

How to Cheat at Piano:  
The History and Ethics of Redistribution, Along with a Practical Guide

By  
Eric Tran

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The written project is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Christopher Taylor, Professor, Piano

Laura Schwendinger, Professor, Composition

Jessica Johnson, Professor, Piano and Piano Pedagogy

Brian Hyer, Professor, Music Theory

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## A Note on the Examples

Since a high-quality scan was unavailable to me because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I renotated Figure 10, faithfully reproducing Rami Bar-Niv's redistribution of hands. Most examples have been reproduced from sources in the public domain. Some small excerpts, within 1–4 measures are cited from sources in copyright; I assert that my use of these excerpts is not an infringement of copyright and falls under U.S. Fair Use law for the following reasons:

1. The purpose of this document is scholarly, and the excerpts are presented with commentary and criticism. Taken as a whole, the excerpts take on new meaning as a novel compendium of pianistic solutions.
2. This document expands musical knowledge and encourages the free spread of ideas to the public's benefit.
3. The amount excerpted is small—at times just one measure and never more than four.
4. The publication of this document has no effect on the potential sales of any of the cited sources. No musician can learn or perform a piece from the excerpts presented.

## How to Cheat at Piano:

### The History and Ethics of Redistribution, Along with a Practical Guide

The history of hand redistribution at the piano has never been written about in any comprehensive way; what exists currently are isolated remarks—passages in books on piano-playing and footnotes in performance editions. Redistribution, also known as *divisi* fingering, re-arrangement, re-handing, rewriting, or—colloquially—cheating, refers to taking notes apparently written for the left hand with the right hand, or vice versa. The word cheating suggests some sort of moral component—that there is something dishonest about redistributing notes between the hands, the assumption being that notes written in the lower staff, for instance, *must* be taken with the left hand alone, by the dictate of the composer. This has been the prevalent attitude in the twentieth century through today. Even pianists who are otherwise in favor of redistribution (and even use it themselves) seem to feel the urge to explain themselves or to issue some caveat, almost in response to some imagined artistic disapproval. Throughout the twentieth century, redistribution is seen either as a pragmatic means of improving the performer's rendering of a passage, or as a moral affront to the composer's intentions, casting a shadow on the performer's abilities and musicianship.

Pianists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—often composers themselves—seem to have been completely untroubled by ethical considerations; the attitude towards redistribution was liberal. From Czerny's editions of Bach to the scores of Chopin and his students, Liszt's remarks in his Weimar masterclasses, and Siloti's editions of Liszt, one can see great musical minds redistributing with abandon.

Composers and editors indicate redistributions in a variety of ways. In his edition of the *Goldberg Variations*, Czerny writes “m.d.” (*mano destra*, or right hand), and “m.s.” (*mano sinistra*, left hand) at the close of Variation 8, a two-manual variation. Of course, to facilitate the translation from two-manual music to one, some finessing is required.



Figure 1: Bach: Goldberg Variations, Czerny edition. Last measure of Variation 8<sup>1</sup>

Chopin, for his own personal use and for his students, marked *g* (*gauche*) to take a note with the left hand, *d* (*droite*) to take a note with the right hand, while penciling in a squiggly line pointing either up or down. One can also notate rewrites of this nature via stems facing different directions:

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Czerny, *Compositions pour Piano seul de J. Seb. Bach* (Leipzig: Peters, ca. 1850), 12. One can argue about the usefulness of this particular redistribution; Czerny obviously seemed to think it was helpful.

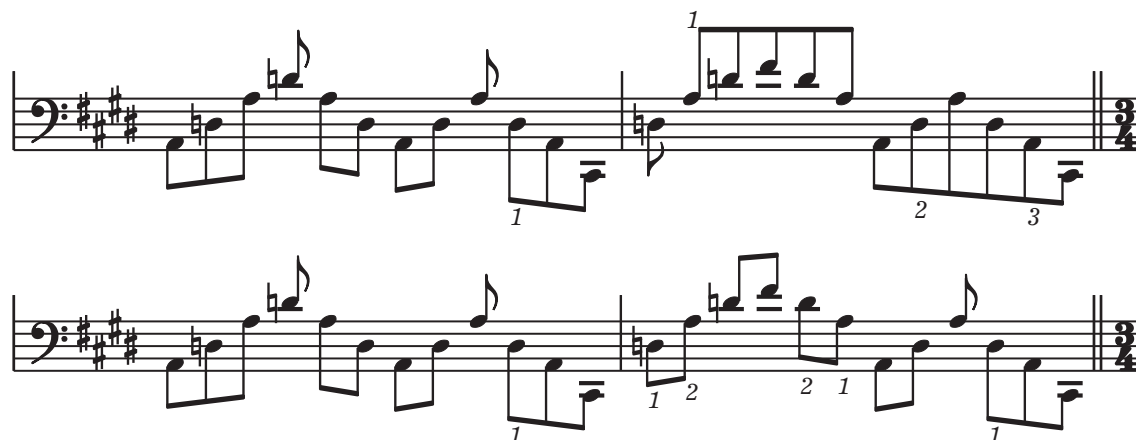


Figure 2: Chopin: Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1, mm. 27–28, two redistributions by Chopin<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that the nocturne's left hand is notated only in the lower staff, Chopin himself allowed for redistribution in a variety of ways: single notes taken with the right hand and unexpected hand-crossings, which were likely personalized for his students.

<sup>2</sup> "Performance Commentary," in *Nokturny*, vol. 5 of *Wydanie Narodowe* [Polish National Edition], ed. Jan Ekier and Paweł Kamiński (Krakow: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2012), 4. The different facing stems are Ekier's. Chopin's students' scores probably looked more akin to the copies of the Well-Tempered Clavier in the subsequent examples.

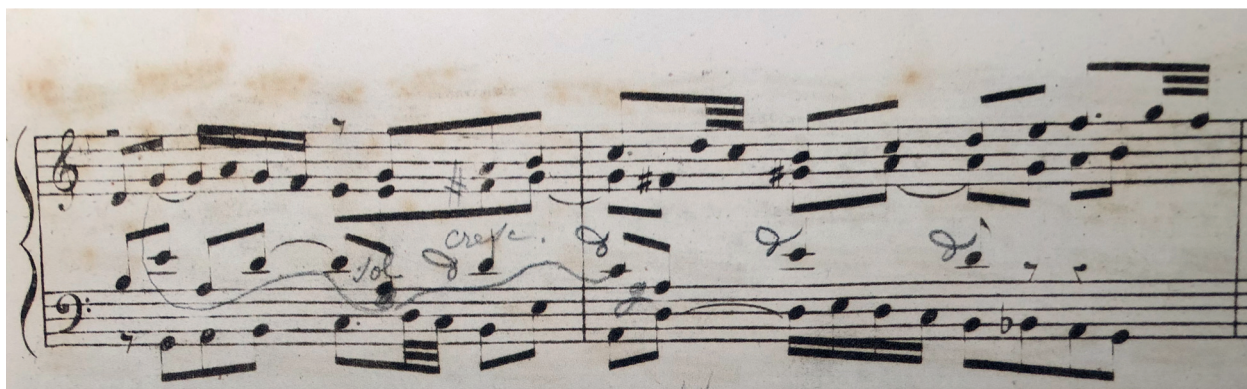


Figure 3: Bach: Fugue in C Major, WTC I, mm. 15–16; Chopin's annotated copy<sup>3</sup>

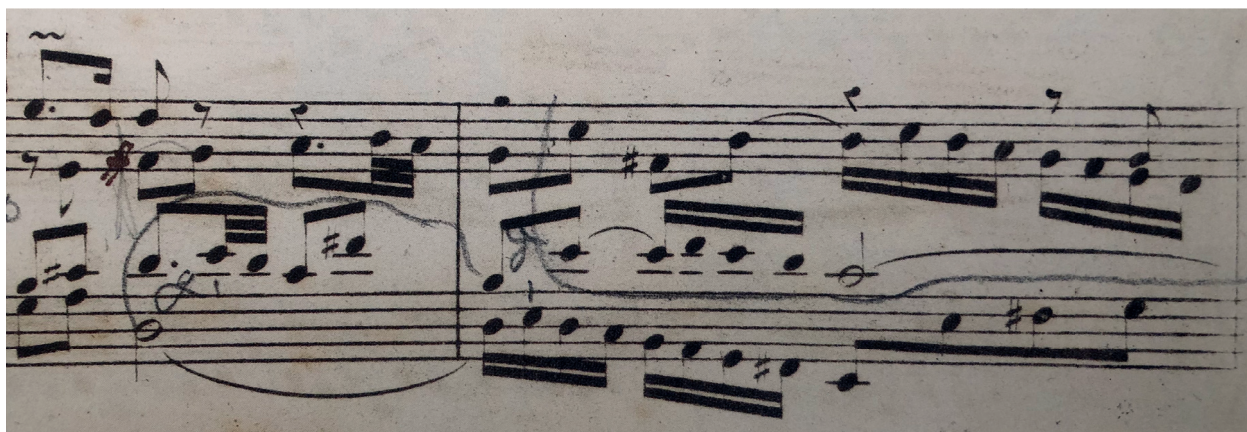


Figure 4: Bach: Fugue in C Major WTC I, mm. 19–20; Chopin's annotated copy<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, Bach's notation disproves any claim that pianists are obligated to take the upper staff with the right hand and the lower staff with the left hand (unless one is adept at playing one-handed parallel 13ths!).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *J.S. Bach: Vingt-Quatre Préludes et Fugues (Le Clavier bien tempéré, Livre I), annoté par Frédéric Chopin*, (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2010), 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Vingt-Quatre Préludes et Fugues annoté par Frédéric Chopin*, 5.

Alexander Siloti, one of the favored students of Liszt, made several editions of Liszt's works, apparently with Liszt's blessing, with several works creatively redistributed, such as *Un sospiro* (1849), *Au lac de Wallenstadt* (1855), and *Au bord d'une source* (1855).<sup>6</sup> On the first page of Siloti's version of *Au bord d'une source*, one can see the original version as notated by Liszt alongside Siloti's redistributed version. In this case, Siloti decided to display both versions on the same page, akin to a side-by-side translation. This page serves as an example of how an editor can indicate wholesale redistribution. When a part is rewritten to this degree, it no longer makes sense to use *m.d./m.s.* or other such indications:

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<sup>5</sup> Slightly more complicated: what Chopin annotated was Czerny's edition of Book One, in which these measures were renotated to order to clarify the counterpoint. In Bach's autographs of this fugue (available on [imslp.org](http://imslp.org)), the tenor moves between staves at these points to avoid inter-staff ledger lines. Bach's original notation nonetheless reveals numerous places where multiple lines co-exist on one staff, unplayable by one hand alone.

<sup>6</sup> Charles F. Barber, *Lost in the Stars: The Forgotten Musical Life of Alexander Siloti* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 25. Liszt's famed geniality may have had something to do with giving Siloti free license to re-arrange his works. I do not discount the possibility Siloti may have exaggerated Liszt's endorsement of his emendations, which supposedly extended to all potential future Siloti editions of Liszt.

Allegretto grazioso

Testo originale  
(Original version)

*dolce tranquillo*

*sempre staccato e leggero*

Allegretto grazioso (♩. = 69)

Piano

*p*

*dolce tranquillo*

Figure 5: Liszt: *Au bord d'une source*; Siloti version, mm. 1–47<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Siloti, *The Alexander Siloti Collection: Editions, Transcriptions, and Arrangements for Piano Solo* (New York: Carl Fischer, 2003), 162. This example raises the question of whether Liszt thought of the melody as consisting of only the sustained notes in right hand, or should the cross-hand notes sound melodic also? I have always brought out the sustained notes alone, with the cross-hand notes accompanimental, but perhaps it need not be so absolute.



