



The Mazurka Phenomenon in Chopin's Music: Categorisation, Innovation, and Folkloric Origins

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Abstract: Chopin's mazurkas represent a remarkable fusion of folkloric tradition and innovative compositional technique, establishing their enduring significance within the Western art music canon. Far from being superficial adornments, the folkloric elements in these works are intricately woven into their structure, rhythm, harmony, and texture, demonstrating Chopin's deep engagement with Polish folk traditions. The structural framework of the mazurka, characterized by the repetitive 'ostinateness' of dance figures, reflects Chopin's reverence for the dance form, while his sophisticated rhythmic patterns capture the physical energy of the traditional mazurka. Harmonically, Chopin employs modal scales and ambiguous tonalities derived from Polish folk music, enriching the emotional depth of the compositions. Texturally, the mazurkas evoke the rustic sounds of folk instruments, reinforcing their connection to the rural Polish landscape. Beyond their musical dimensions, Chopin's mazurkas transcend their origins, existing as timeless works of art that embody both national identity and universal beauty. The philosophical implications of these compositions suggest that they represent a synthesis of folk tradition and eternal artistic principles, resonating with the mathematical precision and beauty that underpins all great art. Through his mazurkas, Chopin immortalized the spirit of Polish folk music within the broader context of classical composition, creating works that are both deeply personal and universally resonant.

Keywords: Mazurkas, Chopin, Folklore

1. Introduction

Mazurkas by Frederic Chopin - an enigma that captivates the ear, a sphinx whose mysteries have intrigued the imagination of listeners and the scholarly thinking of musicologists for almost two centuries. The significance of mazurkas in the works of Frederic Chopin can be likened to the significance of songs in the oeuvre of Franz Schubert or piano sonatas in Ludwig van Beethoven's legacy. Early mazurkas resembled domestic piano miniatures, akin to the waltzes of Franz Schubert and Felix Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, or Carl Maria von Weber's Invitation to the Dance. Simple tunes of rural musicians became for the Polish composer what ancient German myths were for Richard Wagner, and pagan 'sun' rituals for Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. For the Polish composer, the cyclic nature of miniatures was not as imperative as it was for Robert Schumann, yet Chopin's overall body of work feels like a unity, a more immediate 'meta-cycle' compared to the compositions of any of his contemporaries.

The evolution of the mazurka genre mirrors the development of Chopin's artistic style. Through the lyrical prism of miniature genres, various methods of constructing Chopin's artistic world become evident. The 'responsiveness' of miniatures to various forms of interaction between the author's image and the artistic world itself was not discovered by Chopin.

'Composers employed many degrees of stylistic assimilation, imitation and transformation of ethnic materials, not just literal quotation, and they combined these musical elements with literary themes in national culture, history and landscape to create music that would be perceived as national by their urban audiences' (Smith and Riley, 2016, p. 45).

Piano music was central to the dissemination of national music in folk-music idioms. The main form was the short piece or collection of short pieces with a dance title and a characteristic dance rhythm [...] a dance piece for piano was the most effective way to represent a nation through folk music [...] collections of dance pieces could offer a kaleidoscopic overview of national life, perhaps with fragments of cultures from different nations and regions, moods, times and holidays brought together into an overarching unity (Smith and Riley, 2016, p. 55).

Numerous scholars who have delved into Chopin's mazurkas have underscored their semantic richness and inherent ambiguity, which seem to lead the listener into an enigmatic and somewhat incomprehensible realm akin to what Thomas Mann metaphorically termed a 'bottomless well'. The appellation itself serves as a symbol encapsulating this enigmatic quality. It is precisely this profound inexhaustibility, described as 'unfathomable in itself' by Semyon Frank, that characterizes Chopin's mazurkas. This inexhaustibility, initially concealed behind the simplicity of their external structure, inevitably triggers attempts at interpretation aimed at discerning the meaning-generating principles within their 'internal form', as articulated by Gustav Shpet. These principles relate to the ontological determinants underpinning the genre.

2. Ontology of the Mazurka Genre

The mazurka, a folk genre that emerged during the 19th century in the era of national liberation movements, found its way into professional music and gained citizenship rights on par with classical genres. When Chopin turned to the mazurka, this genre was still in an evolutionary state and had not yet developed a unified, firmly established form. The concept of 'mazurka' encompassed a wide range of phenomena, including not only rural but also urban dances, with several types of dances featuring different local characteristics. Forming itself far from secular culture, the mazurka remained free from foreign influences and stood out with its vibrant national authenticity.

Yuri Lotman explains that among ballroom dances, the mazurka was considered the most important invitation to a ball, the most suitable dance 'for declarations'. The researcher highlights the essential structural qualities of mazurka 'pa's'. Firstly, the eccentricity and sophistication of movements were used to demonstratively display the physical elegance of the dancer, primarily the man, who purportedly 'struts' in front of the woman (Lotman, 2002, p. 496).

As Franz Liszt wrote, in the mazurka, the roles of the male and female dancer are equal: the dance's plot involves the symbolic conquest of the woman. It is not coincidental that an additional layer of meaning emerges, noted by Vyacheslav Paskhalov: 'The figures and steps of the mazurka symbolized moments from the military life of the Poles. The stamping of heels vividly resembles the trotting of a horse...' (Paskhalov, 1941, p. 11).

Hence, the image of a man trying to win over a woman constitutes a distinct structural opposition, corresponding to the principle of agonistic games in Roger Caillois's system. Each manifestation of spontaneity in the mazurka introduces a reflection of another type of play – 'alea', where the whim of chance 'forms the sole driving force of the game', and the player 'merely waits with hope and trepidation for the fateful decision' (Caillois, 2007, p. 55). Franz Liszt himself once heard in mazurkas music in which 'the contrast between the joy of love and the ominous foreboding of danger is evident, giving rise to the need for 'sieszyc bide' and seeking oblivion in dance...' (Liszt, 1956, p. 132).

The second structural quality of mazurka movements, according to Lotman, is linked to freedom and spontaneity: 'Both the soloist and the director had to demonstrate inventiveness and improvisational skills'. The motif of unpredictability defines the beginning of the dance 'plot' where the dispute over the right of the cavalier to dance with the lady in a couple is resolved by chance - whoever receives the handkerchief thrown by the lady becomes her partner (Lotman, 2002, p. 496.). This motif also manifests

in the formation of the syntactical sequence of dance movements, which are the 'result of the personal creativity of the dancers' (Paskhalov, 1941, p. 11).

However, Franz Liszt already noted this phenomenological property of the mazurka, emphasizing its crucial characteristic - fundamental duality, dialogical nature, and ambivalence, which are determined by the specificity of gender relations powerfully actualized in the dance, giving it a vital character. In the mazurka, 'they admire beauty more than wealth, a healthy appearance more than status, unlike the polonaise, where priority is given to social status' (Liszt, 1936, p. 68).

