Tracing a lineage of the mazurka genre: influences of Chopin and Szymanowski on Thomas Adès' Mazurkas for Piano, OP. 27

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Dissertation

TRACING A LINEAGE OF THE MAZURKA GENRE:
INFLUENCES OF CHOPIN AND SZYMANOWSKI
ON THOMAS ADÈS' MAZURKAS FOR PIANO, OP. 27

by

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Boston University College of Fine Arts, 2014

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ABSTRACT

British composer Thomas Adès is one of the most celebrated musicians of our time. His career evidences extraordinary early success, followed by unusually rapid rise to international prominence, countless invitations to conduct and perform, top soloists and ensembles eager to premiere his music, adulation from critics, and audiences in thrall. In short, Adès has secured his status as a phenomenon on the current musical scene.

Given that Adès' Mazurkas for Piano, Op. 27, published by Faber Music Ltd. in 2009, represent one of the most significant contributions to the genre since the publication of Karol Szymanowski's 20 Mazurkas, Op. 50 (1924–1926) and Two Mazurkas, Op. 62 (1933–1934), which appeared nearly one hundred years after the fifty-eight Mazurkas (1830-1847) of Frédéric Chopin, the question arises: why the mazurka? What interest would a young Englishman have in a Polish dance of which there had been no fresh musical development for long periods of time? Perhaps the more pertinent question is: what makes Adès' pieces mazurkas, and what makes them Adès? A thorough analysis of the music, the cultural environments, and the compositional styles of the three main figures in the history of the piano mazurka will allow a lineage to be traced through the genre, thereby placing the
mazurkas of today into proper context.

Chapter 1 provides background on Adès and his music, including general characteristics of his work, and incorporating the composer's own words to explain his ideas. The mazurka heritage is outlined in the next two chapters. Chapter 2 covers Chopin's transformation of the mazurka into an elegant art form far removed from its primitive roots, as well as one emblematic of the enduring spirit of the erstwhile Polish state. Chapter 3 describes Szymanowski's rougher, more forthright manifestation of the mazurka, in which he sought to retain the style of the original folk impetus to create his own symbol of Polish nationalism. Specific aspects of the mazurkas of both composers are illustrated at length.

Adès' contribution to the genre is presented in Chapter 4. An analysis of the three mazurkas investigates his musical language, evaluating it according to his own criteria, locating processes within the works, and distilling the sum into small, recognizable components. Chapter 5 addresses the primary question: from Chopin to Szymanowski to Adès, what did today's composer learn from those of the past? Parallels with the earlier models are identified, and not just those necessitated by a common genre. Adès' work is shown to pay homage to his predecessors in many ways, yet to diverge radically in other ways. Connections are evidenced as various stylistic traits are traced through the mazurkas of the three composers, bringing to light compelling associations. Ultimately, Adès' personal voice is seen to assert itself, transforming the mazurka genre into something altogether new, effectively ushering it into the 21st century.
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Chapter 1

Thomas Adès and His Music

"... (W)hile many composers might well envy the publicity which Adès has attracted, few would wish for the attendant burden of expectation. In the recent past similar expectation has crushed the compositional capacities of less resilient personalities . . . "

British composer Thomas Adès, born in 1971 in London, is one of the most celebrated musicians of our time. His career evidences extraordinary success, essentially a composer's dream: early discovery followed by unusually rapid rise to international prominence; countless invitations to conduct and perform; top soloists and ensembles eager to premiere his music; adulation from critics; and audiences in thrall. In short, Adès has indeed secured his status as a phenomenon on the current musical scene.

A prodigy, Adès attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in his teens (1983-1988). His instructors were Michael Blackmore and Paul Berkowitz, piano; Erika Fox and Robert Saxton, composition; he also studied percussion. Adès then matriculated at

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King's College, Cambridge as an undergraduate, where he achieved a double-starred first-class honors degree under the tutelage of Alexander Goehr and Robin Holloway (himself a Goehr pupil). Additional studies in piano and chamber music were undertaken with the Hungarian Gyorgy Kurtag, both in Hungary (1988-1989) and at the International Musicians Seminar in England (1993-1994). Adès' Op.1, the *Five Eliot Landscapes* for soprano and piano, was a product of the Hungarian visit. In 1993, at the age of twenty-two, Adès made his recital debut as pianist and composer in London as part of the Park Lane Group series of recitals. Adès finished his formal education one year later at twenty-three years of age.

His first professional post was as Composer-in-Residence for the Hallé Orchestra (1993-1995), during which tenure he wrote two significant works: his first opera, *Powder Her Face*, commissioned by the Almeida Opera for the 1995 Cheltenham Festival; and the orchestral work, *These Premises Are Alarmed*, for the 1996 opening of the Bridgewater Hall. Adès' truly seminal early work came in 1997: the orchestral piece *Ayyla*, commissioned by the Feeney Trust for Sir Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Adès himself was named Music Director of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group shortly thereafter (1998-2000). Rattle became a powerful advocate for *Ayyla*, conducting it not only at its premiere and subsequent tour, but again in 1998 on his last concert as Music Director of the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, then once more in 2002 on his opening concert as Music Director of the Berlin Philharmonic. *Ayyla* earned its composer the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition (2000), marking Adès as the youngest ever recipient and underscoring his meteoric rise. Adès has since held positions as the Britten Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music; Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival (1999-2008, following in the footsteps of his countryman Benjamin
Britten); Composer-in-Residence with the Los Angeles Philharmonic (2005-2007); and the Barbara Debs Composer’s Chair at Carnegie Hall (2007-2008). Adès was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Essex in 2004. In addition to the coveted Grawemeyer Award, he is the only composer to have won the Royal Philharmonic Society Prize for large-scale composition three times.

In recent years, Adès has enjoyed a high-profile, tripartite career as a composer/conductor/performer, traveling internationally for performances of his works. Major scores include his second opera, *The Tempest* (2004, commissioned by the Royal Opera House); a piano quintet (2005); the orchestral works *Tevot* (2007, also premiered by Rattle, commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic and Carnegie Hall), and *Polaris* (2011); a violin concerto, *Concentric Paths* (2005); a piano concerto with moving image, *In Seven Days* (2008, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and London’s Southbank Centre); and his second string quartet, *The Four Quarters* (2011). Additionally, he has been a featured composer at numerous festivals worldwide, namely the Salzburg Easter Festival (2004); Radio France’s Présences, Paris (2007); the Barbican’s “Traced Overhead” in London (2007); the New Horizons Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia (2007); the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Festival (2009); and the Melbourne Festival (2010). In 2010, Adès’ piano recital tour included stops at Carnegie Hall and the Barbican, where he gave the premiere of his extremely virtuosic *Concert Paraphrase from Powder Her Face*. In 2011, he performed the solo part of *In Seven Days* with the New York Philharmonic, under the baton of Alan Gilbert. That same year, Adès returned to Carnegie Hall in collaboration with tenor Ian Bostridge, presenting an acclaimed recital of art song; works ranged from Dowland to Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*, Kurtág to Adès himself.
Anointed “the most accomplished overall musician before the public today”\textsuperscript{2} by Anthony Tommasini of The New York Times, Adès has inspired numerous laudatory reviews, with contemporary critics and writers outdoing themselves on his behalf. “Some pianists may find it almost unfair that Mr. Adès, who is first and foremost a composer, plays the piano so beautifully,”\textsuperscript{3} Tommasini marvels. Alex Ross of The New Yorker announces that Adès has graduated from the prodigy phase, having “outgrown his status as the wunderkind of a vibrant British scene and become one of the most imposing figures in contemporary classical music.”\textsuperscript{4} Guardian writer Tom Service, in his new book co-authored with the composer, refers to Adès’ nimble ability to transcend unspoken boundaries, calling him “the musician who has done more than any other living composer to connect contemporary music with wider audiences.”\textsuperscript{5} The venerable and notoriously prickly musicologist Richard Taruskin adores Adès, seemingly agreeing with Service’s assessment as he waxes on:

What raises his music so far above today’s average is his phenomenal success at toeing the line – the finest line there is – between the arcane and the banal. The music never loses touch with its base in the common listening experience of real audiences, so that it is genuinely evocative. At the same time it is quirkily inventive and constantly surprising in the small: enough so to confound short-range predictions and elude obviousness of reference even when models (often Stravinsky) are nameable. And that makes it genuinely novel.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4} Alex Ross, “Roll Over Beethoven: Thomas Adès,” The New Yorker (October 26, 1998), 110-112.
Despite the widespread attention that Adès has garnered, there is surprisingly little in the way of critical analysis of his works – a state of affairs not atypical for contemporary composers. Analysis typically lags behind as the current scene is assessed, for many reasons: awaiting the judgment of which products are considered worthy of the effort; developing new techniques with which to explain new music; using hindsight to evaluate works in their full cultural and stylistic context, etc. In the case of Adès, the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been a decidedly challenging era for art music. Whilst the scholarly establishment is actively investigating new music and there is state support in the UK and Europe, the fact remains that classical or art music is appreciated by only a fractional portion of the population; popular music, by contrast, flourishes widely.

The most salient feature of Adès’ compositional style is his use of a very wide palette of materials: style influences from the Renaissance to the present day, with all such stimuli having equal weight. As Alex Ross observes of this pastiche, “Impossibly, it all works.” Adès’ music is inseparably linked to the past, which gives it a more tangible value from a traditional perspective. His contemporary compositional language encompasses tonality and free atonality, non-functional triadic harmonies, chromaticism, jazz and pop sounds, and anything else that strikes his fancy. In his own words, Adès almost renounces responsibility for the myriad components present in his writing.

‘I do think more and more it’s a channeling,’ he says. ‘You absorb music and you need to conduct it like electricity on to the page… I can use anything I want in my

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music – the sound of a tram, Mahler, I don’t care. It all comes through me. That’s what babies are like, using DNA from a long time ago.\(^8\)

The only compositional tool that is self-declared to be off-limits for Adès is, intriguingly enough, the use of electronics – his perhaps evasive reasoning being that, simply put, he worries about such things (not) working. In this regard, Adès may be regarded as part of the “old” compositional tradition of acoustic instruments and standard medium.

Taruskin, whilst postulating about Adès’ peculiar brand of modernism, draws eloquent parallels with Richard Strauss, whose Der Rosenkavalier was considered a modern disappointment; it was stylistically backward compared to Salome, not to mention the works of the Second Viennese School.

(The) ‘dilemma of history’ might more pointedly be called the problem of an accumulated repertory: a past that has remained an eternally present and intimidating challenge to its successors. One solution – Strauss’s . . . – was to accept that eternally present past as a mine. Another, Schoenberg’s, was to try at all costs to outdistance it with labored innovation. That quixotic effort demanded the sacrifice of any hope of robust communication with a nonprofessional public.

The short-range compensation was the tiresome bromide that cast public rejection as a badge of honor. The long-range consequences were drastic: ‘the futile chase,’ as the New Yorker critic Alex Ross puts it, ‘after progressively more arcane and irrelevant musics of the future.’ That is the sad side of the story, the one the textbooks have been telling. Its lingering exponents are history’s castaways, ungracefully aging and resentful.\(^9\)

Adès himself professes admiration for Mozart, Chopin, Janacek, and Szymanowski. He is less attracted to the all-encompassing scores of Wagner and Mahler, feeling that their musical


\(^9\) Taruskin, “A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism.”
worlds were overdone. “There was that attempt to create an illusion of revelation and redemption through music that possibly diverted something quite fundamental about what we’re doing when we write a note.” At the same time, he expresses disdain for the Modernists as well, explaining that their (to him) narrow-minded attitude was ultimately detrimental.

As a self-proclaimed open-minded composer, Adès politely rejects altogether the concept of “style” – at least insofar as it deals with his own music. He emphatically resists categorization, admitting in the process that shunning a label has been difficult. Returning to the Culshaw interview:

More than once in our interview Adès talks of “retaining your innocence” as essential to a composer. When I say he has managed not to be put in a box, he replies: “Yes, but I’ve had to work hard for that. When people start talking about atonal or tonal or postmodern, or whatever – I’m not being weird, but I really don’t know what they are talking about.” These days, he says, “I’ve stopped believing in the past. You have to think of the great composers as your friends. They might be frightening friends, but still friends anyway.”

In all reality, Adès more than likely knows exactly to what the terms “tonal” and “postmodern” refer – he did attend music school, after all. There is also another factor that comes into play, and that is his skill as a pianist; this would account for his absorption of a broad array of music. With a vast repertoire at his fingertips, Adès may then be able to “channel” various elements at will into his own compositions. This supports in large measure the degree of fluency that he exhibits, not unlike that of a skilled improviser.

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11 Culshaw, “Don’t Call Me a Messiah.”
Of his creative processes, Adès has little of any specificity to say. He speaks of stability and instability – naturally, the very forces that governed tonal music for centuries – and how they still hold sway for music today. "I'm finding more and more that the most interesting issue is stability. That's what animates everything in music – stability and instability... The music we listen to is the residue of an endless search for stability..."

Adès speaks also of magnetism, which he defines as the inherent pull of a particular note. One must work out what the notes themselves are inclined to do, then guide them along their respective pathways.

'That's really what one is dealing with all the time, magnetism: understanding the magnetic pull of the notes put in a given disposition, their shifting relative weights. I don't believe at all in the official distinction between tonal and atonal music. I think the only way to understand these things is that they are the result of magnetic forces within the notes, which create a magnetic tension, an attraction or repulsion. The two notes in an interval, or any number of chords, have a magnetic relationship of attraction or repulsion, which creates movement in one direction or another. A composer, whether of a symphony or a pop song, is arranging these magnetic objects in a certain disposition. That means that sometimes, in order to understand the weight of one note and the next note to it, you might have to transfer meaning from one to another. In Polaris, I had to transfer meaning from the C sharp to the A in order to do that. And it was difficult in some ways, because to really discover what the notes want to do, you might have to go against what they at first appear to want to do, and then they start to resist and you have to use other magnets to see what they are really feeling.'

Adès' concept of magnetism is quite abstract, but also general: no rigid categories of music, just the play of notes – albeit a specific, weighted play. They may connect or intertwine, they may run from each other, they may do any number of things; it is the composer's job (as

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Adès sees it) to divine the magnetism of a particular musical work.

It would seem, then, that Adès is deliberately focusing on fundamental properties of music that transcend styles. His description of stability vs. instability, for example, articulates elemental forces. When he speaks of magnetism, of the pull of notes, this is another common metaphor: magnetism is akin to tonal logic. "(A)s Adès himself says, music itself is always a metaphor."\(^{14}\) As he depicts it, then, his compositional process sounds like a search for his own novel and virtuosic ways of dealing with these essential musical properties.

Adès remains abstract when describing what it is like to work with a composer’s “tools.”

“You’re dealing with something that is chronically volatile. It’s like lava, except my material doesn’t actually exist in physical reality. They are evanescent sounds. These notes are not objects that are in front of you — although in another sense it helps to treat them like that; maybe they are, in fact, a sort of invisible object. But that very invisibility is frustrating, because one’s brain can’t necessarily define them clearly at first.”\(^{15}\)

Adès’ comfort level with the abstract may be, in part, a maternal influence. The composer’s mother, Dawn Adès, is a professor of visual art at the University of Essex — a specialist in the surrealists. Just as surrealist art features familiar subjects in unexpected juxtaposition, Adès’ music does the same, with marked effect. Fellow English composer Christopher Fox, known for writing music of enormous stylistic breadth, has a keen insight.