The crucial element here is that the composer himself differentiates the notation from its execution; the mere appearance of a score does not dictate its physical performance.

The moralist position would argue that limited (if any) freedom should be given to redistribute, since it goes against the composer's intentions as manifested in the score. Advocates of this attitude include Kendall Taylor, Boris Berman, Heinrich Neuhaus, and Malcolm Bilson. These are excellent pianists and teachers and have talked and written about piano playing in detail.

Kendall Taylor speaks about redistribution negatively, essentially taking the position that if the composer did not expressly indicate it, it should be discouraged, since it amounts to cheating; his exact turn of phrase is "swindle-technique."<sup>10</sup> He gives two examples—both from the first movement of the Beethoven *Sonata Op. 31 No. 2 "Tempest"* (1802)—in which he gives examples of what he considers artistically faulty rewrites:

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<sup>10</sup> Kendall Taylor, *Principles of Piano Technique and Interpretation* (Borough Green: Novello, 1981), 46–47.

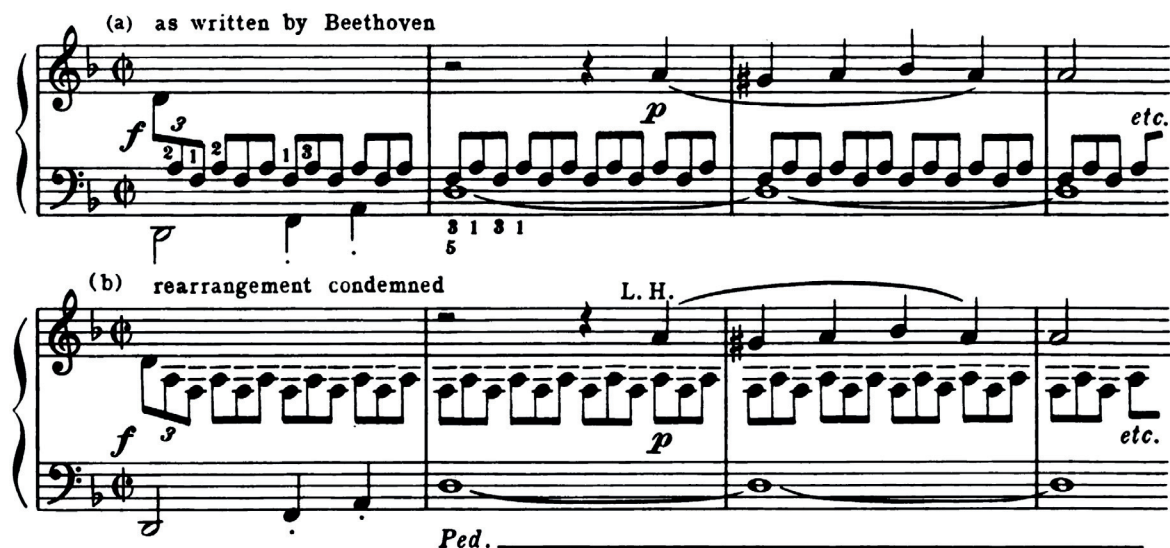


Figure 7: Kendall Taylor on Beethoven: Sonata Op. 31 No. 2, mm. 21–24. From *Principles of Piano Technique and Interpretation*, 46.

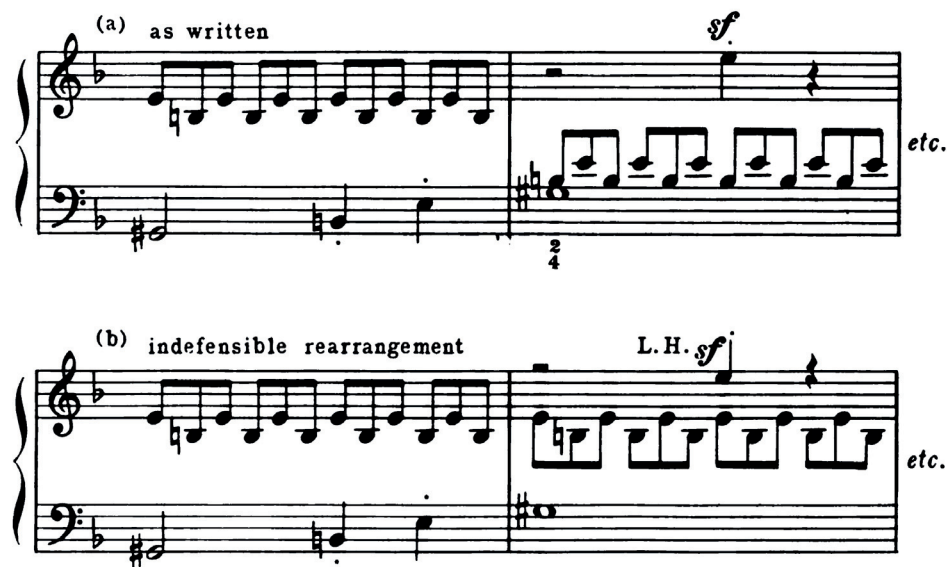


Figure 8: Kendall Taylor on Beethoven: Sonata Op. 31 No. 2, mm. 31–32. From *Principles of Piano Technique and Interpretation*, 47.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In fairness, Taylor only devotes about 300 words to this topic within a chapter on fingering. He likely did not want to dwell on the topic of redistribution, but his attitude toward the issue is clear.

Figure 8b even differs in the notes in the right hand in m. 32: the triplets start on an E rather than on a B. A rearrangement in which the notes themselves are changed might be more aptly called a “recomposition,” and the performer’s license to recompose a piece is not a point I am prepared to argue. I do agree with Taylor in Figure 7 that the given solution is less than ideal; the low D should be held, so playing this passage cross-handed forces the performer to rely on the pedal, which may undesirably blur the soprano melody.

For me the problem is that Taylor gives just two examples in total and in essence creates a straw man. He allows for re-arrangement only in cases where a smaller handspace would make playing as written impossible, with a warning to the performer to envision exactly what the composer intended. He gives no examples of what such redistributions might look like.

Boris Berman acknowledges that redistribution can facilitate the performance of a passage, but he, like Taylor, only gives examples of passages where, in his view, redistribution damages the music.<sup>12</sup> One example he gives is from the first movement of the Schumann *Fantasy Op. 17*, in which he asserts that a passage (mm. 77–79) notated in the lower staff suffers if divided between the two hands. Berman believes that it “loses its solo-like character.” He also introduces a concept he calls the “pride of the virtuoso” in which performers ought to live up to a technical standard; redistribution can avoid the difficulty, but a true virtuoso (and real musician) should face it.

Heinrich Neuhaus gives a humorous example in his own performance of the first movement of the Tempest Sonata, where he redistributed the passage in the upper staff of mm. 13–15 between the two hands in the exposition repeat. He “resorted” to doing so, he claims,

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<sup>12</sup> Boris Berman, *Notes from the Pianist’s Bench*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 133–134.

owing to the cold and his own illness; in his first pass through the exposition, he had played the passage, poorly, with the right hand alone. He recounts that when he redistributed the notes “the result was excellent,” but that he immediately implored his students not to do it, insisting that they instead do what was “written by Beethoven.” What is striking is that Neuhaus condemns not his poor result, but rather his successful one.<sup>13</sup>

Malcolm Bilson, in *Knowing the Score* (2005), wastes little time in establishing “what Beethoven wrote” in the opening to the first movement of Op. 111 (1822) and how it should be played (with the left hand alone, since it’s in the lower staff), essentially arguing that to redistribute is to ruin the essence of the work. To prove this, he claims that he can, without looking, hear the difference ten out of ten times, even when a skilled pianist redistributes the opening.<sup>14</sup> There are two basic claims that are important to examine: does “what Beethoven wrote” in the score mean that a performer must play only what is indicated on the lower or upper staff using the left hand or right hand only? And whether, in Op. 111, there is an audible difference between a one-handed and two-handed opening. In the lecture, he does not actually demonstrate his prowess as a human redistribution detector, and since the claim seems implausible, the burden of proof falls to him. Even if we could design an experiment to determine whether there’s an audible difference between the two performances, there would still be clearer and more substantive differences between various one-handed performances.

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<sup>13</sup> Heinrich Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, trans. K. A. Leibovitch (repr. London: Kahn and Averill, 1993), 147. Neuhaus gives no further guidance on the fingering he wants the pianist to use.

<sup>14</sup> *Knowing the Score*, featuring Malcolm Bilson, directed by Daniel Booth (Cornell University Press, 2005), DVD. See 9:45–11:40.

All one needs to do to disprove the first claim is to find a single example in which Beethoven notates the upper or lower staff in such a way that one cannot play it with just one hand. Here is a first-edition score of a passage from the first-movement development of Op. 2 No. 2 (1795), where keeping the hands in their respective staves is impossible:



Figure 9: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 2 No. 2, first movement, mm. 131–134<sup>15</sup>

If the rule to play each staff with the corresponding hand were taken literally, then the cross-staff notation would have to be alternated every sixteenth-note between the left and right hands (perhaps Beethoven intended the performer to rapidly arpeggiate the left hand in an attempt to return to the middle cross-staff tremolo!). What seems more natural is to take the tremolo with the right hand, and when the high notes appear cross over and take them with the left. I can even imagine Bilson playing it this way, or switching hands for the tremolo in the middle of the third measure of this example. But there is no marking here that indicates either possibility. The first claim is therefore untrue: “what Beethoven wrote” for the lower staff does not mean that it *must*

<sup>15</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, “Sonata II,” in *Trois Sonates: Pour le Clavecin ou Piano-Forte* [...] par Louis van Beethoven; *Oeuvre II* (Vienna: Artaria, ca. 1796), 18. There is no extant autograph for this sonata.

be played with just the left hand. Indeed, here it's impossible to follow that rule. One can argue that this example and the opening of Op. 111 are different, which is true. It *is* possible to play the opening of Op. 111 with one hand, but the premise that Beethoven's notation invariably indicates which notes are to be taken with which hand can be easily disproven.

An alternate trend in the twentieth century is the pragmatist approach to redistribution, characterized by finding practical solutions to pianistic problems. Pianists and pedagogues who fall into this category include Rami Bar-Niv, Julien Musafia, Lora Deahl, and Brenda Wristen.

Rami Bar-Niv first defends his position by arguing that while it could be called “cheating”—Bar-Niv's word—redistribution is a good and natural byproduct of having ten fingers, that the score can be imprecise on which hand to use, and that he would prefer to concentrate on the result rather than the means. He gives numerous examples of his own personal redistributions.<sup>16</sup> One comes from the first movement of Beethoven's *Appassionata*:



Figure 10: Rami Bar-Niv's solution in Beethoven: Sonata Op. 57, first movement, mm. 44–46. From *The Art of Piano Fingering* (2012), 134.

<sup>16</sup> Rami Bar-Niv, *The Art of Piano Fingering: Traditional, Advanced, and Innovative*, 2nd ed. (Ra'anana: AndreA, 2012), 129–135.

His reasoning for this particular redistribution, as opposed to playing the notes all in the right hand or redistributing just m. 45 with the left hand, is firstly to avoid gaps with the right hand and secondly to ensure consistency across the three measures.

Julien Musafia provides no general explanation at all and launches immediately into an even longer list than Bar-Niv's in a chapter titled the "Ten-Finger Apparatus."<sup>17</sup> Some of the redistributions he gives are extremely useful:

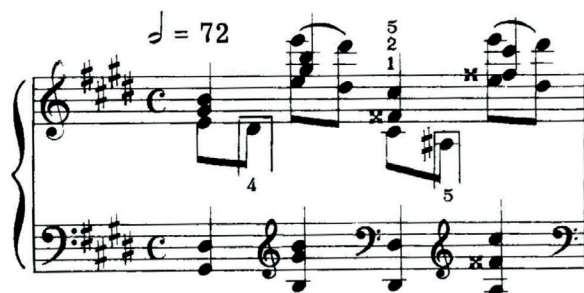
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<sup>17</sup> Julien Musafia, *The Art of Fingering in Piano Playing* (New York: MCA Music, 1971), 67–83.

