



Navigating the Aesthetics Landscape of Chopin's Largo From Sonata for Cello and Piano Op. 65: A Literary Approach Towards Chamber Music

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Abstract

The realm of musical aesthetics offers an endless source of exploration and interpretation. Within the Romantic era, Frédéric Chopin stands as a towering figure, renowned for his piano masterpieces. Yet, his genius extended beyond the piano, as he also crafted exquisite works for cello and piano. This article delves into the aesthetic landscape of Chopin's Cello Sonata, Op. 65, specifically focusing on the Largo movement. Employing a qualitative approach, the study examines the musical score, engages in historical and literary analysis, and observes live performances. This multifaceted approach reveals an expansion in Chopin's compositional techniques and unveils a rich aesthetic dimension that transcends the simplistic dichotomy of intramusical and extramusical elements. To fully grasp the profound impact of Chopin's Largo movement, the study incorporates a music literature approach. This approach illuminates the transformative power of chamber music, extending its influence beyond the realms of philosophical knowledge and performance aspects into a deeper, more transcendent dimension.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Cello, Chopin Largo, Sonata

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Introduction

As a cellist pursuing a degree in music, I hold a special reverence for Frédéric Chopin's chamber music compositions. This admiration stems not only from the intrinsic beauty of these works but also from the remarkable fact that they were composed by a pianist. Chopin's mastery of the cello composition, an instrument distinct from his primary focus, is a testament to his exceptional musical versatility and genius.

Chamber music, by its very nature, is designed to be performed in a room setting. These rooms can vary in shape and acoustic quality. According to Kamien's *Music: An Appreciation (Brief Edition)* (2014), the ideal space for chamber music is an intimate setting within a house or palace. Typically performed by small ensembles of two to nine musicians, chamber music produces a lighter, more delicate sound compared to orchestral music. During the classical era, aristocrats often enjoyed chamber music by hosting professional musicians who would entertain guests at dinner banquets.

Kamien (2014) argues that chamber music is distinctive and intimate because its purpose is to give satisfaction and pleasure to the performer and the audience. Each performer in chamber music has an essential role and often has important thematic material to share in the performance. There is no need for feelers in chamber music, each musician is required to be sensitive to what is going on, they coordinate dynamics, phrasing, and various things together with the other musicians in the piece.

The most important form of performance in chamber music in the classical period was the string quartet whose instruments consisted of two violins, one viola and one cello. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven wrote many string quartet works. A string quartet is likened to a conversation between four vibrant, sensitive and lively people. The four players complement and complement each other in the string quartet.

Moving on to musical structure. In classical times, the musical structure that circulated in compositions spread across performances was the sonata form. The sonata divides itself into four sections where normatively the sequence starts from fast, slow, dance and fast movements. This became a common pattern and was applied extensively, even in the string quartets discussed in the previous paragraph. The term sonata itself is actually used in various contexts and does not only describe musical forms. Sonata da Camera and Sonata da Chiesa, for example, show two sonatas that are distinctive in terms of ideas because their purposes are dualistic. The Sonata da Camera is a sonata for chamber music, music that is

not associated with religious purposes, whereas the Sonata da Chiesa was composed for devotional purposes. The two are simply distinguished in this way.

Chamber music continues to evolve from era to era, reaching its peak. This study will examine chamber music works from the romantic music era. this study chooses a work composed by Frederic Chopin for Cello and Piano. The work composed is a sonata that will be examined for its aesthetic aspects. before moving to the analysis, this article will provide a little biography of the composer.

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) was a popular and highly influential composer of the romantic period. He belonged to the early romantic composers of the same generation as Mendelssohn and Schubert (Apel, 1974). Zamyoski (2010) explains that all of Chopin's legacy still lives strongly around us even though he has been dead for two centuries. Chopin is a legend who is revered for the influence he had on the world of music. He created many famous piano music compositions, which led Chopin to be named a genius composer because of his extraordinary works.

In Chopin's biography book written by Zamoyski (2010), it is written that Chopin was introduced by his mother to the piano at the age of 4. By the age of 6 Chopin was able to play some relatively difficult piano compositions. He also had a talent for creating melodic variations which he then included in the works he was playing. In 1816 Chopin studied piano under a professional pianist named Adalbert Żywny.

Chopin had an instinctive dexterity that made his teacher limited to giving him methods of fingerings and technical skills. As a result of Żywny's teachings, Chopin was able to develop his playing technique, as well as encourage him to understand more about the great composers of classical music and their works. Żywny also helped Chopin to write his first composition at the age of 7. This was the starting point that showed how Chopin would later become a composer, not just a pianist.

