

A Monsieur le Baron de Stockhausen

BALLADE

FR. CHOPIN
Op. 23

Introduction:

The very beginning is like how the rhyme of the Ancient Mariner starts. He stops one in three, he grabs the guy by his shirt and says 'you're going to listen to this story'. For me, that the same thing when he hits that C. It means 'stop and listen to what I'm going to tell you.' It's only after this sudden burst of 'hold everything' that you actually start your tune, whereas all the other Ballades sneak in more or less. They're much more seductive in that sense. Ax

'A sigh' -
Perahia

The beginning is the enslavement, the sadness about losing, about Poland being under the grip of three powers - **Perahia**

Another 'sigh'

This descent is very important to the rest of the piece..you have it here in terms of *sighs*. When you have these very obvious descending lines, it tells you something of the emotional mood, the sadness- **Perahia**

A Neapolitan sixth. That sounds like a very dry technical point but the key point is that the Neapolitan is a kind of mystical chord **O'Hora**

The tragic first subject has this kind of heartbeat and, quite importantly, the second note should be slightly softer than the first always so that it really does feel like a heartbeat, which keeps coming back **Hough**

The tonal balancing of this passage is very hard because the biggest problem a lot of the time is the chords are too large for the melody, they literally obscure it, The issue is actually far more, I think, of projecting and elevating the *Cantalena*. Physically you feel that. So a lot of these difficulties are really quite turned round on the modern Steinway, **O'Hora**

On the surface an "easy" section. But balancing the voices and making the melody sing not so easy



We hear another voice in the bass ... it's more than just a counterpoint, it's a real sort of melody that's combining with it, going in the opposite direction. **Perahia**



Chopin's tendency to write these little *roulades* of his, written in his little notes, always sparks off a reaction that these must be extraordinarily fast. I can remember as a kid seeing these things on the page and I couldn't imagine what you'd have to do to play them. They could all be written out easier. In fact, it's not faster but it's a psychological thing. If they were written in big notes, you wouldn't have that **O'Hora**



First moment of blind panic at squashed flies on the page. Lots of time with Michael working out how to divvy up the 18 notes.. 6+6+6? Or 6+8+4?



Now we have the transition phrase. It takes these sighs and speeds them up ... it's double the speed. And also the whole phrase is in a descending direction. So, in a way, it condenses all of the material of the first thirty or so bars and puts them in two four bar statements. **Perahia**



Passage work links theme A and theme B

All of this stuff (from here onwards), for instance... [It's] completely not melodic and yet we don't hear it as just decoration. We hear it melodically. It almost isn't a melody in the outer sections at all, it's just piano figuration. And yet, Chopin has the genius that, unlike, say, Mendelssohn, or even Weber, where you have melody and then you have decoration or something, Chopin the decoration is the melody. They've become one in some strange kind of way. **Hough**

Chopin's passage work never sounds like filler of any sort. If you played any passage of Chopin in a very slow tempo, like the part leading up to the second theme, adagio you would find that you can make it incredibly beautiful and melodic and it would make a lot of sense. It's all melodic and all beautiful and all elegant.. and all not mindless passage work. The only other composer I can think of who does that all the time is Mozart. **Ax**

Horribly confusing changing patterns. Fingerings need meticulous working out and learning. So much going on so fast in both hands need to memorise, not look at score. Almost give up at this point.

Suddenly, there's hope but the hope is in turbulence, the hope is in martial activity, war. **Perahia**

calando

smorz.

Meno mosso sotto voce

riten.

sempre pp

Horn call (in fourths) introduces Theme B

Theme B

The second subject is even harmonised in Fourths which is something really quite extraordinary - **Hough**

This is very personal... it's a feeling of love, maybe love to this Polish girl, maybe love to Poland, but it's still love **Perahia**

it seems to me that the second subject is some sort of unobtainable happiness happening somewhere else, perhaps. I don't think it's Chopin experiencing that **Hough**

It's the first pianissimo in the piece. It's always been piano until then, so, when it comes, I think there is a kind of a gasp of a new colour. It's miraculous, of course, beginning on that fourth, that comes out of that horn call that has itself come before, of course, in the middle of those G-minor arpeggios. How it melts and adjusts and then, finally, it becomes the beginning of the new subject. That's one of those

First appearance of theme B is perfectly playable - though getting tune floating above bass takes time. At least two lessons with Michael taken up with working out the pedalling of bars 73-75. RH seems to be in three broad beats, suggesting three pedals. But LH seems to be in two. What's known as a "hemiola". Michael is delighted at the challenge. He suggests pedalling with RH, even

Speeded up echo of Theme A

86

89

92

95

98

101

pp

rallentando

a tempo

sempre

dim.

cresc.

f

pp

cresc.

