

**FMusTCL Unit 1 – *Dissertation***

The Piano Writing & Formal Structure in the  
Piano Concertos of John Field (1782 – 1837),  
and their subsequent Influences



By

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: To assess John Field's influence on contemporary, and subsequent composers in terms of Piano Writing and use of Formal Structure, through investigation of his seven Piano Concertos:

METHODOLOGY: A detailed analysis of each concerto provides the research material for an in-depth investigation of a number of specific topics, outlined below. Textual evidence will be augmented by musical examples, whenever appropriate:

- FIELD'S PIANO WRITING: Technical Considerations, Fingering, Use of *Cantilena* and Pedalling
- FORMAL & STRUCTURAL DEVICES: Use and expansion of Classical Concerto First-Movement Form, Slow Movements and Finales
- FIELD'S ACHIEVEMENT & INFLUENCE: This will draw together and consider Field's achievement, and place this within the context of the work of other contemporary composers, and point to its subsequent impact on future developments. Furthermore this will seek to reappraise the status of Field's Piano Concertos, both within his output, and in relation to the repertoire as a whole.

There will also be a short biographical introduction, bibliography, selected discography and index.

In order to keep within the confines of the prescribed word-limit, Field's use of the Orchestra will not form part of this present investigation. Whilst the composer showed considerable skill in this area, when compared, for example, with Chopin, Field's use is essentially still more evolutionary than revolutionary and, as such, would seem the most suitable candidate for necessary omission on this occasion.

## PREFACE

Modern performers or students, wishing to become better acquainted with the seven piano concertos of John Field, are immediately confronted by the lack of readily available scores for all but the first three works. *Musica Britannica* did publish full scores of these first three concertos in 1961, but the projected second volume, incorporating the last four concertos, has never appeared.

In preparing this study, the writer was extremely fortunate to be able to refer to manuscript scores of the Fourth and Sixth Concertos, which the late Patrick Piggott, author of *The Life and Music of John Field – Creator of the Nocturne*, had painstakingly assembled from the full sets of orchestral parts in the British Museum.

The BBC Music Library has a full score of the Seventh Concerto, similarly compiled, as well as an early nineteenth-century copy of the score of the Fifth Concerto, which could just possibly be in the composer's own hand. The score is complete, except for the second piano part and the extra percussion parts which occur during *L'Orage*, but photocopies of these, again taken from the full set in the British Museum, were made available, together with these two full scores, a photocopy in the case of the Fifth Concerto. The full scores of the first Three Concertos were kindly provided by Plymouth Library Services.

The writer is greatly indebted to those above, and to Irish pianist and John Field exponent, Míceál O'Rourke, who also has a full set of performance-scores. Without their invaluable help in providing source material, this study could not have been undertaken.

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## INTRODUCTION & BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

The latter part of the eighteenth century witnessed two interrelated developments, the effects of which made a deep impression on the music and musical life of the ensuing decades. Firstly, music was seeking to free itself from being the prerogative of the upper class, and was now aiming to capture and appeal to a much wider audience through the medium of the developing public concerts. Naturally the concerto could provide one of the best vehicles for claiming the attention and admiration of the musical public, if its form were modified to allow the soloist the necessary opportunities to dazzle, with technical excellence, against an orchestral background. The metamorphosis of the earlier solo concerto into this new concerto for the virtuoso was not a difficult or unpredictable journey.

The second development occurred shortly after Beethoven's birth in 1770 when the piano, originally invented in the early years of the century, was endowed with the sustaining pedal, thus radically altering the instrument's expressive qualities and overall sonority. This would have far-reaching effects on the music which composers would subsequently write for the piano. Also, the increased volume and strength of the new instrument made it the ideal first-choice of the virtuoso who now could enter into orchestral partnership on more equal terms.

It was into this fecund environment that John Field was born on July 26, 1782, in Dublin, Ireland. Both his father and grandfather were musicians, his father a violinist in the orchestra of the Theatre Royal, and his grandfather on his father's side an organist at a Dublin church. It was from the latter that Field received his first piano lessons whilst his practising was supervised by his father. In 1791 Field was sent to Tommaso Giordani,

a leading figure in Dublin's musical life and whose operas were regularly performed, for a course of 'finishing' lessons. Giordani soon billed Field to appear at three *Spiritual Concerts* during 1792, at the second of which he played a concerto by Giordani. Contemporaneous with his early success as a virtuoso pianist was the production of his first compositions – an arrangement for piano solo of an Irish air, two *Rondos* for piano on songs by Giordani, and a *Rondo in A major*.

In 1793 Field left Ireland with his family bound for England, unaware, at that juncture, that he would never return. His father had been invited to become leader of the orchestra at the Bath concerts, but the family subsequently remained there only for a few months before a seemingly inferior post as a violinist at London's Haymarket Theatre caused them to move again. Many celebrated pianists were living in London in 1793, among them Dussek, Gyrowetz, and J B Cramer, a former pupil of Clementi, and so it was natural that the question of Field's future should become of prime importance. He was apprenticed to Clementi for a fee of one hundred guineas, becoming both his pupil and a salesman in the London shop, part of his duties being to play over music to the customers and especially to display the firm's pianos; Field was kept at this for five years. Clementi, for his part, was responsible for Field's entire education, not only his piano playing, and encouraged his development as a performer by having Field make his London debut in May 1794, playing a Clementi Sonata. Great predictions were made for his future, including the following entry in Haydn's diary: 'Field, a young boy, which [*sic*] plays the pianoforte extremely well' which, if not grammatically correct, must still have given copious encouragement to the young pianist!

The First Piano Concerto was performed on February 7, 1799, with Field as soloist, in a Pinto benefit concert at the Haymarket Theatre, and this won for Field his first success as a composer in his own right, appearing, as it did, the first major work after earlier mere bagatelles on borrowed themes. Not only was his expertise at the keyboard highly applauded, but also his natural talent for composition received high praise, and it became obvious to Clementi that his pupil would now benefit greatly from a wider musical experience. Consequently in August, 1802, Clementi took Field to Paris, where, at soirées arranged by Ignaz Pleyel, he made a sensation with performances not only of his own works (probably the three piano sonatas and the First Concerto), but also with works by Clementi, and recitals, from memory, of Bach's '48' and works by Handel. Vienna was the next destination, where Clementi had intended that Field should remain whilst he himself journeyed on to Russia. It was Clementi's aim to set his pupil to study with Albrechtsberger in order that Field's contrapuntal technique and grasp of basic formal principles in composition might be radically improved upon. That Field was a credit to Clementi as a pianist was well and truly endorsed, but as a composer there were many things further to absorb and it was likely that Clementi's conscience was troubling him somewhat for having partly neglected this aspect of the apprenticeship. However, Field eventually persuaded his reluctant master that it would be better for them both to travel to Russia together, where they arrived in St Petersburg in December, 1802. Introductions to some of Clementi's wealthy and aristocratic pupils were arranged for Field, with the result that, almost simultaneously, invitations to play and enquiries for lessons flooded in. Clementi's plans were taking shape and, on his departure for Berlin in

1803, he felt safe that his pupil's recent popularity would now create a new market for his own publications as well as his pianos.

Field's St Petersburg debut in 1804, at which he again played his First Piano Concerto, caused him to become an unparalleled success overnight and the whole of the city was caught by the Field 'fever'. He very quickly was to become the most celebrated pianist in Russia and the most sought-after teacher, as Clementi found when he returned for a visit, a year later. Field was afforded both the patronage and friendship of the nobility and, in their company, attended the opera as well as the important social occasions. At the former he no doubt heard the romantic and embellished melodies which were to issue forth from his fingers in the *Nocturnes* and the *cantilena* sections in the Concertos.

Over the next few years, Field was so much fêted that he became pleasure-loving and eccentric, forgetting appointments for lessons and leading a thoroughly Bohemian life, with a succession of love affairs. In 1810 he married one of his best pupils, Mademoiselle Percheron de Mouchy, nicknamed 'Percheretta' because of her coquettish disposition. Unfortunately she was unable to bring about much organisation in Field's life and already, by the year of their marriage, his fondness for alcohol had grown on him to such an extent that for long periods he was never completely sober. Although he often played at his best when slightly drunk, it did nothing for his disorderly daily routine nor made him any less lazy or absent-minded, and which accounted for him failing to appear at the start of his annual benefit concert in Moscow, in 1810, signifying the temporary end of Field's stay in Moscow, and one possible reason why he decided to return to St Petersburg. Field had written in 1811 to his actor friend Gebhard, who informed him that

the Prussian pianist, Daniel Steibelt, had arrived in St Petersburg three years earlier and had soon established an important position for himself in its musical circles. In view of Steibelt's obvious popularity, Gebhard suggested that the two pianists should effect a direct exchange, which both men found mutually acceptable. Field certainly fared far better from his return to St Petersburg than did Steibelt who, along with many other refugees, soon found himself fleeing from Moscow after the arrival there of the French army under Napoleon. Almost immediately Field re-established his immense popularity with his former audience and was once again accepted back into aristocratic circles.

