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The Role of Harmonic and Formal Elements
As They Relate to Performance Practices In
Chopin's Ballade No. 3 in A-flat Major, Op. 47

Zachary James

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Chopin's Third Ballade

In the storied history of the piano, it is hard to find a more famous composer of piano music than the brilliant but unfortunately short-lived Frédéric Chopin. Though he wrote over 230 different works for piano, a specific type of treasure can be found within the corpus of his work—four ballades. These ballades, unique for their time due to their distinctive form, were composed between 1835 and 1842, and are some of the most well-known and challenging works in the entire piano repertoire. Whether we hear the opening octave arpeggios of Ballade No. 1 in G minor, or the quiet, elegant melody that begins his Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major, these pieces are immediately recognizable among classical music enthusiasts worldwide.

For the music theorist, these pieces have particular interest. Chopin ballades are harmonically complex, and even to experienced music theorists, can appear to be ambiguous in terms of both harmony and form. This makes accurate analysis a challenge, leading theorists to varying, but defensible analytical conclusions.

In this paper, I will analyze Chopin's Third Ballade, Op. 47 in A-flat major, analyzing it from a music theorist's perspective. The primary focus of this analysis will be Chopin's use of harmony in Ballade No. 3, and the secondary focus will be his use of form, for the purpose of practical application for the piano performer. I will take a position based on original research, balanced by other interpretations of the music. By focusing on the different themes,
harmonic progressions, modulations, voicing, and chromaticism, I will show how they are used in the context of the piece’s harmonic and formal structure, as well as how this relates to performance practice. In the course of the secondary discussion of form, I will also compare Ballade No. 3 to other formal structures found in the classical repertoire to determine whether it truly has a unique form or is a modified version of a pre-existing form, such as sonata-allegro form.

Scholars consider the most accurate edition to be the Paderewski, originally published in 1949, and it is this edition upon which I will base my paper’s analysis, because of its historical accuracy to the original Chopin manuscripts.

As a piano major and a musician who enjoys analyzing music, I believe that this will be a beneficial study not only for me, but also for other performers of Chopin piano music. Pianists can benefit from this study’s analysis of the score, enabling them to draw practical as well as theoretical applications, which will inform their own interpretations of his music.

Chopin’s third Ballade in A-flat major (Op. 47) dates back to the summer of 1841, and was dedicated to one Mademoiselle Pauline de Noailles (Samson 218, 1996). Some, such as Camille Bourniquel, a Chopin biographer, argue that “it was undoubtedly the Lithuanian Ballads of [Adam] Mickiewicz [such as Undine or Świtezianka] which inspired him to undertake this excursion into the realm of legend” (Bourniquel 149, 1960). This is backed by reliable reports of a conversation between Chopin and Robert Schumann that took place during a
meeting at Leipzig, Germany (Karasowski 402, 1970). However, other biographers such as James Huneker and Victor Lederer, reject this evidence and believe there is no clear consensus, and no definitive evidence for any specific argument as to the origin of its inspiration (Huneker 2007; Lederer 127, 2006).

It is certainly possible to read a literary narrative structure into the music of Ballade No. 3, but according to scholar and music theorist Byron Almen, "Analyses...that make use of narrative archetypes should not be read as 'proofs' of musical narrative organization. There is no single correct narrative reading of a piece, only a more-or-less convincing one" (Almen 2003, 27). In fact, Bourniquel writes that the Ballades appear to be "a denunciation of programme-music. . .[Chopin] did not feel that he had to make clear the details of the story, and these legends without words and without title. . .never ceased being poetry. It was a case of real creation, an instrumental poem, with no other fixed form apart from its thematic recapitulations" (Bourniquel 149, 1960).

It is difficult to put a specific label on the form when comparing Ballade No. 3 to well-known classical forms, such as sonata-allegro, rondo and rounded binary form, or even to the other Ballades, simply because none of these options fit definitively. Some argue that Chopin's ballades do not fit into any existing form at all. In a 1914 edition of The Musical Times, A. Redgrave Cripps wrote that, "We must not hope to find in Chopin examples of what theorists are pleased to regard as 'form'. . .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...at all" (Cripps 1914, 517).

