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CHOPIN'S PEDALLING ON CHOPIN'S PIANOS – AND OURS

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For Sandra Rosenblum

Pianists and piano composers of Chopin's generation created a musical revolution with the damper pedal. Chopin's version of that revolution differed from that of any other musician, though it was based on the same developments in piano design. Its originality lay in the way he brought the potential of those technological developments together with his own idiosyncratic performance technique and his creative thinking about musical colour – in particular about the expressive difference between pedalled and unpedalled piano sound. With that difference, finely calculated and meticulously notated in his scores, he revolutionised both the musical representation of experience and the experiencing of musical sound.

Our understanding of his ideas about musical colour has been hampered by the monumental changes in Chopin performance in the two centuries since he lived: pianos have changed, as have the ways we play Chopin's music on them, the halls we hear it in, and the ways we listen to it. His pedal markings have come to seem so unsuited to our pianos, halls, habits and tastes that performers and critics routinely disregard them, depriving us of insight into the compositional thinking behind his timbral sequences. The present essay examines Chopin's pedalling as a key to his musical thinking and considers how that thinking can be transferred from its native medium, the pianos of Chopin's day, to the pianos and conditions of today.

The pedalling revolution of Chopin's day was not a response to a new device. Gottfried Silbermann introduced 'hand stops for raising the treble and bass dampers' in pianos he built in the 1740s.¹ By the late eighteenth century, damper mechanisms on German and Austrian pianos were controlled by knee levers underneath the keyboard. Controlling the dampers by means of a pedal – a device patented by John Broadwood in 1783 – was pervasive on pianos built after 1800.² This progression toward hands-free and more flexible controls permitted pianists to remove and reapply the dampers ever more easily, so that a change of tone colour that was manageable only between sections or movements of a work in

1 Edwin M. Ripin and Stewart Pollens, 'Pianoforte [piano]', Section 2: 'Origins to 1750', in *Grove Music Online*, accessed 1 September 2020.

2 Michael Cole, *ibid.*, Section 4: 'England and France to 1800'.

the mid-eighteenth century could be obtained at short intervals, by a flick of the ankle, not disturbing the play of the hands, by the beginning of the nineteenth.

Even then, evidence of a revolution in the use of the damper pedal did not appear all at once. This evidence takes the form of notation: score indications of when to remove the dampers and when to let them drop back onto the strings. These indications are very rare, for instance, in the piano works by Beethoven, Schubert, Weber and their German-speaking contemporaries published in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In fact, as in earlier works like Haydn's C major Sonata, Hob. XVI:50 (1794), the pedal is generally indicated in these works only where it creates a special effect; that is, only where a performer would hardly think to employ the pedal unless instructed to do so. As Sandra Rosenblum wrote in her classic study of evolving pedalling practice, 'any use of the damper-raising mechanism was considered a special effect through the 1820s'.³ Some unmarked passages might invite pedalling, but virtually everything – legato as well as non-legato passages – was written so that it could be played without the pedal, and pianists were trained to play that way. On the one hand, then, the normal sound of the piano was unpedalled, and on the other, pianos had damper pedals, and performers could use pedalled sound where they thought appropriate. Pedalling therefore was largely the prerogative of the performer rather than of the composer.

When composers began putting pedal markings regularly into their piano scores, they were limiting the performers' prerogative. In that way, the use of the damper pedal became an intrinsic element of the work. Already in the 1810s, John Field was publishing piano nocturnes full of pedal markings, prescribing a predominantly, though never exclusively, pedalled sound. Robert Schumann, in most of his solo piano works published in the 1830s, writes *Pedal.* under the opening of most movements or sections, sometimes (as in the first movement of the Phantasie, Op. 17) following up that marking along the way with more specific instructions on just when to use or stop using the pedal. The word *Pedal* at the opening of a movement does not read as a direction to start pedalling there, but more as an open invitation to use the damper pedal where appropriate in that movement, with an implication that it is not to be used in movements lacking that indication. In other words, Schumann seems to assume that pianists in that day would still expect to save the pedal for special effects unless freed from that assumption for a given movement or part of one; he simply decided to free them from it more often than not, making the special effect a lot less special.

Chopin, publishing his solo piano music in the same era, likewise relied on pianists not to pedal when he did not call for it; but his system, in contrast to Schumann's general 'Go ahead and pedal', was to specify precisely when to pedal and when not to. The result was a clear mapping of alternating pedalled and unpedalled

³ Sandra Rosenblum, 'Pedalling the piano: A brief survey from the 18th century to the present', *Performance Practice Review*, 6/2 (1993), 160. On Chopin's pedal indications, see her 'Some enigmas of Chopin's pedal indications: What do the sources tell us?', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 16/1 (1996), 41–61.

colour, treating neither as a special effect and neither as the default sound. The fundamental principle of Chopin's piano sound world is a principle of contrasts in colour. In most works, he draws the listener's attention to the difference between pedalled and unpedalled sound: from one section to another, from one register to another, from one phrase to another, and even between different parts of one continuous phrase. His notes and his pedalling are made for each other, not in the sense that the notes are unplayable without the pedal (that is true at only a very few moments), but in the sense that the work is laid out as a sequence of pedalled and unpedalled sonorities. To play all the notes of a Chopin work while disregarding his pedal indications is in a real sense to miss the story it is designed to tell.

His mapping of sonorities is also made for the pianos he played. If by Chopin's time pianos had already had damper mechanisms controlled by the foot for several decades, they differed from earlier pianos in other ways that affected his use of the damper pedal. The French grands that were his touchstones after he left Warsaw in 1830 – Erards and especially his preferred Pleyels – used iron frame braces (but not a full iron frame) to bear increased string tension while allowing a soundboard that was thin and vibrant (compared to modern soundboards). As Zvi Meniker writes in his excellent dissertation on performance questions, including pedalling, in Chopin, 'the soundboard continues to vibrate by itself even after the dampers fall back on the strings. The effect is stronger yet when the damper pedal is used, since the soundboard sets in motion even those strings that haven't been struck'.⁴

In addition to the persistence of sound derived from the vibration of the soundboard, Chopin's pianos produced a richer tone than earlier pianos, in part because of their increased compass, especially in the bass. While the compass of pianos did not increase uniformly, the bottom note on Pleyel and Erard grands by the 1830s (CC) was a fourth lower than that on many pianos of, say, two decades earlier (FF), and when the damper pedal was applied with the lowest notes, the upper notes would be coloured with a richness of overtones unheard of on earlier pianos. At the same time, the cross-stringing in modern pianos, which produces a uniformity of timbre across all the registers of the instrument, was not used in grand pianos in Chopin's lifetime (even though Parisian builder Henri Pape introduced it in 1828 to enrich the sound of his very short domestic uprights).⁵ So while a Pleyel grand of the 1830s or 1840s produced sounds rich in overtones, it also, like earlier pianos, provided a distinctive timbre or 'voice' in every octave, from a clear 'speaking' sound in the bass to what is often called a 'silvery' tone in the highest register.

Whether he is blending sonorities from across the compass of the piano to explore the play of overtones or is contrasting colours from different parts of that compass, Chopin always plots his use of the damper pedal in relation to the instrument's registers. His lyric bass

4 Zvi Meniker, 'Aspects of Performance Practice in Frédéric Chopin's Piano Works: Slurs, Pedalling, Mazurka Rhythm', DMA dissertation, Cornell University, 2001, 51–52.

5 Edwin Goode, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos: A Technological History from Cristofori to the Modern Concert Grand*, 2nd edn (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 145, 190. Chopin could have tried out Pape's cross-strung uprights.

