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A Survey of the Keyboard Prelude

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A SURVEY OF THE KEYBOARD PRELUDE

(TITLE)

BY

Bonnie Fansler McArthur

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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ABSTRACT

A study of the prelude, the oldest form of idiomatic music for keyboard instruments, offers insight into the heart of piano music. This thesis, a survey of the genre, traces the evolution of the prelude from its roots in the organ improvisations of the fifteenth century to the present century. Although the paper deals exclusively with piano preludes in the chapters after "Preludes of J. S. Bach," the chapters devoted to the organ and harpsichord preludes reveal crucial information necessary to enlightened appreciation of the development of the genre.

Originally a purely functional piece, the prelude allowed the performer to limber his fingers or to evaluate the intonation of his instrument. Identified as unattached preludes, these pieces were antecedents to any other piece of the same key.

By the time of the Baroque Period (1600), preludes were usually paired with fugues or used as preliminary suite movements; thus they have been described as attached preludes.

It was Chopin who was responsible for the development of the independent prelude, a character piece.

This thesis discusses each of these three types of preludes; several musical examples are included. The appendix lists selected preludes for piano, and the bibliography provides additional information on the subject.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PRELUDE

Prelude, as known in today's English language, comes from the Latin praeludere, "to play beforehand."¹ That definition seems simple enough at first glance, but further investigation generates curiosity. Several questions must be asked: Before what is it played? Is a prelude a form? If not, why is a prelude called a prelude? Are the preludes preserved from the fifteenth century akin to those fresh from the composer's pen? Is there a thread of consistency present in the fabric of music history concerning the title? Does the performer, when he sees a prelude for the first time, conjure up a preconceived notion peculiar to all pieces bearing the title? Why are preludes found in profusion from the Middle Ages to the present, except in the so-called Classic Period? What other words are equivalent in meaning? These and other relevant questions will be dealt with in the text of this paper.

In French prelude becomes prélude; in Italian, preludio; in German, Vorspiel.² In addition, the Music

1. Webster's New World Dictionary, college ed., (1966), s. v. "prelude."

2. Wendy Thompson, "Prelude," in The New Oxford Companion to Music, ed. Denis Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 1484.

Dictionary lists these translations for the same word:³

preludium-----Czech
 praeludium, forspil--Danish
 Voorspel-----Dutch
 Präludium-----German
 előjáték-----Hungarian
 preludio-----Italian
 preludio-----Spanish
 preludjum-----Polish
 prelúdio-----Portuguese
 preliudiia-----Russian
 förspel-----Swedish

The aforementioned definition of prelude is relevantly designated to pieces in the Middle Ages through the Baroque, but is generally illogically applied from the nineteenth century forward.⁴ All preludes, however, can be classified under one of three headings: unattached, attached, or independent.⁵ The unattached prelude, found primarily in pieces written before the Baroque, may be used to precede any piece or set of pieces in the same key; it is not followed by a predetermined piece. The attached prelude, conversely, paired with a particular fugue or used to precede a dance suite, is most common to the Baroque. The third type, the independent prelude, came into its own with the preludes of Chopin's op. 28. Then followed the famous Debussy preludes as well those by Busoni, Rachmaninoff, Kabalevsky, and Shostakovich, all of whom wrote a set of twenty-four in all

3. Carolyn Grigg, Music Translation Dictionary (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 113.

4. Howard Ferguson, "Prelude," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th ed., 10 vols., ed. Eric Blom (London: MacMillan Co., 1954-61), XV: 210.

5. Ibid.

major and minor keys.⁶ In the past few decades, more and more preludes have appeared in small groupings, each piece being independent in its own right, but simultaneously existing as part of the whole--Kent Kennan's preludes of 1938 and 1951 are examples.

What do the unattached, attached, and independent preludes have in common? A few general observations may offer an explanation as to why the term prelude is used for pieces that may or may not have prefatory function. Most preludes are improvisatory in nature, the form being dictated by the content. The reason for continued use of the term since the fifteenth century is that it offers no restrictions, not even those of a functional nature. The vast majority are short, very short, in fact, and are of necessity compact and highly unified. Unity may result from the selection of a principal mood or from one or two recurring motives, whether melodic, figurative, or rhythmic. Persistent, driving rhythmic motives result in moto perpetuo preludes.

Preludes are often overlooked by performers because so many are brief, and comparatively few are virtuosic. The preludes of Chopin, Debussy, Rachmaninoff, and Scriabin are important to repertoire of the pianist and are unjustly neglected. The music is significant, and many of the pieces, together with preludes by Clementi, Kabalevsky, Tcherepnin, the virginalists, and many others, have impor-

6. W. Thompson, "Prelude," p. 1485.

tant pedagogical value in the training of intermediate students.

II. FROM ITS BEGINNINGS TO 1500

Of a prelude written in 1455, it has been said:

In its austerity it soars upwards, like the Gothic architecture under which it was created, containing as it were the seeds of that forest whose tremendous ramifications we know in the pages of Bach and Beethoven.⁷

The statement is valuable, but needs to be qualified. In examining the contribution of the early preludes to all of keyboard music, the musician must not overlook the intrinsic beauty of these miniatures.

A look at medieval music is helpful at this point. Most music of that period was based on a pre-existing melody from a sacred or secular song. This melody, designated as the tenor, provided the lowest part, while one or two decorative parts were added above. Eventually, the rhythm of the original tenor became altered to such a degree, and the upper parts became so ornamented that, in essence, the piece became a new composition. By the fifteenth century the tenor had become an original melody.⁸

The transcription of these vocal prototypes into

7. Gerald Bedbrook, Keyboard Music From the Middle Ages to the Beginnings of the Baroque (New York: Da Capo Press, 1943; reprint ed., London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., (1973), p.33.

8. Ibid., p. 28.

keyboard notation was known as intabulation.⁹ The earliest extant sources of keyboard music contain these intabulations. Intabulations of three motets, two of which are from the Roman de Fauvel, are found in the Roberts-bridge Codex, the oldest extant source of keyboard music. Dated 1320, the manuscript is located in London in the British Museum, Add. 28550.¹⁰ Another early manuscript, the Codex Faenza, housed in the Biblioteque Communaria 177, contains forty-seven clavier settings of vocal music which exhibit remarkable right hand virtuosity.¹¹

The oldest existing source containing preludes is the Tablature of Adam Ileborgh, rector of the Stendhal Monastery in northern Germany. Assembled in 1448 and preserved in Philadelphia at the Curtis Institute of Music, the tablature is probably the oldest, most valuable music codex in the United States.¹²

These early preludes originated in the organist's improvisations by which the chanting tone was given to the priest or choir during Mass.¹³ They were a by-product of the growth of an instrumental style emerging from the popu-

9. Bedbrook, Keyboard Music, p. 29.

10. F. E. Kirby, A Short History of Keyboard Music (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 31.

11. Willi Apel, The History of Keyboard Music to 1700, trans. and revised Hans Tischler (Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 27-28.

12. Idem., Masters of the Keyboard (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 27.

13. Idem., The History, pp. 32-33.

larity of improvisation in the day. Notation was merely an attempt to record what had transpired previously.¹⁴ Many times the improvisations were realized for those apprentice organists yet unable to skillfully improvise.¹⁵ Other names sometimes given to pieces of the same function were "fantasia" or "ricercare."¹⁶

The five preludes in the Ileborgh Tablature are genuine keyboard music, void of vocal archetypes or borrowed tenors, created freely, confined only by the limits of the instrument.¹⁷ Such preludes may be considered the ancestors of all genuine keyboard music.¹⁸ These early attempts show much greater unrestrained flow than those of later times,¹⁹ and Brother Ileborgh, who may have composed some of the pieces, must have had a very high opinion of them. This is evidenced by the inscription at the beginning of the collection: "Here begin preludes in various keys [composed] in the modern style, cleverly and diligently collected, with diverse mensurae appended below."²⁰ Note in the facsimile reproduced below (example 1) that the upper

14. Donald Grout, A History of Western Music, revised ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 153.

15. Howard Ferguson, Keyboard Interpretation. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 20.

16. Grout, A History, p. 153.

17. Apel, The History, p. 43.

18. Bedbrook, Keyboard Music, p.33.

19. Apel, The History, p. 43.

20. Idem., Masters, p. 43.

part is written on an eight line staff, and the lower part is indicated by letters--this saved valuable space on expensive parchment. Each pair of letters corresponds to the position of the right and left feet on the pedals.

Example 1. Facsimile from Ileborgh Tablature.²¹

The image shows a facsimile of a page from the Ileborgh Tablature. It features four systems of musical notation, each consisting of an eight-line staff. The notation is a form of lute tablature where letters represent fret positions. The text is written in a Gothic script. The first system includes the text: "Acipite plura dicitur non solum modum sed etiam modum subtiliter et diligenter solliciti in mensuris diuisis in fine amaris p. from Adam Ileborgh dno dny 1228 tpe sui iudicij in fidei dalt". Below this is the text "Sequitur pambula: C a p r u a i b r i i d f g a". The second system has tablature letters "C", "G", "D", "A", "C", "G" above the staff. The third system has the text "Pambula boni fr' C manuale et uari' adob". The fourth system has the text "Pambula boni pedale su' manuale i d f g a et no q' omnia plura h' post p'nc' ap plura solum unum ad om' uotno de met'".

21. Apel, Masters, p. 26.

In the fourth Ileborgh prelude, the lower part, the tenor, consists of three notes (D, E, and D), while the upper part comprises A, G-sharp, and A. These two parts, written in long notes, serve as foundation for a flowing, florid melody, spanning two octaves in range and containing an occasional leap. In its combination of triplets with notes in binary rhythms, the melody defies metrical regularity. This revolutionary style, abounding in external freedom, was still internally restrained. Meant to be transposed, this prelude (example 2) is inscribed "Preambulum super d a f et g." The cadence on the third at the end is uncommon practice before 1600.²² In the original manuscript, downward strokes added to the notes indicate chromatic alteration, and the addition of a flag to a downward stroke suggests a fermata with possible embellishment.²³

These five preambula anticipate the Venetian toccatas and intonations of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries;²⁴ even so, the preludes of the fifteenth century seem archaic compared to work in other genres by Josquin, Dufay, Ockeghem, and others.²⁵

Fundamentum organisandi, written and compiled by Conrad Paumann in 1452, is the second of the old German keyboard sources. The manuscript is bound with Lochaymer

22. Ibid., p. 43.

23. Idem., The History, p. 43.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 122.

Example 2. "Preambulum super d a f et g."26

The image shows a musical score for a prelude. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The second system also has a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The third system has a bass clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The music is written in a style characteristic of the 15th century, with a focus on counterpoint. There are several 'x' marks above the notes in the first two systems, and a 'u.' mark above a note in the second system. The score is presented in a clear, black-and-white format.