While this may be true, we may still attempt to distill the form of Ballade
No. 3 into an abbreviated form to enable the pianist to understand the
overarching structure quickly. This piece has four different themes, as well as
several sections of purely transitional material. The first twenty measures
constitute Theme 1 in A-flat major, after which mm. 21-36 are transitional
measures that temporarily arrive at C major. Theme 1 appears again in m. 37-51
in A-flat major, and then modulates to C major for the appearance of Theme 2 in
mm. 52-64 while moving towards F minor. Without any pause, Theme 3 occurs
next, fully arriving in F minor in mm. 65-81, and repeating again from mm. 82-88
while moving towards the relative major, A-flat major. Measures 89-102
transition from Theme 3 back to Theme 2, which occurs in mm. 103-115.
However, we see the arrival of Theme 4 in mm. 116-143, which lasts until Theme
2 arrives again, although this time in A-flat major. It lasts from mm. 144-156
until the occurrence of Theme 3 in C-sharp minor in mm. 157-179. At mm. 179-
188, Chopin begins to transition from C-sharp minor to B major, arriving at a
very elongated version of Theme 2 in mm. 189-208. During that time, he
modulates upwards in pitch from B major to C major to D major to E-flat major.
Measures 209-212 are transitional measures that prepare for a variation of
Theme 1 to reappear in mm. 213-222. Chopin uses mm. 223-230 as transitional
material, whereupon Theme 4 presents itself in mm. 231-241 to close out the piece. In summary, the form in abbreviated form is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme / Transitional</th>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>21-36</td>
<td>A-flat major (modulating to C major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td>37-51</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>52-64</td>
<td>C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3</td>
<td>65-81</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3</td>
<td>82-88</td>
<td>F minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>89-102</td>
<td>Modulating to C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>103-115</td>
<td>C major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4</td>
<td>116-143</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>144-156</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3</td>
<td>157-179</td>
<td>C-sharp minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>179-188</td>
<td>Modulating to B major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>189-208</td>
<td>B major to C major to D major to E-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>209-212</td>
<td>Modulating to A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td>213-222</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>223-230</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4</td>
<td>231-241</td>
<td>A-flat major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alfred Cripps provides an alternate interpretation of the form, dividing mm. 1-51 into A, mm. 52-115 into B, mm. 116-135 into C, mm. 143-211 into B, mm. 212-229 into A and mm. 230-240 into C, with a form of A-B-C-B-A-C. Cripps' methodology does not rely on thematic elements as major elements of the formal structure, but instead, he divides the piece into six large formal sections. He makes the point that the recurrence of B could remind the listener of rondo form, but that it is not a perfect fit. In his analysis, he also divides mm. 1-51 into the exposition, mm. 52-115 into the development and mm. 143-182 into the recapitulation, with mm. 183-240 as concluding material. Despite this attempt to fit the form of Ballade No. 3 into sonata-allegro form, he remarks that it "is quite possible that anyone with sufficient ingenuity might make out some resemblance to some other forms" (Cripps 1914, 577). Michael Klein responds to this interpretive challenge in his article about musical narrative in Chopin's four ballades, saying, "Since each of the four ballades presents two or more themes and key areas with a reprise of at least one theme, published analyses tend to compare these works to sonata forms. Such comparisons can be problematic because the reprise of the second theme in the ballades [third theme in my analysis] may appear away from the home key." In addition, we cannot separate Chopin's ballades into a separate "ballade form" because "comparison among the ballades reveals some similarities in form, [but] no single model governs the entire set" (Klein 2004, 30).
There are analyses that frame Chopin's Ballades into sonata forms, but the majority of scholars do not analyze them using the sonata or sonata-allegro framework (Klein 30, 2004; Suurpää 466, 2000). To be sure, Ballade No. 3 bears some resemblance to these other forms, but based on the breadth of research and analysis on the subject, the form of this ballade cannot be definitively called sonata-allegro form, rondo form or a ballade form which is common to all of Chopin's ballades. According to Klein, each ballade has its own form that stands unique in classical piano repertoire (Klein 30, 2004). For the pianist, this makes Ballade No. 3 more challenging to memorize and recall on demand, because of the piece's length, irregularity of recurring material, and dissimilarity to common forms in classical piano music. However, whether describing the form by themes or letter-labeled sections, having the form in mind will help the pianist retain memory of this piece for the long-term.

Erik Brewerton, writing for *The Musical Times* in 1925, wrote that "The aim the pianist has in these...excursions is to reach a vantage-ground from which Chopin’s music can be adequately surveyed. Power without violence, delicacy without lack of firmness, rubato without loss of rhythm, brilliancy without hardness, the suggestive without the vague, the dramatic without the rhetorical—such are the tasks [of] the Chopin player" (Brewerton 1925, 502). For all the complexity of an analysis such as this holds, the goal of this analysis is that the pianist would be better equipped to achieve the level of performance so
aptly described by Erik Brewerton, which can only be achieved through acquired knowledge and informed practice.