Gentleness of Theme B ends abruptly with a falling ninth. This becomes an important interval.

Theme A reappears, but much bleaker and edgier

Lucy demands "bebung" : she wants the effect of the second note echoing the first, like a heartbeat. Michael is less fussed

Split octaves between hands, or play in RH? Michael wants the former, Lucy suggests the latter. One hands helps when it comes to turning the page. Mundane, but true.

Return of Theme B

The textbooks will tell you it's an A-major. I don't think it's an A-major ... I think it's in E. **Perahia**

Murray says it's in E-major as opposed to A-major? Is that what he said? Wow! Wow! Interesting! **Ax**

When you come to that climax, here, it is fortissimo but, it should not be bashed and it should not be hurried, it should open up something with a very relaxed, large sound, It is certainly A major, for me. - **Brendel**

It's an ecstatic moment. It's a moment of radiant outpouring. I don't see it is triumphant nor as majestic. Maybe this will stick in your mind and you'll never be able to hear it again, but it's the moment in the Sound of Music where Julie Andrews just runs up the hill and the 'Hills are Alive'. It's that kind of moment of sheer exuberance, **Hough**

This page is covered in pencil in my score because it's so *hard*. The Coda is terrifying, but this is murderous in its own way.. There's no short cut to memorising the LH chords - just no escape. Every bar is subtly different. RH octaves not easy either. No good looking at score. Nightmare.

The second theme comes back fortissimo fervently hoping that this love can flourish, but it's going to constantly go higher and higher and higher with all of these octave runs ... triple fortissimo, so it's going an octave above this ... to here ... so this ascent is this yearning to cut the yoke of the sadness that started the piece, of the descents that started the piece. That's a very pivotal moment, very pivotal moment. Besides the virtuosity that's needed, the passion that's needed for these octaves, you know, to brave this ascent, it's very strong. **Perahia**

These three octave runs so difficult for me. Firstly, what are they? My pencilled scribble suggests "B Minor apart from E sharp" As if that helps. Next, how does one finger such a scale in octaves? The RH thumb plays every note. The upper line ought (to anyone with a technique) be reasonably simple - a mix of 3-4-5. But I'm not used to a thumb-3 stretch over an octave, so it's going to be a mix of 4 and 5. Each of the three scales harder than the previous one. Needless to say, all needs memorising.

The image shows a page of a musical score for piano, specifically measures 105 to 119. The score is in E major and features a return of Theme B. The music is marked fortissimo (ff) and includes several octave runs. The page is annotated with various comments and lines pointing to specific musical features.

Measure 105: The music begins with a fortissimo (ff) marking. The right hand (RH) plays a series of octave runs, while the left hand (LH) plays a series of chords. The music is marked with a red line and a green line.

Measure 109: The music continues with a series of octave runs in the RH and chords in the LH. The music is marked with a green line.

Measure 112: The music continues with a series of octave runs in the RH and chords in the LH. The music is marked with a blue line.

Measure 115: The music continues with a series of octave runs in the RH and chords in the LH. The music is marked with a green line.

Measure 119: The music continues with a series of octave runs in the RH and chords in the LH. The music is marked with a blue line.

122

124 *fff*

126 *più animato* (*p*) *cresc.*

129

132

135 *più vivo*

The second theme comes back fortissimo fervently hoping that this love can flourish, but it's going to constantly go higher and higher and higher with all of these octave runs to a triple fortissimo. So this ascent is this yearning to cut the yoke of the sadness that started the piece, of the descents that started the piece. That's a very pivotal moment. Besides the virtuosity that's needed you need the passion for these octaves- you know, to brave this ascent, it's very strong. **Perahia**

Each of these three octave scales is not quite a conventional scale. So each needs learning and memorising. And fingering. The LH needs to play itself.

Very fiddly repeated pattern of 16 notes. But the pattern doesn't fall on the same beat. Nor do the LH chords. Part music, part maths.

made up of a chain of fourths (Hough)

Waltz

There are one or two performances where this comes off well. For me, one of the shortcomings of the performances is that they often get too fast. It is much more demanding to play things two or four degrees slower, and with all the clarity and with all the necessary rhythm, than just to dash away. - **Brendel**

This, for me, is the present exile in Paris, in the society of Paris, with all the fineries, the bourgeois sophistication. Strauss uses these kind of waltzes for vulgarity in the Rosenkavalier, and Mahler too. I think it's a cynical thing. **Perahia**

Everybody plays the waltz so fast that you actually can't hear what is going on. The right hand and left hand are basically echoes of each other and you should be able to hear that. **Rosen**

More 'sighs'

The RH is not too tricky, but the LH involves huge leaps and awkward middle voices - and keeps changing subtly. Do you look at RH or LH to judge the jumps? Either. But not the score. Which means this, too, has to be memorised.

