***Preludes and Afterthoughts... A personal view***

*This article was written by Everett Hopfner (*[*http://everetthopfner.com/*](http://everetthopfner.com/)*),*

*First Prize Winner of Eckhardt-Gramatté National Competition for Contemporary Music, Brandon, Canada (*[*http://e-gre.ca/*](http://e-gre.ca/)*), May 2013.*

Douglas Finch’s *Preludes and Afterthoughts* is a remarkable piece of music. My own journey through its various twists and turns has led me to a greater appreciation for its source material, Chopin’s *Preludes* op. 28, and connected me personally to a composer and pianist whom I greatly admire. Finch’s vivid imagination, thoughtfulness, and adept pianism radiate from every page of the score.

*Preludes and Afterthoughts* begins in ambiguity: in *Premonition*, one must first tune in to distant, long-faded frequencies, perhaps tiny remnants of vibrations that originated from Chopin’s own instrument centuries ago. Loose strands of melodic material are grasped, examined, and carefully released back into the atmosphere. One can just make out the familiar shapes and outlines of the original preludes, obscured by clouds of resonance, chromaticism, and deep pedal.

There is a pleasing simplicity to some of Finch’s compositional ideas throughout the work. In *Memory 1* and *Dream*, Chopin’s A Major prelude is played through in its entirety, then immediately in reverse. In Memory 2, the A-flat Major prelude is submerged in a sustained cluster and generous amounts of rich pedal. The beauty in these ostensibly straightforward adaptations lies in the patience and care it actually takes to complete the journey. One can feel Finch’s gentle guidance through the suddenly-unfamiliar preludes in his text (*in a dream-like state… tenderly… resigned… nostalgically…*), inviting the performer to slow down, enjoy the moment, and appreciate the curious new blends of sounds, colours and harmonies. This nearly meditative approach can’t help but influence one’s perception of Chopin’s original pieces, allowing the cycle of inspiration and re-interpretation to begin anew with each performance.

The tour-de-force *Whirlwinds and Sighs* offers several spontaneous, near-improvisatory impulses: what would happen if the B-flat minor prelude were to spiral out of control on stage, as it so often does in conservatory practice rooms? How would this piece sound as a tango? What if Chopin’s affinity for the chromatic “sigh” motive were stretched past its breaking point? Ideas are developed, interrupted, abandoned, and combined in dizzying succession, to thrilling effect.

In the final movement, *Rounds*, the combined musical and emotional weight of all that has transpired is allowed to intermingle and integrate before gradually dissolving, dissipating back into the distant vibrations we originally encountered in *Premonition*. Somehow these *Preludes* have found their way to us, the musicians and audiences in the twenty-first century. Their long journey to the present day has left them profoundly transformed, yet the heart of each prelude - those unique elements that make the original pieces so effective - has remained intact. Douglas Finch, in his own thoughtful, creative way, has turned Chopin’s *Preludes* into a brilliant new composition for the contemporary pianist - and in doing so, has reminded us of the power and beauty of the source material that could so easily be taken for granted.

I was utterly captivated by *Preludes and Afterthoughts* from my first encounter with the piece, and I endeavour to continue exploring, re-discovering and performing it for years to come.