Far more difficult jumps can be made almost accessible by jumping with one hand at a time.

*Example 208*

Scriabine, *Etude No. 5*, Op. 8, m. 5



The same procedure is used later in the same piece.

*Example 209*

Scriabine, *Etude No. 5*, Op. 8, m. 37



Figure 11: Julien Musafia's solutions in Scriabin: Etude Op. 8, No. 5. From *The Art of Fingering in Piano Playing* (1971), 74.<sup>18</sup>

He defends redistribution even in the context of a Chopin etude—where one could contend that the whole point is to display or improve digital prowess—by arguing that the musical substance is the most important element, with the means being secondary:

<sup>18</sup> A friend who for a time held a world record in juggling told me that when juggling four balls, he found it much easier to throw a one-handed pattern asynchronously in each hand rather than synchronously.



Figure 12: Julian Musafia’s fingerings for the mm. 9-12 of the Op. 10 No. 12 etude. From *The Art of Fingering in Piano Playing* (1971), 78.

He claims that because of this redistribution one can achieve a larger sound (and perhaps greater security) between the two hands at an exposed juncture point, and that in any case the pianist can play it in one hand two measures later, should the Berman-ian “pride of the virtuoso” be a concern.

Both Bar-Niv and Musafia give only perfunctory justifications and spend most of their time providing practical solutions. This is a clear contrast to moralist approaches to redistribution, which give mostly warnings and admonishments. In terms of what will improve the end result, the pragmatist philosophy on redistribution seems more helpful.

In a chapter full of examples and concrete, technical justifications, Lora Deahl and Brenda Wristen commend redistribution as a tool especially helpful for pianists with smaller handspans. They acknowledge that not all redistributions are created equal—one could re-hand a passage in a way that would assist the pianist neither physically or musically.<sup>19</sup> The overall attitude, however, is one of finding inventive, pragmatic solutions, for instance:

<sup>19</sup> Lora Deahl and Brenda Wristen, *Adaptive Strategies for Small-Handed Pianists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83–105.

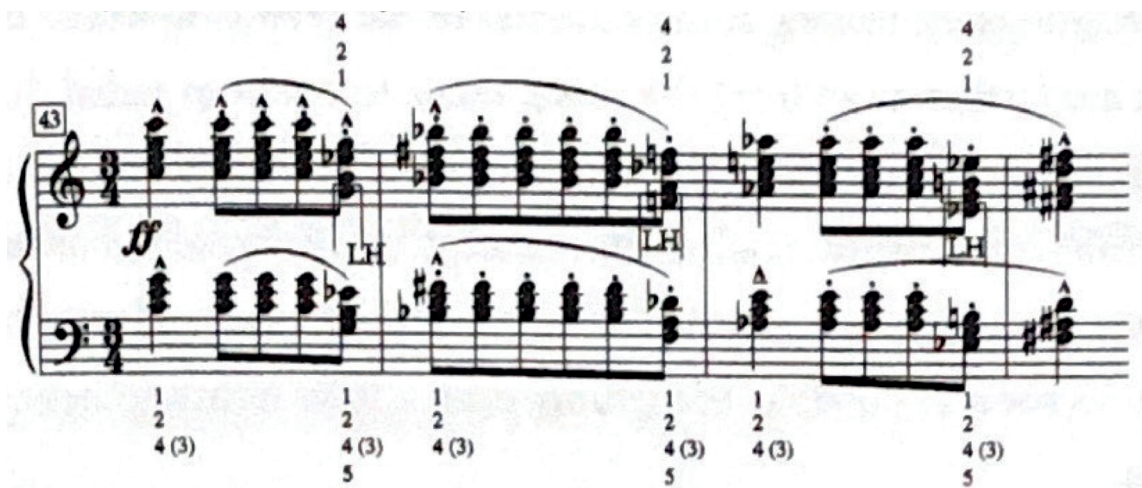


Figure 13: Debussy: *Prélude*, from *Pour le piano* (1901), mm. 43–46. Deahl and Wristen redistribution from *Adaptive Strategies for Small-Handed Pianists*, 99.



Figure 14: Debussy: *L'isle joyeuse* (1904), mm. 252–255, Deahl and Wristen redistribution from *Adaptive Strategies for Small-Handed Pianists*, 103.

Deahl and Wristen argue that solutions such as the ones in Figures 13–14 allow the hand to refrain from staying outstretched, thus reducing strain. They also make the broader point that redistribution can solve myriad problems involving reach, thus granting greater accessibility to pianists with smaller handspans.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Adaptive Strategies for Small-Handed Pianists*, 83.

## My Own Philosophical Approach

Let me clearly acknowledge my position: I'm in favor of using redistribution, even when it is visible to an audience; it is neither important nor offensive to me when pianists redistribute. My primary concern is with the auditory experience and only secondarily with the visual experience. If a performer can play a passage beautifully, or powerfully, or whatever adverb is appropriate to the given music through any means, then I as an audience member am satisfied.<sup>21</sup>

As a physical matter, redistribution can increase a performer's technical command of a passage in order to make the musical intent come to life. It can make a passage more precisely voiced, more brilliant; it can also remove awkward crossings and reduce hand-stretches, which is important for those with smaller handspans. It is also useful as a practice technique.

Robert Roux's position is that both the redistribution of hands and the omission of notes would be considered facilitation, while re-fingering would not, even in the case of fingerings suggested by the composer.<sup>22</sup> He goes on to detail what he deems acceptable as opposed to unacceptable facilitations.

Would one disapprove of a pianist re-fingering a passage in order to achieve a certain musical result or to securely perform a given passage, even if a composer has marked fingerings? If re-fingering a passage is acceptable, then the logical extension suggests that redistribution is

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<sup>21</sup> One caveat is that if a pianist seems to be hurting him or herself—generally this would mean extra physical tension. Then the empathetic side of me would not enjoy the performance, and most likely the music would suffer as well.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Roux, "A Methodology of Piano Fingering" (DMA thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1980), 59. He may have been simply limiting the scope of his consideration.

also acceptable. No notes have been changed, omitted, or added, but have simply been played with a different finger, or in the case of redistribution, with another hand.

Those against redistribution in principle seem to gather under the umbrella of intentionalism. Since the composer intended the distribution as visually notated on the score, it must be respected. Assuming this argument to be true, Liszt himself would go against his own intent when he suggests redistributing in *Rigoletto*.<sup>23</sup> I raise the question of just when it was decided that the lower staff was meant to be played with the left hand and the upper staff with the right. The staves indeed can be a convenient way for a composer or editor to indicate a suggested distribution of the hands. On the other hand, they can also serve as tools to delineate register, such as in the case of Beethoven Op. 2 No. 2, or in the counterpoint of a Bach fugue.

One common next step for those opposed to redistribution is to take the position that in the works of Liszt it is acceptable to redistribute because his compositional nature at times tends towards the less serious: the Hungarian Rhapsodies, concert paraphrases, and so forth.<sup>24</sup> This argument could even descend to the case-by-case level: one could conceivably make the argument that rewrites in the second Hungarian Rhapsody are acceptable, but not in the B minor Sonata.

The problem with this argument is that composers such as Bach have a reputation for serious music, and yet it is completely, physically necessary to redistribute in a fugue, for instance—something Chopin recognized in his annotations to his own copy of the Well-

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<sup>23</sup> One could argue that the composer has more freedom to redistribute or even to change notes. Nonetheless, the visual notation of a score does not necessarily determine the distribution of hands.

<sup>24</sup> A generalization and—in my view—a flawed one.

Tempered Clavier. The entire argument also seems highly subjective in terms of which composers and pieces are considered too sacred to redistribute.

Assume one argues that for a certain composer—Beethoven, for instance—it is more appropriate to not redistribute in the opening of Op. 111 because to play with one hand seems more Beethovenian. How do purists know that Beethoven himself did not redistribute?

Malcolm Bilson seems to think that redistribution sounds different (and wrong). Robert Roux, though not strictly a purist, also chooses not to re-hand Op. 111. Roux summons an imaginary, disapproving Beethoven “sadly shaking his head” if one were to redistribute the opening, because Roux believes the challenge is gone, and because it also looks different.<sup>25</sup> Roux invokes two justifications: the “struggle” argument and the “visual” argument.

The “struggle” argument proceeds as follows: in a given passage, to redistribute is wrong because to do so trivializes the difficulty of the music, thus making it sound glib or too easy; he essentially argues that a sense of difficulty is crucial to its expressive effect. One would rather miss a note for the sake of expression rather than hit the correct notes but fail to achieve the right effect.

The musical core behind the “struggle” argument is well-intentioned. I readily acknowledge that opponents of redistribution often have sound instincts. Claudio Arrau, for instance, connected physical struggle with musical meaning; he too condemned rewrites that reduced difficulty.<sup>26</sup> While I agree that one can make a passage sound undesirably glib via redistribution, I find the connection between the musical tension and bodily tension less than

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<sup>25</sup> “A Methodology of Piano Fingering,” 70.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *Conversations with Arrau* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 152–153.

absolute, as one can perform a piece with great physical difficulty and still lose musical meaning via poor timing, poor voicing, lack of shape, and so forth.

The “struggle” argument comes from a desirable place of attempting to perform with specificity. The problem with this line of thinking is that this sense of difficulty or struggle has not been defined. If one had to define musical “struggle” in piano playing, it would probably mean a delay between notes, often correlated with a sustain or increase of dynamics, sometimes aided by the sound of the performer breathing or grunting.<sup>27</sup> If there existed no other way to achieve this musical goal except to play with one hand alone, then perhaps the argument would hold water. This sense of struggle, however, can be manufactured via timing and shaping, so long as the musical goal is in mind. One can ideally achieve the best of both worlds: redistribute and choreograph the hands in order to ensure consistent success in the physical performance of the notes; and envision a musically satisfying timing and sound.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the strongest argument the purists have concerns the visuals of piano playing, which can have a definite impact on an audience. Though redistribution is often invisible, it can also be blatantly obvious. I often redistribute the opening runs in the Chopin Etude Op. 10 No. 12 between the hands. The re-arrangement creates an incredible clarity and security, surpassing my ability to play the opening with one hand. It also looks strikingly different from the traditional way of performing the etude. A purist would argue that the whole point of the etude is to practice the left hand alone. I agree that one of the purposes of the etude is to improve left-hand facility. But once one has gained a certain ability at performing the piece in the traditional

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<sup>27</sup> This definition refers to struggle between a few notes. Longer passages can also evoke a sense of struggle in various ways, for instance via constant, slowly increasing dynamic shaping over an unwavering beat.

<sup>28</sup> One can still grunt while playing with two hands!

manner, one still stands to gain musically by redistributing. I am not averse to improving one's technique and indeed suggest learning the opening of Op. 10 No. 12 with one hand in order to increase the left hand's mastery. In a performance context, one might of course be unused to seeing this etude performed with two hands. As such, the visual experience would be different and to some no doubt disappointing.

Consider, though, the following thought experiment: assume that a performer plays Op. 10 No. 12 with the left hand as written and that the performance goes well. Now imagine an even better performance in which the pianist redistributes, resulting in greater control, better tone, fewer mistakes, and so forth, to the degree that a juror would consistently prefer an audio recording of the latter performance in a head-to-head comparison. In some cases, one has the choice: to play as written in a less musically satisfying way, or to play with redistribution in a more musically satisfying way. This question, in my experience, provokes a sense of cognitive dissonance for purists. It is in no way wrong to choose the former, but doing so forces one to confront how much one privileges the visual experience, the implication being that the visual trumps the aural (at least to some degree).

