I, Yuchi Sophie Wang, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano.

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Edward MacDowell: A Poetic Voice as Seen in the “Eroica” and “Keltic” Sonatas

Student's name: Yuchi Sophie Wang

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Jonathan Kregor, Ph.D.

Committee member: Michael Chertock, M.M.

Committee member: James Tocco,
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by

Yuchi Sophie Wang

BM, University of Tennessee, 2005
MM, Florida State University, 2007
Doctoral Candidacy, University of Cincinnati, April 23, 2013

700 Riddle Road
Apt 311
Cincinnati, OH 45220
sophiewang.wang@gmail.com

Advisor: Jonathan Kregor, PhD
Reader: James Tocco
Reader: Michael Chertock, MM
Abstract

This study investigates the poetic voice of Edward MacDowell (1861–1908) through two largely unknown works: the “Eroica” and “Keltic” piano sonatas. Working within a tradition of composers who experimented with the marriage of music and literature, MacDowell did not limit his music to abstract constructions, but diversified it with poetry, literature, and folklore.

As a pianist-composer, MacDowell strived to infuse the poetic nature of his source material into tone much as an impressionistic painter captures light and shade on canvas. I propose to demonstrate how MacDowell motivically unified each of the sonatas and musically depicted each with extramusical inspiration. This document also provides interpretive suggestions for pianists, based on the poetic material provided by the composer and descriptions of his own playing.
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Chapter I: Edward MacDowell: the Romantic Poet

Edward MacDowell is not a household name, even among connoisseurs of piano music. “To a Wild Rose,” a charming miniature from Woodland Sketches, is the composition by MacDowell that is widely recognized by the general public. In fact, Michael Broyles considers him the first American since Gottschalk to enjoy European fame.¹ MacDowell’s largely neglected four piano sonatas and two piano concertos are his most significant large-scale contributions to the piano literature. Lawrence Gilman, who holds the distinction of being MacDowell’s first biographer, goes as far as claiming that no other piano sonatas since the death of Beethoven have matched the same level of passion and dignity as MacDowell’s four piano sonatas.² Inspired by medieval and mystical literature, each bears a programmatic title: Sonata No. 1 “Tragica” (1893), No. 2 “Eroica” (1895), No. 3 “Norse” (1900), and No. 4 “Keltic” (1901). The “Eroica” is based on Arthurian legend, while the “Norse” and the “Keltic” are both prefaced by poems. To unite poetry, literature, and music, MacDowell used a network of motives to construct both his “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas, with the expressed goal of allowing listeners to participate in the fantasy envisioned by the poet-composer.

Gilman, T.P. Currier, Alan H. Levy all provide thorough biographical background of MacDowell, as well as a survey of his compositions.³ While biographies of MacDowell are widely available, detailed musical analyses of the “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas are limited. Furthermore, the sources that do exist do not fully embrace MacDowell’s self-proclaimed status


² Lawrence Gilman, Edward MacDowell: A Study (New York: J. Lane, 1915), 155.

as “poet-composer.” The most recent MacDowell biography was published in August 2013. Musicologist E. Douglas Bomberger differs from other biographers by narrating MacDowell’s life story with extensive primary sources and musical analyses that significantly explain MacDowell’s development as a composer. At the same time, Bomberger’s new revelations about MacDowell’s biography mean that he spends little time on the historical and aesthetic contexts for the “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas. Stephen Paul Burnaman’s dissertation, “The Solo Piano Music of Edward MacDowell and Mrs. H.H.A. Beach: A Historical Analysis,” includes brief descriptions of formal structure and compositional devices of all four of the sonatas. Hyunjung Cho provides analyses of the “Eroica” and “Keltic” in her DMA dissertation, “The Four Piano Sonatas of Edward MacDowell.” She sets aside the works’ subtitles, analyzing them with sole regard to the rigid structure, classification of themes and harmony, examination of key structure, and navigation of movement layouts. Neglect of these works’ programmatic elements and a lack of specific examples in the above dissertations result in an incomplete portrait.

The study of program music has been surprisingly limited. The most comprehensive study, Friedrich Niecks’s A History of Programme Music from the 16th Century to the Present Time, is over a century old; and it largely neglects MacDowell and his American colleagues. While Leslie Orrey considers MacDowell to be “the most gifted of the numerous group of American composers” active in the last decade of the nineteenth century, she skims over

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MacDowell’s sonatas in order to cover the composer’s symphonic poems in a short paragraph.\textsuperscript{8} Even Lawrence Casler’s comprehensive two-volume \textit{Symphonic Music and Its Literary Sources} makes no mention of MacDowell’s programmatic sonatas.\textsuperscript{9} Only Dolores Pesce has covered MacDowell’s aesthetic of program music in any detail, and even this is constructed around his symphonic output, not his piano music.\textsuperscript{10} At the same time, these sources provide us with important contexts for MacDowell’s use of programmaticism in his sonatas.

Indeed, MacDowell’s piano sonatas may be seen as rhapsodic in style rather than strictly adhering to traditional sonata form. Hence, to link the works to their inspired sources, I intend to demonstrate how MacDowell musically depicts literature in both the “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas with extramusical inspiration while also motivically unifying each sonata. In particular, this study examines the following:

- Influence of poetic sources of ancestral themes in “Eroica” and “Keltic,” which guided MacDowell’s creativity in tone-painting;
- MacDowell’s use of motivic unity, a technique reminiscent of leitmotif as utilized by Wagner, as well as thematic transformation as employed by Liszt. Concurrent with MacDowell’s use of motive are various poetic implications that will be explored.


• MacDowell’s philosophy of music. Exploration of this aspect will also shed light on the composer’s nonmusical influences, which further identify him not only as a composer, but a poet-composer.

• In the hope of assisting pianists to interpret MacDowell’s works in an appropriate style, this study also offers interpretative suggestions for the sonatas based on the poetic sources used by MacDowell himself, descriptions of the composer-pianist’s own playing, as well as recordings of James Tocco and Constance Keene,\(^\text{11}\) two pianists who have undertaken the rare and enormous task of commercially recording the complete MacDowell sonatas.

Thus, this study invites pianists to explore MacDowell’s piano compositions beyond the *Woodland Sketches*, especially these deserving sonatas, which deliver abundant poetry and emotion. Encompassing love, nobility, anger, drama, tragedy, heroism, and grief, these works should be explored by any devotee of Romanticism and its rich piano literature.

**Brief biography**

There is no surviving birth certificate for Edward McDowell, which makes the exact year of his birth a mystery. Nevertheless, it is known that he was born in either 1860 or 1861 in New York City to a Quaker couple of Scottish and English descent. Throughout his life, the MacDowell was notably enamored with ancient and medieval literature. In fact, the young Edward loved reading so much that he paid his brother two cents an hour to plunk at the piano while he read books. Their mother, who required daily piano practice from young Edward,

would hear from the next room and assume that Edward was busy at work on his piano assignments. Like many Americans during the late nineteenth century, he took the conventional path of studying in Europe. MacDowell’s twelve-year education in France and Germany had a lasting influence on him as a composer. His love and passion for Europe is evident in John Erskine’s dictionary entry on MacDowell: “the Europe he loved was a dream country, suggested by poets and artists and by ancient monuments, by folk-lore, by enchanting forests…[It] was this dream country that continued to inspire him. His music was a bridge from reality to that dream.”

At the age of fifteen, MacDowell pursued his piano studies in Paris with Antoine Marmontel. Interestingly, the young Claude Debussy was his classmate. Equally talented in art, MacDowell was offered free art lessons from the painter Carolus Duran at the Écoles des Beaux Arts. There, he was advised to abandon his musical aspirations in pursuit of a career in the visual arts. Despite the entreaties from Duran, MacDowell chose to continue his advancement as a musician, determined to have a career as a composer-pianist. Nevertheless, it is impossible to dispute that his gifts for creativity and imagination in the visual arts continued to display themselves in his music.

In 1878, MacDowell continued his musical training by moving to Frankfurt, Germany, where he studied piano with Carl Heymann and composition with Joachim Raff. Gilbert Chase quotes Lawrence Gilman in America’s Music, describing Raff as “an influence at once potent and engrossing—a force which was to direct the currents of his own temperament into definite

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Despite having bribed his brother to practice for him while he read, MacDowell had ambitions of becoming a piano virtuoso. Because of this, he spent hours on end practicing the instrument. Time spent on composing was seen as time taken away from practicing at the piano. Raff was the one who saw potential in MacDowell as a composer. Completely convinced of MacDowell’s compositional promise, he even went so far as telling him, “Your music will be played when mine is forgotten!” Inspired by Raff’s confidence in him, MacDowell thereafter devoted increasing hours to composing. Years later he dedicated his First Piano Sonata, the “Tragica,” to Raff, in grieving memory of his beloved master’s death.

