

EXPLORING NEGLECTED KEYBOARD COMPOSITIONS BY CHILD COMPOSERS

by

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Submitted to the faculty of the  
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Music  
Indiana University  
December 2019

Accepted by the faculty of the  
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Music

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December 2019

*To Arnaldo Cohen, for everything that you have taught me about music and life*

## Acknowledgements

The idea for this paper came about back in 2016, when my teacher Arnaldo Cohen introduced me to the music of André Mathieu. Professor Cohen not only provided the inspiration for me to embark on this intriguing topic, but also took the time to guide my research as I navigated through volumes of little-known repertoire. Looking back at my time at Indiana University, I can only say that I was extremely lucky to have studied with a teacher and mentor like him. Thank you Professor Cohen for your never-ending passion and dedication; I shall remain forever indebted to you.

I would not have gotten through my doctorate had it not been the guidance of my committee members, holding me to a standard of excellence. I would like to express sincere gratitude to Professor Evelyn Brancart, for the time and effort she put in to reviewing everything that I have done over my entire doctorate degree. I remain eternally grateful to Dr. Karen Shaw, who pushed me to strive for excellence in my writing and was instrumental in shaping the direction of this paper. Doc, I hope you know that you're dearly missed by many. And last but not least, I have to thank Dr. David Cartledge for agreeing to see me through this last leg of the journey and giving the final polishing I needed for this paper. I was privileged to know you from the beginning of my adventures at Indiana University, and I am grateful that you are seeing me off to the end of my chapter here.

Another wonderful person I cannot forget is Professor Emile Naoumoff, who so humbly provided me with so much of his time to give me a first-hand account of his life and music, as well as scores and manuscripts from his childhood. I am so honored and blessed to have crossed paths with you and your musical world during my time at Indiana University.

To my family: thank you Umma for continuously praying for me, and Appa for having a faith in me that has never swayed once during all these years. Sunmock, I'll always remember how you bought me a plane ticket for Thanksgiving my first year here when I was homesick. Brian, if someone told me the day that we went on that blind date that you would be my husband after three years and one of the few reasons I could survive this degree, I would laugh. Now I'm just grateful that I took a chance and went

out for dinner that fateful day. Thank you guys for your love, support, and that unshakable belief you had in me when I didn't have it myself.

To friends I have met throughout this journey: thank you for brightening up my day in the library or in the practice room, as you helped me stay positive throughout it all. Mokyomoim, meeting with you guys weekly were the only reason I stayed sane and had a strong foundation.

Finally, I give God the glory for placing me on this long and winding journey. You did not abandon me once on this bumpy and bleak road, as you placed all of these people in my life so that I could stay strong until the end. Looking back at this long chapter I've had at Bloomington, I am grateful that I can say Soli Deo Gloria from the beginning to the end.

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## INTRODUCTION

Prodigious children throughout history have been at the center of wonder and awe, and child composers are no exception to this rule. However, the compositions written by child composers do not share this spotlight, as they are often neglected and disregarded. The topic of juvenile compositions is a little-explored field, and research on these works falls largely into four categories, most of which are not relevant.

The first category consists of biographies of composers that happened to be child composers, where juvenile compositions are lucky to get a mention in passing whilst the author discusses the early years. In the second category, juvenile compositions are found in research that surveys a composer's entire compositional output. The research in this category focuses on understanding the style of the composer as it developed throughout their life, and the childhood compositions are often used as aids to better understand the mature works of the composer. The third category is made up of works that are completely unrelated to this topic, which are of compositions written by adults for children. The final category consists of what is of interest to this paper, which is research done specifically on works written by child composers. However, the works in this category are far and few in between.

From this final category comes a book from the scholar and musicologist Barry Cooper that sets itself in its own distinct sub-category. *Child Composers and Their Works: A Historical Survey* (The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2008) traces compositions written by children throughout history (surveying composers born between 1449 and 1899). Barry Cooper's research was the inspiration and starting point for this document.

Why exactly are compositions written by children so disregarded? Children's works are brushed aside, often thought to be lacking originality or competence. Cooper's book states that children learn in three different ways: through imitation of what they hear, through obedience and heedi ng instructions by

adults, and through trial and error. When children compose, it is most likely the result of one or a combination of these factors.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, Barry Cooper believes that the third method (trial and error) offers room for chance discoveries through which children are able to find interesting and novel musical possibilities.<sup>2</sup> However, it is impossible to know how a child composed a certain work without first-hand accounts. The chances are high that most compositions by children do not show competency nor originality.

Despite this, is it possible to find keyboard compositions by children that defy these odds? The goal of this research is to take a deeper look at juvenile compositions and determine whether there are works written by children that amount to more than mere copies, compositional exercises, or childish experiments.

This paper will explore keyboard compositions by Ludwig Van Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn, André Mathieu, and Emile Naoumoff, all which were written between the ages of 4 and 12.<sup>3</sup> Each chapter will start by discussing the biography of the composer briefly, as well as mentioning other keyboard compositions from childhood to supplement context. The main body will contain a detailed examination, discussing aspects like form, melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and pianism of each piece. Signs of personal musical inclinations that allude to future works by the composer will also be mentioned. The remainder of each chapter will discuss the value of these pieces in the concert repertoire and in

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Cooper, *Child Composers & Their Works: A Historical Survey*, (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2008), 45-46. Children often compose through imitation, copying and reproducing the sounds that they hear from around them. Compositions written through imitation are often neat replicas, but little originality can be found. Also, these compositions can show signs of incompetence, as most children will not understand compositional rules and how to adhere to them. Children also learn to compose by following adult instruction, and the compositions are shaped by adult guidance. However, the end results are rather like exercises in counterpoint and form building. When children compose through trial and error, the act of composition is like playtime, as children fancifully experiment until they find something that pleases them.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>3</sup> This study does not focus on the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as notable works from his childhood years were mainly written for other mediums. Prior to age 13, Mozart wrote nine symphonies, one sacred drama, one cantata, and three operas, but only two collections of short works (Works from *Nannerl Notenbuch*, K. 1-5, and *The London Notebook*, K. 15) and a few miscellaneous variations were written for the keyboard. These short keyboard pieces did not justify the quality of his compositions from his youth, and thus were left out.

pedagogical situations. To give a better understanding of these pieces, they will be compared to the Royal Conservatory of Music's classification of solo piano repertoire, which ranges from the easiest, grade 1, to the most difficult, the ARCT.

One could ask at what point the composer stops being a child and is considered an adult. "Coming of age" comes at different points in various cultures, and it is necessary to find a unifying threshold to avoid confusion. This research will look at compositions produced before the age of thirteen, which is generally the point where many cultures signify that one is entering puberty and on the road to adulthood.

## Chapter 1:

### LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827) - PRODIGY FROM BONN

#### Early Life

As a child whose musical talent was apparent from a young age, Ludwig Van Beethoven was subject to his father's heavy expectations to make him into the next Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Johann van Beethoven was a musician at the court of the Prince-Archbishop-Elector of Cologne Clemens August of Bavaria. Johann is recorded as being an abusive and strict father, making Ludwig focus most of his efforts on musical studies alone to make his talent into a "marketable commodity".<sup>1</sup>

Although Ludwig was also interested in composing, his father prohibited those efforts. It was only when Ludwig started studying with Christian Gottlob Neefe at 10 years old that Johann gave up trying to stop his son. Neefe fully encouraged Ludwig's compositions, helping the boy get his first compositions published in 1782 and 1783.

The first critique on Ludwig's initial publications was unfortunately bad, as the *Musikalischer Almanach* dismissed them as exercises written by a beginner,<sup>2</sup> and this is how Ludwig's early compositions have been viewed throughout the years. Although the early compositions are not on the same level as his mature works, there are definite signs of musical intention and thought that merit a closer look, with clear traces of the composer that will emerge.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, ed. Elliot Forbes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

## Compositions from Childhood

In letters from his adult years, Ludwig boldly proclaimed that when it came to composition, “[he] never had to learn how to avoid mistakes”, and that he “wrote correctly without knowing it had to be that way.”<sup>3</sup> Beethoven’s first published composition was the *9 Variations on a March by Dressler, WoO 63* in 1782. This work shows an intuition for the variation genre (which he championed throughout his entire life), where Beethoven understood the need for organic growth of the variations from one to the next.

Any composition that was written prior to this does not survive, making this set of variations the earliest composition by Beethoven that is currently available. In 1783, he composed a handful of pieces, such as the two Rondos for piano (WoO 48, 49), a short lieder, *Schilderung eines Mädchens, WoO 107*, and an organ work, *Fugue in D major, WoO 39*. However, the major output of the year was the *Kurfürstensonaten, WoO 47*, a set of three piano sonatas.

The three *Kurfürstensonaten* were published by Bossler, with an elaborate dedication to the Elector (Kurfürst) Maximilian Frederick (hence the name *Kurfürstensonaten*). This puts Beethoven at age 12 when the work was published.

### ***Piano Sonata in F Minor, WoO 47 no. 2, “Kurfürstensonata”***

The *9 Variations on a March by Dressler* was clearly written for harpsichord, as the score shows no volume markings and very few articulations. However, the *Kurfürstensonaten* show clear indications that it was written for the pianoforte as they are full of effects only possible by the newer instrument.

A surface glance at the *Kurfürstensonaten* may cause one to conclude that they are copies of late Haydn or Mozart, but there are definitely signs of the Beethovenian voice that are hard to miss. Jan Swafford notes that these sonatas show the character associations that Beethoven had for specific keys in works throughout his life.<sup>4</sup> The first *Kurfürstensonata* in E flat major projects a character of noble dignity,

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<sup>3</sup> Thayer, 40.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 63.

similar to the one which can be found in the *Piano Concerto no. 5 op. 73, "Emperor"*. The second sonata in F minor is fiery and driven, similar to works like the *Piano Sonata op. 2 no. 1*, or the *Piano Sonata Op. 57, "Appassionata"*. The third sonata in D major is cheerful and jovial, a predecessor to the *Piano Sonata Op. 10 no. 3*, and the *Piano Trio Op. 70 no. 1, "Ghost"*. Although all three *Kurfürstensonaten* show brilliance, this paper will look in depth at the second sonata in F minor, which is regarded by some as the most prophetic out of the three.

Richard and Edith Sterba state that a sense of rebellion was probably instilled in Ludwig from a young age due to his father's strict regimen. This is seen as the basis of his deep revolt against any sort of authority, a characteristic of his entire life and output.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his life, he looked down upon rules of any kind and sought to prove that he could do otherwise. This is a good starting point for looking at this sonata, which shows the young Beethoven already deviating from conventional formal practices of the day. All three movements have semblance to sonata form, but each have some quirks.

### 1<sup>st</sup> movement – *Larghetto Maestoso – Allegro Assai*

The first movement is in a straight-forward sonata form in F minor save an unusual feature: the nine measures of slow introduction prior to the exposition. (See Table 1.1)

**Table 1.1: Formal Structure of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt***

1 <sup>st</sup> movement: F minor, 2/2, <i>Larghetto Maestoso – Allegro Assai</i>	
mm. 1—9	Slow Introduction (9 m.)
Exposition (mm. 10—37)	
mm. 10—18	Theme 1 (F minor, 8 m.)
mm. 19—37	Theme 2 (A flat major, 19 m.)
Development (mm. 38—57)	
mm. 38—47	Theme 1 fragment in A flat major, modulation to end on V chord of B flat minor
mm. 48—57	Slow introduction in B flat minor, with a transition that leads to a half cadence in F minor
Recapitulation (mm. 58—84)	
mm. 58—65	Theme 1 (F minor, 8 m.)
mm. 66—84	Theme 2 (F minor, 19 m.)

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<sup>5</sup> Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 111.



Before the 1790s, the slow introduction was scarcely used in the piano sonata genre and this work is the earliest piano sonata currently known to have used this feature.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that the rolled chords, dotted rhythms, the half cadence at the end, and the slow tempo marking were inspired by the French overture from the Baroque period as Neefe had introduced Beethoven heavily to the works of J.S. Bach and C.P.E. Bach.<sup>7</sup> (See Example 1.1) Later in his life, Beethoven used a slow introduction again in the *Piano Sonata Op. 13 in C minor, “Pathétique”*, and there are many similarities between the two slow introductions of these sonatas. (See Example 1.2) Although slow introductions in piano sonatas became more common in later years, it was not used frequently yet in 1783.



**Example 1.1: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2 in F minor*, 1st mvmt, mm. 1—9**



**Example 1.2: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata op. 13 in C minor “Pathétique”*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—2**

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<sup>6</sup> James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Cary: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2006), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=430430>, 296.

<sup>7</sup> Swafford, 44.

After the slow introduction, the exposition bursts forth fervidly with a marking of *Allegro Assai*, which also has its share of peculiarities. Theme 1 is eight measures long while theme 2 is much longer at 19 measures, and the transition passage conventionally found between the two themes is missing. The eight measures of theme 1 are not divided into the usual 4+4 phrase division, but rather into 1 (descending scale) + 2 (rising figure with a pedal on F) + 3 (descending dotted rhythm sequence) + 2 (ending on a half cadence by outlining the dominant note, C). It seems like the idea was to outline a quick series of ascending and descending motions. While the idea is not bad, the lack of balance in the phrase structure makes the ascending and descending figures feel disjointed, and the half cadence at the end does not give enough closure to theme 1.

After this half cadence, theme 2 starts right away without warning in A flat major.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the unstable and volatile theme 1, the phrases are relatively balanced with a sunny disposition. There are several perfect cadences that give a sense of stability, and the exposition ends with a resounding PAC in A flat major.

The development picks up in A flat major, but the bass suddenly moves up chromatically in m. 42 to become part of the dominant chord in B flat minor, the minor ii key. This transition into B flat minor leads to the return of the slow introduction (now marked *Andante Maestoso*). The return of the slow introduction within the movement in a sonata was highly unusual at the time, and Beethoven used this element in his later compositions as well (most notably in his string quartets op. 127 no. 1, 2, and op. 130).<sup>9</sup> The slow introduction in the “wrong” key leads to a descending stepwise sequence of blocked chords. However, in the middle of this sequence, Beethoven skips a step in the anticipated bass motion and uses a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord that is not properly preceded nor resolved on to the dominant of F

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<sup>8</sup> Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen, *Beethoven: Die Klaviersonaten* (New York: Barenreiter, 2013), 40; and Hugo Riemann, *L. van Beethoven sämtliche Klavier-Solosonaten: ästhetische und formal-technische Analyse mit historischen Notizen*, vol. 5 (Berlin, M. Hesse, 1920), 48. Both authors view that there is no transition given between the first and second themes.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, 98.

minor.<sup>10</sup> This is an unexpected move and gives it the shock value that Beethoven was possibly going for, but the execution of the chord progressions and bass sequence is not yet at a level to properly give justice to the idea. (See Example 1.3)



**Example 1.3: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2 in F minor*, 1st mvmt, mm. 52—57**

The recapitulation returns in F minor, and other than the fact that Theme 2 is now presented in F minor, there are no significant changes from the exposition.

