Analysis and Interpretation of Frédéric Chopin's Early and Late Nocturnes:

Case Studies of Chopin's Nocturnes, Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1

by

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ABSTRACT

The word "nocturne" was first used to describe a piano work by the Irish composer John Field, who also established its basic framework. The genre was expanded and brought to its maturity by Chopin, who wrote twenty-one nocturnes for solo piano over his entire creative life. Among Chopin's works, it is the nocturnes with their lyrical melodies and improvisational nature that especially provide flexibility and freedom for performers to express inner feelings and individual interpretations. The marked contrast between Chopin's early and late nocturnes naturally leads to different interpretive results. Accordingly, this project investigates how the stylistic changes in Chopin's early and late nocturnes are related to their performances. Taking Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1 as examples of Chopin's early and late nocturnes respectively, the project compares the recordings of Artur Rubinstein (1965) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (1981) through the lens of descriptive analyses.

The introductory chapter covers the influences on Chopin's nocturnes, Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's playing styles of Chopin's works, various editions of Chopin's nocturnes, and the relation of analysis to performance. The main body of the paper alternates descriptive analysis of each section of Nocturnes Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1 with comparisons between the two pianists' recordings. The final chapter outlines how the two nocturnes from Chopin's early and late creative periods differ from one another and how the changes in style affect the two pianists' interpretations. The goal of this project is to aid in a better understanding of the interpretive choices made by Rubinstein and Ashkenazy in these two nocturnes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chopin's twenty nocturnes for solo piano occupy a significant place in his overall compositional output. A number of authors have written about his nocturnes, notably the famous Chopin scholar Jim Samson. However, few have conducted in-depth and detailed study of specific single works, let alone related analyses to performances. Accordingly, the purpose of this project is to explore how the changes in style of Chopin's early and late nocturnes are associated with their performances. The project will examine the similarities and differences in the recordings by Artur Rubinstein (1965) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (1981) of Chopin's early and late nocturnes, Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1.

The introductory chapter consists of four parts, including the influences on Chopin's nocturnes, Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's playing styles of Chopin's works, various editions of Chopin's nocturnes, and the relation of analysis to performance. Chapters 2 and 3 alternate descriptive analyses of each section of Nocturnes Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1 with comparisons between the two pianists' recordings. The final chapter summarizes how differences between these two nocturnes representing his early and late styles influence the pianists' interpretations.

Influences on Chopin's Nocturnes

Nocturnes are slow character pieces on the subject of night, usually expressing a melancholy or comforting emotion. Although the Italian term "Notturno" had been used as a title in eighteenth-century music, the Irish composer John Field was the first to apply the French form of the word "nocturne" to a piano composition. Field attached great

importance to this genre. He composed eighteen nocturnes in total—approximately one quarter of his overall output—over a period of more than twenty years. Before finally deciding on this term, he had tried various titles including romance, pastorale, and serenade.[1] According to *Grove Music Online*, "The first three [nocturnes] were published in Leipzig in 1815, two of them having been published in 1812 with minor differences as 'Romances'."[2] The interchangeability of the terms accounts for the loose use of "nocturne" in the early nineteenth century.

Field's first nocturne is a classic example of "nocturne style." (Example 1.1)

Example 1.1 John Field: Nocturne No. 1 in E-flat Major, mm. 1-3[3]

The left-hand accompaniment is comprised of widely-spaced triplets demanding the use of damper pedal. The right hand starts with a simple lyrical melody which suggests the *bel canto* of Italian operas. As the piece progresses, the melody displays a preference for superficial decoration and variation rather than extensive development. This texture contributes to the genre's distinctively lyrical quality. The structure is usually simple

ternary form with no tempo change. These features, most commonly associated with "nocturne style," are present in the majority of early nocturnes, but not all of them, including even Field's own nocturnes. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to define this genre based on the style as well as the character.

Not surprisingly, Field's nocturnes exerted a significant influence on Chopin's. Chopin's nocturnes span his entire creative life. Like Field, he valued sentimental and contemplative lyricism over virtuosity. He not only borrowed the title, but also referred to Field's nocturnes as a starting point for his own early nocturnes. Chopin's Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 clearly lies within the Field tradition in terms of formal structure, left-hand accompaniment pattern, melodic style, and so on. In his later nocturnes, Chopin experimented with this prototype and developed his own style. His Nocturne Op. 62, No.1 goes beyond Field's model in nearly every aspect, characterized by its dense chromaticism, contrapuntal complexity, and endless melody. The complexity of the harmonic language in Op. 62, No. 1 requires more frequent change and sophisticated control of the pedal than in Op. 9, No. 1.

In addition to the influence of Field's nocturnes, early nineteenth-century Italian opera is also a rich source of inspiration for Chopin's lyricism. His ornamental melodies bear a strong resemblance to the coloratura aria of Italian opera, especially those of Rossini.[4] Operatic derivations and vocal techniques can be perceived in both nocturnes studied in this paper.

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[4] Samson, *The Music of Chopin*, 81.

Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's Playing Styles of Chopin's Works

The Polish pianist Artur Rubinstein (1887-1982) enjoys the highest international reputation after Paderewski.[5] He objected to the overly sentimental method many pianists of his generation applied to Chopin. In his early years, Rubinstein depended primarily on his innate musical talent for his performances. However, in his forties, he came to understand that making music involved more than just producing an effect and occasionally taking unsuccessful technical risks.[6] His change of attitude is evident in his style of playing. Rubinstein's flexible and somewhat dry finger work is often reminiscent of the French school.[7] Although he kept trying to bring new ideas to each performance of a work, his playing of Chopin's works always possessed a noble quality.

Rubinstein did not release his first recorded disc until his forties. He then spent nearly fifty years recording continuously. He recorded the nineteen Chopin nocturnes— eighteen of them published during Chopin's lifetime, plus Op. 72, No. 1 published posthumously—three times over his recording career. His earlier recordings from 1936-37 and 1949-50 are well received, but the set dating from 1965 to 1967 during his late years is unmatched for its mature insight and lifelike stereo sound. Accordingly, the last recording was chosen for this project as demonstration of Rubinstein's mastery of shadings, impeccable sense of rubato and magnificent tone color.

Vladimir Ashkenazy (born 1937) has enjoyed consistent success in his career as a laureate of many major international competitions, including the second prize at the fifth

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[5] James Methuen-Campbell, *Chopin Playing: from the Composer to the Present Day* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1981), 110.
[6] Ibid., 111.
[7] Ibid.

International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw in 1955 and the joint first prize at the

International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 1962. He attended the Moscow

Conservatory as a student of Lev Oborin, the winner of the first International Chopin

Piano Competition in 1927. Oborin's natural and unpretentious interpretation of Chopin

has exerted a profound impact on Ashkenazy's performances. Ashkenazy is equipped

with a comprehensive technique that allows him to execute all Chopin's compositions

with ease, ranging from character pieces like nocturnes and waltzes to larger works such

as scherzos and ballades.

Ashkenazy recorded all Chopin's significant piano compositions, including the

complete twenty-one nocturnes, for Decca from 1974-1984. He recorded Nocturne Op. 9,

No. 1 in 1981 at the age of forty-four and Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in 1975 at the age of

thirty-eight. Unlike Rubinstein, Ashkenazy does not view himself as always looking for

fresh ways to perform well-known pieces. He still holds the same fundamental opinion of

the composer that he had in 1955.[8] He combines spontaneous poetry with emotional

vitality in his playing of Chopin.

Editions of Chopin's Nocturnes

To some extent, the choice of edition will influence one's understanding and

interpretation of a work. The article "Building a Music Library: 2. The Chopin

Nocturnes" by James Methuen-Campbell evaluates and compares various editions of

Chopin nocturnes. All editions include the eighteen nocturnes (Opp. 9-62) published

during Chopin's lifetime, but, except for the Henle edition, they leave out the three

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[8] Methuen-Campbell, *Chopin Playing*, 155.

nocturnes published posthumously (some include the Op. post. 72, No. 1 but not all three). Three significant editions were published during Chopin's lifetime, the French being the most significant and serving as the foundation for the German and English versions.[9]

With a desire to maintain many precious elements of Chopin's playing and teaching, the second half of the nineteenth century saw publication of new editions of Chopin's work containing "authentic" markings from his former students. As one of these students, Carl Mikuli provides a compelling account of Chopin's playing and teaching philosophy in his edition's significant introductory note. A few points are worth noting in particular. Chopin suggested imitating the great Italian singers when executing a turn or appoggiatura.[10] Mikuli also mentions that "he [Chopin] advised his pupils to take up thorough theoretical studies as early as practicable,"[11] reflecting the importance of theory in understanding and interpreting a work. Methuen-Campbell points out that the most important printed editions of Chopin's music to be consulted are those published during his lifetime, with his students' notes alongside as a supplement.[12]

Some distinguished pianists of Chopin's music (such as Rafael Joseffy and Alfred Cortot) also published editions to convey their thoughts about pedaling, phrasing, and occasionally even notation. Cortot also provides his own suggestions about technique and interpretation as a footnote for each nocturne. Paderewski's edition of the Complete

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[9] James Methuen-Campbell, "Building a Music Library: 2. The Chopin Nocturnes," *The Musical Times* 126, no. 1708 (1985): 344. https://doi.org/10.2307/964030.

[10] Carl Mikuli, introductory note to *Complete Works for the Piano, Vol. 4: Nocturnes* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1915).

[11] Ibid.

[12] Methuen-Campbell, "2. The Chopin Nocturnes," 344.

Works of Chopin is a special case. Paderewski began the edition in 1937, but passed away in 1941, with completion by Józef Turczyński and Ludwik Bronarski in 1949.[13] Paderewski's edition is widely acknowledged as one of the most reliable, and for many, the most complete and comprehensive.

The National Edition prepared in Warsaw by the Polish pianist and Chopin scholar Jan Ekier is the edition currently suggested for competitors entering the International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw. In his "Introduction to the Polish National Edition of the Works of Fryderyk Chopin," Jan Ekier states that "the aim of the Polish National Edition of the Works of Fryderyk Chopin (WN) is to present, in the most authentic way possible, the complete musical oeuvre of Fryderyk Chopin."[14] As in the case of Paderewski's edition, Jan Ekier consulted all available source materials, including "autographs, copies of autographs and first editions with the composer`s corrections, and pupils` copies with Chopin`s annotations."[15] Also like Paderewski's edition, each volume of Jan Ekier's edition comes with a Source Commentary outlining the key differences between sources. In addition, Jan Ekier's edition also offers a Performance Commentary clarifying the parts of the score that a modern performer might find confusing.

The author chose to consult Jan Ekier's edition for music examples in the analysis. Although it is difficult to know exactly which editions Rubinstein and Ashkenazy were referring to, judging by their phrasing and dynamics, it seems that Rubinstein's recording

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[13] Methuen-Campbell, *Chopin Playing*, 18, 110.
[14] Jan Ekier, introduction to *The Polish National Edition of the Works of Fryderyk Chopin*, trans. John Comber (Cracow and Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne and Towarzystwo im. Fryderyka Chopina, 1974), 11.
[15] "About Edition," The Foundation for the National Edition of the Works of Fryderyk Chopin, accesed January 27, 2-23, https://www.chopin-nationaledition.com/en/.

is in the closet agreement with Mikuli's edition, while Ashkenazy's is with Paderewski's edition.