We spend at least three lessons on these four bars. RH and LH seem to work to patterns. at times the same, at times different, Pedal to emphasise these patterns (if so, which hand?) or one pedal per beat?

More fanfares in LH

The musical score consists of six systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 138-140) is marked 'scherzando'. The second system (measures 141-143) continues the melodic development. The third system (measures 144-146) shows a change in the LH pattern. The fourth system (measures 147-149) includes a 'cresc.' marking. The fifth system (measures 150-152) features a 'ff' marking. The sixth system (measures 153-155) concludes with a final chord. The score is annotated with various musical symbols, including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

155

156

The sort of simple figure that comes back to bite you. Repeated four times. Michael wants it legato. I think “legato can wait” and learn the wrong fingering. But wrong fingering doesn’t give legato. So have to unpick fingering and try 124/135/245, which is not at all intuitive. And quite alot of wasted time/

157

158

This is where you wish you’d practised your B flat major scales harder at school - though even then, it’s now complicated by an E natural. And then, precisely on the turn, the LH has a big spread chord and the RH switches into E flat minor. Another scale I never learned.

160

161

Third statement of theme B

163

164

Probably, this should not be as big. I think it’s winding down. You’ve had this sort of climax of the waltz section, and I think this is the top point in the phrase, and maybe the fortissimo is for this B-flat where it ends, but, to me, after that, it subsides a little bit, and suddenly this arpeggio, I think, is rolling in a mezzo forte and the theme in a semi forte. It’s actually quite expressive and it’s just warm, **Hough**

166

167

Twenty six bars of broken chords in the LH, each slightly different, with a minimum stretch of a ninth or tenth - sometimes much more. To begin with this gives me severe RSI-like pains. I have to slow down and learn how to keep the LH light and fluid.

169

170

172

175

178

181

183

185

con forza

ten.

sempre f

Six notes in LH against five notes in the RH. Hardish, but worse to come.

Lucy suggests switching 3 to 1 (thumb), purely to get the hand into position for the octave fanfare. Chances are in performance the eye will be so concentrated on the tricky arpeggios in the LH that the RH could badly mis-hit.

Six notes in the LH. That's the easy bit. In the middle are four notes, all played with the RH thumb. Only the first and third notes - the B flat - coincide with any of the six. The other two have to fall between the LH notes. And then, further to complicate things, the outer notes in the RH also fall between the LH, with a tied triplet at the end to make life even twistier. Michael's pensil lines sort of indicate how the notes should fall. I think it means you have to imagine 11 different staggered moments in time. It may be 10.

"Focus trill/turn" scribbles a teacher.. Two different fingerings suggested - 4/5/4 or 3/5/3. Both are v difficult: the first because the fourth and fifth fingers are weak; the second because it's awkward to stretch an octave with thumb and third finger.

Echoes of (speeded up) Theme A again

Switching of finger on a note (eg replacing a fourth finger with a thumb without resounding it) is so-called “legato fingering” - done to create a smoother line. Don’t remember learning this as a teenager. But watch any professional pianist’s hands and they will be using this technique constantly.

A sudden drop of a ninth heralds return of Theme A at original speed and in original key. Ninth anticipates the frenzied RH ninths at start of coda

Theme A returns

You get this minor Ninth fall which happens so much, and then back again, ‘there’s no escape. We thought there was but, actually, no’ ..., and this is the third time this comes. It’s like the three chances you have and, I’m afraid, if you blow it on the third one, there’s not ever going to be a fourth. I think you really feel a sense of that. **Hough**

Descending pattern of falling sighs in original statement of A replaced by ascending phrases

18 *appassionato* *poco rit.*

206 *il più forte possibile*

Presto con fuoco

208

211

214

217

220

The two bars before the Coda are as loud as possible. That really is such an incredible cry of despair. It's absolutely heart rending if you do it with great passion, great loudness, and not too fast. You kind of try not to think about the coda at this point. You try not to think of the coda as being the signal for the starter's gun, you know, that you're off to the races. I think maybe the presto shouldn't be too presto. **Ax**

the minor Ninth, comes back here in these outer voices, I think that minor Ninth is a very important moment from the first time it occurs **Hough**

