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Author(s): A. Redgrave Cripps

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 55, No. 858 (Aug. 1, 1914), pp. 517-519

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/910651>

Accessed: 08-03-2015 22:58 UTC

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CHOPIN AS A MASTER OF FORM.

BY A. REDGRAVE CRIPPS.

THE POPULAR OR LITERARY VIEW OF CHOPIN.

There is probably no musician who has been at once so fortunate and so unfortunate in his posthumous fame as Frederic Chopin. Fortunate, in that he has attracted the attention of many to whom, as a rule, music makes but little appeal; unfortunate, because, largely through that very circumstance, a somewhat false picture of him has little by little been built up. His name has served as a peg on which to hang much empty rhetoric. Thus, we have Chopin the sentimentalist, Chopin the 'tone-poet,' Chopin the lover, Chopin the (supposed) patriot; but Chopin the musician—for him, indeed, we have very far to look.

SERIOUS MUSICIANS NOT UNAFFECTED BY THIS.

It must be admitted, however, that more serious writers who have professedly treated Chopin from a purely musical point of view have not been altogether unaffected by the 'literary' or 'popular' view just spoken of. Indeed, far from correcting it, they have, if anything, rather confirmed it. Thus even Dr. Hadow, in his essay on Chopin (unquestionably the sanest short account of the composer which has yet appeared), permits himself to write as follows: 'We can hardly think of him as marking a stage in the general course and progress of artistic history, but rather as standing aside from it, unconscious of his relation to the world, preoccupied with the fairy-land of his own creation. The elements of myth and legend that have already gathered round his name may almost be said to find their counterpart in his music; it is ethereal, unearthly, enchanted, an echo from the melodies of "Kubla Khan" If his music is sometimes visionary, at least it is all beautiful; offering, it may be, no response to the deeper questions of our life, careless if we approach it with problems which it is in no mind to solve, but fascinating in its magic if we are content to submit our imagination to its spell.' And unfortunately this general view of what may be called the *spiritual* quality of Chopin's music finds very naturally its reflection in a similar estimate of his position as a musician pure and simple, and especially as a master of form. As Dr. Hadow adds, in a passage which follows immediately after what has just been quoted: 'Precisely the same distinction may be made on the formal side of his work. In structure he is a child, playing with a few simple types, and almost helpless as soon as he advances beyond them; in phraseology he is a master whose felicitous perfection is one of the abiding treasures of the art.'

That this, too, is no mere isolated or individual opinion, but is really representative of the view generally held by musicians need hardly be insisted upon. In case, however, there may be any doubt, we may quote the following passage from Sir Hubert Parry (whose authority of course is beyond question), in which precisely the same opinion is somewhat more crisply put: 'His work is not often great in conception or noteworthy in design, but it is the spontaneous expression of a poetical, refined, and sensitive temperament.'

THE QUESTION OF 'FORM,' AND WHAT IT IMPLIES.

Now, as to Chopin's position in Art in regard to the actual intrinsic or spiritual value of his work it is of course impossible to argue. What means much to

one man means little or nothing to another, and there simply is an end of the matter. But with regard to Chopin as a musician, as a master of design, the case is different. Here we have something palpable, something we can weigh, and measure, and discuss, and come to a definite decision about. It may be said, however, that after all a man's 'form'—the mould in which he casts his thoughts—may generally be taken as the measure of the worth of the thoughts themselves. At least is this so in music, where the two are inseparably connected. Should it appear, therefore, that Chopin, far from being the mere wayward and individual genius, the mere artificer of dainty trifles that he is generally supposed to be, is as a matter of fact a master of form second to none,—should this appear, we shall have already gone a great way towards showing that the general estimate of his ultimate or spiritual quality is correspondingly mistaken.

CHOPIN'S POSITION AS A 'PIANOFORTE' WRITER:
ITS TRUE SIGNIFICANCE.

Before, however, proceeding to a consideration of Chopin's form, one very obvious circumstance connected with his work must be touched upon: the fact that the great bulk of his compositions (all, in fact, with a few comparatively unimportant exceptions) are written for the pianoforte. It is this, no doubt, which has stood in the way of a more general recognition of his true place in musical art.