The heterogeneity of the mazurka is also confirmed when evaluating its properties in the context of the structure of the secular ball described by Lotman, highlighting the mediative function of this Polish dance. The ritual of the secular ball as a socio-cultural form of communication between the sexes had its own organization 'grammar' which was structured on the principle of descending from objectively formal, etiquette behavior of high society (polonaise) to the liberation of spontaneous, folk-playful spirit (cotillion). The heterogeneity of the mazurka is revealed through the concept of simultaneous, vertical confrontation of meter as a certain law, norm, and the realm of rhythm, with the irrational, capricious, and whimsical.¹

3. Chopin's Mazurkas

The Mazurka became a pervasive genre in the work of the Polish composer: throughout his life, Chopin turned to it, creating the largest number of Mazurkas compared to other genres. The young composer composed his first Mazurka in 1820 when he was just 10 years old. His final Mazurkas (Op. 57 and Op. 63) were written towards the end of his life between 1845 and 1849. In total, Chopin composed around 60 Mazurkas, some of which have several editions. The Mazurka was the only genre in Chopin's work that he consistently explored throughout his life. It became a 'mirror of the soul' of the composer, as Lev Tolstoy said. He succeeded in poeticising the genre, elevating it to the heights of academic art.

Aphoristic, almost diary-like expressions, sketches from nature, 'obrazki' (little pictures), extended lyrical 'plots' - all found their embodiment in Chopin's Mazurkas from his youth to his final years. They originated from three related Polish folk dances: the Mazur (a folk dance of Mazovia) with its sharp rhythm and accents on the first beat, a variety of accents; the Kujawiak (a folk dance of Kujawy) - smoother, reminiscent of a waltz but with more pronounced rhythm; the Oberka - a livelier variation of the Kujawiak with accents on the third beat of every second bar.

In Chopin's Mazurkas, distinct variations of these dances are evident in different proportions. Tempo is not always a reliable criterion for distinguishing them; the rhythmic characteristics are far more indicative. In the Mazur, we find rhythmic and intonational abruptness and complexity, capricious accentuation; in the Kujawiak - smoother movement with even distribution of accents and greater fluidity in melodic figures; the Oberka is characterised by a faster tempo.

The three following examples characterises all three variations in Chopin's Mazurkas and confirms the composer's keen attention to the nuances and details of folklore.

¹ In the mazurka there is a change in the type of discursiveness: monological discourse is replaced by dialogical discourse according to Julia Kristeva in her book *Semiotic and Research on Semanalysis*.

Figure 1

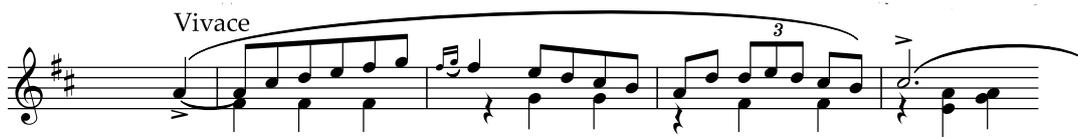
Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in C# major, bb. 10-13 (Mazur's Melody)



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Figure 2

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in D major, bb. 1-4 (Kujawiak's Melody)



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Figure 3

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in F major, bb. 37-40 (Oberka's Melody)



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

In addition to elements of the three dances, the presence of other genres and their elements in Chopin's Mazurkas is noticeable: waltz, recitative, chorale, and aria.

Chopin's *Mazurka in C #minor*, Op. 50, reveals an astonishingly delicate, exquisitely fragile embodiment of poetic principles. The main theme, enriched with descending chromaticism in not just one bass line but four lines (including the melody), contains both a mournful elegy and an idyllic, fleeting waltz-like image. The contrast between elements in the theme reaches maximum depth (hopelessness, inevitability - and the 'glimmer' of a bright ideal, highly chromatic minor - and major diatonic); however, unlike some of Chopin's earlier poem-like Mazurkas, it is presented in a softened and veiled manner, almost as if 'in one breath'. The second 'element' - essentially a sub-theme - is a lyrical Ab major waltz ('fleeting vision' or 'frozen moment', previously characteristic of the middle sections of Mazurkas), which, without any development, 'shades out' by repeating in Cb minor (a unison connection anticipating Liszt's *Forgotten Waltz*). It is the use of cross-genre material that largely accounts for the originality of Chopin's Mazurkas.

In addition to the overarching Romantic premise, there were more specific incentives that drew Chopin to the Mazurka. In contrast to the Polonaises, the Mazurka leaned towards intimacy - a sphere most desirable for Chopin. In his Mazurkas, the composer was attracted to intimacy, the variable capricious rhythm, capable of reflecting all the nuances of Chopin's emotional state.

The capriciousness of the Mazurka can be explained by the combination of a strict framework: rhythmic formula, squareness, accentuation, and improvisational unpredictability: changes in dynamics,

ornamental variations of the melody, phrase harmonisation, texture shifts, and rhythmic alterations. In one piece, whimsy, scherzo-like qualities, epic storytelling, lyrical contemplation, and dramatic beginnings can all curiously coexist.

The capricious and ever-changing rhythm of the Mazurka, with its sudden, anticipated accents and syncopations, opens up the widest possibilities for expressing the 'nervous' emotional temperament of people in the 19th century, especially one as sensitive as Chopin.

The evolution of the Mazurka genre in Chopin's work naturally reflects the composer's stylistic development. At the turn of the 1830s and 1840s, which is after the creation of his preludes and in the lead-up to his 'late' period, the poetic qualities of the Mazurkas reach a qualitatively new level. Starting with *Mazurka No. 26 in C #minor* with its gloomy Phrygian character, most pieces strive to transcend the boundaries of the miniature form. Chopin not only abandons the da capo principle here but also incorporates reprisal into the process of continuous development. The dynamism of the theme imparts a heroic-dramatic quality to the epic Mazurkas. This inclination towards dramatic poetry emerges mainly in the early 1830s (around the time of the composition of his *First Ballade*) when there is a growing desire for dramatic lyricism.

Chopin's Mazurkas are based on the free alternation of themes ('from one melody to another'), rooted in folk playing activities. Regardless of the degree of contrast between the themes, there is always a sense of their 'continuous' alternation, their unity held together by the ostinato Mazurka motion. However, a whole Mazurka often seeks to avoid complete finality. Even a technique like framing (introduction and conclusion on identical material), which typically separates the artistic world from reality, can play the opposite role in Mazurkas, contributing to the opening of the flow of music (e.g., the *A minor Mazurka*, Op. 17, No. 4, and the *C major Mazurka*, Op. 24, No. 2).

Chopin possessed incredible conciseness, but despite this, the Mazurka became his confession, a conversation with himself and the surrounding world. In this aspect, it reveals its functional similarity to the nocturne, with the difference that the musical material of the Mazurka did not provide grounds for an explicit and open priority of the lyrical element. In terms of the breadth of its coverage (within the confines of the miniature form), the Mazurka approaches the genre of the prelude.

The composer endows the Mazurka with a high status, capturing the mechanism of the direct objectification of an ethnogenetic connection. The Mazurka becomes a metaphysical 'umbilical cord' reconnecting the homeland and its son, a connection severed by time and space, where the impossibility of physical presence intensifies spiritual participation.

In this context, the question arises about the phenomenon of the ethnic sound of the Mazurka, understood as the 'possibility of the most accurate transmission of the spiritual world of a person who, containing the whole universe within himself, interprets it, thinks, and speaks about it in a special, unique language with its untranslatable 'mysteries' (Zenkin, 2023, p. 149).

4. Three Types of Chopin's Mazurkas

The scherzo-like quality, almost invariably accompanying the dance, epic-objective genre characteristics, lyrical contemplation, and the lyric-dramatic beginnings are all essential aspects of the Mazurka genre, but they can whimsically blend together in a single piece by Chopin. A constant feature of the genre has become the 'capricious state,' psychological instability, which likely grew from the whimsical rhythm of the peasant Mazurka.

