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Chopin and His Imitators: Notated Emulations of the “True Style” of Performance

JONATHAN BELLMAN

Those who study the performance practices of Frédéric Chopin face a seemingly insoluble problem. Contemporaries who heard him play celebrated his pianism as unique, inimitable, and inseparable from his music itself, but although the Chopin sound would therefore seem to be central to understanding his music, it is unfortunately no longer to be heard. Beyond what his pianism shared with the more generally elegant and refined pianistic aesthetic of early-mid-nineteenth-century Paris, there was no established lineage or codified school that could have maintained it. His students were almost all accomplished amateurs, and his studio—unlike those of Leschetizky or the aged Liszt—did not turn out concertizing virtuosi or high-

profile pedagogues. There were thus few public exponents of his style. Almost as soon as he died, moreover, debate broke out over which students best maintained Chopin’s elusive performance tradition, what the critic Gustave Chouquet called “the true style.”¹

The accounts of those who heard Chopin play his own music are often rhapsodic and evocative but only intermittently specific. Alfred J. Hipkins, the English scholar and keyboardist who served as his tuner in 1848, offered this description:

[Chopin’s] tenderly-subdued style of playing . . . was his own, and [was] inseparable from his conception of pianoforte touch; it was incapable of modification from any influence whatever. His *fortissimo* was the

This paper was originally given, in somewhat different form, at the 1998 national meeting of the American Musicological Society in Boston, Massachusetts.

¹Gustave Chouquet, quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher, As Seen By His Pupils* [1979], trans. Naomi Shohet et al. (3rd edn. Cambridge, 1986), p. 176.

full pure tone without noise, a harsh inelastic note being to him painful. His *nuances* were modifications of that tone, decreasing to the faintest yet always distinct *pianissimo*. His singing *legatissimo* touch was marvellous. The wide, extended arpeggios in the bass were transfused by touch and pedal into their corresponding sustained chords, and swelled or diminished like waves in an ocean of sound.²

According to Sophie Léo, wife of a Hamburg banker based in Paris,

Chopin was *himself*, surely the first, probably the eternally unique manifestation of his species. . . . He appeared hardly to touch the piano; one might have thought an instrument superfluous. There was no suggestion of the mechanical; the flute-like murmur of his playing had the ethereal effect of Aeolian harps. . . . He was not a pianist of the modern school, but, in his own way, had created a style of his own, a style that one cannot describe.³

A Scottish listener said, simply,

I watched, I listened, but can find no adequate description of that thrilling music. One never thought of 'execution,' though that was marvellous. It seemed to come from the depths of a heart, and it struck the hearts of listeners. Volumes have been written, yet I think no one who did not hear him could quite understand that magnetic power.⁴

Despite the popularity of his music, Chopin's performance style was never able to compete in the concert hall with that of Liszt's students and the products of the Russian conservatories. This later nineteenth-century approach flourished and ultimately led to the aesthetic of today's international piano competition, which consists of three principal elements: first, an ironclad mechanism, burnished to meet the challenges of the most demanding repertoire, adverse performing circumstances, and grueling recording sessions; second, a certain homo-

geneity of interpretation, so as to trouble the fewest judges; and third, a dramatic and dynamic vocabulary calibrated to a large hall. Today these elements have constituted mainstream concert pianism for so long that, for most listeners, there is no other kind; a pianist with a strikingly original personality, or one who would not choose to project his or her interpretations to a large hall, or one who hit as many wrong notes as are found on cherished recordings from the first four decades of this century, would be found severely wanting and face insurmountable challenges to building a career.

Chopin's goals were markedly different. To his student Emilie von Gretsck he said that "concerts are never real music; you have to give up the idea of hearing in them all the most beautiful things of art."⁵ His student Wilhelm von Lenz remembered that "one was barely allowed to breathe over the keyboard, let alone touch it!"⁶ (Contrast this with Liszt's confident assertion to Pierre Éradard that, during a concert he played, every detail was heard even by those seated in the seventh level of La Scala.⁷) With respect to practice time, Chopin set a

⁵This is according to Gretsck's niece Maria von Grewingk, as reported in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 5. Emilie von Gretsck was a native of Riga, where she first studied with Heinrich Dorn (one of Schumann's early teachers). From 1842 to 1844 she took thirty-three lessons with Chopin in Paris and preserved much about him in her correspondence with her father, which was subsequently collected and published by her niece. (Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, pp. 164–66.)

