

OVERLOOKED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: A STUDY OF FELIX BLUMENFELD (1863–
1931) AND HIS TWENTY-FOUR PRELUDES, OP. 17 (1892) FOR PIANO

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Overlooked but Not Forgotten:
A Study of Felix Blumenfeld (1861–1931) and His Twenty-Four Preludes,
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North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards
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ABSTRACT

Although the name of Felix Blumenfeld (1863–1931) is rarely mentioned in musical circles today, there was a time when this was not the case. During his lifetime, Blumenfeld commanded a great deal of respect within the world of music and was in great demand as a piano teacher, pianist, and conductor. As a composer, he wrote many works for solo piano. Despite Blumenfeld's enormous popularity during his lifetime, these pieces were quickly forgotten after his death. In this thesis, I will establish the importance of Blumenfeld's piano compositions as artistic works of quality and present these overlooked pieces as valid repertoire for both teaching and performing.

There is very little scholarship focusing on Blumenfeld or his piano music. Therefore, I will sift through and compile information from various existing sources, including biographical works of people connected with Blumenfeld and Inesa Sinkevych's dissertation, "The Piano Teaching Principles of Felix Blumenfeld: Translation with Annotations of a Book by Lev Barenboim" (2010), to present an overview of Blumenfeld's life and piano works. This overview is important as it provides a sense of who Blumenfeld was as a musician and lays a foundation for who he was as a composer. By consulting musical scores and recordings, I will also explore the types of piano works Blumenfeld wrote and discuss the composer's stylistic features, specifically within his 24 Preludes, Op. 17 (1892). Furthermore, my comparison between the prelude sets of Blumenfeld and Frederic Chopin (1810–1849) will show that Blumenfeld's works exemplify and expand on Chopin's style, adapting it to accommodate modern harmonies and Blumenfeld's own distinct compositional features.

In light of their musical and compositional quality, Blumenfeld's works should not be forgotten. As this study strives to create awareness of his works, it will set the stage for a renewed appreciation of Blumenfeld's piano compositions for teaching and performing today.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES	ix
LIST OF APPENDIX MUSICAL EXAMPLES.....	xi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. FELIX BLUMENFELD (1863–1931): AN OVERVIEW OF HIS LIFE AND PIANO WORKS.....	6
CHAPTER 3. AN ANALYSIS OF FELIX BLUMENFELD’S 24 PRELUDES, OP. 17 (1892).....	28
CHAPTER 4. A COMPARISON OF PRELUDES, OP. 17 (1892) BY FELIX BLUMENFELD AND PRELUDES, OP. 28 (1838–1839) BY FREDERIC CHOPIN (1810–1849).....	49
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION	75
REFERENCES	78
APPENDIX A. PUBLISHED SOLO PIANO WORKS BY FELIX BLUMENFELD	83
APPENDIX B. EXAMPLES OF MOTIVIC CELL APPEARANCES IN PRELUDES, OP. 17 BY FELIX BLUMENFELD.....	85

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
3.1. Overview of Musical Parameters in Blumenfeld's 24 Preludes, Op. 17	32
4.1. Comparison of Prelude Sets by Felix Blumenfeld and Frederic Chopin	50
4.2. Linking of preludes by Chopin via matching notes.....	55
4.3. Linking of preludes by Blumenfeld via matching notes	56
4.4. Summary of Melody Placement in the Preludes of Blumenfeld (Op. 17) and of Chopin (Op. 28).....	58
4.5. Overview of Rhythmic and Metrical Features in Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17, and Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28	61
4.6. Overview of Texture in Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17 and Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28	64
4.7. Tempo Markings and Character in the Prelude Sets of Blumenfeld and Chopin.	73

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
2.1. Map excerpt, Russia in 1860 by Samuel Augustus Mitchell. David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com . Used with permission.....	9
2.2. Map excerpt, Russia in 1880 by Samuel Augustus Mitchell. David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com . Used with permission.....	10
3.1. Harmonic Progressions and Structure of Blumenfeld's Prelude Op. 17, No. 3.....	40
4.1. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 9, mm. 1–17, Diagram of Phrasing	71
4.2. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 9, Diagram of Phrasing	71

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

<u>Example</u>	<u>Page</u>
2.1. Blumenfeld, Etude Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 1–2	23
2.2. Blumenfeld, <i>Souvenir douloureux</i> , Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 57–78	25
2.3. Blumenfeld, Sonata-Fantaisie, Op. 46, mm. 35–39	26
3.1. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 19, mm. 41–49	35
3.2. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 17, mm. 7–8	36
3.3. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, mm. 99–104	36
3.4. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 10, mm. 10–23	37
3.5. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 3, mm. 1–3	39
3.6. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 16, mm. 1–2	41
3.7. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 16, mm. 32–33	42
3.8. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, mm. 13–14	43
3.9. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, mm. 67–70	44
3.10. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, mm. 1–4	46
3.11. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, mm. 21–24	46
3.12. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, mm. 61–64	47
4.1. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 1, motivic cells, mm. 27–28. Reproduced from Jim Samson, ed., <i>Chopin Studies</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 182	52
4.2. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 1, motivic cell excerpt, m. 1	52
4.3. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 9, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2	53
4.4. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2	53
4.5. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 5, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 67–68	54
4.6. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 6, motivic cell excerpt, m. 25	54

4.7.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 8, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 17–18	54
4.8.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, motivic cell excerpt, m. 33	55
4.9.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 4, mm. 17-20.....	59
4.10.	Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, mm. 13–14	60
4.11.	Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, m. 8	63
4.12.	Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, m. 12	63
4.13.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 10, mm. 29–30	67
4.14.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 1, mm. 1–26	68
4.15.	Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 22, mm. 13–17	70

LIST OF APPENDIX MUSICAL EXAMPLES

<u>Example</u>	<u>Page</u>
B1. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 1, motivic cell excerpt, m. 1, initial appearance	85
B2. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 2, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, half steps	85
B3. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 2, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 9–10, half steps, inverted	85
B4. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 3, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, whole steps	86
B5. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 3, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 17–18, half steps	86
B6. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 4, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 10–13, half steps	86
B7. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 5, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 67–68, half steps	87
B8. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 6, motivic cell excerpt, m. 25, half steps	87
B9. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 35–36, whole steps	87
B10. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, motivic cell excerpt, m. 67–68, whole steps in treble clef, half steps in bass clef.....	88
B11. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 8, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 17–18, half steps	88
B12. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 9, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, whole steps in upper voice and half steps, inverted, in an inner voice	88
B13. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 10, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 27–28, half steps	89
B14. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 11, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 41–44, half steps	89
B15. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, motivic cell excerpt, m. 33, half steps	89
B16. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 99–100, whole steps	90
B17. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 13, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–4, half steps and whole steps.....	90
B18. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 13, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 11–12, whole steps, inverted	90
B19. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 14, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 18–19, half steps	91

B20.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 15, motivic cell excerpt, m. 11, whole steps and half steps	91
B21.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 16, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 40–41, half steps, inverted	91
B22.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 17, motivic cell excerpt, m. 21, half steps	92
B23.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 18, motivic cell excerpt, m. 9, half steps, partial motive example	92
B24.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 18, motivic cell excerpt, m. 23, half steps, full motive example	92
B25.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 19, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 15–16, half steps	93
B26.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 20, motivic cell excerpt, m. 14, half steps	93
B27.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 20, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 22–23, whole steps	93
B28.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 21, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 33, half steps	94
B29.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 22, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 3–4, whole steps	94
B30.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 22, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 49–50, half steps, inverted	94
B31.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 23, motivic cell excerpt, m. 35–36, whole steps and whole steps, inverted	95
B32.	Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, half steps	95

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the name of Felix Blumenfeld (1863–1931) is rarely mentioned in musical circles today, there was a time when this was not the case. During his lifetime, this Russian musician commanded a great deal of respect within the world of music and was in great demand as a piano teacher, pianist, and conductor. He worked and socialized with many prominent musicians and also premiered music, primarily in Russia and France, as both a pianist and a conductor. It is also notable that he studied composition with the renowned Russian composer, Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

After his graduation from the conservatory in 1885, Blumenfeld associated with a group of musicians (many of whom were significant), which became known as the Belyayev circle.¹ Among its members were Blumenfeld's brother Sigismund Mikhailovich Blumenfeld (1852–1920), Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov (1865–1936), Anatoly Konstantinovich Liadov (1855–1914), Georgi Ottonovich Deutsch (1857–1891), and Rimsky-Korsakov.² The namesake of the Belyayev circle, Mitrofan Petrovich Belyayev [Belaieff] (1836–1904), was a publisher who championed the works of Russian composers,³ including those of Blumenfeld. Blumenfeld's

¹ Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, trans. Judah A. Joffe (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 241.

² Ibid.

³ Richard Beattie Davis, "Belyayev [Belaieff], Mitrofan Petrovich," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001-), accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02622>.

pieces became widely known and were well-represented in collections of Russian piano music of the day.⁴

Despite Blumenfeld's enormous popularity during his lifetime, his pieces were quickly forgotten after his death. In this thesis, I will establish the importance of Blumenfeld's piano compositions as artistic works and present these overlooked pieces as valid repertoire for both teaching and performing.

There is very little scholarship focusing on Blumenfeld or his piano music. Therefore, I piece together information from various sources to present an overview of Blumenfeld's life and piano works in chapter 2. Some of the sources I draw from include Inesa Sinkevych's dissertation, "The Piano Teaching Principles of Felix Blumenfeld: Translation with Annotations of a Book by Lev Barenboim" (2010),⁵ as well as Natalia Rastopchina's book *Feliks Mikhaïlovich Blumenfel'd: monograficheskiï ocherk* [monographic commentary] (1975),⁶ Glenn Plaskin's *Horowitz: A Biography of Vladimir Horowitz* (1983),⁷ and Rimsky-Korsakov's autobiography *My Musical Life* (1923).⁸ Sinkevych's dissertation provides insight into Blumenfeld's thoughts as a musician and piano instructor. The book by Rastopchina is a biography of Blumenfeld. Plaskin's book presents a view of Blumenfeld through the eyes of

⁴ Constantin von Sternberg, ed., *Modern Russian Piano Music: Vol. I, Akimenko to Korestchenko*. Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1915.

⁵ Inesa Sinkevych, "The Piano Teaching Principles of Felix Blumenfeld: Translation with Annotations of a Book by Lev Barenboim" (DMA diss., Manhattan School of Music, 2010).

⁶ Natalia Rastopchina, *Feliks Mikhaïlovich Blumenfeld : monograficheskiï ocherk* [monographic commentary] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1975).

⁷ Glenn Plaskin, *Horowitz: A Biography of Vladimir Horowitz* (New York: William and Morrow, 1983).

⁸ Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakoff, *My Musical Life*, trans. Judah A. Joffe (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923).

Vladimir Horowitz (1903–1989), one of Blumenfeld’s students, while Rimsky-Korsakov gives information concerning Blumenfeld as a student and colleague. The overview provided from these sources in chapter 2 is important, because it offers a sense of who Blumenfeld was as a musician and lays a foundation for who he was as a composer. For example, Blumenfeld’s idea of melody was shaped by the influence of Anton Rubenstein’s (1829–1894) lyricism⁹ and by the emphasis of the effect of vocal music on instrumental performance that was prominent in nineteenth-century Russian aesthetic thought.¹⁰ Furthermore, Blumenfeld’s idea of texture was influenced by the knowledge of orchestration he gained through his conducting experiences.¹¹

Chapter 2 also contains a brief introduction to Blumenfeld’s compositional style. After consulting musical scores (primarily reprints of Belaieff editions) and world-premiere recordings such as Philip Thomson’s performance of Blumenfeld’s preludes and impromptus (2000) and Jouni Somero’s recording of various piano works by Blumenfeld (2003), I discuss the stylistic features and distinctive qualities of the composer’s music.

Chapter 3 focuses on an in-depth analysis of Blumenfeld’s 24 Preludes, Op. 17 (1892). I first became interested in these works after seeing two of his preludes in an antique score, *Modern Russian Piano Music: Vol. I, Akimenko to Korestchenko* (1915)¹² and because of favorable comments on Blumenfeld’s piano music from music critics such as Maurice Hinson¹³

⁹ Plaskin, 38.

¹⁰ Sinkevych, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹² Constantin von Sternberg, ed., *Modern Russian Piano Music: Akimenko to Korestchenko*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1915), 93–110.

¹³ Maurice Hinson, *Guide to the Pianist’s Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 122.

and from performers such as Joachim Braun.¹⁴ Much of my research for these analyses will be drawn from a reprint of the historical Belaieff editions of Blumenfeld's preludes (originally published in Leipzig, Germany, ca. 1897), published by Performer's Editions in 2014. I will examine their form, use of motives, harmony, melody, texture, rhythm, and voicing and use my findings to define Blumenfeld's compositional characteristics, ultimately establishing the artistic and musical validity and merit of his works.

Some critics have dismissed Blumenfeld's piano music as "indistinctive,"¹⁵ "languid,"¹⁶ and ". . . anything great? Not really."¹⁷ However, in chapter 4 of this thesis, I will refute these opinions by comparing Preludes, op. 17 (1892) by Blumenfeld with Preludes, op. 28 (1838–1839) by Frederic Chopin (1810–1849), a composer to whom Blumenfeld is frequently likened. This comparison is meaningful, because it shows that Blumenfeld's works are not lacking in

¹⁴ Joachim Braun, "Blumenfeld, Felix (Mikhaylovich)," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed November 9, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/03316>.

¹⁵ Daniel Cariaga, "Performing Arts; Finds from a Pre-Digital Age Unearthed; Schumann: Toccata, Opus 7; Symphonic Etudes, Opus 13; Fantasy, Opus 17; Earl Wild, piano, Ivory Classics; Felix Blumenfeld: Preludes and Impromptus, Opus 17, Opus 13, Opus 28, Opus, 12, Opus 45, and Opus 16; Philip Thomson, piano, Ivory Classics: Home Edition," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2000, accessed November 9, 2014, <http://proxy.library.ndsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/421562836?accountid=6766>.

¹⁶ Geoff Brown, "Concerts: Arts First Night," *Times* (London), January 4, 2010, accessed November 9, 2014, <http://proxy.library.ndsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/320378571?accountid=6766>.

¹⁷ Harold C. Schonberg, "Guide to Records: Blumenfeld," *American Record Guide* 63, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 92, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=266d650b-c899-4a0f-b870-1495cb21d22f%40sessionmgr114&hid=128&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=mah&AN=3095823>.

musical substance and they pose striking similarities to those of Chopin. As one critic put it, “Blumenfeld was so imbued with the Chopin language that [Blumenfeld’s] music could well have been composed by Chopin himself.”¹⁸ Indeed, at first glance, Blumenfeld and Chopin’s works appear markedly alike, suggesting that Blumenfeld was not an especially original composer. Blumenfeld’s works certainly exemplify Chopin’s style but as my examination of aspects such as structure, mood, virtuosity, rhythm, melody, and harmony will show, Blumenfeld adapted Chopin’s style to accommodate modern harmonies and his own distinct compositional ideas. One feature unique to Blumenfeld is his use of texture. Given that he was influenced by his knowledge of orchestration, Blumenfeld must have conceived of his piano works from an orchestral perspective. This is apparent in the frequently thick textures in his compositions and deep bass lines, of which he was particularly fond of enhancing.¹⁹ Another significant distinction is Blumenfeld’s treatment of texture combined with rhythmic complexity generally resulting in a higher level of virtuosity than in Chopin’s preludes.

During his lifetime, Felix Blumenfeld was a well-respected musician, so the question arises as to why he was so quickly entered the ranks of the overlooked. Perhaps one reason is that Chopin’s preludes already were firmly established in the concert repertory well before Blumenfeld had even penned a note. Another possible explanation may lie in the technical difficulty of Blumenfeld’s preludes. But in light of their attributes, Blumenfeld’s preludes merit attention and should not be forgotten. This study strives to create a new awareness of his works, and to set the stage for recognition and appreciation of Blumenfeld’s piano compositions for teaching and performance.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sinkevych, 56.

CHAPTER 2. FELIX BLUMENFELD (1863–1931): AN OVERVIEW OF HIS LIFE AND PIANO WORKS

Felix Mikhailovich Blumenfeld (1863–1931) was born in the small Russian town of Kovalevk, in the Kherson government²⁰ (guberniya)²¹. Though born in Russia, he descended from Austrian and Polish families.²² Felix’s paternal grandfather had moved from Austria to Russia in 1802 and became a Russian citizen.²³ His mother, Marie Szymanowska (n.d.), was the daughter of a Polish landowner.²⁴ Felix’s parents, Mikhail (n.d.) and Marie Blumenfeld, had seven children.²⁵ Felix, born on April 7, 1863, is thought to be the fourth child; sources are not clear as to the birth order of all of the children.²⁶

²⁰ Richard Beattie Davis, *The Beauty of Belaieff*, 2nd ed. (Bedford, UK: G-Clef Publishing, 2009), 68. There are only a few sources in English containing biographical information on Felix Blumenfeld. Davis’s book and a recent dissertation by Inesa Sinkevych, “The Piano Teaching Principles of Felix Blumenfeld: Translation with Annotations of a Book by Lev Barenboim” (DMA diss., Manhattan School of Music, 2010), tell us more than most of the other sources I have located. Both Davis’s book and Sinkevych’s dissertation translate material from the following sources originally in Russian: Natalia Rastopchina, *Felix Mikhailovich Blumenfeld* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1975), and Lev Barenboim, *Musical Pedagogy and Performance: Pianoforte Teaching Principles of F.M. Blumenfeld*, (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1974). Other sources in English are the following brief entries in encyclopedias: Joachim Braun, “Blumenfeld, Felix (Mikhaylovich)” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03316>, and A. M. Prokhorov and Jean Paradise, eds., *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 31 vols., translated from Russian (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 3:376.

²¹ Guberniya [gubernia] is a major administrative division and unit of local government in Russia (see “Gubernia” in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 7:467).

²² Davis, 68.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. The names of Felix’s siblings were Stanislav, Sigismund, Ol’ga, Zhanna (Jeanne), Marie, and Josif.

