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# The raised fourth degree of the scale in Chopin's mazurkas

## Summary

This article focuses on the raised fourth or Lydian scale degree of the scale in Chopin's mazurkas from the viewpoint of the stylised mazurka's fusion of folkloric elements and nineteenth-century tonal language. A brief exposition of the functions of the raised fourth and its integration into the tonal structures of the mazurkas is given. An investigation of the raised fourth in three selected mazurkas reveals a significant expansion of its role musical meaning, function and effect. As an authentic, modal, structural, motivic and form-generating device, it is in terms of integral to tonal elaboration, development, unification, colouration and contrast.

## Die verhoogde vierde toonleertrap in Chopin se mazurkas

Hierdie artikel fokus op die verhoogde vierde of Lidiese toonleertrap in Chopin se mazurkas vanuit die oogpunt van die gestileerde mazurka wat 'n versmelting van folkloristiese elemente met negentiende-eeuse tonale taal behels. 'n Kort uiteensetting van die funksies van die verhoogde vierde en die integrasie daarvan in die tonale strukture van die mazurkas word gegee. 'n Ondersoek van drie geselekteerde mazurka toon 'n beduidende uitbouing van die verhoogde vierde se rol betreffende musikale betekenis, funksie en effek. As outentieke, modale, strukturele, motiwiese en vorm-genererende middel vorm dit 'n integrale deel van tonale uitbreiding, ontwikkeling, eenheid, kleuring en kontras.

**F**rederic Chopin's artistic stylisations of the mazurka genre, presented in his 59 mazurkas for piano, are the result of a fusion of authentic Polish folk elements and mazurka types with nineteenth-century tonal language and with his own unique compositional style. He succeeds in retaining the original stylistic function and effect of folkloric devices and mazurka traits, while at the same time placing them in the service of major/minor tonality and his own idiomatic requirements. Instead of a purely referential application of such elements, which is their function within the context of a particular folk music and folk dance tradition, broader applications are made to suit Romantic tonal-structural and stylistic ideals. These include the need for tonal elaboration, colouring and contrast, which are realised compositionally through increased linear voice-leading activity, melodic and harmonic inflections and substitutions, greater variety in chord constructions and greater flexibility in harmonic progressions. In all these developments, folkloric melodic devices in particular were made to play significant roles in terms of, tone, structure, motif, colour and contrast.

As for his compositional style and idiom, Chopin's almost exclusive focus on the piano as a medium meant that he had to concentrate more than usual on elements of elaboration, colouration and contrast in order to show the full extent of his artistic versatility and expression. The challenge of limiting himself to the expressive and idiomatic possibilities of a single instrument, the piano, compelled him to draw on as many musical experiences as were available to him. In so doing, he not only revolutionised piano writing, but also had a profound influence on Romantic compositional style. His pre-empting — along with Liszt — of the later nineteenth-century focus on nationalism in music and the wealth which this focus offered individual musical expression undoubtedly has its roots in the re-interpretation of folk elements and traits, rather than mere reflection of these features in quotations from existing folk melodies and rhythms (which, incidentally, are very seldom found in Chopin's compositions).

On the importance of Polish folk elements and their influence on Chopin's mazurkas, Czekanowska (1963: 122) points out that modality and specific folk chromaticisms (meaning isolated modal

inflections) had a direct bearing on the characteristic features of Chopin's national style. With reference to Chopin's tonal language, it is equally true that these elements enrich the harmonic and melodic content and character of his mazurkas in a special way due to the nature of the fusion process mentioned above. The combined presence of modality and chromatic inflections in his music results in colourful tonal structures and in a richness of melodic/motivic material.

I have attempted to address the influence of modality in more detail in an article on Chopin's contribution to the mazurka focusing on the application of modal elements in the mazurkas (Viljoen 1993). The current study develops this issue further by concentrating on Chopin's treatment of one specific modal element in his mazurkas, namely the so-called raised fourth or Lydian degree of the scale. Of all the elements of modality, the Lydian or raised fourth is the most notable and far-reaching in terms of pitch inflection, structural design and colouring. The emphasis of this study will be on the nature of the raised fourth and its integration into the tonal structures of Chopin's mazurkas as part of their structural, motivic and formal content.

