

ANDREA LUCCHESINI
piano

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Drei Klavierstücke D 946

Allegro assai

Allegretto

Allegro

(approx. 25 minutes)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Sechs Klavierstücke Op. 118

Intermezzo. Allegro non assai, ma appassionato

Intermezzo. Andante teneramente

Ballade. Allegro energico

Intermezzo. Allegretto un poco agitato

Romanze. Andante

Intermezzo. Andante, largo e mesto

(approx. 23 minutes)

INTERMISSION

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

24 Preludes Op. 28

1. C major. Agitato

2. A minor. Lento

3. G major. Vivace

4. E minor. Largo

5. D major. Molto allegro

6. B minor. Lento assai

7. A major. Andantino

8. F# minor. Molto agitato

9. E major. Largo

10. C# minor. Molto allegro

11. B major. Vivace

12. G# minor. Presto

13. F# major. Lento

14. E-flat minor. Allegro

15. D-flat major. Sostenuto

16. B-flat minor. Presto con fuoco

17. A-flat major. Allegretto

18. F minor. Molto allegro

19. E-flat major. Vivace

20. C minor. Largo

21. B-flat major. Cantabile

22. G minor. Molto agitato

23. F major. Moderato

24. D minor. Allegro appassionato

(approx. 38 minutes)

Franz Schubert

Drei Klavierstücke D 946

Schubert's *Three Piano Pieces* D 946 were likely composed in 1828, the last year of the composer's life, and remained in manuscript until they appeared in a published edition in 1868. All three are structured in a rondo-like sequence of contrasting sections, and in their wide range of moods and inventive pianistic textures they represent some of Schubert's most adventurous keyboard writing.

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The first of the set, marked ***Allegro assai***, opens in the gloomy key of E-flat minor with an agitated rippling of triplets and a breathless melody that evokes the famous forest ride of the horseman who “rides so late through night and wind” in the composer's *Erlkönig* ballad.



Further developments take the theme into major-mode territory (as in much of Schubert) and eventually to a brashly self-confident chordal theme with the forthright directness of a Schumann march. The slower and more deliberate middle section features moments of drama that with their dazzling runs and swirling tremolos



anticipate the improvisatory piano recitatives of Liszt.

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The ***Allegretto*** second piece opens with a drone-textured lullaby in a style that Brahms would later make his own.



And in this regard, it is perhaps not irrelevant to mention that the editor of the 1868 edition of these pieces was none other than Johannes Brahms himself. The first contrasting episode is conspiratorial in tone, with strange harmonic shifts and jabbing hemiola accents.



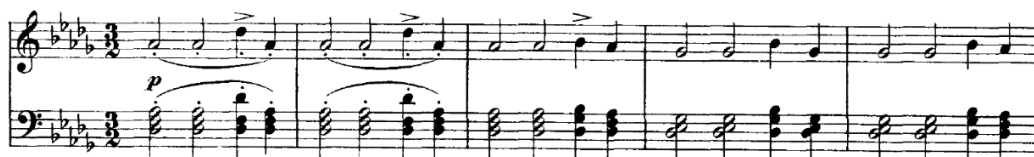
The second episode, tinted in the minor mode but with a penchant for rapturous melodic expansiveness, is Schubertian melody-making at its most magical.



The jubilant syncopations of the *Allegro* third piece in the set will have you cross-eyed in bewilderment wondering where the downbeat is. The exotic rhythms of Hungarian village music are obviously a point of reference here.



The contrasting middle section puts you on firmer rhythmic ground, beginning in a grave and hymn-like manner,



until it, too, starts to feel a lilt in the loins that leads it back to the stomping rhythms of the village square.

Johannes Brahms

Sechs Klavierstücke Op. 118

Brahms' late piano works are exquisite miniatures, modest in their formal dimensions and generally subdued in mood and dynamic range. But they offer up a wealth of intriguing piano textures set in a lavish range of tone colours. Often described as "autumnal," these works are sometimes seen as the products of a musical career approaching its close, combining the serene, often wistful outlook of old age with outbursts of a passion more remembered than spontaneous.

