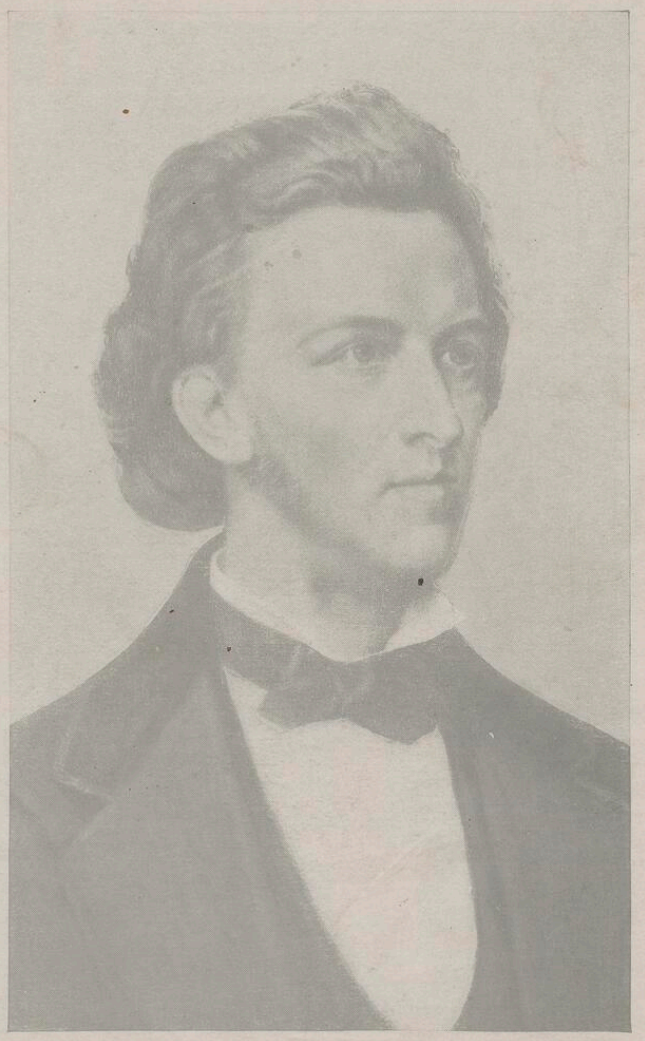
MILITARY POLONAISE IN A MAJOR

Op. 40, No. 1

—By—

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN



REVISED EDITION WITH BIOGRAPHICAL
SKETCH, FINGERING, PEDALING AND
INSTRUCTIVE ANNOTATIONS
BY
W. S. B. MATHEWS

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For the Piano Grade 5-b

MILITARY POLONAISE, IN A MAJOR. Op. 40. No. 1.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF FREDERIC FRANCOIS CHOPIN.

Born at Zelazowa, Wola, Poland, February 22, 1809 (1810?).
Died at Paris, October 17, 1849.

DURING the short span of forty years this great composer left to the world a wealth of music for the piano which is absolutely unique and which forms an indispensable part of the equipment of every pianist. He was so entirely original that one wonders whence he obtained his inspiration. The effects which he drew from an instrument were so novel that when Charles Halle first heard him he said that he could not understand how such tonal combinations could be possible upon the piano. Chopin's harmonization was so rich and varied, his melodies so highly ornamented with a profusion of scintillating arabesques, through which they seemed to show their outlines as through a veil, that a new world seemed to be revealed to the hearer. His music is extremely poetic in character and is extremely difficult to reproduce owing to its subtle character and its tremendous demands upon the technic. Chopin's hands, while small, were extremely elastic, and it is said to have been quite wonderful to see with what ease this hand glided over the most difficult key combinations. His racial characteristics show in his music, for his father was of French descent and his mother Polish, the French strain contributing gaiety and refinement, and the Polish contributing melancholy and a love of oriental mysticism.

Outside of a few songs and one or two other compositions he wrote exclusively for the piano, and with the single exception of Franz Liszt, no composer has ever lived who has sounded the possibilities of this instrument as has Chopin. His mazurkas reflect the spirit of Polish music, and the form under which he revealed some of his noblest inspirations—the Polonaise—is Polish in its origin, having first been used at the Coronation of a Polish Sovereign.

