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FOREWORD

Frédéric François Chopin, son of a French father and a Polish mother, was born near Warsaw in 1810—the same year as Robert Schumann, one year later than Felix Mendelssohn, and one prior to Franz Liszt. Before his fortieth birthday he had succumbed, in Paris, to consumption. Yet the man's artistic legacy included a unique technique—a refined and sensual pianism unknown before his time—as well as, and far more importantly, a catalog of music without expressive precedent, almost entirely for the keyboard.



Chopin's birthplace at Zelazowa-Wola, Poland.

He was a slight, refined-looking man, not much over a hundred pounds in weight, with a prominent nose, brown eyes, a pale complexion and beautiful hands.

Chopin had been brought up on the music of J. S. Bach and W. A. Mozart, who remained his models throughout his life, although he also loved Italian opera. In turn, Chopin influenced virtually all of the piano literature after him until Arnold Schoenberg's *Three Piano Pieces* of 1909. Without the French-Polish master's presence in history, as an expatriate from his ravaged homeland after 1831, we might never have received, as they were conceived, the mature keyboard works of Schumann, the nationalistic outpourings of Liszt, Smetana, Dvořak, etc., Brahms' solo creations beginning with Op. 76, or the works of Debussy, Scriabin and Ravel.

Improvements in piano manufacture must not be overlooked, by Pleyel of Paris most providentially, in the years that Chopin lived there. But this emigré-artist—the composer from Zelazowa-Wola, was the most subtle and influential force in music for an instrument that dominated his century. From the age of seven, he composed prodigiously, beginning significantly with a *Polonaise* in G minor, although not until the age of 15 did he honor a work—the C minor *Rondo* of 1825—with a designation, "Op. 1." His life's dedication came to an end with *Mazurkas* in G minor and F minor, the only products of his final year on earth. Ravaged by illness, looking a dozen or more years older than just 39 in a photograph that has survived (see page 21), he died in Paris, on October 17, 1849.

Of all the romantic composers, Chopin was at once the most revolutionary and the most classic—classic in that for the most part his forms are perfectly matched to the content, his workmanship jeweled and precise. There is little padding and no superfluous passagework.

Chopin's works are reflections of his own style of playing. As his compositions were new, so was his execution—and they complemented each other. In their poetry of conception, in their subtle and original harmony, in their every aspect, they established new ideas of piano playing. The Chopin repertoire determines, to a large extent, the character of pianistic art today. He composed a greater number of works that are in the concert repertoire, in proportion to his total output, than did any other composer. This itself is a testimony to his genius. No pianist is great who does not play Chopin greatly.

CHOPIN THE PIANIST

Chopin's reputation as an outstanding pianist was enormous, in spite of the infrequency of his public performances. Only about thirty of his performances could be called "public." Of these, the one at Manchester, England, on August 28, 1848 had the largest audience—about 1200. Since Chopin never played with a great volume of sound, most of his concerts were presented to small aristocratic audiences in salons rather than in concert halls. Chopin disliked performing publicly, and when he appeared before a large and unselected audience he was not generally well received. His style and temperament were best suited to the more intimate atmosphere of the salon, where everybody could hear him without difficulty. So whenever possible, he wisely avoided large audiences, although he said on some occasions he needed the stimulus of an audience to play at his best.

Chopin's reputation as a pianist was rivaled only by that of Liszt and Thalberg. His concerts were nothing like the solo recitals of today. Liszt was the first pianist to give a full recital without the assistance of others. Chopin's concerts followed the custom of the day in that he included performances of other musicians. His first Paris concert, on February 26, 1832, included a violinist, oboist, cellist, three singers, and a performance of Friedrich Kalkbrenner's *Grand Polonaise* for six pianos, performed by Chopin, Kalkbrenner, Hiller, Osborne, Starnaty and Sorviński.

REPERTOIRE

Chopin performed his own compositions in almost all his concerts. The Paris reviews of his programs never mention Chopin playing the solo compositions of anyone but himself. Karl Mikuli (1821–97), a student of Chopin, mentions hearing Chopin play Weber's *Concertstück*, Sonata in E Minor, and Sonata in A-flat; Hummel's *Fantasy, Septet*, and concerto; and John Field's Concerto in A-flat as well as his nocturnes. But Mikuli does not indicate if he heard Chopin play these works in public. Chopin never practiced his own compositions before a concert; he played only the works of his two great loves, Mozart and Bach.

Chopin in 1838, by Gotzenberger



From his earliest years, Chopin astonished audiences with his skill at improvising. He would sometimes caricature the playing of other pianists. Composing and playing were inseparable for Chopin. The piano was almost an extension of himself.

Besides performing his carefully worked out compositions, Chopin frequently improvised at concerts. In fact, many of his compositions resulted from improvisations. His student Carl Filtsch described the way Chopin worked: "The other day [this was in March, 1842] I heard Chopin improvise at George Sand's house. It is marvelous to hear Chopin compose in this way. His inspiration is so immediate and complete that he plays without hesitation as if it had to be thus." In his letters he repeatedly tells of improvising before an audience and shows great pride in the favorable comments his skill elicited. Chopin attached much importance to improvising, and he seemed most impressed with a fellow musician when that musician was a skilled improviser.

CHOPIN'S HANDS

Stephen Heller spoke of Chopin's slim hands—how they would “suddenly expand and cover a third of the keyboard. It was like the opening of the mouth of a serpent about to swallow a rabbit whole.” Most witnesses agree that Chopin could stretch tenths with ease and that his hands were extremely supple. According to Adolf Gutmann (1819–82), one of Chopin's students, Chopin's whole body was extraordinarily flexible.

I have a plaster reproduction of Chopin's left hand. It is slender and much narrower across the palm than my hand, which is of average size. The fingers are comparatively long, yet the entire hand is smaller than many women's. It is impossible to describe how flexible it appears. I cannot detect any “webbing” between the fingers of the plaster reproduction. The most extraordinary feature of the hand is the wide spaces between the fingers, especially between the second and third fingers and even more so between the fourth and fifth fingers.