## 1. The nature of the raised fourth

Before dealing with the nature of the raised fourth, it is necessary to summarise Chopin's application of modality in his mazurkas. First, modality in the mazurkas is mainly associated with particular inflections of the scale (notably the raised fourth and lowered or Phrygian second) rather than with underlying modes or modal tonalities.<sup>1</sup> These inflections appear within major/minor tonalities which, on the one hand, emphasises their modal quality and, on the other hand, increases their functional ability to include chromatic, motivic, structural and even form-generating devices.

The principal modal element in both the original folk mazurkas and Chopin's stylisations is the raised fourth. It derives from the

1 There are only two mazurkas in which the tonal orientation may be regarded as modal, namely the mazurkas Op 24/2 and 41/2 which respectively are based on the Lydian and Phrygian modes.

Lydian mode, as well as from the so-called Polish mode, which comprises the first six notes of the Lydian mode (Schaffer 1973: 6). It is also associated with one of the two types of gypsy scales found in the mazurkas (the one containing an augmented second interval between the lowered third and raised fourth degrees of the scale). Instances of this particular form of gypsy scale in the mazurkas occur in Opp 7/1, 17/3, 24/1, 59/3, and 68/2 and 4. The Lydian mode itself is found in only three mazurkas: Opp 24/2, 56/2 and 68/3.

The raised fourth operates in three principal ways in the mazurkas: as an authentic Lydian or gypsy element; as a leading tone to the fifth-degree of the scale, thus playing an important part in tonicisations, and as a single inflection in the form of chromatic passing and neighbouring notes. An instance of the raised fourth's operation as both a gypsy element and a leading tone to the dominant is shown in Example 1, the opening eight bars of the mazurka Op 24/1.<sup>2</sup>

Example 1: Mazurka Op 24/1, bars 1-8

Here, C-sharp appears first as the raised fourth of G minor in bar 6. It forms part of a descending stepwise melodic motion from D (bar 6), concluding with D an octave lower in bar 8. The gypsy-flavour is caused by the augmented second interval between C-sharp and B-flat in the descending scale passage. However, on the third beat of bar 7, C-sharp appears again an octave lower in the left-hand accompaniment where it functions as a leading tone of the dominant D. In view

2 All score examples are taken from Henle 1978.

of the harmonic content at this point (a motion from I to V via the secondary dominant of V), the C-sharp of bar 6 is also associated with this harmonic progression through its pitch class and registral connection with the leading-tone C-sharp of bar 7. The first (purely modal) C-sharp is therefore a subtle forerunner of the second (leading-tone) C-sharp which has a predominantly structural voice-leading function. At the same time, however, the leading-tone function of the C-sharp of bar 7 is blurred by the simultaneous occurrence of D in the accompaniment which acts as an anticipation of the dominant harmony or temporary tonic effect to follow in bar 8. In so doing, the second C-sharp also seems to echo the modal effect of the first.

One of several instances in which the raised fourth is used as a chromatic passing tone is the mazurka Op 6/3. Example 2 shows bars 41-48 where it appears first as a descending chromatic passing tone in bar 41 and then as an ascending chromatic passing tone in bar 42, where it functions as a Lydian element rather than as a leading tone of the dominant. The same situation occurs in bars 45-46, whereupon the descending chromatic passing-tone A-sharp appears again in bar 47, as was the case in bar 43. Here, however, instead of a direct motion to A-natural in the melodic line, as in bar 43, the motion is interrupted by an F-sharp which, together with the octave doubling of the melody in the left hand, makes the A-sharp sound like a raised fourth degree, hence the Lydian effect. The reason for this is that the intervening F-sharp prevents a direct resolution of A-sharp to A-natural.

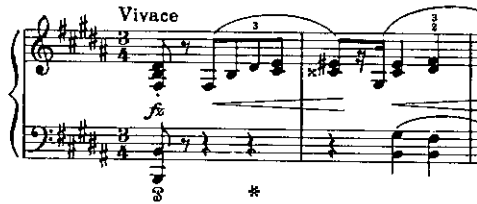
Example 2: Mazurka Op 6/3, bars 41-48

The image displays a musical score for Example 2, consisting of two systems of music. The first system, labeled '33', covers bars 41-43. The second system, labeled '44', covers bars 44-48. The music is in 3/4 time and D major. The right hand plays a melodic line with chromatic passing tones, and the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. Dynamics include piano (p) and crescendo (cresc.) leading to forte (f).