6

Examples of such 'cello solos' are the Preludes, Op. 28 Nos. 3 and 6; Etude, Op. 25 No. 7; Impromptu, Op. 51, bars 48–75; Waltz, Op. 64 No. 3, bars 73–108. It is hard to imagine Chopin blurring a deep chromatic bass line with pedalling as we find in the opening page of Liszt's Second Ballade.

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The principal theme of the Waltz, Op. 34 No. 2; Etude, Op. 10 No. 6; even the tenor-bass duet in the Prelude, Op. 28 No. 15, bars 28–55.

8

The Nocturne, Op. 27 No. 2 provides all the evidence one needs.

9

The A flat Etude, the second of the *Trois Etudes* that Chopin wrote for the Moscheles–Fétis *Méthode des Méthodes*, exemplifies all three of these challenges: repeated notes within a three-voice texture in the right hand and leaps of up to two octaves in the left hand. Those challenges, without using the pedal, are presumably what qualifies this work as a study. The passage of the Impromptu, Op. 51, shown in Example 1 below, is similar.

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In Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher, as Seen by his Pupils* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), see such passages as these: 'His playing was always noble and beautiful, his tones always sang, whether in full forte or in the softest *piano*. He took infinite pains to teach the pupil this *legato*, *cantabile* way of playing' (recollection by Friederike Streicher, reported in Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician*, 3rd edn (London:

melodies, for example, are regularly written without pedal (except for occasional expressive effusions), requiring the performer to make the lines expressively legato by hand, as a cellist would;⁶ the same applies to tenor melodies.⁷ By contrast, he often employs the pedal lavishly with lyric soprano melodies and duets, no matter how embellished the melodies, how much dissonance the melodies pose against a harmony, and how slurred or broken the melodic lines.⁸ Making legato lines is the job of the fingers; pedalling is for colour, dependent on and varying with the register.

Making lines legato – especially lines with repeated notes or large leaps in them or shared with other lines in the same hand – is often in part a matter of illusion on the unpedalled piano, as it is on the organ or other instruments or even in singing.⁹ The illusion may be enhanced on pianos of Chopin's day, compared to ours, because of the greater vibrancy of the soundboards on those pianos and because the returning dampers then were not built to snuff out the strings' sound so relentlessly as modern dampers are. But it is also a matter of the pianist's technique. Accounts of Chopin's own playing and teaching praise his singing legato touch, obtained with what was essentially an organist's technique (a technique formed partly by his training and experience on the organ in his youth).¹⁰ His occasional published fingerings show a willingness to slide from note to note with the thumb, within an unpedalled slur, preferring an expressively articulated lyricism to the overlapping that could easily be achieved by changing fingers.¹¹ Likewise it is striking that in hymn-like textures he almost always calls for unpedalled performance, thereby requiring an organist's illusion of legato.¹² He does the same in many passages of legato bass lines in octaves.¹³ (Example 1 illustrates all three unpedalled situations.) In such cases where the music invokes choral singing or an organ or orchestral bass line, that reference would be undercut if the damper pedal were used to blur the piano sound.



Example 1. Fryderyk Chopin, Impromptu, Op. 51, bars 37–41. Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, [1843], M. S. 3847. From the collections of the British Library and University of Chicago Library. All music examples are drawn from the Chopin Online website: chopinonline.ac.uk.

The thicker the texture, the more he tends to value the clarity of lines that the damper pedal would only obscure. Hence, in the Impromptu, Op. 51, the two-voiced principal theme is pedalled for at least its first couple of bars (bars 3–5), but when it is promptly repeated, with the soprano melody now joined by an alto line, Chopin removes the pedalling (bars 11–15), turning the passage into a finger-twister. It starts to become clear why Camille Saint-Saëns wrote that the reason the pedal ‘is frequently indicated in [Chopin’s] works is that he did not wish it to be used when not indicated. To dispense with this help is no easy matter; for many it would even be impossible, so general has the abuse of the pedal become’.¹⁴

If Chopin shuns the damper pedal as a crutch for legato playing, even in challenging circumstances, in what circumstances does he characteristically call for the damper pedal? The answer again has much to do with register. The two études, for instance, that consist entirely of sweeps from the lowest register of the piano to the highest and back down again are the only two études in which Chopin calls for pedalling throughout, covering almost every single note of the music (Op. 10 No. 1 and Op. 25 No. 12); these are studies in which the overtones of booming bass notes are matched by played pitches in every octave above, creating an unprecedented effect of a single player at the piano unleashing a force of nature.

The resonance of pedalled bass notes figures differently in cases where those bass notes support an atmospheric arpeggiated accompaniment to a melody in a higher register. This effect, associated with Chopin’s nocturnes, is in fact carried out consistently in only two of those nocturnes, but he also uses it in the middle of many of his works in other genres to create a nocturne topic or scene.¹⁵ Field and others pioneered this musical topic of dreamy lyricism before Chopin came along, but he invested it with such intense sensuousness that it has been thought of as the archetype of Chopin’s style at least since Schumann employed it in the ‘Chopin’ movement of *Carnaval* in 1834.

A third part of Chopin’s habitual practice is to use the pedal in dance pieces to boost the resonance of low downbeat notes, lifting the pedal for one or more of the later, higher beats of the accompaniment. This pattern of pedalling puts a spring in the music’s step, as dance music should have; but here too Chopin extends a topical sonority from the obvious genres (in this case, the dance genres of mazurka, waltz, polonaise, bolero and others) to works or passages of works in other genres.¹⁶

Novello, [1902]), ii:341), 46, and ‘He preferred the repeated note to be played with the fingertip, very carefully and without changing fingers’ (Franchomme/Picquet recollection cited in the anonymous *Conseils aux Jeunes Pianistes* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1904), 12–13), 48. On Chopin’s experience as an organist in his Warsaw years, see Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin’s Warsaw* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33–37.

11
See the Impromptu, Op. 51, bars 36–37 (shown in Example 1), the Barcarolle, Op. 61, bar 11, and the Ballade, Op. 52, bars 91–92. In all these cases, the thumb-only legato draws attention to a middle voice.

12
Among many examples, the Nocturne, Op. 37 No. 1, bars 41–64; the Lento sostenuto, of the Fantasy, Op. 49, bars 199–222; and the D flat section of the Mazurka, Op. 50 No. 2. In all these cases, the suddenly unpedalled sound contributes to the listener’s sensation of being transported to a new scene, a scene of choral singing.

13
See the melodic bass of the Prelude, Op. 28 No. 22; the slurred motifs in octaves of the bass in the Sonata, Op. 35, movt I, bars 121–24 and 129–32; in the Barcarolle, Op. 61, the bass at the return of the principal theme, now in octaves (*Tempo primo*, bars 84ff.), actually calls for a more sparing use of the pedal than at the opening, where the bass line is not doubled (bars 4ff.). The fiery double octaves of the Etude, Op. 25 No. 10, all under slurs, are also written without pedal.

14
Camille Saint-Saëns, ‘A Chopin Manuscript’, in *Outspoken Essays on Music*, tr. Fred Rothwell (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), 105.

15
The two Nocturnes are Op. 72 No. 1 and Op. 27 No. 2. This nocturne topic appears in works from the Fantasy-Impromptu, Op. 66 (bars 41–82), to the first movement of the Sonata, Op. 58 (bars 41–56).

16
Examples are the Etude, Op. 10 No. 8, the Prelude, Op. 28 No. 21, and the principal theme (bars 5–18) in the Largo movement of the Sonata, Op. 58.