Cast of Chopin's left hand made by Auguste Clesinger

CHOPIN'S STYLE OF PLAYING

Chopin was a great and highly original pianist, largely self-taught, whose grasp of the capabilities of his instrument was unrivaled. Contemporary observers speak of Chopin's precision, his polished playing, the evenness of his scales, the independence of his fingers, and his way of making the piano sing. But certain pianistic traits seem to have been uniquely Chopin's. His playing was of superlative delicacy. Chopin said: “I could not have learned to play the piano in Germany. There people complain that I perform too softly, too delicately. They are accustomed to the piano pounding of their own musicians.” But the finest German artists understood Chopin's style very well. Mendelssohn praised him as a “thorough musician, who, in contrast to the half virtuosos and half classics of the time, has his perfect and well-defined phrase.” Chopin never set out to stun his listeners with brilliant passagework. He relished the more gentle sonorities and soft nuances of the piano and used a simple natural position of the hands. He approached the piano in a spontaneous and improvisatory manner entirely different from the style of the French pianists of his time. The legato style of the great singers had a decided influence on his playing.

Although we can only guess at what Chopin's playing sounded like, we know from many written accounts that in everything he performed there was elasticity and communicativeness, as well as a super-refinement and a slight reserve.

FINGERING

Chopin displayed some unconventional methods of fingering, and his fingering was considered unorthodox in his day. Alfred Hipkins, who heard Chopin play, speaks of Chopin performing *cantabile* by using the thumb on black keys, passing it under the little finger, sliding a finger from one key to the next (especially black to white), or changing fingers on one key like an organist. In 1825, at the age of sixteen, Chopin was appointed organist to the Lyceum in Warsaw. Any pianist who has played the organ knows that organ playing influences piano technique, especially fingering. Chopin's piano technique was probably modified by his organ experience. The sliding of a finger from one key to the next is another fingering device more common to the organist than to the pianist.

Other Chopin fingering practices, such as passing the third finger over the fourth and fifth, or the fourth finger over the fifth can be found in François Couperin, Türk, and C.P.E. Bach. Chopin prescribed certain fingerings because they utilized unique characteristics of individual fingers. He also recommended fingerings not only for ease of execution, but as aids in producing desired timbres and tone qualities.

PEDALING

Chopin's use of the pedals was unique. No pianist before Chopin had used the pedals with so much skill. Witnesses often remarked that sometimes when Chopin performed, his foot seemed to vibrate. Others indicated Chopin gave great attention to pedal markings and was skilled equally in using and not using it. Hipkins said, after hearing Chopin play, that he used plenty of pedal, especially in left-hand arpeggio passages, "which swelled or diminished like waves in an ocean of sound."

RUBATO

Descriptions of Chopin's *tempo rubato* conflict. Hector Berlioz wrote: "Chopin could ill endure the restraint of time, and to my mind pushed rhythmical independence much too far . . . Chopin *could* not play in strict time." But one of Chopin's students, Mme. Streicher, remembered that Chopin insisted on rhythmical strictness. Mikuli insists that Chopin was unbending in keeping the time.

The term *tempo rubato* means "stolen time"—but with some of Chopin's contemporaries it became grand larceny. From most accounts it appears that Chopin was not guilty of the nineteenth-century *rubato* excesses. According to Mme. Dubois, another of Chopin's students, Chopin said: "Let your left hand be your conductor and always keep time." This is similar to Mozart's letter to his father of October 23, 1777 where he said: "Everyone is amazed that I can always keep strict time. What these people cannot grasp is that in *tempo rubato* in an *Adagio*, the left hand should go on playing in strict time. With them, the left hand always follows suit."

Mikuli's description of Chopin's *rubato* also reminds one of the Mozartian *rubato*:

While the singing hand, either irresolutely lingering or as in passionate speech eagerly anticipating with a certain impatient vehemence, freed the truth of the musical expression from all rhythmical fetters, the other, the accompanying hand, continued to play strictly in time.

This type of *rubato* is highly disciplined, and it was a notable characteristic of Chopin's playing, especially in the Mazurkas. Chopin seems to have been the first composer to introduce the term *rubato* as a direction in the manuscript—namely, in the Mazurka in F-sharp minor, Op. 6, No. 1. It is possible that Chopin's music calls for two kinds of *rubato*—the Mozartian type in which there is freedom in the melody against a constant accompaniment, and the nineteenth-century type in which all parts of the music are treated with elasticity. Most witnesses agree with Moscheles who said that although Chopin's playing was original it never degenerated into timelessness. And so it appears that Chopin's *rubato* was always controlled and never capricious.

TOUCH AND TONE

There seems to be general agreement that Chopin despised banging and that, compared to other pianists of his day, he played quietly. He frequently spoke with scorn of those who pounded on the keyboard. He must have had an exceptionally soft and extremely beautiful touch. Thalberg shouted all the way home after a Chopin concert because "I need some noise because I've heard nothing but a *pianissimo* all evening." But Mikuli described Chopin's tone as "immense in *cantabiles*," and believed that only John Field could equal him in this respect. Chopin wrote that in order to obtain a beautiful touch one need only study the arrangement of the hand in relation to the keyboard.

Chopin's playing combined lightness with perfect control. Any pianist knows that it is more difficult to maintain control while playing quietly than loudly. The control Chopin had over his light playing made it possible for him to produce a *pianissimo* with infinite degrees of shading, and so delicate was his approach that when he came near a normal *forte* it sounded thunderous. Indeed, his control must have been astounding, as demonstrated with his preferred quiet style of playing.

