

## The Etudes (nicknames are not Chopin's)

- 10/1 Chopin said "practice it slowly in the morning, and you will expand your hand."  
10/2 chromatic scales for the pinky side of the right hand, while the thumb and forefinger play chords  
10/3 Chopin apparently once said of this, with a tear in his eye, "ah! My homeland!"  
10/4 alternating hands, with fast notes in one and the melody in the other  
10/5 "Black Key" the right hand plays almost exclusively on the black keys  
10/6 voicing and legato, with watery dissonances  
10/7 fast repeated notes in the right hand with a waltzlike left hand  
10/8 left hand melody, right hand fast runs  
10/9 wide expanses for the left hand  
10/10 wide expanses in the left hand, broken chords in the right hand; I like to think of it as "the Prism" because of its shifting accents and harmonies, like a crystal sending colored lights dancing around a room  
10/11 "Guitar" both hands turn and open to reach wide distances, sounding possibly like a strummed guitar  
10/12 "Revolutionary" left hand fast runs, right hand melody, probably Chopin's most famous etude  
25/1 "Aeolian Harp" wide shimmering expanses in both hands with melodies emerging  
25/2 "Bees" open left hand with closed right hand, with simultaneous faster and slower groups of three  
25/3 "The Horsemen" leaps and turns in both hands  
25/4 "Paganini" wide jumps in the left hand, while the right hand plays a sustained melody--which may have reminded listeners of famous violinist Paganini--over short chords.  
25/5 "Wrong Note" dissonances resolve quickly to consonances  
25/6 "Thirds" right hand chromatic scales in thirds with a left hand melody  
25/7 "Cello" a stark, sustained left hand minor melody until the relief of a lush, pedaled B section  
25/8 "Sixths" in both hands  
25/9 "Butterfly" Broken chords and octaves make the hands together look like a butterfly  
25/10 "Octaves" fast octaves in both hands, with a slower, lyrical middle section  
25/11 "Winter Wind" implacable fast runs in the right hand, with the melody in the left hand; I like to think of this as the car chase of the set  
25/12 "Ocean" Both hands climb up and down the keyboard in monumental harmonies, in a texture that rhymes with 10/1: Chopin has taken us from alpha to omega.

### The three Nouvelle etudes were an afterthought, commissioned for an anthology.

- N1 simultaneous rhythms: three notes in the right hand to four in the left  
N2 three right hand beats for every two in the left  
N3 simultaneous short and sustained notes in the right hand

Jocelyn Swigger



# Chopin COMPLETE Etudes

on an 1841 Paris Erard piano tuned to a historical temperament

**What did it sound like** when Chopin and his students played the Etudes? They might have played on a piano such as this, tuned like this: a sound world completely different from our modern one. Etudes are by definition pieces for teaching, and studying Chopin's has truly made me feel like one of his students. I hope this recording will be interesting for other performers, scholars, lovers, and students of Chopin.

## The Piano

This actual piano could have been played by Chopin's students or even by Chopin himself. It is an Erard, built in Paris in 1841, seven years before his death. It is straight-strung with under dampers, with the original hammers and action. The piano's technician, historical keyboard expert Anne Acker, said "It belonged to a family in Italy for most of its life, and then came to Florida. A family descendant had us restore the piano for sale. We made the rare decision to purchase it for our own collection."

Chopin loved Erard pianos, saying they helped him make a full tone when he was not at full strength. I found that, like the etudes themselves, some of the most challenging aspects of playing this instrument were exactly what created the most interesting moments. The action, though more evenly regulated than any other Erard I have ever played, is more difficult to control than that of the modern piano. The sound has great variety and unforgiving clarity. I enjoyed exploring the different sounds of the different registers, and found that inner melodies sometimes revealed themselves. The sound's fast decay made Chopin's quick tempos necessary for the sustained melodies of the slower etudes (10/3, 10/6, and 25/7). Perhaps the biggest surprise about the Erard, though, is its actual tone: to me the Erard sounds as different from a modern piano as an oboe does from a clarinet, and I fell in love with its rich, warm, metallic sound.

## The Temperament

The listener used to equal temperament might at first find this tuning startling. Devised specifically for Chopin's music by historical tuning scholar Jonathan Bellman, this unequal temperament brings Chopin's dazzling harmonic shifts into relief. Dissonances are intensified; the shift from minor into major brings calm and brightness; and different keys have different characters: C major stable, Ab major sunny and happy, B major busy and shimmering, eb minor unsettled, Gb major simple. I am very grateful to Professor Bellman for sharing his formula for this tuning system.

## The Ornaments

In the 19th century, all pianists were expected to compose and improvise, and Chopin was a brilliant improviser, never playing the same piece the same way twice. Sources for the etudes have surprisingly different markings for pedaling, dynamics, articulation, timings, accents, and even notes: I mostly worked from the edition from Mikuli, who was Chopin's teaching assistant, with Badura-Skoda's excellent and thor-

ough edition as my main back-up text, and also consulted editions by Cortot, Ekier, Paderewski, Schultz, and Zimmerman. I have also taken some liberties, adding some expressive details and ornaments of my own. I hope that pianists who hear this recording might find some inspiration--and perhaps permission--to allow some changes to the marks on the page.

## The Project

Practicing and performing the etudes has been the biggest creative climb of my life. My seven years with them have changed me as a musician and as a person: I had never lived with music this closely for this long, or grappled with technical skills so difficult, or found so many joys and sorrows to pour into music. I am immensely grateful for the support of my family, friends, colleagues, teachers, students, and audiences, and especially to the backers who funded the Kickstarter campaign that made this recording possible.

## The Cover

I made this woodcut one summer in my early twenties, about the age Chopin was when he wrote his etudes. I was at the beginning of trying to figure out my physical relationship to the piano, and practicing felt overwhelming, hard and pointless. I escaped from the practice room to the printmaking studio, where I took out my frustrations about the piano, gouging sharp tools into wood. By the end of the woodcut, and of the summer, I had made some breakthroughs in hearing and playing, and I had worked out that the piano really was what I wanted to do with my life. It feels appropriate to use the image for this recording, since this project has included so many similar moments of frustration and doubt and stress. Purists will note that the piano in this image isn't straight-strung, as the Erard is: it's a modern Steinway, with crossed strings, and indeed most of my practicing of the etudes has been on Steinway pianos. This print hangs in my teaching studio now.

--Jocelyn Swigger

**Jocelyn Swigger** is Associate Professor of Music at the Sunderman Conservatory of Music at Gettysburg College. She is the host of the occasional podcast Play It Again Swig, in which she has chronicled her experience learning these etudes. Her TEDx talk, "How I Memorize Piano Music," uses the Chopin etudes for examples. She enjoys chamber music, playing the ukulele, and jamming with her son, who is a young rock drummer. More information at [jocelynswigger.com](http://jocelynswigger.com).



# Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

## Complete Etudes

Jocelyn Swigger, piano

Piano: 1841 Paris Erard

Piano technician: Anne Acker

Historical temperament  
by Jonathan Bellman

Producer: Ian Quinn

Sound Engineer: Jeffrey Clark

Recorded at PianoGrands in  
Montrose Pennsylvania 2017

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Ian Quinn  
Sandra Santos  
Bettina Swigger

This recording is dedicated to the memory of  
Dr. Nancy Duncan Swigger.



### 12 Etudes, Op. 10 (1833)

- |                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. No. 1 in C major                   | 2:11 |
| 2. No. 2 in a minor                   | 1:31 |
| 3. No. 3 in E major                   | 3:15 |
| 4. No. 4 in c# minor                  | 2:03 |
| 5. No. 5 in Gb major "Black Key"      | 1:45 |
| 6. No. 6 in eb minor                  | 2:04 |
| 7. No. 7 in C major                   | 1:33 |
| 8. No. 8 in F major                   | 2:24 |
| 9. No. 9 in f minor                   | 1:59 |
| 10. No. 10 in Ab major                | 2:03 |
| 11. No. 11 in Eb major "Guitar"       | 2:42 |
| 12. No. 12 in c minor "Revolutionary" | 2:35 |

### 12 Etudes, Op. 25 (1837)

- |                                      |      |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| 13. No. 1 in Ab major "Aeolian Harp" | 2:42 |
| 14. No. 2 in f minor "The Bees"      | 1:36 |
| 15. No. 3 in F major "The Horseman"  | 1:36 |
| 16. No. 4 in a minor "Paganini"      | 1:47 |
| 17. No. 5 in e minor "Wrong Note"    | 2:37 |
| 18. No. 6 in g# minor "Thirds"       | 2:07 |
| 19. No. 7 in c# minor "Cello"        | 4:34 |
| 20. No. 8 in Db major "Sixths"       | 1:19 |
| 21. No. 9 in Gb major "Butterfly"    | 1:01 |
| 22. No. 10 in b minor "Octave"       | 4:02 |
| 23. No. 11 in a minor "Winter Wind"  | 3:40 |
| 24. No. 12 in c minor "Ocean"        | 2:57 |

### 3 Nouvelle Etudes (1839)

- |                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| 25. No. 1 in f minor  | 1:48 |
| 26. No. 2 in Ab major | 1:31 |
| 27. No. 3 in Db major | 1:38 |

Total 1:01:16