

A Readers Guide to the Chopin Preludes

A Reader's Guide to the Chopin Preludes

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In Chopin's set of 24 interconnected Preludes (Op. 28), we are presented with 24 distinct compositional surfaces, aiming at as many distinguishable emotional expressions. As such, the Preludes stand as a virtual survey of the developing musical manners of the 19th century--which was, after all, the stylistic period in which mood was promoted most energetically and frankly. Under analytic investigation, the technical means to these varied expressive ends can be discovered and assessed. 24 separate explorations reveal themselves to the inquiring musician, who can investigate any or as many of the pieces as is wished or needed. At the same time, the Preludes form a fairly compelling total entity, related by precise balances of mood and key, as well as certain subtler interconnecting details. The individual analyses aim at conjoined descriptive statements that take into account the various separable, but ultimately fused, musical elements: line and harmony in the pitch domain; rhythm in terms of local detail, but also at the levels of meter, phrase, and form; and the various expressive modifications of dynamics and articulation. Form is seen to grow out of the harnessed progress of these elements, which together determine expressive content. The Chopin Preludes, a centerpiece of 19th-century Romanticism, are unique: two dozen distinct moods that seem to summarize the musical manners of the time, they also function as an organic whole. This book is a detailed guide through the Preludes, both individually and as a group. The analyses assess technical and expressive means and ends.

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London: Greenwood Press, 1994. Review by Harald Krebs. The Chopin literature, for