CHOPIN THE TEACHER

Although we know from Chopin's letters that he did some teaching before he went to Paris, his teaching career was not fully launched until 1832. From 1832 to 1849 Chopin devoted himself almost equally to teaching and composing. Chopin preferred to devote the summer to composing for he said in a letter from Nohant (George Sand's summer home near Paris) in August 1845: "I must finish certain manuscripts before returning, because it is impossible for me to compose in the winter." Chopin's heavy teaching schedule probably made it impossible for him to compose in the winter. His letters indicate that he generally gave an average of five lessons a day when he was in good health. The lessons always lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour, but frequently he made them longer for his better students. He was punctual: "with me, things go by the clock," and he usually began his lessons at 8 a.m. He charged about twenty francs for a lesson, then a fairly high fee. Chopin would go to a student's home for an extra ten francs, provided the student sent a carriage for him, but he preferred teaching in his own apartment, and on his own piano.



Pencil portrait of Chopin dated November 4, 1829
by Eliza Radziwill

CHOPIN'S PIANO METHOD

Chopin's letters contain very little about his pedagogical methods. He seldom spoke of his aesthetic conceptions outside the narrow circle of his friends.

We do know from George Sand's word that Chopin planned to write a piano method: "He promises to write a method where he will treat not only of craft, but of doctrine. Will he keep his word?"

Unfortunately Chopin never fulfilled that promise. He did, however, leave a few pages of notes for this method that are nothing more than an outline for an elementary piano book but they do contain a few of Chopin's pedagogical principles. Here is what he had to say about equality of strength in the fingers:

Provided that it is played in time, no one will notice inequality of sound in a rapid scale. Flying in the face of nature it has become customary to attempt to acquire equality of strength in the fingers. It is more desirable that the student acquire the ability to produce finely graded qualities of sound, or so it seems to me. The ability to be able to play everything at a level tone is not our object.

And about correct fingering:

Since each finger is formed differently it is far better to develop their special characteristics rather than attempt to destroy their individuality. The strength of each finger is relative to its shape. The extremities of the hand are formed by the thumb, which is its strongest member, and by the little finger. While the third finger has a greater freedom as a point of support . . . the fourth finger is bound to the third by the same tendon like a Siamese twin and is the weakest. One can try with all one's might to separate them, but this is impossible and, thank heavens, useless. There are as many different sounds as there are fingers. Everything hangs on knowing how to finger correctly. Hummel is the most knowledgeable person on this subject. It is important to make use of the shape of the fingers and no less so to employ the rest of the hand, wrist, forearm and arm. To attempt to play entirely from the wrist, as Kalkbrenner advocates, is incorrect.

CHOPIN'S PIANO LESSONS

There were two pianos in Chopin's Paris apartment—a Pleyel grand (ca. 6'8" in length)



Chopin's Pleyel grand piano.

and a Pleyel upright. During their lessons, Chopin's students always played on the grand piano. Chopin insisted that his students practice on quality instruments. He preferred the Pleyel piano for his own use. The Pleyel, with its light touch, was more to his taste than any other piano. It was the instrument that best displayed an aspect of Chopin's playing described by Moscheles: "He needs no powerful forte to produce the necessary contrasts." Liszt described the tone of the Pleyel piano as the "marriage of crystal and water."

Of the English pianos Chopin mentioned only the Broadwood. In a letter from London in 1848 he described the Broadwood as a "veritable London Pleyel."

While the student was seated at the grand piano, Chopin normally presided at the smaller instrument. Lessons generally followed this pattern: exercises were covered first, then scales and then the student presented his "pieces."

Mme. Dubois said that Chopin played the orchestral parts of concertos on the piano.

Chopin had always a cottage piano by the side of the grand piano on which he gave his lessons. It was marvelous to hear him accompany, no matter what the compositions, from the concertos of Hummel to those of Beethoven. He performed the role of the orchestra most wonderfully. When I played his own concertos, he accompanied me in this way.

Chopin gave verbal instructions and corrected student's mistakes by interrupting and demonstrating from the second piano. Mikuli remembered Chopin playing almost continually during some lessons:

He played not only single passages, but whole pieces, over and over again . . . The whole lesson hour often passed without the pupil's having played more than a few measures.

Mme. Streicher, one of Chopin's students, remembered Chopin playing his own works, as well as those of others, to show how they should be performed. He played fourteen of Bach's Preludes and Fugues at one of her lessons.

His students agree that usually he treated them with kindness and patience. Chopin not only recognized timidity or anxiety, but he knew how to deal with them. In a letter of 1844, Emilie von Timm describes how Chopin helped her overcome her inhibitions and play expressively:

It is marvelous to see with what tact Chopin knows how to put someone at his ease; with what intuition he knows, I should say, how to thread his way through the thoughts of the person he sees before him or hears . . . To encourage me, he told me: "It seems to me that you do not dare to express yourself the way that you feel. Be more bold, let yourself go. Imagine that you are at the Conservatory and that you hear the most beautiful playing in the world. Make yourself hear it and you will hear yourself playing it here. Have full confidence in yourself, have the desire to sing like Rubini and you will succeed. Forget that anyone is listening to you and keep listening to yourself. I see that timidity, a lack of confidence in yourself, is a kind of armour, but through that armour I see something else that you do not yet dare confess and we are deprived of it. When you are at the piano, I give you complete freedom to do what you want; follow freely the ideal you have created for yourself and you must feel in yourself; be bold, confident in your ability and your strength, and what you play will always be good. It will give me as much pleasure to hear you play with perfect freedom, as the disgusting smugness of ordinary people is insupportable to me.

Chopin was surely able to put his students at ease. He found great pleasure in teaching diligent and talented students and would correct even the dullest students with kindness and encouraging words.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Chopin cautioned his students about practicing for too long a time and reminded them to concentrate when they practiced, even during exercises. He felt that numerous mechanical repetitions were a waste of time. Avoid muscular fatigue. He suggested they should interrupt their practice hours by reading, looking at beautiful works of art, or taking a walk. Chopin forbade Mme. Dubois from practicing more than three hours a day when he learned she had been practicing six a day. Practice periods should be scheduled around the mind's natural attention span.

