

FRYDERYK CHOPIN, A FORERUNNER OF THE HARMONY OF THE 20th CENTURY¹

- Dedicated to Fryderyk Chopin's 200th Birth Anniversary -

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SUMMARY. Fryderyk Chopin, one of the greatest creators of the 19th century is still enigmatic until nowadays regarding to the energetic – spiritual sources of his music, to the micro and macro systems of his musical language, taking into consideration the harmonic innovations that can predict modern sonorous harmonic elements.

Keywords: Chopin, axial musical systems, geometrical chords, gravitational chords, sixth ajoutée.

There are almost no musical work that belongs to Fryderyk Chopin and it could not has some realizations especially interesting and edifying concerning the birth and the completeness of the music of the 19th century. So:

- The using of the unusual intervals, or series of intervals that predict a tonal axial thinking;
- The demonstration of some musical scales that are very interesting under the form of the symmetrical construction or that of the periodical ones, respectively to some asymmetrical scales;
- The utilization of some harmonies that are built by many more dissonant elements that are situated to different component strata that make a harmonic mixture that can be met all the time even if it is theorized in the 20th century.

We present some fragments which has the role of arguing the above things in a short analyze of the sonorous anatomy and they can accentuate, in the same time their new character (**see the first musical example**).

The harmonic world of the *Prelude nr. 2* can predict the axial thinking of the 20th century. The rhythmic pedal of the voice from the bass did indicate the tonal axis on which Chopin runs his chord accompany, over which he

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develops the tritonal and tetratone melodically structure line. He adopts the scheme of some spaced scales that have the model **3:2, 2:3**, respectively, one time it is **1:4**.

The chord system is born from the overlapping, especially from the harmonically pedal of the intervals of the modal melodically formulas.

In his tendency that is heading towards some neo-modal system (a modal chromatic one), a special role is given by Chopin to the chord of the synthesis major-minor having the implication of the diminished octave. To be seen the chords of the measures:

- m. 5. (overlapping G # - G natural);
- m. 10. (overlapping D # - D natural);
- m. 11-12. (overlapping C x - C #)³

Ex. 1

The Prelude no. 2 in A minor

³ In the graphic of the overlapping of the chords components, we adopted the interval order that was fixed by Chopin in the score, and we did not adopt the usual graphic writing.

These chords are used on a strong beat, they appear as retardation, and the composer alternates them in solving in an interval oscillating movement. However, because Chopin comes to them in an insistent manner, it may suggest his instinctual, irrational but still a well-thought tendency and a rational one, to overcome the tonal-functional frame, by looking for new harmonies, by an exotic color.

However, the solving of this kind of “dissonance” can demonstrate the romantic roots of the harmony of Chopin. Nevertheless, the outnumbered appearance of the chords based on neo-modal principles it has already leading our thoughts to the harmonic world of 20th century. A special attention deserves to be given to the diatonic solving of these harmonic successions that is made by Chopin between the measures 15-21 of *The Prelude* and that made by the “classic” cadencies through the composer ends *The Prelude*.

Ex. 2

The Sonata in *Bb* minor, op. 35

the segment of $E\epsilon E$ (epsilon)

Stability

$Db =$ almost 11 quarter notes

Chord structure formed by the principle of the symmetry

at s t d at

T = the essential tonal axis of the work

the intraaxial Dominant imposed as Tonic

In the analyze that is made to the external aspect (the auditory expression) of the first chord, in one of the bibliographical sources it is interpreted as a camouflaged sixth chord of the first degree from the C # *minor* tonality in his report to the basic tonality. In addition, it is quoted as a variant of the diminished seventh chord of the IVth degree that is sonorous up altered.

In accordance to the principles of the harmony of the 20th century, the chord from the 2nd measure is formed from two overlapped strata. The two strata are in a gravitational report to 9 semitones distances respectively a major sixth ($E-Db / C\#$).

So, between the “hidden” C # of the first two measures and the F of the measures 3 and 4 there is made an interference relationship, a gradually passing from the darkness to the light.

During the 4th measures (eight minims) of *The Introduction*, the presence of the sound Db totals no more than almost 11 quarts. On the basic tonal axis—Bb of the musical work, Db accomplished the function of the intra-axial Dominant. From the length of his duration, and by its outnumbered repetitions, the intra-axial Dominant—respectively Db—it is imposed as a tonic one.

