

ARIEL LANYI
piano

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 30 in E major Op. 109

Vivace

Prestissimo

Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

(approx. 22 minutes)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Mazurkas Op. 59

No. 1 in A minor

No. 2 in A-flat major

No. 3 in F# minor

(approx. 12 minutes)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major Op. 61

Allegro maestoso

(approx. 13 minutes)

MAX REGER (1873-1916)

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach Op. 81

Andante – L'istesso tempo – Sempre espressivo ed assai legato – Grave assai
– Vivace – Vivace – Allegro moderato – Adagio – Vivace – Grave e sempre
molto espressivo – Poco vivace – Allegro agitato – Andante sostenuto –
Vivace – Con moto – Fuge. Sostenuto

(approx. 32 minutes)

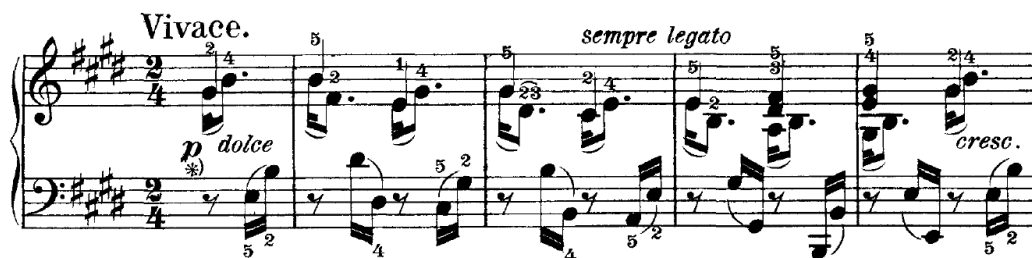
Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata No. 30 in E major Op. 109

The Sonata in E major, Op. 109 is a product of Beethoven's last years. It is one of three sonatas composed between 1820 and 1822. Despite its three-movement structure, this sonata may be thought of in two halves. First comes a complementary pair of emotionally contrasting movements, both in sonata form, played together without a pause: the first a dreamy star-gazing fantasy in moderate tempo, the second a frighteningly focussed *agitato* of nightmarish intensity.

The emotional volatility of these two movements is balanced and resolved by the poised and serene set of variations which serves as the sonata's finale. These variations are based on a melody of such quiet dignity that they virtually erase all memory of the emotional wanderings of the previous movements.

The compression of form of which Beethoven is capable in his late works is evident in the first movement, the exposition of which is complete in a mere 16 bars. It opens with a melody buried within a delicate tracery of broken chord figuration that flutters innocently, as if floating suspended in the air.



It has barely breathed out its first two phrases and is moving to cadence when it is interrupted by a disorienting diminished seventh chord that leads nonetheless to a lovingly lyrical duet, *adagio espressivo*, between left and right hand.

But this second theme has time only to sing out a few bars itself before breaking out, cadenza-like, into a keyboard-spanning series of rapturous arpeggios and scale figures.



And then, the exposition is over...on the first page of the score.

But it is the first element, the fluttering broken-chord harmonies, that Beethoven is obviously in love with. It pulses through the entire development, building to a climax for the return of the opening material, presented this time with the hands at the extreme ends of the keyboard. A coda then seems to merely drift to its conclusion, ebbing away rather than emphatically ending.

Prestissimo.

ff *ben marcato*

The first system of the musical score is for the first movement, 'Prestissimo.' It is in 6/8 time and D major. The treble clef staff begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a 'ben marcato' (well marked) instruction. The melody is characterized by eighth-note patterns, often beamed in groups of four. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above the notes. A circled '5' appears above a note in the fifth measure. The bass clef staff provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with eighth notes and rests.

Despite the breakneck pace, pervasive chromaticism serves to give a sharp edge of pathos to this movement's sometimes-mysterious murmurings and frequent violent outbursts. Remarkable in this movement is the way in which Beethoven manages to express such extremes of emotional violence within a texture so starkly ruled by the strictures of imitative counterpoint.