He was aristocratic and reserved by nature and was not apparently adapted to making public appearances. His life was a mixture of joyousness and sadness and his later days were darkened by the inroads of the disease, consumption, which finally ended his life.

His works for the piano included Waltzes, Mazurkas, Poionaises, Nocturnes, Ballades, Scherzos, Studies, Preludes, Sonatas and some other miscellaneous compositions. We strongly advise the student to lose no opportunity to become acquainted with the works of this great master of the piano, which will furnish an inexhaustible source of delight.

POETIC IDEA.—The Polonaise is rather a march than a dance. It is a fantastic and highly idealized procession of entry preparatory to the actual dances. Liszt, in his book upon Chopin, says that the most prominent man in the festival, leading the lady of first rank, starts the procession, and all the other couples follow in order of precedence. Thus they go around the ball room, even into other parts of the palace; and in the smaller towns or in the country, the leader takes the procession quite out of doors, although necessarily not out of hearing of the music, except where there is a wind section (brass and wood-wind) free to go along with the procession.

In this march, the leader sets the mood. According to the music, it was marched with martial tread and warlike mien, or in a tenderer and more gracious manner, to quieter melodies. All moods were proper in turn, and whichever mood the leaders took, all the others followed.

In France the Polonaise is played generally for the marching in of the people who propose presently to devote themselves to the dances of the evening.

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Liszt's description of the Polonaise contains one passage which might have been written with this so-called "Military Polonaise" of Chopin partly in mind. He says:

"While listening to some of the Polonaises of Chopin, one can almost catch the firm, nay the more than firm, the hard, *the resolute* tread of men bravely facing all the bitter injustice which the most cruel and relentless destiny can offer, with the manly pride of unflinching courage. The progress of the music suggests to our imagination such magnificent groups as were designed by Paul Veronese, robed in the rich costumes of days long past; we see passing at intervals before us brocades of gold, velvets, damasked satins, silvery, soft and flexible sables, hanging sleeves gracefully thrown back upon the shoulders, embossed sabres, boots yellow as gold or red with trampled blood, sashes with long and undulating fringes, close chemisettes, rustling trains, stomachers embroidered with pearls, head-dress glittering with rubies, or leafy with emeralds, light slippers, rich with amber, gloves perfumed with the luxurious attar from the harems.

"From the faded background of times long past, these vivid groups start forth; gorgeous carpets from Persia lie at their feet; filigreed furniture from Constantinople stands around; all is marked by the sumptuous prodigality of the magnates, who drew, in ruby goblets embossed with medallions, wine from the fountains of Tokay; who shod their fleet Arabian steeds with silver; who surmounted all their escutcheons with the same crown which the fate of an election might render a royal one, and which, causing them to despise all other titles, was alone worn as a sign of their glorious equality."

This Polonaise in A major, otherwise known as the "Military Polonaise," is the most complete expression of all that Chopin gave of the martial, even victorious ardor of his country at its best. While written for the piano, and in Chopin's time never heard in any other form, it is in fact a triumphant March, suitable to full military band of a hundred instruments and more. Nothing less can do justice to its brilliancy, its ardor, and its sense of national courage and bravery. Moreover,, the long trills in measures 41, 43, 45, etc., are plainly nothing less than the roll of the drums as the flag is saluted. Nor is it one poor drum, but a whole battery of drums, with very likely a few salvos of artillery thrown in for good measure. Such is the spirit of this magnificent ode to glory.

FORM AND STRUCTURE.—In form and structure the Military Polonaise is the clearest and least complicated of all the Chopin Polonaises. It consists practically of one chief melody, here marked by the letters A, C, G, I. If the repetition marks are observed, as they should be (because the repetitions are necessary for completely establishing the splendid mood intended) this melody is played six times, making forty-eight measures of the total of 152 measures of the piece when played with the required repetitions. Thus it is about one-third the piece.

The second most important melody is that marked D, which is afterwards repeated twice as Melody F. This is the splendid substance of the "middle piece" or "trio," which comes in to relieve the brilliant first subject.