MacDowell married Marian Griswold Nevins in 1884. Four years later, they returned to America and settled in Boston for the next eight years. There he taught privately, composed, and concertized as a pianist. This Boston period was the most fruitful of his life in terms of composition. These years, in fact, saw the completion of his Indian Suite and Woodland Sketches, as well as the “Tragica” and “Eroica” sonatas. In 1896, he was offered a prestigious position in New York City: chair of the newly formed music department at Columbia University. As a pedagogue, MacDowell cared deeply for his students. Aside from the five to six courses he taught weekly, he held informal discussions in his home. He was a patient and respected pedagogue who tailored instruction according to his individual pupils. The years at Columbia brought an increase in responsibilities, and therefore less spare time. However, despite the busy teaching schedule, MacDowell did not neglect his compositional craft. In fact, his New York years are the most important of his life from a creative standpoint. It was in New York that he turned out the Sea Pieces and the final two piano sonatas, the “Norse” and the “Keltic.” Unfortunately, his new pedagogical affiliation would not have a happy ending. His

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resignation from Columbia was forced, over an idiotic controversy between himself and Nicolas Butler, Columbia’s president—a controversy that had been provoked by two irresponsible student journalists. Butler, still new to the Columbia presidency, had reorganized the fine arts curriculum in 1902 when MacDowell was on leave for sabbatical. When he returned, MacDowell was upset about the new administration and informed Butler privately of his intention to resign the next year. Not long afterwards, when two student journalists interviewed MacDowell on the subject of his resignation, he spoke out more forcefully than tactfully on his views of Butler’s new administration. This issue reached the *New York Times*, which quoted MacDowell as saying that his colleagues were “barbarians” and his students largely incompetent. This was followed by a heated exchange of public letters between MacDowell and Butler. MacDowell was insulted by a reprimand from the trustees in their acceptance of his resignation. He left Columbia as a bitter and depressed man. He was unable to put this experience behind him for the next two years. He grew increasingly troubled by insomnia, loss of memory and inability to work. A traffic accident soon afterwards left him mentally and physically weakened. By 1907, he had lost the ability to walk or speak coherently for more than a few moments at a time. He spent hours turning over the pages of illustrated Celtic fairy tales and mythology books. After several unhappy years, MacDowell passed away in New York City on January 23, 1908. His fame diminished considerably after his death. MacDowell’s manuscripts and letter correspondences between friends were unavailable to the public until 1991, almost eighty years after his death.

**Tone-poet with a focus on expression and communication**

Even at the early age of twelve, MacDowell was making works of art that communicated and evoked vivid emotions. During a tour in Europe in 1873, the young Edward and his mother
traveled to Ireland, Scotland, England, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and France. Rather than document his travels through the more traditional scrap-book or journal, MacDowell recorded his journey through drawings and paintings. *The Hen with the Golden Eggs* reveals a sad woman sitting on a curb with a dead chicken. In her hands she holds a dead chicken, bloody knife and three eggs. Later in life, he aimed to achieve the same focus in music that he had exhibited in his childhood works of visual art. Indeed, as he matured as a composer, the increasing intent for expression and communication through his music took the route from absolute music, such as *Petit Morceaux Op. 3, Prelude and Fugue, Op. 13, Second Modern Suite* for piano, Op. 14, to musical evocations of Shakespeare plays and Arthurian legends. This second type of programmatic music can be seen in symphonic poems *Hamlet and Ophelia, Op. 22, Lancelot und Elaine, Op. 25* and the “Eroica” piano sonata, Op. 50. Eventually, MacDowell began to reflect through his music personally assimilated images such as *Woodland Sketches, Op. 51, Sea Pieces, Op. 55*, and *New England Idyls, Op. 62.*

Gilbert Chase’s *America’s Music from the Pilgrim to the Present* explores MacDowell’s views on music and identifies MacDowell’s music as a “soul-language,”14 in which one soul speaks to another. MacDowell utilizes other forms of arts to engage communication. As scholar H. Wiley Hitchcock writes, “MacDowell would not have been the Romantic bard that he was without mingling music and other arts.”15 Among these “other arts,” poetry and literature are among the most prominent. As mentioned previously, the “Eroica” is based on Arthurian legend, while the “Norse” and the “Keltic” are both prefaced by poems. Compositions with poetry references include *Six Idyls after Goethe, Op. 28, Poems after Heine, Op. 31, Four Little Poems,*

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Op. 32, and *Sea Pieces*, Op. 55. Each of the sets opens with a poem by Goethe, Heine or the composer himself.

As a tone-poet whose particular focus was on expression and communication, MacDowell was quoted as saying that “music is not an art, but psychological utterance.”

MacDowell further differentiates music and arts such as architecture, painting or poetry: “painting for example is an art of external...for that art must touch its audience through something more or less material whereas music is of the stuff dreams are made of.” In order to communicate his dreams and images, he often employs programmatic titles, a practice often employed by Lisztians and Wagnerians. Examples of this are all four of his piano sonatas, *Forest Idylls*, Op. 19 (with movements of Forest Stillness, Play of the Nymphs, Revery, Dance of the Dryads), *Moon Pictures*, Op. 21 for piano four hands (with descriptive movements of The Hindo Maiden, Stork’s Story, In Tyrol, The Swan, and Visit of the Bear), *Les Orientales*, Op. 37 for piano (with movements of Clair de Lune, Dans le Hamac, Danse Andalous.) The programmatic/characteristic further carries through both sets of his piano etudes, *Twelve Studies*, Op. 39, and *Twelve Virtuoso Studies*, Op. 46. Much like Liszt’s *Études d'exécution transcendante*, S.139, MacDowell’s sets can also be seen as individual character pieces, for each of the twenty-four bares a vivid description of a scenery, event, dance, or title of a character piece. The Op. 39 consists of Hunting Song, Alla Tarantella, Romance, Arabesque, In the Forest, Dance of the Gnomes, Idyll, Shadow Dance, Intermezzo, Melody, Scherzino, and Hungarian. Similarly, the Op. 46 includes the following titles: Novelette, Moto Perpetuo, Wild Chase, Improvisation, Elfin Dance, Valse triste, Burleske, Bluette, Träumerei, March Wind, Impromptu, and Polonaise.

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16 Chase, *America’s Music from the Pilgrims to the Present*, 357.

17 Ibid., 357.
John Porte labels MacDowell an American tone-poet.\textsuperscript{18} Porte believes that MacDowell particularly excels in small forms, such as in the \textit{Sea Pieces} and \textit{Woodland Sketches}, in which one can sense definite musical moods and vivid depictions of nature. However, Porte is not fond of what he refers to as the “ragged form,”\textsuperscript{19} which he sees as a compromising result of poetic requirements. Conversely, the composer himself purposely avoids “formal constraints”\textsuperscript{20} and adopts the motivic unity for better poetic illustrations. MacDowell’s disobeying the formal formula finds justification in the writing of his first biographer, Gilman, who in \textit{Edward MacDowell} writes, “His form is based on underlying poetic ideas.”\textsuperscript{21} To MacDowell, structure was not a strict guideline, but merely a means to establish intimate communication with the audience. As a free-spirited improvisator, his improvisation during leisure time at home resulted in many drafts of new compositions. In one of his own \textit{Critical and Historical Essays}, a series of lectures at Columbia University published in 1912, he states that, “formal constraints are too scientific and take away from the poetic musical expression.”\textsuperscript{22} To further understand MacDowell’s nonmusical influences as a poetic composer, one can explore his attitudes and beliefs as a pianist and pedagogue.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} John F. Porte, \textit{A Great American Tone Poet, His Life and Music} (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1922), 48.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Edward MacDowell, \textit{Critical and Historical Essays: Lectures delivered at Columbia University}, edited by W. J. Balzell (Boston: A. P. Schmidt, 1912), 9.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Gilman, \textit{Edward MacDowell: A Study}, 113.
\item \textsuperscript{22} MacDowell, \textit{Critical and Historical Essays: Lectures delivered at Columbia University}, 12.
\end{itemize}
Composer-pianist: pianistic style

An aspiring virtuoso from childhood, MacDowell began his music career as a concert pianist. His most important teacher was Teresa Carreño, who later performed MacDowell’s Piano Concerto No.2 more than twenty times between 1890 and 1898. As a pianist, he portrayed the same poetic world that he leaves behind in his compositions: pianistic as tone-painter. T. P. Currier considers MacDowell as a poetic pianist; he was known for “his delicacy, color, sensitivity, intimate interpretation, and poetic imagination.”\(^{23}\) This approach can be seen in his performances of his own piano sonatas which resulted in mixed reviews concerning the inconsistency between his playing, the score indication and his technical deficiencies. However, it is generally believed that with his unique interpretation in playing these sonatas, he managed to shed new light on what had been published in print. With his own composition particularly, he stressed the importance of accent and rhythm. His treatment of the simple texture of melody over accompaniment, for example, was unconventional. Where one expected to find definite tone in the melodic line and a subordinate accompaniment, he instead envisioned that texture as vague, far off, and floating sound in space. Although he was fully capable of a powerful fortissimo, contrasting pianissimo, rapid scales, arpeggios, and trills, to him they were not for virtuosic display, but solely for the purpose of effects—the notes became an effect of waves and swirls. With constant use of half-pedal, he aimed to achieve atmospheric and overtone effects. His fortissimi often resembled bursts of a full orchestra. Every sound he created was to the purpose of music’s poetics. Compared to his contemporaries, the notion of “classical clarity and grace

\(^{23}\)Currier, “Edward MacDowell: As I Knew Him,” 38.
were less important to him than passion, fire and color."\textsuperscript{24} He included Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata, op. 27, no. 2 in almost all his concerts, though his interpretation was debatable. One can imagine his unorthodox take of the first movement as ambiguous and atmospheric coloration, and taking a lightning speed regardless the clarity of all the ascending sixteenth broken chords in the virtuosic final movement. To MacDowell, a dazzling, note-perfect concert that lacked the poetic effect was nothing more than a failed attempt.