⁶Quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 75. A sometime student of Chopin (also of Liszt and Tausig), Wilhelm von Lenz (1808–83) was attached to the Russian Imperial Court and was described thus by Stephen Heller: "This gentleman is a Russian agent by the name of Lenz, that's all we know" (Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 168). He wrote, somewhat immodestly, of his study with Chopin in *Piano Virtuosi of Our Time* (1868); his personality makes him a rather problematic source. Much of what he says is corroborated in the writings of others close to Chopin, and in a couple of cases (such as his discussion of the Nocturne, op. 9, no. 2) he is clearer than anyone else on a particularly elusive Chopinesque practice. Some of his other "memories" are less believable. Chopin's biographer James Huneker reported hearing in Paris that Lenz "did not really love Chopin. The dislike was returned, for the Pole suspected that his pupil was sent by Liszt to spy on his methods" (James Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* [New York, 1900], p. 87).

⁷Quoted in Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847* (New York, 1983), pp. 315–16.

²Edith J. Hipkins, *How Chopin Played, From Contemporary Impressions Collected from the Diaries and Notebooks of the Late A. J. Hipkins, F. S. A* (London, 1937), p. 53.

³Sophie Léo, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 279.

⁴Anonymous Scottish lady, letter to J. C. Hadden (27 March 1903), quoted *ibid.*

strict limit of three hours daily and discouraged memorization, or at least too early memorization.⁸

It seems, then, that although Chopin's music has for at least the last fifty years almost always been interpreted in the modern conservatory fashion, virtually all aspects of that prevailing performance tradition are contrary to contemporary descriptions of his playing and aesthetic. The task of recovering some understanding of his lost, and critically important, performance tradition is therefore both critical and extremely problematic.

We are not, however, entirely without resources. First, the surviving recordings of a small number of pianists, such as Raoul von Koczalski,⁹ are of inestimable value. Koczalski was trained by Chopin's student and disciple Karol Mikuli¹⁰ and seems to have been more thoroughly infused with the Chopin aesthetic

than any other pianist who survived into the recording era. His recordings exemplify the contemporary descriptions of Chopin's playing, particularly regarding the subdued, intimate aesthetic, an interest in coherent phrasing, vocalistic rubato, and the use of ornamental variants.¹¹

Moreover, it is our good fortune that Chopin had legions of musical admirers and imitators, people who heard him in Paris (and in one case, probably in Warsaw also), and who composed works that explicitly sought to evoke his lyricism, phrasing, rubato, and other characteristics. While Chopin himself was parsimonious with performance indications, the composers who heard him play and who openly copied him in their own compositions often were not. Performance indications abound in Chopinesque pieces by such composers as Louis Moreau Gottschalk,¹² Edouard Wolff,¹³ and

⁸The three-hour limit was related to Chopin's biographer Frederick Niecks by Camille Dubois (née O'Meara), who served as Chopin's assistant in 1847–48, and whose playing was widely praised by those familiar with the composer's style (e.g., Jane Stirling, Antoine Marmontel, and Liszt). Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 27. With respect to memorization, see Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 11.

⁹As a *Wunderkind*, Raoul (von) Koczalski (1885–1948) studied for four summers with Karol Mikuli, who gave him daily two-hour lessons and supervised his practicing. (Koczalski: "I was never permitted to work alone.") Mikuli seems to have consciously transmitted the Chopin heritage to this pupil, who later wrote, "As far as he was concerned, Chopin represented the supreme musical authority." Koczalski described Mikuli's teaching this way: "Strictly based on Chopin's method, his teaching was so revolutionary that even today it commands all my admiration. His analyses opened my eyes and trained me not to dissociate technique from mental work. Nothing was neglected" (Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 97). With regard to matters such as rubato and *pianissimo* playing, the recordings of Koczalski (who never had another primary teacher) closely approximate Chopin's pianism as described by the composer's contemporaries.