Now that we have seen the formal structure, we will examine the harmonic analysis of Ballade No. 3. The piece opens in A-flat major with Theme 1, which is based loosely around a I$^6/4$-V-1$^6/4$ progression that cadences on the I$^6/4$ in the second measure. In so doing, Chopin emphasizes the dominant before establishing the tonic, which is a commonplace technique for Chopin—"Chopin's avoidance of the tonic key in the opening measures of his works are apparent. More often than not Chopin begins his pieces on dominant-function harmonies" (Noden-Skinner 33, 1984).
The opening melody (mm. 1-8) uses contrary motion, initially by step, before resolving with a V⁶-I cadence. The chord on the third beat of the second measure is a B half—diminished chord over an E-flat pedal tone, which resolves into a I⁶/⁴ chord.

The practice of resolving to I⁶/⁴ chords, which is found throughout this piece, means that the resolution does not feel as emphatic or final as if it were a tonic chord in root form. Cadences resolving to I⁶/⁴ are often used to transition to another section (such as mm. 2-3). The performer should not see mm. 1-2 as a two-measure phrase and rest too long on this cadence, but should see mm. 1-8 as an eight-measure phrase. When Chopin is ready to end a phrase, he will often resolve to a I chord in root form (such as m. 8), which gives a sense of finality and conclusion to a phrase. At the end of the phrase, the performer can linger a fraction longer to signal that this is the end of the phrase, before moving on to the next phrase. When playing the opening two measures, the melody is in the soprano line of the right hand, and generally speaking, the melody should be given more emphasis than the other voices so it can be clearly heard.

However, in the third measure, the melody moves to the left hand, and the voicing needs to be inverted. Harmonically, the entire measure is an E-flat⁷ chord, which resolves into an A-flat⁶/⁴ chord. The left hand has an ornamental figure on the fourth beat of the measure, which is traditionally played "B-flat-C-B-flat" on the 4th beat as grace notes. The melody continues in the 5th measure over an E-flat⁷ harmony, with the melody remaining in the bass and the tenor
providing harmony. In the 6th measure, there is another cadence, but this time there is a fully diminished chord with an F in the bass (also part of the melody), that is followed by an A-flat6/4, which is the tonic in the key of A-flat. The soprano carries the melody in the right hand through the end of the 8th measure, resolving in a V7-I cadence.

At this point, the largest defining feature of this ballade begins to take shape, which is the use of dominant pedal tones. If we look at the first eight measures, the most pivotal pitch is E-flat, the dominant in the key of A-flat. Even though this piece starts in A-flat, in the first eight measures, almost every accompaniment chord has an E-flat, and the other accompanying voices move around this pedal tone. The important thing to remember about pedal tones is that they should NOT be emphasized above the melody voice, particularly when there are consecutive pedal tones in the bass. They should be no louder than equal volume to the other accompanying voices, and can even be deemphasized without adverse effects. They carry a certain weight because of the repetition, and this particular tone (the dominant) increases the "loading" or sum of suspense because of the implied tonic resolution to come. Pedal tones should always be present and be the foundation of the sound, but they should not overpower the other voices.

When we step back and look at this opening section, we can see some things that will help a pianist in playing this theme. There is a "call and response" idiom in the melody with the left and right hand voices between
measures 1-2 and 3-4. A useful technique for understanding the emotion of this passage, and the piece as a whole, comes from internationally acclaimed pianist, Murray Perahia. In an article for the *Musical Times*, he says that "it is important to try to sketch what’s happening—the drama of the tones—into a kind of metaphorical drama, so that it speaks to you on as many levels as possible, not just the musical level" (Rink 15, 2001). Charles Clevenger, a piano professor at Cedarville University, describes a potential narrative by borrowing from Shakespeare. He describes these melodies as sounding like two lovers having a romantic dialogue, such as the narrative of "Romeo and Juliet." The opening soprano melody would be Juliet, singing "Where art thou, Romeo?" and mm. 3-4 is Romeo’s response: "Here I am, baby" (Clevenger, 2011). Then, the two voices are joined together, though mm. 5-6 has Romeo singing, and in 7-8, Juliet takes the melody to the phrase’s conclusion. Thinking of this classic Shakespearean play may help the pianist get an idea of the rich singing quality these melodies should have (Clevenger, 2011).

