



CHOPIN

14 VALSES
FANTASIE op. 49

FABIO GRASSO, PIANO

General presentation

It would be misleading to consider Chopin's Waltzes just as an expression of the light-hearted side of his personality, related to the attendance of Parisian society circles. The "frivolous" component, objectively limited to some parts of the brilliant Waltzes, is always so deliciously tempered by the highly refined musical taste, that the sporadic allusions to the Viennese Waltz seem to reveal a slightly jeering character, and to make their superiority felt. Indeed, among the 14 Waltzes of the standard collection, the 9 pieces in major tonalities are filled with joyful light, as serene respites from the tragic sense of annihilation of many Chopinian masterworks; but the mastery and the elegance of the writing are so great, that one can categorically exclude any suspect of lack of commitment in the creative approach. Above all, each of them has at least one expressive culminating point, a section or a phrase, but also, wonderfully, just a sudden modulation, an unexpected harmony, a *ritenuto* or a *rubato*, an instant, that still lets so deep inward horizons come out. These concealed features are much more easily perceivable in the 5 Waltzes in minor tonalities, as elegiac veins of melancholy, only partially dissipated by the sweet central major episodes, and sometimes lit with more dramatic colours - but always with the moderation that is appropriate for this musical form. Among these pieces the op. 64 n. 2 deserves a special mention for its effective miniature reproduction of the dualism between the darkness of C-sharp minor (so this tonality is connoted on the strength of the authority of Beethoven's Sonata op. 27 n. 2) and the imploring contemplativeness of D-flat major, just like in the Nocturnes op. 27 or in the Fantaisie Impromptu op. 66.

The formal scheme A-B-A, with several variations, is common to all Waltzes, and, together with the action of the ritornelli, generates many repetitions; but thanks to the richness of musical inventions it is possible for the interpreter, at each repetition, to highlight different details of harmony, sound and

dynamics. The systematic pursuit of this aim is the main feature of this album. In order to achieve it as fully as possible, even interesting textual alternatives, used in historical performances like that of Arthur Rubinstein, have been inserted in some repetitions - it's the case of the op. 69 n. 1 and 70 n. 2.

Like in other recordings, the opus numbers with 2 and 3 very unitarily connected Waltzes have been unified in a single track. So one can listen to them without breaks and easily appreciate, for example, how the numbers 2 of op. 64 and 70 suddenly dampen the joviality of the numbers 1, and then dissolve their melancholic mood into the delicate, comforting smiles of the numbers 3.

One of the reasons of the choice of the Fantasy op. 49 as ending piece of this first Chopinian album is, so to say, its relation of conceptual specularly with the Waltzes in major tonalities. If they are small smiling universes, just veiled by fleeting interrogative shadows, the Fantasy appears at its beginning as a picture with dark colours in the tragic F-minor of the Fourth Ballade, that is, however, soon tinged with gleaming shades, gradually becoming, along the para-sonata formal route, lyric and heroic bursts, bravely opposed to the destroying pulsions. The deep stillness of the rarefied central chorale is masterfully recalled in the Coda, which, unlike the dark, downward final vortex of the 4th Ballade, concludes the piece in A-flat major (confirming a bitonal nature similar to that of the Second Ballade, in which F major and A minor coexist) through a long, ascending luminous flight.

Fabio Grasso - www.fabiograsso.eu

Link to the related video: www.rosenfinger.com - section cd / album

An analytic interpretation of the Fantasy op. 49

We briefly propose a formal interpretation of the Fantasy op. 49, focusing our attention on specific aspects that show various ways of reading the piece. As starting point, we indicate some affinities with other works, in order to illustrate the position of the op. 49 in the creative route that involve them.

We already touched on the relations with the Ballades n. 2 and 4 in the general presentation. A double connection relies the Fantasy to the Sonata op. 35. Firstly, in both works the March plays a basic role, with different outcomes: in the Sonata the funeral March comes, at the middle of the work, to obscure the faint light of the dreamy reminiscence that ends the Scherzo, with its gloomy and inexorable gait towards the nihilistic disgregation of the 4th movement; in the Fantasy the funeral colour of the introductory March is transfigured, as we will see later, in the two triumphant episodes that close the main sections. Moreover, both here and in the 1st movement of the op. 35, there is a temporal ratio 1 to 2 ("doppio movimento") between the introductory section and the following part. Naturally in the op. 49 there is the space for a gradual Tempo change, what is not allowed by the lapidary Sonata's introduction. Just this phase of acceleration starts by a motivic element, to which Chopin gives a special relevance even in other important works (b. 43, 02'39"):



Ex. 1

It's easy to notice the motivic identity of this line, of the ascent at the beginning of the Polonaise Fantaisie op. 61 and of the most connoted melodic figure in the central part of the Adagio of the Sonata op. 58:

Ex. 2 op. 61

Allegro maestoso.

p

op. 58

In this perspective we also have to mention the Nocturne op. 55 n. 1: though with less strong motivic affinities, it also is in F minor, it also starts like a slow march, it also is enlivened by figurations of triplets.

Finally, the two actual contemplative oases at the centre of the Fantasy and of the Polonaise Fantaisie are both built on a theme in style of chorale in B major, tonality that, in the romantic conception of the third affinity, thanks to the enharmonic equivalences is not at all far from A-flat major, tonality of the op. 61 and, as we said above, "co-tonality" of the Fantasy.

Ex. 3

op. 49 Lento sostenuto.

p

b.199 07'50"

op. 61 Più lento.

pp

Probably the op. 49 is the Chopinian work with the richest plot of compositional ideas coming from previous experiences and destined for future revisitings. Its function of laboratory is kept even as regards the formal aspects: like other romantic Fantasies (suffice it to remember the 1st movement of Schumann's op. 17) it aims to reinterpret the sonata-form, and it finds a quite original solution.