Music was important to the Blumenfeld family. In recalling his childhood, Felix wrote, “I can easily say that I was swimming in music since the day I was born.”²⁷ Felix’s father Mikhail taught music²⁸ and French at a boarding school for boys.²⁹ Felix’s oldest brother, Stanislav (1850–1897), was Felix’s first piano teacher,³⁰ and Stanislav later became a music teacher in Kiev, as well as a founder of a music business and school.³¹ Felix’s second-oldest brother, Sigismund (1852–1920), studied voice at the Moscow Conservatory, gained a favorable reputation as a singer, and published a number of songs.³² Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov (1824–1906), the prolific Russian art and music critic, spoke highly of Sigismund both as a singer and composer.³³

Felix also had musical connections in his extended family. The Polish composer Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937) was Felix’s distant cousin (Karol’s paternal grandfather and Felix’s mother were siblings).³⁴ Felix’s nephew, Heinrich (Harry) Neuhaus (1888–1964; son of Felix’s

²⁶ Davis, 68.

²⁷ Sinkevych, 12.

²⁸ Davis, 68.

²⁹ Sinkevych, 12.

³⁰ Davis, 72.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

sister Ol'ga and Gustav Wilhelm Neuhaus), became a well-known pianist and teacher.³⁵ Felix continued contact through out his career with both Szymanowski and Neuhaus and became particularly close to Neuhaus.³⁶

After Felix was born, the Blumenfelds moved to Elizavetgrad (later renamed Kirovograd), a city in the northern area of the Kherson government (see figure 2.1). Elizavetgrad was conducive for musical development as it had a rich arts culture; in music, most notably concerts and recitals given by visiting artists.³⁷ The Blumenfelds took advantage of these opportunities. Russian composer and pianist Modeste Mussorgsky (1839–1881), while on tour in 1879 with contralto Darya Leonova (1829–1896), was one of the prominent visiting artists the Blumenfelds came into contact with. In a letter to Stasov, Mussorgsky wrote about meeting the Blumenfelds in Elizavetgrad. He spoke favorably of them, conveying that he “met the very nice Blumenfeld family, highly advanced in musical matters and vigilantly following musical literature.”³⁸

³⁵ Some of Neuhaus's famous students include, among others, Sviatoslav Richter (1915–1997), Emil Gilels (1916–1985), and Radu Lupu (b. 1945), who went on to have very successful careers. Sinkevych, 2–3.

³⁶ Davis, 68.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson, *The Mussorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste Petrovich Mussorgsky in Letters and Documents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947), 392.

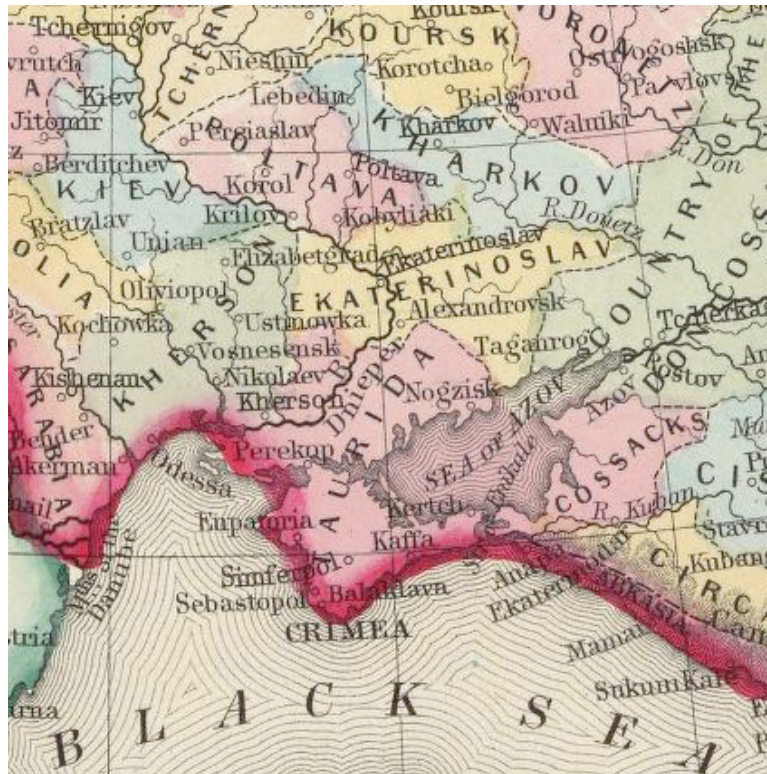


Figure 2.1. Map excerpt, Russia in 1860 by Samuel Augustus Mitchell. David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com. Used with permission.

Felix began his piano studies in Elizavetgrad, first with his older brother Stanislav, then with Gustav Wilhelm Neuhaus (his sister Ol'ga's husband). About age twelve, Felix ceased formal piano studies but continued playing on his own while finishing his academic studies and subsequently in 1880, entering a polytechnic school in Riga, a city much further north, near the Baltic Sea (see figure 2.2).³⁹

³⁹ Davis, 72.



Figure 2.2. Map excerpt, Russia in 1880 by Samuel Augustus Mitchell. David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com. Used with permission.

After his first year in the polytechnic school, Blumenfeld changed the course of his career after meeting Russian composer Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov in the summer of 1881. Blumenfeld often spent the summer months with family friends, the Anastas'ev family in Magarach, in the Crimea near Yalta.⁴⁰ While there, he also came to know the Fortunatos.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid. Felix later married Maria Viktorovna, a daughter from the Anastas'ev family. They had a daughter, Nina, who was born in 1885.

⁴¹ N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1923), 212.

Mikhail and Sof'ya Fortunato's⁴² son, Vladimir, became good friends with Blumenfeld. It was through the Fortunatos that Blumenfeld first met Vladimir Stasov earlier in 1879 (Stasov was Sof'ya's father)⁴³ and later, Rimsky-Korsakov in the summer of 1881.⁴⁴ This introduction and the subsequent interactions had a profound effect on Blumenfeld's career: he then decided to drop out of the polytechnic school and entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory in the fall of 1881.⁴⁵ Blumenfeld made quite an impression on Rimsky-Korsakov. The latter recalled the following in his memoirs:

That day is memorable to me, because in the evening, on our return trip from Anastasyeffs, the oldest Fortunato boy entered our carriage, near Ay-Danil with his chum, Fyeliks Mikhaylovich Blumenfeld, a youth of eighteen or so, whom he there introduced to us. Our charming new acquaintance proved to be a lively pianist of promise, a bountifully endowed musical temperament. For several days we kept meeting him constantly at the Fortunatos', in the *Hotel Russia*. There was a fine grand piano in the hotel drawing-room and more than once, for my Yalta friends, I had to play excerpts from *Snyegoorochka* which interested everybody at the time. Fyeliks seemed to listen with delight.⁴⁶

Blumenfeld's musicianship was shaped at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he studied composition with Rimsky-Korsakov⁴⁷ and piano with Fiodor Fiodorovich Stein (1819–1898).⁴⁸ Stein had personally known Chopin and Schumann and had been particularly influenced

⁴² Ibid. The Fortunatos ran the Hotel Russia, one of the most well-known and “fashionable” bathing resorts in Crimea.

⁴³ Davis, 72.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov, 212–13.

⁴⁷ Braun, “Blumenfeld, Felix (Mikhaylovich).”

⁴⁸ Sinkevych, 15.

by Chopin, a connection which in turn greatly influenced Blumenfeld's development as a musician.⁴⁹ In addition, Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894) taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory while Blumenfeld was a student there. Though Blumenfeld did not study with him directly, Rubinstein's playing greatly influenced Blumenfeld's musical development as well.⁵⁰ When Blumenfeld graduated from the Conservatory in 1885 with a gold medal in piano, it was Rubinstein who awarded him the top mark.⁵¹ Rubinstein later made the following remark in 1893 in a letter to his sister, "Blumenfeld is a young gifted man who lives in St. Petersburg . . . he is quite good as far as the piano is concerned."⁵²

After graduating, Blumenfeld was completely immersed in a musical life. He began teaching at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1885 and performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician, composed, and eventually started conducting.⁵³ He began to build his reputation as a musician, partly due to Stasov's enthusiastic support that began as early as 1879 to publicize Blumenfeld's musical talent.⁵⁴ Stasov also praised Blumenfeld in his writings. He wrote the following on two separate occasions in letters to his daughter Sof'ya:

Felix is highly esteemed in our music circle: no one accompanies better in all St. Petersburg (with the exclusion of Mussorgsky), and he is making good progress as a

⁴⁹ Davis, 72.

⁵⁰ Sinkevych, 15.

⁵¹ Davis, 72.

⁵² Sinkevych, 15.

⁵³ Davis, 72–73.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

pianist with Stein in the conservatory. Honestly, he is exceptionally musical. We are very happy about his development.⁵⁵

I don't have much news to report to you, except for Blumenfeld. He is now making enormous progress as a composer. Within a short time he wrote a few songs, and all of them are superb! In one of them he used Pushkin's poem *Spell* and the tune that I proposed. This song is especially charming. . . . No one in our Russian school, with the exception of Borodin, has ever put such passion, feelings, beauty, love, and vividness in his songs!"⁵⁶

Stasov's admiration of Blumenfeld's musicianship continued to the end of the former's life. In what musicologist Richard Taruskin has called "his last testament, the grand summation,"⁵⁷ Stasov's *The Art of the Nineteenth Century* (1901, 1906)⁵⁸ "names Blumenfeld as one of the most important students of Rimsky-Korsakov. In his works are contained the fine traditions of the independent Russian school."⁵⁹

Stasov was not the only critic to speak well of Blumenfeld. Russian music critic Semyon Nikolayevich Kruglikov (1851–1910) wrote the following about Blumenfeld's performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's Piano Concerto (1882–1883) in 1889: "It is difficult to imagine a better musician for the performance of this concerto than Blumenfeld. The technique of the young virtuoso is excellent and confident. His playing is intelligent, musical, and full of profound

⁵⁵ Sinkevych, 14.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 38.

⁵⁸ Ibid. *The Art of the Nineteenth Century* was published first in abridged form as a supplement to the arts journal *Niva* in 1901 and then was published in full in the fourth volume of Stasov's collected works in 1906.

⁵⁹ As quoted in Natalia Rastopchina, *Feliks Mikhaïlovich Blumenfel'd: monograficheskiĭ ocherk* [monographic commentary] (Leningrad: Musyka, 1975), 23.

feeling.”⁶⁰ In an 1897 article about Blumenfeld’s Mazurka for Orchestra, op. 10 (1888), Russian composer and music critic César Cui (1835–1918) wrote, “Its themes are felicitous. It is well constructed, successfully instrumented. But its chief merit lies in its national colour.”⁶¹ Cui also wrote about Blumenfeld’s 1898 conducting debut at the Maryinsky Theatre where he premiered Rubinstein’s *Feramors* (1861–1862): “We ought to cordially welcome this debut of Blumenfeld as a conductor of Russian Opera. The debut was an absolute success. I can say with certainty: with his rare musical gift and necessary practice he will become a great conductor. And we do need another superb Russian conductor!”⁶²

In addition to *Feramors*, Blumenfeld conducted numerous other premieres, including two of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas, *Servilia* (1900–1901) in October 1902 and *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya* (1903–1904) in February 1907,⁶³ and two works by Alexander Scriabin (1871/72–1915⁶⁴): Symphony No. 3 (*The Divine Poem*, 1902–1904) in February 1906⁶⁵ and *Poem of Ecstasy* (1905–1908) in January 1909.⁶⁶ As part of his

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁶¹ Davis, 74.

⁶² Sinkevych, 19.

⁶³ Mark Humphreys and Marina Frolova-Walker, “Rimsky-Korsakov: (1) Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52074>.

⁶⁴ Scriabin’s birth year is given according to the conventions of *Grove Music Online*: 1871 is the year according to the old-style (Julian) calendar; 1872 is the year according to the new-style (Gregorian) calendar.

⁶⁵ Davis, 78.

conducting job at the Maryinsky Theatre, Blumenfeld was sent in 1904 to Bayreuth, joined by Neuhaus and Szymanowski, to study *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1848–1874) of Richard Wagner (1813–1883).⁶⁷ Through a cooperative effort, he and Eduard Nápravník (1839–1916) then conducted three operas from Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in January and February of 1905.⁶⁸ The performance of *Siegfried* was particularly well-received,⁶⁹ as critics in a February 1905 review “recognized the value and strength of Blumenfeld’s interpretation of *Siegfried*.”⁷⁰

Another notable milestone in Blumenfeld’s conducting career was his 1908 performance in Paris of *Boris Godunov* (originally written by Mussorgsky in 1868–1869, revised in 1871–1872, then re-orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov in 1896 and again in 1908).⁷¹ This was the Paris premiere of the opera’s 1908 version, which also featured Fyodor Chaliapin (1873–1938), a Russian bass who was “widely considered the greatest singing actor of his day”⁷² and who often worked with Blumenfeld.⁷³

⁶⁶ Jonathan Powell, “Skryabin [Scriabin], Aleksandr Nikolayevich,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25946>.

⁶⁷ Davis, 78.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Rastopchina, 33.

⁷¹ Richard Taruskin, “Boris Godunov,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed April 21, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006575>.

⁷² Harold Barnes and Alan Blyth, “Chaliapin [Shalyapin], Fyodor,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed April 21, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25575>.

⁷³ Davis, 78.

Blumenfeld was an active, prominent figure in the musical life of St. Petersburg. He performed and socialized within its “musical gatherings,” such as those hosted by Stasov, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and especially, Belaieff’s ‘Fridays’ organized by Mitrofan Petrovich Belaieff (1836–1903/04).⁷⁴ At these gatherings, many prominent musicians were in attendance, where many new works by various composers were played and then discussed or critiqued. Blumenfeld’s contemporaries spoke highly of his performances, noting that they were always of the highest artistry.⁷⁵ Serge Rachmaninov (1873–1943) recalled a time when he was invited to play at a Belaieff ‘Friday’ and “though he did not stake ‘a half kopeck piece on Belaieff and all his St. Petersburg circle’,” he went and brought his new Fantasy for Two Pianos, op. 5 (1893). Rachmaninov played this piece by memory while Blumenfeld played the other part “superlatively at sight.”⁷⁶

Teaching was also an important part of Blumenfeld’s musical life. He taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1885 to 1918 with two interruptions. The first interruption occurred in 1905 due to the 1905 Revolution and the second from 1907(?) to 1911, during which he focused more on conducting and performing.⁷⁷

The part of the 1905 Revolution that most directly affected Blumenfeld’s career at the Conservatory stemmed from what has become known as ‘Bloody Sunday’ and the events that surrounded it. In 1903, Father Georgy Gapon (1870–1906) founded the Assembly of the Russian

⁷⁴ Sinkevych, 21.

⁷⁵ Rastopchina, 41.

⁷⁶ Davis, 74.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 78.

Factory and Mill Workers of the City of St. Petersburg.⁷⁸ When four workers were dismissed from the Putilov plant in St. Petersburg, Gapon was hoping to resolve the situation.⁷⁹ However, they were not reinstated, and as a result, the workers at the Putilov plant went on strike on January 3, 1905. By January 7, almost two-thirds of the factory workers of St. Petersburg were on strike.⁸⁰ Gapon worked to organize a peaceful march, to be held on Sunday, January 9, to present Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) with a petition.⁸¹ That morning, between 50,000 and 100,000 people (including women and children) began the procession.⁸² When they were ordered to stop but did not, soldiers almost immediately opened fire on the unarmed people.⁸³ When it was over, at least 130 people were dead, and 299 were wounded.⁸⁴ This event led to strikes everywhere in Russia, not only among workers but among students as well,⁸⁵ including those at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.⁸⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov was appointed to be on a committee for “adjusting differences with agitated pupils,”⁸⁷ and after much tension, he was dismissed from his

⁷⁸ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁶ Davis, 78.

⁸⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov, 346.

teaching position on March 19.⁸⁸ Other teachers, including Aleksandr Konstantinovich Glazunov (1865–1936), Anatoly Konstantinovich Lyadov (1855–1914), and Iosif Ivanovich Vitol (1863–1948) resigned in protest to Rimsky-Korsakov’s dismissal.⁸⁹ It is not completely clear if Blumenfeld resigned or was dismissed; according to Davis, “He [Blumenfeld] was dismissed from the conservatoire on March 31st. Although Blumenfeld was re-instated in December 1905, he only remained for another year or so, before resigning once more.”⁹⁰

Several years later, because of famine and illness resulting from the 1917 Revolution, Blumenfeld left St. Petersburg, moved to Kiev, where he became the director of the conservatory there.⁹¹ Heinrich Neuhaus was also at Kiev during this time.⁹² In 1922, both were “ordered by the people’s commissar” to transfer to the Moscow Conservatory.⁹³ While Blumenfeld was teaching in Moscow, he was given the award of “Honored Artist of the Russian Soviet Federated Republic” in 1927.⁹⁴ Blumenfeld taught at the Moscow Conservatory until his death in 1931.⁹⁵

During his teaching career, Blumenfeld taught countless students. Many of them became noted pianists, with successful performing and/or teaching careers of their own. Some of his

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 371–72.

⁸⁹ Davis, 78.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Sinkevych, 22; Davis, 78.

⁹² Davis, 78.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Prokhorov, 3:376.

⁹⁵ Davis, 78.

well-known students include his nephew Heinrich Neuhaus,⁹⁶ Simon Barere (1896–1951),⁹⁷ Maria Yudina (1899–1970),⁹⁸ Maria Grinberg (1908–1978),⁹⁹ and perhaps the best known of them all, Vladimir Horowitz (1903–1989).¹⁰⁰ Horowitz recalled, “Blumenfeld was exactly the teacher I needed at the moment because he was creative.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Neuhaus taught at the Specialist Music School of the Tbilisi Imperial Russian Music Society (later renamed the Tbilisi Conservatory) from 1916–1918, then at the Kiev Conservatory from 1919–1922. He transferred to the Moscow Conservatory in 1922 and remained there teaching until his death in 1964.

⁹⁷ After graduating from the St. Petersburg Conservatory where he studied with Blumenfeld in 1919, Barere taught at the Kiev Conservatory and concertized in the Soviet Union. In 1928, he became the cultural ambassador to the Baltic republics and Scandinavia and moved to Riga; in 1932, he moved to Berlin and later fled to Sweden because of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. In 1939, he moved to the United States and remained there until the end of his life in 1951 when he died during a performance of Edvard Grieg’s Piano Concerto, op. 16 at Carnegie Hall.

