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Extended program notes for a thesis recital

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

EXTENDED PROGRAM NOTES FOR A THESIS RECITAL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

by

Miroslav Dacić

2011

To: Dean Brian Schriener
College of Architecture and the Arts

This thesis, written by Miroslav Dacić, and entitled Extended Program Notes for a Thesis Recital, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Joel Galand

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Kemal Gekić, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 25, 2011

The thesis of Miroslav Dacić is approved.

Dean Brian Schriener
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Florida International University, 2011

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
EXTENDED PROGRAM NOTES FOR A THESIS RECITAL

by

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Florida International University, 2011

Miami, Florida

Professor Kemal Gekić, Major Professor

The purpose of this thesis recital is to focus on an integral performance of Chopin's op.28 prelude cycle which consists of a CD of the recital and an analytical paper on the set. The point of the analysis concentrates on two-part and three-part formal strategies and the ways in which these divisions are motivated by features left incomplete in the first formal section. This sense of incompleteness, always causing a formal division, leads to the second attempt scenario and its successful outcome. Additionally, there is an introductory discussion on the title issues and several remarks about the Prelude throughout the history until its transformation and independent status which it owes to Chopin.

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHOPIN'S PRELUDES OP.28

Chopin's Preludes are compositions of an order entirely apart. They are not only, as the title might make one think, pieces destined to be played in the guise of introduction to other pieces.¹

Reviewing for the *Gazette musicale de Paris* one of the Chopin's recitals from 1841, Franz Liszt was probably one of the first to notice and recognize that the musical connotations of the term *prelude* had taken on new dimensions with Chopin. Liszt, who always believed that Chopin's most inspired work was achieved when free of any fixed formal expectations, added elsewhere in the review that Chopin had chosen to perform by preference those works farthest removed from the classical forms. He played neither sonatas nor fantasias nor variations, but preludes.² Ever since their publication, the title *Preludes* that Chopin gave to the set has raised much confusion and discussion. A century later, André Gide, for example, wrote: "I admit that I do not understand well the title that Chopin liked to give to these short pieces: *Preludes*. Preludes to what?"³ If we briefly trace for the background of the prelude and its role in the musical history, we find that in Renaissance lute music it conventionally served as a partially improvised introduction to more complex compositions. It preserved its introductory purpose in the eighteenth-

¹ Franz Liszt, *Frédéric Chopin*, trans. Edward N. Waters (New York: Macmillan, [1851] 1963), p. 14.

² Cited from Liszt's review on Chopin's recital in J.W. Sobaskie, *Precursive Prolongation in the Préludes of Chopin*, <file:///D:/Thesis%20material/Thesis/sobaskie%201.htm> (accessed October 24-29, 2009), p.25.

³ Cited in Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 146.

century harpsichord suite. In France, the unmeasured prelude was developed by Couperin and Rameau. Meanwhile, in Germany, it became a trend to pair a free, improvisatory prelude with a strictly contrapuntal fugue. Ferdinand Fischer's publication of such paired sets of preludes and fugues in his *Ariadne Musica* (1702) triggered Bach to write his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. To Chopin and his mid-nineteenth-century contemporaries, the prelude retained its functions of sheer precursor of some other more significant work to follow, or of simply establishing the atmosphere, tonality, or style of a set of pieces, as recommended by Czerny in his *Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte*, Op.200 from 1836:

It is akin to a crown of distinction for a keyboardist, particularly in private circles at the performance of solo works, if he does not begin directly with the composition itself but is capable by means of a suitable *prelude* of preparing the listener, setting the mood, and also thereby ascertaining the qualities of the pianoforte, perhaps unfamiliar to him, in an appropriate fashion.⁴

Although Chopin Preludes are often compared to Bach's, the Baroque master's preludes, their wealth and complexity of invention notwithstanding, remain inseparable parts of fugues or serve as highly contrapuntal introductions to his suites (e.g., in the English Suites and the Partitas for Solo Violin). Chopin's Preludes, taken individually, are certainly preludes to nothing, unless each prelude except the last is considered a prelude to the next.⁵ It is to Chopin that the prelude owes its status as an independent genre, free from its traditional, centuries-old conventional role. Undeniably, it was by following Chopin's precedent that the genre continued to be developed and transformed in the piano literature by, for example, Debussy (the Twenty-four Preludes),

⁴ Cited in Kallberg, p.147.

⁵ Jeffrey Kresky, suggests this in *A Reader's Guide to the Chopin Preludes*, (Westport: Greenwood Press 1994), p. xiii.

Rachmaninoff (the Ten Preludes Op.23 and the Thirteen Preludes Op.32), Scriabin (the Twenty-four Preludes Op.11 and numerous other sets), Szymanovsky (the Nine Preludes Op.1), Shostakovich (the Twenty-four Preludes op.34), Messiaen (the Eight Piano Preludes).