‘... (O)ne of the reasons surrealist painting can so beguile our imaginations is because of its preservation of the integrity of the picture plane; what is depicted may be fantastic nonsense but there is a logic within the depiction itself which is reassuringly reminiscent of codes of visual representation familiar from earlier


\(^{15}\) Tom Service, "Composer Thomas Adès: ‘Wagner is a fungus.’"
schools of narrative painting. A similar process takes place within Adès’ music: he presents us with an extraordinarily inventive wealth of melodic and harmonic detail but virtually all of it can be related to a few intervallic relationships, usually introduced at the beginning of a work.16

Fox outlines a six-note cell that forms the basis of pitch material in Adès’ orchestral work America: A Prophecy (1999, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra as part of its “Messages for the Millennium” program). The intervals contained in this cell recur throughout the work, and Fox describes a few such transformations.

Indeed, beneath the shimmering surface of Adès’ creations there often lurk conventional elements: the circle of fifths harmonic progression, triadic harmonies, standard forms, etc. These familiar components appear and reappear, perhaps in unfamiliar contexts, but still recognizable. For example, each character in The Tempest is associated with particular intervals and harmonies, all related. Fox argues that Adès takes this technique beyond Wagnerian leitmotifs.

Qualities of place and status are as important as individual personalities, so the island is represented by evenly flowing accompaniments in woodwind and strings, while the world of the Milan court is represented by more declamatory writing in which the brass are often evident.17

The Piano Quintet, Op. 20 is cast in sonata form, with the requisite repeated exposition. Fox provides an anecdote: “... when Adès and the Arditti Quarter gave the German premiere of the work at the 2002 Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik a palpable shock of disbelief ran through the avantgardiste audience when Adès turned back sixteen pages of

17 Ibid., 54.
score to begin the repeat."\(^{18}\)

Taruskin also speaks on Adès’ surrealist tendencies, making a direct connection with painting:

Mr. Adès is lucky enough to be original both in the way that his music sounds and in the way that it means, and he works hard at his individuality (another reason not to call him a postmodernist). But that he is a committed and already masterly musical surrealist is evident within minutes, no matter which piece of his you choose to listen to.

His polymorphous perversity is only the beginning. More telling by far is the way he contrives his music so that it seems, contradicting what is thought to be the essential nature of the medium, to inhabit not time but space. It is “painterly” rather than “narrative” music. It achieves its special atmosphere, and projects its special meanings, through improbable sonic collages and mobiles: outlandish juxtapositions of evocative sound-objects that hover, shimmering, or dreamily revolve, in a seemingly motionless sonic emulsion.\(^{19}\)

Metrically, Adès has a habit of shifting meter measure by measure. This has been common since, for example, Bartók harnessed the robust metric activity of Eastern European folk music; but Adès accomplishes it in a different way. In his hands, the shifting meter creates a relaxed feel, a contributing factor to an end result almost resembling improvisation. “Nevertheless, rhythmic precision is paramount, for lines frequently converge, articulating certain points of arrival, only to shift out of temporal focus once again.”\(^{20}\) This metric subterfuge is, naturally, not to be perceived; musical lines simply change speed. “Though terrifyingly complex on the page, the aural effect is one of continual, if gentle, ebb and flow, rather like breathing.”\(^{21}\)

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 48.
\(^{19}\) Taruskin, “A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism.”
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 73-74.
Taruskin has a fascinating, if limited, theory of how Adès developed this habit:

Most telling of all is the technique – reminiscent of medieval ‘mensuration canons’ and in all likelihood learned by Mr. Adès in music history class, God bless him – of putting slow melodies in counterpoints that move at different speeds and with beats of differing length. When such lines are contrived so that their beats coincide neither with the bar lines nor with each other, the music becomes effectively meterless, sometimes for long stretches.\(^\text{22}\)

Another peculiarly Adès trait is the earlier acknowledged “pleasure of regression inherent in allusion;”\(^\text{23}\) that is, Adès’ love for what is old and new in music. He rationalizes the entire idea: “If you think of the number of melodies there are in the world, they seem to be infinite. But the differences between them can be infinitesimal.”\(^\text{24}\) While composers today have an enormous framework within which to operate, it is still, to a certain extent, unavoidable to compose melodies not recalling in any way something previously written.

Adès’ use of earlier music may have British roots.

(There is a) richness and diversity of allusion which is characteristic of much British music from the 1960s onwards, and which to some extent replaces the imperative of an earlier generation to seek a specifically English historical context in which to work. Thus Maxwell Davies’s appropriation of technical procedures derived from English medieval music appeared at the time to place him alongside such senior figures as Britten in his acknowledged indebtedness to Purcell’s word-setting, and Tippett’s absorption of the Elizabethan madrigal style.\(^\text{25}\)

Adès is, then, not alone in this pursuit. What does he do particularly with his “cannibalized” materials? British musicologist and writer Arnold Whittall attempts to explain Adès’ allusion

\(^{22}\) Taruskin, “A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism.”
technique in one particular piano piece early in his oeuvre:

(C)ompositions tend to embody that characteristic twentieth-century obsession with the past as another country within which we can discern the elements of new worlds. For example, his piano piece of 1992, *Darknesse visible*, is described by Adès as 'an explosion of Dowland's lute song “In darknesses let me dwell”; no notes have been added' to the Dowland: 'indeed, some have been removed. Patterns latent in the original have been isolated and regrouped, with the aim of illuminating the song from within, as if during the course of a performance.'

Obviously Adès' manifestation of allusion varies in any number of ways, straightforward or subtle, perceivable or not — just as do the materials from which he takes inspiration. A borrowing from Dowland will, presumably, embody a different magnetism than something excerpted from Stravinsky. "While we may still understand very little about the way in which musical language is shaped by historical culture, every composer knows from first-hand experience that musical materials exert their own demands and allow only compositional solutions that realize those demands."27

All of these concepts combine to do what Adès does particularly well, which is to involve the listener in his music. His use of familiar elements makes him not only palatable, but actually liked by today's audiences — an impressive feat. His refusal to be stamped in any particular way, coupled with his persistent openness to all musical influences, lends him an air of approachability.

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Adès' Mazurkas for Piano, Op. 27, published by Faber Music Ltd. in 2009, were premiered on February 2, 2010 at Carnegie Hall by American pianist Emanuel Ax. The United Kingdom premiere followed on March 5 at the Barbican in London, and the European premiere shortly thereafter on March 7 at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, both by Ax. Ax performed the pieces again on April 20 at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and on April 25 at Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco. Subsequent performances of the Mazurkas have been given by pianists Gloria Cheng, Richard Uttley, and Adès himself. The work is included on the composer’s 2011 album Anthology.

Given that Adès’ 2009 opus is one of the most significant contributions to the genre since the publication of Karol Szymanowski’s 20 Mazurkas, Op. 50 (1924–1926) and Two Mazurkas, Op. 62 (1933–1934), which appeared nearly one hundred years after the fifty-eight Mazurkas (1830-1847) of Frédéric Chopin, the question arises: why the mazurka? What interest would a young Englishman have in a Polish dance of which there had been no fresh musical development for long periods of time?

While definitive answers to such questions may be elusive, the composer’s fascination with earlier music is roundly acknowledged, for example, by Ross. “For him, the great composers are not distant idols but noisy neighbors.”28 Adès’ imaginary flatmates in this case are two prominent men from another country and another time – plus untold generations of boisterous Polish peasants.

A study of this heritage may elicit valuable clues with which to investigate this new contribution to the mazurka genre. From Chopin to Szymanowski to Adès: what did today’s composer learn from those of the past? Adès himself makes a number of enticing

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comments on this subject in the book of interviews conducted by Service. He describes his unabashed joy at “being happily promiscuous with pre-existing music,” pointing out that “it’s completely pretentious to imagine that you can do without other music.”\textsuperscript{29} Adès goes on to reveal, suggestively, “I knew there were things in the music that would make people say, ‘Oh, but you’ve borrowed that from x, y, or z’ – but in fact, they just came in by accident.”\textsuperscript{30}

Do such “accidents” occur in the \textit{Mazurkas}? An analysis reveals that there are notable similarities between the Chopin and Szymanowski works and those of Adès. Clearly there is some sharing between these “noisy neighbors”: particular rhythmic patterns, cadential figures, melodic lines, and even pitch quotations resurface with uncanny frequency in the music of the British composer. Yet each of the three retains his uniqueness. Whittall “suggests that allusion in Adès’ music is something undertaken without any hang-ups, because he finds it pleasurable to do so and... hopes that listeners will share that pleasure. Anxiety, fear, guilt or even reverence, have nothing to do with it.”\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps this is Adès’ way of “conversing” with his “noisy neighbors,” or even “introducing them” to his own circle of friends?

Homage, influence, and/or neighborly relations aside, what contributions does Adès make to the genre? How does he effectively modernize the mazurka? In what ways does this treasure of Polish culture live on in another epoch? A thorough analysis of the music, the cultural environments, and the compositional styles of the three main figures in the

\textsuperscript{29} Adès and Service, \textit{Thomas Adès: Full of Noise, Conversations with Tom Service}, 26.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{31} Fox, “Tempestuous Times: The Recent Music of Thomas Adès,” 46.
history of the piano mazurka will allow a lineage to be traced through the genre, thereby placing the mazurkas of today into proper context.
Chapter 2

The Mazurka Heritage, Part One:
Humble Beginnings to Elite Chopin

"You know how much I wanted to feel – and, in part, succeeded in feeling – our national music."

— Frédéric Chopin

Letter from Paris to Tytus Woyciechowski written December 25, 1831

The mazurka is a Polish national dance originating in the sixteenth century, with the oldest extant sources dating from that time. “Early lute and organ tablatures feature many instances of the mazurka rhythm in pieces entitled Polish dance, or in Latin, Chorea polonica.”

Its history is unsurprisingly murky, especially given the circumstances: following the partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795, the country was divided up between Russia, Prussia, and Austria; Poland as a political entity effectively ceased to exist until 1918.


Due to this confused history, and that of Poland’s neighboring countries, many ancient rituals have been lost, while others have been preserved and highly elaborated — a sign of a conquered people’s strong nationalistic spirit. However, consistent records are lacking, and hence the exact history of the mazurka, both the dance and the music, has been obscured.34

The dance takes its name from the people of the Mazovia province near Warsaw, called the Mazurs. In its early days, the mazurka resembled the German Ländler, Nachtanz, Bauernanz, and any number of provincial dance forms from Germany, Sweden, and other countries. According to Anne Swartz, a musicologist at the City University of New York, “That many of the stylistic traits evidenced in Polish folk mazurkas were also present in other folk dances of this period may be observed in musical examples from lutebooks notated in surrounding countries.”35

The term actually encompasses three distinct forms of the dance: the lively mazur, the oldest form, originating in Mazovia; the slower, more graceful kujawiak, from the neighboring district of Kujawy; and the fast oberek, also emerging from the villages of Mazovia in east central Poland. Characteristics common to all types of mazurka include: triple meter (3/8 or 3/4); dotted rhythms; accents on weak beats (second or third beat of a given measure); modal or other non-traditional scales, including mixtures of major/minor and the exotic-sounding augmented second interval; and accompaniment by an instrumental drone or dudy (the Polish equivalent of bagpipes), usually on the tonic or dominant note. The mazurka shares other features common to all dance music: regular phrasing punctuated by clear cadences; repetition of short, one- to two-measure melodic and rhythmic motives;  

and the use of both of these elements to articulate easily graspable form. Tempo rubato also
factors in, along with some spirited extras for the male dancers: clapping, stamping boots,
and leaping to click heels in mid-air (holubiec). As noted Polish folk dance expert Ada
Dziewanowska notes, “It conveys the typical trait of the Polish character, that today we live
and are merry, who cares what tomorrow may bring.”36

Though it began as a folk dance of the peasants, the mazurka eventually “upgraded,”
moving through all other classes of society. Moreover, by the 1830s-1840s, in the decades
after Poland lost independence, the mazurka had spread to other areas of Europe, including
the fashionable ballrooms and salons of London and Paris (also Russia, as a result of the
takeover). At this point, it morphed into a social couples’ dance.

Polish musicologist and ethnographer Anna Czekanowska observes, “It is interesting
to note that in Poland’s case the loss of state sovereignty coincided with the age of general
national enlightenment, and the birth of national consciousness in Europe.”37 For the Poles,
whose nation had been taken from them, this was a heartbreaking time. Desperate to retain
any part of their former identity that would be allowed, they naturally seized upon
instrumental music (lyrics being censored). Folk music represented the lost Poland, the true
Polish heritage. Writing mazurkas became a patriotic imperative.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the ‘nation’ (naród) was a prominent topic not
only among diplomats and revolutionary leaders determined to restore Poland’s lost
independence but also among those members of the middle and upper classes

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Books, 1999), 591.
37 Anna Czekanowska, *Polish Folk Music: Slavonic Heritage, Polish Tradition, Contemporary Trends*
(Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.
concerned with preserving – or more accurately, constructing – a national identity for Poland through its cultural heritage: its language, history, religion, and customs.\(^{38}\)

Allegedly every Polish composer of any skill wrote mazurkas. Pre-Chopin examples include those of Maria Szymanowska, née Wołowska (no relation to the later Karol); Karol Kurpinski; Stanisław Moniuszko (operas); Aleksander Tansman; Roman Maciejewski; and Józef Elsner (Chopin’s teacher). Szymanowska, an acclaimed concert artist and composer of salon music, wrote 24 mazurkas, which were published in three editions over the years 1820-1830. It is not known if Chopin was familiar with them, although he thought highly enough of Szymanowska to attend her concerts. Szymanowska’s mazurkas were far from Chopin’s later products: little pieces of 16-24 measures, schematic and conventional, Romantic and pianistic in style, not nearly at the level of Chopin. Elsner used the mazurka rhythm in his operas, which Chopin surely heard; incidentally, Elsner, in a letter dated 1834, implored Chopin to write a nationalist opera. Perhaps closest to Chopin’s idiom is the mazurek-flavored theme that appears in the rondo finale of Franciszek Lessel’s Piano Concerto in C Major, Op. 14. Lessel had been a student of Haydn and can be regarded as one of many stylistic predecessors to Chopin in the nineteenth-century continuum of piano writing. Of Lessel’s piano writing, Zofia Chechlińska, editor of the Fryderyk Chopin Institute’s facsimile edition of Chopin’s manuscripts, writes the following:

Mozart’s influence is evident in the piano pieces, where there is a strong virtuoso element. His piano concerto in C displays characteristics of the “style brillant” . . . the solo instrument dominates and is followed by the orchestra. Lessel’s works often

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contain Polish features, such as the rhythmic patterns of Polish dances (mainly in cyclic works) and popular melodies used as thematic material on a larger scale.\(^{39}\)

Through these efforts and those of others, the artistic form of the mazurka was established by the time Chopin came on the scene; Chopin brought it to another level.

Chopin, for his part, was born in Mazovia and, according to his letters, heard folk music during childhood trips to the countryside. Musicologist Barbara Milewski discusses this at length in her writings: “Scant as they may be, Chopin’s letters on the subject make it clear that the composer did have access to the music of the folk.”\(^{40}\) Later, as a Polish émigré to Paris, Chopin joined other Poles in feeling nostalgic for his homeland. He eagerly took up the Polish cause. Composing patriotic parlor music for piano may have seemed an unlikely military strategy, but Chopin became a powerful symbol of the enduring spirit of his erstwhile country. According to the esteemed Maurice Hinson,

Robert Schumann wrote: “If the mighty autocrat of the North (the Czar of Russia) knew what a dangerous enemy threatened him in Chopin’s works, in the simple melodies of his mazurkas, he would forbid this music. Chopin’s works are guns buried in flowers.”\(^{41}\)

Chopin truly transformed the mazurka within his own style. In keeping with this transformation, Chopin considered his mazurkas as fully removed from the dance itself, as in no longer danceable. Similarly, he also transformed other dance forms, such as the waltz and polonaise, into high art. James Huneker, a pianist (who audited the class of one of


\(^{40}\) Milewski, “Chopin’s Mazurkas and the Myth of the Folk,” 121.

