

Liner Notes: Rebecca Penneys -- Complete Chopin Etudes on Centaur Records

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)

The idea of recording this body of work came from requests by Eastman students in my 1992 seminar: *The Complete Chopin Etudes*. We addressed the following: Why after more than one hundred fifty years are these pieces still so difficult and fatiguing for most pianists? What made it possible for Chopin to just sit down and play these etudes? What most concerned Chopin, the piano teacher and performer? What were the musical sounds and technical ideas behind each one? Can we catch Chopin's approach and incorporate it into practice, teaching and performance?

Chopin was a great technical and musical innovator. No other composer of keyboard music wrote so exclusively for the piano. This self imposed boundary produced its own infinite and unique world of creative inspiration. His musical and pianistic ideas have had a tremendous influence on 19th and 20th century piano repertoire, technique, and sound production. His voice has even had a retroactive influence on earlier style periods.

The Etudes, or Studies, are the focal point of Chopin's development. They are like a private journal tracing his innermost thoughts and feelings. This collection of pieces displays the immense range of his genius: incredible imagination and variation in handling relationships of form and content, and masterful and breathtaking ideas about touch, nuance, and sensitivity. Visible too, are connections to the rest of his compositions. The Etudes are Chopin's dictionary of sound. They constitute the most formidable collection of musical and technical information needed to play the modern piano.

The two sets of etudes, opus 10 and 25, comprise a total of twenty-four pieces. The opus 10 etudes were written between 1829-1832; the opus 25 between 1832-1836. Each set is created from a large and compelling emotional framework. Three more etudes, the *Trois Nouvelles Etudes*, without opus number, were written for the instruction book of Moscheles and Fétis in 1839.

The needs of his students were the springboard for the Etudes. Chopin was unable to write a method book so he composed the Studies. Written to make a definite break with fortepiano and harpsichord technique, the Etudes explore and convey his views on how the modern piano is best played and how it best sounds. They exemplify a new, richer piano writing that extends over the entire keyboard and illustrate a physiological understanding of distance and finger extensions. The Etudes articulate Chopin's main concerns: cultivation of hearing and touch, rubato as a vocal release, insistence on naturalness, simplicity in playing, rejection of mechanistic concept of instrument playing, *bel canto* singing style, and a sensitivity of touch before virtuosity.

Chopin's ideas and expressions encouraged me to use a more malleable sensuous sound; they inspired me towards a fluency that illuminates simplicity and elegance without losing range of expression. There is no way to understand the full power, wisdom, and magic of these pieces without performing them in their entirety in the sequence of their original sets. They are not playable unless the pianist finds a way to play and communicate without fuss or strain. This project enhanced my knowledge of musical and physical flexibility, strengthening my own views on the relationship and union of physical motion and human emotion.

This is my second disc for Centaur Records. It continues to underscore playing the instrument with great naturalness, flow and beauty of sound. I recorded these pieces in about five hours. Playing these works well truly integrates the feeling and knowledge of most piano a "licks" into both mind and body. The result is an ability to play the instrument and not just a specific corner of the repertoire, eliminating the need for endless hours of repetitive practice. In today's pedagogy, the separation between musicianship and technique is far too great. Perhaps this is part of the reason why the popularity of classical music has declined.

I have included a chart reflecting the main technical issues involved in each etude. Musical qualities are marked in the score; however, notation does not convey how the music is supposed to feel in hands, arms and bodies. Although the subjects seem repetitive, bear in mind that each etude deals with a different kind of figuration. In the two large sets there are twelve etudes that lean toward single notes and twelve etudes that are more for double notes. Chopin's statements and opinions about significant single note patterns as well as double note patterns are indispensable.