¹⁰Karol Mikuli (1821–97) was one of two longtime Chopin students (the other was Georges Mathias) who subsequently enjoyed substantial performing and pedagogical careers. According to Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, "Dedicating his life to the discipleship of Chopin, [Mikuli] refused to let himself be seduced by the music of such as Wagner or Brahms, for fear of betraying his teacher's musical aesthetic" (*Chopin*, p. 172). Chopin's collected works, edited by Mikuli, were published in 1880 ("based for the most part on the composer's own indications"); Mikuli also published a separate edition of the Nocturne op. 9, no. 2, with many of the variant *floriture* that Chopin had notated into the scores of his students.

¹¹Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 97, n. 20.

¹²Born in New Orleans, Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69) displayed musical proficiency early and in 1842 went to Paris to study. Refused a Paris Conservatory audition by Zimmerman (the reason: "America is a land of steam engines but not of pianists"), he subsequently studied piano with Charles Hallé and Camille Stamaty. His 1845 début at the Salle Pleyel consisted of Chopin's E-Minor Piano Concerto; the composer was present and congratulated him warmly after the concert. The subtlety and refinement of Gottschalk's pianism was linked by many contemporaries with Chopin, who had made a lasting impression on the younger pianist. One listener's reaction to a Gottschalk performance (New Orleans, 1853) reads like many descriptions of Chopin's playing: "I cannot tell you how divinely he plays—such execution, such power, and at the same time such extreme delicacy of touch. I don't believe I can enjoy hearing the piano played by anyone else again" (Josephine Mandeville to Rebecca Mandeville, 9 April 1853. Henry D. Mandeville papers, Louisiana State University Archives, Baton Rouge).

¹³Edouard Wolff (1816–80) was a Pole, six years younger than Chopin, who studied composition with the same teacher in Warsaw (Joseph Elsner) and lived in Paris from 1835 until his death. He composed many works for piano, many of the light salon variety, but also many which are open imitations of Chopin, and which demonstrate that he was intimately familiar with Chopin's pianism and musical aesthetic. One example of his taking the older composer for a model is found in a letter, dated 8 August 1835 to Józef Nowakowski in Warsaw, stating that he was writing Mazurkas "à la Chopin" (quoted in Jeffrey Kallberg, "The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor," this journal 11 [1988], 253).

Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmerman¹⁴ (among many others), no doubt because, as Zimmerman himself wrote, "Chopin, like every original talent, is not able to be imitated, however it is necessary to try to enter into the spirit of his compositions in order not to do the opposite."¹⁵ Copious performance indications were provided so that the pianist *could* enter into the appropriate spirit when Chopin's style was being evoked. These indications, then, tell us a good deal about how Chopin's imitators heard his approach to the piano and may thus, at least indirectly, suggest something of that approach itself.

Consider the rhetorical model for phrasing, a time-honored conception that depends on a verbal rather than mathematical conception of notated musical rhythms. Mikuli is one among many who closely identify this approach with Chopin:

Chopin insisted above all on the importance of correct phrasing. Wrong phrasing would provoke the apt analogy that it seemed to him as if someone were reciting a laboriously memorized speech in an unfamiliar language, not merely failing to observe the right quantity of syllables, perhaps even making full stops in the middle of words. Similarly, by his illiterate phrasing the pseudo-musician reveals that music is not his mother tongue but something foreign and unintelligible to him; and so, like that orator, he must relinquish all hope of his speech having any effect on the listener.¹⁶

Jean Kleczyński, writing later, clearly agreed:

All the theory of the style which Chopin taught to his pupils rested on this analogy between music and language, on the necessity for separating the various

¹⁴Chopin's next-door neighbor at no. 7, Square d'Orléans, Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmerman (1783–1853) was also the head of the piano department at the Paris Conservatory. A piano student of Boieldieu, he took *Premier prix* in piano over Friedrich Kalkbrenner in 1803. He wrote the *Encyclopédie du pianiste compositeur*, published in Paris ca. 1840, which codifies the aesthetics and technical approaches of the Parisian piano milieu in which Chopin lived and worked from 1831 until his death.