Chopin’s students) and author of the seminal biography Chopin: The Man and His Music, wrote, “Chopin’s achievement here is comparable to Bach’s in his treatment of the various dance forms, particularly the sarabande.”

What were Chopin’s inspirations in developing the mazurka? Conflicting claims abound. Naturally, there are widespread assertions that it was Chopin’s Polish-ness that was responsible for such art; as the prodigal son of the country, his heart guided him. Chopin’s devout biographer, Huneker, romanticizes, “Chopin is the musical soul of Poland; he incarnates its political passion.” The son of a French father and Polish mother, Chopin lived in Poland until the age of twenty-one, when he joined other exiled Poles in Paris.

From his earliest years as an émigré, he wished not only to remember, but above all, to understand, experience, and to enter into the soul of Polish music – that is, Polish folklore . . . For there is no doubt that Chopin held dear to him everything that reminded him of Poland: his family, his happy childhood and adolescence, and therefore also Polish folklore . . .

How infallible were Chopin’s musical memories, though? Born at the beautiful estate of Żelazowa Wola in the countryside west of Warsaw, the infant Chopin moved with his family to the city just seven months later. Although he went to the country for occasional holidays, he was in all respects a city boy. His connection to the rural life would have been quite limited. Accordingly, Chopin’s mazurkas may be understood as “deterritorialized from the Polish roots we might seek.”

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44 Jan Węcowski, “Religious Folklore in Chopin’s Music.”
seem that Chopin was more likely to have formed his concept of the mazurka in the salons and stages of Warsaw and Paris than among peasants in rural Poland.

For Chopin to become intimately acquainted with folk elements such as sharpened fourths, open-fifth bass drones, or cadences stressing the second beat of a measure, he needed to go no further than Warsaw's art-music offerings. Put another way, while direct contact with a rural musical practice doubtlessly made an impression on the young Chopin, it was not singularly defining for his particular evocation of a Polish musical landscape. To recognize that the composer drew on and synthesized a variety of musical experiences both rural and urban is not, however, to diminish his achievement in this genre. Instead, it gives us a richer context for appreciating the level of inspiration he brought to his sonic account of the nation. In the end, Chopin, like so many of his musical compatriots, was not interested in recovering rural truths, but in bringing Poles of the urban upper classes a little bit closer to a highly constructed and desirable idea of themselves. 

As was common for pianists of the era, Chopin was known to improvise on popular or national themes. Nineteenth-century pianists were expected to roll out virtuosic and entertaining variations on anything from opera arias to national anthems. Given the number of Polish exiles living in Paris at the time, there may well have been an abiding interest in hearing Polish melodies, or Polish dance rhythms, or some other perceived Polish-ness. In any case, this practice of admitting popular or patriotic tunes into the salon likely deepened Chopin’s knowledge of folk music—albeit not via firsthand sources—as well.

Chopin did have exposure to the preeminent and authentic collection of Polish folk music of the day: **Lud**, Oskar Kolberg’s massive 33-volume set of Polish folk songs and dances. **Lud** contains 10,000+ melodies, organized by geographic region, plus descriptions of notable cultural aspects. Although this seminal achievement was not published until

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47 Oskar Kolberg, **Lud: Jego twórczość, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusła, zabawy, piesni, muzyka i tance** (Warszawa: W Drukarni J. Jaworskiego, 1857-1890).
1857-1890, Kolberg circulated a shorter preliminary collection of folk songs with simple accompaniment in 1842, entitled *Piesni ludu polskiego*. Chopin, who ostensibly knew Kolberg, received a copy and was reportedly unimpressed. It seems that he objected particularly to Kolberg's treatment of the melodies.

In a now well-known letter to his family sent in 1847, Chopin judged that “[Kolberg’s] labor only distorts matters and makes work harder for the genius who will one day disentangle the truth. Until then, all these beautiful things remain with their noses straightened, rouged, and their legs chopped off or stuck on stilts, a laughingstock for those who do not take them seriously.”

It is also feasible that, given his high degree of originality, Chopin found the prospect of using entire melodies verbatim simply not in line with his artistic sensibilities, at least insofar as the mazurkas are concerned. Pianist and writer Paul Hamburger suggests that Chopin “felt hemmed in by the primitive rigidity of these melodies in their entirety. On the other hand, he readily let himself be inspired by their elements...” In his dissertation, *Form and the Mazurkas of Chopin*, Frank William Marks summarizes: “Chopin’s sparing and yet prominent usage of these folk elements, furnishes an excellent example of his taking the flavor of his Polish models without resorting to slavish copying or imitation.”

In fact, there appears to be no direct evidence of folk quotation in Chopin's mazurkas, despite the persistent efforts of musicologists to track down source melodies. Rather, Chopin was inspired by various folk-like elements including raised fourths, a drone bass, specific rhythmic patterns, weak cadences, and repetition of short motives. These

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50 Marks, “Form and the Mazurkas of Chopin,” 19.
51 Milewski, “Chopin’s Mazurkas and the Myth of the Folk.”
provincial extracts, whether they came from decades-old memories, the Kolberg anthology, or French parlors, were then polished and incorporated into the composer’s expert writing. The mazurkas may be more chromatic and harmonically adventurous than his other works of the time, and consequently more folk-like or exotic in sound, but still they are quintessentially Chopin.

Chopin’s mazurkas, cast as they were in Parisian high society, had little connection with their primitive roots. Remembering Polish folk music from childhood whilst keeping company with the major musical, artistic, and literary figures of the time, all strongly under the spell of Romanticism, undoubtedly smoothed out any provincial roughness. In contrast to a composer like Bartók, who worked with actual, documented melodies, Chopin engineered a “composite recollection of certain types of melodies and rhythms which are then given artistically valid expression . . .”

What exactly was the result of this imaginative synthesis? After all, writes noted author Herbert Weinstock, “(w)hat a composer accepts for use from the general storehouse of musical creation remains less interesting to analysis than the results of that borrowing: what he adds to it and what he himself imagines and invents.”

The mazurka is a genre in which Chopin wrote during essentially his entire creative life, from 1830 to 1847. Most of these fifty-eight pieces were published in sets of three (four sets, Opp. 50, 56, 59, and 63); four (eight sets, Opp. 6, 17, 24, 30, 33, 41, 67, and 68); or five (one set, Op. 7); there were also a number of mazurkas without opus numbers. In the majority of cases, Chopin combined features of all three types of mazurka, sometimes in

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different sections of one piece. In this way he melded any pure folk influences into a new idiom. Most of the Chopin mazurkas are organized into some type of ABA form, often with the middle section designated as a trio, and sometimes including a coda. Different sections may also be marked with new thematic material, contrasting tempi or key changes, in addition to obvious texture changes. In thirty-seven of the mazurkas there are changes of key and/or tempo/character in the middle section. Chopin follows generally the regular phrasing used in all dance music; four-measure phrases are the rule. One notable folk-like element pertinent to form is his frequent repetition of short phrases. An example of such reiteration and its impact on the phrasing can be found in the Mazurka in Bb Major, Op. 7, No. 1. The opening phrase is a standard four measures; however, Chopin repeats the content of the last measure, progressively lower, for two successive measures. The result is actually a six-measure phrase – a rare exception. This example also illustrates the familiar dotted rhythm used in Chopin’s mazurkas.

Figure 2-1. Six-measure phrase in Chopin, Mazurka in Bb Major, Op. 7, No. 1, mm. 1-6

Chopin delights in the natural metric play of the mazurka, using both second and third beat accents, sometimes switching rhythmic emphasis between sections. "A truism is
that the accent should never fall consistently on the first beat of a measure, as the piece would then become a waltz . . . " He also employs the characteristic dotted rhythm, triplets, and occasional syncopation. The very first published mazurka, the Mazurka in F# Minor, Op. 6, No. 1, contains all of these rhythmic features in the first phrase. Such techniques combine to create a unique rhythmic vitality, avoiding the typical Western classical metric emphases.

**Figure 2-2.** Dotted rhythm, triplets, and syncopation in Chopin, Mazurka in F# Minor, Op. 6, No. 1, mm. 1-8

Melodically, Chopin is quite inventive, using a mixture of major and minor as well as modal scales. Melodic patterns feature the lowered second, augmented second, raised fourth, and lower seventh degrees of the scale. The Lydian mode (demonically dubbed the "Polish mode"), replete with its characteristic displaced tritone, appears most often. One of

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54 Marks, "Form and the Mazurkas of Chopin," 16.
the most celebrated instances of the Lydian mode can be found in the trio of the Mazurka in F Major, Op. 68, No. 3, while the Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 68, No. 2, features a Lydian melodic twist in the second section.

**Figure 2-3.** Lydian mode in Chopin, Mazurka in F Major, Op. 68, No. 3, mm. 33-44

![Figure 2-3](image1)

**Figure 2-4.** Lydian melody in Chopin, Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 68, No. 2, mm. 16-20

![Figure 2-4](image2)
The Phrygian and Aeolian modes also surface. The Mazurka in C# Minor, Op. 41, No. 1, actually begins in the Phrygian mode; the mode returns in the climactic chords near the end.

Figure 2-5. Phrygian mode in Chopin, Mazurka in C# Minor, Op. 41, No. 1

2-5a. mm. 1-8

2-5b. mm. 119-126

**Figure 2-6.** Aeolian mode in Chopin, Mazurka in C Major, Op. 24, No. 2, mm. 5-12

A striking mix of major and minor occurs in the Mazurka in Db Major, Op. 30, No. 3. This modal mixture was also considered a Polish element, although it is also a more general characteristic of Chopin’s style.
These folk-like melodies, essentially created within Chopin’s stylized conception of folk, did not necessarily conform to typical harmonic conventions. Chopin used some of his most chromatic chords or – quite frequently – a folk-inspired drone or pedal point to harmonize them. The open fifth seen in the earlier example, Op. 68, No. 3, is used to accompany the folk-inspired Lydian melody of the trio section. This fifth also features accents that contradict the meter. Both drones and pedal points are very widely used; drones
in particular are found most often in the trios (Op. 68, No. 3) and beginnings. For example, the Mazurka in E Major, Op. 6, No. 3 begins with a drone fifth, also accenting weak beats in the meter.

**Figure 2-8.** Drone fifth in Chopin, Mazurka in E Major, Op. 6, No. 3, mm. 1-8

![Mazurka in E Major, Op. 6, No. 3, mm. 1-8](image)

Successions of seventh chords are also prevalent. A chromatic descent of major-minor or dominant seventh chords (well predating Debussy) appears near the end of the Mazurka in C# Minor, Op. 30, No. 4. A descending circle-of-fifths sequence of similar seventh chords features twice as the second phrase in a two-phrase grouping in the Mazurka in Bb Major, Op. 67, No. 2.

**Figure 2-9.** Chromatically descending dominant seventh chords in Chopin, Mazurka in C# Minor, Op. 30, No. 4, mm. 129-132

![Chromatic descent of dominant seventh chords](image)
Figure 2-10. Descending-fifth sequence of dominant seventh chords in Chopin, Mazurka in B♭ Major, Op. 67, No. 2, mm. 17-24

Grace notes were intended to give a rustic feel to a tune. Returning to the Mazurka in F♯ Minor, Op. 6, No. 1, the entire C section, marked *scherzando*, is suffused with this distinctive style of grace note.
Figure 2-11. Rustic grace notes in Chopin, Mazurka in F# Minor, Op. 6, No. 1, mm. 40-48

"Several examples explore some of the composer's most adventurous chromatic harmonies which, alongside the folk inflections, led many critics to recoil at the quirky, 'exotic' idiom."\(^{55}\) Chopin often reserves a high level of chromaticism for climactic points in the works, for example leading into the key change at the return of the A section in the Mazurka in C Minor, Op. 56, No. 3.

Figure 2-12. Chromaticism at climactic point in Chopin, Mazurka in C Minor, Op. 56, No. 3, mm. 134-137

At other times, the chromaticism may be couched in a flowing waltz-like accompaniment, as in the Mazurka in F Minor, Op. 68, No. 4.
Figure 2-13. Chromatic line over waltz-like accompaniment in Chopin, Mazurka in F Minor, Op. 68, No. 4, mm. 13-23

Earlier mazurkas of Chopin tend to be labeled as more folk-like – whether correctly or incorrectly – because they are less stylized than the later creations. Paul Hamburger theorizes, “As Chopin gradually freed himself from the dance associations of the mazurka the ‘tone-poems’ amongst them become more frequent.”56 Whatever Chopin did, however daring, however folk- or salon-inspired, the result was still consistent with his style.

The emotional content of the works is vast. Every mazurka has an individual poetic

quality, form, and expression, despite general stylistic common traits. The mazurka seems to be treated by Chopin as a form of reflective lyricism. One profoundly striking aspect is that the mazurkas are not particularly technically flamboyant. In an epoch of high virtuosity, Chopin’s conscious limitation of the pianistic texture is noteworthy.

Taken as a whole the mazurkas focus less on virtuoso display in the ordinary sense. Their challenges stem rather from the expert handling of musical details, balance, rhythmic subtleties, melodic inflection, and deft projection of mood. Performers often pass them by in favor of Chopin works that are more brilliant. Musicians who spend time studying the mazurkas, however, almost always come away feeling that the intimacy of these works has given them a vivid realization of the composer’s spirit. 57

The interpretation of the Chopin mazurkas requires a paradoxical combination of naïveté and maturity, much like the music of Mozart, whom Chopin admired. Harold C. Schonberg, in his classic tome The Great Pianists, explains poignantly, "... (T)he eighteen-year-old Chopin, all set to conquer the world at the keyboard, knew that he would have to do it by finesse rather than power.” 58 This attribute is at the heart of the mazurkas. In them (just as in Mozart’s sonatas, for example), everything is exposed, and everything must be thoughtfully executed. Unlike much other piano music of the day, which tended to be flashy and ostentatious, the mazurkas have an intimacy about them that renders such display unnecessary. The pieces are exquisite miniatures just as they are. The performer must not be disappointed by this, but rather appreciate that restraint is a sort of virtuosity unto itself—perhaps a more deeply musical virtuosity than the technical or physical kind.

Chopin’s own playing of the mazurkas has long been a contentious topic. The infamous account of pianist Charles Hallé arguing with Chopin over the meter, accusing him of playing 4/4 instead of 3/4, exposes the question of rubato. In Franz Liszt’s *Life of Chopin*, there is a chapter devoted to the mazurkas. At the end of this chapter, Chopin’s esteemed colleague and friend provides a glimpse into how he played, including the elusive tempo rubato.