Although Field was often reluctant to put pen to paper, it would seem certain that, by 1811, the Second Concerto was in existence, as might well have been the third, which could, in fact, possibly have been written earlier than the better-known Second Concerto. Whilst continuing to live with Percheretta, he found some consolation in his life-long affair with a Mademoiselle Charpentier who, in 1815, bore him a son, Leon. This year was one of great importance for Field, since he made more public appearances than usual during the Lent season, and received an offer of the title 'Court Pianist', which he subsequently turned down. The complications of having an illegitimate son did not curb his musical output, and good progress was made with the Fifth Concerto. The date of the Fourth Concerto, however, is not precisely known. It was, ultimately, an offer from the Leipzig publisher, *Breitkopf & Härtel*, to publish all Field's available and projected compositions, which marked this year as important. Almost immediately the first four concertos, the piano quintet, as well as several solo pieces were published. Whilst the attractions to leave Russia for a European tour were always strong, Field remained in St Petersburg where, albeit briefly, he made a profound impression on Glinka during their

few lessons together. Field's quotidian life suffered a further complication when, unexpectedly, he discovered that Percheretta was, after nine childless years, to have his child. Characteristically he remained oblivious to these new problems after Adrien was born in 1819, and this ultimately prompted Percheretta to leave Field, and to earn a living as a successful teacher.

Possibly as a result of his broken marriage, Field decided to leave St Petersburg once more and return to Moscow at the end of 1821. However, the city which he knew before 1812 no longer existed, and whilst things were improving, his new life-style there would only be a shadow of its former self. In 1822, he became very friendly with Hummel who was on a visit to Moscow, and whose works after this time, and somewhat beforehand, had witnessed a change towards a more romantic style, possibly suggesting that Field's pianistic ideas had a meaningful influence on him. Field made a lot of money from his concerts, commanding higher fees than any other performer, and from his ever-increasing teaching clientele. The programme of his benefit concert in 1822 included the first movement of his newest concerto, No 7 in C minor, which he again included two years later, but he found the ideas for the completion of the work not forthcoming. The state of his health must account to some degree for his gradual withdrawal from the public eye and his silence as a composer during these least productive years of Field's career, from 1824 to 1831. After the publication of his Sixth Concerto in 1823, nothing more appeared until 1832. His intemperance was also seriously injurious to his failing health, and Moscow was alive with various scandals concerning his love affairs. Twice, in fact, was his death reported in 1828 and 1831, and on the latter occasion, as a consequence to a stinging reply published by Field, the paper concerned intimated that if

he were willing, a tour of Europe might satisfy his ever-growing number of admirers outside Russia who had not heard him as a pianist for so long. Eventually Field did overcome his reluctance and left Moscow in 1831. His state of health made it vital that he should have a travelling companion, and his illegitimate son Leon, now sixteen, seemed an ideal choice. Leon Charpentier had developed into an infant prodigy, with the evident makings of a virtuoso pianist, but he also had an impressive vocal and histrionic ability. A visit to Western Europe for the developing singer would give him the opportunity to study in France or Italy.

John Field's return to London in 1831, after an absence of thirty years, was naturally an event of great interest to its music lovers, although it did not afford him the unbridled admiration he had known in Russia. The London public was becoming increasingly more discerning and its interest had been more aroused by the presence of the young Mendelssohn than by the arrival of Field, who was still not very well known in England as a composer. However, Field's first object on reaching London was to find a cure for, or at least relief from, his physical problems, not to re-establish himself in the city's musical life. In 1832, Field did perform his Fourth Concerto at the opening concert of the Philharmonic Society's season, and the work and its performance were well received, though not rapturously. During the visit Clementi died, and Field was one of the chief mourners at his funeral at Westminster Abbey. Before Field left London for Paris, prompted partly by the death of his mother, with whom he had been reunited merely for a year, he had met Mendelssohn, whose success with his Concerto in G minor had somewhat eclipsed Field's own Fourth Concerto. The more immediate appeal of the former's concerto made it the firmest of favourites with London's music-lovers, and must

have accounted for the unusual celerity with which Field decided to leave England for Europe where, since 1815, his works were far better known.

Field's concerts in Paris coincided with the moment when the art of piano-playing was forging new paths. Liszt, Chopin and Alkan were among the foremost pianists there at the time and it is not surprising that Field might have felt his art rather passé, a situation to which he had been averted by his experience with Mendelssohn. Nevertheless, he made a very favourable impression, in 1832, with his playing of his own Seventh Concerto (which had eventually been completed either before he left Russia or during the year he spent in London) with all save his younger rivals. Various derogatory remarks were passed between Chopin, Liszt and Field, but these did not seriously affect the reception Field got on the other occasions at which he performed in public. These Paris concerts came at the start of an extended tour, prompted to some degree by the fact that neither in London nor in Paris had Field really received the level of acclaim to which he had been accustomed earlier in Russia. Early in 1833 Field gave the first of two concerts in Brussels, both a great success, playing after that in Toulouse, Marseilles and Lyons, before moving on to Geneva. Whilst his reputation was again on the increase, the converse was true in the matter of his failing health. Still accompanied by his son, Leon, his concerts in Milan were his last appearances in Italy, for his departure for Florence was to consult again with a celebrated French physician, before struggling on, finally to arrive in Naples in 1834. Here he was taken ill and lay in hospital for some nine months. Field refused to let friends or pupils hear of his condition, until news of his plight became known to a party of visiting Russian tourists, the Rachmanoffs, leading members of Moscow society. They removed him from hospital and he stayed with them first in Ischia,

where the thermal springs helped him to recuperate in preparation for his long and arduous journey with them, and Leon, back to Russia.

On the journey northwards Field stayed in Vienna, first at a local hostelry, and later with Czerny whose extremely large output caused Field to dub him 'a living inkpot'. His health had shown signs of improvement and he began writing and playing once more, including the recently-printed Seventh Concerto at the last of his three concerts in that city. Though Field liked Vienna, he decided to leave for Moscow together with his new benefactors. Here, he and his son were obliged to part as Leon's voice had developed sufficiently, during his training in Paris and possibly in Naples, for him to leave for St Petersburg to commence his long career as an opera singer, under the name of Leonov. Consolation for this loss came almost immediately in the shape of Field's other son, Adrien, who, now seventeen, had gone to Moscow in the hope of continuing his studies as a pianist with his famous father. Unfortunately for him, it was now too late for Field to make anything of his younger son's talents. Curiously enough, after his father's death, Adrien took to drink, and ended his life as a dance pianist, scraping a living in taverns and public ballrooms. As Field's illness progressed, he continued to make occasional public appearances, though only as a supporting artist at various benefit concerts. His last performance seems to have taken place at a *soirée* in March, 1836, but it was not until December that death became imminent. It was as a result of an attack of pneumonia, following a chill caught during the severe weather of December, 1836, that death finally came. He struggled to overcome his severe bronchial trouble for two weeks, but in vain. John Field died on January 11, 1837 and was given a public funeral and burial at the Vedensky Cemetery, on the outskirts of Moscow

## FIELD'S PIANO WRITING

### TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS: FINGERING – USE OF *CANTILENA* – PEDALLING

One area of piano writing in which Field was particularly original, was in his manner of fingering; indeed, it is quite apparent that for Field, fingering was of primary importance. For, whilst the composer's manuscripts are not very abundant, those that still remain, even preliminary sketches, have the fingering written besides the notes. Many copies of his concertos, edited by the composer for the benefit of his pupils, still exist; they are liberally fingered, and ornaments and trills are, in fact, written out in full, with fingering for every note. Field's favourite pupil, Alexander Dubuk, feeling that a great deal could be learned from these copies, published a collection of eighty-eight fingered passages taken from his master's works, mostly the concertos. They contain much that is unorthodox, and a study of them shows that many of Chopin's fingerings, long regarded as without precedent, were anticipated by Field. Various instances from the concertos may be cited:

Passages, in which a rich, bell-like sonority is required, may be played by the same finger throughout;

Ex. 1

7th Concerto later...

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff, labeled '7th Concerto', is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats. It contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. Above the notes are fingerings: 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, and 3. A slur covers the last two notes. The second staff, labeled 'later...', is also in treble clef with a key signature of two flats. It contains a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. Above the notes are fingerings: 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, and 3.

This type of fingering may also be used for light, *staccato* effects (see Ex. 2).

## Ex. 2

## 4th Concerto



Quick repetitions may also be played by the same finger.