And yet they are anything but the lesser offerings of a composer in decline. Rather, they represent the distilled essence of his musical aesthetic, applied with the calm assurance of a master craftsman, a composer with nothing left to prove.

* * *

Brahms' *Six Piano Pieces* of 1893 are intensely concentrated works with all the classic features of his compositional style: motivic density, rippling polyrhythms, an intimate familiarity with the lowest regions of the keyboard and, above all, an ability to create musical textures of heartbreaking lyrical intensity richly marbled with imitative counterpoint. All but the first piece are in a clear ternary A-B-A form.

The opening *Intermezzo in A minor* arrives as if in mid-thought,



a musical thought of restless harmonic change and heavy melodic sighs riding atop a surging accompaniment that constantly threatens to overwhelm them.

The *Intermezzo in A major* sounds like a simple, quiet little nocturne, but its motivic texture is elaborately in-folded, as its opening phrase



eventually yields to a melodically upside-down version of itself. And its middle section



is woven through with canons.

The *Ballade in G minor* is the most extroverted of the set. Its heroic and vigorous opening section



is contrasted with a gently undulating B section



that despite its tender lyricism can't help but dream in its own lyrical way of the opening bars.

In the *Intermezzo in F minor*, a simple repeating triplet figure echoing back and forth between the hands



gives rise to canons that play out through the whole texture. Even the poised and elegiac middle section,



with its bass notes plumbing the very bottom of the keyboard, unfolds in close canonic imitation, just as in the opening.

The *Romanze in F major* sounds vaguely archaic, as its main melody, doubled in the alto and tenor voices, drifts from time to time into the Aeolian mode.



Its middle section is a gently rocking *berceuse* elaborating melodic fantasy lines over a drone bass.



The *Intermezzo in E-flat minor* that closes the set is enigmatic. Proceeding at first in whispers over a rolling carpet of arpeggios originating deep in the bass,



it gathers forcefulness in its middle section, revealing in moments of triumphalism the steel hand buried deep within Brahms' ever-so-velvet pianistic glove.



Frédéric Chopin

24 Preludes Op. 28

Chopin began composing his **24 Preludes** in all the major and minor keys in Paris in 1836 and finished the set during the winter of 1838, during his sojourns on the island of Mallorca and in the South of France. On these journeys he was joined by his new love interest, the cross-dressing French novelist George Sand, née Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin de Francueil (1804–1876). He also carried with him his scores of Bach whose “pattern” or “figuration” preludes in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* may well have inspired the many mono-motivic preludes in continuous 16th-note motion found in Op. 28.

Of course, these aphoristically brief works — almost half of which take less than a minute to perform — were not really preludes to anything at all. The traditional prelude, after all, was meant simply to create a mood or an atmosphere.

Accordingly, Chopin expanded on this notion to compose a series of *character pieces*, each with its own vividly sketched, intensely emotional mood: some joyous, nostalgic or tenderly tuneful, others solemn, brooding or even violent. And in this regard, it would not be a stretch to believe that the melancholy tone of some of them derived from the tuberculosis that was beginning to affect the composer at this time, a health condition to which he finally succumbed in 1849.

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The preludes are arranged according to the circle of 5ths, with each prelude in a major key followed by one in the relative minor.

