

Dr. Melissa Hoag (Oakland University)
MUT311: Form and Analysis

Group exercise: Three Chopin Preludes

Course: Form and Analysis (upper-level undergraduate)
Format: 107 minutes twice per week

Introductory comments:

This is a group exercise to be completed during class time. After we analyzed Chopin's Prelude no. 4 in e minor as a class, I gave each group 20 or so minutes to complete its questions; following this, each group had approximately ten minutes to present its assigned prelude. With more time, I would have asked more detailed questions for each prelude, but because I only have one day to spend on Chopin's small piano works in this course, I could not afford whole-class discussions of each prelude. For each group of questions, I listed some that were required to be answered, but also included one or two more advanced questions in case a group finished early.

I frequently use short, low-risk group projects like this because it provides students with a different classroom experience than the usual discussion format. It also provides students with something more akin to a teaching experience than a formal, prepared presentation. Finally, such an activity encourages students to be actively engaged. This last point is particularly important for a class like mine, which meets for almost two hours at 8 o'clock in the morning.

Though I recently used this particular exercise for a small class of only seven students, I have used similar exercises with larger classes as well (up to fifteen students).

In the case of this exercise, my students' informal presentations were quite successful. Class members asked additional questions; I also asked clarifying questions as needed, and occasionally encouraged students to demonstrate passages at the piano. All students were required to know all three Preludes for their final exam, so it was in the best interest of every student to remain engaged throughout the presentations.

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Chopin Preludes, op. 28, nos. 1, 6, and 9

Group 1 (Prelude no. 1 in C major)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 1-8 (including embellishing tones).

Is any section of the Prelude longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? (Is there a specific pattern or process involved?) Be specific in your response.

Where does the final authentic cadence of the Prelude occur? (Hint: not the last measure!) What happens after the final cadence? How is this passage constructed harmonically?

If time:

In what measure would you say the piece's climax occurs? What parameters (register, pitch, harmony, contour, etc.) lead you to this conclusion? Do you notice anything special about the placement of this climactic moment? (Hint: consider the number of measures in the whole piece.)

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Group 2 (Prelude no. 6 in B minor)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Measures 1-8 exhibit a familiar motivic structure. Name and define this structure.

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 9-14, including embellishing tones (hint: the harmonic rhythm is VERY SLOW).

What harmonic event happens in measures 17-18?

Find and name a prominent metric disturbance (displacement or hemiola).

If time:

Is any part of the form longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? Be as specific as possible. Can you imagine a way in which the form might have been composed in a more symmetrical fashion?

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Group 3 (Prelude no. 9 in E major)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

In detail, outline how each segment of the Prelude is constructed in terms of the following parameters:

- melodic line (contour, use of chromaticism, and ending point)
- harmony (chromaticism and modulation)

If time:

Complete a roman numeral analysis of mm. 1-4 and 9-12. How do these sections compare?

Find examples of the following:

- 5-6 motion
- chromatic third relationships from the original key
- voice exchanges

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ANSWERS

Group 1 (Prelude no. 1)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Form: parallel period (second phrase expanded)

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 1-8 (including embellishing tones).

See score.

Is any section of the Prelude longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? (Is there a specific pattern or process involved?) Be specific in your response.

The second phrase is much longer than the first. First, a chromatic sequence creates an internal expansion. (Best answer: a sequence of parallel sixths from measure 12-21 expands tonic, and an authentic cadence follows this.)

Where does the final authentic cadence of the Prelude occur? (Hint: not the last measure!) What happens after the final cadence? How is this passage constructed harmonically?

Final authentic cadence: m. 25

The final tonic is expanded by plagal motion. (Note that the final upper-voice tonic is withheld during the authentic cadence. It does not appear until mm. 29, when it is repeated four times.)

If time:

In what measure would you say the piece's climax occurs? What parameters (register, pitch, harmony, contour, etc.) lead you to this conclusion? Do you notice anything special about the placement of this climactic moment? (Hint: consider the number of measures in the whole piece.)

Students may have different answers, but most will probably say that the climax occurs in measure 21. This measure features the loudest dynamic marking and the highest register in the right-hand melody. It also marks the point at which the relentlessly ascending contour shifts to a descent, and marks the end of the ascending parallel sixths sequence that has expanded I6 since measure 12.

Measure 21 is situated very near the Golden Section of this 33-measure piece, so its role as dramatic climax fits not only for reasons of register, pitch, harmony, and contour, but also for reasons of proportion.

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ANSWERS

Group 2 (Prelude no. 6)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Form: parallel period (second phrase expanded)

Measures 1-8 exhibit a familiar motivic structure. Name and define this structure.

Sentence structure (a [mm.1-2], a' [mm.3-4], b [mm.5-8])

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 9-14, including embellishing tones (hint: the harmonic rhythm is VERY SLOW).

What harmonic event happens in measures 17-18?

deceptive motion (V-VI)

Find and name a prominent metric disturbance (displacement or hemiola).

Obvious: mm. 13-14, hemiola

Less obvious: mm. 16-17/20-21 (left-hand rhythmic design and harmonic changes in right hand lend a somewhat convincing hemiola interpretation to these measures)

If time:

Is any part of the form longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? Be as specific as possible. Can you imagine a way in which the form might have been composed in a more symmetrical fashion?