Alongside these issues concerning title and genre, another question performers faced was whether to interpret Chopin twenty-four Preludes as an integral set or as individual pieces. In his Parisian concerts of the early 1840's and during his visit to England in 1848, the evidence shows that on several occasions Chopin himself would play a single Prelude combined with other works; he would also perform subsets of the twenty-four. Kallberg describes this range of performance possibilities as an expansion of the genre's functional possibilities. Kallberg has even discovered an intriguing program from Chopin's 1848 Glasgow recital, in which the Prelude No.8 in F#-minor might have been played as an introduction to the F#-major Impromptu op.36.⁶ It is certain that the interpreters of the past generations were more likely to extract preludes liberally as individual compositions, or even to pair them with other forms. For example, in his recording of the Prelude No.7 in A major, Busoni connects it by means of a brief modulation to Chopin's Etude Op.10, no. 5, which follows. In this case, Busoni is actually editing and revising Chopin. Today, with their modernist bias on favor of the *Fassung letzter Hand*, performers are more likely to perform the Preludes as a unity.

Occasionally, subtle links that in different ways lead from one prelude to another are noticeable: The arpeggiated final chords of the Prelude No.3 in G major culminate in a high B whose resonance merges with the B anacrusis to the subsequent Prelude in E

⁶ Kallberg, p. 157.

minor. The D# of the quiet final chord of No.11 converts into the fifth scale degree of the following, rushing G#-minor Prelude. The initial C of the Prelude in F minor (No.18) echoes the last bars of the previous No.17 in A-flat Major, where C, the third scale degree, continues to sound until the end, covering the perfect authentic cadence. The G held on the top of the last Eb-Major chord in No.19 is also the highest pitch of the C-minor chord that opens the ensuing prelude. The Prelude No.22 opens with a Bb octave that arises from a low Bb in No.21. Such audible links unite the Preludes that are otherwise distinguished from one another by remarkable variety of drastic contrasts not only in mood, but in form, texture, sonority, harmonic progression, register, layout of the melodic line, motion of the accompaniment. Louis Ehlert finds in the Preludes the thundering power of the Scherzi, the half satirical, half coquettish elegance of the Mazurkas, and the southern, luxuriously fragrant breath of the Nocturnes.⁷ Theodore Kullak in his preface to the preludes writes that some of them belong to a species of character-etude (No.19 for example). Despite their brevity they are on a par with the great collections op.10 and op.25.⁸ The preludes were finished during Chopin's stay at Palma de Majorca in 1838, and published in 1839, yet there is evidence proving that most of them were written before his trip to the island.⁹ Chopin composed his Preludes, according to German musical author and a noted biographer of Chopin Frederick Niecks, by picking from his portfolio of pieces, sketches and memoranda.¹⁰

⁷ James Huneker, *Chopin The Man and His Music*, (New York: Scribner, 1921) p. 217.

⁸ Huneker, p. 219.

⁹ Huneker, p. 213.

¹⁰ Cited in Huneker, p. 214.

CHAPTER II

TWO-PART STORY

When one considers the overall structure of Chopin's Preludes further, it is useful to introduce one of the features that will be established in most of these miniature masterpieces, including the first - the division in two parts, or "a two part-story" as described by Jeffrey Kresky in *A Reader's Guide to the Chopin Preludes*. According to this formal scenario, a sense of incompleteness at the end of part one motivates the "second try" that leads to a successful outcome.¹¹ For example, in the first wave of the Prelude in C major the melody rises over the course of the first five measures to a dissonant e^2 and then descends over an open-ended $II^{6/5}-V^{6/5}/V-V^7$ progression in mm. 5-8. Thus, the first phrase is harmonically open, the V^7 harmony at m. 8 serving as a dominant divider that articulates the two-part formal division. When the first four bars are restated in mm. 9-12, a new departure of the wave takes place, and instead of descending as in the first one, it unfolds chromatically upward to a climax on a dissonant d^3 at m. 21, propelled pushed by a *stretto* and by the tenor inner voice (placed on the downbeat of m.18), which is the climax in m. 21. Creating a considerable release of tension caused by the second and successful attempt, the final ten-measure codetta (mm. 25-34) resounds entirely on tonic pedal; not all tension immediately released, however, since c^2 melodic goal of the cadential dominant at m. 24 only arrives at m. 29, withheld during the first half of codetta. In sum, the two-part form of the first Prelude is modeled on that of antecedent-

¹¹ Jeffrey Kresky, *A Reader's Guide to the Chopin Preludes*, (London, Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1994), p. 19.

consequent parallel period in which the consequent is expanded first internally by means of chromaticism and then externally by means of a codetta-like suffix.