The two structural bearing archs, respectively extended from b. 68 (03'42") to b. 142 (05'48") and from b. 235 (09'54") to b. 309 (12'05"). have, in effect, all the requirements to be regarded as an Exposition (E) and a Recapitulation (R) of a sonata-form. The first theme (1T) is a two-faced organism, divided into a minor segment (1T- in F minor at b. 68, 03'42") and a major segment (1T+ in A-flat major

at b. 77, 03'56"). The sequence of modulations which starts here can be considered as a transition (**TR**) to the 2nd thematic group - we understand that this assertion is matter of opinion, given the relevance of some thematic ideas of this section; however, not having here space enough for detailed discussions, we anticipate possible objections highlighting an unequivocal tonal relation: the first idea of such thematic group (**2T/1** b. 109, 04'56") marks the definitive reaching of **E-flat major**, dominant of **1T+**. Maybe it does not give the impression of a polar contrast with the 1st theme, as it can happen (but not always it happens) in the sonata-form; anyway the polarity is already present inside the 1st theme itself. Rather, it seems the final point, heroically reached and vigorously affirmed, of a laborious route of elevation which starts from the 1st theme, and whose conclusion is furtherly emphasized by the episode in faster march Tempo, the second idea of this second thematic group (**2T/2** b. 127, 05'26"). It's the "positive" version of the initial March, as testified by the shared opening descending fourth:

Tempo di marcia .

The image shows two musical staves for a piece titled "Tempo di marcia". The left staff is the piano accompaniment, and the right staff is the violin part. Both staves begin with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The piano part features a descending fourth interval in the bass line, which is highlighted with a red bracket and labeled "2nd". The violin part also features a descending fourth interval in the upper register, also highlighted with a red bracket and labeled "2nd".

Ex. 4

Two considerations have to be exposed about the Recapitulation. Firstly, we observe that it starts from the subdominant - the first two-faced theme is here in **B-flat minor** and **D-flat major**. This method, sometimes used by Mozart and Schubert, allows to repeat the modulating way of the Exposition without any variation, since the route **I-V** simply becomes **IV-I** (nevertheless both Mozart and Schubert like to insert some not functional variations). Chopin transposes a fifth down the entire section **E**, just making microchanges, apparently not relevant, but really so refined that they deserve a pair of mentions.

If on the 1st quarter of b. 83 (04'08", in **E**) we find a simple triad of E-flat major, at the corresponding point of **R** (b. 250, 10'24") the harmony is enriched by a dominant-7th:

Ex. 5

In the chordal succession which leads to the episodes **2T/2**, in **E** (b. 124 (05'22")) we meet an augmented 6th, in **R** (b. 291 (11'38")) a diminished 7th:

Ex. 6

Both modifications affect the final part of a passage, in which arises an expectation for the subsequent phrase; therefore they aim to increase the tension, we could say, to catalyse with a certain impatience the harmonic process. It's easily understandable that the addition of a dominant-7th in a concatenation of dominants produces this result; more subtly, the suppression of the augmented 6th and of the related chromatism certainly reduces the pregnancy of the harmonic colour (here the etymology of "chromatism" is illuminating), but just for this reason it enhances the fluency of the harmonies in their running towards the destination.

Until now we examined the analogies with the sonata-form. Among the reasons for which the Fantasy differs from it we firstly caount the absence of a Development. The sections between **E** and **R** bear no traces of thematic-motivic elaboration; on the contrary, we find there a partial re-exposition (e', b. 155, 06'08") with **1T'** in C minor, **1T'+** in G-flat major (so they are separated by a doubled interval), with a

reduced **TR'** and without **2T**. Subsequently, the chorale episode **C** (see. Ex. 3) stands out, quite isolated, and only echoed by the Coda **C1** (b. 320, 12'21"). Another anti-sonata factor is represented by the constant reiteration, though varied, of the episode characterized by the motif of the Ex. 1, an actual connective segment (**X**), always present between a section and another. The following synoptic scheme

	I	b.1 00.00
	X1	b.43 03.39
E	A	1T- b.68 03.42 1T+ b.77 03.56 TR b.85 04.13
	B	2T/1 b.109 04.56 2T/2 b.127 05.26
	X2	b.143 05.48
e'	A'	1T-' b.155 06.08 1T+' b.164 06.26 TR' b.172 06.43
	X3	b.180 06.58
	C	b.199 07.50
	X4	b.223 09.34
R	A	1T- b.235 09.54 1T+ b.244 10.11 TR b.252 10.28
	B	2T/1 b.276 11.12 2T/2 b.294 11.42
	X5	b.310 12.05
	C1	b.320 12.21
	X6	b. 322 13.17

suggests, in conclusion, various attempts to define this undefinable structure: a sonata-form with introduction and coda, without Development and unusually interpolated; or a Rondò-Sonata (ABACABA) with introduction, modified as

$$I(X)-AB1(X)-A'(X)-C(X)-AB2(X)-C(X)',$$

where B1 and B2, respectively in dominant and in tonic tonalities, act as second theme of sonata-form, and each section has X as appendage; or even, by a provocative inversion of perspective, an Introduction and Rondò with X as refrain. Anyway we can surely affirm that this extremely genial hybridization of sonata-form and Rondò is the result of the most important effort ever made by Chopin to conciliate the models of the dominant European compositional thought with the very personal experimentations, that he constantly effected during his entire life.

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Fabio Grasso, piano

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