The broken-chord figuration of the opening movement looks back to similar homogeneously “patterned” textures in the preludes of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the movement’s cadenza-like exaltations of arpeggios find their correlative in similar outbursts of spiritual bravura in Bach’s organ toccatas.

More explicit reference is made in the second movement, which is shot through with canons and passages in double counterpoint.

And now, in the concluding movement, we encounter a variation melody characterized by an almost religious serenity, with the rhythmic imprint of the sarabande (emphasizing the second beat of the bar) and harmonized with the melodically conceived bass line of a four-part Lutheran chorale.



The first variation is an Italian opera aria for keyboard, marked *Molto espressivo*, with an elegantly expressive melody and a clear bass-and-chord left-hand accompaniment.

Variation 2 lightens the texture with a hocket-style alternation of the hands that presents the harmonic and melodic outlines of the theme in interlocking stroboscopic flashes of melody.

Baroque instincts come to the surface in Variation 3, a vigorous exercise in two-voice double counterpoint, with the right and left hands regularly swapping melodies in the course of presenting the theme.

Variation 4 moves the time signature to 9/8 for a change of pace and thickens the texture to a full four imitative voices.

Beethoven's own synthesis of old and new emerges in the final variation, which moves from a simple chordal statement of the theme to a gradual accumulation of rhythmic energy that finally emerges into a texture of whirling trills and flecks of melody flickering in the high register before a simple restatement of the original theme ends the sonata in a mood of spiritual peace.

Frédéric Chopin

Mazurkas Op. 59 Nos. 1-3

Chopin's mazurkas are stylized imitations of the folk dances of his native Poland, specifically those of the province of Mazovia near Warsaw. They come in a wide variety of moods and tempi, from the melancholy to the exuberant, with contrasting emotional states often boldly juxtaposed in the same work.

The mazurka is in triple metre but with rhythmic emphasis "fleeing" the downbeat to land instead on the second or third beat of the bar, where stomping or heel-clicking gestures often occurred in performance. Drone

tones in the bass are sometimes used to imitate the bagpipes, and melodies might be written in exotic scales using a raised fourth scale degree (e.g., F# in C major).

The melodies themselves tend to be “modular,” constructed out of repeated one- and two-bar units of rhythm with recurring melodic motives, richly bejewelled with ornamentation. Repetition is a prominent feature of the genre, especially at the bar and phrase level.

Using these simple “rustic” features of compositional design, however, Chopin composes pieces of considerable elegance, especially in the way that he alternates between personal expression, tailored to the intimate setting of the salon, and rousing choruses with thumping rhythms that evoke the communal spirit of village dancing — all glued together harmonically by his abundant use of chromatic harmony.

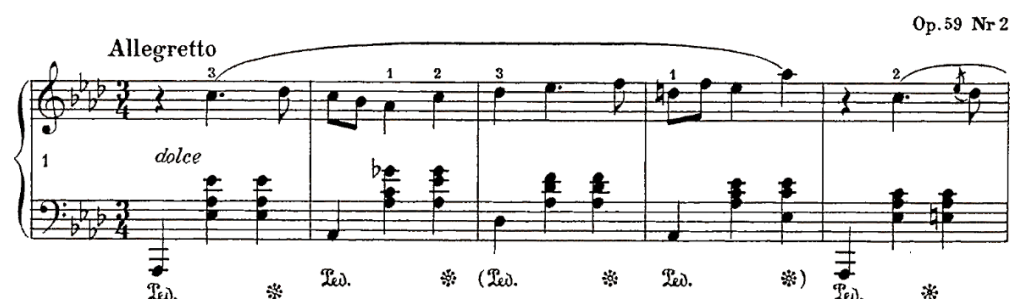
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The *Mazurka in A minor* features a restless, wandering theme with many leaps in the melody line.