In Chopin's Mazurkas, three substantive types can be distinguished. The developed classification of Mazurkas primarily reflects the dominant character of the piece, the emphasis on one sphere or another, but it is by no means absolute. Such categorisation based on content is highly conditional, and often,

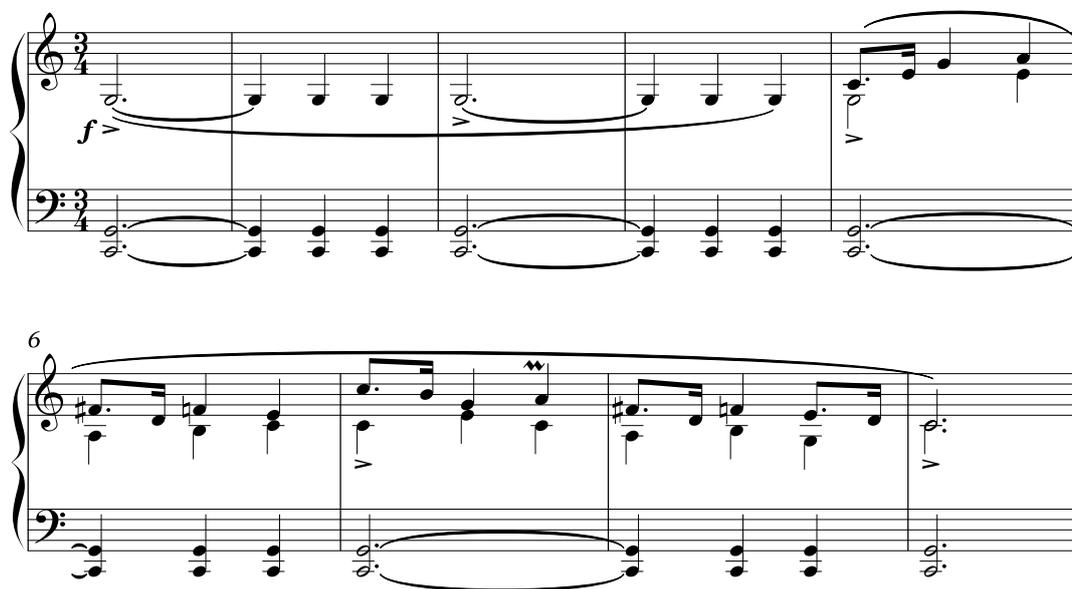
various themes of different character and imagery are contained within a single Mazurka. Chopin's classification of Mazurkas is relative and largely conditional: 'rustic,' 'ballroom,' lyrical, and poetic.

The first group: Genre-scenes, which the composer himself called obrazki - 'pictures' (Op. 7, No. 1, Op. 24, No. 1, Op. 41, No. 4); folk-life sketches, landscape pictures: No. 15 (Op. 24, No. 12), No. 34 (Op. 56, No. 2).

The C major Mazurka, Op. 56, No. 2, recreates the scene of a village celebration. Similar to folk traditions, the Mazurka consists of a series of independent dance melodies. At the beginning, for several bars, a fifth continuously drones, imitating the simple accompaniment of a village orchestra. Against this backdrop, a lively and agile melody with clear, sharp rhythm plays. The music paints a picture of a celebration - a communal village dance. This main theme of the piece loops back at the end, bringing the Mazurka full circle (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in C major, bb. 1-9

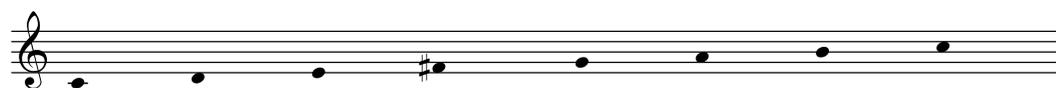


New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The 'common dance' seems to be followed by a solo performance, as was customary in folk dances, where the lead dancer showcases their skill. A new theme emerges: the melody is played in the bass, accompanied by sharply accented chords at the end of each phrase. Following the 'solo performance,' gentle and light music is heard, evoking the image of a girls' dance. Then a new scene unfolds - the 'mill', a playful confusion of dancers. The upper voice persistently imitates the lower voice, mimicking it. The characteristic Lydian mode (major scale with a raised 4th degree), typical of Polish folk music, is especially distinct here, as in Figure 5. Afterward, the main theme of the Mazurka returns, giving the piece a complete form.

Figure 5

Major Scale in Lydian mode



Even in the most realistic depictions of rural life, the playing of village musicians is transformed into colourful and impressionistic strokes, and beneath the dance's surface, lifted for a moment, intimate and confidential dialogues are concealed.

In the *Mazurka in B♭ major*, Op. 7, No. 1, during the middle section, there is a whimsical theme containing augmented seconds. It is played on a double median organ point and portrays the sound of a folk orchestra (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in B♭ major*, bb. 45-50

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The *Mazurka in B major*, Op. 41, No. 2 is full of enthusiasm and folk dance-inspired excitement and impetus. It's as if, at first, the dancing couples can't tear themselves away from the ground, but suddenly, taking off (*sforzando*), they whirl in a dizzying circle. The exhilarating leaps from C♯ major to neighbouring tonalities (in E♭ major, bars 15-19) add to this intoxicating feeling.

For example, Mazurkas like Op. 7, No. 1 (B♭ major) and Op. 6, No. 3 (E major) overall reproduce the spirit of an aristocratic ball with its combination of proud grandeur and elegance, but they also hint at echoes of rural orchestras with booming basses and 'chirping' violins.

The second group: Brilliant ballroom Mazurkas with elegant grace and refined rhythm (Op. 56, No. 2); dance-themed Mazurkas: No. 29 (Op. 41, No. 4), No. 21 (Op. 30, No. 4), No. 23 (Op. 33, No. 2), No. 10 (Op. 17, No. 1).

The *A minor Mazurka*, Op. 17, No. 4, is a kind of lyrical poem where elements of Polish folk dance must blend with elements of recitative and song, creating a complex image.

The *Mazurka in B♭ major* (Op. 7, No. 1) belongs to the group of ballroom dances. It is constructed with contrasting themes. Furthermore, it exhibits characteristics typical of ballroom Mazurkas: sharp leaps in the melody, a shrill rhythm, and a melodic leap of an octave in the final phrase.

At the beginning, a bright, swiftly ascending melody is heard, infused with a clear rhythm. The rapid ascent is answered by a descending movement. Abruptly descending leaps to the seventh and ninth add sharpness and agility to the melody (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in B♭ major, bb. 1-8*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

This theme alternates with two others, forming a rondo structure. The second episode stands out with its characteristic feature: it is played ‘sotto voce’ (in a subdued voice), like the beloved village fiddle playing by the composer. The combination of a unique melodic turn with an augmented second (E♯ to D♭) against the backdrop of the ‘drumming’ fifths in the bass (G♭ to D♭) gives the music a folk character. Finally, the main theme reappears. It ends with a characteristic leap of an octave, typical of Mazurkas.