## Ex. 3

## 7th Concerto



Field, too, has no basic objection to the use of the thumb on black keys. He sometimes deliberately places the hand near the centre, or towards the back of the keyboard, even when more 'traditional' alternatives existed.

## Ex. 4

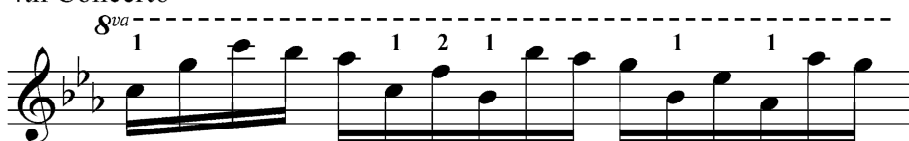
## 2nd Concerto



Often, the type of figuration necessitates the use of the thumb on black keys.

## Ex. 5

## 4th Concerto





Field was in the habit of making the following changes to the previous passage.

Ex. 9

4 4 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 5 4 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4

2 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 1

The musical notation for Ex. 9 consists of a single staff in treble clef. It features a sequence of chords and single notes. The first part has a descending line of chords: G4-A4-B4, F4-G4-A4, E4-F4-G4, D4-E4-F4, C4-D4-E4, B3-C4-D4, A3-B3-C4, G3-A3-B3, F3-G3-A3, E3-F3-G3, D3-E3-F3, C3-D3-E3. The second part has a similar descending line: G4-A4-B4, F4-G4-A4, E4-F4-G4, D4-E4-F4, C4-D4-E4, B3-C4-D4, A3-B3-C4, G3-A3-B3, F3-G3-A3, E3-F3-G3, D3-E3-F3, C3-D3-E3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. A '3' is written above the first note of the second part.

Often, the necessity of to modify an existing form, in this instance because of a lack of facility, promotes the discovery of something original, and something with far more developmental possibilities. The new and forward-looking figuration in the Fifth Concerto can be seen as a direct consequence of the ‘simplification’ which he made in such passages in double thirds,

Ex. 10

8va

3

8va

The musical notation for Ex. 10 is a single staff in treble clef. It shows a sequence of chords and single notes. The first part has a descending line of chords: G4-A4-B4, F4-G4-A4, E4-F4-G4, D4-E4-F4, C4-D4-E4, B3-C4-D4, A3-B3-C4, G3-A3-B3, F3-G3-A3, E3-F3-G3, D3-E3-F3, C3-D3-E3. The second part has a similar descending line: G4-A4-B4, F4-G4-A4, E4-F4-G4, D4-E4-F4, C4-D4-E4, B3-C4-D4, A3-B3-C4, G3-A3-B3, F3-G3-A3, E3-F3-G3, D3-E3-F3, C3-D3-E3. A '3' is written below the first note of the first part. '8va' is written above the first note of the first part and the first note of the second part.

And, from the same movement,

Ex. 11

8va

3

The musical notation for Ex. 11 is a single staff in treble clef. It shows a sequence of chords and single notes. The first part has a descending line of chords: G4-A4-B4, F4-G4-A4, E4-F4-G4, D4-E4-F4, C4-D4-E4, B3-C4-D4, A3-B3-C4, G3-A3-B3, F3-G3-A3, E3-F3-G3, D3-E3-F3, C3-D3-E3. The second part has a similar descending line: G4-A4-B4, F4-G4-A4, E4-F4-G4, D4-E4-F4, C4-D4-E4, B3-C4-D4, A3-B3-C4, G3-A3-B3, F3-G3-A3, E3-F3-G3, D3-E3-F3, C3-D3-E3. A '3' is written below the first note of the first part. '8va' is written above the first note of the first part.

Or, in the final rondo, where some strikingly novel keyboard effects propel the movement towards its imminent close (see Ex. 12).

## Ex. 12

The question of Field's facility in the matter of trills was raised by a report which Schumann made of a certain *Exercice Nouveau* which Field had earlier written, designed for the development of trills with the third and fourth fingers. Schumann, in his review, talks about trills, 'which were not the strongest aspect of Field's virtuosity'. Again, this judgement on Field's playing was probably based on third-hand experience; Wieck, Schumann's teacher, was most likely the main source of information, and he had not heard Field in person. An accurate knowledge of Field's trill technique can only be based on the passages which he wrote out and fingered for his pupils. The following such example, from the Third Concerto, indicates that his trills were not particularly rapid, and were played with frequent changes of fingers.

## Ex. 13

This concerto, incidentally, also offers a rare example of the composer's use of the alto clef for the pianist's left hand (see Ex. 14).



## Ex. 16



would have themselves engendered this more flowing, and expansive type of melody-writing to some noticeable degree. In fact, six of Field's seven concertos with, from the second onwards, their similar use of embellished and *cantabile* melodies, were in print before Bellini's first opera was even heard, and also, up to and including the Fifth Concerto, before Donizetti's first. Thus, if Field were to be adaptor and not originator, it would be from earlier opera composers, rather than from these latter two. Such a composer as Rossini would seem a good candidate, for he was born ten years after Field, and his first opera was produced in Bologna, in 1810. His *cantilena* melodies were less rich than those of Donizetti and Bellini, and also of Field, but equally, tended to be more florid, as this extract from *La Cenerentola* demonstrates.

Ex. 18

The musical score for Ex. 18 is presented in two systems. The top system is for the voice, labeled 'Voice' and '[Clorinda]'. It features a melodic line in a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody begins with a trill on a quarter note, followed by a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, including two triplet markings over eighth notes. The bottom system is for the piano accompaniment, labeled '(Basic accompaniment)'. It consists of two staves: the right hand (treble clef) plays a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand (bass clef) plays a simple bass line with quarter notes and rests.

Even now, Field would have had but one year or less to have heard Rossini's earlier operas and have translated some of their aspects into pianistic terms by the time he was working on the Second Concerto's first movement. Nevertheless, the link between Field and Rossini, though extremely tenuous, may just be a possibility, and it could be further suggested that Field's characteristic use of 'skipped' rhythm-patterns (see Ex. 19),

Ex. 19



And his fondness for the ‘bell’ motif,

Ex. 20

2nd Concerto

Originated in the works of Rossini.

Field’s music depends more than that of any earlier composer on the special tone colour produced by the almost constant use of the right, or sustaining pedal. As Liszt said, later: ‘Without the pedal, the piano is only a dulcimer’. On the other hand, Field used the left pedal very sparingly and, according to Dubuk, he never used it to achieve a *pianissimo*, but only to produce a special timbre. In Field’s few extant manuscripts, the pedalling is usually marked in full, but in the early editions of his works, indications of pedalling are sparse, and often so carelessly printed that they can be regarded only as a very rough guide to the composer’s intentions. When Field’s pedalling is investigated, it soon becomes clear that it is not possible to reproduce exactly on modern instruments all the pedal effects available on those of his time – subsequent developments in piano-making have been too numerous, and too fundamental, during the last two hundred years

or so. The opening of the *Siciliano in G minor* from the Fourth Concerto (solo version) is a striking example of the telling effect obtained when the pedal is held throughout a succession of changing harmonies. Played on an early nineteenth-century grand, this passage would sound entirely convincing, but, like many similar passages in Field's works, it cannot be played in exactly the same way on a modern piano, without sounding too blurred to be wholly effective.

Ex. 21

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece in G minor, 6/8 time. The score is written for a grand piano, with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 6/8. The piece begins with a single note in the bass clef, marked 'Ped.' (pedal). The melody in the treble clef consists of a series of eighth notes, with some notes beamed together. The bass line consists of a series of eighth notes, with some notes beamed together. The piece ends with a single note in the bass clef, marked with an asterisk (\*).

On the other hand, whilst allowing for the more limited sonority of early nineteenth-century pianos, it would appear probable that Field, on occasions, positively preferred a slight haze of pedalled tone to the 'clean' harmonies for which the well-trained modern pianist strives. This is, of course, a consequence of one of Field's commonest technical devices – his use of pedal points. The sound of an implied 'pedal' was intended not to be lost, regardless of phrasing and changes of harmony. The Fifth *Nocturne* is probably one of the best known of Field's compositions, because seemingly it is one of the easiest to play. Yet the performer, whether a young student, or a seasoned concert-pianist, finds the pedalling most difficult, for the very reason of the composer's implied tonic pedal (see Ex. 22).

## Ex. 22

On the rare occasions when Field wished to ensure that the sustaining pedal should not be used, he clearly marked the passage *con sordini*, as was conventional usage in his day; such indications are, however, very few. In the Third Concerto, for example, the only time this instruction is used is at the opening of the *Polacca*, but even here, it appears in the piano reduction of the opening eight-bar orchestral introduction, and not as part of the actual solo-writing.