**MacDowell as a pedagogue: his philosophy of music vs. Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk**

Upon his appointment at Columbia University in 1896, the hiring committee praised MacDowell as the “greatest musical genius America has produced.”\textsuperscript{25} At Columbia University, he not only taught, but developed his own curriculum including European music esthetics and history, practical theory consisting of harmony, counterpoint, composition, and orchestration. However, as an advocate for embracing arts in music education, MacDowell was a firm believer in this larger concept of a well-rounded and diversified complete artist. He promoted the idea of integrating painting, sculpture, architecture and comparative literature—the arts he personally loved so much—into the music curriculum. Similarities can be seen between MacDowell’s philosophy toward music education and Wager’s aesthetic ideals of unifying all works of art in theater, “Gesamtkunstwerk” (total work of art). Wagner championed this concept of fusing poetry, scenic design, staging and lighting into music during the middle of the nineteenth century and articulated his views beginning with his essay “The Artwork of the Future.” Wagner’s

\textsuperscript{24} Bomberger, *MacDowell*, 130.

\textsuperscript{25} Chase, *America’s Music from the Pilgrims to the Present*, 346.
theories were finally applied in performances at Bayreuth beginning in 1876. However, MacDowell’s dream of a unified Fine Arts department never came to be.

**Influences from some Romantics: Wagner, Liszt, Schumann, and Grieg**

During the late nineteenth century, an aesthetic separation in Western music occurred between the Wagnerians and Brahmsians. The Wagnerians incorporated visual, literary, and philosophical elements into music while firm believers of absolute music, the Brahmsians, believed music was at its purist and best without extra-musical ideas or inserted titles. Admiring Wagner and his innovations in music drama, MacDowell noted that they were the “highest development of music in human history.” As MacDowell matured, he continued to take up the more expressive, Wagnerian approach, and his compositional style came to evoke storylines or pieces of literature, such as in his *Six Poems After Heinrich Heine*, Op. 31; Arthurian legends in his “Eroica” (1895) sonata; and personally integrated scenery in the *Woodland Sketches*, the *New England Idylls*, and legends in the “Norse” (1900) and “Keltic” (1901) sonatas. In addition, MacDowell was influenced by both Wagner’s and Liszt’s masterful uses of leitmotif and thematic transformation. Prominent motives can be found in both the “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas which will be discussed in chapters two and three respectively. Although full-blown leitmotif is not applied here, prominent recurring motives do carry out through both sonatas, but they do not necessarily reflect the same characters, ideas or mood.

Although Wagner’s unusual use of mythology did not appeal to the widest mass of composers, MacDowell was an exception. One sees a parallel on the subject matter between Wagner’s *Ring* cycle and MacDowell’s piano sonatas. Wagner’s *Ring* cycle is loosely based on Norse legend while MacDowell’s “Eroica,” “Norse,” and “Keltic” sonatas invoke ancestral
legends. Lastly, as mentioned previously, important parallels exist between MacDowell’s ideal vision in music education and Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, which seeks to unify all works of art in the theatre. As noted by Broyles, “MacDowell’s proclivity for painting and his association with Liszt determined his direction as a composer.”

Author Rey M. Longyear writes in his Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music, “echoes of Liszt’s harmony and musical rhetoric can be found in the work of nearly every composer of the late nineteenth century…Liszt anticipated the harmonic practices of two composers…not generally considered among Liszt’s disciples, Grieg and MacDowell.” The European influence, particular that of Liszt, is apparent in MacDowell’s sonatas, which employ novel programmatic elements within the sonata’s traditional design.

In 1882 MacDowell visited Liszt at Weimar with the manuscript of his recently completed First Piano Concerto. He played it along with the now revered composer-pianist Eugen d’Albert, who played the orchestral reduction. Liszt was highly impressed and said to d’Albert, “look out for your laurels, for when this young American grows older he will get ahead of you.” D’Albert seemed to resent this comment by avoiding performing MacDowell’s works, particularly when his marriage with Teresa Carreño ended. Nevertheless, Liszt recommended the young composer to the prestigious German publishing firm of Breitkopf & Härtel which published the Second Modern Suite, Op. 14.

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Unfortunately, this Liszt association did not always impact MacDowell positively. In 1885 MacDowell was turned down after applying for a faculty position at the Royal Academy of Music in London due to an anti-Liszt sentiment at that institution. The notion of a tone poet is closely related to Liszt and Schumann. Schumann has been called “the poet of the short, the clear, the well-defined.”

John Tasker Howard refers to MacDowell as a “tone poet” in _A Short History of Music in America_ “His music heightens the meaning of a poem. He felt that a poem was far more valuable as a suggestion for instrumental music than as the text of a song.”

MacDowell was particularly attracted to Schumann, the poet, for both composers were fascinated by nature and the supernatural. Like Schumann, MacDowell believed that “it is in the power of suggestion that the vital spark of music lies.”

Another connection between MacDowell and another Romantic composer is Edvard Grieg. Perhaps due to their heritage—both MacDowell and Grieg’s great-grand fathers were of Scottish origin—stylistic similarity of Gaelic elements and the capture of mood and nature in character pieces can be found. Both composers particularly excelled in short character pieces and songs. Grieg composed numerous sets of Lyric Pieces, Opp. 12, 43, 47, 54, 57, 62, 65, 68, and 71. Among those, one can not help but notice the similarity of the programmatic titles: Grieg’s Illusion (Op. 57, no. 3), Homesickness (Op. 57, no. 6), The Brook (Op. 62, no. 4), Phantom (Op. 62, no. 5), Evening in the Mountains (Op. 68, no. 4), and MacDowell’s Sea Pieces, Op. 51: To a Wild Rose (no. 1), In Autumn (no. 4), From an Indian Lodge (no. 5), By a Meadow Brook (no

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30 Ibid., 385.

31 MacDowell, _The Critical and Historical Essays: Lectures delivered at Columbia University_, 263.
9), and Told at Sunset (no. 10.) An indication of their association can be seen in dedications of MacDowell’s final two sonatas, “Norse” and “Keltic.” The two never met in person, but in a letter asking for the permission of the “Norse” sonata dedication, MacDowell expressed his admiration, “your music lies closer to my heart than I can well say. I have dedicated much to you in my thoughts, and this will be my excuse for sending you some of my music. If I do not receive your permission for the dedication I will at least have at last told you of my love for and loyalty to Ed. Grieg”.

The second and third chapters will be devoted to the “Eroica” and “Keltic” respectively. Instead of focusing exclusively on the sonatas’ individual structures, I will consider MacDowell as poet-composer, much like Schumann. Nationalistic coloration and topical elements of both sonatas will also be explored. The programmatic implications, orchestral writing, cyclical technique, and vast emotional range in these piano sonatas qualify MacDowell as a tone-poet.

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32 Bomberger, MacDowell, 130.
Chapter II: “Eroica” Sonata

The sketching of the “Eroica” sonata began in 1894. It is the first composition completed in Peterborough, an abandoned farm in New Hampshire where the MacDowells were headquartered in the summer, now known as MacDowell Colony. Inspired by the nature of their summer residency, MacDowell’s passion for ancient literature completed this masterwork in 1885. It was dedicated to William Mason (1829-1908), a pianist and pedagogue who mentored MacDowell. Manson was particularly helpful to MacDowell as he was beginning the “Eroica” sonata, a time in which he felt great pressure to live up to the popularity of the “Tragica” sonata. Unlike those in the “Tragica” sonata, all tempo indications found in the “Eroica” are in English. With the use of vernacular indications, distance is shortened between the composer and the concertgoers, non-classically trained in particular.

The Arthurian legend

The “Eroica,” bearing the motto “Flos regum Arthuris” (The Flowering of the Reign of King Arthur), is inspired by the heroic Arthurian legend. In fact, this is not his first instance of composition based on Arthurian legend; a previous example is a symphonic poem Lancelot and Elaine, Op. 25 (1885). MacDowell states: “the music is more a commentary on the subject than an actual depiction of it.” Nevertheless, MacDowell himself explains the layout of each movement according to the legend, where each movement represents either a character or an event: the coming of Arthur, a painting by Gustave Doré of a knight in the woods surrounded by elves, Guinevere’s beauty, and the passing of Arthur. MacDowell had contemplated the option of omitting the second movement from the work, for it seems like an interruption. His masterful

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33 Gilman, Edward MacDowell, 151.
use of motives fluidly weaves the whole work together, however, including the second movement.

**Motives**

**Motive I**

In the tonic key of G minor in 6/8, Motive I is stated in the top voice of the right hand. This theme is characterized by a chordal style, opening with a descending minor third, followed by three stepwise scales (**Example 1.1**). Here, a character of mystery and grand nobility are conveyed. Motive I is later developed and transformed by the composer into Motives III and IV, two other figurations of distinct characters.

**Example 1.1:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 1-2

The development opens with Motive I. In the same slow and noble character as the beginning of the movement (**Example 1.2**), a heavier chromaticism is introduced, leading the listener through an area of increasing uncertainty.

**Example 1.2:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 75-76
The second theme of the final movement, marked \( p \), in the key of B flat major, conveys the same dignified and noble effect as the introduction of the opening movement (Example 1.3). Although the meter is altered from 6/8 to 4/4, the rhythm and texture remain.