There are two melodies which are practically interludes. Melody B comes in between Melody A and its repetition as Melody C. Melody B is repeated later as Melody H.

Melody E is the sensational interlude between Melody D and its still more brilliant repetitions under the letter F. Here something great must be pictured—most likely the ceremony of saluting the colors.

Thus the entire piece contains but four melodies, each one eight measures long. Melody A, the principal melody of all, Melody D, the chief melody of the middle pieces; and the two transitional or interlude melodies, B, of the first part, and Melody E of the middle part. When one knows these, it is thereafter merely to master the manner in which a repetition is treated more brilliantly in the accompaniment, or with octaves in the melody itself, in order to attain a climax.

HOW TO STUDY.—The student first must establish the tempo and the true rhythmic feeling. The measure as written is 3-4; but the Polonaise is marched (or felt) as a form of 6-8, *in which the notes group in pairs and not in triplets.* Therefore, the quarter-note unit is divided always into two eighths and occasionally smaller values. But, it will be better to prepare it by first playing the rhythm of eighths. Therefore, at first, it is better to count 6, grouped in "two's" and not in triplets.

The second element is the proper rate of speed. The quarters may go in the first part at perhaps about 76 by metronome; or by tape-measure, with the beats of a pendulum of about 24 inches. It is best to study the left hand alone until rhythm and tempo are firmly fixed in the mind.

It is important that rests in the Polonaise should be actual silences, and not be covered up by retaining the pedal during their time, even in the many places where the pedal is distinctly marked to be thus retained (measures 1, 3, 9, etc.). In playing in public, upon a good grand piano in a large hall, the pedal here will do no harm, provided the accents are delivered strongly.

A third point, which needs to be made right at the first, is the proper firmness of the hand in chords, in order to give the brilliant quality, such as brass instruments would give. The hand must be set in such a way that the fifth finger, which generally has the melody, speaks out stronger than any of the others.

All the accents upon the count "1" must be strong, and the smaller accents upon "3" and "5" strong enough to be distinctly felt. After the rhythm has been established, the melody should be studied alone, at its proper time and with its proper accent.

Melody D should go a trifle slower, but with great power and rhythmic distinctness. The sixteenth-rest, after the accent in measures 26 and 28, is better if not covered up by pedal. The pedal can be used during the first eighth, but no longer.

The changing chords, in measures 29, 30 may have pedal upon each chord. Approaching the climax, not only must the accent at "1" in measures 38 and 39 be strong, but the subordinate accent at "5" must also be clear and unmistakable. The mark *p* in measure 39 should read *mezzo piano.*

In Melody E, the long trill with both hands upon the low bass, is meant to represent the roll of the drums. The pedal can be held through the trill to strengthen the tone, but must be released for the four notes of the turn. In measures 42, 44, etc., use pedal as marked. The chain of trills in measure 48 may go considerably slower, and the bass notes heavy (like the tone of the great bass tuba of the band). The pedal may be taken with each one in spite of the trill in the right hand. With measure 49 the original rate of speed is resumed.