Relation of Analysis to Performance

A number of scholars have discussed the relation of analysis to performance. In his book chapter "Questions Arising in the Relations of Analysis to Performance," Wallace Berry points out their complex relation: "Because there may be diverse reasonable analyses of any piece, and because any structural element may be interpreted in different ways."[16] The first point is particularly obvious in Chopin's late Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1. The endless melody obscures the ends of phrases, which in turn leads to different interpretive decisions. Berry also states that even a single analysis can result in various interpretations, since "no general guidelines can be said to apply to all instances of any cited formal process—all retransitional preparations, all consequent phrases, all motivic correspondences, all sequential developments."[17] In her article "On the Relation of Analysis to Performance: Beethoven's Bagatelles Op. 126, Nos. 2 and 5," Janet Schmalfeldt expresses similar views: "*There is no single, one-and-only performance decision that can be dictated by an analytic observation* [italics in the original]."[18] She observes that a specific outcome is achieved in three different ways in three recordings of a Beethoven's Bagatelle. This observation is similar to one made by Edward Cone in his book *Musical Form and Musical Performance*: "Every valid interpretation thus

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[16] Wallace Berry, "Questions Arising in the Relations of Analysis to Performance," in *Musical Structure and Performance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 10.

[17] Wallace Berry, "Formal Process and Performance in the 'Eroica' Introductions," *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (1988): 3, https://doi.org/10.2307/745789.

[18] Janet Schmalfeldt, "On the Relation of Analysis to Performance: Beethoven's Bagatelles Op. 126, Nos. 2 and 5," *Journal of Music Theory* 29, no. 1 (1985): 28, https://doi.org/10.2307/843369.

represents, not an approximation of some ideal, but a choice: which of the relationships implicit in this piece are to be emphasized, to be made explicit?"[19] Therefore, many scholars reach agreement that there are multiple ways to interpret a piece successfully. Analysis plays a key role in advising the performer on what to avoid doing.

It is risky to base one's interpretation entirely on intuition, especially when one has not received sufficient professional and comprehensive training in the field of music. Some geniuses are born with good musical tastes and instincts which others have to acquire over years of training. Even such gifted pianists are best advised to make decisions with the aid of musical analysis. My piano instructor Professor Robert Hamilton once said, "There are many ways to play a Mozart sonata beautifully, but you must not go so far that it becomes your sonata only, and not Mozart's."[20] Performers should base interpretations on what composers wrote in the score. John Rink coined the term "informed intuition"[21] to describe this kind of intuition with underlying substantial knowledge and experience. Great pianists with rich experience may not need to do as much musical analysis as others, since they have already become familiar with the composer's style. However, one will find in a successful and convincing performance that the interpretative choices are in line with the musical analyses. Accordingly, in this project the author intends to organically integrate analysis and performance for Chopin's Nocturnes Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1.

[19] Edward T Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), 34.
[20] Professor Robert Hamilton, conversation with author, February 23, 2021.
[21] John Rink, "Analysis and (or?) performance," in *Musical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36.

CHAPTER 2

NOCTURNE OP. 9, NO. 1 IN B-FLAT MINOR

The three nocturnes from Chopin's Op. 9 set were published in 1832. The first

nocturne (Larghetto) in B-flat minor adheres to the nocturne model established by Field

in many aspects: the simple ternary formal structure, the broken-chord figuration in the

left-hand accompaniment, the lyrical melody in the Italian *bel canto* style, a single tempo

throughout, and the heavy use of the damper pedal. However, Chopin also made some

bold advances within the style. Contrary to the nocturnes of his contemporaries in which

the melody becomes increasingly decorated as the piece progresses, Chopin embellished

the basic melody with a *fioritura* near the beginning of this nocturne. In addition, the

structure of the first nocturne is notable for the length of the middle B section, which is

almost three times as long as the beginning A section.

The A section is constructed in small segments, no two of them identical. The

internal structure of the A section (mm. 1-18) is outlined in the table below as an abac

design.

Table 2.1 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, formal structure of the
A section

Section	Subdivision	Key
A (mm. 1-18)	a (mm. 1-4)	B-flat minor
	b (mm. 5-8)	Tonicizing D-flat major, ending on b-flat minor: V^7
	a (mm. 9-12)	B-flat minor
	c (mm. 13-18)	B-flat minor, PAC

A Section-a Phrase (mm. 1-4): Analysis

All three nocturnes from Op. 9 begin in a similar way with an anacrusis establishing

the character immediately. Due to their livelier and dance-like character, both No. 2 and

No. 3 begin with a single eighth-note anacrusis, while in the first nocturne, the six-note

expressive and twisting anacrusis foreshadows the lyrical and embellished nature of the

opening. The diminished-fourth fall (D♭-A♮), the 7-8 (A♮-B♭) and 6-5 (G♭-F) half steps

contribute to the dissonance and sentimentality of the anacrusis.

Each a phrase solidifies the tonic key with a two-measure presentation of $i - V^7 - i$

that is repeated with florid variation. The variation of mm. 1-2 in mm. 3-4 expands the

anacrusis from six to eleven notes, and the eight-note melody at m. 1 becomes a *fioritura*

of twenty-two notes. The improvisatory nature of the nocturne is brought into focus at the

very beginning. The irregular tightening and loosening of the motion as well as its

constant change of direction cause minute variations in dynamics, similar to those which

occur naturally in singing. The lyrical treble melody is accompanied by the constant

broken-chord figuration in even rhythm. The rhythmic consistency and harmonic clarity

of the groups of six eighth notes provide a framework for the expressive flights and

embellishments of the treble.

A Section-a Phrase (mm. 1-4): Performance

One common issue for pianists in preparing Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 is how to interpret

the endless groups of six eighth notes in the left-hand accompaniment in the style of the

Romantic period. In both Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's performances, these eighth notes

are executed in a manner completely free from rigidity. Tempi and dynamics are nuanced

to fit comfortably with the varying expressive urges of the right-hand melodic line.

The two performers have very different approaches to offer listeners. Rubinstein

interprets through longer phrases and a peaceful atmosphere, while Ashkenazy displays

more of the genre's improvisational nature and romantic fancy. Perhaps differences in age, temperament, and educational background account for some of these dissimilarities.

Ashkenazy highlights the *express.* marking of the opening anacrusis to the greatest extent, executing it with great freedom and a sense of uncertainty so that the tempo and meter are not established until the left hand comes in. He explores the dissonant fall of a diminished fourth (D♭-A♮) by giving it extra time. His sensitivity to larger intervallic relationships is shown again during his stretched treatment of fourths (F-B♭ and C-F) in the *fioritura* at m. 3. The extra time taken for these two intervals is compensated by a push forward in the descending chromatic scales that immediately follow. His rubato treatment of the *fioritura* truly sounds like he is freely improvising on the melody. Ashkenazy's ingenious removal of the damper pedal on the last two beats at m. 3 helps to reinforce the improvisatory impression.

In comparison, Rubinstein's treatment of the a phrase is relatively straightforward, creating a longer line for the music. He immediately establishes the Larghetto tempo at Chopin's suggested metronome marking (quarter note = 116), leading the opening anacrusis directly into the downbeat without any hesitation. As with Ashkenazy, Rubinstein highlights the two fourths during the *fioritura* at m. 3, but the time he takes for these two intervals is less noticeable and does not compete with the forward impetus of the line.

<center>A Section-b Phrase (mm. 5-8): Analysis</center>

The b phrase is closely related to the a phrase motivically. Example 2.1 offers a comparison of motives in mm. 1-2 and mm. 5-7. The opening two measures present three fundamental motives around which the entire A section is built.

<center>12</center>

1. Three repeated quarter notes (in red).
2. One quarter note followed by four falling eighth notes (in purple).
3. One half note followed by a quarter note via a downward leap (sighing motive) (in green).

Example 2.1 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, comparison of motives between mm. 1-2 and mm. 5-7[22]

Similar to the a phrase, the b phrase starts off with the three repeated quarter notes. The

second half of each measure (mm. 5-7) presents the single quarter note plus eighth notes

motive and its variants: at m. 5 the sighing motive in diminution is fused with an

inversion of the quarter note plus eighth notes motive; at m. 6 the original form of the

quarter note plus eighth notes motive; at m. 7 the direction of the last eighth note is

reversed in order to end on the F at m. 8—part of V^7 in b-flat minor. Besides acting as

part of the quarter note plus eighth notes motive at m. 5, the sighing motive also makes its appearance at m. 7 with an inversion and intervallic expansion. Although the material of the b phrase is derived from the motives presented in mm. 1-2, the tonicization to D-flat major and changes in their shapes provide these motives with different colors.

The repetitive quality of the a phrase sets up the change in the b phase. In the b phrase, the temporary tonicization to D-flat major, the relative major of b-flat minor, brings a ray of sunshine through a dark cloud. The bass alternates D-flat and G-flat until it moves from G-flat to F at m. 8. D-flat major is thus established through tonic and subdominant-function chords, whereas B-flat minor in the a phrase alternated tonic and dominant chords. The more-relaxed subdominant relationship is appropriate for the brightening quality of this phrase. The bass note F at m. 8 is harmonized with an Fdom[7] chord that abruptly reinstates b-flat minor.

A Section-b Phrase (mm. 5-8): Performance

Ashkenazy follows the written crescendo for the repeated B♭s leading to the *fzp* at m. 5. However, he ignores the *p* marking, choosing instead to maintain a strong dynamic while pushing the tempo forward in celebration of the arrival at D-flat major. He also thickens the harmonic support in the left hand to help convey the warm tone of D-flat major. (One can hear his excited breathing as he plays.) There is no diminuendo or ritardando until the second half of m. 7, where a *smorz.* prepares for the return to the tonic key b-flat minor.

On the other hand, Rubinstein focuses more on the added voice at m. 5 than on the dynamic change. He takes his time as the two voices converge on G-flat, adding clarity to

both parts. He also emphasizes the modal change in the second half of m. 7 by making a very delicate diminuendo, but his dynamic contrast is more subtle than Ashkenazy's. There is no obvious change of tempo during the b phrase in Rubinstein's rendition, as he seems to prefer saving energy for the climactic conclusion in the c phrase. While Ashkenazy focuses more deeply on each moment, Rubinstein's reserve reveals the longer line.

A Section-Returning a Phrase (mm. 9-12): Analysis

The return of the a phrase in mm. 9-12 is literal until the F5 on the downbeat of m. 11, equivalent to that at m. 3, unexpectedly makes a two-octave upward leap to F7— the highest note throughout the nocturne. In addition, the number of notes, articulation and shape of the *fioritura* at m. 11 are also different from those of its counterpart at m. 3 (Example 2.2). The 22 notes of the *fioritura* at m. 3 forms a more complicated cross rhythm against the groups of six eighth notes in the left hand. The irregular rhythmic pattern is one characteristic of Chopin's ornamentation style. The *fioritura* at m. 3 involves numerous melodic turns and alternates legato with portato. In comparison, the eighteen notes of the *fioritura* at m. 11 against two groups of six eighth notes in the left hand can be simplified into regular and neat groups of three against two. With the marking *legatiss.*, the highest F7 dives straight to the D♭5 on the downbeat of m. 12. All these factors contribute to different feelings of these two *fioriture*: the former at m. 3 more improvisatory and uncertain, while the latter at m. 11 more dramatic and explicit.