¹⁵"Chopin, comme tout talent original ne peut être imité, cependant il faut tâcher d'entrer dans l'esprit de ses compositions afin de n'y pas faire de contresens" (Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmerman, *L'Encyclopédie du pianiste compositeur* [Paris, 1840], p. 59).

¹⁶Karol Mikuli, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 42.

phrases, on the necessity for pointing and for modifying the power of the voice and its rapidity of articulation. . . .

[The] pauses are of great importance; without them music becomes a succession of sounds without connection, an incomprehensible chaos, as spoken language would be if no regard were paid to punctuation and the inflection of the voice.¹⁷

Chopin was not alone among his contemporaries in stressing rhetorical coherence in interpretation. Zimmerman wrote more specifically on the same subject in his 1840 treatise *L'encyclopédie du pianiste compositeur*:

Merely to play correctly is to speak well in order to say nothing. . . .

In repetitions or sequential progressions within a passage, expression itself must be progressive, for it is useless to repeat the same idea (musical or otherwise) several times if the repetition doesn't bring with it a greater degree of persuasion or emotion.

In piano music, the meaning not being fixed by words, the nuances, the expression sometimes become arbitrary; two contrary versions are able to be equally good. What is bad is the absence of intention, for uniformity is frigidity, and with it no effect is possible; the music becomes a monotonous warbling which is only able to produce boredom.¹⁸

Today, more than a century removed from this interpretive environment, we are used to lit-

¹⁷Kleczyński, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, pp. 42–43. Jean Kleczyński (1837–95) was a Pole who went to Paris, studied (1859–66) with Antoine Marmontel at the Paris Conservatory, and sought to immerse himself in Chopin's pianistic aesthetic. He also studied with Chopin's students and intimates Marcelina Czartoryska, Camille Dubois, Georges Mathias, Julian Fontana, and Zofia Zaleska Rosengardt. His writings on the Chopin tradition are very valuable and preserve much of importance, but are also occasionally colored by the thinking of other writers aesthetically distant from Chopin (in particular Mathis Lussy).

¹⁸"Ne jouer que correctement, c'est bien parler pour ne rien dire. . . . Dans les répétitions, ou les progressions d'un passage, l'expression elle-même doit être progressive, car il est inutile de répéter plusieurs fois la même idée (musicale ou autre) si cette répétition n'amène pas avec elle un degré plus grand de persuasion ou d'émotion. Dans la musique de piano, le sens n'étant pas fixé par des paroles, les nuances, l'expression deviennent quelquefois arbitraires; deux versions contraires peuvent être également bonnes. Ce qui est mauvais, c'est l'absence d'intentions" (Zimmerman, *L'Encyclopédie*, p. 58. I am grateful to Ralph P. Locke for help with the translation).

Example 1: Louis Moreau Gottschalk, "Ricordati" (1845–46), mm. 16–25.

eral readings, so the rhetorical metaphors remain somewhat unclear. What this aesthetic could *not* have encompassed is a list of rules for uniform inflection, such as "always crescendo to a high note" or "always accent a syncopation." (Such advice, still heard in piano studios, was wrongly attributed to Chopin by Kleczyński himself; see n. 17.) A closer approximation of what was probably meant may be found in Louis Moreau Gottschalk's "Ricordati," composed probably in 1855–56 and published in 1857. The piece is designated a nocturne, a genre with which Chopin was prominently associated since the 1830s, and Chopinesque traits abound. These include Italianate melodic writing; a hushed, intimate dynamic level; glistening chromatic *fioriture* (and Gottschalk's *fioriture* are far closer to Chopin's ornamental language than those of almost any other imitator); and—as will be seen

shortly—instructions for rhetorically coherent execution. These affinities and the fact that Gottschalk's Parisian contemporaries often compared his pianism to Chopin's¹⁹ strongly suggest that there was conscious modeling on Gottschalk's part.