**Example 1.3**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 57-60

![Example 1.3](image)

**Example 1.4** shows the right hand taking the motive. Rather than continuing the same chordal style, the left hand now plays a descending chromatic ostinato, which provides a stronger sense of forward, if less certain, motion.

**Example 1.4**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 129-134

![Example 1.4](image)

Right before the recapitulation, the three-stave texture shows another instance of Motive I (Example 1.5). In the tonic key of G minor, the motive is in the middle register played on the first beats of each measure, while the bass sustains a dominant pedal point of D. Meanwhile, the right hand flashes extroverted, virtuosic arpeggios.
Example 1.5: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 152-160

At the fiery climax of the final movement, another instance of this motive is found, now in augmentation, blended with ascending octave figurations (Example 1.6).

Example 1.6: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 203-209

The final appearance of this Motive I occurs right before the coda. With identical tonality, texture and rhythm as the opening of the sonata (recall Example 1.1), it conveys the same dark and mysterious mood. A minor difference is the left hand accompaniment, which now plays the dominant D octave, instead of the expected tonic (Example 1.7).
**Example 1.7:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 257-260

![Example 1.7](image)

**Motive II:** the “Arthur theme”

After eighteen measures of introduction emerges the first theme of the opening movement, the “Arthur theme.” This two-measure motive first appears in the key of G minor in the left hand for one measure, and is afterwards distributed to both thumbs in the following measure. Marked *staccato, ppp*, and *crescendo*, this motive is essentially an ascending G minor scale, starting with the tonic and bearing the immediately noticeable distinction of a raised fourth (Example 2.1).

**Example 2.1:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 19-22

![Example 2.1](image)

An immediate restatement of the “Arthur theme” is given octave higher, played by the right hand only (see Example 2.1). The eighth rests in both the melody and accompaniment in the restatement yields a certain rocking syncopation which in turn raises an uneasy suspension for the unknown. The *ppp* “Arthur theme” progresses to the first climax of *fff*, as the D octave dominant pedal point thrusts for six measures, and it arrives in *p* with another “Arthur theme,”
now accompanied by fluid left hand triplets (Example 2.2). This time scale degree 5 instead of scale degree 1 opens the motive.

Example 2.2: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 36-40

Marked tenderly, the next appearance of Motive II is in the major mode of B flat (Example 2.3).

Example 2.3: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 66-74

As in Example 2.1, the motive starts with the dominant note, but here it is doubled in three octaves while the pedal tonic note of B flat is sustained. After two measures of the “Arthur theme,” the left hand takes over, providing a restatement of the theme. The last appearance of the “Arthur theme” is in the recapitulation. It is stated four times in this capacity, starting in a low
register in *pp*, each restatement adding doubling voices and dynamic level to increase tension toward a mounting climactic point (**Example 2.4**).

**Example 2.4**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 148-156

![Example 2.4: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 148-156]

Only one instance of the “Arthur theme” can be found in the second scherzo movement. This reminiscence signifies Arthur going through an enchanted forest, surrounded by elves and spirits, depicted in the music by trills and runs. The theme is distributed between the thumbs, similar to **Example 2.1**. In the key of F minor, in diminution, a raised fourth can once again be noted (**Example 2.5**).

**Example 2.5**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. II, mm. 142-148

![Example 2.5: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. II, mm. 142-148]

Since MacDowell himself explains the first and last movements as the coming of Arthur and the passing of Arthur respectively, one can only expect a reappearance of the “Arthur theme” in the finale. Indeed, this motive returns in the final movement as the first theme, albeit in disguise. Like the opening movement, the “Arthur theme” begins in the tonic note of G. Now appearing in
the right hand top voice, instead of outlining an ascending scale, it descends and ends on the dominant (Example 2.5).

**Example 2.5:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 5-6

[Music notation]

**Motive III**

Derived from the chordal introduction of Motive I, Motive III is characterized by a soft dynamic level and follows this rhythmic pattern:

[Music notation]

Motive III starts on either the tonic or dominant note instead of the median, like Motive I. The dotted rhythm at the following measure is preserved from Motive I. The first instance is the secondary theme of the first movement, accompanied by MacDowell’s notations, *simply, yet with pathos* (Example 3.1). In G minor’s relative major, it starts with scale degree 1 of Bb major, leaps up to scale degree 5, and then immediately returns to the tonic. This is the only instance of Motive III with a double-dotted-eighth note which gives it a Scottish character.

**Example 3.1:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 55, 56

[Music notation]
Example 3.2 shows the transformation of this Motive I to the minor mode of C minor. Accompaniment is now characterized by descending C minor scale passage work, marked *non legato*. This scale passage work creates a sense of urgency and uneasiness which is vital to the story being told through this music.

**Example 3.2**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 89-91

Right before the recapitulation of the first movement, Motive III returns in the key of E flat major, now marked *tenderly*. Instead of opening with the tonic note and followed by a fifth as seen in Examples 3.1 and 3.2, the dominant starts the motive and leaps up an octave, and the tonic note returns at the end of the motive (**Example 3.3**).

**Example 3.3**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 119, 120
The last appearance of Motive III in the opening movement is to be played *mysteriously*. The left hand takes the motive in the tonic key of G minor, opening with the expected interval of fifth, but the following measure moves up stepwise rather than outlining a minor chord. The right hand sweeping G minor arpeggios across the keyboard helps create the appropriate atmosphere upon which to convey mystery or suspense (Example 3.4).

**Example 3.4**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 173-175

The third movement, which represents the tender Guinevere, reveals one instance of Motive III. Although the meter is marked as 2/2 (6/4), the original rhythmic profile is preserved (Example 3.5). In the key of E flat major, the motive lies in the top voice of the right hand, while the bass plays descending chromatic bass line. Like Example 3.3, the dominant starts this motive and leaps up an octave, but the tonic never returns at the end. Instead, the dominant note is heard.

**Example 3.5**: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 17-20

A fragment of the Motive III from the opening movement is presented for the final time in the coda of the final movement. Indicated *with breadth and dignity*, the rhythmic profile is preserved, but the tonality is altered to a major key. The left hand now plays ostinato-like G
major chords (Example 3.6). The first note of the Motive III is omitted here, but an outline of a minor chord is preserved at the following measure. Unlike all other instances, here the Motive III is only a fragment of this melodic line. In a symbolic mood of peaceful religious affirmation, the sonata ends quietly in a major key.  

Example 3.6: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 293-304

Motive IV

Motive IV is undoubtedly an outgrowth of Motive I, though it appears with drastic tempo and character changes. Motive IV opens with the interval of a third, like Motive I, but in a major mode as opposed to minor. A dotted rhythm is placed at the beginning of this dazzling melody of Motive IV, instead of at the end of the motive, as in Motive I. Marked fast, the first instance of Motive IV is in the development section of the opening movement. In the key of D major, the right hand top voice opens with a major third and followed by quick, stepwise sixteenth scale passage (Example 4.1). It furthers travels to the key of G major after eight measures.

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34 Levy, Edward MacDowell: An American Master, 165.
**Example 4.1:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 75-78

When this motive returns in the final movement, it is in an altered meter of cut time, in the new key of C major when the left hand outlines a descending chromatic scale. This lively restatement motive from the opening movement symbolizes King Arthur’s life flashing in front of him as he approaches the end. This concept of restating the opening theme is not foreign, as instances have been seen in Bach’s Goldberg Variations and the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonata, Op. 109. The *pp* dynamic and staccato articulation on the third and fourth beats of the motive provide the light and swift character (**Example 4.2**).

**Example 4.2:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 91-98

The final appearance of this motive in the development section of the final movement, although carrying all the same articulations of slurs and staccatos from **Example 4.2**, moves away from the distinctively light character with a dynamic indication of *f* (**Example 4.3**).
Example 4.3: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 121-123

The only appearance of Motive IV in the third movement marks the significance of two different motives played simultaneously. In the meter of 2/2, in E flat major, the right hand plays Motive IV while the left hand plays Motive III (Example 4.4). The left hand Motive III is normally lyrical and tender in mood, but here is marked poco marcatto with a sense of triumphant resolve.

Example 4.4: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 67-69

The last appearance of Motive IV is in the recapitulation of the final movement. Marked $fff$ in the key of D major, both hands play the motive with the thumbs (Example 4.5). The left hand starts with the dominant A octave in the piano’s lowest register. Majestic and heroic feeling is suggested by the writing.

Example 4.5: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 177-179


Tone painting

To search for a composite of MacDowell’s tone-poet aesthetic, an examination of pieces in similar subject matters is useful in order to seek instances of compositional technique in programmatic characteristics and tone-painting. “Legend,” from Indian Suite, Op. 48, resembles surprising structural similarities with the opening movement of the “Eroica” sonata. Both movements open with a slow introduction. “Legend,” from the Indian Suite, utilizes the expressive marking: Not fast, with much dignity and character, the “Eroica” indicates Slow, with nobility. Both bear the lament and narrative quality with relatively longer note values. After the opening section, “Legend,” from the Indian Suite, takes us to a contrasting section of Twice as fast, with a decision, the “Eroica” moves to Fast, passionately. A sense of grandeur and heroism are fully embraced in this section. Both movements then move to a lyrical section. The lyrical themes of both pieces are based on previous short motives.