Another insight from Clevenger is that male pianists will tend to bring out the Romeo (tenor/bass) melody, while not bringing out the Juliet (soprano) melody enough. The inverse tends to be true for female pianists, as they will prefer to bring out high melodies, but tend not to emphasize low melodies. This is likely because of the vocal range of males to females (Clevenger, 2011). Males will tend to instinctively prefer notes on the bass clef, while females tend to prefer the treble clef. While this effect will vary among pianists, and hopefully
wane with practice and experience, it is something of which a pianist trying to learn this piece should be aware. As in virtually all examples of classical piano music, melodies in both hands should come through with equal clarity.

In the next four measures (mm. 9-12), the left hand alternates octaves and chromatically descending triads. At first glance, it is tricky to determine, but the melody is retained in the right hand octaves through these measures. Thus, the left hand accompaniment goes from an A-flat\(^4\) to a D diminished chord, to a D-flat minor chord to a A-flat\(^6/4\). It continues down through a B diminished chord in first inversion to a G diminished chord in second inversion. With the E-flat bass that sounded earlier in m. 16, the G diminished chord sounds like an E-flat\(^7\), even though the E-flat is no longer sounding. This happens because the mind remembers the E-flat and blends it into the next chord (the G dim\(^6/4\)) because the next chord happened very shortly after the E-flat stopped sounding. After this, the progression repeats through measures 13-16, but with a more active octave melody in the right hand.

At measure 17, Chopin continues the chromatic descent in the left hand, but by measure 19, it appears that Chopin is preparing to modulate, with the appearance of a G minor chord leading to a B-flat\(^7\) chord with a F bass. This progression starts to modulate to the key of E-flat, which would seem to be confirmed by the E-flat chord in measure 20, but it becomes an E-flat\(^7\) and resolves to the tonic, A-flat in measure 21. Once again, these chords are built around a pedal tone (E-flat in both hands in mm. 15-16, A-flat in the left hand in
mm. 17-18, and B-flat in the right hand in mm. 19-20). This particular B-flat pedal tone initially is a melody note, and then becomes accompaniment when the B-flat7 chord moves the melody down to A-flat. After this, measures 21-24 essentially repeat the chord progression of mm. 17-20, but the voicings are higher and wider, with frequent use of octaves.

A little later than expected, at measure 25, Chopin begins to modulate. Instead of modulating to a closely related key such as F minor or E-flat major, he modulates up a chromatic mediant (major third) to C major at measure 31. In measures 25 and 30, Chopin uses repeated cadences with slight variations to transition the listener's ear between keys.

This is one of Chopin's many techniques for making transitions less abrupt than would be found in expositions from Classical sonata-allegro form. Karol Berger of Stanford University mentions that in Chopin's Ballades, "Chopin...uses subtler ways of smoothing over the joints between successive sections." One such method is that "cadences...are either linked or elided with the following music." (Berger 1996, 50)
Chopin starts the transition with a half—diminished C chord to a F7 to B-flat octave, which appears to cadence in the key of B-flat. However, he then writes a D diminished chord at m. 27, adds a B in the bass to make it fully diminished, and then moves straight from the fully diminished chord with a B root to a G7 chord which resolves to C in measure 28. The G7-C cadence repeats in measure 29, completing the key change at m. 30.

Because this is transitional material, it should be emphasized that it may not be useful for a pianist playing this piece to analyze what key this section is in, because the tonal center does not remain in any key for any significant length of time. However, it is still worthwhile to analyze each individual chord harmonically, so that memorization can be much easier.

After measure 30, Chopin cadences three more times, maintaining the G7-C chord progression. At m. 33, he uses an unusual 16th note pattern in the right hand that utilizes 2-1, 4-3 and 6-5 appoggiaturas in the key of C in rapid succession while using a minimal accompaniment in the left hand. This passage utilizes nearly every scale degree except the leading tone to create a cascading, fluid sound of constant motion in the key of C.

Playing these 16th -note figures are difficult for the average pianist, particularly at fast tempos, and passages such as this one can create high levels of tension in a pianist's hands. For this reason, I recommend a method prescribed by piano professor John Mortensen. His method calls for the notes be divided up into 3 note groups, and that you play each group in a single motion,
"grabbing" all the notes and leaping to the next group. At slower tempos, it will appear that there are gaps in between each group, but at performance tempo, it is completely seamless (Mortensen, 2008). The harmonic analysis shows that all these 16th notes happen over a C chord in the left hand, with no accents in the right hand. This means that all the notes in these right hand groups can be played with equal emphasis to create a wall of sound, as opposed to the strategy of finding a melody and emphasizing it throughout this section.

