

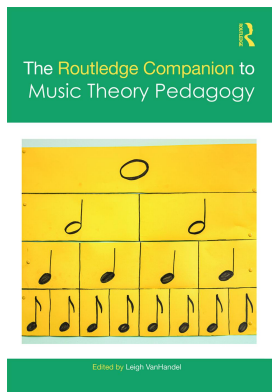
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.98.160

On: 23 Oct 2020

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## The Routledge Companion to Music Theory Pedagogy

Leigh VanHandel

### A Cornucopia of Accidentals

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429505584-4>

Paula J. Telesco

**Published online on: 21 Feb 2020**

**How to cite :-** Paula J. Telesco. 21 Feb 2020, *A Cornucopia of Accidentals from: The Routledge Companion to Music Theory Pedagogy* Routledge

Accessed on: 23 Oct 2020

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429505584-4>

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT**

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# 3

## A CORNUCOPIA OF ACCIDENTALS

*Paula J. Telesco*

**Topic:** Accidentals and enharmonic notation.

**Goal:** Students will be able to understand and notate accidentals in various contexts, and learn about enharmonic notation.

**Background:** The ability to read music in bass and treble clefs; some familiarity with triads helpful.

### Teaching Accidentals

Most music theory instructors likely know the frustration of searching for just the right musical example to illustrate a point, and not being able to find one quickly. During a class period, it is always easier and more efficient to explain topics with the fewest number of musical works possible, both to save class time, and to keep students focused on a single composition. This also allows for more extended playing of a composition or section thereof.

One source that is truly a compendium of accidental usage is the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C major, Op. 53, the "Waldstein," which provides examples of almost every type of accidental usage one would ever encounter or wish to teach their students; most make their first appearance within the exposition. Since the sonata is in C major, no accidental is used to cancel a sharp or flat from the key signature. For the few examples not found in the Waldstein, I turn to Chopin's Nocturne in D $\flat$  major, Op. 27 No. 2.

Part and parcel of teaching accidentals is teaching the concept of enharmonic notes. This is not usually difficult for students when it involves the dual nature of the black notes on the piano (e.g. G $\sharp$ /A $\flat$ ), but grasping the concept and purpose of B $\sharp$ , E $\sharp$ , C $\flat$ , and F $\flat$  and double sharps and flats can be considerably more difficult. The pitches B $\sharp$ , E $\sharp$ , C $\flat$ , C $\ast$ , and F $\ast$  are all found in the "Waldstein" sonata, while those pitches plus F $\flat$ , E $\flat\flat$ , A $\flat\flat$ , and B $\flat\flat$  are all in the Nocturne. Thus, these works provide a great opportunity to let the music lead the discussion of a topic with which most students think they are already familiar, though often they are not.

This close examination of accidentals can also serve as a brief introduction to topics typically covered later in the theory sequence such as leading tones, triad spelling, secondary dominants, borrowed chords, Neapolitan chords, and augmented-sixth chords. One can then return to these compositions for more in-depth study as those topics arise.

Once the basic information about accidentals has been presented, students can be shown examples in the Beethoven Sonata and Chopin Nocturne, and then be directed to further examples, giving them an opportunity to examine and discuss how and why the composer notated them as such.

## Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata

Below are 11 principles or categories of examples of accidentals present in the sonata. These can be taken in any order; often, the students' comments or questions determine the order of presentation. And, I always ask the students for their observations before I explain what something is. A link to a score of the Waldstein is provided in the online Supplemental Materials.