Example 2.2 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, comparison of *fioriture* between m. 3 and m. 11[23]

A Section-Returning a Phrase (mm. 9-12): Performance

As with the beginning a phrase, Ashkenazy again interprets the anacrusis very freely, resuming the tempo on the downbeat of m. 9. In this return, he highlights the decorated B-flat at m. 8—the only difference from the previous anacrusis—by taking extra time for it. A series of differences between the two *fioriture* at m. 3 and m. 11 leads Ashkenazy to take a more straightforward approach to the latter. He extends the written crescendo at the end of m. 10 to the peak F7 at m. 11, where the big leap from F5 is stretched and

[23] Ibid., 12.

highlighted. He then rushes all the way down to the G♭5 on the last beat to stress its accent.

In comparison, after slowing down at the end of the b phrase, Rubinstein's little hesitation on the first note of the anacrusis at m. 8 marks the clear start of the returning a phrase. He places emphasis on the highest F7 without any crescendo. The note stands out nonetheless, given his relatively plain treatment of the previous *fioritura* at m. 3. Like Ashkenazy, Rubinstein chooses to then move straight to the G♭5, creating his accent by making a ritardando at the end of m. 11.

A Section-c Phrase (mm. 13-18): Analysis

The c phrase (mm. 13-18) starts with the same repeated B♭s as the b phrase (mm. 5-8), but the sighing motive is highlighted more in this phrase. Its expansion to a sixth drop and placement at the beginning of the phrase (m. 13) anticipate the heightened expression of this conclusion (Example 2.3). The rhythm and downward shape of the sighing motive appear in every measure, and at the end (mm. 17-18) this motive is recalled by the diminished third—C-flat to A-natural—that circles the last melodic note, B-flat.

Chopin alternates rapid melodic figures with the slower sighing motive to form a series of subphrases in an arch shape. The momentum gained by the fast rhythms is repeatedly interrupted by the half note of the sighing motive. Chopin's expressive markings reinforce these successively higher peaks: B♭5 has an accent mark, D♭6 is marked *appassionato*, F6 *cresc.*, and D♭7 *con forza* followed by a dramatic drop to *piano* at the cadence at m. 18.

Example 2.3 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, mm. 16-18[24]
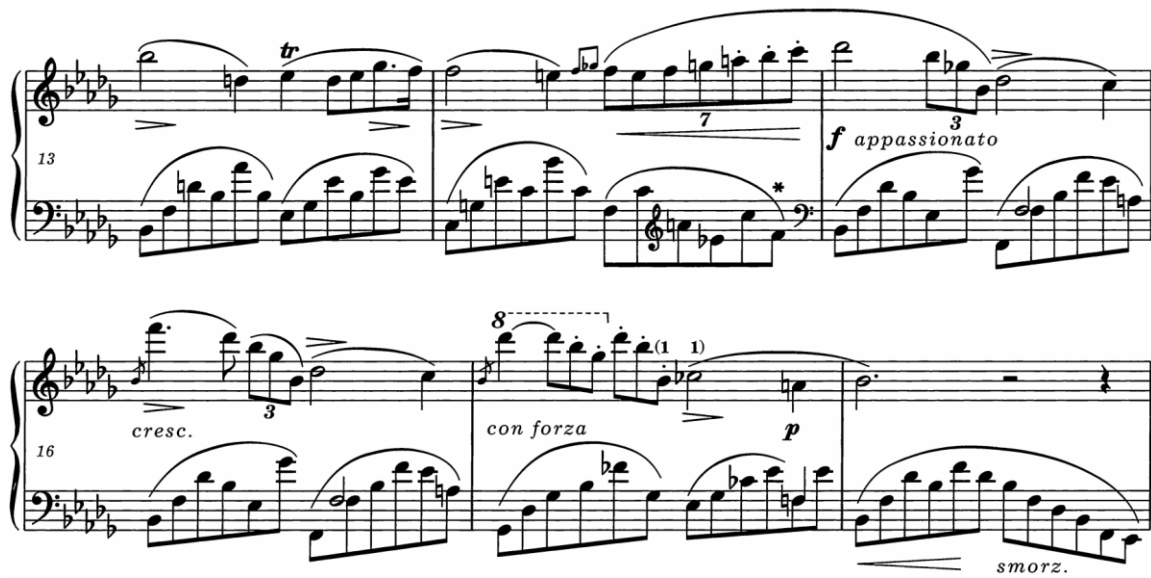
The weak cadences in mm. 16-17 also prepare for the climactic conclusion of the A section. At m. 16, the first scale degree set up by the D♭ to C in the melody of m. 15 is converted to a grace note that suddenly leaps to a high F6. The second, "one more time" attempt on the downbeat of m. 17 is thwarted by a bigger leap to D♭7 in the melody, marked *con forza,* at the same moment the V[7] moves deceptively to VI. This VI chord becomes V[7] of the Neapolitan chord when an F♭ is added to it, and the secondary dominant goes on to complete the return to the tonic with an N[6] – V[7] – i progression. The A section finally ends with a perfect authentic cadence at m. 18.

A Section-c Phrase (mm. 13-18): Performance

Unlike his performance of the opening B♭s of the peaceful b phrase, Rubinstein immediately picks up the tempo for the same three quarter-notes that launch the c phrase.

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[24] Ibid., 13.

This change in the interpretation prompts growing tension, indicating that the music is now moving towards a climax in mm. 15-18. Rubinstein follows the score's dynamic markings faithfully. From the middle of m. 14 until the last beat of m. 17, he employs a gradual crescendo so that the climax occurs with the *con forza* at m. 17, and not earlier on the downbeat of m. 15. In his interpretation, m. 15 grows into m.16, which then grows again sequentially to m. 17. The pianist's left hand provides strong support in this process, relinquishing only slightly at the brief cadential hints of mm. 15 and 16. Following the *con forza* at m. 17 there is a significant drop in sound at the *p* marking on the final beat, which prompts a full cadence on the downbeat of m. 18.

Ashkenazy also pushes the tempo forward to launch the c phrase, as he did for the opening three B♭s of the b phrase. His dynamic treatment of mm. 15-17 is very different from Rubinstein's. He makes an unexpected diminuendo and relaxes the tempo at the descending arpeggio at m. 15 perhaps to further highlight the subsequent peaks. Unlike Rubinstein, Ashkenazy treats the ends of m. 15-16 more as anacruses leading to the main notes on the downbeats of m. 16-17. He makes a crescendo and picks up the tempo again when the D♭ goes down to C, arriving at the high F6 on the downbeat of m. 16 more forcefully. Like Rubinstein, Ashkenazy also intensifies the eighth notes in the left hand to help build up the *cresc.* The even more dramatic D♭7 at m. 17 is achieved by the substantial time Ashkenazy takes between the grace note B-flat and the main note D♭7. He then makes an unwritten diminuendo as the arpeggio descends to prepare for the *p* marking at the end of m. 17.

Both pianists slow down substantially at m. 17 in preparation for the final arrival of the PAC in b-flat minor. However, they have different opinions about the function of the eighth notes in the left hand at m. 18. Ashkenazy ignores the written crescendo below the first six eighth notes and plays them very gently and smoothly, more like an afterthought. In contrast, Rubinstein follows the dynamic indication, seeing the eighth notes more like a transition. He even picks up the tempo a bit before gradually slowing down at the *smorz.* marking.

B Section-Main Body (mm. 19-50): Analysis

The key scheme of the B section alternates the local tonic key D-flat major with its Neapolitan key D major. The Neapolitan relationship here was foreshadowed at the end of the A section. The B section alternates between the two keys, both major, for a very long time, creating a peaceful and static quality rather than exploring a variety of keys as might be expected of a contrasting B section. The relatively slow rhythm and repetitiveness of the melody also contribute to the tranquil character and seeming timelessness of this section.

The B section consists of a series of four-measure phrases plus a relatively long codetta and retransition (Table 2.2). The regular and even phrase structure relates to that of vocal music. In addition, Chopin did not elaborate the melody with ornamentation or *fioriture* at all in this section. The melody of the B section stays within a relatively narrow range as opposed to that in the A section. The relative simplicity of the rhythm and the confined range of the melody also suggest a vocal rather than pianistic style.

Table 2.2 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, formal structure of the B section

Section	Subdivision	Key
B (mm. 19-70)	d (mm. 19-22)	D-flat major
	e (mm. 23-26)	Tonicizing D major
	d (mm. 27-30)	D-flat major
	e' (mm. 31-34)	Tonicizing D major
	f (mm. 35-38)	D-flat major
	e' (mm. 39-42)	Tonicizing D major
	f (mm. 43-46)	D-flat major
	e (mm. 47-50)	Tonicizing D major
	Codetta (mm. 51-60)	Subdominant inflection
	Retransition (mm. 61-70)	Dominant preparation

After the dramatic ending of the A section, the bass line at m. 18 directs the music to D-flat major (the relative major) in the B section. The first phrase (d phrase, mm. 19-22) of the B section establishes a peaceful atmosphere with its static harmony and bass as well as the very soft dynamic. Unlike the A section where the melody is presented in a single line, the main body of the B section (before the codetta and retransition) presents its melody completely in octaves. The doubling of the melody adds a warm tone to this section.

Although the motives are not as subtly embedded in the melody in the B section as they are in the A section, the material of the B section still bears a loose relationship with the motives in the A section (Example 2.4). The first three notes (in orange) of the B section melody (F-F♭-E♭) can be seen as an inversion of the first trichord of the A section (B♭-C-D♭). Another recurring motive in the B section is the variant of the sighing motive (in green). The reverse rhythm—here one quarter note followed by a half note—along with the accents on the weak beats mildly disturbs the triple meter.

Example 2.4 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, comparison of motives between m. 19-21 and m. 1-2[25]

The second phrase (e phrase, mm. 23-26) begins with the same melodic note F supported by the same D-flat-major triad, but the second note F-flat and its harmony in the first phrase are reinterpreted as E-natural with an Adom$^6_5$ chord here, and used surprisingly as an entry into D major, a distantly related key to the local tonic key. D major as the Neapolitan key of D-flat major can be viewed as an extension of the Neapolitan chord at m. 17. The second phrase slips easily and quickly into D Major, which becomes a sort of "dream" tonality. Chopin highlights this special key with an even softer *ppp*. The return to D-flat major is more of a struggle with the *forte* chords in mm. 25-26.

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[25] Ibid., 12-13.

In mm. 27-34, the first and second phrases (d and e phrases) repeat almost exactly with the only exception of the last note in the left-hand accompaniment—the original A-flat at m. 26 is replaced by B-flat here at m. 34. The B-flat ensures a smooth transition from the D-flat major chord at m. 34 to the A-flat major chord of the following new phrase (f phrase, mm. 35-38). The new phrase also starts with the trichord motive like the first and second phrases (d and e phrases). However, instead of going down, the trichord motive here moves up with a faster tempo (*poco stretto*) and strong dynamic (*f*). In addition, this phrase also features the single quarter note plus eighth notes motive from the A section. The moving eighth note also helps heighten the expressive and passionate quality of this phrase. The pause on E♭ at m. 38 sets up the expectation that it will fall to D♭, but instead it pushes up through E♮ back to the starting F of the e' phrase (mm. 39-42). Like the first half of the B section, the f phrase also repeats in mm. 43-46, followed by a concluding e phrase in mm. 47-50. Therefore, as shown in Table 2.2, the main body of the B section is constructed symmetrically (dede'/fe'fe). Both d and f phrases are repeated twice and connected through the e phrase and its variant e' phrase.