Motivic economy binds the whole piece – a one-bar repetitive gesture prevails throughout. Nevertheless, this short, wave-like pattern repeated in each measure is built on a multi-layered structure and its rather unusual subdivision of the meter: the main melody, which is played with the thumb, slightly out-of-phase, syncopated inner voice in the bass staff, almost instantly echoed an octave higher, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in C Major Op.28, No.1, m. 1

In an attempt to decipher its vagueness and, in particular, its harmonic ambiguity, the Prelude No.2 in A-minor has perpetually raised questions. James Huneker calls it an asymmetric tune, and, in a more descriptive manner, he affirms that Chopin seldom wrote ugly music, but “is this not ugly, forlorn, despairing, almost grotesque, and discordant...deepest depression in its sluggish, snake-like progression...and aversion to life.”¹² Jeffrey Kresky in his guide to Chopin Preludes, pointing out the remarkable contrast between the first two preludes, writes that “the forthright clarity has yielded to obscurity and ambiguity...although the separation of the melody and accompaniment is so much clearer in this piece than in the last, everything else here is surely less clear –

¹² James Huneker, p. 222.

including, after a while, such astonishing basic elements as key and chord.”¹³ In a more analytical treatment, Gerald Abraham observes that not even Wagner in his prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* avoids the tonic more stubbornly than Chopin does here, suggesting that the “subconsciousness of the tonic” is created through dominant and sub-dominant.¹⁴ In Schenker’s words (*Free Composition*, 89) this piece is a true prelude: it represents a fifth-progression over V—I only.¹⁵ Only with the arrival of the cadential 6/4 chord in m. 15—at the earliest—could one retrospectively reinterpret the opening of the piece as prolonging the dominant minor (E minor). Several works written around the Chopin’s Majorcan period have similar partially non-tonic openings, such as the Second Ballade and the Third Scherzo.

In several Preludes, the left hand accompaniment precedes the actual entrance of the theme. This is the case with in Nos.2, 17 and 24, but the two-bar introduction in the Prelude no.3 in G major is especially curious in this respect because of the hidden motivic relationship between the melody and the accompaniment, almost calling to mind an augmentation:



Figure 2.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in G Major Op.28, No.3, mm. 1-2

¹³ Jeffrey Kresky, p. 9.

¹⁴ Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin*, (London, Boston & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1985) p. 143.

¹⁵ Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 89.

This Prelude recalls the first in so far as it too features a second attempt or restart of the opening theme, which is considerably expanded upon its restatement. Here, after the introduction, an eight-bar antecedent phrase leads from I to V (mm. 3–10 plus a one-bar extension of the V goal). The consequent follows the antecedent literally for four measures but then fleetingly tonicizes IV (C major) in mm. 16–21. The turn back towards G major at m. 22 is established by a discreet, almost unnoticeable shift occurs in the left-hand accompanimental figure; here, a passing F converts into F#, conferring a Lydian modal flavor to the passage and, more crucially, forcing us to hear C major as a subdominant once more, rather than a tonic, however local.



Figure 3.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in G Major Op.28, No.3, mm. 21-22

Both hands unite in playing the accompanimental figuration in the short coda that climaxes on a high B that prepares two arpeggiated, imperfect tonic chords, anticipating the same B found at the following prelude's downbeat.

Several of the features noted in the first three Preludes are found somewhat more integrated in the fourth. Partly due to a significantly more dramatic climax (m. 17) than in the first Prelude, the division in two parts is clearer and the second attempt more conquering. A quite simple melodic line and the absence of any technical demands do not impede its appealing lyricism and further, its harmonic ambiguity. It opens with an

unstable first-inversion tonic and proceeds via a descending chromatic bass to the dominant divider at m. 10; the dominant goal is extended through m. 12. Although this chromatic descent from I^6 to V is based on a normative succession of parallel 6/3 chords, suspensions and chromatic passing tones obscure these sixth-chords. As in the second Prelude, a root-position tonic arrives only with the final chord of the piece. As observed in the previous Prelude, an interesting resemblance exists between the motion of the accompaniment, an ongoing motion of the eight-note chords in this case, and the actual melodic line. These small descents, at times of the top, middle or of the bottom of the chords in the left hand, replicate the downward slides of the basic melodic descent simultaneously. Moreover, the bass line in mm. 10–12 replicates the B–C–B neighbor-note motive of the opening melody. When this bass line returns in mm. 19ff., it incorporates not only the reference to the neighbor note motive but also to the descending passing tone Bb from m. 4. The resulting 4/2 chord on Bb in m. 23 would normally have moved on to a 6/3 chord on A, this threatening to continue the series of descending parallel 6/3 chords indefinitely. Instead, the second half of m. 23 consists of a fermata rest during which the 4/2 Bb chord is silently reinterpreted harmonically as an inverted augmented-sixth chord (A#–C–E–G) leading to the home dominant in m. 24. Some editors, notably Paderewski, have wanted to “correct” Chopin’s notation by changing the bass Bb in m. 23 to A#, reflecting its ultimate function as a pre-dominant chord. But the point of the passage is that on the first half of m. 23, the Bb would be expected to descend, as it had in m. 4. With the fermata rest, Chopin puts a stop to cyclical process that could have continued. Chopin’s notation is a way of visually conveying the aural

effect of the passage. It is a better interpretive hint for the performer than is the pedantically correct A#.

