

# STYLE AND ARCHITECTURE IN CHOPIN'S PIANO WORKS

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Abstract: From a historical perspective, the extraordinary echo for Chopin's posterity - pianist and composer - is inseparable. This may seem startling, given that choice in relation to the orchestra and piano choice instead of extensive miniature forms (opera, symphony, etc.) is not apparently a prerequisite for this celebrity. Public attraction and pianist for the Chopinian creation remained constant at all times, regardless of the evolution of musical language and public taste.

## 1.1. Introduction

The majority of Chopin's compositions are dedicated to one particular instrument: piano. The composer's thinking arises from the Polish emotional climate, describing his Romantic era and emphasizing the universe of this one instrument: the piano. During his life, Chopin earned appreciation as a pianist, performer, composer and pedagogue. Unlike Schumann, who stated in 1839 "the piano is too tight for me", Chopin identified himself with the pianistic sonorities, making use of both: the old tradition forms (The Prelude, Variation, Rondo, Sonata and Concerto) and the present ones (The Ballade, Waltz, Scherzo). His new invented forms: the Polonaise and the Mazurka brought a refreshing air in the pianistic world of the time. As a pedagogue, Chopin constructed a methodology of piano teaching, in which he indicates the order of a steady practice. As a composer, Chopin survived the epoch's changes remaining today as popular as he was during any period of time.[1]

It is difficult to delineate the two aspects of Chopin's personality (and activity): the composer and the pianist as both influenced on each other as the cause-effect concept. Chopin's pianistic style fingerprinted his compositional musical language just as this language became alive through the performer's personality.

Inevitably, biographic factors influenced Chopin's stylistic evolution such as the radical change from Warsaw admiration to Vienna's indifference to the composer's stated pathway. Regardless of these changes, the results did not only affected composer's musical style but also his composing method devoting himself more to composition rather than to piano performance.[2] It is not difficult to identify the changes in Chopin's style – at least at general level. It is essential to admit that his musical style is shaped less on the Viennese classical model, and more on the post-classical *concerto* repertoire, often described as *brilliante-style*, which Chopin adopted and developed in his works. Among the most significant elements of style are those acquired from the folk genre. These are easily observed in his late written *Phantasies*. In *Studies op 10* the conventional model of the *brilliante style* takes one new meaning, above all, to reveal an unprecedented density of the information counterpoint. In the first *Nocturnes*, the specific ornamentation of the *brilliante style* were finished and finally fused with melodic substance to create ornamental melody in his so characteristic music of maturity. Most importantly, however, is that Chopin has gradually developed a very broad harmonic vision that earned structural control on the style presented by alternation of the *brilliant* lyrical

fragments with the figurative ones. These stylistic changes were the essential prerequisites in the early 1830s, in the construction of new forms of Chopin. His extensive works were either *rondo*, *variations* (or *potpourri's*) and *concertos* written in a *brilliante* manner or organized in cyclic structures consisting of several parts (Op 4, Op 8), after the classical archetypes. By textural, melodic and harmonic developing, in the early 1830s, Chopin made a kind of synthesis of the two separate worlds, putting together the synthesis of the concert Post-classical music and the basic model of the Austro-German tradition of the sonata.

## 1.2. Stylistic features

The most important feature in the interpretation of Chopin's music is its vocal aspect, because his works give you the impression that they speak. This particular aspect of Chopin's music made Asafiev to say that his work is 'the most human means of expression from all of the music elements.'[3]

Ornamentation used by Chopin has a close link with chromaticism that he often uses. He uses it due to its harmonic thinking that led to a broadening of the tonal base. Another interesting thing is how Chopin builds its work with a specific way to merge several voices. A process very specific to Chopinian style is to change the rhythmic and melodic design to mitigate repetition of precise rhythm, asked by its dancing character. In the complexity of harmonic means used, Chopin uses specific popular mods: frigid scale, gypsy scale. The use of pedal plays a very important role in Chopin's creations. Harmonies of his works are closely related to the pedal. Chopin was a sober pianist, which pays special attention to sound neat, observance of the score and kept the left hand rhythmic rigor. Chopin was able to fully exploit all the resources of the piano, causing him to answer all of his intentions. The wild and craggy element inspired by his homeland found expression in bold dissonances in strange harmonies, while specific delicacy and grace of his person appeared in thousands of forms, thousands of ornamental imagination impossible to forget. [4] Chopinian rhythm is the fusion of the dance and the orderly winding romantic thinking. Very rarely resort to polyphony, melodic overlays designed to illustrate the emotional functioning on several levels. The clarity of pianistic writing and the romantic and emotional background of Chopin's music, claiming a fair interpretation. A strict observance of isorhythmic or exaggeration of *rubato* are not suited to this music, whose emotional tone is as varied as it is clearly expressed. Romantic or exaggerated morbid

interpretations denotes a false understanding of his music. No sentimental interpretation carried to banal or chaotic distorted can make sound images designed by Chopin, but an interpretation in which balance is achieved and dynamic movements carefully and correct understanding of the context. What gives life (achieving expression through the proper color images).[5]