B Section-Main Body (mm. 19-50): Performance

The two pianists' treatments of the first phrase (d phrase, mm. 19-22) are similar, although Ashkenazy varies his dynamics more. Both pianists make the indicated crescendo with the help of the left hand at m. 21 and at the same time push the tempo forward to the melodic highpoint of B-flat at m. 22. They lift up this highpoint smoothly instead of accenting it dynamically, a common performance practice during the Romantic

period. Then they make a diminuendo and slight ritardando in order to end the phrase even though the score does not have any indication.

Both pianists follow the *poco rall.* marking at m. 23 to highlight the detour to the surprising key of D major. Ashkenazy even takes time prior to the E-natural octave in the second half of m. 23 to further stress its distinctiveness. Rubinstein does not follow the score markings as meticulously as Ashkenazy in mm. 25-26. Although Rubinstein executes the *a tempo* indication in the second half of m. 25, he then relaxes the tempo substantially through m. 26 to separate this phrase from the next repetition of the d phrase. It is Rubinstein's performance habit to articulate each phrase very clearly.

Ashkenazy does not then simply repeat the d phrase like Rubinstein. He treats its reprise (mm. 27-30) like a development of the previous one, playing in a faster tempo with a restless mood. He also highlights the added grace note at m. 30 by briefly taking time prior to playing it very expressively.

The two pianists also interpret the last B-flat in the left hand at m. 34 very differently. Ashkenazy plays from the melodic B-flat octave at m. 33 all the way to the B-flat an octave higher at m. 36 as one long phrase. He achieves this effect by beginning the *poco stretto* at m. 33 rather than later at m. 35 where it is indicated. In the process, the entrance of the new phrase (f phrase, mm. 35-38) is somewhat disguised and unclear (almost as if Ashkenazy wishes to create an elision). He maintains his passion throughout the f phrase, ignoring the *p* marking immediately following the *fz* at m. 38. Although he substantially slows down towards the end of m. 38 (one measure before the written *poco rall.* at m. 39) to conclude the phrase, he does not fully calm the music until the tonicization to D major in the following e' phrase.

In comparison, there is not much difference between the e and e' phrases in Rubinstein's performance. He makes a diminuendo and ritardando towards the end of e' phrase, just as he did in the previous e phrase. Unlike Ashkenazy, Rubinstein does not group the e' phrase and the new f phrase together. After a clear pause between m. 34 and m. 35, Rubinstein immediately picks up the tempo for the f phrase according to the *poco stretto* marking. Rubinstein's treatment of the f phrase leans more on expressivity compared with Ashkenazy's passionate playing. Rubinstein's interpretation of groups of four melodic eighth notes displays another common rubato performance practice during the Romantic period. He pauses on the first eighth note of each group and pushes forward the tempo of the remaining notes to compensate for the extra time. This expressive way of playing is closer to vocal style. Again, Rubinstein makes a substantial ritardando in the second half of m. 38 to articulate the end of the phrase.

Ashkenazy's interpretation of the reprise of f and e phrases in mm. 43-50 is similar to his approach to their first appearances in mm. 35-42. He carries the momentum at the end of the main body over to the ensuing codetta. On the other hand, for some reason (which might just be a mistake), Rubinstein omits mm. 39-46 and directly jumps to the last e phrase (mm. 47-50). As with all his endings of the e phrases, he makes a diminuendo and ritardando here as well, and thus the *ff* marking at the beginning of the codetta sounds like more of a surprise in his performance.

B Section-Codetta+Retransition (mm. 51-70): Analysis

The codetta and transition in this nocturne serve as a classic example of Chopin's application of vocal duet texture in a piano composition. The unison texture in the main

body of this section turns into double thirds and sixths. By simply adding a C-flat,

Chopin turned the last tonic chord (D-flat major triad) at m. 50 of the main body into

V^7/IV to initiate the codetta. The use of subdominant inflection is typical in the

codetta/coda, but what is unusual here is that this V^7/IV never resolves to IV. This V^7/IV

lasts through the codetta (mm. 51-58).

In the following retransition (mm. 59-70), out of expectation, Chopin removed the

C-flat and repeated the melody of the codetta exactly over a pure D-flat major triad.

However, the D-flat major triad as a dominant chord prepares for the return of the

"wrong" key G-flat major/g-flat minor instead of the tonic key b-flat minor. Therefore, in

the last four measures of the retransition (mm. 67-70), the eighth notes in the left hand

have a difficult time finding their way back. In mm. 67-68, the bass first wanders around

the A-flat—the fifth of the D-flat major triad, and then goes up a half step to the leading

tone A-natural in b-flat minor at m. 69, and finally gets back to the tonic B-flat at m. 70

(Example 2.5). Accordingly, as in the A section, the C-flat again plays a significant role

in the closing passage in the B section as part of a chromatic chord. The extreme dynamic

transition from *ff* in the codetta to *ppp* in the retransition complements the harmonic

change so that the whole codetta sounds like a natural disappearing process even without

the resolution of V^7/IV.

Example 2.5 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, mm. 67-72, the path back to b-flat minor[26]

B Section-Codetta+Retransition (mm. 51-70): Performance

The two pianists take different approaches in their interpretations of the codetta. Ashkenazy performs the first *ff* part with great excitement, in a much faster tempo and louder dynamic than Rubinstein. The big melodic leap in the soprano from A♭ at m. 54 to F on the downbeat of m. 55 takes more time in Ashkenazy's rendition, helping to accentuate the F. Besides the accent mark in Jan Ekier's edition, the F is further reinforced by a *con forza* marking in many other editions.

Ashkenazy's overflowing enthusiasm does not calm until the *pp* at. m. 57, and he takes time prior to m. 57 for the extreme dynamic drop from *ff* to take effect. To strengthen this striking contrast, he also relaxes the tempo for the echo phrase, stretching further the concluding B♭-A♭ melodic descent with an added diminuendo to clarify the codetta's ending.

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[26] Ibid., 17.

In comparison, Rubinstein's interpretation of the *ff* part provides a much broader feeling. His slower tempo allows enough time to sing out the melody. He stretches the tempo of select left-hand eighth notes to coordinate with his rubato for the right-hand melody, and recovers the lost time when the melody has long notes by moving forward the eighth notes in the accompaniment. As with groups of melodic eighth notes in the f phrase, Rubinstein pauses on the first sixth interval at m. 54 before speeding up the others. (Ashkenazy applies this performance practice here as well.)

Rubinstein inserts a diminuendo at m. 56, establishing a smooth transition to the following *pp* echo phrase. He interprets the echo with a slower tempo and a magical color change. Like his treatment at the end of the A section, Rubinstein plays the remaining left-hand accompaniment in mm. 58-60 as a transition to the next part. He accomplishes this effect by immediately picking up the tempo for the left-hand eighth notes following the last melodic note at m. 58, with a very slight slowing into m. 61.

Since the melody of the retransition is the same as that of the codetta, the two pianists repeat many of their treatments, including Rubinstein's flexible left-hand accompaniment, both pianists' rubato treatment of the group of six eighth notes at m. 64, and Ashkenazy's extra time taken for the leap from A♭ at m. 64 to F at m. 65. However, both pianists create a completely different atmosphere in the retransition given the harmonic and dynamic changes, although in different ways. Ashkenazy provides a sharp contrast, turning his fast, loud, and exciting playing in the codetta into the opposite of slow, soft, and lyrical in the retransition. Rubinstein, with his broader and more restrained approach to the codetta, needs only to place added emphasis on the timbre to bring an ethereal and hazy sound to the retransition.

The two pianists' treatments of the last four measures of the retransition again demonstrate their different focuses. Rubinstein pays more attention to the modulation to b-flat minor in the bass, particularly stressing the arrival of B-flat marked with an upward stem at m. 70. Ashkenazy, on the other hand, makes more of the *smorz.* marking to connect the B section and the returning A section seamlessly.

<center>Returning A Section-a Phrase (mm. 71-74): Analysis</center>

The returning A section is a truncated version of the opening A section (Table 2.3). Only the first (mm. 1-4) and last (mm. 13-18) phrases return, whereas the two phrases in the middle (mm. 5-12) are omitted.

Table 2.3 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, formal structure of the returning A section

Section	Subdivision	Key
A (mm. 71-85)	a (mm. 71-74)	b-flat minor
	c with extension (mm. 75-85)	b-flat minor

In order to compensate for the absence of the build-up to the climactic last phrase, Chopin intensified the *fioritura* from m. 3 with elements from m. 11. After being decorated by a neighbor group as before, the F5 at m. 73 then makes an unexpected huge leap to the high F7 instead of B♭5 (Example 2.6). Chopin stretched the rhythm of the first half of m. 73—following the regular groups of three against two at m. 11—to highlight the F7, but the second half fits 20 melodic notes against only six notes in the left hand. Although the *fioritura* here retains the melodic turns, the compact design and the removal of the portato articulation weaken the uncertain nature.

Example 2.6 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, m. 73[27]

Returning A Section-a Phrase (mm. 71-74): Performance

Observing the marking *rall. e dolciss.* at m. 70, both pianists do not start the original tempo until the downbeat of m. 71. However, as with the beginning of the nocturne, Ashkenazy's treatment sounds more like an improvisation. Then the absence of dynamic markings for the *fioritura* at m. 73 gives rise to the two pianists' different dynamic treatments. As with m. 11 in the A section, Rubinstein accentuates the high F7 before rushing through the following notes with a big diminuendo that suggests a gentle breeze. Unlike Rubinstein, Ashkenazy makes a crescendo through the first half and a diminuendo for the rest. He also slows down slightly at the end of the *fioritura*, adding an improvisatory quality.

Returning A Section-c Phrase with Extension (mm. 75-85): Analysis

The perfect authentic cadence in the tonic key of b-flat minor at m. 80 corresponds to the one at m. 18, but here it is followed by an extension (mm. 80-85) (Example 2.7), which further emphasizes the C-flat both melodically and harmonically. The whole

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[27] Ibid., 15.

extension develops from the sighing motive (C♭-A♮-B♭) at the end of the phrase in mm 79-80. Instead of the Neapolitan chord plus the dominant seventh chord, here Chopin harmonized C-flat and A-natural by a single German augmented sixth chord around the first scale degree—an unusual use of German augmented sixth chord—over a tonic pedal.

The whole extension alternates this special German augmented sixth chord with its resolution tonic chord three times. For the first two times, the music gradually fades away with the echoes of the sighing motive marked *smorz.* Out of expectation, for the third time Chopin highlighted this distinctive German augmented sixth chord by an accented interval cascade. The astonishing effect of the *ff* is caused by its extreme dynamic contrast with the disappearing sound in the previous measure. The combination of *accel.* and *ritenuto* brings about an improvisatory quality.

Example 2.7 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat Minor, mm. 82-85, extension[28]

[28] Ibid., 17.

Returning A Section-c Phrase with Extension (mm. 75-85): Performance

Since the c phrase in mm. 75-80 is almost a literal reprise of its statement in the opening A section, the two pianists' treatments are likewise similar to their earlier performances, including their different executions of the weak cadences. It should be noted that their interpretations of the extension vary considerably. The *dim.* marking at m. 79 replaces the *p* marking at m. 17, prompting Ashkenazy to make a significant diminuendo in preparation for the *p* marking placed this time on the next downbeat. For the first echo of the sighing motive, he maintains the same dynamic. For the second, he downplays the indicated *smorz.*, but highlights the ascending arpeggio variant on the C-flat with a slight crescendo, before immediately dropping to the *p* dynamic again. The left-hand accompaniment after the melodic note B-flat at m. 82 does not fade away, but rather makes a crescendo to connect to the last outburst.

