Frédéric Chopin

ÉTUDES Opus 10
Volume 1: 1 - 4

C major
A minor
E major
C# minor

Piano Practical Editions
pianopracticaleditions.com
Some of Chopin’s 24 studies were conceived when a precocious 19-year-old, a period which saw his departure from Warsaw, arriving finally in Paris (via Dresden, Vienna, Linz, Munich and Stuttgart). A fairly early opus revealing the inspired creativity of this extraordinary composer before his short life was beset by complications of existence, relationships and ill-health in western Europe; all twelve studies from this collection were dedicated to Liszt.

Simultaneously published in France, England and Germany, they reveal conflicting details — and were then further tweaked by the composer. Quite apart from the futile quest for precision, and without wishing to encourage a ‘free-for-all’, a wide spectrum for individual readings is available.

To quote Jeffrey Kallberg — Indeed, some of this sense of difference arose precisely because of Chopin’s habits as a composer. He revised inveterately. Individual manuscripts of his works teem with cancellations and insertions. Multiple autographs of the same composition seldom agree. The texts of editions issued "simultaneously" in different
countries during his lifetime frequently diverge. In sum, composition for Chopin was an open-ended process, unbounded by the nature and physical restrictions of the source or the limits of publication. However, it should not be overlooked that his sensitive organism and extraordinary improvisatory gift were constantly susceptible to the influence of spontaneous and intuitive creative impulses.

**Piano Practical Editions**

While a number of commercial editions vie with each other to produce a ‘definitive’ version*, I present an entirely personal interpretation of these études, created nearly 200 years ago and still probably the most significant contribution to the pleasure and frustration of thousands, dare I say millions, of aspiring pianists worldwide.

Cortot, who was usually most eloquent in his appraisal of Chopin’s works, limits himself to a very short paragraph:

*We did not wish to overload the text with any æsthetic observation. It is just possible to establish rules in hand and finger technique for artistic expression. We cannot equally define personality and taste.*

This edition attempts to underline the artistic qualities of these highly imaginative studies, before reviewing the multiple technical problems they pose.

It should be mentioned that the metronome speeds indicated seem to have been added after the autographs. Maelzel’s latest gadget (1815) was a musician’s must-have, but in general tempi are nearly always considerably faster than is musically desirable and reasonable. Although I dislike to commit myself, suggestions are included. Much thought has been given to alternative hand distribution and for what it is worth, my own individual fingering.

With apprehension, PPE admits to ‘adaptations’ of the text (usually marked with an asterisk) and does not reproduce every accent, nuance and expression mark from any particular source. A further consideration must involve a comparison between Chopin’s Pleyel and modern instruments: there is less tone volume, the action is lighter, keys are smaller (the octave span is narrower) and the key dip is eight instead of ten millimetres on a modern piano. A few comments and afterthoughts can be found in the appendix on page 38.

While each étude presents one or more specific technical challenges, the music presented is often emotionally charged and always very satisfying to study. Beyond mere transcendental exercises, they have become indispensable repertoire for self-discovery.

* Ray Alston  
January 2023

*There are no less than 24 editions of the studies, many claiming to be Urtext, including those of Paderewski, Fontana, Reinecke, Klindworth, von Bülow, Kullak, Mikuli, Friedman, Friedheim, de Pachmann, Casella, Joseffy and Badura-Skoda.*
allegro \( \{ \text{\( \dot{\text{d}} \) = 144} \} \)

simile

\[ \text{\( \dot{\text{d}} \) = 144} \]
the entire study in skeleton form
try playing the entire piece in this pattern displacing accentuation to contract rather than extend the hand

left hand finger substitution will visually help guiding the right — to be practised until the technique is automatic with eyes shut
allegro * \( \text{[} \text{d} = 116 \text{]} \)  
sempre legato *
con bravura

[ Sost. Ped ]

ritenuto

a tempo

sf

mp
preneto \( \text{[} \frac{\text{d}}{\text{c}} = 140 \text{]} \)  

_con fuoco_
sempre più fuoco
the entire study in skeleton form
Appendix

Comments and afterthoughts

• phrasing, dynamics and accentuation are not a strict copy from any particular source

• The composer disliked giving titles, and those that have gained favour over the years are often quite inappropriate.