In the case of the second movement of the “Eroica,” listeners are transported to the scene of a knight surrounded by elves. Curiously, both “Forest Spirits,” from Indian Suite No. 1, Op. 42 and “Will-o’-the-Wisp,” from Woodland Sketches evoke the same subject matter, implied by their titles. Musically, all three movements are in the style of a Mendelssohnian scherzo. All three pieces are decorated with constant running sixteenth notes and chromaticism. “Forest Spirits” and the second movement of the “Eroica” have even more similarities, including grace notes figuration and the employment of high registers for melodic lines. All the above compositional devices, along with leggiero articulation in both movements, evoke an elven image. Structurally, both movements contain a contrasting lyrical middle section. Finally, both pieces end with an accelerando. These shared characteristics in different compositions, both
dealing with the same subject matter, lend corroborating evidence that the compositional devices described above are programmatically intentional.

In the final movement, the climax happens surprisingly early with plenty of remaining material and the \textit{pppp} lament section in the recapitulation. All of these confirm MacDowell’s commentary of this movement, which is to depict the passing of King Arthur.\footnote{Gilman, \textit{Edward MacDowell: A Study}, 58.} The \textit{pppp} lament section is beautifully realized with the left hand playing descending octaves in long note values while the right hand decorates with running Alberti accompaniment. The accompaniment disappears gradually as the lowest note of C sharp is reached. Two measures of silence resembles the tragedy and intensifies the already-abundant dramatic tension. The slow introduction from the opening movement then proceeds, which according to John Porte, symbolizes the coming of Arthur once again.\footnote{Porte, \textit{A Great American Tone Poet, His Life and Music}, 48.} To Porte, the slow introduction of the first movement is the “Arthur theme” \textit{(recall Example 2.1)} whereas my understanding of the “Arthur theme” comes after the slow introduction \textit{(recall Example 1.1)}. The absence of the “Arthur theme” in the final movement symbolizes Arthur’s death.

\textbf{Interpretative suggestions}

James Tocco and Constance Keene are the two out of four pianists who have commercially released recordings of the complete MacDowell sonatas. A survey of these two recordings in their pacing, pedaling, voicing, and articulation will contribute to my own interpretive choices, as will the examination of MacDowell as a pianist. As a perfectionist, MacDowell constantly revised his compositions until they were sent to the publisher. At times he...
repeated the passages up to fifty times on the piano, deciding each detail of note value and expression indication. With his meticulous planning, his works sound orchestral but are pianistic. Indeed, the composer’s own poetic suggestions in the score are to be consulted carefully. My interpretive choices will aim to convey the same poetic beauty of MacDowell’s source material.

**Movement I**

MacDowell communicated to his performers through varieties of instructive tempo and expression indications throughout the score. Moreover, the composer-pianist stressed the importance of delivering the same poetic beauty in performances. The opening movement starts with a chordal procession. The D major chord, led by grace notes in octaves, is the peak of the first eight measures (**Example 5.1**). In interpreting the opening movement, with the programmatic implication of this movement in mind (the coming of King Arthur), the grace notes in both hands in m. 7 should not be played too shortly or rapidly. Otherwise, abrupt grace notes disrupt the noble and stately quality of the movement.

**Example 5.1:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 1-9

Marked *triumphantly*, the right hand states the same descending melody four times. The thick harmonic texture and cumulative crescendo create the orchestral effect. An accent on each
downbeat on the left hand bass octave is suggested to create a forward harmonic motion, which
in turn depicts the ferocious king (Example 5.2).

Example 5.2: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 105-112

Stressing the importance of the bass notes should not only be in climactic spots. One instance of
its importance is when the music transitions from a major key of B flat back to D minor in mm.
71-74 (Example 5.3). Although the dynamic level is decreasing, the bass notes of repeated B
flat, which eventually lead to A, should be heard.

Example 5.3: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 70-74

Slurs are inserted over the right hand eighth-notes in m. 21, but not over a group of octaves at the
following measure (Example 5.4). Pedal should be used consistently to help articulate the slurs
in m. 21, and also in the first and third beats of the following measure to sustain the four-measure
G pedal point. This is the first statement of the “Arthur theme,” and the touch of pedal creates the
sense of fierceness intended here. Furthermore, to achieve the composer’s indication of ppp to fff
within fifteen measures, a lack of pedal can cause an interruption of this long line.

**Example 5.4:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 19-22

![Image of musical notation]

The contrasting second theme captures the tender side of King Arthur. The affectionate melodic line and the waltz style accompaniment without the downbeats add difficulty to perform this passage. The tendency is to apply too much stress on the accompaniment chords, therefore, pedaling should be used with caution. A touch of pedal at each dotted-quarter note is essential to smoothen the melody, however, only partial pedal is suggested to avoid over blending the linearity of the texture (**Example 5.5**).

**Example 5.5:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. I, mm. 55-56

![Image of musical notation]

The recapitulation opens with the instruction of *very marked, almost roughly* to symbolize King Arthur’s greatness. Accentuated as a waltz, the “Arthur theme” is stated four times starting in a low register in *pp*, each restatement adds doubling voices and dynamic level (**Example 5.6**). A touch of pedal is suggested each time when the G minor chord is struck. To gradually increase the intensity and dynamic level of the climactic point, the length and depth of the damper pedal can be increased each time, starting from only pedaling for the length of an eighth note. At the final statement, Tocco increases his pedal from the length of an eighth note to a dotted quarter note.
Movement II

The scherzo movement of the “Eroica” sonata reveals MacDowell’s obsession over supernatural characters. He once wrote, “I will confess that I have moments in my work that make me believe in the supernatural…If I really thought music were a mixture of sound, or a vibratory means of affecting the body, I would never dream of wasting the poor rest of my life at it.” The movement is based on a painting by Gustave Doré of a knight surrounded by mythological forest folk in the woods. Virtuosity only for the sake of display is never MacDowell’s intention. Therefore, series of running notes, grace notes, and a lightening tempo are to illustrate the supernatural characters.

In terms of choosing a feasible tempo with the mark *Elf-like, as light and swift as possible*, it is often a tendency to start the movement too fast. Therefore, it is helpful to start the piece by imagining a comfortable tempo when the bouncy and playful theme starts in the right hand in measure 9 before starting the introduction (Example 5.7).

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At the end of the lyrical trio B section, MacDowell indicates *Little by little dying away*, but the next tempo indication is not seen until the return of the A section, marked *As at the beginning*. That leaves us with sixteen measures of transitional passage without clear instructions of tempo. A forward tempo motion at the beginning of this passage in m. 144 is suggested to better transit into the A section (Example 5.8). This passage is the only reminiscence of the “Arthur theme.” In fact, both Tocco and Keene start a new faster tempo here. While Keene maintains a steady tempo, Tocco further accelerates toward the end of this passage. By the time he reaches the A section, he is back to the original tempo. Another option would be to starting a new faster tempo in m. 144 as these two pianists, accelerate as the register goes up, but slow down when tapering off this transitional passage.
Example 5.8: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. II, mm. 135-148

Due to the high register, soft dynamic marking, and the intended light nature of this scherzo movement, *una corda* can be used for almost the entire piece.

Movement III

King Arthur’s queen, Guenevere, is realized exquisitely in this movement. Porte writes that “the movement is considered by many of the composer’s admirers to be one of his most beautiful inspirations.” To depict the beauty of Arthur’s queen, a warm and lyrical tone particularly in the melodic line is crucial. The dissonance is not to be ignored; right hand C and D at measure 2, the same two notes in m. 7, and the A flat in the left hand in m. 8 (Example 5.9).

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**Example 5.9:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 1-11

Scottish snap is apparent in m. 18, with two chords in the right hand in sixteenths followed by rests, creating a sense of a short-long rhythmic pattern with the shorter note falling on a downbeat. Although a crescendo is included, in order to appropriately paint this nationalistic color, the first chord, D diminished, of the Scottish snap should be played with an emphasis (Example 5.10).

**Example 5.10:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 17-18

Immediately after the Scottish snap comes the Motive II, first stated in the middle register of the piano (Example 5.11). The repetition of the motive is not only doubled as octaves but one octave higher. When the motive is once again repeated, it is in a minor mode. Tocco presents this motive three times beautifully with unusual voicing on the bottom notes in measure 21, each time one octave higher though the right hand plays at the same register the second and third times.
Example 5.11: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 17-24

The B section, con anima, represents a sense of longing and urgency (Example 5.12). In order to create the agitated motion in this contrapuntal texture, each voice should be carefully sorted out. The octave bass could be voiced with an emphasis on the lower note. In the next measure where the left hand plays eighth note runs, besides creating the rise and fall as indicated in the score, treating the whole measure as two groups of sweeps helps with the momentum.

Example 5.12: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 41-42

Example 5.13 shows both hands simultaneously playing Motives III and IV derived from the previous movement. A way to differentiate these two lines, right hand can play marcato while the left hand uses a legato articulation for the first two measures, only to reverse the articulation at the following two measures.
Example 5.13: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 66-68

At the end of the movement one can use long and flutter pedal to achieve the serene and intimate quality. In order to sustain the left hand subdominant A flat grace notes throughout measures 91 and 92, one should use only one pedal in these two measures. Flutter pedal is an option depending on the acoustic of the hall. A long pedal is encouraged from measure 93 to the end in order to sustain the low tonic of E flat for at least three measures (Example 5.14).