1. **Accidentals remain in force throughout a measure, notated only on their first appearance.** There are numerous examples throughout the movement, but early instances appear in mm. 2 (RH), and 5–6 (RH and LH). Measure 2 affords an opportunity to introduce the concept of a leading tone. I perform the first three measures with both an F $\sharp$  and an F $\natural$  in the soprano. As students listen to both versions, we compare the effect of each. They can hear that the F $\sharp$ , a half step below G, propels or *leads* the music up to G in the following measure, unlike the F $\natural$ , a whole step below. The same is true of the C $\sharp$ s in mm. 4 and 17, and the F $\sharp$  in m. 15.
2. **Rewriting an accidental in the following measure if it is to remain in effect.** Measures 5–6 illustrate this, as do mm. 9–10 (RH and LH). I play through the first seven measures so students can experience the palpable lowering of the music by a whole step through the use of the B $\flat$ s, which create a chord that does not belong in C major – a borrowed chord, or a non-diatonic chord.<sup>1</sup> Even though students likely have not yet learned about diatonic versus borrowed chords, they can experience and recognize the effect of such a chord.
3. **Writing an accidental in all clefs and registers within a measure to alter a single pitch on all occurrences within that measure.** Students sometimes mistakenly believe that a single accidental applies to all like pitch classes in that measure. Measures 8, 12, and 22–23 demonstrate this principle. Measure 22 has an added benefit: the A $\sharp$  creates an Italian augmented sixth chord, so playing through mm. 19–23 can sensitize students to the colorful sound of this chromatic chord, and thereby spark their curiosity and anticipation of its later study.
4. **Canceling a single sharp or flat within a measure** (mm. 4, 17). Here again, one can point out the effect of the C $\sharp$  leading tones. I play these measures with and without the C $\sharp$ , both in the ascending and descending passages so students can hear the different effects and discuss them.
5. **Changing an accidental within a measure:** (a) from a natural to a sharp and back to a natural (m. 4); (b) alternating between sharps and naturals (m. 24). The second half of m. 24 also presents a chromatic scale segment.
6. **Cautionary (or courtesy) accidentals** (m. 8, B $\sharp$ ; m. 10, B $\sharp$ ; m. 11, A $\sharp$ ; m. 14, E $\sharp$ ; m. 18, F $\sharp$ ). As non-diatonic accidentals accumulate in a work, it becomes ever more necessary to include cautionary accidentals.
7. **Accidentals tied across a barline:** Measures 122–23, 124–25, 126–27, and 128–29 illustrate that such accidentals are not rewritten, contrary to those that must otherwise be written when crossing a barline, as in mm. 5–6 and 9–10. I ask the students why they think that is. These measures also contain examples of accidentals being applied to pitches in multiple registers.
8. **Enharmonic pitches, not including double sharps or flats:** B $\sharp$ , E $\sharp$ , and C $\flat$  all appear as chord tones, not merely embellishing tones or in a chromatic scale passage (although E $\sharp$  does appear in the chromatic scale passage in m. 42). Focusing on these pitches allows for a preview of chord tones versus non-chord tones (or embellishing tones), and even secondary dominants if the instructor wishes. At its simplest, all triads contain three notes of every other letter name (or three successive line or space notes) and must be spelled that way. The B $\sharp$  in mm. 36, 40, and 48 is part of a G $\sharp$  major harmony on beats 1–2. I point out that if Beethoven notated the B $\sharp$  as a C $\flat$ , it would violate the triad-spelling rule and make notation and

harmonic comprehension confusing – triad spelling must be consistent. The E<sup>♯</sup> occurs in m. 197 in the parallel passage of the recapitulation, part of a C<sup>♯</sup> major triad. Similarly, if the E<sup>♯</sup> were spelled as an F<sup>♯</sup>, it would violate the triad-spelling rule.<sup>2</sup>

The C<sup>♭</sup> in m. 105, within the development section, is part of a C<sup>♭</sup> major harmony, tonicized by the preceding G<sup>♭</sup> dominant <sup>4</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, both a Neapolitan sixth chord in the fleeting key of f minor, and a secondary dominant of C<sup>♭</sup>. Discussion of the colorful Neapolitan chord and the harmonic flux of a development section is well beyond the topic of accidentals, but these passages can serve as tantalizing examples of topics to come. And while students may not yet know what a development section is, it is of heuristic value to ask them for their observations.