⁹⁸ Yudina attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory and studied with Blumenfeld. She then attended the Petrograd Conservatory, graduating in 1921 and beginning her teaching career there until 1930. She taught at the Tbilisi Conservatory from 1932–1934, and later began teaching at the Moscow Conservatory in 1936 until 1951 and additionally at the Gnessin Institute of Music beginning in 1944 until 1960. She performed extensively throughout her career but was mostly restricted to performing within the Soviet Union because of the political climate of the time.

⁹⁹ Grinberg studied with Blumenfeld at the Moscow Conservatory. Like others in her day, political issues restricted where she could perform and caused problems in her teaching career but she did begin to teach at the Gnessin Institute in 1959. She is best known for her recordings, most notable are her recordings of the complete Beethoven sonatas as she was the first Russian pianist to do so.

¹⁰⁰ Horowitz studied with Blumenfeld at the Kiev Conservatory and began an extensive performing career. He left the USSR in 1925 and moved to Berlin. His American debut was in 1928 and the United States was his home base for the rest of his life, returning to Europe and Russia to perform in his later years.

¹⁰¹ David Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz* (1991; repr., Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2004), 9.

Other students also remembered Blumenfeld's teaching in a favorable light. The following statement by Grinberg about Blumenfeld provides some insight into Blumenfeld's teaching and musicianship:

My first teacher was Felix Blumenfeld, a prominent concert pianist, an astounding musician. . . . Being a conductor, he heard the piano as an orchestra, and taught his students how to 'orchestrate' piano music in their interpretations. This quality made his students sound differently from everybody else. He developed their artistic thinking, and I learned much from him, especially in this area.¹⁰²

Neuhaus also fondly remembered his studies with Blumenfeld during his childhood, being exposed to different facets of Blumenfeld's teaching by listening to Blumenfeld's playing and critical feedback of Neuhaus' own playing:

The greatest musical and family events were the visits of my uncle, Felix Blumenfeld, my mother's brother, who lived in Petersburg. I shall never forget how, as quite a small child, I would listen for whole evenings on end, later into the night (during his visits, we were allowed to go to bed very late) to his magnificent playing. . . . Of course, my sister and I had to play to him and we listened reverently to his observations. Happy, unforgettable days!¹⁰³

Though it has been stated that Blumenfeld was Barere's most influential teacher¹⁰⁴ and Barere was one of Blumenfeld's most prominent students, there is very little documenting their student-teacher relationship other than the fact that Barere's son Boris mentions in an interview that Blumenfeld introduced his father to Godowsky's transcriptions.¹⁰⁵ Barere recorded

¹⁰² Sinkevych, 5.

¹⁰³ Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, trans. K. A. Leibovitch (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), 14–15.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Johnson, "Pearls of Sheer Light," *International Piano* 30 (March/April 2015): 71.

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Leiser, "My Father, Simon Barere," *Clavier* 44, no. 8 (Oct. 2005): 26.

Blumenfeld's Etude for the Left Hand, op. 36 (1905) in 1934. Horowitz described this recording as "like a miracle," and he supposedly stopped performing this piece after hearing Barere's recording.¹⁰⁶

Blumenfeld's teaching principles, as laid out in Lev Barenboim's book, are summarized by Sinkevych:

The core of Blumenfeld's pedagogic method was to teach his students to understand the meaning of the piece, create its artistic image, and communicate it to the audience. According to him, sincerity, richness in content, truthfulness, integrity and clarity were among the most essential qualities of a successful performance. In his work, Blumenfeld gave the utmost importance to the role of the musical ear. From his first lessons, he demanded a maximum aural activity, and taught 'in-depth listening'; he wanted to free his students' aural memory from clichés and develop their own artistic imagination.¹⁰⁷

Blumenfeld himself said, "A true musician hears music with his inner ear, and then reproduces it with his fingers"¹⁰⁸ and "Your eye will always fail you and will never compensate for the lack of listening. Either learn how to *hear*, or quit music."¹⁰⁹ Blumenfeld felt so strongly about aural perception and comprehension that he refused to teach pianists who would not or could not develop these abilities.¹¹⁰ He described three basic principles relating to developing the musical ear: 1) practicing in a mechanical and formal way is unacceptable (practicing for the sake of practice; being formulaic and not listening and/or reacting to one's playing); 2) requiring

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, 69.

¹⁰⁷ Sinkevych, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 35 (original italics).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

maximal aural concentration *always*; and 3) choosing repertoire that would enhance each individual student's aural development.¹¹¹

Blumenfeld would often be purposely vague or brief in his comments to students in lessons. He felt self-education was important and wanted his students to be creative – to think rather than just follow directions, and to figure things out on their own so that they would not just be following clichés and stereotypes.¹¹²

Emphasis on color and orchestral qualities in piano music also was indicative of Blumenfeld's teaching. He spent a lot of time talking about these ideas with his students. One method he used to develop the ear was having students learn and memorize works away from the piano while at the same time, be able to interpret and hear various “orchestrations” of each melody.¹¹³ The importance Blumenfeld placed on these concepts is reflected in his musical descendants carrying on his idea of the “orchestral” possibilities of the piano.¹¹⁴ This emphasis is apparent in his piano compositions as well. The thick textures that are generally present in most of his piano works allow a performer the opportunity to explore different layers of sounds and combinations of colors.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 35–36 (emphasis added).

¹¹² Ibid., 29.

¹¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 8, 10. Regina Horowitz (1899–1984, Vladimir's sister) and her student Victor Makarov (b. 1953) are two examples of teachers who have carried on Blumenfeld's ideas concerning the orchestral qualities in piano music within their teaching methods.

Blumenfeld's compositional output is primarily works for piano solo.¹¹⁵ Most are character pieces with titles typical of Chopin, including etudes, mazurkas, nocturnes, preludes, impromptus, waltzes, and polonaises. He composed three large-scale works for piano solo: his two sets of variations, Op. 8 (1888) and Op. 34 (1903), and his Sonata-Fantasia, Op. 46 (1913).

His early works have characteristics that are reminiscent of those of the Russian Nationalist school, showing the influence of his mentors and colleagues. Even a cursory glance at Blumenfeld's first solo piano work, Four Pieces, Op. 2 (1883—No. 1, Etude; No. 2, *Souvenir douloureux*; No. 3, Quasi Mazurka; and No. 4, Mazurka de Concert), displays repeating motives and dance-like rhythms, two of the common characteristics of the Russian Nationalist school. Looking closer, chromaticism and nontraditional harmonies abound. The first two measures of Blumenfeld's Etude from Op. 2 (example 2.1) show chromaticism from the onset. There are many half steps in the uppermost voice, and some fleeting but direct dissonances between the E \flat in the bass clef and the E \sharp in the uppermost voice. This E \flat -E \sharp dissonance occurs multiple times within these two measures.

The image shows a musical score for the first two measures of Blumenfeld's Etude Op. 2, No. 1. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (upper voice) and a bass clef staff (lower voice). The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo and articulation markings are 'Allegretto grazioso' and 'non legato'. The first measure begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The upper voice features a chromatic melody with many half steps. The bass line contains a dissonance between E \flat and E \sharp . The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Example 2.1. Blumenfeld, Etude Op. 2, No. 1, mm. 1–2.

¹¹⁵ Besides his piano solo works, Blumenfeld wrote a few orchestral works, a piece for piano and orchestra, a string quartet, a movement for *Les Vendredis* (a collaborative work of sixteen pieces for string quartets in honor of Belaieff), two works for cello and piano, and nine opuses of songs.

A study of the second piece from Op. 2, *Souvenir douloureux*, shows some unexpected and nontraditional harmonies. The opening theme follows more conventional progressions the first two times it appears (mm. 1–10 and mm. 29–38). That theme returns a third and final time beginning in m. 57. The first five measures of this final statement are exactly the same as the other two statements but after the downbeat of m. 62, the melody begins to take a different direction, and instead of a return to the home key of G# minor that took place in the first two statements, the melody leads to a repeat of mm. 61–62, staying in B major. As it continues, it seems to play with the key of C# minor for the next two measures. Then an unexpected arrival of a C major chord occurs in m. 67, followed by a diminished seventh chord and back to another C major chord but in second inversion this time, with the melody leading into this four-measure chord progression: G/B–D–F–Am–A♭/C–E♭/D♭–A♭/C–E♭/D♭. It then resolves back to the tonic key but as a weak resolution resolving to a first inversion G# minor chord. The stronger resolution to a root position tonic of G# minor does not happen until five measures later, on the downbeat of m. 78, which begins the coda (example 2.2).

m.57

pp *p*

m. 61

cres.

m. 65

f

m. 69

disperato *ff*

dim.

G/B D F Am A b/C E b/D b A b/C E b/D b

m. 73

m.s.

G#m/B C#m

m. 77

dim. *p*

A#⁰/G# G#m

Example 2.2. Blumenfeld, *Souvenir douloureux*, Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 57–78.

Later works show a further departure from tonality as well as some other unique features. Richard Beattie Davis (1922–2008) described Blumenfeld’s suite, *Près de l’eau*, Op. 38 (1906), as an “extraordinary anticipation of parts”¹¹⁶ of Ravel’s *Ondine*.¹¹⁷ Davis also mentions “the use of superimposed fourths in the Sonata-Fantaisie, Op. 46”¹¹⁸ as adding to a more modern sound. In measures 35 through 39 of the first movement (example 2.3), the added fourths creates a pattern of suspensions.



Example 2.3. Blumenfeld, Sonata-Fantaisie, Op. 46, mm. 35–39.

Though it is beyond the scope of this study to go further into detail in all of Blumenfeld’s later works, it is worth mentioning that it has been noted “the final works from Op. 47 onwards, all point to a progressive mind.”¹¹⁹ For a complete list of Blumenfeld’s published piano solo works, refer to Appendix A. The rest of this study will focus on Blumenfeld’s “magnum opus,”¹²⁰ the Preludes, Op. 17. This work marks an important point in Blumenfeld’s stylistic

¹¹⁶ Davis, 80.

¹¹⁷ *Ondine* is from Maurice Ravel’s (1875–1937) suite, *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908).

¹¹⁸ Davis, 80.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Marina Ledin and Victor Ledin, liner notes for *Felix Blumenfeld: Preludes and Impromptus*, Philip Thomson, piano, streaming audio, Ivory Classics 71002, 2000, <http://naxosmusiclibrary.com>.

development as “frenzied” and “dramatic” qualities began to be more apparent in his compositions.¹²¹ The next chapter will give an overview of the preludes, as well as a more in-depth analysis of four selected preludes. I will examine form, use of motives, harmony, melody, technical challenges, texture, rhythm, and voicing to define Blumenfeld's compositional characteristics and style and, ultimately, establish the artistic and musical validity and merit of his works.

¹²¹ Davis, 80.

CHAPTER 3. AN ANALYSIS OF FELIX BLUMENFELD'S 24 PRELUDES, OP. 17

(1892)

When composing a prelude set, “composers tend to purposely experiment with diverse compositional styles and to employ varied pianistic techniques and devices.”¹²² This quote aptly describes the variety of musical expressions in Blumenfeld’s 24 Preludes, Op. 17. This chapter will explore this diversity by first giving an overview of the 24 Preludes as a whole, followed by an in-depth analysis of four specific preludes: No. 3 (G major), No. 16 (B♭ minor), No. 24 (D minor) and No. 7 (A major). These four preludes represent the breadth of Blumenfeld’s compositional diversity and demonstrate his typical stylistic traits of layering (No. 3), lyricism (No. 16), virtuosity (No. 24), and a combination of all three aspects (No. 7). Furthermore, the analyses will show that these works merit performance.

By the time Blumenfeld composed his Op. 17, the prelude as a genre was well-established as a stand-alone composition versus playing an introductory role to a larger work. Composers often published their preludes in groups, most frequently as a set of twenty-four.¹²³ It is uncertain whether Blumenfeld meant for these preludes to be performed individually or as a set. But the characters of the first and last preludes suggest that Blumenfeld may have intended for the 24 Preludes to be performed as a set. The first, only twenty-nine measures in length, is one of the shortest and its choral-like texture may serve as introductory material, almost like a

¹²² Eric Gilbert Beuerman, “The Evolution of the Twenty-Four Prelude Set for Piano” (DMA diss., The University of Arizona, 2003), 77.

¹²³ Other composers who had composed twenty-four prelude sets before Blumenfeld include Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750; *The Well-Tempered Clavier I & II*, 1722, 1742), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837; 24 Preludes, op. 67, 1814–1815), Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785–1849; 24 Preludes, op. 88, 1827), Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849; 24 Preludes, op. 28, 1836–1839), Stephen Heller (1813–1888; 24 Preludes, op. 81, 1853), and Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924; 24 Preludes, op. 37, 1879–1881).

prelude to the preludes. The final prelude is the most fiery and aggressive of the twenty-four, perhaps serving as a climatic finish.

Blumenfeld completed the preludes in 1892 while teaching at his alma mater, the St. Petersburg Conservatory. This collection was first published in 1895 by Russian publisher, M. P. Belaieff,¹²⁴ who specialized in publishing works by Russian composers. The fact that Belaieff published Blumenfeld's music adds to the legitimacy of his compositions since Belaieff only published serious, quality music¹²⁵ that had met the approval of his selection committee comprised of Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, and Lyadov.¹²⁶ Blumenfeld was one of the first composers to be published by Belaieff, beginning in 1886, and his company was the sole publisher of Blumenfeld's compositions until the 1917 Revolution.¹²⁷ Blumenfeld also created a number of orchestral reductions and transcriptions for Belaieff.¹²⁸

Though not widely available in print today,¹²⁹ Blumenfeld's preludes appear to have been very popular for a time soon after they were published.¹³⁰ They circulated throughout Russia,

¹²⁴ Belaieff was an important proponent of Russian music not only with his publishing house but his "Fridays" and Russian Symphonic Concerts also gave birth to and promoted new Russian music.

¹²⁵ Davis, 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 44. When Belaieff first started his publishing house, he went through the selection and approval process himself but quickly realized he did not have enough expertise in this area thus a selection committee was formed.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 44, 80. The only exception was Blumenfeld's Op. 1 (Six Melodies for Voice and Piano), which was originally published by Büttner in 1883 but was reissued in 1900 by Belaieff.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 87, 161.

¹²⁹ Blumenfeld's 24 Preludes, Op. 17 are only available in downloadable PDF format from various websites or in hard copy through Performer's Editions and a few other distributors, the number of which has increased since I began this research. They can be downloaded from the following websites (all accessed on October 23, 2016): <https://www.everynote.com/piano>

Europe, and the United States.¹³¹ Not only were they published as a complete set but also separately in several piano collections, such as the *Modern Russian Piano Music: Akimenko to Korestchenko*, Vol. I, published by Oliver Ditson in 1915, which included Prelude No. 3 (G major) and Prelude No. 21 (B♭ major).

Similar to prelude sets by other composers, each of Blumenfeld's preludes are set in a different key. They are ordered according to the circle of fifths, alternating major keys with their relative minor, starting with C major and ending in D minor.¹³² The following quote by Blumenfeld from a conversation between him and Lev Barenboim on September 7, 1928 gives insight into Blumenfeld's perception of how the key of a piece affects its character:

Perfect pitch is very desirable for any musician, but it is imperative for a composer. Lack of perfect pitch could influence a composer's sense of tonality color. All Beethoven's compositions written in the same key have similarities in their character. For example, one can compare Sonata, op. 2, no. 1 with the *Egmont* Overture, both written in F minor. Often characters of Wagner's operas are associated with their own favorite key and a similar notion is also true to Weber's music. The key of A major is the most cheerful and radiant for me, possibly because of my favorite opera *Snegurochka*. F major symbolizes the petty bourgeois social system. . . . C major is full of courage and good spirits. F sharp minor is my favorite key. . . .¹³³

.choose/1/424/1/8.note; <https://musopen.org/sheetmusic/29872/felix-blumenfeld/24-preludes-for-piano-op17/>; [http://imslp.org/wiki/24_Preludes_for_Piano,_Op.17_\(Blumenfeld,_Felix\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/24_Preludes_for_Piano,_Op.17_(Blumenfeld,_Felix)); <http://www.free-scores.com/download-sheet-music.php?pdf=86242>; and <http://www.sheetmusicarchive.net/instrument-and-orchestration.cfm?instrumentation=piano>. Hard copies of Blumenfeld's 24 Preludes, Op. 17 can be purchased through the following websites (as of October 23, 2016): <http://performersedition.com>; <https://uk.schott-music.com>; www.boosey.com; www.sheetmusicplus.com; and www.paganino.com.

¹³⁰ Ledin.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Examples of prelude sets using the same key scheme previous to Blumenfeld's include those by Hummel, Chopin, Heller, and Busoni.

¹³³ Sinkevych, 28–29.

Each prelude is unique in character. At least one edition (ca. 1897)¹³⁴ of Op. 17 was published with the title page of *Preambles dans tous les tons* (Preludes in all shades [colors]), suggesting distinctiveness of character with each prelude. Blumenfeld took great pains to convey the emotional and musical sensibility of a work, as evidenced by the abundance of interpretive indications he included in his scores (*scherzando*, *marcato*, *furioso*, *dolce*, *cantabile*, *amoroso*, *semplice*, *febile*, *con passione*, and *disperato*, to name a few).

Blumenfeld also often ties his tempo markings to the character of each prelude and bases each on an individual motivic idea indicative of the character. By doing so, Blumenfeld creates a vast range of expressions from solemn and religious (No. 1, C major) to aggressive and ferocious (No. 24, D minor). Examples of Blumenfeld's use of descriptive tempo markings include No. 14 (E♭ minor), which is marked *Andante maestoso e lugubre*, signaling its grand and mournful character, and No. 2 (A minor), which is fast and agitated as its *Allegro agitato* suggests. One prelude (No. 18, F minor) is subtitled, "Memento mori" ("Remember you must die"), which provides even more insight to Blumenfeld's thoughts concerning its character, reflecting on mortality. Another prelude (No. 20, C minor) is published with a motto. It is a quotation from Nikolaus Lenau's (1802-1850) *Schilflieder* (1832) and the storminess and despair of the verse is mirrored in the mood of Prelude No. 20.¹³⁵ Table 3.1 presents an overview of musical parameters

¹³⁴ See [http://imslp.org/wiki/24_Preludes_for_Piano,_Op.17_\(Blumenfeld,_Felix\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/24_Preludes_for_Piano,_Op.17_(Blumenfeld,_Felix)).