Of the perfection of Chopin's writing for the instrument there is indeed no need to speak: it is sufficiently recognised, in words at least (though perhaps it is only those who have actually *played* his works who can have any conception of how very perfect that perfection is), by all who have written on him. But what needs to be pointed out is that it is precisely because Chopin was not a pianoforte writer at all, in any special sense, that his writing is so perfect. Chopin, that is to say, was not *primarily* a writer for the pianoforte. We cannot imagine him scheming out special effects for the instrument, as Liszt, or even Schumann (in rather a blundering way) did, and then incorporating them in his music. In the whole of his music—in the whole, that is, of his mature writing—there is hardly an instance of a passage dragged in merely for the sake of display, or to fill up, or for the sake of some special effect; every passage exists only for the sake of its relation to the whole, and apart from that whole would have no meaning. The perfection of his pianoforte writing, in short, lies in this,—that it is only part of a greater perfection: and it is only when this is recognised that we can appreciate in any true sense even the perfection of his pianoforte writing itself.

CHOPIN'S CONCEPTION OF FORM.

One thing further follows almost immediately from what has been said. We must not hope to find in Chopin examples of what theorists are pleased to regard as 'form' in the abstract,—or if we do we shall be disappointed. Theoretical writers are fond of dividing form into different categories,—the 'Sonata form,' 'Rondo form,' the 'Dance form,' and the like. For Chopin—as a composer—such divisions simply did not exist. Indeed, if we would do justice to him we shall do best to start by forgetting that there is such a thing as form, in the abstract, at all. Only then shall we be in a position to view the matter from Chopin's own standpoint; and only then, therefore, can we realise what he aimed at, and how perfectly he achieved his aim.

ROUGH CLASSIFICATION OF CHOPIN'S WORKS (AS REGARDS 'FORM').

Classification, however, provided it be sufficiently rough and loose, may be useful as making for greater clearness. And, taking Chopin's works altogether, we find that, roughly, they may be divided into three classes: (1) Those pieces which are perfectly homogeneous (as to style and 'subject') throughout, and which may therefore be conveniently described as 'one-idea' pieces; (2) those which are made up of two (at least) distinct ideas or 'subjects,' and which may accordingly be called 'two-idea' pieces; and (3) those pieces which consist of a number of 'subjects,' and may be described as 'completely developed' pieces. Of course this classification cannot be strictly maintained: each class merges into the one above it; but that being understood, some such rough classification may make our task easier. It is with the third of these classes (the 'completely developed' pieces) that we are here chiefly concerned. Nevertheless, the principles of construction which Chopin employs are so essentially the same throughout all his works that it will be well to begin by glancing at the first two classes.

THE SIMPLEST OR 'ONE-IDEA' PIECES.

The 'one-idea' pieces (as we have called them) are few and, of course, slight in length. They are to be found almost exclusively among the Preludes and Etudes. Very few, however, of these—in fact, only a few smaller Preludes, such as Nos. 1 to 7, 9, 10, 11, &c.—can be said to be strictly 'one-idea' or absolutely homogeneous throughout. Mostly they may be subdivided into three sections according to the following plan: (1) A 'section' beginning of course on the tonic and making a more or less definite close either in the tonic or (more generally) some allied key; (2) another section, naturally springing from the preceding and forming a continuation to it; and (3) the first section repeated, but altered at end so as to remain in tonic. This plan may be conveniently represented to the eye by the formula $a + b + a$. Nearly all Chopin's Etudes are in this simple form (all of Book I. and nearly all of Book II.), and it is also to be found in a few other smaller pieces. So clear and simple, however, is it that it can hardly be overlooked. As a particularly obvious example the third Etude, Book I., may be quoted. The first section (a) ends at bar 21; the second (b) extends to bar 61; and the first (a) is then repeated, with one phrase omitted. In the Etude which follows immediately, No. 4, the division is less clear; it is not easy to say precisely when the first section (a) ends, though its return (at bar 51) is clear enough. In this Etude, too, as in many others built up on this plan, Chopin extends the final section into a little *Coda*, thus emphasising the sense of tonality, and rounding off the design.

'TWO-IDEA' FORM.

If in a piece built on the above simple plan the three sections be more distinctly marked off from each other, and given a more distinctly separate character, we have what we have called a 'two-idea' form, which may similarly be expressed by the formula $a + b + a$. This form, in reality, in no way differs from that just spoken of, except in the more decided character of its sections; and it is, as a matter of fact, impossible to draw a hard and fast line between them. As decided examples, however, of the 'two-idea' form may be mentioned Etudes Nos. 5 and 10 in Book II., which may be contrasted with the examples just mentioned of the 'one-idea' form. Other examples may be found in the Valses (Op. 64, Nos. 1 and 3; Op. 70, No. 1), the Mazurkas (Op. 17,