Chopin didn't look for pianistic formulas and he didn't start from them. Saint-Saens has done some very judicious observations about the extreme simplicity of his playing. About his *rubato*, about the execution of the trill, which should start with the higher note, but also long phrases, *spianato*, sung smoothly and without interruption rhythm, attainable only by those who play with a perfect suppleness. This flexibility of the hand and *poignet* that Chopin have stunned many contemporary pianists. Chopin was concerned the whole life to compose a written method to describe and to record his lessons of interpretation. He asked his students participation and total dedication to interpretation. Chopin said that *il n est pas de vraie musique sans arriere-pensee* (there is no real music without the thinking to determine it). [6]He also pays special attention to fingering. In his view, fingering must be preserved as originally established. Chopin was interested in the character of each finger, the qualities of each finger that should be explored as well. Fingers were ranked by their ability dynamic, starting with the thumb, then put the little finger. Third, was the index which in the technique of interpretation was acting as a pivot, followed by fingers 3 and 4, as low. Basically, Chopin did not look the most comfortable fingering but the one that allowed interpretation best parts addressed. Chopin worked hard on perfecting his works. His works were not the result of spontaneous creation. Chopin's compositions were meant to suggest, evoke, to excite. Chopin was very strict with his compositions and often used to resume dozens of times an excerpt or edit notes. Ornamentation technique is present in every genre: from *Etudes* to *Nocturnes*, from Mazurka to Polonaise, from Preludes to the Sonatas. It can be said that Chopin represent the ornament culmination of the Romantic era. Continuity and expressive meaning of the chopinian melody is based on ornaments. Starting from the actual ornaments (apoggiaturas, mordent, trills, grupets) by amplifying them, the complex ornaments are born, combined with exceptional divisions, diatonic or chromatic scales. The script of the ornaments is generally with small fonts but rhythmical-melodic variation of the motives can be considered a form of complex ornament inserted into the basic melody. By using these methods of development of musical discourse, Chopin get that specific *cantabile* of his style. Melodicism is emphasized by the large phrasing in which the many ornamental convolution is based on harmonic accompaniment of bass. The Chopinian musical discourse cannot conceive a strict metrical interpretation, mainly due to his *bel canto*'s characterizing his song. The rhythmic pulsation varies continuously according to the internal organization of ornamentation and melodic profile. Chopin's *rubato* music results from the sinuous rhythmic, elastic, specifically romantic. Freedom of rhythmic *rubato* effect obtained by using frequent exceptional divisions, combined with multiple instances of combining the duration (in syncopation), all in order to avoid symmetry rhythmic structures.

### 1.3. The romantic composer

The term 'romantic' connotes ideas and motivations rather than styles. Over all, this term is included in the idea that the world may be better known by feelings and ideas through creative imagination than by conceptual or empirical observations. In music, a romantic aesthetic prominently in the primacy of emotions and musical language ability to express the emotional inner world and the outer world perception. In this sense, one can say that Chopin was 'romantic' (at least in music stylistics of maturity) and allowed his music to be as stated by Dahlhaus 'a fragment of his biography'. In Chopin's music there is a passion and intensity and sometimes terrifying power that could easily suggest an inner life whose turmoil was expressed through music. In expressing his state of mind as well as his attitude towards his job, Chopin had more in common with the classical titans that he loved so much than with his contemporaries. His mind was dominated by a love of order and precision, a rejection of exaggerated feelings. He shared little of romantic enthusiasm, while remaining true to absolute music in an era dominated by programmatic and descriptive titles. Unlike his contemporaries, Chopin had only a passing interest from the literature or from other arts and share a little of abstract ideas that dominated the imagination of people of those times. Apart from Italian opera, he was praised by contemporary composers, reserving total admiration to the classical titans like Bach, Handel and Mozart. The nineteenth century produced both 'romantic' listeners and 'romantic' composers. Such a dutiful inclination was to look for either a specific referential meaning in his music—the music of Chopin gave plenty of such 'meanings' in the nineteenth century criticism or a hidden emotional content. These levels of environmental understanding became part of music for future generations while they colored their wisdom that Chopin had. For many, he became the model of romantic composer—a wounded personality of love and exile, 'the hero of all sensitive souls'. Over time Chopin's romantic aura as a man influenced the music too. It was recognized in France as a romantic composer—a piano poet who expressed his inner depths. He is first of all, a pianist of emotions', he is first foremost a poet, a sensitive poet who makes everything possible to dominate poetry, he is an 'elegiac, a dreaming and profound poet of the sounds. '[7] Also in France, some of the specific literary references were related to music (slightly different from the fanciful titles attributed to his work in England). His compositions were very detailed connected to Lamartine's poems and Jean-Paul Charles Nodier's story and especially the characters of Shakespeare. More than anyone, France promoted the image of Chopin as that of a 'sick salon composer'. From childhood, his health was delicate and the image of Chopin, with his pallor has a special significance, interpreted almost as a philosophy of life or even an explanation of his creative output. Through music, he reveals his suffering. Emotional descriptions made by Liszt and others in recent years and especially in the last hours of life of Chopin, boosts image quality of music imbued with a special melancholy, even morbidity. This 'sick talent' cobbled together a picture of persistent and merged well with romantic ideology matters where illness and creative inspiration will be about as common