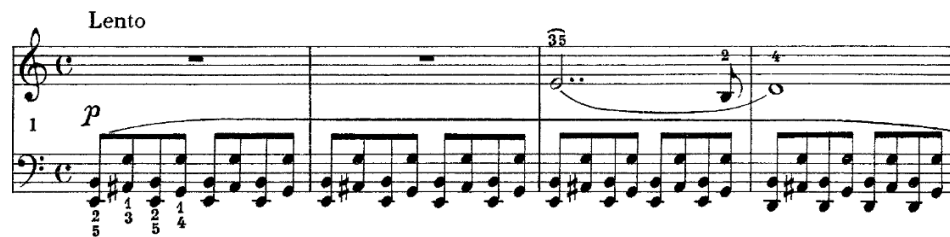
The **Prelude No. 1 in C major** offers a buoyant opening to the set



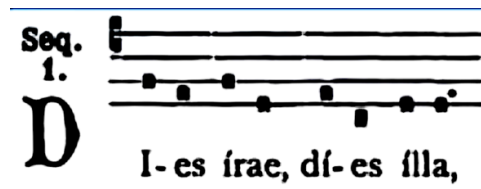
with its cresting and falling waves of yearning two-note melodic gestures, echoing between the alto and soprano voices as the texture surges and retreats like sea waves lapping at a shoreline. Its simple, repetitive chordal elaborations are an obvious tribute to the “Ave Maria” Prelude No. 1 in C major from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I*.

And in keeping with a frequently encountered pattern of bold contrasts between successive preludes, this is followed by what is surely one of

Chopin's most enigmatic — and arguably “ugly” — compositions, the *Prelude No. 2 in A minor*.



While many listeners might readily associate the grinding dissonances of the left-hand ostinato and static dullness of the right-hand melody with the painful experience of medieval dental surgery, others, by contrast, take a more morbid turn in hearing the accompaniment drone home the first five notes of the death-dirge *Dies irae* from the same period.

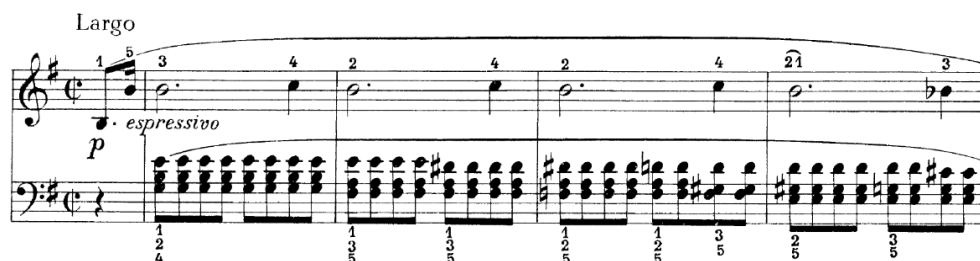


A spirit of lightness and even frivolity, however, returns in the *Prelude No. 3 in G major*, with its tireless etude-like left-hand figuration



that catches the ear so completely that it almost makes the right hand seem like an “accompaniment.”

Melancholy returns in the soulful *Prelude No. 4 in E minor*, with its lethargic right-hand melody that initially struggles, with reluctance, to move far from its first note



while the chromatic inflections of its gently pulsing left-hand accompaniment chart the shifting sands of its unusual harmonic backdrop.

This prelude was performed at Chopin's funeral by celebrated French organist Alfred Lefébure-Wély.

The *Prelude No. 5 in D major* is strangely ambivalent in tone due to the absence of any real sense of "melody" in the *moto perpetuo* onrush of 16th notes.



Further ambiguity resulting from the rapid alternation of B natural and B flat in the texture make this a kaleidoscopic harmonic experience for the ear.

The *Prelude No. 6 in B minor* — yet another of the Preludes performed at the composer's funeral — is probably the best known to beginning students of the piano.



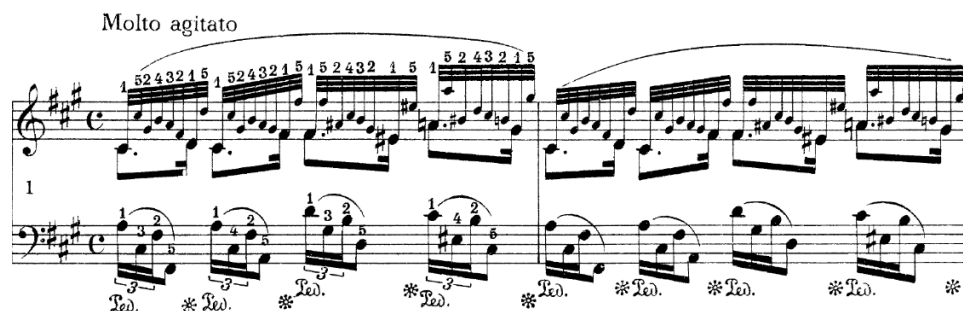
Its lonely, pleading melody in the rich baritone range amply suggests a cello in duet with the keyboard.