Through his peculiar style of performance, Chopin imparted this constant rocking with the most fascinating effect; thus making the melody undulate to and fro, like a skiff driven on over the bosom of tossing waves. This manner of execution, which set a seal so peculiar upon his own style of playing was at first indicated by the term *Tempo rubato*, affixed to his writings: a Tempo agitated, broken, interrupted, a movement flexible, yet at the same time abrupt and languishing, and vacillating as the flame under the fluctuating breath by which it is agitated. In his later productions we no longer find this mark. He was convinced that if the performer understood them, he would divine this rue of irregularity. All his compositions should be played with this accentuated and measured swaying and balancing. It is difficult for those who have not frequently heard him play to catch this secret of their proper execution. He seemed desirous of imparting this style to his numerous pupils, particularly those of his own country. His countrymen, or rather this countrywomen, seized it with the facility with which they understand everything relating to poetry or feeling; an innate, intuitive comprehension of his meaning aided them in following all the fluctuations of his depths of aerial and spiritual blue.\(^{59}\)

It has been said that “(n)o compositions are so Chopin-ish as the Mazurkas.”\(^{60}\) Regardless of source or inspiration, the works are strongly personal. Chopin’s voice comes through in every note that he writes, across the repertory. Whether folk-driven or not, Chopin’s Polish sympathies are undoubtedly sincere, and his naturally genteel nature influenced his interpretation and development of the genre. In his own way, he was a rebel,

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\(^{60}\) Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music*, 197.
a warrior for the Polish cause. In lieu of fighting, though, Chopin spoke with musical poignancy; "guns buried in flowers" indeed. Once again, in the words of Liszt: "He did not task himself, nor study to be a national musician. Like all truly national poets he sang spontaneously without premeditated design or preconceived choice all that inspiration dictated to him..."\(^{61}\)

\(^{61}\) Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, 90.
Part 2. The Mazurka

Chapter 3

The Mazurka Heritage, Part Two:

Szymanowski’s Góral Encounters

"‘Let our music be national in its Polish characteristics’, he wrote,

‘but not falter in striving to attain universality.’"\(^{62}\)

– Karol Szymanowski

Following Chopin’s aristocratic stamp, other composers seemed content to allow him the final say on the genre. There were a few offerings from the Russians, for example an aria in the mazurka style in Mussorgsky’s opera *Boris Godunov* (1872), the two mazurka movements in Borodin’s *Petite Suite* (1885), and, most substantially, the piano mazurkas of Scriabin (twenty-three mazurkas, Opp. 3, 25, 40, and posthumous, 1884-1903). For the most part, however, the mazurka seemed to have reached its developmental peak . . . until Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937). This arguably next great Polish composer considered Chopin to be a “noisy neighbor” in the Adès sense: he studied all of Chopin’s music and was profoundly influenced by the earlier master, stating “. . . for Polish musicians (Chopin) is a


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still living reality, an active force which exerts a direct and spontaneous influence on the
evolution of our contemporary music in its entirety.”

Naturally, Szymanowski had some affinity with his illustrious Polish predecessor. Many affectionate anecdotes describe the innate sense of nobility with which Chopin seemed to be endowed. Similarly, Szymanowski, as described by his biographer B. M. Maciejewski, “embodied a typical XVI century Polish nobleman: gallant, artistic, completely devoid of realism, proud of his ancestors and ‘Grand Poland,’ before its decline and partitions.” Also like Chopin, Szymanowski turned away from German Romanticism. Perhaps in part because the world became a bit smaller during the decades between the two men, Szymanowski was able to travel much more widely. Coupled with his innate curiosity, these travels undoubtedly helped his formation of a more worldly perspective. The distinguished Szymanowski scholar Jim Samson theorizes:

The poverty of indigenous traditions after Chopin forced Szymanowski to look outside his homeland, and in some respects his development as a composer can be viewed as a series of responses—some muted, some not so muted—to German, French and eastern European styles respectively.

Szymanowski went not only to Paris and London, but also to Italy, North Africa (Algiers, Tunisia), and, of course, the United States. His travels had an immeasurable impact upon his creative output. Living as a subject of the Russian Empire, he absorbed the Russian musical

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tradition, notably the developments of Scriabin and Stravinsky. He also had an abiding interest in Arab and Mediterranean culture. Szymanowski was inspired by themes from classical and oriental antiquity. This in itself is a measure of the composer’s changing aesthetic sympathies, relating him to French and Russian rather than to German musical traditions. The German classical tradition was essentially inward-looking, feeding off itself in a development which culminated in an inbred crisis of expression which affected in different ways Mahler, Strauss and Schoenberg. By contrast French and Russian composers in the nineteenth century were often eclectics, turning to exotic and folk cultures and allowing the musical stylizations of these to reshape and modify established European techniques. Szymanowski’s growing preoccupation with an “exotic of time and space” was in proportion to his declining interest in German music and literature.  

His prolific pre-war creative period, during which he drew upon the above array of influences, was rudely interrupted by the October Revolution of 1917. The Russians took over: the Szymanowski family estate at Tymoszówka was destroyed; and the composer’s pianos were, horrifically, rolled into the lake. Clearly this was a dark time. “‘Can you imagine,’ he wrote in 1918, ‘I cannot compose now.’”  

The re-emergence of the Polish state after World War I demanded an artistic response. Szymanowski returned from his exile on Christmas Eve, 1919, settling in Warsaw. Though he soon staged a concert of his music, it was not (in his opinion) well-received. The composer lamented,

“I am a stranger to them. They do not understand me, and I probably have no place in the general structure of Polish music.” The final phrase is significant, for it hints at the composer’s growing conviction that a nationalist aesthetic, however outmodeled in Western Europe, had validity in the newly independent Poland. 

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Szymanowski’s many unfinished pieces dating from 1920 are testament to his artistic conundrum. Clearly in need of fresh inspiration, he soon found it.

“With the beginnings of an interest in old Polish music and the gradual publication of Oskar Kolberg’s multi-volume collection of folk music, Polish musicology and ethnomusicology were encouraged.” Szymanowski commenced a stylistic phase dominated by Polish nationalism – a quest for a modern national idiom. He wanted to do for twentieth-century Polish music what Chopin had done in the nineteenth century. The mazurka, as a symbol of Polish national identity, was the perfect manifestation. Polish musicologist Teresa Chylińska is of the opinion that “Szymanowski reached directly to the Chopin mazurka model and . . . achieved success . . .”

But Szymanowski’s take on the mazurka was not simply a refraction back to the Romantic period, nor a twentieth-century modernization of Chopin. Szymanowski pursued a rougher, more forthright concept of the folk à la Stravinsky. Music professor Adolf Chybiński of the University of Lwów introduced Szymanowski to the music of Podhale, in the foothills of the Tatra range of the Carpathian Mountains in southern Poland. “The increasingly topical matter of musical folklore in relation to musical creativity came up . . . as I was occupied at that time with the musical culture of Podhale, I could not let slip the chance to bring up the primitivism and individuality of the music of the Tatra.” Szymanowski became fascinated with the vibrant music of the Tatra Highlanders, known as Góral music, centered in the mountain resort of Zakopane. This culture remained intact,

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69 Ibid., 16.
71 Szymanowski, Selected Writings of Karol Szymanowski, 53.
unaffected by war and change due to geographic inaccessibility. Though he had traveled to Zakopane before (famously making friends with Artur Rubinstein there in 1904), “it was only in the 1920s that he joined that company of artists, writers, and mountain enthusiasts that were committed totally to the folk culture and traditions of the region, a company dubbed by Szymanowski as ‘the emergency rescue squad of Tatra culture.”

Szymanowski took on an ethnomusicologist’s role, keeping a folklore notebook of authentic melodies, living among the people, and gleefully reveling into the wee hours at their rambunctious all-night parties. He welcomed the spirit of the place; he was welcomed in return. He delighted in the original melodies and harmonies of true self-taught musicians, most of whom were of a very advanced age, thus a treasured link to another century. These people, Szymanowski felt, were the key to his revitalization of the mazurka.

In the nationalist climate of the 1920s many Polish artists managed to persuade themselves that the undoubted creative energy of Tatra culture was the residue of a once vital Polish style, suppressed elsewhere by political vicissitudes. Yet the real appeal of the region – for Szymanowski, and perhaps for others – was its exoticism, its existence as a world of presumed innocence and vitality which could stand muster as an alternative reality, again suggestive both of ancient roots and of Dionysian escape. This, rather more than Tatra’s dubious capacity to speak for the nation, helped liberate Szymanowski from his creative paralysis. There was no phony nationalism. The ideological input served here its legitimate and customary purpose, which is to trigger rather than determine the creative impulse, even if the composer himself may have assigned it greater privilege. And in this respect Szymanowski fell into line with more general developments in eastern central Europe in the early years of the century. Nationalism was indeed the essential agent of a musical “awakening” throughout the region, but once awakened this music very soon entered the wider world.

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In particular, Szymanowski was guided by Stravinsky’s seminal work with Russian folk music, aspiring to do the same with Polish sources. His introduction came courtesy of Rubinstein and Petrouchka; Szymanowski formally acknowledged Stravinsky’s influence in an unpublished article in 1921.\textsuperscript{74}

Essentially, Chybniński’s invitation to investigate Góral music materialized quite fortuitously, just in time for Szymanowski to resolve his crisis of inspiration with new material to which to apply some of Stravinsky’s intriguing ideas. Samson discusses the overall impact of Góral influences on Szymanowski’s writing:

Undoubtedly the composer’s fascination with Góral music in the 1920s had as much to do with the timing of his discovery as with the nature of the music itself. The real point about this music for Szymanowski was that it represented a key to his major dilemma – how to write music which would be national in character and yet which would not involve a total sacrifice of that “inner life”… His “inner life” had been nurtured on the world of exoticism and for the composer the largely unfamiliar Góral music, with its harsh dissonance and fascinating heterophonic effects, was in a sense yet another form of exoticism, with the same primitive energy and “archaic” harmonies which appealed to Stravinsky in some Russian peasant music. It is worth noting that later in life he tired of this kind of exoticism just as he had tired of the earlier variety.\textsuperscript{75}

A look at Stanisław Mierczynski’s Muzyka Podhala, a collection of accompanied melodies, gives an indication of Szymanowski’s source material. Melodies have a narrow range, probably suited for the voice. Alternative scales are readily apparent, especially the Lydian mode. Phrasing is not necessarily regular. The music is exclusively in duple meter (2/4 or 4/4), with off-beat rhythmic accentuation and syncopation. Grace notes and turns abound. Accompaniments are simple. The overall effect is high-spirited, but also straightforward and

\textsuperscript{74} Samson, The Music of Szymanowski, 156.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 168.
repetitive; these notated versions of the tunes were likely a basis for improvised embellishment. A few examples appear in Figure 4-1: straightforward instances of D Lydian melodies in five-measure phrases over octave drones in Nos. 1 and 3; and, in No. 64, an intriguing mixture of D Lydian (with the G♯ in m. 3) and D major in the first section and Góral, which combines a raised fourth and a lowered seventh (occurring with the Cs in mm. 9 and 14), and Lydian in the second section, in four-measure phrases, also over octave drones. The Lydian mode is by far the most common in the collection – one can see why it is called the “Polish mode” – and the majority of the pieces are written in five-measure phrases. There is a large degree of similarity between pieces in the collection.
Figure 3-la and b. Lydian mode and five-measure phrases in No. 1. Sabalowa and No. 3 Sabalowa from Muzyka Podhala
Figure 3-1c. Lydian, major, and Góral scales in No. 64. Drobny Zakopianski from *Muzyka Podhala*.

Szymanowski wrote his 20 Mazurkas while living in Zakopane. They retain the free, improvisatory style of their original folk impetus. Though he pays homage to Chopin by adopting the genre, Szymanowski transplants it from the plains of Mazovia to the Tatra highlands. The result is a stunning contrast of elements, mixing regional characteristics to achieve a novel way of expressing Polish nationalism in music.
The folk flavor is at its strongest in the pitch material. Szymanowski utilizes the Podhale or Góral scale. This striking combination of raised fourth and lowered seventh contains two tritones; e.g. given a tonic C, both C to F♯ and E to B♭; this contrasts with the standard placement of the single tritone in the corresponding diatonic scale, F to B. The first theme of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1 employs this scale on E: E, F♯, G♯, A♯, B, C♯, D, E; Szymanowski also adds in the leading tone, D♯, in a different octave, thus mixing the Góral and Lydian scales in the same phrases.

Figure 3-2. Góral and Lydian scales in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1, mm. 1-8

Other modal scales are evident, along with the standard pentatonic folk scale. The first theme of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2 is a mixture of A Mixolydian and A major scales, containing both G and G♯.
Figure 3-3. Mixolydian and major scales in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, mm. 1-8

The Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 11 features an E Dorian melody, accompanied by a drone fifth.

Figure 3-4. Dorian melody in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 11, mm. 3-7

Though Szymanowski always retains a tonal center in these pieces, on occasion he may have more than one: bitonality is evident at times, arrived at through the movement of two polyphonic lines, or melodies in different keys. In the beginning of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 3, the composer creates a curious bitonality, juxtaposing a line using the white keys of the piano with a line using the black keys. The top line (white keys) adheres to a diatonic pentachord on A (A, B, C, D, E), while the bottom line (black keys) forms a diatonic pentachord on C# (C#, D#, E#, F#, G#).
Figure 3-5. White key / black key bitonality and diatonic pentachords in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 3, mm. 1-9

The Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 14 features a similar bitonal effect created by two independent lines; the top remains in the overall E♭ major tonality of the piece, while the bottom diverges.

Figure 3-6. Bitonality in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 14, mm. 17-22

Szymanowski also animates his melodic lines with numerous grace notes and other forms of decoration, giving to a certain extent the illusion of improvisation. The Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 11 contains both grace notes and ornaments; the Vivace section is a fine example.
Szymanowski’s harmonic material meets the challenge of harmonizing folk scales and modes with solutions ranging from drones to chromaticism. The open-fifth drone or pedal is his most common response (and did have precedent in Chopin). Obviously the open fifth is an effective way to deal with a melody that resists traditional tonal harmony, suppressing the third, and, therefore, a triadic or major/minor reference. Likewise, an open-fifth accompaniment works well when mixing major and minor or other modes (bimodality). Szymanowski’s use of fifth drones is extensive. In an earlier example, the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 11, a fifth drone was used to accompany a Dorian melody. In the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1, a fifth drone plays under the chromatic upper voices of the B section.
Figure 3-8. Fifth drone under chromatic lines in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1, mm. 17-24

Szymanowski stacks two fifths, with a shared note between, to create a different sort of fifth drone in the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 20.

Figure 3-9. Stacked-fifth drone in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 20, mm. 26-33
Szymanowski also has a flair for writing minor-second drones, which sound deliciously raw, yet somehow appropriate. A minor second drone features prominently in the second theme of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2.

**Figure 3-10.** Minor-second drone in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, mm. 9-14

Another minor-second drone colors the opening of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 18; it returns at the *Vivace molto* section.
Figure 3-11a. Minor-second drone in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 18, mm. 1-7

Figure 3-11b. Minor-second drone in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 18, mm. 105-112

Other notable harmonies include quartal and quintal chords. A prominent use of both, along with seconds and dominant seventh chords in a series, occurs in the middle of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2.
Figure 3-13. Quartal and quintal harmonies, along with seconds and dominant seventh chords, in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, mm. 23-28

Szymanowski also uses fifths in succession. A descending series of quintal harmonies accompanies the melody in the *Meno mosso* section of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 6.

Figure 3-14. Series of quintal harmonies in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 6, mm. 49-54

A chromatically descending chain of fifths appears in the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 10.
Figure 3-15. Descending series of fifths in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 10, mm. 15-19

When melodic twists and turns occur more frequently, the harmonic surroundings veer toward the chromatic spectrum. Szymanowski enjoys harmonic ambiguity, particularly creating surprising outcomes from chords that do not function in expected ways.

In terms of phrasing, Szymanowski is quite daring. His first mazurka features the established 4-bar phrases common to all dance music, but already in the next Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, six-measure phrases (subdivided into two three-measure phrases) are evident in the B section.
Figure 3-16. Six-measure phrases in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, mm. 9-14

The Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 3 features the same sort of six-measure phrases, subdivided in the same manner.
Subsequent mazurkas exhibit varying phrase lengths: three measures, five measures, and other asymmetrical units. The opening of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 7 is dominated by five-measure phrases.
Figure 3-18. Five-measure phrases in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 7, mm. 1-10

The beginning of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 11 is similarly organized: following a two-measure introduction, the A theme appears in two five-measure phrases.

Figure 3-19. Five-measure phrases in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 11, mm. 3-12
Irregular phrases are a hallmark of Highland music. Szymanowski avoids altogether the patrician symmetry of Chopin.

