should resolve to E-sharp, which of course it does aurally, but where does the following B in the alto register come from? It surely must be a continuation of the B in the RH that coincides with the F-sharp of the previous crotchet.

the bass, but form a melodic structure that is loosely related to the bass, but not dependent on it. Thus Chopin can be freer than other composers in the structure of these scales, and even at the end of this large-scale work can avoid the tonic-dominant alternation that so characterises the endings of the works of his contemporaries.

No other pianist-composer of the time stepped outside the major/minor system as frequently or as consistently as Chopin did, yet paradoxically his works are remarkable for the directional power of their harmonic movement, and many have been presented by Schenkerian analysts as models of the working through of tensions within the tonal system.[112] While Liszt was capable of adopting a Hungarian style from time to time for the Rhapsodies and similar works, the modal characteristics of Hungarian music by no means permeate his work in general; alongside these 'Hungarian' works must be placed the very much larger body of work that adopts a more conventional - albeit highly chromatic - tonality. Liszt's works abound with chromatic scales, and with arpeggio patterns derived from the diminished chord on which so much of his harmony is based.

The hours that Liszt and other pianists spent in practising scale and arpeggio patterns and repertoire based substantially on these, must have influenced the formulation of their compositional style. Chopin had no such continuous and repeated exposure to these formulae. His compositional style is derived rather from the operatic vocal style to which he was so much exposed, and from the distinctive characteristics of the folk music that was so much a part of his youth. His music is formulated with constant regard for the aesthetics and theory of the eighteenth-century musical tradition.

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[112] For a discussion of the directional force of Chopin's music, see John Rink's article 'Tonal architecture in the early music', *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, pp. 78-97. According to Laskowski's index, Schenker himself analysed sixty-two of Chopin's works (*Heinrich Schenker: an annotated index to his analyses of musical works*. NY: Pendragon Press, 1978).

PART THREE

CHOPIN AND THE KEYBOARD TRADITION

The elements that shaped Chopin's compositional style are apparent also in his style of playing and his attitude to performance. Here the question of stylistic precedent is particularly significant, for his formal training as a pianist was minimal and by no means conventional. The emphasis in his education on eighteenth-century values influenced his attitude to the piano and to performance, and the formulation of his distinctive style as a teacher. His training in opera led him to value the 'singing' capabilities of the piano, and to place immense importance on tone quality. Perhaps most importantly of all, his fingers were trained not in the conventional patterns, but rather in the folk-influenced designs of his own improvisations: a factor that was to have a profound influence on the development of Chopin's pianistic style.

1. Chopin's 'classical' style

Chopin did not whole-heartedly embrace the new virtuoso style, but neither did he completely reinvent piano technique. While some aspects of his pianistic style appear to have no obvious precedent, others are clearly derived from existing keyboard traditions. In fact, far from being at the *avant-garde*, in several respects Chopin's views harked back to an earlier era of keyboard music. While others experimented with the 'orchestral' possibilities of the piano, Chopin resisted the trend, and clung to the eighteenth-century view of keyboard music: that it was essentially an intimate chamber repertoire; that the essential model was the human voice; that its own distinct style was derived from the mechanical characteristics of the instrument itself, and that the possibilities of variation within this essential style were by no means exhausted.

Reports of Chopin's playing often compare him with pianists of the previous generation, particularly those who largely opposed the 'brilliant' school and maintained the 'classical' ideal of keyboard playing. Most contemporary critics suggest that Hummel, Clementi, Cramer, Field and

Chopin were in some way set apart from other pianists by these 'classical' tendencies. Mendelssohn summarised the situation in this description of Chopin's playing, written in 1835:

> There is something so thoroughly original and at the same time so very masterly in his piano playing that he may be called a really perfect virtuoso. I was glad to be once again with a thorough musician, not one of those half virtuosos and half classics who would like to combine in music the honours of virtue and the pleasures of vice, but one who has his own perfect and clearly defined style.[113]

This 'classical' school was considered to be derived from Clementi, and indirectly from Mozart. Salaman recalls Hummel's playing:

> Hummel was a pupil of Mozart, and also of Clementi. With ease and tranquil concentrated power, with undeviating accuracy, richness of tone, and delicacy of touch, he executed passages in single and double notes and in octaves, of enormous difficulty. Above all his playing possessed the indefinable quality of charm.[114]

and of John Field he says:

> ...in the singing quality of his touch, the infinite grace and delicacy of his execution, his emotional expression, he was unrivalled in his day ... the extreme refinement of expression and the magnetic charm of Field's playing were recalled to me by the playing of Chopin, as I listened to the famous Pole sixteen years later.[115]

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[113] Arthur Hedley, *Chopin*, p. 51.

[114] Salaman, 'Pianists of the Past' (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1901, p. 313).

[115] Ibid. p. 311.

According to Marmontel, Chopin '... clearly belonged to the school of Clementi, whose excellent studies he always recommended and appreciated...'[116] and Chopin's pupil, Mikuli remembered

> ...his playing being characterized above all by its radiant freedom and ease. In this process, the tone which he could *draw* from the instrument was always immense; in this regard Field alone could be compared with him.[117]

The technical approach of this school emphasised legato, lack of unnecessary movement and gesture, a 'singing' tone, a natural, unforced playing position, suppleness and above all a rational and highly practical approach to the instrument. By the mid-1830's the virtuoso movement was at its height in Paris, and the 'classical' school of piano playing very much in the background.[118] In Paris from the mid-1830's on, Chopin was unique among the young pianist-composers in his 'classical tendencies', as this anonymous writer for *Le Pianiste* suggests:

> The catalogue of pianists undoubtedly offers a few exceptions: we cite particularly M. Chopin, who prefers thought to the tour-de-force, and whose compositions and playing style are distinguished by correctness of design which never becomes mean, narrow, or too predictable.[119]

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[116] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 274. Source: Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, Paris, Heugel, 1878.

[117] Ibid. p. 275. Source: Mikuli 'Preface' pp. 2-3.

[118] The situation was somewhat different in Germany, however, where musicians such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Friedrich Wieck and others were somewhat suspicious of the frivolous trend manifesting itself in Paris.

[119] Unsigned article in *Le Pianiste*, vol. 2 no. 15, June 5, 1835. Translated in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 291.

2. Chopin's attitude to technique: his Method and its application

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the popular virtuoso style of the time was the emphasis placed on 'technique'. Chopin's opposition to the notion of technique for its own sake is therefore fundamental to his unique style. His opinion that such an emphasis inhibited musical expression and created difficulties where none existed is put forward in his fragmentary 'Sketch for a Method':

> To those who are studying the art of playing the piano I suggest some practical and *simple* ideas which I know from experience to be really useful. ... People have tried out all kinds of methods ... methods that are tedious and useless and have nothing to do with the study of this instrument. It's like learning, for example, to walk on one's hands in order to go for a stroll. Eventually one is no longer able to walk properly on one's feet, and not very well on one's hands either. It doesn't teach us how to play the *music* itself - and the type of difficulty we are practising is not the difficulty encountered in good music, the music of the great masters. It's an abstract difficulty, a new genre of *acrobatics.*[120]

In the climate of Paris in the 1830's and 40's, Chopin must have felt somewhat alone in holding this attitude. He would have found more allies in Germany at the time; Robert Schumann, for instance, wrote of a set of studies by Edouard Wolff:

> ... difficulty is their only distinguishing feature; there is more music in many a Chopin mazurka than in all of these 24 studies. Young composers cannot grasp soon enough that music does not exist for the sake of the fingers, but the precise opposite; and no-one should dare to be a poor musician in order to become a fine virtuoso.[121]

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[120] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 23. A complete version of this document is presented for the first time in Appendix 1, pp. 190-197.

[121] *Neue Zeitschrift* 14 (1841), p. 175; quoted in Simon Finlow, 'The twenty-seven études and their antecedents', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, pp. 59-60.

Equally radical for the time was Chopin's scorn for the hours of daily practice that most teachers insisted on. At no stage in his life does he himself seem to have been committed to practising, and he refers in his letters to 'playing' rather than 'practising'. In a letter to Titus quoted earlier in Part One, Chopin spoke of the offer of a piano to practise on: 'I declined, for my room was too small and those few hours of practice would not have been much use, especially as I was due to play in two days' time.'[122] This, from an inexperienced nineteen-year-old, just before his début in Vienna, of all places! His close friend Ferdinand Hiller recalled a later time in Paris:

> He disliked being without company - something that seldom occurred. In the morning he liked to spend an hour by himself at his grand piano; but even when he practised - or how should I describe it? - when he stayed at home to play in the evenings, he needed to have at least one of his friends close at hand.[123]

This attitude was a prominent feature of his teaching as well, as several of his students recall. The accounts of Camille Dubois and Karol Mikuli are typical:

> He feared above all ... the *abrutissement* [stupefaction by overwork] of the pupils. One day he heard me to say that I practised six hours a day. He became quite angry, and forbade me to practise more than three hours. (Dubois)

> He never tired of inculcating that the appropriate exercises are not merely mechanical but claim the intelligence and entire will of the pupil, so that a twentyfold or fortyfold repetition (even nowadays the worshipped arcanum of so many schools) does no good at all; while one hardly dare mention the kind of practice advocated by Kalkbrenner, during which one may occupy oneself reading (!)(Mikuli)[124]

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[122] *Correspondence*, p. 32

[123] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 270. Source: Hiller, *Briefe an eine Ungenannte*, Köln, 1877. Hiller is referring to the years 1831-1836; he left Paris in 1836 and lost contact with his friend.

[124] Ibid. p. 27. Sources: Niecks; Mikuli, *Vorwort*. Both Dubois and Mikuli were among the few students of Chopin to take up a professional career. Eigeldinger points out in a footnote to the Mikuli quotation that '... in 1832

The idea of strictly limiting hours of piano practice and prohibiting the practise of 'strengthening exercises' must have found little sympathy with other piano teachers. Though his attitude changed in later life, even Liszt fully concurred with the prevailing attitude at this time, recommending Kalkbrenner's mechanical aid to his students. According to Lenz, Liszt himself practised on a specially constructed keyboard that demanded extra strength from the player[125] - a far cry from Chopin's preference for the light touch of Pleyel instruments. According to one recollection of Liszt's teaching in 1832:

> Again he recommended simple and broken octaves in all keys; notes struck with all the fingers, holding down those not in use on the keys; fast and loud scales, in short the entire gymnastics of the hand for at least two hours daily.[126]

Chopin's very different approach to the piano is apparent in specific aspects of what he called the 'mechanism': hand position, fingering, pedalling, and so on. The ideas he set down in his 'Sketch for a Method' are very much in draft form, random in their organisation and fragmentary, yet there are two paragraphs which are highly significant for the clues they give regarding his ideas on hand position and fingering. In another earlier paragraph, Chopin praises

> ... the genius who presided over the construction of the keyboard, so well adapted to the shape of the hand. Is there anything more ingenious than the higher [i.e. black] keys - destined for the long fingers - so admirably serving as points of pivot.[127]

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even Liszt succumbed to this barbarity.' That Mikuli's reference to 'even nowadays ...' (1880) is still valid in some quarters says much for the enduring strength of the virtuoso tradition.

[125] Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, pp.136, 302-303. In his monograph, Lenz claims he could barely make the instrument sound.

[126] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 35. Source: Mme Auguste Boissier, *Liszt pédagogue. Léçons de piano données par Liszt à Madamoiselle Valérie Boissier à Paris en 1832.*

[127] Ibid. p. 192.

Accordingly, Chopin's view of the ideal hand position is demonstrated on E - F-sharp - G-sharp - A-sharp - B: a pattern of notes which allows the short fingers to rest on white keys, the longer ones on black keys. Already Chopin is significantly at variance with established wisdom. The 5-note pattern generally regarded as the basis for keyboard hand position runs up the major scale, from C to G - all white keys. While it is perhaps understandable that this pattern be used for beginners unsophisticated in matters of notation, it was widely used by Clementi, Czerny, Cramer and others in études for more advanced students;[128] furthermore, the études and exercises of many piano pedagogues are, even to the present day, firmly rooted in the tonal system implicit in this pattern. Chopin's concept of a fundamental keyboard pattern that includes a raised fourth challenges not only conventional keyboard wisdom, but perhaps also the conventional view of tonality, and this matter was discussed in an earlier chapter. Directly relevant here though, is Chopin's insistence on naturalness and ease in playing: in this, his only purely pedagogical work,[129] he was more concerned with the comfort and convenience of the hand than with conforming to the conventional scale pattern.