The adorably cutesy *Prelude No. 7 in A major* is a slow mazurka



with its characteristic accented second beat of the bar reduced to a lilting pulsation.

Worry and restless anxiety dominate the florid figuration of the virtuosic *Prelude No. 8 in F# minor*



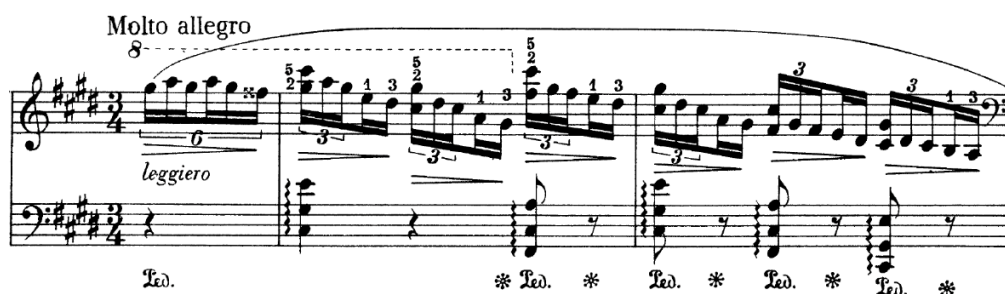
that swirls and twirls in dust-devil spirals of shimmering turbulence made ever more chaotic by descending chromatic lines and the polyrhythmic discord between left and right hands.

The majestic *Prelude No. 9 in E major* is the shortest of all the Preludes at a mere 12 bars.



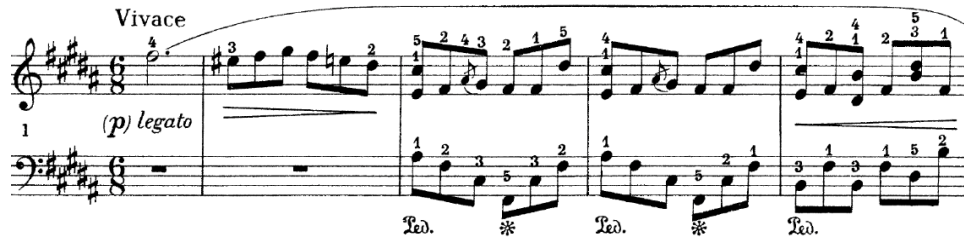
Its mood is unrelentingly solemn and processional, driven by a plodding but resoundingly strong bass line. Yet despite the march-like pace and proudly strutting dotted rhythms of the melody line, there is something almost tragic about this prelude that you just can't put your finger on.

Similarly brief, but entirely contrasting in mood, is the quixotic *Prelude No. 10 in C# minor*



that flashes by in a few quick gestures like a golden butterfly speeding back and forth around a bright lamp.

The coy, occasionally hesitant melody of the *Prelude No. 11 in B major* simply bubbles over with good spirits, with mid-bar ornaments that add a chuckle to its peaceful flow.



Employing harmonies of the utmost simplicity, this is Chopin at his most simply melodic.

The doggedly energetic *Prelude No. 12 in G# minor* drives grimly forward on its investigative mission, sniffing out the chromatic niches of its tonality with the determination of a bloodhound.

