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## Group exercise: Three Chopin Preludes

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MUT311: Form and Analysis

Group exercise: Three Chopin Preludes

Course: Form and Analysis (upper-level undergraduate)  
Format: 107 minutes twice per week

Introductory comments:

This is a group exercise to be completed during class time. After we analyzed Chopin's Prelude no. 4 in e minor as a class, I gave each group 20 or so minutes to complete its questions; following this, each group had approximately ten minutes to present its assigned prelude. With more time, I would have asked more detailed questions for each prelude, but because I only have one day to spend on Chopin's small piano works in this course, I could not afford whole-class discussions of each prelude. For each group of questions, I listed some that were required to be answered, but also included one or two more advanced questions in case a group finished early.

I frequently use short, low-risk group projects like this because it provides students with a different classroom experience than the usual discussion format. It also provides students with something more akin to a teaching experience than a formal, prepared presentation. Finally, such an activity encourages students to be actively engaged. This last point is particularly important for a class like mine, which meets for almost two hours at 8 o'clock in the morning.

Though I recently used this particular exercise for a small class of only seven students, I have used similar exercises with larger classes as well (up to fifteen students).

In the case of this exercise, my students' informal presentations were quite successful. Class members asked additional questions; I also asked clarifying questions as needed, and occasionally encouraged students to demonstrate passages at the piano. All students were required to know all three Preludes for their final exam, so it was in the best interest of every student to remain engaged throughout the presentations.

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**Chopin Preludes, op. 28, nos. 1, 6, and 9**

Group 1 (Prelude no. 1 in C major)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 1-8 (including embellishing tones).

Is any section of the Prelude longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? (Is there a specific pattern or process involved?) Be specific in your response.

Where does the final authentic cadence of the Prelude occur? (Hint: not the last measure!) What happens after the final cadence? How is this passage constructed harmonically?

If time:

In what measure would you say the piece's climax occurs? What parameters (register, pitch, harmony, contour, etc.) lead you to this conclusion? Do you notice anything special about the placement of this climactic moment? (Hint: consider the number of measures in the whole piece.)

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Group 2 (Prelude no. 6 in B minor)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

Measures 1-8 exhibit a familiar motivic structure. Name and define this structure.

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 9-14, including embellishing tones (hint: the harmonic rhythm is VERY SLOW).

What harmonic event happens in measures 17-18?

Find and name a prominent metric disturbance (displacement or hemiola).

If time:

Is any part of the form longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? Be as specific as possible. Can you imagine a way in which the form might have been composed in a more symmetrical fashion?

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Group 3 (Prelude no. 9 in E major)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

In detail, outline how each segment of the Prelude is constructed in terms of the following parameters:

- melodic line (contour, use of chromaticism, and ending point)
- harmony (chromaticism and modulation)

If time:

Complete a roman numeral analysis of mm. 1-4 and 9-12. How do these sections compare?

Find examples of the following:

- 5-6 motion
- chromatic third relationships from the original key
- voice exchanges

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MUT311: Form and Analysis

### Chopin Preludes, op. 28, nos. 1, 6, and 9

#### ANSWERS

##### Group 1 (Prelude no. 1)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

*Form: parallel period (second phrase expanded)*

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 1-8 (including embellishing tones).

*See score.*

Is any section of the Prelude longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? (Is there a specific pattern or process involved?) Be specific in your response.

*The second phrase is much longer than the first. First, a chromatic sequence creates an internal expansion. (Best answer: a sequence of parallel sixths from measure 12-21 expands tonic, and an authentic cadence follows this.)*

Where does the final authentic cadence of the Prelude occur? (Hint: not the last measure!) What happens after the final cadence? How is this passage constructed harmonically?

*Final authentic cadence: m. 25*

*The final tonic is expanded by plagal motion. (Note that the final upper-voice tonic is withheld during the authentic cadence. It does not appear until mm. 29, when it is repeated four times.)*

If time:

In what measure would you say the piece's climax occurs? What parameters (register, pitch, harmony, contour, etc.) lead you to this conclusion? Do you notice anything special about the placement of this climactic moment? (Hint: consider the number of measures in the whole piece.)

*Students may have different answers, but most will probably say that the climax occurs in measure 21. This measure features the loudest dynamic marking and the highest register in the right-hand melody. It also marks the point at which the relentlessly ascending contour shifts to a descent, and marks the end of the ascending parallel sixths sequence that has expanded I6 since measure 12.*

*Measure 21 is situated very near the Golden Section of this 33-measure piece, so its role as dramatic climax fits not only for reasons of register, pitch, harmony, and contour, but also for reasons of proportion.*

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## ANSWERS

### Group 2 (Prelude no. 6)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

*Form: parallel period (second phrase expanded)*

Measures 1-8 exhibit a familiar motivic structure. Name and define this structure.

*Sentence structure (a [mm.1-2], a' [mm.3-4], b [mm.5-8])*

Complete a roman numeral analysis of measures 9-14, including embellishing tones (hint: the harmonic rhythm is VERY SLOW).

What harmonic event happens in measures 17-18?

*deceptive motion (V-VI)*

Find and name a prominent metric disturbance (displacement or hemiola).

*Obvious: mm. 13-14, hemiola*

*Less obvious: mm. 16-17/20-21 (left-hand rhythmic design and harmonic changes in right hand lend a somewhat convincing hemiola interpretation to these measures)*

If time:

Is any part of the form longer than you expect? What causes this to occur? Be as specific as possible. Can you imagine a way in which the form might have been composed in a more symmetrical fashion?