Like the first and third Prelude, the fourth is cast in the form of a parallel period with expanded consequent. Measure 12, for example, expands the one-beat, octave-leap anacrusis into a measure-long arpeggiation that incorporates a reference to the motivic C–B. The consequent phrase includes a florid stretto passage (c.f., the stretto in the first Prelude) that climaxes at m. 17 on c^3 , the highest note in the piece, which is left unresolved in that register (a b^2 appears at the end of the measure). This melodic climax dissonates against the bass B^2 , the lowest note in the piece thus far. Thus, these simultaneously sounding pitch *extrema* express in vertical form the melodic C–B motive that saturates the piece.

Compared to No.4, the fifth Prelude in D major presents considerably less harmonic ambiguity, although a continuous shift between major and minor suffuses this short, yet harmonically intricate composition. Its major-minor shift is set up at the very beginning – four bars of arpeggiated A7 sustain an eight-note figure alternating between B–A and Bb–A:



Figure 4.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in D Major Op.28, No.5, m. 1-4

Such prolonged openings, built on an extended dominant, have been described by Edward T. Cone as “expanded upbeats”. They are characteristic of nineteenth-century music and are often found in Chopin’s music (e.g., Ballade No.1, Etude Op.10 No.12 or Op.25 No.7, Polonaise Op.44, Barcarolle, Prelude No.16).

Quick turnovers of the harmony occur three times per measure. Unlike earlier two-part Preludes, the first and second “attempt” are articulated here not by a dominant divider but by a diving chromatic median III (F# major). Maintaining the aura of these unstable modal shifts that have ruled the piece since the back-and-forth B-Bb of the opening, the eight-note line Bb – A – G – F# repeats three times without ever shifting to the B natural.



Figure 5.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in D Major Op.28, No.5, mm. 32-37

The melodic line of the Prelude No.6 in B minor, which is presented in the tenor register, is made of a simple rising arpeggio and its successive variants. But intriguingly, each one of these arpeggio-motions rises higher than its predecessors, with the third (coinciding with a change of harmony to VI at mm. 5–6) being the most expanded, and the most distant, reaching g^1 . The same sequence is repeated in the corresponding six bars of the “second attempt” (mm. 9–14), yet this time the climax, coinciding with the C-major Neapolitan harmony at mm. 11-14, is attenuated, reaching only e^1 (decorated by

the upper neighbor f^1). This climax, paradoxically enough, already seems to augur the decline towards the ending.

A peculiar detail appears in the coda – the ostinato pattern of the right hand (which might have inspired aspects of Ravel’s *Le Gibet*) unexpectedly becomes alive with the A on the third beat of m. 22. Even if its function might only be to bring the ostinato down from the obsessively b^1 to $f\#^1$ via a *cambiata* dissonance on the seventh (a^1), Chopin marks an accent here, emphasizing this minor seventh that is left by leap and never resolved, but rather followed by a fading-out on the abiding ostinato $f\#$:

