

# MPKS 472b Written Assignment 1

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† This document is typesetted via L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, a typesetting system extensively used in scientific papers, in particular math (which is why I have been using it for a long while). For your convenience, some words below are hyperlinked with corresponding YouTube videos. For example, clicking on this sentence will redirect you to a video of Liszt's Sonetto 104 del Petrarca.

## 1 Schumann, *Études Symphoniques*, Op.13

*Many composer revise or restructure works. Sometimes in preparation for publication, sometimes much later. Robert Schumann did so for the Etudes Symphoniques Op. 13. As you listen to the Demus online performance, please realize that it is in 3 segments. The first 2 segments present the revised published version, the one we most often hear today. Schumann scrapped 5 variations. Demus records them in segment 3. Some performers add one or more of the extra variations. What would you do? Play the revised version that we usually hear? Add one or more of the eliminated variations? If so, where would you place them? Write a few sentences justifying it.*

I would probably add three variations when playing.

- (1) Variation III right before Etude IX. On one hand, the previous Etude VIII / Variation VII is very slow and *sempre marcato* in  $\mathbf{C}$  but it is followed by a *presto* in  $\frac{3}{16}$ . Unless Schumann intended to do so to stress the sudden, dramatic change (which is entirely possible), it is more reasonable to insert a Variation in-between to ensure a smoother transition. On the other hand, Etude IX is followed by Etude X / Variation VIII, another fast-paced piece whose style highly resembles its predecessor (staccato notes) but with a more intense dynamic (overall louder). It makes sense to construct a three-Variation sequence, starting from Variation III, that increases in both tempo and intensity, thereby achieving a mini climax at the end of Etude X.
- (2) Variation II after Etude X and before Etude XI / Variation IX. Having built up a little climax during the previously, the transition from being energetic to *andante* is huge, let alone the sudden shift in key from  $\sharp\mathbf{C}$  minor / E major to something else ( $\sharp\mathbf{G}$  minor), the first time since the beginning! Putting Variation II in-between will address this issue well, since its beginning harmonically connects to Etude XI and its melodic, fading end will prepare the audience for the upcoming surprise in change of key.
- (3) Variation V between Variation IX and Etude XII /Finale.  $\sharp\mathbf{G}$  enharmonically serving as the dominant of  $\flat\mathbf{D}$ , the soft ending of Variation IX connects beautifully with the beginning of Variation, and they both happen

to have *legato* sixteenth notes with **C**. Variation V also happens to be in the same key as the Finale, so the transition between these two are also very smooth. And one last reason: this scrapped Variation is just so exquisite that I must not leave it unused, but it fits nowhere else better than near the end.

## 2 Henselt, 12 *Études Caractéristiques*, Op.2

As you listen to the 12 Etudes of Adolf Henselt Op. 2, draw comparisons with the 24 Chopin Etudes Op. 10 and 25. For example, the Op. 2 no. 1 of Henselt that we heard in class is obviously an etude to LH passage work and extension. One thinks of the Chopin LH Etudes: the Op. 10 nos. 9 (extension) and 12 (dexterity). Is the Henselt more or less demanding? What does the RH do while the LH is challenged? Are there differences or similarities? Try to find other comparisons between the two sets.

One thing for sure is that Henselt's etudes require a larger handspan, which one can immediately tell just a few seconds into Op.2 No.1. There are also several places where Henselt simply wrote tenth chords, of which one example is in No.10. There are also a huge amount of broken tenths throughout the 12 etudes. Interestingly, I noticed that, in No.10, the pianist, Budiardjo, modified some octaves into tenths to bring up the upper voice (four measures of  $\flat D$  in a row on the top), which sounds more beautiful than the one Henselt wrote. It really takes a large hand to play these pieces well.

The image shows a musical score for Henselt's 12 Études Caractéristiques, Op. 2, No. 1. The score is in 5/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes. The right hand (RH) plays broken tenths, while the left hand (LH) plays a more rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes markings such as "sempre stacc.", "a tempo", "p", "marcato", "crescendo", "f", and "dim.". Red boxes highlight specific measures in the RH part where the pianist Budiardjo modified the original notation to include a flat D in the upper voice.