Throughout the movement, the abundance of sharp dynamic contrasts and the copious amount of carefully notated articulations are notable, showing Beethoven taking advantage (almost to an excess) of the capabilities of the new fortepiano. The sudden dynamic changes from pianissimo to fortissimo, or the quickly changing articulations on fast 16<sup>th</sup> notes will require a very fine pianist to execute exactly what the score dictates.

One could remark that the faults in this movement were because the young Beethoven was not competent as a composer yet. This may be true, but when looking at the other movements and the other two sonatas in this opus, it is clear that Beethoven knew how to write “even” phrases while using the key relations and cadences that was the standard at the time for sonata form. The sudden changes in key and mood are not present in the other sonatas, and they were probably meant to add to the tempestuous character for this movement specifically. There is a definite understanding of character and drama and

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<sup>10</sup> R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn's Musical Education: A Study and Edition of His Exercises in Composition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 26. Johann Kirnberger's treatise, *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* (1774) specifically states that diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords should be used only like a dominant 9<sup>th</sup> chord without the bass note, and need to resolve to the tonic.

some interesting ideas, but it probably was hindered by lack of experience to notate them effectively.

There is a curious mind at work here, one which shows promise for bigger things to come.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> movement – *Andante*

The second movement is in A flat major, and the structure and phrases are clear and straight-forward when compared to the first movement. (See Table 1.2)

**Table 1.2: Formal Structure of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt***

2 <sup>nd</sup> movement: A flat major, 2/4, <i>Andante</i>	
Exposition (mm. 1 — 1 <sup>st</sup> beat of 40)	
mm. 1—8 (1 <sup>st</sup> beat)	Theme 1 (A flat major, 8 m.)
mm. 8 (2 <sup>nd</sup> beat) — 27 (1 <sup>st</sup> beat)	Transition (confirms tonic key of A flat major, modulates to E flat major and ends on a B flat pedal [V of E flat], 19 m.)
mm. 27 (2 <sup>nd</sup> beat) — 35 (1 <sup>st</sup> beat)	Theme 2 (E flat major, 8 m.)
mm. 35 (2 <sup>nd</sup> beat) — 40 (1 <sup>st</sup> beat)	Codetta (E flat major, 5 m.)
Development (2 <sup>nd</sup> beat of mm. 40—60)	
mm. 40—54	Development on thematic material of Theme 1 (F minor, but no PAC)
mm. 55—60	Modulatory, ends on V of A flat major
Recapitulation (mm. 61—85)	
mm. 61 — 69 (1 <sup>st</sup> beat)	Transition (A flat major, first 10 measures are missing, ends on E flat pedal [V of A flat], 9 m.)
mm. 69 (2 <sup>nd</sup> beat) — 77 (1 <sup>st</sup> beat)	Theme 2 (A flat major, 8 m.)
mm. 77 (2 <sup>nd</sup> beat) — 85	Codetta (A flat major, extended ending as material from Theme 1 appears, 8 m.)

In this movement, the treatment of texture and the way in which themes are written are evocative of different instruments. Theme 1 introduces a lyric melody in *andante* with a second voice a third below, which could easily be transcribed to a duet for two clarinets. It is an eight-measure phrase that divides neatly into 4+4. The transition modulates from A flat major to eventually arrive at the dominant key of E flat major. The new material in the transition has the right hand in constant 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, with every single note having an articulation marking. The new fortepiano allowed this sort of precise and quick alternation between articulations and Beethoven seems to have capitalized on this. Although it is possible to execute,

it requires careful dexterity and control, and seems rather like a passage written for a flautist. (See Example 1.4)



**Example 1.4: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2 in F minor*, 2nd mvmt, mm. 19—22**

Theme 2 begins on a delicate dominant pedal of E flat major, with the melody in a duet once again. Although this theme has several cadences in this dominant key, the chromatic passages and modulations keep it from settling into this key until the final PAC at the end. A codetta of six measures repeats the V-I cadence in E flat major with sudden dynamic changes of forte and piano, which finishes the exposition.

The development starts with the sudden appearance of D flat in the bass, which is part of the  $\text{vii}^{\text{o}4}_2$  chord of F minor. The first 14 measures use the thematic materials from theme 1, 2, and the first half of the transition in F minor, but all of the cadences end with the Tierce de Picardie. This tactic provides resolutions that are not satisfying, and an impression of wandering without actually modulating. The flute-like thematic material from the second half of the transition then returns, going through a circle of 5<sup>ths</sup> until it finds itself back in A flat major and briefly pauses on a half cadence.

After this half cadence the second half of the transition from the exposition appears in its entirety, but now transposed to A flat major. This is actually the beginning of the recapitulation, which is impossible for listeners to realize as theme 1 and the first half of the transition have been discarded. Theme 2 and the codetta follow after the truncated transition, all back in the tonic key of A flat major. However, the missing theme 1 is not completely gone, as a fragment of it returns after the codetta to finish off the movement.

Omitting or switching the placement of the first theme in the recapitulation is not necessarily a novel practice, as it can be seen in the 2nd movement of F. Haydn's *Piano Sonata in C major Hob. XVI/35* (written 1750?) and the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of W.A. Mozart's *Piano Sonata in D major, K. 311* (written 1777). However, Beethoven does not produce an exact replica of either of his predecessors' works, as Haydn's recapitulation completely omits theme 1, and Mozart's recapitulation merely changes the order and theme 1 returns in its entirety after theme 2.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> movement - Presto

The final movement of this sonata returns as a fiery *presto* in F minor. Like the other two movements, it is once again in sonata form, but with a few structural oddities. (See Table 1.3)

**Table 1.3: Formal Structure of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt***

3 <sup>rd</sup> movement: F minor, 2/4, <i>Presto</i>	
Exposition (mm. 1—74)	
mm. 1—16	Theme 1 (F minor, 16 m.)
mm. 16—32	Theme 1 repeated (F minor, embellished, 16 m.)
mm. 33—44	Transition (A flat major, 12 m.)
mm. 45—52	Theme 2 (A flat major, 8 m.)
mm. 53—74	Theme 2 repeated and extended (A flat major, 23 m.)
Development (mm. 75—84)	
mm. 75—83	Development on thematic material of Theme 1 (F minor, ends on V of F minor)
Recapitulation (mm. 85—126)	
mm. 85—96	Theme 1 (F minor, highly altered, ends on the V chord of F minor. 8 m.)
mm. 97—104	Theme 2 (F minor, 8 m.)
mm. 105—126	Theme 2 repeated and extended (F minor, 23 m.)

The tempo marking, time signature and the quick eighth notes of the first theme feel similar to the initial thematic material in the third movement of his *Piano Sonata op. 10 no. 2 in F major*. Additionally, the near-frantic character, time signature of 2/4, and the key is akin to the third movement of his *Piano Sonata op. 57, "Appassionata" in F minor*. Given the quick tempo, time signature, and the changing of harmony generally every two measures, it is more natural to feel the downbeat on every other measure in this final movement.

For the exposition (and recapitulation), Beethoven chose to repeat the themes twice. The exposition begins with the driven theme 1, which has both hands heavily articulated and ornamented in unison. (See Example 1.5) Once again, this will be a tricky passage to execute effectively and exactly as written, especially as the tempo marking is *presto*. After this first iteration of theme 1 in unison, it is repeated with the left hand in a frantic alberti bass pattern.

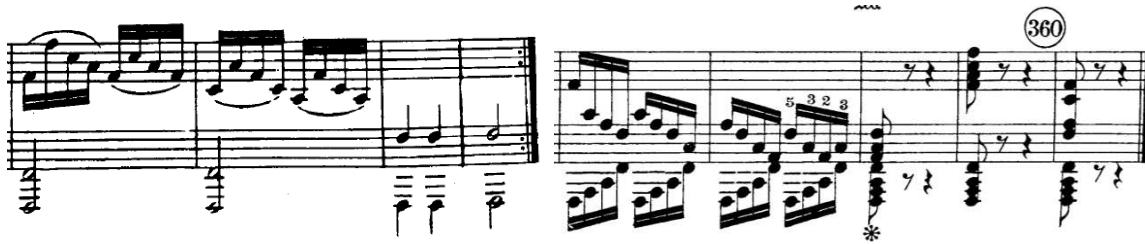


**Example 1.5: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2 in F minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—8**

The transition brings in some calm, with its sudden change to piano and A flat major. It uses material from theme 1, but the character is changed as it is fragmented and written like a call-and-response between the hands. Theme 2 outlines a big V-I cadence in A flat major with 16<sup>th</sup> notes in large ascending and descending motions in the right hand. The second iteration of theme 2 is exactly the same except that it has a few extra measures that go through quick diversions through the subdominant, and finally a PAC in A flat major ends the exposition.

The development starts back unexpectedly in F minor, which has both hands in unison with ornaments, articulations, and contours that resemble theme 1. After only 10 measures of this, a half cadence in F minor precedes the transition from the exposition (now transposed to F minor), which is once again the beginning of the recapitulation with an omitted theme 1. Like the second movement, the material for the development and the transition are all based on the same thematic material, making it hard to discern where the recapitulation started. The rest of the recapitulation continues exactly as the exposition (but transposed to F minor), with theme 2 and all of its extra diversions.

Unlike the second movement, theme 1 does not make a re-appearance in this recapitulation. The forceful manner in which the movement closes uncannily resembles the end of the “Appassionata” sonata. (See Example 1.6)



**Example 1.6: The ending of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata WoO 47 in F minor*, 3rd movement (left), The ending of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata Op. 57 in F minor*, 3rd movement (right).**

## Closing Thoughts

The three *Kurfürstensonaten* have been much neglected in Beethoven’s output, with Wilhelm von Lenz going so far as to claim that “these embryos do not even contain traces of Beethoven”.<sup>11</sup> Thankfully, later authors like Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen and Jan Swafford have viewed these works more favorably than Lenz, and Hugo Riemann and Barry Cooper have included these sonatas as part of Beethoven’s piano sonata output, putting the total number of sonatas at 35.

These *Kurfürstensonaten* showcase a strong understanding of the keyboard instrument and its capabilities. The largest span of notes given is an octave, and everything is thought out in respect of the keyboard geography. A strong understanding of the instrument and its capabilities is notable for an early work in the composer’s output, as there have been cases like Claude Debussy’s *Piano Trio in G major* where the 18-year-old composer wrote a note for the violin that is not playable.

The excess of ornamentations can prove difficult in execution, especially in parts like the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement. (See Example 1.7) Jörg Demus’s recording of this particular sonata on Deutsche Gramophone

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<sup>11</sup> Hinrichsen, 37; my translation.



treats the articulation as a guide on the initial attack in fast passages, rather than the length of the notes.<sup>12</sup> This approach would help the performer make the distinction between the articulation without losing any speed.



**Example 1.7: Beethoven, *Piano Sonata WoO 47 no. 2 in F minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 45—48**

In terms of difficulty, the Royal Conservatory of Music places the 1<sup>st</sup> movement from the *Kurfürstensonate* in E flat major in grade 8, which is considered in the intermediate category. Beethoven's piano sonatas from Op. 49 is placed in the same level, while the other "short" piano sonata, op. 79, is ranked in grade 9.<sup>13</sup> The set of *Kurfürstensonaten* is ideal for an introduction to Beethoven's piano sonatas for intermediate pianists, and is a fresh alternative to the popular Op. 49 and 79 sonatas. Because the two Op. 49 sonatas contain only two movements, the *Kurfürstensonaten* and the Op. 79 sonata (all which have three movements) may be a better introduction to pave the way to the later piano sonatas. *Kurfürstensonaten* no. 1 in E flat and no. 3 in D major are both charming in their own right, with the D major sonata notably using a Minuetto in theme and variation form for its 2<sup>nd</sup> movement.

The *Kurfürstensonaten* are all under 15 minutes in performance even with the repeats, which make them more accessible to program in a concert with time limitations. It may be quite interesting to program the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Kurfürstensonate* along with the *Pathétique* and *Appassionata* Sonatas to show how the seedling from the early sonata blossomed into the later masterpieces.

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<sup>12</sup> Jörg Demus, pianist, *3 Sonatas for piano WoO 47 (Electoral), No. 2 in f minor – III. Presto*, by Ludwig van Beethoven, track 3 on *Klavierwerke vol. 2*, Deutsche Grammophone 453700, 1997, compact disc.

<sup>13</sup> *The Royal Conservatory Piano Syllabus 2015 Edition*, PDF file, May 1, 2019, [www.files.rcmusic.com/sites/default/files/files/RCM-Piano-Syllabus-2015.pdf](http://www.files.rcmusic.com/sites/default/files/files/RCM-Piano-Syllabus-2015.pdf).

## Chapter 2:

### FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847) - ROMANTIC VIRTUOSO

#### Early Life

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1809 to an affluent and high-class family. His grandfather was the famous Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and his father, Abraham, was a banker and a well-cultured man. Both Abraham and his wife, Lea, were excellent amateur musicians, and Fanny and Felix first learned piano from their mother. Abraham and Lea were highly interested in their children's education and subjected them to a rigorous study regime which began every day at 5am.<sup>1</sup>

Felix was known for being enthusiastic about learning, showing interest in many fields. He was a skilled linguist (fluent in German, French, and English, with knowledge of Italian, Greek, and Latin), and gifted in art and music. As a child, he also enjoyed writing (creating a "newspaper" with friends) and loved to put on performances of Shakespeare plays with his siblings (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the favorite of the Mendelssohn children).<sup>2</sup>

Herbert Kupferberg grandly states that "the Mendelssohns were the Rothschilds of culture", and this is probably not an exaggeration.<sup>3</sup> The Mendelssohn Musicales were held on Sunday mornings where famous musicians, great minds, and intellectuals from all over Europe would gather and the Mendelssohn children often performed at these gatherings. Their home at Leipzigerstrasse no. 3 was described as "palace-like",<sup>4</sup> and an audience of several hundred could be invited for these musicales. Orchestras and

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Kupferberg, *The Mendelssohns: Three Generations of Genius* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 107.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 111-112.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, xi.

choirs were engaged for Felix to try out his own compositions, and he was given the freedom to select the program, run rehearsals, play as soloist, as well as conduct his works from a very young age.

Both Felix and Fanny were highly talented performers, as Felix was transposing études at sight at age eight, and Fanny played from memory 24 preludes from J.S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier at age twelve.<sup>5</sup> Felix always viewed Fanny as the superior pianist, and it is unfortunate that Fanny was not permitted to pursue a career in music, being a woman of upper class.

Both children benefited from learning from famous teachers like Franz Lauska (teacher of Meyerbeer), Marie Bigot (highly talented pianist who played for both Haydn and Beethoven and received critical praise from both composers), and Ludwig Berg (colleague of Clementi and John Field, whose playing inspired E.T.A. Hoffmann to feature him in a short story).<sup>6</sup> However, the teacher that ended up having the most impact on Felix's music was C. F. Zelter, a rather bristly man with conservative tastes, who was good friends with the famous poet Goethe.