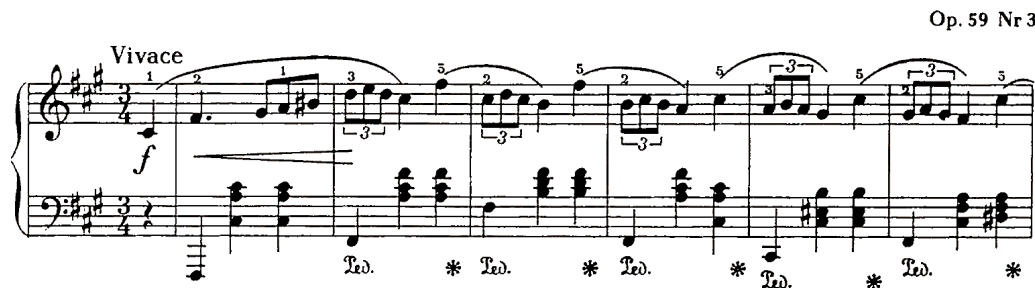
A regular alternation of tone colours between minor and major creates quicksilver changes in mood between the forlorn and the hopeful. Its middle section in A major is gracious and youthfully buoyant, untroubled by the chromatic wanderings of the opening, and its mysterious ending is utterly delicious.

The *Mazurka in A-flat major* appears to have been composed in response to a request from Felix Mendelssohn for a short piece for his wife.



As such, it avoids any form of melancholic brooding in favour of a waltz-like tone throughout, with a near-constant oom-pah-pah left-hand accompaniment cheering on the ballroom atmosphere.

The final *Mazurka in F# minor* opens with a stern and dignified call to arms and a polonaise-like ceremonial tone that simply melts away at the arrival of the coy and coquettish middle section in F# major.



Not even the return of the F# minor opening can resist the trio's charms, and this mazurka ends with a polite curtsy in F# major.

Frédéric Chopin

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major Op. 61

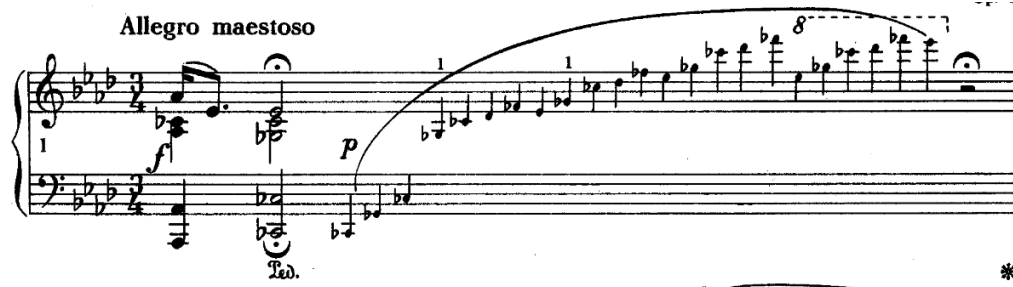
Chopin's *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, written in 1846, was the composer's last extended work. It is indebted to the *polonaise* for its metre, its large-scale ternary (A-B-A) form and for the characteristic polonaise rhythm that frequently animates its accompaniments.



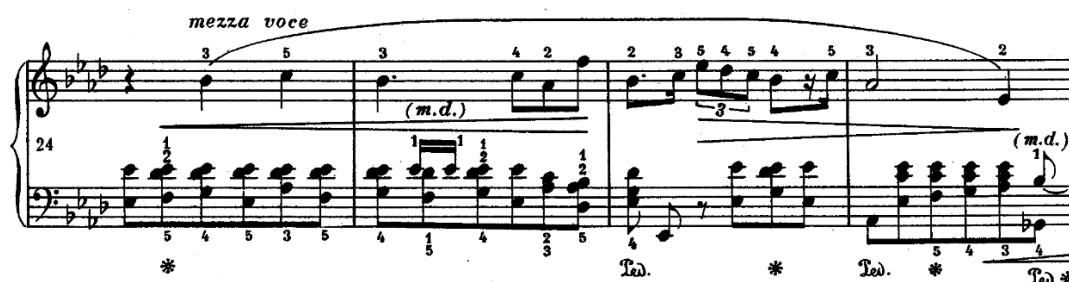
Its basic operating principle, however, is that of rhapsodic improvisation and continuous variation — i.e., *fantaisie*. As such, it lacks the fixity of phrase lengths and literal repetition of material in sections that normally characterize dance genres like the polonaise.