Example 1 presents the B section of "Ricordati." Over the eighth notes—pianists tend to call these "speaking eighth notes"—there are the indications *piangendo* ("weeping"), *con lagrime* ("with tears"), *parlando* ("speaking"), and *con amore* ("with love"). Moreover, when the opening figure of the section is repeated a third higher, "un poco meno piano" is notated, so as to guide the pianist in

¹⁹Indeed, Gottschalk himself later wrote of his debt to Chopin. S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula!: The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York, 1995), p. 52.

differentiating between the two statements. This much information amounts to dramatic coaching of the kind a director might give an actor; it goes rhetorically well beyond what notes, dynamics, and articulations alone could possibly communicate. Because Gottschalk died well before the recording era, we do not know how he would realize such indications, but it is clear that an imaginative, expressive interpretation of such musical ideas might impress listeners as unique and inimitable.²⁰

Chopin himself was never this generous with performance information. We are at least somewhat luckier with regard to recordings, such as those of Chopin's nocturnes by the aforementioned Raoul von Koczalski, whose pianistic lineage instilled in him a coherent, rhetorical, creative, and dramatic (but not exaggerated) approach to phrasing. For example, there is a clear correspondence between the contemporary accounts of Chopin's playing, with its almost indescribable level of nuance, and Koczalski's recording of the opening of Chopin's Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, no. 1: one hears singing, "speaking" quarters and eighth notes, intensified repetitions, and rhythmic subtleties resulting from the privileging of the integrity of the line over the beat. (This passage is rhythmically and texturally analogous to the Gottschalk excerpt shown in ex. 1; Koczalski's realization of the Chopin passage bespeaks an interpretive concept consistent with performance indications such as Gottschalk's.) Similarly vocalistic, imploring, rhythmically flexible phrasing can be found in Koczalski's recording of Chopin's Nocturne in D \flat Major, op. 27, no. 2, which is as close to an operatic love-duet as anything the composer ever wrote.²¹

Creative, rhythmically coherent, and dramatically colored phrasing is ultimately difficult to codify in explicit terms; this accounts

²⁰That Chopin, like virtually all his contemporaries, thought in such figurative, evocative terms is suggested by his student Adolf Gutmann (1819–82), who told Frederick Niecks that Chopin directed him to play the opening of the middle section of the Nocturne op. 48, no. 1, like a recitative: "A tyrant commands" (the first two chords), he said, "and the other asks for mercy" (quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 81).

²¹Koczalski's recordings of these nocturnes are found on Biddulph CD LHW 022, *Chopin: The Complete Études*.

in large part for the impassioned but often maddeningly vague accounts by Chopin's contemporaries. Similarly problematic is the realization of Chopin's celebrated *floriture*, the ornamental intensifications of melody lines that inspired rhapsodic evocations from admirers who heard him play. In 1833 Berlioz wrote:

He has created a kind of chromatic embroidery in several of his compositions, whose effect is so strange and piquant as to be impossible to describe. Unfortunately, virtually nobody but Chopin himself can play his music and give it this unusual turn, this sense of the unexpected which is one of its principal beauties; his playing is shot through with a thousand nuances of movement of which he alone holds the secret, impossible to convey by instructions.²²

Ferdinand Hiller resorted to metaphor: "What in the hands of others was elegant embellishment, in his hands became a colourful wreath of flowers; what in others was technical dexterity seemed in his playing like the flight of a swallow." Emile Gaillard settled for describing his own feelings: "His right hand would seem casually to unfold a magnificent lacework of sound. Virtuosity disappeared behind the emotion; one was less dazzled than moved."²³ There are many such descriptions; the reader senses that the writer is trying, somehow, to get at just exactly *what* Chopin was doing with his *floriture*, but the descriptions remain evocative rather than explicit.

How pianists and listeners are to make use of such accounts is not at all clear, and more explicit instructions run the risk of error. For example, Jean Kleczyński says that

[*floriture*] . . . most frequently appear when the same motif returns several times; first the motif is heard in its simplicity; afterwards, surrounded with ornaments, richer and richer at each return. It is, therefore, necessary to render this motif with very nearly the same shadings, whatever may be the form in which it reappears . . . these ornamental passages

²²Hector Berlioz, "Concerts," *Le Rénovateur* II/345 (15 December 1833), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 272.