¹³⁵ Motto: Trübe wird's, die Wolken jagen, Und der Regen niederbricht, Und die lauten Winde klagen: "Teich, wo ist dein Sternenlicht?" Suchen den erloschnen Schimmer, Tief im aufgewühlten See. Deine Liebe lächelt nimmer, Nieder in mein tiefes Weh! English Translation (by Amy Mercer): It's gloomy, chasing the clouds, And the rain is breaking, And the loud winds lament: "Pond, where is your starlight?" Search for the lost shimmer, Deep in the agitated sea. Your love never smiles, Down into my deep woe!

Table 3.1. Overview of Musical Parameters in Blumenfeld's 24 Preludes, Op. 17 (continued).



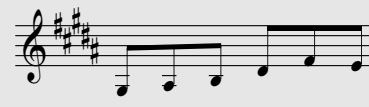








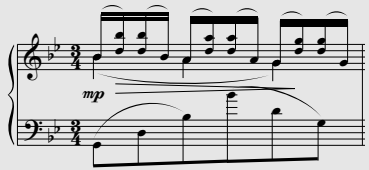
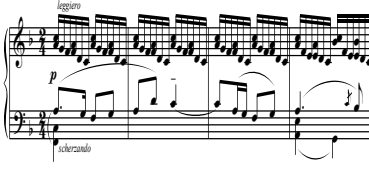

Prelude No.	Key	Meter	Tempo Marking	Character	Motive
10	C# minor	12/8	Andante	introspective	
11	B major	3/4	Andante con moto	sentimental	
12	G# minor	6/8	Presto	whirling, perpetual motion	
13	F# major	3/8	Andantino	delicate	
14	Eb minor	4/4	Andante maestoso e lugubre	heavy, mournful	
15	Db major	4/4	Allegro non tanto	expressive, rippling	
16	Bb minor	2/4	Adagio	songlike	
17	Ab major	4/4	Allegro	soaring	
18	F minor	6/8	Andante	reflective, recitative style	
19	Eb major	4/4	Andante	swirling, expressive	

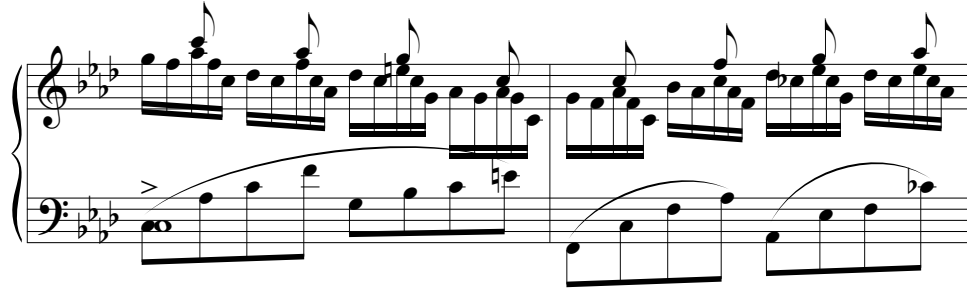
Table 3.1. Overview of Musical Parameters in Blumenfeld's 24 Preludes, Op. 17 (continued).

Prelude No.	Key	Meter	Tempo Marking	Character	Motive
20	C minor	2/4	Allegro furioso	furious, foreboding	
21	B♭ major	4/4 (12/8)	Andante tranquillo	tender	
22	G minor	3/4	Allegro	longing	
23	F major	2/4	Allegro	playful	
24	D minor	2/4	Presto	aggressive, ferocious	

Blumenfeld favored clear, expressive melodies in his compositions, and his preludes are no exception. Even though most of his preludes tend toward thick textures and virtuosity, his lyricism shows through. Prelude No. 22 (G minor) is a fast-moving work with a minimum of three layers of sounds occurring at any given moment, with the melody embedded within virtuosic sixteenth-note passages. Yet when played by a skillful musician, the lyrical melody sings out over the busy, energetic accompaniment patterns. Prelude No. 19 (E♭ major) is another example of Blumenfeld combining a lyrical melody with virtuosity and thick textures. Measures 41–49 are so dense that he notated them in three staves to help performers decipher the music more clearly. Yet, despite this density, the melody is clearly audible if played appropriately (see ex. 3.1).

Example 3.1. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 19, mm. 41–49.

Most of Blumenfeld’s preludes are technically demanding. The difficulties lie in voicing within the layers of sound that the composer weaves into each prelude, together with complex rhythmic figures, large leaps, and challenging passagework. Prelude No. 17 (A \flat major) demonstrates these qualities with sixteenth-quintuplets against paired eighth-notes and many leaps in the left hand. Example 3.2 shows a sampling of its technical difficulties.



Example 3.2. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 17, mm. 7–8.

Blumenfeld’s harmonies are in line with late Romanticism—tonal with extensive chromaticism, as well as unpredictable chord changes and unusual harmonic shifts. Prelude No. 12 (G# minor) is a good example of Blumenfeld’s use of chromaticism. The melody features patterns of half steps throughout the work. Example 3.3 demonstrates his use of half steps in the melody (mm. 99–100) as well as in the octave accompaniment (mm. 101–104).



Example 3.3. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, mm. 99–104.

Prelude No. 10 displays Blumenfeld’s use of creative and diverse harmonic progressions. This prelude opens in C# minor but by the end of the second phrase, he seems to be modulating to E major by ending with a B-major chord in m. 11. He does indeed resolve to E major but only to modulate to A minor in m. 12. Beginning in the next measure (m. 13), Blumenfeld proceeds with the following progression: E–Am–Am7/G–F–FM7/E–Dm–Dm7/C–B°–E–Dm–Dm7/C–B°–

E. After arriving at E major in m. 17, one might expect a return to A minor. However, Blumenfeld then brings back a C# minor harmony for two beats, and then returns to E major for two beats. This time, because of the harmonic pattern (Dm7/C–E–Dm7/C–E) set up in mm. 16–17, the listener may anticipate a similar pattern of echoing chords, in this case C#m–E–C#m–E. But instead, after the C#m–E in m. 18, Blumenfeld moves to a C7 chord and then briefly modulates to F major, followed by a C/G–F#°7/A–G#+7–G#+7/F#–G#7/F# progression which leads to a restatement of the main theme in the home key of C# minor (see example 3.4).

10

F#7/C# B E Am E Am

14

Am7/G F FM7/E Dm Dm7/C B° Em Dm Dm7/C B° E

18

C#m E C7 FM7 C/G F#°7/A G#+7

22

G#+7/F# G#7/F# C#m F#m7

Example 3.4. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 10, mm. 10–23.

Example 3.4 also reveals one of many diverse ways in which Blumenfeld approached his typical style of dense texture and layering. Perhaps due to his role as a conductor, he wrote for the piano as if it were an orchestra.¹³⁶ This may explain his preference for the thick, layered texture that he seems to have preferred in his piano compositions. However, thickness in texture is not universal to all the preludes. One exception is Prelude No. 3 (G major), which features a more sparsely layered texture, making it ideal for examining Blumenfeld's compositional technique of layered voicing.

Prelude No. 3

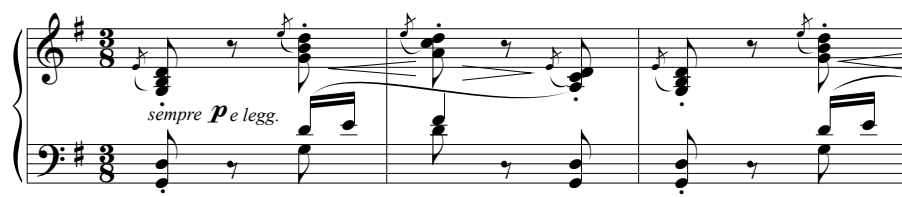
When comparing the individual preludes in Op. 17, Prelude No. 3 (G major) is unique in overall style, and it is a good model for examining Blumenfeld's technique of layering. Although Blumenfeld is usually inclined to use thick textures, No. 3 is relatively sparse in comparison. Even so, he manages to have three layers with a melody line sandwiched between the bass line and the upper layer of chords with grace notes, thus demonstrating his skill of layering in composition even in more delicate textures. Another unique stylistic feature for this prelude is the narrow dynamic range that he maintains throughout the work. Blumenfeld usually has at least one passage or section in each prelude that is full and forte in sound.¹³⁷ However, No. 3 is marked *sempre p e legg.* (always soft and light) at the beginning, *più p* (more soft) in m. 34, and *pp* (very softly) in m. 48.

In addition to the thinner texture and quiet dynamics, Blumenfeld achieves, through the use of staccatos and rests, a gracefulness that the *Allegretto* tempo marking seems to indicate. The chords in the principle motive are adorned with grace notes in the right hand, contributing

¹³⁶ Sinkevych, 5.

¹³⁷ No. 13 (F# major) is the only other prelude in Blumenfeld's set that is entirely soft.

further to the lighthearted, whimsical character. These chords generally occur on beats one and three. Since No. 3 is in 3/8 time (see ex. 3.5), this metrical rhythm also adds to its playful character.



Example 3.5. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 3, mm. 1–3.

At around forty seconds, its relative brevity again reinforces its light and whimsical quality. It is by far the shortest of the set in performance time. The next closest prelude in length is No. 20, C minor, which is in excess of one minute. Most are at least twice as long, averaging two or three minutes.

Technical challenges in Prelude No. 3 include maintaining a legato and sustained melody while playing the staccato bass notes and right hand chords with grace notes. As the melody sometimes passes from one hand to the next, keeping it seamless can present difficulties as well. Adding to the complexity of these challenges is the fact that the work is to be played lightly, softly, and quickly throughout.

Blumenfeld takes this short work on an interesting tonal path. It opens in the key of G major, but he manages to modulate to B minor (m. 16), then back to G major (m. 24), then to C major (m. 32) and C minor (m. 34), and then again back to the original key of G major (m. 43). Figure 3.1 shows this prelude's harmonic progressions as the principal factor in its organic structure.

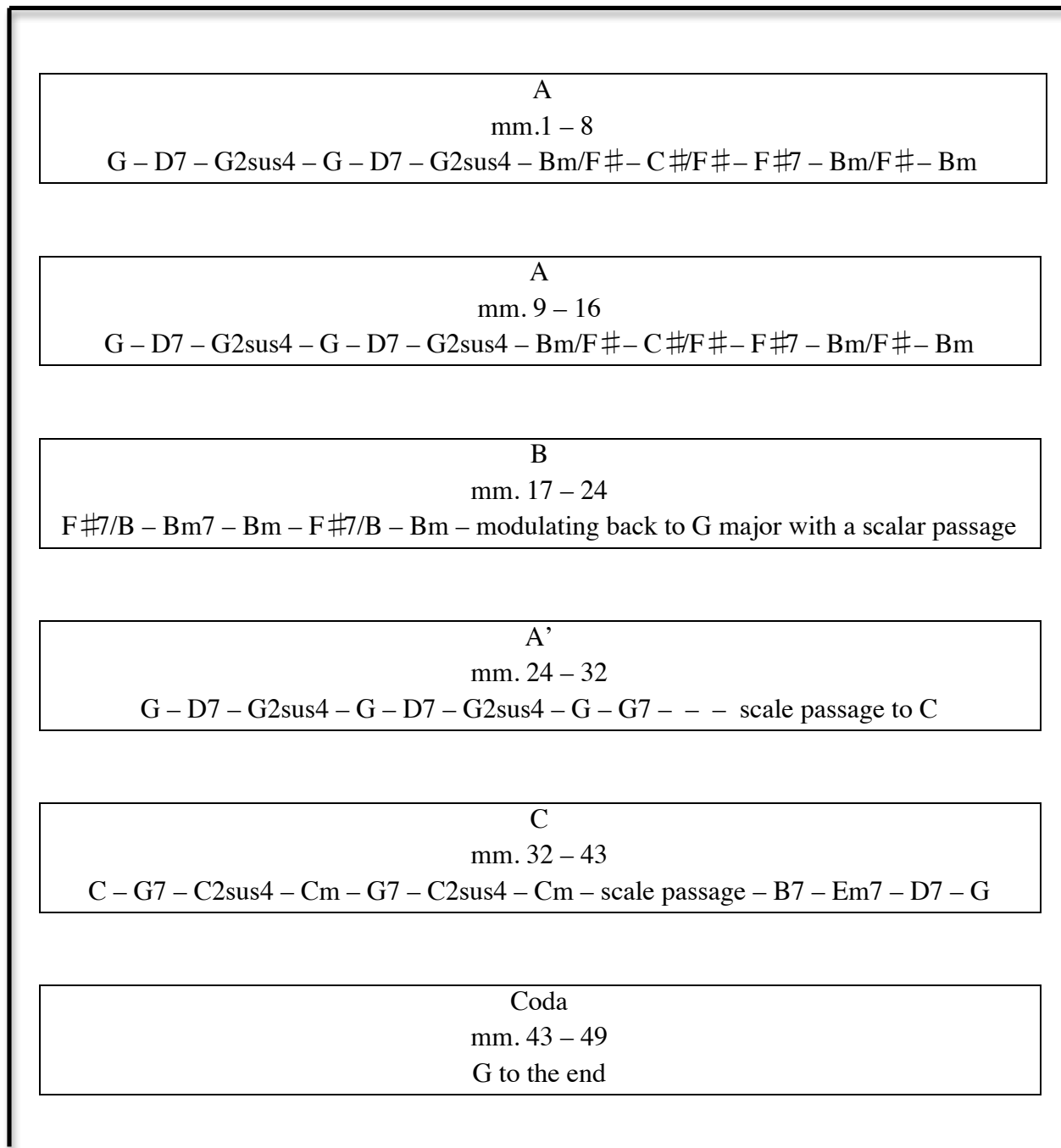


Figure 3.1. Harmonic Progressions and Structure of Blumenfeld's Prelude Op. 17, No. 3.

Prelude No. 16

With its *cantabile* melody, Prelude No. 16 (B \flat minor) is a prime example of lyricism in Blumenfeld's piano compositions. The melody fluctuates in placement, starting in the lowest voice and then alternating mostly between an inner voice and the top voice until the conclusion when it returns to the lowest voice. Typical of Blumenfeld's style, the melody is part of a fairly thick texture throughout. In m. 32, he introduces a countermelody in the bass that continues until the climatic chord of the piece in m. 53.

This prelude is lyrical and songlike in character. Although the tempo marking is *Adagio*, which does not directly express the character of this piece, Blumenfeld suggests its free and expressive character by including performance directions such as *molto cantabile ed espressivo* (very songlike and expressive) and *la tema in basso poco rubato* (the low theme [is] a little free, flexible).

In addition to its lyricism, the principle two-measure motive (see ex. 3.6) also adds to its character in that the melody is comprised principally of this motive. Blumenfeld scores the melody in the left hand with repeating double note intervals (mostly thirds) in the right hand (see ex. 3.6). Even though this is one of the longest preludes (over three minutes), he incorporates this motive within a large dynamic range (*pp* to *ff*), differing harmonies, occasional ornaments, and countermelodies to create variety and interest throughout, all of which are indicative of Blumenfeld's inventiveness.

The image shows a musical score for the first two measures of Blumenfeld's Prelude Op. 17, No. 16. The music is in B-flat minor (three flats) and 2/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melody of double notes, primarily thirds. The left hand (bass clef) plays a counter-melody of double notes, also primarily thirds. A slur covers the first two measures. The performance instruction *molto cantabile ed espressivo* is written below the bass staff.

Example 3.6. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 16, mm. 1–2.

Difficulties in playing this prelude lie in its many leaps and octave passages, but the most challenging aspect is the voicing. The varied placement of the melody creates technical challenges while the second half of the piece features the added complexity of two simultaneous melodies (see ex. 3.7).



Example 3.7. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 16, mm. 32–33.

A feature of this prelude that demonstrates diversity is tonal ambiguity. For example, this work begins on a single pitch, D \flat , that is joined by an F in the second half of the first beat. Thus, the prelude sounds as if it is in D \flat major (especially if the performance is following No. 15 in D \flat major). By the end of the first measure, a sixteenth-note B \flat in the melody hints at B \flat minor, but it is not until the second half of the second measure that B \flat minor is firmly established.

Blumenfeld continues with tonal ambiguity by the beginning of the next four phrases in the same manner as the opening phrase; he starts each of them with a single note (the second, fourth, and fifth phrases start with a D \flat while the third phrase begins with an E \flat). The sixth phrase of the piece (starting in m. 13) also begins similarly, but adds an octave with a grace note on the first note of the left hand melody. In this phrase, Blumenfeld firmly establishes the tonality of D \flat major and remains in this key center until m. 32, where he returns to B \flat minor.

Prelude No. 24

The Prelude No. 24 in D minor is a driving, aggressive, and furious piece that greatly demonstrates the composer's exploration of virtuosity. Much of its technical difficulty is due to

the speed of the piece combined with frequent cross-rhythms, large chords, octaves, and leaps within a thick, chromatic texture.

Thus the character of this prelude is intense and dramatic. Blumenfeld employs a number of accents and calls for dramatic changes in character using terms such as *furioso* (furious), *marcato* (marked), *pesante* (heavy), and *strepitoso* (resounding, deafening). The wide dynamic range of *p* to *fff* further amplifies its expressive content.

The triplet-figure motive also contributes to the character, adding a constant driving rhythm to the piece. Until the last four measures, the triplet flow is only interrupted twice, in mm. 27–28 and mm. 55–56, where accented eighth-note chords replace the triplets.

No. 24 is set in a two-part form with a coda (AA' coda) but not in a typical binary form with two contrasting sections (AB coda). Except for a two-measure transition to the coda, the second section (A') contains the same motivic and thematic material as the A section but with different tonalities.

This prelude's tonal ambiguity is due in part to the presence of dissonant, non-harmonic tones often occurring on strong beats and over pedal tones. Additional factors contributing to tonal ambiguity are the frequent use of chromaticism and numerous diminished and half-diminished chords. Example 3.8 demonstrates both Blumenfeld's use of chromaticism and use of diminished chords as well as the beginning of a long section with a pedal tone on A.

Example 3.8. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, mm. 13–14.