Liederbuch in Berlin Staatsbibliothek (40613)27 and deals mainly with writing of instrumental counterpoint.²⁸ Among other music, it contains three preambles. In this document, the prelude shows signs of expansion as it does in the Buxheimer Orgelbuch, the most important collection of organ music of the fifteenth century. Named for the Carthusian Monastery of Buxheim in southern Germany, it was most likely assembled there about 1460; it contains approximately 250

26. Willi Apel, ed. Keyboard Music of the 14th and 15th Centuries: CEKM, v. 1, p. 28.

27. Kirby, A Short History, p. 34.

28. Ibid.

pieces of medieval organ music.²⁹ This treasure appears in volumes 37-39 of Das Erbe deutschaer Musik, and a facsimile of the original manuscript is also included in volume 39. The original is housed in the Munich Staatsbibliothek, Cim. 352b.³⁰

In both the Fundamentum organisandi and the Buxheimer Orgelbuch, two types of writing exist. The first uses slow moving lower parts versus the rapid upper part (as seen in Ileborgh); the second is a chordal movement in which all parts move together.³¹ (The latter approach is commonly called conductus style in vocal music.) The mixture of the styles first appears in the Orgelbuch and is an indication of the increased independence of keyboard music. However,

. . .in length these compositions remain relatively short as if the composer, like a child learning to walk, were afraid to wander too far afield; or possibly, these were functional pieces or beginnings to be continued improvisationally. ³²

No longer does the tenor merely function as a drone; the lower part gradually accelerates and contributes to the contrapuntal interplay. Sometimes it is deleted completely, allowing the upper voice freedom "to spin its roulades without the necessity of agreeing or clashing artistically with

29. William Young, "Keyboard Music to 1600, II," Musica Disciplina 16 (1962): 124.

30. Eileen Southern, "An Index to Das Buxheimer Orgelbuch," Music Library Assoc. Notes 19 (December 1961): 47.

31. Young, "Keyboard Music, II," pp. 127-28.

32. Ibid.

another voice."³³

Notational principles in the Orgelbuch are similar to those found in the Ileborgh Tablature. The highest part, written in mensural notation on a staff of seven lines, is opposite the letters for the lowest part. Loops on downward stems probably indicate mordents.³⁴

The following transcription (example 3) of a prelude from the Hamburg Manuscript of 1457, exhibits a first step in the stylization of the prelude. Starting with a short series of relatively long notes, the upper part becomes faster and florid only near the cadence; there the lower part resorts to very long note values.

Example 3. Hamburg Manuscript, Prelude.³⁵



33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., p. 124.

35. Apel, Keyboard Music, p. 25.

Musicologist Willi Apel designated 1500 as a crucial line of demarcation in the history of prelude composition. The clarification of ideas, solidification of structure, and regulation of technic after this date seem consistent enough to warrant this division of time.³⁶ Chapter three will deal with some of these innovations.

36. Idem., The History, p. 213.

III. FROM 1500 TO THE EARLY BAROQUE PERIOD

Until the sixteenth century, most activity in the realm of keyboard music originated in Germany, but by 1500 France, Italy, and England began producing some noteworthy keyboard composers; in this chapter the most important contributions in prelude composition from these four countries will be briefly discussed. The organ remained the dominant keyboard instrument, but for the first time, music was specifically written for the harpsichord and clavi-chord. In England, where the instruments originated, the virginalists developed the first genuine idiomatic style of writing for the harpsichord.

The Germans

Hans Kotter (c. 1485-1541) and Leonard Kleber (c. 1490-1556) were the most important German contributors of preludes. Their work is notated in the German organ tablature. Kotter wrote seven preludes, some of which have humanistically learned titles. He entitled each piece "anabole", the Greek word for "beginning."³⁷ These preludes are more advanced in construction than those found in the Buxheimer Orgelbuch. The harmony, supplying momentum for the music, determines form and regulates melody. The musi-

37. Apel, The History, p. 213.

cal ideas are symmetrical and fit into periods, while the earlier examples mentioned in chapter two are not so clearly structured.³⁸ A change in voicing or figuration determines the sections. The voicing may consist of 1) four-part chords, 2) three-part chords with a running bass line, or 3) three-part chords with a florid upper part.³⁹

Kleber wrote fourteen preaembula. In general, his pieces contain monophonic passages at the beginning and end (as did the Ileborgh preludes), but the note values are more regular and tend to follow scale outlines. The sharing of passagework between right and left hands anticipates the Italian toccata style. Some of Kleber's other preludes, however, exhibit four-part chords in logical harmonic succession.⁴⁰

A feature in the Buxheim preludes also found in the following Kleber prelude is the contrast effected by the alternation of scalar and chordal movement. (example 4)

Example 4. Kleber, Prelude, measures 1-6.⁴¹



38. Young, "Keyboard Music, II," pp. 132-33.

39. Apel, The History, p. 215.

40. Ibid.

41. Kirby, A Short History, p. 41.

Willi Apel believed that the prelude entitled "Finale in re seu preambalon" is Kleber's highest achievement. When performed with full organ and solo stops, the piece has an impressive effect. Fermatas separate the four-part beginning and ending from the two-part middle.

From 1550-1600 the prelude became almost nonexistent in Germany. This occurred because of the predominance of the colorist school of composition, which preferred transcription of polyphonic ensemble music (mainly motets and chansons) and improvisation to original music for keyboard.⁴³ One organ composer, Jacob Praetorius (1586-1651), wrote three preludes, however, which are examples of a vital process in the evolution of the prelude. In these compositions, the actual prelude portion was only eight to sixteen measures long, but it was followed by a fugal section five times that length which used a single subject. Other composers had done this in the earlier part of the century, but not until the beginning of the seventeenth was it appreciated aesthetically.⁴⁴

The French

The prelude cultivated in sixteenth-century France did not exhibit the unique properties that the concurrent German preludes did. Only three French preludes from the period are extant, and these could easily have been mistaken for

43. Kirby, A Short History, p. 42.

44. Apel, The History, p. 356.

any other generic piece.⁴⁵ These three pieces appear in the sole French publication of the sixteenth century, a series of prints issued by the Parisian firm of Pierre Attaignant from 1529 to 1531.⁴⁶ Of the seven books bound in the edition, the following two contain the preludes: Magnificent sur les huit tons avec Te Deum Laudamus, et deux preludes, and Treize motets et un prelude.⁴⁷ The "Prelude sur chacun ton" in the former book has short sections exploiting a single motif in a sequential manner. Four-part writing prevails, and a decorative upper part flourishes over full triads in the lower part.⁴⁸

The Italians

The first printed collection of Italian keyboard music, the Frottole intabulate da sonare per organo, appeared in 1517, apparently ending a century of inactivity in keyboard composition; no intermediary sources have been found between the Frottole Intabulation and the Faenza Manuscript of the fourteenth century.⁴⁹

The prelude was an important mode of composition in Italy during the sixteenth century, where it was developed from pieces that were improvised before the playing of poly-

45. Ibid., p. 217.

46. Kirby, A Short History, p. 50.

47. H. Ferguson, "Prelude," p. 211.

48. Young, "Keyboard Music, II," p. 166.

49. Kirby, A Short History, p. 49.

phonic compositions--most often during church services. The name given these Italian preludes was intonazione, or intonation, because they set the tone for the singing in the service. Many were associated with and identified by specific keys. Example 5 below, by Andrea Gabrieli (c. 1510-1586), is identified by mode. The characteristic, short, chordal opening followed by scale figuration identifies this piece as a prelude, and the idiomatic writing is free from counterpoint.

Example 5. Andrea Gabrieli, "Intonazione settimo mode."

The image displays a musical score for a prelude by Andrea Gabrieli. It consists of five systems, each with a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music begins with a short, chordal introduction in the bass staff, followed by a melodic line in the treble staff. The piece is characterized by its idiomatic writing, which is free from counterpoint, and its characteristic short, chordal opening followed by scale figuration.

Another Italian, Marcantonio Cavazzoni, published an important collection of pieces in 1523. The first pieces in Recerchari, motetti, conzoni, Libro I are of the same improvisational mode as the preludes in the Paumann Manuscript. Called ricercares rather than preludes, they are closely related to the lute compositions of the same name.⁵⁰

The usual form-giving devices of repetition, variation, and imitation are absent; the chief characteristic is an alternation between sections of different character--scale figurations, on the one hand, and chordal passages, on the other. For this reason, they seem related to the prelude type.⁵¹

The English

"The evolution of the sixteenth century prelude found its conclusion in England."⁵² Although most of the preludes were based upon a cantus firmus tenor or a folk tune, greater vivacity, playfulness, and expressive figuration were evidence of a new, profound emphasis on the development of secular keyboard forms; some historians consider the virginalists' techniques to be the principal basis for modern keyboard writing.⁵³

The earliest extant sources of English virginal music

50. Young, "Keyboard Music, II," p. 168.

51. Kirby, A Short History, p. 45.

52. Apel, The History, p. 221.

53. Margaret H. Glyn, Elizabethan Virginal Music and Its Composers (London: William Reeves, 1934), p. 6.

date from the early 1500's. My Lady Neville's Book, 1591, contains music by William Byrd (1543-1623). The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, containing 291 separate pieces, is the largest and most representative collection of virginal music, and includes music by most of the important composers. Named for its original holder, Richard Viscount Fitzwilliam, its manuscript (Ms 32G29) is located in Cambridge in the Fitzwilliam Museum.⁵⁵ The Parthenia, the first published collection, dated 1611, contains music by Byrd, John Bull (c. 1562-1628), and Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)--the three most important virginal composers.

Of the three, John Bull's preludes exhibit the most complex techniques; his filigree passages exploit the virtuosic qualities of the improvisatory style. He chose to keep his preludes short, rather than elaborate them into the larger toccata forms used by the Italians.⁵⁵

The seven preludes by Bull that are included in the Fitzwilliam Book contain left hand octaves, arpeggios, rapid ornaments, and virtuosic scales of more than three octaves, exhibiting a bravura quality.⁵⁶ Some of Bull's pieces can be compared to piano etudes in that they exploit the resources of the instrument.⁵⁷

54. Kirby, A Short History, p. 56.

55. Ibid., p. 58

56. Apel, The History, p. 221.

57. Glyn, Elizabethan Virginal Music, p. 10.

In the facsimile reproduced below (example 6), virtuosic scales are evident.

Example 6. Bull, Prelude CCX, Fitzwilliam Virginal Book
Book.58

Left hand octaves exist in the following modern transcription of another prelude written by Bull. (example 7)

Example 7. Bull, Prelude CXCII, Fitzwilliam Virginal Book,
measures 10-13.59

58. J. A. Fuller Maitland and W. Barclay Squire, The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, 2 vols. (Breitkopf and Hartel, 1899; Dover Publications, 1963), p. iii.

59. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 260.