*The second phrase is longer than the first. The second phrase is expanded by the extra time spent on the Neapolitan in measures 13-14, and by the deceptive motion in measure 18. If measures 13-14 and 18-21 were removed, the two phrases of the period would be more closely symmetrical (note: this only works because the harmonic progression would still remain intact!). Removal of the coda after the final cadence (mm. 23-end) would make this a wholly symmetrical form.*

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MUT311: Form and Analysis

## ANSWERS

### Group 3 (Prelude no. 9)

Determine the form of the Prelude by marking cadences and thematic repetitions.

*Form: three-phrase period (antecedent, antecedent, consequent)*

*Depending on how the instructor has taught half cadences, the instructor may wish to explain the first half cadence as particularly weak, in that it is an inverted dominant seventh. We usually would not count such a weak dominant as a half cadence, but I always explain that it substitutes for a more structural half cadence in this location.*

In detail, outline how each segment of the Prelude is constructed in terms of the following parameters:

- melodic line (contour, use of chromaticism, and ending point)
- harmony (chromaticism and modulation)

*Phrase 1: Melodic line  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}-\hat{5}$*

*Harmony: Diatonic, except for a  $V7/V$  in measure 4.*

*Phrase 2: Melodic line  $\hat{5}-\hat{3}$  (enharmonically spelled)- $\hat{5}$*

*Harmony: Very chromatic! Moves to  $bIII$ , then  $bVI$ , then modulates to  $III$  ( $G\#$  major)  
(enharmonically spelled as  $Ab$  major)*

*Phrase 3: Melodic line  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$*

*Harmony: Sequential modulations from  $E$  to  $F$  (Neapolitan) to  $G$  minor*

*Melodic lines outline tonic triad.*

If time:

Complete a roman numeral analysis of mm. 1-4 and 9-12. How do these sections compare?

*See score for RN analysis.*

*Measures 1 and 9 are based on the very similar progressions. However, through the introduction of mode mixture ( $C$ -natural instead of  $C\#$ ), measures 9-12 take an entirely different path, one that is entirely sequential and largely chromatic.*

Find examples of the following:

- 5-6 motion *This is everywhere, but I've marked only the most obvious occurrences.*
- chromatic third relationships from the original key *Measures 5 ( $bIII$ ), 6 ( $bVI$ ), and 8 ( $III$ ).*
- voice exchanges *See two examples in Phrase 2.*



# PRELUDE 1 IN C MAJOR

In the right-hand part of this prelude, what effects are produced by the changes from two triplets to one quintuplet per bar? Where is the final cadence, and what is happening there? (su<sup>1</sup>, based in inner voice)

This section of the musical score for 'L'Espresso' by Debussy contains measures 14 through 21. It is written for piano in 3/4 time. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key annotations include 'Agitato' at the beginning, 'mf' (mezzo-forte), 'ff' (fortissimo), and 'dim.' (diminuendo). There are also performance instructions like 'stretto' and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The score features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Fingering numbers (1-5) and articulation marks (accents, slurs) are present throughout. Measure numbers 14, 17, and 21 are circled. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the tempo/mood is marked 'Agitato'.

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Measures 28-33 of a Chopin Prelude. The music is in 3/4 time. Measure 28 starts with a circled number 28. The melody in the right hand features eighth-note patterns. The left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Chordal progressions are marked as IV-I, IV-I, IV-I, and IV-I. A dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) appears in measure 32. The piece concludes with a fermata in measure 33, marked with an asterisk (\*).

# PRELUDE 4 IN E MINOR

Measures 1-13 of Chopin's Prelude 4 in E Minor. The tempo is marked *Largo*. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The melody in the right hand is marked *espress.* (espressivo). The left hand features a dense, rhythmic accompaniment of eighth-note chords. Measure numbers 5, 9, and 13 are circled at the beginning of their respective staves. The piece ends with a *stretto* marking and a repeat sign in measure 13.

## PRELUDE 6 IN B MINOR

How does the left-hand part serve simultaneously as principal melody and as foundation of the harmony? What happens at bars 7–8? Why did Chopin write a top-line slur there? Compare Schumann's *Wilder Reiter*, bars 9–16, on page 313.)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis, see Charles Burkhardt, "The Polyphonic Melodic Line of Chopin's B-minor Prelude," in *Frederic Chopin / Preludes, Opus 28*, Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1973, pp. 80ff., particularly Ex. 2, p. 83).

## ■ PRELUDE 9 IN E MAJOR

*Largo*

5 - 6

sw 4-3

①

tr

Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*

± V I IV ii vii<sup>6</sup> V iii<sup>6</sup> vi<sup>7</sup> ii<sup>6</sup> V

④

sw 9-8

sw 6-5

sw 7-6

tr

cresc.

Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*

VI I<sup>7</sup>/V V<sup>6</sup>

HC

⑦

ff

decrec.

p

Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*Re. \*

I V I

*ant*

⑩

*cresc.* *ritenuto* *ff*

I V I IV  
g: III i V i V I

PRELUDE 19 IN E FLAT MAJOR<sup>6</sup>

*Vivace.*  
*legato*

⑥

⑫

⑱

<sup>6</sup> An analysis of the entire piece is given in Charles Burkhart, "The Two Curious Moments in Chopin's E Flat Major Prelude," in *Structure and Meaning in Tonal Music: Essays for Carl Schachter*, ed. Burstein and Gagné (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press: forthcoming).