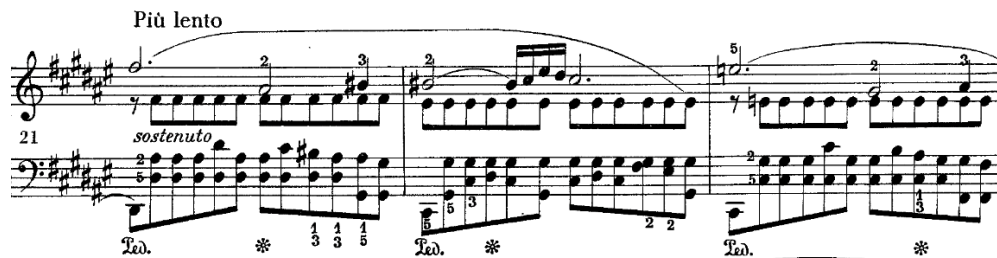


A bloodhound on horseback, that is.

The *Prelude No. 13 in F# major* is the exact opposite.



Basking in the tonal radiance and slow pacing of its nostalgic melodies, it marks time with a constant quiet patter of 8th notes in the left hand that mask the static nature of the harmonies. As one of the larger works in the set, it unfolds in A-B-A form with a middle section



not really at odds with the mellowness of the opening.

The *Prelude No. 14 in E-flat minor*, like the analogous final movement of the composer's Sonata in B-flat minor Op. 36, is composed as a murmuring, sometimes rumbling pattern of unisons between the hands.



Dark and vaguely threatening in tone, it eschews outright tunefulness in favour of implied melody rippling out of its turbulent texture, like the menacing warnings of a mafioso.

The so-called “Raindrop” *Prelude No. 15 in D-flat major* is the longest and most often performed of the Preludes, deriving its nickname from the constant drip-drip of its ostinato patterns in the bass, starting on A flat.



But like many a Chopin nocturne, this simple, tuneful piece adopts a far more serious tone in its ominous middle section in C# minor.



Perhaps the most virtuosic of the set is the tour de force *Prelude No. 16 in B-flat minor*



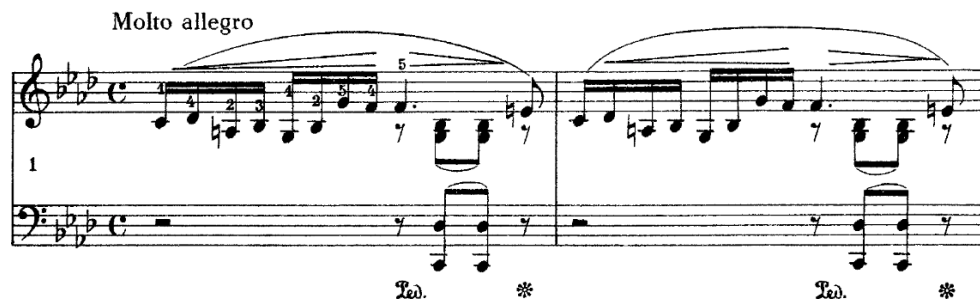
that explodes out of the starting gate with a whirlwind stream of delirious runs that never stops for a breath until its climactic ending.

What begins as a naively “inquisitive” melody in the richly padded pulsing of the *Prelude No. 17 in A-flat major*



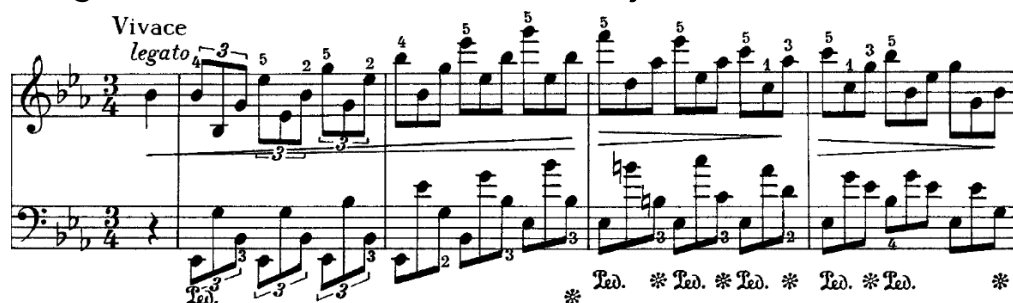
ends up glorified in the sonorous, deep-bass-inflected texture of its final section in an example of pianism in “the grand manner.”