Perhaps the dance nature of the genre is most freely transformed in the *Mazurka in C# minor, Op. 50, No. 3*. Its main theme, of a lyrical-narrative character, starts as a monophonic chant and develops polyphonically. The lyrical song freedom here so prevails over the dance that the first strong beat is obscured (hidden!), which even the dance pulse gradually reveals (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in C# minor, bb. 1-5*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Elevating itself to a symbol, the Mazurka begins to play an essential role in the process of stylistic formation. In Chopin's hands, the Mazurka ceases to be just a dance, entering the realm of presented music. In the last period of Chopin's work, Mazurkas lose their dance character and become a means of conveying lyrical moods, emotional experiences, and intimate expressions.

The retained traits of dance are just a way of expression, a 'façon de parler'. Dance-like qualities in Chopin's Mazurkas consistently give way to recitation. The melody, in its development, takes on the character of continuous and flowing human speech, conveying the subtlest nuances of emotional movements. In this speech, one can hear sadness, supplication, consolation, or the smile of happiness—each replacing the other in the unified development of the melody. Often, even the accompaniment loses its dance quality, but if it is retained, it serves only as a backdrop for the lyrical-intimate 'verbal' expression of the melody.

The third group consists of numerous major key Mazurkas that tend to move away from the actual dance, conveying more of the enveloping atmosphere of play or tender lyricism, or even both. There are also Mazurkas that serve as reminiscences, where the song-like and aria-like elements come to the forefront. Such Mazurkas are often characterized by the key of A \flat major, which usually imparts a lyrical hue, unlike the psychologically simpler, 'earthly' keys like C, D, G, F, and B \flat major.

Lyrical-psychological and lyrical-dramatic Mazurkas are often tinged with feelings of sadness, nostalgia, and they prominently exhibit traits of poeticism, a tendency towards continuous development, dramatization, and even 'comptonization' of this genre. Examples include No. 22 (Op. 33, No. 1), No. 14 (Op. 24, No. 1), No. 49 (Op. 68, No. 4), and No. 13 (Op. 17, No. 4).

The Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4, is one of Chopin's most daring and innovative works, likely the earliest example of a complete transformation of the dance into a lyrical miniature poem.

The Mazurka in B \flat minor, Op. 24, No. 4, begins from silence, as if it were a mournful thought that the heart initially decided to keep silent about but somehow gives birth to a song – a quiet lament that, after a few moments, turns into a passionate moan. The first 12 bars of this Mazurka start from piano, poco crescendo to fortissimo, then diminuendo – one expressive bar – and again, the growing moan. Further on, it traverses the journey of love: tenderness, trust, emerging restlessness, the motif of a mournful song again, a flash of jealousy, a brief moment of reconciliation with sadness, renewed agitation (*più agitato e stretto*), another passionate moan! It evokes the elegy of soulful solitude (*piano, legato, sotto voce*), followed by animation, rekindled hope, alternating between light and shadow, and various shades of emotions (Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in B \flat minor, bb. 5-6*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Figure 10

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in B \flat minor, bb. 7-8*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The nuances in this Mazurka range from pianissimo dolcissimo to a burst of passionate intensity (*ff*) and are constantly alternating until the feeling fades away. Chopin's characteristic 'zal'² returns with its mournful song, the primary emotional tone of a lonely soul. It gradually slows down and becomes

² From Polish, the word can be translated both as 'dream', 'sadness' and 'memories'.

quieter, fading into the silence of the heart, and finally, it freezes, exhaling one last time in the concluding reminiscence (an expressive melodic cadence on one of the motifs of emotional solitude). It is noteworthy to emphasise the pulsating rhythmic motif pervasive throughout the entire exposition of the composition (Sidelnikov, 1989, p. 127).

This composition belongs to the category of mazurkas described as 'lyrical poems' that portray the passionate sentiments of artistically individual and emotionally sensitive human nature.

The range of emotions in minor-key mazurkas spans from those shrouded in melancholic dance scenes to the tragic soliloquies and reflections. Mazurkas with a flowing, melodious quality, assimilating the intonation of everyday romance, made their appearance in the earliest opuses (e.g., Op. 7, No. 2 and Op. 17, Nos. 2 and 4). However, even in these early works, traces of the dance-like and capricious elements are evident, primarily in the lightning-fast, unexpected melodic leaps and twists.

Chopin retained its dance basis of the mazurka primarily as an occasion for a purely lyrical statement. Such vocally inspired mazurkas could lack the punctuated rhythm and rhythmic sharpness that are essential characteristics of the genre as a whole (examples include Op. 50, No. 3 in C# minor, Op. 63, No. 3, Op. 63, No. 2 in F minor, and Op. 68, No. 4).

One of the most vivid examples of a miniature poem is *Mazurka in B♭ minor*, Op. 24, No. 4. Its poetic quality is achieved through very subtle 'micro-dramaturgical' elements. The main theme, following a classical sixteen-bar dance structure, presents a unified and complete state, albeit one that is revealed through its inner development and growth. The four-bar introduction can be seen as a state of near 'indefiniteness' or 'searching.' Two chromatic lines, converging like 'incorporeal' contours, gradually coalesce into a dance melody, initially sounding like a distant memory but gradually gaining power and pathos (Figure 11). The middle section of the main part resembles Chopin's elegant and rapid waltzes and thus, in relation to the first, subjectively lyrical theme, appears as something 'external' or 'background.'

Figure 11

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in B♭ minor, bb. 1-11

The musical score for Chopin's Mazurka in B♭ minor, Op. 24, No. 4, measures 1-11, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a tempo marking of *Moderato*. The melody in the right hand is characterized by a chromatic line that gradually gains intensity, marked with *poco a poco*. The left hand provides a simple harmonic accompaniment. The second system (measures 7-11) starts with a *cresc.* marking and leads to a fortissimo (*ff*) section. The melody continues with more complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic contrast. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The concentration of poetic qualities in this mazurka is linked to the coda, precisely twice the length of the reprise. Essentially, it serves as a lyrical epilogue consisting of two stages: the tragic ‘romance-elegy’ in a dance rhythm is succeeded by an ‘enlightenment’ (B \flat major), subtly reflecting the material of the central ‘folkloric’ theme. Thus, the intonation of E \flat , C, and B \flat in the mentioned theme (major third and major second, forming a tritone) transforms into C, B \flat and G \flat (Figures 12 and 13).

Figure 12

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in B \flat minor, bb. 54-59

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Figure 13

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in B \flat minor, bb. 126-136

In the major-key epilogue, there is also a ‘dialogue’ between an unpretentious melody (major diatonic) and the ‘constricting’ tritonal intonation—only now both elements appear in a lyrical context.

The concept of genres in Chopin’s music is an open system that develops naturally over time. It contains nothing immutably fixed or predetermined by something outside the author’s will. The system’s freedom lies in its creative and, at the same time, romantically comprehensive exploration and transcendence of certain genres, traditions, and ‘conditions’. The openness, flexibility, and comprehensiveness of the system, as well as the interrelation and interpenetration of its elements (also always open and flexible), are all determined by the specifics of the romantic method, which manifested itself harmoniously in Chopin’s work, uniting its irreconcilably opposing tendencies.

The ‘absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses’ (Friedrich Schlegel) functions as an attribute of romantic creativity. In Chopin’s music (in individual works, within the scope of a genre, and throughout

his entire body of work), this sense of the highest order and universal harmony distinctly emerges through the romantic spontaneity. It is certainly not a rationalistic 'foundation' but rather an awareness of the highest regularity and universal harmony.