Szymanowski faced perhaps the greatest challenge in matters of rhythm. The mazurka is traditionally a triple-meter dance. However, 3/4 meter is totally foreign to Góral music, so the introduction of the mazurka triple meter forms part of what Szymanowski referred to as a hybrid of lowland and highland cultures. He also exploits the already captivating rhythmic accentuation of the mazurka. In the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, he writes accents on every other beat, clearly going against the triple meter.

Figure 3-20. Metric play in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 20, mm. 1-8

A similar scenario occurs in the Poco piu mosso section of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 16. Accents are placed on the first and third beats of the measure, then on the first and second beats.

76 Tadeusz A. Zieliński, Szymanowski (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1997).
Patterns cross over bar lines; syncopation is even more pronounced. In short, rhythmic emphasis is almost unpredictable.

Formal ideas are largely adapted from the Chopin model. Usually Szymanowski employs some type of ABA form. Like Chopin, Szymanowski commonly introduces new melodic statements in the middle or B section, increasing excitement in a quasi-developmental manner, leading to a climax at the return of the A section. The Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2 exemplifies this formal concept, as does the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 4. Szymanowski modifies the form more than Chopin, though, having fewer literal repetitions and more variance in general. Reprises in Szymanowski usually come with melodic variation, often involving changed harmony. He also innovates at the end, writing codas having a somewhat developmental approach. Szymanowski’s textures are multifarious: whereas
Chopin’s mazurkas always involve a melody plus accompaniment, Szymanowski’s are more contrapuntal, having more left hand involvement and multiple simultaneous lines.

Despite Szymanowski’s close connection to Góral music and his obvious inspiration derived accordingly, the scope of his use of folk materials has been questioned.

Szymanowski’s approach to folklore did not have the scholarly research of Bartók; his was purely responsive, instinctive – as he often said, emotional. This does not mean that he did not try to analytically grasp the essence of folk music – yet he always proceeded from the viewpoint of his own creative endeavors; never for ethnographical purposes. Commenting on the composer’s notes, Chybimski observed, that “One cannot overlook the impression that Szymanowski wrote down some of the mountaineer melodies in the way in which he was eager to hear them, and not in their original sound.”

Thus the folk originals were, from the outset, personally “modified” through the creative imagination of the composer, so as to more strongly serve as a catalyst for individual intervention.

Even though Szymanowski accepted the Chopin model of a mazurka as a basis (he was never interested in the authentic folk mazurka), his aim was rather an ideal Polish style conceived from the most general and beyond folkloristic classifications. He confirmed this quite categorically in his last interview before leaving Poland in the autumn of 1936:

“Folklore has only one meaning for me, a fertilizing function. My aim is to create a Polish style . . . in which there is not even a grain of folklore . . . We have at times, some ties to the Tatra folklore in the Mazurkas, but also loose . . .”

Without a doubt one should not overrate the role of the mountaineers’ folklore in the process of transforming the selected model. This “cross-breeding of races,” as referred to jokingly by the composer, did not take place, because it was not possible to do so. The composer’s uppermost problem was to freely apply elements of the new musical language to the old model, particularly in the area of sonority.77

Just as with Chopin, there are no direct folk quotations in Szymanowski. Both men pursued their own highly individual syntheses of folk and art music.

The Szymanowski mazurkas are, ironically, richer for being less genteel. Szymanowski, like Stravinsky and Bartók, parlayed local culture into wider appeal.

77 Chylinska, Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Works, 196.
“Szymanowski remarked in 1923 that he would be entirely satisfied if he could move Polish music from its deadlock and release it from its provincialism and lethargy.” It would seem that he took some significant steps in exactly that direction.

Part 3. Musical Analysis

Chapter 4

An Analysis of the Mazurkas of Thomas Adès

"The piece has to be a vehicle that is capable of moving from one place to another. One doesn’t want to be just watching a process happen."

— Thomas Adès

The mazurka, in 2009, by an Englishman: what exactly has Adès done? Though chronologically at a great remove from Chopin and Szymanowski, it is immediately apparent in the Mazurkas for Piano, Op. 27, that Adès has managed his strategic aim of handling all musical influences and composers, no matter the century, as current. Parallels with the earlier models abound, and not just those necessitated by a common genre. Analytically speaking, the temptation is to attempt to evaluate Adès’ work according to his own criteria — however vague. How do the mazurkas match up to his earlier commentary? Is there evidence of stability and instability, of magnetism? What processes occur in the music? Are there elements of the tonal vocabulary, functional or not? Can the sum of the musical

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language be distilled into small, recognizable ingredients? An analytical journey through Adès’ mazurkas uncovers many such findings.

A striking feature about the first mazurka is its form: it is entirely regular, fulfilling the age-old expectation of dance music. Every phrase is four measures in length, almost always with some type of cadential figure at the end. The overall structure is a five-sectioned arch: A B C B’ A’. Consistency within sections is notable. A is comprised of four 4-measure phrases, thus sixteen measures; B is also four 4-measure phrases, sixteen measures; C is the same as B; B’ is only a quarter of the length of the earlier segments, i.e. one 4-measure phrase, four measures; A’ is half the length of the previous A, B, and C sections, i.e. two 4-measure phrases, eight measures. Thus of the total sixty measures, the arithmetic divides quite neatly: $16 + 16 + 16 + 4 + 8$. However, although the A sections are metrically regular (continually 3/4 meter), the B and C sections exhibit metric changes, switching from 3/4 to 2/4, 5/8, and even $2/4 + 3/16$. These changing time signatures result in a progressive shortening of the number of beats in each section, notwithstanding the number of measures.
Figure 4-1. Formal structure of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Phrases</th>
<th>Meter</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>16 measures, 4-measure phrases, all 3/4 meter, 192 sixteenth notes (smallest subdivision)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3/4 + 2/4 + 3/16 + 5/8</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>16 measures, 4-measure phrases, 12 mm. 3/4 meter, 2 mm. 2/4 meter, 1 m. 2/4 + 3/16 meter, 1 m. 5/8 meter, 181 sixteenth notes, less beats than A section although same number of measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3/4 + 5/8 + 2/4</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>16 measures, 4-measure phrases, 9 mm. 3/4 meter, 5 mm. 5/8, 2 mm. 2/4, 174 sixteenth notes, less beats than A and B sections despite same number of measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B'</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3/4 + 2/4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4 measures, 1-measure phrase, 3 mm. 3/4 meter, 1 m. 2/4, 44 sixteenth notes, almost exactly a quarter the length of the earlier B section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>8 measures, 2-measure phrases, all 3/4 meter, 96 sixteenth notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elegant and improvisatory in nature, the first mazurka makes use of varied repetition of motives to invoke the mazurka aesthetic. The four phrases of the A section are all very similar, with phrase beginnings generally more alike than phrase endings. Three voices combine: the long, embellished top, descending, ascending, and descending again over a range of two and a half octaves; the slower-moving middle, following the top in canon, gradually widening its range from five notes to almost two octaves; and the low voice, providing a foundation in long held tones. The latter outlines a circle of fifths progression, an inclination already noted in Adès’ music. Beginning on A1, after an initial alternation between A1/A2 and F3, the bass voice moves from A to D2 (m. 9) to G1 (m. 13) to C2 (m. 15), lower and lower, increasing in volume along the way. All twelve pitch classes are used in the first two measures; chromaticism is a hallmark of the work. Despite this overriding use of the chromatic collection, though, Adès gives significance to certain triads and scales: F major, B major, F# major, and A minor seem of greatest importance. B major figures prominently as a cadential area (mm. 4, 8, 12) and as a scale in the middle voice, second and third phrases (mm. 7-12). If a pitch center or magnetic pull could be defined, it would be A; the piece begins and ends on A.
Adèse’s use of canon and the circle of fifths in this opening A section are of primary significance, as these techniques recur—not only in this mazurka, but in the second and third mazurkas as well. In his canonic writing, the canon generally breaks after a period of time to allow the phrase endings of the voices to meet; this happens twice in the first phrase. Because the voices are moving at different speeds, i.e., an augmentation canon, the canonic interval may become wider apart as it progresses; this occurs in the second phrase. The canon is therefore readily perceptible, but also highly variable. Another repeating element of interest is the chromatic scalar line that occurs in m. 16, leading from the A section to the B section; Adèse writes this sort of chromatic line at almost every transitional moment in the piece. In this first instance, the middle voice climbs upward through a series of half steps, beginning on Eb and landing on G in m. 17. At the same time, the top voice previews the focal and cyclic pitches to come in the B section: A, E, Bb. In this way, Adèse links the rather square phrasing across the seams.
The B section is dominated by a march-like rhythm and sprightly character. In direct contrast with the long lines of the A section, the B section nevertheless features the same type of slightly varied repetition of motives. Here, too, phrase beginnings match more than phrase endings; alternating phrases (five and seven, mm. 17-20 and 25-28; six and eight, mm. 21-24 and 29-32) share even greater similarity. The material is distributed equitably between right and left hands. The right hand always begins with a double neighbor figure circling around B♭4 (B♭4, A4, C5), then expands upward, outlining A minor triads with added thirds. The left hand is an ostinato with a chromatic descending line: F♯4 to D♯4 in mm. 17-20; turned slightly to become F, F♯, E, D♯ in mm. 21-24. The more complex dotted rhythm from the A section appears in the third and fourth phrases (mm. 25-31).
Looking at the sum of the material in the B section, a striking bitonality is present: A minor/major versus B major. A minor tertian chords abound in the right hand, continually pitted against B major thirds in the left hand. B major is a bold cadential point of the first and third phrases (mm. 20 and 28); the second phrase has a calm and unusual cadence with A minor atop E major (m. 24). As previously stated, new and irregular meters appear in this section. Also of note is the chromatic line leading to the next section. Written in the left hand in mm. 31-33, this line travels down from B4, arriving on Ab1 at the opening of the C section; at the same time, the right hand leaps upward. All parts crescendo into the climax.
Figure 4-5. Chromatic line between B and C sections of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 31-33

Marked *Avanti*, the C section is the dynamic high point and the crux of the piece. Expansive and exciting, it is comprised of several noticeable processes. Each of the four phrases can be segmented into two subphrases, just as in the A section. Also like the A section, the material is split into three voices. The top voice repeatedly traces a giant, sweeping, descending chromatic line, from seven to eight notes in length. For the first two phrases (mm. 33-40), the line begins progressively lower at each occurrence: $A_\flat 4/5$ to C#$4$ (mm. 33-34); beginning on G$\flat 6$ (m. 35); on E$\flat 6$ (m. 37); and on D$6$ (m. 39). The line restarts for the third and fourth phrases (mm. 41-48), with lower starting points for subsequent occurrences until leveling off: beginning on F$6$ (m. 41); on E$6$ (m. 43); and on D$6$ (mm. 45 and 47), ranging down to G$\sharp 2$ in m. 46 and farther downward to F$\sharp 2$ in m. 48. Toward the end, the chromatic descent becomes less exact, with the occasional whole step or turn appearing in the line; this is how the last chromatic line manages to travel farther despite having the same starting point as the one prior.
Figure 4-6. First phrase of C section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 33-36

The middle voice in the C section is built of octaves and minor ninths. Each set climbs up, from the low bass to the middle register of the instrument. Usually the octave occurs first. For example, in mm. 33-36: Ab1, Ab2, A3; C#2, C#3, D4; Gb1, Gb2, G3; B1, B2, C4. In the second phrase (mm. 37-40), the intervals are reversed; in the third and fourth phrases (mm. 41-48), the original order returns. The bottom voice of this section has two patterns: a big dramatic circle of fifths and a new chromatic line. The circle of fifths appears in the first and third phrases. For example, in mm. 33-36: Ab1, C#2 (Db); Gb1, B1 (Cb). In mm. 41-44: Gb1, Cb1; then a slight modification to F1, Bb1. The first bass note is always a half step higher than the note in the top voice: G7 in the top against Ab1 in the bottom (m. 33); F6 against Gb1 (mm. 35 and 41); E6 against F1 (m. 43). This same half-step juxtaposition remains in the second and fourth phrases, when a new chromatic pattern is introduced in the bass. This pattern circles around E2 in the second phrase: E2, F2, Eb2, E2 (mm. 37-40). It takes a downward turn in the fourth phrase: Eb1, E1, Db1, C1. This line is
part of a chromatic path to the next section: from Db, arriving on A4 in the right hand of m.

49.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase 9 (mm. 33-36)</th>
<th>Phrase 10 (mm. 37-40)</th>
<th>Phrase 11 (mm. 41-44)</th>
<th>Phrase 12 (mm. 45-48)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top</strong></td>
<td>Descending chromatic line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ab, G, F♯, F, E, Eb, D, C♯</td>
<td>Eb, D, C♯, C, Gb, A</td>
<td>F, E, Eb, D, D♭, C, Gb</td>
<td>D, D♭, C, G♭ / A, B♭, G#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 notes each line</td>
<td>7 notes each line</td>
<td>7 notes each line</td>
<td>7-8 notes each line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle</strong></td>
<td>Octaves + m9ths</td>
<td>m9ths + octaves</td>
<td>Octaves + m9ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A♭, A♭, A</td>
<td>E, F, F</td>
<td>G♭, G♭, G</td>
<td>E♭, E♭, F♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C♯, C♯, D</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C♭, C♭, C</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G♭, G♭, G</td>
<td>Eb, F♮, F♭</td>
<td>E♭, G♭</td>
<td>D♭, D♭, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, B, C</td>
<td>E, F</td>
<td>B♭, B♭, B</td>
<td>C, C, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each set climbs up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bottom</strong></td>
<td>Circle of 5ths</td>
<td>Chromatic line</td>
<td>5ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A♭, C♯</td>
<td>E, F, Eb, E</td>
<td>G♭, C♭</td>
<td>E♭, D♭, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G♭, B</td>
<td></td>
<td>F, B♭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 step higher than</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>top (M7th)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G/Ab, F/G♭</td>
<td>Eb/E, D/E♭</td>
<td>F/G♭, E/F</td>
<td>D/E♭, C/D♭</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The return of the B section comes in shortened format, almost a snippet. The only major difference between B and B’ is a slightly altered pattern in both hands, which creates a mirror inversion: B♭4, A4, C5, Db5 in the right hand (mm. 49-51); matching D♯4, E4, C♯4, C4 in the left hand. As in the earlier B section, there is bitonality, this time A major/minor and B♭ minor.

Figure 4-8. Beginning of B’ section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 49-50

Also following an established pattern, Adès writes a chromatic transition between this section and the following A’ section: from C♯4 down to A3 in the left hand (mm. 51-53).

Figure 4-9. Chromatic line between B’ and A’ sections of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 51-53

The arrival on A for the final section is not coincidental; A is what Adès would refer to as the magnetic center of the piece, so it has some aural impact of return. This A’ section features the extreme high register of the instrument, an area of the piano that the composer
is known for exploiting (for example, in his concerto *In Seven Days*). The gently embellished lines from the opening are now even more ornamented, tinkling away to create a music box effect. As earlier, Adès outlines certain triads: B major again, also F major and C# major. The pitting of A against B thus remains, achieving greater prominence by its return. The middle voice in this section does something quite novel, though: it spins off from the top voice to continue a descending ornamented line in contrary motion with it; this occurs in mm. 54 and 56. The bass is comprised of fifths, as before, although not a circle of fifths this time, but rather in pairs: A3, D3 (m. 53); D#4, A#4 (m. 55); D4, G3 (m. 57); F#4, B3 (m. 58). In the final two measures, the top and bottom voices converge to a close on A: F#7, G#7, A7 in the right hand; F#2, G#1, A0 in the left hand; with the bass touching on the lowest note of the keyboard (A0) just before the finish.

