

**Example of a student posing his performance of a piece on YouTube and asking Mr. Kogosowski questions of concern. There are various other ways of accomplishing this - through Skype, for instance, or simply by email:**

To: alan\_kogosowski@hotmail.com  
Subject: Scherzo 2  
Date: Wed, 26 Oct 2011 22:29:48 -0400

Alexander Lang: Chopin Nocturne #13 in C minor



Hi,

I'm having trouble with the Scherzo. I'm stuck on just the first page. I've listened to a lot of recordings, and decided that I like it the way you played it - only I can't play it like that. When I try, it comes out wrong, too heavy or too muddy or too dry. I've noticed that most people play it far too heavily and lose the character of the 'joke' which it means in Italian. I've been thinking about how it is called a Scherzo, rather than a Ballade or

something more flowing and serene. Then I remember that it is a very large-scale work and I mustn't play it too flippantly or lightly - and then I can't find a balance. Most of all, I can't figure out the first page. How should I approach that?

Alex

P.S. If you were to put another piece up on YouTube, I would say put the Scherzo. Not only is it a personal favourite of mine but you have a different take on parts of it which make it sort of more *bel canto*, particularly the opening. Definitely my favourite version.

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From: alan\_kogosowski@hotmail.com  
Subject: RE: Scherzo 2  
Date: Sun, 30 Oct 2011 04:30:39 +0000

Alex -

The main reason this page - and the whole piece by extension - is so often thrown out - is the open-*8ve* bass notes (B flat, then A flat, later B flat and finally low C), which are so placed as to completely overpower everything else. They sound like heavy cannon shots, or organ point basses - and that completely skews the atmosphere, rhythm, tempo, sound quality, and the idea of a 'Scherzo'.

Scherzos - even dark, demonic ones like Chopin's first three or Beethoven's 9th Symphony or Brahms' 2nd concerto - must *always* be light and fast. By 'light' I mean not heavy and laboured - which the first page of Chopin's #2 can and *will* be if you don't actively do something about it. Because those *ff* chords - and *especially* the open-*8ve* cannons in the bass - will overpower the sound and destroy the rhythm of the piece.

Answer: pluck those bass cannon shots so that they are not booming pedal points! *Pull at the keys*, play them pizzicato (forte, yes, but still *plucked*), and *release* the sound immediately - i.e. do not hold down the pedal solidly over them; rather, give them a quick pedal when you play them, then replace the pedal a split second later.

Then, the full chords up in the treble *must* be played in a sprightly manner - otherwise they will become heavy right away.

Light, quick, pizzicato is the order of the day.

*All* music should in fact be what I call 'light' - though it can be and is often, of course, deep and profound. 'Light' has nothing to do with being 'flippant'. Music must take flight, soar - not get stuck in the keys, or on the page. Unlike visual arts, music exists in time - it has to *move*.

So, to recap -

Bar 1 and 2: very quiet, but very clear and crisp - a clear triplet, unpedalised, with sharp attack of the ends of the fingers - the notes plucked, *pulled* from the keys, and in a very distinct, unpedalised triplet.

Next: low B flat - not too *fortissimo*: it's going to sound overpowering in any case, and if you play it with your full strength and your body (as is tempting), you will skew the whole thing: the rhythm and tempo will be slowed down because of the overhang of reverberation from this fortissimo - you won't be able to stop that happening.

Furthermore, play this bass *8ve* staccato, even *staccatissimo*. In order to do this you must be very careful with the pedal - i.e. even if you play the note staccato, the pedal will carry the sound over and cancel out any staccato effect you may have achieved.

Solution: you must release the pedal immediately, then replace it right away in order to catch the overhang reverberation of the note.

Next: four full chords in the treble. As full chords these are liable to become heavy and stolid, and - worst of all for this situation - slow down the tempo and triplet rhythm.

Solution: don't play the chords with equal attack on all the notes; the top note (B flat on the fourth chord) should stand right out above the ones below it; same on the next chord, etc. The third chord - the quaver, or *eighth* note - should be light and quick, not nearly as strong in sound as the chords around it.

Next: the downward arpeggios. Key to this: the two left-hand figures, which establish the rhythm and keep the whole thing moving in the same tempo in which the piece began. Make those left-hand figures very clear to the 3/4 rhythm: the first chord in each case is an up-beat, and should be played as such - i.e. *audibly* quieter than the chord on the beat.

Let me know how you go with that,

Alan

P.S. The Nocturne on your Youtube clip is too slow, though heartfelt; but that's another story.