But the line can be crossed in the other direction as well. Those on the other side might ask me whether it would be acceptable to play Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand* (1930) redistributed. If I had to draw the line, there it is—I would perform it with the left hand alone. When a composer specifically states, in the title no less, that the piece ought to be played with the left hand, and that the piece was originally composed for a one-armed pianist, then playing it

in both hands does cross the line.<sup>29</sup> Other pieces for the left hand alone, such as those by Saint-Saëns, Scriabin, and Prokofiev should therefore also be performed without the use of the right hand. I privilege the aural above the visual, up to a point, but I would prefer the concert experience of the *Concerto for the Left Hand* played well with one hand over a redistributed version, even if the redistributed performance were more successful.

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<sup>29</sup> This line has been crossed before. In August 1933, Alfred Cortot arranged Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand* for two hands. Ravel detested the arrangement and expressly forbade Cortot from performing it or sharing it in its altered version.

(Christine Baur, introduction to *Ravel: Concerto for the Left Hand for Piano and Orchestra*, ed. Douglas Woodfull-Harris, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2016), xvi.)

Cortot's intention, though, was probably to make the piece more approachable to the broader base of pianists by and large. The situation is complicated by the fact that Cortot's manuscript not only distributes notes between the hands, but also thickens the texture by adding notes and rearranging the text. No doubt the lines one draws today are not those one would draw a hundred years ago. See Blake Howe, "Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability," *Journal of Musicology* 27/2 (2010): 162–163.

## The Swindle Spectrum: Considerations Before Using the Guide

Even the staunchest purists would likely accept the redistribution of notes in a practice situation. One excellent practice tactic in general is to redistribute the notes of one hand into two, in order to create a more ideal model for how the one hand alone should eventually sound. For instance, in the opening measures of the Chopin G major Prelude, Op. 28 No. 3 (1839), one could redistribute as follows:



Figure 15: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 3, m. 1, redistributed

In this redistribution, the right hand takes the notes with stems facing upward, which is easier than playing the passage with the left hand alone. Then, one can use this two-handed version as a model for the left hand to follow. For instance, one could alternate practicing the passage with two hands, and then with just the left hand. In the context of an actual performance, to redistribute as above might be useful, but it is also visually obvious. In general, the more visible a cheat, the more controversial.

The tricks one uses can be so sneaky that even pianists in the audience who play the piece might not realize one is using them. They can also be so obvious that a non-pianist would notice them right away. To an extent, the level of visibility depends on the way a performer moves. The

angle of a performer's body, whether leaned in or leaned out, to one side or another, could obscure or display the hands. Leaning in, to the right, or away from the audience would obscure the hands; leaning out, to the left, or towards the audience, in contrast, would display the hands.

The context of a performance also influences the perception of redistribution. In a competition, for instance, to visibly rearrange the hands runs the risk of alienating at least one juror, whereas in a recital, the same rearrangement might not pose a problem. The level of knowledge audience members have also influences the amount of offense they take: non-pianists often seem largely uncaring about which hands are used to play the notes. Generally, the risk of giving offense via hand distribution occurs with pianist audience members intimately familiar with the repertoire.

As for technical matters that change the visibility of redistribution, the closer the hands are to one another, the less visible the redistribution. Conversely, if the hands have to cross, or if one hand has a rest, redistribution becomes more obvious.

When compiling the following list of examples, I was obliged to devise a logical system for organizing it, in a way that allows my readers to take the lessons learned and apply them to their repertoire. This list of examples will be graded from the most anodyne to the most controversial. Redistribution in Bach is not only inoffensive but is often a physical necessity. On the other side of the spectrum, redistribution in some Chopin etudes and certain late Beethoven sonatas can appear artistically suspect.

The following list of pianistic solutions is the first of its kind to be organized with respect to the potential controversy caused, allowing readers to easily determine personal usage according to individual context. It covers pieces from Bach to Messiaen, with tricks from pianists of our time, editors, and the composers themselves, including some examples from the previous

sections. By nature a truncated list, it tends towards more famous repertoire and ends with a derivation of principles for readers to employ in their own pieces.

### Guided List of Examples

Bach: Well-Tempered Clavier I, Fugue in C Major BWV 846 (1722)

I begin with Johann Sebastian Bach, the Fugue in C Major from Book One of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Throughout the piece, and indeed through much of Bach's keyboard music, the notation is indicative of the counterpoint and not of the physical distribution between hands. As a starting point, it serves as a reminder that music notation can represent an abstract ideal, rather than a technical edict. The following redistributions, if one would call them so in the context of this music, come from Chopin's annotations.



Figure 16: Bach: Fugue in C Major WTC I, mm. 15–16; Chopin's annotated copy. From *Vingt-Quatre Préludes et Fugues annoté par Frédéric Chopin*, 5.

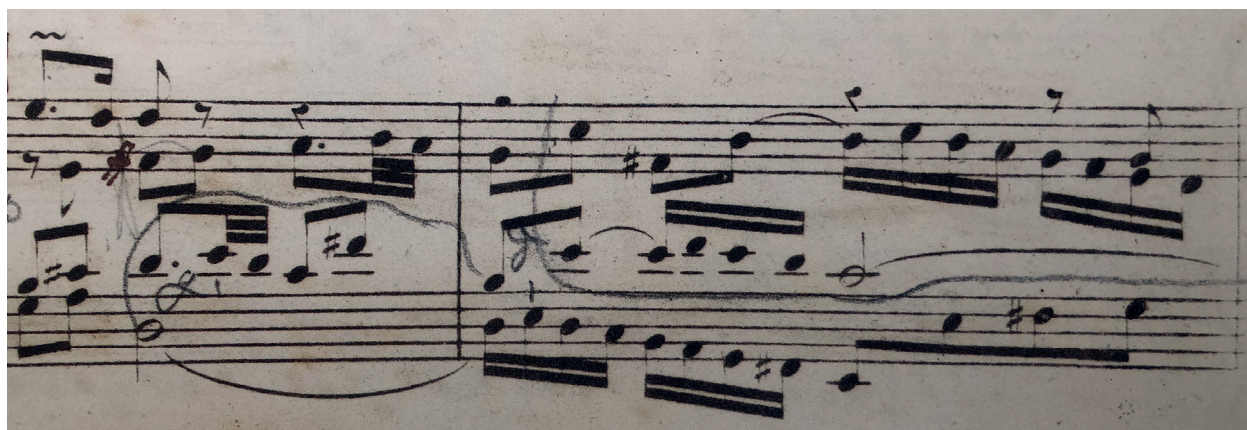


Figure 17: Bach: Fugue in C Major WTC I, mm. 19–20; Chopin's annotated copy. From *Vingt-Quatre Préludes et Fugues annoté par Frédéric Chopin*, 5.

In the case of Bach, at least, redistribution is a matter of simple pragmatism. I rate Chopin's cheats completely inoffensive. In certain editions, such as the Henle, the notes in these measures are redistributed across the two staves without comment, in such a way that the right-hand notes remain in the upper staff, basically in the way that Chopin has done:



Figure 18: Bach: Well-Tempered Clavier I, Fugue in C Major, mm. 14–15. From Johann Sebastian Bach, *Das Wohltempierte Klavier: Teil I*, ed. Otto von Irmer (Munich: G. Henle, 1974), 7.

For comparison, the autograph of these measures is reproduced here as well:



Figure 19: Bach: Well-Tempered Clavier I, Fugue in C Major, mm. 14–15 as it appears in the autograph. The upper staff is in soprano clef, the lower staff in bass clef.<sup>30</sup>

Redistribution in the context of contrapuntal music as a whole can be rated completely uncontroversial.

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<sup>30</sup> Johann Sebastian Bach, “Das Wohltempierte Clavier I,” Autograph, 1722–1723, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (D–B): Mus. ms. Bach P 415.

## Chopin: Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1 in C# minor (1836)

Chopin's use of redistributions were not limited to Bach; we see similar indications, for instance in two of his students' copies of the Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1:

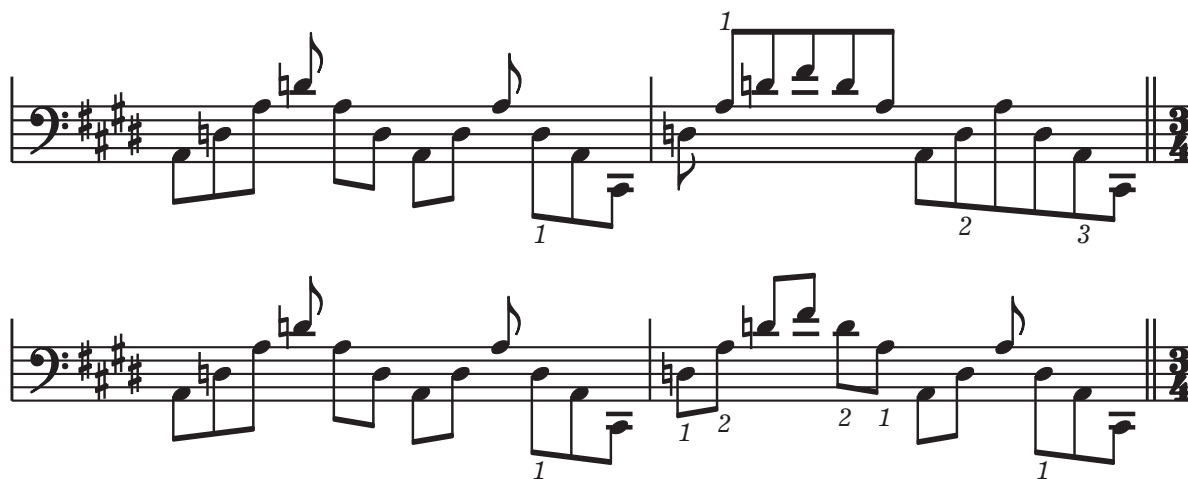


Figure 20: Chopin: Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1, mm. 27–28, two redistributions by Chopin. From “Performance Commentary,” in *Nokturny*, 4.

Even the most pedantic of teachers would likely accept Chopin's redistributions in his own compositions. I also rate Chopin's cheats here completely uncontroversial.

If the aforementioned swindle spectrum were to be graded from 1 to 10, with 1 being completely uncontroversial and 10 extremely controversial, the above redistributions would receive a swindle level of 1. The redistributions described next would probably receive a swindle level of 2 or 3, bearing in mind that not every pianist will agree with the ratings I attach.

## Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 3 in G Major (1839)

As written, m. 7 is one of the trickier measures of this prelude, particularly because of the F# in the left hand:

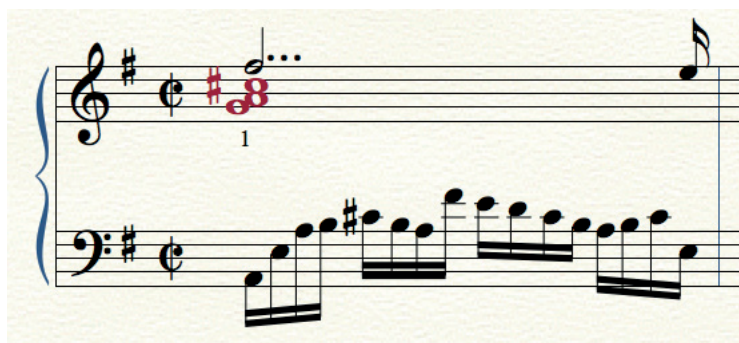


Figure 21: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 3, m. 7 as written

Owing to the rapid shift onto a black note at this moment, likely involving the thumb, listeners may well hear an undesired bump, either from an accentuation or from an unevenness in the sixteenth note flow.<sup>31</sup>

At first glance, it seems that the left hand must fend for itself, given that the right hand is occupied. The hands, however, are close together, which is one sign that redistribution may be possible. Notice also the right hand is sustained practically throughout m. 7, as well as in m. 9 (a repetition of this measure). This right-hand chord is also rather easy—another sign of potential redistribution.