The third measures brings with it a α segment, a geometric chord Eb ϵ (Eb epsilon), it is came to stability only in the 4th measure by a chord that is symmetrically structured.

The presented analyze of the fourth measures is one of the possible interpretations of the fragment. In this consist its charm and its enigma.

How can that Chopin come to this type of the sonorous combinations? It is very simple. It prolongs its value, it gives a special importance, and it overlaps the alternating notes, the passing notes, and the retardations with the real elements of the chords.

The above fragment is similar to a rhetoric question. Only the Sphinx can ask this rather questions. The answer to the question is the musical work.

In his musical works, Chopin does not hesitate to use alterations with an opposite sense to the same note, inside the same chord. See:

Ex. 3

Sonata in Bb minor, op. 35, m. 91-93 (the circled chords)



In the same time, the composer does not hesitate to use the theoretically tonalities. To be seen the measures 85-88 from the same sonata from where there is taking again in sequences, the same motif for four times.

Ex. 4

Sonata in Bb minor, op. 35, m. 85-86



However, there are cases when Chopin leaves the whole musical work in suspension by the final unresolved chord.

Ex. 5

Mazurka op.17 no. 4, in *A minor*, m. 129-132



In our case, as a last phrase of the musical work, the composer takes back again in an identical manner, the *Introduction* and the final chord is a sixth chord of a VIth degree in *A minor* tonality.

Chopin makes an interesting harmonically combination in the *Retransition* towards the last apparition of the theme in the *Mazurka in B b major*, op. 7. no. 1.

Ex. 6

Mazurka op. 7 no. 1 in *B b major*, m. 44 – 46

pp sotto voce

F E D^b (C) B^b E

B^{flat} → D^{flat} G^{flat} → B^{flat}

E D^b B^b G^{flat}

10: 7 4

Gravitational chord

1:3 1:2 6
(1+2+3=6)

In a comparison to the basic tonalities, the sequenced motif in the Retransition, is situated to a descendent major third - *Gb*. The rhythmically pedal *Gb - Db* of the fragment constitutes the chord strata no. 1, over this point, it is overlapped then, in a horizontally development a melodically line of a hexatone structure.

So, the scale that can be extracted from the melodically line in a descendent profile that contains the models **1:3**, **1:2**, respectively, **6**. By the vertical overlapping of these elements, over the basic strata, *Solb - Db* there is obtained a gravitational chord to which the chord strata are situated to a 4 semitones distance (a major third).

Along the years, I came close, in many times to the *Ballad I in G minor* of Fryderyk Chopin. At the beginning, there were fascinating me, in a listening manner, then, it did its rich, harmonically colors, and the melodic lyrics. Later, as performer, the technical solvating of the musical work has created me - I do admit - many problems. The greatest difficulty consisted in the giving the right and uniform and pearl sound of the notes from the passages that had a certain kind of virtuosity. On the third place, the curiosity of the annalist carried me away so much that it made me taking again the musical work that I play it long time ago and I had to decompose its own passages, following their intervallic structure. The result was a huge surprise for me.

Generally, listening to Chopin's music, its harmonic continuity seems to be so natural that it almost draws the attention from its structural regularities.

The shallow analyze that I made can be summed up in two musical examples with their graphical explanations.