The practical application of Chopin's ideal hand position may be seen throughout his works. He has a distinct preference for keys which include several sharps or flats: for instance, sixteen of the twenty-one Nocturnes, and eighteen of the twenty-seven Études have key signatures of three or more sharps or flats. Even when he is writing in C, G or F major, frequent chromatic inflection ensures liberal use of the black keys.[130] Occasionally in his works we catch a glimpse of the significance of the physical layout of the keyboard to the construction of Chopin's works.

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[128] Cramer's *Eighty-four Studies* no. 1; Clementi's, *Gradus ad Parnassum* nos. 16 and 17 and Czerny's *The Art of Finger Dexterity* op. 740 no. 1 are among hundreds of études and exercises based upon this pattern.

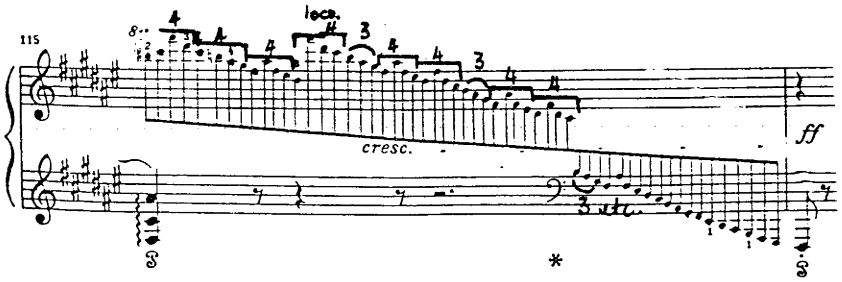
[129] That Chopin did not regard his études as pedagogical works is discussed in some detail elsewhere.

[130] If we reduce the matter to statistics, the C major Étude opus 10 no. 7 is a typical example: of the first sixteen bars, only two (b. 8 and 16) contain no chromatic alteration. Eigeldinger produces statistics ranging across Chopin's *oeuvre* on p. 100n.30 of *Chopin: pianist and teacher.*

The unmeasured cadenza at the end of the *Barcarolle* op. 60 offers an example: some of the figuration of this cadenza comes from the preceding bars (113-114), where it is grouped in fours. However the fifty-seven notes of this cadenza are not divisible by four, and it is clear that, connecting the patterns borrowed from previous bars, are groups of three:

Example19

Chopin, *Barcarolle* op. 60, bars 113-116



We might speculate that the groupings of three are directly related to the layout of black and white keys. At speed, Chopin's layout is fluid and relatively easy to play, because the thumb is placed on the white key B, and the 4-3-2 fingering pattern that follows lies comfortably on the black keys. Had Chopin continued instead the pattern set up in the third and fourth groups of four, the layout would not be so comfortable, or so fluid: the all black key layout and the necessity of using the thumb on A-sharp would hinder free and rapid movement.

Chopin's concept of fingering was similarly radical for its time. While others were (and still are) endeavouring to equalize the strength of the fingers, Chopin's preference once again inclined rather towards what was most easy and natural. He states in his Method:

> No-one will notice the inequality of sound in a very fast scale, as long as the notes are played in equal time - the goal isn't to learn to play everything with an equal sound. A well-formed technique, it seems to me, [is one] that can control and vary [*bien nuancer*] a beautiful sound quality. For a long time we have been acting against nature by training our fingers to be all equally powerful. As each finger is differently formed, it's better not to attempt to destroy the particular charm of each one's touch but on the contrary to develop it. ... As many sounds as there are fingers - everything is a matter of knowing good fingering. ...[131]

The principle of exploiting the innate characteristic of each finger is apparent in Chopin's own fingering indications in his works. This aspect of Chopin's technique has been thoroughly documented by Eigeldinger, and need not be reiterated here.[132] However as with his ideas on hand position, his fundamental principle is one of naturalness and ease, and in this matter his attitudes are closer to C.P.E. Bach or even Mozart than they are to pianists of his own time. For the virtuoso pianists competing with others of their kind to make a living out of the profession, there was nothing to be gained from propagating the doctrine that piano-playing was easy and natural. Indeed the public's fascination with the virtuoso depended to a large extent upon their perception that extreme difficulties were being faced and overcome before their very eyes, and if they believed that there was something supernatural about the process, then so much the better. Neither Paganini nor Liszt refuted rumours of diabolical influence, and during his career as performer, Paganini went to great lengths to maintain the myth that only he could play his works.

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131 Chopin, 'Sketch for a Method' in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher* p. 195. The square brackets are the translator's.

132 Ibid. Eigeldinger's most comprehensive discussion of Chopin's fingering appears in the Introduction (pp. 19-20) as a summary of his innovations; subsequent references are scattered throughout the Notes, though they are no less detailed: for instance, a comprehensive list of occurrences of particular types of fingering is found on pp. 116-117. Nevertheless, these references represent documentation rather than analysis: a task beyond the already formidable scope of *Chopin: pianist and teacher*. As far as this author is aware, a detailed analysis of this aspect of Chopin's technique has yet to be published.

Chopin's views, that good playing was largely a matter of an intelligent, rational approach that put musical values before virtuosity; that endless hours of practice did more harm than good; and that the appropriate forum for performance was still the salon rather than the concert hall, were certainly an anachronism in nineteenth-century Paris. In this respect, his attitudes are closer to those of the eighteenth century, and there are many echoes of C.P.E. Bach's treatise in the views expressed by Chopin on the matter of performance.

3. Chopin and the étude tradition of the early nineteenth-century.

Simon Finlow has demonstrated that, despite his very different approach to the genre, Chopin's études are nevertheless comparable with those of Clementi, Czerny, Cramer, Moscheles and others in their technical components, in the broad type of figuration, and to a lesser extent in the more detailed figuration within individual études.[133] The essential 'types' of piano étude are mostly present: that is, individual studies require fluency in a particular aspect of piano technique: double thirds, sixths or octaves, rapid scale or arpeggio passages, and so on. It is possible to find among the études of Czerny, Clementi and others some obvious equivalents to many of the Chopin études. The following comparison draws on the *oeuvre* of Carl Czerny, who was probably the most influential teacher of his generation, who certainly composed more in the genre than anybody else, and whose work conveniently offers a compendium of pre-Liszt piano technique. The following excerpts (Example 20) are drawn from Chopin's opp. 10 and 25, and Czerny's *The Art of Finger Dexterity* op. 740.

There are clear similarities here in approach to the genre. Even though Chopin might have in mind the musical possibilities, rather than the physical benefits to be derived, both composers in general confine themselves to one broad technical issue in individual studies. In Example 20*a*, the technical focus is upon arpeggio patterns and an extended position of the right hand; Example 20*b* extends the left hand in an accompaniment figure; Example 20*c* explores the possibilities of double thirds in the right hand, and the final example, in Czerny's words, 'the same movement in both hands'. Similar resemblances could be shown for studies in octaves, double 6ths, ornamentation, and so on.

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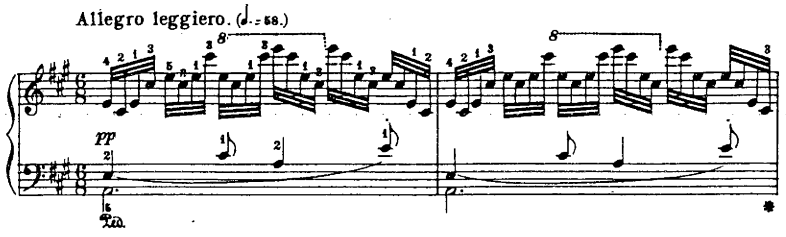
[133] Simon Finlow, 'The twenty-seven études and their antecedents'. Finlow draws on the work of a number of composers - Cramer, Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Field, Berger, Kessler, Moscheles, Szymanowska and others - to demonstrate precedents for the broad technical concerns addressed, for the types of figuration employed by Chopin, and for his textural, structural, and harmonic practice.

Example 20

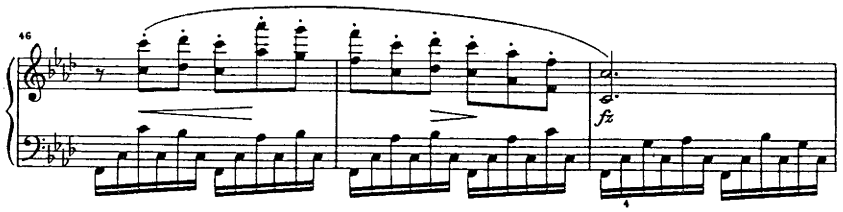
a. Chopin, op. 10 no. 1



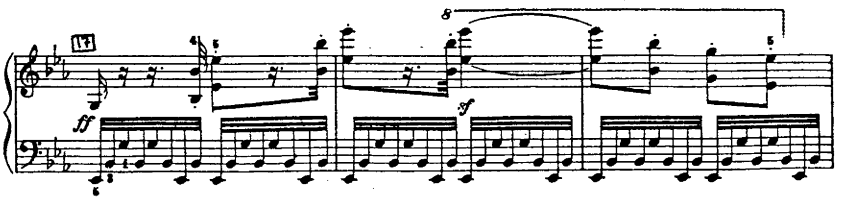
Czerny, op. 740 no. 36



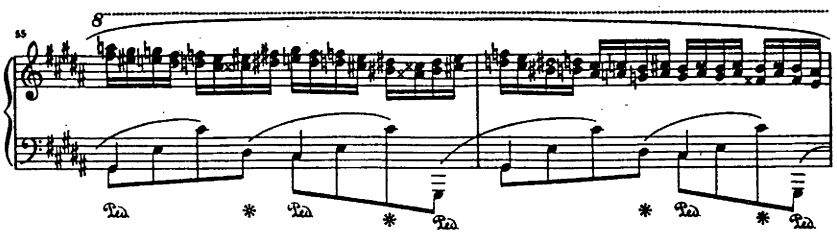
b. Chopin, op. 10 no. 9, b. 46-48



Czerny, op. 740 no. 15, b. 17-20



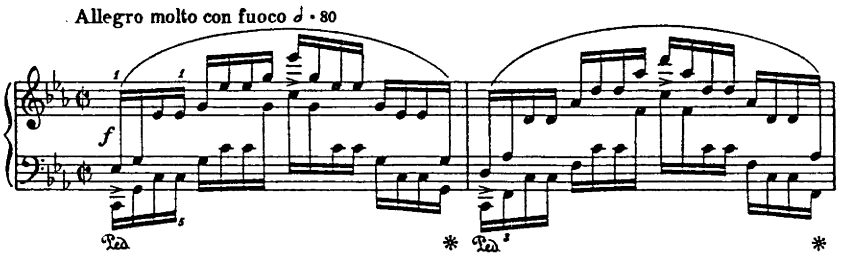
c. Chopin, op. 25 no. 6, b. 55-56



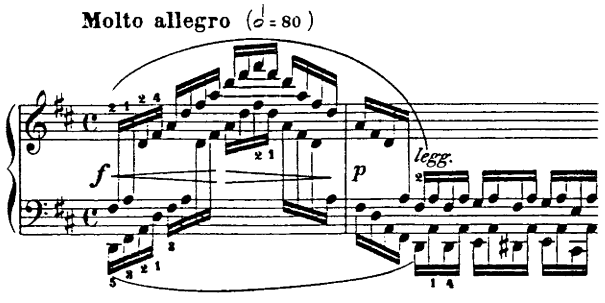
Czerny, op. 740 no. 10, b. 10-12



d. Chopin, op. 25 no. 12



Czerny, op.740 no. 21



On a more detailed level, there are also broad similarities in the types of figurations employed: arpeggios and broken chords, and scale passages in single and double notes are after all essential to all keyboard music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Given the fact that his writing is so strongly founded on the nature of the instrument itself, it is perhaps not surprising that, in their broad technical coverage, the Chopin études do not differ essentially from earlier pedagogical works for piano - even from the keyboard work of J.S. Bach, if we exclude chord technique, double octaves, and 3rds and 6ths.

The difference between the figuration in the études of Chopin and those of his predecessors lies not so much in the patterns themselves, but rather in their setting - in the textures created by their accompaniment. Again, the pedagogical works of Czerny offer a useful comparison, though not because of any perceived influence of Czerny on Chopin: it is precisely the difference in attitude and approach between the two men that demonstrates the ubiquity of these pianistic figurations. For instance, the patterns found in the excerpts of 20*a* (RH) are similar to the extent that they are both wide-ranging arpeggio patterns that span a 10th, then reverse direction for the interval of a 3rd, and then resume the pattern; Chopin uses all notes of the triad, whereas Czerny omits the 5th. The upper limits of the patterns are identical; Chopin's, however, is extended down an octave, thus each unit of the RH pattern covers four octaves and a 3rd. Czerny covers one octave less. The harmonic rhythm of the Chopin is somewhat slower, as he takes two bars to complete each unit, where Czerny takes one bar. Both composers subsequently change the descending pattern, giving a change of harmony with every bar in Chopin's étude, and every half-bar in Czerny's.