A fourth practice is less often associated with Chopin than any of the others but is actually one of his most identifying practices: he lets a pedalled bare octave in the bass ring in the air for a moment and then fills in its sonority with harmony. One of the most striking cases is the very opening of the Barcarolle, Op. 61, when a booming C sharp octave in the bass is held by the pedal while it is met by a chord made up of its overtones three octaves above. In several other works – the Scherzos, Op. 31 and 54, the Ballade, Op. 47, and the Fantasy, Op. 49 – the same gesture occurs not at the very beginning, but a few bars in, as the first pedalled sound after an unpedalled opening, intruding its unexpectedly rich (and usually much louder) boom into an unassuming milieu and thereby opening up an unsuspected world of sonorous pianistic possibilities. In all these cases, except the Barcarolle, the effect is then repeated, often on a different and unexpected new bass octave each time. In a couple of these cases (the Ballade and the Fantasy), different versions of that gesture – a ringing, pedalled octave sonority, immediately filled in with harmony – recur throughout the work, connecting the whole by punctuating its different sections.

Portraying the Experiencing Subject with the Pedal

One could go on cataloguing the musical topics, textures or gestures that Chopin habitually associates with a given use of the pedal or abstention from it, but that way of studying his music provides only a first step in understanding the particular revolution he created with pedalling. One part of that revolution is defined by his way of representing sequences of imagined experience by means of contrasts of piano colour – contrasts attained by alternations of pedalled and unpedalled sound. It might be questioned whether the contrast between pedalled and unpedalled sound can produce a rich enough palette of colours for that kind of representation. The best answer is to turn to our catalogue of his pedalling practices not as a list of textures associated with pedalled or unpedalled sound, but as a field of expressive types, each connecting a realm of cultural experience and feeling with a range of distinctively coloured piano sonorities. In hymnlike passages, for example, Chopin's unpedalled legato writing evokes the distinctness of the vocal lines in any communal part-singing. In dance genres and dance-like passages in other genres, his downbeat-centred pedalling evokes the intoxicating regularity of dance steps and movements. And in those grand gestures of pedalled bass octaves joined by chordal harmonisation, the rich resonance of the sound suggests a summoning or awakening of consciousness.

To represent a sequence of experiences, or create a narrative, in these terms requires playing on a succession of contrasting topics or gestures or figurations, each with its distinctive sonority, to suggest

a progression of thoughts, scenes or states of mind. Almost every composition by Chopin works that way. Even among the briefest of them, such as the preludes, which model the act of riffing on a musical figure in preparation for a longer work, a good number have structures of answering phrases¹⁷ or sections in contrasting textures¹⁸ or endings that depart from the initial texture,¹⁹ and all of those differences are aligned with changes in the pedalling patterns. The B minor Prelude (No. 6 of Op. 28), a mere 26 bars long, offers just a single significant change in mode of expression. For the most part, it consists of a cello-like legato melody in the bass, harmonised by a two-stroke chiming above; pedalling is absent (except at one moment), as we would expect, given the low register of the legato melody. But at the end, after the cadence, the opening phrase of the melody returns and comes to a rest as the chiming continues, and this whole four-bar passage is coloured by a single pedalling (Example 2). Suddenly, what we have previously experienced as present-time action turns, through the addition of pedalling, into recollection, coloured with a tone of wistfulness. More than that, what we have previously heard for ourselves as a musical action (the melody) performed in a particular setting (where a bell is chiming) gets assumed into the consciousness of an experiencing subject, who – we realise retrospectively – has been hearing that action, in that setting, all along. The pedalling effects that transformation.



Example 2. Fryderyk Chopin, 24 Préludes, [Op. 28] No. 6, bars 21–26. Paris: Ad. Catelin, [1839], Ade.C. (560) & Cie. Scherbatoff copy. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

In somewhat longer pieces (the vast majority of his compositions), Chopin worked largely in unassuming genres, genres of solo piano music that mimicked the contemporary forms of domestic music-making: singing, instrumental playing and dance accompaniment. These works, like their domestic models, are constructed as strings of couplets all in the same phrase structure or as sequences of alternating episodes, usually in contrasting character. In both cases, Chopin characteristically created contrasts in the application of the damper pedal from one unit to another. To have done so simply for the sake of variety would hardly have counted as revolutionary. But within these sequences of material, each of them true to the announced genre, he just as characteristically created colour changes that transform the nature of the experience

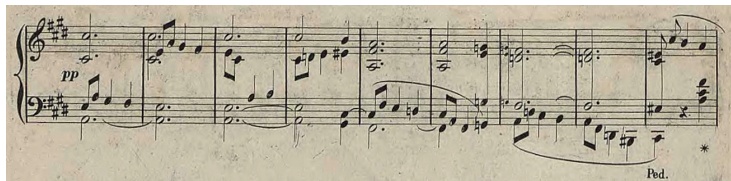
17
Op. 28 No. 10.

18
Op. 28 Nos. 13, 15, 21, 22.

19
Op. 28 Nos. 11, 12, 16, 18.

being represented, colour changes through pedalling in which, as in the B minor Prelude, we feel the emergence of an experiencing consciousness. And in these works, that consciousness does not emerge in an afterthought, but earlier along the way, changing the course of the work.²⁰

The C sharp minor Mazurka of Op. 41, for instance, begins as a string of couplets, all dancy in different ways, those differences all tied to different patterns of pedalling: one springy (bars 1–16), one swirling (bars 17–32), one changeable (bars 33–48); the fourth one (bars 49–64), tense with third-beat accents and dotted rhythms, is the first that is unpedalled, at least until each of its phrases cadences. But the second of those phrases breaks the mould of its dance genre: it gets stuck on its cadential dominant chord (see bars 63–64 in Example 3), slowing as its melody creeps upward chromatically, the unchanged pedal building our suspense past the expected moment for cadencing. This disruption of the mazurka's rhythmic structure transports us to a new scene and state of mind: a deceptive cadence (bar 65) draws us into a hushed serenity in which the main theme of the mazurka returns, shorn of its dotted rhythms, dance beats and active chord changes. In the consciousness that we are now inhabiting, that mazurka is a distant memory, and one that keeps slipping away as the music slips from one key to another. And whereas in the Prelude No. 6 the bathing of the familiar theme in pedalling signalled a switch to a state of wistful recollection, here it is the opposite change, the removal of the pedal just when the music has become frenzied, that allows us to contemplate the mazurka theme as a thought purified by memory. What matters most, it seems, is not whether the pedal is on or off, but that a switch in pedalling as powerfully dramatised as this one can make us feel a presence in whose mind the music is being imagined.



Example 3. Fryderyk Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 41 [No. 4], in C sharp minor, bars 60–73. Paris: E. Troupenas, [1841], T. 978. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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See James Parakilas, 'Disrupting the genre: Unforeseen personifications in Chopin', *19th-Century Music*, 35/3 (2012), 165–81.

Once we recognise that presence in the music, we cannot forget it. Another surprising cadence (bars 72–73) brings back the main theme, struggling to reconstitute itself. The original sequence of themes returns, but now the imagining figure seems to be dancing in a frenzy to suppress memory. The dominant pedal point that earlier was extended to two bars is now extended to ten (bars 109–118), leading to an outburst of the main theme (bars 119–126) that is a terrifying mirror of the earlier hushed passage: this too is harmonically immovable and unpedalled, but thundering in double octaves, with dotted rhythm in every bar. Then the pedal continues not to be touched as the plaintive concluding phrases subside into oblivion. That Chopin could create such a powerful and compressed inner drama in a work that is formally just a string of phrases in mazurka rhythm, relying on no virtuosic display, points to the expressive capacity he discovered in contrasts of musical colour, orchestrated with the damper pedal.