Continuing his precocious beginnings as a performer, Felix was also a prolific composer and achieved stature early on with his *String Octet* (1825) and *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826), composed at ages 15 and 16 respectively. In the Romantic time period where his colleagues were pushing the boundaries of musical style, Mendelssohn's works use the technique and forms of past eras. However, his works embrace the sensibility and expressiveness of the Romantics, which place them amongst his contemporaries.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 155, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 53.

## Compositions from Childhood

1820 and 1821 were productive years for Mendelssohn, as he produced many compositions. From what is still available today, we can see that he wrote eight sonatas (that are complete) during these two years, which are mainly for piano. (See Table 2.1)

**Table 2.1: Sonatas that Mendelssohn wrote between 1820-1821**

Solo Piano	Sonata in A minor (1820)
	Sonata in C minor (1820)
	Sonata in E minor (1820)
	Sonata in F minor (1820)
	Sonatina in E major (1821)
	Sonata in G minor, op. 105 (1821)
Two Pianos	Sonata in D major (1820)
Violin	Sonata in F major (1820)

These sonatas are still largely influenced by the previous century. The formal and stylistic models are highly similar to Mozart and Haydn, and there are passages that resemble exercises in counterpoint.<sup>7</sup> However, James Mannheim states that these works show an emergence of the “distinctive delicate melancholy that is the essence of Mendelssohn’s language.”<sup>8</sup>

Most of these sonatas are now available in recent publications, but the only one that received an opus number is the *Piano Sonata in G minor, op. 105*. The composition was written at age 12 in 1821, but it was published posthumously in 1868 along with his *Piano Sonata in B flat major, op. 106* (written in 1827), thus acquiring a deceptively high opus number.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 70.

<sup>8</sup> James Manheim, “Mendelssohn Rarities – Roberto Prosseda,” All Music, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.allmusic.com/album/mendelssohn-rarities-mw0001398512>.

<sup>9</sup> R. Larry Todd, *Grove Music Online*, “Mendelssohn(-Bartholdy), (Jacobd Ludwig) Felix,” accessed September 14, 2019, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051795>.

## ***Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 105***

Although it seems quite conservative when compared to other Romantic compositions, the *Piano Sonata in G minor, op. 105* is probably the most “modern” out of all of the sonatas from 1820-1821. In the early 1820s, when Beethoven was writing his final piano sonatas and Schubert his *Wanderer Fantasie*, Mendelssohn’s education with Zelter was based around the music and style of J. S. Bach. Zelter taught how to write chorales, 4-part counterpoint, canons, and fugues using Kirnberger’s treatise, *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, which teaches the fundamentals of music harmony using principles from the music of J. S. Bach. Although Mendelssohn soaked up his teacher’s highly conservative style and was an excellent student, an independent musical taste began to show up in his compositions.

A big influence on Mendelssohn during this time period were the two works of Carl Maria von Weber that premiered in June of 1821: the opera *Der Freischütz, Op. 77*, and a work for piano and orchestra, the *Konzertstück in F minor, Op. 79*. Both compositions were notable for the radical and liberal use of the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord. Although Zelter was not too impressed with Weber’s compositions (as he commented that the *Konzertstück* had “gunpowder and nonsense”), the *Konzertstück* became a staple in Felix’s repertoire and he and Fanny became big fans of *Der Freischütz*.<sup>10</sup>

In these works, Weber used diminished 7ths as suspensions. This is quite shocking when compared to Kirnberger’s treatise, which states that this chord should be used in caution and always be treated as a minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> chord without a root that resolves to the tonic. Despite Zelter’s careful instruction, Felix’s counterpoint notebooks show a few examples where he uses the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord as a suspension.<sup>11</sup> Although we do not know when these exercises were completed, there seems to be a good chance that it was after hearing Weber’s works.

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<sup>10</sup> Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Todd, *Mendelssohn’s Musical Education: A Study and Edition of His Exercises in Composition*, 26.

The *Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 105* was completed a few months after Weber's premieres, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1821. It is usually described as "cut and dried" due to its monothematic outer movements,<sup>12</sup> but the rich harmonic language (which shows heavy influence of Weber) and the lush sensibility of the middle movement showcase a tendency towards the ideals of the Romantic period.

### 1<sup>st</sup> movement – *Allegro*

The first movement of this sonata is in a monothematic sonata form, and it is structurally quite straightforward except one oddity in the final coda. (See Table 2.2)

**Table 2.2: Formal structure of Mendelssohn's *Piano Sonata op. 105*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt**

1 <sup>st</sup> movement: G minor, 4/4, <i>Allegro</i>	
Exposition (mm. 1-60)	
mm. 1—18a	Theme 1 (two iterations of the theme in G minor, 18 m.)
mm. 18b—31	Transition (modulates from G minor into B flat minor, ends on the V of B flat minor, 14 m.)
mm. 32—51a	Theme 2 (B flat major, 9 m., B flat minor, 9 m, but ends on B flat major, 18m.)
mm. 51b—60	Closing material (confirms the B flat major key and uses the transition material, 9m.)
Development (mm. 61—106)	
mm. 61—106	New thematic material (based on Theme 1 material) introduced, which is developed on and modulated along with the material from Themes 1 and 2 through many different keys, finally ends with the V of G minor
Recapitulation (mm. 107—172)	
mm. 107—124a	Theme 1 (two iterations of the theme in G minor, 18 m.)
mm. 124b—133	Transition (stays in G minor, 10m.)
mm. 134—144a	Theme 2 (in G minor, only one phrase which is slightly elongated, 11m.)
mm. 144b-157	Closing material (confirms G minor key and uses the materials from the themes, transition, and development, 14m.)
mm. 158—172	Coda (Unusual because the repeat sign usually found at the end of a recapitulation is found before the coda at measure 157. Repeat sign goes back to the beginning of the development. 14m.)

Theme 1 has a mischievous yet driven character in G minor and has two phrases that form a textbook example of a musical period. The diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords seen in this theme are treated like a minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> without a root that resolves to the tonic. In fact, there are no diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords in

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<sup>12</sup> R. Larry Todd, liner notes for *Mendelssohn: The Complete Solo Piano Music, Vol. 3*, Howard Shelley, Hyperion CDA68098, 2015, compact disc.

this movement that resolve following the directions from Kirnberger’s treatise. The chord is used an unusual amount, saturating the movement. (See Example 2.1)



**Example 2.1: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—9**

In the transition, the left hand has bass octaves while the right hand has triplets that descend from up high, requiring the left and right hands to change parts in the middle to accommodate it. The transition performs its traditional function to modulate from the tonic to the relative major key.

Theme 2 also has two phrases: the first phrase is in B flat major while the second is in B flat minor. The first half of the phrase uses the same thematic material as the beginning of theme 1, but the second half of the phrase is different, as it contains a circle of 5ths using the minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> chord. (See Example 2.2) This must have been quite a novel sonority at the time, as having so many minor dominant 9ths in a row makes it sound like a very distant ancestor of jazz progressions.



**Example 2.2: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 36—40**

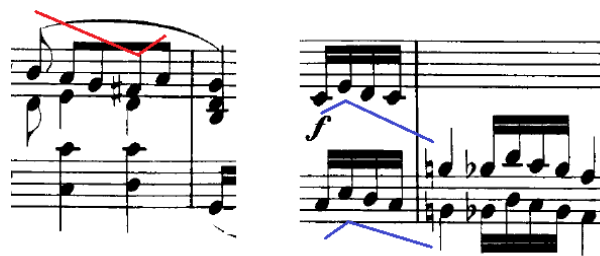
The exposition finishes with a closing material in B flat major that uses the thematic material from the transition. However, the PAC in B flat major is not the end of the exposition, as a little fragment of theme 1 is used as a transition to either go back to the beginning of the exposition or go onwards to the

development. (See Example 2.3) This tactic is similar to how Beethoven transitioned into the development in the first movement of his *Piano Sonata op. 10 no. 3 in D major*.



**Example 2.3: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 56—65**

Although the transition to the development seems to lead back into G minor, the development actually ends up starting in C minor. (See Example 2.3) The development section starts with what looks like a new theme, but this is actually an inversion of a fragment of theme 1. (See Example 2.4) Throughout the development, this fragment is seen in sequence and presented in conjunction with other portions of theme 1, travelling through several different keys before it returns to the recapitulation.



**Example 2.4: A fragment of theme 1 (shown in red) and the same fragment found inverted in the development (shown in blue), Mendelssohn's *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt**

The recapitulation is nearly identical to the exposition, except that the transition stays in G minor and theme 2 is also in the tonic key. At the end of the recapitulation, the closing material starts in G minor, but a reappearance of the sequence from the development leads to a repeat sign (at m. 157) that



goes back to the beginning of the development. This seems to be a way to accommodate the vague end/beginning of the exposition and development, as going back to the beginning of the development after a clear cadence would not have worked.<sup>13</sup> The coda arrives at measure 157, which mashes together the thematic materials from the development and the themes, finally finishing the movement on a PAC in G minor.

One thing to note when learning this movement is that there is a strong gravitational pull to the third beat of the measure. When looking at the way that theme 1 is notated, the first two-note slur falls on the third beat, which creates what I perceive to be an emphasis stronger than what is felt on the original downbeat. Many pianists end up playing so that the third beat is the strongest, as though the downbeat was displaced.<sup>14</sup> (See Example 2.5) If played in this way, the exposition (and recapitulation) flows quite organically as many cadences and important chords happen on the third beat. For instance, the minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> circle of 5ths start on the third beat, and passages in the closing material (and the coda) give a punch on the third beat by placing a chord there. (See Example 2.6)



**Example 2.5: Original notation of theme 1 (line 1), and the theme with the downbeat shifted to the third beat (line 2), Mendelssohn’s *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt**

<sup>13</sup> In the first movement of *Piano Sonata Op. 10 no. 3 in D major*, Beethoven chooses not to write a repeat sign at the end of the recapitulation.

<sup>14</sup> Igor Komarov, “Igor Komarov plays Mendelssohn Piano Sonata Op. 105,” Margo Beloved, YouTube video, 15:47, <https://youtu.be/cmC3iyqdhwg>; and Brigitte Meyer, “Mendelssohn – Brigitte Meyer (2014) Piano Sonata No.2, Op. 105 (1821),” On The Top of Damavand for ever, YouTube video, 16:48, <https://youtu.be/G7NlVuImfi0>. These recordings are a couple of examples of performances that feature a stronger third beat.

Roberto Prosseda, pianist, *Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 105, MWV U 30 – I. Allegro*, by Felix Mendelssohn, track 12 on *Piano con fuoco* CD 1, Decca DEC 4765118, 2012, compact disc. Prosseda’s recording does this to a lesser degree, but still has a strong third beat.



**Example 2.6:** Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 56—57

However, in the development, the performer must make decisions on how to perform the fragmented thematic material. When the fragmentation of the slurred pairs from theme 1 arrive, they start on beat two instead of three. The performer has the choice to either make the first pair louder to keep it in line with how they are played in the original theme or to make the second pair louder to keep the third beat the strongest. (See Example 2.7) In any case, the performer should be consistent throughout this section in how they have decided to play these slurs.



**Example 2.7:** Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 72—73 and mm. 89—90

### 2nd movement – Adagio, Cantabile e lento

Although trained in the fundamentals of music from the Baroque era, the second movement of this sonata clearly shows that Mendelssohn was breathing in the style of his time. The movement is loosely structured in a ternary form (ABA') and is in the unusual submediant key of E flat major. (See Table 2.3)

**Table 2.3: Formal structure of Mendelssohn’s *Piano Sonata op. 105, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt***

2 <sup>nd</sup> movement: E flat major, 3/8, Adagio – Cantabile e lento	
A section (mm. 1—47)	In E flat major, modulates to the mediant key of G minor, 47 m.
B section (mm. 47—117)	Starts in G minor and modulates to B flat major and C minor, ends on the tonic key of E flat major, 71 m.
A' section (mm. 117—155)	In E flat major, some material from the A section is slightly truncated and modulated to the tonic key, and ends in the tonic key of E flat major, 39 m.

The movement starts out with a large expressive leap of over two octaves. Although there is a pedal in the bass on an E flat, the tonic chord is not fully established until the 7<sup>th</sup> measure. The progression begins on the  $V_2^4$  of the dominant, which goes to a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord (used as the minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> key without the root) and then finally resolves to the tonic. (See Example 2.8) The first satisfactory PAC in the tonic key is not given until measure 31, and the lack of this cadence causes the initial 30 measures to feel unsettled.



**Example 2.8: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt*, mm. 1—7**

Right at the beginning of this movement, a raised 4<sup>th</sup> degree is placed against the tonic note in the bass (which is part of the  $V_2^4/V$ ), which creates a momentary augmented 4<sup>th</sup> before it is resolved chromatically. This gives a melancholy coloration within the major, setting the mood for what is to come ahead. Mendelssohn wrote brief augmented fourths that resolve chromatically in the beginning of several of his other compositions throughout his life (by using the  $V_2^4/V$  or a passing note), all which convey moods that can be only described as part-sentimental, part-melancholy, and part-nostalgic. This

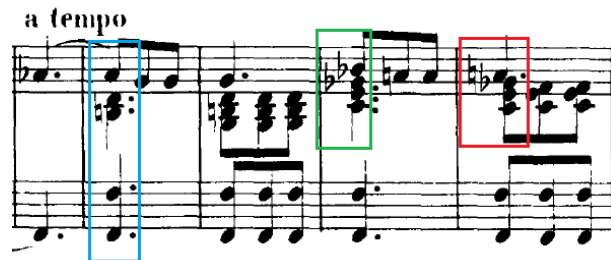
movement, as well as all of the examples below, all happen to have the marking of *adagio*. (See Example 2.9)

**Example 2.9: Top: “Sadness of Soul”, Op. 53 no. 4, Bottom left: “Retrospection”, Op. 102 no. 2, Bottom right: *Organ Sonata op. 65 no. 1 in F minor, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt* by Mendelssohn**

In this movement, the use of the open damper pedal is especially notable. This technique had been previously used by Haydn, Dussek, and Beethoven, but it was still relatively new in Mendelssohn’s time. The damper pedal is used in this movement to create a wash of sound that is characteristic of Romantic piano repertoire. This technique is used to blur the passages with pianissimo arpeggiation that unfurl gently across the keyboard, and also to accommodate the long notes held as pedal point in the bass. The damper pedal markings usually align with the harmony changes but at times the pedal keeps going across different harmonies, creating dissonant washes of sound.

Diminished 7ths are once again very prominent in this movement with nearly all of the major cadences using a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> or a minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> chord in the place of a dominant chord. However, Mendelssohn has slipped in some usages of diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords as suspensions or passing chords, discreetly using non chord tones like appoggiaturas and suspensions to briefly create the sonority before melting into a different chord. There are several instances of this, and the most prominent and complex

example of this is when the opening theme returns in the B section. Through passing notes and suspensions, three different diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords are implied within just five measures. (See Example 2.10)



**Example 2.10: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt*, mm. 72—76**

It is easy to get lost in the beautiful wash of colors and lose the pulse in this movement, especially at the *adagio* tempo. The main theme is not a lyrical melody but consists mostly of fragmented sigh gestures, and the accompaniment is also many times fragmented. It is easy to stop on every harmony that offers points of tension or emotion and lose the sense of the phrase, and it is up to the performer to carry the direction of the line to let it flow and sigh without getting pedantic.