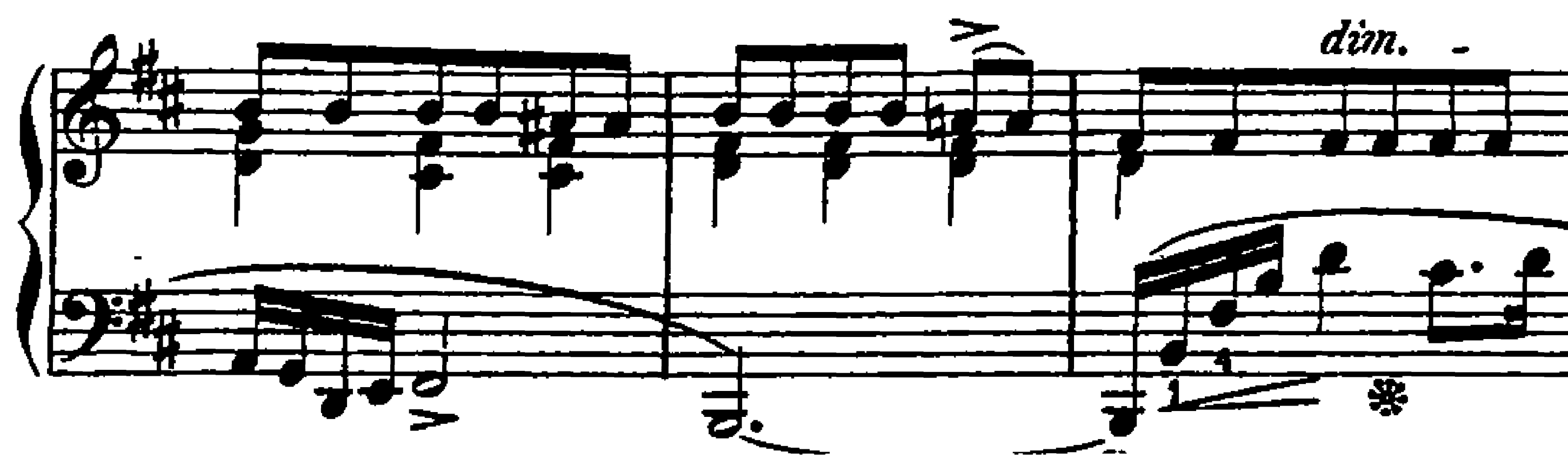


Figure 6.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in B Minor Op.28, No.6, mm. 21-23

Perhaps because of its simplicity and harmonic stasis (V–I every two bars with exception of the ending), the Prelude No.7 in A major offers a marked contrast to all the irregularities that preceded. This *petite mazurka* consists of two eight-bar phrases in which the second one leads to an $F\#7$ (functioning locally as $V7/ii$) substituting for the expected I:



Figure 7.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in A Major Op.28, No.7, mm. 9-13

In the Prelude No.8, Chopin creates a thick texture by assigning the main melodic line to the thumb throughout the piece and echoing it in the upper octave, where it is combined with highly decorated figuration against the semiquaver triplets of the left hand:



Figure 8.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in F-sharp Minor Op.28, No.8, m. 1

In addition to the multi-layered texture, restless harmonic modulations and polyrhythms contribute to the *agitato* character, which Chopin intensifies into a *stretto* (cf., Preludes 1 and 4) at the reprise, or responsive part of the underlying two-part form (m. 19). Giving equal weight to each one of these components, Franz Liszt, when teaching this Prelude, insisted that as well as the thumb melody, the thirty-second notes must be heard clearly, not as a mere melody adornment, and that the triplets in the left hand must be heard as triplets.¹⁶

In the Prelude No.9 in E major there are few subtle peculiarities worth underlining. Quite uncharacteristic for Chopin is the deep, relatively Brahmsian register of the melodic line written entirely in the bass clef. The highest note in the composition is the ab^1 on the downbeat of m. 8, which marks not only the melodic but also the dynamic

¹⁶ August Gollerich, *The Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt 1884-1886*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 37.

apex of the piece (note the *fortissimo* goal here of the crescendo begun in m. 5), as well as the harmonic point of furthest remove – a climactic cadential 6/4 in the key of A-flat major, an enharmonic respelling of #III (G# major). An unusual harmonic feature of this Prelude is that in this twelve-measure piece, Chopin uses all four possible forms of the mediant: iii (G# minor), III# (G# major), bIII (G major), and biii (G minor)!



Figure 9.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in E Major Op.28, No.9, mm. 5-8

In previous Preludes (Nos.1, 3, 4, 5 and 7), the form was that of an antecedent phrase followed by an expanded consequent. Here, we have a three-fold repetition of a four-bar phrase: the initial statement is entirely diatonic, save for a raised scale degree 4 in m. 3. This phrase is resumed at two points (mm. 5–8 and mm. 9–12). When the theme is restarted for the second time in m. 9, it does not settle down or resolve into some sort of coda, as in previous preludes, but rather ascends once again, this time incorporating an ascending-step sequence that tonicizes first bII and then bIII on the way to the final perfect authentic cadence (thus, i–bII–bIII–V–I). While the accompaniment moves in triplets, the quarter notes of the melody, as well as in the bass, are enlivened by sixteenth- or thirty-second-note anacrusis. At first it seems accidental that the sixteenth-note anacrusis of the upper line are followed by the quicker ones in the bass – a total of

twenty-eight times – until they finally coincide with the anacrusis to the last measure, where the thirty-second notes are found in both melody and bass:



Figure 10.2 Frédéric Chopin: Prelude in E Major, Op.28, No.9, mm. 10-12

Four sliding cascades, ornamentally embellishing the tonic (mm. 1–2), followed by a chordal prolongation of V7 (mm. 3–4), make up the four-bar thematic idea of the Prelude No.10 in C sharp minor, one of the shortest, yet unpredictable, pieces in the set. This four-bar idea is repeated almost literally in mm. 5–8, except that before the cascading motive ends its tumble down on G#, it passes through A# instead of A; this shift announces a sudden dominant minor (G# minor), in which key the first authentic cadence of the piece occurs. This cadence in v (mm. 7–8) articulates the two-part formal division.