**Figure 4-10.** Ending of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 58-60

![Figure 4-10](image)

Adès’ second mazurka is an extraordinarily virtuosic undertaking for the performer. Marked *Prestissimo molto espressivo*, it is a flurry of activity, replete with ornaments occurring with a frequency akin to music of the French Baroque. The form is a pseudo-rondo type: A B A’ B’ A”. Each return of each section gets progressively shorter: A is 46 measures, for 138 beats of 3/4 meter; B is 20 measures, for 49 beats of 3/4 and 2/4 meters; A’ is 13 measures,
38 beats of 3/4 meter; B' is seven measures, for 18 beats of 2/4 and 3/4 meters; and A'' is 11 measures, for 33 beats of 3/4 meter. Like the first mazurka, the A sections are metrically regular, while the others have changing meters.
Figure 4-11. Formal structure of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A B A' B' A'' Form</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **A** | 46 measures  
All 3/4 meter  
138 quarter note beats |
| **B** | 20 measures  
9 mm. 3/4 meter, 11 mm. 2/4 meter  
49 quarter note beats |
| **A'** | 13 measures  
All 3/4 meter  
38 quarter note beats  
B section begins on beat 3 of the last measure  
Significantly shorter than the earlier A section |
| **B'** | 7 measures  
4 mm. 2/4 meter, 3 mm. 3/4 meter  
18 quarter note beats  
App. a third the length of the earlier B section |
| **A''** | 11 measures  
All 3/4 meter  
33 quarter note beats  
Slightly shorter than the earlier A' section |
The material for the entire piece is generated from a few processes, which Adès subjects to inversion, character change, and juxtaposition. One such compositional building block is the series of seventh chords appearing in the top voice of the A section. The combination of an upward octave plus descending thirds creates a series of descending seventh chords of various types (minor seventh, half-diminished seventh, dominant seventh). Each successive chord shares three notes; Adès removes a note at the top and adds a note at the bottom to move through the series. For example: F6, D6, B♭5, G5 (mm. 1-2); D6, B♭5, G5, E5 (mm. 3-4); B♭5, G5, E5, C5 (mm. 5-6); and so on. Interestingly, the interval removed from the top always matches the interval added at the bottom, e.g. minor third subtracted/added, major third subtracted/added. Each chord lasts for two measures. The first series, evident in mm. 1-12, illustrates the pattern. Interestingly enough, this is not a complete cycle; a full cycle would require one more chord with the top note A, leading back to the beginning of the sequence on F. The series is interrupted prematurely as Adès begins a new sequence in m. 13.

Figure 4-12. Beginning of A section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 1-4
Figure 4-13. Series of descending seventh chords in top voice of A section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 1-12
The anatomy of the chords yields further fundamental elements. Each chord is, of course, comprised of two interlocking fifths, always one perfect fifth and one tritone, alternating in configuration to make varying types of seventh chords. From the bottom note of one chord to the top note of the next there are also alternating perfect fifths and tritones. Certain notes are altered slightly, e.g. E in mm. 5-6 becomes Eb in mm. 7-8. The really intriguing point, though, is the scale outlined from the top note of one chord to the bottom note and top note of the next, in this case a complete descending octave of F major, before an alteration to move to the next sequence. F major is the collection used in this series; whether it is the reason for the occasional altering of a note in a seventh chord, or the result of such alteration, cannot be determined.

These descending seventh-chord patterns comprise the top voice for the entire A section. A series generally lasts for six measures, sometimes four; near the end of the section, the series are shortened to only two measures. Each series utilizes a different scalar collection, with no evident overall pattern or design to the succession of scales. There are pitch modifications to accommodate new collections, as well as some shifts ahead in the sequence. All scalar collections are reinforced by bass roots.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>B♭</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 1</td>
<td>F D B♭ G</td>
<td>D B♭ G E</td>
<td>B♭ G E C</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>G E♭ C A</td>
<td>E♭ C A F</td>
<td>C A♭ F D</td>
<td><strong>( )</strong> F D♭ B♭ G♭</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Italics indicate altered tones. **Parentheses indicate skips ahead in the sequence.*

**Scalar collection:** FM

- Eb Lydian/M
- Db M
- DM
- GM
- C Lydian
- A Phrygian/Aeolian
- Eb Lydian
- G Aeolian/M
- Db

**Figure 4.14. Descending seventh chord patterns and scalar collections in top voice of complete A section of Ades, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 1-46.**
The middle voice in the A section is mostly in canon with the top. It is the same variety of Adès-style canon that was evident in the first mazurka, usually beginning quite strict, then breaking down as it goes along. In mm. 1-18, the canon is structured in patterns of step plus skip or skip plus step, all quarter notes. Each pattern begins with descending motion. Otherwise, the makeup of the pattern varies: a down step plus either an up or down skip; or a down skip plus either an up or down step. The steps outline a descending scale: sometimes contiguous steps in successive measures, usually on the first and second beats; at times skipping a measure; on occasion repeated. For example, the series in mm. 1-5 outlines an F major scale descending through an octave. The scales in this middle voice almost invariably match those in the top voice. On two occasions there are differences of mode: A Aeolian in the middle voice, mm. 33-38; C Mixolydian in the middle voice, mm. 42-44. Syncopation and ornamentation begin in m. 19, with the canon going slightly faster – up to four notes per measure. This syncopation makes the scalar patterns less discernible, as does the double neighbor figure in which the notes are now couched.

Figure 4-15. Syncopation in A section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 16-20
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 1-6</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>m. 7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Eb Lydian | m. 7 | C | Bb | A | G | F 
| 13-18   | m. 13 | 14 | 15 | (repeat) | 16 | (repeat) | 17 | (repeat) | 18 |
| Db M    | m. 13 | Db C | Bb Ab | Dc | Bb | Ab | F |
| 19-24   | m. 19 | G F# | E D | C# B | A G | E D | 24 |
| DM      | m. 19 | G F# | E D | C# B | A G | E D |
| 25-28   | m. 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| GM      | m. 25 | G F# | E D C | B A G |
| 29-32   | m. 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 |
| C Lydian | C B A | G F# E | D C |
| 33-38   | m. 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 |
| A Aeolian | m. 33 | A G F | E D | C B A |
| 38-42   | m. 38 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 42 |
| Eb Lydian | m. 38 | Eb D | C Bb | A G | F Eb |
| 42-44   | m. 42 | 43 | 44 |
| C Mixolydian | m. 42 | C | Bb A | G F E C |
| 45-46   | m. 45 | 46 |
| Db M    | m. 45 | Db C | Bb A | F |
As mentioned above, the bass voice articulates the root of each scalar collection with a corresponding octave/chord, as follows: Eb (mm. 7-12), Db (mm. 13-18), D (mm. 19-24), G (mm. 25-28), C (mm. 29-32), A (mm. 32-38), Eb (mm. 38-42), C (mm. 42-45), Db (mm. 45-46). The pedaling also reflects these harmonic areas, for the most part. There is no particular collection represented in the bass if the notes are combined linearly, nor it is chromatic. However, there is – perhaps on purpose – a very prominent extract of the circle of fifths progression at the dynamic climax of the piece: D4, *fortissimo* (mm. 19-24); G4, continued *fortissimo* (mm. 25-28); C4/5, *fortississimo*, the highest dynamic level in all three mazurkas (mm. 29-32). These are, interestingly, the same three pitches that appeared in the dynamic expansion of the A section of the first mazurka: D2 (mm. 9-12), G1 (mm. 13-14), C2 (mm. 15-16).
In the B section, marked “boisterously,” Adès achieves a total transformation of character. The basic materials are the same as in the A section: he inverts everything, alters the articulation, and varies the meter. The end result is a new element of raucousness added to his elegant writing. This is announced straightaway as the familiar ascending octave is flipped upside down to commence a series of ascending seventh chords. These chords are built in exactly the manner as those in the A section, just going in the opposite direction. Thus, most chords share three notes; as one is removed from the bottom, one is added on top. For example: F#3, A3, C#4, E4 (mm. 47-49); A3, C4, E4, G4 (mm. 49-51); C4, Eb4,

Figure 4-17. Excerpt of circle of fifths progression in A section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 21-30
G4, Bb4 (mm. 52-53); and so on. There are some pitch modifications – more than in the previous section – conforming to a particular scalar collection. Collections are mostly Aeolian. As before, varied types of seventh chords result, including minor sevenths, half-diminished sevenths, and now major sevenths. Perfect fifths are found between the top note of one chord and the bottom note of the next, with the exception of the places where there is a shift ahead in the sequence; this happens twice (mm. 60 and 65). There is also an ascending scalar line to be found amid the top and bottom notes of one chord plus the top and bottom notes of the next, although it is not a specific scale. As the overall time frame is condensed, so is the material: while each chord still lasts approximately two measures, the scalar collections are also passed through every two measures, which is a faster rate than in the A section.

**Figure 4-18.** Beginning of B section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 46-50
Figure 4.19. Ascending seventh chord patterns, scalar collections, and ascending scalar line in right hand of B section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 47-66.
The changed texture of this section contributes greatly to its rowdy spirit. Canon and counterpoint are gone: the middle and lower voices combine into a quirky, waltz-like left hand accompaniment with booming bass octaves and bouncy chords. The upward scalar line from the middle voice of the A section also appears here. One may trace the line in two segments through the entire section, although the line does not conform to any particular scale; it also skips, restarts, and has a bit of a turn at the end.
The A' section features the same materials as the original A section, more condensed, with greater modification. Overall motion is upward again. The octave leap is followed by the familiar descending seventh chords of various types, built from perfect fifths, tritones, and (noticeably) one perfect fourth (shortened tritone). The sequence
commences just like the very beginning, i.e. with the same pitches, then alters immediately. Though there are no shifts ahead in the sequence, there is significantly more pitch modification and chromaticism. Scalar collections are weaker and often shift sooner. The scale evident in the top and bottom notes of the seventh chords is also not properly ordered or defined.

Figure 4-21. Beginning of A' section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 66-70
Figure 4-22. Descending seventh chord patterns, scalar collections, and descending scalar line in top voice of A section of Adias, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 67-79

*Italics indicate altered tones.*
While still apparent, the descending scalar line in the middle voice is more difficult to trace. Scales are now incomplete, out of order, or insufficiently defined altogether. For example, mm. 67-69 are clearly B♭ Lydian: B♭5, A5, G5, F5, E5, D5. However, mm. 75-77 have merely three pitches: A3, B3, C♯4. This small collection may identify as A to correlate with A Aeolian in the top voice, but, taken on its own, it is incomplete to the degree of being unclear. Thus there is a general unraveling of the materials used in this section, to coincide with heightened chromaticism.
Figure 4-23. Descending scales in middle voice of A' section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 67-79

The B' section is essentially a smaller, more chromatic version of the original B section. Overall motion is upward again, with three ascending seventh chords and three scalar collections. There are no shifts in the sequence. The left hand resumes its waltz-like
accompaniment, and one continuous upward scale line can be delineated all the way to the A" section. Adès moves quickly from flats to sharps between the two sections.

**Figure 4-24.** Beginning of B' section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 76-85
Figure 4-25. Ascending seventh chords, scalar collections, and ascending scale in right hand of B' section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 79-86

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Ab</td>
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<tr>
<td>Db</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dom7</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Db Mixolydian</td>
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*Italics indicate altered tones.*
Figure 4-26. Upward scalar line in left hand of B' section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 79-86

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 79-82</th>
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<th>80</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cb</td>
<td>Db</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gb</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Bb</td>
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<th>85-86</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D♯E</td>
<td>(skips F♯)</td>
<td>G♯(skips A)</td>
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In the A" section, the descending motion of the A sections and the ascending motion of the B sections converge. Right and left hands now move in contrary motion, in the texture of the syncopated latter portion of the original A section. Ascending seventh chords appear in the right hand, built in the same manner as in previous B sections. Intervals between the top note of one chord and the bottom note of the next are now alternating perfect fourths and perfect fifths (no tritones). Scalar collections are clearly outlined. The final scale leads to an F major collection at the end: B♭6, C7, E7, F7 (m. 97). An ascending scale comprised of the top and bottom note of each seventh chord is apparent; it is a full octave of B Aeolian before taking the turn toward F.
Figure 4-27. Beginning of A" section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 86-89

Figure 4-28. Ascending seventh chords, scalar collections, and ascending scale in right hand of A" section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 87-97

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm. 87-88</th>
<th>89-90</th>
<th>91-93</th>
<th>93-95</th>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>G#</td>
<td>*G</td>
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<td>C#M</td>
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*Italics indicate altered tones.
Due to the contrary motion between the hands, there is no canon in the left hand middle voice of the A" section. The descending scales do reappear; they are clear, if incomplete.

Figure 4-29. Descending scales in left hand of A" section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 87-97

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<th>88</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 87-88</td>
<td>D♭M</td>
<td>D♭ C B♭</td>
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<tr>
<td>89-90</td>
<td>m. 89</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>E D C♯</td>
<td>B A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91-92</td>
<td>m. 91</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Lydian</td>
<td>G F♯ E</td>
<td>D C♯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-95</td>
<td>m. 93</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Mixolydian</td>
<td>B A</td>
<td>G♯ F♯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-97</td>
<td>m. 96</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>C B♭ (skips A)</td>
<td>G F</td>
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</table>

Looking at the structure of this middle voice, it is apparent that Adès has written three-note groupings, indicated with phrase markings, some conjoined. Each collection is comprised of small intervals, i.e. the minor second, major second, minor third, major third. Eight such patterns of intervals can be discerned in the section, with some being used considerably more often than others. There is, however, no discernible overall structural formula among these patterns.
The piece's closure on F provides cohesion, as it matches the beginning—just as the first mazurka begins and ends on A. F is also significant because it is the second bass note outlined in the first mazurka; the bass voice alternated between A and F in the first two phrases of the A section (mm. 1-8). Perhaps this was foreshadowing, intended to create interrelation in the set.

Adès' third mazurka is, perhaps due to the simplicity of the writing, the most analytically straightforward. Marked Grave, maestoso, and semplice, it has an ethereal, transparent quality, very fitting to close the set. The form is A B A': A is 19 measures, B is 28 measures, and A' is also 28 measures, for 75 measures in total. The actual time proportions, however, are radically different. Because the B section moves at a rate four times faster than the surrounding sections, its 28 measures are, timewise, equivalent to seven. Thus, the A' section is slightly longer than the A and B sections combined.

The A section is akin to a passacaglia—a form for which the composer has professed fondness. Everything is built upon the bass. Written in dotted half notes, the bass cycles through all twelve pitch classes in the first twelve measures, separated into two hexachords a tritone apart: C♯3, G♯2, B1, B♭0, A1, C1; G1, D1, F1, E2, Eb1, F♯1. The cycle begins anew at m. 13 and reaches D4 (the eighth pitch) at the start of the B section in m. 20. Looking at the ordered intervals within a given hexachord, perfect fourths are prominent, as is a three-note chromatic trichord.
Separating out the top voice for a moment, it is apparent that the held notes (half note tied to eighth note) follow the same cycle as the bass, transposed a fifth up. The two voices thus form a series of stacked fifths, connected via shared notes and chromaticism. For an example of the former: in the sections generated by fourths, the top note of one fifth becomes the bottom note of the next fifth; G# transfers from top (G#5) to bottom (G#2) in mm. 1-2, G transfers (G3 to G1) in mm. 6-7, D transfers (D5 to D1) in mm. 7-8, and so on.
mm. 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12
  top  G#  D#  F#  F  E  G  D  A  C  B  Bb  C#
 bottom C#  G#  B  Bb  A  C  G  D  F  E  E♭  F#
    down 4th    chromatic

mm. 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  top  G#  D#  F#  F  E  G  D  A  C  G  D
 bottom C#  G#  B  Bb  A  C  G  D  chromatic  down 4th

Figure 4.31. Cycle aggregate in outer voices of A section of Ales, Third Mazurka, Op. 27.
Within the top voice itself, other cycles and processes are perceptible. The second note in each measure (eighth note) is always a fourth away from the first note (half note tied to eighth note); it alternates measures at a fourth up and a fourth down. The second note in odd measures (the one at a fourth up) is also the same as the bass note. Another pattern manifest in alternating measures is the whole-tone scale. Looking at the long notes (half note tied to eighth note) in odd measures, a descending whole-tone scale emerges: G#5 in m. 1, down an octave and a tritone (with octave displacements) to D6 in m. 19. Meanwhile, an ascending whole-tone scale emerges in even measures: D#4 in m. 2, up an octave and a tritone (also with octave displacements) to A4 in m. 20. The two are, of course, the two complementary types of whole-tone scales; WT₀ is in the odd measures, whilst WT₁ is in the even measures. The eighth notes also form different whole-tone scales in alternating measures. In odd measures, a descending WT₁ scale forms: C#6 in m. 1, down an octave and a tritone to G7 (including octave displacements) in m. 19. In even measures, an ascending WT₀ scale forms: A#3 in m. 2, up an octave and a major third or diminished fourth (again, with octave displacements) to D3 in m. 18. Each descending scale has its ascending twin, although the last one is a whole tone shorter than the others.
Figure 4.32. Whole-tone scales in top voice of A section of Ades, Third Mazurka, Op. 27.
Whole-tone scales become even more important in the B section of the piece.

