

**REDISCOVERING FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN'S
*TROIS NOUVELLES ÉTUDES***

A Monograph

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Qiao-Shuang Xian

B.M., Columbus State University, 1996

M.M., Louisiana State University, 1998

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ABSTRACT

Frédéric Chopin's *Trois Nouvelles Études* (Three New Études) were composed in 1839 at the request of François Fétis and Ignaz Moshceles for inclusion in a new and elaborate piano teaching method. While these new studies are less dramatic and brilliant than Chopin's two previous sets of Études, op. 10 and 25, they are no less concerned with expressive musical qualities and they are of equal artistic merit to any of Chopin's earlier Études.

The monograph's five chapters deal with specific aspects of these works. Chapter One traces the historical background of the *Three Nouvelles Études*. Chapter Two is devoted to a discussion of Chopin's general compositional style and its reflection in the *Three Nouvelles Études*. The focus of Chapter Three is on Chopin's general pianistic and pedagogical approach, followed by a harmonic analysis of each Étude in Chapter Four. The final chapter applies information from the preceding chapters to teaching strategies, from the initial presentation of the work through practice suggestions and performance interpretation.

Chopin's last three Études are sensitive, poetic expressions that are often overlooked by contemporary performers and pedagogues. These works address critically needed skills for developing pianists and can add great beauty and interest to recital programs.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Rise of Piano Methods

“It is not surprising that as the piano began to emerge and gain popularity there was an outpouring of didactic material.”¹ One reason for the proliferation of piano methods and études in the early nineteenth century was the significant improvement of the piano as a musical instrument. In 1821, the invention of the double-escapement action by Pierre Érard (1794-1855) resolved the significant problem of slow repetition in the instrument’s action, thus enabling performers to play at faster tempi. The addition of a cast-iron frame, during the 1820s, greatly strengthened the instrument, making it more rigid and capable of supporting two or three strings on each note. In addition to making the tuning more stable, which made the instrument considerably more user friendly for the average person, having more than one string per note allowed the instrument to produce greater volume. Thus, the piano could be used more successfully in combination with other instruments or with singers. It was also capable of sustaining tones long enough to play expressively at a slow tempo. Improved tensile strength of the strings, which resulted from the change-over from brass to steel strings, resulted in the use of longer-length bass strings and higher-pitched treble strings, allowing the range of the instrument to be expanded in both directions. Consequently, the range of the piano grew to some six and a half octaves during the early 1900s. These significant improvements in the piano not only helped to make it the most popular instrument of the time, but also changed the very nature of how the instrument was played.

¹ Stewart Gordon, *Historical Overview of Keyboard Pedagogy*, in *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, by Marianne Uszler, Stewart Gordon, and Elyse Mach (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), 305.

François-Joseph Fétis (1784-1871) in his *Méthode des Méthodes de Piano* (Method of Methods for the Piano, 1840) pointed out:

The successive changes introduced into the system of the construction of the piano did not exert less influence on the mechanics of the fingers. For more than fifty years, the hammers which struck the strings were short and light levers, suspended by hinges of hide that the least effort made take action; the strings were thin, fragile, and had to be careful with in order not to break them. It is for such instruments that all the music of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, the greatest part of the works of Clementi, and many works of Dussek, of Cramer and of Steibert were composed. The necessary qualities for their execution and for the touch of the instruments was the delicacy of the sense of touch, expression and lightness... Later, and progressively, a total change took place in the system of construction, and later in the system of touch. The necessity, felt more and more, of increasing the intensity of sound, had the lever of the hammers lengthened, gave them more weight, a more powerful action, complicated their mechanism of combinations of an escapement, and made it give more force to the keys.²

Encouraged by publishers such as Maurice Schlesinger (1798-1871), who was eager to cash in on the newly developing market for piano instructional materials, Fétis was able to realize his long-held goal of producing an instructional method that would reflect the new realities involved in piano performance.

A growing trend towards virtuosity in performance, especially by pianists, was responsible for an increase in the number of études being composed for the piano during the early decade of the 1800s. Between 1815 and 1830, composers such as Muzio Clementi (1752-1832), Johann Baptist Cramer (1771-1858), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837), Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785-1849), and Carl Czerny (1791-1857) composed methods that contained exercises and études designed to provide opportunity for the development of technical skills at the piano. The Études by these composers typically focused on one specific technical skill, such as scales, arpeggios,

² François-Joseph Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles, *Méthode des méthodes de piano*, introduction translated by Carol Taylor (Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, 1840; reprint, Genève: Minkoff, 1973), 2.

octaves, double-notes, repeated-notes, skips, or other traditionally encountered figurations. While these Études provide some insights into the development of technical skills, they are for the most part without musical substance or significance.

The publication of Frédéric Chopin's (1810-1849) twenty-four Études, op. 10 and 25, in 1833 and 1837 set a new standard for the Romantic étude. Chopin's studies not only allow for the development of traditional technical skills, but they also point to an expanded view of piano technique not common at the time. This view places the acquisition of a refined sense of touch, the cultivation of a variety of sound, control of counterpoint, and development of rhythmic skills ahead of obtaining power and speed in performance. More importantly, in Chopin's Études, technical development is never pursued apart from musical considerations, but is always fully integrated into the musical meaning of the piece. This is especially evident in his *Trois Nouvelles Études* (Three New Études), which first were published in the *Méthode des Méthodes*.

The *Méthode des Méthodes* de Piano of 1840

The *Méthode des Méthodes* was an ambitious pedagogical treatise, compiled and edited by arguably the two greatest pedagogues in Europe during the early nineteenth century, Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870).

Fétis was born in Mons, Belgium and grew up in a family of musicians and instrument makers. As a child, he became well acquainted with the music of C.P.E. Bach, Viotti, Mozart, and Haydn through playing the continuo for many of his father's musical gatherings. By 1818, Fétis had established himself as a freelance musician, composer, teacher, and critic. In 1821, Fétis accepted a position at the Paris Conservatory teaching counterpoint and fugue, and from 1826 to 1830, served as

librarian of the Conservatory. In 1827, Fétis founded the *Revue Musicale* (Music Review), a weekly journal that became a model for future publications of its type.³ Over time, the *Revue* established Fétis' position as an important figure in Parisian musical life during the 1820s.

In 1833, Fétis returned to Belgium, where he became both the first director of the newly established Brussels Conservatory as well as *Maitre de Chapelle* to Leopold I. In 1834, his *Revue* was purchased by Parisian publisher Maurice Schlesinger and was known as *La Revue et Gazette Musicale* (Music Journal and Review). This publication contained the most powerful musical writings in France in the nineteenth century, employing Berlioz, d'Ortigue, Fétis, Legouv e, and Liszt as contributing editors.⁴

As a composer, F tis was interested in early music and was deeply inspired by Viennese Classical composers, Mozart in particular. As a pedagogue, he was eclectic in his approach, borrowing widely from previous authors in the field. His *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens* (Biographies of World Famous Musicians, 1835-44 and 1860-65) and the *M thode des M thodes* are reflective of his unusual approach. At the end of his life, F tis had completed five volumes of an originally projected eight-volume general history of music, which even included material on ethnomusicological subjects. These writings were exceptionally rare for their time and are sometimes referred to as the foundation of comparative musicology. F tis was also the owner of a remarkable musical collection. Today, his personal library and collection of early instruments are valued treasures of the Royal Library of Belgium.

³ Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), s.v. "Fran ois-Joseph F tis," by Katharine Ellis, vol. 8, 746.

⁴ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years 1811-1847* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 167.

As an excellent bibliographer and one who was extremely familiar with traditional pedagogical works, Fétis had wanted for some time to prepare a series of instructional books for violin, piano, and voice that would be based on the best of earlier methods. Eventually this idea became the basis of his *Méthode des Méthodes*. In 1829, together with Moscheles, Fétis drafted a plan for the *Méthode*, which proposed to include works by some of the most influential pianists, pedagogues, and composers of both the past and present.

Ignaz Moscheles was born into a Jewish family in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Between 1808 and 1825, his extensive concert appearances made him one of the most famous and most respected pianists in Europe. His pupil, Edward George Dannreuther (1844-1905) described his playing as: “distinguished by a crisp and incisive touch, clear and precise phrasing and pronounced preference for minute accentuation. He played octaves with stiff wrists and was careful in the use of the pedals.”⁵ Moscheles also became well acquainted with virtually every one of the leading musicians and composers of his day, especially Clementi, Cramer, and Kalkbrenner.

Moscheles was also a proponent of earlier music. He was active both as an editor and as an interpreter of Händel, Haydn, Mozart, Clementi, Weber, and particularly Beethoven. He knew Beethoven personally and prepared numerous arrangements and editions of Beethoven’s works including a piano reduction of the opera *Fidelio* in 1814.

Moscheles first became interested in the works of Chopin in 1833. He admired Chopin's innovative piano writings, but remained unconvinced of their true artistic value. In his diary, Moscheles wrote:

⁵ David Dubal, *The Art of the Piano: Its Performances, Literature, and Recordings* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 176.

I like to spend a few hours in the evening, when I am free, getting to know Chopin's Études and his other compositions. Their originality and the national coloring of their themes hold great attraction for me. But every so often my thoughts, and through them my fingers, stumble over certain harsh, inartistic and incomprehensible modulations, while the music as a whole at times seems too sweet to me, and it hardly seems worthy of the man and educated musician.⁶

Moscheles's wish to meet Chopin finally came true in September 1839, when he was in Paris. In a letter, he wrote:

His appearance matches his music perfectly, both being tender and passionate. At my request, he played for me, and it is only after hearing him play that I am now able to understand his music. I was also able to grasp why he has such an enthusiastic following among the ladies. The ad libitum passages adjoining his works, which become mere displays of tactlessness when attempted by other interpreters of his music, are the essence of charming originality in his own performances. His hard modulations, which I cannot get over when I play his pieces, are a sign of his dilettantism, and no longer shock me, after having seen his elfin fingers gliding over the keyboard to execute them with such skill. His piano is tuned in such a way that he does not need to play with much forte in order to produce the contrasts he desires. Thus one does not miss the orchestra-like effects which the German school demands of its pianists, but instead one is enraptured by the playing, as if it were a singer who does not worry about his accompaniment, but follows his own intuition and feelings completely. Suffice it to say he is unique among pianists. Moreover, he professes to have a great admiration for my compositions and even if this is not the truth, he does have a thorough knowledge of them.⁷

Moscheles and Chopin frequently performed together at Paris society soirées. During this time, the French court invited them to play before King Louis Philippe. Their successful performance of Moscheles's *Grande Sonata*, op. 47 for piano duet became so popular that they had to give a repeat performance at almost all the social functions they attended together. As a result, they earned for themselves the nickname of "La Sonata".

⁶ Emil F. Smidak, trans., *Isaak-Ignaz Moscheles: the Life of the Composer and His Encounters with Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin & Mendelssohn* (Brookfield, Vermont: Gower Publishing Company Limited, 1989), 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-21.

Moscheles was one of the finest teachers of his time. He built up a circle of talented pupils, including Litloff, Thalberg, Louis Brassin, Sir George Henschel, Richard Hoffman, Rafael Joseffy, Sydney Smith, Max Vogrich, and many others.⁸ As a composer, Moscheles published 142 opus numbers, most of which were piano compositions. His Twenty-four Études, op. 70, of 1826 were so popular that they were widely used for decades. Schumann thought of them as bridging the gap between Clementi's and Chopin's Études and as being influenced by Bach's *Clavier-Übung*.⁹ Chopin often used Moscheles's Études in his own teaching.

Because of Moscheles's respected and influential position in European musical society during the early nineteenth century, he was able to convince many distinguished pianists such as Chopin, Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), and others to contribute to the *Méthode*. Fétis began his project with the help of Maurice Schlesinger, a French publisher of German descent who regularly printed the works of Chopin, Liszt, Berlioz, and Wagner. The *Méthode* was first published in Berlin by Maurice's father, Adolf Martin Schlesinger (1769-1839), sometime between August and September of 1840. Maurice Schlesinger later released his edition of the *Méthode* on November 15, 1840 in Paris (Fig. 1a & b). Lastly, Chappell publishing company in London printed an edition of the *Méthode* in January 1841.

The *Méthode des Méthodes* was published in two volumes. The first volume contains a preface by Fétis, a seven page overview of basic musical notation, and a four page introduction that includes the history of the development of the piano, a

⁸ Dubal, 175.

⁹ Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), s.v. "Moscheles, Ignaz (Isaac)" by Jerome Roche and Henry Roche, vol. 17, 163.

MÉTHODE des MÉTHODES
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Fig. 1.1. Title page: a, the 1840 Paris edition of the *Méthode des Méthodes*, reprinted by Minkoff in Geneva in 1973; b, an English translation of the title page (Fig. continued).