After the C arpeggio in measure 35, Chopin uses the left hand octaves to transition back into the first theme, returning to the key of A-flat. The theme continues identically to its first occurrence until measure 42, where we see the appearance of a VI chord in the key of A-flat. It is worth noting that the melody moves to the bass voice, with the tenor voice providing harmony. Note how the tenor and bass voice in mm. 41-44 use only intervals of thirds or sixths, both major and minor. These are among the most consonant intervals in the Western harmonic language next to octaves and fifths, which is why this passage has a sweet, warm harmony.

At m. 45, we see the melody begin to close at a beautiful double cadence at mm. 46-47. The right hand plays the melody in octaves with an inner voice present, usually an E-flat. The left hand holds a pedal tone and fills out the chords outlined in the right hand, resolving at an A-flat chord in second inversion.
At m. 48, we hear the first theme melody reprised quietly in low octaves, without any harmonic accompaniment, and at m. 50, we see an A-flat\(^6\) chord, which concludes the first theme. After holding it for 2 measures and an eighth note, C octaves are played standing alone for 2 measures. This may at first appear confusing since the piece has been in A-flat major for most of the piece, but Chopin already modulated to C major in m. 30, setting up the listener's ear for the common-tone modulation at m. 50.

In this case, Chopin wants to go to C major, and to do this smoothly, he picks a common tone from both keys and uses that note to connect the piece from A-flat major to C major and make the listener's ear hear the new key as a smooth transition. While Chopin might have picked F or G as the common tone to modulate between keys because they are both used in A-flat major and C major, the option Chopin used sounds the smoothest because the common tone is the tonic of the new key.

Although there are many accidentals in mm. 54-65, Chopin has functionally modulated from A-flat to C major, but he does not change the key signature because the modulation is relatively short in length. Because of this, when pianists reach measure 52, they will need to switch their mental tonal framework to C major. To help prepare mentally before the strain live performance, it can useful to memorize which notes have no accidentals for an entire section, while knowing which notes have changing accidentals. For example, in this section, all D's and E's are natural and have no accidentals;
however, there are accidental A-flats and B-flats occurring amongst the A-naturals and B-naturals.

This type of chromatic mediant key change, from A-flat major to C major, may seem unusual for pianists inexperienced with Chopin piano music. However, this is a central facet of Chopin's piano compositions. "Where he thus avoids what are called the 'nearly related' keys, it is noticeable that he...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." (Cripps 1914, 519) This key change is a prime example of this principle, and is worth remembering when trying to determine Chopin's final destination when modulating.

Once in the new key of C major on m. 54, we see the second theme, as well as a new figure that will make this theme immediately recognizable. Chopin uses a strong-weak figure clearly marked with decrescendos that end at the end
of each figure. The effect that this creates is that the melody is carried in the loud notes of the figure, and the soft notes are present mainly for harmonic structure and rhythmic motif.

It is important for the pianist to recognize the melody; the easiest way here is to look at the soprano and alto notes and watch for stepwise motion. In measures 56-57, the highest notes are E-natural, D natural and C natural. Even though there are G-naturals in between the E-natural and D-natural, these occur on weak beats and are not actually part of the melody. In fact, they are a continuation of the alto part, and therefore not as important. The same is true for the C-naturals in the right hand for measures 58-59, and all other similar figures.

In this section, at measures 52-63, there are eighteen decrescendos with no crescendos. While it might technically be possible to continue to decrease in volume, the mezza voce (meaning "half or subdued voice") at measure 52 helps clarify the confusing abundance of dynamic markings. Another useful clue comes from the harmonic analysis, where we see Chopin using more notes on the first eighth note of the short decrescendo figures, and fewer notes on the second eighth note of these figures, such as the first occurrence in m. 54. Thus, these figures have a natural "strong-weak" sound, which leads us to a reasonable conclusion for this interpretation. Chopin does not intend for this section to reach triple pianissimo after eighteen decrescendos, but rather, that the pianist play all of these figures with strong-weak pattern.
At measure 63, we begin to see the first transition to F minor with the D half-diminished chords leading into C chords. However, in measure 64, the C chord adds the seventh scale degree and appears in a 4-2 inversion. While this is a I chord in the key of C, the seventh acts as a tendency tone from B-flat to A-flat in the F minor chord at m. 65, although the tension happens in changing voices.