3rd movement – *Presto*

The final movement is once again in a sonata form in G minor and is marked *presto*. (See Table 2.4) Its sparkling mischievousness is a characteristic that can be seen again in many other compositions by Mendelssohn, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the *String Octet*.

**Table 2.4: Formal structure of Mendelssohn's *Piano Sonata op. 105, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt***

3 <sup>rd</sup> movement: G minor, 2/4, Presto	
Exposition (mm. 1—100a)	
mm. 1—24a	Theme 1 (G minor, 24 m.)
mm. 24b—50a	Transition (modulates from G minor into B flat major, 26 m.)
mm. 50b—74a	Theme 2 (B flat major, 24 m.)
mm. 74b—100a	Closing Material (variation on theme 1 and 2 material, confirms the B flat major key, first ending to return to exposition [modulates to G minor], second ending to go onto development [modulates to C minor], 26 m.)
Development (mm. 100b—130a)	
mm. 100b—130a	Starts in C minor, briefly modulates through A flat major then returns to end on G minor. Uses mix of thematic material from theme 1, transition and coda. (30 m.)
Recapitulation (mm. 130b—230)	
mm. 130b—148a	Theme 1 (G minor, slightly truncated, 18 m.)
mm. 148b—172a	Transition (stays in G minor, passage from development appears in E flat major, then finishes in G minor, 24m.)
mm. 172b—196a	Theme 2 (in G minor, 24 m.)
mm. 196b—230	Closing Material (confirms G minor key, elongated with new thematic material and no repeat signs, 34 m.)

This movement is described as also a monothematic sonata form.<sup>15</sup> However, the only resemblance between the themes is that both utilize scalar passages, which is a rather weak justification for calling this movement monothematic. The interesting thing about this movement is that the two themes are relatively straightforward, while the noteworthy activities happen in the transition and coda.

Dexterity is required from the performer here, due to the scales that span the entire keyboard in *presto*. However, like the other works that Mendelssohn wrote in this time period, the passagework is still written in the vein of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the right hand pulls the weight (mostly playing scalar figurations) and the left hand plays only a supporting role. Although technically brilliant, the virtuosity in this movement has yet to reach the level of its Romantic contemporaries.

Theme 1 consists of short interrupted scale passages and is divided into two phrases. The phrases are almost identical, except for the fact that the second phrase circles around a few deceptive cadences before finding the PAC in G minor. There are no minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup>/diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords in theme 1, but the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> sonority is used very blatantly from the transition onwards.

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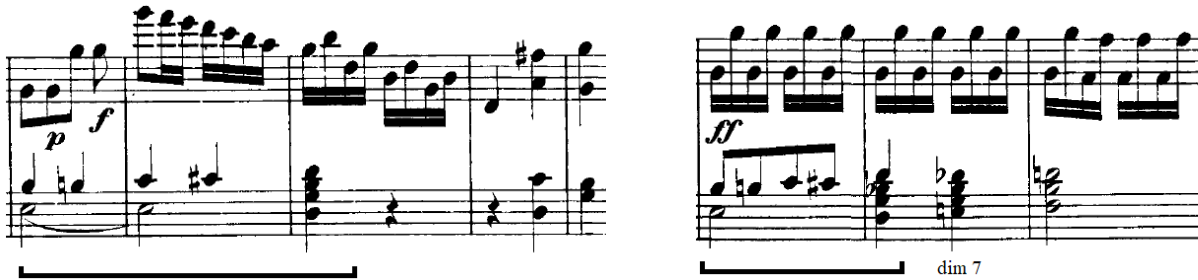
<sup>15</sup> Todd, liner notes for *Mendelssohn: The Complete Solo Piano Music, Vol. 3*.

The transition begins with a descending G minor scale, which arrives on a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord that is spread across two measures. (See Example 2.11) Although it resolves to the tonic chord, the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> sonority is quite prominent due to it being the arrival point of the descending scale, and also because this whole passage is repeated twice.



**Example 2.11:** Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 28b—32

The transition uses the same left-hand progression from the end of theme 1, but the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> is the pivot chord which causes the modulation to B flat major. (See Example 2.12)



**Example 2.12:** Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 20—24a and mm. 41—42

Theme 2 is in B flat major, and it has long scalar passages that span four and a half octaves that require the hands to cross. The final scale passage in this theme ascends through a little more than five octaves and considering that Beethoven's last works around this time were written on an instrument of six and a half octaves, Mendelssohn probably spanned nearly the entire keyboard of the instrument he was using.

After a joyous PAC in B flat major, the closing material starts with an altered theme 1 in B flat major. There is a bass pedal point on B flat, and Mendelssohn repeats several V-I progressions to establish the key. However, instead of a regular V chord, Mendelssohn uses a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord over

the B flat pedal in the bass, which would create a V<sup>11</sup> (with a minor 9<sup>th</sup>) that resolves to the tonic of B flat major. Needless to say, the extended dominant probably was not an idea that came from his teacher. This same progression can also be seen at the end of the first movement of his *String Symphony no. 7 in D minor*, MWV N7 which was written right around the same time as this sonata. (See Example 2.13)

**Example 2.13: Left: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 76—78, Right: Mendelssohn, *String Symphony no. 7 in D minor*, MWV N 7, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 219—222**

Although the closing material establishes the B flat major sonority, it is hard for listeners to pinpoint a definitive point where the exposition ends. The first ending seamlessly modulates back to G minor to repeat the exposition, while the second ending ends up modulating to C minor to go on to the development. The development is relatively short compared to the other sections, and it is unusual as it mainly uses the material from the transition and the closing material. The altered theme 1 from the closing material returns changed even further as it is in A flat major now, with a marking of *dolce*. This transformed theme 1 offers the only moment of tranquility in this entire movement, and the original character in G minor returns all too soon with the recapitulation. (See Example 2.14)

**Example 2.14: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 110—113**

The recapitulation seems to only have minor alterations, but the tranquil theme from the development appears in the middle of the transition, now in E flat major. To transition and modulate out



of this theme, diminished 7ths are used chromatically in passing (although it could be argued that these are minor dominant 9ths). (See Example 2.15)



**Example 2.15: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 166—172a**

Theme 2 returns now in G minor, and there are not many alterations save for a couple of extra notes. Theme 2 in the exposition included a few passing notes in the bass that very briefly hinted at a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> sonority. However, those passing notes are written as quarter notes in the recapitulation which unabashedly creates a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord in suspension before it resolves a step lower. (See Example 2.16)



**Example 2.16: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 188—191**

The final closing material is extended, now filled with the forbidden diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord. There is an ascending chromatic sequence of minor dominant 9<sup>th</sup> chords that resolve, but its descending counterpart only uses diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords with no resolution. (See Example 2.17)

dominant minor 9th of iv      iv      dominant minor 9th  
(with no root) of V      dominant minor 9th

diminished 7ths in a descending chromatic sequence

**Example 2.17: Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 210—213a and mm. 215—218a**

The movement finishes in fortissimo, after freeing the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord from the cages of its careful rules. The popularity of this chord rose so much in the years following that in 1854, theorist Carl Friedrich Weitzmann lamented the excessive use of the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord. To our modern ears, the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> is no longer shocking, but it would have stunned many ears in 1821.

A lightness of touch is necessary in this movement, which facilitates the quick speed and allows the sound to sparkle in the scalar passages. There are a few problematic passages in theme 2, where the long scales cause the right hand to swoop lower than the left-hand accompaniment.

In measure 52, the right hand plays an E flat that the left hand is supposed to strike again immediately afterwards, which is also precisely when the two hands need to cross. Extremely agile pianists with small hands may be able to coordinate this and play as written, but the easiest and the most discreet option for most to leave out the first E flat in the left-hand part to avoid any collisions between the hands. In the next measure, holding the C in the left hand as written may make it difficult to play the other accompanying notes without making an accent, unless one has a big hand. In this case, leaving out one of the repeated notes on beat two may be the most discreet option to keep the accompaniment

inconspicuous. Similar passages throughout the movement can be solved in the same manner. (See Example 2.19)

Leave out this Eb to avoid hand collisions while crossing

Leave out this Eb and F to facilitate holding down the C

**Example 2.18: Suggestion for coordination in passages with hand crossings, Mendelssohn, *Piano Sonata Op. 105 in G minor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 52—53**

## Closing Thoughts

The diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord was probably used the most excessively in this sonata out of all of Mendelssohn's output. While he used it in moderation in other compositions, he continued to have a fondness for this chord throughout his life, as it can be found in moments in Mendelssohn's compositions which carry emotional significance.<sup>16</sup>

While Mendelssohn is a regular composer on concert programmes, his solo piano compositions are rather under-programmed. The *Songs without Words*, *Variations Sérieuses op. 54*, *Rondo Capriccioso op. 14*, *Prelude and Fugue in E minor, op. 35*, and the *Fantasia in F-sharp minor ("Sonate écossaise") Op. 28* are probably the only works that are heard frequently, while the three piano sonatas with opus numbers (*Op. 6 in E major*, *Op. 106 in B flat major*, *Op. 105 in G minor*) are rarely performed.

Op. 6 and 106 are frequently mentioned in academia due to their obvious homage to Beethoven's piano sonatas. On the other hand, Op. 105 gets perhaps a line or two in description or is not mentioned at all in Mendelssohn research, perhaps due to the date of composition, and the relatively short length.

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<sup>16</sup> Phillip Radcliffe, *Mendelssohn, The Master Musicians*, edited by Peter Ward Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 142.

However, the thematic material is original compared to the other two sonatas, and the melancholy and capricious characters found are akin to his most beloved compositions. When the difficulties in execution are worked out, the sonata is effective in performance. Without repeats, it is approximately 15 minutes.

The sonata probably would be best for pianists of advanced technical level, as the tricky passage work requires quick and lithe fingers, and there is a need for delicate phrasing and pedal work in the second movement. The *Variations Sérieuses op. 54* are classified under the highest level of ARCT in Piano Performance by the Royal Conservatory of Music.<sup>17</sup> As the technical difficulties of this sonata is demanding of only the right hand, while the variations are taxing on both hands, this sonata may be considered to be around a grade 10 level.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Royal Conservatory Piano Syllabus 2015 Edition.*

## Chapter 3:

### ANDRÉ MATHIEU (1929-1968) – THE CANADIAN MOZART

#### Early Life

Canadian pianist and composer André Mathieu lived in the center of media attention starting from his first public performance in his hometown of Montreal at the age of four, until his premature death at the age of 39. He was heralded as the “Canadian Mozart” by the papers after his first public performance and it is rumored that after hearing him play in New York, Sergei Rachmaninoff congratulated and proclaimed him his heir.<sup>1</sup>

André’s unusually bright ear was noticed early on by his mother Mimi, a violinist. His father Rodolphe, a composer and pianist, could not ignore the signs when he heard André improvising something completely new at the piano. Although he did not want another musician in the family, Rodolphe gave up his own composing efforts to fully support André.<sup>2</sup>

André began to perform extensively, and by the age of 10 he had performed with his own compositions throughout eastern Canada and the USA, Paris, and London. By age 12, he had performances broadcast on the Canadian Broadcasting Company, BBC, and the Radio Luxembourg, and had completed a two-year tour with 32 concerts in 14 cities in Canada and the USA.

André went through rough adolescent years as the expectations from his family, the endless concerts and the public eye, and his own anxiety on not being able to live up to all of these things greatly

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<sup>1</sup> Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre, *André Mathieu: Pianiste et Compositeur Québécois (1929-1968)* (Montreal: Lidec, 2006), 22

<sup>2</sup> Georges Nicholson and Alain Lefèvre, *André Mathieu* (Montreal: Québec Amérique, 2010), 68.

affected him.<sup>3</sup> It is known that André was a heavy drinker from a young age (his early death attributed to alcoholism),<sup>4</sup> and had symptoms of being bipolar.<sup>5</sup>

Although André went off with high hopes to study at the École normale de musique in Paris at age 17, his stay was not fruitful. He was greatly offended when Arthur Honegger suggested that his violin sonata needed to be reworked, and subsequently André wrote to his father that this school was unbearable.<sup>6</sup> The lack of commitment to his studies unfortunately caused an early return back to Canada after just one year.

André was only 18 when he returned, but cementing a career as a musician proved to be difficult for him. The Canadian music industries did not yet have the means to support and promote Canadian artists,<sup>7</sup> and André's celebrity status from his childhood only went so far to open doors.<sup>8</sup> In 1954, at the age of 25, he organized the first of several "pianothons", where he played for more than 21 hours straight in an attempt to create a concert series and to make some money. They received much media coverage, but he did not earn much money from them, nor did they help in boosting his career. Four more of these "pianothons" were performed between 1954 and 1957, but they ceased simply because the public was not interested anymore.<sup>9</sup> After this, André played in public only three more times<sup>10</sup> before he succumbed to alcoholism nine years later in 1968.

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<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre, 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson, 458.

<sup>5</sup> Lefebvre, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>7</sup> Lefebvre, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholson, 281.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholson, 379.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 538-539.

After his death, Mathieu's music has been largely ignored until 2003, when the Québécois pianist Alain Lefèvre played Mathieu's *Piano Concerto No. 3 ("de Québec")* with the Laval Symphony Orchestra to critical acclaim.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to the efforts of Lefèvre and two publishing houses (Nouveau Théâtre Musical and Orchestra Bella), most of his solo piano works, several lieder, some chamber works, and the concerti are available today. However, the concert programmes that survive in the Canadian archives show that there are still many compositions that have yet to see the light of day, and many more are incomplete or lost.

There are not many resources on André Mathieu, but two excellent books have been guides to this research. Georges Nicholson and Alain Lefèvre have written a biography called *André Mathieu* (Québec Amérique, 2010), and Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre has another biography, *André Mathieu, pianiste et compositeur québécois* (Éditions Lidec, 2006). Both books provide detailed information on the composer's life.<sup>12</sup>

The scores used for my research and this paper were kindly provided by Nouveau Théâtre Musical.

## Compositions from Childhood

Mathieu was highly productive as a composer up until his major tour of 1939-1941, and most of his works written prior to 1939 have programmatic titles that seem to be inspired by nature and sights which would catch childish imaginations.<sup>13</sup> Musicologist Kiersten van Vliet notes that these compositions are imitative, rely on clichés (such as the use of *pesante* chords in the left hand for the entirety of

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<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre, 56.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre has written a biography on Rodolphe Mathieu, as well as edited several of his published compositions.

<sup>13</sup> A few compositions from this category are *Les Gros Chars* (1933-4), *Procession d'Éléphants* (1934-5), *Marche Funèbre* (1934-5), *Les Cloches* (1935), *Les Abeilles Piquantes* (1935), and *Les Vagues* (1939).