The middle voice enters in m. 8, after the top and bottom voices have provided an introduction. This voice consists of alternating ascending and descending minor triads in a dotted rhythm, passing between the hands. Intriguingly, the roots of the triads follow exactly the pitch cycle outlined in the bass, one note ahead in the cycle. This voice forms one complete cycle. There is some variety in inversions of the triads, with second inversion occurring most frequently, but there is no consistency in the ordering of the inversions.

Figure 4-33. Appearance of middle voice in A section of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 8-11
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<th>mm.</th>
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<tr>
<td>fm</td>
<td>cm</td>
<td>ebm</td>
<td>f#m</td>
<td>c#m</td>
<td>g#m</td>
<td>bm</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>cm</td>
<td>gm</td>
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Figure 4.34. Minor triads in middle voice of A section of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27.
The three-voice texture prevails in the B section. Each of the three voices progresses by whole steps down. The top voice outlines a complete WT₀ scale: G♯5, descending to A♯6 (octave displacement). A WT₁ scale appears incomplete in the middle voice: A₄, descending to B₄ (octave displacement), skipping C♯. The bottom voice has the same WT₀ scale as the top, but incomplete: D₄, descending to E₄ (octave displacement), skipping F♯. The lines move at varying speeds, progressively slower from top to bottom. Metric displacement of lines and rhythmic figures is evident, though there is no consistent formula for either. The overall effect is somewhat ghostly, given the extreme dynamic level of quadruple piano.

Figure 4-35. Beginning of B section of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 20-23

The A' section contains all of the same materials as were in the original A section; the top, middle, and bottom voices have the same pitch material, same minor triads, and same patterns of organization. Because the A' section is considerably longer, two complete cycles of the aggregate are presented, and the series continues three notes into a third cycle as the piece closes. A new middle voice appears, though, creating a four-voice texture. Seemingly inspired by the B section, this fourth voice is a descending line of quarter notes arranged in segments of six or twelve tones. The line is a mix of whole and half steps, with some clear repetition and some merely similar passages. However, as with other areas in
Adès’ music, there does not seem to be any consistent overall formula applying to the whole. Time and time again, a process weakens or disintegrates as it progresses: Adès establishes patterns, then disrupts them. A statement from the composer addresses his view of the role of pattern in music: "Music will have pattern in it, but the pattern is not the music. . . Pattern is a very powerful thing, yet it mustn’t be so powerful that it’s the only thing in the music." After helping to reach the climactic dynamic point of *forte* in m. 61, the fourth voice disappears altogether after m. 67, thinning out the texture near the end.

**Figure 4-36.** Climax of A’ section of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 60-63

The ending of the third mazurka is curious. As mentioned earlier, the cycle of pitches in the bass ceases abruptly toward the beginning of the third sequence. If the A’ section were to stop at the same juncture as the A section, the piece would end in m. 67 (the last measure in which the fourth voice is present). However, it continues on for eight remaining measures, spinning out the cycle a bit more. Though fifths have formed the basis of the piece, the final interval is not a fifth, but a tritone – odd. To reach a satisfying

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conclusion, Adès seems to rely on the reduced texture, dynamic markings of piano, pianissimo, pianississimo, and diminuendo al fine, along with the character marking calando al fine.

Figure 4-37. Ending of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 71-75

Adès' own observations about his music, and those of others, do in fact apply quite well to the mazurkas. There is nothing inherently unusual or unprecedented about the materials that he uses; rather, his compositional tools are, ironically, remarkable in part for their familiarity. He does, however, combine all of these elements with an astonishing virtuosity – a performer's virtuosity. In the case of the Mazurkas, it is likely that his considerable pianistic abilities and overall musical sensibilities superseded his compositional aims at a certain point (not unlike Chopin). It is this quality that makes the music more than the sum of its analyzable components. Alluding back to Adès' earlier quote: it is a vehicle in motion. A further word from the composer explains this view of the art of composition:

'I couldn't sleep at night. I would feel that I would absolutely die if I didn't succeed in bringing the piece to harbor. It would have been a frightening feeling not to do that. It's more than a need – it feels essential. It's like transporting a person through the air, and you have to make sure they land in one piece.'

81 Service, "Writing music? It's Like Flying a Plane."
Chapter 5

From Chopin to Szymanowski to Adès: Tracing a Lineage Through the Genre

“In a musical work, you permanently fix something that in life would be appreciable only for a moment.”

— Thomas Adès

In the journey from 1830 to 2009, much has changed in the mazurka, yet much has remained the same. Naturally, certain elements are inherent in the genre itself and must be present in some measure to keep the association. Within that framework, though, there is clearly ample room for the composer’s imagination. Chopin personalized the mazurka in his own inimitable way, whilst Szymanowski injected a radically different sort of charm into his concept of the mazurka. Simply being Polish was, of course, a major impetus for the explorations of both composers. It is especially intriguing that a non-Pole would invest in the mazurka so many years on. What inspired Adès’ interest? Where did it lead him – and the mazurka? Perhaps the more pertinent question is: what makes Adès’ pieces mazurkas, and what makes them Adès?


It is hard to imagine a mazurka conceived outside Chopin's shadow, and Adès' are manifestly within the stylistic remit, acknowledging the distinctive accentuation and ornamentation, and the 4-bar phrasing. At least to begin with. Yet these "givens" start to deliquesce. Adès' own distinctive metrical complexity infiltrates old certainties and puts the familiar form before distorting mirrors. The music is charming and alarming at the same time, as Adès often is. Adès does, in fact, conform to the "stylistic remit." His work shows the influence of both Chopin and Szymanowski. And, just as Szymanowski graciously accepted the genre from Chopin and moved it forward, so does Adès push the mazurka far beyond Szymanowski. Whether this is the cause, i.e. a deliberate attempt to develop the genre, or the effect of Adès' efforts may not be ascertained, yet the result is the same.

Adès' First Mazurka pays homage to his predecessors in many ways. As noted earlier, the phrasing is entirely regular, matching exactly the neat four-measure units used by Chopin. The overall form is an arch (A B C B'A'), a pattern frequently seen in the mazurkas of both Chopin and Szymanowski. Beyond the formal structure, though, there are striking thematic connections. Appearing right away at the outset is a prominent similarity between Adès' melodic line and the one in Chopin's Mazurka in C# Minor, Op. 41, No. 1. Both are softly descending/ascending, a mix of chromatic/scalar steps and triadic leaps, with remarkable similarity in rhythmic profile. Adès expands the range of the line and adds more ornamentation from the start, plus he sets the melodic line in canon with the middle voice;

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very different from the waltz-like accompaniment that Chopin eventually gives his melody. Yet the affinity is clear. Interestingly enough, there is also a resemblance between Adès’ first theme and that of the Szymanowski Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1. Szymanowski adds ornamentation as well, but accompanies his theme with simple chords and a drone fifth.

Figure 5-1. Thematic connections in Adès, Chopin, and Szymanowski

5-1a. First theme of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 1-4

5-1b. First theme of Chopin, Mazurka in C# Minor, Op. 41, No. 1, mm. 1-4

5-1c. First theme of Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1, mm. 1-4
Szymanowski’s theme in the B section of the same mazurka features a descending chromatic line beginning on E5, along with a contrapuntal middle voice; there is a marked resemblance between this thematic material and that appearing in the C section of Adès’ First Mazurka.

Figure 5-2. Thematic connections in Adès and Szymanowski

5-2a. Theme of C section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 33-36

5-2b. Theme of B section of Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1, mm. 17-20

Adès’ second theme has the familiar mazurka rhythm used in so many of Chopin’s and Szymanowski’s works. For example, the A and C sections of Chopin’s Mazurka in Bb Major, Op. 7, No. 1 are suffused with this regal dotted rhythm. Szymanowski uses the rhythm as a drone in the B section of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2.
Figure 5-3. Rhythmic similarities in Adès, Chopin, and Szymanowski

5-3a. Theme of B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 17-20

5-3b. First theme of Chopin, Mazurka in B♭ Major, Op. 7, No. 1, mm. 1-4

5-3c. Drone in B section of Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, mm. 9-14
The strongest connection comes with the C section of Szymanowski's Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1. Adès' first three notes are an exact transposition of Szymanowski's: B♭4, A4, C5 in the Adès; G4, F♯4, A4 in the Szymanowski; and in the same rhythm. The melodic profiles differ from there, but the initial affinity is persuasive.

Figure 5-4. Melodic and rhythmic similarities in Adès and Szymanowski

5-4a. Theme of B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 17-20

5-4b. Theme of C section of Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 1, mm. 29-32

Looking at the surroundings of these rhythmically similar sections, Chopin writes in his customary melody-plus-accompaniment texture, whereas Szymanowski takes this a step beyond, with full parallel chords under the melodic line. Adès writes independent voices, even a mirror canon when this section repeats.
Adès’ cadential gesture in the same section, comprised of a dotted rhythm followed by a lift, also has precedent in both Chopin and Szymanowski. For example, Chopin uses the same rhythm leading to a *sforzando* on the third beat at the *Fine* of his Mazurka in B♭ Major, Op. 17, No. 1. Szymanowski writes this cadential figure five times in the *avvivando* section of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 9.

**Figure 5-5.** Cadential figures in Adès, Chopin, and Szymanowski

5-5a. Cadences in B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 17-20

![5-5a. Cadences in B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 17-20](image)

5-5b. Cadences in B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 25-28

![5-5b. Cadences in B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 25-28](image)
It seems that Adès the pianist may have been recalling specific aspects of Chopin’s and Szymanowski’s mazurkas when constructing his First Mazurka. Whether purposeful or not, only the composer knows (perhaps); but Adès has admitted to such intentional acts in other compositions. As he told Tom Service, “Following Stravinsky’s principle that ‘a good composer doesn’t borrow, he steals,’ I took the melody from the sarabande in the final act of The Rake’s Progress.”

In the case of the First Mazurka, there is no direct quotation; however, there are some compelling associations.

Adès diverges radically from his mazurka ancestors in other aspects of the piece, however. One obvious area is meter: although both Poles invariably notated their mazurkas
in 3/4 meter, their English associate challenges the notion that a mazurka must be written in that way. Adès’ First Mazurka starts as expected, but the B and C sections introduce other time signatures, including 2/4, 5/8, and even an instance of 2/4 + 3/16. Of course, both Chopin and Szymanowski (especially the latter) wrote patterns of accentuation that went against the notated meter, but Adès pushes this concept to another, more modern, level.

Figure 5-6a. Metric changes in B section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 25-28

Figure 5-6b. Metric changes in C section of Adès, First Mazurka, Op. 27, 41-46

Another distinctive aspect of Adès’ First Mazurka is his pitch material. Chopin’s and Szymanowski’s mazurkas are always in a certain key or mode, albeit with some switching about (particularly the latter). Adès, by contrast, uses the full chromatic spectrum. Straightaway in the First Mazurka, all twelve tones are used. The piece is not a twelve-tone mazurka, by any means, but the chromatic flavor is potent.
Adès does not take his chromatic language too far – that is not his style. He usually retains some sort of pitch center, by some means. The First Mazurka, as mentioned, begins and ends on A. Adès also keeps elements of the tonal vocabulary, i.e. a triad on occasion. His use of the circle of fifths is an instance of another familiar tonal organizational strategy, as well as a hallmark of his music in general.

The canonic writing appearing in the A section of Adès’ First Mazurka is fresh ground, i.e. a departure from Chopin and Szymanowski. Chopin’s mazurkas, as mentioned, are written in the popular piano style of melody plus accompaniment. Szymanowski wrote his mazurkas in a more complex, contrapuntal manner, possibly imitating the ensemble texture of the Góral musicians. Adès expands Szymanowski’s move in this direction, ironically with an old musical tool - canon. Another Adès trait, at least in his piano writing, is the exploitation of register extremes. This manifests at the end of the First Mazurka; for much of the piece, though, the pianist’s hands are quite far ranging.
Adès’ First Mazurka may be regarded as a kind of starting point for his mazurka explorations. The influence of Chopin and Szymanowski is prevalent, yet Adès ultimately uses their work as a point of departure from which to form his own take on the mazurka. Whittall states emphatically that, with Adès, “models, sources, influences are never allowed to become dominant, intimidating.”

Adès’ Second Mazurka is far more Adès, in the sense that there is markedly less of a Chopin or Szymanowski imprint evident in the piece. A primary example is that melodic tidbits from the past do not surface here; there are no discernible thematic connections between Adès’ Second Mazurka and those of Chopin and Szymanowski. There are, however, several characteristics in Adès’ writing here that do stem from his Polish heirs. Just as in the First Mazurka, the form of Second Mazurka adheres to rondo-type models found in both Chopin and Szymanowski: A B A’ B’ A”. Adès’ phrasing moves away from

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the Chopin-like four-measure regularity of the First Mazurka, though. The Second Mazurka contains phrases of mostly two measures, but couched in varying ways due to changing meters; the B sections generally contain more variability than the A sections. In this respect, Adès is aligned with Szymanowski. Adès' phrases also cross over bar lines, resulting in a weakened perception of meter.

The Second Mazurka's pitch material is organized into major, minor, and modal collections; absent tonal functionality, but merely conforming to established collections. As analyzed in the previous chapter, these collections shift as the piece cycles through its structural patterns. A pitch center of sorts can be identified as F, where the piece begins and ends. In these regards, Adès does connect with Chopin and Szymanowski. Chopin, in keeping with the practice of his time, wrote in a certain key or mode, occasionally shifting during the course of a work. Szymanowski's mazurkas cannot necessarily be labeled as being in a particular key, but he writes in various modes and always has a center. Adès picks up at some point post-Szymanowski, traveling through more and more modes, yet retaining a center at the outer edges.