people parallel escapades. Although the twentieth century brings fresh wind of change, it cannot fully disperse such images.

#### 1.4. Slavonic composer

There can be no doubt regarding authenticity of Chopin's commitment to Poland. Most of these feelings he developed after he left home. Chopin said that he could not relax than with his friends and one can see that his letters in Polish had a very intimate tone and content. However, there is something about professional exile of Chopin. Life in France was good and he quickly forgot thoughts of returning to his native country. He did not feel at ease in nationalist circles of the Polish Literary Society in Paris and refused to serve in the Polish case the most obvious way possible that you can have a composer by his work. It cannot be said, however, that his music was not touched by Polish nationalism, addressing the main national dances, the *Polonaise* and the *Mazurka* -changed significantly in the early years in Warsaw. In a manner which strikingly anticipated the development of the late nineteenth century, he transformed these colorful exotic dance elements into a potent evocation of Poland and especially oppressed Poland. A comparison with Liszt would be constructive. Both composers cultivated images of their home countries and using musical symbols to convey these images, although only in a few works. At the same time, they combined national material with the most advanced techniques of contemporary European music, merging modernism nationalism. Their music derives energy from the national material but it was not limited by the nationalist aesthetics. For Europeans, his nationality became a way to explain any unfamiliar or exotic from his music. On the other hand, the Polish were eager to consider Chopin as one of their own, arguing that 'its national style' consists less in folkloric elements than 'expressive specific climate that permeated all his compositions, an elusive mood so characteristic of his fellow compatriots psyche'. [8] For many listeners of Chopin from the nineteenth century Polish Chopin this was the national struggle, helping them to cement the spirit of Polish in a time when the country had no political status. From all these points of view, his music has influenced Polish composers immediately. In the difficult years that followed insurrection, life, music was conservative and insular and music that answered to the needs of the Polish was less of Chopin's and rather Moniuszko's. The truth is that very few Polish composers of the late nineteenth century were able to agree with what Chopin left. Only in the early works of Chopin's successor, the great Karol Szymanowski, who lived in the early twentieth century, the legacy of Chopin was fully used. It is indeed arguable that the most productive legacy of the Slavonic composer- Chopin, was not 'used' by the Polish but by the Russians. Here, its impact is considerable and inspiring the formation of radical nationalist style as that of Balakirev and in his circles. From this point of view Chopin can be seen as a harbinger of the future, as one of the forerunners of a development that culminated in the radical changes in the musical language of the first part of the twentieth century.

#### 1.5. Componistic features

Chopin's creation begins with the *Polonaise*. These express the festive atmosphere. The *Polonaise* is not a fast but a majestic dance. Chopin manages to combine heroic sonorities with the sense of patriotism. Everything like shine, power and will in the sense of patriotism that may include a *Polonaise*, is built in this masterpiece to the highest power of expression. [9] Chopin's piano art was a challenge for his students and pianists who approached his work. *Studies* for piano, two books, Op 10 and 25, which today underpin piano education, technical question of completely new. Each of these piano works brought a new problem, which he treated musically but which require solving some more specific instrumental difficulties. Here are some of the issues raised by *Studies* of Chopin: right-hand chromatic scale, throughout the *Study*, the scale that the last three fingers are running, while the first two play an accompaniment that supports the smooth and harmonic the alert melody of the chromaticisms sequence; another example would be the *Study* exclusively for black keyboards, a *Study* only in *third* and *sixth, decimas* over the entire keyboard that not harm the beauty and moose of the *Study*. The general observation that can be made on the form of all 27 studies is that they are built on formal scheme lied: AB A. Equilibrium shape, the principle that controls almost all musical works of the classical and romantic, determine the structure. In Chopin's creative profile, the *Studies* form the bridge between the first works in which virtuosity was placed first and those that will follow. Note that Chopin uses decimal interval not only in his *Study* but in the entire creation because it is superior harmonic of the fundamental tone. The novelty of his piano writing was not understood at first by all the musicians, especially by those with conformist views. Regarding *Preludes*, they are not improvising character pieces, as some have claimed. The *Preludes* have a deep emotional content and are not simple improvisations. [10] Chopin made a miniature model form, transforming the prelude for the piano to perfection, establishing a new profile in music history. Not only as the title might make us believe, parts intended to be sung as an introduction to other pieces are poetic preludes, admirable in their diversity and meticulous craftsmanship that lies within, revealing only to a thorough analysis. Everything seems to spring from a spontaneous inspiration, a winged moose. *The Preludes* have a liberal, unhindered, which characterizes the works of genius. As for *Ballads*, they are one of the characteristic types of Romanticism and through them, Chopin manifests the entire romantic current interest for history. *The Ballads* meet several principles combined musical forms: sonata form, the rondo, free variation, lied, and just the way he combines them makes it so special. By his way of structuring the *Ballad* and the means of expression used, it forms a new genre, superior to the *Ballad* that existed before. Another genre approached by Chopin is the *Nocturne*-a creation specific to the Romanticism. In the 20 *Nocturnes*, he used a variety of musical imagery and a variety of forms that together characterize his song. Miculi, a pupil of Chopin's and a great pianist says that the *Nocturnes* are soluble by the *rubato* style that Chopin practiced. In interpreting piano, Chopin was considered the creator of bel-canto best piano and we see this in his

