

Chopin Fusion

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COMPOSER'S NOTES

The Chopin Fusion project started as a creative diversion from Chopin's Preludes, asking 'what if the music went here instead?' So, it's not an attempt to improve Chopin's work :)

Rather, it's a NEW JOURNEY using extracts from the Preludes:

- x Melodic fragments (sometimes just a few notes)
- x Chord structures
- x Rhythmic patterns and irregular time
- x Transformed melodies

This new imagination also invoked stories and images, which further stoked the composition process and performances.

from Chopin Prelude 1 – **'East River'**

Chopin's (frenetic) 1st prelude reminded me of the constant momentum of New York City life as viewed from the East River.

In composing from the material in the 1st Prelude, I drew from the constant rhythmic movement (albeit with a change of time signature), and this well-crafted harmonic progression:

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords in 3/8 time: C, G/B, C, Cmaj7/E, Fmaj7, D9/F#, G13, and G7. Each chord is accompanied by a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with some notes beamed together in groups of three (trios).

from Chopin Prelude 3 – ‘Wild Frontier’

Metaphorically, we can all encounter that next wall or frontier that appears hostile and uninviting. Unexpected life and beauty often awaits, however, as we take a step forward...



I adopted and adapted this lively left hand pattern, and shared the melodic content between the hands. I later re-organised these scalic fragments into different note groups (eg. 3s, 4s) explored minor keys areas including this broadly cinematic progression for the improvised solos:

Gm Bbm C#m G# Bm F# Bm / D /

from Chopin Prelude 4 – ‘Atacama Hope’

Based on the inspiring, breath-taking story of the Chilean miners in 2010, trapped for 69 days below ground as they prayed for, hoped for, and eventually found their freedom.

I tried to capture the aching, the darkness (heard in the chromatic falling line), the bleak desert landscape is the middle section, the playfulness of the unsuspecting miners before the rockfall, the rising prayer sound from ‘Camp Esperanza’ and a daring to hope as the main theme returns.



[LH simplified to highlight descending bassline]

By arpeggiating the left hand and using irregular time, Chopin’s music is transformed using a world music feel, further enhanced by ethnic hand drums. The descending chromatic movement (in both parts) carries a feeling of foreboding; a dark shadow falling.

from Chopin Prelude 6 – ‘**Vistula Vision**’

Chopin watched as his native land struggled for independence. A century later, in 1920, on the banks of the Vistula, Poland finally won her hard-fought freedom.



A beautiful and haunting melody, striving for emancipation. I changed up the tempo to give it a more feisty character, yet with an air of dignity.

from Chopin Prelude 10 – ‘**Exiled in Paris**’

Chopin spent most of his adult life away from his native land of Poland. He grieved to see his motherland struggling for freedom, and his music surely represents this heartache. He knew what it was to feel like an alien in a strange land.



Grouping notes into irregular patterns can be used to express unrest, or an ‘out of step-ness’ with your surroundings. These figures in Chopin’s Prelude no.10 cascade downwards further heightening the emotional impact. ‘An Exile in Paris’ uses jagged motifs in irregular time, before smoothing out the music in a melancholic and wistful nostalgia.

from Chopin Prelude 11 – ‘**New Found Land**’

‘As a person thinks in their heart, so they are’. Perceptive words that offer an invitation to check long held beliefs. Not so much looking for greener grass, but for **solid** ground.



Original

Fusion Version

The pitches from the opening of Chopin's Prelude 11 dramatically change character when passed through a harmonic and rhythmic filter. Even the smallest of motifs (seeds) holds great potential (check out Beethoven's 5th if you don't believe me).

from Chopin Prelude 14 – **'Turbulent Times'**

In the middle of tribulation, times such as these, we need a resting place, a rock that is higher...



This 2-bar phrase which concludes Prelude 14, became the aggressive opening motif for the most rocky piece of the collection. Choosing which notes are stressed / accented radically changes the feel, the most natural choice here is to bring out the upper melodic line.

from Chopin Prelude 15 – **'Hidden Fire'**

Sometimes we meet people who have amazing depth and presence (which is often not immediately apparent); they carry a hidden fire...

In Prelude no.15, the left hand takes the melody while the right hand has an insistent pedal note above. The idea of cross rhythms (3 vs 4) is borrowed from Prelude no.23.



Original

Fusion Version

from Chopin Prelude 20 – **'Sand'**

Probably Chopin's best known prelude...

The original melody is transformed using 5 time, with a further section in 7 time, plus an improvised section. The result is a musical picture of Chopin's vicissitudinal relationship with Georges Sand: caring, passionate, dynamic, but increasingly turbulent...

Note the rich harmonic support for the simple melody in line 2 (typical Chopin!):

Largo

Cm Fm⁷ G⁷ Cm Ab Db Eb⁷ Ab G⁷ C⁷ Fm C D⁷ G D⁷ G

Cm Ab/C B^o Gm/Bb Am⁷ Ab⁷(#11) G G/F Cm/Eb Fm G/B Cm Ab Db G⁺⁷ Cm

from Chopin Prelude 23 – ‘G.A.L.’

I dedicated this piece to my wife Geraldine (G.A.L.), a gospel singer with fantastic creative rhythmic ideas; this is our wedded dance :)

Original

Fusion Version

A single note is added to Chopin’s 8-note motif and the pattern organised into 4, 3 & 2 note groupings (a kind of 9 time). As the piece develops, listen out for other groovy syncopations and cross-rhythms!

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