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for the Piano**

or

Treatise on the Art of Playing This Instrument

based on the analysis of the best works on this subject and particularly, of the methods of

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Fig. 1b¹⁰

¹⁰ Text translated from the French (Fig. 1a) by Carol Taylor.

discussion of how the piano affects musical style in composition and performance, and an explanation of the benefits of combining or analyzing the best of diverse methods and techniques:

A new method of piano, conceived in an absolute system, as would be without fail the one which would be able to be written by artist attached to productive rules (concepts, or principles) of his talent, would only have put into circulation some particular ideas on the art of playing the instrument, without advancing toward the fusion and the uniting of all the elements of the art considered under the most general point of view. To summarize everything good that has been produced up until this day; to give on each thing the opinions and the rules of the most famous leading schools; to make of it a reasoned analysis and to apply them with discernment, such is for the present era the only manner of making a work which is of universal use, such is the only way of putting reason in place of prejudices. It is what I proposed to do in this *Méthode des Méthodes*, from this fusion of principle will be born, when it shall have been understood, a new art, extended, varied, immense, which embraces all the nuances of the art, and which will be conformed to the unlimited purpose of music.¹¹

The body of the first volume consists of fourteen chapters of finger exercises and technical drills, which are presented with very detailed instructions. The suggestions for executing these exercises and examples are drawn for the most part from methods and theoretical essays by distinguished pedagogues of earlier times, including Louis Adam (no dates), François Couperin (1688-1733), C. P. E. Bach (1714-1788), Daniel Gottlob Türk (1750-1813), Clementi, Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812), Hummel, Kalkbrenner, August Eberhard Müller (1767-1817), and Aloys Schmitt (1788-1866). The final chapter of the first volume contains selected pieces and *Études* by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Cramer, Czerny, Johann Kessler (1800-1872), Moscheles, and Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757). Although quite detailed in its treatment of many aspects of piano playing, the level of difficulty of the *Méthode* progresses very rapidly from a beginning level to a highly advanced level.

¹¹ Fétis and Moscheles, 4.

The second volume of the *Méthode*, subtitled *Études de Perfectionnement* (Études for Advanced Pianists) contains a total of eighteen Études: one by Sir Julius Bénédict (1840-1885), three by Chopin, two by Theodor Döhler (1814-1856), one by Stephen Heller (1813-1888), one by Mendelssohn, one by Adolph Von Henselt (1814-1889), one by Liszt, two by Moscheles, one by Jean-Amédée Le Froid de Méreaux (1802-1874), one by Jacob Rosenhain (1813-1894), two by Sigismond Thalberg (1812-1871), and two by Edouard Wolff (1816-1880). These works are all clearly intended for advanced pianists and, for the most part, they deal with virtuosic skills commonly used by early nineteenth-century pianists.

Tempo markings for these Études range widely from *Andante patetico con moto* to *Presto impetuoso* and, generally speaking, the Études fall into two distinct types. The first type concerns itself primarily with balance of melody against accompaniment. These Études consist of a lyrical melody set against a variety of different accompaniment figures played in either the same hand, the opposite hand or distributed between the hands. This approach is found in Études of Moscheles, Rosenhain, Mendelssohn, Henselt and Méreaux. The second type represents a virtuoso style of playing, common among the pianists of the day. It focuses specifically on fast, brilliant playing, and consists of difficult passages in traditional techniques (arpeggios, double-notes, octaves, staccato chords, and wide leaps in rapid tempi), which stretch the performer's endurance to extreme limits. The Études of Liszt and Döhler are of this type and are perhaps the most outwardly difficult of all the Études contributed to the *Méthode*. Although well-intended and perhaps of some technical merit, most of both types of these Études sound repetitive and are of little artistic value.

Chopin's *Three Nouvelles Études* are without a doubt the most successful of all the contributions to the *Perfectionnement*. These works focus more on areas of phrasing, nuance, and cultivation of the imagination to project musical ideas than on development of power and velocity. Chopin himself recognized the value of these three works as being on a par with his other *Études* when he had them republished (without opus numbers) in Paris and Berlin one year after the publication of Fétis and Moscheles's *Méthode des Méthodes*.

Despite the considerable encouragement and backing of M. Schlesinger, the outstanding pedagogical qualifications of Fétis and Moscheles, and a stellar cast of pianist-composer contributors, the *Méthode des Méthodes* remains virtually unknown today and, with the single exception of Chopin's *Three Nouvelles Études*, the pieces contained in its second volume are almost never performed by contemporary pianists.

CHAPTER 2

CHOPIN'S GENERAL MUSICAL APPROACH

By all accounts Chopin was one of the most outstanding pianists of his time. After Chopin's public debut on February 26, 1832 at the Salle Pleyel, a fashionable concert hall in Paris, Fétis commented in his *Revue Musicale*:

Here is a young man, who abandoning himself to his natural impressions and without taking a model, has found, if not a complete renewal of pianoforte music, at least a part of what has been sought in vain for a long time – namely an abundance of original ideas of which the type is to be found nowhere... I found in M. Chopin's inspirations the indication of a renewal of forms which may exercise in time much influence over this department of art.¹

Chopin's music has a truly unique sound. His innovative compositional style drew directly from his profound understanding of the piano. In spite of the fact that his early mazurkas, nocturnes, and études were modeled after works by early nineteenth-century composers such as Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831), John Field (1782-1837), and Moscheles, they are so entirely idiomatic for the piano that each of these forms was transformed by him into something entirely new and fresh. A more complete understanding of Chopin's compositional style can contribute significantly to the performance of his works and the *Three Nouvelles Études* in particular.

Formal Structure in Short Works

Generally speaking, there are two contrasting approaches to formal structure in Chopin's short works. One is a continuous form, or through-composed approach, and the other is a sectionalized ternary design.

Structure in the majority of his ternary forms is obvious, but on occasion, that which at first may appear to be a ternary structure turns out not to be so. On closer

¹ Tad Szulc, *Chopin in Paris: The Life and Times of the Romantic Composer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 89.

inspection, some of Chopin's ternary designs are actually more continuous, through-composed forms, in which the middle section offers an intensification of the opening material rather than a separate section.² For example, the middle section of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major (measures 17-40) actually consists of the same figuration as the outer sections, but the material has been intensified through remote harmonic modulation, chromatic bass line progression and the addition of melodic material to inner voices. In this instance, Chopin is actually exploiting an irregular, less predictable tension-release structure within a form that might first appear to be a traditional ABA pattern. Similar treatment appears in the Prelude in G-sharp Minor, op. 28, no. 12.

Postponing cadential closure in the tonic key is another of Chopin's typical formal strategies within his continuous forms. In the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major, after the opening theme returns in measure 33 and reaches its dominant of A-flat in measure 47, it remains for 20 measures without resolving to the tonic until measure 67 of the piece. Here Chopin effectively builds intensity by prolonging the dominant, most apparent in the bass line of the work, making the resolution to the tonic a much more dramatic and satisfying event at the end of the piece. Similarly, the Prelude in A Minor, op. 28, no. 2 is another good example of Chopin's use of prolongation of dominant and postponing the final resolution in the tonic key until the last possible moment.

Melody

Chopin's melodies for the piano are always vocally conceived and particularly inspired by Italian opera. As Gerald Abraham puts it: "Chopin's melody is not an imitation but a stylization of Italian *bel canto* (beautiful singing)."³ Chopin manages to

² Jim Samson, *Chopin* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 183.

³ Gerald Abraham, *Chopin's Musical Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 64.

completely synthesize vocal substance and pianistic ornamentation so that his melodies are essentially singable, yet idiomatically suited to the piano. Consequently, Chopin's approach to melody can be said to owe as much to vocal models as it does to pianistic possibility, and his melodies never emphasize one of these aspects to the exclusion of the other.

Despite extensive chromaticism and dissonance, the fundamental structure of Chopin's melodies is diatonic. As with Mozart, who was one of Chopin's favorite composers, chromatic elements like passing tones, appoggiaturas and other ornaments are purely decorative in function. Measures 9-12 of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor (Ex. 2.1) provide a good example of this. Here the chromatic passing tones in the melody are simply decorations of the diatonic chords (i and V₇), the notes of which are circled in the following example.

The image shows a musical score for measures 9-12 of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor. The score is written in F minor (three flats) and common time. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The melody is marked with a slur and a triplet '3' over measures 9 and 10. The chords are labeled as Fm: i, V7, i, and V7. The notes of the diatonic chords are circled. The bass line is marked with 'Ped.' and asterisks.

Ex. 2.1. *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor, measures 9-12

Phrase Structure

Chopin almost invariably employs regular phrases of either four or eight measures in length. While Chopin's large phrases are regular in length, beneath the phrase level his melodies are often comprised of sub-phrases of unequal length. For example, the phrase in measures 1-8 of the Nocturne in F Minor, op. 55, no. 1 (Ex. 2.2)

is divided into sub-phrase lengths of 2+2+4 measures, an approach often found in piano compositions of the Classical period.



Ex. 2.2. Nocturne in F Minor, op. 55, no. 1, measures 1-8

Likewise, the opening four bar phrase of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor (Ex. 2.3) is divided into sub-phrases of 1+1+2 measure lengths.



Ex. 2.3. *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor, measures 1-4

For Chopin, music was a language and as such, it was directly related to patterns of speech. His pupil, Karol Mikuli (1819-97) pointed out:

Chopin's attention was always directed to teaching correct phrasing. Wrong phrasing would provoke the likely remarks that it seemed to him as if someone was reciting a carefully memorized speech in an unfamiliar language. The narrator not only failing to observe the right quantity of syllables, but also perhaps even making full stops in the middle of words. Similarly, by his incorrect phrasing the pseudo-musician reveals that music is not his mother tongue but something foreign and unintelligible to him; therefore like that narrator, he must give up all hope of his speech having any effect on the listener.⁴

⁴ Frederic Chopin, *Complete Works for the Piano*, book VIII, *Études*, edited, fingered and with an introduction by Karol Mikuli (New York: G Schirmer, Inc., 1943), iii.

The Waltz in A-flat Major, op. 69 no. 1 (Ex. 2.4) is an example of how the performance of Chopin's phrasing can be related to subtle inflection in speaking. Each eight-measure phrase acts as a complete sentence. A slight pause and softer dynamic level can be used to indicate a termination of thought. More subtle dynamic inflections (inserted by the author in the example below) can also be used at the end of each sub-phrase.

The musical score for Ex. 2.4 consists of three staves of music in 3/4 time, A-flat Major. The first staff contains measures 1-8, with dynamics *p* and *mp*. The second staff contains measures 9-12, with dynamics *mf*, *f*, and *mf*. The third staff contains measures 13-16, with dynamics *mp*, *pp*, and *rit.*. Phrasing is indicated by slurs and dynamic wedges. Measure numbers 3, 5, 9, and 13 are marked above the notes. The piece ends with a ritardando marking.

Ex. 2.4. Waltz in A-flat Major, op. 69, no. 1, measures 1-16

The opening phrases of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major (Ex. 2.5) are divided into 4+4 measures and 2+2+4 measure sub-phrases. Even without the presence of slur marks in each of these phrases, the contouring of the melodic line indicates Chopin's intended sub-phrasing, and again as with speech, performers must respond using subtle changes of tempi, dynamics and pedaling appropriate to these places. Without appropriate and effective responses on the part of the performer as described above, the music degenerates into a mere series of notes without connection, direction or substance. Properly executed subtle inflections of the kind described above create a wealth of interest and allow listeners to follow the development of the musical thought.

The image shows a musical score for a piano exercise. It consists of four staves of music in 2/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is marked mezzo-piano (*mp*). The third staff starts with mezzo-forte (*mf*) and includes a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking later in the phrase. The fourth staff ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The music is characterized by flowing eighth-note patterns and is divided into phrases by slurs and dynamic markings.

Ex. 2.5. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 1-16⁵

Chopin always insisted on the importance of correct phrasing with his pupils and provided them with specific directions in the execution of expression and inflections. He said:

A long note is stronger, as is also a high note. A dissonance is likewise stronger, and equally so a syncopated note. The ending of a phrase, before a comma, or a stop, is always weak. If the melody ascends, one plays *crescendo*, if it descends, *decrescendo*. Moreover, notice must be taken of natural accents. For instance, in a bar of two, the first note is strong, the second weak, in a bar of three the first strong and the two others weak. To the smaller parts of the bar the same direction will apply. Such then are the rules: the exceptions are always indicated by the authors themselves.⁶

Harmony

Chopin's use of harmony is one of the most individual and fascinating aspects of his music. As Gerald Abraham pointed out: "There may have been precedents for some

⁵ The author has inserted additional sub-phrase and dynamic markings in Ex. 2.5.

⁶ Jean Kleczynski, *Chopin's Greater Works*, trans. with additions by Natalie Janotha (London, William Reeves, 188?), 41-42; quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 42.

of his [Chopin's] harmonic exploits...but it is obvious that many of them were directly inspired by the timbre of the instrument or brought to light by the improviser's [Chopin's] delicate fingers."⁷ The inspiration for Chopin's harmonies springs largely from the sound quality of the piano and it is the responsibility of pianists to explore the implications of Chopin's harmonies and find ways of effectively expressing their meaning.