In the following prelude by William Byrd, a printed example from Parthenia (example 8), the scalar passages serve as bridgework between full chords distributed between the hands. Trills (shakes) and mordents are indicated by \parallel in several measures, but the trills with endings are written out in measures 2, 3, and 4. After imitating the upper part in measure 7, the lower part assumes for the remainder of the piece the sixteenth note movement previously delegated to the upper part.

Example 8. Byrd, Prelude (facsimile).60

Preludium. Mr. William Byrde. I.

In the modern version of Byrd's prelude (example 9), the precise vertical alignment facilitates easier reading.

Example 9. Byrd, Prelude (modern version).61

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano prelude. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and common time (C). The first system shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a supporting accompaniment. The second system continues the melodic and accompanimental lines. The third system concludes the piece with a final cadence. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks, demonstrating precise vertical alignment between the two staves.

In conclusion, it is interesting to read a contemporary view of the prelude by Thomas Mace, written in 1676. Although he was speaking specifically of the lute prelude, the keyboard prelude is so closely related to it that the observation is relevant.

. . .a piece of confused-wild shapeless kind of intricate play. . .in which no perfect Form, Shape, or uniformity can be perceived, but a Random-Business, pottering, and Groping, up and down, from one stop, or key to another; and generally, so performed to make Tryl, whether the Instrument be well in Tune, or not.⁶²

62. Glyn, Elizabethan Virginal Music, p. 22.

63. John Caldwell, English Keyboard Music Before the Nineteenth Century (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 61.

64. Kirby, A Short History, p. 58.

IV. PRELUDES OF THE FRENCH CLAVECINISTS

From 1650 to 1700, a unique type of prelude flourished in France during the productive reign of the benevolent Louis XIV. Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, the king's harpsichordist, and Louis Couperin, together with Nicolas Antoine Le Bègue, Jean-Philippe Rameau, and many others, produced at least fifty quasi-improvisatory pieces known as unmeasured preludes. The popularity of the piece was attested by the fact that Jacques Champion de Chambonnières was the only major clavecinist who wrote no unmeasured preludes.⁶⁵

Similar to the improvised lute music of Denis Gaultier, the short, figurative preludes were rhythmically free and remarkably fluid; consequently, exact notation was an impossibility.

French unmeasured preludes have three basic problems; they are French, they are unmeasured, they are preludes. These words can easily mislead players into chasing a mirage, a hybrid musical-entity which has no rhythmic regularity, which resembles what he thinks an improvisation might sound like. . . .⁶⁶

There were two principal means of notating these elusive pieces: the manuscript style, consisting of a long

65. Beverly Scheibert, Jean-Henry D'Anglebert and the Nineteenth-Century Clavecin School (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 141-45.

66. Davitt Moroney, "The Performance of Unmeasured Harpsichord Preludes," Early Music 4 (1976): 43.

series of semibreves, and the printed style, incorporating more diversity in its mixed note values and interspersion of measured notation.⁶⁷ D'Anglebert was the only composer for which both manuscript and printed sources exist. In comparing examples 10 and 11 below, one notices that ornaments are written out in the manuscript, while in the edition some symbols are used. In addition, the slurring is more precise, and occasional barlines are used in the printed form.

Example 10. D'Anglebert, Prelude (manuscript version).⁶⁸

67. Ibid.

68. Scheibert, Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, pp. 137-38.

Example 11. D'Anglebert, Prelude (printed version).69



D'Anglebert's autograph score (Res. 89ter) is located in the Paris Biblioteque Nationale. The other two sources of manuscript preludes are the Bauyn Manuscript (Paris, Bibl. Nat. Res. Vm7 674) and the Parville Manuscript (University of California, Berkeley Music Library, MS 778). The most important printed examples of unmeasured preludes, in addition to those by D'Anglebert, are those by Le Bègue, Louis Marchand, Louis Nicholas Clerambault, Le Roux, and Rameau. Only Le Roux retained the semibreve notation in print. His added figures below some of the bass notes clarify harmony;

they are not figured bass.⁷⁰

The unmeasured prelude was influenced by the toccata and the tombeau of the Italians, and can be classified as one of these two genres.⁷¹ Found in Louis Couperin's work, the toccata form is divided into three sections. The outer sections, rhythmically free, frame the strictly contrapuntal middle section, where fugal entries most often occur in the soprano and bass voices.⁷² The tombeau type, set in a slow tempo, is rhythmically free, but dictated in measured notation. It often commences with an anacrusis in the form of a scale rising a fourth (usually the leading tone to the mediant).⁷³

Louis Couperin wrote fourteen unmeasured preludes, more than any other clavecinist. They are found in both the Bauyn and Parville manuscripts. Thurston Dart has compiled a modern edition of the former, entitled Pièces de clavecin d'après le manuscrit Bauyn. Alan Curtis' Louis Couperin: Pièces de clavecin contains preludes from the Parville Manuscript.⁷⁴

These preludes are relatively long--some occupy as many as seven pages of the manuscript. Lengthy melodic

70. Moroney, "The Performance," pp. 143-45.

71. Scheibert, Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, pp. 145-56.

72. Moroney, "The Performance," p. 145.

73. Ibid., pp. 146-47.

74. Ibid., p. 151.

scale passages often oscillate between treble and bass voices. The primary key center shifts and occasional chromaticism produce intriguing harmonic movement.⁷⁵

D'Anglebert's unmeasured preludes are more specifically notated than those of any other clavecinist, but their clarity does not hinder the desired improvisatory effect.⁷⁶ Three of the four suites in Pièces de clavecin are written in a unique style--whole notes are mixed with eighths, and even sixteenths are sometimes used. Sporadic barring aids in clarification of intentions.

As in Louis Couperin's preludes, D'Anglebert's melody shifts from treble to bass, but it is a more continuous line, avoiding the repeated motives or sequences that Couperin employed. The rich sonorities, added sevenths and ninths, suspensions, and dissonances are evidence of the importance he placed on harmony--melody is sometimes an incidental by-product of the harmonic structure.⁷⁷

D'Anglebert's notational ideas were not adopted by other composers since interest in the genre was already decreasing by 1700, and it is theorized, moreover, that the unmeasured prelude was not even popular outside

75. Scheibert, Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, p. 133.

76. Ibid., p. 140.

77. Ibid., p. 139.

France.⁷⁸ In addition, the performance of these pieces became increasingly difficult with the advent of printed music after 1670. As long as only manuscripts were written, the composer's verbal directions were enough to clarify questions about interpretation; after mass production and distribution of the music became possible, the problem of misunderstanding the composer's intentions increased. Fears of discrepancies and inaccuracies forced some composers to delete their preludes from collections of works going to print.⁷⁹ Very few composers were able to adapt and improve the notational systems sufficiently to meet their needs; as a result, few examples of the music still exist.⁸⁰

One man did, to some extent, meet the challenge-- Francois Couperin Le Grand, the nephew of Louis Couperin. Perhaps not wanting to risk error, he left no signed unmeasured preludes. The eight measured preludes in L'art de toucher le clavecin (1717), however, are to be played freely in an improvisatory style.⁸¹ It is important to remember that

many notational unmeasured preludes can be affiliated to notationally measured genres. The notational dress disguises this musical fact, but the difference is for the player's eye, not the listener's ear.⁸²

78. Ibid., p. 75.

79. Moroney, "The Performance," p. 143.

80. Scheibert, Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, pp. 135-36.

81. Ibid., p. 145.

82. Moroney, "The Performance," p. 147.

Couperin Le Grand was one of the first composers to recognize the prelude as an independent piece; he said his preludes could be played with or without a sequel.⁸³ Although he did not use preludes as introductory movements in his music; in his treatise, he recognized them as proper prefaces to dance suites. To him the prelude was prose and measured music was poetry.

A prelude is a free composition in which the imagination is allowed free expression. It is however, extremely rare to find talented persons capable of producing them instantly. Those who use these non-improvised preludes should play them in a relaxed manner without being concerned about strict rhythm unless I have expressly indicated it by the word mesuré. Thus, one may venture to say that in many ways music (like poetry) has its prose and its verse.⁸⁴

Knowledge of performance practice is necessary if the French preludes are to be interpreted stylistically. The correct performance of preludes requires, in general, that passages with themes should be played metrically; those without themes should be allowed more freedom. "The effect should be that of the player tentatively feeling his way towards some more positive thematic idea, or of displaying his manual dexterity."⁸⁵

Beverly Scheibert believes that it is feasible to infer that preludes were not virtuosic pieces because they allowed the player to test the instrument and limber his fingers. Pierre Rechelet remarked in 1680 that the

83. H. Ferguson, "Prelude", p. 211

84. Scheibert, Jean-Henry D'Anglebert, p. 145.

85. H. Ferguson, Keyboard Interpretation, pp. 20-21.

Example 13. Le Begue, Prelude.88

Prelude. En. f. ut. fa.

Before realizing an unmeasured prelude, the performer should 1) establish the harmonic structure by differentiating between basic and decorative notes, 2) analyze the melodic elements by distinguishing between the main functions of the treble clef notes, which may be a melody, a descant, an appoggiatura, an arpeggio, or an inner voice, and 3) supply missing rhythms or phrases.⁸⁹

Shown below is one of Louis Couperin's preludes (example 14) with a possible realization. (example 15)

88. Ibid., p. 135.

89. H. Ferguson, Keyboard Interpretation, pp. 26-27.

Example 14. Louis Couperin, Prelude.90

The image displays a musical score for Louis Couperin's Prelude.90, consisting of four systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The score is numbered 1 through 17. The first system (measures 1-4) features a melodic line in the treble clef with slurs and a bass line with a wavy, arpeggiated pattern. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melodic line with a trill-like figure in measure 6 and a wavy bass line. The third system (measures 10-13) shows a more active melodic line with slurs and a wavy bass line. The fourth system (measures 14-17) concludes the passage with a melodic line that ends in a double bar line and a wavy bass line. The notation includes various note values, slurs, and a wavy line symbol (w) in the bass line.

Example 15. Louis Couperin, Prelude (realization).91

Harmonic structure

A possible realization
Slow and free, ♩ = c. 72

1

5

10

15

Even though this school of prelude composition lasted for only approximately fifty years, the influence it had on subsequent music is significant. A more elegant, rhythmically defined, and richly embellished style is the legacy of the French clavecinists.⁹²

92. C. F. Weitzman, A History of Pianoforte-Playing and Piano-Forte Literature (New York: G. Schirmer, 1897; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), p. 26.

V. PRELUDES OF J. S. BACH AND OTHER GERMANS

During the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth, the prelude was used most frequently to introduce a suite or a fugue, but unattached preludes in improvisatory style continued to be written, especially in France. Johann Sebastian Bach utilized the prelude in all three ways, although the pairing of prelude with fugue predominates in his compositions.