The Pedalling in the Ballade, Op. 52

In longer works of a more explicitly narrative character – the four ballades and the two great fantasies – he relies on more complex thematic structures to guide the listener through the narrative progression, but here the contrasts of pedalled and unpedalled sonority, sometimes subtle, sometimes extreme, are used even more strategically to catch us up in the force and sense of that progression. By examining the interplay of thematic and pedalling structures in the Fourth Ballade, Op. 52, we can track not just continuity in the telling and new stages in the tale, but even the vagaries of the teller's consciousness. That Ballade, like two of its three predecessors, is organised around a musical stanza that repeats a number of times, evoking the form of a sung folk ballad, in which a dramatic, even ghastly story unfolds in the course of unchanging repetitions of a stanzaic melody. But in a wordless piano ballade, according to Chopin's scheme, the unflappably recurring narrating melody is constantly giving way to music representing either the dramatic scenes of the story or the narrator's own loss of control over the act of telling it.

In the Fourth Ballade, the narrator's consciousness is at issue even before the narrating stanza appears. The music opens with a dreamily pedalled melody that emerges from oblivion and drifts back into it, leaving only its unpedalled lower parts still ticking off the passage of time (see the first seven bars of Example 4). This is as if to let us know that we can understand everything to come as the dream that our narrating subject recollects and recounts in the form of a ballad.

Andante con moto. F. Chopin, Op. 52.

BALLADE.

Example 4. Fryderyk Chopin, Ballade, Op. 52, bars 1–22. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1843], no. 7001. Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Warsaw.

The narrating stanza is then heard for the first time, its twisting phrases and repeated notes manifesting the urgency in the subject's voice as narrator, while the lilting accompaniment, pedalled in the regular downbeat pattern borrowed from dance music, keeps the unfolding slow and steady and unthreatening, for now. This stanza ends on a half cadence (bar 22) and then immediately starts in again and continues as before, except for slight ornamenting of the melody now and then, leading us to think of the repeating melody of a folk ballad. But just on the brink of its final note and chord (Example 5, bar 36), the melody breaks off, and the accompaniment drifts into a passage dominated by a bass line in octaves. Everything about this passage creates an atmosphere of mystery: its quiet, its solemn rhythm, its sinking modulations and its unpedalled legato. From this mysterious moment, the music lurches just as abruptly back to the world of the narrating stanza, returning to its motifs,

The image shows three systems of musical notation for Chopin's Ballade, Op. 52, bars 35-48. The first system shows the beginning of the passage with a piano accompaniment featuring a bass line with frequent chords and a melody in the right hand. The second system continues the accompaniment with a more complex texture. The third system shows the end of the passage with a 'mezzo voce' (m. v.) marking and a final cadence. Pedalling instructions are indicated by 'Ped.' and asterisks below the bass line.

Example 5. Fryderyk Chopin, Ballade, Op. 52, bars 35–48.

accompaniment, *mezzo voce* volume and pedalling all at once (see bar 46 in Example 5). From the way we have detoured out of the narrating stanza into an altogether alien sound world and just as brusquely returned, it would be hard to think of the intervening passage as a part of the story being narrated. It seems, rather, that the narration is being blocked here, that the narrator has temporarily lost the place. Perhaps this narrator (unlike traditional folk balladeers) is so personally involved in the story that to begin recounting it takes her or him momentarily into an uncertain state of mind. The interior sound world of this passage, with its wandering, dry bass voice, could chart that state of mind.

The emergence from this passage supports the idea of a narrator working to get back on track: the elements of the narrating stanza return, but it takes the narrator eleven bars of improvising with those elements to arrive at the half cadence so narrowly avoided before (bar 57). Now the narrating stanza is heard for a third time, with its melody unadorned and its pedalling unchanged, but with more inner voices, more inner motion, thicker chords, increasing volume – a more agitated presentation, as if the narrator's voice is getting caught up in the forces being unleashed within the story. Again we leave the stanza just before it cadences, but with a difference this time. The agitation of the stanza itself carries the narration into new phrases that continue that agitation, becoming a whirlwind, richly pedalled, that leads us to a sequence of episodes in distinctive rhythms, motifs, textures and pedalling,

as if representing different sets of characters interacting in different settings (bars 84–120).

If it seems that we are now successfully launched into the plot of our tale, Chopin has a different idea. By one of his characteristic combinations of texture and pedalling, he takes us again into the head of his narrator. A long sinking phrase in a wash of sustained pedalling (Example 6, bars 117–119) slides into a passage of complex contrapuntal character in which the voices are made clear by the lack of pedalling (bars 120–128). In this passage, we hear motivic hints of the narrating theme (its twisting quaver motif and its warbling semiquaver motif, eventually joined – just at the point when the pedal is reintroduced, at bar 125 – by the motif of four repeated

Example 6. Fryderyk Chopin, Ballade, Op. 52, bars 117–147.



(Example 6 continued)

quavers). This suggests that the narrator is not starting a new stanza of the ballad, but rather is caught up in recollecting what there is to tell. This mental drifting, conveyed by a modulatory journey from the key of A flat into the remote key of A, also reveals a link Chopin had not previously made so evident: that the motif of four repeated quavers in the narrating theme is shared with the Introduction theme, which we now hear again in its entirety (bars 129–134).²¹ The dream and the telling are linked. The Introduction comes to rest as before, but this time, instead of launching into the narrating theme, the resting chord (an A major triad) comes alive in a very delicate, unmeasured, arpeggiated blur, pedalled throughout, before coming to rest on another A major triad (bar 134). At the very centre of this action story, we are left contemplating a blur of pedalled sonority. Our narrator is at a standstill.

Picking up the thread of the tale takes even more effort now than last time: the narrating theme resumes in a series of false starts, each in a different key, all canonic, first in two voices, then three, then four, all unpedalled, so that we clearly hear the narrator casting about for that thread (bars 135–146). And then (at bar 146), we find ourselves in the middle of a new stanza, in the original presentation and key. From this point on, the tale unfolds with relentless momentum. Whether in a new narrating stanza (bar 152) or a reprise of an earlier episode (bar 169), the music is carried along by a ceaseless flow of triplet semiquavers. Ample pedalling adds to the energy. But when the forces at work in the plot reach their reckoning, those features are replaced by their opposite: a passage of extremely clipped chords with no pedalling, rushing ever faster, stumbling from one harmony to another, leading to a blackout (Example 7, bars 199–202).

21

This reprise of the Introduction has no pedal markings until the middle of bar 134 in the incomplete autograph score that served as the *Stichvorlage* for the first German edition. The first French and English editions have the same pedal markings as the Introduction.



Example 7. Fryderyk Chopin, Ballade, Op. 52, bars 199–211.

Out of this unexpected stillness emerge six long, utterly quiet chords, all but the last comfortably bathed in pedalled resonance (bars 203–210). How do we make sense of this final extraordinary interruption in the narrative? Is our narrator once again lost in a haze of memory, momentarily unable to sustain the narration? Or is this a glimmer of false hope within the tale, a hope that the characters might be spared from the cataclysm to come? That cataclysm follows immediately, in a blind fury that tears to shreds any previous theme identified with either narrator or characters.

The relationships between different themes and sections in this Ballade can be described in terms other than those proposed here. But the fact that it is even possible to analyse a one-movement, generically titled piece of solo piano music in these terms, that it is possible in such a work to detect a difference between a narrator's thought process and the characters' experiences, that we can even speculate about what that respite just before the final outburst represents in this narration – all of this indicates that Chopin had an expressive resource at his command beyond the traditionally analysed ones of melody, harmony, rhythm and texture. He had pianos capable – perhaps more than any pianos before or since – of transporting listeners across different imagined perspectives and experiential landscapes by shifting among the most vividly contrasted sonorities, relying on the damper pedal to highlight and characterise each shift.