The modern pianist seeking a faithful interpretation of Field's *Nocturnes* or Concertos or, for that matter, any music composed before 1840 on today's grand, is faced with problems to which no really satisfactory solution exists, other than the use of period instruments or their copies. The actual quality of sound with which Field enthralled his audiences has now been lost, and the perfection of his finger-technique was closely associated with the types of piano-action in use during his time. It is also essential to have an understanding of the pedalling problems mentioned above. Further aspects of Field's piano writing will be considered later, when assessing the composer's achievement and influence.

## FORMAL & STRUCTURAL DEVICES

Field's formal plans, in his seven concertos, have often received significant criticism for their apparent lack of direction and sectional imbalance, for their often rambling and shapeless design which, it is suggested, often shows the composer as if lost in a maze from which he had no idea how to extricate himself. However, the remit of this present investigation is to view the concertos as a whole and to investigate their overall design in the context of the developing concerto-form at the time, rather than to scrutinize too closely those internal links between sections which, admittedly, can occasionally be somewhat questionable.

The classical concerto, in the form definitively established by Mozart, in the 1780s, resembles the concerto of Vivaldi in its general scheme of three movements, and in the relatively greater length and weight of the first movement as compared with the other two. So far as the thematic aspect of the concerto's first movement is concerned, the last half of the eighteenth century saw the gradual merging of the old *ritornello* form with sonata form. Gradually the reappearances of the *ritornello* became reduced by two (dispensing with the relative, and subdominant *tuttis*), when the form of the classical concerto, with one *tutti* in the dominant half-way through the movement and the other at the end in the tonic, emerged. The similarities between this adapted type of *ritornello* form and early sonata form are clear: the dominant *ritornello* leading straightway into a fairly wide circle of modulations, which arrive back at a final *ritornello* in the tonic, is a parallel with the development and recapitulation of sonata form. Similarly, the first solo, which begins in the tonic and modulates to the dominant, is analogous to the exposition of sonata form. Only the opening *ritornello*, beginning and ending in the tonic as it does,

is foreign to sonata form, and as the sonata principle infiltrated into the concerto, composers came to regard this opening *ritornello* as a self-contained orchestral introduction.

In his First Concerto, Field immediately introduces the second subject in the dominant, in the opening *tutti*.

Ex. 23



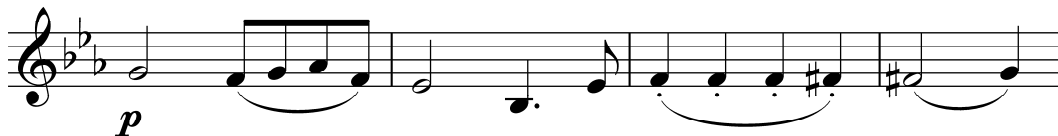
Mozart, only in two concertos (K 413 & 449) and Beethoven (No 3 in C Minor) also previewed the second subject in the dominant, and Field was, no doubt, of the opinion that, on this occasion, as he did not intend using any of the thematic material of the first subject in the piano's exposition nor in the development, the use of a double exposition was excusable. Indeed, whilst the opening *tutti* is tastefully orchestrated, Field used sometimes to play the first movement as an unaccompanied solo piece, completely omitting the *tuttis*; this, to some degree, might possibly indicate the amount of importance which he placed on his orchestral passages from the structural standpoint, and led composers such as Mendelssohn to seek a situation where *tutti* and soloist would simultaneously give out thematic material (his G minor Concerto). However, that five out of Field's seven concertos have opening *tuttis* where the first and second subjects are given out according to symphonic first-movement form, could just as easily suggest that the composer considered this part of the movement as important from the orchestra's standpoint, as the rest of the work would be from the soloist's. His opening *tuttis* are always well scored, and never abruptly curtailed, as they well might have been, had he

merely seen them as part of the ritual before the concerto proper commenced, when the soloist entered.

The first *tutti*, though, is still not regarded as a sonata exposition, as this really begins with the first solo, but more as a survival from the Baroque concerto. It is only in the first solo that the key contrast generally occurs, indeed with true second subjects, whereas frequently the *ritornello* merely presents a string of secondary material (in the tonic), following the main theme. Mozart treats the beginning of the first solo in a variety of ways, sometimes introducing a brief thematic diversion for the soloist before the main theme. Beethoven, following Mozart, sometimes introduced an important new theme in the soloist's exposition. More rarely, he let the orchestra have a contrasting theme that did not come until the recapitulation. The concluding *tutti* is generally interrupted on a cadential six-four chord, a *cadenza* intervening between it and the final dominant seventh-to-tonic resolution. Subsequently, a final extended trill on the dominant-seventh chord gives the orchestra its cue to resume the *tutti* and bring the movement swiftly to an end.

As mentioned earlier, in his first four concertos, as well as in the seventh, Field does write a true double-exposition with the second subject in the dominant, or relative major, in the case of the seventh. When Beethoven had done the same in his C minor Concerto, it was partly because the second subject could only be used in a major-key version, unless the end of it was adapted to accommodate the final appoggiatura (see Ex. 24).

## Ex. 24



No such similar complication occurred in Field's themes, and thus it must be for some other reason that he largely chose to write symphonic opening *tutti*s. As mentioned above, in the First Concerto, the first subject is not recapitulated, and Field might well have considered that it needed greater prominence in the opening *tutti*, which he thus obtained by true contrast of key with the second subject. He possibly also felt that sufficient contrast between orchestral and solo exposition would be achieved simply by the extra embellishments which the piano could clearly add and he was not, even at seventeen, afraid of writing a quite lengthy orchestral opening, confident, as he would have been, in his ability as an orchestrator. The Second Concerto, from this formal standpoint, is modelled on the first (except that the recapitulation is complete), and Field most likely considered that the far more romantic writing for the solo instrument, to be discussed later, was ample compensation again for writing a double exposition. In the second subject of this concerto, another reason why the composer showed a preference for this type of exposition comes to light; Field often allows the soloist two statements of a theme, the one usually more chordally conceived, the other exploiting the piano's expressive qualities. As this first statement could easily be played by the orchestra, Field may have thought that, by giving this to the soloist, in the second-subject key, he was obliged to do likewise for the orchestra – and the only place where this could be achieved, without too much trouble, was in the opening *tutti*. By the time of the Third Concerto, whilst continuing to adopt this plan, Field seemed to sense that something else

needed to be done, to heighten the contrast between the orchestral and solo expositions. To this end, as Beethoven had done before, he interpolates a new theme in the first solo, between the first and second subjects, but which does not reappear. This pattern is used again in the next concerto, although the 'new theme' now serves partly as an anticipatory glance at the subsequent manner of treatment which the second subject will receive. In the next two concertos, Field writes orthodox first *tuttis*, with both subjects in the tonic key. Because, as far as the exposition of the Fifth Concerto is concerned, he has followed Mozart's example for the first time in his concerto-output, he avoids introducing a new theme in the solo exposition, relying, hopefully, on the contrast of the first modulation away from the tonic, now being somewhat later than usual and, of course, on the dramatic and novel effects of the subsequent development, the 'Storm' section. Effective as this is, Field was no doubt aware that one of the main defects of the Fifth Concerto as a whole, and the remainder of the first movement in particular, was that it was almost totally in C major throughout. This may well have prompted him to think more closely about the exposition of the Sixth Concerto, again without an orthodox concerto key-scheme. For, not only does he introduce the soloist for eight bars in the opening *tutti*, a very rare, if not unique occurrence so close to the real first entry, he further presents a somewhat lengthy new theme, still in the tonic key, before the piano makes the first modulation to the dominant for the second subject. Reverting to a practice noted initially in the First Concerto, Field does not recapitulate both subjects; in this case he omits the second subject.

The still somewhat experimental nature of this movement, as witnessed by the incomplete recapitulation and, of course, by the *Meno Mosso* section which stands in lieu

of a development, may well have caused the composer to return again to the more familiar double-exposition construction, when he planned his Seventh Concerto. The incorporation of two distinct episodes (one functioning as a slow movement) instead of a true development section, no doubt suggested to Field that the simpler plan of the first two concertos, with regards to their expositions, would now be sufficient in as much as the development of the Seventh Concerto would appear extremely original, and thereby contrasting; thus he writes a double exposition and conventional recapitulation, introducing no new theme in the solo half.

The Third and Fourth Concertos both introduce the soloist in similar vein; the piano's opening statements are initially devoid either of decoration, or of direct reference to the orchestral first subject.

Ex. 25

3rd Concerto

Ex. 26

4th Concerto



## Ex. 29

Musical notation for Ex. 29, showing two staves of music. The top staff is marked '8va' and features a melodic line with eighth notes and accents. The bottom staff features a similar melodic line with eighth notes and accents.

The finale of Chopin's F minor Concerto, the first movements of concertos by Scriabin, Poulenc and, of course, Rachmaninov, at the opening of his Third Concerto, provide some further examples of this kind of writing.