Each of the six English Suites opens with a prelude employing figuration similar to Italian string writing; the prelude to the first suite is the most improvisatory of the six. The large, sectional movements in extended ABA form alternate fugal passages with two episodes.⁹³ So elaborate is the prelude in the sixth suite that it has two movements marked "Lento" and "Allegro."

Although preludes are absent in the French Suites, they are present in some of the partitas, disguised by such titles as "Overture" (no. 7) and "Argumentative fantasia" (no. 6). The fifth partita opens with "Praelambulum."

The D minor and E minor preludes, Book I, in the Well-Tempered Clavier originally appeared in the Clavierbüchlein, compiled by Bach for his son Wilhelm Friedmann in 1720 and

⁹³. James Frisken and Irwin Freundlich, Music For the Piano (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1954; Dover Pub., 1973), p. 55.

1722. Nine other preludes in this collection are included in the WTC*, either in shorter or incomplete versions. The Clavierbüchlein also contains a set of little preludes (S. 924-32), which are unattached preludes ideal for younger students. Other sources of unattached, pedagogical preludes are the Notenbücher für Anna Magdalena Bach in two books (1722, 1725), and two separate sets identified as S. 933-8 and S. 939-43.⁹⁴

Book I of the WTC was compiled in 1722.⁹⁵ Although Book II was compiled between 1739 and 1742, many of the pieces were written earlier and simply transposed or arranged to fit the desired key scheme. Composed for clavier, which implied the clavichord, the harpsichord, or the organ, the WTC was written with three purposes in mind. First, Bach wanted to show that it was possible, with the newly-instated equal temperament system, to play in any key equally in tune. Second, he desired to construct an effective model for students, and third, he hoped to provide a pleasant diversion for accomplished performers.⁹⁶

In many ways the WTC is the most impractical and least idiomatic of Bach's keyboard works.⁹⁷ Many times the

*. WTC refers to Well-Tempered Clavier.

94. Kirby, A Short History, p. 132.

95. Ralph Kirkpatrick, Interpreting Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), p. 6.

96. Kirby, A Short History, p. 127.

97. Kirkpatrick, Interpreting, p. 38.

rhythm pattern, figuration, or texture.¹⁰¹ The first prelude, Book I, for example, employs consistent figuration. (example 17)

Example 16a. J. S. Bach, WTC, Book I, Prelude in B major, measures 1-2.

(Allegretto. $a = 60.$)

tranquillo

Example 16b. J. S. Bach, WTC, Book I, Fugue in B major, measures 1-4.

cantabile

¹⁰². Kirby, A Short History, p. 128.

Example 17. J. S. Bach, WTC, Book I, Prelude in C major, measures 1-15.

(Moderato. ♩ = 112)

The musical score is presented in five systems, each containing a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The tempo is indicated as 'Moderato' with a quarter note equal to 112 beats per minute. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, with some notes beamed together. The piece is in C major and 3/4 time.

A few number of preludes are sectional. Tempo changes in the C major and C minor preludes, Book II, demarcate sections. The E-flat major and F-sharp minor preludes, Book II, have a ternary construction; the F minor prelude, Book II, is written in rounded binary form, complete with double bar and repeat signs. The sections in the E-flat prelude, Book I (example 18), are delineated by the mixture of figurative and chordal style, characteristic of many of the preludes mentioned in preceding chapters.

Example 18. J. S. Bach, WTC, Book I, Prelude in E-flat major, measures 1-18.

Influences from other genres can be detected in many of the preludes. The style brisé, closely related to arpeggiation in lute music, occurs in the prelude in C major, Book I. The prelude in E-flat minor, Book I, is an arioso, associated with the accompaniment of opera seria; other preludes suggest dances.¹⁰²

Despite being paired with fugues, some of the preludes

102. Ibid. p. 129.

are treated contrapuntally. The prelude in A major, Book I, for example, is essentially a sinfonia.

It is ironic that a collection Bach probably never expected to be published¹⁰³ has had a profound influence on generations of musicians. In scope, originality, and choice and treatment of material, few compositions surpass its genius. "It has some of the characteristics, at once revealing and disquieting, rich and provocative, rewarding and overwhelming, of a condensation into a single day of an eternity of experience."¹⁰⁴

Other Germans

Besides Jacob Praetorius, the following organists also wrote preludes containing fugal sections: Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707), Georg Böhm (1667-1695), Johann Krieger (1672-1735), and Franz Xaver Murchhauser (1663-1738). Both Johann Fischer and Johann Sebastian Bach preferred the fugue as a separate movement.¹⁰⁵

Bernhard Christian Weber (1712-1758) composed a book of the same name and intent as Bach's WTC,¹⁰⁶ but J. K. F. Fischer's Ariadne musica is the most important predecessor of the Bach masterpiece. Printed in 1702, the first edition

103. Kirkpatrick, Interpreting, p. 37.

104. Ibid. p. 12.

105. H. Ferguson, "Prelude," p. 210.

106. Ernest Hutcheson, The Literature of the Piano, revised ed., by Rudolph Ganz (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 27.

contains a collection of short preludes and fugues in nineteen different keys. Fischer's preludes are smaller, more unified, and more concentrated than Bach's. The sequence of keys is the same in both works, except that Bach used the major key, followed by the parallel minor key, rather than the reverse (which was Fischer's preference). Another difference is that the key of C minor appears at the beginning in Bach's work, and at the end in Fischer's. Whereas Fischer omitted C-sharp major, E-flat minor, F-sharp major, A-flat minor, and B-flat minor, Bach more fully exploited the equal temperament system by using each major and minor key. Both volumes of Bach's WTC begin with C major and C minor and progress through the remaining keys chromatically.¹⁰⁷

107. Apel, The History, p. 591.

VI. PRELUDES IN THE CLASSIC PERIOD

As a designated form, the prelude is almost nonexistent in music of the Classic Period; the few examples, however, that were composed in that era supply evidence of a continued evolution in the genre. Perhaps the classical preoccupation with form, restraint, and balance was not always compatible with the improvisational style of the preludes found earlier in music history. Sonata form, moreover, demanded the attention of most keyboard composers in larger works, and most smaller forms were dances.

Walter Schenckman believes that Muzio Clementi (1752-1832), the most prolific prelude composer of the Classic Period, played a significant role in the development of the prelude. Before Clementi's lifetime, preludes were usually associated with fugues; subsequently they were usually independent pieces.

Clementi wrote dozens of fugues but generally chose not to pair them with preludes.¹⁰⁸ According to the custom of the period, preludes were written to precede almost anything,¹⁰⁹ and as in Bach's time, they were also used by the performer to become acquainted with the instrument and to

108. Walter Schenckman, "Beyond the Sonatinas: Music of Muzio Clementi," Clavier (October 1980), p. 22.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

"warm up" his fingers. In contrast to the Baroque preludes, the Classic ones tended to emphasize contrast and juxtaposition of unrelated ideas.

Clementi wrote several preludes; these are found primarily in two sources. Op. 19, entitled Musical Characteristics, contains "Twelve Preludes," deliberately written in the styles of five of his contemporaries: Mozart, Haydn, Kozeluch, Stempei, and Vanhall. (He also parodied his own style!) Written in 1787, the set includes two preludes for each of the above composers, but it has no obvious key plan. The preludes are independent pieces, and each set of two is followed by a cadenza.¹¹⁰ They are printed in volume five of the Complete Works of Muzio Clementi, published by Da Capo Press.

A German review which called "Twelve Preludes" "nothing other than human parody,"¹¹¹ is less complimentary than an English one which said Clementi had

minute and intimate acquaintance with the several authors he has had before him. . .and indeed scarcely one of the examples are [sic] without some degree of the spirit as well as the manner of the composer in view.¹¹²

The second source of Clementi's preludes is op. 43, An Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Pianoforte, written in 1801. The following prelude from op. 43 (example 19) is reminiscent of a fantasia in that the

110. Ibid., p. 22.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

The "Prelude in F Minor" (example 21) is a more conventional prelude, reminiscent of the Baroque tradition.

Example 21. Beethoven, "Prelude in F Minor," measures 1-21.

The image displays a musical score for the first 21 measures of Beethoven's "Prelude in F Minor". The score is written for piano and consists of seven systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is F minor (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Dynamics include a forte (*f*) marking in measure 10 and a crescendo (*cresc.*) in measure 17. The score is annotated with numerous fingerings and articulation marks throughout.

Example 23. Hummel, Opus 67, No. 2.

Allegro moderato.

p *sempre piu cresc.*

f *dimin.* *p rallent.*

This collection of exceptionally brief pieces helped pave the way for op. 28, the monumental set of preludes composed by Frederic Chopin. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

VII. PRELUDES OF CHOPIN AND SOME CONTEMPORARIES

The sonata was the principal keyboard composition of the Classic Period; in the Romantic Period, the character piece became the predominant means of expression. It was

closely bound up with the Romantic ideal of the art work as the subjective emotional expression of its composer and that such a view gave rise to a glorification of inspiration as the source of all art.¹¹⁴

Character pieces appeared under many titles: Franz Schubert (1797-1828) used "moment musical" and "impromptu," Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) chose "intermezzo" and "capriccio," Robert Schumann (1801-1856) preferred "novelette" and "fantasy piece," and Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) liked "song without words." Frederic Chopin (1810-1849), however, was the only major composer of the romantic era to label an entire set of character pieces "preludes."

Felix Mendelssohn, the great Bach revivalist, wrote a set of six preludes and fugues, op. 35, in the Baroque tradition. These works exhibit Bach's influence in their use of monothematic ideas. In addition to op. 35, Mendelssohn wrote the three independent preludes of op. 104.

Stephen Heller (1813-1888) wrote a few preludes found in opp. 81, 117, 119, and 150. Charles Henri Alkan (1813-1888) wrote a set of twenty-four labeled op. 1.

114. Kirby, A Short History, p. 275.

Robert Schumann's Bunte Blätter, op. 99, written from 1836 to 1849, contains a "präludium." Besides the "Preambule" which opens Carnaval, this is his only use of the genre.

Included in the impressive piano repertoire of Franz Liszt (1810-1886) are only a few isolated preludes. The Transcendental Etudes and the Paganini Etudes each commence with a prelude, and there is a prelude based on J. S. Bach's cantata, Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen.