Chopin's Pedalling and the Experiencing of Musical Sound

In this Ballade, shifts in consciousness or experience are marked by changes in pedalling from one theme or even one phrase to another. That is one side of Chopin's revolution with the pedal. There is another side, which is to make listeners conscious of



Example 8. Fryderyk Chopin, Nocturne, Op. 48 No. 1, bars 1–9. Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, [1841], M. S. 3487. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

changes in piano sonority. This side of his revolution is best observed in pedalling changes that he makes within phrases, just as chiaroscuro effects in painting are most striking when they divide the representation of a single surface – a face, a body, a robe – into lit and shaded areas, rather than dividing one object from another.²²

Something analogous to the chiaroscuro effect of highlighting one portion of a single object by casting the rest into shadow can be found everywhere in Chopin's music, with pedalling often tied to a deeper bass part, producing a sense of darkness, while an unpedalled portion of the same phrase, with a higher bass part, produces a contrasting effect of light. The Barcarolle, Op. 60, for instance, offers many wavelike phrases in which the imagined boat in this imagined boat song rises up unpedalled into the sunlight, only to crest and fall through pedalled sound to a trough with a view into the depths (the two waves of bars 20–22 are an example).²³

Another kind of chiaroscuro effect occurs when a sustained melody note is freed from its complement of bass and other lower sounds by the lifting of the pedal, allowing the continuing melody note to bloom just slightly and just briefly before the next pedalled bass note arrives. Given that notes struck on piano strings cannot swell like notes produced by a singer or wind or string player, this effect, however subtle and fleeting, can provide an arresting means for composers and performers to make the piano 'sing'. The narrating theme of the Ballade, Op. 52, which we examined just above, supplies a beautiful example. Once that theme begins (see Example 4, bar 8), every half-bar is pedalled from the bass note

²²

Chopin's friendship with Eugène Delacroix would have given him ample opportunity to observe those effects in Delacroix's paintings (such as on faces in his *Liberty Leading the People of 1830* or *The Abduction of Rebecca of 1846*) and to discuss such issues of painterly technique with him, as Delacroix's journals show they frequently did.

²³

See James Parakilas, 'The Barcarolle and the *Barcarolle*: Topic and genre in Chopin', in Jonathan Bellman and Halina Goldberg (eds.), *Chopin and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 231–248.

on the first of the three quavers to the onset of the third, giving an apparent boost in resonance to the continuing *legato* line of the melody, also in quavers, in that momentary clearing. Notice, for instance, how the tied D flat in the melody at bar 9 seems to swell into the arrival of the bass F on the next beat, while the melody D flat in the following bar, when that motif repeats, gets no such bump in sound because the note is cut off along with the accompaniment and pedal.

A more dramatic use of this effect comes in the opening theme of the Nocturne, Op. 48 No. 1 (Example 8). That theme brings us into an operatic scene in which a soprano can be imagined pouring forth a desperate plaint. She strains over the opening notes of her melody, gasping after her high G and A flat before sustaining the rest of the phrase as she makes her way through a series of plunges down a course of an octave and a half to a dark cadence. But how can a piano suggest a soprano gasping between notes? First, the performer can make each of those first notes ring out with an equal urgency. According to someone who studied with Chopin, he directed her to play each of the first three notes with the third finger, saying ‘The third finger is a *grand chanteur*’.²⁴ Then comes the pedal trick. Each half of that bar starts with a pedalled crotchet bass octave, followed on the next beat by a crotchet melody note accompanied by a crotchet chord. The accompanying chords, like the bass octaves, bear staccato marks, while the melody notes do not. The pedalling that starts with each bass octave is released with or just after the staccato accompanying chord (the exact placement of the release signs varies in the original editions). The performer is therefore asked to hold the melody note longer than its accompanying chord and perhaps longer than the pedalling that was initiated with the previous bass octave. The melody can thereby sing out by itself for a split-second before it cuts off, just when the next bass octave sounds. And in that singing out, right up to the breaking off, we hear the effect of a singer gasping dramatically between individual notes in her phrase, so great is the emotional strain she is enacting. The effect is repeated several times in the course of this 24-bar theme, along with other moments of melodic blossoming like those in the Ballade theme, all dependent on the timely lifting of the pedal.

Chiaroscuro is a painterly device of stark contrast between dark and light. Alongside chiaroscuro, painters in the Renaissance developed the effect known as *sfumato*, in which contrasts between dark and light, between one tone or colour and another, are made so gradually that the eye cannot find borders between them; the Mona Lisa is a famous example.²⁵ Chopin had a pedalling analogy to *sfumato* as well as to chiaroscuro, or so it can be assumed from contemporary accounts of his infinitely subtle pedalling. But musical notation did not then and still does not provide a means of indicating gradual or partial pedal changes. What we have to judge

24
Recollection of Mme de Courty, reported in Louis Aguettant, *La Musique de Piano des Origines à Ravel* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1954), 196, cited in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 47–48; see also 80–81.

25
Marcia B. Hall catalogues varieties of colour contrast in Italian Renaissance painting in *Colour and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and other studies.

by are multiple sources of the same works, often showing signs of what may be reconsideration on Chopin's part. But they may also show his extreme care to give performers precise instruction through an imprecise notational system.



Example 9. Fryderyk Chopin, Fantasy, Op. 49, bars 42–53. Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, [1842 corrected reprint of 1841 first edition], M. S. 3489. Stirling copy. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

A case in point is the passage in the Fantasy, Op. 49 when the metre changes to cut time and the tempo is marked *poco a poco doppio movimento* (Example 9, starting at bar 43). This marks the transition into the main body of the work, and the music transports us by a whole series of transformative steps to a new setting for the actions to follow (starting at bar 68). These transformations are created by a series of winding figures that climb up from a low bass note to settle (in the first two cases) on a five-voice minor or major triad, held for more than a bar. In the original sources for this work, the winding figure is pedalled from the initial low bass note to varying points in its course, just as the time it takes from beginning to lift the pedal to clearing it may vary. In all sources, however, that initial bass note is to be released, along with the notes that do not belong to the final triad, by the time that final triad is completed, while the notes of that triad are being held down by artful finger switching. The sustained triad then emerges with extraordinary freshness from the blur of sounds created by pedalling together the rich bass note, the rest of the triad and some or all of the non-triad notes. The freshness of the emergent unpedalled sound, and with it our sense of entering a fresh imagined landscape, comes not just from the clearing away of the blur of overtones and dissonances, but also from the fact that almost all the pitches of the emergent triad are held over from that blur, rather than newly struck. The aura of this sound, remarkably different from what we would hear if the chord were

struck all at once, or for that matter if the chord were pedalled, justifies the fermata that invites the performer, along with the listeners, to attend to the evolving resonance of the chord.



Example 10. Fryderyk Chopin, Barcarolle, Op. 60, bars 1–5. Paris: Brandus, [1846], B. et Cie. 4609. British Library.