9. **Double sharps** (F<sup>\*\*</sup>, mm. 42–43, F<sup>\*\*</sup> and C<sup>\*\*</sup>, mm. 45–47). Double sharps once again raise the specter of enharmonic notes, and students invariably ask why Beethoven would use them. These passages provide another opportunity to discuss enharmonicism and preview both leading tones, and chord tones versus non-chord tones. The F<sup>\*\*</sup> in m. 42 is part of a chromatic scale passage; it is not too difficult for students to accept that when ascending, chromatic scales use sharped notes. I then point out that beats 1–2 of mm. 42–43 present an E major triad, which contains a G<sup>♯</sup>; by notating an F<sup>\*\*</sup> rather than a G<sup>♯</sup>, Beethoven clarifies the pitch's function as an embellishing tone and a leading tone to the following G<sup>♯</sup> in m. 43. The F<sup>\*\*</sup> in m. 43 is similarly a leading tone to G<sup>♯</sup>. If Beethoven had notated the F<sup>\*\*</sup>s in mm. 42–43 as G<sup>♯</sup>s, it would make notation and harmonic comprehension confusing. Similarly, m. 45 contains a B dominant seventh chord; to notate the C<sup>\*\*</sup> (a leading tone to D<sup>♯</sup>) as a D<sup>♯</sup>, against the B dominant seventh chord, would be confusing.
10. **Canceling a double sharp, returning to a single sharp** (mm. 43, 45–47). This notation, a natural sign followed by a single sharp, is likely unfamiliar to many students, but it appears three times in the span of four measures.<sup>3</sup> I explain there is a B major triad on beat 3 of m. 43, and it contains an F<sup>♯</sup>. Students can now articulate why the F<sup>\*\*</sup> must be lowered to a single sharp. I also ask students if all the Gs in mm. 43 and 46–47 remain sharped, and reinforce that the sharps must appear in all registers. The same situation occurs in m. 46, and a similar one in m. 45.
11. **Accidentals renoted enharmonically across a barline** (G<sup>♭</sup> is renoted as F<sup>♯</sup>, mm. 125–126). While this passage involves a topic far more advanced than accidentals, the simple answer is that G<sup>♭</sup> fits in the chord in m. 125 (E<sup>♭</sup> minor), while F<sup>♯</sup> fits in the chord in m. 126 (F<sup>♯</sup> dominant seventh).<sup>4</sup> Students are always curious, so I explain that this is covered in the later topic of enharmonicism – something to look forward to!

After discussing all the earlier passages, I play a YouTube performance (Pletnev) of the exposition, sections of the development (starting at 4:33), including the retransition (m. 142, 5:54) and the beginning of the recapitulation (6:16). Please see the Supplemental Materials for a link to this video, which scrolls the score so students can see what they are hearing.

This composition always piques the interest of my students, often eliciting interesting comments and discussions, particularly when seeing all the double sharps, and then listening to the passages as they fly by at lightning speed. It is ideal for illustrating all these categories of accidental usage, previewing more advanced topics, and providing students an opportunity to find similar examples.

For further in-class work, or for an assignment, the instructor could isolate passages not studied in class and ask students to identify and explain the various kinds of accidental usage. Given the movement is in sonata form, the recapitulation contains many of the same passages found in the exposition (where most of my examples are drawn from), some in different keys; the development, too, contains many examples. For example, one could ask students why there is a D<sup>♯</sup> in m. 60 or m. 74, or why there are so many natural signs in m. 106. One might also ask students why Beethoven wrote so many D<sup>♭</sup>s in m. 249, or perhaps ask them to find more instances of what appear

to be leading tone accidentals. Many of these activities will depend on the level of students in the class. For many, having taken such a careful and exciting stroll through this exhilarating movement will be sufficient.