Example 5.14: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. III, mm. 89-99

Movement IV

The final movement is physically taxing to play; even the composer himself felt so. In fact, MacDowell himself found the “Eroica” sonata out of all four of his piano sonatas the most exhausting, both physically and mentally.\(^{39}\) Pacing is an issue in this movement, which contains

a drastic dynamic range from \textit{ppp} and \textit{fff} within the first twenty measures. The movement opens with a dynamic indication of \textit{ppp}. The four-measure introduction is to be played so softly as if heard in distance. After the introduction, the right hand comes in with assertion in measure 5. The accent over the right hand E flat chord in the next measure can naturally be heard without extra effort because of the nature of the downbeat. The composer himself stresses the importance of accents in performances. In order to articulate the \textit{tenuto} over the right hand G minor chord, a slight crescendo is suggested over these three chords in m. 6 (Example 5.15). The \textit{tenuto} creates an illusion of uneasy syncopation which foreshadows the battle King Arthur is about to commence and his realization that his life is no longer in his hands.

\textbf{Example 5.15} MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 5-6

To sustain the bass and soprano dominant of A octave for four measures without drowning other texture, the sostenuto pedal should be applied (Example 5.16).

\textbf{Example 5.16:} MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 36-40

Right after the first \textit{fff} outburst in m. 26, one is suggested to push the tempo forward to maintain the heroic momentum, particularly due to a low dynamic level in the next sixty measures before the development section. In measure 57 when the opening motive from the first movement is recollected, MacDowell specifically writes in \textit{no slower}. Keene, however takes a
slightly slower tempo which should be avoided. Instead of keeping the meter in 2/2, one can regroup this motive by taking out the measure lines of four measures and make it into one measure (Example 5.17).

**Example 5.17:** MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 57-60

Beat: 1 2 3 4

![Musical notation](example_music.png)

The music reaches a climactic point at the recapitulation, preceded by an eight-measure phrase stated three times in different keys, each time with an increase of dynamic starting from *pp* and ending in *fff* (Example 5.18). This is another instance of a tactful dynamic pacing required with the help of pedal increase at each modulation. Keene takes an unorthodox route of keeping the chordal melody in the background, instead stressing the left hand chromatic accompaniment. At the end of the second repetition, Tocco takes the liberty of playing the left hand G octave one octave lower for an explosive effect which is not an uncommon practice of the Romantic tradition. Whether it is perpetual crescendo in each descending chromatic accompaniment, or taking an octave lower, both aim to achieve the same fiery and dramatic effect this strenuous section conveys; the battle King Arthur fights and his death caused by his own nephew.
The climax of the movement is achieved by a series of ascending octaves (Example 5.19). The G minor chord in **fff** is another instance in which Tocco lowers the left hand octave of D, displaying another explosive effect. When both hands strike full chords back and forth at extreme ends of the keyboard at the climax, one can take liberty of time. This pacing helps with accumulating musical tension while releasing physical tension. However, a new steady tempo needs to be reestablished at the pickup of B flat octaves in m. 215 to precede the **pppp** lament section. A troublesome rhythmic triplet subdivision occurs at this new section. One trick is to start counting in triple meter several measures before the **pppp** section.
Example 5.19: MacDowell “Eroica,” Mvt. IV, mm. 207-223
Chapter III: “Keltic” Sonata

Throughout his life, MacDowell possessed a deep fascination with ancient and Medieval Celtic literature. He always surrounded himself with Celtic folklore and fairy tales. This was an enormous source of comfort and solace as mental and physical immobility plagued MacDowell toward the end of his life. In speaking of his compositional output, MacDowell claimed to have a Celtic influence in all his work. Such an influence clearly became the foundation of both his third and final sonatas, entitled the “Norse” and “Keltic.” This indisputable influence is confirmed by accompanying poems. The “Norse” is prefaced by an anonymous Norse poem:

Night has fallen on a day of deeds.  
The great rafters in the red-ribbed hall  
Flashed crimson in the fitful flame  
Of smouldering logs.  
And the stealthy shadows  
That crept ‘round Harald’s throne  
Rang out a Skald’s strong voice,  
With Tales of battles won;  
Of Gudrun’s love  
And Sigurd, Siegmund’s son.

Among MacDowell’s four piano sonatas, “Keltic” is considered the greatest by a vast majority of listeners, performers, and musicologists. It demonstrates what James Tocco describes as “a cycle of development similar in style to that of the Mahler symphonies.” Written in 1901, the “Keltic” sonata reveals MacDowell’s captivation and fascination for his own Celtic heritage. This sonata recalls the ancient and dramatic time when MacDowell’s ancestors across the Atlantic fought in epic and heroic battles. Like many MacDowell enthusiasts who consider the

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40 Levy, Edward MacDowell: An American Master, 166.
41 Gilbert Chase, America’s Music from the Pilgrims to the Present, 361.
42 James Tocco, MacDowell & Griffes, Gaspara Records, compact disc, 1984.
“Keltic” the composer’s greatest contribution to the sonata literature, the composer himself acknowledged it as his personal favorite sonata out of the four, going so far as to claim that there was not a measure of music in this sonata MacDowell would alter.43 Gilman provides insight into MacDowell’s own performance of this piece, “he played it con amore, and it grew to be part of him as no other of his works ever did.”44 MacDowell prefaced this sonata with a poem penned by Fiona MacLeod, a pseudonym for William Sharp, with whose poetry the musician was obsessed:

Who minds now Keltic tales of yore,
Dark Druid rhymes that thrall
Deirdre’s, and wizard lore
Of great Cuchullin’s fall.45

The Gaelic legend

The “Keltic” sonata was written during the period of MacDowell’s captivation with the poems and novels of Fiona McLeod. The poet felt that in the late Victorian years, women had advantages with regard to the publication and reception of epic poetry; therefore a female pen name could only benefit the recognition of his work as a poet. The poem above was inspired by the ancient Gaelic legends in a series of epics known as the Cycle of the Red Branch. The “Keltic” tells the story of King Conchobar, who falls in love with Deirdre, a beautiful harpist, and wants to make her his wife. However, much to the king’s dismay, she has fallen in love with another man, Naoise, who is the king's nephew. The couple is forced to flee to Scotland. There, knowing that the king’s attack is inevitable, the couple seeks help from Cuchullin, a Herculean

43 Gilman, Edward MacDowell: A Study, 71.
44 Ibid, 71.
creature who is half-god, half-man. In the end, the king invades and wins the battle. Distraught over the loss of her love, Naoise and her noble protector, Cuchullin, Deirdre ends her life.

The sonata’s initial dedication was to the poet. MacDowell wrote to MacLeod upon his completion of the “Keltic” sonata, asking if he may dedicate the work to "her." However, MacDowell’s request met with no response. After MacLeod’s silence, he then rededicated the work to his close friend, Edvard Grieg. Years later, Mrs. MacDowell learned that MacLeod/Sharp had, in fact been delighted with the dedication. At the time of reply, the poet was living in Italy. At the time of receiving his letter from MacDowell, MacLeod had become ill to the degree that he was confined to his home for a few days. Unable to run errands on his own, Maccleod had given his reply letter to a young boy to mail. To this day, it remains unknown whether the boy lost the letter or stole the extra international postage.

**Motives**

Compared to his earlier three piano sonatas, MacDowell’s final foray into that genre, the “Keltic” sonata, is based on more “intricate plans”\(^{46}\) of motivic unity. There are six prominent motives in the “Keltic.” Four of these are introduced in the first movement; the fifth is the opening theme of the last movement, and the last comes from the transition material of the last movement. Three of these motives undergo motivic developments throughout the movements and unify the work as a whole. Though the motives are not necessarily literal, they do evoke narrative and characters.

The original form of Motive I reads as follows:

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 155.
The sonata opens in E minor, with a grand chordal declamation. Marked *With great power and dignity* and a dynamic level of *fff*, this stately introduction depicts the majestic and noble King Conchobar. This four-measure theme is first stated as full chords in the right hand (Example 6.1). Motive I returns at least eight times with different dynamics and textures throughout the movement. In transformed guises, sometimes the melodic and rhythmic profile of this four-measure motive is evoked but the harmonic function and texture are altered; other times the meter, tonality, and dynamics are altered, but the intervals between each note are maintained.

**Example 6.1**: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 1-6

The following three examples have in common only a fragment of Motive I. **Example 6.2** reveals that the left hand plays the motive in the key of E flat major, marked *pp*, while the right hand plays highly chromatic passagework. The opening interval of the motive is altered from a perfect fifth to a unison.
Proclaiming the motive with an extra pickup note, the accompaniment is now characterized by ascending arpeggios in the development (Example 6.3).

Example 6.3: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 78-79

At the climax of the first movement, marked with breadth and power, the motive is in G minor and doubled in both hands with full chords. The first time this motive transfigures to a major key is in the development. In the key of E major, scale degree 5 opens the motive instead of scale degree 1, but the double dotted rhythm, as in the beginning, is maintained (Example 6.4).
Example 6.4: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 157-159

As expected, the complete four-measure Motive I returns at the recapitulation. However, certain differences should be noted. Here, a leap of a major third opens the motive rather than a perfect fifth. Instead of ending on scale degree 1, scale degree 3 is heard. Lastly, the tonality is now in the major mode of E (Example 6.5).