A different effect of emergence is heard in the opening of the Barcarolle, Op. 60, when the booming bass octave that starts the work is met by a cluster of three notes three octaves above it (Example 10). These two contrasting sounds, joined by the pedal, hang in the air for more than a beat, at which point the three voices of the cluster begin, one by one, to move in the swaying rhythm that will dominate the work. As they start to move, the pedal is lifted, so that their long, intertwined phrase, shedding the remaining resonance of the initial bass, emerges into the airy light for two beats before their counterpoint is immersed in its own pedalling, which gently sustains the offbeat dominant pedal point in the lowest of the three voices until the phrase cuts off. Here, as in the passage of the Fantasy, Chopin's notation marks a precise point at which the pedalling initiated with a deep bass note should end (and here too the sources disagree on where that point is). But that does not tell us in either case whether the lifting of the pedal should be quick and decisive or gradual and smooth – that is, whether the emergence into the light should be *chiaroscuro* or *sfumato*. Whether on a mid-nineteenth-century piano or a twenty-first-century one, the application of the damper pedal is not a mechanical operation. As Chopin said, 'The correct employment of it remains a study for life.'²⁶

Analogy to a painter's treatment of colour and light is also illuminating in the study of Chopin's pedal indications in the Berceuse, Op. 57. This work is extreme in its formal simplicity: a four-bar theme with variations is played over an unvarying one-bar bass that gently oscillates between tonic harmony in the first half-bar and dominant harmony in the second (see Example 11).²⁷ The pedal indications for this work vary widely among the three original editions, but those in the French edition can be taken as representative of Chopin's pedalling practice in that they distil his

26
Recollection by Friederike Streicher, reported in Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician*, 3rd edn (London: Novello, [1902]), ii:341, cited in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 57.

27
The theme and variations extend from bar 3 to bar 55. In the Coda (bars 55–70), the figuration of the bass part continues, but its tonic-dominant harmonic structure yields to other patterns.



Example II. Fryderyk Chopin, *Berceuse*, Op. 57, bars 1–14. Paris: J. Meissonnier, [1845], J.M. 2186. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

thinking in works of various genres with exemplary clarity. The principle operating in the theme and most of the variations, in this edition, is that the tonic half of each bar, which begins with a low D flat in the bass, is pedalled, and the dominant half, which stays an octave and a half above that note, is not. And because the melodic line of each variation sings above that bass in a smooth legato, steady in its rhythm, register and figuration, this constant alteration between using and not using the pedal disturbs that continuity of the melody in an obvious and seemingly arbitrary way, like a relentless alternation of filters in the filming of an unchanging object or scene. This effect might seem at odds with the nature of the genre. The purpose of an actual berceuse, after all, is to lull a child to sleep, and anything that disturbs the continuity of the sound might defeat that purpose. But a piano berceuse is not really a lullaby; its purpose is to soothe like a lullaby without putting listeners to sleep. Chopin's alternating pedalling serves that purpose by subjecting his constantly varied but still soothing melody to the most vivid contrast of colouring his medium offered.

His pedalling here is in effect the equivalent of Delacroix's practice in painting of systematically juxtaposing daubs of one colour with daubs of its 'reflection' (complementary colour), such that 'at a certain distance the touch [the visible evidence of the painter's working method] dissolves into the whole, but it gives the painting an expression that blended colour can't produce'.²⁸ The technique Delacroix is describing here relies on intermingling daubs

28

See Parakilas, 'Disrupting the genre', 173. The cited passage of Delacroix comes from Eugène Delacroix, *Journal 1822–1863*, ed. André Joubin [1931–32], rev. Régis Labourdette (Paris: Plon, 1980), 779–780 (entry for 13 April 1860).

of complementary colours so that the viewer's eye, at 'a certain distance', can no longer distinguish the individual daubs or their colours (the painter's 'touch dissolves'), but amalgamates them into a resultant colour that is more vivid than the colour that would result from blending the same component colours on the palette. The point of the technique lies in the vividness, or 'expression' (*accent* in Delacroix's French) that the technique, systematically applied, gives the whole painting. Chopin's technique in the Berceuse and passages of many other works treats time the way Delacroix treats distance. The point is not to strike the listener with the difference between pedalled sound in the first half of a given bar and unpedalled in the second half; on the contrary, the changes between one sonority and the other are so frequent and regular, so often repeated over such short time intervals, that the composer's 'touch' as colourist 'dissolves', yet the sound of the whole has a vividness of colouration that could not be obtained from a more uniform timbre.



Example 12. Fryderyk Chopin, Polonaise-Fantasy, Op. 61, bars 1–6. Leipzig: Breitkopf u. Härtel, [1846], 7546. University of Chicago Library.

The Polonaise-Fantasy, Op. 61 opens with a colour change between two chords reminiscent of the change between the two halves of the bars in the Berceuse: an unpedalled triad is followed by a contrasting triad, which is pedalled (see Example 12). But this case presents us with an utterly different experience of piano sonority. This juxtaposition of chords does not set up a recurring alternation in harmonic function, tonic and dominant; it presents a confrontation between alternative visions, alternative worlds: one a stark sonority in the minor mode, the other a rich sonority in the relative major. What is more, the pedalled second chord prolongs its sound through a long arpeggiated progression, as soft as the chords themselves were loud, that climbs slowly from the bass note of the chord into the stratosphere of Chopin's piano,

sounding notes of the chord but also notes adjacent to them, and ending on a fermata, so that the whole cloud of sound hangs in the air indefinitely. Even though varied transpositions of this opening bar continue during the *allegro maestoso* opening of the work, the leisurely and unmeasured arpeggiation that concludes each of them precludes any steady rhythm of colour alteration, as in the Berceuse, from developing. And the repeated move from two clearly stated triads to a dissonance-filled cloud of sonority makes an opposite effect to that in the *poco a poco doppio movimento* section of the Fantasy, Op. 49: instead of a clear sonority emerging from the cloud of sound, we hear a simple, clear sonority repeatedly swallowed up in an accumulating cloud of rising tones that linger in the air.

The opening of this work gives us an extraordinary temporal experience. The sequence of two chords in rhythm, leading to a passage of single notes written in unmetred note values, ending in a fermata, is heard four times, in different keys and at different volumes. We might think of the whole *allegro maestoso* opening as a dream sequence, much of it free from the rhythms of waking consciousness, or perhaps as a series of assertions (the pairs of chords) in waking rhythm that keep falling into dream time. In that case, the mind being represented awakens fully only with the arrival of the polonaise rhythm in *tempo giusto* (at bar 22).

This description treats the opening of the Polonaise-Fantasy as a representation: an image in sounds of an evolving state of mind. But it is equally possible to consider it in another way: as an invitation to free ourselves from the idea of representation, from the considerations of image or character or topic or expression that rhythmic musical progressions typically suggest to us and instead focus our attention on the sounds the piano is producing, in one sumptuous assemblage after another, each one embracing notes from across more than five octaves – thanks to the damper pedal – and each one suspending the motion of time once it is fully realised. Chopin and the performer are inviting us, for these moments, to be aware of the medium of sound in which they are working.

Delacroix, as we found, drew attention to the importance of the viewer's distance from a painting: beyond 'a certain distance', the evidence of the painter's 'touch' – the brushstrokes, the dots or daubs of individual colours – 'dissolves', and one sees only the composite image. But at closer range, he argued, where one becomes conscious of the painter's touch, which is to say of the painter's treatment of the painterly medium, one learns 'to read the thought' of the artist.²⁹ We might qualify his statement with the observation that the dissolving phenomenon does not occur uniformly for the whole painting: one may stand at a distance from a painting – certainly from many a Delacroix painting – where one can see the painter's touch more clearly in one passage, while that touch dissolves more readily into image in another. At that distance, one

29
Delacroix, *Journal*, 612
(entry for 13 January
1857).

reads the painter's thought in its complete range from colour and brushstroke to the image that emerges from his 'touch'.