Chopin was the most outstanding composer of preludes in the Romantic Period. He wrote a set of twenty-four preludes, op. 28, plus the two separate preludes entitled "Prelude in C-Sharp Minor," op. 45, and "Prelude in A-Flat Major." Op. 28 has been described by many scholars as a synopsis of Chopin's work, a compendium of his compositional creativity:

No work of Chopin's portrays his inner organization so faithfully and completely. Much is embryonic. It is as though he turned the leaves of his fancy without completely reading any page. Still, one finds in them the thundering power of the Scherzi, the half satirical, half coquettish elegance of the Mazurkas and the southern luxuriously fragrant breath of the nocturnes. Often it is as though they were small falling stars dissolved into tones as they fall.¹¹⁵

After reading the set, Robert Schumann remarked,

I must signalize them as most remarkable. I confess I expected something quite different, carried out in the grand style of His Studies. It is almost contrary here; these are sketches, the beginning of studies, or if you will, ruins, eagle's feathers, all strangely

115. James Huneker, Chopin: The Man and His Music (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900; reprint ed., New York: Dover Pub., Inc., 1966), p. 121.

intermingled. To be sure, the book also contains some morbid, feverish, repellent traits, but let everyone look in it for something that will enchant him.¹¹⁶

Franz Liszt believed the preludes were too modestly named and found in them a youthful vigor lacking in some of Chopin's later works.¹¹⁷

Chopin's preludes are concentrated expressions of intense emotion ranging from feverish states to melancholy ones.¹¹⁸ They are "precious gems, in which the whole poetic nature of Chopin shines and sparkles in most diverse iridescence."¹¹⁹

Although the collection is cloaked in the mystery surrounding Chopin's tenure on the Isle of Majorca with George Sand, there does not appear to be any connection between the preludes and literature unless one interprets them as the musical equivalent of the literary genre of the romantic writers.¹²⁰

As in the preludes discussed in previous chapters, Chopin's preludes are usually brief--the prelude in E major has only twelve bars. Also, the preeminence of motivic passagework and improvisatory qualities link them with earlier preludes.

116. Hutcheson, The Literature, p. 234.

117. Huneker, Chopin, p. 121.

118. Oscar Thompson, Debussy, Man and Artist (New York: Dover Pub., 1965), p. 264.

119. Weitzman, A History, p. 158.

120. Kirby, A Short History, p. 288.

In general, the preludes of op. 28 are of three types: 1) a perpetual motion style, with melody hidden in figuration, 2) a cantilena style employing melody and accompaniment, and 3) a homorhythmic, chordal style. The close relationship existing between the etude and prelude in nineteenth-century piano music is especially evident in the moto perpetuo preludes. The figuration is often built from a motive only one measure long, as in the prelude in G-sharp minor. (example 24)

Example 24. Chopin, Opus 28, No. 12, measures 1-12.

Presto

1 *f* *cresc.*

5 *Ped.* * *Ped.* * *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

9 *cresc.*

Ped. * *Ped.* * *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

The prelude in G major from op. 28 (example 25) is an etude for the left hand, but the melody above the rapid figuration identifies this as the second type of prelude mentioned earlier.

Example 25. Chopin, Opus 28, No. 3, measures 1-12.

The musical score is presented in four systems, each consisting of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked 'Vivace' and the articulation is 'leggiermente'. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rapid, repetitive eighth-note pattern, while the right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with slurs and fingerings. The score is divided into four systems, with measure numbers 1, 4, 7, and 10 marked in the left hand and 2, 4, and 12 in the right hand.

The famous "Raindrop Prelude," no. 15 in D-flat major (example 26), presumably given its name by George Sand, is a chordal prelude of larger dimensions in the form of a nocturne.

Example 26. Chopin, Opus 28, No. 15, measures 1-23.

Sostenuto

1 *p* Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

5 Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

10 Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

15 Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

20 Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

Most of the preludes use a variety of modified ternary form, with the final "A" often one-sixth the length of the whole piece.¹²¹ The prelude in A-flat major (example 27) is a scherzo with a second trio, an ABACA form, "a la Schumann."¹²²

Example 27. Chopin, Opus 28, No. 17, measures 1-15.

Allegretto

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system (measures 1-5) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 6-10) continues the piece. The third system (measures 11-15) concludes with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Pedal markings, consisting of 'Ped.' and an asterisk, are placed below the bass line at various intervals throughout the piece.

121. Gerald Abraham, Chopin's Musical Style (London Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 44-45.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The preludes of op. 28 are often not played as a set but various combinations of separate pieces for performance are feasible. Ernest Hutcheson believed that the preludes should not be played in succession because of the preponderance of slow tempi.¹²³

Theodore Kullak recommended an order of study of the preludes as follows: Nos. 4, 6, 7, 9, 15, and 8 are the easiest; nos. 1, 14, 10, 22, 23, 3, and 18 are of medium difficulty; nos. 2, 5, 13, 19, and 20 are the most demanding. In the last group, a profusion of extensions, leaps, and double notes make delicate, legato playing a challenge.¹²⁴

Since the spirit of improvisation was always present in Chopin's playing, and he never played anything the same way twice, one may assume that the repetition of material should be varied in performance. A fresh, spontaneous, variable interpretation must be given priority.¹²⁵

Chopin admired and studied Bach; it is evident that op. 28, no. 1 was written by a disciple of the elder composer. Just as Chopin was influenced by Bach, numbers of composers after Chopin looked to his preludes as models. Chopin himself must have also thought highly of his preludes--of the three pieces played at his funeral, two were preludes.

123. Hutcheson, The Literature, p. 235.

124. Huneker, Chopin, p. 122.

125. Abraham, Chopin's Style, pp. 51-52.

VIII. PRELUDES OF DEBUSSY

To [the] evolution of the independent prelude Debussy added a complexity of materials and a completeness of form, which without losing its essential characteristic of brevity, brought the prelude to its highest point of development.¹²⁶

The fact that Debussy was an admirer of Chopin is more easily discernible in the preludes than in any of his other compositions.¹²⁷ Seventy years passed, however, between the publication of the two composers' works in the genre. It was during that interval that Gabriel Faure' (1845-1924) wrote nine preludes, op. 103, and Ferruccio Busoni (1886-1924) composed a set of twenty-four, op. 37, these demonstrating an interest in Chopin and Schumann.¹²⁸ Attached preludes appeared in César Franck's (1822-1890) "Prelude, chorale et fugue" and "Prelude, aria, et finale."

Debussy's twenty-four preludes, written and published in two books, are independent preludes whose sequential contrasts allow an effective continuous performance. Pairs or small groupings of contrasting preludes frequently appear on recital programs also. Leon Vallas, in Claude

126. E. Robert Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950), p. 129.

127. Wallace Brockway and Herbert Weinstock, Men of Music (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939), p. 552.

128. Larry Sitsky, "Busoni: A Short Survey of the Piano Music," Piano Quarterly 28 (1979-80): 23.

Debussy: His Life and Works, stated his belief that Debussy intended the preludes as unattached, prefatory pieces to larger works (because of the absence of a key pattern), but this theory has not been generally accepted.¹²⁹

Compared to the Images and Estampes, Debussy's Préludes are more concise and single-minded--this confirms the traditional conception of the prelude. In many of the preludes, a similar texture of figuration is preserved throughout, and no distracting contrasts exist.¹³⁰ In "Le vent dans la plaine," for example, the sextuplet figure that suggests a lively breeze is interrupted only by the descending eighth-note chords and the abrupt accented octave chords which portray gusts of wind.¹³¹ (example 28)

Debussy painted the picture he desired with brevity and concentration.¹³²

Most of the Preludes are delicious morceaux raised above triviality by their confectioner's unfaltering taste, perfect sense of the proportions of small things, and sharp inventiveness.¹³³

An ostinato consisting of three ascending tones outlining a

129. Raymond Park, "The Later Style of Claude Debussy," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1967), p. 321.

130. Frank Dawes, Debussy Piano Music (London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1969), pp. 36-37.

131. Oscar Thompson, Debussy, Man and Artist (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 265.

132. Schmitz, The Piano Works, p. 130.

133. Brockway and Weinstock, Men of Music, p. 552.

Example 28. Debussy, Prelude, Book I, No. 3, measures 25-32.

The image displays a musical score for Debussy's Prelude, Book I, No. 3, measures 25-32. The score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. Each system contains two staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 3/8. The music features a complex texture with overlapping melodic lines and chords. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo), *f* (forte), and *p* (piano). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a *pp* dynamic in the grand staff. The second system features a *f* dynamic in the grand staff and a *pp* dynamic in the bass staff. The third system has a *pp* dynamic in the grand staff and a *f* dynamic in the bass staff. The fourth system shows a *f* dynamic in the grand staff and a *pp* dynamic in the bass staff. The music concludes with a final chord in the grand staff.

"Le vent dans la plaine"

third provide the unifying impetus in "Des pas sur la neige." (example 29) The composer himself believed this simple appoggiatura "should have the sonorous value of a melancholy ice-bound landscape."¹³⁴

Example 29. Debussy, Prelude, Book I, no. 6, measures 1-15.

Triste et lent ($\text{♩} = 44$)

pp *p* *expressif et douloureux* *piu pp*

Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé

m.d.

pp *expressif*

Cédez - - - *Retenu - - - //*

$\frac{2}{4}$

"Des pas sur la neige"

Besides being brief and highly unified, many of the preludes have an improvisatory quality. The performance directions at the beginning of "Voiles" promote improvisatory character--"Dans un rythme sans rigueur et caressant" (with a rhythm without strictness and tenderly). In contrast to the continuous "spinning-out" of figuration in Bach's and Chopin's preludes, Debussy's preludes are often sectional. This division is accomplished either by changes in tempo, rhythmic values, thematic material, or by interpolation of rests, as in "Les collines d' Anacapri." (example 30)

Debussy's preludes are more objective than Chopin's,¹³⁵ despite the Frenchman's use of titles--many of which were devised after the pieces were written. Debussy's placement of the titles at the ends of the preludes may be indicative of his reluctance to allow them to become program music. The titles often give clues to the musical techniques and character portrayed within the piece.¹³⁶ In "Danseuses de Delphes," the classic symmetry suggested by the title is achieved by use of clear rhythms, precise cadences, and balanced sections. The tonal scheme, tonic-dominant-tonic, which delineates the ternary form, is also typical in Bach's music.

The preludes are sketches, rather than paintings-- suggestions, rather than descriptions. They are novel

135. Ibid., p. 263.

136. Park, "The Later Style," v. 2, p. 320.

Example 30. Debussy, Prelude, Book I, No. 16, measures 1-15.

Tres modéré

pp

Vif ($\text{♩} = 184$)

pp léger et lointain

quittez, en laissant vibrer

Tres modéré

pp

En serrant

p

quittez, en laissant vibrer

Vif

f

dim. molto leggiero

p

p joyeux et léger

pp

"Les collines d' Anacapri"

journeys through exotic images. "So amazingly does Debussy cut across all the accumulated rhetoric of piano writing in order to probe music's sharply defined realistic associations."¹³⁷

The second book of preludes, completed in 1914, is a sequel to the first, which was completed in 1910. Of the two volumes, the second is generally more difficult, more mannered, and more advanced in terms of musical language.¹³⁸ (All the preludes in the second book are either partially or completely notated on three staves.) The treatment, moreover, of literary connotations is more abstract in the second volume.¹³⁹

A parallel exists between the two books because several of the preludes from each book can be paired according to mood, title, or general musical content. The Spanish idiom is exhibited in "La serenade interrompue" and "La puerta del vin"; American idioms abound in "Minstrels" and "General Lavine--eccentric." An ethereal lightness and delicacy pervades "La danse de Puck" and "Les fees sont d'exquises danseuses," while power and virtuosity permeate "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest" and "Feux d'Artifice." "La fille aux cheveux de lin" and "Brûyeres" display similar musical characteristics, even though the titles are

137. Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, Inc., 1936, reprint ed. New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 152-3.