## Ex. 30

Musical notation for Ex. 30, showing two staves of music. The top staff is marked 'Allegro ma non tanto' and '2'. The bottom staff is marked '(Orchestra)' and '2'. The music features a melodic line with eighth notes and a piano dynamic marking 'p'.

Had Field perhaps composed his opening some years later, when the device had become more familiar in romantic piano-concerto writing, he might not have decided on the need for this eight-bar intrusion to precede the soloist's real first entry. It seems, in fact, as if he was uncertain of the effect which this soft, octave opening would have on his listeners, used to a more dramatic first solo entry. If only he had taken courage from the opening of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto (see Ex. 31), of some fifteen years earlier.

## Ex. 31

**Allegro moderato**

Although in the Sixth Concerto the soloist is introduced into what was usually the orchestra's domain, Field does not actually continue the experiments of Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Concertos. As an effective orchestrator, Field possibly felt that it was better to leave things as he found them, with regards to the opening of each concerto (except for the isolated instance of the sixth), relying on the fact that the first *tutti* would be efficiently and successfully scored, and creating a greater feeling of anticipation for the piano's first entry.

The soloist's entry in the Seventh Concerto looks back, in some degree, to Field's First Concerto:

## Ex. 32

A series of *bravura* flourishes, based on arpeggios, which soon lead to a rhapsodic sentence, a very free statement of the first subject (see Ex. 33).

## Ex. 33

The musical score for Ex. 33 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo/mood is marked 'con espress.'. The piece features a complex, flowing melodic line in the treble staff, often with triplets and slurs. The bass staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. Pedal markings 'Ped.' and asterisks are placed below the bass staff to indicate where the sustain pedal should be used.

As regards the remainder of the first movement, each concerto is fairly straightforward. In the first two works, the development begins quite conventionally in the dominant minor, whereas in the Third Concerto (in E flat), it opens in F sharp major, approached enharmonically from the previous *tutti* in the dominant key of B flat. The greater preponderance of modulations in this concerto's development section, and in that of the next work, as has been previously noted, often puts the harmonic ingenuity of the composer severely on test. The approach to the concluding trill just before the development section shows Field in just such a situation, forced to interpolate a somewhat harmonically-challenged passage to accommodate a return to the dominant.

## Ex. 34

The musical score for Ex. 34 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The piece features a series of trills (tr) in the treble staff, each marked with a 'tr' above the note. The bass staff provides a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic.

In the Fifth Concerto, a conventional thematic development is begun, but this is soon turned into the 'Storm' section which, whilst essentially programmatic, can still be seen as the working-out of previous material and figuration, though here with far greater

unity of purpose. The last two concertos represent both a logical culmination of the composer's thoughts on development sections, as well as an attempt to unify the concerto as a whole. The Sixth Concerto's development begins in the dominant, but very soon becomes the *Meno Mosso* section, mentioned earlier, where a distinctly new theme and manner of treatment appears.

Ex. 35

**Meno mosso**  
8<sup>va</sup>

con sordino

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \*

As noted earlier, Field carries this one step further in the final concerto, where he replaces the development by two independent episodes, one in G and the other in A, which are complete in themselves, though merging into the outbursts of pianistic *bravura* which frame them. The G major interlude, in fact, was subsequently published as *Nocturne* No 12, and soon became one of Field's best known melodies. Its clear similarity to Chopin's *Andante Spianato* will be discussed later.

The 'development' sections of these last three concertos are interesting and increasingly novel, but nevertheless are no real substitute for that portion of a work where thematic investigation and metamorphosis should be the order of the day. Field, in searching for something suitable to interpose between exposition and recapitulation, may have been looking to the future; equally, the insertion of a complete entity, like the Twelfth *Nocturne* above, maintained an effective movement, without necessitating the organic development of thematic material, certainly not the composer's strongest point.

The recapitulations in the concertos are, except for the first and sixth examples, essentially regular in structure. In the First Concerto Field ignores the first subject and proceeds straightway with the second subject, whereas in the Sixth he dispenses with the second subject altogether. In his avoidance of a conventional *cadenza*, Field was looking forward, rather than back, and this is witnessed by the fact that, on the only occasion where a *cadenza* occurs (in the Fifth Concerto), it is an accompanied one, still a great innovation in his day, despite Beethoven's example in the 'Emperor' Concerto.

Slow movements were generally much simpler in design, of course, than first movements, and often suggested an operatic aria with the soloist taking the place of the singer. Either the orchestra, or the soloist alone, could start the movement, or both parties combined, as in Field's Second and Sixth Concertos. Perhaps surprisingly, he does not favour the soloist embarking on his own in the remaining slow movements, which even Mozart had done, in the F sharp minor *Adagio* of his A Piano Concerto, K 488, his only complete movement in that key. Whether the movement is ternary, or double-ternary (that is, with two episodes), there is often an element of variation present, particularly in these concertos, where the return of each main theme receives different embellishment on each appearance. In general, if an opportunity for a *cadenza* was allowed, it was understood that such a *cadenza* should be short and expressive, like those in the First Concerto, rather than long and flamboyant as in first movements. The slow movements of the Second, Fourth and Sixth Concertos are basically ternary, or double-ternary in design, whilst that of the First Concerto is cast as a theme with two variations on James Hook's song, '*Twas within a mile of Edinboro' Town*' (see Ex. 36).

## Ex. 36

**Adagio non troppo**

Ped. \*

Interestingly, whilst the ‘Scotch Snap’ appears frequently throughout the movement, its use in the works of Field, is restricted mainly to his very early compositions (this concerto, Second Sonata and the *Pastoral* in A), and occasionally also as a decorative element in concerto passage-work. In fact it hardly appears at all in his one obvious ‘Scottish’ piece, the *Rondo Écossais*!

The only remaining slow movement, from the Fifth Concerto, is purely orchestral, and exists essentially as an introduction to the final rondo. Although the soloist makes a short intrusion with a reference to the ensuing rondo theme, it would appear, in consideration of Field’s other works, to be little more than a subconscious process on the composer’s part, rather than a conscious effort to achieve cohesion by using thematic relationships between movements. The unifying devices of Mendelssohn’s G minor, or Schumann’s Concerto, were not part of Field’s musical equipment. For the first two concertos, Field favoured the dominant key for their slow movements: in the Fourth and Sixth, he prefers a mediant relationship, whilst the short *Adagio* of the Fifth Concerto remains in the tonic key.

Field’s closing rondos vary from being overlong, to being more economic in length, but then suffering from the lack of contrasting episodes. Basically, each one is

cast in simple rondo form, and there is thus a certain similarity of construction between them. In the First, Third and Seventh Concertos, the rondo is begun by the orchestra; only in the second does the piano begin solo, whilst the rondos of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Concertos are commenced by both parties together. Three appearances of the rondo main theme occur in each example and, in the first six concertos, they are separated by episodes. These, too, follow a pattern in that the first episode is much simpler in design than the second, and is usually far less adventurous, in terms of key contrast. Except for the First Concerto, where the first episode is in the subdominant, the dominant is the favoured key in the Second to Sixth Concertos. The second episode generally contains the greatest variety of modulations, ideas, and orchestral and solo writing and, whilst no true development of material really occurs, the resulting mixture usually produces the most successful part of the rondo, if the internal points of construction are not examined too minutely.

In the First Concerto's rondo, whilst the second episode in the tonic minor is of greater proportions than the first, it is only from the Second Concerto onwards that this characteristic of design can really be seen emerging. The second episode of the rondo in the Second Concerto is far more substantial, with its long section in the tonic minor, which leads enharmonically to further distinct passages in remote keys, culminating in a lengthy *fugato*, and Field's most extended essay in contrapuntal technique in his whole concerto output. From the Third Concerto, a new element occurs – the addition of a subsection, quite different in character from the rest of the rondo, and usually with a change of tempo, or time signature. This is exemplified by the *Più Moderato* section in the Third Concerto, which may have intentionally been incorporated to compensate for the absence

of a slow movement *per se*, confirming that the concerto was actually played as written, without the conjectured insertion of a *nocturne*. It is also seen in the short, rustic section in the Fourth, and the six-eight pastoral episode in the Fifth, where, just afterwards, a short reference to the first episode appears, then in the dominant, but now in the tonic, which is, in fact, the closest which Field comes to writing a sonata-rondo. The rondo of the Sixth Concerto is of very small proportions, with little in the way of contrasting episodes; however, in the second episode, a short passage in the tonic minor, with definite Russian overtones, occurs.

Ex. 37

The rondo of the Seventh Concerto is somewhat diffuse, but nevertheless can be seen as the final outcome of the design processes formulated in the earlier works. The first episode is now extended into two separate sub-sections, in the relative minor, and in the dominant. Field avoids the rather less-common plan of having four appearances of the rondo theme, in what is still basically a simple-rondo format, by moving straight from these two sub-sections without interposing a return of the rondo theme – in any case, he had already stated the main theme four times, at the beginning of the movement.