As with No. 16, the tonic key is not immediately established in Prelude No 24. However, Blumenfeld accomplishes this initial tonal ambiguity differently in each of these preludes. By beginning No. 16 on a single D \flat it is not clear what the tonic key will be, but then Blumenfeld eventually begins to establish several different tonal areas. In No. 24, he opens with a B \flat ^o7 chord and hints at a weak D-minor resolution at the end of the second measure. This is just the beginning of an uncertain tonality in this piece that never feels completely settled by a strong resolution in any specific key until firmly establishing the home key of D minor in the coda.

As mentioned above, Prelude No. 24 establishes a feeling of conclusion to the end to the set, and its dramatic closing emphasizes this idea. The last four measures break away from the triplet flow for a climatic four-octave ascending melodic minor scale in sixteenth-note septuplets, followed by a D-minor chord accompanied by grace notes and marked *sff* (see ex 3.9).

Example 3.9. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, mm. 67–70.

Prelude No. 7

While the three previous preludes discussed were each examples of differing aspects of Blumenfeld's compositional style, his Prelude No. 7 in A major presents a synthesis of his principal stylistic traits of lyricism, layering, and virtuosity. Perhaps the most striking feature of this work is the combination of vigor and lyricism. The lyrical, expressive left hand melody is

supported by a constant energy provided through the right hand sixteenth-notes, which are introduced in the primary motive and carried throughout the entire prelude.

The terms “expressive” and “energetic” also describe this prelude’s character in general. Blumenfeld’s tempo marking of *Allegro vivo*, performance directions such as *leggiero* (light), *ma sempre leggiero* (but always light), and *brillante* (bright, brilliant), and large dynamic range from *pp* to *ff* together indicate to the performer the wide-ranging expressive characteristics that Blumenfeld presents in this work.

Though Blumenfeld employs his traditionally thick texture in this prelude, he does achieve a lightness in sound often by featuring notes in higher registers, by changing between two and three layers, and by varying the number and frequency of notes within each layer. The top layer, which contains the sixteenth-note motive, is frequently situated in notes above the treble staff. Its sixteenth-note pattern ranges from combinations of single notes to three-note chords. The middle, melodic layer is almost always stated in single notes, whereas the lowest layer fluctuates between single and double notes.

The virtuosic challenges of No. 7 are found in maintaining the characteristic lightness within the rapid tempo. The left hand plays the lower two layers and, as a result, calls for many wide leaps. The virtuosic challenges of right hand are a combination the constant sixteenth-note flow together with occasional leaps of its own.

The form of this prelude is ABA’ coda. Each of the four sections is identifiable by the patternistic changes in the melody. The types of patterns used in the melody define the different sections. Each section is comprised of four-bar and two-bar phrases with the exceptions of mm. 33–38 (which builds to the return of the A section) and m. 65 to the end (the coda), which have lengthy phrase extensions. The melodic pattern defining the A section and the first half of the A’

section is a four-bar phrase (see ex. 3.10). The B section and the second half of the A' section have two- and four-bar phrases that are more sequential in nature, both melodically and harmonically (see ex. 3.11).

Example 3.10. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, mm. 1–4.

Example 3.11. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, mm. 21–24.

Examples 3.10 and 3.11 also show Blumenfeld's handling of chromaticism, a primary harmonic trait of this prelude. These two examples clearly illustrate his prominent use of half-steps through numerous accidentals throughout this work.

One more notable feature of this prelude is the presence of hemiola. He employs this technique in mm. 61–64 to help build excitement to the arrival of the coda in m. 65 (see ex. 3.12).



Example 3.12. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, mm. 61–64.

The analysis of Blumenfeld's preludes shows the composer's primary stylistic elements—layering, lyricism, and virtuosity. Even though these traits are present to some extent throughout his preludes, this study demonstrates his creativity in generating expressive variety. In the following chapter, the comparison of Blumenfeld's preludes to those (Op. 28, 1838–1839) by Frederic Chopin (1810–1849) will present additional insight to Blumenfeld's compositional style, especially with regard to complexity in texture, rhythm, and harmony. Blumenfeld was the first Russian composer to create a twenty-four prelude set, presumably patterned after Chopin's prelude set.¹³⁸ He was praised for his interpretations of Chopin's music in performances,¹³⁹ and his compositions appear to have been influenced by the music of Chopin. By comparing the preludes of these two composers, I will show that although Blumenfeld's style was similar in some ways to Chopin's, he did not merely copy Chopin. He developed his own prelude set on an individual and a more complex level. This examination will further reveal the high quality and

¹³⁸ Marina Ledin and Victor Ledin.

¹³⁹ Sinkevych, 16–17.

thus the validity of Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17 for both the teaching studio and the concert hall.

**CHAPTER 4. A COMPARISON OF PRELUDES, OP. 17 (1892) BY FELIX
BLUMENFELD AND PRELUDES, OP. 28 (1838–1839) BY FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810–1849)**

To look further into Blumenfeld's style, one can turn to a composer to whom he is frequently compared: Frederic Chopin (1810–1849). Harold C. Schonberg and Martin Anderson have implied in their writings that Blumenfeld's piano works are similar to Chopin's but of lesser quality.¹⁴⁰ However, though long overlooked, Blumenfeld's preludes are comparable to Chopin's in style and quality and may be seen as valid alternatives for the teaching studio as well as the concert hall.

In an effort to refute the idea of the inferiority of Blumenfeld's compositional style, I will compare the piano prelude sets by Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17 (1892) and Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28 (1838–1839). Compared to Blumenfeld, Chopin was a more innovative composer for his time, so one could say that he was a greater composer. However, while Blumenfeld's works may have some of Chopin's style traits, he was innovative by adapting it to accommodate the more modern harmonic techniques of the 1890's and own stylistic ideas. To show this, I will compare elements such as structure, treatment of melody, use of rhythm, texture, harmony, phrasing, virtuosity, and mood in selected preludes by both composers in order to demonstrate stylistic similarities and differences (see Table 4.1 for a summary). My analysis of the prelude sets will strongly suggest that Blumenfeld must have been familiar with the style of Chopin's works but

¹⁴⁰ Harold C. Schonberg, "Guide to Records: Blumenfeld," *American Record Guide* 63, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 92, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=7&sid=271b3c97-494d-4819-a975-c688d7ed0f81%40sessionmgr115&hid=124&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=mah&AN=3095823>; and Martin Anderson, "Et Cetera," *Tempo*, n.s., no. 195 (Jan. 1996): 61.

that he put his own stylistic stamp on his pieces with thicker textures, complex rhythms, and progressive harmonies.

Table 4.1. Comparison of Prelude Sets by Felix Blumenfeld and Frederic Chopin.

Element	Felix Blumenfeld, Op. 17 (1892)	Frederic Chopin, Op. 28 (1838–1839)
Structure	set of 24 preludes, arranged by key	set of 24 preludes, arranged by key
Treatment of Melody	distinct from accompaniment in thirteen preludes, embedded in eleven	distinct in sixteen preludes, embedded in eight
Use of Rhythm	generally more complex	usually less complex
Texture	more complex	thinner, more streamlined
Types of Harmonies	chromaticism, unpredictable	chromaticism, unpredictable
Phrasing	typically follows a four-bar phrase pattern	frequent use of elision
Virtuosity	complex textures and rhythms, fast passages, large leaps, stamina needed as a result of longer length	fast passages, large leaps
Mood	wide variety of emotions and characteristics	wide variety of emotions and characteristics

Structure

Blumenfeld and Chopin each appeared to follow the compositional example of previous composers of keyboard preludes, organized in sets of twenty-four. Both composers follow the same tonal order: they move through the circle of fifths and alternate major keys with their relative minor, starting with C major and ending in D minor. This order differs from the model of the prelude set established by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) in his preludes from his famous *Well-Tempered Clavier* (Book I, 1722; Book II, 1742). Bach’s preludes and fugues were

organized according to the twelve chromatic pitches, in parallel major and minor keys, starting with C major and ending in B minor.¹⁴¹

In composing his preludes, Chopin is said to have been greatly influenced by J. S. Bach.¹⁴² In fact, the only scores Chopin had with him in Majorca while working on his preludes were Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*.¹⁴³ Stylistic influences that Chopin gained from Bach include figurations, texture, counterpoint, chromaticism, and form.¹⁴⁴ As Jim Samson wrote: "Like Bach, moreover, Chopin was adept at the construction of figuration which generates a clear harmonic flow while at the same time permitting linear elements to emerge through the pattern."¹⁴⁵ This same statement also applies when describing Blumenfeld's preludes as well.

Both Blumenfeld and Chopin employ a unique motive (or multiple motives) as a basis for each individual prelude. Additionally, both composers also have one (in the case of Blumenfeld) or two (in the case of Chopin) motives that they incorporate into all of their preludes. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger says of Chopin, "Above all, the Twenty-four Preludes are a cycle by virtue of an omnipresent *motivic cell* which assures its unity through a variety of textures."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ See footnote no. 123 on page 28 for a listing of other composers of 24 prelude sets previous to Blumenfeld.

¹⁴² Jim Samson, *The Music of Chopin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 73.

¹⁴³ Nicole Biamonte, "Variations on a Scheme: Bach's 'Crucifixus' and Chopin's and Scriabin's E-minor Preludes," *Intégral* 26 (2012): 48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3128057>.

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of these influences on Chopin, see Biamonte, "Variations on a Scheme"; Daniel Sakari Mahlberg, "The Baroque Continuum: The Influence of the 'Praeludien' from Bach's 'Well-Tempered Clavier' on Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28" (master's thesis, California State University, 2007); and Jim Samson, ed., *Chopin Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁵ Samson, *The Music of Chopin*, 73–74.

¹⁴⁶ Samson, ed., *Chopin Studies*, 181 (original italics).

Eigeldinger identifies in Chopin's preludes two closely related motivic cells, labeled as motive X and motive Y (see example 4.1; the circled notes indicate the motive notes). The pitches of the initial motives are G-E-D for motive X and G-E-D-C for motive Y. According to Eigeldinger, each of Chopin's twenty-four preludes includes either one or both of these two motives.

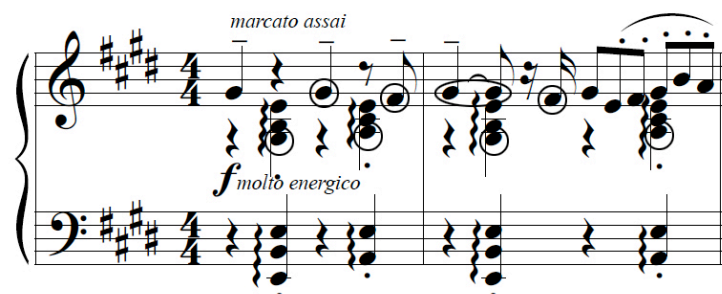
Example 4.1. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 1, motivic cells, mm. 27–28. Reproduced from Jim Samson, ed., *Chopin Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 182.

Likewise, this study has identified what may be a unifying motivic cell present throughout Blumenfeld's twenty-four preludes. Constructed of half steps, this motive first appears in Prelude No. 1 as F-E-F-E. It appears initially in m. 1 of the first prelude in the upper voice as part of the melody (see example 4.2; the circled notes denote the motive).

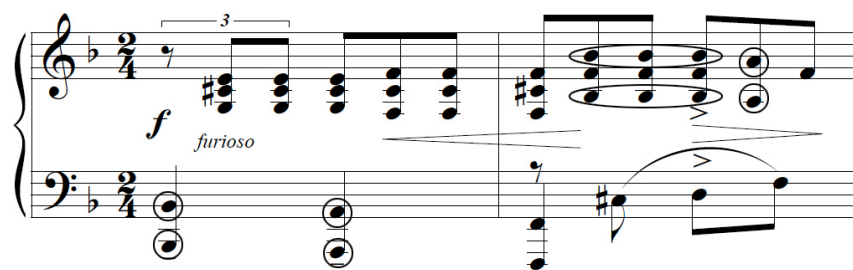
Example 4.2. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 1, motivic cell excerpt, m. 1.

Each one of the following twenty-three preludes contains this motive, usually multiple times. In all but four preludes (Nos. 9, 16, 23, and 24), it appears in its original half step

construction. In No. 9, the motive occurs in whole steps throughout the piece in the melody and also in an inverted form with half steps in a middle voice, usually with the pitches G \sharp -A-G \sharp -A (as seen in example 4.3). In No. 16, the motive is in half steps but is inverted. In No. 23, it occurs in whole-step form. In No. 24, it appears in half steps but is split between the bass lines and uppermost voices (see example. 4.4).



Example 4.3. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 9, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2.



Example 4.4. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2.

In nine of the preludes (Nos. 3, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20, and 22), the motive is present in multiple ways. In these preludes, the motive is sometimes in its original structure of half-steps, sometimes in either a whole step or inverted form of either whole or half steps, and/or in a partial form in half steps. The motive can be found in the melody or accompaniment or sometimes in both. The following excerpts (see examples 4.3-4.6) from Preludes No. 5 (D major, inner voice), No. 6 (B minor, bass voices), No. 8 (F \sharp minor, inner voice melody), and No. 12 (G \sharp minor, upper melody) serve as examples that demonstrate Blumenfeld's approaches in using his motivic

cell (for examples from each prelude, see Appendix B). The presence of the recurring half steps in his motivic cell also demonstrates Blumenfeld's extensive use of chromaticism.

8va

sempre pp una corda e legato

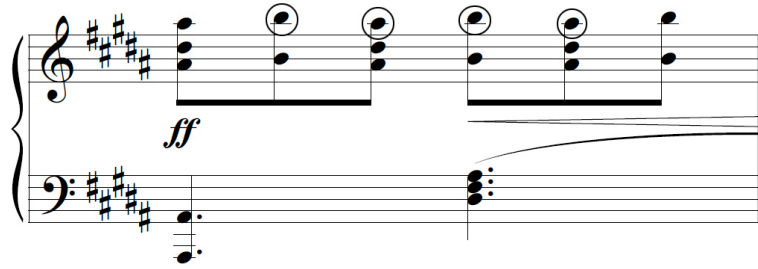
Example 4.5. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 5, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 67–68.

mf dim. sempre

Example 4.6. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 6, motivic cell excerpt, m. 25.

p

Example 4.7. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 8, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 17–18.



Example 4.8. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, motivic cell excerpt, m. 33.

Another structural element to consider is whether or not the prelude sets by both composers were intended to be performed as a complete set or as individual pieces. The first and the last preludes of both sets may seem to indicate that each of the sets could have been intended to be performed as a whole. Although Blumenfeld and Chopin begin their sets with preludes of differing characters, both are relatively short and introductory in nature with a seeming need to move on to something else. Both sets then end with preludes that are substantial in content and length and are fiery pieces with exciting finishes that emphasize the sense of conclusiveness. The idea of performing these sets as a whole is also supported by the fact that both composers often seem to link the endings and beginnings of consecutive preludes—usually by matching ending notes of a prelude to the beginning notes of the next. Chopin links ten of his preludes in this manner while Blumenfeld connects five of his preludes in this way (see tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Table 4.2. Linking of preludes by Chopin via matching notes.

Preludes	Linking notes
No. 3 to No. 4	B
No. 4 to No. 5	B
No. 5 to No. 6	D and F
No. 7 to No. 8	A and C #
No. 9 to No. 10	G #
No. 11 to No. 12	B and D
No. 15 to No. 16	F
No. 17 to No. 18	C
No. 19 to No. 20	G and E♭
No. 21 to No. 22	B-flat octaves

Table 4.3. Linking of preludes by Blumenfeld via matching notes.

Preludes	Linking notes
No. 1 to No. 2	C
No. 10 to No. 11	E and G
No. 15 to No. 16	D \flat
No. 16 to No. 17	B \flat
No. 21 to No. 22	B \flat

Furthermore, both composers also link two successive preludes through dominant-tonic relationships, suggesting that they should be played consecutively. Blumenfeld uses this technique by concluding No. 19 (E \flat major) with a single G and opening No. 20 (C minor) with a C minor chord. Chopin's use of the dominant-tonic relationship is more subtle. He concludes No. 13 (F \sharp major) with an F \sharp major chord in which the top notes are an A \sharp octave. The enharmonic spelling of A \sharp is B \flat , which is the dominant of E \flat and Chopin then begins his next prelude, (No. 14, E \flat minor) on an E \flat octave.

Treatment of Melody

In their preludes, both Blumenfeld and Chopin vary in their treatment of melody by either keeping it distinct from the accompaniment or by embedding it into the accompaniment. Blumenfeld keeps the melody distinct from the accompaniment in thirteen of his preludes, (Nos. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, and 23) and maintains it within the accompaniment in the remaining eleven preludes. Only eight of Chopin's Preludes feature embedded melodies, (Nos. 1, 5, 12, 14, 19, 23, and 24) while the melodies of the other sixteen are separate from the accompaniment.

Blumenfeld and Chopin also differ in their voice placement of melodies (see table 4.4 for a summary of the placement of melody in both prelude sets). Chopin tends to favor the top voice

for the melodies in a majority of his preludes, while Blumenfeld scores the melody for the top voice exclusively in only ten of the twenty-four preludes. Moreover, Blumenfeld is more likely to change voice placement of a melody within the course of a prelude; this occurs in eight of his preludes whereas it happens only twice in Chopin's Preludes. Both sets contain smaller numbers of preludes that place the melody solely in an inner voice or just in the bass voice. There are also a few individual instances in both sets where the melody is at times indistinguishable.

Blumenfeld only has one such prelude: his No. 8 technically has a melody in the top voice but the tempo and texture sometimes render the melody almost indistinguishable. This top voice moves so fast that it is more atmospheric than an actual melodic line; however, on occasion, there is a distinct inner voice melody against those atmospheric figurations. On the other hand, Chopin has four preludes that fit this category where it is difficult to discern if there is indeed a melody or just a patternistic flow: No. 14 is constructed of single-note lines in both hands that are an octave apart, creating a parallel octave movement causing the melody and harmony to be the same and inseparable; No. 16 is similar to Blumenfeld's No. 8 except that it does not contain an added inner voice melody; No. 18 is a combination of a recitative style and parallel octaves; No. 23 has melodic fragments in the bass line against constant atmospheric figurations.

Table 4.4. Summary of Melody Placement in the Preludes of Blumenfeld (Op. 17) and of Chopin (Op. 28).