138. Dawes, Debussy Piano Music, p. 263.

139. Schmitz, The Piano Works, p. 129.

essentially unrelated.¹⁴⁰

The subjects suggested by the preludes include nature ("Brouillards"), supernatural beings ("La danse de Puck"), legend ("La Cathedrale engloutie"), portraits of people ("General Lavine--eccentric"), and classic objects ("Canope"). "Les tierces alternees" (Book II), the only prelude given a purely musical title, is considered a "prelude" to the Etudes of 1915.

The general formal principles of Debussy's compositional technic are inherent in the preludes. Most of the preludes exemplify some type of ternary design. In his use of ABA form, the restatement is often highly modified and condensed--sometimes it is merely suggested. (In "Les collines d'Anacapri," the return of "A" is truncated into thirteen measures from an initial length of thirty-three measures.) The middle section may contain new material or may utilize ideas from the first section. The principal climactic point appears at the center or near the end of the piece.¹⁴¹

All the essential qualities of Debussy's music exist in his piano preludes. The writing is idiomatic, but sensitive orchestral transcriptions can clearly separate the planes of sound into timbres not altogether possible on the piano. A legacy from Chambonnières, Rameau, and Couperin, the basic style exudes clarity, supple melody, rhythmic

140. Park, "The Later Style," v. 2, pp. 320-21.

141. Ibid., v. 1, p. 22.

precision, and formal simplicity.¹⁴²

Viewed historically, the variety and originality of the sonorities in the preludes have served as a vastly important influence on later generations of twentieth-century composers.¹⁴³

142. Schmitz, The Piano Works, p. 130.

143. Park, "The Later Style," v. 2, p. 323.

IX. PRELUDES OF THE RUSSIANS

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), Serge Rachmaninoff (1873-1943), Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977), Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904-1987), and Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) were important Russian musicians who, collectively, composed dozens of preludes. Serge Prokofiev (1891-1953), perhaps the most outstanding Russian composer who ultimately remained in Russia, wrote only one prelude, op. 12, no. 10.

Alexander Scriabin

Scriabin composed throughout his lifetime more than eighty-five preludes, which comprise almost one-half of his total music for piano. They are listed below.

Op. 2, No. 2	(1889)	
Op. 9, No. 1	(1894)	(for the left hand)
Op. 11	(1888-1896)	24 Preludes
Op. 13	(1895)	6 Preludes
Op. 15	(1895-1896)	5 Preludes
Op. 16	(1894-1895)	5 Preludes
Op. 17	(1895-1896)	7 Preludes
Op. 22	(1897)	4 Preludes
Op. 27	(1900)	2 Preludes
Op. 31	(1903)	4 Preludes
Op. 33	(1903)	4 Preludes
Op. 35	(1903)	3 Preludes
Op. 37	(1903)	4 Preludes
Op. 39	(1903)	4 Preludes
Op. 45, No. 3		
Op. 48	(1905)	4 Preludes
Op. 49, No. 2	(1905)	
Op. 51, No. 2		

Op. 56		2 Preludes
Op. 59, No. 2		
Op. 67	(1912-1913)	2 Preludes
Op. 74	(1914)	5 Preludes

A proficient pianist, Scriabin wrote easily and idiomatically for his favorite instrument, the piano.¹⁴⁴ Although his music is not generally well-known or frequently performed, he was an extremely vital transitional figure. One of the few composers grounded in traditional harmony who was able to break away from it,¹⁴⁵ he originated novel sounds and concepts which contributed to the ushering in of the "new music."¹⁴⁶ Study of his preludes reveals the stylistic evolution of his music.

Representative of the progressive trend in Russia, Scriabin began to deviate from traditional tonality as early as 1903; the works written after 1910 (opp. 67 and 74) are the culmination of his style. The chromaticism of these late preludes reached the outer limits of the tonal system and pointed the way to a new use of twelve tones. Op. 74 abounds with nervous, enigmatic, and mystical sound effects.¹⁴⁵ Neither op. 67 nor op. 74 uses key signatures, and quartal harmony is evident in example 31 below.

144. Murray Baylor, Scriabin: Selected Works (Port Washington, N. Y.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1974), p. 2.

145. James Baker, The Music of Alexander Scriabin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. vii.

146. Joseph Machlis, Introduction to Contemporary Music (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1961), p. 99.

147. James Bakst, A History of Russian-Soviet Music (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1966), p. 266.

Example 31. Scriabin, Opus 67, No. 2, measures 1-9.

Presto

pp inquiet

mp

poco

cresc.

mp

Scriabin's early preludes are late romantic works, infused with a legacy from Chopin. Op. 11 is especially Chopinesque in its eloquent melody and ingratiating harmony molded into an idiomatic style of writing.¹⁴⁸

148. Baylor, Scriabin, p. 5.

Scriabin's op. 17, no. 2 refers to Chopin's famous prelude, op. 28, no. 20, and op. 15, no. 3 is reminiscent of Chopin's etude, op. 10, no. 11. "Since Scriabin's development was to be so strongly harmonic in direction, Chopin's music remains at the core of everything he wrote."¹⁴⁹

Op. 11, the largest set of preludes, contains twenty-four in all major and minor keys, arranged like Chopin's op. 28. Op. 13 then begins with a prelude in C major, and the pattern is again maintained through the third prelude of op. 15; there it ceases, never to reappear.

Since Scriabin was a master of small forms, the prelude was an excellent genre for his creativity. Opp. 11 and 74 possess a magical concentration not present in his other preludes, however.¹⁵⁰ His gift for a single, brief utterance can be seen in op. 16, no. 4. The three-bar theme is stated, extended once, extended twice, and then restated.

Thematic content in the preludes may consist of two contrasting ideas, but even in monothematic works, there is always a feeling of contrast and return.¹⁵¹

Improvisatory rhythmic combinations result from irregular groupings such as those in op. 22, no. 3:



149. Hugh John MacDonald, Skryabin (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 13.

150. Ibid, p. 39.

151. Baker, The Music, p. 17.

The perpetual motion element is present in many preludes. Op. 15, no. 2; op. 13, no. 4; and op. 67, no. 2 are a few examples.

American critic Paul Rosenfeld remarked that

the Preludes of opp. 11, 13, 15, 16, 17--all written before Scriabin was twenty-five--contain individual numbers of genuine beauty and distinction. The composer displays, first of all, his intuitive knowledge of piano sonorities. He is playing with the sheer beauty of piano sound and the ingenuity of technical means which may be used for its exploitation.¹⁵²

Op. 74, no. 2 was the composer's favorite prelude. Written the year before his untimely death, the piece was described by him as " a desert, an astral desert. . .here is fatigue and exhaustion. See how this prelude embraces all eternity, millions of years."¹⁵³

Serge Rachmaninoff

Serge Rachmaninoff, like Scriabin, composed twenty-four preludes in all major and minor keys, but in a random key order. Written in three groups, the preludes encompass the period from 1892 to 1910 and are indicative of his stylistic development during those years. The famous prelude in C-sharp minor, op, 3, no. 2, for which he was paid twenty dollars,¹⁵⁴ was commissioned in 1892 by the publisher

152. Samuel Randlett, "Elements of Scriabin's Keyboard Style," pt. 1, Piano Quarterly 74 (1970-71): 21.

153. Hilde Somer, "Scriabin's Complete Preludes and Etudes," Piano Quarterly 94 (1976): 46.

154. Anthony La Magra, "A Source Book for the Study of Rachmaninoff's Preludes," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1966), p. 43.

Gutheil as one of "Fantasy Pieces." Eleven preludes comprise op. 23, written in 1904, ending a period of inactivity subsequent to the failure of the first symphony in St. Petersburg. The final set, composed in 1910, contains thirteen preludes, op. 32.

Rachmaninoff made allusions to Chopin, one of his models, in op. 23, no. 7 (similar to Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude") and op. 23, no. 4 (similar to Chopin's nocturne, op. 62, no. 2). Unlike Chopin, "Rachmaninoff inclined towards a solid and often polyphonic treatment, a broad structure, or towards clear contrasts of musically independent sections."¹⁵⁵

Many pianistic technics initiated and employed by Franz Liszt are also evident in the Rachmaninoff preludes. Among them are 1) widely separated hands (op. 32, no. 4), 2) rapid leaps (op. 23, no. 5), 3) extreme dynamic range (op. 32, no. 2), 4) double grips (op. 23, no. 3), 5) slow melody with rapid figurative accompaniment (op. 32, no. 9), 6) full, thick chords (op. 23, no. 2), 7) octave passagework (op. 32, no. 4), and 8) wide hand stretches (op. 23, no. 4).

Considered by many musicians to be the best of the preludes, op. 32, no. 10, was also Rachmaninoff's favorite. It was inspired by a painting by Böcklin, "The Return." Perhaps his least favorite, op. 3, no. 2, is simultaneously his best known and loved piano piece. Whenever and

¹⁵⁵. Vladimir Ashkenazy, Notes in the booklet "The Twenty-Four Preludes" for compact disc of the same title, perf. by Ashkenazy, Decca 414 417-2, p. 6.

wherever he performed, the great virtuoso was almost coerced by the audience to play "It."

The Rachmaninoff 'fans'--and there were thousands of them in the audience--clamored for the favorite piece of the Flatbush 'flappers.' They swayed toward Serge in serried masses. They clustered about the stage. But the chief thing is the fact that Rachmaninoff did not play It. All Flapperdom sorrowed last night, for there are amiable fanatics who follow the pianist from place to place hoping to hear him in this particular Prelude, like the Englishman who attends every performance of the lady lion tamer, hoping to see her swallowed by one of her pets.¹⁵⁶

Published dozens of times, the piece was never granted international copyright. It was arranged for organ, accordion, banjo, military band, guitar, and trombone. Rachmaninoff even arranged it for two pianos in 1938.¹⁵⁷ He believed that many of his preludes were superior to "The Moscow Waltz" or "The Bells of Moscow," as it was called, and he grew increasingly disdainful that the public would not give the subsequent preludes a fair hearing on the concert stage.

Rachmaninoff's preludes are, on the whole, longer than Scriabin's or Chopin's, but they exhibit a greater economy of material than is present in his earlier solo piano works. In some cases, the entire prelude is built from a tiny rhythmic or melodic idea. In op. 23, no. 9 (example 32), the two motives in the first measure are the

156. Harold Schonberg, The Great Pianists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 374.


157. Geoffrey Norris, Rakhmaninov (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1976), p. 83.

basis of the entire piece.158

Example 32. Rachmaninoff, Opus 23, No. 9, measures 1-10.