Nos. 2 and 4), the Nocturnes (Op. 9, No. 3; Op. 37, No. 1; Op. 48, Nos. 1 and 2), and the Impromptus (Nos. 1 and 4). Examples, indeed, are very numerous; in fact, by far the greater number of Chopin's pieces are founded on this form (which of course is one of the simplest known in music), or else, more commonly, on some simple extension of it. Such extensions are to be found, indeed, in even the smaller homogeneous pieces, especially the Mazurkas and smaller Valses (which may be said to stand about midway between the true homogeneous 'one-idea' piece just spoken of and the more distinct 'two-idea' pieces we are here considering); and generally they take the form of a subdivision of one or other of the sections, making the section so divided a complete little piece in itself. Thus in the Mazurka, Op. 17, No. 1, we have the first section subdivided (giving the formula $a b a + c + a b a$); in the Mazurka, Op. 17, No. 3, both sections are subdivided (giving the formula $a b a + c d c + a b a$). It may be remarked, however, that, as a rule, when the first section is subdivided only the first sub-section is heard on the repetition, as in the Mazurkas, Op. 6, No. 1; Op. 7, No. 1; the Valse, Op. 69, No. 1 (of which the formula is $a b a + c + a$); and the Mazurka, Op. 7, No. 2 ($a b a + c d c + a$). Very often, of course, the first and second sections are divided less obviously, as into two parts only and so on, giving such forms as are to be found in—to take a few examples at random—the Mazurka, Op. 24, No. 1 ($a b + c + a$); Op. 41, No. 1 ($a b + c d + a b a$); Op. 7, No. 3 ($a + b c + d + e + a$). In the last of these, as in some other Mazurkas, a certain unity is given by the repetition of an opening phrase at the end. To go, however, over all the varieties to be found would be unnecessary as well as tedious; and it is, of course, in the larger (or 'two-idea') pieces that the possibilities of this simple form are most strikingly conveyed. In these nearly always the first section is itself subdivided, and very often the second: as in the Scherzo, Op. 20, (A ($a + b + a$) + B + A ($a + b + a$)); the Polonaises, Op. 26, No. 2 (A B A + C + A B A); and Op. 40 No. 2 (A ($a + b + a$) + B ($a + b + a$) + A a). Here, too, very often only the first subdivision of the first section is heard on the repetition; and it may be remarked that, as in the smaller forms also where this is the case, and especially where the three sub-sections of the first sections are pretty distinctly divided, the effect on the hearer is often that of the 'Rondo' form. The simple form we are considering, however, is capable of even wider expansion than in the pieces just named. This may be seen from such pieces as the Scherzos, Nos. 3 and 4, and the Barcarolle. These, it is true, verge towards the 'completely developed' pieces presently to be considered: but in all of them the underlying 'three form' (A + B + A) may be distinctly traced. Another method of extension (not so often employed) may be mentioned: it lies in the simple device of introducing after the repetition of the first section not a new section, but the second section again, following this by the first section once more,—thus making the formula A + B + A + B + A. This may be seen very clearly in the second Ballade (F major) and the third Scherzo (C# minor).

CHOPIN'S MASTERY OF FORM SHOWN IN HIS PERFECT MANAGEMENT OF ARTISTIC RESOURCE.

It is, however—and this fact cannot be too strongly emphasised—not the mere fact that most of Chopin's compositions can be reduced to a certain form, or formula (satisfying to the eye), that makes him a master of form; otherwise any duffer who can compose

in accordance with some predetermined scheme (and what duffer, alas! cannot?) would be a master of form. *It is in the wealth of resource exhibited within the limits of that form that his mastery is shown.*