²³Ferdinand Hiller, *Briefe an eine ungenannte* (Köln, 1877), p. 151, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 270; Gaillard, quoted in Albert Déchelette, "Le jeu de Chopin," *Journal des Débats* (28 December 1934); and Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 276.

should not be slackened, but rather accelerated towards the end; a *rallentando* would invest them with too much importance, would make them appear to be special and independent ideas, whereas they are only fragments of the phrase, and . . . may be regarded as parentheses which, quickly pronounced, produce a greater effect than they would if they were [held back].

Chopin differed, in his manner of using arabesques and parenthetical ornamentations, from the usual manner of his time, which was to dwell upon such passages and to endue them with importance, as in the cadenzas attached to the airs of the Italian School.²⁴

Kleczyński's description seems clear and credible. His comment that melodic returns should be shaded like the original statements sounds commonsensical enough, and indeed this approach is commonly heard today. But many witnesses agree that the composer played his own works, and melodic returns within them, with myriad variations. In the Nocturnes, for example, melodies often have different indications for phrasing and articulation at each return. Zimmerman (as we have just seen) specifically advocated differing inflections in repeated or sequentially developed melodies, preferring the interest and persuasiveness of a contrasting approach to mere interpretive repetition. Kleczyński's suggestion that Chopin's melodies should always be realized in the same way within a piece thus not only finds no contemporary support, but is also at odds with Chopin's published compositions.

But what about his assertion that *fioriture* should not be played with *rallentandi*, and that Chopin differed in this from the approach of "the Italian school?" In fact, Chopin based his *cantabile* aesthetic on Italian *bel canto*, and he constantly urged his pupils to hear good singers.²⁵ Furthermore, contemporary pieces mod-

eled on Chopin's *cantabile* aesthetic suggest that Kleczyński also has this idea wrong. Example 2 gives an excerpt of a Nocturne by Pierre Zimmerman, taken from his op. 21 and included in his 1840 piano treatise. The excerpt not only imitates Chopin's pianistic *bel canto* but also includes a third stave with an ornamentation of the original melody—one that includes two clearly Chopinesque *fioriture*. The first of these has an explicit *rallentando* indication, and the second would undoubtedly have been played the same way. Example 3 gives another excerpt, this one by Chopin's contemporary, admirer, and imitator Edouard Wolff, from the end of the first of his three Romances, op. 11, of 1838. This *fioritura*, luxuriantly Chopinesque in construction and style, is clearly marked *rallentando*.

Further support for the *rallentandi* eschewed by Kleczyński may be found in the recordings of Raoul von Koczalski. One of Koczalski's recordings of Chopin's E♭ Nocturne, op. 9, no. 2, incorporates the composer's own variant *fioriture*, which were published in a separate edition of the work by Koczalski's teacher, Chopin's student Karol Mikuli.²⁶ Throughout, these *fioriture* come to elegant, vocalistic closes with gentle, nonexaggerated *rallentandi*. The same is generally true for the *rallentandi* in Koczalski's recordings of the Nocturnes ops. 27, no. 2, and 62, no. 1. In the latter, the return of the main theme—a trill-variation, which dissolves into a series of glistening *fioriture*—provides the opportunity for a tour de force demonstration of how such passages can be shaped, given direction, and brought down to an absolute whisper.

What we can glean from Chopin's imitators regarding these three specific issues of performance practices—rhetorical phrasing, the inflection of melodic repetitions in different ways, and *rallentandi* at the end of *fioriture*—suggests that there is a good deal more to be done with regard to the bigger interpretive picture, the task of realizing Chopin's scores in viable performances. Imitative works by composers such as Wolff and Zimmerman reflect a highly

²⁴Kleczyński, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, pp. 52–54.