The coda is hell for every pianist. You breathe in, and then off you go and then, if you're too excited, you blow up. So every pianist is so scared right from the beginning. It's notorious. **Ogawa**

The strength of the piece is really in this coda. The amount of virtuosity needed for it is huge. Much of the practice that one does has to go into these various difficulties of the coda, but it's not for a virtuoso showpiece, it's for the intensification of these emotions that have been kept down through the piece. They rise a little bit at different points and then there's just an explosion at the end. **Perahia**

Huge leaps LH. Manic energy RH. Rhythms all feel wrong. Complex pedalling decisions. Welcome to the first four bars.

223

226

229

232

235

239

I don't think I ever played the coda accurately. You know, it's a very, very hard thing. They are all terribly difficult but this one has such dramatic extremes. It's incredibly hard to do it really presto and loud and powerful and without too much pedal. It's just very hard. **Ax**

The tremendous brilliancy of a coda is very much like a fast cabaletta from an Italian opera. **Rosen**

The coda is the nearest you get in Chopin where you actually need to feel a player at the edge of their powers. That's not at all common with Chopin because of thing of dignity and *souplesse* and everything in the aristocratic sense of the music, **O'Hora**

The thing to take comfort in, is it's always easier to leap to black notes than to white notes **O'Hora**

The hardest moment is when you leap down the octave. Once you're down the octave, it's not so difficult. Important here to keep a loose wrist so that you don't become tense, that the thumb is also free. The thumb can often get tight more than the other fingers because it's the odd finger out, it's not shaped like the others, it's in a different position, it's thick, it's heavy, it's cumbersome. **Hough**

Next eight bars need memorising. Chords and patterns not at all obvious. Hands wrists and arms by now feeling burn

the coda can be too fast and if one can keep that in mind it's probably useful. It's in two, but I think it can help if you think it in four because that will slow you down a little bit. If it's just an easy going two I think the danger is that it will be too fast. **Hough**

The Coda is not comfortable and I think it's supposed to maybe sound not so comfortable. It's not supposed to sound as though you're playing with ease. There's a struggle going on and the release of the struggle is that low D, That's when you can really think in terms of half bars or bars but before that I think you're really thinking in quarter note segments and sometimes even eight notes. **Ax**

The chromatic scale is not really very difficult. We all learn chromatic scales. What's difficult about it is you begin in a strong part of the piano, go to the weaker part of the piano, but you need to make a crescendo. The danger here is that you start too loud and so you can't actually make a crescendo as you get to the smaller strings which have less resonance. If you crescendo with the left hand, it will give the allusion that the right hand is making an even bigger crescendo. **Hough**

The mood is, 'this can't go on any longer, revolution ... the furies of hell will be unleashed on this'..., it's just ultimate destruction, There's no rescue for anybody, these trumpets are very important ... under the final ascent ... these trumpets announce the doom. **Perahia**

An 18-note pattern of sorts - repeated once and then breaking off after 13 notes and changing into a very rapid descending G Minor scale. Extraordinary sweep in five bars from the very heights of the piano the the very depths.

It's like shredding, ripping up a love letter, or something. You know there's something, physically it looks dramatic and I think these pauses are, you know, very important that they have their space. **Hough**

I can't help but be reminded of the idea of the tombs opening up, you know, at the end of the world, and everybody in horror and then the end of the regime of everything ... everything. **Perahia**

A cruel moment. These two scales have to sound equal, don't they? But the second one is much harder than the first because it's in tenths rather than in an octave, so, I think you have to be conscious that you don't have too much of a smile on your face as you do this brilliant G-minor scale going up and then find that, when you get to the second one, it sounds very tentative and nervous. Do the first scale in the manner in which you will be able to do the tenths because otherwise it will sound like the tenths aren't as strong as the first one. **Hough**

This, to me, is almost like shaking someone by the shoulders, even on the page, but when you watch someone playing it, it's not just what you're listening to, it's what you're seeing, seeing on the page, seeing on the piano. Also, I think it's quite important in a performance that there's accelerando, that these bars are actually the right length, often they're doubled **Hough**

The coda is totally terrifying, ending up with those jagged... that violent dissonance, coming together, I don't know, it's scary. **Ax**

once you've got the accelerando of this chromatic scale going, it's just, you know, there's nothing more to say, I just have to finish this, it's too much, then it finishes. I don't think it ends and then it's a kind of big dramatic pompous ending. I think it ends. It's over. It's finished. **Hough**