Two further prominent instances of the raised fourth as a chromatic passing tone without any Lydian connections occur in the main themes of the mazurkas Opp 30/3 and 63/1. An example of the raised fourth as a chromatic lower neighbour of the fifth degree of the scale, once again without Lydian connections, is found in the main theme of the mazurka Op 17/1. Example 3 gives bars 9-10 of Op 30/3, as well as the opening bars of Opp 63/1 and 17/1, respectively.

Example 3: Mazurka Op 30/3, bars 9-10; Mazurkas Opp 63/1 and 17/1, bars 1-2



### 3. The raised fourth in selected mazurkas

The following selection of mazurkas focuses on Chopin's use of the raised fourth as an authentic, structural, formal and motivic element and on how these features are integrated into a single mazurka. It also makes some observations on the role of the raised fourth in terms of tonal elaboration, colouration and contrast.

In the Trio section of the mazurka Op 68/3 (see Example 4a), the E-natural in the melodic line first appears as a chromatic lower neighbour of F in bar 37, as well as in bar 41, but for the rest of the Trio it functions as an authentic Lydian element, supported and enhanced by a drone-bass fifth on B-flat in the left-hand accompaniment (see bars 38-39 and 42-43 of the Trio).

Example 4a: Mazurka Op 68/3, Trio

The E as a chromatic lower neighbour of F is derived from its motivic and structural role as the diatonic lower neighbour of the tonic F on more than one structural level during the first 25 bars, as well as in the concluding bars of the mazurka. A middleground voice-leading graph of bars 1-25 presented in Example 4c (the score of these bars being given in Example 4b) shows how the motion F-E-F represents the underlying melodic motion for bars 1-8 as well as on a higher level for bars 1-25. The neighbour-note and Lydian motions of the Trio are therefore surface parallelisms of the middleground configurations of bars 1-25. Ultimately the F-E-F configuration is seen to span the melodic motion of bars 1-45, including the large A-section and Trio (see Example 4d). Conversely it can also be said that

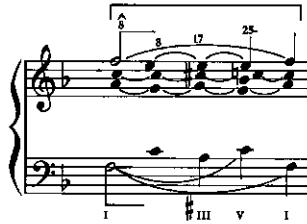
the striking neighbour-note Lydian configuration in the folk-melodic line of the Trio may have exerted a subconscious influence on Chopin's creation a tonal structure determined and unified by the same feature. From a conceptual point of view, it is also significant that, what started off as a unifying diatonic neighbour-note configuration in the main key of F major subsequently became a Lydian surface feature by means of a simple key change from the tonic F major to the subdominant B-flat major, which merely altered the melodic functions of the unchanged configuration.

Example 4b: Mazurka Op 68/3, score, bars 1-25

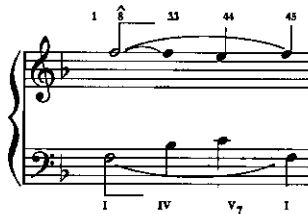




Example 4c: Mazurka Op 68/3, underlying melodic motion, bars 1-25



Example 4d: Mazurka Op 68/3, underlying melodic motion, bars 1-45



In the mazurka Op 7/1 (Example 5a), E-natural, the raised fourth of its B-flat major tonality, is first encountered as a chromatic lower neighbour of the fifth degree F in the various statements of the main theme. It also appears as a lower neighbour of F in the B-section (bars 25-32), but tonally redefined within the tonicised F major or dominant key area. Finally, it occurs in the Trio section (bars 45-52) where it has no less than four different functions.

Example 5a: Mazurka Op 7/1

Vivace  $\text{♩} = 50$  Opus 7 Nr. 1

5 10 15 20 25

*f* *cresc.* *ff* *p scherz.* *sfz* *p* *legato* *stretto* *tr*

31 *a tempo* *poco rall.* *f* *tr*

37

43 *sotto voce* *pp*

48 *rubato* *poco rall.*

53 *a tempo* *cresc.* *f* *tr*

59 1. 2.