As with his melodies, Chopin's harmonic progressions are fundamentally diatonic in nature but highly decorated with chromaticism. His approach often includes overlaying of basic chord progressions with a wide and complex variety of non-harmonic tones. The *Étude* in G-flat Major, op. 10, no. 5 (Ex. 2.6) contains an example of a single chord (G-flat Major) sustained for four measures (25-28) by using a series of diatonic passing notes in the right-hand and chromatically ascending passing notes in the

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Étude in G-flat Major, op. 10, no. 5, measures 25-28. The score is in 2/4 time and G-flat major. The right hand features a complex, chromatic melody with many slurs and accents, while the left hand plays a simple, arpeggiated bass line. A label 'G♭ Major Chord' is placed above the first measure of the right hand.

Ex. 2.6. *Étude* in G-flat Major, op. 10, no. 5, measures 26-28

bass line. The *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor is an example of Chopin's use of a highly chromatic right hand melody that extends, elaborates and amplifies diatonic arpeggiated chords in the left hand.

In other instances, Chopin resorts to a series of transitional chord progressions without affecting the basic tonal structure of a piece. Chains of V-I progressions occur

⁷ Abraham, 77.

frequently in his harmonic progressions. Such progressions usually serve as an extension of a single harmony or to temporarily obscure the tonality. Examples of this are numerous and include the Étude in A Minor, op. 10 no. 2, measures 19-24 (Ex. 2.7), and the middle section of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 17-24 (Ex. 2.8).

19
FM: V7 ----- I

21
Gm: V7----- i

23
Am: V7----- i

Ex. 2.7. Étude in A Minor, op. 10, no. 2, measures 19-24

17

E Major: I ----- V7

21

C Major: I ----- V

Ab Major

Ex. 2.8. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 17-24

Chopin was particularly fond of using tonal relationships involving the interval of a third to modulate between sections. The Scherzo in B-flat Minor, op. 31 modulates to the relative major key (D-flat Major) in the trio section and the Scherzo in E Major, op. 54 modulates to the relative minor key (C-sharp Minor) in the trio section. Likewise, the Ballade in G Minor, op. 23 and the Ballade in F Major, op. 38 also rely on third relationships to modulate between sections, moving from G Minor to E-flat Major and F Major to A Minor respectively.

Chopin's use of third relationships is also evident in the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major (Fig. 2.1). After the opening section cadences in the tonic key of A-flat Major in measure 16, the piece then modulates in descending whole steps to the key of E Major in measure 17. This modulation could be thought of enharmonically as G-sharp to

Measure Number:	1	5	15	16	17	21	25	29	32	33	36	37	40	41	45	59	60	
Bass-line:	A ^b	D ^b	E ^b	(G [#])	E	C	A ^b	(A-B ^b -B)	-cm	-am	-fm	-b ^b m	-C	-B ^b	A ^b	D ^b	E ^b	A ^b
Tonal Function: (A-flat Major)	I	IV	V	I	V [#]	III	I	iii	i [#]	v/ii	ii	V/vi	V7	I	IV	V	I	
													(C-pedal point)					

Fig. 2.1. Tonal progression of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major

F-sharp to E, which forms the first third relationship. The middle section of the piece (m. 17) establishes a sequential pattern first in the key of E major, then modulates down a third to the key of C major (m. 21), and then down another third to the key of A-flat in measure 25. During measures 25-29, the harmonies ascend chromatically from A-flat to C, where another sequence appears first in the key of A Minor from measures 29 to 32 and then again in the key of B-flat Minor from measures 33 to 36. A pedal point on the note C is then established in measure 37, which sets up the climax of the *Étude* in measure 39. The return of the tonic key of A-flat Major occurs in measure 41 through the harmonic progression of V/vi-V7-I.

Texture and Figuration

Texture in music results from the combination of horizontal and vertical elements present in a composition. Between the two extremes of strictly polyphonic (horizontal) and strictly homophonic (vertical) music lie a large variety of intermediate textures.⁸

Two specific approaches to texture are common in Chopin's works. One of the predominant approaches is the characteristic texture found in the nocturnes. This texture consists of an ornamented melodic line against a wide-ranging chordal accompaniment. Although this textural approach is present in piano music from the

⁸ Willi Apel, *the Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), s.v. "Texture," 842.

earliest years of the nineteenth century, Chopin's treatment of it excelled in many ways. No less fundamental is the texture of accompanied melody in all its many varieties.⁹ For example, his melodic contouring often implies multiple voices. The melody line almost always consists of independent layers either in one voice or in several voices simultaneously. At least one of these layers typically functions as the harmonic structure for the piece while occasionally interact with other voices. The middle section of the Nocturne in E Major, op. 62, no. 2 (Ex. 2.9) shows a three-voice texture with each of the voices working contrapuntally against each other. The lower voice in beat two of measure 42 initially begins as an imitation of the melody in the top voice and is later transformed into an independent accompaniment pattern at the beginning of measure 43.

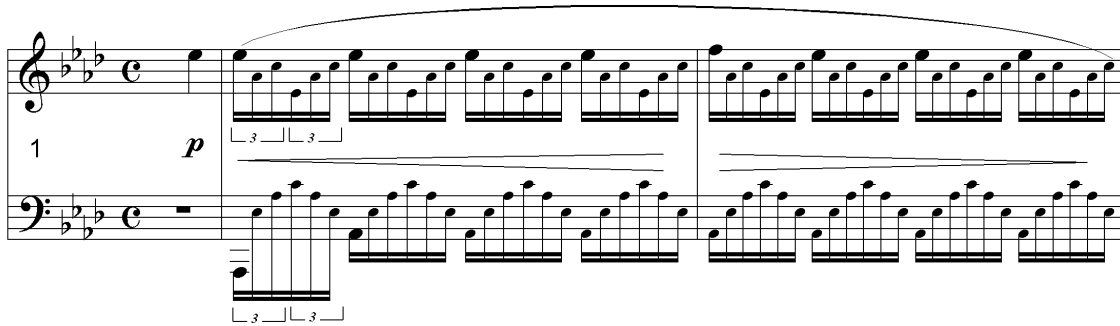
Ex. 2.9. Nocturne in E Major, op. 62, no. 2, measures 42-45

⁹ Jim Samson, *Master Musicians: Chopin*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 168.

Similarly, the texture in the right hand of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major appears to be chordal rather than linear. The melody in the outer sections appears exclusively in the upper notes of the chordal texture and the left hand functions primarily as the harmonic foundation for the work. However, in the middle section of the work, melodic lines emerge from both the upper and lower voices (Ex. 2.10). The author in the following example provided additional stemming in the middle voices from measures 17 to 20 in order to demonstrate melodic fragments where it creates counterpoint against the alto voice of the right hand part. Additionally, the distance between the two hands is reduced in the middle section of the *Étude* thereby increasing the density of the overall

Ex. 2.10. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 17-20

Another type of texture often found in Chopin's music is figuration. It occurs in many different ways and is generally an outgrowth of the technical point of the *Étude*. For example, the *Étude* in A-flat Major, op. 25, no. 1 (Ex. 2.11) provides an interesting example of the texture resulting from the interconnection of a melodic chordal figure in the right hand and similar chordal figures in the left hand. The technical device Chopin is emphasizing in this *Étude* is the voicing of the melody within the arpeggiated chordal figurations.



Ex. 2.11. Étude in A-flat Major, op. 25, no. 1, measures 1-2

Another example is the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major (Ex. 2.12): the texture in this work blurs the boundaries that divide melody, harmony and figuration in both principal voice and the accompaniment. The technical device Chopin is primarily exploiting in this Étude is the voicing of the top notes of the blocked chordal figurations.



Ex. 2.12. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 1-4

Texture is a significant contributing factor in Chopin's music. As much as any other musical element, Chopin's use of texture defines the fundamental character of the sound of his music.

Rhythmic Complexities

Chopin's use of rhythm is no less original than his use of harmony or texture. Rhythmic complexity adds considerable depth and interest to his compositional style.

One way Chopin creates rhythmic interest is by varying the rhythmic interactions between various lines. For example, in the Étude in F Minor, op. 25, no.2 (Ex. 2.13), each measure consists of four groups of eighth-note triplets in the right-hand against the two groups of quarter-note triplets in the left hand. While the rhythmic values between the hands correspond at every other note, the voices actually function independently from a rhythmic point of view because their performance requires independent stresses between the hands. The result should be a rhythmic effect of duple versus triple.¹⁰ Because the two hands sound together on every second eighth note, the delicate counter-play of duple versus triple in this work may escape the notice of some performers.

Ex. 2.13. Étude in F Minor, op. 25, no.2, measures 1-2

The rhythmic structures of the *Nouvelles Études* in F Minor and A-flat Major are less subtle in nature than op. 25, no. 2. The two Études, however, reach out toward greater complexity of non-coincidence (notes that do sound together): the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major (Fig. 2.2) consists of a single point of non-coincidence (notes that do not sound together) between coincidences.

¹⁰ The additional stemming and grouping of the notes in Ex. 2.13 are added by the author.

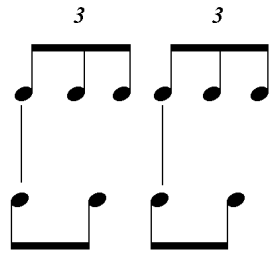


Fig. 2.2. Rhythmic coincidence within the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major

The *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor consists of multiple points of non-coincidence between points of coincidence, which creates a considerable sense of rhythmic freedom.¹¹ After each hand establishes separately the feeling of either triple or duple divisions of the pulse, the individual rhythms then combine to create two points of coincidence per measure surrounded by multiple points of non-coincidence (Fig. 2.3). In essence, these tiny rhythmic ambiguities amount to an effect similar to *rubato*, the subtle combination of lingering and acceleration that “robs” from a beat or measure in order to escape any sense of rhythmic constraint.¹²

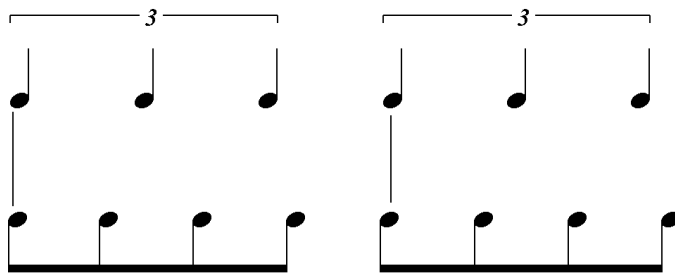


Fig. 2.3. Rhythmic coincidence within the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor

¹¹ Elaine Brody and Jan Larue, “Trois Nouvelles Études,” *Musical Quarterly*, vol. LXXII/1 (1986): 12-13.

¹² *Ibid.*

Chopin's innate compositional insight enabled him to realize the essential musical possibilities inherent in any musical material and to always adopt an approach to the treatment of his material that was both individual and effective. Chopin's pianism and pedagogical approach were equally insightful and these will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

CHOPIN'S PIANISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

Chopin's playing was unique, quite unlike any of his contemporaries or those who had preceded him. Karol Mikuli said: "Chopin had a complete grasp of the technique necessary to play his own compositions, which were then considered to be of an almost unprecedented difficulty. He has small hands, but they are extremely flexible. His legato playing can make the piano sing as vividly as any vocalist."¹

A basic principle of Chopin's writing, performing, and teaching was that technique should be a tool to realize musical self-expression rather than a vehicle for mere mechanical display. Knowing Chopin's perspective gives us a better understanding of his style of writing and his approach to composition. It enables the pianist to avoid wasted effort during the learning process and to develop a more authentic approach to the performance of his works.

The Art of Touch

Chopin widened the definition of traditional piano technique through his emphasis on the cultivation of a wide variety of touches and refined control of sound through careful listening. In his *Projet de Méthode* (Sketch for a Method), Chopin wrote: "The goal is not to learn to play everything with an equal sound, but rather, a well-formed technique that can control and vary a beautiful sound quality."² Chopin insisted on the importance of maintaining suppleness of the entire body while playing and using a delicate touch to avoid the hands becoming heavy or clumsy. At the heart of Chopin's

¹ James Methuen-Campbell, *Chopin in Performance*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 193.

² Frédéric Chopin, *Projet de Méthode*, trans. Naomi Shohet, quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 31.

approach to the piano was his belief in a direct connection between the sound obtained from the instrument and the sensations experienced in the tips of the fingers. The slightest degree of unnecessary stiffness in the joints, or heaviness and over-use of muscles in the larger levers, the arms, was thought by him to interfere with and inhibit the performer's ability to control or inflect sound. He also believed that executing passages with exaggerated dynamics (*fortissimo* and *pianissimo*) would help to gain control of various tone qualities, and it should not fatigue the hands if done properly.

The close relationship between the piano on which Chopin played and his overall approach to the instrument is a factor that should never be underestimated. Chopin's favorite piano was made by Pleyel, the French piano manufacturing firm. Pleyel's magnificent instruments lent themselves admirably to the various shadings of Chopin's playing.³ From the time of his arrival in Paris in 1831, Chopin performed and taught exclusively on the Pleyel piano and also encouraged his pupils to practice on them. Pleyel's instrument had a lightweight single escapement action and was noted for its mellow, rich tone and sensitivity of touch. The transparency and registral differentiation of the instrument perfectly suited the intricacies of texture in which Chopin reveled, highlighting especially the contrapuntal dimension of his harmonic writing.⁴ These qualities of the instrument made it considerably easier for performers to bring out the subtle contrapuntal lines in his harmony.