Part two of this Prelude retains C# as the top note of each cascade, but in mm. 9–10, the harmonic context is altered from a prolonged i to a prolonged iv (F# minor). The final iteration of the four-bar pattern, for the first time, provides an authentic tonic cadence (mm. 15–16), but then an unexpected, syncopated, and accented A octave ushers in a repetition of the cadence. As described by Kresky, this A octave provides “a charming

glance backwards, a musical equivalent of ‘but wait a minute’—which is then followed by an ‘Oh, never mind!’”¹⁷

The absence of textural contrast and the fusion of harmony and melody in the Prelude No. 14 in E flat minor, evoke the finale of the Sonata No. 2, op.35, which Chopin composed the following year (1839). Nevertheless, its two-part division is clear (mm. 1–9/mm. 10–19). After mumbling through a rather peculiar harmonic combination, it finds its way back to the opening, starting a second attempt at a cadence. The cadence itself is obscured. Although the bass is clear enough (Ab–Bb–Eb, implying IV–V–I in mm. 16–17), the V supports a cadential 6/4 that does not resolve; rather Chopin transforms it into a *consonant* 6/4 (c.f. the treatment of the implied cadential 6/4 over tonic pedal in mm. 80–83 in the Prelude No. 17).

The bravura, etude-like Prelude No.16 in B-flat minor opens with an expanded upbeat on its dominant with the minor ninth G flat on top. As already heard in Prelude No.5, the effect of such a dominant opening is gestural, indeed physical, provoking wonder, simulating momentum, and launching the breathless perpetual motion sustained until the last bar of the Prelude.¹⁸ The second attempt (m. 18ff.) is here emphasized with added octaves in the left-hand accompaniment.

As in the Preludes Nos. 2, 5, 7, or 16, the Prelude No. 18 in F minor opens on its dominant. The basic idea, presented twice in mm. 1–2, consists of a *recitativo* figure in which an attempt in sixteenth-notes to get things going is interrupted by two orchestral strikes of a dominant ninth (Db). In m.3, the sixteenth-note motive manages to launch a

¹⁷ Kresky, p. 55.

¹⁸ Sobaskie, p. 31.

two-bar *Fortspinnung* that continues to prolong the dominant. This dominant does not resolve to I; rather, mm. 5–8 repeat mm. 1–4 up a fifth, so that the expected tonic is replaced by F9 (the dominant ninth of the iv, or B-flat minor—cf., mm. 1–4 of the preceding Prelude No. 17). The sense of a drastically extended dominant and avoidance through the entire composition of the expected tonic, lingers even in the very last two chords: the cadential V lacks a leading tone, and an authentic cadence is denied by the fifth scale degree (C) on the top: the very first C of the beginning resounds at the end.

An effect of gradual fading into distance is achieved in the funeral-march-like chord successions in the Prelude No.20 in C Minor. The opening four bars are marked *ff*, followed by two identical four-bar phrases, the first *p* and the second in *pp*. The combination of the repetitively descending rhythmic pattern (typical of a funeral march) of a dotted-eighth passing downward through a sixteenth-note, the chromatic descent of the left-hand line, and the fading dynamics cohere into an impression of a funeral cortege approaching and then moving on.

Further textural innovation appears in the Prelude No.22 in G minor, where the entire melodic line is given to the bass in octaves, disrupted by off-the-beat, slurred chords in the right hand. An ample amount of fully-diminished chords and the octave doublings give a certain Lisztian aura to the piece.

The transparently-textured Prelude No. 23 in F major is made up largely of a four-bar phrase that is transposed steadily upwards to reach f^4 , the highest pitch in the piece and, indeed, in the entire set of Preludes (it occurs in several other Preludes, including the last). The four-bar group is transposed up a fifth to C major in mm. 5–8, then up an octave back to F major in mm. 9–12. This third statement is altered by the appearance in

m. 12 of an accented E flat, which prepares a fourth version of the theme, based on a IV–V7/V–V progression that ushers in the final iteration of the four-bar group, now transposed up two octaves from its original guise. Perhaps one of the most exceptional points of this prelude takes place at the very end, when a two-bar extension of the final four-bar group incorporates an Eb into the arpeggiated tonic chord. This moment harkens back to m. 12, as if Chopin were going to repeat mm. 13ff., but this time the F7 sonority hangs in the air, unresolved, and in a most unusual manner provided yet another Prelude with an open-ended close.