In 1821, the Warsaw Conservatory was established, which later became a place for Chopin to pursue formal music education. Chopin was accepted as a student of the Warsaw Conservatory in 1826. There he gained knowledge of music theory and composition. In the 1830s Chopin left for a career in France. There he performed and presented his compositions. The work of the composer and the twists and turns of his life have a connection with the soul of the works composed. Therefore, the search for biographies is fundamental to do and is presented in this article. This study will analyze the musical aesthetics of the Largo from Sonata for Cello and Piano. In the musical rules of the romantic era, there are boundaries

that are penetrated and give birth to the expansion of interesting interpretations and processing of intramusical and extramusical dimensions to be revealed.

Structural form analysis with aesthetic dimensions has been previously explored by Adzkie (2016) in his study of *Laras Madya*, an art form inherited from Javanese nobility. Adzkie examined the musical form and contextualized it within the framework of cultural resistance. In contrast to his approach, my study will employ a literary approach focused solely on the territory of chamber music within the context of Western music.

Other studies have examined music from the perspective of musical structure, such as Caturono's analysis of melodic variations in Joseph Haydn's trumpet concertos. Caturono's (2020) study analyzed the themes, forms, and holistic breakdown of Haydn's melodic variations. The work studied is classical music and does not touch on the contextual approach of programmatic music. I believe that concerto music can be further studied, even though it is still absolute music of the classical era. It can be studied from both programmatic and extra-musical dimensions. My study offers novelty in terms of the era of music studied and the approach used to examine intra-musical and extra-musical dimensions in musical works.

Putra's (2023) insightful analysis of Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre* provides a valuable framework for understanding the work's programmatic nature. By labeling the composition as a "symphonic poem," Putra highlights its narrative and evocative qualities, setting it apart from the realm of chamber music. This categorization aligns with the piece's instrumentation, featuring a solo violin and orchestra, rather than the intimate chamber setting typically associated with chamber music.

In contrast, my research focuses on Chopin's *Largo*, an exemplar of absolute music, devoid of programmatic elements. This distinction between programmatic and absolute music forms the crux of my comparative analysis. While Putra's work delves into the programmatic aspects of *Danse Macabre*, my study explores the structural and contextual dimensions of Chopin's *Largo*, employing a multifaceted approach that encompasses both structural analysis and contextual considerations.

The existing body of research on Chopin's *Largo* offers valuable insights into the composition's formal structure, harmonic language, and melodic intricacies. However, I aim to expand upon these perspectives by incorporating a contextual approach that considers the work's historical and cultural milieu. This comprehensive analysis will illuminate the deeper layers of meaning embedded within Chopin's *Largo*, revealing its connections to the

composer's personal experiences, the prevailing musical trends of the era, and the broader social and cultural context.

Through this comparative analysis of Chopin's Largo and Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, I seek to shed light on the diverse approaches to musical expression, highlighting the interplay between programmatic and absolute music. The study will not only contribute to a deeper understanding of these individual compositions but also provide a broader perspective on the nuances of musical interpretation and the significance of contextual considerations in musical analysis.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, as defined by Creswell (2016), to comprehensively grasp the essence of the research subject. This methodology entails immersing oneself deeply in the phenomenon under investigation, fostering a holistic understanding that extends beyond mere surface-level observations. By adopting a qualitative approach, the researcher actively engages with the research subject, fostering a nuanced and in-depth understanding that transcends the limitations of quantitative methods. This approach allows the researcher to delve into the intricacies of the phenomenon, uncovering hidden patterns, meanings, and insights that might otherwise remain obscured. Moreover, the qualitative approach facilitates the exploration of subjective experiences and perspectives, providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

This research delves into the profound significance of a specific event – a performance of Chopin's Largo cello sonata. To achieve this, the study adopts a qualitative approach, prioritizing in-depth exploration over statistical analysis. This multi-stage approach begins with a thorough examination of existing literature on the piece and its composer. Next, the research meticulously analyzes the musical score itself, dissecting its structure, harmony, and notation to uncover potential layers of meaning embedded within the music. This is in line with how Stein (1979) emphasizes the importance of music score analysis in the tradition of systematic musicology. Finally, the study turns its attention to the performance aspect. By meticulously observing video recordings of various cellists interpreting the Largo sonata, the research seeks to understand how individual choices and interpretations can influence the emotional impact and perceived meaning of the music.

Through this comprehensive approach, the research aims to paint a richer picture of the deep meaning held within Chopin's Largo cello sonata.