TEACHING REPERTOIRE

Chopin used Clementi's *Preludes and Exercises* with all his students, no matter how advanced they were. He used his own Nocturnes, as well as those by Field, as studies for teaching *legato* and tone control. Some of his other teaching repertoire included: Bach, *Well Tempered Clavier*, English and French Suites; Beethoven, Concertos and several Sonatas (op. 27 no. 2, op. 26, and op. 57); Clementi, *Gradus ad Parnassum*; Cramer, Etudes; Hummel, *Rondo brillant sur un thème russe*, op. 98, *La Bella Capricciosa*, Sonata in F-sharp minor, op. 81, Concertos in A minor and B minor, Septet; Liszt, *La Tarantelle de Rossini*, Septet from *Lucia*; Mendelssohn, *Songs without Words*, Concerto in G minor; Weber, Sonatas in C Major and A-flat Major, and pieces by Mozart, Dussek, Ries, Moscheles, Heller, Hiller, and Schumann.

TECHNICAL STUDIES

Technique and interpretation were inseparable in Chopin's teaching. Technical skill, for Chopin, was not an end in itself, but a means of freeing and training the hand for the most perfect musical expression. He deplored the way some teachers assigned exercises that had nothing to do with the works of the great masters, and called such pianistic drills "a new kind of acrobatics."

Chopin constantly warned his students that exercises must not be performed mechanically but with concentration. Complete concentration was demanded of all his students whether they practiced technical studies or the great masterpieces.

One aspect of technique was the "arpeggio" study which every student was required to play at the beginning of his/her lesson.



A harsh uneven presentation would bring forth the question, "Is that a dog barking?" The point was to make it smooth, unaccented, with a slight climax at the top, but not a push or a thump.

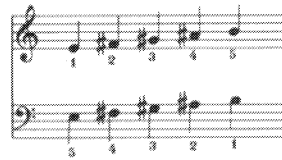
POSITION AT THE PIANO

Chopin directed the student to sit in front of the keyboard in such a way that either end of the keyboard might be reached without leaning sideways. Seated in this position, the student was then to place his right foot on the pedal without depressing it, and place his fingers on the notes E, F-sharp, G-sharp, A-sharp, and B. "In order to obtain equality of leverage," Chopin writes, "the fingers on the black keys must be kept in line. The same applies to the fingers on the white keys. The resultant move will be found to follow the natural formation of the hand." The wrist and forearm should round themselves into a curve, thereby allowing an ease of movement that would be impossible if the fingers were extended.

Under some exercises he devised for his niece Louise, Chopin wrote that the elbow should be even with the white keys and the hand turned neither to the left nor the right. Chopin preferred a low seat at the instrument. Mme. Courty writes that Chopin told her not to sit so high at the piano and directed her to make as few movements as possible.

HAND POSITION

From the first lesson, Chopin's aim was to eliminate rigidity and any stiff contorted movements in the student's hand. A supple, natural, rounded hand position was his immediate concern.

Proper Hand Position:

Hands should be turned slightly outward. Elbows fall close to the body naturally. Mikuli mentioned some exercises, to be performed away from the keyboard, that Chopin devised for attaining the much desired flexibility.

As gymnastic aids he recommended bending the wrist inward and outward, the repeated wrist stroke, the pressing apart of the fingers—but all with an earnest warning against over-exertion.

SCALES

Chopin started his students with the scales containing many black keys—B major, F-sharp Major, and D-flat Major. C Major, he wrote, although the easiest to read, is the most difficult to play; therefore it should come last. Chopin thought the B Major scale the most natural because it places the longer fingers over the black keys.

Mikuli remembered one of Chopin's preparation for scale-playing:

According to Chopin, evenness in scale-playing depends not only on . . . perfect freedom of the thumb in passing under and over, but foremostly on the perfectly smooth and constant sideways movement of the hand (not *step by step*) letting the elbow hang down freely and loosely at all times. This movement he illustrated by making a *glissando* across the keys.

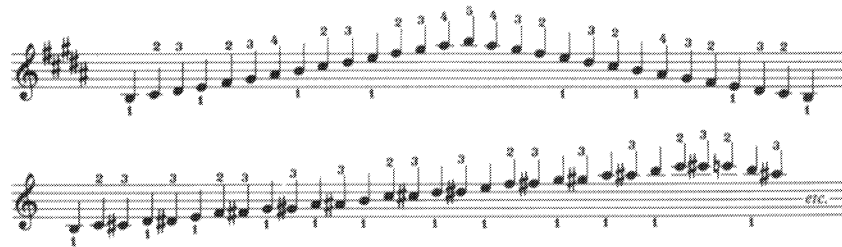
Chopin taught that the hand should be bent inward to facilitate passing the thumb under, and passing the other fingers over it. He insisted that his students play their scales exactly in time. Mikuli said:

He [Chopin] required a very full tone, as *legato* as possible, at first very slowly and taking a quicker tempo only step by step, and playing with metronomic evenness.

Chopin's written instructions confirm the importance he placed on evenness as one of the essentials in scale-playing:

Provided that it is played in time, no one will notice inequality of sound in a rapid scale.

Here is an exercise for fluency which Chopin sent to his niece Louise:



Elbow should be level with the white keys. Hand neither toward the right or the left.

Chopin at the piano, by Eliza Radziwill, 1826.

**FINGERING**

Chopin stated: "There are as many different sounds as there are fingers. Everything hangs on knowing how to finger correctly."

He obviously attached great importance to proper fingering. Determined that his students should use advantageous fingering, he frequently used his pencil by adding fingering to his student's music. Mikuli writes about some of Chopin's innovative fingering practices:

Chopin did not hesitate to use the thumb on the black keys, or to pass it under the little finger (with a decided inward bend of the wrist, to be sure), where it facilitated the execution, rendering the latter quieter and smoother. With one and the same finger he

often struck two neighboring keys in succession (and this not simply in a slide from a black key to the next white one), without the slightest noticeable break in the continuity of the tones. He frequently passed the longest fingers over each other without the intervention of the thumb.

Chopin developed another type of fingering in which he capitalized on the special characteristics of each finger, its weaknesses as well as its strengths. He taught his students to recognize and utilize each finger's individual qualities. Mme. Courty said that Chopin stressed the fact that the "third finger is a great singer."

