

# Understanding Music

Seventh Edition

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**PEARSON**

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## B

1:03	Modulating, unstable B section—shorter, faster exchanges of questioning idea, answered by descending arpeggios.
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1:20	Minor version of questioning idea in low range. Crescendo, then decrescendo, leads to:
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## A'

1:39	Clear return of the beginning, moving quickly to faster sequential phrases.
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2:15	Closing section using questioning idea, including crescendo and leap to highest note of the piece. Ends with gentle decrescendo.
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## COMPOSERS, PATRONS, AND AUDIENCES

### Music for the Middle Classes

The nineteenth century witnessed the rise—across Europe—of a large, primarily urban, middle class. Members of this class not only formed the largest audience for music, but also became music “consumers,” buying sheet music of songs or chamber music for performances at home. An evening was not complete without a song recital or an amateur piano performance after dinner. Nineteenth-century novels, such as those of Eliot or Thackeray, are full of references to such performances, mostly by women.

Composers, too, belonged mostly to the middle class. They were small entrepreneurs in their own right, negotiating fees with publishers and concert promoters. Many composers made a comfortable living from their music. They were also freer from the constraints of employers such as the church or aristocratic courts, which had often dictated terms of style or content to composers in previous eras. The artistic freedom of composers in the nineteenth century was therefore the result of economic as well as aesthetic conditions.

### Fryderyk Chopin (1810–1849)

Chopin was the first of the great piano virtuosos in the Romantic era. Most composers before Chopin played the piano, and many of them actually composed at the keyboard, even if they weren’t writing piano music. But after Beethoven, Chopin was the first important nineteenth-century composer to achieve fame as a performing pianist, and almost all of his compositions are written for solo piano.

Chopin was born in 1810 to a French father and a Polish mother. His father taught French, and his mother taught piano at a school in Warsaw. Chopin began formal piano lessons at the age of seven, and his first composition was published the same year. At the age of eight, he gave his first public concert, and at the age of 15, he was sufficiently accomplished to play before Tsar Alexander I of Russia, who presented him with a diamond ring.

When Chopin was 19, he heard the great violinist Paganini play and was inspired to become a touring virtuoso himself. Most of his compositions at this time were designed for his

own use. Chopin would improvise for hours at the keyboard and only occasionally write down what he had played. His music was often based on traditional Polish dances such as the polonaise or the mazurka.

In 1830, Chopin completed two piano concertos, which he performed in public concerts, and toward the end of the year he left Poland, unaware that he would never see it again. From a distance he heard of the Warsaw uprising and the storming of the city by the Russian army. From this time on, the Polish quality of his music deepened, and his compositions became more intense and passionate. A review stated, “Chopin has listened to the song of the Polish villager; he has made it his own and united the tunes of his native land in skillful composition and elegant execution.”

In 1831, at the age of 21, Chopin settled in Paris, an important center of European artistic activity. Soon he was caught up in the whirl of Parisian society, and his brilliant and poetic playing made him very much in demand in the city’s fashionable salons. He had a wide circle of friends, including some of the great





Chopin as a young man.

Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863). *Portrait of Frédéric Chopin* (1810–1860), 1838. Oil on canvas, 45.5 × 38 cm. Louvre, Dpt. des Peintures, France. © Photograph by Erich Lessing. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

Compared with Berlioz, Chopin was a morbidly sentimental flea by the side of a roaring lion.

—J. W. Davison

cultural figures of the time, such as Berlioz, Liszt, and the artist Delacroix.

In his late 20s, Chopin was introduced by Franz Liszt to Aurore Dudevant, a well-known novelist who published under the male pseudonym George Sand. They soon started living together, and the years they spent together were among the most productive of Chopin's life. He was often ill, however, displaying the first signs of the tuberculosis that would later kill him. George Sand looked after him devotedly, although Chopin was a difficult patient. There is a rather unflattering portrait of him in one of her novels, *Lucrezia Floriani*, in the character of Prince Karol.

The relationship ended in 1847, after which Chopin's health rapidly deteriorated. He composed little but gave public recitals in London and Paris. It was reported that he was too weak to play louder than *mezzo-forte*. Chopin died in 1849 at the age of 39. At his request, Mozart's Requiem was played at his funeral.

### Chopin's Music

The best way to think of Chopin's music is as poetry for the piano. His style is entirely a personal one, as might be expected from one who improvised so freely. Most of his pieces are fairly short, and they fall into several categories:

**Dances:** polonaises, mazurkas, and waltzes. The **waltz** was fast becoming the favorite ballroom dance of the nineteenth century. Chopin managed to create enormous variety of mood with the basic format of this one dance. **Mazurkas** and **polonaises** are both Polish dances, and Chopin invested them with the spirit of Polish nationalism. Mazurkas are in triple meter with a stress on the second or third beat of the bar. Polonaises are stately and proud.