Example: 6.5: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 173-177

The last appearance of Motive I in this movement is in the coda (Example 6.6). Appearing as single notes in the right hand, the opening interval of a rising fifth is altered to a falling minor second while the dotted rhythm at the second measure is taken out. Rather than completing the whole motive, only the first two measures are taken. This fraction of motive is then further developed and explored in the form of a sequence.
A drastic thematic transformation occurs in the opening theme of the second movement (Example 6.7). Here, the melodic and rhythmic profile of Motive I is evoked, but in a contrasting context of songful lyricism and tenderness. Instead of being linked to the majestic king’s stern block chords of E minor, here the lyrical, gentle and arpeggiated chords in upper registers convey the allure of the beautiful Deidre playing her harp. In her article, “New Light on the Programmatic Aesthetic of MacDowell’s Symphonic Poems,” Dolores Pesce points out how MacDowell’s music rarely depicts the storyline in a literal sense; rather, he employs his titles as “musical evocations of the moods and atmospheres.”47 This explains why certain motives do not always correspond to the same characters. On the other hand, the variations of the motives evoke the overall necessary atmosphere.

Example 6.7: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. II, mm. 1-4

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The end of final movement evokes Motive I for the final time, now introduced in the key of E major. Here, instead of starting and ending with the scale degree 1, the motive starts and finishes with scale degree 5 and 3, respectively. A stubbornly sustained B dominant pedal tone is prolonged in the left hand (Example 6.8).

**Example 6.8:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 261-266

Motive II

Unlike Motive I, Motives II, III, and IV are much shorter in length; one can even refer to them as motivic cells. Motive II, usually played by one hand, contains sweeping upward scales or arpeggios, presenting a broad effect perhaps inspired by ocean waves. Reminiscent of reports on MacDowell’s own playing, his inclusion of virtuosic passages such as scales and arpeggios serve solely to create extra-musical effects, never to merely decorate or show off digital dexterity. Such virtuosity is initially heard in the left hand while the right hand introduces Motive II (Example 7.1).

**Example 7.1:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, m. 4

The strong and agitated sense of tension is built up with recurrences of the sweeping ascending
Motive II—five more times within the ensuing fifteen measures. Two of these restatements, in the right hand, are notated as grace notes (Example 7.2).

**Example 7.2:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 4-10

As the first movement builds up to the climactic point, Motive II is doubled and played by both hands, with the indication *very broad and emphatic*. Here, instead of one hand sweeping scales, virtuosic diminished arpeggios are flashed in both hands (Example 7.3). These figurations only heighten the pointed and direct drama of the passage.

**Example 7.3:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 40-42
Motive III

The next recurring motivic cell is first introduced as part of Motive I at the opening phrase of the sonata. The quick, falling two-note statement in octaves, which is comprised of the intervals of a second or a third, is identified as Motive III (Example 8.1).

Example 8.1: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 1-3

When Motive III returns in the development, it no longer serves as a mere part of the melodic line of Motive I. Finally, it comes into its own being, standing alone in the form of decorative grace notes (Example 8.2).

Example 8.2: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 91

In the final movement, Motive III first appears as a grace note accompaniment in the secondary theme (Example 8.3).
Example 8.3: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. II, mm. 92-93

Later, just preceding the arrival of the coda, Motive III conjuncts with Motive VI, still in a transformed figuration of grace notes. In the upper register, when this two-note motive enters, the music comes to a pause. With the arrival of the pause, one can note a certain sense of comfort in the tragic ending of the epic story (Example 8.4).

Example 8.4: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 241-242

Motive IV: “fate” motive

Like Motive III, Motive IV consists of two falling notes; however Motive IV is more melodic in character than the previous rhythmic Motive III. Doubled as octaves or in three octaves, this two-note descending figuration throughout the work retains the same tragically sentimental quality, and may be labeled the “fate” motive. It is first introduced in the opening movement at the end of the first theme, right before the transition into the secondary thematic area (Example 9.1). At its first appearance, this falling third “fate” motive in octaves provides an emotionally suggestive commentary of what has already occurred.
Example 9.1: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, m. 25

The “fate” motive returns in the secondary theme, and is now repeated four times at the end of each four-measure phrase (Example 9.2).

Example 9.2: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 53-54

Examples 9.3 and 9.4 show that both the first and last movements not only close with repetitions of this “fate” motive, but now the interval is expanded to a fourth. Pitch and rhythm otherwise remain identical. At the end of the first movement, the “fate” motive is reinserted, but with a rhythmic alteration. Rather than continuing the rhythmic pattern of an eighth note followed by a half note, the movement ends with prolonged note values of an half note then a quarter note, with two intermediate iterations of quarter and half notes.

Example 9.3: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 209-end
Example 9.4: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 257-266

Motive V

The final movement, marked very swift and fierce, illustrates the battle between the king and the warrior Cuchullin. Motive V is directly associated with Cuchullin. The staccato and impetuous eighth-notes motive in E minor (Example 10.1) undergoes transformation from pppp single notes, to pianissimo thirds, to fortissimo octaves, and finally to full chords at the climax of the movement. This violent and furious passage depicts the presence of King Conchobar and the death of Cuchullin, as hinted in the poem prefacing the sonata.

Example 10.1: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 10-19
In the development section, Motive V transforms to a much lighter character and alters the rhythmic pattern in the development. Instead of opening with an eighth rest as seen in its first appearance, now the rest is shortened to the value of sixteenth, and falls after a down beat. The articulation remains the same. It is first played by the left hand (Example 10.2), and shortly thereafter by the right hand (Example 10.3).

**Example 10.2:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 165-170

![Example 10.2](image_url)

**Example 10.3:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 178-181

![Example 10.3](image_url)

**Motive VI**

Indirectly derived from Motive V, Motive VI is a four-note motivic cell that moves in stepwise motion, first heard in the top voice of the right hand in the transitional material of the last movement, marked *ppp* (Example 11.1).
Example 11.1: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 61-67

Motive VI serves as the basis of the rhapsodic secondary theme of the same movement, now decorated with triplet broken chords and bass octaves (Example 11.2).

Example 11.2: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 87-91

Eighteen measures later, this motive arises again as full chords within the middle register of the piano with accompaniment of triplet broken chords and bass octaves. Here, the full range of the piano is exploited (Example 11.3).
Example 11.3: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 112-121

A harmonic shift occurs right before the recapitulation. Example 11.4 comprises two motives transformed into a major key. The upper voice of the texture plays the first theme, which is Motive V, while the left hand plays the second theme, Motive VI. This passage suggests an increasing significance in the role of Motive VI in the further development of the piece.

Example 11.4: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt III, mm. 194-197

The last appearance of Motive VI transforms from agitated single notes in 6/8 to majestic full chords, tragic and board proclamation in the meter of 4/4 (Example 11.5). This passage, marked With tragic pathos, combines Motive II with sweeping ascending scales, and motive III with quick, falling two-note grace notes.
Anyone remaining unconvinced of the poetic influences and reflections throughout the “Keltic” need only read the words of the composer himself. MacDowell readily acknowledged the “Keltic” as a rhapsody freely inspired by MacLeod’s poetry: “I have made use of all the suggestions of tone-painting in my power just as the bard would have reinforced his speech with gesture and facial expression.”

The legend which prefaces the poem involves love, tragedy, power, and rage—all necessary ingredients to an epic poem; a gamut of emotions that can only find additional expression in a musical counterpart. Cast in three movements, though each contains its own contrasting sections and intermingling characters within a movement, it is clear that the triumphant declamation of the opening movement depicts the majestic King Conchobar;

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Example 11.5: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 241-246

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48 Gilman, Edward MacDowell: A Study, 158.
the tenderness of the middle movement reflects the beauty of the captivating Deirdre; and the raging drive of the furious, violent and reckless final movement signifies the heroic Cuchullin.

The abundance of sweeping chords and octaves in the opening measures of the first movement paints the presence of the majestic king in a grandiose way. One can almost hear the trumpets announcing the arrival of the king, and almost see the breathtakingly colorful clothes and jewelry in which the king is dressed. The contrasting second theme in a major key suggests the hope in Deidre’s heart.49 This area, with its more lyrical nature, can be called the feminine aspect of the exposition, and the serene imagine of the young maiden playing her harp is conveyed very introspectively. The imitation of harp is exhibited throughout the sonata in arpeggiated figuration in upper registers. One of these instances can be seen in the first movement (Example 12.1).

Example 12.1: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, mm. 138-139

At the end of the movement, MacDowell utilizes extreme dynamic levels, from fff to ppp and the repetitions of the “fate” motive, each time with a diminished dynamic. This provides the listener with a foreboding premonition of the trouble that is yet to come in the remaining music.

In the middle movement, MacDowell instructs to perform with naïve tenderness. This immediately conveys a more detailed image of the king’s object of obsession, Deirdre. Deirdre is

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described as “a woman of wondrous beauty, bright gold her hair, eyes piercing and splendid, tongue full of sweet sounds, her countenance like the color of snow blended with crimson.” Consistent harp-like rolled chords at the opening of the middle movement for eleven measures confirm the depiction. The simple melodic line expresses the beauty and gentleness of Deirdre. The poet-composer, MacDowell specifies as heard from afar as opposed to a traditional way of dynamic indication. This conveys a sense of distance, which can only remind that listener of the king’s personal feelings concerning his unreturned love for Deirdre.