INTERPRETATION

Chopin's basic principal of interpretation was "Play as you feel and you will play well." Sometimes Chopin resorted to visual imagery in order to elicit more expressive playing from a student. One day, he told a student who was playing mechanically, "Do put your whole soul into it." Although Chopin often played for his students, he did not want them to become mere imitators "without giving something of themselves." We know from contemporary listeners that Chopin varied his interpretations each time he played, and there was never any fixed interpretation representing the composer's last words on the subject. If the student's playing did not strictly conform to his own but was musically acceptable, his frequent comment was: "I do not play it this way, but your rendering is good." There was a flexibility in interpretation which he allowed, and a tolerance of the ideas of others as well.

SIMPLICITY

Chopin said: "Simplicity is the final thing. After having conquered all difficulties, after having played a huge quantity of notes, it is simplicity that emerges with all its charm as the final seal of art. It is not an easy thing."

Chopin admired his student Karl Filtsch (who died at the age of 15), his one student of genius, because he played so simply, "as if it could be no other way." Chopin despised exaggeration as much as he adored simplicity; he scornfully asked if waving elbows and exaggerated lifting of the hands were attempts to catch pigeons! For him the essential thing was simplicity, and absence of declamation and brutal antitheses.

Mikuli summed up Chopin's ideal—expressive playing, free of affectation or exaggeration:

With all the warmth of his peculiarly ardent temperament, his playing was always within bounds, chaste, polished and at times even severely reserved.

THE UNA CORDA PEDAL

The use of the *una corda* pedal on the grand pianos of Chopin's day produced a sound similar to plucking the strings of a guitar or harp. Although Chopin used the *una corda* pedal in his own playing, he was reluctant to let his students use it. Mme. Courty and Mme. Piquet remember that Chopin did not want his students to be dependent on this pedal for quiet playing. After a student could produce many tonal shades, Chopin would then permit the pupil to use it.

Chopin said of Sigismund Thalberg: "He . . . produces *piano* with pedal rather than the hand."

THE DAMPER PEDAL

Mme. Streicher stated that Chopin was very strict about the use of the pedal, and he told her, "The correct employment of it remains a study for life." Chopin's generous use of pedal indications show his great concern for it. He indicated more pedal markings than

most of the other romantic composers. He advised that the pedal be used with care, “for it is a sensitive and awfully noisy rascal.” It should be treated politely and delicately, for “as a friend it is most helpful, but its friendship and love are not easily won.”

EMPHASIS ON VOCAL ART FOR PIANISTS

Chopin was an ardent admirer of beautiful singing. He told his students that they should listen to good singers regularly, if they wanted to perform well. He felt listening to Italian opera was essential for the pianist. Chopin told one student, Mme. Rubio, “You must sing if you wish to play,” and he had her study voice so that she might become a better pianist.

“In my works,” he told Hipkins, “everything must be made to sing; the bass and the inner parts.” Chopin constantly reminded his students, “You must sing with your fingers.” He felt the pianist should try to produce the same effects on the piano that the great singers produced with their voices. “If you want to play the long cantilena in my Scherzo [in B-flat Minor], go hear Pasta or Rubini.” He was a friend of the great opera composer Bellini, and in his nocturnes tried to capture a Bellinian type of melody.

Vocal art greatly influenced Chopin’s concept of phrasing. He taught that whenever a singer breathed in the melody, the pianist should raise his/her wrist and let it sink back on the “singing note” with great suppleness. Obviously, Chopin could make the piano “breathe.” His *legato* style is directly related to the singer’s art. He also suggested to his students to model their performance of the turn and appoggiatura on the great Italian singers. Chopin also taught his students how to discover the beginning and the end of a musical idea in a composition, and showed them how to place musical periods, commas, and dashes, in their scores.

ORNAMENTATION

Chopin generally began the trill on the auxiliary note, and he recommended varied fingerings, that is, the use of several fingers alternately. For slow practice of trills, he even recommended that four fingers be used in succession. If a small note preceded the trill, the trill began with the small note rather than the auxiliary. Evenness rather than rapidity was demanded for trills. The closing turn of a trill should be played easily and not hurried. Chopin taught that cadenza-like embellishments, like those in his own works, should sound like an improvisation—they should not be retarded but accelerated towards the end. His practice of adding ornaments and variants to the printed text is well-documented by witnesses.

RHYTHM

Chopin insisted that his students play in time. He hated all lingering and dragging, misplaced *rubatos*, as well as exaggerated *ritardandos*, and he always had a metronome on the piano. As regards *rubato*, Chopin taught his students the Mozartian type, that the left hand should keep strict time, allowing the right hand freedom in shaping the melodic line, along with all its ornamentation, above this. The rhythm would fluctuate but never the underlying metrical pulse, so there was order in the freedom with a sure foundation as regards tempo. He also taught the nineteenth-century type of *rubato* in which all parts of the music are treated with elasticity.

MEMORY

Chopin almost never spoke of musical memory. There is only one brief maxim of his, which implies that to play a piece perfectly it must be committed to memory, and this he demanded of his students.

PERFORMING CHOPIN TODAY

Chopin's music is open to a wider variety of successful interpretations than that of any other great composer, with the possible exception of J. S. Bach. The fine Chopin performer must reveal something of the musical essence of the composer, and although virtuosity is necessary to play many of Chopin's works, he is above all a composer of contrasts, and the ideal pianist has to be able to express his complex style with the utmost pianistic refinement.

There is no one way of playing Chopin that is definitely "right" or "wrong," but there are particular characteristics which are the hallmark of good Chopin playing. These include the most subtle *legato*, the ability to sustain the purity of the melodic lines; contrasts in mood, texture, and the balance between the parts; highly developed contrapuntal playing, and rhythmic flexibility. The phrasing must never sound stiff or fragmentary, and the musicality of the performer should always outweigh his pianism.

The discovery of the inner core of the composition is always central to good Chopin playing—more important than the pure mechanics of playing the notes correctly.