And it may be that in an equivalent way we can read the range of Chopin's thought in listening to the opening of the Polonaise-Fantasy. The crisply rhythmic pairs of chords, one unpedalled and the other pedalled, present us with an identifiable musical image, a statement built on contrast; the succeeding run of single notes, suspended together by pedalling, invite us not to identify an image but to listen to an accumulating sonority, that is, to attend to the medium from which a musical image might be summoned. Or has been summoned, since the arpeggiated run of notes is actually deconstructing one part of the initial image into its constituent sounds. And the unmetred notation of the notes in that run allows the performer to share in the composer's act of deconstructing the image into a sound palette. That is, the performer determines the timing of the run, thus taking on what Dana Gooley has termed the 'seductive aura of improvisation' that pianist-composers like Chopin and Liszt could create when they performed their own (or each other's) composed works.³⁰ Like an improviser, the performer models for the listener the act of listening to what each new sound adds to the growing palette before proceeding to the next. Then, as the music of the opening section moves from one juxtaposition of chordal image and arpeggiated run to another, the listener can 'read' Chopin's 'thought' the way a viewer, stepping toward and away from a canvas or turning from where the painter's 'touch' is more apparent to where the image emerges more clearly, reads the painter's thought. And once listeners have learned that knack, that sensitivity, as they listen to the opening of this work, they may apply it in listening to the rest (or for that matter to Chopin's whole output), where he does not so blatantly juxtapose image with palette, expression with 'touch'.

This is only one of several passages of Chopin's music where time and movement are interrupted, leaving us to focus on the sheer sound of a given constellation of notes, prolonged either by a sudden shift to very long note values or by a fermata. These moments of lingering sonority tend to resemble the ones in the opening of the Polonaise-Fantasy in two respects: they interrupt the momentum of a rhythmic passage, rather than standing alone, and they occur in a sequence of similar phrases, each one consisting of the same transition from rhythmic movement to sonorous stillness. In other words, Chopin made a practice – and it is a particularly common practice in his last big works – of creating sequences of these interruptions, so that we are not just jolted once by a sudden revealing of the composer's touch, but are induced by the repetition of that juxtaposition to contemplate the relationship of touch and sound to expression and image.

The emerging triads in the *poco a poco doppio movimento* section of the Fantasy, Op. 49 (see again Example 9) offer another of these sequences. The five *pianissimo* chords that interrupt the long, stormy reckoning at the end of the Ballade, Op. 52 (see again Example 7)

30
Dana Gooley, *Fantasies of Improvisation: Free Playing in Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 214.

present a third case, but with a difference: there is just a single interruption to the momentum of the surrounding passage. But that momentum is so overwhelming that it would be unthinkable to interrupt it more than once. Instead Chopin offers us not a single still sonority to contemplate, but five, of which the last and longest is in effect the fermata chord; it is actually measured, but its much greater length, along with its dramatic shift of register and its unpedalled sonority, make it stand apart as an event out of time. That we would be left to listen to the sonority of long, quietly resonant chords at the very peak of dramatic fury in this work gives us a sense of Chopin's daring in drawing our focus away from narrative expression to the sonic means from which he creates.

Example 13. Fryderyk Chopin, Scherzo, Op. 54, bars 1–45. Leipzig: Breitkopf u. Härtel, [1843], 7003. University of Chicago Library.

Another example is so undramatic that it might easily escape notice: the lingering chord that completes the first phrase of the Scherzo, Op. 54 (Example 13). This chord, appearing in the fifth bar, hardly interrupts the continuity of the phrase at all, except that it concludes a phrase that has begun in bare octaves by filling in the final octave of the phrase with a five-note chord. Besides, that chord lasts for four bars, as long as the rest of the phrase. It may not be altogether clear, this early in the game, that that chord is lingering as a specimen of sonority for us to contemplate; given the *Presto* tempo, it does not even linger that long. But the change of texture and note-length in the middle of a short, simple phrase establishes from the start that we are hearing an especially mercurial work. And

in that context, the four-bar chord in the first phrase counts as an opportunity for listening to sonority. This is followed by a second such opportunity in the second phrase (bars 9–16), also an inverted dominant seventh chord. But it is in the third instance that the listening opportunity becomes something new: an opportunity for comparing sonorities. This phrase (bars 33–40) is a variation of the first, but the variation is entirely a matter of sonority. The initial four notes of the melody in bare octaves have now expanded to three octaves with the previously missing tonic note (E) added this time as a pedal point. And they are completed now by the same dominant seventh chord in the same inversion, but expanded correspondingly from a five-note to a seven-note chord occupying an octave more. And whereas the chord in the first phrase was unpedalled, this one is pedalled. It does not need to be, but it is. In all, we are shown how much difference pedalling can make, joined to different voicing (that is, spacing and register) in the sonority of a chord that is otherwise the same as before.

This recolouration makes a beautiful effect, well worth noticing, certainly not as dramatic an effect as the lingering moments in the opening of the Polonaise-Fantasy, but perhaps capable of making us feel that we are being let into the workshop of Chopin's raw material. These moments of brief lingering may then tip us off that the whole Scherzo can be an exercise in listening to Chopin at play in that workshop. As it continues, continuous transformations of sonority give us the impression that the scene is constantly changing before our eyes, and that impression, to a remarkable degree, is due to the timing of Chopin's pedal changes. The music unfolds with great regularity in four- or eight-bar phrases, and because of the stunning differences from one phrase to another in rhythmic movement, texture, register and key, the phrasing is extremely easy to spot on the page. But what we hear is far less regular, far more changeable than what we see, because Chopin changes the pedal at times that confound the phrase structure. Within one phrase (bars 17–25), crotchet chords (all on one harmony) rise in lush pedalling and fall (through changing harmonies) in unpedalled sparkles. In the little waltz section that seems to settle into a single consistent topic, or scene, for an unusual length of time (bars 249–272), a bewildering alternation of pedalled and unpedalled bars nevertheless makes for a riotously unsettled effect. And across longer sections of the work, recurring gestures that have been consistently identified with the onset of pedalling (like the stand-alone bass notes at bars 9, 41, 49, 72, 88, etc. that tie the end of one phrase to the start of the next) suddenly find themselves left low and dry (bars 344 and 352).

In mechanical terms, the damper pedal is a simple on-or-off device. It is capable of being applied or released in varied and subtle ways. But in this Scherzo, there is hardly time or occasion for that kind of subtlety. Instead, there is a virtuosic display of how the

simple on or off of the pedal, when deployed in conjunction with changes in register but in counterpoint to phrasing and texture, can create a head-spinning kaleidoscope of piano colours. That sensation, relieved only by the soulful pleasure of the largely pedalled barcarolle section (bars 384–600) that interrupts the scherzo, is in fact what keeps this repetition-filled work compelling for so long. Of course, listening that makes one's head spin seems to be the opposite of relishing sonorities that linger in the air, as we do in the opening of the Polonaise-Fantasy. But in both instances, Chopin is drawing attention to his palette of piano sound, putting his compositional 'touch' on display, so that we can listen and think across the boundary between medium and expression.

Pedalling Chopin on Modern Pianos

To make sense of Chopin's damper pedal revolution, the most direct and informative approach is to play and hear his music on pianos of the kinds he played. There are restored examples of those pianos in many public and private collections, as well as specialist piano builders making replicas of pianos from his era. There are also recordings of his music performed on those instruments by specialist performers. All pianists can learn from the availability of these resources. But most pianists will continue to play Chopin, and most listeners will continue to hear his music, on more modern instruments, with their very different capacity and sound. For those pianists, a crucial step is to investigate the complex question of what Chopin wrote, and in particular what pedal indications he wrote, since those are the features of his scores that have been most vulnerable to well-intended adulteration by editors old and new. This investigation entails examining the critical report at the back of a critical edition and following its map of discrepancies to the wealth of original sources (manuscripts and early editions, reproduced online) that tells what can be known about every Chopin work.³¹ The discrepancies require choices from performers, as they do from editors, which is to say choices grounded in the range of evidence.