To produce a variety of tone colors, Chopin believed one should let the finger lead the arms and that the arms should be used naturally. He thought that one should

³ Eigeldinger, 293.

⁴ Jim Samson, *Master Musicians: Chopin*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.

practice obtaining every color of sound by modifying the weight of the fingers falling on the keys. For singing passages, he felt the fingers should stretch or elongate, and for the special cloudy fluency of ornaments or appoggiaturas, the fingers should bend closely. To produce a sustained and melancholy sound, Chopin insisted on a *legato* approach in which the fingers delay release of the keys. This gives the produced sound a singing quality similar to that of the Italian singers whom Chopin recommended as models.⁵ For *staccato* sound, he recommended the performer imagine *pizzicato* on the violin, employ a short and dry touch from the fingers and avoid snatching the hand away from the keys. Chopin never allowed his pupils to attack the keys, but always encouraged them to caress the keys, to be sensitive to their feel, and to imagine molding the keyboard with a velvet hand.

The goal of the great majority of keyboard exercises that date from before the time of Chopin was to train the fingers to be equally powerful. Chopin believed to the contrary that it was better to preserve the nature of the differences between the fingers and to develop an approach that takes advantage of those differences. From his *Projet de Méthode* (Sketch for a Method), he wrote:

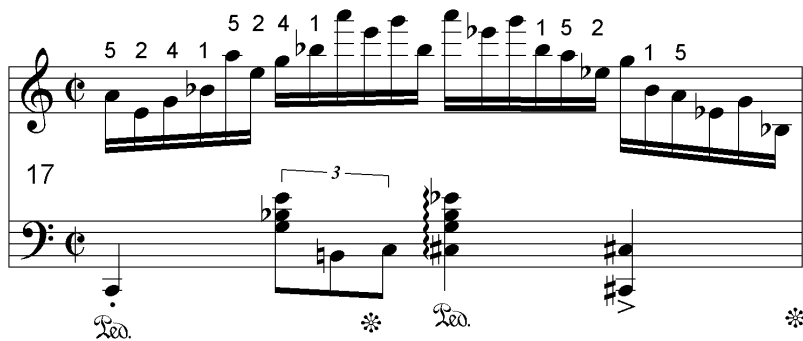
Each finger's power is determined by its shape: the thumb having the most power, being the broadest, shortest and freest. The fifth finger as the other extremity of the hand. The third as the middle and the pivot, then the second. The fourth finger is the weakest one, the Siamese twin of the third, bound to it by a common ligament, and which people insist on trying to separate from the third, which is impossible, and fortunately, unnecessary. As many different sounds as there are fingers.⁶

⁵ Eigeldinger, 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

Fingering

Chopin broke many traditional rules of fingering. In order to give ease in executing a passage, he adopted fingering most suitable to the natural position of the hand.⁷ Johann Nepomuk Hummel's approach to fingering influenced Chopin in many ways and inspired further development of his own innovative piano technique. For example, to achieve an evenness of sound and quietness of the hand, Chopin freely allowed, and at times required, use of the thumb on the black keys or passing the thumb under the fifth finger as in the *Étude* in A Minor, op. 25, no. 11 (Ex. 3.1).



Ex. 3.1. *Étude* in A Minor, op. 25, no. 11, measure 17

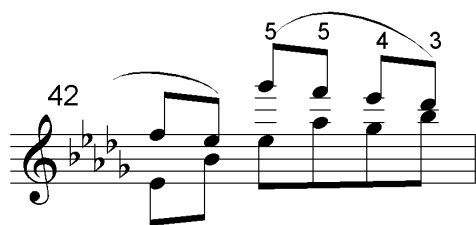
He frequently used the same finger to slide from a black key to a white key on successive notes of a melodic line for *legato* and *cantabile* playing as in the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major (Ex. 3.2a & b).



Ex. 3.2a

Ex. 3.2. *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major: a, measures 18-19; b, measure 42 (Ex. continued)

⁷ Ibid., 19.



Ex. 3.2b

Chopin also used the same finger for consecutive notes in order to produce a more articulated tone color than that which could be obtained with a more traditional fingering approach. In this case the fingering of 1-1-1 appears in the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor (Ex. 3.3).



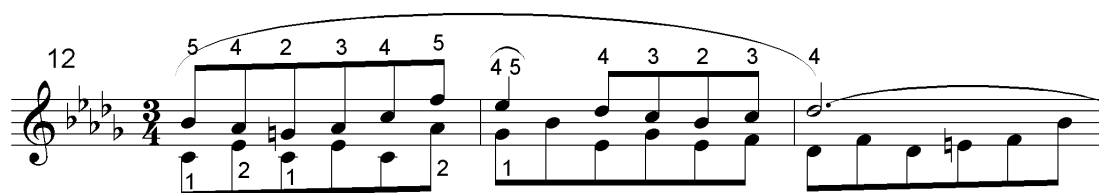
Ex. 3.3. *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor, measures 41-43

In chromatic passages, he often used the third, fourth, or fifth fingers to cross over one another without the help of the thumb, thereby enabling the performer to obtain the smoothest *legato* in the quickest tempo as in the *Étude* in A Minor, op. 10, no. 2 (Ex. 3.4).

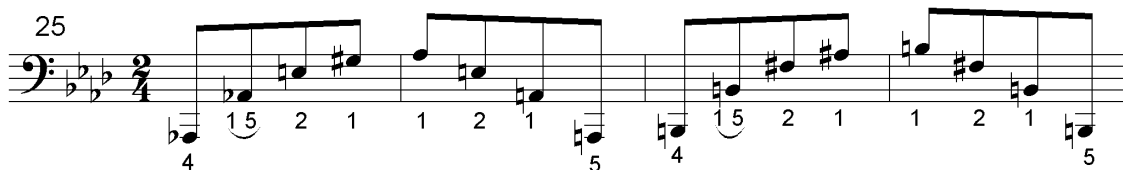


Ex. 3.4. *Étude* in A Minor, op. 10, no. 2, measure 1

Chopin often made use of finger substitutions. According to Edith J. Hipkins's description of Chopin's playing in the *Andante spianato*, op. 22, he changed fingers upon a key as often as an organ player did.⁸ Finger substitutions enable the creation of a *legato* effect without use of the damper pedal and as an additional means of maintaining evenness of tone in a melody. Examples of these occur in the *Nouvelles Études* in D-flat (Ex. 3.5) and A-flat Major (Ex 3.6).⁹



Ex. 3.5. *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major, measures 12-14



Ex. 3.6. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 25-28 (left hand)

Chopin's fingerings are an indispensable guide to understanding his technical advances and his originality. From them, we can determine an approach to his compositions based on natural hand positions that thereby enable pianists to learn his works with greater ease and perform them more gracefully.

⁸ Edith J. Hipkins, *How Chopin Played* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1937), 5.

⁹ Finger markings in Ex. 3.5 and 3.6 are from the 1973 Wiener Urtext edition of Paul Badura-Skoda.

Use of the Damper Pedal

Chopin was very particular about his use of the damper pedal and the indications for its use in his manuscripts. He repeatedly told his pupils: “The correct way to use the pedal remains a study for one’s lifetime.”¹⁰

To understand Chopin’s use of the damper pedal, one must know something about the Pleyel piano on which his works were composed. The Pleyel piano was not capable of sustaining sound as long as the modern piano. Therefore, it is to be expected that some of Chopin’s pedal markings will not achieve the same effect on the modern piano as they did on Chopin’s piano. On occasion, some adaptation in one’s use of the damper pedal on a modern piano is necessary to realize an effect similar to that which Chopin’s own piano would have produced.

Certain characteristics of Chopin’s pedaling emerge from a study of his pedal indications in the *Nouvelles Études*. He often indicates that the pedal be used throughout passages containing a series of nonharmonic melodic tones in a melody as in measures 43-44 of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major (Ex. 3.7). Partial pedal is sometimes an appropriate simulation of this effect on the modern piano.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both are in 3/4 time and D-flat major. The right hand has a melodic line with a long slur over measures 43 and 44. The left hand has a bass line with a 'Ped.' marking under measure 43 and an asterisk (*) under measure 44. The asterisk indicates a partial pedal effect.

Ex. 3.7. *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major, measures 43-44¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

¹¹ The pedal marking is from the 1983 Henle edition of Ewald Zimmermann.

Chopin often does not indicate any pedal marks at all in extended passages or even entire works where the use of the pedal is obviously required of the performer. One possible explanation is that Chopin assumes the required pedaling is obvious and therefore does not need to indicate it. Conversely, he may have felt that the desired pedaling was too complex to be indicated by pedal marks. In these cases, Chopin trusts the correct use of the pedal entirely to the instincts and listening skills of the performer. An example of this is the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, where Chopin included no pedal marks at all throughout the entire work except in the last two measures.

Sources of Our Understanding of Chopin's Pedagogical Thought

As a pianist, Chopin presented far fewer public concerts than any of his contemporaries: only thirty concerts in thirty years, from childhood until the year before his death.¹² His performances were mostly at private gatherings and charity functions. In spite of the fact that Chopin rarely played in public, he nevertheless made a profound impact on people who heard him. Léon Escudier (1816-81), a journalist and founder of *La France Musicale*, remarked on Chopin's playing after hearing a recital in February, 1842:

A poet, and a tender poet above all, Chopin makes poetry predominate. He creates prodigious difficulties of performance, but never to the detriment of his melody, which is always simple and original. Follow the pianist's hands, and see the marvelous ease with which he performs the most graceful runs, draws together the width of the keyboard, passes successively from *piano* to *forte* and from *forte* to *piano*! Listening to all these sounds, all these nuances, which follow each other, intermingle, separate and reunite to arrive at the same goal, melody – one might well believe one is hearing small fairy voices sighting under silver bells, or a rain of pearls falling on crystal tables. The pianist's fingers seem to multiply *ad infinitum*; it does not appear possible that only two hands can produce effects of rapidity so precisely and naturally... His inspiration is all of tender and

¹² Tad Szulc, *Chopin in Paris: The Life and Times of the Romantic Composer* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1998), 91.

naïve poetry; he wishes to speak to the heart, not to the eyes; he wishes to love you, not to devour you. See: the public is in ecstasy; enthusiasm is at its peak: Chopin has achieved his aim.¹³

As a teacher, Chopin was exceedingly dedicated to his pupils. The majority of his pupils came from the aristocratic and moneyed classes and were interested in music only as an avocation. However, several of them went on to become professional musicians and were remembered as outstanding teachers and performers. This group of Chopin's most talented and dedicated students is an invaluable source of information regarding Chopin's approach to playing the piano.

Two of Chopin's pupils stand out as the most influential in passing on Chopin's ideas to future generations: Georges Amédée-Saint-Clair Mathias (1826-1910), and Mikuli. Mathias taught at the Paris Conservatory from 1862 to 1893. Among the great number of his students during this time were Isidor Philipp (1863-1958, who taught Guiomar Novães [1895-1979] and Nikita Magaloff [1912-92]), Raoul Pugno (1852-1914), Ernest Schelling (1876-1939), Teresa Carreño (1853-1917, who taught Egon Petri [1881-1962] and Edward MacDowell [1860-1908]), composers Paul Dukas (1865-1935) and Camille Chevillard (1859-1923) and the American critic James Huneker (1857-1921).

Mikuli taught piano, composition and theory at the Lemberg Conservatory in Poland from 1858 to 1893, and dedicated his life to his discipleship of Chopin. He taught Aleksander Michałowski (1851-1938, whose students included Mischa Levitski [1898-1941], Wanda Landowska [1879-1959] and the Russian pianists Heinrich Neuhaus [1888-1964] and Vladimir Sofronitsky [1901-61]), Moriz Rosenthal (1862-1946,

¹³ Eigeldinger, 293-4.

whose students included Charles Rosen [1927-] and Robert Goldsand [n.d.]) and Raoul Koczalski (1884-1948). As a second-generation student of Chopin, Koczalski left a very extensive discography of Chopin's works, which holds a special place in the early history of recorded performances of Chopin. No other second-generation Chopin student recorded his works as widely as Koczalski.¹⁴

While Chopin's approach to the piano is revealed to a considerable extent through his students, his specific teachings on quite a number of subjects are also revealed to us directly in his own words. The unfinished notes Chopin left outlining his own piano method are a unique source of considerable value in uncovering fundamental tenets and priorities in Chopin's art.