CHAPTER III

THREE-PART STORY

The rising chromatic line, segmented into eighth-note pairs, in the Prelude No.12 in G# Minor, is harmonized entirely by the tonic. No other Prelude examined thus far opens with such a clear, wide-ranging expression of the tonic. In general, the Preludes that exhibit a three-part design have more extended phrases, expansive developmental sections, and more elaborate codas than do the two-part Preludes. The Prelude No. 12 arguably expresses the following formal scheme:

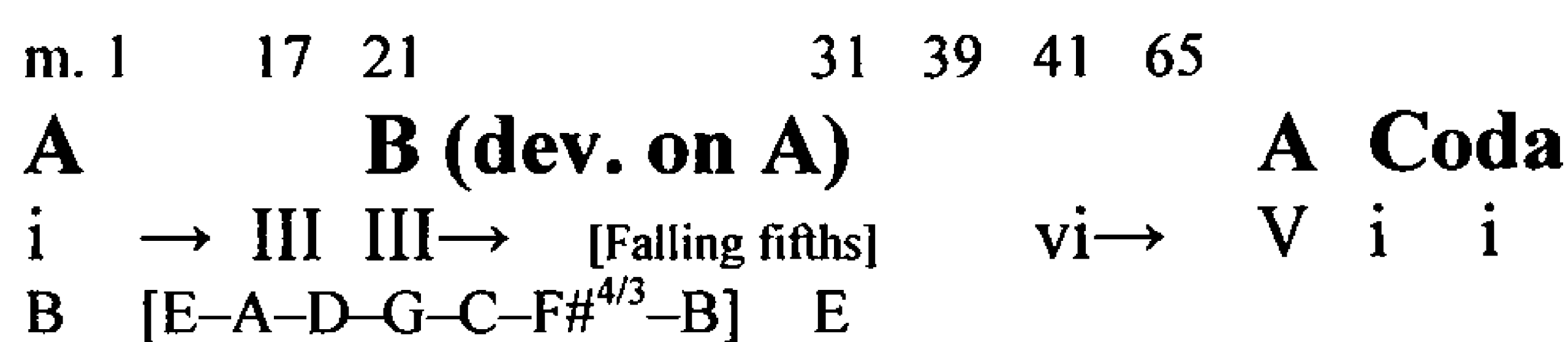


Figure 1.3 Frederic Chopin: Prelude No.12, an overview of the form.

The bulk of the central section consists of an interpolated falling-fifth progression prolonging III.

In the following F#-major Prelude, an ABA¹ ternary layout is more apparent; the central section is more of the contrasting than the developmental kind, articulated as it is by obvious changes in texture, melodic design, tempo and key. The initial A section taken by itself forms a parallel period: antecedent in mm. 1–8, expanded consequent in mm. 9–20. Recall that the expanded parallel period was the paradigm for several of the two-part Preludes (e.g., Nos. 1, 3, 4, and 6); now, it serves as a module within a larger,

compound form. The return of the A at m. 29 is truncated: only mm. 13–19 return, extended by a one-measure codetta that recaptures the \wedge^3 *Kopfton*.

The ternary design is further expanded in the Prelude No.15 in D flat major (“Raindrop”), where the A-section material is developed sufficiently to be itself subdivided into a smaller a–b–a. The expansion is produced by an asymmetrical, contrasting eleven-bar b section that tonicizes first the minor dominant and then the submediant. Such asymmetric phrase divisions (here, 4 + 6 + 1) do not occur in the earlier Preludes, with the exception of the Prelude in G# Minor where, after regular 4+4 construction in the A section, the B section begins with a 3 + 4 + 1 grouping:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Frederic Chopin's Prelude in G# Minor, Op. 28, No. 12. The first system covers measures 21 to 25, and the second system covers measures 26 to 28. The music is written for piano in G# minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and 3/4 time. The left hand features a steady eighth-note accompaniment, while the right hand plays a melodic line with various articulations and dynamics. A forte (*f*) dynamic marking is present at the beginning of measure 21. The notation includes stems, beams, and slurs to indicate phrasing and articulation.

Figure 2.3 Frederic Chopin: Prelude in G# Minor, Op.28, No.12 mm. 21-28

The A section of the D-flat Prelude is largely constructed over a continual A-flat ostinato in the left hand. This ostinato transfers to the right hand in the B section where, respelled as an enharmonic G#, it is reinterpreted as the \wedge^1 of C# minor and then \wedge^5 of G#, the tonal goal of the B section.

As in the Preludes Nos. 13 and 21, the return of the A section here is abridged: after six measures, it yields to an eight-bar coda that continues to exploit the Ab ostinato.

The opening middle C of the idyllic Prelude No. 17 in A-flat Major is supported by an unstable 6/4 chord. Chopin resolves the 6/4 normatively enough to a V7, but the V7 in turn resolves not to I^{b7} (i.e., V7/IV). Thus, the composer launches a strategy of avoiding a stable tonic avoidance. The opening melody is deployed as a lyrical parallel period that avoids the tonic until the perfect cadence at m. 18, whereupon Ab is immediately reinterpreted as $\hat{3}$ of bVI (Fb major, respelled as E major), launching a contrasting B episode. But, by analogy with m. 4, this new tonic also has an added seventh, so that it functions locally as V/bII (mm. 19–20). After two sequential progressions, Chopin attains a perfect cadenced in bVI at m. 28 and then smoothly brings us back to the dominant (Eb) through a fully diminished (V7/V).