The two extracts in Example 20*b* (LH) are also similar in their surface pattern, the difference here being Chopin's addition of a melodic tenor that moves in (mostly) contrary motion to the RH melody. Example 20*c* shows similarity in the composers' use of scale patterns in double thirds, though of course the Chopin excerpt is much more chromatic, and his accompaniment is both more imaginative and more simple in its concept. The resemblance between the two patterns

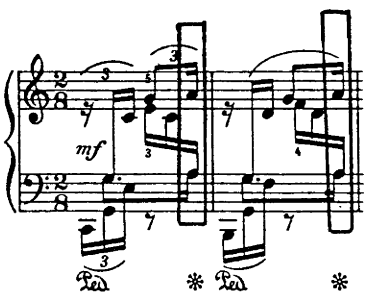
in Example 20*d* is particularly striking. As before, the musical concept of Chopin is somewhat simpler and less fussy in its detail than that of Czerny: the rate of pattern change is again slower, dynamic change is more broadly conceived, and the harmony is more complex. Nevertheless, despite these crucial differences, all of these examples demonstrate striking similarities in the types of figuration used. They are found very frequently in other keyboard works of all types by Czerny, Chopin, and indeed every other keyboard composer of their time.

While it is possible to establish a precedent for the essential components of Chopin's keyboard textures in the études, his use of these standard figurations tends to be more complex in other works. This is particularly true of the *Préludes* op. 28, which, as suggested earlier, are more explicitly textural studies along the lines of Bach's model in the *Well-tempered Clavier*. The complicating factor is very often the introduction of a melodic or motivic element into the pattern itself, that in turn has harmonic implications. The dissonant notes bracketed in Example 21 below could be seen as demonstrating part of this process. In each case, these notes form a neighbour note motive that is a significant melodic element in each piece; in the case of Example 21*d*, this motive is replicated in the inner parts as well (G-sharp and B bracketed in the first group of demi-semiquavers).

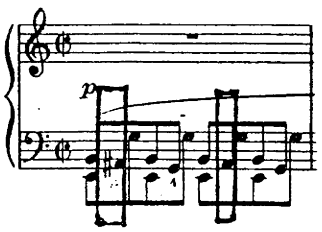
Example 21

Chopin, Preludes op. 28

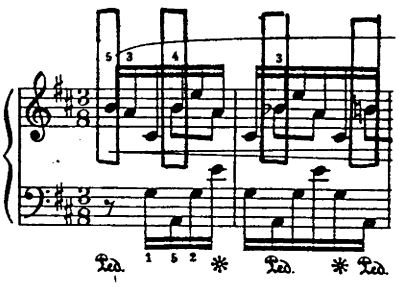
a. no. 1



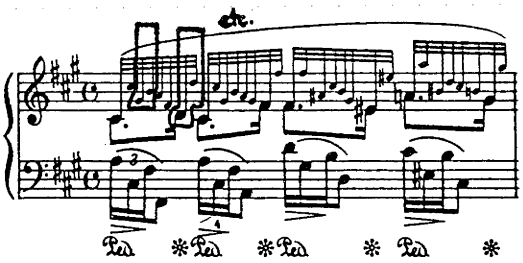
b. no. 2



c. no. 5



d. no. 8



e. no. 23.



An additional complication to these patterns occasionally occurs in the manner they are laid out, and in the technique required or intended to play them It would be unwise to assume that when Chopin employs patterns in common use at the time, his fingering of them would be much the same as others. The excerpts cited in Example 20 demonstrate Chopin's significant variation from normal practice of the time in suggested fingerings. (Note that, in the Henle edition used, normal editorial practice is reversed: that is, Chopin's fingerings are given in roman type, the editor's in italics). For the arpeggio patterns in Examples 20*a* and *d*, Chopin shows a marked preference for an extended hand position rather than a passing under of the thumb; the same preference is shown in Example 20*b*, where Czerny uses the 5th and 3rd fingers for a perfect 5th

on white notes in the bass, Chopin prefers the 5th and 4th (though his pattern is more extended upwards than Czerny's).

Eigeldinger offers a lucid summary of Chopin's innovations in the fingering of these standard patterns;[134] however there is one noteworthy instance in the Études where a conventional fingering is simply not possible, and where a highly idiosyncratic fingering is built in to the pattern itself. This occurs in op. 10 no. 2, where the chromatic scale is continuous, is accompanied by two-note chords in the same hand, and is marked *sempre legato*. A conventional chromatic fingering is not possible here if *legato* is to be maintained. The pianist has no choice but to adopt Chopin's suggested fingering, or some variant of it, which requires the passing of the 3rd finger *over* the 4th, and the 3rd and 4th fingers over the 5th. This étude was copiously fingered in this manner by Chopin himself in the first French edition; this extent of fingering indication is quite exceptional, even for Chopin, suggesting that he was aware of deviating from the normal practice of the day. It seems likely that the frequency with which Chopin indicated fingering was - like his copious pedal markings - intended to counteract the far less discriminating usage that was common practice. Again note that in this Henle edition, Chopin's fingerings are given in roman type, and those of the editor in italics.

Example 22

Chopin, Étude op. 10 no. 2, bars 1-2



134 Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, Introduction, pp. 18-21.

In this case, the layout of the pattern itself - the fact that the chromatic scale is divided into four-note groups, and that it is marked *legato* - defies any attempt to introduce a more conventional fingering.

However exceptional it may be for its time, there is plenty of precedent for this type of fingering in the work of earlier composers for keyboard. Couperin, C.P.E. Bach and others offer many examples: for instance, C.P.E. Bach offers the following fingering for the C major scale: (RH) 1-2-3-4-3-4-3-4, and later gives two exercises in 'treacherous keys' with one accidental, the first of which requires the passing of the third finger over the fourth. Couperin suggests a similar fingering for a passage in double thirds (example 23*a*):[135] While it would be anachronistic to attribute all such fingerings in earlier keyboard traditions to a desire for a pianistic style of legato, as early as 1716 Couperin documents a change in attitude towards the joining of tones (example 23*b*).[136] These examples bear a striking resemblance to Chopin's fingering: for instance, his habit of frequently changing fingers on the one key (documented later in example 31), and to his fingering of rising scale passages where not all fingers are available (see for instance the previous example).

Chopin's knowledge of J.S. Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* has been documented elsewhere; given Chopin's concern for legato lines, and his fascination for complex contrapuntal textures, it is likely that he was in the habit of employing this sort of fingering - the passing of one finger *over* another - in his playing of that work. The modern editor, Hans-Martin Theobald, suggests such a fingering for a passage in double sixths from Fugue no. 8 in book I; given the

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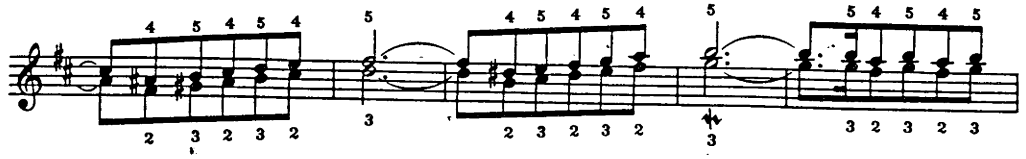
[135] F. Couperin, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, p.79. This example refers to *La Passacaille* from *Le deuxième livre de pièces de clavecin.*

[136] Ibid. p. 51.

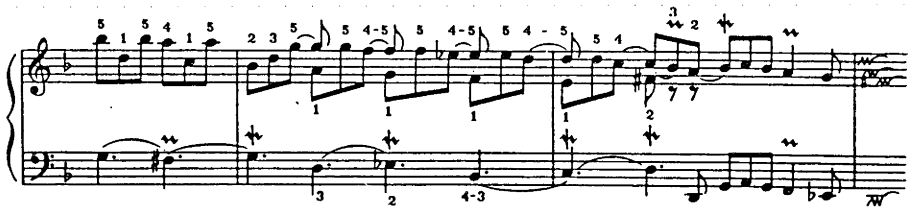
evidence from Couperin, C.P.E. Bach and others, it is likely that Bach himself employed this or a similar pattern (example 23*c*).[137]

Example 23

a. Couperin, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*



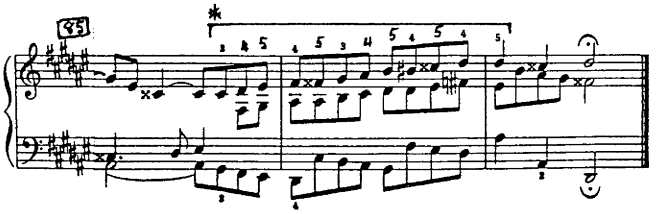
b. Couperin, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*



Remarqués quelle liaison Les changemens de doigts donnent au jeu! Mais, on me dira qu'il faut plus d'adrèsse que dans L'anciénne maniere. J'en conuiens.

Notice what binding (legato) the changing of fingers gives to playing! But I will be told that this requires more dexterity than the old style (of fingering). I admit it.

c. J.S. Bach, *The Well-tempered Clavier I*, Fugue no. 8, b. 85-86.



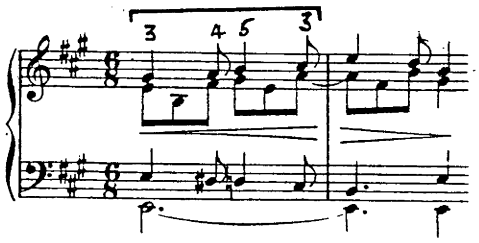
[137] Henle Urtext edition. The full implications of Theobald's fingering (i.e. for every note) have been provided by the author.

These examples are by no means isolated in the pre-classical keyboard repertoire. An isolated (but not unique) instance in Beethoven's opus 101 reminds us of that composer's fondness for the legato style, his acquaintance with C.P.E. Bach's treatise, with the *Well-tempered Clavier*, and his preoccupation with the polyphonic style in these late sonatas. In Example 24*a*, the fingering indicated by the author (or some variant of it) is essential to the legato melody; in Example 24*b* the fingering is Beethoven's.[138]

Example 24

Beethoven *Sonata* op. 101

a. 1st movement, b. 1-2



b. 3rd movement, b. 248.



Not surprisingly, Chopin takes up this fingering in other works, for instance in the opening of the *Ballade* op. 47:[139]

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[138] Beethoven's endorsement of the legato style of playing is well documented by Schindler, whose description of Beethoven's playing bears a striking resemblance to accounts of Chopin's playing: his physical restraint at the keyboard, his use of rhetorical devices, his aversion to the new virtuoso style, and so on. According to Schindler, Beethoven often complained that "Czerny never sustains his notes". (Schindler, *Beethoven as I knew him*, pp. 415-16)

[139] Eigeldinger cites the *Berceuse* op. 57, *Nocturne* op. 9 no. 2, *Prélude* op. 28 no. 15 'and elsewhere' as examples of this practice. (*Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 19).

Example 25

Chopin, *Ballade* op. 47, b. 1-2.[Stirling]



Notably absent from Chopin's études, are several techniques which occupy a prominent position in the pedagogical works of the older generation. Broken octaves occur only once in the études (op. 10 no. 4, bars 4 and 54), and rarely elsewhere in Chopin's music; they are the subject of numerous études in the pedagogical work of other composers (for instance, Czerny op. 740 nos.7, 27, 35; Clementi *Gradus* nos. 21, 76 and elsewhere). Related to this perhaps, is Chopin's avoidance of rapid repeated notes and tremolos; again, this technique is regarded by others as an important aspect of piano pedagogy (for instance, Czerny op. 740 nos. 7, 32 and 35; Clementi *Gradus* nos. 1, 20, 27 and 34). Studies involving the crossing over of the hands are common in the works of Clementi, Moscheles, Czerny, et al; this technique too is totally avoided by Chopin in the études, and used only sparingly elsewhere. It is significant that the techniques avoided by Chopin were essentially of a showy, virtuoso nature, and all of them were fundamental to the new 'transcendental' technique of the succeeding generation.