Projet de Méthode

Chopin intended to produce a treatise covering both the art of piano playing and the theory of music. Unfortunately, the work was left unfinished because of his failing health and early death, but he did manage to sketch a few pages of important ideas, which form an interesting outline of his subject matter. Among the important ideas included in the sketch was Chopin's insistence that music is a language and through the specific medium of organized sounds, it seeks to express a world of thoughts, feelings and sensations.¹⁵ Chopin thought the primary goal of music to be the communication of meaning and without that, all else is little more than physical exercise. On the subject of technique, Chopin wrote:

People have tried out all kinds of methods of learning to play the piano, methods that are tedious and useless and have nothing to do with the study of this instrument. It's like learning, for example, to walk on one's hands in order to

¹⁴ Most of Koczalski's recorded performances date from the 1930s and were recorded for Polydor; some of these recordings are still available on Replica (RPL 2462).

¹⁵ Eigeldinger, 14.

(make an entrance in a salon) to go for a stroll. Eventually one is no longer able to walk properly on one's feet, and not very well on one's hands either. It doesn't teach us how to play the music itself (nor what one calls difficulties), and the kind of difficulty we are practicing is not the difficulty in good music, the music of the greatest masters. It's an abstract difficulty, a new genre of *acrobatics*.¹⁶

In Chopin's view, technique was only a means to an end and its sole purpose was to provide the player with the ability to freely express the music. In his sketch, Chopin also focused on delicacy of expression and touch; a quality rarely mentioned before his time. He said:

Intonation being the tuner's task, the piano is free of one of the greatest difficulties encountered in the study of an instrument. One needs only to study (the most natural) a certain positioning of the hand in relation to the keys to obtain with ease the most beautiful quality of sound, to know how to play long notes and short notes, and to attain unlimited dexterity.¹⁷

In the study of scales, Chopin thought B Major and E Major scales best promoted a natural hand position at the keyboard because in them the thumb and fifth fingers are placed on the white keys and the middle three fingers lie naturally on the black keys. On the contrary, the scale of C Major was thought to be more difficult because of its flat topography and was therefore best left until the student was at a more advanced level. Additionally, whenever passing the thumb under the fingers, both the hand and the wrist should move slightly laterally; this motion must not affect the desired evenness of the tone. According to Chopin, all fast *legato* scales and arpeggios require similar supple lateral movement of the hands, which he thought was essential to attaining the perfect tone quality.

On the subject of how long pianists should practice daily, Chopin suggested that practicing be kept to a maximum of three hours each day. His intention in imposing such

¹⁶ Ibid., 193.

¹⁷ Ibid., 192.

a limit was to avoid the formation of any automatic or mechanical reflexes that might destroy the spontaneous flow of the music.

Having surveyed Chopin's compositional style and unique approach to his instrument, a closer investigation of Chopin's three *Nouvelles Études* will now be undertaken with the purpose of providing performers with specific tools and techniques for approaching these works.

CHAPTER 4

FORMAL AND HARMONIC ANALYSES OF THE *THREE NOUVELLES ÉTUDES*

Compared to his *Études*, op. 10 and 25, Chopin's *Three Nouvelles Études* are more intimate in feeling, not as fiery or outwardly virtuosic, and somewhat less challenging from a purely technical point of view. Accordingly, pianists often assume that they are minor works, a kind of postscript to Chopin's great achievement in the *étude* genre.¹ Thus, these *Études* are infrequently performed, less frequently recorded and rarely taught. Nonetheless, a close investigation of these works will reveal that they are at least as important as the other twenty-four and that they are written with a wider view of piano technique than commonly existed before Chopin's time.

The *Études*, op. 10 and 25 are mostly in ABA form, many with substantial codas. By contrast, the formal structures of the *Three Nouvelles Études* are more innovative, smaller in scope, and more improvisatory in feeling than the other twenty-four. The dynamic range of the *Three Nouvelles Études* is more subdued, with the single exception of the final *fortissimo* chords of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major. The tempo markings are comparatively relaxed, *Andantino*, *Allegretto* and *Allegretto* respectively, which places a stronger emphasis on the cultivation of sensitivity than on pure technical display.

There is no doubt Chopin intended all his *Études* for public performance but he provided no indication that he intended the *Nouvelles Études* to be performed together as a cycle. Given that the performance of each of these works requires less than two

¹ Jonathan Bellman, "Redefining the Study: Chopin's Trois Nouvelles Études," *Piano & Keyboard*, no. 164 (September-October 1993): 38.

minutes, performers have found it difficult to program them individually in recital. Pianists often choose to perform the three works together in order to create a satisfying group; therefore, the question of order in performance of the *Nouvelles Études* has to be established by the performer. Two distinct approaches to this problem are commonly found. Some decide to adhere to the tonal plan that arranges the Études in a iii-V-I order (D-flat Major being the “tonic” key). This sequence puts the liveliest Étude last. Others believe that the order of F Minor, D-flat Major, and A-flat Major is far better: the nesting of the D-flat waltz between two polymetric reveries, with a key sequence of four-flats, five-flats, four-flats, makes more “Chopinesque” sense.²

The following discussion provides a formal and harmonic analysis of each of the three Études in the latter order. A clear understanding of formal structure and harmonic organization in these works will contribute significantly to a more successful performance. As Debussy wrote in his preface to his edition of Chopin’s complete works: “We must recognize the degree to which everything is in its place and carefully organized.”³

Nouvelle Étude in F Minor

The initial challenge of this study is to execute correctly the polyrhythm consisting of quarter-note triplets in the right hand against eighth notes in the left hand. After each hand introduces its rhythm separately for four measures, the two rhythms are combined in a three against four, two-voice polyrhythm that continues throughout the remainder of the piece. This kind of extended polyrhythm between the hands produces a specific

² Ibid., 39.

³ Claude Debussy, ed., Preface to *Chopin: Oeuvres complètes pour Piano, Valses* (Paris: Editions Durand & Cie, 1910), ii.

coloristic effect typical of Chopin's music. Other examples include the Étude in F Minor, op. 25, no. 2 and the Fantasia-Impromptu in C-sharp Minor, op. 66.

Beneath the extremely long *legato* slurs that Chopin has indicated in this Étude are continuous, overlapping eight-measure phrases each of which can be divided further into 4+4 measure sub-phrases. The through-composed formal structure can be diagrammed as below (Fig. 4.1).

Measure number:	1	5	8	9	17	21	21	29	29	57	58	67	
Form:	Intro.			A				Transition	B	Coda			
Key (F Minor):	V ₇	i	i	V ₇	i	i	v	v (C Minor)	i	i			

Fig. 4.1. A formal structure of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor

In spite of this Étude's expansive, dreamlike sound, its tonal structure is very concise, and shows the influence of classical formal models on Chopin. The secondary tonal center of C Minor is reached in measure 29; the piece returns again to the tonic key in measure 57, and concludes with a ten-measure coda.

The high level of rhythmic complexity gives the work a complicated sound, but the harmonic foundation consists of a relatively simple series of diatonic chords. The shape of the left hand figuration remains consistent throughout the entire piece and some of the harmony in the series lasts for either a single measure or several measures. In these respects the Étude is reminiscent of both the Prelude in C Major from the first book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and Chopin's own Étude in C Major, op. 10, no. 1. Furthermore, while the right hand melody may at first appear to be highly chromatic, it is actually a harmonically generated study in figural and ornamental writing loosely inspired by a general feeling of *bel canto* operatic practice. As such, it

are used to indicate dominant relationships, which occur within the framework of the piece.

In summary, this Étude is entirely characteristic of Chopin's compositional style. Within a basically eighteenth-century classical harmonic language, it contains a uniquely stylized *bel canto* approach to the ornamental melodic line, an intriguing rhythmic structure, long *legato* lines and a prevailing soft dynamic. All of these elements combine to address skills that are as relevant and necessary to piano performance today as they were over 150 years ago when this Étude was composed.

***Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major**

This Étude is a study in voicing and control of simultaneous and contrasting articulations in the right hand. The underlying waltz-like bass line emphasizes the need for these difficulties to be managed with the utmost gracefulness. Most agree that this Étude is the most physically demanding of the set, although its graceful dance-like style and unassuming demeanor mean that its challenges are not readily apparent to audiences.

As in the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor, Chopin's long slurs indicate *legato* playing rather than separating individual phrases. In addition to the slurs, Chopin uses the expressive direction *legato* in measure three to emphasize his intent. The phrase structure is mostly in four-bar lengths, with the exception of two sections. Measures 19-25 divide into sub-phrase lengths of 2+2+3, and measures 41-46 are in sub-phrase lengths of 2+4.

In this work, the overall formal structure of the Étude is ABA¹C (Fig. 4.3). The B section (m. 25-32) acts as a transition. The modulation to the dominant key of A-flat is

Measure number:	1	2	3	25	25	32	33	47	47	67	72	73
Form:	Intro.		A	B		A ¹		C				
Key (D-flat Major):			I	V	V	I		V	V	I	V	I

Fig. 4.3. A formal structure of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major

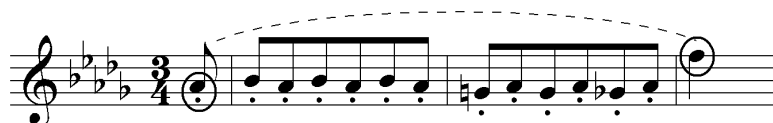
quickly followed by a return to the tonic key of D-flat in measure 33. In the A¹ section (m. 33-46), the first eight measures of the opening material are restated and then extended for six measures, ending with a modulation to the dominant key of A-flat Major. In the final section (measures 47-73), Chopin builds intensity by using the prolongation of the dominant note A-flat in the bass-line from measure 47 until the cadence in measure 67. From there, a brief extension leads to final closure in the tonic of D-flat Major in the very last bar of the piece.

A visual representation of the bass-line progression of the Étude (Fig. 4.4) will help to clarify further its overall shape and also direct the performer's attention to important arrival points within the score such as the endings of phrases, cadences, climactic points and the prolongation of the final cadence.

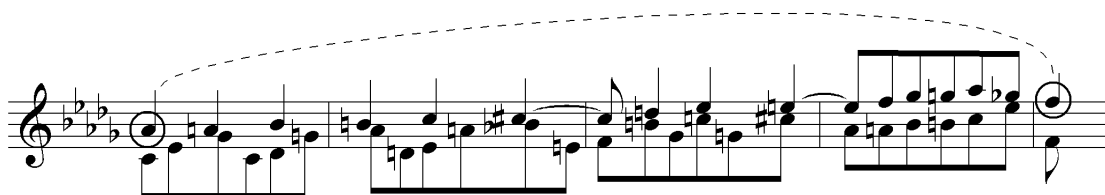
Formal Structure:	A			B		A'	C								
Measure Numbers:	3	7	11	15	19	24	25	33	37	42	43	47	67	72	73
Visual Analysis:															
Harmonic Structure:	D♭M: I		ii			V		I		ii		V - - - - V I			

Fig. 4.4. A visual analysis of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major

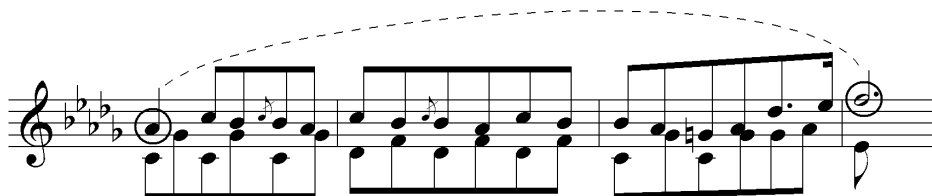
In the diagram above, the notes connected with upper stems represent the internal motive of the piece which is constructed of a rising interval of a major sixth followed by a descending interval of a major second (E-flat – C – B-flat). This motive later appears in its inverted form (E-flat – G-flat – A-flat). The right hand covers the same ascending sixth, A-flat to F, in the first three measures of the Étude (Ex. 4.1a), as well as in measures 29-33 (Ex. 4.1b), and again in measures 55-58 (Ex. 4.1c). The inverted version of the motive occurs in the top voice at the very end of the piece in measures 72-73, where A-flat falls to F (Ex. 4.1d).



Ex. 4.1a

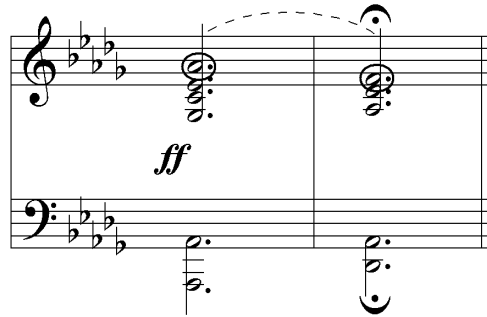


Ex. 4.1b



Ex. 4.1c

Ex. 4.1. Internal motive of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major:
a, measures 1-3; b, measures 29-33; c, measures 55-58;
d, measures 72-73 (Ex. continued)



Ex. 4.1d

Interestingly, Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger observes this same melodic shape acting as an underlying motive in every one of the Preludes, op. 28. He writes: “the 24 Preludes are a cycle by virtue of an omnipresent *motivic cell*, which assures its unity through a variety of textures.”⁴

***Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major**

The A-flat Major Étude returns again to the serene and reflective mood of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor. While both works include extended polyrhythmic writing between the hands, coping with the rhythmic complications of two against three between hands should not be a major obstacle for students of this level. The primary difficulty in this work is to create a forward-moving, expressive melodic line in the top note of the right hand chords, which has to be done within the subdued dynamic range of the work.