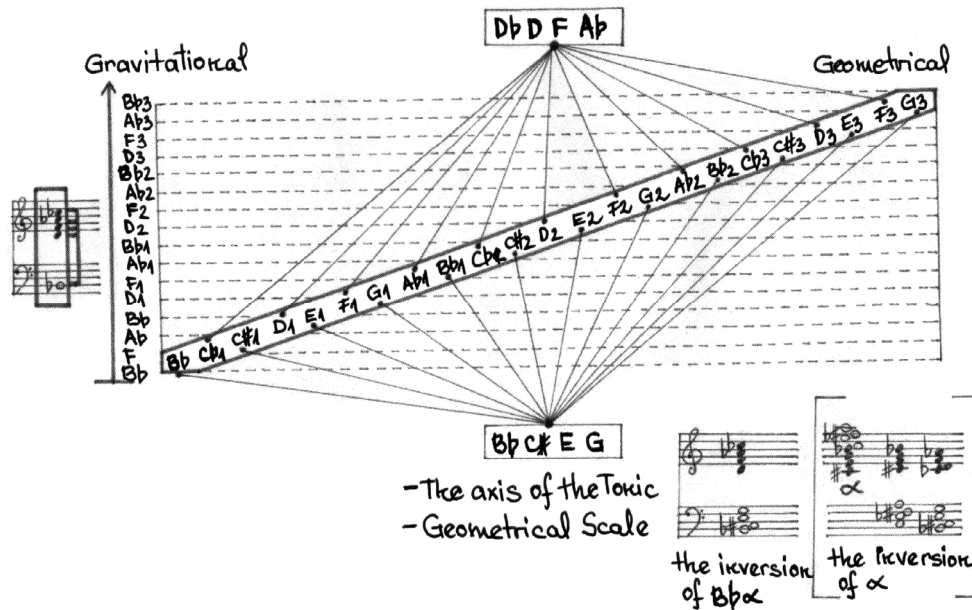
Ex. 7a

Ballad no. I in G minor, op. 23, m. 130-134

The image shows a musical score for the Ballad no. I in G minor, op. 23, measures 130-134. The score is written for piano and includes a pedal part. The piano part consists of two staves: the upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The pedal part is written in bass clef below the piano part. The score includes various annotations such as fingerings (1, 2, 3), slurs, and a 'Ped.' marking with a circled '3' and an arrow pointing to the right. The music is in G minor, as indicated by the key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb).

Ex. 7b

Ballad no. I in G minor, op. 23, m. 130-134



On the foundation of a vertical and gravitational chord pillar, there are running the sounds of an outdistanced scale. In the frame of this one there can be found a kind of model like 1:2; on the other hand, we can find a geometrical scale, which has its own elements in a relation of 3 semitones. The last one is made by the elements of the basic gravitational chord—*Bb*. However, the only difference it has is that *Bb* is replaced by *Cb*. Due to this modification, there is born the model 3:3. The *Cb* sound can be, in the same time, the constitutive element of the model 1:2. In the last model, it can be found both elements of the Axe of the Tonic and those of the Axe of the Dominant.

By the vertical summing up of the sound that are presented it results a *Bb* α inverted chord. The procedure of this inversion is a simple one (see the brackets from the right side of the example nr. 7). The two harmonically strata change their position, in reality. Due to this changing, the report of 11 semitones of the α chord is changing into 13 semitones.

Ballad I in *G minor*, op. 23, m. 150-154

In the last example, on the skeleton of some ascendant scale that is equally distanced (the semitone model **2:2**) that is highlighted by Chopin by using the agogic accents it is overlapping three strata of scales which has their elements in the following reports: **1:4**, **4:5** and **1:3**. The models **1:3** and **1:4** adopt a descendant profile. Only the **4:5** model has an evolution under the shape of a broken line.

By the vertical totaling of the sonorous blocks that are amplified by the sequencing, it results major chords with a major seventh; inside them, the third, the fifth and the seventh are followed by added ("ajoutée") kind of elements that are situated to a minor second.⁴

⁴ The added (ajoutée) elements are characteristic to the French music. However, it must be looked at the fact that the ajoutée sound and the main sound to which it is added this sound form a single sonorous unity. So, in the leading of the voices, the two elements are considered to be as a single sonorous point. To any chord, no matter of its type, it can be added one or more ajoutée elements. The only basic condition is that, the two elements, the

By this combination, it results what can be named in the 20th century, a chords structured on the major-minor synthesis.

The examples that are referring to the theme: "*Fryderyk Chopin—a Forerunner of the Harmony of the 20th century*" can be gone on for quite a while. However, we stop here. In this present, analyze of the right discovery of the fact that Chopin is a great innovator in the harmony of music is not a new thing.

By the 1950s, already, outnumbered biographical sources refer and they highlight the fact that this character of Chopin is present in his musical work. Therefore, they sustain their affirmations by many examples. The new thing is the analytic interpretation can be given to some harmonic moments that are different by their color. On the other hand, it is about some moments that are analyzed so far from a certain point of view, or of the interesting moments to which we can draw our attention.

The study can be looked from the perspective of the history of the harmony. The sonorous phenomenon that is intercepted by Chopin in a horizontal succession (see the examples from the *Ballad I*), it is taken over by other composers (as Wagner, Debussy) in a predominant vertical form. Than, each composer select some specific elements and resonator ones as their nature and thinking, and create a new own language.

(Translated by Maria Cozma)

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main sound, and the ajoutée sound must be together. They are reciprocally conditioned. The most spread form of the ajoutée note is the **sixth ajoutée**. The Rameau chord: *C major*



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