Figure 1: Budiardjo instead played  $\flat D$  for all notes in red boxes

Another major difference is that, while Chopin's etudes mostly focus on one hand and leave the other hand relatively simple (or focus on two hands parallelly, like Op.25 No.12), Henselt seems to enjoy alternating the difficult part between two hands. For example, No.2 begins with the right hand constantly playing broken tenths, but as the etude switches to minor, he instead gives the sixteenth to left hand. Same thing happened in No.5, No.9, and

No.10.

Nevertheless, ignoring the extra challenge posed by the requirement of a massive handspan, I believe these etudes are slightly less technically demanding than Chopin's. Henselt's works consist mainly of running sixteenths, whereas the sixteenths in Chopin's etudes sometimes come with chords: e.g. Op.10 No.2 or Op.25 No.6, which are far more challenging. Also, Chopin's works like Op.25 No.11 are significantly faster than (at least based on Budiardjo's rendition) Henselt's, which demands more stamina as well.

### 3 Liszt, 3 *Sonetti del Petrarca*, S.270

*You will have listened to the 3 Petrarch sonnets in the piano version as part of your Liszt listening assignment. You will remember that this music was inspired by love poems written by Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374). It should not be a surprise, therefore, that Liszt wrote these pieces originally as vocal settings of the poems themselves. Go online and listen to the voice and piano settings as performed by soprano Margaret Price here. Write a paragraph or two comparing the two settings, indicating which setting you prefer and why.*

Especially curious about the of Sonetto 104 (which I found to be the most beautiful among the three), I searched online and found an English translation of the original poem by Petrarch in this dissertation. Below are some partial quotes.



Peace I do not find, and I have no wish to make war;  
and I fear and hope, and burn and am of ice . . .

\* \* \*

One has me in prison who neither opens nor locks,  
neither keeps me for his own nor unties the bonds;  
and love does not kill and does not unchain me,  
he neither wishes me alive nor frees me from the tangle.

\* \* \*

I feed on pain, weeping I laugh . . .  
In this state am I. Lady, on account of you.



Petrarch seemed to be in limerence as he composed this poem: a burning heart but with a feeling of ice, a never wavering love which he could not let go. Since Liszt originally composed his Sonetto 104 based on this Sonnet, it is reasonable to assume that he wanted to express the sense of ambivalence and the combination of romance and poignancy, of which he does a *far* (a subjective claim here) better job in his 1861 piano solo version. The stretching tempos shows the effusive emotions. The contrasts in dynamics (e.g. *p* (*dolce* in E minor) immediately following the #C major *ff*) represent the internal state of conflict. The beautiful calm ending shows a sense of hope, but still not without the second-last augmented triad, thereby adding a sense of uncertainty.

The vocal version is indeed good, but I feel much less when listening to it (again, most likely due to my lack

of knowledge in vocal music). The tempo is more fluid, something I do not think is what Liszt intended. Most importantly, even though the soprano did an expressive ending, it is still *not even close* to how ethereal the piano itself can obtain (those G-aug chords and the  $\sharp C_{\text{min}}7!$ ).

## 4 Brahms, Piano Sonata No.3

*The Brahms 3<sup>rd</sup> piano sonata is unusual in that it has 5 movements rather than the usual 4. The second movement is prefaced by a short poetic stanza from C. O. Sternau (Otto Inkermann, 1823-1862). Can you find a translation for the stanza online if you cannot translate it yourself? Where does the extra movement occur? What does Brahms tell you about its content in the title “Rückblick”? Describe what happens. The final movement starts out as if it is going to be a rondo. The structure is changed significantly however as the piece unfolds. Can you describe it? (Hint: what happens to the four-note descending theme that is introduced in the C section?)*

The following is an elegant translation found here:



Der Abend dämmt, das Mondlicht scheint,	Through evening's shade, the pale moon gleams.
Da sind zwei Herzen in Liebe vereint,	While rapt in love's ecstatic dreams,
Und halten sich selig umfassen.	Two hearts are fondly beating.
— Sternau	— Sternau



The “extra” movement is the Intermezzo, *Rückblick*. Translated literally to “looking back”, this piece refers to the Andante and begins with a similar romantic theme, except this time in minor mode which provides a darker feeling. In addition, *Rückblick* also makes extensive use of the ominous Beethovenian “fate motif” in the left hand, which, in this Sonata, first appeared in Allegro, the first movement. The sense of desolation foreshadows the triumph in the coming (second half of) Finale.