As with many other of Chopin’s short works, the overall formal structure of this Étude is ABA. In most of current editions, Chopin marked only two extremely long legato slurs in the score. The first is indicated from measure 1 to 16 and the other from

⁴ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, “Twenty-four Preludes Op. 28: Genre, Structure, Significance.” *Chopin Studies*, edited by Jim Samson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 181.

measure 16 to the end of the piece. While Chopin gives no indication of sub-phrases underneath these long slurs, the harmonic rhythm outlines a regularly occurring, classically designed four-measure phrase structure, which is occasionally subdivided into sub-phrases of 2+2 measures. Chopin clearly marks these phrases by altering the repeated note patterns in the top voice of the right hand in various ways without changing the harmonic structure in the left hand. When properly inflected these melodic alterations emphasize the regularity of the underlying phrase structure and give the appearance of natural patterns of speech as discussed under “Phrase Structure” in Chapter Two (Ex. 2.5, p. 18).

At the start of the contrasting middle section in measure 17-24 (Ex. 4.2), Chopin introduces a bass line, which evokes the feeling of a cello solo. While the bass line

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Chopin's *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 17-24. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system, labeled '17', shows the beginning of the middle section. The treble staff features a complex, layered texture of chords and moving lines, while the bass staff introduces a simple, rhythmic bass line. The second system, labeled '21', continues this texture, with the bass line becoming more prominent and the treble staff showing further melodic and harmonic developments. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 2/4.

Ex. 4.2. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 17-24

accompaniment in the outer sections functions mainly as harmonic support, the left hand in the contrasting middle section is much more obviously melodic in content. Fragments of melody flow from one voice to the other, but they remain completely dependent on the harmony and do not possess thematic importance of their own. This Étude provides yet another excellent example of how Chopin blurs the boundaries between melody, harmony and figuration by realizing a variety of melodic and figural possibilities from within the harmonic structure.

In this Étude, Chopin uses the tonal relationship of the interval of a third both between large sections and also as an organizing factor for harmonic relationships within the middle section. The following diagram (Fig. 4.5) visually represents these relationships.

Formal Structure: **A** **B** **A**

Measure Numbers: 1 5 9 11 13 16 17 21 25 29 33 37 41 59 60

Visual Analysis: *Internal Motive*

Harmonic Structure: A♭M: I V I V[♭] III I iii i[♯] ii V/vi V₃⁴ I V I

Fig. 4.5. A visual analysis of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major

After the opening section cadences in the tonic key of A-flat at the beginning of measure 16, the piece then modulates to the key of E Major through the bass line which descends in whole steps enharmonically as G-sharp – F-sharp – E. The middle section begins in measure 17, establishing a sequential pattern in measures 17-20 and 21-24 of I-V₇ harmonic relationships, first in the key of E Major and then in the key of C Major

(Ex. 4.2 above). In measures 25-28, the harmonies begin chromatically ascending from A-flat. This is followed by another sequence, again V-I progressions, first from the key of A Minor in measures 29 to 32, then in the key of B-flat Minor from measures 33 to 37. A pedal point on the note C in measure 37 harmonically reaches to the climax of the piece at measure 39, and then sets up the return of the tonic key of A-flat Major in measure 41 through the harmonic progression of $V/vi_{(fm)}-V_7-I$.

Such harmonic relationships were rather unusual at the time. Moscheles found Chopin's modulations bizarre, and he was certainly not alone. This kind of modulation without secondary dominant chords was intentionally contrary to common harmonic practice of the time.⁵

The primary vocal orientation of this piece, as reflected in its singable melodic lines owes much to the influence of *bel canto* singing. This is entirely characteristic of Chopin's pianistic approach as a whole. He stresses this point repeatedly in his music, in his *Projet de Méthode*, and in numerous comments to friends and students where he relates that the basis of all music, for him, was the singer's art, and it was this model that students were to emulate.⁶

A thorough grasp of theoretical concepts underlying a work can contribute significantly to a performer's understanding of a work and the quality of the resulting performance. In the next chapter we shall see how these principles can be incorporated into the study of each of the *Nouvelles Études*.

⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5
PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSES OF THE
THREE NOUVELLES ÉTUDES

Teachers often encounter students whose pianistic development is uneven. Technically speaking they may be well on their way toward developing a good physical approach to the instrument, but in the area of musical understanding their progress lags behind. At least one reason for this is that young people are typically more eager to spend time learning pieces that are loud and fast and that make an impression on an audience. Students are not as willing to develop subtleties of touch, control and a refined sense of phrasing. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure students realize that the acquisition of power and speed is only a part of the education of the developing pianist. Isidore Philipp wrote in the preface to his collection of *Exercices quotidiens tirés des oeuvres de Chopin* (Daily Exercises Drawn from the Works of Chopin):

You must appeal to the pupil's intelligence and reason, lead him to work more with the mind than with the fingers, to think and concentrate more. He must clearly understand that the important thing is not the quantity but the quality of his work, and that purely mechanical work, with no thought, is useless. Above all you must show him how to work so as to achieve the best results in the shortest time and so that his virtuosity may equally become a means of expression.¹

In many ways musical sensitivity is more difficult to cultivate than overt physical skills. The path to developing musical sensitivity in students is far from clearly laid out, but through selection of a properly balanced repertoire, teachers can raise issues of musical sensitivity within a technical environment that will allow students to focus

¹ Isidore Philipp, *Exercices quotidiens tirés des oeuvres de Chopin*, quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils*, trans. Naomi Shohet, Krysia Osostowicz and Roy Howat, ed. Roy Howat (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 98.

primarily on this goal. Chopin's last three *Études* point in directions towards new priorities in touch, rhythm and texture. They offer explicit instruction and practice in those aspects of pianism dearest to Chopin: seamless texture, subtleties of soft dynamics, varieties of articulations, and above all, legato.² Study of these pieces will not only broaden a student's technical skills, but it will also deepen their musical understanding. These qualities make the *Nouvelles Études* invaluable for the developing pianist.

Leveling the *Three Nouvelles Études*

The *Three Nouvelles Études* were definitely not intended for early or intermediate level students; however, they are suitable for serious high school or collegiate level students. According to Jane Magrath, the author of *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*, Chopin's *Three Nouvelles Études* are ranked in difficulty at level ten.³ The following list of works is offered to provide the reader a general idea of other repertoire from various style periods at this same level of difficulty:

Baroque Literature

Prelude in E Major, from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1 by J.S. Bach
Prelude and Fugue in D Major, from the WTC, Book 1 by J. S. Bach
Sinfonia in D Major by J.S. Bach
Sonata in D Major, K. 96, L. 465 by Domenico Scarlatti*

Classic Literature

Sonata in F Major, Hob. XVI/23 by Haydn*
Sonata in A Major, K. 331 by Mozart*
Fantasy in D Minor, K. 397 by Mozart*
Sonata in C Minor, op. 10, no. 1 by Beethoven*

² Jonathan Bellman, "Redefining the Study: Chopin's Trois Nouvelles Études," *Piano & Keyboard* no. 164 (September-October 1993): 43.

³ Jane Magrath, *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature* (Van Nuys: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1995): 147.

Romantic Literature

Consolation in D-flat Major, no. 3 by Liszt
Impromptu in E-flat Major, op. 90, no. 2 by Schubert*
Nocturne in F Minor, op. 55, no. 1 by Chopin*
Waltz in C-sharp Minor, op. 64, no. 2 by Chopin*

Twentieth Century Literature

Clair de lune, from "Suite Bergamasque" by Debussy*
Minstrels from Preludes book 1 by Debussy*
Sonatine, movement 1 by Ravel
Prelude in G Minor, op. 23, no. 5 by Rachmaninoff*⁴

The musical sophistication of the *Three Nouvelles Études* makes them problematic to introduce to students. At a minimum, students should have previous successful experiences in each of the following areas before beginning study of the *Nouvelles Études*.

- Controlling a predominately two-voice texture of independent lines
- Creating a refined legato and sensitive phrasing
- Handling two contrasting articulations within the same hand
- Voicing the top note of chords and/or intervals
- Coping with polyrhythms between the hands
- Managing a left-hand waltz-like and arpeggiated chord bass
- Using the damper pedal in a sensitive manner

Some of Chopin's own Preludes, Nocturnes and Waltzes are among the very best choices for preliminary study by students before they begin exploration of the *Three Nouvelles Études*. The Prelude in F-sharp Major, op. 28, no. 13 is an elegant piece that requires considerable care in voicing the top note of chords in the right hand. The middle section of Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor, op. 15, no. 3 will also be helpful for students to develop voicing skills. The Waltz in A Minor, op. 34, no. 2 is an excellent study in refined legato and phrasing. The Waltzes in D-flat Major, op. 64, no. 1 and

⁴ Works designated with asterisk are selected pieces ranked as level ten in Jane Magrath's *the Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*.

C-sharp Minor, op. 64, no. 2 are outstanding pieces for developing control of a melody while managing a waltz-style bass in the left hand.

The Place of the *Three Nouvelles Études* Among Chopin's Works

These works are characteristic of Chopin's mature compositional style and entirely reflective of the priority he placed on the complete integration of musical and technical concerns. The use of extended polyrhythms within the *Nouvelles Études* in F Minor and A-flat Major makes them excellent preparation for study of the *Fantasia-Impromptu* in C-sharp Minor, op. 66, the *Étude* in F Minor, op. 25, no. 2, the middle section of the *Nocturne* in F-sharp Major, op. 15, no. 2, the *Waltz* in A-flat Major, op. 42 and the *Prelude* in F-sharp Minor, op. 28, no. 8. Additionally, the study of these works can serve as an entry point for the rest of Chopin's *Études*. The skills developed in the *Three Nouvelles Études* are necessary in performing the great majority of Chopin's compositions and the duration and level of difficulty of these works make them an excellent introduction to some of his more extended and difficult works.

Presentation of the *Three Nouvelles Études*

Depending on the goals of the teacher and the level of preparation of the student, it is possible to begin one's study with any one of the *Three Nouvelles Études*. However, generally speaking, the pieces rank in order of difficulty from the F Minor as the easiest to the D-flat Major as the most difficult of the set. The author recommends use of either the 1973 Wiener Urtext edition of Paul Badura-Skoda or the 1990 Polish National edition of Jan Ekier by students. The texts of both of these editions are faithful to Chopin's original editions, the fingerings are logically chosen, and the editorial indications are both insightful and clearly distinguishable from markings of the

composer. Furthermore, these editions are cleanly printed and well laid out on the printed page making them very user friendly.

During the initial presentation of these works the teacher should address student motivation, provide an accurate sound image of the work and assist the student in obtaining a proper physical approach to the work. Because of the introspective nature of the *Three Nouvelles Études*, they are not always as immediately compelling for students as other works that are faster in tempo and feature greater extremes of dynamics. Therefore, teachers should motivate the student by exploring the special moods and sounds of these works with the students to create a high level of enthusiasm. With such an approach teachers can help students to overcome the initial difficulties encountered in these pieces and bring the student to a point at which their own motivation can begin to take root and drive their study of these works.

To obtain an accurate sound image of the work, the teacher should begin the initial presentation with an exciting performance of the work for the student. This can be done either through a live performance or a recording. During the performance, the teacher should direct the student's attention to the overall mood of the work, to places within the work where the primary skills or goals of the Étude are most clearly in evidence, and to specific places within the work where concerns of a unique or special nature will be encountered.

Following a review of the performance, the teacher should guide the student in successfully experiencing at least a small portion of all difficulties that they will encounter in a specific Étude before they leave the initial lesson. The teacher should also offer specific practice strategies for difficulties that the student could not be

expected to handle properly on their own. Only then can the teacher be sure that all concepts were correctly understood and will be properly approached by students as they begin study of the work.

***Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor**

The mood of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor is one of subtle poetic reflection and introspection somewhat similar in overall character to a Nocturne. Arthur Friedheim, in the preface to his 1916 edition of the Chopin Études wrote: "in this Étude we are once again confronted with a poem - a Night Vision. Broodingly it takes its course in sullen *Weltschmerz*, in wrath repressed and lofty disdain, scarce cheered by ray of light - then suddenly fades resignedly away."⁵

The primary skill required of performers in this Étude is the ability to establish and maintain the refined legato of the long horizontal melodic lines of the piece while at the same time negotiating the three against four polyrhythm that exists between the hands. Unfortunately, the initial experience of this rhythmic difficulty invariably tends to focus the attention of students almost entirely on the vertical relationships that exist between the hands. This typically results in significant inhibition of the horizontal movement required in these melodic lines. Therefore, the teacher should divide the piece into smaller sections and have the student practice each section hands alone until the proper shaping of the *legato* line is established. Practice should be done at a slow to moderate tempo, concentrating on the goal of approaching the downbeat without hesitation at the barline.

⁵ Frederic Chopin, *Études*, edited by Arthur Friedheim (New York: G. Schirmer, 1916), 9.