Melody Placement	Blumenfeld	Chopin
Top Voice	Nos. 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19	Nos. 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24
Inner Voice	Nos. 2, 3, 21, 23	Nos. 1, 8
Bass Voice	No. 24	Nos. 6, 22
Combination of Placement (voice placement listed in the order that it appears)	No. 1 (top & inner) No. 7 (inner & bass) No. 10 (bass, inner, & top) No. 14 (mostly top but the countermelody sometimes crosses over) No. 16 (bass, middle, & top) No. 18 (top, middle, & bass) No. 20 (bass & top) No. 22 (inner & top)	No. 5 (top & inner) No. 15 (top & bass)
Unique Cases	No. 8	Nos. 14, 16, 18, 23

As previously indicated, both Blumenfeld and Chopin based each of their preludes on a single motive (or in some cases, two or more motives) that may be placed in the melody, the accompaniment, or both. Sometimes these motives are the basis of the melodies. Seventeen of Blumenfeld's preludes¹⁴⁷ have motivic melodies that either are the motive itself, part of the motive, or blend with the motive. Some of these (Nos. 9, 10, 13, 16, 21, and 23) have melodies that are based on their own motive, separate from the accompaniment motive. Sixteen of Chopin's preludes¹⁴⁸ have with motivic melodies with four of these (Nos. 3, 6, 8, and 9) having their own separate motive.

¹⁴⁷ The preludes by Blumenfeld that use motivic melodies are Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 23.

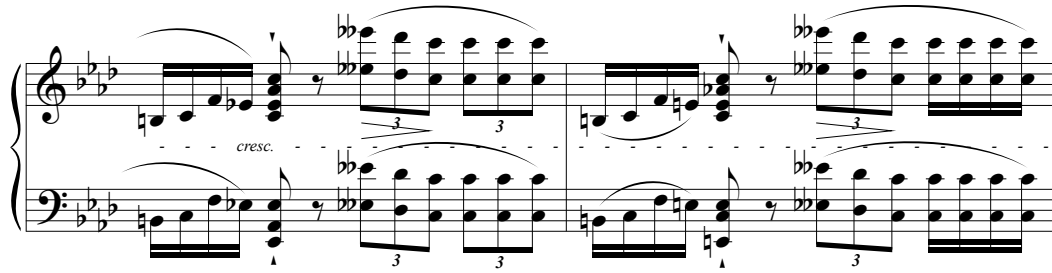
¹⁴⁸ The preludes by Chopin that use motivic melodies are Nos. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 23.

Blumenfeld's melodies are more likely to encompass a larger range of the keyboard (two octaves or more), partly due to his propensity to doubling the melody at the octave. Only four of his preludes (Nos. 3, 13, 21, and 23) contain melodies that are within a range of less than two octaves. Chopin was much more evenly divided, having eleven preludes with a larger range and twelve with a smaller range.¹⁴⁹ Both composers had one prelude each that had a combination of ranges: Blumenfeld's Prelude No. 8 has a large range for the atmospheric line while a smaller range for the inner voice melody. Chopin's Prelude No. 15 has a smaller range for its top voice melodies in both the A and B sections but a larger range for the left hand melodies in the B section, due to the use of octaves at times.

While doubling of the melody at the octave can be found in both prelude sets, Blumenfeld does this more frequently than Chopin. Another difference in their usage of octaves is that Blumenfeld usually fills in the octaves with harmonizing notes while Chopin is more likely to use open octaves. The following examples show typical usage of octaves by each composer.

Example 4.9. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 4, mm. 17–20.

¹⁴⁹ Chopin's preludes of a larger range: Nos. 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24. Chopin's preludes of a smaller range: Nos. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20.



Example 4.10. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, mm. 13–14.

The last melodic comparison between Blumenfeld's and Chopin's preludes is their use of embellishments. Both composers frequently add various small-scale ornaments such as grace notes, mordents, and rolled chords. Chopin occasionally uses trills but Blumenfeld only has one trill in his entire set (m. 16 of No. 16). Chopin employs extended melodic embellishments in four of his preludes (briefly in Nos. 15 and 21; extensively in Nos. 18 and 24); whereas Blumenfeld's preludes feature only two instances of extensive melodic embellishment, in m. 32 of Prelude No. 9 and in m. 54 of Prelude No. 20.

Rhythm and Meter

Because of the motivic nature of the preludes in both sets, there often are repetitive rhythmic patterns within each prelude in either the melody or in the accompaniment or both. Blumenfeld's rhythmic texture generally is more complex because he employs more cross-rhythms between the melody and accompaniment and at times, creates metrical ambiguity with rhythms that obscure the beat (such as hemiola). Though all of the preludes of both composers have specific repeated rhythmic patterns in each of their preludes (due to their motivic nature), some have additional rhythmic characteristics that contribute further to their complexity. A comparison of these characteristics in both sets (see table 4.5) shows both the similarities and differences between the two composers in their use of these various rhythmic features. Preludes listed without specific measure numbers indicate that the rhythmic trait is an overriding feature.

Table 4.5. Overview of Rhythmic and Metrical Features in Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17, and Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28.

Rhythmic Category	Blumenfeld, Preludes, Op. 17	Chopin, Preludes, Op. 28
Cross-Rhythms	Nos. 4, 11, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24	Nos. 1, 4 (m. 18), 8, 9, 13 (m. 4, 11), 15 (m. 4, 23), 17 (m. 17), 23 (m. 8, 12-15), 24
Ambiguous Metric Feel	Nos. 2, 3, 5, 18	Nos. 5, 14, 18
Meter Changes	Nos. 2, 5, 6, 10, 14	None

Both composers employ cross-rhythms in nine of their preludes. Chopin most often features them in a few measures at a time while Blumenfeld employs them more extensively in longer phrase segments. A notable exception is found in Chopin's Prelude No. 8 (F# minor), which features continuous thirty-second notes in the right hand against sixteenth-note triplets in the left hand until the last two measures. The most extreme example of Blumenfeld's cross-rhythms occurs in Prelude No. 17 (A \flat major). Until the two final measures (like Chopin's No. 8), Blumenfeld consistently uses a sixteenth-note-quintuplet-against-eighth-note pattern that is further complicated by emphasizing the third note of each quintuplet.

Four of Blumenfeld's preludes have a metrically ambiguous feel, while three of Chopin's preludes have this characteristic. Interestingly, both composers feature this musical characteristic in their preludes 5 and 18. One way Blumenfeld achieves metrical ambiguity is by stressing notes, through his use of rhythm, in such a way that the music sounds like it is in a different time signature than what is printed on the score. In his Prelude No. 2, though most of the piece is written in 3/4 time, it sounds like it is in 6/8 time because of the right hand groupings of eighth notes that continue throughout until the time signature change in m. 121.¹⁵⁰ The left hand

¹⁵⁰ In m. 121, the meter changes to 2/4 but it is imperceptible to the listener as such a strong sense of two has been established with the 6/8 sounding rhythms.

sometimes sounds like it is also in 6/8, such as when it has continuous dotted quarter notes. In other areas of the piece, the left-hand rhythms create a hemiola effect – at times, the left hand emphasizes rhythmic groupings of 3/4 (which is the actual time signature of the work) while the right hand continues to sound like it is in 6/8. The reverse is true of No. 5, which sounds like it is in 3/4 but is really in 6/8, except for the ending section which Blumenfeld sets in 3/4. In Blumenfeld's third prelude, he alternates between a strong metric sense and more metrically ambiguous passages. No. 3 is in 3/8 time and through the use of repeated rhythmic patterns, Blumenfeld establishes a strong 3/8 feel for most of the piece. He interrupts this rhythmic flow four times with rapid sixteenth-note passagework that disguises the 3/8 meter through the quick changes in melodic direction and in some cases, chords falling on beats either beats two or three, stressing the weaker beats.¹⁵¹ In No. 18, Blumenfeld combines an improvisatory nature with frequent stresses on weak beats, creating a metrically ambiguous flow. He does so in this 6/8 piece by adding grace notes or chords various weak beats, most often on beats two, five and six.

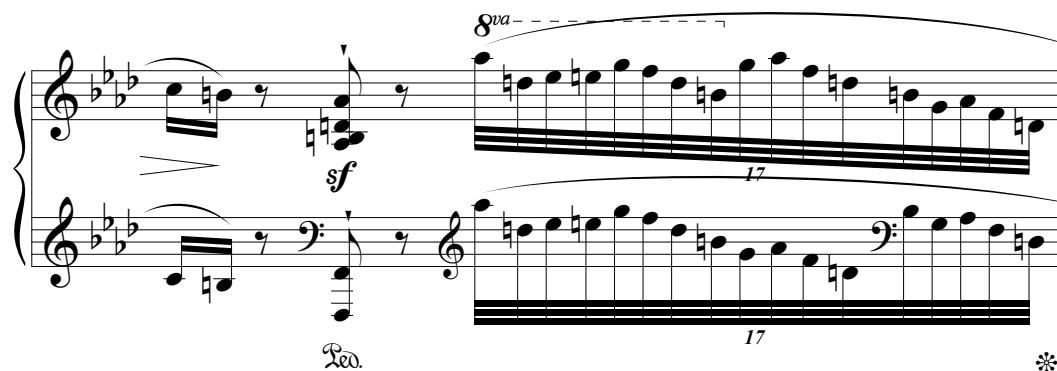
Chopin also uses the technique of stressing weak beats in his Prelude No. 5, often by placing melody notes on weak beats. In his Prelude No. 14, triplets are used in both hands until the very last note. The alternation of low and high pitches within these triplets creates a metrically ambiguous feel since the higher notes tend to stand out more. Chopin's No. 18 frequently stresses weak beats but additionally uses two extended, almost improvisational-sounding note groupings that contribute to obscuring the beat. These groupings happen in m. 8 (see example 4.11) where both hands have twenty-two sixteenth notes in the space of one

¹⁵¹ In Blumenfeld's Prelude No. 3, measures 30–31 and 37–39 have both the rapid sixteenth-note passagework and the offbeat chords while measures 22–23 and 45–46 contain the sixteenth-note passagework only.

common time measure and in m. 12 (see example 4.12) where both hands have seventeen thirty-second notes in the space of beats three and four.



Example 4.11. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, m. 8.



Example 4.12. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, m. 12.

Another meter-related difference between the preludes of Blumenfeld and Chopin pertains to notated changes in meter. Blumenfeld does so, often more than once, in five of his preludes while Chopin does not include changes of meter in any of his preludes. Blumenfeld's first two preludes with meter changes are No. 2 and No. 5, and both change toward the end of each piece. Interestingly, these two preludes are, as stated above, metrically ambiguous, and the meter changes Blumenfeld uses in them actually reflect the listener's perception of the meter from the outset prior to the change: No. 2 changes from 3/4 to 2/4, and No. 5 changes from 6/8 to 3/4. Preludes No. 6 and No. 14 each begin and conclude with the same meter with the following

changes: No. 6 begins in 3/2, changes to 2/2, and returns to 3/2; No. 14 begins in 4/4, changes to 12/8, and then returns to 4/4. The most frequent meter changes occur in Blumenfeld's Prelude No. 10; it opens in 12/8, then changes to 6/8, to 12/8, to 6/8, and then returns to 12/8 one last time for the remainder of the piece.

Texture

Texture is another stylistic feature where similarities and contrasts are apparent. Table 4.6 provides an overview of textures in both sets. As is typically characteristic of Blumenfeld's piano works, a majority of his preludes either have rather thick textures or multiple changes in texture within a single piece. Comparatively speaking, Chopin's preludes are generally thinner, having fewer layers of sound.

Table 4.6. Overview of Texture in Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17 and Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28.

Primary Type of Texture	Blumenfeld, Preludes, Op. 17	Chopin, Preludes, Op. 28
Homophonic with Single-line Melody	Nos. 7, 9, 10, 17, 21, 22, 23	Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16, 23,
Homophonic with Harmonized Melody	Nos. 4, 6, 11, 13, 15	Nos. 3, 7, 21, 22
Homophonic and Homorhythmic	None	Nos. 5, 11, 17, 19
Octave Doublings	None	No. 14
Block Chords	Nos. 1, 24	No. 20
Contrasting Sections	No. 14 (chordal and polyphonic) No. 16 (homophonic and polyphonic) No. 19 (homophonic and polyphonic)	No. 13 (homophonic with harmonized melody and homophonic with single-melody/chordal accompaniment) No. 15 (homophonic and pedal tones)
Constant Changes	Nos. 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, 18, 20	Nos. 10, 18, 24

Though most of the preludes by both composers can be described as melodic, there are textural variances in both sets. A majority of Chopin's preludes are in the more traditional vein

of homophonic texture with a clear melody against an accompaniment pattern. Nine of his preludes consist primarily of single-note melodic lines with some sort of accompaniment pattern in the other hand, while Blumenfeld has seven preludes exhibiting this trait. In contrast to Chopin's preludes, Blumenfeld's are typically more dense in texture and feature one or more of the following traits: more layers, octave doublings of the melody, or busier accompaniment patterns. Similarly, when comparing the homophonic preludes of both composers with a harmonized melody, with one or more additional notes either above or below the melody, Blumenfeld's are typically thicker for one or more of the reasons stated above. Chopin may feature up to three layers of sound, including the melody, whereas Blumenfeld's always feature three or more.

Chopin's set contains four preludes that are both homophonic and homorhythmic as well as one prelude (No. 14) that consists entirely of a monophonic-like texture in the right hand doubled at the octave level in the left hand. Not surprisingly, Blumenfeld does not have any preludes with these two types of textures, because his style tends to be too complex in texture than these simpler textures would allow.

Both sets contain at least one prelude with block chord textures. Blumenfeld's set has two of these, and they happen to be his first and last. Though they are both chordal, they are vastly different in character and expression. Blumenfeld's No. 1 is slow and hymn-like while No. 24 has mostly thick, furious-sounding chords in both hands. Chopin's one prelude that fits this category is No. 20, often nicknamed the "Funeral March" because of its heavy chordal style.

Blumenfeld composed three preludes with contrasting texture changes (Nos. 14, 16, 19) while Chopin's set contains two (Nos. 13, 15). The two composer's approaches to texture changes are very different. In Blumenfeld's Nos. 14, 16, and 19, the introduction of a

countermelody changes the texture in a fluid manner from chordal or homophonic to polyphonic in various passages. These changes in texture are not always connected to the overall structure. In contrast, Chopin's changes in texture are structural. In Prelude No. 13, he alters the texture, as well as the tempo, in connection with the form of the piece (ABA'). The A sections are homophonic with a harmonized melody against a single-line arpeggiated accompaniment. The slower B section is also homophonic but the melody is a single line supported by chords of three to four voices. Likewise, in No. 15, Chopin's transformation of the texture, along with changing the key, is linked to its ABA' form. The A sections, in D \flat major, are homophonic in texture with a right hand single-line melody over the accompaniment. In contrast, the B section, set in C \sharp minor, features the melody in the left hand, harmonized by a right hand accompaniment of primarily a G \sharp pedal tone.

Harmony

Harmonically, both sets are similar in that they are frequently highly chromatic and include unpredictable chords – harmonic changes uncommon to standard harmonic progressions. Again, Blumenfeld's harmonies often sound more progressive and modern compared to those of Chopin. For example, as discussed in chapter three, the middle section of Blumenfeld's Prelude No. 10 contains a number of unpredictable changes in harmony (see example 3.4 on page 37). No. 10 also presents an example of chromaticism in the bass line under the return of the main melody in mm. 29–30 (see example 4.13).



Example 4.13. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 10, mm. 29–30.

Another example of unpredictable chord changes is found in Blumenfeld's first prelude of the set. Though the prelude is in C major, it strays far from its home key. It moves through the tonalities of A minor; then E major, with an implied move to C# minor but instead returns more firmly to E major; and then C major to end the piece. One of the most unexpected chords is in m. 12. Beginning with the quarter-note pick-ups to m. 9, this piece sounds like it is going to modulate to C# minor. Because of the pattern Blumenfeld has set up previously with phrases ending on either a strong tonic or dominant, a G#-major chord (the dominant of C# minor) of is expected in m. 12 for a half cadence. Instead, Blumenfeld substitutes a G#-minor chord, remains in the key of E major, and ends the phrase on a G#-minor chord (iii). Another unexpected chord occurs in m. 18 where Blumenfeld uses a B^o7/F chord. After firmly establishing E major, one would expect to hear a chord diatonic to the key of E major. However, Blumenfeld surprises the listener with this B^o7/F chord, which hints at the eventual return of C major. Lastly, after Blumenfeld's last E major cadence, he abruptly uses a C-major chord, seemingly returning to C major. But then he employs an F minor chord instead of the expected F-major chord, clouding the tonality until it eventually is firmly re-established in C major. Example 4.14 shows of Blumenfeld's use of chromatic harmony in Prelude No. 1 (mm. 1–26).

Andante religioso

sempre p e molto legato

C F/C C F/C C F/C C Dm G B⁰⁷/F Em C Am Dm Am Dm Am Dm Am Dm G B⁰⁷/F

m. 8

marcato il tema

E C#m F#m⁷C#m F#m⁷C#m F#m⁷C#m F#m B D#⁰⁷/A G#m C#m F#m⁷C#m F#m⁷C#m

m. 14

mp *mf*

F#m⁷C#m F#m B D#⁰⁷/A G#m G#m⁷/F# E B⁰⁷/D E B⁰⁷/D E B⁰⁷/D E Dm/F

m. 20

pp *sonore*

il basso poco pronunciato

G Dm/F E C Fm C Fm C Fm C Dm G B⁰⁷/F Em Em⁷/D C Em

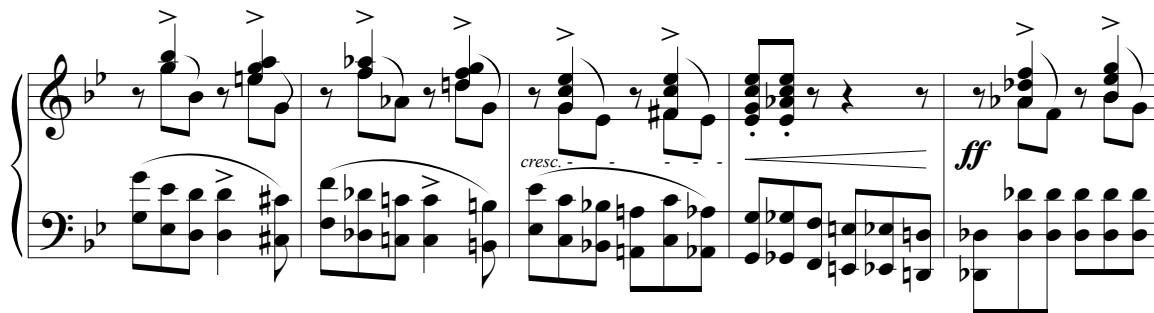
Example 4.14. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 1, mm. 1–26.