Unfortunately, it is precisely this resource, this mastery of detail, which it is impossible to illustrate on paper. It is, however, so essential to our argument that the attempt must be made. Let us take as an example the Nocturne in F \sharp major, Op. 15, No. 2 (quite a fair average specimen of Chopin's short works), and examine it a little in detail. It obviously exhibits the extremely simple form of A + B + A; but let us see how the details are carried out. The first section (A), which consists of a little sentence repeated in a more ornamental form, obviously ends at bar 16; it is very clear as regards tonality, and thus a very distinct impression of key is made on the hearer. To it succeeds a passage which seems to grow out of it, and which, from the first bar, we might expect to go on in much the same way for some time. The bass, however, falls rapidly from C \sharp to A \sharp by steps of semitones, thus producing a feeling of uncertainty or confusion in the mind (as if the ground were suddenly giving way), which is only partially dispelled when A \sharp is at last reached. This A \sharp (felt as a dominant) would seem to prepare the way for D \sharp minor, but after a *weighing* of A \sharp in the treble (a good example of a special pianistic device applied absolutely subversively to the broader principles of design) the music is suddenly turned off into a section built up almost entirely of dominant harmony. To pursue our analysis further in detail, however, though easy, would be superfluous. It is sufficient that here, in these first twenty-four bars, we see the devices of clear tonality and rhythmic arrangement, confused tonality, ornamentation, and even a particular device for the instrument (an exceptional thing in Chopin), all used together for an artistic purpose. The piece as a whole shows Chopin as a perfect master of form, not because it corresponds to an elementary formula, A + B + A, but because, within the limits of that formula, it *interests*. The mind is carried forward irresistibly from one point to another; every bar is felt to be inevitable, and yet when first heard it has that element of strangeness or surprise which is necessary to all great art. Within its limits, it would be difficult to imagine a better example of the perfect management of artistic resource.

TONALITY AS A FACTOR IN FORM: CHOPIN'S ATTITUDE HERE.

Tonality, or key-relationship, as a factor of form, is of course most important, and Chopin's attitude in regard to this is particularly worthy of notice. It is often supposed that here he is wildly revolutionary; but a very little consideration of his works will show that this is quite a mistake. It is true that he often, even in the smaller pieces (though by no means always), eschews the well-worn contrasts of tonic and dominant; but where he does so it is obviously from no mere eccentricity or waywardness, but from an artistic desire to obtain greater variety through a wider or more subtle contrast. Where he thus avoids what are called the 'nearly related' keys it is noticeable that he very often, in fact nearly always, chooses some key (either major or minor) *at the distance of a third (major or minor) above or below his tonic*. Examples of this are so numerous that it can hardly be necessary to quote any. But it is in the larger pieces, divided or subdivided into several sections, that this use of the distance of the third as the basis of the principle of tonal contrast is most clearly displayed. Especially in

those pieces in which the second section itself is repeated (which we have represented by the formula A + B + A + B + A) is it apparent. In such pieces, whatever key B may first appear in, it is generally placed, on its repetition, in a key a third (major or minor) higher or lower. A very good and clear example of this is the Nocturne in G, Op. 37: the contrasting section is first introduced (bar 28) in C major, and on its reappearance (bar 83) in E major, —a third higher. Here, too, it is worthy of remark, that the first four bars of the theme are brought in at the end to round off the design as a sort of *Coda*, in the tonic G,—thus completing the steps of thirds upwards. Another good example is afforded by the *Finale* of the Sonata in B minor. Here, however, the second or contrasting section is itself subdivided into two parts, the first in B major, and the second in F \sharp major; and on its repetition the first part is transposed a major third upwards and the second part a minor third downwards, so that it appears in E \flat major throughout. (In this movement, too, the first section is itself—rather exceptionally—transposed, appearing first in B minor, then in E minor, and then in B minor again.) That there is, however, nothing mechanical in this use by Chopin of the distance of the third as his principle of key contrast is shown by such a movement as the Nocturne in D \flat , Op. 27, No. 2 (which is written in the form, *a + b + a + b + a + b + Coda*), where the second section, which appears originally in B \flat minor, is on its first repetition transposed to A major, but with certain subtle modifications; appearing afterwards for the third time in E \flat minor. In fact, it may be said of Chopin's choice of key relationship, as of his form pure and simple, that in every case it seems to grow inevitably from his thought; and the proof of this is that if we take almost any of his works and try to imagine the key centres changed, the effect is felt at once to be absolutely ruined. Try to imagine the Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48, for instance, with the second section in E \flat major instead of C major! Such points as we have been here able to deduce are worthy of note as forming part of what may be called his *unconscious* scheme; though it may be added it is in the larger or 'fully developed' pieces that they find their fullest application.

(To be continued.)

SOME OF THE EVILS OF 'HARMONIC' STRICT COUNTERPOINT.

By C. H. KITSON.

Those who adversely criticise the study of strict counterpoint are generally either those who do not understand it, or those who cannot write it. Nevertheless, even for the intelligent student it presents many enigmas, many difficulties which arise from the method of study. You cannot put new wine into old wine-skins, and the more you attempt to bring strict counterpoint 'up to date,' the more illogical it becomes. The use of the term 'chord' in reference to this subject is liable to be very misleading in some important directions, and the utterly false idea that it is a licence to change the harmony in the bar (representing two accents) leads to some absurd positions. I do not suppose anyone would gainsay that in the example below:

