

Diversity of the tonal structure of Chopin's *Études*

Mirosław Majchrzak

Abstract: The revealing and original sound of Chopin's music results from his original approach to the harmony (Tomaszewski 1999). In Chopin's time the term 'tonal unity', was understood to be an absolute domination of the main key in a piece. A piece characterised by tonal unity had to be distinguished by an identical key in its opening and conclusion. In the second half of 1830s and early 1840s, some trends for 'off-key' treatment of the form appear in Chopin's output, which was caused by a discrepancy between the initial and the ending key (Golab). Certain deficiencies in application of Riemann harmonic analysis method in studies on the Chopin harmonics have been noticed by Ludwik Bronarski (1935), author of "The Chopin Harmonic", since side triads, often characterised by significant independence, get crammed into functional inter-dependencies. This article is concerned with the application of an original analytical method (Majchrzak 2005, 2007, 2008) for the purpose of study of the tonal structure of Chopin's *Études*. It also includes the description of selected pieces of early Romanticism (miniatures of Schumann and Mendelssohn) and as a result we can compare the tonal structure of Chopin's *Études* with other pieces composed in the same period.

With the use of an original analytical system, the quantitative prevalence of chords classified by ranges of a given key in a musical piece can be determined. The method of analysis enables arranging a given set of keys in a hierarchical order, under which chords have been classified versus the main key in which the piece is maintained. (In key range 2 – D major and B minor harmonic – the following chords are classified, for example: DF#A, AC#EG, BDF#, AC#EGB, DF#AB, C#EG or DEF#GABC#).

Results

Early-Romanticism miniatures (several miniatures of Schumann and Mendelssohn) being analysed appear to be of a similar tonal structure: one-modal type of diagram, a low number of key ranges, frequent symmetry in the distribution series construction. The tonic key range (In F Major and D Minor – KR -1; in A Major and F sharp Minor – KR 3) dominance is characteristic to all the pieces. Noticeable in the Chopin *Études* is that the main key range sometimes tends to be marginalised. This paper distinguishes various types of diagrams of tonal structure of Chopin's *Études*. The tonal structure of selected *Études* is much remindful of the tonal structure of miniatures by composers of the former half of 19th century. However, different situation is to be met with others pieces. The analysis explains great originality of the tonal structure of Chopin's *Études* as compared to the pieces composed in the same historical period. My paper suggests a new approach to music analytical comparisons between Chopin's *Études* and the miniatures of early Romanticism. The analytical method will enable us to observe transformations in the structure of tonal harmony.