5. Folklore Origins in Chopin's Mazurkas

The folkloric origins manifest differently in Frederic Chopin's mazurkas: in the whimsy of rhythm, the variability of accents, and the disruption of periodicity; in the peculiarities of texture that mimic the techniques of rural musicianship (for instance, the double quintessential organ points that replicate the sounds of a violin or double bass; melismas on triplets, mimicking the play of the Polish folk instrument - the fujara³); and in the extensive use of variation and improvisation in the development of themes.

The syncretism of folkloric sensibilities in Chopin's mazurkas emerges from the basis of a purely romantic interpenetration of poetry and reality, the 'self' and the world, subject and object, psychology, and nature. This unity, which is inherent to Chopin but particularly vividly expressed in the mazurkas, connects them with Schumann's 'portraits': immediately, the most visible, tangible phenomenon, movement, or gesture is interpreted as emotions, lyrical reflections, and experiences. The methods of artistic vision themselves merge into an inseparable unity, with each mazurka presenting something new, different, and individualised, depending on the measure and proportions of its components.

The distinctiveness of Chopin's mazurkas resides in their profound engagement with folk musical culture, extending beyond specific linguistic attributes such as rhythmic and modal elements. This influence permeates the entirety of the mazurka genre, profoundly shaping its aesthetic underpinnings and exerting an impact across all strata of its artistic composition. Notably, unlike folk culture, which primarily serves utilitarian functions within the context of daily life, Romantic art actively aspires to integrate itself into the intricate realm of the human spirit, effectively perpetuating its existence therein. In this vein, life takes on a quasi-utilitarian role, effectively becoming 'applied' to the domain of artistic creation.

Chopin, a seminal figure in the Romantic movement, embarked on a transformative reinterpretation of the improvisational aspects inherent in folk music forms, thereby departing from the structured preludes prevalent during the Baroque period. Concurrently, within Chopin's mazurkas-poems, the vectorial temporality intrinsic to Romantic artistic expression coexists harmoniously with elements of contemplative lyricism. This coexistence encapsulates instances of temporal suspension or, metaphorically, a 'frozen moment'. The fusion of diverse and profoundly Romantic modes of artistic vision culminates in the distinctive diversity and intricate 'capriciousness' emblematic of the mazurka genre, as refracted through the prism of Chopin's artistic sensibilities.

Chopin's historical significance is underscored by his profound and expansive synthesis of rural and urban intonations rooted in folklore. The melodious and partly harmonic attributes found in Chopin's mazurkas, which are notably vibrant and trace their origins to the wellsprings of musical folklore, serve as illustrative examples. One noteworthy feature is the liberal employment of melismas, primarily in the form of grace notes, employed as a means of infusing intonational dynamism and ornamental diversity. Such melismas within Chopin's compositions, a trait subsequently echoed in the works of Edvard Grieg, consistently bear the indelible mark of their origin in the violin, owing to the prevailing role of the violin as a folk melodic instrument.

³ The fujara is a type of three-hole transverse flute that generates sound by directing the airflow to the edge rather than the reed. The fujara is characterised by its remarkable ability to have a wide dynamic range, spanning two and a half octaves and including eleven different levels of overtones.

Additionally, Chopin's mazurkas incorporate imitations of specific techniques employed in rural musical performance, exemplified by the inclusion of descending chromatic passages (as evident in the central segment of Mazurka Op. 17 No. 2 and the Coda of Mazurka Op. 33 No. 2).

Another facet of this musical tapestry lies in the deliberate utilization of straightforward and ostinato tonic-dominant alternations, discernible in compositions such as Mazurkas Op. 7 No. 5, Op. 24 No. 2, and Op. 33 No. 3.

Expressive possibilities of ostinato are intriguingly employed in the middle sections of certain minor mazurkas (Op. 17 No. 2, Op. 24 No. 1, Op. 30 No. 2, Op. 41 No. 2, and others). Dance figures are woven into the context of lyrical contemplation, and folk-genre elements blend with other genres (barcarole, waltz, romantic pastoral) and are absorbed by them. In such major episodes (often marked as 'dolce'), ostinato becomes a means of hypnotic focus on a thought that acquires the strength of an *idée fixe*. Even drone fifths (organ point) become a psychological factor, introducing a sense of inertia, tranquillity, and intensifying the state of immersion in memories (of a distant and unattainable homeland). Such pauses are typically associated with the contemplation of an ideal, a tantalizing romantic dream. A similar role is played by the 'mazurka' *Prelude in A Major* in the Op. 28 cycle.

The extensive use of ostinato fifths, sustained organ points imitating the accompaniment of the violin or double bass (beginnings of mazurkas Op. 6 No. 2 and 3, middle sections of mazurkas Op. 17 No. 2 and 4, Op. 68 No. 3, or the introduction of mazurka Op. 56 No. 2). Just as Beethoven, in the first movement of his Fifth Symphony, managed to create a work of astonishing dramatic power based on the repetitive, almost ostinato-like motif, Chopin, through the means of naive folk dance, reveals a deep and complex inner world. In the mazurkas in C# minor Op. 50; F minor Op. 68, C# minor Op. 33, dance associations recede far into the background.

At the heart of Chopin's mazurkas lies the free alternation of themes ('from melody to melody'), harkening back to folk playfulness. Regardless of the degree of contrast between the themes, there is always a sense of their unbroken 'continual' alternation, their unity bound by the mazurka's ostinato movement.

This is the use of 'natural' turns, distinct from the turns of European major and minor scales. Chopin maximises the expressive possibilities of each mode. For instance, the Lydian mode, with its specificity - major third and augmented fourth - conveys a mood of joy and folk celebration.

Examples of such mazurkas are Op. 24 No. 2 in C major, Op. 56 No. 2 in C major, Op. 68 No. 3 in F major, as well as Mazurkas No. 56 in B \flat major and No. 57 in C major. In Op. 68 No. 3 in F major, the main theme exhibits heroic characteristics, reflected in its chordal texture and dotted rhythm, imparting a sense of march-like quality (Figure 14).

Figure 14

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in F major, bb. 1-7*

Allegro, ma non troppo

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The descending sequence incorporates both modal change and plagal cadence (F-D-Bb), all of which, in combination with the forte dynamics, create an image of resolute courage.

In stark contrast to the main theme is the middle section, which portrays a genre picture of folk revelry. Here, it is indeed the Lydian mode that serves the primary expressive function (Figure 15).

Figure 15

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in F major, bb. 32-46*

Poco piu vivo.

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

When creating his mazurkas, Chopin was maximally close to folklore, not only in terms of intonation and rhythm but also concerning their forms. A significant portion of the mazurkas is characterized by the simplicity of their forms, resembling fragments of folk-dance music with its characteristic alternations of dance rhythms.

This transformation is not limited to elegies and mournful compositions but is also observed in brilliant ballroom and scherzo-like mazurkas (Op. 50 No. 1 in G major, Op. 56 No. 1 in B major). Here, Chopin not only abandons the da capo but also involves the reprise in the process of continuous development. The dynamic treatment of the theme leading to the transformation of the image (a characteristic feature of the ballad genre) imparts a heroic and dramatic element to the epic mazurkas (Op. 41 No. 1 and 2, respectively in C# minor and E minor, both with a restrainedly somber Phrygian hue).

In subsequent compositions, another method of varying the reprise is employed - polyphony. Such are the mazurkas Op. 50 No. 3 in C# minor and Op. 63 No. 3, all three mazurkas Op. 59.