Étude N° 1 in C major page 1

Curiously the set begins without that familiar Chopinesque subtlety which we know and love, and could almost pass for the work of any of his contemporaries such as Clementi, Cramer, Czerny, Heller or Henselt. However, the extended chordal configuration over four octaves provide much physical satisfaction and there are a few harmonic frissons along the way.

Guard against over-practising and using too much permanent force. To help grasp its form, on page 9 I have included a skeleton omitting the perpetual semiquavers). In addition to recommending the Cortot edition preparatory exercises, to achieve a more contracted hand position, another has been added with an alternative rhythmic approach on page 11.

• most editions give $\downarrow = 176$

• 1 and similar passages have been slightly modified

• 29 C is an alternative reading

• 31-40 editorial fingering reflecting the difficulty of playing this passage on a modern piano

• 60 some editions give E↑
A dramatic contrast in dynamics and style — this delicate work is undoubtedly the most difficult of the 24; apart from achieving a light, precise and elegant touch with the weaker fingers, there is a problem of stamina. I make no apology for proposing the omission of a few strategic notes (diamond-headed), which will render the study slightly less punishing on a modern piano. It would seem superfluous to advise against over-practising.

- most editions give $\bullet = 144$
- it can be instructive to vary chromatic technique between legato and leggiero
- 16 modification of text
- 19 some editions add an octave above, perhaps in error
- 19-30 the chord progression is reproduced without chromatics on page 16
- 44 note the subtle difference with 17

an early Kistner edition with fingering in Chopin’s hand c. 1833
Almost immediately after its publication in 1833 this became one of the composer’s most popular pieces, the main theme accessible to amateur pianists. Rather like the Beethoven Fantasy Sonata in C sharp minor (Op 27/2) it has been much diserved by inappropriate nicknames and a hackneyed and sentimental approach to interpretation, dated nineteenth century traditions.

The surreal transformation from the manuscript’s Vivace ma non troppo to the published Lento ma non troppo is worthy of a Holmes mystery and I rely on personal experience and insight to effect a solution. As Chopin clearly wrote, I believe the beat should be in crotchets, the underlying flowing semiquavers murmuring agreeably in accompaniment. Somewhere between Beethoven’s Op 13 central Adagio, and Chopin’s original Vivace I believe there is room for compromise, and I propose an Andante $q = 45$, at which speed the poco più animato makes more sense. It is worth mentioning an abridged version which Chopin approved for his pupil Jane Stirling, omitting the technically more challenging section from 32 — 53.

While recommending the Cortot edition preparatory exercises, on page 22 another has been added for 46 — 54. As an excellent aural preparation for polyphonic music, I recommend selecting any two voices and allocating one hand for each to better control dynamic balance.

• most editions give $q = 50$
• editorial andante (see above)
• 1 editorial omission of unlikely syncopated accents
• 2 editorial alto voice omission
• 8 editorial soprano
• 17 editorial dynamic
• 18 editorial bass voice
• 20 grace notes possibly before the beat
• 41 several editions give F #
• 46 an interesting effect may be achieved by combining the sostenuto and damper pedals for a few bars
Étude N° 4 in C♯ minor page 24

Although this is essentially a study for rapid and light fingerwork, there is much to admire both harmonically and melodically; it is most instructive to attentively play through the harmonic and melodic framework on page 32. Whenever I hear this particular study I recall “Sparky’s Magic Piano”, first heard as a very young child. Despite the implications of its sombre key, we discover a world of goblins in an animated virtuoso showpiece. The trick is to aim for Chopinesque refinement and to avoid Lisztian force in the louder passages. In addition to recommending the Cortot edition preparatory exercises, for a few awkward passages, three have been added on page 37.

- most editions give an unlikely $\frac{1}{2} = 88$ (a Keaton or Chaplin accelerated chase soundtrack)
- 15 A♯ is an alternative reading
- 19 F♯ is an alternative reading
- 21 LH F octave — compare with 17
- 44 B♭ is an alternative reading
- 78 proposed omission

Ray Alston

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- Chopin chez les Radziwills 1829 Siemiradzki