

Chopin Jazz Variation

By
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A few weeks ago I decided to bring out the Chopin Etudes. I quickly realized that I should do that more often. In order to play these etudes musically, a high level of technical skill is a must. The only way to achieve this is to practice, and practice correctly. Since I had not played the etudes in a long time, I lowered the tempo considerably. This made it easier to memorize the piece and to acquire muscle memory. I'm still working on this overwhelming piece but bit-by-bit I feel that my technique is improving.

I have also applied the Chopin etudes to my jazz playing, which presents a whole new set of problems and challenges. By taking parts of the etudes and altering the melody, harmony and rhythm, you can create variations which are suitable for use in a jazz context. The idea behind this approach is make all music fair game, thereby expanding your imagination and creativity. I don't mean for it to be a substitute for Chopin's version, but after you learn the original version you are free to experiment.

The following examples show how you can create your own versions of Chopin's etude #1 in C-major.

First 8 bars of the original version.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the first 8 bars of Chopin's Etude #1 in C major. The first system covers bars 1 through 4, and the second system covers bars 5 through 8. Both systems are written in 4/4 time and include a treble and bass staff. The first system is marked 'Allegro' and 'legato'. The bass line in the first system starts with a forte 'f' dynamic and includes a 'Ped.' (pedal) marking. The second system starts with a '3' (triple) marking in the treble staff and includes 'Ped.' markings in both staves. A dashed line with the number '8' above it spans across the two systems, indicating the 8-bar phrase. Asterisks are placed at the end of the first system and at the end of the second system.

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5

8

Leod. * Leod. *

7

8

Leod. * Leod. *

Version 1: The pattern in bar 1 and 2 is played over a B \flat chord. This creates the sound of a B \flat 7 #11 chord.

legato

8

B \flat 7 B \flat 13 B \flat 9 B \flat 7

Version 2: The pattern from bar 1 is used, but each note is approached from a whole step above. Experiment with approaching the notes from half steps and whole steps above and below.

legato

CMaj7 C \flat 6

Version 3: The pattern from bar 3 is used over a $A\flat 13$. The F is the 13th, and the A is the $\flat 9$.

Version 3 musical score: Treble clef, 4/4 time, *legato*. A dashed line with the number 8 above it spans the first four measures. Chords are $A\flat 7$, $A\flat 13$, $A\flat 13$, $A\flat 7$, and $D\flat 9^6$.

Version 4: Each note in bar 3 is approached from a half step below.

Version 4 musical score: Treble clef, 4/4 time, *legato*. Chords are F6, FMaj7, and F6.

Version 5: Bar 4 from the original etude. The two first beats are exactly like written. Beat two and three are transposed to fit the $B7\#9$ chord. In the last bar the pattern is inverted and the notes are changed to fit the $E m7$ chord.

Version 5 musical score: Treble clef, 4/4 time. A dashed line with the number 8 above it spans the first two measures. Chords are $F\# m7(\flat 5)$, $B7\#9$, and $E m7$.

As you can see in these examples, the possibilities are endless. Take bar 5-8 of the etude and create your own variations. Practice your variations and learn to play them musically. Remember to always be musical when you practice!

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