At this point, we have arrived in F minor, and Chopin begins the Theme 3 melody with an opening motive that sounds similar to the melody we just heard, but in a minor mode. If you compare m. 55 to m. 66, we see a similar rhythmic motive which has moved from major to minor and uses successive thirds instead of sixths. Once again, Chopin uses a pedal tone in the bass, staying on an F for 2 ½ measures, while maintaining the strong-weak figure from Theme 2. He then moves chromatically down to an E-flat pedal tone, then A-flat and walking back down to another F pedal tone in m. 69. Though these pedal tones are short, in some cases only one or two measures long, they sustain underneath at least two different chord changes (such as the i to VI6 in m. 70), making them definitively pedal tones.
Without looking at the formal analysis, this part of the piece (m. 65-70) might appear to be the climax of the previous section. However, pianists playing this piece would be wise to pick a dynamic around *mezzo forte*, because there is a bigger climax yet to come in m. 81, which will take the same melody and expand the voicings’ range and density.

At m. 71, note that the melody switches to the left hand on the 3rd beat of the measure, and continues with the melody until m. 73. The following melody in mm. 73-74 can be very tricky to properly bring out because of all the voices being doubled. A useful strategy is to maintain a delicate touch and lower the dynamics of supporting voices to allow the melody to stand out.

From m. 73-80, we see a series of chords placed over a C pedal tone. These chords are structured into two different progressions, which are both repeated for a total of 4 progressions. The first uses sixths as its primary interval and works its way downwards in pitch before repeating, while the second uses octaves as the primary intervals. The melody of the second progression is in an inner voice, bracketed by the octaves. The pianist must take great caution to bring out that melody in the midst of the pedal tone octaves, because the tendency for most pianists will be to emphasize the high repeated C octaves while the middle voice, which doubles the melody with the tenor voice in the right hand, is buried underneath.

The previous section uses an intense crescendo that builds up to fortissimo at m. 81, coinciding with a reprise of the F minor theme (Theme 3).

with expansive voicings in both hands. This fortissimo section is one of the emotional climaxes of the piece, and should be the loudest and boldest section of the piece to this point.

In the following measures, m. 82-85, we see the Theme 3 melody occur again. Theme 3 appears to continue as before, but at m. 86, it descends chromatically with both hands doubling the melody and supporting harmonies in octaves. By the cadence at the beginning of m. 88, we might assume that Chopin may be heading back to A-flat, but he immediately adds a G-flat to add the 7th to the A-flat chord, cadences into D-flat, and then repeats this cadence. However, he does not actually transpose to the key of D-flat, because just a short time later at mm. 91-93, we see Chopin cadence from G half diminished 7 to C. This is the real key change, at m. 93, because Chopin will stay in C major for another 22 measures.

These measures (mm. 91-94) can be a trouble spot for pianists who are not reading carefully. It is easy to think that Chopin is cadencing G to C because of the left hand root notes, but the chord is actually a G half-diminished chord, meaning that the overall harmonic structure will outline G-B-flat-D-flat-F, with variations according to the melody. At measure 95, we see C major cadenced again, confirming it as tonic, but this section transitions to a modality centered around the use of A-flat and B-flat. This continues through to m. 99, where F minor is briefly tonicized. The next progression comes unexpectedly back to
tonicize A-flat, cadences in A-flat and then repeats the progression, but returns firmly to C major.

At this point, Theme 2 repeats almost exactly in mm. 103-116. The melody is essentially intact, although there are some changes to the harmonies surrounding it, particularly in the left hand. It continues until m. 116, where we see Theme 4 abruptly emerge in the key of A-flat.

The first thing a pianist will notice about the next seven measures (mm. 116-122) is the extensive use of grace notes before the first notes of each run of sixteenth notes. There are two methods of interpreting these grace notes. The first method, from piano professor Daniel Sachs, is to play these grace notes quickly before the beat, so that the first full note occurs on the first beat of each measure (Sachs, 2010). The second method comes from John Petrie Dunn, an expert in Chopin ornamentation. He writes that grace notes should be played as sixteenth notes, starting on the downbeat of the measure and carrying over into the measure (Dunn 1971, 20).

The instinct when first learning this passage would involve connecting all the notes, leading to very awkward hand positions. However, according to John Mortensen, you can separate these notes into smaller groups of three notes and
quickly leap from group to group, grabbing the notes as you progress. This will prove to be an easier and more efficient method, reducing the potential of hand injury while achieving the same aural results (Mortensen, 2008).