Everything in this Military Polonaise turns upon the time being well managed, the chords strong and brilliant, the accents well adjusted, and the increases of power up to the strongest moments, carried out precisely as marked. Of chord technic the piece requires much; of what used to be called "technic," meaning mere fluency of finger, it takes very little. Hence it is quite possible for players having large, strong hands, but entirely lacking in the finger fluency required by almost any fine fourth grade piano piece.
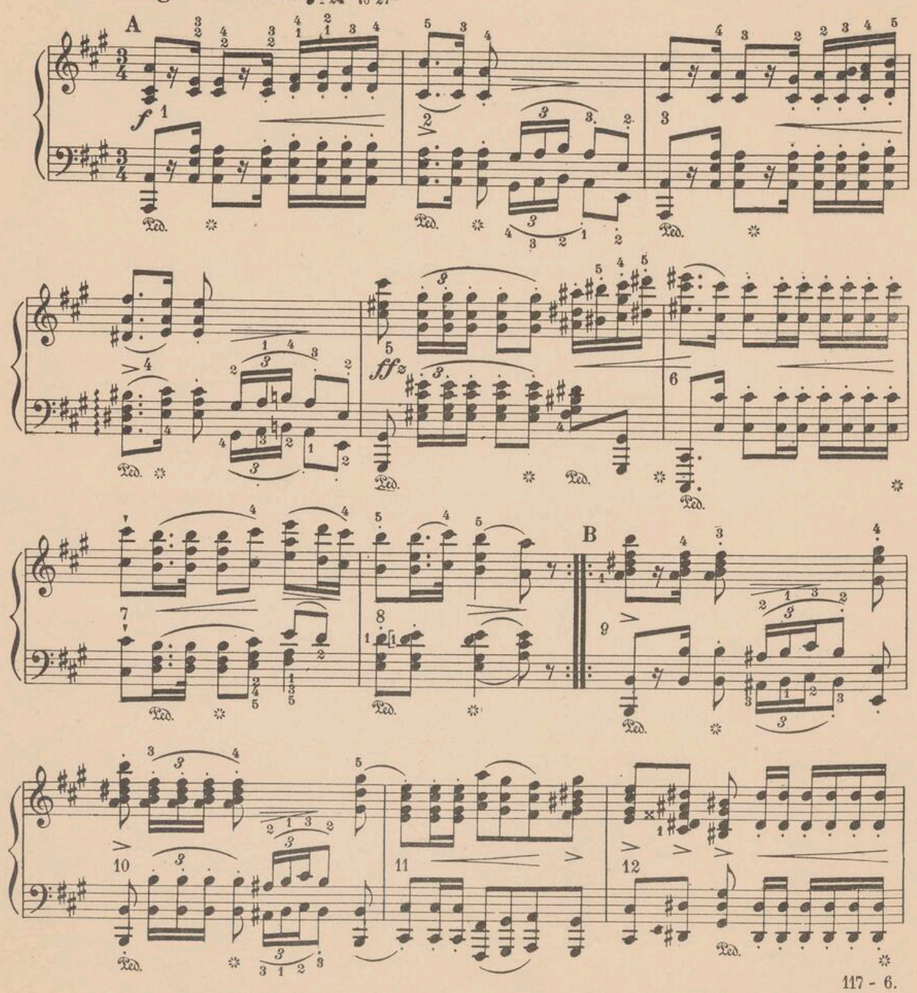
The playing must have the ringing sonority of the band, together with the commanding rhythm of the drums, and the steady marching of well-trained soldiers. Such is the idea of the way in which this piece must be studied, imagined, and played.