One of the most important elements in performing Chopin today is the pianist's use of *rubato*. When applied with taste and perception this can bring the music to life in a way that the strictly academic observance of the note values can not. However, when misused, *rubato* can cripple the music, and reduce it to absurdity.

Chopin would probably have tolerated any imaginative performance of his works. Some pianists have in the past claimed that their performances of Chopin were "authentic." If this word is taken in the dictionary meaning "of the original" or "of the principal," then only those who actually heard Chopin play could be relied upon to give "authentic" performances. But since none of his students who survived him possessed a degree of talent approaching that of their master, they were unable to emulate his performance, and give "authentic" renderings of his style.

The problem of achieving a satisfactory balance between the contrasting elements of Chopin's complex style will always present a challenge. It often happens that the pianist with the most highly developed technique fails to shape the melodic lines so as to allow them their direct appeal. Superb technicians sometimes have a tendency to emphasize so many of the contrapuntal details in the writing that the musical line becomes confused.

The accounts of Chopin's own playing and his response to the performance of his works by other pianists indicates that he might have accepted a less than rigorous attention to his markings, especially if it had been a performance by an exceptionally original pianist.

A number of contemporary pianists perform Chopin's music on old pianos from Chopin's time, and while recognizing this as a revealing musical document, I do not believe that this is the best way of performing his works today. Such antiquarianism is contrary to Chopin's own approach to the instrument. He himself exploited the advances in piano manufacture which took place in his lifetime.

Some of our contemporary pianists play Chopin too loud and too fast. Yet it is an unanswerable question whether Chopin should be played delicately, on the grounds that being weak and sickly he had no strength to perform his compositions in a strong, aggressive manner.

As long as today's Chopin performer combines some of the characteristics discussed in this section, he/she will be on the right path to a viable Chopin musical performance.

My hope is that *At the Piano with Chopin* will assist the pianist in such a way so that Chopin, or one of his contemporaries, would recognize the pieces, at worst, without bewilderment, and at best, with pleasure.

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

As I began working with manuscripts and early editions in the preparation of this collection, I thought I could produce a practical *urtext* edition. But I soon realized that an *urtext* edition was fraught with difficulties. The problems arise because although Chopin prepared many of his compositions for publication with great care, he would when playing them himself vary the ornaments, improvise variants and alter the dynamics, and he often inserted alterations and variants into his students' copies when subsequently teaching. He was always ready to improve them. Chopin frequently had new thoughts on a work already published, and would pencil these into a student's copy, and it may be true that he never envisioned the printed version of any of his works as a finally finished product. I have included some material of this nature in this collection. Krystyna Kobylańska's authoritative catalogue *Manuscripts of Chopin* demonstrates how many "original" sources there are for Chopin's works, some of them even differing in respect to notation. The second edition of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger's *Chopin vu par ses élèves* shows in some detail the type of ornamentation Chopin himself used when playing his own works, and the alterations he made in some of the harmonies. There are thus, in many cases, too many variants for any one version of Chopin's text to be pronounced "authentic."

Therefore, I have prepared a teaching-performance oriented edition based on the most reliable sources I could locate. Chopin's fingering is indicated in italics when I could positively identify it. All other fingering is by the editor. I have retained his pedal indications and have added others where needed to help clarify the musical idea or effect. The subtleties required in pedaling this music cannot, in many cases, be accurately notated. Therefore, the pedal indications in this edition must be taken as only suggestions and approximations of the actual pedaling required for musical performance. Constant and careful listening is required for musical pedaling. All metronome marks are editorial and are only suggestions. Ornaments are realized either in the score or in footnotes. I have based my interpretative indications on a number of the original manuscripts written in Chopin's own hand, and have had access to some of the editions originating from Chopin's students—among them Mathias, Tellefsen, Mikuli and some lesser-known individuals who contributed copies of the music corrected in the composer's hand. These copies contain much valuable material that cannot be ignored. In many cases they represent the composer's later thoughts on a published work, and his students' testimony and the documentary evidence of their copies of his music show that he did not regard the versions he sent off to his publishers as sacrosanct. Some of the authentic variants have been left out of subsequent editions only because they are difficult to perform.

"KK" stands for Krystyna Kobylańska's *Frédéric Chopin Thematisch-Bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis*, published by G. Henle Verlag, Munich, 1979. This work represents the most thorough and reliable catalog of Chopin's works.

"BI" stands for "Brown Index," found in Maurice J. E. Brown's *Chopin—An Index of His Works in Chronological Order*, second, revised edition, published by Da Capo Press, New York, 1972.

The pieces in this collection are arranged alphabetically by title.

ABOUT THE PIECES

ALBUM LEAF IN E MAJOR, BI 151; KK IVb/12 *Page 23*

This piece was composed in January of 1843 and is dedicated to the Countess Anna Szeremetieff. The autograph is located at the Central Archives for Literature and Art, in Moscow, Russia. Take plenty of time for the large broken chords in measures 4 and 16.

TWO BOURRÉES, BI 160b; KK VIIb 1/2 *Page 24*

These two delightful airs were notated for the piano and given a simple harmonization by Chopin while he was at Nohant. They are supposed to be dance tunes native to Berry (a historical region of central France) and were used by George Sand for the music in her play *François le Champi*.

CONTREDANSE IN G MAJOR, BI 17; KK Anh. Ia/4 *Page 26*

This piece was composed for Chopin's good friend Titus Woyciechowski. It was originally written in G flat major. The prominent melody should be supported with a lilting rhythmic flow.

CANTABILE IN B-FLAT MAJOR, BI 84; KK IVb/6 *Page 28*

This miniature "nocturne" was composed in Paris in 1834. The right hand flowing melody, vocally inspired, is full of novelty, surprise, and variety. Treat it approximately one dynamic level louder than the pulsing left hand part.