For the section that follows in mm. 116-133, there are typically dozens of fingerings over the next twenty measures. This is because getting correct fingerings for this section is vital, as the passagework is fast and tricky, with frequent leaps, changes of direction and potentially awkward fingerings. It is highly recommended that a pianist sit down as early as possible in the process of learning this section, before bad habits become engrained, to figure out the fingerings and practice them that way as early as possible. Learning them incorrectly and then relearning them will likely lead to unnecessary time and difficulty in learning what is already a very difficult passage. When played properly, this passage will be a blur of notes that move around the harmonic chord structure before resolving to the chord at cadences.

A particularly helpful technique from Mortensen for learning this particular passage is his idea of "centering." Whenever you have a fast passage with difficult fingerings, he suggests taking the passage very slowly, one note at a time and placing your hand in the most natural position for each individual note. As you move between notes, he recommends trying to keep your hand in the most comfortable position for each note, which will limit awkward hand positions and tension in a pianist’s hand.
While the left hand accompaniment is fairly easy to follow in mm. 116-125, the right hand has a number of notes that don’t fit the chord outlined in the left hand. A good example of this is the D natural and F natural in the right hand at m. 117, which seem out of place with the A-flat bass note in the left hand that typically outlines an A-flat major chord. Typically in these passages, the pianist will want to take two notes in the outlined chord and grab two notes a whole step above notes in the accompaniment chord before resolving them to the chord.

It may be helpful for the pianist to recognize that the measure is essentially an A-flat major chord with some incidental notes around the foundational chord. While Chopin writes accidentals around the root chord in the measure, he will eventually resolve the dissonant accidentals.

At m. 126, we see one of the more confusing chords to be encountered in this piece. While the right hand ascends vertically in a D-flat major scale, the left hand has a G-flat, A-flat, C-natural, G-flat. This chord acts as a IV of D-flat, which is the next chord change, arriving in m. 128. The ascending chromatic notes are working towards the F natural in m. 128, and are not part of the A-flat chord in m. 126.

At m. 128, D-flat major is abruptly tonicized, and the piece continues to tonicize D-flat major until m. 136. However, I do not believe that it is an actual modulation, because of the short length of the tonicization and the fact that most of the chords are explainable in A-flat major.
At m. 136, we arrive at an E-flat major chord in the key of A-flat major, which is outlined in the left hand. This section (mm. 136-144) makes frequent use of IV and V chords in 1st inversion, as well as octave melodies. All of these elements make the section feel more tonal and familiar, providing a respite from the drastic chromaticism of the previous section, making memorization much easier. An unusual chord in this section is the V of ii in m. 138, which leads chromatically upwards to a ii in m. 139. One useful feature of this section that may help with memorization is that from mm. 136-144, there are two four-measure sections that have only slight variations. At m. 144, Chopin cadences on an A-flat major chord, definitively confirming the key of A-flat major.

Leading into Theme 2 in mm. 144-156, we see a familiar rhythmic motive, the quiet, repeated octaves. Chopin has repeated the second theme, but has placed it in A-flat major, rather than C major. There are some minor differences, but it is essentially the same music until m. 156, where Chopin modulates from A-flat major to C-sharp minor, or enharmonically, D-flat minor. The modulation to C-sharp minor may appear to be a direct modulation, but Chopin actually uses the common tone A-flat, or enharmonically, G-sharp, which is common to both keys, to make the transition smoother. This is the first time in this ballade we have been in a sharp key.

In mm. 157-164, the left hand maintains a rapid stream of notes with heavy chromaticism and the use of a number of double sharps. At first, it may seem that the left hand is more important and should be emphasized above the
right hand, which looks like accompaniment, but it is actually the opposite. If you play the right hand by itself, you will notice that Theme 3, which was originally in F minor, is reprised here in C-sharp minor. The left hand should support the right hand melody, so that the listener can make the connection.

At m. 165, the right hand has a pedal tone accompaniment on repeated G-sharps in octaves. These are difficult to play, and require playing a three-note group before repositioning the hand to play the next three note group. Because of the rapid sustained hand movement required, the pedal should be used to sustain the legato in between movement of the hand. It is difficult because of the rapid motion, but the right hand needs to be much quieter than the left hand because this section will start at piano or mezzo piano before growing to fortissimo at m. 173.

In mm. 173-178, the reprise of the F minor theme reaches its apex, with chaotic right-hand movement. While it may look intimidating at first glance, note that the hand positioning is mostly the same as the repeated G-sharp octaves. However, in each position, you are grabbing more notes, increasing the difficulty.