The Finale first undergoes a classic A-B-A'-C structure, where the main Rondo theme becomes stronger when it repeats itself (e.g. addition of octave support on left hand). Things start to “become weird” starting from the transition from C to A”. After 8 measures of right hand's off beat chords, the suspension finally resolves with a surprising, quiet, *legato* canon in  $\flat D$ . A short reappearance of theme A” follows, but it was quickly replaced by more canon. A series of modulation slowly transforms from minor to F major and ends the piece with a brilliant accelerated coda, as if Brahms has finally resolved all his hesitations with this grand triumph.

## 5 “The Mighty Five”

*The piano music of three members of The Mighty Five is seldom heard. Your listening assignment for 3/1 asks that you listen to piano music by these three: Cui, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Write an evaluation of what you hear. Is this music unjustifiably neglected or does it deserve to be passed over in favor of music by Balakirev and Mussorgsky? Justify your conclusion in a few sentences.*

Per your suggestion, I listened to *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Islamey*. To be honest, among the five videos of the five composers from “The Mighty Five”, my favorite ones are Cui’s Preludes and Borodin’s Scherzo. The three Preludes included in this video clearly implies that Cui is under the influence of romanticism: lyrical melodies, stable rhythms, and more or less standard harmonic progressions. (*Most of the music I listen to are classical and romantic, with the exception of some impressionist pieces. Therefore I usual prefer listening to music that resemble these styles. Cui’s Preludes are some examples.*) Borodin’s Scherzo, on the other hand, features a much brighter mood. It constantly modulates between keys, for example  $\flat A$ ,  $\flat E$ , B, and  $\flat D$ . The *staccato* ’s and slurs on ’s perfectly mix with each other, making the piece very playful, hence the name Scherzo. The chromatic descent with an emphasized quarter note upbeat reminds me of some piece I have heard of before but I cannot recall it right now. As for Rimsky-Korsakov, I did not really enjoy the first piece in his *Morceaux Op.11*, partly because the piano in this recording sounds somewhat unnatural. Personally, I think No.3 is a little thin and No.4 is a little repetitive in melody. Nevertheless, regardless of whether his other works are overshadowed by Balakirev’s and Mussorgsky’s, he is still famous for *Flight of the Bumblebee*, even outside the music community.

## 6 Clara Schumann, on Female Composers

*There are two poignant statements below about women composers, one by Clara Schumann and one by her husband Robert Schumann. Read them and write a paragraph reflecting on the statements and your thoughts about them.*

*Clara Schumann: “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose there has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?”*

*Robert Schumann: “Clara has composed a series of small pieces, which show a musical and tender ingenuity such as she has never attained before. But to have children, and a husband who is always living in the realm of imagination, does not go together with composing. She cannot work at it regularly, and I am often disturbed to think how many profound ideas are lost because she cannot work them out.”*

It is very easy for us — as spectators from 150 years later — to say that Clara should have “kept her idea”, “showcased her compositional talent”, or “ventured to be *the one*”, because we know that, if she did, her courage and work would both be acknowledged by us from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But we also have to keep in mind that, it takes more than mere courage for Clara to break the tradition, step out and compose. It is completely reasonable that she decided to restrain her musical ideas since she definitely would not want to defy the social norm.

Indeed, it is truly a pity that Clara had to succumb to the social and gender stereotypes during her days, thereby not leaving us more legacy which she otherwise could have, but it is at least somewhat comforting to see that she gained recognition for her piano performance and effort in piano education. We cannot change the past, but it is our duty to ensure that history does not repeat its own mistakes.