What then? The next step, using whatever piano is at hand, is to put his notation into practice. That may require a considerable adaptation of one's technique, especially, as we have noted, in legato passages that are marked as unpedalled (a changed technique that will serve equally well in pedalled passages). It may be tempting, even while adapting in this way, to think that Chopin's pedalling just does not work on a modern piano. But that is one of the rewards of playing and hearing the music on a Chopin piano: one discovers that his pedal markings create effects on his pianos that differ in intensity, but not in kind, from what they create on modern pianos. There are hardly any passages in fact that seem over-pedalled or under-pedalled on only a modern piano. The main difficulty with

³¹ The best critical editions are the Peters New Critical Edition and, for works not yet available there, the Henle edition. The manuscripts and earliest editions, including published copies owned by students of Chopin, with his annotations in them, can all be viewed and compared on Chopin Online (www.chopin-online.ac.uk).

the transfer is that Chopin's pedalling uses variety in registers and combinations of registers to achieve constant, vivid juxtapositions of colour, yet the modern piano, with its cross-stringing and other features designed to homogenise the piano's whole compass, offers less variety of colour than his pianos did. The task, then, is to double down on his pedal indications, reinforcing the effects of simply lowering or raising the pedal by means of colour effects achieved with changes in touch.

One of the obstacles to making sense of Chopin's pedalling is the assumption that the ideal medium for a Chopin performance is a Steinway or Bösendorfer concert grand played in a large venue like the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall or Carnegie Hall. But that way of thinking was questioned already in Chopin's day. Berlioz, no enemy of grand-scale musical experience, wrote that 'Chopin's talent is of an entirely different nature [from Liszt's]. In order to appreciate him fully, I believe he has to be heard from close by, in the salon rather than the concert hall'.³² For the pianist as well as the listener, the colour changes of Chopin's piano sound – vivid as well as subtle, in his sonatas and ballades as much as in his preludes and nocturnes – reveal themselves better today in an intimate space, on a medium-sized piano, than in a concert hall. The pianist who discovers the beauty of those effects in an intimate setting can then set about determining by what means, live or remote, to convey them to large numbers of listeners.

One of the reasons Chopin's art of pedalling seems so alien today is that, despite his overwhelming influence on later piano music, hardly any later piano composers followed his path in pedalling. Piano design changed, halls grew larger, and the cult of pedalled sound as the default sonority became irresistible. Even Claude Debussy, who relied on the contrast between pedalled and unpedalled sound in a way reminiscent of Chopin's, indicated pedalling in a completely different way. Depending largely on long notes that are unsustainable without the pedal, he created a very different new world of sonority. If there is one later work that shows where a deep comprehension of Chopin's thinking about and indicating of the pedal could lead, it is Emmanuel Chabrier's *Bourrée fantasque*, composed in 1891. Chabrier marks pedalling and unpedalling (for both pedals, actually), as well as styles of articulation in counterpoint to it, with Chopinesque precision. The way he ties these markings to piano registers reminds us that while many piano manufacturers had long adopted cross-stringing by then (four decades after Chopin's death), the French manufacturers Pleyel and Erard were still using straight stringing on the pianos that Chabrier likely played. And what was he after with this meticulously varied pedalling? As he wrote about the *Bourrée* to the pianist Edouard Risler: 'I've concocted a little piano piece for you which I think is quite fun and in which I've counted nearly 113 different sonorities'.³³ Chopin would have smiled at that.

32
Hector Berlioz, review in *Le Renovateur*, ii:345, 15 December 1833, cited in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 272

33
Emmanuel Chabrier, letter of 12 May 1891 to Edouard Risler, cited by Roy Howat in his notes to Emmanuel Chabrier, *Works for Piano* (New York: Dover, 1995), xi.

ABSTRACT

Pianos had been equipped with damper mechanisms for the better part of a century before Chopin came on the scene. Nevertheless, Chopin's generation created a revolution in composing with the damper pedal. To some extent, that revolution can be described as a change in notational practice: composers before Chopin's time rarely marked where the damper mechanism should be employed, except in cases where they wanted some extraordinary effect from it. Composers of Chopin's generation, by contrast, called for it liberally – or in Chopin's case, meticulously. That indicates a change in roles: instead of composers leaving the use of the damper pedal (as of other pedals) largely up to the performers, they now more or less dictated its use to those performers. It also indicates a change from the use of the damper pedal as a special effect within a generally unpedalled sound world to a sonorous landscape in which the damper pedal was used to create constant shifts in colour. (But certainly not to the modern practice whereby the damper pedal is employed so regularly – contrary to Chopin's notation – that unpedalled sound becomes the special effect.) Although the damper mechanism itself did not change much once its controls migrated from a knee-lever to a pedal around the beginning of the nineteenth century, the piano changed drastically in other ways that influenced how Chopin incorporated damper pedaling into his compositional thought. The increased compass (roughly, from six octaves to six and a half), concentrated in the bass, increased the richness of sound of the whole instrument, as did other changes in material and design. But cross-stringing was not yet used in grand pianos, so that each octave of the compass still had a much more distinct colour than on later pianos. The instrument therefore offered composers both rich, blended sonorities combining notes across its compass and striking contrasts of colour between one part of that compass and another. What is most remarkable in Chopin's notation for the damper pedal is how it harnesses both of those capacities of the instrument. There are hardly any works by Chopin in which he calls for the damper pedal either throughout or not at all. Almost always he draws the listener's attention to the difference between pedalled and unpedalled sound, from one section to another, from one register to another, from one phrase to another, and – marvellously – between different parts of a single, continuous phrase. Often he pauses on a sonority or a harmony and asks us to relish its particular ring; in the opening of the E major Scherzo, he does this four times, the first two times sustaining unpedalled chords, and the third time sustaining the same chord as the first time, but differently spaced and pedalled, so that we can notice both the equivalence and the change. His notes and his pedaling are always made for each other, not in the sense that the notes are unplayable without the pedal (that is true at only a very few moments), but in the sense that the work is laid out as a sequence of pedalled and unpedalled sonorities. To play all the notes of a Chopin work while disregarding his pedal indications is in a real sense not to play the work at all. So too, his pedalling art and his pianos were made for each other, and the best way to explore the role of the damper pedal in any Chopin work is to test that work on pianos (or replicas of pianos) from the 1830s or 1840s. But then what? How do we apply the lessons learned to performance on pianos of our era? To assume that because pianos have changed, Chopin's pedal indications no longer make sense would be to risk blurring or obliterating the extraordinary progression of sonorities that constitute a Chopin work. A better starting point is to study what effect, or what nest of effects, each indicated application or release of the damper pedal could produce and to see how to make that effect come across on our modern pianos. In the process, we may need to turn away from the experience of Chopin played on a concert Steinway or Bösendorfer in the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall or Carnegie Hall and learn to listen for the magic that can emerge from this music in more intimate settings. There is reason to believe that even a modern piano can provide what we're seeking. After all, Chopin's particular use of the damper pedal to produce mercurial transformations of sonority was idiosyncratic in his own era and little imitated by later piano composers, despite his incalculable influence in other respects. But a study of Chabrier's *Bourrée fantasque* shows a later composer who, writing in 1891 for pianos still like those of Chopin's day in some respects, created a remarkably Chopinesque progression of contrasting sonorities (he himself joked: 'I have counted about 113 sonorities' in it) using a remarkably Chopinesque specification of pedalling.

KEYWORDS

Chopin, Fryderyk, nineteenth-century pianos, damper pedal, pedal indications, Chopin first editions

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