Ashkenazy achieves the ultimate in accenting each interval at m. 83, and his rapidly switching tempo reveals the improvisatory quality of Chopin's cascade. A pause just before the downbeat of m. 84 helps him reduce the great momentum gained by his accelerando in preparation for the extreme dynamic change from *ff* to *ppp*. In the last broken B-flat major chord, Ashkenazy stresses the soprano D-natural in the imperfect authentic cadence by separating it from the rest.

On the other hand, Rubinstein achieves the astonishing effect of the *ff* at m. 82 by intensifying the extreme dynamic contrast in its previous measures. He extends the *dim.* at the end of m. 79 to link to the *smorz.* at m. 81. The sighing motive at the end of m. 79 remains in a strong dynamic, and its two echoes get increasingly softer. Unlike Ashkenazy, Rubinstein interprets the ascending C-flat major arpeggio like a delicate

feather flying into the air. Hence, the sighing motive and its two echoes in mm. 79-82

gradually soften and nearly disappear, as if the piece will end this way.

In this manner Rubinstein successfully shocks his listeners with the ensuing sudden

ff. He does not accelerate for the descending interval cascade as much as Ashkenazy. As

before, Rubinstein's interpretation is heavily weighted in favor of a broad and glorious

sound. Lastly, instead of taking extra time between mm. 83-84 as Ashkenazy, Rubinstein

makes the most of the written *ritenuto* in setting up the nocturne's final closure.

Summary

In his first published Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1, Chopin adopted the texture

conventionally associated with the nocturne style—a floating melody with a widespread

accompaniment figuration which demands extensive use of the damper pedal. However,

some ingenious features distinguish this nocturne from those of all other composers,

including the unusual placement of the highly decorated melody near the beginning and

the exceptionally lengthy middle section. In addition, Chopin took advantage of a single

note—C-flat—to effectively integrate different sections. The C-flat appears at the end of

each section—despite being in a different harmony each time—and thus serves as one of

the unifying elements to connect the three sections of the nocturne as an organic whole.

This kind of integrating device evolved into a hallmark of his mature music (as we shall

see in the next chapter with his later Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1). Despite some Chopinesque

characteristics, the phrase structure, harmonic language, and texture of Op. 9, No. 1 are

relatively straightforward. There is no denying that Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's

different priorities give rise to some subtle interpretative discrepancies, but their

performances are not essentially different.

CHAPTER 3

NOCTURNE OP. 62, NO. 1 IN B MAJOR

The two nocturnes comprising Op. 62, composed in 1846, are widely thought to represent Chopin's highest achievement in the genre. Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B major is cast in simple ternary form—the form commonly associated with the genre, but, apart from this fact, Chopin transcended Field's nocturne model and his own earlier output in almost every detail of construction. The left hand no longer provides mere arpeggiation accompaniment to the right-hand melody, but presents counter-melodic material of multiple layers. Counterpoint plays an indispensable role in both Op. 62 nocturnes. The harmony also becomes more complex, changing at a faster rate with an increasing number of chromatic chords requiring frequent change of the damper pedal.

Another significant difference between the early and late sets of nocturnes has to do with the role of the ornamentation. In the late nocturnes, ornamentation is elevated from an improvisatory and decorative role to a structural principle. This functional change is particularly noticeable in Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1. The recapitulation of the main theme appears arrayed in a profusion of trills and *fioriture*. The sublime of this moment results from Chopin's calculated limit of ornamentation in the previous sections. Instead of the ornamentation, Chopin achieved subtlety by means of phrase structure and counterpoint in the opening A section. The internal structure of the A section (mm. 3-36) is outlined in the table below as an abca' design plus a two-measure introduction.

Table 3.1 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, formal structure of the A section

Section	Subdivision	Key
Introduction (mm. 1-2)		B major: ii^7— V^7
A (mm. 3-36)	a (mm. 3-10)	B major, PAC
	b (mm. 11-21)	B major, ending with IPP in d-sharp minor
	c (mm. 21-27)	D-sharp minor, IPP
	a' (mm. 28-36)	B major, ending on A-flat major: V^7

Introduction (mm. 1-2): Analysis

In the introduction, a powerful slow arpeggio laid out over three octaves on ii^7 dissolves quietly into another big chord on the dominant seventh. The stillness and simplicity conveyed by the introduction provides a marked contrast to the continuity and complexity of the following main theme of the A section.

Introduction (mm. 1-2): Performance

Besides elements related to pianists, the ambiguity of the phrase structure and the complexity of multiple voices in this late nocturne permit a wide variety of performance possibilities. There are many differences between Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's interpretations owing to their individual priorities.

The different treatments of the introduction reveal Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's different understandings of this nocturne. Rubinstein sets a broad and noble tone for this nocturne by spreading out the opening arpeggio evenly and slowly. In contrast, Ashkenazy makes a dramatic entrance by playing this arpeggio much more freely and faster like an improvisation, clearly distinct from the ensuing peaceful main theme. Regarding these small arpeggio notes, it is interesting to observe the difference between

editions. Mikuli's edition presents them as quarter notes, while Paderewski's edition has

eighths (Example 3.1).

Example 3.1 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 1-2, Mikuli and
Paderewski editions[29]
Mikuli's edition   Paderewski's edtion
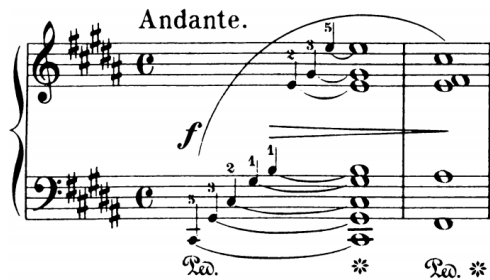
A Section-a Phrase (mm. 3-10): Analysis

William Rothstein has noticed that during the decade of the 1840s, Chopin favored

seamless melodic continuity.[30] The a phrase (mm. 3-10) is a classic example. From a

theoretical point of view, this phrase can be analyzed as a parallel and non-modulatory

period. However, the cadences can hardly be sensed due to the metrical displacement of

melodic repetitions. The antecedent phrase begins on the third beat of m. 3, while the

consequent phrase appears with the same melody on the first beat of m. 7. The antecedent

and consequent phrases are so overlapped with each other that they become a seamless

whole. In addition to the beginning of each subphrase, the descending tetrachord (B-A♯-

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[29] Frédéric Chopin, *Complete Works for the Piano, Vol. 4: Nocturnes*, ed. Carl Mikuli (New York:
G. Schirmer, 1915), 82.

  Frédéric Chopin, *Nokturny*, ed. I. J. Paderewski, L. Bronarski, and J. Turczyński (Warsaw: Instytut
Fryderyka Chopina, 1951), 89.

[30] William Rothstein, "Phrase Rhythm in Chopin's Nocturnes and Mazurkas," in *Chopin Studies*,
ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 128.

G♯-F♯) also repeats itself on different beats within each subphrase so that the entire

phrase leaves an impression of going around in circles (Example 3.2).

Example 3.2 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 1-7, repeated descending tetrachords[31]

Another crucial factor resulting in the complexity of the a phrase is the contrapuntal

interest in the accompaniment. The accompaniment in the left hand is not just a harmonic

foundation in the background as in the early nocturnes, but functions more as a

countermelody with multiple layers that interact with the main melody. Leaving out the

decorative notes, the bass line of the antecedent phrase is essentially a chromatic ascent

from B (I) through E (ii$_5^6$) to F♯ (V^7), while the harmonic progression of the consequent

phrase can be reduced to I (B) – ii^6 (E) – V^7 (F♯) – i (B) (Example 3.3).

[31] Frédéric Chopin, *Nocturnes Opp. 9-62* (Kraków, Poland: PWM, 1995), 103.

Example 3.3 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 1-10, structural notes in the bass line[32]

A Section-a Phrase (mm. 3-10): Performance

For the a phrase (mm. 3-10), Rubinstein creates a tranquil atmosphere and his dynamic change is not as obvious as Ashkenazy's. Rubinstein chooses to emphasize the repeated melodic F♯s in their first appearance at m. 5, whereas Ashkenazy reserves this emphasis for the consequent phrase when there is a crescendo. Unlike Rubinstein taking extra time on the third F♯, Ashkenazy takes time between the second and third F♯s, lifting up the third one—the peak—instead of accentuating it (a performance treatment he also uses in Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1).

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[32] Ibid.

It is interesting to note how Rubinstein and Ashkenazy interpret differently the overlap between the antecedent and consequent phrases at m. 7. Rubinstein clearly treats the descending tetrachord motive as a cadence by making a diminuendo and taking time between the two phrases. In contrast, Ashkenazy treats the motive as the beginning of the consequent phrase by making a crescendo and moving forward to the following D♯. In addition to the metrical displacement of melodic repetitions, it is note worthing the different ways of dividing the legato line between Mikuli and Paderewski editions (Example 3.4). Mikuli's edition ends the slur after the descending tetrachord motive to indicate the conclusion of the antecedent phrase. By comparison, the slur in Paderewski's edition crosses over the descending tetrachord motive to suggest a seamless melody. Curved lines in Chopin's own hand seem to just indicate legato. It is the editors like Mikuli who add phrasing to the general legato line.

There is another noticeable difference in the rhythmic notation on the second beat of m. 6 between these two editions (the same on the fourth beat of m. 31). Rubinstein plays the dotted rhythm found in Mikuli's edition, whereas Ashkenazy chooses even eighth notes as seen in Paderewski's edition (taken from the earlier French edition). This rhythmic difference perhaps arises since Chopin "frequently changed details in his works from one performance to another and presumably encouraged his pupils to do the same, since he bothered to pencil variants into their printed copies of his compositions."[33] The variant in Mikuli's edition was possibly inserted by Chopin himself during his teaching.

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[33] James Methuen-Campbell, "Building a Music Library: 2. The Chopin Nocturnes," *The Musical Times* 126, no. 1708 (1985): 344. https://doi.org/10.2307/964030.

Example 3.4 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 6-7, Mikuli and Paderewski editions[34]
Mikuli's edition:
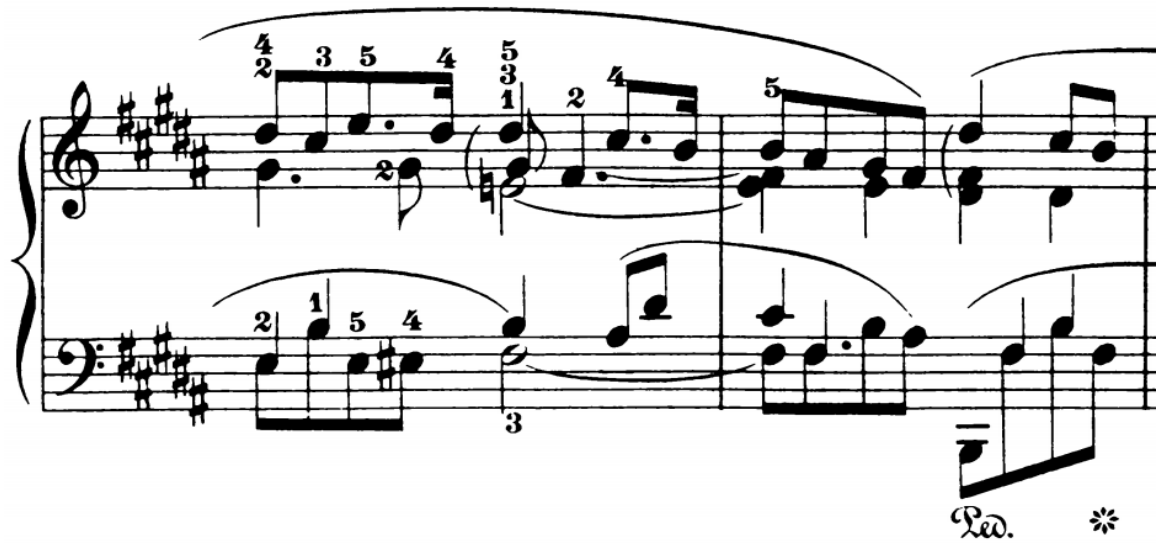
Paderewski's edition:

Rather than the divergence of opinions regarding m. 7, Rubinstein and Ashkenazy

reach agreement about the clear perfect authentic cadence (PAC) at m. 10. Both pianists

[34] Chopin, *Vol. 4: Nocturnes*, ed. Carl Mikuli, 82.