Chopin's preludes are typically more conventional in harmonic language than Blumenfeld's. Generally, Chopin's preludes do contain a large number of chromaticisms but within a more traditional harmonic framework. Some of the preludes are simpler harmonically, such as No. 7 (A major) while others, like No. 22 (G minor), are more complex. Hana Kim Park

describes No. 22 as “a turbulent piece full of chromaticism and daring harmonic progressions.”¹⁵² Though not as daring as Blumenfeld, this description is understandable considering Chopin’s early nineteenth-century tonal environment. As a means of comparing one of Chopin’s more harmonically progressive works within the language of the early Romantic period, Prelude No. 22 is an excellent example of Chopin’s use of chromaticism and of unpredictable chord changes. For the first eight measures of No. 22, Chopin combines the bass line melody with right hand chords to create a series of suspensions and resolutions, mostly staying within a conventional harmonic framework.¹⁵³ An exception is found in mm. 6 and 7 where a B \natural is sounded on the downbeat in the bass line followed by a D \flat harmony in the right hand accompaniment, which is the subdominant of the Neapolitan and gives the listener a hint of what is to come in the middle section. Measures nine through twelve are a repeat of the first four measures, only set an octave higher. Beginning in m. 13, his chromaticism leads to a key change. It begins with an E \flat chord followed by an A7. One would expect the A7 (V7/V) to resolve to D (V) but instead, Chopin unexpectedly brings back the D \flat major chord. It is followed by a G7 (V7/iv) to a C minor chord (iv). Next appears a F \sharp 7 (vii $^\circ$) which suggests an eventual cadence in the tonic. However, Chopin goes a different direction with a descending chromatic bass line, which ends in m. 17 with a modulation to the Neapolitan key (A \flat) (see example 4.15).

¹⁵² Hana Kim Park, “A Performer’s Analysis of Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 28, Prelude in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 45, and Prelude in A-Flat Major WoO by Frederic Francois Chopin” (DMA diss., Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 134.

¹⁵³ For more details on suspensions in Prelude no. 22, refer to pages 69-73 of Yangkyung Lee’s DMA dissertation, “Non-Harmonic Tones as Aesthetic Elements in Chopin’s Preludes, Op. 28” (University of Cincinnati, 2002).



Example 4.15. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 22, mm. 13–17.

One more harmonic surprise occurs in m. 24–25 of this prelude. Measure 24 begins with an A° (ii°) followed by a $D7$ ($V7$), so a resolution to the tonic next would be expected. Instead, Chopin returns to the $D\flat$ major chord and then continues by repeating the material from mm. 17–24. He does resolve to the tonic in m. 33 but not strongly, since the G minor chord is in first inversion. He follows this resolution with material taken from the beginning, breaks dramatically on a German sixth chord, and then concludes the work with a strong resolution back to the tonic.

Phrasing

Blumenfeld typically begins his preludes with a four-bar phrase or phrase pattern with clear beginnings or endings, occasionally featuring elision. Within each piece, he tends to add more elision and more variety in phrase length as the piece progresses. Blumenfeld's Prelude No. 9 (E major) provides a good example of his usual phrasing patterns by opening with a four-bar phrase with a clear ending followed by phrases of different lengths and the use of elision. Figure 4.1 illustrates the first seventeen measures of Prelude No. 9; the black lines between color changes indicate a break between phrases while small areas of blended colors denote elision of phrases. Blumenfeld begins Prelude No. 9 with a four-bar phrase and a new phrase begins at measure five. This phrase is extended by an extra measure and then beginning in m. 10, elides into the third phrase. This third phrase is four measures in length and then elides into another

four-bar phrase in m. 14. From that point on, he continues to vary between phrase lengths and between using elision or clear phrase endings.



Figure 4.1. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 9, mm. 1–17, Diagram of Phrasing.

Chopin is less predictable in his phrasing patterns from prelude to prelude. He also often uses four-bar phrases, and he often blends his phrases together, by employing elision. Chopin's Prelude No. 9 (E major) shows this technique. This prelude is only twelve measures long and is constructed of three four-bar phrases with each phrase eliding into the next (see fig. 4.2).



Figure 4.2. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 9, Diagram of Phrasing.

Virtuosity

Virtuosity is a prominent feature in both prelude sets with fast passages and large leaps. Blumenfeld's set can be judged as more virtuosic overall, partly due to the longer length of his set and issues of stamina related to it. Performances of Blumenfeld's entire set averages around fifty minutes¹⁵⁴ while performances of Chopin's prelude set are around thirty-five minutes.¹⁵⁵ Blumenfeld's preludes are generally more complex in the areas of rhythm and texture, which also contribute to the technical demands of the set as a whole.

¹⁵⁴ Felix Blumenfeld, *Felix Blumenfeld: Preludes and Impromptus*, Philip Thomson, Ivory Classics 71002, 2000, streaming audio, <http://naxosmusiclibrary.com>.

¹⁵⁵ Frederic Chopin, *Murray Perahia Plays Chopin*, Murray Perahia, Sony Classical 886444530194, 2014, streaming audio, <http://naxosmusiclibrary.com>.

Mood

Both composers portray a wide variety of moods and characters in their preludes. Their tempo markings and other performance directions are connected to the character of a given prelude, and this is particularly evident in Blumenfeld's preludes. It is interesting to note that Blumenfeld and Chopin often portrayed contrasting moods for each key since the tempo markings are almost always opposite for each composer's respective preludes in the same key. Their G #-minor preludes (No. 12 in both sets) are the only tonal match with the same tempo indication, *presto*. The first preludes in each set are a prime example of contrasting expressive character. Blumenfeld's is marked *Andante religioso*, is quiet throughout, and has a solemn, grounded feel while Chopin's tempo indication is *Agitato*. It features a larger dynamic range and it feels unsettled to the end with its agitated sense of forward motion. Although their journeys through the twenty-four keys are very different, they both end their sets with a fast, fiery prelude, much like many of their predecessors.¹⁵⁶

Table 4.7 presents a comprehensive overview of the similarities and differences in tempo and character in Blumenfeld's and Chopin's preludes.

¹⁵⁶ The paths taken by their predecessors were also varied and thus presented models for variety. Hummel and Kalkbrenner were predecessors of both Blumenfeld and Chopin. They started their sets differently: Hummel with a *Quasi improvisazione* and Kalkbrenner with *Allegro di molto* but ended more similarly with fast preludes (Hummel: *Allegro spiritoso* and Kalkbrenner: *Allegro agitato*). Heller and Busoni were predecessors of Blumenfeld only, and they too had different ideas for beginning and ending their prelude sets. Heller begins with *Ruhig* (calm, quiet) and transitions to *Heiter* (bright, merry) in his first prelude and his last prelude is a thoughtful, reflective sonnet, which is very different from the typical fast, fiery ending. Busoni's first prelude is *Moderato* and his last is *Presto*, the same tempo marking as Blumenfeld's last prelude.

Table 4.7. Tempo Markings and Character in the Prelude Sets of Blumenfeld and Chopin.

Prelude No. and Key	Blumenfeld		Chopin	
	Tempo	Character	Tempo	Character
No. 1 (C major)	Andante religioso	Solemn	Agitato	unsettled
No. 2 (A minor)	Allegro agitato	wild, agitated	Lento	Cold
No. 3 (G major)	Allegretto	lighthearted, whimsical	Vivace	light, whirling
No. 4 (E minor)	Andante	passionate	Largo	Plaintive
No. 5 (D major)	Allegretto	expressive, yearning	Molto allegro	expressive with restless undercurrents
No. 6 (B minor)	Allegro molto	bombastic	Lento assai	introspective
No. 7 (A major)	Allegro vivo	expressive but with undercurrents of constant energy	Andantino	reflective, thoughtful waltz
No. 8 (F# minor)	Allegro vivo	melancholy mixed with agitation	Molto agitato	swirling, agitated
No. 9 (E major)	Maestoso	grand, march- like	Largo	grand in a solemn way
No. 10 (C# minor)	Andante	introspective	Molto allegro	quasi-scherzo
No. 11 (B major)	Andante con moto	sentimental	Vivace	light, expressive
No. 12 (G# minor)	Presto	whirling, perpetual motion	Presto	dramatic, agitated, aggressive
No. 13 (F# major)	Andantino	Delicate	Lento	calm, contemplative
No. 14 (Eb minor)	Andante maestoso e lugubre	heavy, mournful	Allegro	dark, impassioned
No. 15 (Db major)	Allegro non tanto	expressive, rippling	Sostenuto	gentle, expressive (A sections) foreboding (B section)

Table 4.7. Tempo Markings and Character in the Prelude Sets of Blumenfeld and Chopin (continued).

Prelude No. and Key	Blumenfeld		Chopin	
	Tempo	Character	Tempo	Character
No. 16 (B \flat minor)	Adagio	Songlike	Presto con fuoco	Fiery
No. 17 (A \flat major)	Allegro	Soaring	Allegretto	cantabile, expressive
No. 18 (F minor)	Andante	reflective, recitative style	Molto allegro	intense, passionate
No. 19 (E \flat major)	Andante	swirling, expressive	Vivace	light, cheerful, expressive
No. 20 (C minor)	Allegro furioso	furious, foreboding	Largo	funeral march
No. 21 (B \flat major)	Andante tranquillo	tender	Cantabile	cantabile, dramatic
No. 22 (G minor)	Allegro	longing	Molto agitato	very agitated
No. 23 (F major)	Allegro	playful	Moderato	light, gentle
No. 24 (D minor)	Presto	aggressive, ferocious	Allegro appassionato	Passionate

Blumenfeld was known for his interpretations of Chopin's music in performances.¹⁵⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that he would be greatly influenced by Chopin in his own compositions, and that there are similarities in their works. Further, it is natural that a set of works as significant as those of Chopin would have a tendency to overshadow another set of twenty-four preludes composed by a more obscure composer such as Felix Blumenfeld. However, this study demonstrates that Blumenfeld's preludes are not merely an imitation of Chopin's preludes. Rather, it shows that Blumenfeld's preludes not only hold up well when juxtaposed to Chopin's, but also are, in fact, more complex and progressive with regard to melodic placement, rhythm, texture, and harmony.

¹⁵⁷ Sinkevych, 16.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Today, the prelude as a genre is firmly entrenched in the repertoires of performing pianists and is often chosen by piano instructors for their students. Through this study, it is my hope that greater awareness of Felix Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17, will be facilitated and thus lead to more study and performances of these pieces.

Chapter 2 presented a general overview of Blumenfeld's life and works. Blumenfeld's musical career had many facets (performing, composing, conducting, and teaching) during his lifetime, but his legacy as a great piano teacher is what is best known about him today. His musical activities influenced his compositions, especially conducting as it affected how he thought about music. As a result, his piano compositions have an orchestral feel to them with thick textures and opportunities for a variety of sounds and colors. Though this paper primarily deals with Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17, the high quality of Blumenfeld's preludes shown in this study strongly suggests that other works for solo piano by Blumenfeld should be considered for further study.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of Blumenfeld's preludes, which represent the range of expressive content in Blumenfeld's piano compositions. They run the gamut of solemn and religious in sound, to sweet and whimsical, to fiery and passionate, and everything in between. There is some variety in the textures, but most of his preludes tend more toward a thicker, layered sound. Lyricism abounds. Even some of the most virtuosic contain beautiful melodies that sing through. This study also has revealed his rhythmic variety and a harmonic language filled with chromaticism and abrupt shifts of tonality.

Chapter 4 provided another view of Blumenfeld's preludes by comparing them to those of Chopin. Though Blumenfeld's preludes do have many similarities to Chopin's preludes such

as key scheme, lyricism, use of motives as a basis for each prelude, and being Romantic in nature, there are some distinct differences as well. Both sets contain twenty-four pieces, but Blumenfeld's set is much longer in length. Another difference is the expressive character of the preludes in the same key, which tend to be opposite in character. Blumenfeld's textures are generally thicker than Chopin's. Blumenfeld tends to use more complicated rhythmic patterns than does Chopin. Harmonically, both abound in chromaticisms but Blumenfeld features more nonfunctional chord progressions than does Chopin.

This study is important for anyone who is looking for new, artistic repertoire for either teaching or performing. There is a profuse amount of piano music available today but it seems that teachers and performers generally tend to remain with what is familiar.

For the teacher looking for ideas for new repertoire for their more advanced students, Blumenfeld's prelude set offers an ample variety of quality material. Some would be excellent as studies on melodic balance over complex accompaniment patterns (such as Nos. 13 and 16), while others would work well as technical studies (Nos. 12 and 24 for example).

For the performer, these preludes present alternatives to the standard repertoire, and provide audiences with something new in the late Romantic style. Because there is so much variety within this prelude set, it would make a nice program just on its own. However, each prelude can stand on its own as well and be performed separately or a number of preludes could be chosen and grouped together as a small set.

The question arises as to why these pieces were entered the ranks of the overlooked. Though it can only be speculated, it seems very likely that Blumenfeld's preludes could not escape the shadow of Chopin's preludes which were already well-established in the repertory by the time Blumenfeld's preludes were published. Also, a number of the preludes present major

technical challenges that only advanced-level pianists could successfully negotiate so some may have felt that learning them was not worth the necessary time and effort. However, I think this music contains beautiful melodies and harmonies that can provide an emotional connection between the listener and performer, a valid reason to be no longer overlooked.

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APPENDIX A. PUBLISHED SOLO PIANO WORKS BY FELIX BLUMENFELD

Works Published by M. P. Belaieff in Leipzig

Quatre Morceaux, Op. 2 (1883)

Three Etudes, Op. 3 (1885)

Valse-Etude, Op. 4 (1887)

Two Nocturnes, Op. 6 (1887)

Variations caracteristiques sur un theme original, Op. 8 (1888)

Mazurka, Op. 11 (1889)

Four Preludes, Op. 12 (1888)

Two Impromptus, Op. 13 (1890)

Etude “Sur Mer,” Op. 14 (1890)

Valse-Impromptu, Op. 16 (1892)

Preludes, Op. 17 (1892)

Nocturne-Fantasie, Op. 20, (1895)

Trois Morceaux, Op. 21 (1895)

Deux Morceaux, Op. 22 (1896)

Suite Polonaise No. 1, Op. 23 (1897)

Etude de Concert, Op. 24 (1897)

Deux Etudes-Fantaisies pour piano, Op. 25 (1898)

Dix Moments Lyriques, Op. 27 (1898)

Impromptu en si pour piano, Op. 28 (1898)

Deux Etudes, Op. 29 (1898)

Suite Polonaise No. 2, Op. 31 (1901)

Suite lyrique, Op. 32 (1902)
Deux fragments caracteristiques, Op. 33 (1902)
Ballade en forme de variations, Op. 34 (1903)
Three Mazurkas, Op. 35 (1902)
Etude for the Left Hand, Op. 36 (1905)
Deux Morceaux, Op. 37 (1905)
Près de l'eau, Six Morceaux detaches, Op. 38 (1906)
Cloches, Op. 40 (1909)
Four Etudes for piano, Op. 44 (1912)
Two Impromptus for piano, Op. 45 (1913)
Sonata-Fantasie, Op. 46 (1913)
Two Lyric Fragments, Op. 47 (1915)
Etude-Fantasy, Op. 48 (1915)

Piano Solo Works Published by Gosudarstvennoye Muzykal'noye Izdatelstvo (Soviet State
Music Publishing House), Headquartered in Moscow

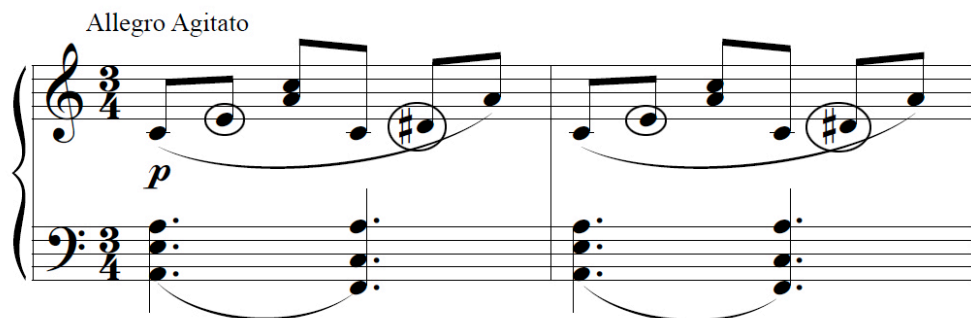
Deux Morceaux, Op. 49 1917
Two Moments Dramatiques, Op. 50 (1926)
Three Nocturnes, Op. 51 (1925)
Episodes dans la vie d'une danseuse, Op. 52 (1926)
Deux Morceaux, Op. 53 (1927)
Etude, Op. 54 (1927)

**APPENDIX B. EXAMPLES OF MOTIVIC CELL APPEARANCES IN PRELUDES,
OP. 17 BY FELIX BLUMENFELD**

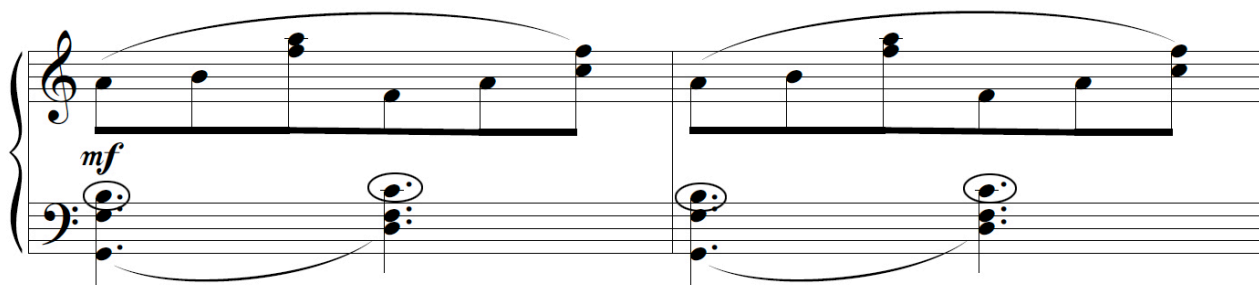
The following examples are a sampling of the motivic cells found in Blumenfeld's Preludes, Op. 17:



Example B1. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 1, motivic cell excerpt, m. 1, initial appearance.