*Procession d'Éléphants*), and have a lack of formal development. Van Vliet gives a general outline of the structure that these early pieces tend to follow:

In most cases, his early works follow a rounded binary form (ABA') with standard 8-measure phrases repeated twice (the second time often at the octave), a contrasting B section with more rhythmic interest, and a return to the opening material in a different register and with a contrasting dynamic marking. In each piece there is very little sense of development due to the final repetition of the primary theme.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the faults that Van Vliet mentions, there are many points of creativity found within his undeniably juvenile forms.<sup>15</sup> The early solo piano works are defined by a few things that make them distinctive. First of all, Mathieu was able to create a soundscape or evoke an idea from just one motive or texture. For instance, *Danse Sauvage, op. 8* uses [017] chords (a tritone inside of a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>) which are used both as part of melodic and accompaniment material, while *Les Abeilles Piquantes, op. 17* consists completely of constant 16<sup>th</sup> notes between the right hand (minor third that falls a half step) and left hand (half step ascending) to conjure up angry swarming bees. The brevity of the compositions keeps these compositions from becoming monotonous, as most are under 4-5 minutes.

Another trait that Mathieu tends to use is a stepwise motion to string together unrelated chords, rather than using harmonies in their traditional functions (although he was perfectly capable of writing traditional harmonic progressions). One or more notes are moved up or down by a step, creating unexpected sonorities that still have a connection through the stepwise line. This can be seen in many places, like in *Tristesse, op. 11*, *Dans La Nuit, op. 12*, and *Les Abeilles Piquantes*.

Finally, 7<sup>th</sup> and extended chords are an imperative part of his musical language. Many different kinds of 7<sup>th</sup> chords are used in his works, particularly the major 7<sup>th</sup>, minor 7<sup>th</sup>, and half-diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords. The half-diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord is especially prominent in many pieces: such as in the climax of

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<sup>14</sup> Kiersten van Vliet, "Performing Québécois Nationalism: The Reception and Revival of André Mathieu" (Master's Thesis, McGill University, 2017), 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> It is unfortunate that in her Thesis, Kiersten van Vliet left out mention of the *Trois Études, or Concertino no. 2, op. 13* (1934-5) from the discussion of Mathieu's early works, as they defy many of the faults she has mentioned regarding the works from this time period. The *Trois Études* and *Concertino no. 2* showcase a sound knowledge of the instrument and technique, with an abundance of harmonic colors. The *Concertino no. 2* was not discussed in this paper solely because it is not a piece written for the solo piano.



*Étude sur les noires, op. 1*; as part of the theme in *Étude sur les noires et blanches, op. 3*; acting as the catalyst to change the mood in *Été Canadien*; and the starting sonority in *Bagatelle no. 2*.<sup>16</sup>

### **The *Trois Études***

*Étude sur les noires, op. 1* (On the black keys, 1933-34), *Étude sur les noires et blanches, op. 3* (On the black and white keys, 1934-35), and *Étude sur les blanches, op. 4* (On the white keys, 1934-35) comprise the set known more commonly as the *Trois Études*. It is not known whether these études were intended as a set, and concert programs show that Mathieu freely interchanged the order and often programmed just one or two. They are the earliest compositions that he wrote, written between the ages of 4 and 5. While most composers are not proud of their first compositions, Mathieu certainly did not seem to feel this way, as Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre approximates that Mathieu played these three études in concert the most out of all of his compositions (a total of 55 times).<sup>17</sup>

From the moment that they were presented to the world, the *Trois Études* were extremely well received and lavishly praised. Émile Vuillermoz wrote the following in *L'Excelsior*:

His *Trois Études* for piano reveal not only a sense of the keyboard that is absolutely disconcerting but a miraculous subtlety of ear. These are perfectly balanced works, resting on an admirable harmonic logic, and an infallible instinct which supplements all technical forms. If the word "genius" has a meaning, it is here that we can decipher it.<sup>18</sup>

The *Trois Études* differ from other pieces from this time period as they have no indication of being a programmatic work (the only other works with an absolute title are the *Piano Concertinos 1 & 2*, and the *Suite pour deux pianos*). However, these études are still based on one single idea, and built with an innate sense of harmony that is strung together stepwise. The fascinating thing is that although they were his first compositions, they can definitely be used by pianists of considerable facility as exercises to improve piano technique.

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<sup>16</sup> *Bagatelle no. 2* was published as *Bagatelle hors opus* by the Nouveau Théâtre Musical.

<sup>17</sup> Lefebvre, 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 15; my translation.

### Étude sur les noires, op. 1

The first étude is in a rounded binary form with a coda. (See Table 3.1) There is no key signature, but as it is named “on the black keys” it has a pentatonic sonority with an abundance of flats.<sup>19</sup> The left hand has constant chords in eighth notes while the right hand plunks out a call-and-response-styled melody which alternates on either side of the left hand. (See Example 3.1)

**Table 3.1: Formal Structure of Mathieu’s *Étude sur les noires, op. 1***

A Section	(mm. 1—16) – 16 measures
B section	(mm. 17—29) – 12 measures
A' section	(mm. 30—35a) – 5 measures, abridged
Coda	(mm. 35b—39) – 4 measures

The musical score shows the first four measures of the piece. The right hand plays a pentatonic scale (G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, E-flat) in a call-and-response style. The left hand plays constant eighth-note chords. The tempo is 'Moderato'. Dynamics include 'mf legato' and 'più f'. The left hand starts with a piano 'p' dynamic.

**Example 3.1: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires, op. 1*, mm. 1—4**

The pentatonic sonority, a simple form and texture, and the brevity (at 39 measures) make this étude sound rather juvenile. However, there are some rather surprising aspects to this composition which merit the wonder and surprise it produced when it was first introduced to the world.

Although the piece uses only the notes of the pentatonic scale in the beginning (G flat, A flat, B flat, D flat, E flat), C flat and F later appear in the piece. These together constitute the notes of G flat major, and the coda uses inversions of the G flat major chord to finish the piece. There is only one note in the entire piece that is not from G flat major, and it is used to create a specific effect which will be discussed below.

Although this piece uses the notes of G flat major, the harmonic progressions do not adhere to the rules of traditional harmony. Mathieu does not use chords based on their functional roles, but strings chords together by moving one or more notes from the chord a step in either direction. (See Example 3.2)

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<sup>19</sup> The piece was notated by his father; it was most likely Rudolphe’s decision to write this work in flats instead of sharps.

Example 3.2 shows a single melodic line on a treble clef staff in G-flat major. It consists of four chords:  $I_4^6$ ,  $vi$ ,  $ii^6$ , and  $I_4^6$ . The notes are:  $I_4^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $vi$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $ii^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat), and  $I_4^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat).

**Example 3.2: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires*, op. 1, Harmonic analysis of mm. 1—16**

This idea is taken a step further in the B section when the notes on the white keys emerge (C flat and F), adding a layer of sonic complexity to the simplistic pentatonic mode. On a surface glance, there seems to be no regard for functional tonal harmony here, nor can a stepwise progression be seen.

However, the stepwise progression is found between the top note in the left-hand chord and the bottom note in the right-hand chord. (See Example 3.3)

Example 3.3 shows a piano score with two staves: LH (Left Hand) and RH (Right Hand). The chords are:  $I_4^6$  (LH),  $ii^6$  (RH),  $IV_4^6$  (LH),  $V^6$  (RH),  $I_4^6$  (LH),  $ii^6$  (RH), and  $augIV^{\emptyset 7}$  (RH). The notes are:  $I_4^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $ii^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $IV_4^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $V^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $I_4^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat),  $ii^6$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat), and  $augIV^{\emptyset 7}$  (B-flat, D-flat, F, G-flat).

**Example 3.3: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires*, op. 1, Hand divisions and chord analysis for mm. 22—29**

The chords in this section are grouped into twos save the last group, which has one more chord. The line goes from B flat-C flat, then then to C natural, which is the only note in the whole piece that is not part of the G flat major scale. Also, the chord built on top of the C natural is the only half-diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord in this entire piece, which is written as a dotted half note with a fermata (the longest value in the entire work), a forte, and an accent. It seems that Mathieu wanted this unexpected sonority to stand out and be very noticeable, as it is the climax point of the B section. (See Example 3.3)

The A section returns abridged, and the coda suddenly commences a cascade of inversions of the G flat major chord with an E flat minor chord thrown in the middle, which finishes the piece.

Despite its simplistic nature, this composition can be used as a technical study on articulations. Unlike Beethoven's *Kurfürstensonata no. 2*, it seems to be possible to execute the abundance of dynamic and articulation markings written due to the fact that the piece is quite simple and marked *moderato*. This

is a great exercise for the performer to contemplate on what they think a particular combination of articulation and dynamic would sound like, and how to physically produce that sound on the piano. The performer's capacity to bring out the variations will create a level of attraction and sophistication to this otherwise simple, yet charming little étude. (See Table 3.2)

**Table 3.2: The combinations of dynamics and articulations in Mathieu's *Étude sur les noires, op. 1***

Dynamic Sign	Articulation/markings written on the right-hand part
Piano	No articulations
	Staccatos
	Staccatos with slurs
	Legato
	Accents with staccatos
Mezzo Piano	No articulations
	No articulations with crescendo and diminuendo swell
	Accents
	Accents with staccatos with crescendo and diminuendo swell
	Accents with staccatos
Mezzo Forte	No articulations
	Legato
	Accents
	Accents with staccatos with diminuendo
	Accents with staccatos
Forte	No articulations
	Accents with staccatos
	Accents
Più Forte	No articulations
	Accents with staccatos

*Étude sur les noires et blanches, op. 3*

Soon after the first étude's creation, the second and third études were composed and premiered by the five-year-old composer. In *Étude sur les noires et blanches, op. 3*, we can see the same stylistic characteristics found in the first étude, but on a more sophisticated level. This étude is once again in rounded binary form with a coda, but it is much longer than the first étude at 70 measures. (See Table 3.3)

**Table 3.3: Formal structure of Mathieu's *Étude sur les noires et blanches, op. 3***

A Section	(mm. 1—26) – 26 measures
B section	(mm. 27—37) – 10 measures
A' section	(mm. 38—63) – 26 measures
Coda	(mm. 64—70) – 7 measures

There is no key signature and no inferred tonality, as this piece is created by threading together various types of 7<sup>th</sup> chords. The texture for the piece remains the same throughout, with the right hand playing a 7<sup>th</sup> chord without the third, while the left hand is assigned one note that fills in the missing note from the right-hand chord. The left-hand notes are noted as *poco marcato* and its erratic movement (mostly in half and whole steps) changes the type of chord sonority being produced. For instance, the notes in the first measure produce an oscillation between a French 6<sup>th</sup> and a half-diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord. (See Example 3.4) Many of these chords are spelled enharmonically incorrectly, and the labels on the chords in example 3.4 are given as just a general guide.

**Allegro**

*pp*  
*poco marcato*  
*sempre marcato*

Fr6 min7 Fr6 ø7 ? ø7 Fr6 min7 Fr6 ø7 ø7 ø7

**Example 3.4: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires et blanches*, op. 3, Harmonic Analysis of mm. 1—4**

It is hard to call the left-hand part a melody, but it is the main line that we pick up on throughout the piece thanks to its unpredictable nature and *poco marcato* marking (which later becomes *molto marcato*). As this texture is the same throughout the entire piece (except for the coda), the drama comes from the unexpected movements of the line and phrase groupings. The left-hand begins with accents and staccatos on each note, but soon groups of slurred notes are introduced. There are no specific patterns, as slurs appear at random points with varying number of notes. This causes the piece to have a mischievous helter-skelter quality to it, but the piece is kept from becoming total chaos as it follows one large trajectory for each section.

The A section is spirited, with an unpredictable line. Although the trajectory isn't clear at first, an almost gravitational pull causes the notes to descend in a mostly chromatic fashion from F#5 to F#2. After some deliberation on the F#2, the direction takes a sudden upturn, ending abruptly on Ab2. (See

Example 3.5)



**Example 3.5: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires et blanches*, op. 3, The trajectory of the A section**

The B section starts out cautiously, marked *ritenuto molto*, and gingerly follows an ascending chromatic trajectory. A gradual *accelerando* frantically builds up the momentum which connects the line into the next section. (See Example 3.6)



**Example 3.6: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires et blanches*, op. 3, The trajectory of the B section**

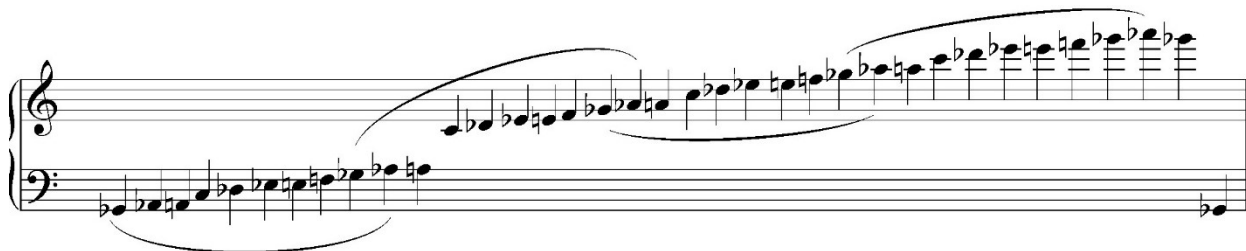
A' repeats the A section exactly, except now after the deliberation on F#2, the line takes one more step down and pauses on F#2.



**Example 3.7: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires et blanches*, op. 3, The trajectory of the A' section**

There is completely new material in the coda marked *molto vivace* that runs up the keyboard in an impish manner, disappearing on a final G flat. The scale here seems to have been created by Mathieu by alternating three-note groupings, where the left hand plays two black keys then a white key, and the right hand plays a white key then two black keys. This creates this collection of notes that he repeats from Gb2 to Gb6: GbAbA# - C#DbEb - DbEbE# - F#GbAb. The overlap of notes between the groupings causes the

motion to feel like a dizzying flight path of a buzzing insect, keeping consistent with the unpredictable yet playful manner of this étude. (See Example 3.8)



**Example 3.8: Mathieu, *Étude sur les noires et blanches*, op. 3, The trajectory of the coda**

This étude is a useful study to develop the technique of playing repeated chords quickly. The right-hand is called to be agile, rapidly moving to different positions within a range of pianissimo to fortissimo. In order to achieve this, one needs to make sure that the arms and shoulders are relaxed yet supportive of the hand as it moves horizontally across the keyboard, while the wrist needs to be supple and flexible to accommodate the repeated movements vertically. The left-hand line has only one note that must always be louder than the right hand and requires quick changes of articulations while jumping back and forth on either side of the right hand. Thus, the performer must pay attention and care to minimize unnecessary movement for efficiency while performing.