Chopin, *Nokturny*, ed. I. J. Paderewski, L. Bronarski, and J. Turczyński, 89.

choose to ignore the crescendo marking, but instead make a diminuendo and ritardando to articulate the cadence clearly.
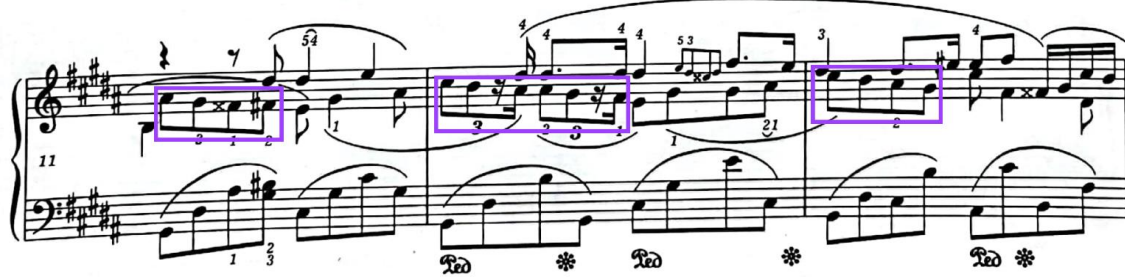
A Section-b Phrase (mm. 11-21): Analysis

In the b phrase (mm. 11-21), Chopin began to depart from the tonic key B major and explored a variety of closely related keys. After the PAC at m. 10, the b phrase takes a sudden turn to emphasize g-sharp minor (the relative minor of B major) until the bass line and a twisting melodic figure lead to a PAC in F-sharp major (the dominant key to B major) at m. 14. The modulation to F-sharp major temporarily lightens the gloomy atmosphere created by the surrounding minor keys. The second half of the b phrase changes keys even more frequently, all of which are minor keys. At m. 15 the focus is immediately shifted away to c-sharp minor (the supertonic key to B major), then again to g-sharp minor on the second half of m. 17, and finally to d-sharp minor (the mediant key to B major) on the second half of m. 19.

As the tonal plan becomes more complex, the interaction between layers becomes more active as well. Compared to the a phrase, the contrapuntal interest in the b phrase is placed more in the right-hand material than the left-hand accompaniment. In the a phrase, the alto voice mainly consists of quarter and half notes, while in the b phrase, it develops into an independent countermelody juxtaposed perfectly with the soprano melody. In mm. 11-12 where g-sharp minor is emphasized, the alto voice presents the descending tetrachord motive and its variant repeatedly against the soprano melody formed by three notes D♯5-E5-F♯5 (Example 3.5). At m. 13 the alteration from E to E-sharp in the soprano voice creates V^7 resolving to I^6 in F-sharp major, after which both layers go

downward to converge at the PAC at m. 14. Then at m. 15 where c-sharp minor is brought into focus, the soprano melody opens up again to G♯5. Once g-sharp minor is reached at m. 17 the soprano melody stops developing and wanders mainly around five notes G♯4-A♯4-B4-C♯5-D♯5 until it arrives at the imperfect plagal cadence in d-sharp minor at m. 21. Meanwhile, the alto and bass voices return to the role of accompaniment, swaying against each other in contrary motion in even eighth notes.

Example 3.5 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 11-13, descending tetrachord motives[35]

A Section-b Phrase (mm. 11-21): Performance

Scarcity of dynamic markings in the b phrase provides Rubinstein and Ashkenazy freedom to interpret the departure from the tonic key B major differently. Listeners can hear an obvious color change in both of their recordings at m. 11 when g-sharp minor is highlighted. However, Rubinstein maintains the restrained mood throughout the varied repetition at m. 12 to ensure a smooth modulation to F-sharp major. Then he lifts up the F♯5 at m. 13—the melodic peak in the first half of the b phase—and pauses briefly due to the big drop from F♯5 to F𝄪. Unlike Rubinstein, Ashkenazy establishes a stark contrast to highlight F-sharp major—the only major key in the b phrase. He gets more excited at the

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[35] Chopin, *Nocturnes Opp. 9-62* (Kraków, Poland: PWM, 1995), 103.

varied repetition by making a crescendo and moving forward, but suddenly lifts up on the third beat of m. 13 where I^6 in F-sharp major is established.

Mikuli and Paderewski editions again suggest different ways to execute the second half of the b phrase (mm. 15-21). Mikuli's edition subdivides the phrase into two two-measure segments, whereas Paderewski's edition sees mm. 19-20 as the variation of mm. 17-18 and thus groups mm. 17-21 together as a single unit. Both pianists regard mm. 17-21 as one phrase and adopt similar dynamic treatments, making a crescendo in the first two measures and a decrescendo in the following two measures to close the phrase. However, Rubinstein seems to consider the suggestion in Mikuli's edition by taking a little time after m. 18. In general, Rubinstein is more cautious about slur markings, creating more space between phrases, whereas Ashkenazy's performance is more dramatic with greater dynamic fluctuation.

<div align="center">A Section-c Phrase (mm. 21-27): Analysis</div>

The endless flow of the first two phrases is suddenly interrupted by the textual change of the c phrase starting at m. 21. The polyphonic texture gives away to a single ornamented line with a simple syncopated accompaniment. The right-hand melody is basically a descending melodic scale across an octave from A♯5 to the lower A♯4, decorated by the "new" motive—sixteenth notes circling around. This motive has already been indicated since m. 17 (Example 3.6). The melody is then repeated with variation in mm. 23-24. Following a whispering echo (*pp*) of the melody's final notes comes the peak of the entire A section—a highly dramatic ornamental flourish with a sudden dynamic

change to *f*. On the other hand, the repeated syncopated notes in the left-hand

accompaniment are indeed a variant of the repeated F♯s in the right-hand melody at m. 5.

Example 3.6 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, comparison between
m. 17 and mm. 20-22[36]

Motivically the c phrase serves as a connecting link between the preceding phrases

and the following sections. The syncopated rhythm and the repeated notes foreshadow

the accompaniment in the B section, while the entire c phrase provides material for the

extended coda. Harmonically, in contrast to the instability in the previous b phrase, d-

sharp minor does not really expand after the imperfect plagal cadence at m. 21, constantly

alternating I with either V^7 or $ii^{\emptyset 4}_2$.

A Section-c Phrase (mm. 21-27): Performance

The two pianists hold quite different opinions about the "new" sixteenth-note motive

of the c phrase. Rubinstein executes the sixteenth notes with much freedom and rubato,

[36] Ibid., 104.

focusing more on the fluidity of these faster notes. He lingers on the beginning long A♯5 of each statement (at m. 21 and m. 23 respectively), then makes an accelerando through the sixteenth notes, and finally returns to the original tempo at the end of each statement. Pursuing an entirely different path, Ashkenazy plays these sixteenth notes in tempo, with increased lyricism as if singing a vocal melody. (One can even hear him humming softly while playing.)

For the ornamental flourish at m. 26, the dynamic markings in Mikuli's and Paderewski's editions are again different (Example 3.7). Both editions include *f* and *rall.* markings, but Paderewski's edition places *rall.* earlier and also has a crescendo that is not present in Mikuli's edition. It is unclear if this crescendo is from Chopin or the editor. A slowing of the tempo is certainly needed in order to play this striking ornamental flourish brilliantly and musically.

Note also the difference in the right- and left-hand slurs between the two editions. Paderewski's edition moves all the way through to the *sf* downbeat, while Mikuli's edition ends with the notes before the chord, allowing for some separation before the downbeat. Perhaps taking his clue from Mikuli's edition, Rubinstein begins the flourish with immediate forcefulness that remains dynamically uniform until the *sf* chord. Ashkenazy presents the crescendo of Paderewski's edition, setting up a more directional thrust into the chord as the goal. He even stresses its arrival by enunciating the broken chord tones in the left hand.

Example 3.7 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 26-27, Mikuli and Paderewski editions[37]
Mikuli's edition
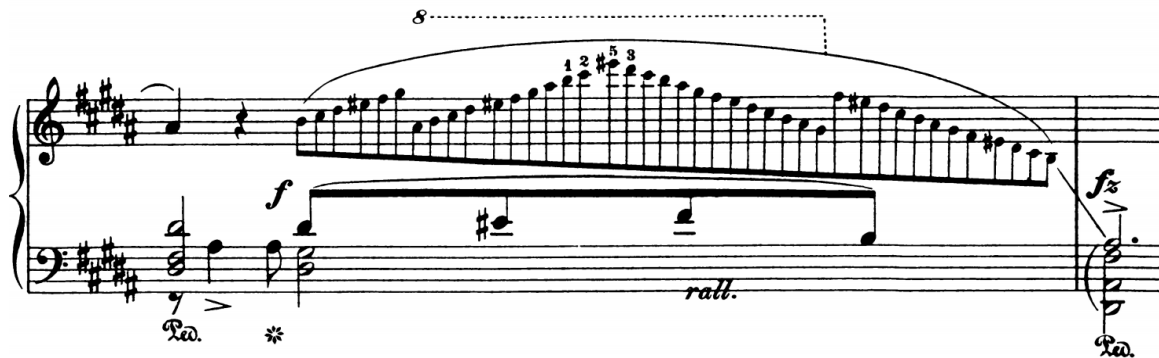
Paderewski's edition

A Section-a' Phrase (mm. 28-36): Analysis

A long D-sharp at m. 28 serves as a common tone to bring back the tonic key B

major and initiates the a' phrase. The D-sharp occurs at major turning points throughout

the nocturne, and thus like the chromatic note C-flat in the nocturne Op. 9, No. 1, plays a

key role in uniting the sections of this nocturne. The a' phrase (mm. 28-36) corresponds

to the opening a phrase, but at the end leads into the B section. After a fermata on the last

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[37] Chopin, *Vol. 4: Nocturnes*, ed. Carl Mikuli, 83.
  Chopin, *Nokturny*, ed. I. J. Paderewski, L. Bronarski, and J. Turczyński, 90.

repeated F♯ at m. 34, the a' phrase does not conclude with a PAC in B major, but modulates to A-flat major—a distantly related key to B major.

A Section-a' Phrase (mm. 28-36): Performance

Both pianists disregard the *p* marking right after the *sf* at m. 27, but rather continue the tension into the long D-sharp in the following measure. The return of the endless melody again arouses controversy about the start of each phrase between Mikuli and Paderewski editions (Example 3.8), as reflected once more in the two pianists' different interpretations.