The second phrase is longer than the first. The second phrase is expanded by the extra time spent on the Neapolitan in measures 13-14, and by the deceptive motion in measure 18. If measures 13-14 and 18-21 were removed, the two phrases of the period would be more closely symmetrical (note: this only works because the harmonic progression would still remain intact!). Removal of the coda after the final cadence (mm. 23-end) would make this a wholly symmetrical form.

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ANSWERS

Group 3 (Prelude no. 9)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Form: three-phrase period (antecedent, antecedent, consequent)

Depending on how the instructor has taught half cadences, the instructor may wish to explain the first half cadence as particularly weak, in that it is an inverted dominant seventh. We usually would not count such a weak dominant as a half cadence, but I always explain that it substitutes for a more structural half cadence in this location.

In detail, outline how each segment of the Prelude is constructed in terms of the following parameters:

- melodic line (contour, use of chromaticism, and ending point)
- harmony (chromaticism and modulation)

Phrase 1: Melodic line $\hat{5}-\hat{1}-\hat{5}$

Harmony: Diatonic, except for a $V7/V$ in measure 4.

Phrase 2: Melodic line $\hat{5}-\hat{3}$ (enharmonically spelled)- $\hat{5}$

*Harmony: Very chromatic! Moves to $bIII$, then bVI , then modulates to III ($G\#$ major)
(enharmonically spelled as Ab major)*

Phrase 3: Melodic line $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$

Harmony: Sequential modulations from E to F (Neapolitan) to G minor

Melodic lines outline tonic triad.

If time:

Complete a roman numeral analysis of mm. 1-4 and 9-12. How do these sections compare?

See score for RN analysis.

Measures 1 and 9 are based on the very similar progressions. However, through the introduction of mode mixture (C -natural instead of $C\#$), measures 9-12 take an entirely different path, one that is entirely sequential and largely chromatic.

Find examples of the following:

- 5-6 motion *This is everywhere, but I've marked only the most obvious occurrences.*
- chromatic third relationships from the original key *Measures 5 ($bIII$), 6 (bVI), and 8 (III).*
- voice exchanges *See two examples in Phrase 2.*

SIX PRELUDES

from Op. 28 (1836–1839)
Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Inspired by the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Chopin wrote a prelude for each of the twenty-four keys. In terms of both piano writing and musical structure, these aphoristic statements are among the most original creations in the Romantic literature.

PRELUDE 1 IN C MAJOR

In the right-hand part of this prelude, what effects are produced by the changes from two triplets to one quintuplet per bar? Where is the final cadence, and what is happening there?

The musical score for Chopin's Prelude No. 1 in C Major, Op. 28, No. 1, is presented in four systems. The right-hand part (treble clef) features a series of triplets and quintuplets, while the left-hand part (bass clef) provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score includes various musical markings such as *Agitato*, *mf*, *p*, *dim.*, *cresc.*, and *stretto*. Handwritten annotations include *app (or sus, based in inner voice)*, *N*, *C: I * I V 5 * I * I*, *I 6*, *V 6/V*, and *cresc.*

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28

IV - I

IV - I

IV - I

IV - I

pp

And.

*

This musical score segment covers measures 28 to 32. It is written for piano in a 4/4 time signature. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 29. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. Roman numerals 'IV - I' are written below the left hand in measures 29, 30, 31, and 32. The piece concludes with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking and a *And.* (Andante) tempo marking, followed by a final chord marked with an asterisk.

PRELUDE 4 IN E MINOR

Largo

espress.

5

9

13

stretto

This musical score is for Chopin's Prelude 4 in E Minor, marked 'Largo'. It is written for piano in a 4/4 time signature. The right hand plays a simple, expressive melody, while the left hand features a dense, rhythmic accompaniment of eighth-note chords. The score is divided into four systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking 'Largo' and the dynamic 'espress.'. Measure numbers 5, 9, and 13 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The piece concludes with a *stretto* marking and a repeat sign.

PRELUDE 6 IN B MINOR

How does the left-hand part serve simultaneously as principal melody and as foundation of the harmony? What happens at bars 7–8? Why did Chopin write a top-line slur there? Compare Schumann's *Wilder Reiter*, bars 9–16, on page 313.)⁵

⁵ For an analysis, see Charles Burkhardt, "The Polyphonic Melodic Line of Chopin's B-minor Prelude," in *Frederic Chopin / Preludes, Opus 28*, <https://digitalcollections.sfsccc.edu/jmtp/vol26/iss1/15>, particularly Ex. 2, p. 83).

PRELUDE 9 IN E MAJOR

[illegible]

10 *ant*

cresc. *ritenuto* *ff*

♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭.

I V I IV
g: III i V i IV I

PRELUDE 19 IN E FLAT MAJOR⁶

Vivace.
legato

♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭.

6

♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭.

12

♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭.

18

♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭. * ♭.

⁶ An analysis of the entire piece is given in Charles Burkhart, "The Two Curious Moments in Chopin's E Flat Major Prelude," in *Structure and Meaning in Tonal Music: Essays for Carl Schachter*, ed. Burstein and Gagné (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press: forthcoming).