First, it is a Lydian element in so far as it forms part of a portion of the gypsy scale on B-flat with which the melodic line of the Trio is associated. At the same time, it appears over a drone-bass fifth in the left-hand accompaniment, built on G-flat, the lowered sixth degree

of B-flat. The drone and the E, together with other structural voices in the melodic line, produce an augmented sixth chord which is prolonged throughout the Trio, resolving to dominant harmony only at its end Trio (see Example 5b). Thus the E playing both a prolongational and a formal role as it becomes the underlying melodic component for almost the entire Trio. Example 5b demonstrates the E of the Trio to be a middleground chromatic lower neighbour of F, relating it to its appearances in the main theme and in the B-section. This once again shows the penetration of the raised fourth into the large tonal design of the mazurka. In retrospect, there is a sense that the somewhat forced application of E in the main theme, juxtaposed to the B-flat major tonic harmony, hints at its structural and formal roles in the Trio as well as in the mazurka as a whole. It is also interesting to note that the E first appears in a lower register in the main theme and then an octave higher in the B-section. In the Trio, the situation is reversed, in melodic terms too, in that the E is preceded by F, whereas it is followed by F in the main theme. These features reinforce both the structural and the motivic significance of the raised fourth.

Example 5b: Mazurka Op 7/1, Trio



Finally, the mazurka Op 68/2 demonstrates the use of the raised fourth as part of a single melodic/motivic configuration in which it has both a modal and a non-modal character. The main melodic feature of this mazurka is the raised fourth D-sharp which appears prominently in the main theme as an authentic gypsy element (see Example 6a). In the voice leading, however, it is a chromatic lower neighbour of the fifth degree E to which it directly resolves in the melodic line each time it appears. From a structural point of view, this function of the D-sharp takes precedence over its gypsy

derivation in spite of the presence of the characteristic augmented second interval between the D-sharp and the third degree C immediately preceding it. Example 6b, which is a voice-leading graph of bars 1-8, clearly shows how D-sharp embellishes E in the voice leading, a fact emphasised by the delicate ornamentation of D-sharp on the melodic surface. The result is a melodic neighbour-note configuration or motive E-D-sharp-E in the foreground voice leading. Thus we have an instance of the raised fourth operating both as a gypsy element and as an embellishing structural lower neighbour note.

Example 6a: Mazurka Op 68/2, score, bars 1-8

Example 6b: Mazurka Op 68/2, voice-leading graph, bars 1-8

In the brief B-section of bars 17-20 (see Example 6c), the same configuration occurs in the left-hand accompaniment, but it is tonally redefined within the local C major key-area (III of A minor). Simultaneously, a transposed version of the motive is displayed in the melodic line, itself a transposed repetition of the opening of the main theme. Here, the raised fourth F-sharp embellishes the fifth degree G while at the same time functioning as a Lydian element within the scale of C major. Example 6d is a voice-leading graph of bars 17-20.

Example 6c: Mazurka Op 68/2, score, bars 17-20

Example 6d: Mazurka Op 68/2, voice-leading graph, bars 17-20

In the Trio (bars 29-44), the E-D-sharp-E voice-leading motive acquires an additional upper neighbour F-sharp to produce a double neighbour-note figure E-D-sharp-F-sharp-E (see Examples 6e and f, being the score and a voice-leading graph, of the Trio respectively). The addition of the F-sharp, together with the key change from A minor to A major, causes the raised fourth to lose its gypsy modal character and to function only as a chromatic lower neighbour of the fifth degree E. This altered version of the neighbour-note motive is transferred an octave down in bars 35-36, coinciding with a temporary key change to C-sharp minor (III of A major). The latter resembles the situation during bars 17-20, where the neighbour-note motive also occurs an octave lower within III of A minor. For the rest of the Trio, the raised fourth occurs again in an inner voice on the

first beats of bars 39 and 43, this time as a curiously misplaced chromatic upper neighbour of the third degree C-sharp. The situation is, however, immediately corrected by the expected diatonic upper neighbour D on the second beats of the two bars in question. This suggests that Chopin is referring back to the modal character of the D-sharp in preparation for its final return as a gypsy element in the repetition of the large A-section which follows the Trio and with which the mazurka closes.

Example 6e: Mazurka Op 68/2, Trio

Example 6f: Mazurka Op 68/2, voice-leading graph, Trio

Further examination of the mazurka's voice leading reveals several more instances of the double neighbour-note motive of the Trio. These occur as part of inner voice activities during sections Aa (bars 1-8) and Ab (bars 17-20). First, there is a circling motion around C in the highest voice of the left-hand accompaniment during Aa, comprising the notes C-B-C-D-C (see Examples 6a and b). This relates to the motion of the melodic line of bars 35-36, as well as to that of the alto voice in bars 31-32. Secondly, the E-D-sharp-E figure in the left-hand of bars 17-20 is altered in bar 19 to include F in place of D-sharp, thus producing an overall motion of E-D-sharp-E-F-E for bars 17-20 (see Example 6d). This time it relates both to the melodic line of bars 31-32 and to the already indicated inner voice of bars 35-36. These as yet unobtrusive accompanying figures may therefore be said to be the initiation of the development of the double neighbour motive in the Trio.