4. The legato technique

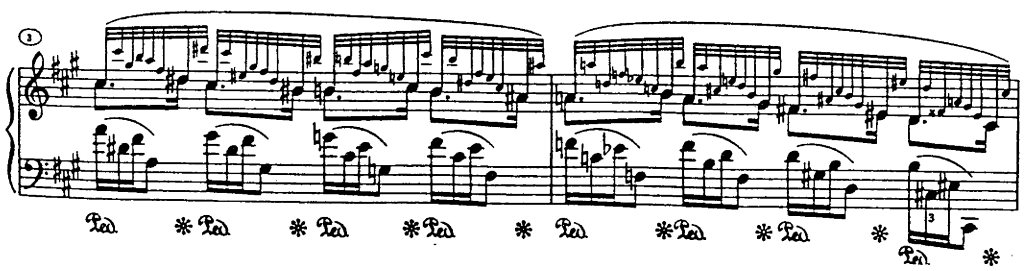
The two sources for Chopin's legato technique - the bel canto style in opera, and the eighteenth-century tradition of singing as the model for all music - are outlined in Part Two. In general, Chopin's melodic lines closely follow the vocal model: they tend to be continuous and legato, whether they are of a solo nature, as in the RH melody of many of the Nocturnes, or as one part of a contrapuntal texture. Chopin's concern for legato, however, is apparent even where the texture is quite complex, and derived from specifically keyboard figurations rather than the vocal tradition. *Moto perpetuo* patterns abound in the Études and Preludes, and almost all are contained within the range of an octave. Example 26 demonstrates the way in which these textures are designed to lie under the hand; observe how Chopin's fingering (1-5, given in the Stirling edition) in the LH of bars 34 and 35 of Example 26*a* ensures legato.

Example 26

a. Chopin, Nocturne op. 15 no. 2, b. 34-36



b. Prelude op. 28 no. 8, b. 3-4



Occasionally the outwards extension of these patterns might be facilitated by the use of a 'pivot' finger, as in op. 28 no. 5, where the 3rd finger has the capacity to act as a pivot, and makes possible the legato connection of the inner voice B - A - B-flat - A (Example 27 below). The editorial fingering given in this Henle edition (4th finger on the second B in the RH) does not so easily permit this legato.

Example 27

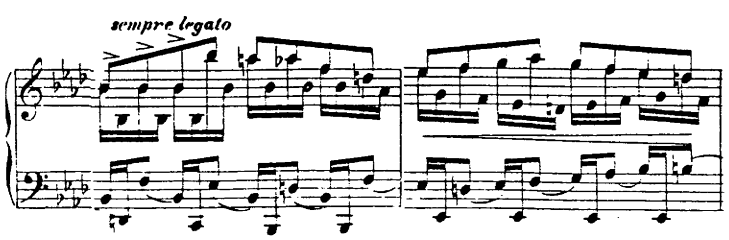
Chopin, Prelude op. 28 no. 5, b. 1-4



While it may be said that, because of their speed and their inherent nature, *moto perpetuo* patterns might be expected to lie comfortably under the hand, this is not necessarily true of the works of Chopin's contemporaries. In fact, *moto perpetuo* patterns are not so frequently found in, say, Schumann or Liszt. When they do occur, they are likely to be broken up into units smaller than a vocal phrase length, and to contain a greater variety of articulations than Chopin employs within the phrase. Where they do resemble Chopin in their phrase length, they are not always written to lie under the hand and thus allow a true legato. The following example must depend on the pedal to maintain the impression of legato, despite Schumann's explicit instruction, *sempre legato*; a pivot note might have been built in to the texture, perhaps by altering the order of notes within the pattern, but Schumann had different (and of course equally valid) priorities.

Example 28

Schumann, *Six Concert Studies* op. 10 no. 1, b. 9-10.



Chopin's concern for a true legato connection between notes is shown even where his figuration extends across a wide range. For instance, the accompaniment figures in the Nocturnes frequently span large intervals that are nevertheless connected internally, at times by the 3rd finger acting as a pivot (Example 29*a*)[140]; the figuration in many of the Études consists of motivic cells that lie entirely under the hand, and the connections between cells are designed so that legato connection is possible. There is no exception to this rule in the Études, and if exceptions exist at all elsewhere, they are certainly rare. The figuration in op. 25 no. 11 is typical of Chopin's practice (Example 29*b*). Even where the range is extended to its utmost (b. 81), the patterns are designed so there is the possibility of a legato connection between them. Liszt, on the other hand, often includes an additional voice in these RH textures, thus denying the possibility of finger legato even within the motivic cell (Example 29*c*).[141]

Example 29

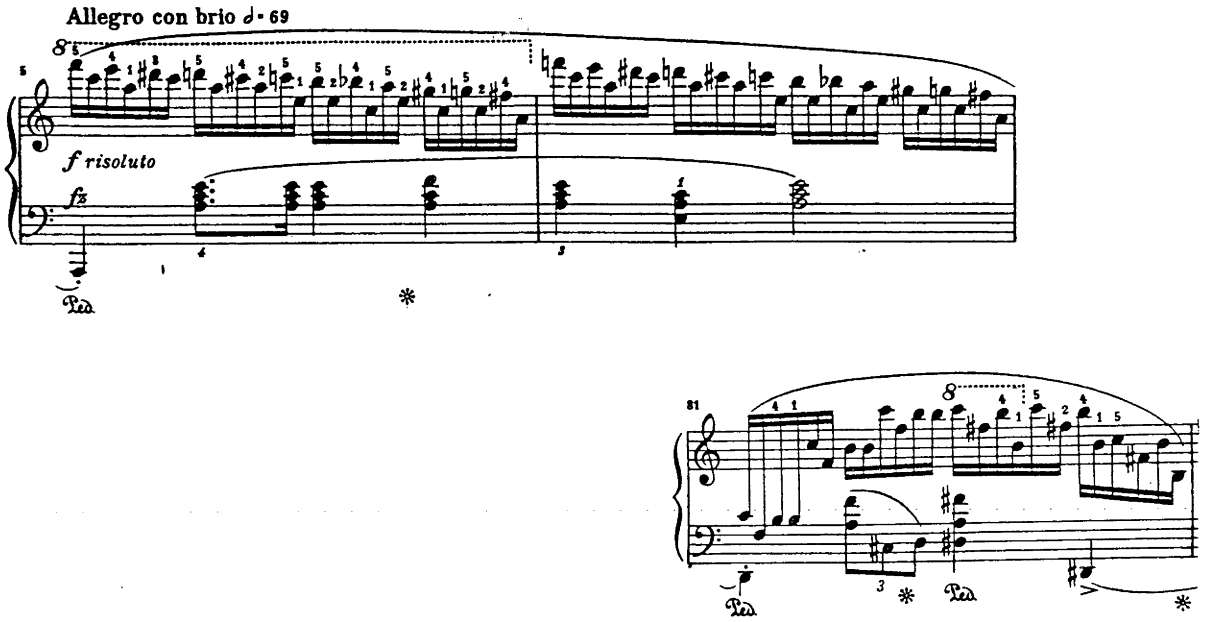
a. Chopin, Nocturne op. 9 no. 1, b. 71-73 (Stirling)



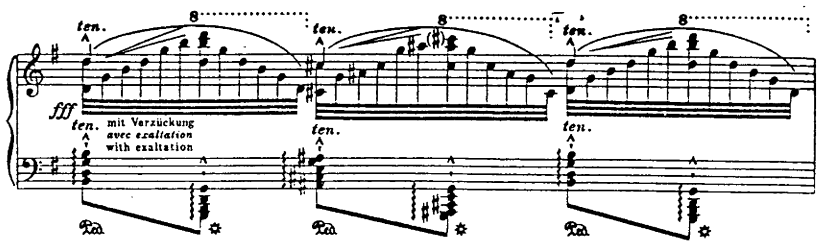
[140] It must be noted that Chopin is less pedantic about legato connections in the bass accompaniment of some of the Nocturnes; in some cases he states a low pedal note at the beginning of sections before beginning the pattern proper, and relies on the pedal to maintain the low note. See the following section for a more detailed discussion of Chopin's practice in this regard.

[141] Example *a* is drawn from the facsimile of the original French edition owned by Chopin's pupil, Jane Stirling. (*Frédéric Chopin: Œuvres pour piano*, ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger and Jean-Michel Nectoux). Many of the annotations on these facsimile scores are in Chopin's hand, and Stirling was careful to ensure that those added by herself stemmed directly from Chopin. This edition is therefore used where appropriate throughout this study, despite the poor quality of the reproduction.

b. Chopin, Étude op. 25 no. 11, b. 5-6 and b. 81 (Henle edition; fingerings in roman type are Chopin's)



c. Liszt, *Grandes Études* no. 6, b. 32



It need hardly be stated that in all of the above discussion regarding a fundamental legato concept for keyboard figuration, Chopin's practice resembles that of classical composers, and that Liszt, Schumann and many other of Chopin's contemporaries depart radically from it. Even if we consider some of the most extravagant patterns in Beethoven's late sonatas, the legato concept

behind the writing is apparent, and in this case, as in others, is made quite explicit by the trills that sustain the motionless part.[142]

Example 30

Beethoven, Sonata op. 111, 2nd movement, bars 168-171.



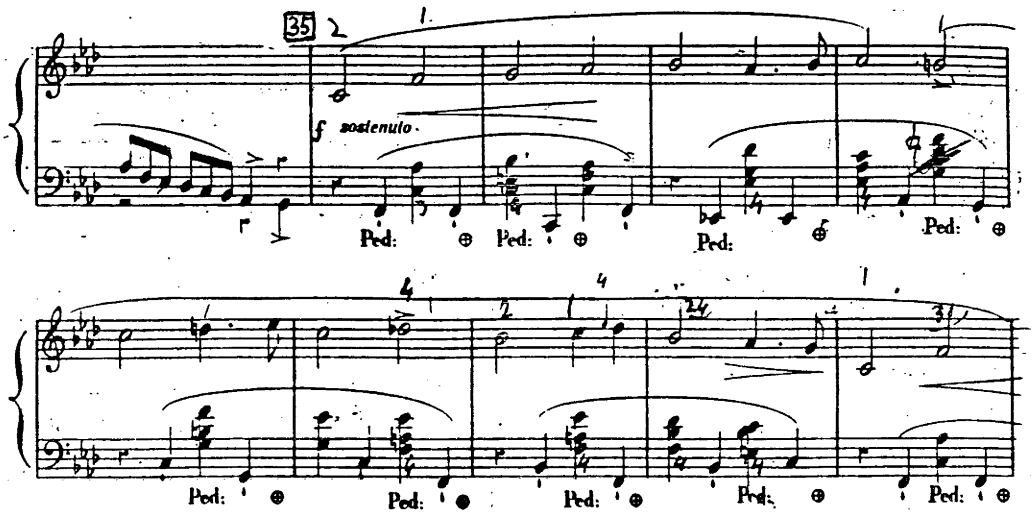
The scores of Jane Stirling are particularly informative with regard to Chopin's insistence on legato lines, particularly those works she studied in detail with Chopin. The following examples demonstrate fingering patterns that often involve the changing of fingers on the one key (which Chopin indicated as shown in Example 31*b*, LH bars 2, 4, 5, 14), and other somewhat unconventional practices:

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[142] There are, however, isolated exceptions in these late sonatas: for instance the interval of an 11th in the bass in bars 170 and 171 of this example, though given the speed, the dynamic level and the fact that it is an accompaniment, the lack of connection would hardly be noticed, even without the pedal.