In the Celtic legend Cuchullin, in his last battle, remains standing upright against a rock. After suffering mortal injuries from the king’s forces, he chains himself to a stone monument so that he could have the dignity of dying standing up. His enemies do not realize his death until a raven lands on his shoulder and sings. It is of significance that both the opening and closing movements of this sonata end with this two-note descending “fate” motive. This passage is noted by author Pesce as one of MacDowell's most literal uses of tone-painting, “a darting two-note motive suggests the bird that lands on Cuchullin's shoulder as he takes his last breath.” With the inclusion of this motive at the first movement, stated five times, each time with a dynamic decrease, we foresee what is yet to come. In the final movement, a violent and desperate battle is conveyed through an agitatedly virtuosic octave study of speed, and dynamic range from p to fff. In an overt piece of tone painting, the dead Cuchullin's is depicted by a slow and melancholy chordal lament with four measures of bird calls. As a conclusion, Cuchullin’s enemies rejoice with a fortissimo passage of octaves sweeping across the keyboard. MacDowell considered

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50 Allan Kozinn, Liner notes, James Tocco, MacDowell & Griffes, Gasparo Records, compact disc, 1984.
including a scherzo movement like in the “Eroica” sonata, but decided that such a movement would only interrupt the piece’s effective sense of narrative flow.

**Interpretative suggestions**

**Movement I**

Even the most uninvolved of listeners will note an overwhelming sense of orchestral sonority upon a first hearing of the "Keltic." Therefore, one might assume, before examining the score, that the sonata lies awkwardly under the hands. It is quite surprising to note that, to the contrary, the sonata is quite pianistic. MacDowell achieves this trademark orchestral sonority through a thickness of harmonic texture, as well as cumulative effect in climaxes and long crescendo. The striking four-stave effect requires the pianist to move rapidly to and from extreme registers. Take, for example, the beginning. The opening eight-measure phrase is lengthy and full in texture. In order to shape these opening measures in an organic manner, one must soften the dynamic level of the middle voice of full chords. The four-measure secondary theme continues and is stated four times, each time followed by the “fate” motive, accompanied by the marking *slightly rit.* With the repetition of a passage or indication must come the avoidance of monotony. Different degrees of *rit* should be executed on the “fate” motive to sustain listeners’ suspense and curiosity with the last one taking most liberty. In keeping with a highly orchestral conception, MacDowell takes full advantage of the dynamic capacity of the modern piano. For instance, the coda of the opening movement spans from *pppp* to *fff.* Any performing this music must take an equally orchestral conception of the work, channeling it through the possibilities of the instrument. For example, performers should embrace bass notes, particular when they are the roots of a chord or prolonged. The rhapsodic opening is conveyed
by a sweeping E minor arpeggio over the wide range of four octaves. The initial bass E is the root of the chord and calls for a *tenuto* articulation. The arrival of the development section comes with an increase in tonal ambiguity. Here, a strong emphasis should be stressed on the ascending chromatic bass line in the context of the indicated *piano* dynamic (*Example 12.2*).

**Example 12.2:** MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, m. 124

![Example 12.2: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. I, m. 124](image)

At the first climatic point in m. 101 when a whole note D minor chord is struck followed by a virtuosic octave passage, flutter pedal should be applied to sustain the D minor chord at the downbeat without burying the rest of the measure. Double dotted rhythm, an obvious nationalistic color, is apparent at this climax. Rhythmic precision should be given here as well as other occurrences in m. 2, 19, 100, and 103. Although in m. 19 *broaden* is noted, the true value of the dotted rhythm must be clearly projected.

Prior to the recapitulation, hands take turns flashing virtuosic accompaniment of arpeggiated passageworks which exploits the piano’s registers. In such instances, MacDowell’s underlying purposes for virtuoso passagework must be internalized. As he exhibited in his own playing, MacDowell reflects an overlying concern with effect rather than any empty virtuosity. Both Keene and Tocco distinctively project the octave melody despite the challenging accompaniment.
Movement II

A problematic dynamic pacing occurs from mm. 25-35. The first climax of the movement is achieved over the course of these eleven measures, beginning with the indicated \( p \). At the interval of every three measures, MacDowell specified \( \text{increase} \). Yet, three measures into this passage, in m. 29, a strong dynamic of \( \text{ff} \) is noted. A literal interpretation of the \textit{fortissimo} marking will lead to an overplaying of this area, weakening the possibilities of the \textit{crescendo} and diminishing later, bigger, points of arrival. This passage can be seen as a continuous growth in intensity toward the climatic point. To successfully reach the climax in m. 35, one should start the series of ascending octave passagework in mm. 29, 31, and 32 on a lower dynamic level and gradually crescendo to the top. To accumulate the necessary momentum of intensity two measures before the climax, both Tocco and Keene play the rapid thirty-second sweeping upwards passages distributed between both hands with a rush (\textbf{Example 12.3}).

\textbf{Example 12.3:} MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. II, mm.33, 34

Tocco’s forward motion occurs so drastically that this technically awkward passage sounds like one natural and sweeping pianistic gesture. In turn, he prolongs the sixteenth rest which concludes this passage while simultaneously taking on another ascending passage. The climax of the passage occurs with the arrival of thick \( \text{fff} \) chords in both hands, consistent with the previously discussed orchestral sonority. Across four measures, the right hand plays continuous descending chords while the left hand leaps to bass octaves periodically. Balance-wise, voice
independence is an absolute must. The right hand should not sound interrupted by the left hand. Although MacDowell provides a wealth of expressive instructions, at times he shows a good deal of faith in the performer’s own distinct interpretation. In m. 64 for instance, he indicates $fff$, but the next dynamic is not given until thirteen measures later as $ff$, ironically with three crescendo markings instructed in between. It is only natural to taper off at the end of a phrase and before the increase as instructed in m. 72. Moreover, the increase indication implies a gradual dynamic growth over a course of several measures and should not be confused with a subito dynamic increase.

The agitated middle section of the middle movement is another instance of four-stave writing. Keene gives the sorrowing upper melodic line its full focus by underplaying other voices. Her legato melody beautifully floats above the triplet accompaniment distributed to both hands and the bass.

To sustain the downbeat dominant D in the bass across the measure of 77 without blurring other chords thereafter, sostenuto pedal is a perfect choice for the D octave (Example 12.4). Damper pedal should still be applied and changed on all four chords of the measure.

Example 12.4: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. II, mm. 74-77
Movement III

Rhythmic variation of the main theme is applied. Contrasting with Example 12.5, Example 12.6 reveals the shortened eighth note on the downbeats followed by a sixteenth rest which in turn provide a subtle snap. This essential accent requires extra attention, but is not to be overstressed either.

Example 12.5: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 178-179

![Example 12.5](image)

Example 12.6: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, m.186

![Example 12.6](image)

Another instance of a passage requiring rhythmic precision occurs in the left hand accompaniment (Example 12.7). This eighth note octave followed by two sixteenth rests is not to be confused with what is followed, three dotted quarter notes. Tocco’s careful pedaling here, a short pedal over the eighth note octave at the downbeat, followed by legato pedaling at the dotted quarter chords, demonstrates the rhythmic varieties provided in the score.
Example 12.7: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 25-26

Similarly, Example 12.8 portrays the same rhythmic pattern in the left hand. One should avoid over pedaling the downbeat of C octave.

Example 12.8: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 182-185

The recapitulation differs from the exposition in its non staccato articulation in the right hand and longer note value in the left hand accompaniment. A legato pedaling is therefore called for at the recapitulation. One instance of the rare use of the sostenuto pedal is the low bass C sharp in mm. 251-252 prior to the meter change (Example 12.9).

Example 12.9: MacDowell “Keltic,” Mvt. III, mm. 241-242
The *sostenuto* pedal enables the full and sustained sonority without blurring other voices.

Concurrent with the meter change from 6/8 to 4/4, the presence of the prolonged B dominant is striking in the section of *With tragic pathos*. The B dominant should be sustained with the pedal at all time for fourteen consecutive measures. At places where pedal changes are necessary due to changes of harmony in other voices, releasing the pedal only partially is encouraged. Careful execution of the pedal is noted in the final four measures of the sonata. To capture the full force of *fff*, accommodate the thick texture at the low register and the speed of *accelerate to very fast*, flutter pedal should be applied throughout the rapid sixteenth octave run. A clear change of pedal is crucial when the E minor chord is reached at the upper register.
Chapter IV: Conclusion

MacDowell’s insistence on poetic and motivic connections throughout his works is reflected in his assertion that: “If the composer’s ideas do not imperatively demand treatment in the sonata form, that is, if his first theme is not actually dependent upon his second and side themes for its poetic fulfillment—he has not composed a sonata movement, but a potpourri, which the form only aggravates.”

Through application of motivic unity and tone painting, the composer manages to achieve mastery not only in musical storytelling, but also in application of the sonata form he so admired seen in both the “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas. Very much in keeping with the traditions as established by Wagner and Liszt, MacDowell strives to imbue the poetic nature of his source material in tone much as an impressionistic painter spreads the multicolored paints upon his canvas.

My hope—and prediction—is that Edward MacDowell’s beautifully inspired musical poetry of the “Eroica” and “Keltic” sonatas will begin to gain the long overdue attention they have always deserved from the public. Any performer, researcher, or enthusiast who takes the time to search out the poetic aspects of these sonatas will be well rewarded with an abundance of interpretive suggestions that take into account MacDowell’s vast array of symbolic intent. Such an endeavor will open the mind of performer and scholar alike to the themes’ spontaneity, individuality, and freedom that are so vital to the understanding of all music, and especially music from the Romantic period.

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52 Gilman, Edward MacDowell: A Study, 147.
Bibliography