By clever crossing over of the second finger, the right hand can help the left hand by taking the F#:

<sup>31</sup> Although it is conceivable to use a 2 in the left hand on the F#, followed by 1 on E.

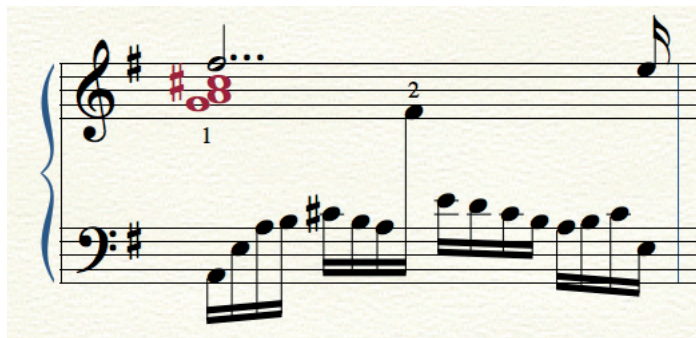


Figure 22: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 3, m. 7 redistributed

This trick, however, requires a handspan that can touch an octave with 2 and 5. For those with a smaller hand, one could redistribute it as follows:

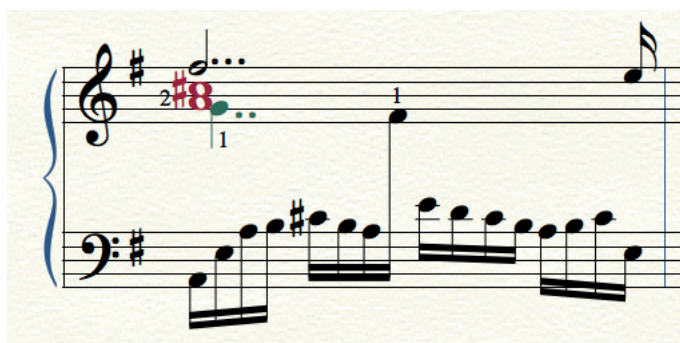


Figure 23: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 3, m. 7 redistributed for a smaller handspan

Letting go of the right-hand G does little harm, and in context, the change from playing the figure with the left hand only to assisting with the right hand is likely to increase smoothness and security, while decreasing any unexpected thud on the F# and decreasing psychological panic when approaching these measures. This trick is practically invisible to the audience.

The original solution involving the second finger crossing over was first introduced to me by Hung-Kuan Chen. I subsequently devised the logical extension for those with a smaller handspan.

## Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 5 in D Major (1839)

M. 5 of this prelude includes a particularly awkward stretch in the left hand:



Figure 24: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 5, m. 5 as written

The tenth between the first two notes in the left hand can sound unwieldy at a fast tempo.

Luckily, the right hand has a rather easy job and can take a note, as follows:

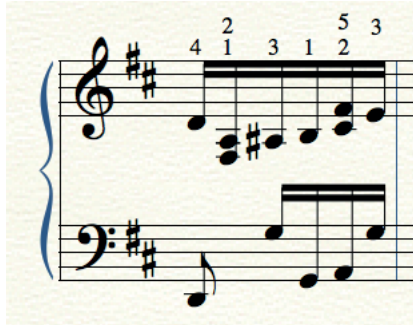


Figure 25: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 5, m. 5 redistributed

In addition to easing the stretch and rapid movement needed to reach the next note in the left hand, this trick also provides a musical benefit—by allowing extra time for the harmony to be heard on the downbeat. When playing as written, one runs the risk of moving too quickly from note to note and not giving enough time to the low D.

This trick can be applied to a few places in this prelude, for instance at m. 9:



Figure 26: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 5, m. 9 as written

Again, the difficulty as written lies in the left hand, with multiple wide intervals at a fast tempo. The right hand's role is comparatively less challenging.



Figure 27: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 5, m. 9 redistributed

By giving the G to the right hand, the left-hand passage becomes much easier; this solution allows extra time to navigate the large stretches of the passage by removing the initial interval of a descending tenth. In addition, the placement of the hands in close proximity and the fast tempo of the prelude allow for the trick to occur inconspicuously.

This solution was introduced to me by Christopher Taylor.

## Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 12 in G# minor (1839)

Of the twenty-four Op. 28 preludes, the one in G# minor is among the most technically difficult. Mm. 37–38 are especially tricky:



Figure 28: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 12, mm. 37–38 as written

The difficulty in this case lies in the right hand—the combination of the octaves with thirds in the inner voices is challenging to play with clarity at tempo. The left hand, while not trivial, is manageable even at a Presto.

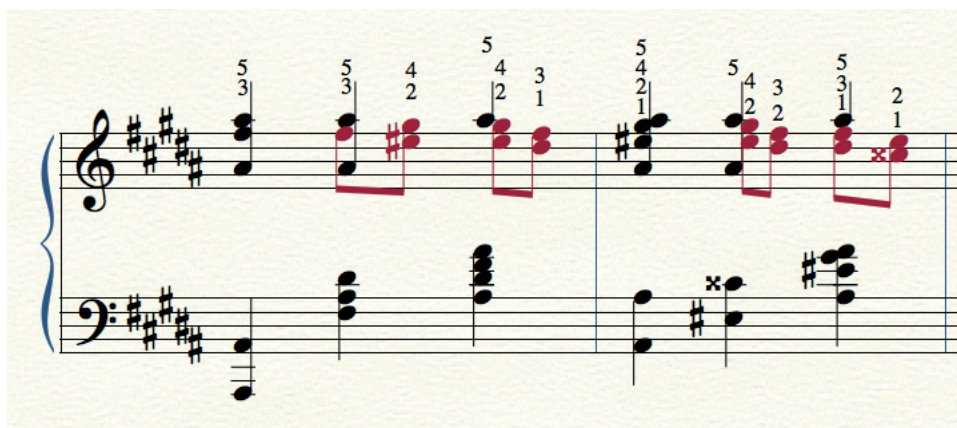
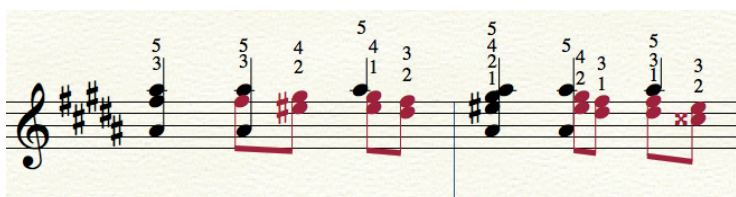


Figure 29: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 12, mm. 37–38 redistributed<sup>32</sup>

In the third beat of each measure, it is possible to take the lower note of the A# octave with the left hand, which only slightly increases the left hand's difficulty. The right hand, however, now stands a chance at playing the thirds with clarity. The hands occupy basically the same register on the keyboard, which reduces the visibility of this trick. Few would notice the redistribution, except that the result might be more intelligible than one ordinarily hears it—probably a benefit.

This solution was first introduced to me by José Feghali, and then, on a separate occasion, by Christopher Taylor.



<sup>32</sup> Another fingering for the right hand:



Figure 30: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 12, mm. 53–57 as written

Later in the piece, one encounters a great disparity between the difficulties of the left and right hands (Figure 30). The left hand has a rather easy job—just a chord—while the right hand is sentenced to endless two-note groups in addition to the chord. The hands, however, are again in close proximity, which is a sign that one might be able to usefully redistribute:



Figure 31: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 12, mm. 53–57 redistributed

The left hand now has just one extra note to play in its chord on the second, third, and fifth measures of this passage, which allows the right hand to have a small, but noticeable improvement in terms of security.

This mild, unassuming redistribution is uncontroversial enough that the Polish National Edition, used by the International Chopin Competition, endorses its use.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Performance Commentary,” in *Preludia*, vol. 7 of *Wydanie Narodowe*, ed. Jan Ekier and Paweł Kamiński (Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2018), 3.

Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 16 in B $\flat$  minor (1839)

The B $\flat$  minor Prelude is one of the most technically demanding, so any small gains to efficiency are welcome. In the endless stream of fast sixteenth notes in the right hand, there is a moment near the end in which one can surreptitiously sneak some left-hand assistance.



Figure 32: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 16, m. 37 as written

One of the difficulties of this passage is that the right hand tends to use a weak finger (4) on the beat, especially in the latter half of the bar. Though both hands have difficult technical challenges throughout the piece, the right hand probably has the more difficult task here. Even one note can make a difference:



Figure 33: Chopin: Prelude Op. 28 No. 16, m. 37 redistributed

By rewriting the last sixteenth note into the left hand, the right hand can align a stronger finger (3) with the pulse. The smaller shift that results (1 to 3 versus 1 to 4) also smooths out any potential gaps in the sound between the twelfth and thirteenth sixteenth notes. In this case, the redistributed note lies close to the center of the keyboard, and as the passage passes by so quickly, the rewrite is hardly noticeable.

This trick was introduced to me by Christopher Taylor.

## Chopin: Barcarolle Op. 60 in F# Major (1846)

Figure 34 shows a right-hand passage in sixths that occurs elsewhere in the Barcarolle. It is tricky for a few reasons. First, the pattern is repeated. Though not as prolonged as the strings of sixths in the Etude Op. 25 No. 8, this passage still risks tangling the fingers. Second, at the end of the run, the interval changes to an octave on the last sixteenth note, before returning to a sixth on the downbeat. The end of the pattern has the potential to sound awkward:



Figure 34: Chopin: Barcarolle, mm. 14–16 as written

Taking the last octave's lower G# with the left hand allows the right hand to gracefully exit the pattern without the need to swerve to the octave and back. The hands were practically overlapping as written, and this trick allows them to untangle. Given that the hands are so close together, the trick seems rather elegant and unassuming.



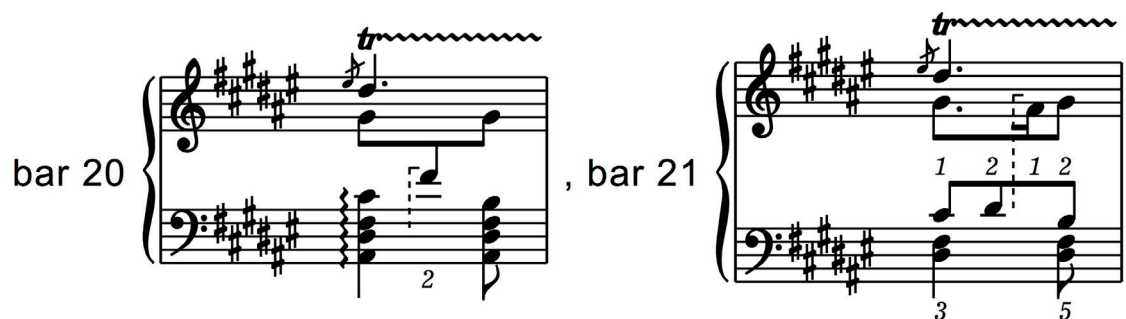


Figure 37: Chopin: Barcarolle, the trills of mm. 20–21, Ekier’s solution. From “Performance Commentary,” in *Dzieła Różne*, 5.