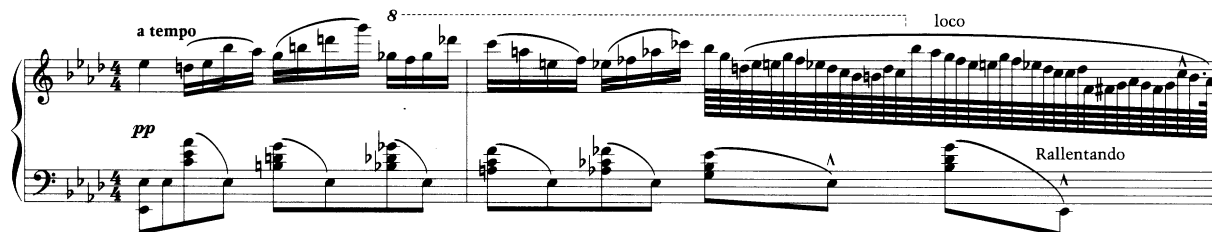
²⁵This may be a matter of degree. Kleczyński would have been right in observing that Chopin would not have sanctioned slowing to the point of completely destroying the rhythmic context, as might have been done by opera singers who lacked taste and musical sense (which does not seem to be the case with those Chopin admired), or of playing the little ornamental notes as if they were equal in importance to the melody notes. As stated here, though, the prohibition is much more inclusive.

²⁶This recording is included on the Biddulph CD cited in n. 21.

Example 2: Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmerman, Nocturne from his op. 21, mm. 19–32.

relevant style of historical performance. While they do not supply real-time interpretive illustrations that can be imitated, they likewise cannot be ignored, because they demonstrate that scores, by their very nature, are all too

incomplete in their transmission of actual music in this style. It also follows that much more information about this Chopinesque performance style is still to be found in other interpretive areas.



Example 3: Edouard Wolff, *Trois Romances*, op. 11, no. 1, mm. 52–53.

One such area would be articulations, of signal importance in the Parisian piano aesthetic. Gradations of articulation between staccato and full legato are discussed—and notated—in the treatises of Louis Adam (1804), Alexis de Garaudé (ca. 1820), Henri Lemoine (1827), Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1831), and Antoni Kóntski (1851). Chopin notated several varieties of *portato* articulation, and his playing undoubtedly had almost infinite variety. But Chopin's imitators notated such articulations more often than he did, in particular on repeated melody notes—a context in which he himself also tended to take more care in notating articulations—and on one-finger slides from black keys to white keys. A comparison of imitative uses of these notations with analogous passages in Chopin's own works has, potentially, much to offer.

Another area is the *fioriture* themselves—not just whether they close with a *rallentando*, but how such passages are to be realized in terms of character. In Gottschalk's "Ricordati" alone *fioriture* are given the instructions *con delicatezza*, *scintillante*, and (my favorite) *zeffroso*. All of these are in perfect keeping with the descriptions of Chopin's playing and offer a more three-dimensional idea of what might have been so magical about Chopin's own realizations of such passages.

An even more problematic issue is that of *fioriture* variants and changed endings, both improvised and prepared. Chopin not only incorporated these into his own performances, but also notated them in his students' scores. Interpretive variants in pianistic *bel canto* were not unique to Chopin, as we saw in the ornamental line published with the Zimmerman

Nocturne in ex. 2.²⁷ In this context, Zimmerman's chart of recommended trill preparations and terminations, seen in ex. 4, is doubly instructive. Not only does it offer a variety of contemporary ornaments (some of which amount to independent *fioriture* themselves), but it also illustrates—as does a similar chart in Henri Lemoine's piano treatise of 1827—that such figures were freely used by pianists in the works of others within (one assumes, or hopes) the limits of *bon goût*. While it is a commonplace of performance practice studies that, historically, the letter of the published text was not sacrosanct in the same way more recent performers have conceived it to be, this knowledge has yet to be incorporated in any widespread way by those who perform and interpret the music of this period. It remains true, though, that we skew our understanding of this music when we ignore, in study or performance, the tradition of interpretive ornamentation.