Results and Discussions

Musicology as a Fundamental Approach

Musicology, the study of music, is deeply intertwined with the intricate art of analyzing the structural framework of musical compositions. This structural framework, known as musical form, serves as the foundation upon which a piece of music is built, giving it coherence and unity. Stein (1979), a renowned musicologist, eloquently articulates that musical form analysis involves dissecting the composition's structural elements, ranging from the smallest building blocks to the overarching architecture.

At the most fundamental level, musical form is constructed from figures, the smallest musical units. These figures are then combined to form motifs, which in turn coalesce into semi-phrases. The progression of semi-phrases creates phrases, which can be further categorized as antecedent and consequent phrases. Antecedent phrases, often characterized by a sense of anticipation, typically conclude with a half cadence, while consequent phrases, often embodying a sense of resolution, typically conclude with a full cadence.

The combination of phrases, often consisting of eight measures, forms a period, the basic unit of musical form. Periods, when combined, give rise to larger structural entities, such as two-part forms, three-part forms, rondo forms, minuet forms, and sonata forms, each with its own distinct set of characteristics and rules.

Within a period, the antecedent and consequent phrases exhibit a symmetrical structure, creating a sense of balance and order. The antecedent phrase, often likened to a question, typically employs a I-V cadence, while the consequent phrase, often likened to an answer, typically employs a V-I cadence, guiding the melody back to the tonic, the tonal center of the piece.

The analysis of antecedent and consequent phrases provides a valuable tool for understanding the overall form and structure of a musical composition. This approach, when applied to the Song of Strength and Consolation, can reveal the intricate patterns and relationships that shape the piece's musical architecture.

Leon Stein's seminal work on musical form analysis serves as a cornerstone for musicologists worldwide. His comprehensive framework, encompassing not only rhythmic and melodic elements but also harmonic progressions and thematic motifs, provides a powerful lens through which to examine the intricate structures embedded within musical compositions.

Educational institutions and music scholars across the globe, including those in Indonesia, have embraced Stein's theoretical framework as an indispensable tool for dissecting the musical forms found in a vast repertoire of compositions. His insights extend beyond mere surface-level observations, delving into the deeper layers of harmonic relationships and melodic patterns, revealing the essence of a composition's musical identity.

The Superficial Analysis

The sonata analyzed in this study was composed by Chopin for cello and piano. I don't see this as a sonata for the cello although some references mention that it is a sonata for cello. In this sonata Cello and Piano play a role to complement each other, they communicate with each other. They performed the main melody and became accompaniments in turn. This phenomenon shows a conversation that takes place between the cello and the piano. I saw that there was a dialogue going on between the two. I also saw this kind of event happen in Beethoven's Sonata for Cello and Piano, as well as Brahms's work. This phenomenon gives it its own uniqueness and attraction.

Returning to Chopin's Sonata for Cello and Piano, the melody performed alternately in the 3rd movement occurred in balance. Each instrument has an equal portion, they are aligned. The piano is not only an accompaniment, but also appears as a center along with the cello instrument. Both have the same position to be presented as a chamber music performance. The cello that provides a long note accompaniment adds an interesting charm to the melody played by the piano. Even though it is only a long note, the role given by the cello is very important in supporting the aesthetics created from the music presented. Below you can see the score of the sonata I discussed.



Figure 1. Largo from Chopin's Sonata for Cello and Piano Op. 65 (Source: IMSLP)

Establishing the Piano's Melody and the Cello's Supportive Role

The opening measures of this movement immediately establish a clear hierarchy between the instruments. In measures 3 and 4, the cello adopts a background role, providing accompaniment to the piano's captivating melody. This pattern persists throughout the following sections, with the cello's dynamics mirroring those of the piano. This allows the piano melody to take center stage, its expressiveness unencumbered by dynamic competition. However, the cello's role extends beyond mere accompaniment. Subtle dynamic variations within the established framework allow the cellist to inject personal touches and emotional nuances, enriching the overall musical tapestry.

Chromaticism and Emotional Depth

The composer's masterful use of chromaticism adds a layer of poignancy to the melody. Particularly in measures 5 and 6, the introduction of chromatic notes creates a sense of yearning or longing. These chromatic inflections subtly bend the tonal center, evoking a sense of unease or emotional complexity. This technique allows the music to transcend the boundaries of conventional major or minor tonality, reaching a deeper level of emotional expression that resonates with the listener.