**Free forms** without dance rhythms: preludes, études, nocturnes, and impromptus. The **preludes** follow the pattern established by Bach in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*: there is one in each of the major and minor keys. **Étude** literally means “study piece,” and each of Chopin's études concentrates on one facet of musicianship or piano technique. The **nocturnes** are moody, introspective pieces, and the **impromptus** capture the essence of improvisation (“impromptu” means “off the cuff”). The formal structure of these pieces is fundamentally simple, relying upon the ABA pattern common to aria or song form. However, Chopin usually varied the return of the opening section quite considerably, creating instead an ABA' structure.

In all these genres, Chopin wrote highly individual pieces, each one with a nostalgic or singing quality, perfectly suited to the special sound and capabilities of the pianos of his time. The sound of the instrument was softer, less brilliant than it is today, but it allowed for rapid repetition of notes and sustained sounds. Chopin's melodies and chords exploited these qualities. Chopin's left-hand harmony is varied and expressive, and sometimes the main melody will appear in the left hand with the accompaniment above it in the right. There is often much delicate, rapid ornamentation in the right hand, with short free passages or runs or trills that add to the impression of improvisation. Finally, Chopin's written directions often call for a special expressive device called **rubato**. Literally, this Italian word means “robbed.” Using this technique, the player keeps the tempo going in the accompaniment while the melody slows down slightly before catching up a moment later. Carefully applied, rubato can suggest the kind of expressive freedom that must have characterized the playing of Chopin himself.

## LISTENING GUIDE

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### FRYDERYK CHOPIN (1810–1849)

#### *Prelude in E Minor, Op. 28, for Piano*

**Date of composition:** 1836–39

**Tempo:** *Largo* (“Broad”)

**Meter:**  $\frac{2}{2}$

**Duration:** 1:47



CD II, 11

Chopin composed 24 preludes between 1836 and 1839. They follow the same idea as Bach's two sets of preludes and fugues, presenting all 24 major and minor keys of the scale system.

This prelude features an ABA' structure. In the A section, an almost static melodic line is accompanied by steady chords that constantly descend. Notice the use of “neighbor” tones in the right-hand melody: the melody goes to an adjacent pitch and then returns. The B section is marked by melodic arpeggios and has more rhythmic movement. The return of the A section is varied, and there is a wonderfully expressive silence before the end.



Time	Listen for
<b>A section</b>	
0:00	Opening melody. Focus is on descending left-hand accompanying chords. Upper neighbor tone is heard several times in right hand.
0:20	New note, melodic motion continues to descend.
<b>B section</b>	
0:46	More motion in melody and change in accompanying figures.
1:01	End of section, little flourish in melody, returning to:
<b>A' section</b>	
1:07	Variation of A.
1:22	More rhythmic activity in both hands.
1:25	Loudest part.
1:35	Feeling of stasis.
1:48	"Goal" reached.
2:01	Final chord?
2:04	Expressive silence.
2:09	Real final cadence (three chords).

### Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Of all the early Romantics, Robert Schumann was the most imbued with a literary imagination. He was born in 1810 in a small German town. His father was a bookseller, so the young boy had unlimited access to the popular Romantic writings of the day.

Schumann read voraciously and began to pour his feelings into poems and novels of his own, before finding a more congenial outlet in music. He played the piano well, though his exuberance outran his discipline. "I was always a fiery performer," he said, "but my technique was full of holes."

After his father died, Schumann went to the University of Leipzig as a law student, but he had no interest in the subject. He drank heavily and spent his money on having a good time. While in Leipzig, he met Friedrich Wieck, an eminent piano teacher, and Schumann took lessons from him.

A turning point in Schumann's career came (as it did for so many Romantic musicians) upon hearing the Italian virtuoso

Paganini play a concert. He was entranced by the showmanship and hypnotic intensity of the great violinist and decided to become a piano virtuoso. He gave up his undisciplined life, enrolled as a full-time student with Wieck, and took a room in Wieck's house in order to devote himself to constant practice. Unfortunately, Schumann took this to extremes, as he tended to do with everything. He overdid the practicing and permanently damaged his hand.

There was, however, a bright side to this episode: Schumann turned from performing to composing music, and he met Clara, Wieck's daughter, who was to become the love of his life. When Schumann moved in with the Wiecks, Clara was only 10 years old. But she was a brilliant pianist, and Wieck had the highest hopes for her. Clara could outplay Schumann, even though he was twice her age.

By the time Clara was 15, she was already a great pianist, astounding audiences at home and abroad. But her father suddenly noticed a cloud on the horizon: Clara and

Wieck, in a letter to Schumann's mother: "Taking into account his talent and imagination, I promise to make him into one of the greatest living pianists."