In the central section of the slow movement from Beethoven's Third Concerto, the composer broke new ground by making the piano accompany a duet for bassoon and flute, with quiet, rippling arpeggios. It became commonplace in romantic concertos (for

example, in the slow movement of Mendelssohn's G minor Concerto) for the piano to be given a subsidiary role here and there, but it was very unusual in 1800. Field, in accordance with his conception of the soloist's position of prime importance, makes very little use of this practice, but it is in this first A minor episode, that the piano accompanies various solo woodwind instruments.

Ex. 38

The musical score for Ex. 38 consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Oboe, the second for the Clarinet, the third for the Bassoon, and the fourth for the Flute. The piano accompaniment is shown in two staves: the upper staff is the right hand and the lower staff is the left hand. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a simple harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The woodwind parts have melodic lines with some rests and accidentals.

Especially in this rondo, there is more give and take between piano and orchestra than in previous finales, but, as far as the overall relationship throughout the seven concertos is concerned, the piano receives *prima donna* treatment, even though the 'chorus', too, has an important part to play. The second episode combines facets from all the previous rondos – beginning in the subdominant, (all earlier examples had begun either in the tonic, or tonic minor) it contains extended passages in remoter keys, references to the first episode's material, and incorporates a rather disconnected and enigmatic *Adagio* in four-four, beginning with a little three-note trumpet fanfare which, at the first performance, so strangely impressed the leading Parisian music critic, Joseph-Louis d'Ortigue, who likened it to a 'far-off voice floating upon the air' (see Ex. 39).

## Ex. 39

**Adagio**

*f* Trumpets

*p*

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

*p* Bsns / Vlas / Cellos

Basses

It would seem that Field's preference for the introduction of new and mainly contrasting material, at the expense of thematic development, might have persuaded him to create a more satisfactory vehicle as a finale, had he ever written an eighth concerto. Having initially turned his hand to evolving a more congenial first-movement design, he could subsequently have investigated a similar possibility for the finale. For the same reasons as in his formulating a first-movement design, Field was no doubt aware that, for him, the future would not be found in the simple-rondo plan, even less in the sonata-rondo design. Whilst acknowledging the fact that, from his listeners' point of view, the brilliant concluding rondo was almost obligatory, he had, by the Seventh Concerto, evolved a form, a one-movement concerto form, which really could, and indeed should have stood on its own. If Field had had the confidence in his design which Liszt had in his Second Concerto, mentioned later, this disjointed and redundant rondo need not have been written, and the one-movement form could have been attributed to John Field, rather than to his Hungarian successor, and quite some years earlier, too.

## FIELD'S ACHIEVEMENT & INFLUENCE

It is clear from contemporary reports that, by 1830, Field had become a legend, and that his superiority among pianists was so generally recognised that he was usually regarded as a leader of his profession by such eminent names as Elsner, Wieck, Kalkbrenner and Chopin, though their appraisal was based on the immense fame he had acquired throughout Europe, without him even having been obliged to leave Russia where he was idolised. The publication of his concertos, as well as his *Nocturnes* by *Breitkopf & Härtel*, which began about 1815, added to his already brilliant reputation as a pianist, and quickly became an essential part of the repertoire.

Field's art represented a new pianistic ideal, possibly enhanced somewhat by the fact that to hear him remained only a dream for most musicians, and the consequent glamour, which always surrounds a legendary figure, increased his influence even more. D'Ortigue wrote, in his *Balcon de l'Opéra*, 1833: 'As a pianist, Field has no rival, whether as regards genre or method. He has no adopted system and is of no school ... Field is Field ... a school of his own'. Despite the tendency to exaggerate, especially by those who had made the journey to Russia to hear Field play, such a reputation was certainly well earned; only to study the many detailed descriptions of his playing left by his pupils, colleagues, and by such esteemed musicians as Spohr, Hummel and Glinka, is to be made so readily aware that Field was a pianist of unique quality. Even at the beginning of his career, he was recognised as having outstanding ability or, as London's *Morning Post* in 1799 put it, was 'one of the best performers in the kingdom'. It must be said, however, that contemporary reports tended to praise his facility and technical

prohess, making no mention, at that time, of the poetic quality of his mature style, which accounted for Field's true position in the subsequent history of piano-playing, because of its strikingly individual nature. Louis Spohr, in his autobiography, is the first person to draw attention, on paper, to this most important aspect of Field's playing, neglected in earlier reports. Whilst Spohr mentions the young pianist's technical fluency, he goes on to write: '...the dreamy perfection of his execution. As soon as his touching performance began, one forgot everything and became all ears'. From this time onwards, all accounts of Field's playing praise its poetry, and the beautiful *cantabile* quality of his tone, even more than his obvious technical facility. Other great pianists have been eulogised for this precious singing quality, but none more frequently or more fervently than Field – even singers were advised to listen to his piano-playing, so that their performances might be enriched. Obviously, a degree of hyperbole is evident in some accounts, but it is still possible to arrive at what were the essential characteristics of his art.

Its technical perfection, though never an end in itself, was a very important aspect of it, and this he of course owed to the rigorous training of Clementi. Towards the end of his career, Field was regarded as the upholder of a great classical tradition of piano-playing. This tradition, which he shared with Cramer, and had received from Clementi and Dussek, was, above all else, one of restraint. This would explain the unprecedented addition of a second piano for the *L'Orage* section of the Fifth Concerto – Field would not allow one single instrument to be pounded, just to enable it to compete with the might of the full orchestra. In his playing, everything must be made to seem easy, however difficult it might really be. To this end, Field practised special exercises each day, often with a coin balanced on the back of his hand to ensure a quiet style and avoid all hasty

movements. This latter trick was part of Clementi's training and, in fact, remained in use for many years. Field regarded the key as an extension of the finger, and what he abominated was a percussive attack on the keyboard itself. It has already been noted that, in achieving his rounded, unforced singing-tone and marvellous agility, Field was very dependent on the character of the pianos of his time. Their pure, transparent tone and, above all, relatively easy action made the pianist's task something quite different from what it was to become after the changes which were forced on piano-makers by the next generation of virtuosi – Liszt, Thalberg and their followers. Field used Clementi's pianos in his youth, and sometimes those of Broadwood, but in later years his particular favourites were the instruments made by Tischner, a Prussian who emigrated to Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century and opened a successful piano factory which, however, went into liquidation on his death in 1830. Tischner's grand pianos are now very rare, but the best surviving instruments are still ideally suited to Field's style of playing. Their sweet, silvery tone and immediate response to infinitely small gradations of touch are exactly what Field's music demands.

Many composers had contributed to the development of the classical concerto form since the works of Mozart. Beethoven's five piano concertos show a constant attempt to mould the formal elements, in particular the problems of the first *tutti*, into a more musically-satisfying whole. The composers whose work played a part in the formation of Field's own concerto style must naturally include, in the first instance, his teachers Giordani and Clementi. The former's influence can be seen in the frequently-used two-movement form in his concertos, which Field himself employed in the Third and Seventh Concertos. Clementi's concertos are well made, with formal observances

worthy of such an eminent pedagogue, though lacking in any true creativity. The decorated *cantabile* style in parts of Dussek's concertos can be seen as embryonic for Field, who was at his most youthfully receptive age when Dussek was a leading figure in London's musical life. Steibelt, with whom Field was in direct competition in St Petersburg, had also been earlier in London, where his Second and Third Concertos met with great success. This Third Concerto contains a rondo, in which a storm is quite naïvely depicted, and which became the rage not only in London, but throughout Europe. Perhaps to oust it from its popular position Field later wrote his own Fifth Concerto entitled *L'Incendie par l'Orage*. Of more direct significance was the fact that Steibelt's concerto used a Scottish air as the basis of the slow movement. This practice had earlier been well-established by J C Bach, and Steibelt would certainly have been aware that such an inclusion would have gone down extremely well with the public at that time. Earlier, George Griffin, one of Field's greatest rivals, had just introduced his own concerto which contained a movement based on *The Blue Bells of Scotland*, and these two successes no doubt influenced Field's decision to employ a popular 'Scottish' air (actually by the contemporary English composer, James Hook) as the second movement of his debut concerto.