In Mazurka Op. 68 No. 3, the key of F major is established twice, in a cadential four-bar phrase at the end of the first section and at the very end. At other moments, it is coloured with the Lydian fourth – initially as F-B \natural (correctly marked in the Oxford edition in the 4th bar of the main melody), and then in the trio as B \flat -E \natural . This transformation turns the trio into a F major with Lydian inclination, rendering the entire mazurka a vivid folk modal unity.

Certain features of the folkloric element can have varying interpretations in different mazurkas. In the so-called 'obrazki,' they resemble the sound of violins, while in Mazurka Op. 6 No. 2, they have a rather somber tone. Natural modal turns (referring to the Dorian and Lydian modes) serve not only as a source of distinctive colour but also occasionally reflect heightened expressiveness.

In the concise *Mazurka in C major* characterised by the Mixolydian mode, Op. 7 No. 5, there are intriguing details in the ligatures that lend capriciousness and whimsy to the phrasing. Particularly noteworthy are the chord progressions accompanying the third beat of the measure, which do not align with the overall measure of the melody or even with the smaller textural ligatures (Figure 16).

Figure 16

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in C major, bb. 8-11



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

In these four links or four measures that make up the entire mazurka, what's striking is the 'life of rhythm' within the framework of the simplest melodic structure.

In *Mazurka in C Major*, Op. 24, No. 2, Chopin employs a diatonic scale on the white keys, which results in pronounced modal shifts, and signs of different diatonic modes can be discovered. The Lydian mode in F with its characteristic ritenuto on the B modal degree is particularly evident in bars 27-28 (Figure 17).

Figure 17

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in C Major, bb. 24-28*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

In *Mazurka in C Major*, Op. 56, No. 2, the 'flickering' between the IV degree of the Lydian mode and the IV degree of the natural C Major scale creates a playful effect (Figure 18).

Figure 18

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in C Major, bb. 6-9*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

However, it's the cadence that firmly establishes the Lydian character (Figure 19).

Figure 19

Frederic Chopin, *Mazurka in C Major, bb. 77-84*



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Often, in Chopin's compositions, the cadence becomes the focal point for modal characteristics. For instance, in *Mazurka in D Major*, Op. 33, No. 2, only the final cadence outlines the Lydian mode (Figure 20).

Figure 20

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in D Major, bb. 129-135

2 **smorzando**

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The Phrygian mode, with its minor third and lowered second degree, has always carried a tragic semantic load. This is particularly evident in *Mazurka in C# Minor*, Op. 41, No. 1, where the initial theme sounds like a recitative without accompaniment. Its descending motion and the emphasis on the modal fourth degree with a crotchet note duration intensify the tragic sound (Figure 21).

Figure 21

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in C# Minor, bb. 1-6

Maestoso Op. 41 N^o1

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

In many of the mazurkas, alongside distinct diatonic modes, chromaticism is widely used. This includes not only parallel variable modes, as seen in *Mazurka in C Major*, Op. 24, No. 2 (C Major – A Minor), Op. 68, No. 3 (F Major – D Minor), Op. 67, No. 2 (G Minor – B \flat Major), Op. 59, No. 1 (G Minor – B \flat Major), and others but also variable tonic and dominant relationships. For example, in *Mazurka in C Major*, Op. 6, No. 2 (C \sharp Natural – G \sharp Mixolydian) and Op. 7, No. 5 (C Major – G Major), the use of different scale degrees with a shared tonal centre demonstrates modal variability. Scales with augmented seconds (harmonic and double harmonic) lend Chopin's melodies a special refinement and delicacy.

In *Mazurka in B Minor*, Op. 30, No. 2, the use of the augmented second (A \sharp to G) is linked to the use of variable modes: B Minor – F \sharp Minor (Figure 22).

Figure 22

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in B minor, bb. 1-4

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

In *Mazurka in A Minor*, Op. 68, No. 2, the augmented seconds in the melody, combined with the dynamics marked as 'piano' and the tempo 'Lento', emphasising spaciousness and gentleness, give the melody a particular elegance (Figure 23).

Figure 23

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in A minor, bb. 1-7

New York: Schirmer, 1915.

Chopin's use of diatonic scales gives his mazurkas a unique and distinct quality. It is thanks to the characteristic steps of these scales and their delicate, skilful integration that mazurkas can sound both refined and simple, pastoral and idyllic, witty and playful, or restrained and austere, depending on the context.

For Chopin, the various features he observed in folk music, such as static bass fifths, intricate zigzag melismas, modal shifts, or raised fourth degrees, served as stimuli for shaping a particular musical language. Organically derived reference points gave rise to complex combinations and mergers, as well as harmonic clashes. Folk-inspired ornamental melismas contributed to the development of intricate patterns that are characteristic of Chopin's passages, imbued with their elegant poetic imagery. Alterations of the fourth and other degrees justified the exploration of corresponding chromatic harmonies.

The presence of 'improvisational' unpredictability and disruptions of the regular flow in the Mazurka's rhythm is a fundamental quality that underlies Chopin's entire style. Romantic individualism, while rejecting the 'letter,' reinterpreted the 'spirit' of tradition in a new way. This spirit was particularly pronounced in the Mazurkas, which incorporated not only the collective wisdom of folk culture but also bridged the connection with a centuries-old tradition.

For many romantics, the fusion with the long-standing folklore tradition was an ideal, establishing harmony with the grand ancestral principle. In Chopin's music, the Mazurka became not only a symbol of Poland but also a symbolic space where the inner conflicts of the composer's personality unfolded. This is especially evident in his later, melancholic 'anti-Mazurkas'. In these compositions, the process of symbolism intensifies, with the genre's ancestral characteristics and its archetypal image becoming remarkably transparent, revealing the ontological depths of meaning.

The spirit of Polish musical folklore, characterised by lively vigour and graceful brilliance in moments of joy, as well as the constant infusion of liveliness and temperament into moments of sadness, where capriciousness and emotional variability are typical, permeates all of Chopin's Mazurkas. By introducing the expressiveness of diatonic modes to the world, Chopin paved the way for a new wave of interest in folklore, which manifested in the 19th century as folklore music in the works of composers like Glinka and the members of 'The Mighty Five' and in the first half of the 20th century as contemporary traditionalism in the compositions of Karol Szymanowski.

6. Kinesics in Chopin's Mazurkas

The definition of the structural-semantic invariant of the genre allows us to identify the features of the musical language, in which rhythmic structures, and more broadly, structures related to the kinesthetics of the genre, i.e., choreographic elements, will have primary significance.⁴

By identifying the genre-specific characteristics of mazurka kinesics, one can discover the following features of the previously formulated structural-semantic invariant of the mazurka. The randomness manifests itself in the unpredictability of accent shifts and the nature of the mazurka kinesics itself. The core essence of the kinesics is expressed in the moment of splitting the first strong beat, leading to the destabilisation and 'breaking apart' of metric stability and integrity.

The particular complexity and indeterminacy of metrical rhythmic relationships testify to the mediative nature of the mazurka, its ontologically relative essence. The total relativisation of rhythmic organisation becomes evidence of the presence of principles of carnival discourse in the mazurka, the conditions of which include the ambivalence of signs, the principle of coronation-dethronement, and

⁴ The term was first introduced by American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell, who defined kinesics as complexes of kines (the 'smallest, indivisible, least noticeable movements') through which real communication between people takes place. Ray Birdwhistell (1970). *Kinesics and context: Essays on body-motion communication*. Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 25.

non-finality. These properties of the genre invariant are metaphorically characterized by Ignacy Paderewski as the 'innate national arrhythmia' (Hentova, 1970, p. 228).