As an aid in learning the notes of the piece the student should be made to see that the chromatic figurations of the right hand and the arpeggio-like figurations of the left hand are actually based on relatively simple chord progressions. The ability to see the chord structure underlying the lines in each hand makes learning the notes much easier.

Following establishment of a proper approach with each hand separately, the teacher should work next to insure the student has some successful experience with the rhythmic complexity between the hands. As an initial step towards putting the hands together, teachers should have the student play one hand while the teacher plays the other and then switching parts. The goal of this exercise is to have the student aurally experience the independent lines between the hands. Piano pedagogue, Frances Clark, in her *Questions and Answers* stated, "In order to be able to play any cross rhythm, students should be able to establish and maintain an absolutely steady pulse and be able to alternate between various divisions of the pulse without losing the beat."⁶

Some preparatory exercises (Fig. 5.1a & b) can be of assistance in helping students master the polyrhythm. Each exercise should be transposed to several different keys and without fluctuation in the tempo when changing from duple to triple rhythm. Once students are able to play these exercises accurately, they are ready to tackle the three against four polyrhythm in the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor. Before allowing the student to play with both hands, the teacher should assist the student in dividing the piece into small sections (two measures at a time) and practicing these

⁶ Frances Clark, *Questions and Answers: Practical Advice for Piano Teachers* (Northfield: Instrumentalist Company, 1992), 88.

small sections in the same way as in the preparatory exercises shown above, first alternating hands and then hands together (Fig. 5.1c).

Fig. 5.1a is a musical score for piano in common time (C). It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 72-96. The score is divided into two systems. The first system consists of two measures: the first measure has a treble clef with a quarter note G4 and a bass clef with a quarter note F3; the second measure is a repeat sign followed by four measures of eighth-note triplets in both hands. The second system also consists of two measures: the first measure is a repeat sign followed by four measures of eighth-note triplets in both hands, and the second measure is a repeat sign followed by a whole rest in both hands.

Fig. 5.1a

Fig. 5.1b is a musical score for piano in common time (C). It is divided into two systems. The first system consists of two measures: the first measure has a treble clef with a whole rest and a bass clef with eighth-note triplets; the second measure is a repeat sign followed by four measures of eighth-note triplets in both hands. The second system consists of two measures: the first measure is a repeat sign followed by four measures of eighth-note triplets in both hands, and the second measure is a repeat sign followed by a whole rest in both hands.

Fig. 5.1b

Fig. 5.1. Rhythmic Exercises for the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor (Fig. continued)



Fig. 5.1c⁷

There are two aspects to polyrhythmic complexity that must be dealt with, one quantitative and the other qualitative. Initially students understand clearly and precisely how these two different rhythms actually fit together from a quantitative standpoint. The following diagram (Fig. 5.2) explains the relationships between these two rhythms.

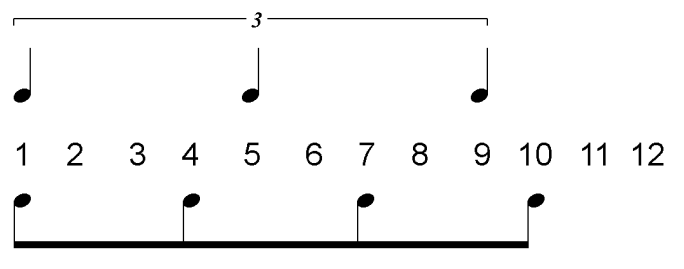


Fig. 5.2. Quantitative aspect of the polyrhythm

⁷ Rhythmic exercises in Fig. 5.1 are adaptations of Frances Clark's preparatory exercises for the *Fantasie-Impromptu* in C-sharp Minor, op. 66, which are found in *Questions and Answers: Practical Advice for Piano Teachers*, p. 89.

An accurate understanding of the vertical relationships between the two lines can help to prevent the establishment of incorrect rhythms and physical tension which can result from uncertainty over how the rhythms fit together. But even more important is the incorporation of qualitative aspects into the student's performance. To accomplish this, each section must be repeated in gradually increasing tempo until the student manages to restore the proper sound of the two independent voices that was established during the previous hands alone work (Fig. 5.3).

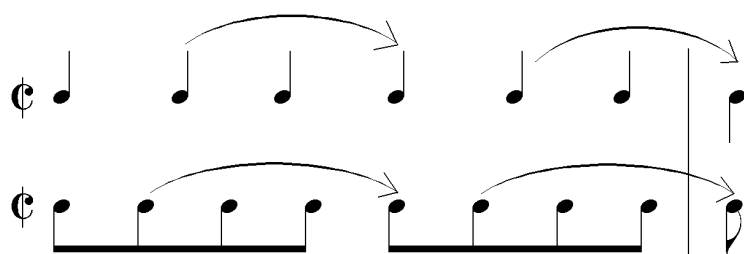


Fig. 5.3. Qualitative aspect of the polyrhythm

Finally, the attention of the student should be called to a unique fingering in the right hand in measures 40-1, 42-3 and 46-7 (Ex. 5.1). Here Chopin calls for the thumb to be used on three consecutive notes. This special fingering was chosen to take advantage of the unique timbre and tone color that the thumb can produce. Students should be directed to play these notes from the arm so that the thumb is not lifted from its joint, or from the wrist, but rather with the arm pulling the thumb upward from the key.



Ex. 5.1. *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor, measures 41-47

Attention to the mood and musical aspects of this Étude should be important elements of student practice. Through his use of extremely long slurs, Chopin indicates his clear emphasis on the linear or horizontal aspects of the voices over the complex vertical relationship that exists between the hands. This effect requires a refined *legato* and the projection of a strong sense of forward progression. The slightest accent or separation in either voice would disturb the evenness of the texture and interrupt the forward rhythmic flow of the piece.

As soon as the student is comfortable with the piece their attention should be directed to listening for the significant harmonic tones, which occur in the bass line of the piece (Fig. 4.2, p. 45 of Chapter Four). Hearing these structural notes will help the student hold the entire piece together and listen their way through the entire work in performance.

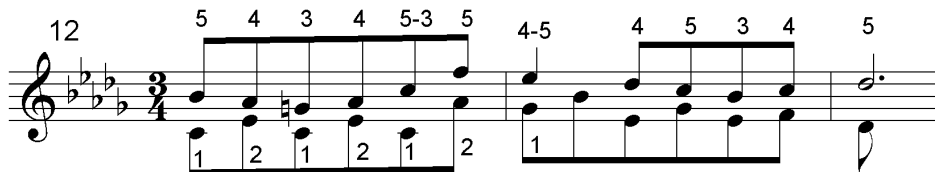
***Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major**

The overall mood of this Étude is elegant and, as Friedheim put it: “soulfully thoughtfully serene, flowing onward easily and gracefully.”⁸ The *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major is the most upbeat in character of the set. A good performance of it requires lilt and flair. The biggest challenge is in voicing the melody and managing the contrasting articulation in the right hand. This is made all the more difficult because none of the pianist’s extreme efforts in this regard should be at all apparent to the listener. Chopin was an acknowledged master at imitating vocalistic portamentos and staccatos on the piano, and the variety of articulations indicated in his scores is wider than that of any of his contemporaries.⁹

⁸ Chopin, *Études*, ed. Friedheim, 9.

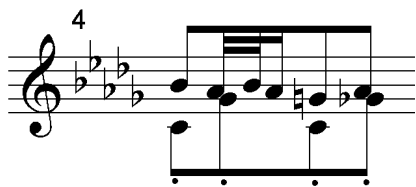
⁹ Bellman, 42.

The technical demands of the right hand can best be addressed by having the student play only the top voice of the right hand using the correct fingering until a satisfactory *legato* and the proper inflection of the phrase is achieved. In this regard the use of a number of finger substitutions can be helpful. The first place where this occurs is the fifth eighth-note “C” of measure 12 and the first quarter-note “E-flat” in the following measure (Ex. 5.2). Employing finger substitutions in these two places can successfully sustain the top voice of the right hand. The attention of the student should be drawn to all places throughout the *Étude* where finger substitutions are used.

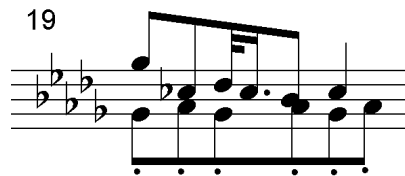


Ex. 5.2. *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major, measures 3-6¹⁰

All grace notes in the *Étude* should be played on the beat (Ex. 5.3a & b). They should be treated lightly and melodically.



Ex. 5.3a



Ex. 5.3b

Ex. 5.3. Grace notes in the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major: a, measure 4; b, measure 19.

After establishing the correct sound of the top voice of the right hand the staccato notes of the lower voice should be added. Students should always strive to distinguish

¹⁰ Finger markings in Ex. 5.2 are from the 1973 Wiener Urtext edition of Paul Badura-Skoda.

the two voices from a dynamic point of view while at same time maintaining a feeling of horizontal movement in the top voice. Any vertical gestures created by the performance of the staccato line must not be allowed to interrupt the melodic shaping of the top voice.

Coping with the contrast of articulations between the two voices presents a considerable physical challenge for students. Fortunately, several exercises are available to assist students in developing independence of the fingers of the right hand. Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) in his 1967 Salabert edition of the *Études* provides the following exercises (Fig. 5.4a & b).¹¹

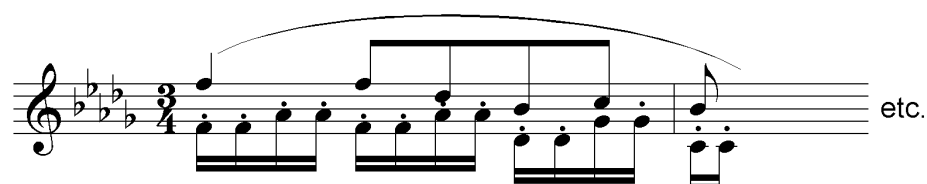


Fig. 5.4a

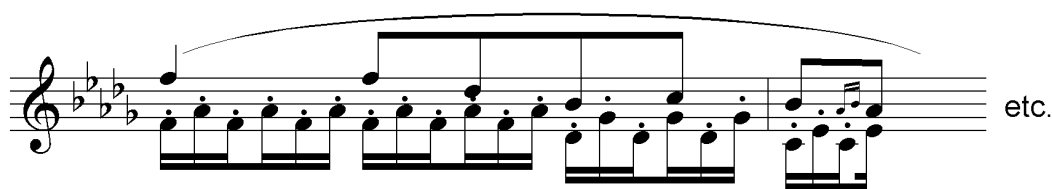


Fig. 5.4b

Fig. 5.4. Articulation exercises from the Cortot edition of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major

When practicing the left hand alone, the student should first play the bass line of the left hand without the chords, one phrase at a time. The purpose is to establish the sound of the bass line progression clearly in the ear of the student. Following this, the

¹¹ Alfred Cortot, ed., *Chopin: Pièces Diverses, 2me volume: 3 Nouvelles Études* (Paris: Editions Salabert, 1967), 44.

chords should be added and played lightly so as not to interfere with the predominance of the bass line. Once students feel comfortable with the left hand, pedal should be added according to the markings in the music.

After each hand has been practiced separately, the teacher should assist students in playing the piece hands together in several gradual progressive steps. This can be done first by having the teacher play one hand while the student plays the other and then switching parts. The teacher should then have the student play only the top voice of the right hand along with only the bass line of the left hand (Ex. 5.4).

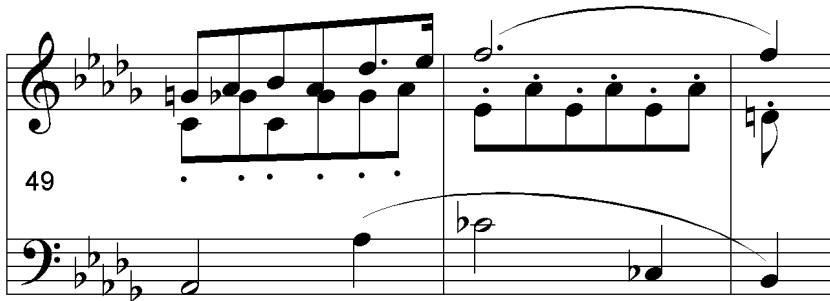
The musical score for Ex. 5.4 consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both are in 3/4 time and D-flat major. The right hand part starts with a 'legato' marking and a dynamic of *p*. It features a melodic line with several slurs and fingerings: 5, 4 3 5, 4 3 2 3 4 5, 4 3 2 3 5 4, and 3 2 3 4 5 4. The left hand part has a bass line with fingerings: 5, 5 4, 5 4, and 5. A large slur covers the right hand part, and a large wedge-shaped dynamic marking is placed between the staves.

Ex. 5.4. Melodic outline of the *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major

Next the chords of the left hand should be added, and finally the staccato voice of the right hand should be incorporated into the performance. In each case care should be taken to insure that the proper shaping of the melodic lines are clearly evident in the student's performance.