Military Polonaise in A Major.
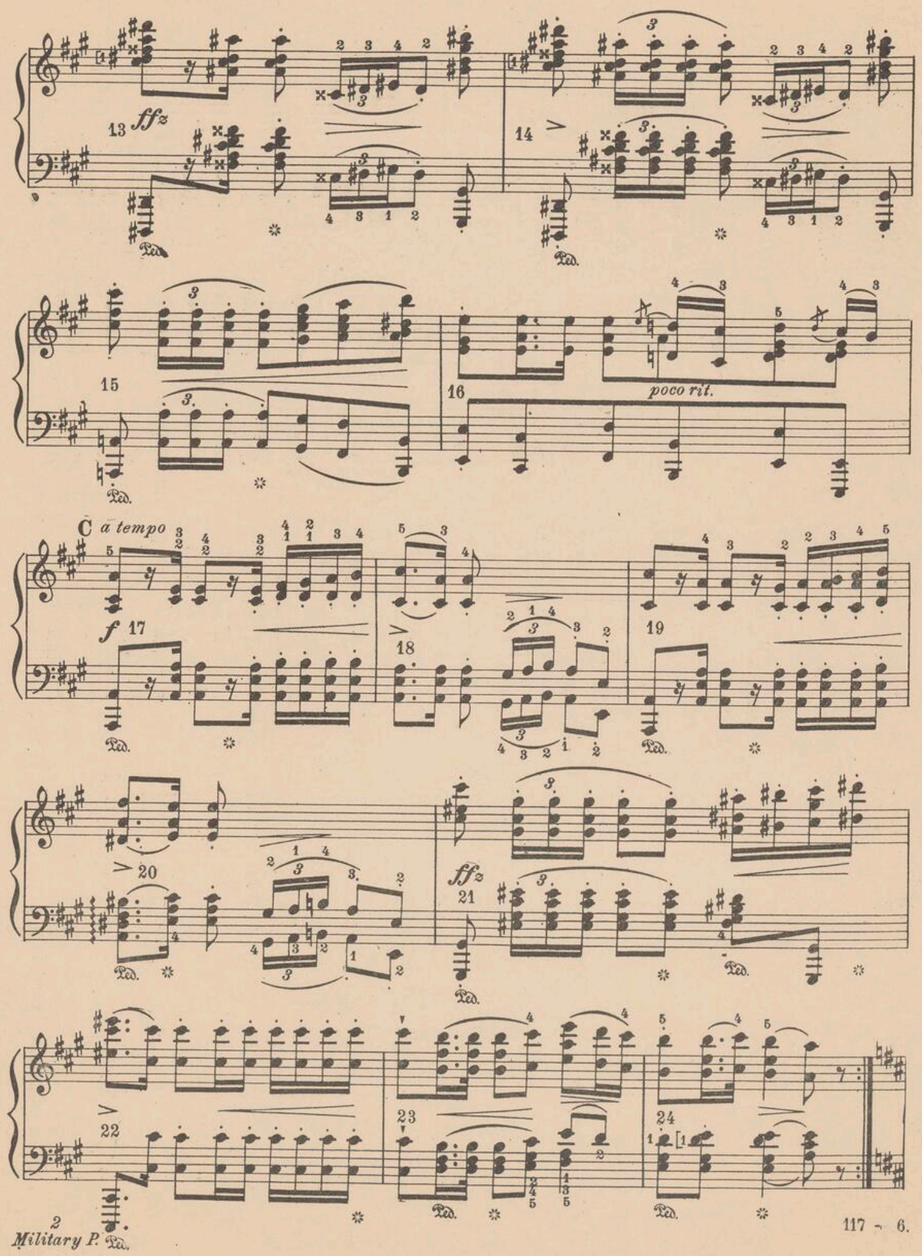
Revised and Annotated by
W. S. B. Mathews.

Allegro con brio. ♩ = 72 to 84 ♩ = 24" to 27"

FREDERIC CHOPIN, Op. 40, No. 1.



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D

ff energico

p

p

più f

fff

p

cresc.

f

p

cresc.

fz

E

f

F

a tempo

48 *fz riten. e molto cresc.*

ff

p

p

più f

fff

58 59 60

61 *p* *cresc.* 62 63 *f* *p*

8 64 *cresc.* *fz* G 65 *f* 66

67 68 69 *ffz*

70 71 72

Military P. 5

H

73 74 75

76 77 *ffz* 78

I *a tempo*

79 80 *poco rit.* *f* 81 82

83 84 *ffz* 85

86 87 88

Military P.6

RECITATION QUESTIONS ON "MILITARY POLONAISE, IN A MAJOR." OP. 40, NO. 1.

1. What is the signature and what the key of this piece?
   Ans.

2. Can you tell what is the key in measures 9, 10; measures 13, 14, and 25 to 40?
   Ans.

3. What is the time signature, and what is the actual time-unit of the Polonaise, a quarter-note or an eighth?
   Ans.

4. In counting six, where do the accents fall besides upon the "1"?
   Ans.

5. Write here the rhythm of the melody in measures 1, 2, and mark the accents.
   Ans.

6. Write also the rhythm of measures 25, 26, using two lines of notes, those for the melody above, and those of the bass rhythm below them, properly spaced as they should be played.
   Ans.

7. How many melodies in all are there in this piece?
   Ans.

8. How many measures are occupied with Melody A and its repetitions?
   Ans.

9. How many measures are occupied with Melody D and its repetitions?
   Ans.

10. What is the nature of Melody B? Is it a principal idea, or more like a transitional idea, to bridge over between stronger ideas?
    Ans.

11. Give the dates of birth and death of Chopin, and places.
    Ans.

12. Mention whatever kinds of pieces you remember as having been composed by him.
    Ans.

13. For what instrument did Chopin write?
    Ans.

For Teacher's Record

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Ano. 117-2

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