Example 31[143]

a. Chopin, *Impromptu* op. 29, b. 35-43 (Stirling)

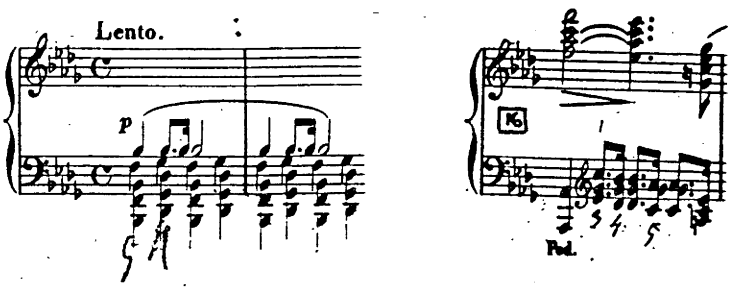


b. Chopin, *Valse* op. 34 no. 2, b. 1-6 and 13-14 (Stirling)

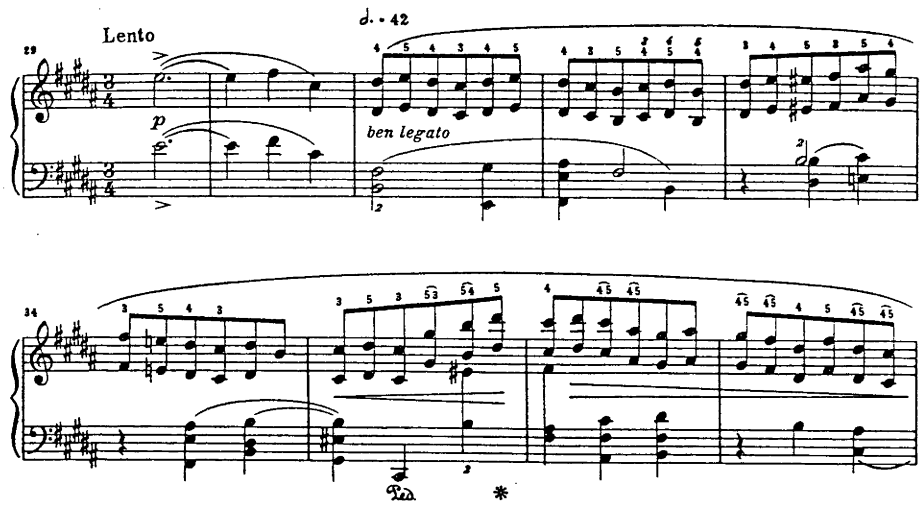


[143] The Étude op 25 no. 10 is not included in the Stirling facsimile, and so the Henle Urtext edition (1972) is used for example *d.* It is important to note here that the editor (Ewald Zimmermann) has reversed normal editorial practice regarding fingering annotations in this edition: those in roman type are Chopin's, and those in italics are editorial.

c. Chopin, Sonata op. 35, 3rd movement, b. 1-2 and b. 16 (Stirling)



d. Chopin, Étude op. 25 no. 10, b. 31-37



For Example 31*a*, a more conventional fingering for the first eight notes of the RH would be 1-2-3-4-5-3-4-5. Why begin the phrase at bar 35 with 2-1? The reason is surely to be found in the dynamic marking of *forte*, with a crescendo to the top of the phrase: Chopin's fingering not only ensures legato, it adds strength to the line by using stronger fingers (2-1-2-3) at the start of the phrase. Similarly the accented B-natural at the beginning of the next phrase uses 1, rather than the more conventional 2, and again on the following D-natural. The accented D-flat acquires force from the closed position of the hand (the preceding C would be played by the thumb, as is the next C). Observe the finger-change on the F in bar 43: this is not strictly necessary to achieve a smooth line, but again Chopin chooses the strongest fingers to lend weight to the tone.

The copious finger-changes in Example 31*b* ensure strict legato, again with the strongest possible combination of fingers. The change of fingers on the bass E in bar 14 (which is doubtless intended to apply also in bars 6-8) ensures the literal sustaining of that note in the most comfortable position. Example 31*c* demonstrates Chopin's practice where large chords prevent the literal connection of all lines. In bar 1 (and implicitly wherever this pattern appears), it is his clear intention that the *low* end of the bass octaves should be connected; and in bar 16, again it is the bottom line that 'sings'. Example 31*d* shows Chopin's view that even octave passages should 'sing'; the fingering shows the remarkable flexibility of his by no means large hand, and again, where true legato is not possible in all voices (where the line becomes disjunct in bars 35-37) his detailed and somewhat complex fingering (complex only in appearance - not in execution) leaves no doubt that the top line can and should be legato.

5. Implications of the legato technique for use of the sustaining pedal

Many of the examples given above from other composers' works show them relying on the sustaining pedal to supply legato connections in the many places where finger legato is not possible. While it is true that Chopin employed the sustaining pedal in ways never dreamed of by his predecessors, in other respects his use of the device resembled the classical view of it. The care he took to ensure legato within the phrase meant that he was rarely obliged to resort to the pedal for this purpose. This seems to have been quite intentional, for Debussy writes:

> ... I remember very well what Madame Mauté de Fleurville told me. Chopin wanted his pupils to study without using the pedal and only to use it sparingly when performing. [144]

and Madame de Courty:

> Chopin did not want [me to use the] pedal, yet he himself used it, particularly the soft pedal - without however indicating this to his pupils, in order not to exaggerate or overstep its resources.[145]

The view of the sustaining pedal as a legato device seems to have been first adopted in the early 19th century. With the prevalence of legato writing and playing in the second half of the 18th

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[144] In a letter to Durand quoted in Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, p. 7. Mme Mauté was Debussy's first piano teacher; she claimed to have studied with Chopin, though evidence on this point is inconclusive (see Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 129n.). Eigeldinger points out that Debussy's reports of her memory of Chopin's teaching are entirely in keeping with Chopin's practice; he also reminds us that Marmontel was Debussy's teacher at the Paris Conservatoire.

[145] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 58. Mme Courty's reference to the soft pedal is interesting. There is only one known instance of Chopin's indicating its use to his pupils, and that is in an annotation to Jane Stirling's score of the Nocturne op. 15 no. 2 (see facsimile edition of the Stirling scores, ed. Eigeldinger; also the editor's note on p. xxxvi of the Introduction).

century, the pedal was seen not as a means of linking notes, but rather as a colouristic device.[146] Chopin's view seems to have coincided with this classical concept of the pedal, rather than with the view of his contemporaries. There is plenty of evidence in the Nocturnes to suggest that he did not rely on the pedal either for legato or to reinforce a 'singing' tone, as the intermittent markings in the opening bars of opp.15 nos.1 and 2, op. 32 no. 1 and op. 37 no. 1 demonstrate. His use of the pedal was frequently more restrained in places where the integrity of contrapuntal lines was paramount (and that is true of much of his music); on the other hand, his use of the pedal could be infinitely more daring in those places where clarity of line is sacrificed to colouristic effect.

Chopin's notational practice differed considerably from that of his contemporaries. He never adopted the ubiquitous practice of writing 'Ped.', or 'Con Ped.' at the beginning of works, preferring to indicate its use precisely where he required it, and the manuscripts show the careful alignment of the pedal indications with the notes. The facsimile score of the Preludes op. 28 reveals many instances of this practice; one instance is given in Example 32*a*. i, which demonstrates the precise alignment of the release sign with the stem of the semiquaver. In other places the release sign is crossed out and replaced under an adjacent note (Example 32*a*. ii, bar 50): surely a strong indication of the intentional precision of Chopin's pedal markings.[147] There are many works in which the pedal is copiously indicated for one section or texture, and not indicated at all for an intermediate section or texture. For example, the opening of the Nocturne op. 15 no. 2 reveals the careful indication of pedal for the first five bars, the complete absence of markings

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[146] For instance, Haydn's use of the open pedal in the first movement of the Sonata in C, Hob. XVI no. 50, b. 120-24, where it is held through four bars of changing harmony. Beethoven's pedal indications often exemplify some sort of special effect rather than merely a legato connection: for instance the first movement of op. 27 no. 2; the recitative passages of the first movement of op. 31 no. 2; for entire thematic statements in the last movement of op. 53; for the arpeggios in the second movement of op. 78, and so on. Schindler's comment regarding Beethoven's revolutionary use of the pedal surely refers to instances such as these, and to its use in the later, more orchestrally conceived sonatas (for instance, the opening of op. 106).

[147] 24 Préludes op. 28, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951.

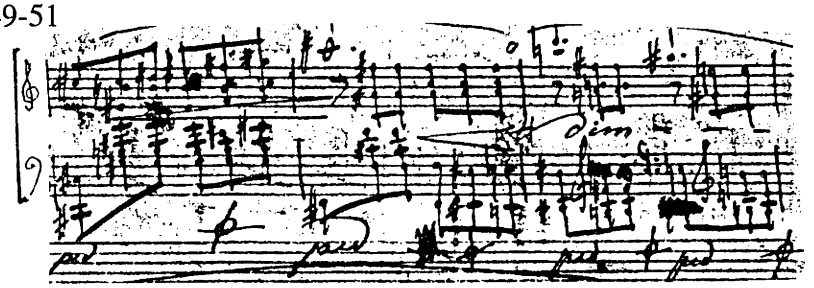
during the explicit counterpoint of the following three bars, and the resumption of pedalling where the opening texture reappears at bar 9. We see the same tactic adopted in the middle section of the same work, where again the absence of the pedal seems to be motivated by the emergence of a contrapuntal element (Example 32*b*). On the other hand, Chopin was also capable of indicating long pedals, even through changes in surface harmony (Example 32*c*); showing his appreciation of the pedal as a colouristic, even impressionistic device.

Example 32

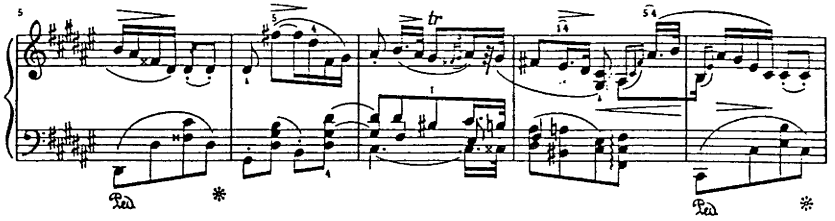
a. i Chopin, Prelude op. 28 no. 5, b. 9-12



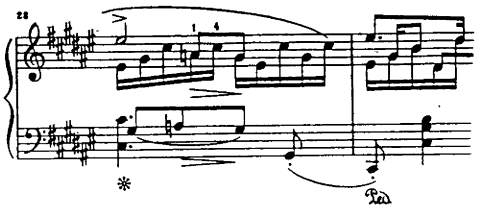
a. ii. Prelude op. 28 no. 17, b. 49-51



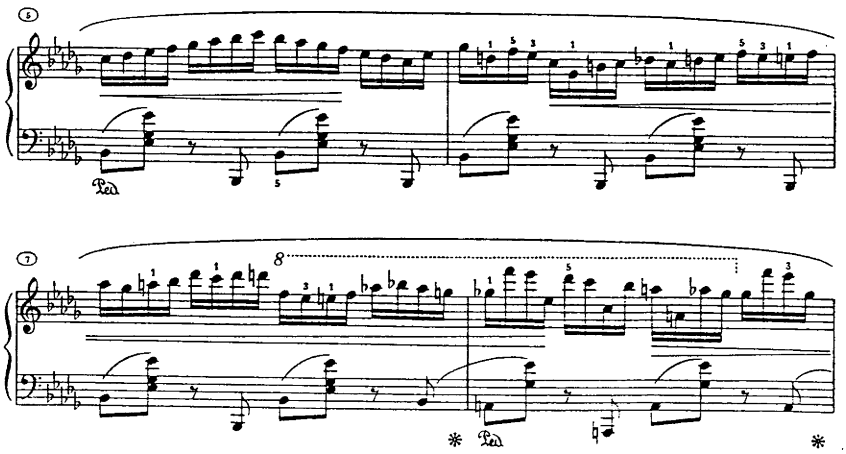
b. Chopin, Nocturne op. 15 no. 2, b. 5-9 and b. 25-29







c. Chopin, Prelude op. 28 no. 16, b. 5-7



There are also several works where pedal markings are very sparse indeed, or absent altogether. Particularly telling in this respect are some of the Preludes: the set was submitted to the publishers as a whole, and the Autograph facsimile reveals that the pedal indications were set down with particular care throughout. Can we assume in this context, that the solitary pedal marking at the end of no. 2,[148] or the two very brief indications in the middle of no. 4, or the complete absence of pedal in no. 14 are a departure from Chopin's usual precision? Pianists these days are loath to play *senza pedale*, but written evidence suggests that Chopin's view was rather different, and this is supported in many of his scores. It seems that, in this respect at least, Chopin's careful and restrained practice was overtaken by the more *laissez faire* attitudes of his contemporaries. It has been assumed that, since it was generally the practice in nineteenth-century piano scores to

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[148] This work has long puzzled pianists and audiences in its extreme dissonance and bleak texture. Most pianists are very uncomfortable with the sparseness of the texture, and attempt to fill it out by using the sustaining pedal, thus detracting considerably from the dramatic effect of the pedal at the climax of the work. A recent discussion of the work by Lawrence Kramer (*Music and Cultural Practice*, chapter 3) reminds us that music need not be 'beautiful' to be expressive, and suggests a reading which gives particular weight to these bars. However Kramer does not remark on the pedal indication.

leave the use of the pedal largely to the discretion of the pianist, then it is also the case in the music of Chopin. There can be little doubt that the prevailing attitude towards the pedal as a legato device has played a large part in the decline of the classical legato technique and the singing style which was so much a part of Chopin's writing and playing.

More broadly speaking, though, it was the phasing out of the vocal model in favour of an orchestral one that caused the decline of the legato technique. Compare Chopin's simple philosophy of the ideal keyboard style '*Il faut chanter avec les doigts*' with that of Liszt:

> In its span of seven octaves [the piano] embraces the range of an orchestra; the ten fingers of a single man suffice to render the harmonies produced by the combined forces of more than 100 concerted instruments ... We make arpeggios like the harp, prolonged notes like wind instruments, staccatos and a thousand other effects ... [149]

Chopin's adherence to the bel canto ideal, and his aversion to the orchestral model for piano playing set him well apart from his contemporaries, and was surely a significant factor in the development of his distinctive style as composer and pianist.