Form and Emotional Impact

The movement adheres to a traditional ABA' form. This structure provides a sense of familiarity and balance, mirroring the emotional journey of the music. Section A establishes the main theme, section B introduces a contrasting mood or musical idea, and section A' serves as a recapitulation, revisiting the main theme with development. This form serves as a powerful tool for the composer, allowing him to build emotional intensity within the contrasting B section, before ultimately returning to the familiar comfort of the A section,

albeit with subtle variations. By employing this established form, the composer guides the listener through a carefully crafted emotional arc, maximizing the impact of the music.

The chosen form for this movement, the traditional ABA' structure, is far from a mere technical detail. It plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional journey experienced by the listener. Imagine the ABA' structure as a three-act play. Section A, the first act, introduces the main theme, establishing a foundation and a sense of familiarity. This initial presentation sets the stage for the emotional exploration to come.

Section B then serves as the contrasting "second act." Here, the composer introduces a new melodic or harmonic idea, often with a different mood or emotional character. This contrasting section builds tension or evokes a different emotional response than the opening. This "second act" can be thought of as a complication or a turning point in the narrative. The contrasting ideas and emotions introduced in Section B create a sense of unease or anticipation, leaving the listener wondering how the movement will resolve itself.

Finally, Section A' acts as a recapitulation, the "third act" of the emotional journey. This section revisits the main theme, but often with subtle variations. The familiarity of the A theme brings a sense of comfort and resolution. However, the development within the A' section ensures that the emotional journey is not simply a predictable return to the beginning. The music may be subtly altered, hinting at the complexities experienced in the contrasting B section. By employing this ABA' structure, the composer creates a carefully crafted emotional arc. The music builds tension and introduces contrasting ideas before ultimately finding a sense of resolution, albeit a resolution that acknowledges the emotional journey taken.

As a Romantic work, this sonata movement fulfills the essence of the Romantic character. The composer poured his great feelings into this work. Although this is not program music, the impression produced is very close to the idiom of program music. This movement gives a peaceful atmosphere at the beginning, then moves to be piercing and full of emotion in its continuation. Chopin does not avoid the emotional accentuation that will arise in the perception of the listener. Instead, he very prominently makes this song to have a deep emotional impression. He processes this work so that the resulting nuances can convey a feeling of melancholy. He expresses it without giving a descriptive title that explains what emotions he wants to convey. We are left to imagine and experience his work ourselves. Listeners alike reflect on this movement as an expression of emotion with an

intensity that can only be understood by each individual. They feel it and only they know how far this feeling arises and has an impact on themselves.

Just like any other work of art, a musical drama goes through a series of stages before it comes together as a cohesive whole. In their research on the creation process of musical dramas, Darussalam & Wiyoso (2021) identify several key stages. This stage involves translating raw observations into the form of musical compositions. It's like pouring your ideas and emotions onto the canvas of music.

Once the initial musical compositions are complete, they are further developed by incorporating additional instruments. This is where the magic happens as the music is transformed into a rich tapestry of sound. Instruments like keyboard, guitar melody, violin, cello, drum, bass, flute, and saxophone are added to bring depth and dimension to the musical landscape.

The final stage is the presentation of the musical drama, where the audience gets to experience the culmination of all the creative efforts. The music, the story, and the performances come together to create a powerful and moving experience. Chopin, the renowned Polish composer, was a master of instrumentation. He understood how to use different instruments to their fullest potential, creating music that not only sounded beautiful but also conveyed a wide range of emotions. Similarly, in the creation of a musical drama, instrumentation plays a crucial role in supporting the narrative and conveying the emotions of the characters and the story. By carefully selecting and arranging instruments, composers and arrangers can enhance the overall impact of the musical drama, making it a truly immersive and unforgettable experience for the audience.

Piano Mimicry and Elaborate Accompaniment

In the marked image, we witness a captivating interplay between the cello and piano. The piano, rather than simply providing a supportive accompaniment, engages in a remarkable act of mimicry. It echoes the cello's melody, adding layers of complexity and intrigue to the musical landscape.



Figure 2. The Pianistic Mimicry (Source: IMSLP)

Chopin's masterful craftsmanship shines through in the piano's accompaniment. He deftly employs arpeggios and chords, transforming the accompaniment into a dynamic and expressive entity in its own right. These arpeggios and chords not only embellish the melody but also provide a harmonic framework that enhances the emotional impact of the music.

This intricate interplay between cello and piano is a testament to Chopin's genius. He seamlessly blends the two instruments, creating a dialogue of equal voices that elevates the music to new heights. The piano's mimicry of the cello's melody adds a layer of depth and refinement, while the elaborate accompaniment provides a rich tapestry of harmonic support. Together, these elements create a musical experience that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant.

