

Exx.3 and 4 use this solution in order to offer, respectively, a relatively literal transcription of the sketch and a 'realization' of what Chopin's runic scrawl may have implied musically. I have no illusions that this realization offers *the* right solution for the opening (or indeed for other interpretative details), or that there can even be such a thing as *the* right solution. For a composer who so customarily allowed multiple versions of his published works to appear in print at the same time, it would be surprising if one of his sketches displayed a more

determinate nature than his finished works.¹⁴ Indeed, I intend the sense of 'realization' precisely to mirror the process by which a keyboard player renders a continuo part into sound: different renditions of the E♭ minor sketch will reveal at once the adherence to a common source and the individuality of the various interpreters. In this light we might recall Delacroix's words: 'Perhaps the sketch of a work only pleases as much as it does because everyone finishes it to his liking.'

Despite the blurred edges of the beginning and

Ex.3 Relatively literal transcription of the E♭ minor sketch

Es moll [staves 3-4]

5

9 [staves 5-6]

13 [staves 7-8]

17 [staves 9-10]

closings →

end of the sketch and the haziness of many of its internal details, we can nevertheless garner a sense of what sort of E♭ minor Prelude this sketch represents. Or, put another way, we can understand what led Chopin to undertake the sort of compositional labours on paper that George Sand so evocatively described in her memoirs. For undoubtedly it was the innovative timbral and textural surface, the intriguing possibility of building a prelude around unrelenting torrents of trills densely enchain- ed beneath melodic triplets, that impelled Chopin to

take up paper and quill. This timbral gesture can be understood in one sense as experimental: Chopin's impulses here led him down a path (with respect to the unprecedented tethered trills) that he would not allow himself to tread in a published work until the reprise of the Nocturne in B major, op.62 no.1—and even there the appearance of the trills in the melodic line produces a less radical effect (ex.5). In another sense the timbre sounds disturbing, even grotesque: there is something disquieting in the prolonged turbulence of the trill, an effect perhaps

Closing version 1

21 [staves 11-12] [staves 13-14]

Closing version 2

21 [staves 11-12] [staves 13-14]

Closing version 3

21 [staves 11-12] [staves 13-14]

Ending version 1

Ending version 2

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Ex.4 Realization of the E \flat minor sketch

[Prelude]

6

11

16

21

26

dim.

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Ex.5 Reprise of Nocturne in B major, op.62 no.1

67

cresc.

dim.

poco più lento

dolce

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

70

(tr)

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

not too surprising when we recall the rhetoric of distress that Sand used in her memoirs to describe Chopin's compositional activities on Majorca:

The cloister was for him full of terrors and phantoms, even when he felt well. He did not say anything, and I had to guess. When I would return from my nocturnal explorations in the ruins with my children, I would find him, at ten in the evening, pale at his piano, his eyes haggard, his hair standing almost on end. It would take him some moments to recognize us.

He would then make an effort to laugh, and he would play us the sublime things he had just composed, or, better, the terrible and harrowing ideas that had seized him, unwittingly, in that hour of solitude, sadness and terror.

It is there that he composed the most beautiful of those brief pages that he modestly entitled preludes.¹⁵

Perhaps, too, the sound of the prelude shows Chopin imaginatively evoking music of the past, for the massed trills bring to mind more the sound of such *clavecinistes* as François Couperin and Rameau than any model chronologically proximate to Chopin's time. To my ear, Couperin's style seems most apposite to that of Chopin's sketch. Readers of this journal are better placed than most to conjure up their own associations with specific pieces. For myself, the conjoined trills of the sketch call to mind

the repetitive intensity of a work such as the B minor *Passacaille* (*Pièces de clavecin*, 2^e livre, 8^e ordre)—see ex.6. Yet it is difficult to ascertain precisely when and how Chopin might have come into contact with music from this earlier epoch. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger has argued that Chopin would likely have been familiar with some of the music of François Couperin. But Eigeldinger's evidence points to this knowledge as developing after the drafting of the E♭ minor sketch: the fundamental source by which a musician in Paris could have come to know the music of François Couperin, Jean-Joseph-Bonaventure Laurens's anonymously edited anthology of 38 *Pièces de clavecin par F. Couperin*, was published in 1841, more than two years after the putative date of the sketch.¹⁶ The *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* did print, at various times during 1839, an *Archives curieuses de la musique* that included compositions by Louis Couperin and Rameau, but it is not clear whether Chopin would have had access to even the earliest issues of this newspaper while away on Majorca. But to worry over a specific source for Chopin's knowledge may well miss the point, for various of Chopin's musical acquaintances with strong antiquarian tendencies