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[149] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 20n. Source: *Pages Romantiques*, Paris, Alcan; Leipzig, Breitkopf and Härtel, 1912, p. 136.

6. Chopin and the 'transcendental' technique.

An essential, if not *the* essential feature that distinguished the old styles of playing -both the 'classical' and the 'brilliant' - from the new, post-Paganini virtuoso style was the use of the sustaining pedal. Pianists had discovered the fact that the pedal could be used to create an additional layer of sound - to give the impression that three hands were at work, thus enhancing the piano's ability to emulate the layered effect of orchestral writing. Liszt's *Grandes Études* (1837) are among the first explorations of these colouristic and textural possibilities. When compared with the earlier *Étude en douze exercices* (1826) on which they are based, the significance of the pedal in the formulation of the new style becomes apparent from the outset. When the *Grandes Études* are compared with a still later version - the *Études d'exécution transcendante* of 1851 - it becomes clear that Liszt's piano technique was by no means fixed once he reached maturity, but was constantly evolving. The range of the first study in the 1826 version is C two octaves below middle C to F three and a half octaves above; in the 1837 version it is extended down a whole octave and up a third to A. Furthermore, an additional layer of sound is added by means of the pedal: in the first bar the low octave C is sustained by the pedal while the middle, and then the upper registers are brought into play. The tempo has been increased to *presto*.

Example 33

a. Liszt, *Étude en douze exercices* no. 1, b. 1.



b. Liszt, *Grandes Études* no. 1, b. 1.



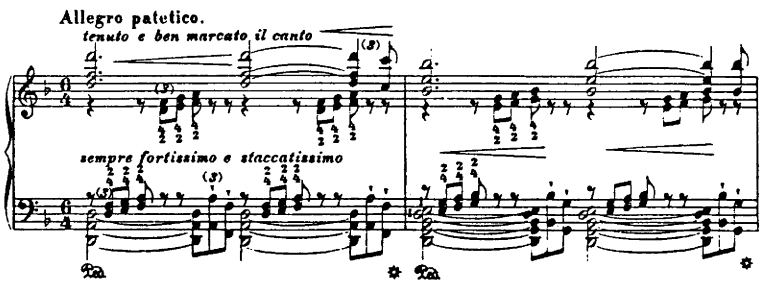
The technique becomes increasingly more striking as it is used for picturesque or narrative effect, as in no. 4, entitled *Mazeppa* in the later 1851 version. Here in this intermediate version a melody is added to the existing structure, and the sustaining of both melody and bass is achieved solely by the pedal, for the rapid semiquavers in the middle register demand the attention of both hands. Compare the literal notation of the early version, where the bass notes (which cannot be held by the fingers) are notated literally as quavers and the notation of the later version which acknowledges the sustaining power of the pedal.

Example 34

a. Liszt, *Étude en douze exercices no.* 4, b. 1-4.



b. Liszt, *Grandes Études* no. 4, b. 1-2.

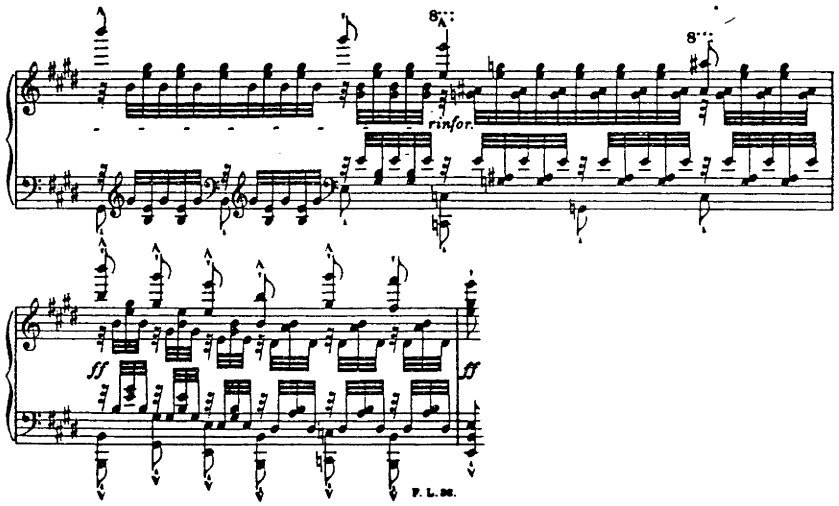


This effect, used extensively in Liszt's works, is picturesque in more ways than one, for the visual display of the rapid hand movements necessary in so many of these passages undoubtedly added considerably to the somewhat frantic tone engendered by the music. As audiences (and concert venues and pianos) become larger, and perhaps inevitably less discriminating, the visual element of performance gained in significance. The relatively tame hand-crossings of the 'brilliant' school of Herz, Czerny, Moscheles, Kalkbrenner and others were

supplemented by more dramatic visual devices. There were many variants on the 'three-handed' technique; for instance, at one point in the final étude the visual impact is enhanced further by the rapid alternation of the hands in the middle of the keyboard, punctuated by fast outward leaps to maintain top and bottom lines. Again, Liszt's notation recognises the sustaining role of the pedal. This étude is so dramatically changed from the 1826 version that comparison is pointless.

Example 35

Liszt, *Grandes Études* no. 12, bars 22-23.



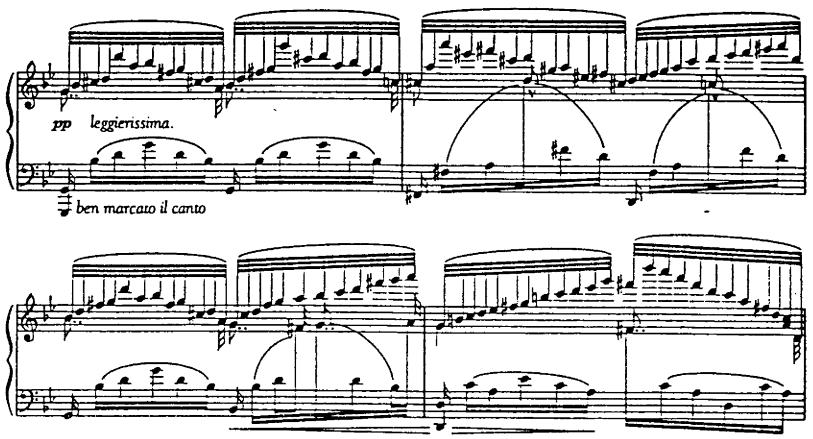
The effect was widely adopted and adapted by other virtuoso pianist-composers - notably Thalberg, whose ability to sustain a full-bodied melody in the middle register surrounded on both sides by a substantial accompaniment became something of a specialty (Example 36).[150]

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[150] The following example is quoted in E. Douglas Bomberger's article, 'The Thalberg effect: playing the violin on the piano' (*The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 75 no. 2, 1991, pp. 198-208).

Example 36

Thalberg, *Fantasie sur des thèmes de 'Moïse'*



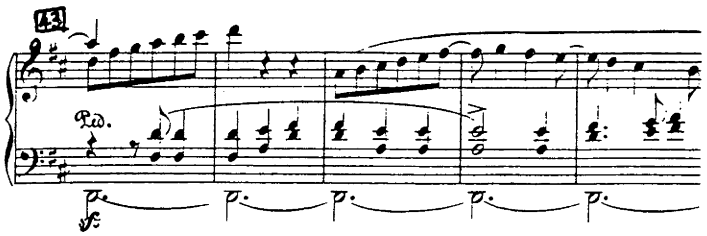
For Liszt though, particularly in works other than the études, it seems that the visual effect was not so much indulged in for its own sake as merely a fortunate by-product of achieving his real aim, which was to emulate the orchestra. The use of the sustaining pedal, and not the fingers, to hold a part, played a large part in the realisation of this aim. The playing of Paganini during his first visit to Paris in February, 1831, is often cited as a significant influence on the development of the new school of virtuoso pianism. While Paganini's influence is undisputed, the very many orchestral and operatic transcriptions written by Liszt during the 1830's and 40's must surely have been equally influential on the development of specifically pianistic elements of the new style. However inspiring his playing must have been, Paganini can not have been of much practical assistance in Liszt's transcription in 1833 of Berlioz' s *Symphonie fantastique*; the task would have daunted even Beethoven, who was perhaps the only previous composer to attempt such orchestrally conceived writing in the late piano sonatas.

Other composers also exploited the pedal for its expansion of the sonority and colour of the instrument. Schumann frequently employs the sustaining pedal to provide an additional voice, for instance in these examples from the end of *Papillons* op. 2, the *Allegro* opus 8 (1831), and no. 4 of *6 Konzert-Etüden nach Capricen von Paganini* op. 10 (1833). In the first two examples,

Schumann follows Liszt's frequent (though by no means consistent) practice of notating held notes, even though they cannot be held by the fingers; in the third his notation is more literal - perhaps to ensure the taking of the upper semiquavers by the left hand. Czerny also employed the technique freely (Example 37*d*).

Example 37

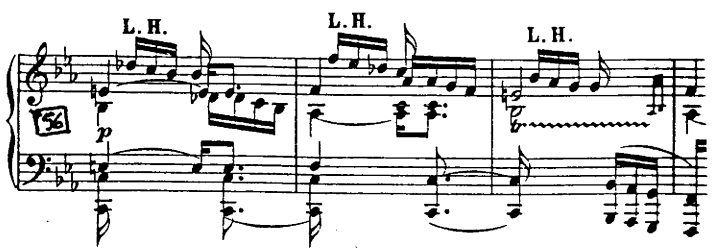
a. Schumann, *Papillons* op. 2, 'Finale', b. 43-47



b. Schumann, *Allegro* op. 8, b. 163-165



c. Schumann, *Six Concert Studies* op. 10 no. 4, b. 56-60



d. Carl Czerny, *Fantasie 'Die Nacht'* op. 392 no. 2 (*ca.*1837) [151]



For Chopin, this practice must have seemed something of a heresy, depending as it often did on less than accurate notation. With his concern for the strict observance of legato within the phrase, his regard for the continuity of voice-leading strands, and for the rules of contrapuntal movement in general, he seems to be alone among composers of his times in his careful, almost pedantic notation. Certainly Chopin, of all pianists, understood the effects of the sustaining pedal, but he also understood the practical implications of the harmonic series: that is, the ability of bass notes to generate harmonics and to fill the gap between a low bass line and a high treble. Chopin's textures often appear thinner than other composers, but they are no less resonant. Similarly, his concern for a sustained legato line surely has implications for the degree of resonance of tone.

For other composers, this application of the sustaining pedal freed them from the limitations imposed by the classical convention of legato technique: that is, from the necessity of keyboard patterns lying within the range of the hand. Their notation demonstrates that they considered notes or chords held by the sustaining pedal on a par with those sustained literally by the fingers, and this is shown clearly in Examples 10*a* (bar 1), 20*a* (Czerny), 29*c*, 37 *a* and *b*, and 42 (b. 5), and indeed in many other places in the works of Liszt and Schumann in particular. Chopin's notation in the examples below seems pedantic in comparison. Example 38*a* provides justification for the assumption that, in general, Chopin assumes the maximum span of a 10th in the left hand. This span will of course vary accord to the layout of the keys and the context: in this

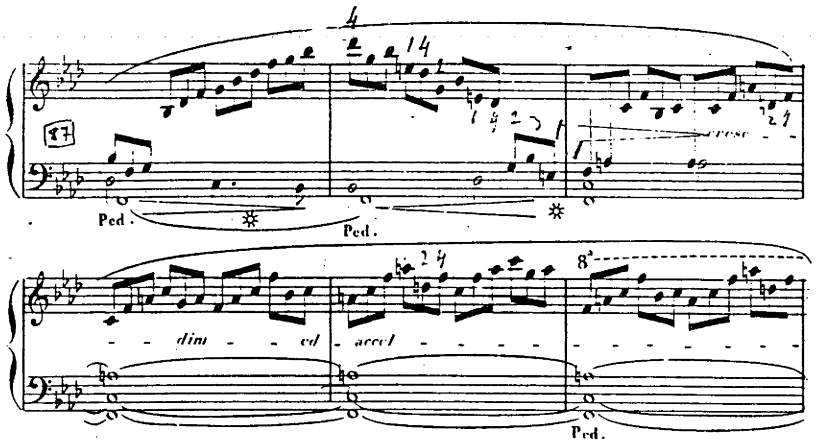
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[151] The Czerny example is drawn from *The Fantasia II*, ed. by Peter Schleuning.

case the stretch is facilitated by the fact that the low 5th is already sustained when the 10th (A) is sounded first in the right hand, then taken over by the left (b. 89). Examples 38*b* to *d* show how Chopin's notation faithfully reflects what can, and cannot be sustained by the fingers. In each case, it seems reasonable to assume that, were it not for the limitations of the hand, the sustained line would be continued. These examples are all drawn from the Nocturnes, where one might expect that the characteristic wide-ranging accompaniment in the left hand might lead to carelessness of notation.

Example 38

Chopin Nocturnes: *a.* op. 55 no. 1, b. 87-91 (Stirling)



b. op. 15 no. 1, b. 5-9



c. op. 32 no. 2, b. 11-14



d. op. 37 no. 2, b. 44-47.



In Example 38*b*, note the descending line in the bass that begins in bar 5 with D - D flat - C. Where it becomes impossible to sustain with the fingers (with the major 10ths in bars 7-8), the notation of the bass line changes from crotchet to quaver. Chopin's indication of a change of fingers on the G sharp at the beginning of bar 8 clearly shows that he is not content to rely on the sustaining power of the pedal. Similarly in Example 38*c*, the descending crotchets in the bass become quavers where the stretch becomes too great at bar 14, however desirable the continuation of this line may be. In Example 38*d*, any other composer would surely have continued the bass minims into bars 45-46. Chopin explicitly notates the doubling of the treble melody in the bass clef - no doubt to ensure the utmost legato in this line as well. Note the almost complete absence of pedal indications in this episode both times it occurs (b. 28-68 and b. 84-124) - the only exception is one single marking at bar 119. The copious indication of the pedal in the surrounding sections suggests that its omission here is no accident, and thus makes Chopin's concern for true legato playing all the more understandable.

The complexity of Chopin's legato notation is not unique in piano scores of the time. This type of notation was standard practice among composers of the previous century, and at times other composers of Chopin's generation showed a comparable degree of precision. However, with the discovery of the greater textural possibilities afforded by the pedal, the practice of precise legato notation waned. Other composers were inconsistent in their practice, notating sometimes according to what was possible with the fingers only, but more often, according to what the pedal made possible. Although there are exceptions in Chopin's practice, they are isolated, and in general his notation was consistent, and followed the conventions established in the previous century.[152]

This is not to suggest that Chopin does not at times exploit the ability of the sustaining pedal to compensate for the limitations of the fingers: he does so very frequently in the Nocturnes, and elsewhere, as the following typical examples show. However, his notation almost always reflects precisely what can be sustained by the fingers, rather than allowing for the capabilities of the pedal.

Example 39

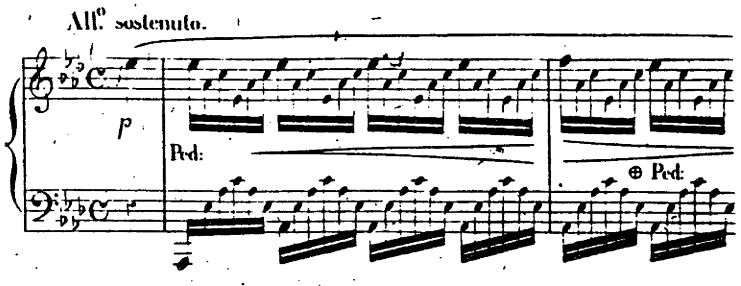
a. Chopin, Nocturne op. 15 no. 2, b. 25-28 (Stirling)



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[152] An examination of all the Nocturnes yielded only three instances where Chopin's notation does not literally denote the placement of the fingers: they are op. 15 no. 1, bar 21; op. 27 no. 1, b. 66, and op. 48 no. 1, with the spread chords which begin at b. 29. In each case, the sustaining power of the pedal is relied upon.

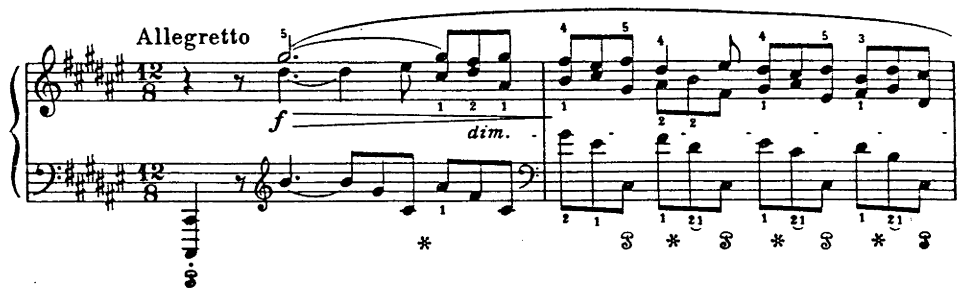
b. Chopin, Étude op. 25 no. 1, b. 1-5 (Stirling)



c. Chopin, Nocturne op. 27 no. 1, b. 1-3 (Stirling)



d. Chopin, Barcarolle op. 60, b. 4-6



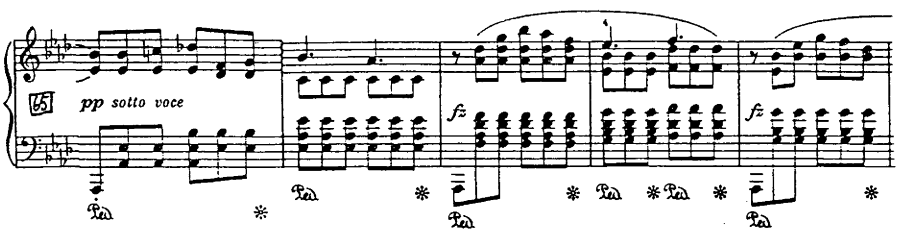
In each case, the pedal is employed primarily for the sake of the lowest bass note, which, in every case, is part of a continuous line, while at the same time being explicitly connected to other voices as part of the accompaniment texture.

In addition to his stricter notational practice, another important distinction between the works of Chopin and those of his contemporaries, is Chopin's preference for only two 'layers' or textural elements: melody and accompaniment. Even though the latter, and sometimes the former, may be 'compound' in that more than one voice is implied, the texture is rarely extended into three distinct levels the way it so often is in the work of Liszt and others. Even where he is using

extremes of register and more than two distinct layers of texture, Chopin remains faithful to the keyboard model in the connectedness of each line, and in continuity of texture as far as possible. For instance, in Examples 34*b* and 35 (*Grandes Études* nos. 4 and 12), Liszt frequently interrupts both outer parts, aurally, visually, and - for the pianist - physically. Chopin is at pains to keep such interruptions to a minimum. Example 40 shows Chopin employing a multi-layered texture; the low bass pedal note (A-flat) is referred to only every second bar. In much of Schumann's music, constant textural interjections or displacements disrupt the continuity of line (see for instance Example 43); Chopin maintains continuity within each textural element, and in general, the outcome is entirely pianistic, in contrast to the 'orchestral' style apparent in the writing of others. Furthermore the visual effect of rapid movement around the keyboard is not an issue for Chopin, who preferred that the audience should focus purely on the musical quality of a performance.

Example 40

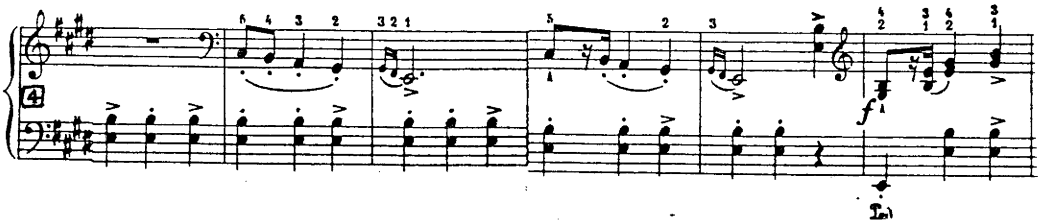
Chopin, Prelude op. 28 no. 17, b. 65-69.



The crossing of hands is another aspect of technique which is used freely by other composers and very seldom by Chopin: it appears nowhere in his études or preludes, and only rarely in other works. The following examples demonstrate how Chopin's use of the technique differed from that of other composers (Example 41).

Example 41

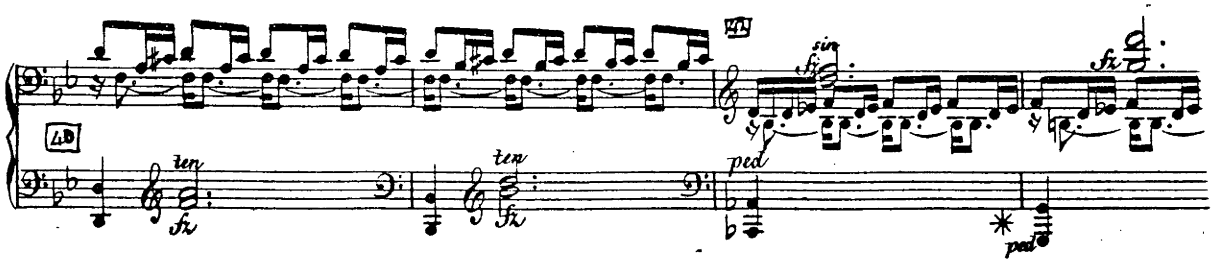
a. Chopin, *Mazurkas*, i. op. 6 no. 3, b. 4-9



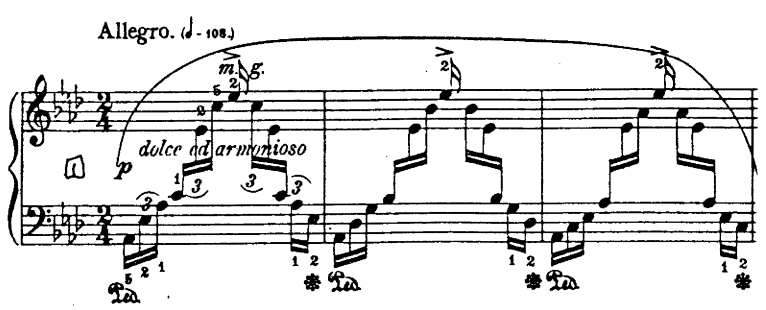
ii. op. 33 no. 4, b. 79-83 (Stirling)



b. i. Clementi *Gradus*, no. 48, b. 40-43



ii. Czerny op. 740 no. 18



In each of the Chopin examples, the melody is taken over in entire phrases, with no disruption to the continuity of either melody or the accompaniment. Compare this practice with the above excerpts from hand-crossing studies of Clementi's *Gradus* and Czerny's *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, op. 740: the essence of the technique here is that one hand is simultaneously carrying two widely separated voices, and moving frequently between the two. Where Chopin indicates crossed hands, the parts simply cross over - he does not simultaneously maintain widely separated parts in the one hand.

It is not surprising that other composers adopt the hand-crossing technique in repertoire other than études. This instance, from *Années de Pèlerinage II*, is typical of Liszt:

Example 42

Liszt, *Années de Pèlerinage II*, 'Sonetto 123 del Petrarca', b. 1-5



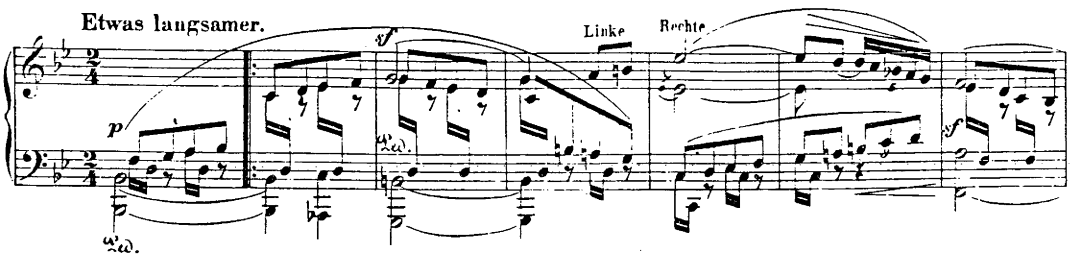
Schumann's hand-crossings are rather more unusual. He seems to have been particularly interested in the different tone colours afforded by hand crossing, and at times employs it where a more conventional layout might be both more expected and more convenient. It is difficult to explain why it should be so, but there can be little doubt that, in the following examples, the effect of the hand-crossing is indeed a subtle and original enhancement of tone colour (Example 43).

Example 43

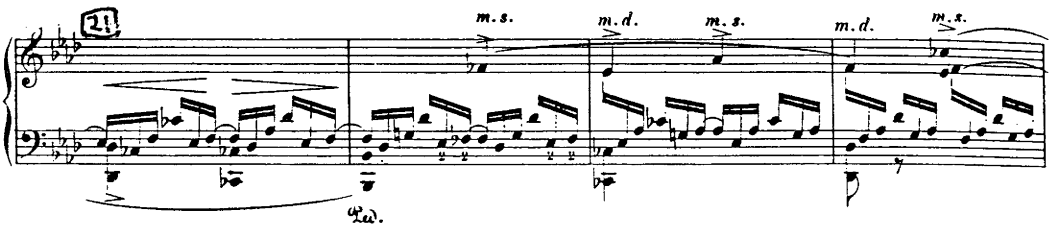
a. Schumann, *Kreisleriana* no. 2, b. 123-127



b. Kreisleriana no. 3, b. 33-37



c. Schumann, Sonata op. 14, 4th movement, b. 21-24



At the root of Chopin's avoidance, or significant modification, of so many of these virtuoso devices, was his disdain for the picturesque. Liszt's frequent use of tremolos, of hand-crossings, and the multi-layered effect stemmed from his desire to express extramusical ideas and images, and he was by no means alone in this aim. The deliberate diversions and disjunctions of Schumann's language may well have been in emulation of the literature of the time,[153] in addition

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153 This idea is discussed in Anthony Newcomb's 'Schumann and late eighteenth-century narrative strategies', John Daverio's 'Schumann's 'Im Legendenton' and Friedrich Schlegel's *Arabeske*' (both in *19th-Century Music* vol. 11 no.

to his frequent excursions into more or less explicit imagery. Chopin alone resisted the trend: his titles betray nothing more specific than the generic type of the work ('nocturne', 'berceuse', 'mazurka', 'ballade', and so on). He avoided also the visual effects that were part and parcel of so many of these devices. In his playing and teaching, as in his scores, he maintained ideals that in many respects were more characteristic of Vienna at the end of the previous century, than of Paris in the 1830's and 40's.

2, 1987, pp. 164-174 and 150-163), and this author's 'The *Kreisleriana* of Robert Schumann and E.T.A. Hoffmann: some musical/literary parallels' (*Musicology Australia 16*, 1993, pp.3-18.).

CONCLUSION

> Chopin, who has not been heard in public for several years; Chopin, who imprisons his charming genius in an audience of five or six persons; Chopin, who resembles those enchanted isles where so many marvels are said to abound that one regards them as fabulous; Chopin, whom one can never forget after having once heard him ... Forward then, Chopin! Forward! let this triumph decide you; do not be selfish, give your beautiful talent to all; consent to pass for what you are ... and when it shall be asked who is the first pianist of Europe, Liszt or Thalberg, let all the world reply, like those who have heard you ..., 'It is Chopin.'[154]

This report, written in 1838, shows the frustration Chopin's devotees must have felt at his reclusive habits. They considered him to be superior to all other pianists; by his example he could have unmasked the excesses of the virtuoso movement and instigated a completely new style of piano playing. Yet Chopin disliked playing in public concerts and encouraged his students to perform, as he preferred to do, in more intimate environments where there were fewer distractions from the music. A recent study suggests he gave around fifty concerts in all, only about half of which were given in Paris, and many of the others given in his youth, prior to his arrival there.[155] Several of these Paris events were benefit concerts at which he played only a minor role, and later in his life, where he was the prominent artist, he carefully vetted attendance lists. One contemporary critic wrote:

> M. Chopin's talent appears publicly only at long intervals, even then surrounded only by all kinds of painstaking supervision and organisation. M. Chopin admits only an élite audience of initiates to his

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[154] Report by M. Legouvé of a benefit concert at which Chopin appeared in March, 1838; *Gazette musicale*, March 25, 1838; quoted in Niecks vol. 2, p. 16.

[155] Janet Ritterman, 'Piano music and the public concert', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson. Ritterman's chapter (pp. 11-31) offers a refreshingly clear analysis of this complex subject, giving a chronology for the numerous changes in convention over the period, and clarifying many points that have long been the subject of confusion.

> annual revelations ... The day a microscope is invented for the ear, that day M. Chopin will become deified.[156]

Mikuli relates Chopin's view:

> Chopin played rarely and only reluctantly in public: to 'exhibit himself' was absolutely against his nature. Prolonged ill-health and nervous irritability did not always allow him to unfold the full range of his resources in the concert hall. Even in intimate circles he rarely played anything but his shorter compositions, and occasionally fragments from the larger ones.[157]

and Wilhelm von Lenz recounts his first meeting with Chopin, at which he played Chopin's Mazurka opus 7 no. 1:

> I got through well; the *volata* through the two octaves went better than ever before, the instrument ran even easier than my Érard. Chopin whispered engagingly: 'That *trait* is not your own, is it? *He* [Liszt] showed you that! *He* must have his hand in everything; well! he may dare - he plays for *thousands*, I seldom to one! Very well, I will give you lessons - but only twice a week, that is the most I ever give; it will be difficult for me to find three-quarters of an hour.'[158]

Most accounts of Chopin's playing - certainly the most useful - relate to performances at lessons or private gatherings, and many of these accounts refer to his ability to obtain the most extreme degree of softness: a characteristic admirably suited to intimate surroundings, but equally liable to be misunderstood in a large hall. Berlioz's account is typical:

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156 Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 287n. Source: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 April, 1842, article by Blaze de Bury.

157 Ibid. p. 275. Source: Mikuli, *Vorwort* to *Fr. Chopin's Pianoforte-Werke*, Leipzig, 1880.

158 Lenz, *Great Piano Virtuosos*, pp. 49-50.

> There are unbelievable details in his Mazurkas; and he has found how to make them doubly interesting by playing them with the utmost degree of softness, piano in the extreme, the hammers merely brushing the strings, so much so that one is tempted to go close to the instrument and put one's ear to it as if to a concert of sylphs or elves.[159]

On the few occasions where he did perform in a larger hall, the smallness of the sound he produced was invariably commented upon, even in his early years.[160]

In his 'Introduction', Eigeldinger quotes Chopin's advice to a pupil, 'Concerts are never real music; you have to give up the idea of hearing in them the most beautiful things of art.' and goes on to suggest that if one adds to this 'a certain confidential atmosphere in Chopin's lessons ... one understands better why their contents are recorded so incompletely.'[161] Chopin's preference for intimate surroundings, for performances as well as lessons, explains also his refusal to give group lessons[162] - a practice widely adopted at the time. While Chopin had no shortage of enquiries, and on the whole, made a comfortable living from piano teaching, he was considerably less accessible to the public than was Liszt. Marmontel relates:

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[159] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 71. Source: Berlioz, *Le Renovateur*, 15 December, 1833, p. 345.

[160] Of his Vienna début he wrote to his family: 'The general opinion is that I play too quietly, or rather too delicately for those accustomed to the banging of the Viennese pianists ...' (*Correspondence*, p. 25; letter of August 12, 1829).

[161] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 5. The quotation is attributed to Maria von Grewingk's *Eine Tochter Alt-Rigas, Schülerin Chopins*, Riga, 1928.

[162] Ibid. p. 10.

> Chopin was surrounded, adulated and protected by a small entourage of enthusiastic friends who defended him from unwelcome visitors or second rate admirers. Access to him was difficult as one had to make several attempts before one could succeed in meeting him.[163]

A brief comparison with Liszt's career emphasises the enormous gulf between the two men in outlook and output. By 1849, the year of Chopin's death, Liszt must have given several hundred concerts: his father claims thirty-eight public appearances in just four months in 1823-24.[164] Searle refers to his touring 'from Dublin to Moscow, and from Lisbon to Constantinople' between 1839 and 1847,[165] and he would often give several concerts in major cities. In addition to a large body of original piano music and transcriptions (including three Beethoven symphonies and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*) he had composed an opera, an oratorio, a mass, and many other sacred and secular choral works, completed three major orchestral works and sketched others, two piano concertos and at least three other works for piano and orchestra; conducted *Tannhäuser* and other large works; written copious letters and some articles on diverse musical subjects, read widely, travelled extensively in addition to his tours as a virtuoso (and remember how slow travel was, by modern standards!); organised the setting up of a Beethoven monument; and taught a large number of students. Chopin's activities seem scant by comparison, and if Liszt's energy was exceptional, the breadth of his activities was far more typical of the ambitious pianist than was the narrow focus of Chopin's life.

There must have been many to whom Chopin's success as a pianist seemed more than a little unfair. Here was a virtuoso acknowledged to be at the pinnacle of his profession, yet he had no ambition and no liking for the profession. When so many were trying so desperately hard to achieve that goal, he seems to have achieved it almost by accident. The more he distanced himself

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[163] Ibid. p. 9.

[164] Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, p. 96.

[165] Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, p. 39.

from the admiring public, the more successful he became. At a time when the career pathway for pianists was becoming increasingly standardised, Chopin bypassed much of this mechanism in his early years, and even later at the height of his reputation remained strangely aloof from it all. How was then was his reputation as a pianist achieved and sustained for nearly twenty years of his life, and for so long after his death? In addition to the extraordinary talent he must have had, his reputation rested largely on his *differentness* to his colleagues. His attitude towards music and to his instrument, his style of composing, playing and teaching were in many respects the very antithesis of the popular view.

Despite the fact that he was aware of diverging dramatically from pedagogical opinion of the time, Chopin wrote no 'method' apart from the fragmentary 'Sketch for a method' mentioned above. Apart from his letters to friends and family, he wrote nothing - again, in sharp contrast to many of his contemporaries, whose facility with the pen gives us a more complete understanding of their lives and philosophies. He disliked writing and, in the words of George Sand:

> Chopin speaks little and seldom about his art; but when he does, it is with a wonderful clarity, a soundness of judgement and of intent that could annihilate quite a few heresies were he to speak his mind openly, But even in private he is reserved, and only at the piano does he really open his heart.[166]

A reputation as a virtuoso was absolutely essential if Chopin was to procure the publication and dissemination of his compositions. There can be no doubt that he achieved such a reputation, despite his unconventional training and lack of respect for the profession. According to contemporary reports, Chopin's piano playing and his teaching were as distinctive in style as were his compositions, but even in his own time there was not a Chopin 'school' - the highly individualised approach he employed in his teaching, and the nature of his students militated against this. Except for the fragmentary 'Method', Chopin himself did not systematically record details of his approach for posterity, and the reports of his colleagues and students are by their

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[166] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: pianist and teacher*, p. 4. Source: Sand, *Impressions et souvenirs*, p. 88.

nature incomplete and at times inconclusive and contradictory. Frequently apparent in descriptions of his playing is the writers' frustration with the inadequacy of language to do justice to the phenomenon - even those experienced wordsmiths, Berlioz and Schumann, were struggling.

By the middle of the century Chopin was dead, leaving only a few students to perpetuate his ideas. The 'virtuoso' school, on the other hand, was in full swing. Liszt was to continue teaching in Weimar until 1884, and his many pupils extended the Liszt tradition well into the twentieth century: indeed, the phenomenon is perpetuated by the descendants of Liszt's pupils in many conservatoria today. It seems likely, then, that aspects of Chopin's style, particularly where he differed markedly from his contemporaries, might have been, to at least some extent, subsumed by the larger and stronger tradition, the perpetuation of which has significant consequences for the Chopin performer and scholar.

In a letter quoted earlier, Chopin referred to his 'perhaps too audacious but noble wish to create [for himself] a new world.'[167] Paradoxically, it was his very lack of pianistic training, the rigorous nature of his training in another field altogether, and his failure to fulfil his destiny as an opera composer that enabled him to achieve this goal. While others were swept along in the enthusiasm for the new virtuosity, Chopin alone resisted the trend. He created his own style, that, in placing musical values above all else, remained true to an older and ultimately, perhaps, more durable concept of virtuosity.

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[167] *Correspondence*, p. 103.

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LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example no.

1. *a.* Chopin, Nocturne op. 62 no. 2; *b.* Schumann *Kreisleriana* no. 2. *p. 32*

2. *a.* Chopin, Nocturne op. 27 no. 2, J.S. Bach, Suite for solo cello no. 1, Prelude; *b.* Mendelssohn, *Songs without Words* book 7, op. 85 no. 1; *c.* Liszt, *Années de Pèlerinage II*, 'Sonetto 104 del Petrarca'; *d.* Schumann, *Carnaval* op. 9, 'Chopin'. *p. 35*

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6. *a.* Chopin, Prelude op. 28 no. 21; *b.* op. 28 no. 24; *c.* J.S. Bach, *Well-tempered Clavier I*, Prelude no. 1;*d. Well-tempered Clavier I*, Prelude no. 2; *e. Well-tempered Clavier I*, Prelude no. 23. *p. 48*

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