THREE ECOSSAISES, Op. 72, No. 3; BI 12 *Page 29*

These dances were written when Chopin was sixteen years old and makes a delightful group. They are exquisitely light in texture and full of figuration that is perfectly adapted to the character of the passage at hand. These early pieces also reveal to a remarkable degree Chopin's understanding of the idiom of the piano. The rapid passages in the right hand must be carefully supported by the wide skips in the left hand. The pedal is mainly rhythmical.

LARGO IN E-FLAT MAJOR, BI 109; KK IVb/5 *Page 33*

The manuscript of this piece is dated "6 July" but the year of composition is unknown. Its style faintly resembles that of the prelude in the same key, Op. 28, No. 20. The manuscript is located at the Paris Conservatoire. The melody always resides in the top voice.

MAZURKA IN B-FLAT MAJOR, BI 73; KK IVb/1 *Page 34*

This work is dated June 24, 1832, and was written for Mme. Alexandra Wolowska, wife of "Wolowski, the deputy," as he was called by Chopin's friends. Accents sometimes fall on the second, sometimes on the third beat. The fourth degree is raised in bars 14-16, a characteristic of Chopin's mazurkas that comes from Polish folk music.

MAZURKA IN D MAJOR, KK. Anh. Ia/1 *Page 35*

This early dance was composed when Chopin was ten years old. It is spiritually related to the simple peasant dance. The raised fourth degree, a characteristic of Chopin's later mazurkas, is already present in measure 13. Chopin seems to be naively enjoying his command of moving over the keyboard for his own satisfaction.

MAZURKA IN F MINOR, Op. 68, No. 4, BI 168

Page 36

This piece is Chopin's last composition. He left it in the form of a sketch, and it was "realized" by August Franchomme (1808–84), a French cellist and good friend of Chopin. The endless chromatic melody and harmony contains an almost exact premonition of Richard Wagner's *Tristan* in measure 14. Chains of dominant or diminished sevenths, beginning at bar 9, are mixed by way of suspensions, and provide splashes of exotic color.


NOCTURNE IN C-SHARP MINOR, BI 49; KK IVa/16

Page 38

This elegant and somber nocturne, although not thus originally entitled, is an outstanding example of Chopin's early style. There are four manuscripts of this piece, but they do not agree in detail. Composed before Chopin left Poland, it was inscribed to his older sister with the words, "To my sister, Louise, for practice before she starts playing my concerto." The nocturne is filled with allusions to the Concerto in F Minor, Op. 21, composed in the same year.

The nocturne's opening tranquil section, while independent thematically, is in very much the same vein of effusive yet delicate sentiment as the slow movement of the concerto. After that the thematic references appear more quickly. The next section of the nocturne:



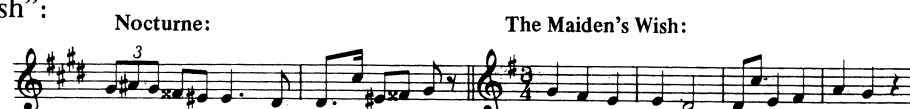
is based on the opening of the finale of the concerto: 


The continuation of this theme: 

is borrowed from this little tag end of a phrase in the opening movement of the concerto:



A fragment of the next section is rather unexpectedly a variation of Chopin's song, "The Maiden's Wish":



The new triplet motif in the bass: 

is based on the striking French Horn motif of the finale of the concerto:



These quotations are woven into the texture of this lovely piece with such skill and subtlety that they can be enjoyed without even being noticed.

NOCTURNE IN E-FLAT MAJOR, Op. 9, No. 2; BI 54/2

Page 43

Chopin added a number of fingerings to the music of Mme. Dubois. He indicated striking neighboring notes with the same finger in bars 6, (D flat to C), 26 (E flat to D to C), and 27 (D to C). He added to the left hand, bar 32, the repeated fifth finger, so as to prevent the heavy thumb from landing on the second B flat. This heavy or percussive touch could have produced an ugly sound on his Pleyel piano. In bar 30, Chopin's direction for the fifth finger on the first E-flat, is far more comfortable than the third finger would be. In bars 13, and 21, Chopin marked the arpeggiated ornament to begin *on the beat*. In bar 7, Chopin added an E to Mme. Dubois' score to show that he wanted the trill to begin on the lower auxiliary note. In bars 12 and 20, Chopin placed a vertical line after the seventh beat to indicate a "breath."

POLONAISE IN B-FLAT MAJOR, BI 3; KK IVa/1

Page 46

Chopin was seven years old when he composed this Polonaise. He included only one dynamic, the *f* in bar 1. The performance should include rhythmic vigor coupled with a majestic character. This clearcut piece suggests a miniature *Polonaise Militaire* and is not far removed from the dance origins of the form.

PRELUDE IN A-FLAT MAJOR, BI 86; KK IVb/7

Page 48

This short piece is dated "Paris July 18, 1834." It is dedicated to Pierre Wolff (1810–82) who was a teacher of piano at the Geneva Conservatory and a friend of Franz Liszt. The manuscript is untitled, and although it is etude-like with its rapid filigree figuration, it must never go so fast that the melody, sometimes woven carefully into the texture, cannot be clearly heard.

PRELUDE IN A MAJOR, Op. 28, No. 7; BI 100/7

Page 50

Notice the majority of Chopin's pedal markings are held across the barlines. Play the piece as Chopin indicated, *Piano dolce*, and the slight mixture of ornamented tones in the melody suggests the reminiscence of a dance heard from afar. Bars 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, and 15 have the non-harmonic tones in the melody blurred into their resolutions.

Facsimile of manuscript, *Prelude in A Major, Op. 28, No. 7*

**PRELUDE IN C MINOR, Op. 28, No. 20; BI 107/20**

Page 51

The disputed note in the last chord of bar 3, given in most editions as E natural, is stated by Ganche, editor of the Oxford edition, to be E flat, since Chopin pencilled in a flat before the printed E in Jane Stirling's copy (one of Chopin's students). Correct pedal usage will make one chord melt into the next, without a break and without blurring the harmonies. The piece originally ended at bar 8.