*Nocturnes*. In the pianistic interpretation, Chopin was considered the creator of the pianistic *bel-canto* and we see this in his *Nocturnes*. About Chopin's *Waltzes*, we can say that they were not written to be danced. They reveal a world of pure beauty ideal. They are reminiscent of stylized dance pirouettes that describe young dancers. [11] Another genre approached by Chopin is the *Mazurka*, which is the most difficult to interpret. From a technical standpoint, the *Mazurka* is not difficult but the simplicity of the restricted means, the multitude of colors and the expression that must be obtained with very few elements, giving the pathos, the declamation and virtuosity make their interpretation a difficult obstacle to cross. Most of the *Mazurkas* were created by Chopin when he was outside Poland and especially should be admired the atmosphere perfectly presented in these dances. Generally, the musical writing of the *Mazurka* is clear, uncluttered. In the Chopin *Concertos*, which were composed in the early part of his creation, as the *Studies*, when he was less than 20 years old. *Concerto in E minor, Op 11* raise piano technique and interpretation, intractable. Orchestration is less developed, allowing soloist instrument first. Regarding *Concerto in F minor*, it is much more dramatic than the other. In the third part of this concert it can be recognized the peasant's music, full of joy. None of the two concerts deviates from the form of concert for piano and orchestra. [12] Chopin composed three *Sonatas*. The first *Sonata*, op 4 is not well known and is almost never played. *Sonata in B flat minor, Op 35* is a dramatic work and one of the most profound pieces composed by Chopin. Statov say that 'most fierce enemies of programmatic music can not have doubts about programmatic of the *Sonata in B flat minor*'. The dramatic climax of this sonata can be found in the *Funeral March-Part III*, about which Liszt says in his book about Chopin that 'it is born the feeling that is crying not a single hero, but fell a generation.' Following the example of Beethoven, Chopin, like Schumann does not respect the traditional implementation of the re exposure, which is not a simple re exposure of the themes whose conflicts are resolved only through the tonal unity. Not only the re exposure changes but it's shorten or remove of the sections and the insertion of various episodes marks the freedom of the sonata form. Both *Scherzo, Funeral March and Finale* are a comment of the profound drama. *Funeral March* of the third part and the transparency of the strange *Finale* contributed to the great popularity of the sonata. Unlike clear dramaturgy of the *Sonata op. 35*, the third *Sonata* is more complex and less tragic. Broader, *Sonata in B minor*

*op. 58*, with a denser writing is vigorous in the first part, impetuous in *Scherzo*, meditative in *Largo*, sonata ending with a frenetic and grandiose *Rondo*. Deviation from the traditional plan of the classical sonata is a characteristic of the Chopin's sonata, activated by a torrent of emotional and by an entirely different thematic that of the classical sonata. Chopin composed the *Sonata for Cello and Piano op 65, Berceusa, Barcarolle, Fantasy in F minor, Scherzo, Impromptu, Lied, Rondo, Variations and various pieces (Allegro concert op 46.)*

## 1.6. Conclusion

Chopin remains in music history as one of the great melodist with endless creative inventiveness. His immortal dramatic *cantilenas* alternates with dramatic recitatives or with melismatic opera embroidered on a flexible and exciting rhythmic harmonies, whose chromaticisms break the diatonic, foreshadowing subtleties impressionist harmony. Besides Berlioz and Liszt, Chopin form the romantic trinity.

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