Example 3.8 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 28-34, Mikuli and Paderewski editions[38]
Mikuli's edition

[38] Chopin, *Vol. 4: Nocturnes*, ed. Carl Mikuli, 83.
Chopin, *Nokturny*, ed. I. J. Paderewski, L. Bronarski, and J. Turczyński, 90.

Paderewski's edition

    Mikuli's edition underlines the descending tetrachord motive by breaking the slur
after each one. Reflecting this option, Rubinstein does not initiate the antecedent phrase
until the third beat of m. 29, playing the descending tetrachord motive with an intentional
diminuendo and rallentando. Like his interpretation at the conclusion of the antecedent
phrase in the a phrase, Rubinstein interprets the variant of the descending tetrachord
motive at m. 32 as a cadence and starts the consequent phrase thereafter.

    In comparison, Paderewski's edition groups the whole a' phrase under one slur.
Ashkenazy slows down at the end of m. 28 to prepare for the return of the main melody
and picks up the tempo after the downbeat of m. 29. Consistent with his rendition in the a
phrase, Ashkenazy treats the variant of the descending tetrachord motive at m. 32 as the
beginning of the consequent phrase by making a crescendo to the following D♯, despite
the diminuendo in Paderewski's edition. For the last repeated F♯ with a fermata at m. 34,

Ashkenazy's interpretation is more dramatic than Rubinstein's. Unlike Rubinstein going straight to the last F♯, Ashkenazy dramatically stretches the tempo of the arpeggio in the left hand, and instead of simply accentuating the last F♯, he strikes this note gently and expressively.

The two pianists' have different understandings about the transition from the A section to the B section as well. Rubinstein carries on with the intensity from the prolonged F♯ at m. 35 and then makes a slight diminuendo at m. 36 so that the first C in the B section sounds like a resolution from the previous C♯. Quite the opposite of Rubinstein, Ashkenazy plays m. 35 as an echo of his last gentle F♯, then makes a crescendo at the end of m. 36, and continues the B section at a forte dynamic.

B Section-d Phrase (mm. 37-44): Analysis

Chopin continued to limit the use of ornamentation in the B section, but the texture of the B section is sparser than that of the main theme in the A section. The thinning-out of the texture has been anticipated by the c phrase in the A section. Likewise, the contrapuntal texture is replaced by a single melody with a syncopated accompaniment. However, instead of a smooth descending line, the melody in the B section features leaps and octave displacement, and the rhythm is stretched out in longer note values (Example 3.9). The left-hand accompaniment consists of two layers, alternating repeated chords with a single note line in the bass. Both the angular melody and the left-hand syncopation break the even flow created by the A section.

Example 3.9 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 37-40[39]

The B section (mm. 37-67) can be divided into three phrases plus a retransition

(Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, formal structure of the B section

Section	Subdivision	Key
B (mm. 37-67)	d (mm. 37-44)	A-flat major, covered cadence
	e (mm. 45-52)	Sequences
	d' (mm. 53-61)	A-flat major, HC
	Retransition (mm. 62-67)	Dominant preparation

The harmony of the d phrase (mm. 37-44) solidifies the local tonic key A-flat major.

Contrary to the expectation that the V^7 at m. 44 resolves to I, the bass (E♭) moves up a

half step to E♮ at m. 45 while the seventh (D♭) of V^7 resolves down by step, giving rise to

a deceptive resolution.

B Section-d Phrase (mm. 37-44): Performance

Rubinstein places more weight on the *sostenuto* marking at the beginning of the B

section, and thus creates a broad and calm atmosphere throughout the opening d phrase.

The dynamic fluctuation in his performance is not as obvious as in Ashkenazy's,

probably because Rubinstein intends to provide a striking contrast at its repetition in the

[39] Chopin, *Nocturnes Opp. 9-62* (Kraków, Poland: PWM, 1995), 105.

d' phrase. In comparison, Ashkenazy focuses more on the instability and urgency of the syncopated accompaniment in the left hand. In spite of different priorities in their performances, one can hear the phrase structure clearly in both renditions. Both pianists are aware of the half cadence at m. 41 and the covered cadence at m. 44, and make a natural diminuendo and ritardando at these two places accordingly.

B Section-e Phrase (mm. 45-52): Analysis

The e phrase (mm. 45-52) consists of two sequences, serving as both a melodic and harmonic expansion between the d and the d' phrases. The e phrase starts with the same melodic note C5 at m. 45, then climbs up every two measures through D♮5 at m. 47 to E♮5 at m. 49 where the second sequence starts, and then goes back every two measures through D♮5 at m. 51 to the same note C5 at m. 53, namely the start of the d' phrase (Example 3.10). Chopin added a second voice (in green) underneath—a descending chromatic line—against the soprano voice to help accumulate the tension while it climbs up. Meanwhile the bass line goes chromatically in the same direction as the melody from E♮ at m. 45 up to A♮ at m. 49 and then back to E♭ at m. 53, the same bass note as the beginning of the d phrase at m. 37. The e phrase ends with the arrival of an augmented German sixth chord at the end of m. 52, which resolves finally to V^7 in the next measure.

The intensity of the e phrase is also achieved by the rhythm, harmony, and dynamic. The rhythm of the right-hand melody features eighth notes here instead of half notes in the d phrase, which results in more violent collisions with the left-hand syncopations. The harmonic rhythm also speeds up from one diatonic chord per measure in the d phrase to two chromatic chords per measure in the e phrase. The dynamic fluctuation basically

52

adheres to the development of the melodic contour except at the end of the phrase.

Chopin marked *cresc.* for the melodic ascent through mm. 45-49, and *dim.* as the melody

drops from mm. 49 to m. 52, but *cresc.* again at the end of m. 52 to lead powerfully to *f* at

the start of the next phrase. All of these elements contribute to the urgency and instability

of the e phrase.

Example 3.10 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 45-56, structural notes in the melody and bass line of the e phrase[40]

B Section-e Phrase (mm. 45-52): Performance

It is clear that both pianists recognize the second voice underneath—the descending

chromatic line in the middle range (in green in Example 3.10)—in the first half of the e

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[40] Ibid., 105-106.

phrase (mm. 45-48), but Rubinstein's version is more discernible since he lingers slightly on each note of the second voice. Rubinstein achieves intensity by emphasizing the conflict between the two voices. In comparison, Ashkenazy creates intensity by pushing the tempo forward, but stretches the tempo of the last ascending arpeggio at the end of m. 48 in order to articulate clearly the beginning of the second half of the e phrase.

For the second half (mm. 49-52) of the e phrase, Rubinstein puts more emphasis on the score markings than Ashkenazy. Both pianists stretch the tempo of the first trill at m. 50 and endow the following measure marked *dolciss.* with a very sweet and delicate timbre. However, Ashkenazy chooses to start the crescendo at the second half of m. 51, earlier than the score marking, and goes directly to the next d' phrase. His interpretation ensures that the two phrases are bonded closely together. Unlike Ashkenazy, Rubinstein maintains the *dolciss.* until the second trill where the score suggests a crescendo, and greatly stretches the tempo of the second trill to allow enough time for the crescendo. Therefore, the arrival of *f* at m. 53 is made very powerful by the extreme contrast between *dolciss.* and crescendo.

B Section-d' Phrase (mm. 53-61): Analysis

The tension accumulated in the e phrase is not completely released until the downbeat of m. 57 in the d' phrase (mm. 53-61). The first measures of the d' phrase continue the chromaticism from the e phrase, featuring descending chromatic lines in different voices harmonized by secondary dominant seventh chords. The melody at m. 57 is repeated at m. 59 in order to prepare for the end of the phrase at m. 61. Chopin marked

dim. at m. 57 as the melody approaches the cadence, and it finally disappears into the

ethereal *pp* of the retransition (mm. 62-67).

<center>B Section-d' Phrase (mm. 53-61): Performance</center>

Although both pianists play in the same forte dynamic in the d' phrase, their

performances convey different feelings. Rubinstein keeps the *sostenuto* tempo here as in

the previous d phrase so that his interpretation sounds broad and magnificent. In addition,

the sustained tempo allows him to bring out the countermelody in the left hand in mm.

53-56 clearly and lyrically. On the contrary, Ashkenazy interprets its reprise with even

more momentum and enthusiasm. His stress on the syncopation endows the

countermelody with an urgent and aggressive quality.

After a big melodic drop from F5 to Eb4 in mm. 56-57, a color change to the

peaceful atmosphere occurs in both pianists' performances. Rubinstein spaces the *dim.*

evenly throughout mm. 57-61 in accordance with the marking on the score. In

comparison, Ashkenazy continues to push forward the eighth notes at m. 57 and m. 59

and does not completely calm the music until the end of the d' phrase (mm. 60-61). Both

pianists make a substantial ritardando in mm. 60-61 to articulate the end of the d' phrase

clearly, despite any of indication in the score.

<center>B Section-Retransition (mm. 62-67): Analysis</center>

The change of the rhythmic pattern in the left hand from syncopation to even eighth

notes gives the retransition a calming quality. As commonly seen in a retransition, the

bass is anchored to the fifth scale degree (Eb) in A-flat major. The E-flat also happens to

be the common tone between A-flat major and the global tonic key B major

<center>55</center>

(enharmonically spelled as D-sharp in B major). At the end of the B section at m. 67, the right hand takes over E-flat from the bass, and the tension accumulated by the long trill and pause on the note leads naturally to the climax of the whole nocturne. The way this modulation is laid out is reminiscent of m. 28 where the modulation is also achieved by a common tone D-sharp.

<div align="center">B Section-Retransition (mm. 62-67): Performance</div>

The two pianists phrase the retransition differently. Rubinstein presents the retransition as smaller segments and lingers at the end of each measure, conveying an aimless and uncertain feeling. On the other hand, Ashkenazy organizes the retransition more as a unit, lingering only on the melodic high points at the ends of m. 62 and m. 64. He makes a substantial ritardando at the end of m. 66 and spreads out the broken chord at m. 67, highlighting the resolution to V at m. 67. Both pianists choose not to apply the written crescendo for the trill at m. 67, but rather to slip quietly into the returning A section.

<div align="center">Returning A Section-a'' Phrase (mm. 68-75): Analysis</div>

The internal structure of the returning A section (mm. 68-94) is outlined in the table below (Table 3.3). Contrary to the convention that a coda is shorter than a main section, the returning A section in this nocturn is highly truncated with the coda greatly extended so that the closing is the same length as the main section (both are fourteen measures long).

Table 3.3 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, formal structure of the returning A section

Section	Subdivision	Key
A (mm. 37-81)	a'' (mm. 68-75)	B major
	"New" material (mm. 76-81)	Sequences, Counterpoint, ending with PAC in B major
Coda (mm. 81-94)		B major

After long-term restraint in ornamentation throughout the opening and middle sections comes the final climax of the nocturne. The material of the a''phrase is based on that of the a phrase in the opening A section, but here is enveloped entirely in trills, interspersed with two ecstatic *fioriture*. Both *fioriture* display the influence of Italian operas (Rossini in particular) on Chopin. Example 3.11 shows excerpts from Rossini's *La Cenerentola* as reference points in comparison with the two *fioriture*.

Example 3.11 (i)[41]

Rossini, *La Cenerentola*

Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 71-72

[41] Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 84.
   Chopin, *Nocturnes Opp. 9-62* (Kraków, Poland: PWM, 1995), 107.