At m. 35, the A theme is returns, *fortissimo*, and in a more massive texture, mainly as a result of extremely low octaves of the bass. So far the main theme has been presented three times (m. 2, m. 11, m. 35), each time growing in texture and in amount of sound (*p*, *f*, *ff*). At 43, the pompous return of the theme is put on hold when, by means of an ascending 5–6 chromatic sequence, Chopin tonicizes first E major (bVI, c.f., mm. 19–32) and then F# major (bVII). A *descending* 6–5 sequence arrives chromatically at the enharmonic equivalent of V/bVI, namely a German sixth (Cb–Eb–Gb–A) that resolves to a cadential 6/4 in the key of the home dominant Eb. When the A theme, thus prepared, returns for the fourth time at m. 65, its sonority and function are entirely transformed. This time, the dynamic level is the lowest so far (*pp* and *sotto voce*). The main theme is

present in its entirety, as in the opening, but this time entirely over a tonic pedal—an accented (*fz*) low A-flat in the bass which, like a bell, marks the downbeat of every two measures. Whether we interpret it as a return of the theme over a long-expected but hitherto under-projected tonic bass, or simply as a coda, this conclusion of the prelude marks a ternary development of the earlier two-part scenario, where harmonic or some other structural complication result in two attempts at completing a formal trajectory: attempt (incompletion)—attempt (incompletion)—completion. The overall form of the Prelude No. 17 is that of the five-part rondo (ABACA)—the only prelude that extends the ternary principle to encompass two episodic digressions.

Some of the Preludes exhibit a significant difference between a much more dynamic movement of the accompaniment and a more static melodic outline. This is true of Nos. 2, 3, 4, 13, but especially No.21 in B-flat major. Here, the accompaniment figure always begins on a single note and then unfolds in a contrary-motion wedge pattern. The first bass note of the accompaniment stands alone followed by a second note, in reality the first note of the wedge figure, which ends with the bass note on the downbeat of the next measure. The gesture gives an entirely distinct motion between the two hands, as seen in the figure 3.3:



Figure 3.3 Frederic Chopin: Prelude in B-flat Major, Op.28, No.21, mm. 1-3

The opening A section consists of two eight-bar groups, the second of which changes its shape in the last four bars, now doubling the left-hand figuration at the upper octave. A sudden burst of Gb major (bVI) transports us into a new sphere; this B section consists of an eight-measure phrase followed by a *pp* echo. Chopin incorporates an F flat in the accompaniment of the echoed version: he breaks the harmonic stasis of this 16-measure long Gb-major prolongation by turning it into a G-flat7, which he enharmonically reinterprets as an augmented-sixth chord resolving to the home dominant F (mm. 32–33). The entire B section can be heard in retrospect as an extended one-chord preparation for the return of A. With the return of A at m. 33, all the basic material used in the first A section is now elaborated under the F pedal—the left-hand accompaniment figuration is now doubled by both registers, and the initial falling third motion of the melody F–D is restated as a sequence (F–D, G–E-flat, A–F, B-flat–G-flat), which leads to the *ff* culmination. But the further intensification of the dominant F is prolonged at the very climax as the accompaniment figuration on its own descends chromatically, slightly differently than in the first A, which at last sets up a somewhat more extended coda – after a few more attempts of fragmented material, only the solo bass figure remains in motion to the end.

An urgent accompaniment pattern in the left hand at once sets the apocalyptic tone and pulse of the final Prelude in the set. The tonic remains intact for the first ten bars, while the expressive theme consists mainly of the chord notes A–F–D. The entire A section (mm. 1–19), which modulates from D minor to A minor, is subsequently transposed down a perfect fourth (A minor to E minor). Repetition on this scale is unprecedented in the Preludes. In contrast to the twice recurring, fairly predictable A, the

following developmental section is of a particular interest, traveling through several distant tonalities as the theme searches for the home tonic, falsely restated in C minor (m. 39) and then in D flat major (m. 43). The harmonic shifts in the A section occur almost unnoticeably at the left-hand pattern, but they become more obvious in the development. After the second repetition of A is brought to E minor (m. 37), a chromatic bass descent (E–Eb–D4/3) briefly established C minor. From the C, an ascending 5–6 chromatic sequence rises back to D minor. The return of the theme at m. 50 is reinforced by octaves but is truncated, quickly leading to a coda, as in the several other three-part Preludes (Nos. 8, 12, 13, 15, and 21) in which the return of A represents a preparation for coda rather than its complete return. A cascading figure heard earlier in the Prelude (mm. 17 and 35 within other tonal contexts) returns in mm. 66, 70, and 74, now firmly embedded in D minor. The final cascade and the three knocks of the low D ring with all the finality missing among the earlier Prelude endings.¹⁹

¹⁹ Kresky, p. 128

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