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COLLECTION OF CRITICAL EDITIONS OF THE WORKS OF

Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin

No. 6/2

24 Préludes Op. 28 *2nd Book*

Introduction, Text, Fingering, and Commentary

by

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In the previous page: sculpture of Chopin's left hand carried out following the cast made by Jean-Baptiste Clésinger shortly after the death of the composer.

Foreword to the Second Book

The publication of the Second Book completes our critical edition of the Preludes Op. 28 by Frédéric Chopin.

In the introduction to the First Book we have briefly reviewed some musicological, biographical and editorial sides, which have distinguished as a unicum this sublime collection of musical paintings, all linked together. Here we add that we have profited from Paul Badura-Skoda's edition, which we had given up hope of getting. We also reported for the first time some precious excerpts from the correspondence between Friederike Müller, Chopin's pupil as from late October 1839, and her aunts who had remained in Vienna (see Additional Bibliography, p. IV): it is probably the most important source on Chopin as a teacher (but not only), which informs us about many known and unknown sides of the composer's character and life. For example, in her letter dated Wednesday/Thursday, October 30/31, 1839, comparing his appearance with the one in her memory, Friederike Müller notes: "My poor Chopin is pale as a corpse, looks like a wax figurine, and coughs a lot. At first I would not have recognized him, but today, after talking to him for quite a long time, I recognized his features. He has not aged; he looks a bit like Liszt, only thinner and more severe, but his hair is not so extravagant, even if it is long; it has a completely natural coup de vent" (GOEBL-STR.[2018] p. 51). In the same letter, describing the Chopin's apartment, she specifies that "he lives on the ground floor because he cannot climb the stairs" (ibid. p. 52). Again, in the letter dated Wednesday, November 20, 1839, where the lesson of Sunday 17 is described, we read: "That day (Chopin) was terribly suffering and tense. His look was waxy yellow, he could hardly open his eyes, and for the whole hour he held a bottle of eau de cologne on the piano, with which he occasionally rubbed his temples and forehead" (ibid. p. 64). So the composer had not fully recovered, indeed he had not recovered at all!

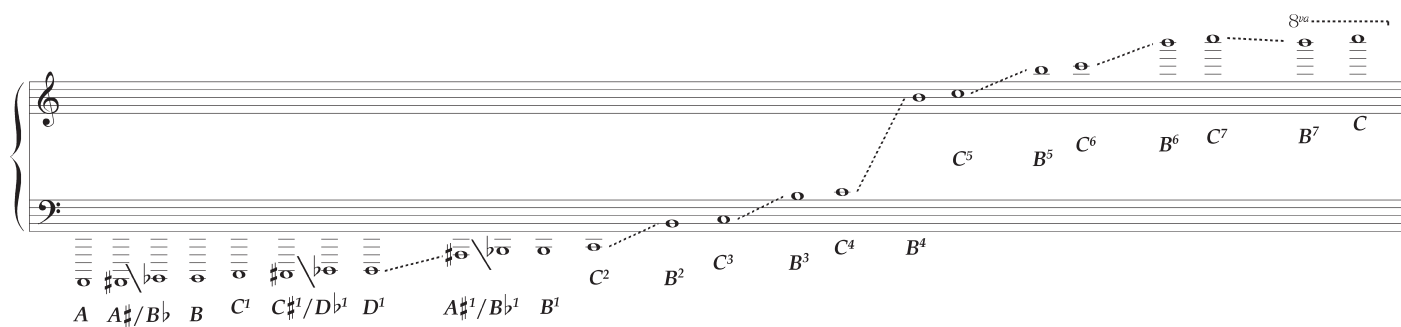
Nevertheless, he loved to play for his pupils and guests. And so we learn that "on Saturday [scil. November 9, 1839] Moscheles came, and Chopin played the so-called black (Etude) [scil. the one on the black keys], the fifth of the first Etudes, then the sixth, magnificently, the 11th with the arpeggiated chords, which Liszt and Wieck also played, and the 10th in A flat at such a speed, with such lightness and clarity that Moscheles was astonished" (ibid. p. 59). Surprising is what is reported in the letter of November 27, which opens with a general consideration: "There are days in life that more than others should be imprinted on the calendar of memory, so that when you are sad and discouraged, you can still revive and console yourself with memory. One of these days, as clear and rosy as ever, was graciously granted to me by heaven (and by my Chopin, well disposed and brilliant beyond words), just today" (ibid. p. 66); then, during the lesson, asking about the Ballade (Op. 23), Chopin says: " 'I want to play it to you (je veux vous la jouer).' Oh, if I could as if by magic have you, Aunt Lotte and Plachy just here in the flesh! You have never heard—I stress—anyone play like that! Aunt Mina is still all excited; just as she was going to bed, she exclaimed, 'No, Chopin is a real genius!' His notes sing, and it is just not clear how a piano can produce such long lasting and yet softly struck sounds. Then, after having superbly preluded for a while, he performed a series of chords in which some notes resonated, even if he had not struck them, but simply he was holding down the key without playing it, so that you thought you heard a harmonica. Wonderful! The effect is to feel electrified! Chopin understood I liked that, because he said: 'It's something new, isn't it (N'est-ce pas, c'est quelque chose de nouveau)!'" (ibid. p. 67). Finally, on Saturday, November 2: "... then (Chopin) played me a Prelude, the 17th. How can I just start writing to you how he plays. All the adjectives would say nothing, any expression would be silly; I admire Thalberg; Liszt leaves me astonished; but when Chopin plays, you do not think about anything, you do not admire anything, just you listen to and you are happy!" (ibid. p. 54 f.).

As usual, we renew our invitation to point out errors or inaccuracies.

Dorno, March 2020.

Franco Luigi Viero

Notes and keys



[To make a simple and immediate connection between the notes on the pentagram and the corresponding keys, we preferred a system of easy understanding for the piano student. Notes without number in superscript correspond to the few keys, which do not belong to full octaves and are at the ends of the keyboard; all the other notes are numbered from 1 to 7 depending on the octave (from C to B), to which they belong, from the lowest to the highest one.]



Additional Bibliography

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- PE^B* Frédéric Chopin, *Klavierwerke: Préludes Op. 28*, herausgegeben von Paul Badura-Skoda, Leipzig/Dresden (Edition Peters) 1984.

