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Ballade No. 3 in A-flat Major-Frederic Chopin

Chopin's third Ballade in A-flat Major was written between 1840 and 1841. "According to Bourget and Schumann, this ballade was close to Mickiewicz's "Switez", a tragic narration of man's uncertainty and beautiful maiden's deception" (Tran). The word "ballade" was originally used in reference to French poetry in the form of a story (Tran). His ballades are to be taken as a narrative to be followed by the listener (Tran). The structure of all of the ballades is nearly non-existent. The structure consists of progressing from one unpredictable phrase to another (Tran). Chopin did not intend these four pieces to be played together as a set, but they are performed innumerable times all over the world (Tran).

Chopin had recently left his homeland and proceeded to compose all four ballades (Tran). During these years, Chopin had become more attached to his lover, George Sand. He had recently traveled to Majorca to try to overcome his illness, tuberculosis (Atwood 123). Ballade No. 3 mirrors the "Raindrop Prelude" in its repetitive rhythm, which was written while Chopin was in Majorca. After this trip he returned to Paris.

Chopin's ballades have been used as a style and form guide for many great composers who followed him. Liszt and Brahms both composed ballades after Chopin, but the "ballade genre" is most well-known because of Chopin (Tran). This particular ballade begins with a first theme with a development into a second theme. The second theme is then embellished and returns to its original form. Hints of the first theme enter into what could be considered an

official “C section” if the first two themes are A and B. The second theme is then again brought back. The piece changes key to c-sharp minor. The second theme is brought back again with a much embellished left-hand part. Both hands come together rhythmically in measure two hundred thirteen and progress through the first melody. After this section, another development section leads to the grandiose ending. This development lasts from measure two hundred twenty-five to two hundred thirty-one. From this point to the end, shades of measures one hundred eighteen to one hundred thirty-two appear in the left hand. The rhythmic structure and melody are similar to this other section of the piece. The last chord is very satisfying because of the inversion. The piece finally resolves to a one chord in first inversion.

The two main themes include many second inversion chords to create a feeling of suspense of resolution. The first appears within the first few measures. The dominant chord takes the lead for most of the movement within this theme. This theme could also be divided into two sections. The first is more legato with several second inversion tonic chords interspersed between the dominant chords. The second part is more rhythmic. The tonic chord takes the lead while sub-dominant, supertonic, or sub-mediante chords end the phrase. These chords also contribute to the feeling of suspense at the end of the phrases.

The second theme occurs in measure fifty-two. This theme grows from a first inversion tonic chord and proceeds to a mediant chord at the end of the phrase. Interspersed are progressions using six and seven chords with a cadential six-four thrown in. When the listener hears a progression that sounds as though it might resolve, a second inversion chord begins the next phrase of the melody. This section is dance-like and embodies the supposed inspiration of a

beautiful maiden. It is most often quoted in the rest of this piece, exactly so in measure one hundred five and varying in measure one forty-five.

During the Romantic era, composers used modal mixture. This consists of using aspects of both major and minor keys to make the progressions more interesting (Schonbrun). If the Roman numerals of major and minor keys are compared, they are essentially in different keys (Schonbrun). In Ballade No. 3, Chopin uses this technique left and right. In sections such as measure sixty-three to seventy-three, Chopin progresses from three chords all through to tonic chords while using chords that do not seem to exist within A-flat major. Another example occurs in measures one thirty-four to one forty-six. Chopin begins this section with a four chord approaching a minor two chord. He then bounces between four, five and six chords to lead back to a one chord and the second theme. An especially perplexing measure was measure sixty-seven. In beat two, Chopin used an f-flat as the bass along with two other f-flats to make his point. Technically this should be a form of a six chord, but f-flat does not appear in the key of A-flat major. However, this could be borrowed from A-flat minor according to modal mixture.

Second inversion chords are used very frequently in this piece. They have a great impact on the texture of the piece. Second inversion chords cause a feeling of anticipation for the listener because they are the most unstable inversion. Chopin ends the first phrase in measure four, causing the phrase to feel as though it still needs to continue. In most of his melodic phrases he ends with a second inversion chord to prolong the sense of constant motion. In the second main melodic section, measure fifty-two, Chopin does use a first inversion chord leading to a six chord. He eventually leads to another second inversion triad in measure sixty-three. This could be considered the second part of this melodic section. Because it begins with a

second inversion chord, the piece still wants to move forward instead of resolving. A few other similar examples occur in measures one hundred forty-six in the right hand on beat two, and two hundred eight leading to two hundred nine in the right hand. These chords have notes that are not part of the chord in A-flat major.

The rhythm in this piece also contributes to the driving, dance-like feel. In the first few measures of the first theme, the rhythm can be taken with more leisure. Chopin embellishes the rhythm and melody in measure nine, making the rhythm more accented and exacting. This continues for the rest of the first theme. The second theme could be considered a waltz. This rhythm prevails the most throughout the rest of the piece. Even as the left hand takes the core of the melody and the right embellishes like crazy in measure one hundred sixteen, the waltz feel is still present and drives the beat forward.

After analyzing this piece, I want to play it twice as much. I have been recently deciding on playing one of the ballades, and this one is certainly a good option. I love the detailed progressions. Now that I know that modal mixture is used so much within this piece I understand why it is so pleasing to the ear. When romantic composers use complicated progressions such as in this piece, listeners tend to enjoy the sense of uncertainty of how the progression will lead to a core chord. The intermingling of major and parallel minor is more interesting and provides more options for the composer to progress to very different themes or phrases, as Chopin does in all of his ballades. So much of Chopin's writing makes more sense now that I have analyzed this piece. Chopin seemed insanely complicated to analyze at first, but his style for progression is really much simpler than meets the eye. I think understanding some of Chopin's greatest works will certainly help me learn and perform them in the future.

Works Cited

Tran, Anh. *Chopin: The Poet of the Piano*. 17 April 2012. Web. 25 April 2012.

Atwood, William G. *Fryderyk Chopin: Pianist from Warsaw*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Print.

Schonbrun, Marc. *Modal Mixture*. 2012. Web. 25 April 2012.