Finally, although it is undeniable that the partial reconstruction of a performance idiom through comparison with published imitations is, to a certain extent, speculative, it at least allows us to rely on analogical connections. This benefit—the affinity between the imitator and the imitated—is no longer applicable to the most unrecoverable sector of the *terra incognita* of Chopin's pianism: his own improvisations, about which contemporaries simply raved. For example, Eugène Delacroix recorded

²⁷It is interesting here that Zimmerman offers such variants for melodic figures that have not yet been heard, even though he states elsewhere that variants should only be introduced when melodies are repeated.

Préparations



Terminaisons

Example 4: Zimmerman, recommended trill preparations and terminations from *L'Encyclopédie du pianist compositeur*, p. 60.

the opinion of Chopin's Polish friend Wojciech Grzymała that "Chopin's improvisations were far bolder than his finished compositions," while according to Chopin's close associate Julian Fontana, "Chopin's most beautiful finished compositions are merely reflections and echoes of his improvisations."²⁸

Yet it is just possible that occasional echoes of even these "far bolder" improvisations can be found in the music of Chopin's imitators. I

suspect that it is the memory of Chopinesque improvisation that underlies two arpeggiated passages from Edouard Wolff's 1852 "Hommage à Chopin," designated a "Reverie-Nocturne" (see ex. 5). The first arpeggio is quartal and the second root-fifth-sixth (pentatonic minus the third, so to speak); to my knowledge Chopin never used either sonority in this kind of purely coloristic way in his published works (something close is used in the Nocturne op. 62, no. 2, but there it is more clearly a suspension, and more metrically bound). These passages sound like figures Debussy might extrapolate from Chopin, then play in block chords, the kind of writing that could have motivated his famous

²⁸Both Delacroix and Fontana are quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin*, p. 282. Other accounts, several extremely enthusiastic, are found on pp. 282–87.

a. Measure 24.

b. Measures 53–54.

Example 5: Edouard Wolff, "Hommage à Chopin," op. 169.

comment that "Chopin is the greatest of all—for with the piano alone, he discovered everything."²⁹

Passages based on Chopinesque principles but nonetheless going well beyond his published works (perhaps harmonically, as in these examples, or in the complexity of *fioriture*) do recur in the imitative pieces, as do certain turns


of melody.³⁰ It may just be that the composers who imitated him—none of them Chopin's equal—were exploring on their own, going him

²⁹Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Claude Debussy* [1960], trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London, 1972), p. 44.

³⁰For example, F#-major arpeggiated melodies with repeated notes open both Gottschalk's "Ricordati" and Wolff's "Hommage à Chopin." Repeated notes as either melodic incipit or vamp open Schumann's "Chopin" and the middle section of Wagner's 1840 "Albumblatt für Ernst Benedikt Kietz: Lied ohne Worte," which nests eight or so measures of quasi nocturne in between outer sections that are clearly indebted to Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. Instances of this repeated-note opening tic in Chopin's published music are found in the second and fourth ballades and the *Alb nouvelle étude*.

one better. This would be more plausible if these composers were, typically, inventive, daring, and experimental—but they were not. More likely, we hear in such passages a distant echo of something Chopin's imitators heard him play but that he never wrote down. Given how closely we have seen them model their works, their pianism, and their aesthetics on his, it would be surprising indeed if they only sought to evoke the music he published.

Such hints are at best fragmentary. Viewing Chopin's unwritten improvisations through the lens of imitative compositions by others differs from study of his published works from the same perspective in that credible informed performances of the latter are far more likely. While it is hard to imagine a satisfyingly Chopinesque improvisation based on the descriptions of con-

temporaries, a melody or two that Chopin is known to have used, and suggestive hints of this kind from imitative works, it is not impossible.³¹ For the moment, though, fragments and imitations of Chopin's pianism are all that remains. Identification and close consideration of such evidence enable us to get a far better idea of the totality of his music—score and sounded reality—than we have for the most part had since the composer's death. 

³¹As illustration, we have the stellar example of Robert Levin's two different idiomatic and persuasive improvised solo paragraphs that could open Beethoven's *Fantasia for Piano, Chorus, and Orchestra*, op. 80 (found on his recording of this work with John Eliot Gardiner and the *Orchêtre Romantique et Revolutionnaire*, Uni/Archiv 47771).