Example 3.11 (ii)

Rossini, *La Cenerentola*

Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 73-74

The first *fioritura* occurs at m. 71 between D♯5 and C♯5, suddenly opening out to the high register through a rapid ascending scale and getting back to the melodic line through a descending arpeggio. Its construction imitates portamento and arc-shaped *fioriture* in Italian operas. The second *fioritura* decorates descending melodic notes at m. 73 with double neighbor figurations also derived from Italian operas.

The a'' phrase ends in mm. 74-75 with an expanded version of the repeated melodic F♯s. It is first harmonized as before with a V^7/IV at m. 74, but then unexpectedly Chopin left this chord unresolved and instead harmonized the motive with a new chord—D dominant seventh chord—by moving B and D♯ from the previous chord to C♮ and D♮ respectively (Table 3.4). The suspense is further heightened by a *rallent.* and long pause at the end of the a'' phrase.

Table 3.4 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 74-75, harmonic analysis

m. 74	m. 75
Bdom^7	Ddom^7
V^7/IV	?
B	C♮
D♯	D♮
F♯	F♯
A♮	A♮

Returning A Section-a'' Phrase (mm. 68-75): Performance

Ashkenazy expresses his tremendous ecstasy about this final climax of the whole

nocturne through added changes of tempo and dynamic, whereas Rubinstein stands on

the more poised side with less fluctuation. To conform to the phrasing of the main

melody in the opening A section, Rubinstein sees the D♯5 on the third beat of m. 69 and

the downbeat of m. 73 as the beginning of each subphrase, and clearly separates the prior

descending tetrachord motive by taking time in between. He provides the two

appearances of the repeated F♯s with different colors: the former more ethereal, while the

latter more solid.

On the other hand, Ashkenazy takes the downbeat of m. 69 and third beat of m. 72

respectively as the start of each subphrase, both of which have the bass on F♯ from V^7.

He makes an accelerando in the antecedent phrase until the *fioritura* at m. 71 to help

accumulate tension for the crescendo below the repeated F♯s. As in the opening A

section, it is refreshing to hear him lift up the last repeated melodic F♯ on the downbeat

of m. 71.

Ashkenazy initiates the consequent phrase with a forward momentum and crescendo

to arrive at the D♯ on the downbeat of m. 73, but then relaxes the tempo of the following

sextuplets and makes a natural diminuendo as it descends. Then unexpectedly he reaches

the first repeated F♯ on the downbeat of m. 74 with the utmost expression and gradually speeds up the trill. He makes a substantial crescendo at m. 74 in order to leave enough room for the *pp* at m. 75. Compared with Rubinstein, Ashkenazy makes a more substantial *rallent.* and pauses longer on the quarter tenuto rest at m. 75, so the following material sounds more surprising. Ashkenazy's treatment of the a'' phrase sounds like he is actually improvising on it.

<div align="center">Returning A Section- "New" Material (mm. 76-81): Analysis</div>

As in the opening A section, the continuity of the main theme is interrupted by "new" material. However, the c phrase which served as the interruption before, now becomes the coda. Before concluding the nocturne in the tonic key B major, in mm. 76-80 Chopin inserted a passage which integrates the counterpoint of the A section and the sequence from the B section. The new phrase continues the F♯ from the previous a'' phrase and then twists down in four voices with a descending chromatic bass line, which connects to another threefold sequence, clearly derived from the syncopation at m. 10. This sequence starts with only two voices and gradually climbs up each time with a growing dynamic (*cresc.*) until reaching the highest note A♯, whose expressiveness is emphasized by an abrupt *ritenuto* and rolled chord. For the third time, the two voices in the left hand also join in to thicken the texture. This contrapuntal passage ends with a circle of fifths at m. 80. Chopin made preparations for the final arrival at PAC in B major at m. 81 by decreasing the dynamic (*dim.*) throughout m. 80 until the music returns to serenity (*p*), where the coda starts.

Example 3.12 Frédéric Chopin: Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 in B Major, mm. 75-80[42]

Returning A Section- "New" Material (mm. 76-81): Performance

Rubinstein seems not really affected by the Tempo I marking on the score (tempo primo in Paderewski's edition) and continues the "new" material without an obvious tempo change. He begins to move forward along with the *cresc.* marking throughout mm. 77-79, and gives equal importance to the two voices as equally important. On the other hand, Ashkenazy takes a faster tempo for this phrase as the score indicates. Unlike Rubinstein, Ashkenazy does not treat the two voices equally, but gives more weight to the top voice in mm. 77-79. As with the last repeated melodic F♯ in the A sections, Ashkenazy lifts up the highest note A♯ instead of accentuating it. Although the *ritenuto* marking lasts from the note prior to the peak to the end of the phrase, in order for A♯ to stand out from its surrounding, both pianists decide to resume their original tempo after arriving at the peak, and not to slow down until the end of the phrase.

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[42] Chopin, *Nocturnes Opp. 9-62* (Kraków, Poland: PWM, 1995), 107.

Coda (mm. 81-94): Analysis

The c phrase in the opening A section is elaborated into an extended coda. The entire coda remains in a soft dynamic. The continuously flowing sixteenth notes in the coda are transformed through subdominant inflection, a typical coda procedure. The sixteenth-note figuration first winds down following an E major descending scale as in the c phrase in the opening A section, then floats up to a high register, and finally comes down in broken chords.

The entire process is then repeated in the next four measures (mm. 85-88), but this time suggests e harmonic minor in mm. 85-86 and then a mixture of B major and b harmonic minor at m. 87, and finally resumes B major at m. 88. The introduction of harmonic minors decorates the repeated material with an exotic flavor. Despite what the right hand is doing, the left hand is prolonging B major the entire time with a pedal B in the bass.

The V^9 in the second half of m. 88 resolves to I on the downbeat of m. 89. However, the expected PAC in B major is prevented by a big soprano leap to D♯5—the third scale degree of B major. The D♯ does not move to the first scale degree B until the downbeat of m. 91. The concluding four measures serve as an extension to highlight D-sharp in a lower register, with the piece ending on D♯ in the soprano. Therefore, all of these factors—lower register, numerous repetitions, and the position of the last note–combine for D♯ to leave an indelible impression, even though the last PAC of the whole nocturne occurred at m. 91.

Coda (mm. 81-94): Performance

As with their different treatments of the sixteenth-note motive in the c phrase,

Rubinstein again takes a faster tempo than Ashkenazy. It is clear from their performances

that both pianists recognize the modal change of the material in this coda. For the first

phrase in E major (mm. 81-84), Rubinstein makes a straightforward and substantial

crescendo as the scale goes up at m. 84. In comparison, Ashkenazy decides to play the

entire first phrase in the dynamic of *forte*, despite the *p* marking on the score. In addition,

in order for the tonic pedal to sound all the way through, he intentionally accentuates

every B in the bass on the downbeat and takes time prior to it.

Both pianists make an audible color change for the repetition emphasizing harmonic

minors (mm. 85-88). This time Rubinstein does not make a crescendo at all for the scalar

ascent at m. 87, but expressively lingers on the high B♯6 on the downbeat of m. 88 in

order to intensify the modal change. On the other hand, Ashkenazy's sharper dynamic

contrast—from his improvised *f* at m. 81 to the score's *pp* at m. 85—conveys the eerie

and hazy quality in a dramatic way. His interpretation underscores the high B♯6 by

making a slight crescendo in the last four sixteenth notes ascending towards it. His

emphasis on B in the bass is less distinct in this phrase except on the downbeat of m. 87

when the focus is shifted from e harmonic minor to a mixture of B major and b harmonic

minor.

Both pianists make a ritardando at the end of m. 88 in preparation for the resolution

to the tonic B major chord on the downbeat of m. 89. Ashkenazy brings out the

countermelody in the left-hand top voice at m. 90 and stresses the accented G♯ by taking

time prior to it. He then makes a substantial ritardando to articulate the final PAC of the

nocturne. There is an important distinction in the *calando* marking between Mikuli and Paderewski editions. Paderewski's edition clearly shows a duration limit for this marking, with broken lines extending out just two measures (mm. 89-90) to help performers recognize the final PAC. Mikuli's edition has the *calando* marked only at m. 89, suggesting that the marking continues to the very end of the piece.

The two pianists' treatments of the subsequent extension (mm. 91-94) are similar. The change to the lower register leads to a thicker sound. Both pianists provide the inflected IV^{M7} at m. 92 with a special color to differentiate the plagal resolution from the surrounding $V^{(7)}$ – I. Rubinstein chooses to linger on the last dotted sixteenth note at m. 93 and makes a slight ritardando thereafter to bring the piece to a close, while Ashkenazy puts particular emphasis on the changed melodic shape of the sixteenth notes at m. 93 by greatly stretching them out.

Summary

Chopin's later Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 shows a departure from the common features of Field's model with a greater variety of musical elements. Its rich harmonic vocabulary, elaborate contrapuntal lines, and seamless melodic continuity set Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 apart from Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1. The lavishly embellished reprise of Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 ranks among Chopin's most creative moments. The greatest possible restraint in the previous sections maximizes the effectiveness of this moment. Similar to his first nocturne Op. 9, No. 1, Chopin, in this later nocturne Op, 62, No. 1, again used a crucial note (D-sharp here) at the end of each section in order to closely unite individual sections.

This later Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 offers a broad range of performance options due to the ambiguous phrase structure and intricate contrapuntal texture. The melodic seamlessness raises the question for both editors and performers as to the ends of phrases. Unlike in Op. 9, No. 1 where the differences in Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's interpretive choices remain on the surface, their different interpretations in Op. 62, No. 1 display two completely different understandings of the phrase structure.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

After closely examining Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 and Op. 62, No. 1, one can clearly

sense the great changes occurred in the style from Chopin's early to late nocturnes.

Nocturne Op. 9, No.1 obviously follows Field's nocturne model, given his use of the

ternary formal design and the combination of a cantilena melodic line with harmonic

accompaniment. However, in his later Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1, Chopin moved away from

the relaxed, almost improvisatory nature of the early nocturne with increased diversity.

Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 is distinguished from Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 by its complex

harmonic language, intricate contrapuntal lines, and seamless melodic continuity. In

addition, Nocturne Op. 62, No. 1 is notable for its highly embellished recapitulation.

Rubinstein's and Ashkenazy's interpretations are inevitably influenced by the

differences between Chopin's early and late nocturnes. In general, these two pianists'

understandings reflect their different personalities, educational backgrounds, and ages at

the time of recording. Rubinstein delineates phrases calmly and places more importance

on the bigger picture, while Ashkenazy's youth offers more dramatic freedom as he

focuses more on the impact of individual phrases. While the early Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1

reveals subtle interpretive differences, the ambiguous phrase structure in the later

Nocturne Op. 62. No. 1 exposes a more fundamental diversity in their approaches.

The seamless style of melodic writing in Nocturne Op. 62, No.1 also poses a

challenge for editors to mark slurs. Differences between editions in the length and

placement of slurs can lead to organizational performance decisions, though it is not clear

that Chopin intended to indicate phrases in this way. Editions also differ in their notation

of rhythm, dynamic markings, and even the specific notes where expressive markings are placed. In contrast, in Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1, there are fewer significant differences between editions.

There is by no means one single way to interpret a given piece. Analysis serves as a guideline in helping performers determine what to do and what not to do. The author hopes that this project may help to promote a better understanding of the theoretical reasons behind the interpretive decisions of Artur Rubinstein and Vladimir Ashkenazy in performing two of Chopin's nocturnes.

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