

Michael R. Rogers. Teaching Approaches in Music Theory.

Possible answers to the questions on pp. 94 – 98 by William Wieland with observations by you.

1. *Most of the chords in this composition are coloristic (i.e. used non-functionally for their sound value) rather than serving some key-defining role. Within the first eight measures locate (by m. and beat) and discuss any three chords that operate in this way.*

Among others,

- m. 2, beat 4 --- F⁷ typically resolves to B flat,
- m. 4, beat 1 --- E⁷ typically resolves to A, and
- m. 6, beat 3 --- D#^{o7} typically resolves to E.

“chromatic journey” Alec

2. *Why does the bass line begin on G?*

- To give the bass a longer trek down to the dominant, B.
- To make a less stable first inversion chord.
- To make the key of E minor very slightly ambiguous.

“unsettled feeling” Emily --- “weaker” Chris --- “a struggle to achieve stability” Nicole

3. *Describe the basic (i.e., undecorated) motion of the soprano line in scale degree numbers during mm. 1 – 11.*

Refer to the score on page 95. The scale degree numbers 5 – 4 – 3 – 2, 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 appear above mm. 1, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 21 respectively. These numbers are inspired by Schenkerian analysis.

“slow stepwise progression downward” Andrea

4. *What note is conspicuously missing in m. 12?* E (tonic)

Why? We want to hear closure, but Chopin makes us long for more.

“We don’t really get home ’til the very end.” Joe --- “leaves us wanting” Rebecca --- “an expectation for resolution that is not met” Rochelle --- “unsettled” Anna --- “Chopin tricks us a bit” Michelle

5. *In light of the two previous questions, how is the arrival of m. 21 **both** the achievement of a long-awaited goal and the derailment of that goal?*

The melody finally reaches tonic, but the cadence is deceptive rather than authentic.

“Chopin makes us wait” Kristen --- “Things don’t get settled until the very end” Piumi --- “suspense and tension” Alisha

How could this measure be recomposed to make it the ending of the piece?

The left-hand harmony in m. 21 could be an E minor triad like the last bar of the prelude.

Formally, why would this location (m. 21) be unsatisfactory as the end?

The first half of the piece is 12 measures long. Ending in m. 21 would make the second half several bars shorter. “structurally lopsided” Ian

*6. Describe as many similarities **and** differences as you can between the two halves of this piece (melody, harmony, pacing, bass lines, register, and dynamics).*

Similarities: Begin exactly alike --- Rhythm (for the most part) --- Chromatic non-functional harmony

Differences: The melody reaches F# in the 10th bar of the first half but the 6th bar of the second half. --- The loud climax in mm. 16 & 17 of the second half is nothing like any first half bars. --- The melody never arrives on E in the first half, but the important melodic pitch in the last 5 bars is E. --- The last 3 measures are unlike anything in the first half.

7. Where is the climax of the piece? Measure 17. It is quite dramatic—especially compared to most of the prelude. It is forte in a quiet composition. The highest pitch of the piece is on beat 2. The lowest pitch of the piece (except for the final 2 bars) is on the downbeat. The largest leaps in the melody and the accompaniment are in this measure. The left hand plays thick 4-note chords. The melody is constant eighth notes in contrast to the dotted half note / quarter note rhythm of most of the work. Chopin writes stretto in m. 16 indicating the tempo should quicken. It appears at the golden ratio.

*8. Discuss and contrast **several** possible harmonic explanations of m. 17 and of m. 23.*

In m. 17, the notes B – D# – F# – A – C resolve to E – G – B or e: V^{7(b9)} to i⁶. This appears to be a normal authentic cadence, but the tonic triad is in first inversion. In fact, the very last eighth note pitches of m. 17 are identical to the very first downbeat. In a sense, we’ve gone nowhere.

In m. 23, a German augmented sixth chord is followed by silence. Chopin presents several non-functional dominant seventh chords in this prelude. (See question 1.) German augmented sixth chords are enharmonically equivalent to dominant seventh chords, but the chord in m. 23 is functioning as a proper pre-dominant harmony unlike the chords identified in question 1.

*9. Which basic elements are the most static? What **does** provide the principal interest, drive, and intensity?*

The rhythm is mostly unchanging—eighth note chords in the left hand and a dotted half / quarter note melody in the right hand. This makes bars 12, 16, 17, and 18 really stand out. The melody is also very subdued. With the exception of the bars just mentioned, it gently undulates and gradually descends.

The non-functional harmonies are most interesting. We hear common chords like dominant sevenths and other chords that are difficult or impossible to identify. These chords often do not resolve as expected but rather move chromatically to chords we may or may not recognize.

Paraphrase of Paul: The melody is like a riff tune, e.g. C Jam Blues, which is interesting because of what moves/changes underneath.