If every family has a problem child, the “problem prelude” of this set is the stormy and combative *Prelude No. 18 in F minor*



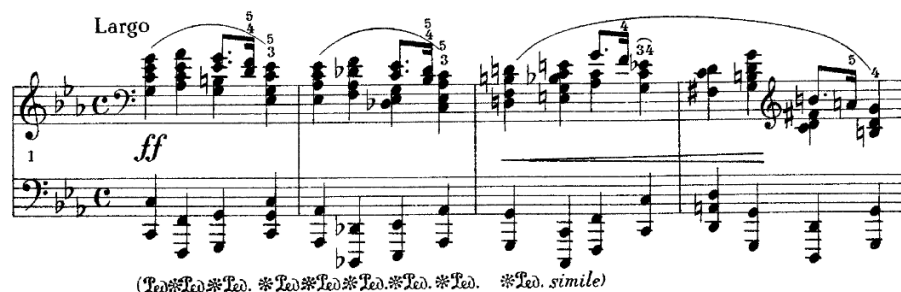
that in a series of violent outbursts vents its spleen and then stomps its foot down in a final “So there!”

The best response to such bad behaviour comes in a joyous outpouring of good feeling in the *Prelude No. 19 in E-flat major*.



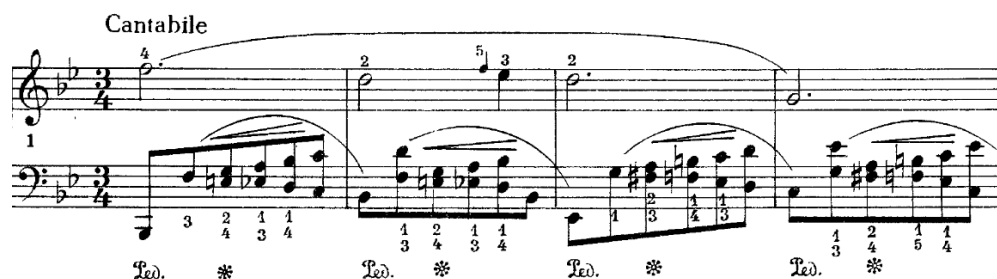
With exhilarating patterns of widely spaced arpeggios in both hands, it challenges the pianist to remain calmly exuberant while sending his eyes in opposite directions.

The third Prelude from the Op. 28 set to be performed at Chopin’s funeral was the eminently funereal *Prelude No. 20 in C minor*.

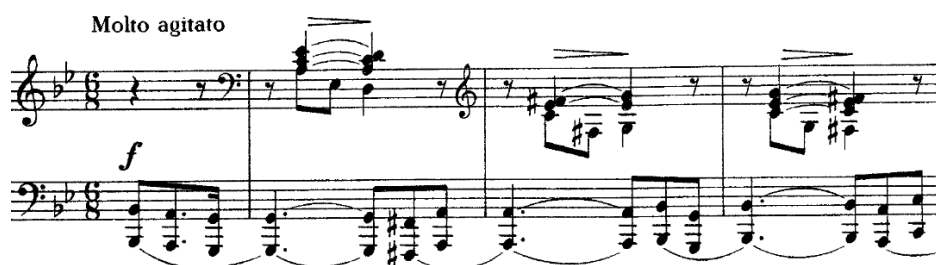


At once grave, majestic and mournful, it encapsulates a spirit of grieving combined with grim solemnity, comparable only to the funeral march from the composer's B-flat minor Sonata.

The peaceful *Prelude No. 21 in B-flat major* is yet another prelude in which the wanderings of the left-hand accompaniment capture the ear far more than the melody above it.

