

DOCTORAL THESIS

A Historically Informed Approach to Teaching Chopin's Nocturnes

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Abstract

Modern piano teaching of Chopin's piano nocturnes tends to focus on refining technical and musical issues, as is reflected in both mainstream method books, academic, and pedagogic writings. Nearly without exception, modern piano pedagogy assumes that artistic interpretation evolves from a precise notation. Typically, a pupil who is learning one of Chopin's nocturnes will try to follow the notes (pitches and rhythms) and other performance indications "faithfully", largely unaware of the fact that different editions, whether *Urtext* or performers' editions, may offer different information, including phrasing, pedal markings, fingerings, and even pitches. When a pupil cannot reproduce the notes exactly as printed on the score, the teacher may offer alternative solutions that are often regarded as compromises. However, historical evidence does not corroborate the rigidity of modern pedagogy witnessed in most piano studios. In his own teaching, Chopin appeared to have been much more creative and flexible than most teachers today. For example, he developed different embellishments for different hands, and prescribed fingerings to achieve particular musical effects. In this research, I endeavor to develop a historically informed approach to teaching and learning Chopin's nocturnes, and bring new ideas to the modern teaching environment by scrutinizing Chopin's own teaching. In particular, I explore his unique approach to embellishments and fingerings and discuss the way modern teachers can enrich their teaching by learning from Chopin's teaching practices.

Keywords: Chopin, nocturnes, historically informed teaching, pedagogy