Presto. (♩=152)

The musical score consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The tempo is marked 'Presto' with a quarter note equal to 152 beats per minute. The key signature has three flats. The right-hand part is highly technical, featuring rapid sixteenth-note passages with numerous accidentals and complex fingerings. The left-hand part provides a more melodic accompaniment with sustained notes and some rhythmic patterns. Dynamics range from piano (p) to forte (f), with a crescendo section in the fourth system. The score ends with a fermata over the final notes.

The rhythmic figure  appears in op. 32, nos. 10, 11, and 13 as a unifying element. Rhythmic flexibility effected, in part, by cross rhythms, contributes to the improvisatory flavor of op. 32, no. 5.

Some of the preludes are etudes, perpetual motions built around a specific technic. Op. 23, no. 9 is a study in double notes, and the persistent syncopated accompaniment in op. 32, no. 7 is an exercise in rhythm.

Rachmaninoff's own words reveal the importance he placed on the prefatory function of the prelude.

The prelude, as I conceive it, is a form of absolute music, intended as its name signifies, to be played to some function. The form has grown to be used for music of independent value. But so long as the name is given to a piece of music, the work should in some measure carry out the significance of the title. [After the playing of the prelude], the listener has been aroused, stimulated, and then quieted. His mind is alert and open for what follows. The prelude has filled its office.¹⁵⁹

Some of the preludes have introductory notes or passages, hence each of these could be called a "prelude within a prelude." Op. 32, no. 8 is one such example. Several have a postlude, a brief subdued ending consistent with Rachmaninoff's conception of what a prelude should be. Of the twenty-four, fourteen are cast in ternary form, four are variational, four are variational ternary, and three are examples of other forms.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹. Ruth Slenczynska, "Rachmaninoff's Preludes," Clavier (November-December 1976), p. 28.

¹⁶⁰. La Magra, "A Source Book," p. 233.

Two types of melody prevail in the preludes. The less frequent, a flowing melody that encompasses a large range, appears in op. 23, no. 8. More often, the melodic idea is fragmentary and centers around one tone, thus allowing for greater developmental possibilities.¹⁶¹

Op. 23 owes much to the Rachmaninoff's second concerto for its style; nos. 6 and 10 melodically recall the larger work. Op. 32, considered less technically difficult than op. 23, is interpretively more demanding.¹⁶² Op. 32 represents Rachmaninoff at the peak of his compositional power and supplies evidence that he was a fully developed composer "capable of creating much more extended works of deep substance and great originality [than in op. 23]."¹⁶³ Referring to the preludes as a whole, Ruth Slenczynska said, "I know of no more rewarding group of short compositions where such a huge variety of necessary techniques can be learned."¹⁶⁴

Alexander Tcherepnin and Dmitri Kabalevsky

Alexander Tcherepnin, whose early style reconciled the old Russian nationalistic school with the avant-garde tendencies of Serge Prokofiev, composed "Huit Preludes,"

161. Ibid., p. 238.

162. Geoffrey Norris, Rakhmaninov, p. 87.

163. Morton Estrin, "Playing the Preludes, Op. 32," Clavier, July 1973, p. 19.

164. Slenczynska, "Rachmaninoff's Preludes," p. 28.

op. 9, "Quatre Preludes," op. 24, and the twelve preludes of op. 85. The driving ostinato in op. 85, no. 9 contributes to the moto perpetuo style seen in numerous preludes in preceding chapters of this paper.

In addition to the four preludes, op. 5, Kabalevsky wrote a complete set of twenty-four, op. 38, published in 1945, which follows Chopin's key plan. The last prelude, in D minor, cadences in D major. The preludes in the set are based on folk tunes, most of which were chosen from One Hundred Songs by Rimsky-Korsakov.¹⁶³ Op. 38, no. 15 is a simple quotation; others, such as the Schumann-like no. 18, are complex texturally as well as harmonically. (example 33)

Example 33. Kabalevsky, Opus 38, No. 18, measures 3-6.

The image shows a musical score for Kabalevsky's Opus 38, No. 18, measures 3-6. The score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs, while the left hand provides a rhythmic and harmonic foundation with chords and arpeggios. The key signature is D minor (three flats), and the piece concludes with a cadence in D major.

165. Stanley Krebs, Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), p. 240.

Op. 61, six preludes and fugues, are good teaching pieces, and the preludes are more lyrical than those of op. 38. The first of the set derives its ABA form from the simple placement of prelude-fugue-prelude.

Dmitri Shostakovich

Like Kabalevsky, Dmitri Shostakovich produced twenty-four preludes, but his preludes and fugues number twenty-four to Kabalevsky's six. The preludes, op. 34, composed in 1932 and 1933, are neo-classic in style, but superficially resemble Chopin's in their number, their variety, their key plan, and in the fact that each one develops briefly a single music idea and projects a single mood.¹⁶⁶

Each prelude is a commentary on another composer's style, a paraphrase of Chopin, Bach, Prokofiev, Scriabin, Tchaikovsky, or Richard Strauss.¹⁶⁷ The third prelude is a three-part fugue "a la Bach"; the twenty-fourth is reminiscent of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite. (example 34)

The twenty-four preludes and fugues were inspired by Shostakovich's visit to Leipzig in 1950, the bicentennial of Bach's death.¹⁶⁸ A varied, modern treatment of an old form, the work exhibits the composer's fluent technical

166. Richard A. Leonard, A History of Russian Music (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 330.

167. Ibid.

168. Norman Kay, Shostakovich (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 46.

skill and knowledge of sonorities.169

Example 34. Shostakovich, Opus 38, No. 24, measures 1-25.

Allegretto $\text{♩} = 76$

The musical score consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 76 beats per minute. The dynamics include *f*, *ff*, *mf espr.*, and *p cresc.*. The score is heavily annotated with fingering numbers (1-5) and articulation marks (asterisks, slurs, accents). The piece concludes with a final chord in the bass clef.

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Of the Russian composers discussed in this chapter, Rachmaninoff and Tcherepnin were the only two self-exiles from their native land. Despite the loss of homeland and limitations of socialist realism imposed upon those composers who chose to remain in the U. S. S. R., the Russians made significant contributions to the repertory and won immense popularity in the United States and England.¹⁷⁰

170. Joseph Machlis, Introduction, p. 270.

X. PRELUDES OF OTHER TWENTIETH-CENTURY COMPOSERS

Preludes for piano exist in profusion in the music of the twentieth century, but the nature of each piece is as individualistic as its composer.

One such example is found in Ludus Tonalis, composed in 1942 by Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), a modern parallel to J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. The piece consists of twelve fugues, interposed with interludes, framed by a prelude and a postlude. A fantasia in three parts, the declamatory, improvisational prelude begins in C and ends in F-sharp. The postlude, conversely, is a cancrizan of the prelude, beginning in F-sharp and ending in C.

Arthur Honegger's (1892-1955) brief "Prelude, arioso et fughetta," composed in 1932, employs a broken chord prelude as the prefatory movement to the work, which is entirely constructed from the four letters of Bach's name.¹⁷¹

Robert Starer's (b. 1924) "Prelude and Toccata" (1946), "Prelude and Dance" (1949), and "Prelude and Rondo Giocoso," and Paul Creston's (1906-1986) "Prelude and Dance," op. 29, nos. 1 and 2 (1942), utilize the prelude in the same functional manner. (These two composers also wrote independent preludes which will be discussed later in the

171. Kirby, A Short History, p. 395.

chapter.)

Oliver Messiaen

Oliver Messiaen's (b. 1908) eight preludes, completed in 1928, were stylistically affected by Debussy, Ravel, and Satie. Debussy's influence is obvious:

In most of the preludes, Messiaen, like Debussy in his works of the same collective heading, paints a musical picture in which all colors blend euphoni-ously in the creation of a largely unified arti-fact.¹⁷²

Although Messiaen's harmonic vocabulary is more avant-garde than Debussy's, the parallelism, added notes, three stave notation, glistening sonorities, constant reassertion of tonal center, and poetic titles demonstrate the close affinity of the two styles.¹⁷³

Messiaen's use of traditional formal plans, sophisticated harmonic arpeggiation, and occasional long melodic line reflect the influence of Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), who wrote one prelude in 1913. Erik Satie's (1886-1925) stylistic impact on Messiaen's preludes is evidenced by the sparse texture and recurring rhythm of the opening ritor-nello figure in the fourth prelude. (example 35)

"Although eclecticism is pronounced in these early compositions, Messiaen's ability to incorporate such varied

¹⁷². John M. Lee, "A Look at Oliver Messiaen: The Man, His Philosophy, and His Piano Preludes," Piano Quarterly 128 (1984-85), p. 55.

¹⁷³. Ibid., p. 5

influences into a homogeneous product is noteworthy."¹⁷⁴

Most of Messiaen's preludes are built around a single mode of limited transposition--a scale which can be transposed only a given number of times without repetition of a previously sounded note.¹⁷⁵

Example 35. Messiaen, Prelude No. 4, measures 1-9.

Instants défunts

Lent, ému, d'une sonorité douce et lointaine

The musical score for 'Instants défunts' (Prelude No. 4) by Olivier Messiaen, measures 1-9, is presented in three systems. The first system shows measures 1-3, the second system shows measures 4-6, and the third system shows measures 7-9. The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex rhythmic structure with frequent changes in meter. The tempo is 'Lent, ému, d'une sonorité douce et lointaine'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *mf*, and *p*, and expressive markings like 'expressif'. The piece concludes with a 'Modéré' section.

174. Ibid. p. 55.

175. Ibid.

Mompou, Ginastera, Chavez

Another neo-classicist, Frederico Mompou (b. 1893), wrote ten preludes between 1928 and 1944. The avoidance of key signatures, meters, and cadential progressions in these pieces reveals a style closely related to Satie's.¹⁷⁶ The elegant simplicity of his music requires sensitive interpretation.

The Argentine Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) composed "Twelve American Preludes" in two volumes. Published in 1944, the preludes are of various styles. Some are like etudes, others are molded into a particular national idiom, and still others represent different composers.¹⁷⁷

Another Latin American, the Mexican Carlos Chavez (1899-1978), wrote ten percussive preludes in 1937 which use the white keys almost exclusively. The last of the group is the only one using black keys to any extent.¹⁷⁸

Gershwin and Seeger

Several American composers have written excellent preludes--the best known of which are the three preludes by George Gershwin (1898-1937), written in a jazz and blues idiom. Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953), an outstanding but obscure composer, wrote nine preludes, five of which were

176. Kirby, A Short History, p. 436.

177. Ibid., p. 458.

178. Frisken and Freundlich, Music For the Piano, p. 302.

never published. The last four of the group, published in 1930, are laden with changing meters, biting dissonances, and quasi-serial writing.¹⁷⁹

Kent Kennan

Kent Kennan's (b. 1913) set of three preludes (1938) are frequently performed by students, but the set of two preludes composed in 1951 are lesser known. The first of the 1951 preludes is a rather free, introspective piece based on a single motif which is transposed, inverted, sequenced, and varied. The second prelude, whose driving rhythm contrasts noticeably with the first prelude, is built on fourths, fifths, and unisons.