On the matter of meter, Adès organizes the Second Mazurka in much the same way as the First Mazurka: the A sections are consistently in the expected 3/4 meter, while the B sections have more variable meter. Overall, most of the piece is in 3/4 meter. Also, the metric alterations in the B sections are less daring (merely between 3/4 and 2/4), although still beyond what Chopin or Szymanowski ever did. Adès' shifts from 3/4 to 2/4 appear unpredictable, too, i.e. not happening in a visible pattern.
Adès enthusiastically adopts the idea of ornamentation, evident in the Chopin and Szymanowski mazurkas, and absolutely exploits it in the Second Mazurka. The piece is overloaded with ornaments, appearing in the melodic line and the canonic middle voice, throughout. Given the extreme tempo of Prestissimo, Adès’ ample ornamentation results in an uncommonly virtuosic incarnation of the mazurka. A comparison between Chopin’s, Szymanowski’s, and Adès’ use of ornamentation in the mazurkas reveals a considerable explosion in frequency in the Adès version. One of Chopin’s greatest examples of ornamentation occurs discreetly in the melodic line of the Mazurka in B Minor, Op. 33, No. 4. One of Szymanowski’s most ornamented examples is also quite discreet, occurring in the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 10. Intriguingly in this excerpt, Szymanowski places ornaments in an inner voice. Adès, of course, places ornaments in both the upper and middle voices in his Second Mazurka.
Figure 5-10. Ornamentation in Adès, Chopin, and Szymanowski

5-10a. Ornamentation in A section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 26-30

5-10b. Ornamentation in A'' section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 94-97
5-10c. Ornamentation in Chopin, Mazurka in B Minor, Op. 33, No. 4, mm. 1-12

5-10d. Ornamentation in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 10, mm. 49-54
Adès gleans some accompaniment clues from Chopin and Szymanowski in the Second Mazurka. His quirky waltz-like left hand part underlying the melody in the B section is a more exuberant take on Chopin’s style. Chopin’s version of this accompaniment is usually flowing and elegant; a perfect example is seen in the Mazurka in B Minor, Op. 30, No. 2. Chopin puts more strength into the accompaniment in the Mazurka in B♭ Major, Op. 17, No. 1, adding octaves and marking the section *Vivo e risoluto*. Szymanowski employs waltz-like accompaniments much more sparingly than Chopin; nevertheless, they are present. A sedate version appears in the *Tranquillo* section of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2. A more robust instantiation, with one-bar and two-bar patterns, occurs in the *avvivando* section of the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 12. In the transition leading back to the return of the first theme (*Tempo I*) in the Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 9, Szymanowski writes the waltz pattern in such a way that it crosses bar lines, thus going against the 3/4 meter (and waltz feel); it is actually structured in a four-beat hypermeter along with the melodic phrasing. Adès seems to take as a starting point music resembling the latter examples of both composers and turns them into something rather bombastic, with booming bass octaves and widely spaced, often rolled chords. Adès always writes this particular type of accompaniment with a 3/4 pattern (bass note/octave followed by two chords), yet the notated meter for the section switches between 3/4 and 2/4.
Figure 5-11. Waltz-like accompaniment in Adès, Chopin, and Szymanowski

5-11a. Accompaniment in B section of Adès, Second Mazurka, mm. 51-55

5-11c. Accompaniment in Chopin, Mazurka in B♭ Major, Op. 17, No. 1, mm. 1-8

5-11d. Accompaniment in Szymanowski, Mazurka, Op. 50, No. 2, mm. 53-60
This accompaniment is also another example of Adès’ fondness for extremes of register.

Which elements of Adès Second Mazurka have no derivation in Chopin or Szymanowski? As mentioned above, there appear to be no melodic similarities in either the A or B sections of the Second Mazurka, which, as noted earlier, have related melodic
material; the B section is an inversion of the A section. The canonic writing that Adès introduced in the First Mazurka is more extensive and complex in the Second Mazurka, in the same varied style, including canon at the octave and at the fifth, also with syncopation. This canonic writing, inversion, and the contrary motion at the end all show a more linear style in composing mazurkas. It is also arguably a more technical and less spontaneous style of writing than that of Chopin and Szymanowski. Both Polish composers were trying, to varying extents and with varying adaptation, to capture the folk-like element of the mazurka; this was key to the expression of Polish nationalism. Adès, by contrast, would have no reason to embody the Polish spirit. He seems to have written mazurkas purely for musical purposes and merits, i.e. exercising his compositional prowess and pianistic virtuosity.

Rhythmically, Adès’ Second Mazurka shows profound complexity. The constant syncopation, the separate top lines with instructions to “hear this” and “play this,” and the switching between duple and triple figures reach a level of rhythmic difficulty not seen in his predecessors’ mazurkas. Chopin and Szymanowski both wrote great rhythmic vitality in their mazurkas, especially enjoying the unusual and sometimes unpredictable accentuation. Adès takes these rhythmic explorations to a contemporary level; the notation alone is sufficiently peculiar to stand out. Adès’ extra top line is shown throughout the piece.
This third line exists as a means of “translating” the apparently unwieldy syncopations for the performer. Essentially, the 5/12 meter indicates that there are five triplet eighth note durations per unit, which are organized in a regular, repetitive pattern, as such: two regular eighth notes, each at a value of one and a half; plus two triplet eighth notes, each at a value of one; totaling five. The dashed lines at the very beginning show this pattern, which starts after the initial upbeat notes. The pattern occurs ten times in mm. 1-6; crossing from m. 6 to m. 7, at the eleventh appearance, the pattern changes to five triplet eighth notes. The first pattern then resumes nine times before switching to all triplet eighth notes again. The entire piece, both A and B sections, features this pattern, in its original form and in tiny
permutations. Additionally, three such patterns correspond with a 5/4 overlay meter of five quarter notes in the lower voice, providing a framework for the pianist. The piece is thus organized with the number five in mind.

**Figure 5-12c.** Rhythmic complexity translated: patterns of five in Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 1-10

Another remarkable feature of Adès’ Second Mazurka is his use of the pedal. Adès writes specific instructions for surprisingly large swaths of damper pedal in the A sections of the piece, resulting in considerable blurring of sonorities. Typically, the pedal changes coincide with changes in the bass chords/octaves, as in the A section. In the A’ and A” sections, however, the pedal changes seem less coordinated.
In any case, Adès’ heavy use of the pedal is a very unique feature of the Second Mazurka – almost shocking. The B sections, by contrast, are marked *senza Pedale.*
Two further facets of the Second Mazurka that exemplify Adès' style are the extreme contrasts in register and dynamics. The composer's use of register in piano writing has been noted. Whereas the First Mazurka featured the lowest note on the keyboard (A0), in the Second Mazurka, Adès actually calls for the highest (C8), as well as the second-lowest (Bb0) notes. He also confines the music to the extreme high register for prolonged periods, for example at the climax of the A section.

Figure 5-14. Extreme high register in A section climax of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 26-30

In theorist David Denton's review of some of Adès' earlier music, he describes the composer's "predilection for high twitterings that recall Messiaen's bird music."\(^{86}\) This passage, with its stratospheric writing coupled with the excessive ornamentation, certainly exemplifies Denton's assessment.

Adès' extreme dynamics in the Second Mazurka also warrant comment. *Fortississimo* is reached at the climax of the A section, *fff* at the climax of the B section. Near the end of the piece, the dynamic level drops to *pianississimo*.

**Figure 5-15a.** Extreme dynamic in A section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 26-30

![Extreme dynamic in A section](image)

**Figure 5-15b.** Extreme dynamic in B section of Adès, Second Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 61-65

![Extreme dynamic in B section](image)
These dynamics do, of course, appear in other works of Adès, and in fact all of the recently mentioned characteristics – canon, register and dynamic extremes, meter, etc. – are salient features of his style in general.

Adès’ Second Mazurka thus shows more deviation from the mazurka model handed down to him from Chopin and Szymanowski than does the First. He takes their ideas and innovations even farther, simultaneously creating a more contemporary mazurka and a more Adès-like mazurka. He also pushes the boundaries of the instrument – and the performer (coincidentally, not unlike Chopin did in the Études). The mental and physical challenges of the Second Mazurka herald a new level of virtuosity for the genre.

The Third Mazurka is perhaps Adès’ most personal of the set. Its mood of infinity, set by the markings Grave, maestoso and semplice, lends an air of profundity not unlike that found in the late Beethoven sonatas. The sparse texture and openness make the mazurka concept seem distant; not only is the piece utterly unthinkable as a dance, it pushes the character of the genre to a new realm.
Some aspects of the Third Mazurka do align with general mazurka traits. Formally, the Third Mazurka possesses a simple A B A’ structure, as seen in numerous examples of Chopin and Szymanowski. Most of the groupings in the A sections are of two or four measures. The meter remains 3/4 throughout; significantly, the Third Mazurka is the only one of Adès’ mazurkas that does not modify the established mazurka meter. There is also a startling melodic connection: the middle voice in both A sections, marked con slancio, conjures up the main theme of the Chopin Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 68, No. 2. The resemblance is brief; only the triadic portion of the Chopin theme is excerpted. Nevertheless, the relation to such an iconic piece is unmistakable. Adès takes the triadic motive and expands it, in upward and downward motion, through many triads, all minor.

Figure 5-16. Melodic connection between Adès and Chopin

5-16a. Middle voice in A section of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 8-11
5-16b. Main theme of Chopin, Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 68, No. 2, mm. 1-8

Beyond these contributions, the Third Mazurka appears to be all new – and all Adès. As described in Chapter 5, the piece is highly structured. Adès adapts the passacaglia to the mazurka and accordingly builds the work from the bass. The A sections are governed by an aggregate of all twelve notes, separated into two hexachords. This series generates the fifths that predominate. Adès gives a new twist on the drone fifth favored by Chopin and Szymanowski: in his Third Mazurka, fifths cycle through the outer sections, shifting with each measure, according to the series. Thus there is an ever-present fifth (albeit with changing pitches), and a certain commonality of the interval that is fundamental. The excerpts of the bass that move in a circle of fifths pattern also reinforce the general importance of the interval.

Figure 5-17a. Fifths moving in cycle in A section of Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 1-4
Unlike the two previous mazurkas, Adès does nothing to indicate a pitch center in the Third Mazurka. Even the open fifth pattern between the top and bottom voices dissolves eventually, with the piece ending, strangely, on a tritone a short distance into a new series. One cannot help but ponder: why there? Perhaps Adès felt that stopping at the expected point, i.e. the conclusion of a series, would be too predictable. Perhaps, by halting in the middle of his processes, he creates the illusion of not stopping at all – the aforementioned infinity. In any case, the Third Mazurka’s odd closure, absence of a center, and governance (mostly) by the aggregate result in a very contemporary mazurka.

The middle (B) section is also notable in its source of pitch material. Entirely whole-tone, its three independent lines carry on Szymanowski’s polyphonic writing. The lines do not appear to have any sort of teleological aim. Rather, the section is static and underscored, written at the ultimate soft dynamic level of pianississimo. The most remarkable aspect of the B section, though, is rhythmic. Adès writes a metric modulation at the double bar: a sixteenth note in the A section now equals a quarter note in the B section, hence the B section moves at a rate four times faster than the A section. This is not only a surprising turn of events, but also highly difficult for the performer to execute. A metric modulation in
A mazurka is a unique advancement by Adès (although not unusual in contemporary music generally).

Figure 5-18. Metric modulation in Adès, Third Mazurka, Op. 27, mm. 19-20

Perhaps the most striking innovation in the Third Mazurka, though, is the overall setting. Adès’ calm, ethereal world is, effectively, worlds away from the original connotations of the mazurka. Although Chopin and Szymanowski both wrote mazurkas that were not on the lively side, Adès’ Third Mazurka is spiritually removed from all others. Its reflective nature makes it seem as though it is looking back on Adès’ previous two mazurkas and the mazurka in general. Coincidentally, the fact that he wrote a set of three invites further comparison with Chopin. In any case, the Third Mazurka is Adès’ last word on the genre – a fitting close to the set.

The Mazurkas, Op. 27 of Thomas Adès are not only a fascinating advancement of the mazurka as a genre, but also a progression of their own accord, i.e. as a set. Adès begins with much reverence for his predecessors, showing considerable influence of Chopin and Szymanowski – the number of melodic connections in the First Mazurka is especially telling – as well as a high degree of adherence to the fundamental characteristics of the genre. As he moves to the Second Mazurka, however, his creativity runs more freely. Adès’ unique
double virtuosity as pianist and composer asserts itself. He places demands upon the performer that are unprecedented in the genre. His writing evidences intellectualism over folk, with several pre-compositional processes occurring and developing throughout the piece. His personal voice comes across, in all its artistic inventiveness. With the Third Mazurka, Adès’ interpretation reaches its apex, transforming the mazurka genre into something quite new. Far removed from its Polish connotations, it is now a cosmopolitan ground celebrated purely for its musical value.

Adès’ exploration of the mazurka allows him the prospect of enjoying his penchant for combining elements of old and new. As a pianist, following in the footsteps of Chopin is an especially attractive prospect; as a composer, Szymanowski remains one of the more original, yet neglected, figures of the twentieth century. The combination of these two influences, plus a genre that had been forgotten for decades, must have been quite tempting for Adès: perhaps he saw an opportunity to add to the repertoire of his instrument whilst joining in a lineage of great pianist-composers. The mazurka offered room to grow; it needed a “facelift,” so to speak, to bring it into the next century.

A fascinating statement from the composer gives some indication of his perspective.

A thing becomes possible which makes another thing possible which wouldn’t have been possible without it. That’s life. I mean, you can just barge through a door; but I can imagine barging through a door and not knowing what to say, and whatever’s behind it just looking at you in puzzlement. You have to enter and understand. That’s what is happening to me all the time, continually being released from one space into another, finding what’s behind the door, and emerging, again, into another elsewhere. 87

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Did Chopin and Szymanowski help to make possible Adès' Mazurkas, Op. 27? As Adès says, perhaps he opened the doors into their respective musical worlds, endeavored to comprehend what was happening, and then, full of inspiration, moved on to create his own musical world.
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Vita

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Jennifer A. Maxwell was awarded the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Boston University in January 2014, where she was in the studio of the acclaimed Anthony di Bonaventura. Maxwell received a Master of Music degree from the University of Louisville on full fellowship as a student of Artist-in-Residence Lee Luvisi, himself a student of Rudolf Serkin and Mieczysław Horszowski; and a Bachelor of Music degree with honors and highest distinction on full scholarship from the University of Iowa, studying with Daniel Shapiro, a Leon Fleisher student. She has also trained at the Brandywine Piano Institute in West Chester, PA, and the Chautauqua Institute in Chautauqua, NY.

An avid performer of solo and chamber repertoire, Maxwell has presented concerts at Boston University, the University of Rhode Island, the Jamestown Piano Association, Music in the Loft, Steinway of Chicago, the Mostly Music Concert Series, CUBE Chicago Contemporary Music Series, Schubertiade Chicago, the Illinois State Music Teachers Association Convention, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Illinois, Western Illinois University, Illinois Central College, Cardinal Stritch University, the Music Institute of Chicago Duo Piano Festival, and the PianoForte Great Pianists Series, among others; performed concerti with the Southern Illinois Symphony and University of Chicago Symphony; and been featured repeatedly on Live From WFMT, Chicago’s Classical Radio.

Maxwell has held professional positions as Piano Instructor and Director of Public Relations at the University of Chicago Department of Music; Piano Instructor at the
University of Chicago Orthogenic School; Program Annotator, Public Relations Manager, and Education Coordinator at the Louisville Orchestra; Artist-in-Residence at the Kentucky Center for the Arts; Faculty at the University of Louisville Summer Piano Institute; Piano Instructor at the University of Louisville School of Music; and Pianist/Organist at Clifton Unitarian Universalist Church of Louisville. A committed educator, Maxwell has maintained a private teaching studio throughout her career, working with pianists of all ages and levels. Her students have performed in recitals and master classes, won competitions, and received music scholarships at colleges and universities. Currently she spends a portion of each week on the island of Nantucket, MA, where she is on the faculty of the Nantucket Community Music Center; and she is the pianist/organist at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading, MA. Maxwell is also active as a clinician and adjudicator, presenting master classes at various universities and serving as a judge for Music Teachers National Association, the Bay State Contest, the Judged Festival, the Society of American Musicians, the National Federation of Musicians, and the Louisville Orchestra Young Artist Competition, among others.

Maxwell is a member of the dynamic Belsky-Maxwell Piano Duo with pianist Svetlana Belsky. The ensemble has recorded two CDs featuring works of Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, White, Schubert, Debussy, and Barber.

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