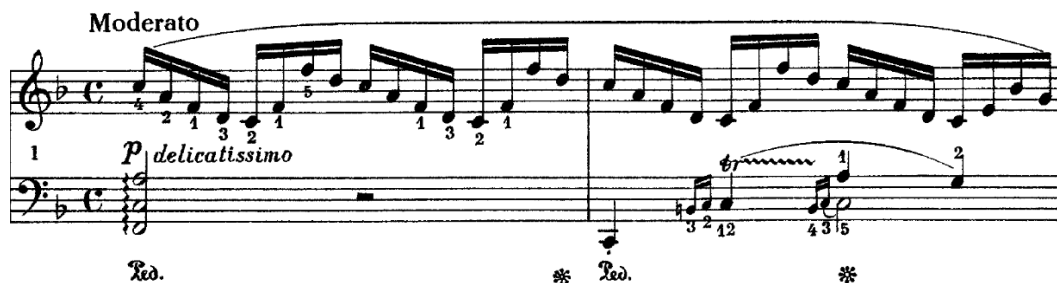


Equally dominated by the rhetorical force of its left-hand gestures is the turbulent *Prelude No. 22 in G minor*

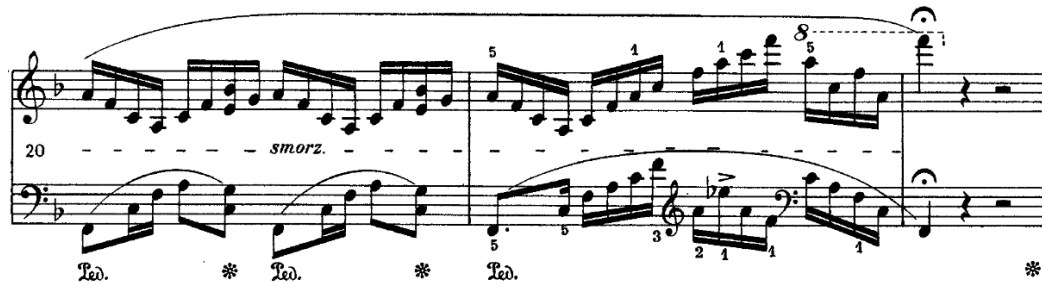


that pursues its argument with a right hand that can only weakly respond to its continual challenges.

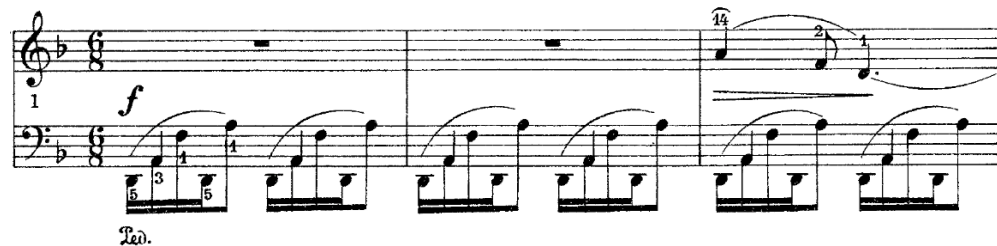
The deliciously delicate lacework of the *Prelude No. 23 in F major*, with its thrilling trills in the underbrush of the left hand's harmonies, comes as a welcome relief to all that turmoil.



Capturing the attention of the critics since its publication is the odd transformation in the penultimate bar of the final, supposedly tonic harmony into a purposefully accented dominant 7th chord of exhilarating colouristic effect.



The Op. 28 set ends with the grimly defiant *Prelude No. 24 in D minor*,
Allegro appassionato



a snarling tantrum of a prelude that with its shrieking, keyboard-spanning runs and horrific cascades of double 3rds descending like avenging demons from the upper registers outshines in rhetorical force and emotional impact even the “Revolutionary” Etude in C minor Op. 10 No. 12.

The depth of despair it lays bare to the ear is nowhere better expressed than in its final notes, described by critics as “the final three nails in the coffin.”



Donald G. Gíslason 2025