At m. 179, Chopin abruptly adds new material, deviating from the original Theme 3 in a chaotic flurry of octaves in the left and right hands. At this point, Chopin is no longer effectively in the key of C-sharp minor. Instead of direct or common tone modulations as he has used before, he uses repeated circle of fifth tonicizations as transitional material to arrive at B-major.
In mm. 179-182, he descends as he tonicizes, landing on the V7 chord of the key he will tonicize next. He starts in C-sharp, then writes an F#-major7 chord and then continues with a B-major chord to tonicize B-major. Next, he plays an E-major7 chord and then plays an A-major chord to tonicize A-major. He continues this process identically, tonicizing G#-major, F#-major, E-major, D-major, C#-major and finally B-major.

At m. 183, Chopin creates a rumbling, bass-dominated texture, using the A-sharp with the B octaves to create dissonance and a fuller, less tonal sound. In mm. 183-191, he takes bits and pieces from Theme 2, which was originally in C-major, later in A-flat, and now in B-major. At m. 189, he adds some new material, before beginning his chromatic descent in m. 192, to arrive in C-major in m. 194. Once again, the left hand is chromatic transitional material that should not be overly scrutinized. However, note that the right hand is actually playing the
same melody from Theme 2, but in the new key of C-major, before we actually arrive in C-major, preparing the listener's ear for the new key.

In mm. 194-201, Chopin uses the same material with some slight variations before transitioning chromatically up a major second to D-major. Chopin places the melody in octaves to create more tension and excitement, while using much of the same material. However, instead of repeating the whole section in D-major and transitioning chromatically again, Chopin abruptly directly modulates to E-flat major in m. 205. He does not use a cadence to prepare the listener’s ear for any of these ascending modulations. He continues through the material in mm. 205-208 as though there were no interruption, although he has now modulated to E-flat, and then arrives at another transitional section.

This transitional section, starting at m. 209, uses an A-flat minor chord in second inversion, while the right hand ascends chromatically, building tension without being rooted in any particular key. This passage continues until m. 213, when a variation of Theme 1 breaks through the musical tension, returning to the original key of A-flat major in a joyful reprise of Juliet’s call to Romeo, as described by Charles Clevenger earlier in this analysis.

The voicing of the chords are based in octaves with harmony notes filling in, giving this section (mm. 213-224) a very full, brilliant sound. Though it is a reprise of Theme 1, there is some harmonic variation to build tension. At m. 225, Chopin uses repeated chords that change one or two notes at a time (typically
ascending chromatically) to build tension as the piece crescendos towards the climax. It is transitional material, and until the last ii to V7 chords in m. 230, the chords often make little sense if analyzed traditionally in the key of A-flat major. It is more accurate to label this section transitional material heading towards thematic material.

At m. 231, we see the only reprise of Theme 4, which we originally saw in mm. 116. It retains much of its original form, although Chopin repeats a small section twice before writing flourishing arpeggios spanning nearly the entire range of the piano. After pausing, he writes large, long chords on a V of vi, vi and dominant 7 chord which resolves to tonic in a resounding and powerful conclusion to Chopin’s Third Ballade.

Having worked through the entire analysis of this ballade, it is clear that the form and harmonies closely inform the pianist’s interpretation of this ballade. The harmonic progressions and their cadences reveal to the pianist where the phrases begin and end, and where the climax of each phrase lies. Understanding the form reveals the point of climax and enables the pianist to save his or her most dramatic moment for that point. As far as memorization is concerned, difficult passages are much easier to remember if a pianist has something beyond muscle memory, mental knowledge. In fact, knowing the formal pattern and harmonic progressions of the piece may very well save a pianist from total collapse in a stressful performance setting.
My hope is that reading this analysis with the score in hand will inspire other pianists to dig more deeply into the pieces they are studying, so that they might interpret those pieces more accurately and musically, while remaining in step with the composer's original intentions. The more deeply a pianist understands the inner harmonic and formal workings of the piece being played, the more truthfully and wonderfully the music can be communicated to the listener. That is the whole point of this analysis; that we would take the best pieces ever written and interpret the music more faithfully, beautifully and wonderfully than ever before. By taking the time to understand our pieces and communicate the music accurately, we become more faithful, intentional musicians who can provide something unique to the world: beautiful, powerful, lush performances of skillfully crafted pieces that move our listeners to awe.
Bibliography


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