In Chopin's Mazurkas, three typologically stable kinaesthetic structures can be identified within the multitude of rhythmic figures. Each of these structures has the potential to become an algorithm or, more precisely, an 'internal form' that generates processes of meaning and form creation.

The first kinaesthetic structure involves a dotted rhythmic formula that is antinomic because it contains an immanent contradiction between two elements: choriamb and iamb. This embodies primary anthropological opposites such as systole-diastrale, arsis-thesis, inhalation-exhalation- *Mazurka op. 7 No. 1 in B♭ major* (Figure 24).

Figure 24

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in B♭ major, b. 1-2



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

In other words, the dotted rhythm in the Mazurka serves as a kinaesthetic element that openly facilitates the coupling of opposing elements, semantically objectifying the inclination towards a carnivalesque discursive model (Figure 25).

Figure 25

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in B minor, bb. 1-2



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The second kinaesthetic structure is associated with the principle of breaking the first beat, usually achieved through triplets (*Mazurka op. 30 No. 2 in B minor*). It becomes another structural expression of the internal form of the Mazurka genre, characterised by insurmountable ambivalence, paradoxicality, and the absence of any stability.

The third kinaesthetic structure is particularly unique, as it combines mazurka-like and anti-mazurka elements, along with kinaesthetic (related to bodily movement), and intonational aspects, becoming an orientation towards dialogical discourse, especially in slow tempos- *Mazurka op. 63, No. 2 in F minor* (Figure 26).

Figure 26

Frederic Chopin, Mazurka in F minor, bb. 1-2



New York: Schirmer, 1915.

The dense combination of two divergent proto-structural vectors forms a national symbolic image of fractured unity, referred to by Lev Anninski as the 'vertical Polish soul' (2001, p. 65).

7. Chopin's Innovations in the Mazurka Genre

Looking at all of Chopin's mazurkas with a unified perspective, we can sense that their world, revealed in a fundamentally endless sequence of pieces, is essentially constant. All the mentioned contradictions form the poles ('duality of sensations') of this multifaceted world, between which lies the 'space' filled with 'reflections' of its various facets, each time unique, arising as if by chance, at the whim of the improvising artist. At the heart of this improvisational play lies a series of universally meaningful folk motifs-formulas, as stable as Bach's intonations-symbols, but without boundaries in varying their figurative meaning and genre-intonational content.

Mazurka Op. 17 No. 4 in A minor - one of Chopin's most daring and innovative works and perhaps the earliest example of a complete transformation of a dance into a lyrical miniature poem. The extraordinary concentration of entirely new harmonic twists (diatonic with soft 'half-resolutions' of seventh chords, and then - chromatic descent of three voices in bars 9-11, melodic expressiveness with the characteristic 'Chopin' intonation of a 'question'), the 'capriciousness' of the rhythm (bars 11-12) - all of this creates an image that combines astonishing fragility and even 'brittleness' of lines with deep tragedy (a peculiar 'multiplication' of the baroque chromatic descending bass scale).

Ornamental variation of the melody lends increasing refinement to the A minor Mazurka, and the 'middle' of the first section (bars 37-44) is perceived as a small 'instrumental interlude' between the 'verses' of the song-ballad. The code, which is a distant reflection of both the 'middle-interlude' (texture and melodic contours) and the main theme (semi-tone descent of chords), plays a decisive role in affirming the poem-like nature of this Mazurka.

The technique of turning is very important in the 'micro-dramaturgy' of the piece: for example, in the finale (bars 125-130), the ascending third A-C (echo of the intonation of a question) is balanced by the descending 'sinking' third C-A (a similar relationship exists in the left-hand part, in the accompanying figures). This creates such a strong ending that the brief 'afterword' (based on the introduction material), concluding with the sixth chord A-C-F, cannot shake the sense of the form's completion. However, it speaks of the irresoluteness of the question and, at the same time, of hope, after the 'answer' (the inverted descending third C-A) has been given. The boundaries of the completed form are 'slightly opened,' and the lyrical 'musical moment' is perceptibly introduced into the flow of time, both timeless and endless.

In the first and third parts, the *A minor Mazurka* No. 42 sounds as a beautiful 'antiphonal' duet. Only in the code of the Mazurka do both voices duet against the trill, merging with thirds and sixths in the usual Italianised manner.

Chopin attaches greater importance to introductions in both complex and simple forms. He quite generously supplies the Mazurkas with introductions, sometimes reintroducing them before the reprisals or at the end of the piece as framing (Mazurkas No. 13, 15).

Starting around 1839-1840 (after the creation of the preludes), the manifestation of the programmatic element in Chopin's mazurkas reaches a qualitatively new level. With Opus 41, most of his pieces strive to transcend the confines of the miniature form. This transformation occurs not only in elegies and mournful compositions but also in brilliant ballroom and scherzo-like mazurkas (Op. 50 No. 1 in G major, Op. 56 No. 1 in B major). In these works, Chopin not only abandons the da capo structure but also incorporates the reprise into the process of continuous development. The dynamism of the themes, leading to the transformation of the narrative (a characteristic feature of the ballad genre), imparts a heroic and dramatic element to the epic mazurkas (Op. 41 No. 1 and No. 2, corresponding to D# minor and E minor, both with a subtly somber Phrygian hue). In subsequent compositions, a different approach

to reprise variation is employed – polyphony. Such is the case with the mazurkas in D# minor, Op. 50 No. 3, Op. 63 No. 3, and all three mazurkas in Op. 59.⁵

The *A♭ major Mazurka*, Op. 41, No. 3, concludes with a ‘cadence of a question,’ which places it within the series of ‘circular mazurkas’ that have no ending—a mazurka with a constant return to the da capo or, as seen here, a pause in an unfinished form.

However, even what Chopin managed to write testifies to an astonishingly delicate, one might say, exquisitely fragile realisation of poetic principles. The main theme, its tragic nature intensified by descending chromaticism in not just one bass line but four lines (including the melody), contains within itself both a mournful elegy and an idyllic, fleeting waltz-like image. The contrast between the elements of the theme reaches maximum depth (hopelessness, inevitability, and the ‘reflection’ of a bright ideal, highly chromatic minor alongside major diatonic); however, unlike some of Chopin's earlier poem-mazurkas, it is presented in a softened and veiled manner, almost as if it were ‘on a single breath!’

The second ‘element,’ effectively a subtheme, is the lyrical A major waltz (‘fleeting vision’ or ‘frozen moment,’ characteristic previously of the middle sections of mazurkas), which immediately, without any development, becomes ‘shaded,’ repeating in B♭ minor (a unison connection, foreshadowing Liszt's *Forgotten Waltz*). The stylistic features of the mazurka permeate other works by the composer (for example, in the F# minor polonaise), indicating the enormous significance of the genre.

Chopin liberated the mazurka from its utilitarian purpose, transforming the rustic dance music into refined poetic miniatures of psychological content. By infusing personal, individual elements into folk elements, Chopin created his own genre - lyrical, sometimes dramatic mini-poems, underpinned by dance rhythms.