Chopin's idiosyncratic way of writing for the keyboard is much in evidence in this work. The score features left-hand countermelodies in abundance, scintillating passagework in the high treble, shimmering multiple trills between the hands and a pervasive use of chromatic harmony that facilitates sudden harmonic shifts and modulations.

This work might best be thought of as a *dream* of a polonaise, and this dreamlike quality is established from the opening bars in a series of wide-ranging explorations of piano tone extending over five octaves.



This introduction then continues on with murmurs and motivic hints of the principal polonaise theme to come.



This theme, and others of a similar stamp, are worked and re-worked in improvisatory style until the arrival of the contrasting middle section.



The final section sees the return of the opening dreamlike arpeggios and builds to an apotheosis of the principal polonaise theme, very much like the coda of Chopin's Ballade No. 3 in A-flat, Op. 47, with pulsing chordal harmonies in the right hand singing out over a rumble of octaves in the left.



This is Chopin writing in the pianistic “grand style” to end this “dream” of a piece with the heroic resolve befitting a polonaise.

Max Reger

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach Op. 81

The Bach revival of the 19th century began with a performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829 conducted by the 19-year-old Mendelssohn and was furthered by the editions published by the Bach-Gesellschaft, which was founded in 1850. By the end of the century, Bach had become more than merely an object of academic study but an inspiration for public performances before a contemporary audience — with a few “modifications,” of course, to “update” him to meet the expectations of the time.

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) dressed up Bach as a creature of the Romantic era, a lonely heroic figure sitting on his organ bench filling a vast cathedral with the booming sound of his creations. His transcriptions thickened Bach’s scores to imitate that immense sound on the concert grand piano.

Max Reger (1873-1916) was both more conservative and more progressive than Busoni. Considered a forerunner of Schoenberg, he admired the Baroque forms and procedures of Bach but used them to create new works written with the more “modern” type of chromatic harmony being used by Liszt and Wagner.

His epic *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach*, Op. 81, was written in 1904. Its theme is taken from the instrumental introduction to a contralto-tenor duet from Bach’s Cantata No. 128, *Auf Christi Himmelfahrt allein*.

4. Aria



Reger finds the spare, two-voice texture of the original unsuitable for the keyboard, so in his version he fills in the harmonies implied by the figured bass.

Andante (♩ = 66)¹⁾ (*quasi Adagio*)
sempre assai legato, la melodia sempre dolce (quasi Oboe solo)

sempre espressivo
p

Max Reger, op. 81

A piano accompaniment for the 4. Aria. The score is in G major, 8/8 time. The right hand features a melodic line with a trill (tr) and a fermata. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The tempo is marked Andante (♩ = 66) and the mood is quasi Adagio. Performance instructions include 'sempre assai legato, la melodia sempre dolce (quasi Oboe solo)' and 'sempre espressivo p'.

In his first two variations he does little but wrap the theme in comfy contrapuntal swaddling clothes, with the theme easily recognizable. But beginning with Variation 3, his chromatic leanings become clear, and from this point on he bases his variations on only certain elements of the theme rather than the theme as a whole.

And it is hair-raising passages such as this, from Variation 3, that explain why this work has been so seldom performed and, more seldom still, recorded:



Some have opined that Reger's training as an organist may well have accustomed him to a level of sound that the piano, even the concert grand, is unable to deliver.

While Reger takes care to alternate between solemn and virtuosic variations for the sake of variety, the burden on the pianist only increases as the work goes on, with some variations, such as Variation 6, sounding very much like concert études.



While his slower variations allow some rest for the ear volume-wise, their very harmonic complexity often makes them into a bewildering labyrinth of voice-leading that is difficult to follow, as in Variation 12:



There are 14 variations, after which comes a double fugue with a chromatic opening fugue subject that seems to bear little relation to the original theme:



About halfway through, a second, peppier fugue subject in 16th notes is introduced:



And of course, what aspiring contrapuntist worth his J.S. Bach coffee mug could resist combining these two themes:



The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* says that Max Reger's musical ideals were "architectonic beauty, melodic and imitative magic," buttressed by "intellectual content."

His *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach* appear to have fulfilled that aim.