Although Mozart (in his E flat Concerto, K 271) had previously allowed the piano to join in the opening bars, the effect is far less striking than that achieved by Beethoven with the quiet opening of the Fourth Concerto mentioned earlier, or with the equally original, but quite different start of the 'Emperor' – a grand *cadenza* for the soloist, punctuated by three massive orchestral chords. Indeed, the problem of the opening was to be an important consideration in the subsequent development of the Romantic concerto

and, until a suitable compromise could be found, many concertos of the early nineteenth century, for instance by Moscheles and Cramer, have found no regular place in today's repertoire. In most of these examples, the first *tutti* sounds as though it was conceived after the soloist-orchestra exposition, and tacked on as a matter of convention. Mendelssohn, taking his cue from Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Concertos, scrapped the orchestral preamble altogether, and his three best-known concertos are all 'single-exposition' works. The G minor Concerto, performed a year earlier than Field's Seventh Concerto, has no great classical *tutti* to herald the development section, and the recapitulation is one of the shortest known. These formal experiments are the more successful by the use of certain unifying devices, which might have given Field's equally experimental canvasses far greater cohesion – in Mendelssohn's case, near the end of the last movement, quotations from the first movement are heard and this, together with the tucket of horns, used to unite the three movements, helps to create a more unified whole. The logical continuation of the experimental ideas first broached by Field, Spohr and Weber, and amplified by Mendelssohn, led ultimately to Liszt's Second Concerto, a real one-movement work, in fact a non-programmatic symphonic poem for piano and orchestra, not based on the sonata-form alternation of orchestral *ritornelli* and solo episodes, but at last reverting again to the 'concerto' in one of its earlier connotations – the opposition of two distinct tone masses. Whilst the time-span of Field's concertos, 1799 – 1832, is roughly paralleled, chronologically, by Beethoven's First, and Mendelssohn's G minor Concertos, the genealogy of Liszt's subsequent thinking is clearly shown by the fact that he does make specific mention of his acquaintance with the devices of formal unity in the earlier-written concertos of Herz, Moscheles and Field.

Field's influence in general tends to be somewhat diminished, partly because his actual ability to impart, to his pupils, the secrets of his own keyboard technique, was inclined to be somewhat variable. His main teaching method was by illustration; he would rarely explain the form of a composition, leaving this to the pupil to discover. Naturally, this pedagogic approach was suitable only for those pupils who already had a good musical training and, while he would have had a number of such pupils who interested him, probably the greater part of his teaching was no more to him than mere drudgery, since, like most fashionable teachers of his day, Field depended very largely on the patronage of the wealthy. He accepted pupils more often for their ability to pay his high fees, than for their talent. To his gifted pupils he gave his full attention, ever scrupulous about fingering, extremely critical of the use of force in tone-production, and prepared, on occasions, laboriously to write out technical exercises. The actual number of serious students trained by Field is smaller than might be supposed, in view of his long and illustrious career; it does, however, include some important names, among them Dubuk and Villoing, from whom stems the great tradition of Russian piano-playing, which has continued unbroken to the present day. Also numbered among his pupils were such names as Verstovsky, Gurilyev, Alabyev and Glinka, important figures in early Russian musical history.

It must be assumed that, to all intents and purposes, Field was not a teacher by vocation. In any case, his reputation owed very little to his teaching ability and, in fact, even the originality of his compositions, with their individual romantic charm, could only, to a very small degree, be considered as instrumental in securing Field's then highly-revered position. It was as a pianist that he was incomparable, for he was able to

reveal beauties of sound unheard before his time, and he constantly strove for, and attained many pianistic innovations during his lifetime. It is thus no surprise that one of his most celebrated pupils, Anton Kontski, said of Field that ‘he achieved the impossible’.

It is a sad fact that, as Dubuk put it, when concluding his memories of Field, ‘the tragedy of all great pianists (is) that their art died with them’. More recently, piano-rolls and their subsequent transfer to other recording media have, at least, somewhat diminished the ‘great tragedy’ to which Dubuk referred. Though, because of the vivid descriptions which can still be read, of Field’s art, it is not too hard for the modern listener or pianist to imagine that poetic, singing quality which is the hallmark of all Field’s best, and most characteristic music. Indeed, it was in this way that Wieck and Schumann, for example, were able, so lucidly, to appraise Field’s playing on such intimate terms, rather than hearing him first hand.

John Field’s most immediate influence is, of course, seen in the work of his Polish contemporary, Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 49). Even in Field’s First Concerto, the *fioriture*, so characteristic of the Irishman, and, of course, Chopin, is apparent (see Ex. 40).

## Ex. 40

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a trill marked with a '3' and an 18-measure crescendo marked '18 cresc.' leading to an 8va passage. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system also consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains an 8-measure passage marked '(8)' and a decrescendo marked 'dim.'. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Then, in the same concerto's rondo, Field uses a *bravura* pattern often later employed by Chopin (e.g. fourth bar after piano's entry in the E minor Concerto).

## Ex. 41

The image shows two side-by-side musical staves. The left staff is labeled 'FIELD' and the right staff is labeled 'CHOPIN'. Both staves are in treble clef and show an 8va passage. The FIELD passage is in E minor (two flats) and the CHOPIN passage is in E minor (one sharp).

Pianistically, Field's Second Concerto represents a considerable advance over its predecessor. This once-celebrated concerto was, in fact, admired and taught by Chopin, was thought 'divine' by Schumann, and was a staple part of the virtuoso's repertoire during much of the nineteenth century. It has also been said that this concerto, especially the opening movement, served Chopin as a model for his F minor Concerto (No 2, though written before No 1 in E minor), and certainly similarities, partly heightened by the shared key signature, can be seen (see Ex. 42).



Ex. 44

Musical score for Ex. 44, showing a piano passage. The score is in G-flat major (three flats) and 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a fermata over the final two notes. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The dynamic is marked *f* (forte) and the tempo is *con fuoco* (with fire).

Mozart had employed the same device, but his use, and that of Beethoven, tended rather to grow out of invertible counterpoint between both hands, as seen in the *Scherzo* from the Piano Sonata in A flat, Op 26.

Ex. 45

Musical score for Ex. 45, showing a piano passage. The score is in G-flat major (three flats) and 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with a fermata over the final two notes. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The dynamic is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte).

followed, 4 bars later by...

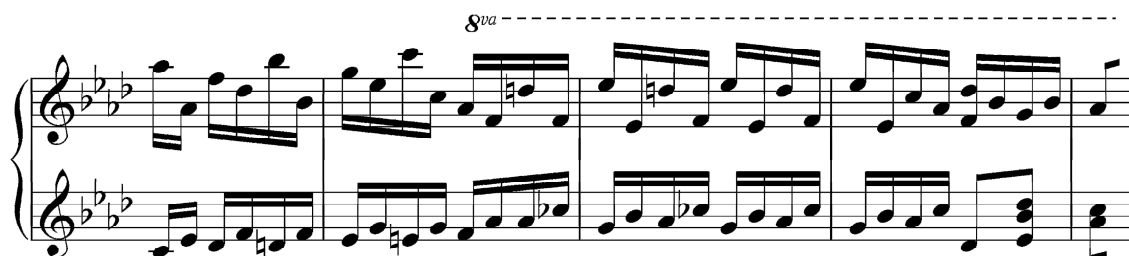
Musical score for Ex. 45, showing a piano passage. The score is in G-flat major (three flats) and 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with a fermata over the final two notes. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The dynamic is marked *f* (forte) and *sf* (sforzando).

Field's use throughout his extended passage is not, however, the result of such interplay. On two occasions the run is taken over by the right hand and, at times, the right hand participates in the semiquaver motion in counterpoint to the left hand. The whole passage is treated as a lengthy *fugato*, something rare indeed in Field's work, and does possibly substantiate a statement by one of his Russian biographers that Field underwent, about this time, a course of contrapuntal studies with the great theoretician, J H Miller,

for many years an important figure in Russian musical circles and who numbered Glinka among his pupils.

In this rondo, a further feature of Field's style has been particularly in evidence – his use of short episodes of a few bars, usually repeated, which are separate and complete entities, frequently moulded out of chord sequences which embody some element of moving away from the tonic and back to it. The final section of the coda offers two examples,

Ex. 46



And immediately following, is this episode, with its marching bass.

Ex. 47

The musical score for Ex. 47 is a piano piece in G major. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The right hand plays a melodic line with a repeating motif of eighth notes, while the left hand provides a marching bass line of eighth notes. A '8va' marking is placed above the treble staff, indicating an octave shift. The piece is in a simple, repetitive style characteristic of Field's rondo form.

Here the music proceeds not by development, but by a succession of complete and finite ideas - again a feature to be seen in Chopin's style.

In the exposition of the Third Concerto's opening movement, Field makes use of a short modulating passage which moves through a number of keys till it arrives again at

the starting one – a sort of chromatic ‘round-trip’ much used by Chopin, and here harmonically somewhat suggestive of the D flat major section from the C sharp minor Waltz, Op 64 No 2.