Example B2. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 2, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, half steps.



Example B3. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 2, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 9–10, half steps inverted.

sempre *p* e legg.

Example B4. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 3, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, whole steps.

Example B5. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 3, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 17–18, half steps.

Example B6. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 4, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 10–13, half steps.

8va

sempre pp una corda e legato

Example B7. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 5, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 67–68, half steps.

mf

dim. sempre

Example B8. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 6, motivic cell excerpt, m. 25, half steps.

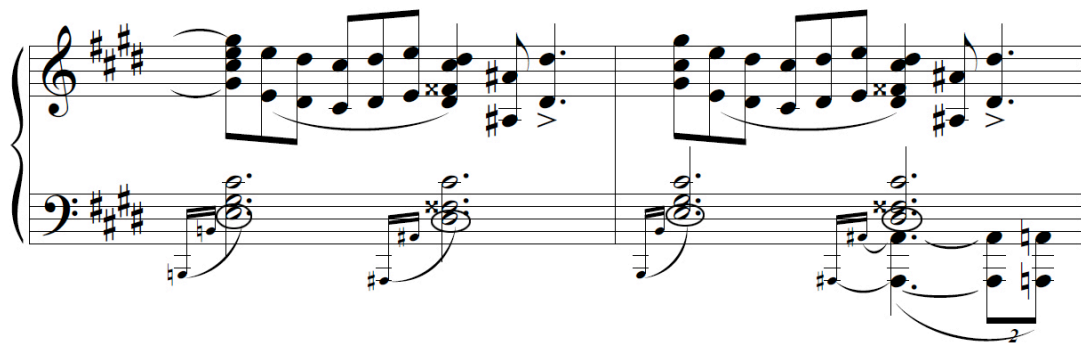
cresc.

Example B9. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 35–36, whole steps.

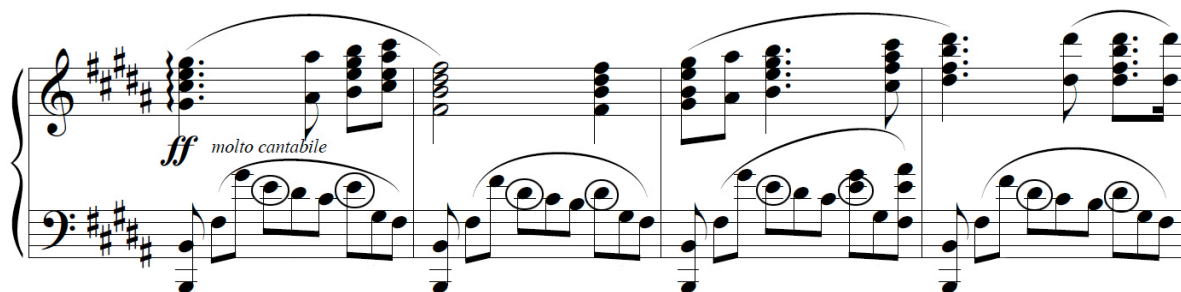
Example B10. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 7, motivic cell excerpt, m. 67–68, whole steps in treble clef and half steps in bass clef.

Example B11. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 8, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 17–18, half steps.

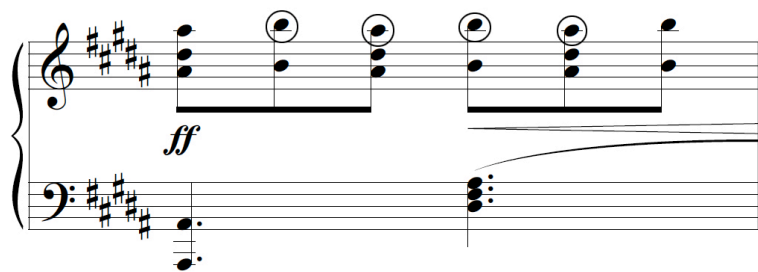
Example B12. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 9, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, whole steps in upper voice and half steps, inverted, in an inner voice.



Example B13. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 10, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 27–28, half steps.



Example B14. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 11, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 41–44, half steps.

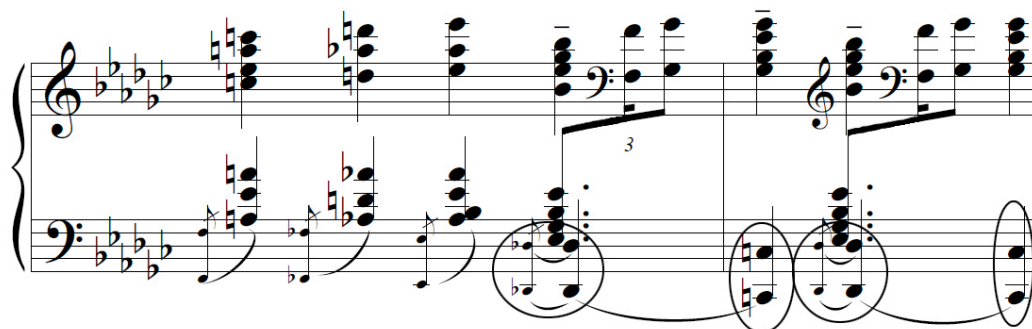


Example B15. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, motivic cell excerpt, m. 33, half steps.

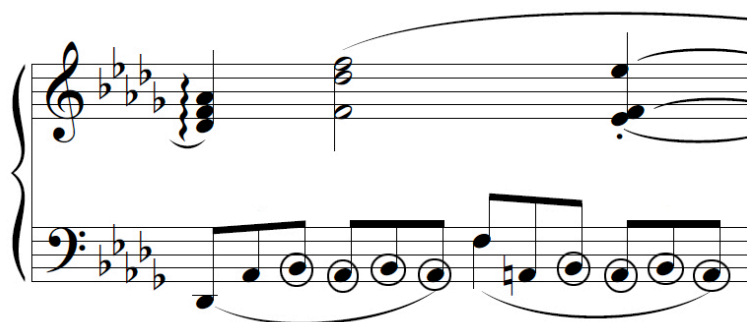
Example B16. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 12, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 99–100, whole steps.

Example B17. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 13, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–4, half steps and whole steps.

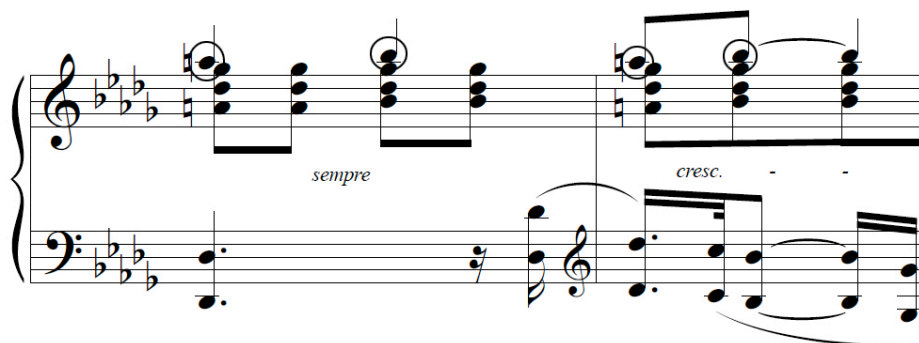
Example B18. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 13, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 11–12, whole steps, inverted.



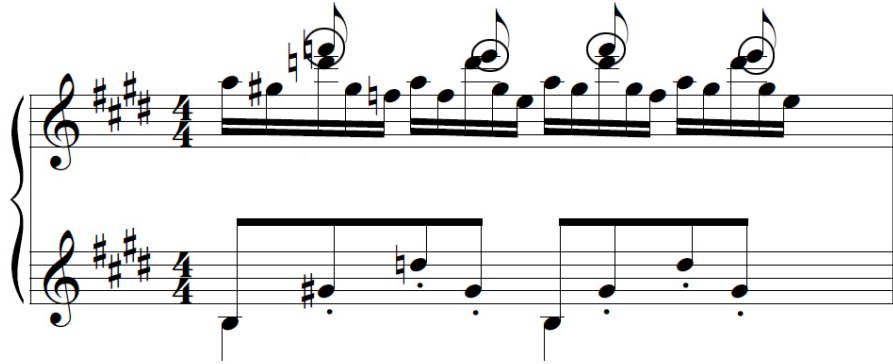
Example B19. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 14, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 18–19, half steps.



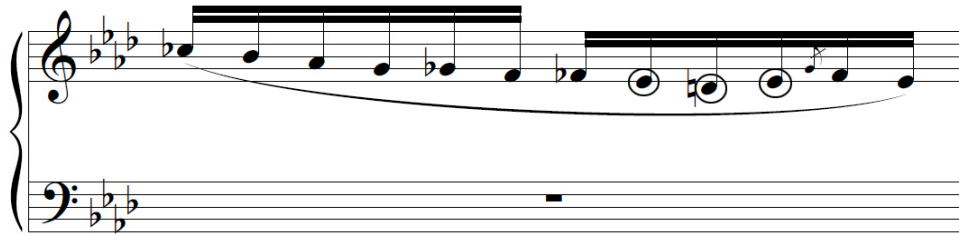
Example B20. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 15, motivic cell excerpt, m. 11, whole steps and half steps.



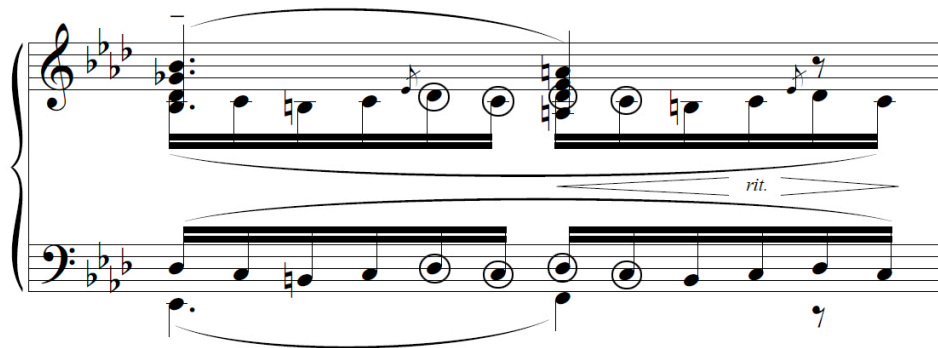
Example B21. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 16, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 40–41, half steps, inverted.



Example B22. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 17, motivic cell excerpt, m. 21, half steps.



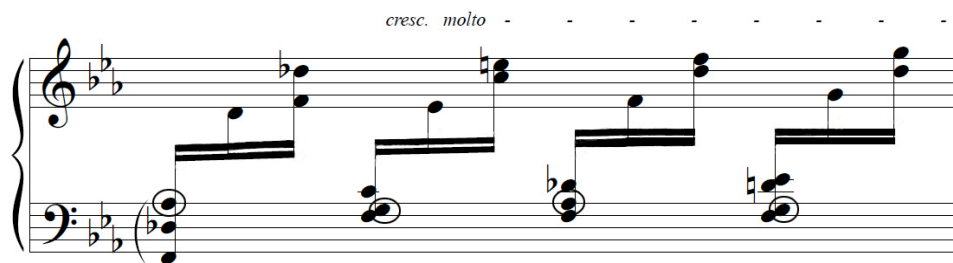
Example B23. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 18, motivic cell excerpt, m. 9, half steps, partial motive example.



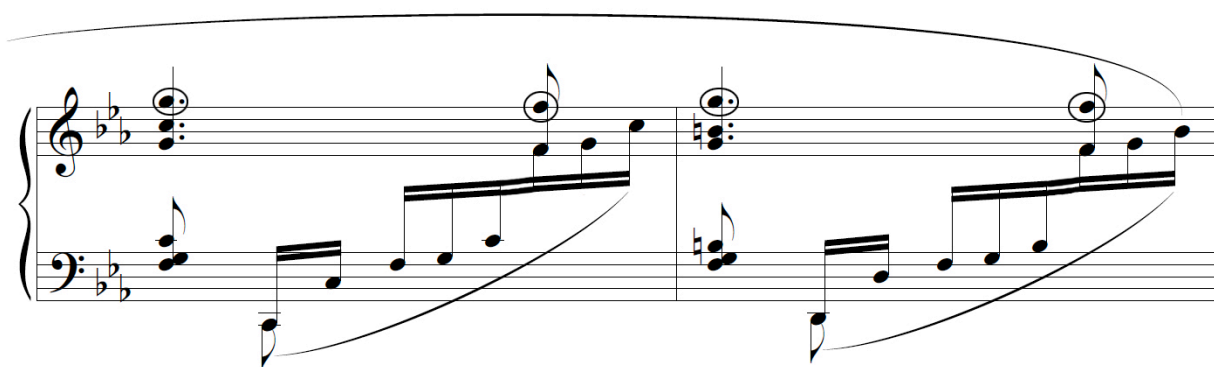
Example B24. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 18, motivic cell excerpt, m. 23, half steps, full motive example.



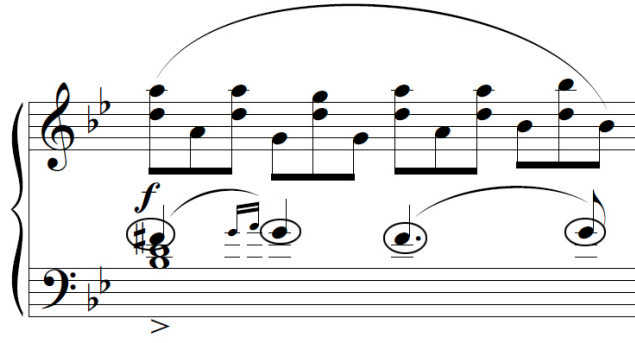
Example B25. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 19, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 15–16, half steps.



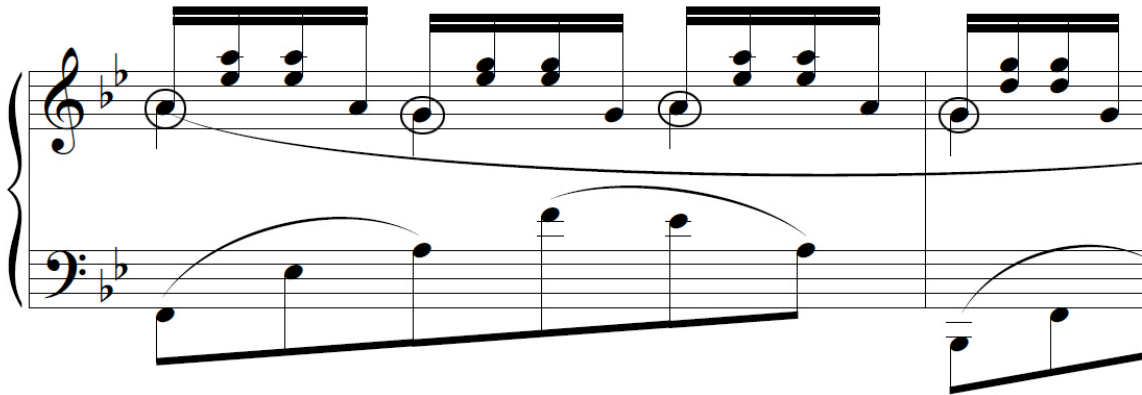
Example B26. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 20, motivic cell excerpt, m. 14, half steps.



Example B27. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 20, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 22–23, whole steps.



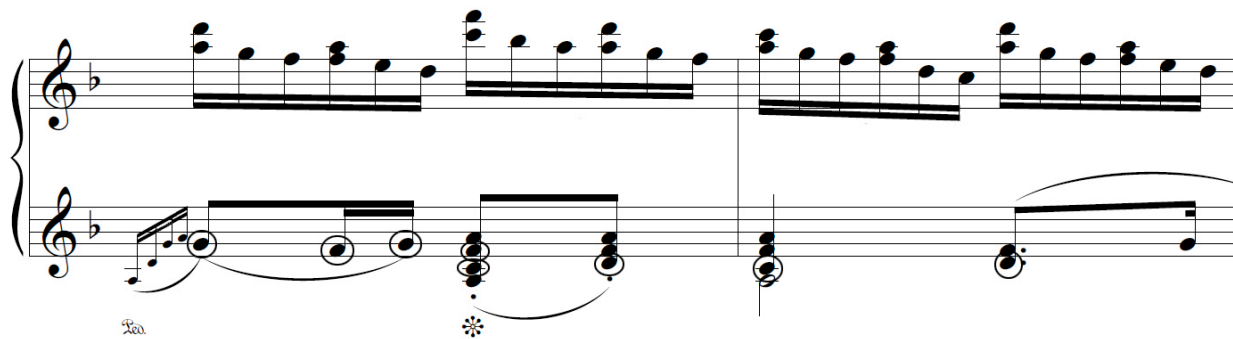
Example B28. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 21, motivic cell excerpt, m. 33, half steps, inverted.



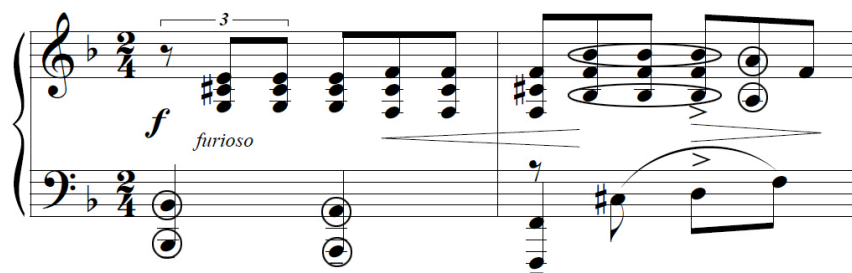
Example B29. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 22, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 3–4, whole steps.



Example B30. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 22, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 49–50, half steps, inverted.



Example B31. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 23, motivic cell excerpt, m. 35–36, whole steps and whole steps, inverted.



Example B32. Blumenfeld, Prelude Op. 17, No. 24, motivic cell excerpt, mm. 1–2, half steps.