The Kennan preludes are prime examples of a conception of the prelude which is primarily peculiar to the twentieth century--that is, the preludes are intended to be performed in toto, as a suite.

Robert Muczynski

Other excellent examples of this new functional arrangement of preludes are "Six Preludes," op. 6, by Robert Muczynski (b. 1929), "Five Preludes" by Robert Starer, and "Six Preludes," op. 38, by Paul Creston. Each of these tightly constructed collections must be studied and performed as a whole in order to appreciate the cumulative

¹⁷⁹. Maurice Hinson, "Remember Ruth Crawford," Clavier, December 1976, p. 29.

effect of unity and contrast achieved by each composer.

Of the preludes mentioned above, Muczynski's are perhaps the most accessible to students, and the minimum number of rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic patterns in each facilitates memorization. Written in 1954, the preludes were dedicated to Alexander Tcherepnin, Muczynski's teacher.

Robert Starer

Robert Starer, born in Vienna, became a U. S. citizen in 1957. His five preludes, composed in 1965, are a five movement suite: Largo, Molto allegro, Andante, Presto giocoso, and Lento maestoso. Each prelude is remarkably unified by one or two thematic ideas which are sequentially developed. This unity is contrasted by marked differences in dynamics (fff to ppp), mood, rhythmic patterns, keyboard range, and articulation. The playful syncopated patterns of the fourth prelude (example 36), set at the extreme ranges of the piano, are stark contrast to the stately third and the sombre fifth preludes.

Example 36. Starer, Prelude No. 4, measures 1-3.

Presto giocoso ♩ = 176

The musical score for Example 36, Starer, Prelude No. 4, measures 1-3, is presented in a grand staff format. The tempo is marked 'Presto giocoso' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 176. The dynamic marking is *f*. The score shows three measures of music. The first measure begins with a syncopated pattern in the right hand, followed by a similar pattern in the left hand. The second measure continues the syncopated patterns in both hands. The third measure concludes the sequence with a final syncopated pattern in both hands. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

In the first prelude (example 37), the improvisational character is enhanced by the thirty-second note leaps, seemingly out of context in the largo tempo setting.

Example 37. Starer, Prelude no. 1, measures 1-9.

Largo $\text{♩} = 66$

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo is marked "Largo" with a quarter note equal to 66 beats. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first system shows the right hand (r.h.) playing a melody with a fermata and the left hand (l.h.) playing a bass line with a forte (f) dynamic. The second system features a fortissimo (ff) section with thirty-second note leaps in both hands, marked with a fermata and a triplet of eighth notes. The third system shows a dynamic range from mezzo-forte (mf) to pianissimo (pp), with various articulations and dynamics in both hands.

Paul Creston

Paul Creston wrote six preludes, op. 38, for two reasons: 1) he hoped to establish priority for the terminology, and 2) he desired to create rhythmic studies for pianists. In the study of his own music, and the music as far removed as that of the seventeenth century, he identified and formulated five rhythmic structures, four of which are present in music written before the twentieth century. (The structures are called regular subdivision, irregular subdivision, overlapping subdivision, regular subdivision overlapping, and irregular subdivision overlapping. They are explained in Creston's Principles of Rhythm, which was published after the preludes.)¹⁸⁰

Each of the preludes is a study in rhythm; nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are based on one structure each, and the first prelude is based on simultaneous, successive use of all the structures. Unity is also achieved by the one-part form, one meter, one theme, and one figuration in each prelude.

Creston's first rhythmic structure, regular subdivision, provides the foundation for the second prelude in the set (example 38). In this structure, each measure is divided into beats of equal duration, but only the first beat coincides with the first pulse.¹⁸¹

Morton Subotnik's (b. 1933) two preludes for piano and electronic sounds are examples of a new compositional technique applied to the genre. It will be interesting to watch for more developments, but only hindsight will allow an

objective evaluation of the role of twentieth-century composers in the continual evolution of the prelude.

Example 38. Creston, Opus 38, No. 2, measures 1-8.

Tranquil $\text{♩} = \text{about } 52$

pp

XI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has attempted to examine representative preludes from each general historical music period for the purpose of formulation of inductive conclusions about the nature of the genre. (In so doing, I have become acquainted with, studied, and performed several works previously unknown to me that will be usable for personal enjoyment or for pedagogical or performance purposes.)

Numerous primary sources have been consulted during the research of this paper due to the relatively few secondary sources devoted to the subject. Many preludes mentioned in the paper were discovered as a result of random search through anthologies.

Much has been written about the preludes of J. S. Bach, Frederic Chopin, and Claude Debussy, whose pieces rise above the others as landmarks in the evolution of keyboard music. Although Rachmaninoff's and Scriabin's preludes are also known, many others have been neglected or forgotten by performers and teachers. This paper is a synopsis of several of the most important preludes produced since the fifteenth century.

All preludes can be classified as unattached, attached, or independent. Unattached preludes, pieces which could precede almost any other composition written in

the same key, virtually disappeared before the Baroque era.

Attached preludes, those paired with fugues or included in suites of dances, were profuse in the Baroque Period, and, after a dormancy in the Classic and Romantic periods, have reappeared in piano music of the twentieth century.

Independent preludes, unlike the unattached and attached preludes, are prefatory only to a mood or atmosphere. They are, in effect, brief character pieces. Initiated during the Classic Period, they were more skillfully handled and molded by Chopin, and later, by Debussy, Scriabin, and Rachmaninoff.

In the twentieth century, independent preludes most often are composed in small groups. The popular grouping of twenty-four preludes in all major and minor keys coexists with sets of less than ten preludes.

Despite changes in function over the years, the prelude itself has retained many essential characteristics discernible in the majority of the pieces so entitled. The traits which distinguish most preludes from other keyboard genres are: 1) brevity, 2) improvisatory qualities, and 3) economy of thematic material. In addition, many preludes are essentially etudes in their employment of one figuration or keyboard technique throughout the entire composition which often results in a perpetual motion style. Fewer numbers of preludes are sectional and are usually structured as ternary forms; in the preludes of Debussy and

those which followed, the final "A" is often shorter than the initial one (dynamic symmetry).

A selection of preludes for study from each historical period mentioned in this paper may provide an excellent awareness of the development of keyboard technic, performance practice, and style. Many combinations are possible. This can be accomplished on an intermediate level, as well as on an advanced, sophisticated plane, because many of the preludes are accessible to young students.

The prelude as keyboard genre is now more than five hundred years old. In the evolution of keyboard music, it is surely one example of "survival of the fittest."

APPENDIX

SELECTED COMPILATION OF PRELUDES FOR PIANO

- Alkan, Charles-Henri (1813-1888): 25 Preludes, op. 31
(piano or organ)
- Archer, Violet (b. 1913): 6 Preludes (1979)
- Bartok, Bela (1881-1945): "Preludio All Ungherese" from
Nine Little Piano Pieces (1926)
- Beach, Mrs. H. H. A. (1867-1944): op. 81
- Beethoven, Ludwig van (1770-1827): op. 39, nos. 1 and 2;
"Prelude in F Minor"
- Busoni, Ferruccio (1866-1924): 24 Preludes, op. 37
- Casadesus, Robert (1899-1972): 24 Preludes, op. 5 (1924)
- Chavez, Carlos (1899-1978): 10 Preludes (1937)
- Chopin, Frederic (1810-1849): 24 Preludes, op. 28; op. 45;
"Prelude in A-Flat Major"
- Clementi, Muzio (1752-1832): 28 Preludes from op. 43,
12 Preludes from op. 19
- Concone, Giuseppe (1810-1861): 24 Preludes, op. 37
- Creston, Paul (1906-1985): 6 Preludes, op. 38
- Cumming, Richard (b. 1928): 24 Preludes (1968)
- Debussy, Claude (1862-1918) 24 Preludes in 2 books
- Faure, Gabriel (1845-1924): 9 Preludes, op. 103
- Gerschefski, Edwin (b. 1909): 6 Preludes, op. 6
- Gershwin, George (1898-1937): 3 Preludes
- Ginastera, Alberto (1916-1983): "Twelve American Preludes"
(1944)
- Griffes, Charles (1884-1920): 3 Preludes (pub. 1967)

- Heller, Stephen (1813-1888): 32 Preludes, op. 119; 24 Preludes, op. 81
- Hummel, Johann Nepomuk (1778-1837): 24 Preludes, op. 67
- Kabalevsky, Dmitri ((1904-1987): 4 Preludes, op. 5; 24 preludes op. 38
- Kennan, Kent (b. 1913): 3 Preludes (1938); 2 Preludes (1951)
- Martin, Frank (1890-1974): 8 Preludes (1948)
- Mendelssohn, Felix (1809-1847): 3 Preludes, op. 104b
- Messiaen, Oliver (b. 1908): 8 Preludes (1930)
- Mignone, Francisco (b. 1897): 6 1/2 Preludes (1971-72).
- Mompou, Frederic (b. 1893): 4 Preludes (1928); 6 Preludes (1962)
- Mozart, Wolfgang (1756-1791): Prelude (c. 1776)
- Muczynski, Robert (b. 1929): 6 Preludes, op. 6
- Ohana, Maurice (b. 1914): 24 Preludes (1974)
- Palmer, Robert (b. 1915): 3 Preludes (1941)
- Prokofiev, Serge (1891-1953): op. 12, no. 7
- Rachmaninoff, Serge (1873-1943): op. 3, no.2; op. 23; op. 32
- Ravel, Maurice (1875-1937): Prelude (1913)
- Rubinstein, Anton (1829-1894): 12 Preludes, op. 24
- Satie, Erik (1866-1925): 4 Preludes (1912)
- Scriabin, Alexander (1872-1915): (See list on page 68)
- Seeger, Ruth Crawford (1901-1953): 4 Preludes
- Shostakovich, Dmitri (1906-1975): 24 Preludes op. 34; 5 Preludes
- Starer, Robert (b. 1924): 5 Preludes
- Stevens, Halsey (b. 1908): 6 Preludes in 2 series (1952-56)
- Subotnik, Morton (b. 1933): 2 Preludes for piano and electronic sounds

Tcherepnin, Alexander (1899-1977): 8 Preludes, op. 9;
4 Nostalgic Preludes, op. 23; 4 Preludes, op. 24;
12 Preludes, op. 85.

Turina, Joaquin (1882-1949): 5 Preludes, op. 80 (1933)

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