*Étude sur les blanches*, op. 4

Although the other two études in this set have no designated key signature, the exclusive use of white keys and a prominence of the C major chord at the ends of phrases make this étude sound undeniably in C major. It is in a rounded binary form without a coda. (See Table 3.4)

**Table 3.4: Formal structure of Mathieu’s *Étude sur les blanches*, op. 4**

A Section	(mm. 1—16) – 16 measures
B section	(mm. 17—33) – 17 measures
A' section	(mm. 34—50) – 17 measures

This piece is written entirely in 6ths, except at the end where the left-hand plays C and G to allow for a root position C major chord. Because of the *leggiero* marking and the various alternations of

groupings between the hands, the right-hand melody sounds carefree and scampers around. (See Example 3.9)



**Example 3.9: Mathieu, *Étude sur les blanches*, op. 4, mm. 1—2**

The A section is simple with two 8-measure phrases in C major, but the B section is where we see Mathieu's signature style emerge. Unlike the A section where both hands are mostly in unison and outlining major or minor chords, the B section uses a slightly different pattern between the hands to add 7<sup>th</sup> and extended chords into the mix. When the animated rhythm is stripped away, it is possible to see the outline of various sequences found in the B section. (See Example 3.10) The A' returns nearly the same as the A section, but slight changes are given to end the piece on a root position C major chord.

This étude is helpful as a preparatory study before learning the technique for playing consecutive octaves, especially for pianists with smaller hands. The interval of a 6<sup>th</sup> would reduce possible tension that could come from overextending the fingers horizontally to reach an octave. The 6<sup>ths</sup> are written in various figurations, either in alternation between the hands (See Example 3.9) or consecutively (See Example 3.11). The consecutive passages of 6ths are relatively short, which make it an approachable steppingstone before tackling consecutive octaves. The pianist should prepare for these passages as though one would play octaves: making sure that the thumb is not locked, the wrist is flexible to aid the vertical motion, and the arms and shoulders are relaxed while guiding the horizontal motion. The key to playing this work *allegretto* is to economize the motion needed and being as relaxed as possible while playing.



Moving up in scalar manner

e min 7      a min      e min

Outline of M. 17-19, where things move by step. M. 20-22 repeats this once more.

C maj 9 - e min      d min 7 - d min

Outline of the sequence found in m. 23-26a. The rhythmic pattern changes from m. 26 onwards but this harmonic sequence continues until m.30a

change of rhythmic pattern

Transition passage with 6ths used in a scalar manner to lead up to the final C major sonority (m. 30b to 33)

e min - C maj      d min - b dim      C maj - a min      C maj

**Example 3.10: Mathieu, *Étude sur les blanches*, op. 4, sequences found in the B section**

**Example 3.11: Mathieu, *Étude sur les blanches*, op. 4, mm. 32—33**

### *Étude no. 4: unpublished*

After this initial trio, there were two other études: *Étude no. 4* (1941) which is currently unpublished, and *Étude no. 5* (1946) which remains incomplete. The Nouveau Théâtre Musical publishing house allowed for this research to include the unpublished *Étude no. 4*.

*Étude no. 4* was written a little later in Mathieu's life at the age of 12, and it is not known whether he wrote it during the last leg of the tour of 1939-1941, or right after its completion. When looking at his concert programmes, there are only three times between 1941 and 1942 where this étude is mentioned, and even then it is not clear whether the program is referring to the 4<sup>th</sup> étude or the Op. 4 étude.<sup>20</sup> In any case, this is a stark contrast to how many times the *Trois Études* were played throughout his life. This work is in a clearly different style from the earlier études, and it shows Mathieu's compositional growth.

When surveying the compositions of Mathieu that are still available today, it is possible to see a stylistic difference in the compositions written before and after the tour of 1939-1941. After the tour, his works start to incorporate more key signatures, coupled with a strong Romantic inclination.

Mathieu sketched the first version of *Été Canadien* in May 1939 before going off on the tour in October, and in 1940 *Printemps Canadien* was composed. These were supposed to be part of a Romantic suite called *Les Saisons*, of which the rest never materialized. These works, along with *Étude no. 4*, were the only compositions from 1939-1941, and they showcase the beginning of his mature style which he later dubbed as "pure modern Romantic".<sup>21</sup> The compositions from this point have larger formal structures that are improvisatory and fantasy-like, with a clear sense of tonality, lush harmonies with lots of extended chords, and a dominant lyrical melody.

*Étude no. 4* differs from the earlier works as it is in binary form, (See Table 3.5) has no reprise of the initial themes, and major development is done on the thematic material. The A section has a key signature in C sharp minor with a passionate melody and accompaniment, while the B section has no key signature and is gradually stripped away of all musical elements until it ends with a jarring dissonant chord cluster.

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<sup>20</sup> Nicholson 520; and Lefebvre 22. Nicholson records that the piece that Mathieu performed on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1942 in Carnegie Hall at the Music Festival of Allied Nations (where Albert Einstein was in attendance) was the 4<sup>th</sup> étude, while Lefebvre writes that it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> étude, op. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholson, 280.

**Table 3.5: Formal structure of Mathieu’s *Étude no. 4***

A Section	(mm. 1—25) – 25 measures
B section	(mm. 26—49) – 24 measures

The A section starts with a four-measure progression that is repeated four times, each time with some variation. Mathieu takes the harmonic progression that was made especially famous by Johann Pachelbel’s *Canon in D* (I-V-vi-iii-IV-I-IV-V) and writes it in C sharp minor, with a descending stepwise line in the bass. Mathieu embellished the original progression with suspensions and passing tones that effortlessly transform the original harmonies into extended chords, a staple in Mathieu’s style. (See Example 3.12)

Chord progressions in C sharp minor:

- Row 1: *i*, V6 (with C# from previous chord), VI (with G# from previous chord), III<sup>4</sup>/<sub>3</sub>
- Row 2: *iv*<sup>7</sup>, *i*<sup>6</sup> (with A from previous chord), *ii*<sup>ø</sup><sup>7</sup> (IV chord with D# added on), V<sup>7</sup>

**Example 3.12: Mathieu, *Étude no 4*, Chord progressions from mm. 1—16**

The melody of the A section is melancholy with a hint of despair and is written in octaves with small contours that outline the main harmonies. (See Example 3.13) With each iteration of this progression, the melody also comes back slightly embellished and altered.

**Example 3.13: Mathieu, *Étude no. 4*, mm. 1—4**

After the fourth repetition, the progression is transposed to the relative key of E major. There is a short-lived sense of relief in this major key, and the fragmented melody becomes more flowing. However, things modulate to E minor in the next phrase, finishing the A section on a despairing note.

In the B section, each element from the A section is stripped away one by one until things slowly disintegrate. The key signature and tonality are removed at the start of the B section, but the four-measure phrasing, the left-hand accompaniment (with the descending bass line), and the melody in octaves are still intact. The melodic contour from the E major phrase is still present at the beginning of the section (mm. 26—29).

After this, the phrase is shortened to two measures, but the melody still has similar contours. The melody is then exchanged between the hands in imitation, removing the descending bass line and the original left-hand accompaniment pattern (mm. 29—35).

Soon, the melodic contour is stripped away (mm. 36—39), and the agitation increases when the phrase is reduced to one measure groupings (mm. 40—42a). Things get more and more frantic as imitation is discarded, and both hands move towards the center from either extremes of the keyboard using a four-note fragment (that is inverted in the left hand) and the groupings are now in half measures (mm. 42b—44a). (See Example 3.14)



**Example 3.14: Mathieu, *Étude no. 4*, m. 43**

Finally, all sense of contour is removed in the last measures as both hands descend in a torrent of octaves that have an unpredictable mix of half and whole steps, finally crashing on a dissonant tone cluster (mm. 44b—49).

Compared to the earlier études, the *Étude no. 4* is more in the vein of the great Romantic études that transcend the mere technicalities of piano playing and are evocative pieces in their own right. The constant use of octaves in the melody will require a careful study of hand positions and fingerings to achieve a full and legato sound without discomfort (which is different than the type of technique and sonority required in *Étude sur les blanches, op. 4*). Also, as the left-hand accompaniment includes many jumps, this will require a lot of careful coordination work with separate hands before slowly incorporating the hands together.

Something that is also different in this work is that this étude requires the use of the damper pedal. The earlier études can be played largely without pedal, probably because the composer was not able to reach the pedal at age 4. Photographs taken throughout Mathieu's childhood show that he was not able to reach the pedals until the time that he was on tour in 1939-1941. The performer must be careful to change the pedal well so as to not blur the rich harmonies together in the A section, and it must be changed frequently (sometimes on every half beat) as to keep lines from being buried under the layers of imitation and disordered harmonies in the B section.

It is a shame that this composition has been forgotten, even seeming to be neglected by Mathieu himself. It has been overshadowed by the charming earlier études, but *Étude no. 4* is important as it showcases the emergence of his mature voice and style.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Although these compositions (especially the *Trois Études*) have received a lot of awe from incredulous audiences, they haven't received recognition in terms of their musical value.

In pedagogical situations, The *Trois Études* would do well for intermediate pianists studying various techniques. The brevity of the études (each lasting between a minute and a minute and a half) allows for the pianist to concentrate on grasping the technique. Also, the freshness of the harmonic language is quite delightful and attractive to audiences, and the number of times Mathieu performed them throughout his lifetime is testament to this. The first étude would probably be categorized into the grade 9

level for the Royal Conservatory of Music due to its slower speed and lack of virtuosity, while the other two are probably between grade 10, or even borderline ARCT for piano performance.

The *Étude no. 4* is probably best tackled after learning the first three, as the introduction of constant octaves in the right hand along with the large jumps in the left hand require a higher degree of coordination and dexterity. *Étude no. 4* is also more complex in form and development, which directly correlates to its interpretation in performance (especially in the B section). The difficulty of this étude would probably classify it as part of the ARCT for piano performance.

In terms of performance, playing all four études would take approximately 6 minutes in total. Their brevity makes it easy to program them in various types of recitals, and the fast études (op. 3, 4, and no. 4) can be great crowd pleasers. When looking at his concert programmes, Mathieu never played the *Trois Études* in order. They were most often played in the order of op. 4, 1, and 3, and at times he did not even play all three in concert. Following Mathieu's lead, the performer should feel at liberty to program these études in any order, and as many as they please.

## Chapter 4:

### EMILE NAOUMOFF (B. 1962) - BULGARIAN WUNDERKIND IN PARIS

#### Early Life

Bulgarian-born French pianist Emile Gueorguiev Naoumoff has been a recognized composer and pianist since he was a child, and he was the last protégé of Nadia Boulanger. As he is still living today, much of my research has benefitted from insights directly from the composer.

Emile Naoumoff was born in 1962 in Sofia, Bulgaria, where his father, Gueorgui Naumov, was a radiologist and cancer specialist, and his mother a laboratory assistant. Emile came from an artistic family: his father was also a musician (a composer as well as an author of a treatise on accordion playing),<sup>1</sup> his paternal grandmother was a solfege teacher; and his paternal grandfather was Vladimir Naoumov, a renowned Bulgarian painter.

Emile started piano lessons at the age of five, and his father quickly realized that there was something intriguing at work when Emile started to improvise after he finished playing the piece that he was currently learning.

In 1970, Emile and his parents left cold-war Bulgaria in the hopes of finding a suitable musical education for Emile, a sacrifice that was not made lightly as they would not be able to return to Bulgaria for decades. Their courage allowed Emile to meet Nadia Boulanger, and she famously took in Emile as her last student until her death in 1979. He blossomed under her rigorous guidance, notably premiering his own piano concerto with Yehudi Menuhin conducting at the age of 10.

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<sup>1</sup> Soojin Joo, “Stylistic Evolution in Emile Naoumoff’s Music” (Doctoral Diss., Indiana University, 2017), 1.

Emile Naoumoff's career has been multi-faceted as a performer, composer, and teacher. Naoumoff signed with Schott publishers at age 18 and still actively composes and improvises (improvisations are uploaded on his Youtube channel),<sup>2</sup> while in high demand as a piano soloist. He has previously held a teaching position at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris and is currently on the piano faculty at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

Naoumoff is still an active composer and performer, and his early years are well-documented through scores and manuscripts, recordings on Youtube, a few dissertations, and a book that he wrote which documents his time with his teacher, *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*.<sup>3</sup> Through a combination of these resources with first-hand accounts from the composer himself, it is possible to get a picture of his early musical style and the influences that inspired his compositions.

## **Compositions from Childhood**

The compositions from Naoumoff's childhood are a product of three major factors: his improvisations, the musical foundation and knowledge that he received from Mlle. Boulanger, and his nostalgia for Bulgaria.

Like many children who show precocity in music at an early age, improvisation was how he first started to express his musical ideas. The interesting thing about his first improvisations was that they were not continuing the musical content of another piece. He was bored of the childish pieces, and he let his

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<sup>2</sup> His youtube channel can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/user/dafeneo>.

<sup>3</sup> Emile Naoumoff, *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*, trans. Gregory Martin (self-pub., 2015), PDF, [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/9aaf97\\_fd97e9af97934dca8e96720cd66e5f08.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/9aaf97_fd97e9af97934dca8e96720cd66e5f08.pdf).



own thoughts on the piano to continue the music a little longer.<sup>4</sup> His father decided to notate Emile's improvisations, which became his earliest compositions.<sup>5</sup>

*Menuet* (1969) is a product of an improvisation that came after playing a Minuet by J. S. Bach at age seven.<sup>6</sup> It is a dance in  $\frac{3}{4}$ , but that is where the similarities end with Bach's composition. It is a simple yet well-crafted piece that is in rounded binary form (ABA'), and the B section acts as a quasi-development section. It is a modest little piece of 53 measures in C major, with unexpected chromatic voice-leading in the left hand.

After meeting Mlle. Boulanger, he was composing away from the piano as she believed that he would not learn how to organize his thoughts if he only improvised, but improvisation still served as a point of inspiration for his compositions. For instance, the theme of the second movement of the first piano concerto came from an improvisation from childhood.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, it is impossible to discuss any of Naoumoff's music without mentioning his teacher, Nadia Boulanger. She provided a rigorous study regime that provided knowledge of various musical styles and gave all the musical tools for him to be able to independently notate his thoughts. Mlle. Boulanger recognized and satiated his musical thirst, and his mother carefully took notes at every single lesson to make sure he remembered all of it.

Although Mlle. Boulanger was a strict teacher, her composition lessons were freer, giving him the liberty to write what he wanted. She never changed what he wrote, but rather, she gave general guidelines

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<sup>4</sup> Emile Naoumoff (pianist, composer and professor at Indiana University), interview with author, December 15, 2016. Naoumoff remarked that he was bored as he was hearing chord clusters in his head, but he could only play Bach Minuets.

<sup>5</sup> Naoumoff writes, "My father was very meticulous scientist and with similar ethics he would not "embellish" it when notating it nor have me fix it upon replaying it from his notated score of mine. It is as in the original initial performance which was captured on the audio recording which he made of it." (Emile Naoumoff, email message to author, June 18, 2019.)

<sup>6</sup> The original audio recording that his father made of the *Menuet* can be heard at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTMWrlmVpSU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTMWrlmVpSU).

<sup>7</sup> Naoumoff, interview with author, December 15, 2016.

to think about for his next composition. Mlle. Boulanger guided him without hindering his inspirations, which allowed for Naoumoff to find a unique musical voice from an early age.

This leads to the last influence, which is his longing for Bulgaria. Although born in Bulgaria, Naoumoff had minimal connections to the culture or language as he left at such an early age.<sup>8</sup> The majority of his compositions prior to leaving Bulgaria are tonal, with only small hints of Slavic folk music. However, the Slavic elements emerged prominently in his compositions after leaving Bulgaria.