Chopin's *Prelude in C Minor, Op. 28, No. 20***SOSTENUTO IN E-FLAT MAJOR, BI 133; KK IVb/10**

Page 52

This piece, in the nature of a waltz but not so entitled, was signed by Chopin and dated "Paris, July 20, 1840." 1840 is the one year in a decade when Chopin was not at Nohant, the home of George Sand, during the summer months. *Sostenuto* indicates the piece should be performed smoothly throughout. Take a little more time with the left hand melody in measures 17-24.

VALSE MÉLANCOLIQUE, KK Anh. Ia/7

Page 53

The autograph for this work is unknown, but it seems to date from the time when Chopin and George Sand spent the winter and spring of 1838-9 at the Convent of Valldemosa, on the island of Majorca, Spain. It should be played with great tonal delicacy and shading, careful observance of phrasing, and with no excessive *rubato* or loud sonorities. The feeling should encompass simplicity and melancholy. Be very careful not to play the piece too fast.

VARIATION NO. 6 FROM "HEXAMERON", BI 113; KK IIb/2

Page 58

The *Hexameron* was a collection of six variations for piano solo on the march in Bellini's opera *I Puritani di Scozia*, contributed by Liszt, Thalberg, Pixis, Herz, Czerny, and Chopin. The Introduction, bridge passages, and Finale were composed by Liszt. This set appeared in 1837 under the title *Hexameron*, alluding to the six co-composers. It was composed for the Princess de Belgiojoso, who wished to raise money from its sales for impoverished Polish exiles. Chopin's variation is a lovely nocturne-like piece that requires great sensitivity to the pedal and careful control of *rubato*.

WALTZ IN E-FLAT MAJOR, BI 46; KK IVa/14

Page 60

Not all authorities accept the authenticity of this work. It is very similar to the *ländler*, a type of slow waltz. Here, Chopin moves the right hand quickly over the keyboard by taking figurations and breaking them up so that the notes scatter like pinpoints of flame. Special attention should be devoted to the left hand part. The wide skips required are not technically easy.

"WIOSNA" (Spring), Op. 74, No. 2; BI 117

Page 63

This was one of Chopin's most plaintive songs and he arranged it for piano solo several times for friends between 1838 and 1848. It was transcribed by Liszt for the second of his *Chants Polonais*. The version in this collection is signed by Chopin and dated "Paris, February 5, 1846."

THE PURPOSE OF THIS COLLECTION

In addition to presenting a collection of beautiful pieces by Chopin (some unknown and others well-known), the editor has endeavored to include material that throws light on a number of Romantic performance practices, especially as relates to Frédéric Chopin, since Romantic performance practice is almost a lost art. Today, it isn't enough to have a good edition in front of you—you also need to know how to use it. Hopefully, this collection will help the student and teacher with the interpretative process involved in finding out what Chopin meant to write, as well as help them make educated conjectures about what he probably meant to be *played*, when solid evidence is lacking. There is a great deal to learn from Chopin's playing and teaching and much of this diverse material has been brought together in this collection.

Another purpose of this collection has been to produce a score that will assist the pianist in bringing his/her own musical personality to bear on each piece, stylistically speaking, in order to bring out its substance, content, or meaning. It is what the performer makes—interprets—of the piece's meaning, that is so vitally important. Interpretation is *what* we choose to convey in the recreation of a composition.

The final purpose of this collection has been to produce a volume that constantly reminds the pianist of the importance of correct historical Chopin performance. This concept always requires a performance with feeling but without sentimentality, and with controlled strength but without brutality.

Maurice Hinson

FOR FURTHER READING

1. Eigeldinger, Jean-Jacques. *Chopin vu par ses élèves* [Chopin as viewed by his pupils] (2nd rev. ed.). Neuchatel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1979.
2. Hedley, Arthur. *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*. London: Heinemann, 1962.
3. Higgins, Thomas. *Chopin Interpretation: A Study of Performance Directions in Selected Autographs and Other Sources*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1966.
4. Holcman, Jan. *The Legacy of Chopin*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.
5. Holland, Jeanne. *Chopin's Teaching and His Students*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1973.
6. Kiorpes, George A. *The Performance of Ornaments in the Works of Chopin*. DMA dissertation, Boston University, 1975.

Three Ecossaises

(1826)

Op. 72, No. 3
BI 12

I

Vivace ♩ = c. 88

The musical score is written for piano in D major (two sharps) and 2/4 time. It begins with a *mf* dynamic and a tempo marking of *Vivace* with a quarter note equal to approximately 88 beats per minute. The first system includes the instruction *Brillante*. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 3, 6, 9, and 13 indicated in boxes. Measure 6 features a first and second ending. Measure 9 includes a 143-measure repeat sign. The piece concludes with a first ending in measure 13. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes, and articulation marks like accents and slurs are used throughout. The bass line provides harmonic support with chords and single notes.

Nocturne in C-sharp Minor

(1830)

BI 49

KK IVa/16

Lento, con gran espressione ♩ = c. 69

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is C-sharp minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C).
- **System 1 (Measures 1-3):** Starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 1 has a whole note chord. Measure 2 features a triplet of eighth notes in the bass and a triplet of sixteenth notes in the treble. Measure 3 continues with similar textures. A *pp una corda* instruction appears in measure 3.
- **System 2 (Measures 4-6):** Measure 4 is marked with a box containing the number 4. Measure 5 includes a *tre corde dolce* instruction. A detailed fingering diagram for the right hand is shown above the staff. Measure 6 features a triplet of eighth notes in the bass and a triplet of sixteenth notes in the treble.
- **System 3 (Measures 7-9):** Measure 7 is marked with a box containing the number 7. Measures 8 and 9 continue the melodic and harmonic development with various fingering indications.
- **System 4 (Measures 10-12):** Measure 10 is marked with a box containing the number 10. Measure 11 includes a *poco rit.* instruction. A detailed fingering diagram for the right hand is shown above the staff. Measure 12 concludes the system with a triplet of eighth notes in the bass and a triplet of sixteenth notes in the treble.