The effect of this trick is that the right-hand thumb no longer has to hop between G# and F#—it can stay on the G#—which allows the trill in the upper fingers to continue relatively less hampered by the inner line.<sup>34</sup> After gaining proficiency at this trick, one stands a greater chance of keeping both the trill and inner lines smooth.<sup>35</sup> The thumbs of the two hands are close in register, which keeps the trick relatively hidden.

<sup>34</sup> For the trill in the upper fingers, I suggest a 5-3 fingering.

<sup>35</sup> This passage reminds me of the words of Paul Hersh, who told me that “So much work goes into making a passage sound unremarkable.”

Chopin: Polonaise Op. 53 in A $\flat$  Major (1842)

To avoid an awkward stretch in the right hand, one can use Ekier's suggested re-handing:



Figure 38: Chopin: Polonaise Op. 53, m. 14, Ekier's solution. From *Polonezy*, vol. 6 of *Wydanie Narodowe*, ed. Jan Ekier and Paweł Kamiński (Krakow: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2017), 64.

Another useful redistribution later in the polonaise:

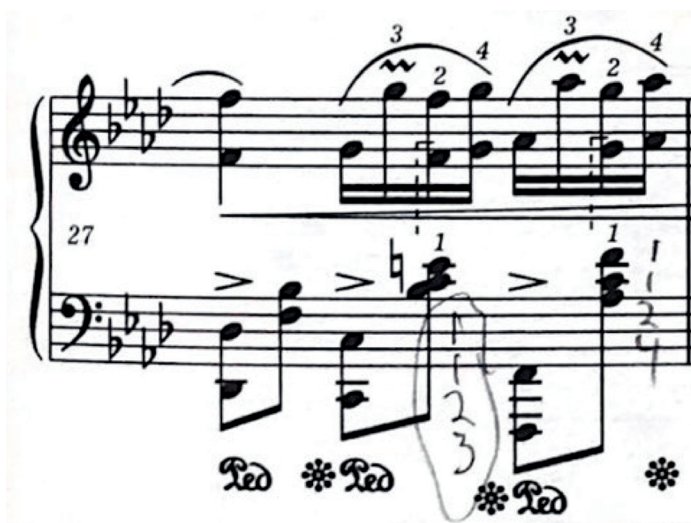


Figure 39: Chopin: Polonaise Op. 53, m. 27, Ekier's solution. From *Polonezy*, 65. <sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Handwritten fingerings by Christopher Taylor.

Messiaen: XV. *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus*, from *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944)

The previous examples mostly showed passages in which redistribution was beneficial in more conspicuously technical—generally more rapid—music. Re-handling can also assist in slow passages. For instance, one can clarify voicing in closely voiced chords:

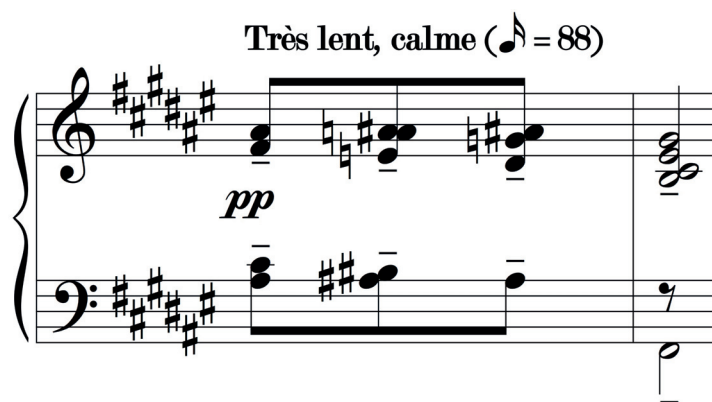


Figure 40: Messiaen: *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus*, m. 1 as written

Redistribution in this case adds musical benefit if one chooses to voice the top line.<sup>37</sup>

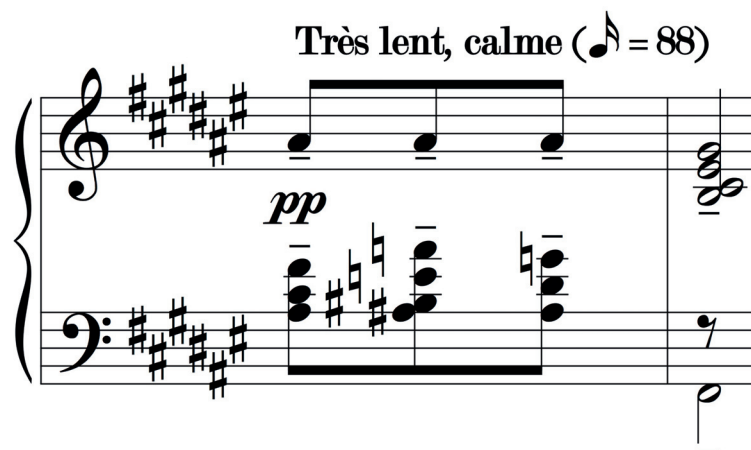


Figure 41: Messiaen: *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus*, m. 1 redistributed

<sup>37</sup> Of course, one need not voice too prominently.

Later, during the climactic section of the piece, sets of trills appear in both hands:



Figure 42: Messiaen: *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus*, m. 102 as written

In this case, one can gain consistency and power by redistributing and crossing over the trills:



Figure 43: Messiaen: *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus*, m. 102, trills redistributed

This type of redistribution of trills also works at the corresponding passage at m. 112. It also reminds me of Bar-Niv's rewrite in the *Appassionata* in Figure 10. In essence, re-handing can serve as a stable, clear-cut choreography.

The Messiaen solutions were introduced to me by Thomas Schultz.

The previous section comprised almost completely innocuous solutions—probably somewhere within 1 to 3 in the swindle spectrum. The next set of redistributions is more visible

in nature and includes some famous cheats, ranging from somewhat uncontroversial to borderline controversial (perhaps 4 to 7). Some pianists in the audience might notice but would rarely be concerned. Occasionally, some might take issue.

Bach: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue BWV 903 (ca. 1720)

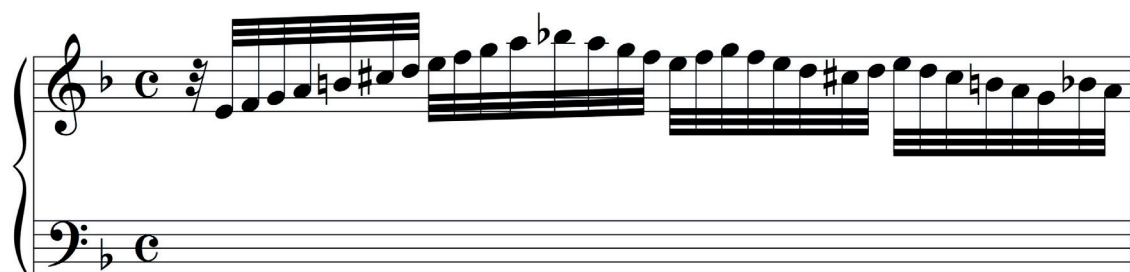


Figure 44: Bach: Chromatic Fantasy, m. 21 as written

In order to create a strong start to the beginning of the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, one can redistribute:

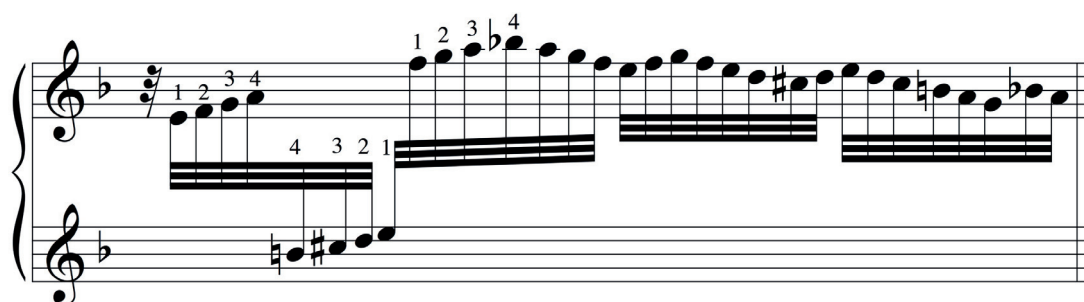


Figure 45: Bach: Chromatic Fantasy, m. 21 redistributed

This trick was first introduced to me by Sharon Mann. Combined with a touch of pedal and a crescendo through the ascending scale (through the B<sub>4</sub> above the staff), a dramatic, unzipping effect results.

## Schumann: Fantasy Op. 17 (1838)

In the notorious coda to the second movement of Robert Schumann's Fantasy Op. 17, the performer faces continuous rapid leaps in opposite directions with either hand:

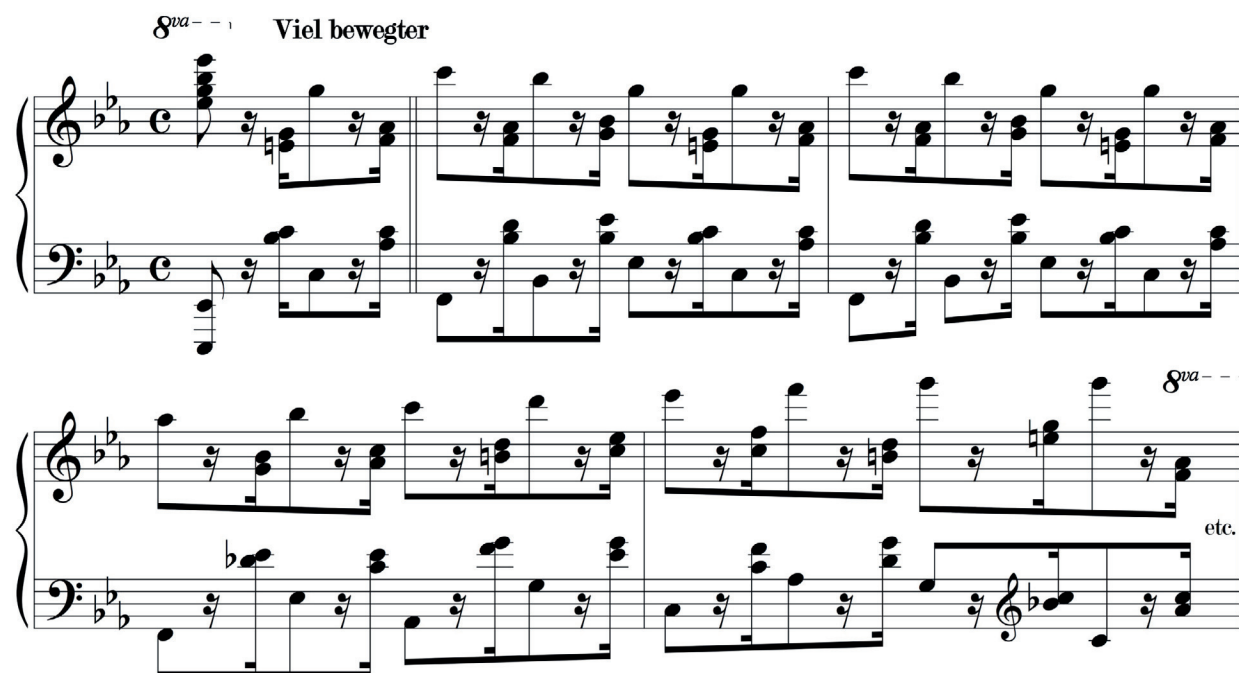


Figure 46: Schumann: Fantasy Op. 17, second movement, mm. 232–236 as written

One can redistribute select notes into the left hand in order to allow the right hand to have a simple octave stretch for many of the leaps:

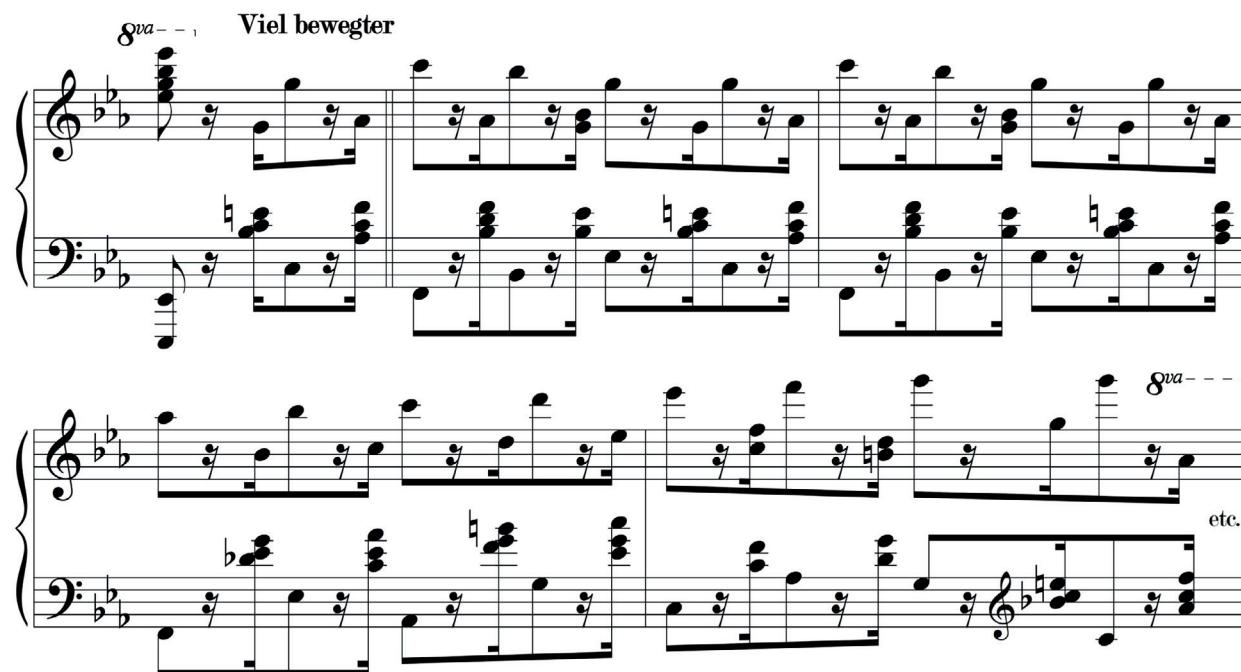


Figure 47: Schumann: Fantasy Op. 17, second movement, mm. 232–236 redistributed

The difficulty increases in the left hand, but it becomes drastically easier for the right hand. In this coda, one should be prepared to accept things may go wrong, so a strong right-hand performance—especially of the top notes—will tend to obscure any left-hand messiness.

This solution is recommended by both Sharon Mann and Julian Martin.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> This solution is no magic bullet: although the right hand is more likely to be played successfully, one must still practice wisely to stand a chance of surviving this coda.

## Beethoven: Sonata Op. 31 No. 2 (1802)

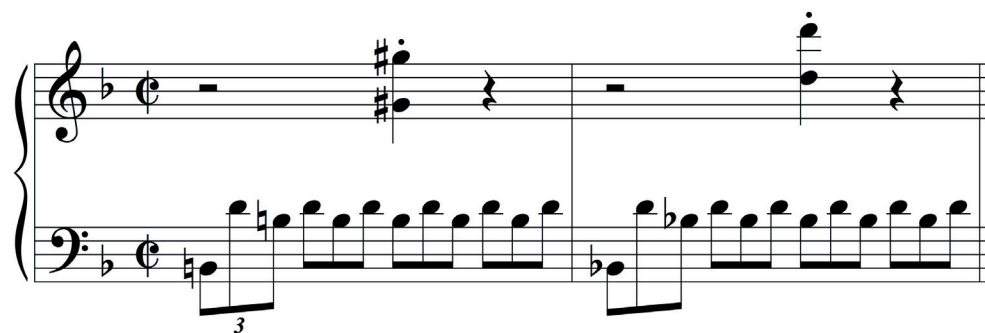


Figure 48: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 31 No. 2, first movement, mm. 119–120 as written



Figure 49: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 31 No. 2, first movement, mm. 119–120 redistributed

By crossing over to take the low B<sub>2</sub> with the right hand, one avoids an awkward shift in the left hand alone.

This trick was introduced to me by Sharon Mann.

## Schumann: Piano Concerto in A minor Op. 54 (1845)

*Animato*

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54, measures 67-74. The tempo is marked 'Animato'. The score is in 2/4 time. The right hand part is in the upper staff, and the left hand part is in the lower staff. The right hand has a melody with some triplets and a final chord. The left hand has a more complex, technically demanding part with many triplets and a final chord. The key signature is A minor (three flats).

Figure 50: Schumann: Piano Concerto Op. 54, solo part, first movement, mm. 67–74 as written

As written, the right hand in Figure 50 has the easier job, while the left hand must take on extra work, necessitating hand-position shifts. By redistributing, one can keep both hands more neutral and probably more accurate:

**Animato**

The musical score is for the solo part of the first movement of Schumann's Piano Concerto Op. 54, measures 67-74. It is marked 'Animato'. The score is written for piano and features a complex redistribution of parts. The first system shows the right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) parts, with a 'Red.' (Redistributed) section. The second system continues the LH part and shows the RH part. Fingerings and articulations are indicated throughout.

Figure 51: Schumann: Piano Concerto Op. 54, solo part, first movement, mm. 67–74 redistributed

The solution for m. 67 was introduced by Christopher Taylor; the solution in mm. 69–70 is mine.



## Mozart: Piano Concerto in C Minor K. 491 (1786)



Figure 53: Mozart: Concerto K. 491, first movement, solo part, mm. 309–310 as written

In this developmental passage, the left hand is completely unoccupied, and the right hand must play strings of perfect sixteenth notes. The fact that there are black notes (F# and C#) on the second and third beats of the opening measure only hinders attempts to smooth out this passage.

One can redistribute as follows:

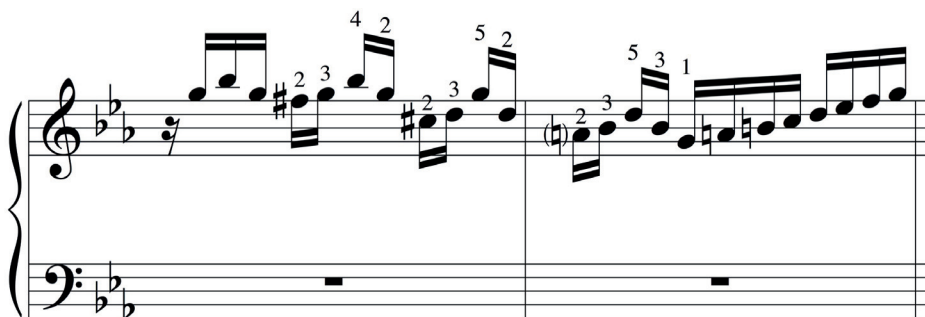


Figure 54: Mozart: Concerto k. 491, first movement, solo part mm. 309–310 redistributed

In addition to increasing command of the sixteenth notes, this solution can help define the meter. Another possibility would be to take just the first note of each beat with the left hand. This is one of my personal solutions.

## Beethoven: Sonata Op. 53 (1804)



Figure 55: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 53, third movement, mm. 465–469 as written

The original idea in this passage and subsequent bars was presumably to use an octave glissando. Depending on handspan and on choice of piano, however, this technique can be impossible. In order to get the right sound, one can use Schnabel's solution:

a) Il revisore consiglia di dividere nel modo seguente il passaggio di ottave. Così senza sacrificare nessuna nota di queste otto battute, si può ottenere l'esecuzione rapida, leggera e chiara che il passaggio richiede:

a) The editor recommends the following distribution which, without sacrifice of even a single note, nevertheless makes it possible to play the 8 bars with the octave-scales as easily, rapidly and clearly as is required here:

a) Der Herausgeber empfiehlt folgende Verteilung, die sich, ohne das Opfer auch nur eines einzigen Tones der acht Takte mit den Oktavenskalen, dennoch mühelos ausführen läßt, was hier an leichter Geschwindigkeit und Deutlichkeit gefordert ist:

Figure 56: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 53, third movement, mm. 465–469, Schnabel's solution. From Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonata N. 21*, ed. Artur Schnabel (Milan: Curci, 1949), 260.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> One pianist I know insisted on playing this passage without redistribution and ended up playing the entire run in staccato octaves.


Schnabel's trick is an instance in which the solution is more difficult than the original: if one can successfully play octave *glissandi*, then the original is preferable. This solution takes considerable control and practice owing to the constant shifts, and because it requires that the pianist use pedal to maintain the long chord, it can easily cause an undesirable blur. Nonetheless, it should still be attempted if the alternative proves impossible.

Ravel: Toccata, from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1918)

Dorothy Brandwein has written about re-handing in various works of Ravel. A page from her thesis is reproduced here, detailing some of her rewrites in the Toccata:


"Toccata"

Measure 5




Measures 6-7 same as measure 5

Measure 8




Measures 11-13



Measures 15-17 same as measures 11-13

Measures 19-20 same as measures 11-12

Measures 21-22



Measures 35-39




Figure 57: Selected redistributions of Dorothy Brandwein in Ravel: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Toccata. From "Divisi Fingering in Selected Passages from Ravel's Solo Works" (DMA thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1981), 122.

I agree with Brandwein's ideas, although I would disagree with the particulars. For instance, regarding the redistribution in mm. 11–13, I would rather they be executed as follows:



Figure 58: Ravel: Toccata, mm. 11–13 redistributed

The benefit of this solution is that it is mentally much easier than Brandwein's redistribution. It also avoids the challenging, repeated notes in the left hand until the last measure.

Redistributions can be intensely personal. The next set of redistributions comprises the most controversial solutions, in which one will almost invariably face charges of cheating.

## Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 2 in A minor (1830)

*Allegro sempre legato*

*p*

Figure 59: Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 2, mm. 1–4 as written

*Allegro sempre legato*

*p*

(if possible)

Figure 60: Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 2, mm. 1–4 redistributed

This trick requires the reach of a tenth in the left hand. Otherwise, one can play the as-written version for the first beat before switching to the redistributed version. Similar solutions, where

one can take inner notes with the left hand, exist throughout the etude. In the next example, the use of the sostenuto pedal allows for left-hand assistance:



Figure 61: Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 2, mm. 32–35 as written

Figure 62: Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 2, mm. 32–35 redistributed

This kind of example is apt to offend competition jurors with keen eyesight; the notion being that such tricks undermine Chopin's pedagogical intent. These solutions were first introduced to me by Hans Boepple, with fingerings inspired by Christopher Taylor.

## Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 12 in C minor (1831)

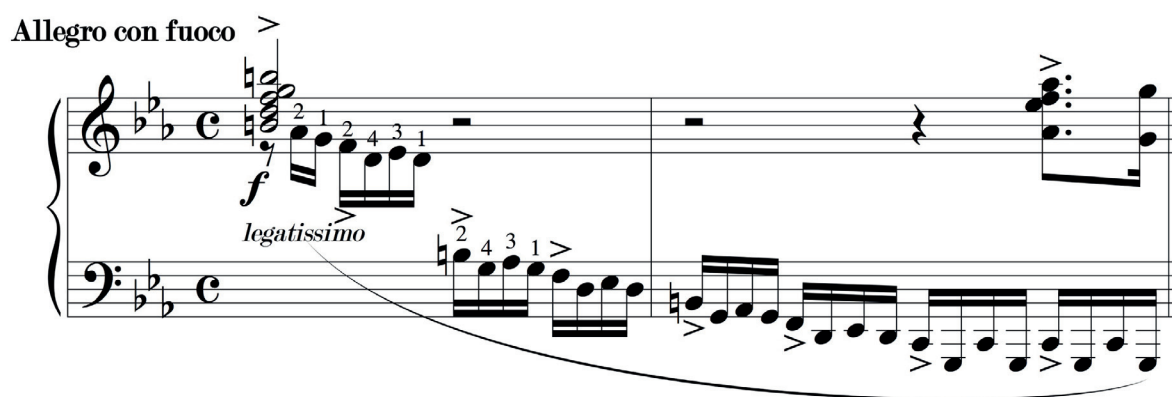


Figure 63: Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 12, mm. 1–2 as written

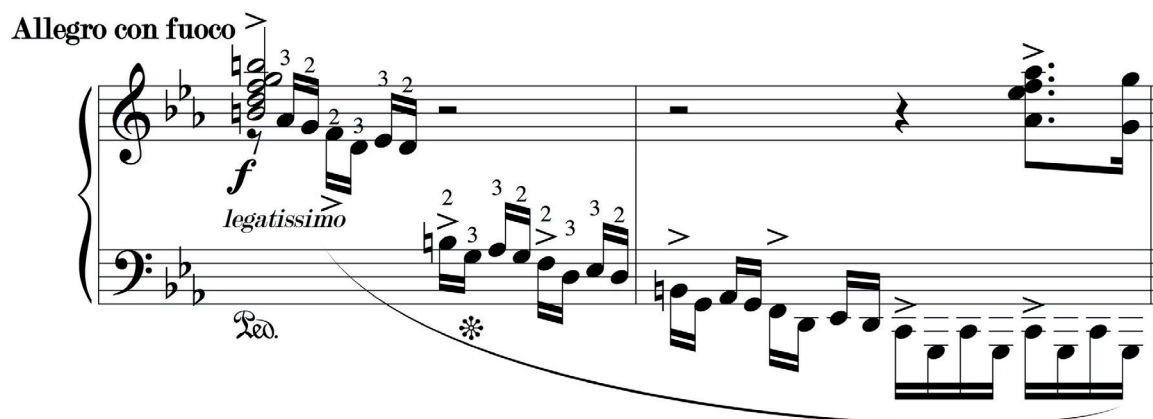


Figure 64: Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No. 12, mm. 1–2 redistributed

If one chooses not to use pedal, one can begin as written, switching only at the last two sixteenth notes of m. 1 to the redistributed version. The solution is mine.

## Chopin: Etude Op. 25 No. 6 in G# minor (1835)

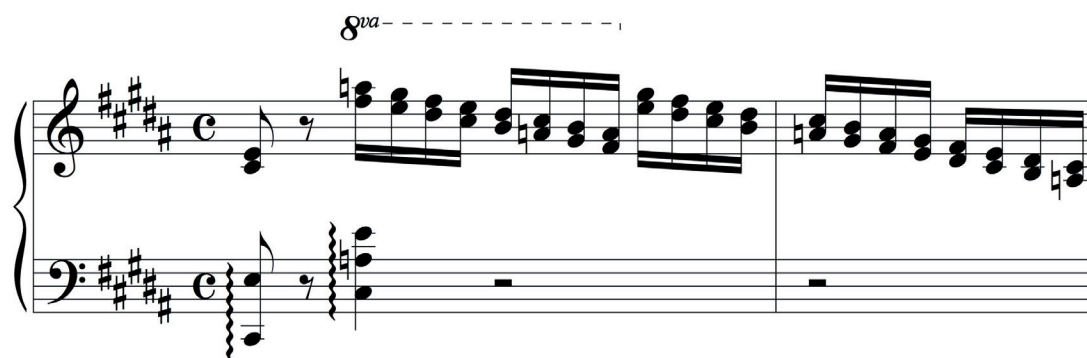


Figure 65: Chopin: Etude Op. 25 No. 6, mm. 47–48 as written

As written, the exposed scale near the ending of Etude Op. 25 No. 6 can easily tangle the fingers. With the following redistribution, one achieves a simplicity of fingering and avoids hopping the thumb:

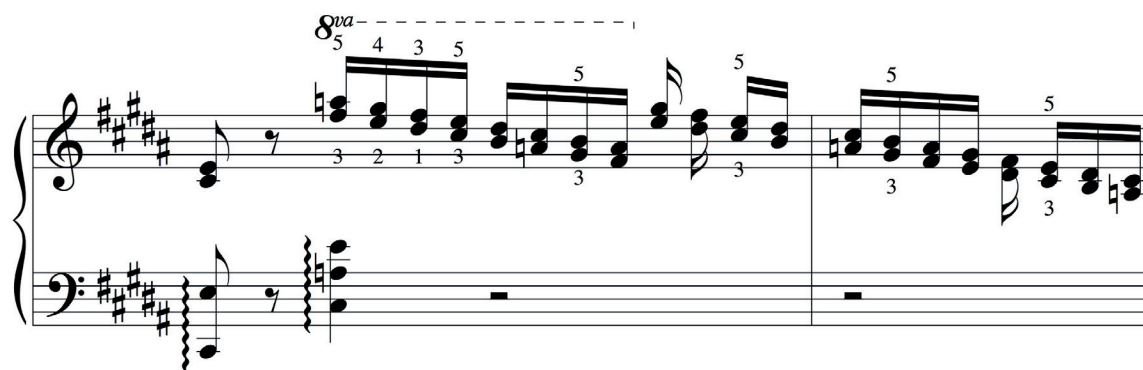


Figure 66: Chopin: Etude Op. 25 No. 6, mm. 47–48 redistributed

Although Figure 66 is my personal rewrite, others have found the same or similar redistributions, for instance:

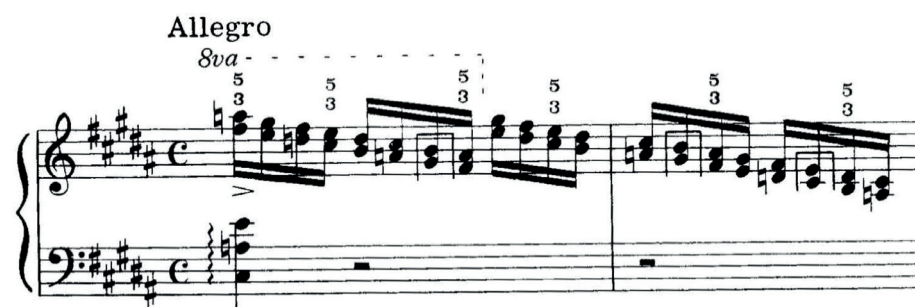


Figure 67: Chopin: Etude Op. 25 No. 6, mm. 47–48, Musafia’s solution. From *The Art of Fingering in Piano Playing*, 78.

In Musafia’s case, the fact that the left hand takes different notes at times makes it slightly more taxing mentally. In my redistribution, the left hand consistently takes the notes D and F#. On the other hand, Musafia’s redistribution has the benefit of adding left-hand assistance earlier.

## Beethoven: Sonata Op. 2 No. 3 (1796)



Figure 68: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 2 No. 3, first movement mm. 1–3 as written

The thirds can come off as unclear, and in m. 3, the interval of a tenth in the left hand may be unreachable. One can redistribute to achieve clean thirds and to hold all notes to their full values if one uses the middle pedal and finger substitution:

**Allegro con brio**

Figure 69: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 2 No. 3, first movement mm. 1–3, solution

Even if one has to play as written later in the piece, by using this trick one can start confidently. This is my personal solution, but I am aware that others have made similar rearrangements. This solution has a mechanical danger: one must test the ever-finicky middle pedal on the piano being used. Without a functioning middle pedal, one can also use the right pedal, but it may cause an

undesirable blur or else cheat the full value of the whole notes in the bass. This redistribution is also highly visible at this notoriously exposed opening; some pianists in the audience will look down on the performer who uses this solution.

## Beethoven: Sonata Op. 106 (1818)

**Allegro**

*ff*

Red.

\*

Figure 70: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 106, first movement, mm. 1–4 as written

**Allegro**

*ff*

Red.

RH

RH

\*

Figure 71: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 106, first movement, mm. 1–4, redistribution A

**Allegro**

*ff*

Red.

RH

RH

LH

LH

\*

Figure 72: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 106, first movement, mm. 1–4, redistribution B

The idea of redistributing the opening notes of the Op. 106 already existed in the mid-nineteenth century. Hans von Bülow suggested taking the opening notes using either of the solutions in Figures 71–72.<sup>41</sup> Cheats this famous and this prominently placed are especially likely to produce scornful reactions from knowledgeable pianists in the audience.

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<sup>41</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, “Sonate Op. 106,” ed. Hans von Bülow (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, ca. 1875); repr. trans. John Henry Cornell (New York: Edward Schuberth, 1891). This edition also shows potential alterations for smaller handspans.

## Beethoven: Sonata Op. 111 (1822)

The famous opening of Beethoven Sonata Op. 111 appears as written:



Figure 73: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 111, first movement, ms. 1, as written

Alfredo Casella shows one potential redistribution for the opening figure and subsequent passages:

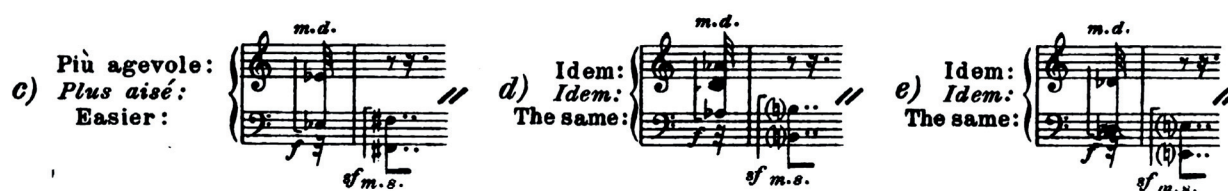


Figure 74: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 111, first movement, Casella's solution<sup>42</sup>

A few other solutions exist to the same problem, for instance:

<sup>42</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonate per Pianoforte di L. van Beethoven*, ed. Alfredo Casella, vol. 3 (Milan: Edizione Ricordi, 1920), 193.



Figure 75: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 111, first movement, ms. 1, redistribution C



Figure 76: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 111, first movement, ms. 1, redistribution D



Figure 77: Beethoven: Sonata Op. 111, first movement, ms. 1, redistribution E

The remarks given earlier concerning Op. 2 No. 3 and Op. 106 apply equally well here.

Regarding redistributions C, D, and E, I have no strong preferences and doubt that any consistent differences would be audible in controlled experiments.

## Concluding Remarks

The list presented above detailed famous examples from the literature, from which pianists—especially those less familiar with re-arrangement—might gain a practical understanding of redistribution. By studying it, we can find certain patterns that observant pianists can refer to when tackling difficult passages in other works:

1. One staff has rests.
2. One staff has simple material that can be sustained with the fingers or with the pedals.
3. The hands are very close, overlapping, or crossing in register.

Redistribution can be used to lessen all sorts of difficulties that one (or both) of the hands may face, but especially likely examples of these difficulties would include:

1. Awkward jumps
2. Rapid hand shifts
3. Precision in voicing
4. Large hand stretches

I hope the list will prove itself useful and perhaps even entertaining. Over the long term, however, I believe that the best model for pursuing this topic further would be to develop an online wiki, similar to Wikipedia. To that end, I am hoping in due course to create a free, online repository of pianistic solutions, where pianists can search for tricks, as well as submit suggestions for the pieces they are working on.

The topic of redistribution is controversial and has received only spotty attention, but I have found it both intriguing as a researcher and practical as a performer. Although the

moralistic element may never be fully divorced from the physical act of redistribution, “cheating” can be as wholesome and useful as finding a good fingering.

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