Naoumoff's strong longing for his roots is evident when looking at *Nocturno* and *Pastorale*, compositions written just months after leaving Bulgaria. These pieces showcase a substantial use of elements from Bulgarian folk music, such as irregular time signatures, drone-like basses, sorrowful peasant melody, ornamentations, and the use of modes.<sup>9</sup> Mlle. Boulanger quickly recognized this and she was supportive, stating that "Chopin stayed Polish, de Falla stayed Spanish; there is no reason that Emile should not stay what he is – that is to say, himself: a Bulgarian with a French intellect."<sup>10</sup>

As Emile barely knew anything of Bulgarian culture, his knowledge about Bulgaria came from his grandfather's paintings,<sup>11</sup> and the weekly packets sent by his father from West Germany (where he was working). These packets included handwritten scores of Bulgarian music, letters, and audio cassettes that the father made, informing Emile about the folklore, language, dances, and culture of their home country.<sup>12</sup> Through these things, Emile pieced together elements of Bulgarian musical style, which are strongly pronounced in the musical compositions from his childhood.

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<sup>8</sup> Naoumoff, interview with author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Joo, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Naoumoff, *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Soojin Kim, "Perfume of the Soul: Compositional Influences of Emile Naoumoff" (Doctoral Diss., University of Kansas, 2014), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Joo, 4.

A modal language that resemble the modes that are used in Bulgarian music (Aeolian, Mixolydian and Phrygian)<sup>13</sup> is often used in his early works, along with ostinatos and drones. The second is a favored interval used throughout all of his music, especially as he heard this interval in his head as a consonant interval.<sup>14</sup> This interval is featured heavily in Bulgarian folk music, especially in biphonic songs sung by peasant women.<sup>15</sup> Unusual time signatures, frequent meter changes and irregular phrase lengths can also be seen but only to a certain extent.<sup>16</sup> Most of Naoumoff's compositions at this time were not trying to replicate Bulgarian folk music. Rather, these elements became like a personal signature within a larger creative process.

The two compositions that will be looked at in detail, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, and *Danses Bulgares*, were written in 1972 at age 10 after a few years of study with Boulanger.

### ***Le Marché aux Oiseaux***

The theme of this charming little triptych came to Naoumoff when he heard a bird next to his apartment sing a little tune, which sounded as though a human whistle. He transcribed down the 10 notes that the bird sang and used it as the leitmotif for *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, which is named after the bird market in Paris where Naoumoff visited every Sunday with his mother. The work is programmatic, with the first movement introducing the bird, the second movement showing the bird sad in its cage, and the third movement portraying the bird jubilantly flying away free. This work is Naoumoff's loose take on a theme-and-variation form, connecting together the different kinds of music and influences that he came across with his own musical ideas.

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Rice, "Bulgaria", in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 8 Europe*, ed. Timothy Rice, James Porter, Chris Goertzen (New York: Garland Publishing, 2003), 40.

<sup>14</sup> Emile Naoumoff (pianist, composer and professor at Indiana University), interview with author, February 16, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Penka Pencheva Mincheva, "Characteristics of Bulgarian Folk Music," *International Journal of Literature and Arts* 2, no. 5-1 (2014): 35, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijla.s.2014020501.16>.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, 9, 11. A possible reason for this is that Naoumoff said that rhythm was something that did not come easily to him at an early age (Naoumoff, *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*, 8).

The entire suite consists of interruptive fragments that are pieced together, and Naoumoff uses “buffer zones” throughout, which are quick one measure insertions that interrupt the phrase. The commas throughout the piece are indications that separate two different ideas. Naoumoff remarked that he later realized the style of this work was similar to the quirky humor of Satie in *Sports et Divertissements*. Granted, he had not heard of Satie or any of his works at the time of this composition, and he attributes this style to the fact that he wasn’t able to write proper bridges and transitions to connect his thoughts yet.<sup>17</sup> Although this type of writing could end up being incoherent, the cyclical nature of the theme and the overarching program is what gives *Le Marché aux Oiseaux* unity.

Modality is not particularly featured in this work, as it is based around the theme of the bird, which he heard as in F major. It centers around the notes from the F major tonality but is not necessarily meant to be in the major mode. The movement has many time signature changes and irregular phrases throughout, but it feels more like they were used to accommodate the varying musical fragments than to emulate Bulgarian polyrhythms.

Moderato-Thema, Allegretto

The work begins with a statement of the theme played in unison in both hands. The way that the notes are tied over is specifically notated, creating a subtly different effect than just using the damper pedal. (See Example 4.1)



**Example 4.1: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—4**

The movement has the theme presented in many different forms, such as in augmentation and diminution of the rhythmic values, changes of pitch, and in call and response. Unlike conventional theme

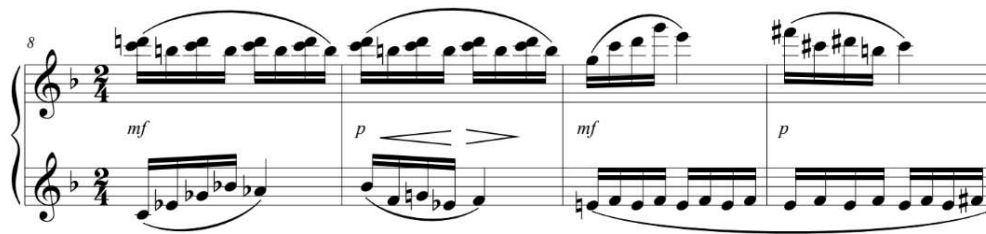
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<sup>17</sup> Naoumoff, interview with author, February 16, 2017.

and variation form, the variations on the theme are not clearly distinguished or marked, and different thematic materials are interspersed in between them.

The use of seconds in the accompaniment part is quite prominent, and Naoumoff muses that this must have been because his hands were too small to reach a third. However, there are sections where he actually did write thirds (such as in mm. 26—34). Whatever the reason, the choice to use the seconds in such a copious amount in this movement makes it more distinctive than if it was been written in thirds.

(See Example 4.2)



**Example 4.2: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 8—11**

“Buffer zones” are single measures with material unrelated to the previous or subsequent phrases (such as in mm. 23, 35 and 45). These are often marked with a suddenly different dynamic to show that it is something distinctly separate. It acts as a transition between phrases and functions similar to how actors in a play would quickly say an aside, then return to the main flow of the plot.

Measures 26 to 34 is suddenly bitonal, which was inspired after hearing Darius Milhaud’s music. (See Example 4.3) It feels abrupt and out of place (notice the use of thirds in the left-hand accompaniment), adding to the sense of the fragmentation in the piece. It returns to the regular key signature through a buffer zone.



**Example 4.3: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 26—29**

Naoumoff commented that when the leitmotifs are presented in full (the statement of the thema in the beginning, measures 24-25, and 46), they should be played quite freely as a bird would sing. When listening to Naoumoff’s own recording of this movement, one can hear the liberties taken when playing the theme and the buffer zones. The bitonal section is notable, as Naoumoff plays it slightly faster, zooming up and down in a delightfully playful manner.

Adagio – En cage

The second movement places the first four notes of the theme as a chord and moves them up and down chromatically to depict the sadness and anguish of the caged bird. When writing this, Naoumoff heard this in his head as though an oscillation between a major and minor chord. (See Example 4.4)



**Example 4.4: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt, m. 1**

While the intent was to write major-minor, the end result is a lot more interesting and does the job of illustrating the distress of the bird well. We can also speculate that he was drawn to using the notes of the theme as a chord because it has a second buried within it (B flat – C).

Throughout this movement, there is a constant juxtaposition between B flat and B natural, which can be seen as an extension of the initial chords, as B flat was part of the “major” chord and B natural a part of the “minor” chord. B flat and B natural can be seen in close succession after one another, never letting the other linger too long. (See Example 4.5)

**Example 4.5: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt, mm. 8—9, mm. 16—19, mm. 24—25**

This juxtaposition is seen through the entire movement and after much deliberation, the B flat is the one that we see in the final chord. If we associate major and minor chords with their most basic labels (happy versus sad), it can be said that ending with the “major” chord is a symbol of hope, which will be fulfilled in the final movement.

This movement is also a collage of various ideas and themes, but all parts include the B flat – B natural juxtaposition. Buffer zones are still present, although they are less prominent than the first movement. There seems to be three main ideas, which are joined together by little transitions and buffer zones. The first is the oscillation of the “major-minor” chords (mm. 1—4), the second is the theme played in an improvisatory style (mm. 5—9; here Naoumoff commented that it should be played freely like how someone would whistle), and the march-like *andante* section (mm. 16—23). The final two measures feature the return of the “major-minor” chords, which round off and finish the piece.

In the whistling and the *andante* sections, an ostinato drone can be found on a C. Although this piece is not overtly in F major, the dominant note of the key signature is still featured in an important role.

The sudden change of tempo in the *andante* section is also marked with a change of writing, where the drone C acts as the driving pulse, on top of which the right hand plays parallel 4ths, 5ths, and (of course) 2nds. Interestingly, the composer mentioned that he did not hear the final chord in this section (m. 23) as dissonant when he first composed it. (See Example 4.6)

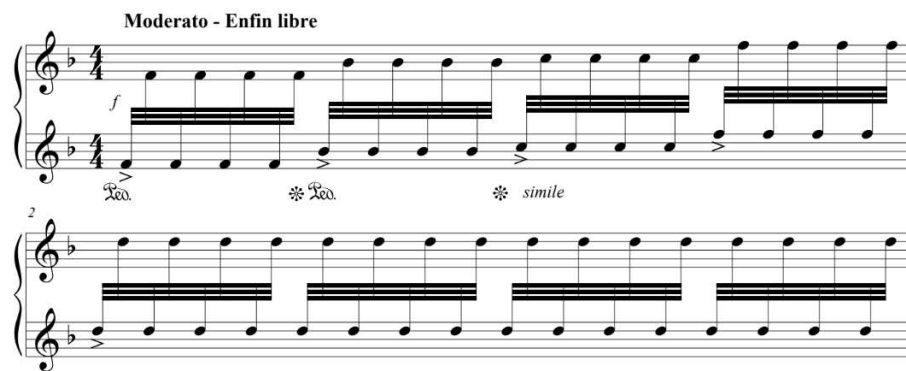


**Example 4.6: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt, mm. 22—23**

Naoumoff asked for an *andante* to be written at measure 5, as the ostinato bass should move a bit more after the chromatically anguished beginning in *adagio*. Similar to the first movement, Naoumoff asked for measures 12-14 to be played freely as though it was the theme (the notes are not the same, but its contour is the closest to having the theme in its entirety in this movement). Finally, measures 20-23 should be played in time, but with a direction towards the arrival on the dissonant chord in measure 23.

*Moderato – Enfin libre*

The third movement begins jubilantly with the theme stated in repeated notes between the hands. This technique was Naoumoff’s way to express how the feathers would fly from the bird everywhere as it flew free from its cage. Naoumoff stated that he used this “vibrato” technique to counter the inevitable decay of the piano sound. (See Example 4.7) He returns to this technique in other compositions, such as in the theme of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of his *Piano Concerto no. 2*.

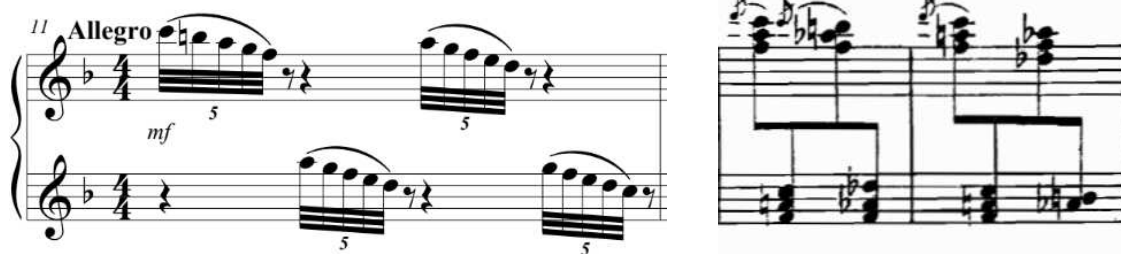


**Example 4.7: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—2**

After the “vibratos”, Naoumoff portrays the chirping of birds through notes in groups of five that are to be played quickly like a rolled chord rather than strictly in time (mm. 11—14). He mentions that he

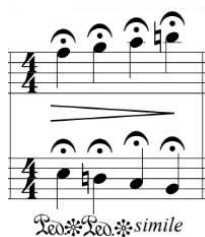


found out later that Mussorgsky had already used a similar sound in his *Pictures at an Exhibition* to portray birds and if he had known of this, he would have tried to write differently. However, the way Naoumoff notated the chirping of his birds looks visually quite different than Mussorgsky’s piece, as Naoumoff writes five notes in scalar motion while Mussorgsky places grace notes on chords. (See Example 4.8)



**Example 4.8: Left - Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, m. 11, Right – Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks”, mm. 3—4**

A buffer zone connects the chirping section to the final iteration of the theme, and the reason why Naoumoff wrote fermatas on each note is solely because he thought they looked like eyes and liked the way they looked. (See Example 4.9) After this, the theme returns triumphantly again in “vibrato”, ending with the bird flying off.



**Example 4.9: Naoumoff, *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, m. 16**

When listening to Naoumoff’s own recording of this , the section that depicts the chirping of the birds is played quite freely, as he starts off a little slower and does a slight accelerando up until the end of the passage. This makes it seem more bird-like than if it was played in straight rhythm.

Although this composition is slightly quirky due to its haphazard way of piecing together musical material, it is no doubt permeated by the composer’s original thoughts and touches. It is filled with his

unique imagination, nowhere near being a pastiche or the product of adult supervision. Mlle. Boulanger took a special liking to this work, and she often requested, “My little Emile, play your little bird composition”.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Danses Bulgares***

Naoumoff attributes the inspiration for the *Danses Bulgares* to the times when his father visited France, where he learned about Bulgaria as they took walks along the Seine.<sup>19</sup> These pieces are his take on Bulgarian dances, which incorporates together his knowledge on Bulgarian music with elements from the Western Classical tradition. They are written in irregular time signatures ( $\frac{7}{16}$  and  $\frac{5}{16}$ ) and the phrase lengths are more or less symmetrical (usually 4+4 or 8+8), keeping with the tradition of dance music which is limited by the dancer’s steps.<sup>20</sup> The melodies are within a tone row (collection of notes that are usually scalar) and use a variety of modes that are found in Bulgarian music. One curious aspect of these dances is that he barely wrote any embellishments or ornamentation (another feature of Bulgarian folk music), although he used them in other pieces that feature a heavy use of Bulgarian elements, like *Pastorale* and *Nocturno*.

Naoumoff had no memory of hearing or seeing Bulgarian folk dances while in Bulgaria,<sup>21</sup> which is evident when listening to the recording of his performance of *Ruchenitsa* that he made soon after composing it.<sup>22</sup> In this recording, he plays the final group of the 2+2+3 rhythm like a group of 4 at times. This is a common mistake that happens when one is not familiar aurally with this rhythm. (See Example 4.10)

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<sup>18</sup> Naoumoff, *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rice, 890.