Ex. 48

FIELD

Musical score for FIELD, consisting of two systems of piano and bass staves. The first system shows a melodic line in the right hand with triplets and a *crescendo* marking, and a bass line with chords and triplets. The second system continues the melodic line, marked *8va* (octave), and includes a triplet and a sixteenth-note figure in the right hand, and a bass line with chords and triplets.

CHOPIN

**Più lento**

Musical score for CHOPIN, marked *Più lento* and *molto cantabile*. The score is in *mf* (mezzo-forte) and consists of two systems of piano and bass staves. The right hand features a melodic line with a long slur, and the left hand features a bass line with chords and a steady rhythm. Pedal markings (*Ped.* and *\* Ped.*) are indicated below the bass line.

The second movement, marked *Tempo di Polacca*, also exists in a separate, shorter form for piano solo, as the *Polonaise en Rondeau*. The future developments of the polonaise, in the hands of Chopin, should not any distort any modern appraisal of this

seemingly quite different-in-character piece by Field. In the early nineteenth century, the polonaise in Russia was an essential part of the ritual of the court and high society, and it is this aspect of it, rather than its national associations, which Field has expressed in his music, making it a resounding success with the aristocracy at every performance. Nevertheless, Field does make use of a rhythmic pattern of running semiquavers and paired chords, seen later in Chopin's *Grande Polonaise Brillante*.

Ex. 49

FIELD

CHOPIN

8<sup>va</sup>

The image shows two musical excerpts side-by-side. On the left, labeled 'FIELD', is a piano piece in B-flat major. The right hand has a melody with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and the left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. On the right, labeled 'CHOPIN', is a piano piece in B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with a trill and a grace note, marked '8<sup>va</sup>' (octave), and the left hand has a similar eighth-note accompaniment.

Subsequent passages even hint at the type of writing to come in the *Stretta quasi Presto* of Liszt's B minor Sonata.

Ex. 50

FIELD

LISZT

*p*

The image shows two musical excerpts side-by-side. On the left, labeled 'FIELD', is a piano piece in B-flat major. The right hand has a melody with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and the left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. On the right, labeled 'LISZT', is a piano piece in B minor. The right hand features a melodic line with a trill and a grace note, marked 'p' (piano), and the left hand has a similar eighth-note accompaniment.

It is, though, in the Fifth Concerto that the solo part bears the look of Chopin on the page more strikingly than any of Field's concerto movements so far; it is brilliant and difficult, containing a number of technical *tours de force* not to be found elsewhere in

Field's work. Frequently, passage-work, with its convoluted and chromatic patterns, suggests the kind of writing which Chopin would take further.

Ex. 51

In the first movement of the Sixth Concerto, there are sections where the use of repeated notes is much in evidence and the piano-writing again looks forward to Liszt, with its wider use of the keyboard.

Ex. 52

Later in the same movement, these repeated notes finally extend across the keyboard, in a similar manner to that in the fourteenth variation from Brahms's *Paganini* set (Book One), shortly before the coda (see Ex. 53),

## Ex. 53

FIELD

BRAHMS

Followed, shortly afterwards, by a section where the final bar recalls Chopin's *Étude* in A minor, Op 25 No 11.

## Ex. 54

FIELD

CHOPIN

In Field's final Concerto, there are many convoluted passages in sixths, as well as in tenths, and, in the following example, a phrase strongly reminiscent of a similar pattern from Chopin's *Grande Polonaise Brillante* (see Ex. 55).

## Ex. 55

FIELD  $8^{va}$

6

$8^{va}$

CHOPIN  $8^{va}$

leggiero

3

The principal interest in the G major interlude from the first movement, mentioned earlier, and subsequently published as *Nocturne* No. 12, lies in the harp-like accompaniment of the left hand.

## Ex. 56

Lento

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

This is actually the only instance in Field's music of a formula which was to become over-popular with later pianist-composers. It was, in fact, after hearing Field play this concerto in 1833 that Chopin added the *Andante Spianato* to his *Grande Polonaise Brillante*. It would indeed be hard not to see the similarities between Field's interlude and

the Chopin movement, first heard in 1835, both in the harp-like bass, floating theme and filigree decoration common to both, and, of course, the same choice of key.

Ex. 57

**Andante Spianato**

At the close of the movement, the soloist's part concludes with a florid passage and final trill. Like Field, Chopin in both his concertos seeks ways of amplifying the conventional concluding trill for the solo instrument, as previously favoured by writers of the classical concerto.

Ex. 58

FIELD

(Ex. 58 continued)

CHOPIN (from Concerto No 1)

ff marcato

8va

tr

Later, in the closing rondo, Field incorporates a technical pattern which Chopin uses in the coda of the finale of the F minor Concerto.

Ex. 59

FIELD

8va

3

CHOPIN

8va

brillante 3

3

The Belgian music theorist, historian, and composer, François Joseph Fétis's pronouncement on the Seventh Concerto is basically true for all the concertos. Field, who could devise really effective smaller modulations, was more often than not at sea when it came to managing these on a larger canvas; again and again, when the music seems to be moving somewhere, the listener is upset by trite cadences and too-frequent returns to the basic key, by suddenly-curtailed melodic-lines, and unmistakable signs of his not knowing where to go next. It is to his great detriment that a series of 'happy ideas', often highly original ones, cannot alone make a convincing larger work – a sense of development and a greater appreciation of form are such an essential ingredient here.

John Field's place in musical history rests if not solely on his invention of the *Nocturne* and its subsequent flowering in the works of Chopin. From the biographical details of his strange and colourful life, it becomes apparent that Field's seven piano concertos, and, of course, his playing of them, should be considered in a more serious light, if a more accurate picture of this most individual of Irishmen, and of his initial influence, particularly on Chopin, is to be drawn.

It has been noted that Field's sense of construction is often suspect on the larger canvas of an extended work for piano and orchestra, and this has largely accounted for the fact that his concertos have all but disappeared from today's concert hall. From the plethora of works of this genre which abound from the early stages of musical Romanticism, it is not surprising that out of Field's seven concertos perhaps only two or three could possibly hold any lasting position (No 2, No 3 and No 7), and even these would slot into a similar compartment as Hummel's A minor Concerto, Op 85, or even Mendelssohn's Second Concerto in D minor. Chopin's two concertos were a necessary stage in his development, both as a creative artist and as a performing musician with a public to impress. They show him unhappy in such large-scale compositions, particularly in their orchestration, a department where Field does have much greater prowess. It would be natural to assume that had Chopin, in fact, needed to write even five concertos, then, like Field's perhaps only two or three would remain as relatively well-known to the general public. In composing seven concertos, works which, of necessity, must include 'something for everyone', it is understandable to find rambling passages and clichés in Field's work. But, amongst these uncertainties, there are points of great subtlety which, if only Field, with greater self-criticism, could have presented in a more consistent form,

might then have afforded him possibly a position in musical history of slightly greater import than ‘inventor of the *Nocturne*’ would suggest. For this is to base an appraisal of this composer’s works on a mere handful of miniatures, when compared with the real bulk of his output, namely the piano concertos.

The importance of his pianistic innovations justifies Field holding a position at the source of the Romantic Movement in musical composition. His contributions to the developing form of the romantic piano concerto, still one of the most popular and entertaining musical genres, were vital, providing the necessary fuel to fire the creative power of later composers. Many reasons have, of course, been put forward to account for the relative neglect of John Field’s concertos, and for the consequently skewed estimation of his true contribution to musical history. Whilst he achieved great fame during his lifetime, this was only on account of his great executant ability. Largely, the musical content was not fully understood at the time, resulting in the almost total neglect, not too long after his death, of all but his *Nocturnes*. Had he lived some twenty years later, he might have been attributed with a far more significant role in the development of the romantic piano concerto. John Field did invent the *Nocturne*, but he also brought into being a whole new range of pianistic expressiveness and feeling, from the *cantilena* melodies, with their opera-like embellishments in the *Nocturnes* and the Concertos, to the *bravura* technical passages and devices in the latter, and in other works. The romantic flavour in music came into being with Field, but unless the larger canvasses of the Concertos are examined in conjunction with the *Nocturnes*, it is really not possible to assess the full extent of his influence.

Despite the noted shortcomings in his Concertos, there clearly remains enough evidence to confirm that John Field was still one of the few truly original minds. During his lifetime, he was hailed by the French as ‘The Racine of the Piano’. To make this comparison today, some three hundred or so years later, would be like excluding such great dramas as *Phèdre*, or *Iphigénie*, when seeking similarly to appraise the work of that eminent seventeenth-century French tragic poet!

But then, perhaps the French might, after all, have been cannily prophetic, had they meant to refer to Field not as ‘Le Racine du Piano’, but as ‘la *racine* du piano’ – the ‘root, or origin of piano-playing’. A true appreciation of his seven piano concertos would certainly add more than a little weight to this appraisal, when considered alongside John Field’s already acknowledged achievements in the creation of the *Nocturne*.

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