### 3. Conclusions

What may be regarded as an authentic modal feature in Chopin's mazurkas is significantly expanded in musical meaning, function and effect. Chopin succeeds in retaining the original modal qualities of the raised fourth, as either a Lydian or gypsy element, by means of the directness with which it is presented and the particular modes or scales (albeit mostly in fragmented form) with which it is associated. Simultaneously it is treated as an integral part of major/minor tonality and of voice-leading activity, where its function as a chromatic, motivic, structural and form-generating device is evident.

In terms of tonal structure and form design, the raised fourth becomes part of tonal voice-leading elaboration and development, and, in the case of Op 7/1, the controlling melodic element for all but the final bar of its Trio, the result being a significant tonal expansion of the raised fourth, becoming a huge interpolation between the structural tonic and dominant harmonies in the mazurka's middleground. Although neither a raised fourth, nor a Lydian element in the main tonality of F major in Op 68/3, the lower neighbour-note E, which later becomes a Lydian element, nonetheless features as the underlying prolongational melodic element for the generation of the B section (bars 17-24).



In terms of motivic design, the raised fourth usually forms part of, and effects, important melodic/motivic configurations in both foreground and middleground structures and thus becomes a strong unifying element in the voice leading of a particular mazurka. Its modal character is retained, emphasised or played down, in accordance with on the nature of the motivic configuration and the tonal context. As a modal element, however, the raised fourth is predominantly associated with motivic and structural design and is hardly ever used purely as a superficial modal colouring device or stylistic feature.

The different structural functions and contexts within which the raised fourth operates in the mazurkas make it a powerful tool for tonal elaboration, colouration and contrast. Its simultaneous application on more than one level of structure, that is from a controlling background/middleground element to a part of surface melodic configurations and embellishments, demonstrates its role in both tonal-structural design and elaboration.

An important factor in the richness of voice leading and of colouring effects in the mazurkas is the combination of modal and chromatic inflections. The colouring effect of the raised fourth is particularly evident in this regard, by means of its combined modal and chromatic functions, reinforced by its motivic significance and regularity as a part of melodic embellishments.

Another feature of tonal colouration in the mazurkas is to be found in the juxtaposition of folkloric/colouring and motivic/structural applications of the raised fourth, as well as of any other modal element or inflection. In the opening theme of Op 68/2, for example, the gypsy modal effect created by the augmented second intervals in the melodic line between the third and raised fourth degrees is set against the A-minor main key of the mazurka. The result is the simultaneous presence of both the A-minor tonality and

apart from the desire for greater freedom of tonal movement and expression, more emphasis was placed on tonal ambiguity and conflict in realising these objectives.

The different functional and contextual applications of the raised fourth also play a role in the creation of contrasting voice-leading content in various form sections, as is illustrated in the mazurka Op 68/2. Here, the contrast between the A-section and the Trio is not only due to the tonal change from A minor to A major, but also to the contrasting applications of the raised fourth, first as a combined modal and melodic/motivic element and then as a purely chromatic lower neighbour-note motivic figure, influenced partly by the tonal quality change and partly by the addition of the F-sharp upper neighbour-note to the abovementioned motivic figure. The raised fourth, however, plays no notable role in setting up contrasting key areas, except perhaps for the mazurka Op 7/1, where the tonally contrasting augmented sixth chord on G-flat is derived from the raised fourth as both a Lydian and a chromatic motivic element in the mazurka's tonal structure.

Of all the modal and chromatic elements available, the raised fourth is the most dissonant and directional. This is due, on the one hand, to its tritone relationship with the tonic scale degree (the most dissonant interval) and, on the other hand, to its functional relationship with the dominant (its leading tone). It is these two tonal relationships and the ways in which they are presented and developed that make the raised fourth perhaps the most significant and far-reaching voice-leading device in the mazurkas. The various influences and tonal effects simultaneously exerted on it and presented by the tonic and dominant degrees within a given tonality represent one of the keys to the richness in tonal voice-leading content, activity and colouration in these tonally remarkable and forward-looking compositions.

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