But a whole mazurka often seeks to avoid complete finality. Even a technique like framing (an introduction and conclusion with identical material), which usually separates the artistic world from the real one, in mazurkas can play precisely the opposite role, contributing to the unfolding of the music's flow (Mazurkas in A minor Op. 17 No. 4, C major Op. 24 No. 2).

A clear expression of formal openness is the endless Mazurka in C major Op. 7 No. 5, with the author's remark ‘senza fine.’ This sparkling mazurka, pushing the perpetuum mobile tendency to its logical conclusion, leads to its opposite. ‘Eternal movement’ and ‘stopping of time’ (variously and individually combined in Chopin's mazurkas) are fused here to indistinguishability.

Chopin's last composition, the *Mazurka in F minor* Op. 68 No. 4, contrary to the appearance it typically has in printed editions, was not completed by the author. The manuscript contains the initial outlines of the second ‘trio,’ after which one would naturally expect further ‘poetic’ development and an extended coda. However, by fate's design, the Mazurka took on the form of a miniature da capo.

The mazurka became Chopin's ‘mirror of the soul,’ his confession, a conversation with himself and the world around him. This reveals its functional proximity to the nocturne (with the difference that the musical material of the mazurka did not give rise to an explicit and open priority of the lyrical beginning). In terms of the breadth of phenomena covered (on the scale of a miniature), the mazurka approaches the genre of the prelude.

The ‘dissolution of boundaries’ within a musical composition is a characteristic often associated with Romantic music, particularly in the realm of miniatures. However, nowhere else in Chopin's oeuvre are there pieces that so clearly emphasise their ‘infinity.’ Mazurkas Op. 24 No. 3 and Op. 41 No. 4 (both in

⁵ Schubert and Liszt opt for fugal forms in such cases (Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* and Liszt's *Sonata in B minor*). Chopin, on the other hand, employs the canon form and simple imitation. The pre-reprise preparation draws attention to the monophonic beginning of the reprise, where the main motif of the theme resounds, emphasised through repetitions.

Ab major) gradually fade away without reaching a conclusion, slowly 'recede from view.' In terms of expression, the intrigue of Chopin's mazurka is highlighted; it is encapsulated in the fact that the genre's idiomatic characteristics of this Polish dance are not only concentrated in the mazurka-miniatures but also dispersed within the polygeneric context of Chopin's complex compositions. This underscores the unique role of the mazurka genre as a significant participant in shaping the logic of the evolution of the musical whole.

Within the context of the emerging patterns of motivation at the level of deep structural elements of the text, the special phenomenological role of 'mazurka-ness' and chorality as algorithms of meaning-making becomes clear, encoding the fundamental principle of Chopin's style ('ontological crevice') expressed through the dysfunctional relationship between these two genre archetypes. Thus, the phenomenon of Chopin's mazurkas lies in the contradiction between 'mazurka-ness' and chorality.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chopin's mazurkas stand as a profound synthesis of folkloric tradition and innovative compositional technique, a marriage that has granted these works a unique and enduring place within the canon of Western art music. The folkloric elements that permeate these compositions are not merely superficial; they are deeply woven into the fabric of the music, manifesting in a multitude of distinctive features that reveal the composer's intimate engagement with the Polish folk tradition.

Firstly, the structural characteristics of the mazurka, as explored by Chopin, are a testament to his reverence for the traditional dance form. The mazurka's connection to the 'ostinateness' of dance figures, a hallmark of its dance origin, is preserved throughout Chopin's oeuvre. This is particularly evident in the sequential development of the two-act 'cell', a structural unit that serves as the foundational building block of these compositions. This structural principle is not merely a formal device but is indicative of a deeper connection to the repetitive and cyclical nature of folk dance, where the reiteration of rhythmic and melodic patterns creates a sense of continuity and communal participation. Even in his most mature works, Chopin adheres to this structural paradigm, demonstrating a profound respect for the traditional forms that underpinned the mazurka while simultaneously imbuing them with his own compositional voice.

Secondly, the rhythmic complexities of Chopin's mazurkas are another key aspect of their folkloric character. The rhythms of the mazurka, particularly the pronounced emphasis on the first beat and the characteristic 'stomping' effect on the second beat, are faithfully reproduced by Chopin. These rhythmic patterns are not merely decorative but are essential to the dance's identity, evoking the physical movements and communal energy of the dance floor. Chopin's meticulous attention to these rhythmic nuances demonstrates his deep understanding of the mazurka as both a musical and a social phenomenon, rooted in the lived experience of the people who danced to these rhythms. Through his mazurkas, Chopin captures the rhythmic vitality of the folk dance, transforming it into a sophisticated art form that nevertheless retains its connection to the rural traditions of his homeland.

Thirdly, the harmonic language of Chopin's mazurkas is richly infused with elements drawn from Polish folk music. The use of modal harmonies, particularly the Lydian and Phrygian modes, along with plagal cadences, harmonies with augmented seconds, and major sevenths, all point to a deep engagement with the harmonic idioms of Polish folk music. These harmonic choices are not arbitrary but are carefully selected to evoke the sound world of the mazurka, a world in which the boundaries between major and minor tonalities are often blurred, creating a sense of ambiguity and emotional depth. The harmonic language of the mazurkas is therefore both innovative and deeply rooted in tradition, reflecting Chopin's ability to transform simple folk melodies into complex, emotionally resonant compositions that transcend their humble origins.

Furthermore, the textural elements of Chopin's mazurkas also contribute to their folkloric character. Chopin frequently employs textural devices that mimic the sounds of traditional folk instruments, such as the bagpipes, fujara, and double bass. The use of organ points, melismatic triplet figures, and arpeggiated repetitions serves to recreate the sound of these instruments, grounding the mazurkas in the sonic landscape of the Polish countryside. This textural simplicity, when compared to the more elaborate textures found in Chopin's other works, is deliberate, reflecting a conscious effort to evoke the raw, unpolished sound of folk music. The texture of the mazurkas often retains a connection to the physical movements of the dance, such as the stamping of feet or the graceful whirling of couples, further reinforcing their link to the folk tradition.

Chopin's mazurkas, therefore, are not just compositions; they are a cultural artifact, a musical reflection of the Polish spirit and identity. Through these works, Chopin achieves a synthesis of folk elements and classical forms, creating music that is at once deeply personal and universally resonant. The mazurka, as reimagined by Chopin, transcends its origins as a simple dance tune, becoming a sophisticated vehicle for artistic expression and a symbol of national identity. In this sense, the mazurkas stand as a testament to the enduring power of folk music to inspire and inform art music, a power that Chopin recognized and harnessed to create works of lasting significance.

Finally, it is worth considering the philosophical implications of Chopin's engagement with the mazurka form. As Iwaszkiewicz eloquently suggests, Chopin's mazurkas can be understood as existing in a realm of eternal mathematical beauty, akin to the dome of St. Peter's Basilica (2008, p. 16). This comparison highlights the idea that the mazurkas, like all great works of art, transcend the temporal and cultural contexts in which they were created. They exist as timeless entities, embodying a mathematical precision and beauty that endures beyond the ephemeral nature of human existence. Even if humanity and its creations were to disappear, the abstract ideas and mathematical principles underlying these works would continue to exist, affirming the eternal nature of beauty. In this way, Chopin's mazurkas are more than just music; they are a profound statement about the nature of art, beauty, and human creativity, rooted in the rich soil of Polish folk tradition yet reaching towards the infinite.

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