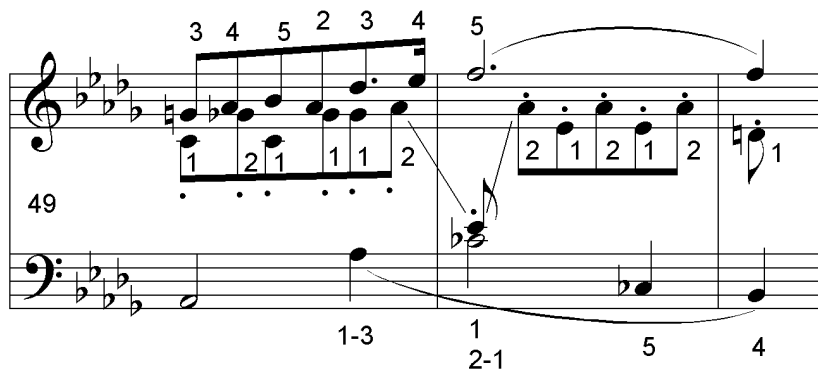
Finally, the teacher should call the attention of the student to several specific concerns in this Étude. Correct fingering is critically important, but particularly difficult to determine in this piece. Comparison of the fingerings in fourteen different editions shows that there is not a single, commonly accepted approach to the fingering in this

work. This is due in part to the large physical stretches that are often required in the right hand. These large intervals can pose special problems for all except those with the largest of hands. At the downbeat of measure 50, for example, the right hand must reach the interval of a minor ninth from E-flat to F (Ex. 5.5a).



Ex. 5.5a. Measures 49-51

For students whose hand size will not allow the physical freedom necessary to manage the melody successfully as written, a possible solution is to play the eighth note E-flat in the left hand (Ex. 5.5b). Performers must be sure that the volume and articulation of the redistributed note matches exactly with the other staccato notes in the right hand. At the downbeat of measure 51, reaching a minor tenth (D to F) in the right



Ex. 5.5b. Redistribution in measure 50

Ex. 5.5. *Nouvelle Étude* in D-flat Major: a, measures 49-51; b, redistribution in measure 50.

hand with a sense of physical ease is also quite difficult for most performers. A possible solution is to release the tied-note F and support the sound with the damper pedal. The student must carefully voice the thumb, D-natural (first eight-note in m. 51), which should be played very lightly making sure that the fifth finger (dotted quarter note F) produces enough volume in the previous measure (m. 50) so that it can be carried over for four beats.

The same situation occurs in the right hand again in measure 58, but in some editions the left hand part is shown in octaves instead of single notes. Obviously, redistribution of right hand notes into the left hand is not an option in this case. It should be noted, however, both versions of this left hand passage (with and without the lower note of the octave), appear in original Chopin sources. Accordingly, the teacher should feel free to choose the option in this passage that best matches the physical capabilities of the student. If the redistribution approach is adopted, it should be used from the beginning in all hands alone and hands together work with the student.

The extremely long slurs marked in the score by Chopin indicate the use of *legato* and place emphasis on horizontal forward motion in the piece. Therefore, in all cases and with all practice strategies students should be reminded to give their primary attention to incorporating these goals into their performance.

As the student becomes more comfortable with the piece, their attention should be directed to understanding how the piece fits together at a larger level and how to listen to the work using underlying points of arrival. Fundamental structural notes of a piece often appear in the left hand bass line. The teacher should carefully mark all important cadences and circle important bass line notes throughout the student's score.

While the student is playing the piece, the teacher should double the bass line in order to help students hear more clearly these structural notes in the left hand. Having students sing these tones while they are playing is also a good strategy to be sure they are able to incorporate this into their performance. The “visual analysis” in Chapter Four (Fig. 4.4, p. 47) provides the teacher with a very specific outline of the left hand that will help the student to perform the piece with a sense of coherence and unity.

***Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major**

The mood of this *Étude* once again returns to the “deep repose and blessed peace” of the *Nouvelle Étude* in F Minor.¹² A good performance of this work requires both a clear projection of voicing in the right hand chords as well as effective phrase shaping.

Students should have already had considerable experience with extended two against three polyrhythms between the hands. Teachers will, however, still have to give considerable attention to the development of a feeling of horizontal movement in the student’s performance of the long melodic lines of the right hand. First of all, the teacher should be sure the student is aware of the direction of each phrase and should clearly mark these goals in the score. One strategy for helping students incorporate these goals into their performance at the piano is to have them sing through each phrase with their primary attention on moving to and from these goals dynamically. The teacher should also help the student to understand and experience a sense of horizontal movement in the melodic line by having them conduct each phrase using long, horizontal arm movements as they sing the melodic line. This approach helps the

¹² Chopin, *Études*, ed. Friedheim, 9.

student feel the length and movement of the phrase in the larger muscle groups of the upper arm, shoulders and back, which can help them to shape the small figures of the melodic line together into a single larger horizontally moving phrase. The result of this in performance is that the student experiences the notes within each beat as an upbeat to the following beat, each measure as an upbeat into the first note of the next measure, and all measures as upbeats moving toward the overall goal of each phrase.

Voicing in double notes and chords is largely a matter of forearm rotation. To insure that the student masters the proper physical approach in this matter, the teacher should begin by having the student first practice only the top voice of the chords with the correct fingering until the proper *legato* can be established. The student then should add the remaining notes of the right hand chords while continuing to play the top note in the same manner as was previously established with the top voice alone.

The following exercises are designed to assist students in developing control of voicing within blocked chords. These exercises should be done in various tempi and continued until the student is completely comfortable with this aspect of the piece (Fig. 5.5a, b, c & d).

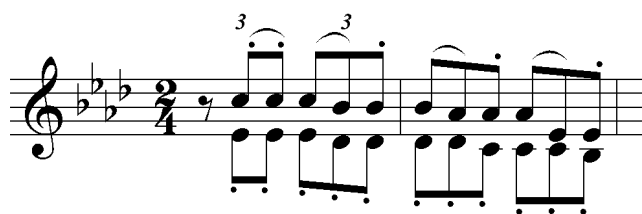


Fig. 5.5a

Fig. 5.5. Exercises for the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major (Fig. continued)

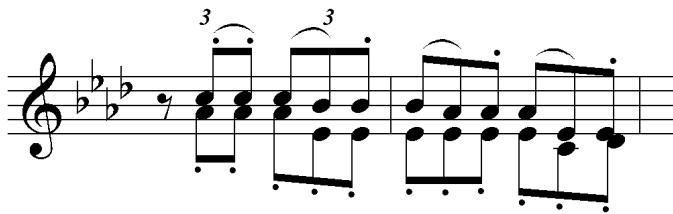


Fig. 5.5b

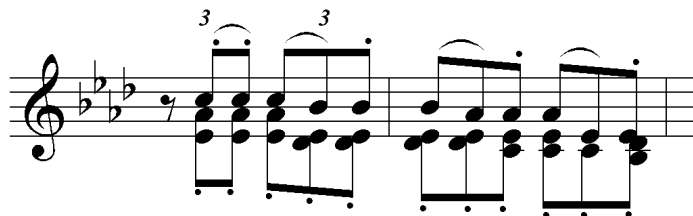


Fig. 5.5c

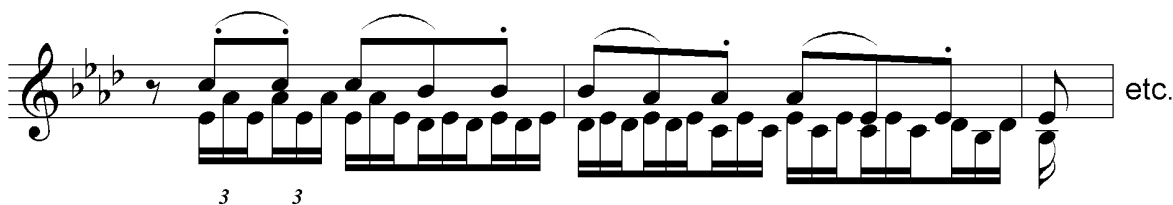


Fig. 5.5d¹³

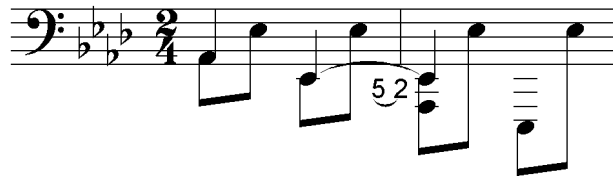
When practicing the right hand, the teacher should instruct the student to hold their fingers close to the keys and keep all vertical movements of the hand to an absolute minimum. Additionally, the student should be directed to sustain the notes of the melody as long as possible, especially the repeated notes, and to listen for the top note of all chords.

The left hand part of the work consists primarily of wide leaps made of broken chord-like figures. Generally speaking, all notes that occur on the second half of the beat (the thumb in particular) should be played lightly, with the weight of the arm

¹³ Exercise in Fig. 5.5d is from Cortot's edition of the *3 Nouvelles Études*, 47.

reserved for the following beat. The teacher should guide the student in practicing the left hand by emphasizing the movement from the eighth notes on the second half of the beat to those that occur on the following beat.

There are several left hand passages that require the use of finger substitutions. The first instance occurs in the first measure of the piece (Ex. 5.6).



Ex. 5.6. *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, left hand, measures 1-2

The teacher should be sure the student understands and successfully accomplishes this finger substitution and all other similar occurrences.

Since Chopin did not provide any indications for pedal in this piece, the teacher should carefully mark the desired pedaling into the score for the student. Several editions of this work, such as the 1880-85 Bote & Bock edition of Karl Klindworth, the 1916 Schirmer edition of Arthur Friedheim, and the Cortot edition, suggest a change of the pedal on every beat in most places throughout the piece. This approach is recommended and any departures from this pedaling should be carefully written into the student's score.

As an initial step towards putting hands together the teacher should have the student play only the top note of the right hand chords together with only the notes that occur on the beat in the left hand part (Ex. 5.7a). Following this, the teacher should have the student continue with the top note of the right hand chords, but with the left hand part as written (Ex. 5.7b). The remaining notes of the right hand chords should be

Ex. 5.7a

Ex. 5.7b

Ex. 5.7. Outline of the *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat Major, measures 1-4

added into the student's performance. In each of these cases, the teacher must ensure that the student's performance projects the correct voicing and the appropriate inflection of the phrases. The student's attention should also be directed to listening to the significant harmonic progressions that occur in the bass line of the piece (Ex. 4.6, p. 51 of Chapter Four). Only then will the student know how to hold the work together on a level will come alive for the listener.

Chopin's *Études* reflect core priorities in musicianship for pianists. The final evolution of his thought on this genre is clearly reflected in his last three *Études*. Study of these works can provide pianists with clear instruction and guidance in music making.

This can do much to establish important priorities that are often overlooked in the early development of pianists.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Chopin's *Trois Nouvelles Études* are entirely reflective of the core principles of his pianism and pedagogy. The level of musicianship and technical skill required to play these works makes them not only important vehicles for developing pianism and musicianship, but also important works of art. For a variety of reasons, these works have long been under-appreciated or even overlooked by performers and teachers. The level of physical skill required in these works makes them appropriate for teachers of serious high school and collegiate level students to use in building essential skills and establishing musical priorities. Furthermore, the captivating sound of these pieces makes them an extremely effective group on a recital program. Any of the reasons that might account for limited use of these works in the past is clearly overcome by the high quality of the music and the importance of the technical skills they contain. These last three Études of Chopin are easily equal in quality to his earlier Études, op. 10 and 25 and rediscovering the *Three Nouvelles Études* will greatly enrich both the teaching and performing repertoire of the piano.

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VITA

Qiao-Shuang (Tracy) Xian was born in the city of Shanghai in the Peoples Republic of China, where she began playing the piano at age of four. After graduating from the pre-college division of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, she received a scholarship in 1992 to pursue her musical studies at the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, as a student of professor Stephen Clark.

Following completion of her Bachelor of Music degree in piano performance in 1996, Ms. Xian attended Louisiana State University as a student of Professor Constance Carroll, where she completed the Master of Music degree in piano performance in 1998 and the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance in 2002.

Ms. Xian is a member of Phi Kappa Phi and Pi Kappa Lambda and maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout her doctoral program. She has appeared as featured soloist and chamber musician on many recital series and music festivals throughout the United States, some of which have been broadcast on National Public Radio. She has performed for the state conferences of the Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina Music Teacher Associations, for the national conference of Music Teachers National Association and the American Matthey Association Piano Festival. Ms. Xian has appeared on numerous occasions as soloist with orchestra performing works by Beethoven, Liszt and Ravel and she is in demand as a chamber musician. She performs frequently as collaborative artist in music festivals and with faculty and visiting artists at universities. She has also served as an official accompanist for musical

associations including several occasions as official accompanist for the national finals of the Music Teachers National Association Competitions.

Ms. Xian has been finalist or prizewinner in many state, national and international piano competitions including the Beethoven Club International Competition and national winner of the 1998 Music Teachers National Association Collegiate Artist Piano Competition.