<sup>21</sup> Naoumoff, interview with author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Emile Naoumoff, “Bulgarian Dances by Emile Naoumoff,” mcafetst, YouTube video, 2:32, <https://youtu.be/dFqc-rcg2do>.



**Example 4.10: Naoumoff, *Danses Bulgares*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—4**

When playing *Danses Bulgares*, it should be noted that in Bulgarian folk music, a strong favoritism is placed on instruments which have a shrill and breathy quality (like the kaval, an end-blown flute), or reedy with a nasal or piercing quality (accordions, or bagpipes). This is lost when played on the modern piano, with its even timbre throughout all registers. It is helpful to listen to recordings of Bulgarian folk music on traditional instruments as a full-toned singing legato is not the effect the pianist should look for when playing this suite.

*Ruchenitsa*

*Ruchenitsa* translates to hand dance, or handkerchief dance and is in 7 beats (4+3 or 2+2+3). It is a common dance that can be danced solo, in pairs, or in a large group and is associated with wedding ceremonies and celebrations.<sup>23</sup> Naoumoff's *Ruchenitsa* is in  $\frac{7}{16}$ , with the marking of *allegro*.

The left hand takes the role of the drums, tapping out the 2+2+3 rhythm for the majority of the piece, while the right hand plays the melody that is based mostly on a pentachord. The key signature is in A major but the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> degrees are used a half-step lower most of the time, which creates the Phrygian dominant scale with its distinct augmented second. (See Example 4.11) However, harmonic structure from the Western Classical tonal system is incorporated from time to time, which is especially obvious when preparing for modulation. For example, two transition points (measures 20 and 44) end with chords that strongly hint of the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord of the key that it will soon modulate to.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rice, 897.

<sup>24</sup> Joo, 9.



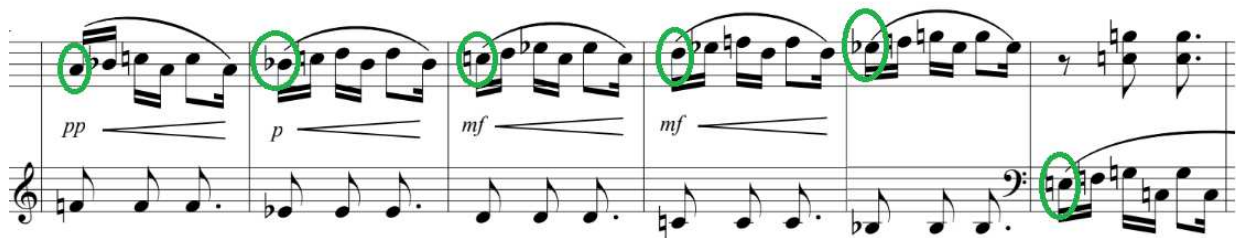
**Example 4.11: A Phrygian Dominant Scale (Used with the key signature of A major)**

The piece resembles a rounded binary form (ABA'), which is closer to the Western Classical tradition. (See Table 4.1) In Bulgarian music, modulation of the melody usually causes a change in the number of notes and structure of the original tone row.<sup>25</sup> However, when Naoumoff modulates, the number of notes and structure are still preserved.

**Table 4.1: Formal Structure of Naoumoff's *Danses Bulgares*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt**

A Section	(mm. 1—16) – 16 m., in A Phrygian dominant
B Section	(mm. 17—44) – 28 m., in F Phrygian dominant and C Phrygian dominant
A' Section	(mm. 45—60) – 16 m., in A Phrygian dominant

The transitions between each of the keys are done differently each time. The transition going from A Phrygian dominant to F Phrygian dominant (mm. 17—20) is marked as *piano* and *andantino*, and a fermata is placed on the final chord, which is the V<sup>7</sup> in the key of F. The next transition is the only phrase with 5 measures (mm. 29—33), which prepares to go to C Phrygian dominant. In the right hand, a fragment of the thematic material is repeated four times, where each time the right hand moves a step higher and the left hand moves a step lower. The final E flat in the sequence from the transition connects chromatically to the E natural in the beginning of the next section. (See Example 4.12)



**Example 4.12: Naoumoff, *Danses Bulgares*, 1<sup>st</sup> mvmt, mm. 29—33**

<sup>25</sup> Mincheva, 35.

The final transition (mm. 42—44) is prepared four measures prior to the actual transition. An *andantino* is written at the middle of the phrase in measure 38, and here G sharps appear for the first time in the piece. This prepares for the last chord of the transition which hints at a  $V^7$  of the key of A, right before the return of the A Phrygian dominant.

When playing this dance, Naoumoff strongly suggests subdividing in eighth notes to preserve the asymmetrical rhythm. Also, he asked to have m. 38 played as *meno andantino* as he didn't want this to be played as slow as the first *andantino*. As the marking is given in the middle of a phrase, the tempo should not be so slow to affect the direction of the line.

### Bavna Ruchenitsa

*Bavna Ruchenitsa* translates to slow hand dance or slow handkerchief dance, as *bavna* means slow in Bulgarian. The time signature is once again in  $\frac{7}{16}$  (divided into 2+2+3), but this time it has the tempo marking of *moderato*. The entire dance is written mainly in the Aeolian mode (notes of the natural minor scale), giving it a sorrowful melancholic quality. This dance has a *da capo al fine* at the end of the B section, repeating the A section and making the dance a rounded binary (ABA). (See Table 4.2)

**Table 4.2: Formal Structure of Naoumoff's Danses Bulgares, 2nd mvmt**

A Section	(mm. 1—26) – 26 measures, in G Aeolian
B Section	(mm. 27—59) – 33 measures, with heavy modulations and bitonality, DC al fine marking back to the beginning
A Section	(mm. 1—26) – 26 measures, in G Aeolian

The A section (mm. 1—26) is in G Aeolian, starting with a two-measure introduction of the ostinato that is seen for the majority of the piece. (See Example 4.13) The A section consists of three phrases and finishes on an unexpected Tierce de Picardie.

**Example 4.13: Naoumoff, *Danses Bulgares*, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt, mm. 1—6**

The B section (mm. 27—59) is much more complicated in key and structure. It starts out once again in G Aeolian, but this time the melody is in the left hand and the accompaniment in the right hand. An interval of a second on C and D is seen constantly from mm. 31—37, which creates a layer of dissonance through the modulation in this section and heightens the tension. The four-measure transition to the next key (mm. 35—38) is prepared in a quite complex manner, as E naturals are placed above an A in the left hand while still in G Aeolian, which hints at the sudden modulation to A major that is coming. However, the modulation proceeds one step further after arriving on A major, ending the section in A flat major. (See Example 4.14)

This interval is constant through this transition until the modulation reaches A $\flat$  at m. 38.

E $\natural$  is lined on top of A, giving a hint of the sonority to come in the next measure.

Any notes from the previous measure that was not part of A major (except the second interval at the top) is moved chromatically to A major

A sudden chromatic modulation half step down brings the transition to end on an A $\flat$  major sonority.

**Example 4.14: Naoumoff, *Danses Bulgares*, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt, mm. 35—38**

The next phrase (mm. 39—45) can be seen as once again transitory, as there are two measures in A flat Aeolian, two measures in G harmonic minor, and three measures of chromatic contrary motion that lead into the ostinato of the next section.

Measures 46 to 59 is divided into two six-measure phrases, with the hands in different keys. In the first phrase, the left hand has the ostinato in F sharp major while the right hand has the melody in A Aeolian. (See Example 4.15) The second phrase has the right hand with the ostinato in C sharp major, while the left hand has the melody in C sharp Aeolian. After this complex play with modulation and bitonality in the B section, the *da capo al fine* leads back to the A section, which finishes off the dance.



**Example 4.15: Naoumoff, *Danses Bulgares*, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt, mm. 46—51**

When playing this piece, the pianist should be once again careful about the subdivisions as this dance has a fair bit of accents written on the groupings of three eighth notes, making it easy to linger a little too long.

### *Paidushko Horo – Canon*

The *horo* is a generic name for line dances, and the *paidushko horo* is a circle dance in 5 beats, grouped into 2 (quick) and 3 (slow) beat divisions. Due to the uneven nature of the steps, it is known as the “limping dance” or “drunken dance”.<sup>26</sup>

Naoumoff’s *Paidushko Horo – Canon* is written in  $\frac{5}{16}$  and marked *allegro*, and it uses the greatest diversity of modes out of the three dances. It is written as a canon in two parts between the hands and has the semblance of a rounded binary (but very loosely this time). The entire dance consists of three symmetrical phrases of 16 measures (divided 8+8), with one transitory phrase in between. (See Table 4.3)

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<sup>26</sup> Rice, 897.

**Table 4.3: Formal Structure of Naoumoff's Danses Bulgares, 3rd mvmt**

A Section	(mm. 1—16) – 16 measures, in A Aeolian and A Mixolydian
B Section	(mm. 17—32) – 16 measures, A Aeolian/C Ionian and C Mixolydian
Transition	(mm. 33—40) – 8 measures, dominant pedal of A
A' Section	(mm. 41—56) – 16 measures, heavily altered from the A section, ends in A Aeolian

The first eight measures are in A Aeolian, and the canon is immediately apparent as the left hand starts two measures after the right hand in imitation. The next phrase briefly includes C sharp and F sharp in the left hand, hinting at A Mixolydian (mm. 9—16). Although modal, there is still some tonal structure present as the first phrase ends with an E (the dominant of the key of A) while the second phrase ends on an A min<sup>7</sup> chord. The same thing happens again in the final two phrases found in measures 41-56.

In the B section, the notes of A Aeolian are rearranged, suggesting C Ionian (major). The first phrase (mm. 17—24) starts on the note G and hovers around C, while the second phrase (mm. 25—32) starts in a similar way but the quick appearance of F sharps alludes to C Mixolydian. This does not last long, and this phrase finishes in A Aeolian.

Measures 33 to 40 act as a transitory passage, where the right-hand repeats a drum-like passage on an E (the dominant of A) which gradually crescendos, and arrives (or resolves) onto A.

A' returns, and the two phrases are in the general vicinity of a mode on A, but the exact mode is ambiguous. The first phrase (mm. 41—48) uses C sharps in the left hand and C naturals in the right hand (hinting major vs minor), and the second phrase (mm. 49—56) has juxtapositions between C sharp and C natural, F sharp and F natural, and G sharp and G natural. Although this causes categorization into a single mode impossible, the final measure of the dance is clearly in A Aeolian, with the use of C natural and G natural. This ambiguity in modes suggests that Naoumoff was experimenting with bitonality once again. The melody in A' is different than the melody from A, but as they both use the same tone row, the final two phrases can be seen as a heavily modified A section. (See Example 4.16)





Example 4.16: Naoumoff, *Danses Bulgares*, 3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt, mm. 39—56

## Closing Thoughts

Although these pieces by Emile Naoumoff were written at age 10, they show that he was already capable in expressing original ideas. Nadia Boulanger had a high regard for his compositional voice, as she said the following in an interview with Bruno Monsaingeon:

Little Emile Naoumoff, who is Bulgarian, is a gift of my old age. He has been with me five years now, and his personality as a composer has developed naturally without being enslaved to any school. [...] I let him speak [...] When he composes, I want him to be absolutely free.<sup>27</sup>

*Le Marché aux Oiseaux* and *Danses Bulgares* would probably be categorized as early advanced to advanced repertoire. The Royal Conservatory of Music has Bela Bartok's *Bagatelle op. 6 no. 12* as part of the grade 10 repertoire,<sup>28</sup> which features an abundance of repeated notes as well as quick notes in scalar succession (which is similar to the “chirping” motive found in the third movement of *Le Marché aux Oiseaux*). The interruptions of phrases and quick change of thematic material will probably categorize this suite in the grade 10 level.

The *Danses Bulgares* may seem a little easier technically due to the simpler texture of melody and accompaniment throughout, but the asymmetrical time signatures are challenging to master when one

<sup>27</sup> Naoumoff, *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> *The Royal Conservatory Piano Syllabus 2015 Edition*.

is not comfortable in this tradition. Bartok's *Romanian Dances*, Sz 56 are classified as grade 10 as well in the Royal Conservatory of Music,<sup>29</sup> and they are similar to the *Danses Bulgares* in its texture and use of asymmetrical rhythms.

*Le Marché aux Oiseaux* takes about five and a half minutes in performance, and the *Danses Bulgares* takes approximately four minutes. They can thus easily be slotted into a performance program of various kinds due to their brevity.

It would be interesting to program *Le Marché aux Oiseaux* with other works that are inspired by birds and birdsong. Some examples of such repertoire are Franz Liszt's *Légendes no. 1, S. 175* (St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds), Maurice Ravel's *Oiseaux Tristes* from *Miroirs*, Olivier Messaien's *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*, Louis-Claude Daquin's *Le Coucou*, and Jean-Phillipe Rameau's *La Poule* from the Suite in G major in *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin*.

Naoumoff has written many dances for solo piano, and it would be interesting to program *Danses Bulgares* with other dances from his output. Some of these dances include the *Menuet* from 1968, *Valse pour Nadia*, *Perky and Zesty Mazurka*, *Valse Capricieuse*, *Trois Gymnopédies*, as well as *Danced Souletude*, *Siciliana Souletude*, and *Waltz Souletude* from *Emiland: Souletudes for Piano*. If one is feeling particularly courageous, Naoumoff's transcription of the "Infernal Danse" from Stravinsky's *Firebird* is also available and would be an excellent close to a recital.

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<sup>29</sup> *The Royal Conservatory Piano Syllabus 2015 Edition*.

## Conclusion

The main challenge of this research was not in finding works by children that seemed to be more than copies or compositional exercises, as many of these neglected compositions showed startling maturity and insight. The difficulty was to figure out how to gauge the originality found in a composition. What exactly is original thought? Even the greatest composers were influenced by what preceded them as well as the things around them, and John Donne's famous quotation sums it up: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main."<sup>1</sup>

After a deep look at the context of each composer's life and analyses of the compositions, one thing started to become clear. The originality that was seen in these keyboard compositions did not come necessarily from doing things that were entirely unheard of and completely novel. Rather, these elements that seemed original were the manifestation of the composer's personal musical convictions, as a unique signature arose when each child followed the tendencies that came naturally. Beethoven's rebellion against structure and order; Mendelssohn's love of the diminished chord and the puckish character; Mathieu's fondness for 7<sup>th</sup> and extended chords; and Naoumoff's deep longing for his Bulgarian roots were the things that gave each composition their distinctness. It is possible to deduce that these were elements that meant something personal to them, as each composer continued to use it throughout their life.

While these juvenile compositions will probably never become as critically acclaimed as the masterpieces from the composers' mature output, the aim of this document is to put a small crack in the stereotype that is held against all compositions from youth. The hope is that these neglected works are given at least a second glance and that eventually, more will be heard in performances and included in pedagogical situations.

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<sup>1</sup> John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Death's Duel* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1999), 108.

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