In the realm of experimental piano music, Putri's (2022) composition "Karang Boma" stands out as a bold and innovative exploration of the instrument's sonic potential. Drawing inspiration from the works of contemporary composer John Cage, "Karang Boma" challenges traditional notions of harmony and melody, venturing into uncharted territories of musical expression.

The work's unique approach lies in its transformation of a painting into a musical score. Putri, disregarding conventional notions of sound production and harmonic rules, meticulously transcribes the visual elements of the painting into a series of musical notes. This unconventional method results in a score that defies expectations, inviting the pianist to interpret the visual cues and translate them into a sonic experience.

A particularly striking example of this approach is the depiction of a cat, where the arrangement of notes on the score mirrors the shape of the animal. This visual-to-audio translation blurs the lines between art forms, challenging the listener to perceive music through a lens of visual imagery.

While "Karang Boma" shares a spirit of exploration and innovation with Chopin's "Largo," the two works diverge in their approach to musical boundaries. Chopin, though a revolutionary composer in his own right, operated within the confines of his era's musical conventions. In contrast, "Karang Boma" fully embraces the experimental ethos of John Cage, venturing far beyond the established norms of piano music.

Putri's work serves as a testament to the boundless possibilities of piano music, demonstrating that the instrument can be used to express a wide range of ideas and emotions, even those that defy traditional musical structures. "Karang Boma" is a captivating example of experimental music at its finest, challenging listeners to expand their perception of what music can be.

In conclusion, "Karang Boma" by Putri (2022) is a groundbreaking work of experimental piano music that pushes the boundaries of the instrument and challenges traditional notions of harmony and melody. Drawing inspiration from John Cage and employing a unique visual-to-audio translation method, the work invites listeners to embark on a sonic journey that defies expectations and expands their understanding of music's expressive potential.

Discussions

The discussion of Romantic music can be further enriched by considering the findings of Cita Hapsari & Naam (2023), who posit that emotional expression is a key determinant of aesthetics in art. Their study suggests that through the skillful manipulation of harmony, rhythm, and dynamics, composers can evoke profound and captivating artistic experiences in their listeners. The literary approach to music employed in my research on Chopin's Largo also aligns with Bauana's (2022) hermeneutic examination of art. Bauana's study delves into ethnic art forms, revealing their inherent performative dimensions. The interpretation method adopted embraces the concept of solidarity while also being crafted to be poetic and aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, Chopin's Largo bears a connection to the composer's cultural background, which informed the creation of a soulful work.

Furthermore, Cook (1998) in his book "The Language of Music" argues that music can function as a form of symbolic language, conveying emotions and ideas beyond the realm of literal meaning. This perspective strengthens the case for a literary approach to music analysis, as it allows us to explore the narrative and metaphorical potential within musical compositions. By examining the interplay of musical elements such as harmony, rhythm, and melody, we can gain deeper insights into the emotional core and expressive intent of a piece like Chopin's Largo.

Conclusions

Through this in-depth analysis, we have delved into the intricate world of Chopin's Cello Sonatas, uncovering a captivating tapestry of musical expression. The study has illuminated the egalitarian dialogue between the cello and the piano, revealing a sonata that is remarkably balanced in its musical distribution. This balance, a hallmark of chamber music, exemplifies the genre's maturity and its capacity for expansion.

The analysis has also brought to light the interplay of absolute and programmatic approaches employed by Chopin in his cello sonatas. While the compositions adhere to the formal structures of absolute music, they also embody programmatic elements, hinting at narratives and evocative imagery. This duality adds depth and richness to the musical experience, inviting listeners to engage with the music on multiple levels.

In these sonatas, the traditional soloist-accompanist dynamic is transcended. Instead, both the cello and the piano assume equal roles, complementing and enriching each other throughout the musical journey. This collaborative approach highlights the inherent strengths of each instrument, allowing them to shine in their own right while contributing to a cohesive and harmonious whole.

The analysis has also revealed the remarkable potential for musical exploration within the cello sonata genre. Chopin's compositions showcase his mastery of the cello's expressive capabilities, pushing the boundaries of the instrument and eliciting a wide range of emotions. His innovative techniques and melodic inventiveness have left an indelible mark on the cello repertoire.

Furthermore, the study has shed light on the evolution of chamber music aesthetics during the Romantic era. Chopin's cello sonatas epitomize the Romantic spirit, characterized by emotional intensity, dramatic expression, and a heightened emphasis on personal

expression. These sonatas stand as testaments to the power of music to evoke profound emotions and connect with listeners on a deeply personal level.

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