Trois Nouvelles Etudes

- #1 - single notes/three against four
- #2 - double notes/RH legato and staccato
- #3 - double notes/two against three

Op. 10

- #1 - single notes/RH pivot finger (2nd)/extensions/hand & arm flexibility
- #2 - double notes/RH fingers crossing over (3rd, 4th & 4th)/hand flexibility
- #3 - double notes/RH legato/extensions/hand flexibility
- #4 - single notes/RH & LH turning/extensions
- #5 - single notes/RH turning/thumb on black keys ("Black Key")
- #6 - double notes/RH legato/hand extensions
- #7 - double notes/RH repeated notes/hand flexibility
- #8 - single notes/RH extensions/hand & arm flexibility
- #9 - single notes/LH pivot fingers (2nd & 3rd)/hand flexibility
- #10 - double notes/RH & LH extensions/hand and arm flexibility
- #11 - single notes/RH & LH pivot fingers/extensions/hand & arm flexibility
- #12 - single notes/LH turning/extensions ("Revolutionary")

Op. 25

- #1 - single notes/RH & LH pivot fingers (2nd & 3rd)/extensions/hand & arm flexibility ("Harp")
- #2 - single notes/RH turning/LH extensions
- #3 - double notes/RH & LH extensions/hand & arm flexibility
- #4 - double notes/LH extensions/hand & arm flexibility
- #5 - double notes/RH & LH extensions/hand & arm flexibility

- #6 - double notes/RH fingers crossing over/LH extensions ("Thirds")
- #7 - single notes/LH legato ("Cello")
- #8 - double notes/RH & LH extensions/hand flexibility ("Sixths")
- #9 - double notes/RH extensions/hand flexibility ("Butterfly")
- #10 - double notes/RH & LH hand & arm flexibility ("Octave")
- #11 - single notes/RH turning/extensions ("Winter Wind")
- #12 - single notes/RH & LH hand & arm flexibility ("Ocean")

Rebecca Penneys Rochester, New York May 1994

Chopin Etudes (complete)
Rebecca Penneys, piano



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Trois Nouvelles Etudes (1839)

- 1 No. 1, F Minor - Andantino [1:30]
- 2 No. 2, D-flat Major - Allegretto [1:36]
- 3 No. 3, A-flat Major - Allegretto [2:00]

Opus 10 (composed 1829-32)

- 4 No. 1, C Major - Allegro [1:40]
- 5 No. 2, A Minor - Allegro [1:17]
- 6 No. 3, E Major - Lento,
ma non troppo [4:01]
- 7 No. 4, C-sharp Minor - Presto [1:51]
- 8 No. 5, G-flat Major
("Black Keys") - Vivace [1:36]
- 9 No. 6, E-flat Minor - Andante [2:58]
- 10 No. 7, C Major - Vivace [1:27]
- 11 No. 8, F Major - Allegro [2:09]
- 12 No. 9, F Minor - Allegro,
molto agitato [2:09]
- 13 No. 10, A-flat Major - Vivace assai [2:09]
- 14 No. 11, E-flat Major - Allegretto [2:28]
- 15 No. 12, C Minor ("Revolutionary")
- Allegro con fuoco [2:12]

Opus 25 (composed 1832-36)

- 16 No. 1, A-flat Major
- Allegro sostenuto [2:37]
 - 17 No. 2, F Minor - Presto [1:30]
 - 18 No. 3, F Major - Allegro [1:35]
 - 19 No. 4, A Minor - Agitato [1:34]
 - 20 No. 5, E Minor - Vivace [2:55]
 - 21 No. 6, G-Sharp Minor - Allegro [1:52]
 - 22 No. 7, C-Sharp Minor - Lento [4:55]
 - 23 No. 8, D-Flat Major - Vivace [:59]
 - 24 No. 9, G-flat Major - Allegro assai [:56]
 - 25 No. 10, B Minor - Allegro con fuoco [3:52]
 - 26 No. 11, A Minor ("Winter Wind")
- Lento; Allegro con fuoco [3:15]
 - 27 No. 12, C Minor - Molto allegro,
con fuoco [2:10]
- Total Duration:** 61:24

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