### Chopin, Nocturne in D $\flat$ major, Op. 27 No. 2

Chopin's Nocturne contains almost every accidental usage found in the Beethoven movement, with the exception of tying a non-diatonic accidental across a barline, and canceling a double sharp; rather, there are cancelations of double flats. There are also accidental usages not found in the Beethoven movement, which drive home the point of some of the principles listed earlier.

As the Nocturne is a much more complicated work, it is not ideal for the initial presentation of the topic, and I don't spend a lot of time on it. I use it primarily to illustrate F $\flat$  and double flats, to compare the cancelation of a double sharp to that of a double flat, to have students find cautionary accidentals, and to look at a few of the more complex usages. Nevertheless, I list below some of the many measures where each of the earlier categorized usages occur. Instructors may wish to use these with more advanced students or as additional assignments or extra credit work.

1. **Accidentals remaining in force throughout a measure:** m. 5, A $\sharp$ ; m. 16, C $\flat$ ; m. 37, C $\sharp$ ; m. 39, G $\sharp$ .
2. **Rewriting an accidental in the following measure:** mm. 22–23 C $\flat$ ; mm. 49–52, C $\flat$ .
3. **Writing an accidental in all clefs and registers:** m. 5, A $\sharp$ ; m. 19, B $\flat\flat$  and F $\flat$ ; m. 37, C $\sharp$ , A $\sharp$ ; m. 39, C $\sharp$  and G $\sharp$ .
4. **Canceling an accidental from the key signature:** m. 5, A $\sharp$ . I start by asking if anyone can see a relationship between the accidentals in mm. 4 and 5. I then point out that this is part of a modified sequence of leading-tone relationships. The E $\sharp$  cancels out the flat in the key signature, and acts as a leading tone to the following F $\sharp$ ; the C $\sharp$  is a leading tone to D $\flat$ , and the A $\sharp$  in m. 5 (canceling the key signature's A $\flat$ ) is a leading tone to B $\flat$  in m. 6. This passage can also be used as an assignment, since it is relatively easy for students to grasp.
5. **Changing an accidental within a measure:** m. 17, D $\sharp$  cancels out the key signature's D $\flat$ , then returns to D $\flat$ ; m. 44, C $\sharp$  changes to C $\flat$ ; m. 50, F $\sharp$  changes to F $\flat$ .
6. **Cautionary accidentals:** m. 10, G $\flat$ ; m. 44, A $\sharp$ .
7. **Enharmonic pitches, not including double sharps or flats:**
  - a) chromatic passing tones: B $\sharp$ , m. 35, m. 39; E $\sharp$ , m. 39;
  - b) chord tones: F $\flat$ , mm. 19, 21; C $\flat$ , mm. 22–23, 41; B $\sharp$ , m. 38. The simplest explanation is again that they fit in the chord. To spell F $\flat$ , C $\flat$ , or B $\sharp$  as E $\sharp$ , B $\sharp$ , or C $\sharp$ , respectively, would violate the triad-spelling rule.
8. **Double sharps:** C $\sharp\sharp$ , m. 39 (part of an inner-voice chromatic scale segment starting on G $\sharp$  and ending on F $\sharp$  in m. 40).
9. **Double flats:** B $\flat\flat$ , mm. 8, 17–18 (LH), mm. 21–22. I point out that B $\flat\flat$  fits the chord; to spell it as A $\sharp$  would violate the triad-spelling rule.<sup>5</sup>
10. **Cancelation of double flats:** m. 32, B $\flat\flat$  to B $\flat$  to B $\sharp$ ; m. 72, B $\flat\flat$  to B $\flat$ ; m. 52, E $\sharp$  to E $\flat$  to E $\flat\flat$  to E $\flat$ . Here I emphasize that while double sharps go from the double sharp to a natural followed by a single sharp (\* to  $\sharp$ ), double flats go directly from the double flat to a single flat ( $\flat\flat$  to  $\flat$ ).
11. **Accidentals renotated enharmonically:** m. 23, C $\flat$  rewritten as B $\sharp$ ; m. 24, C $\sharp$  rewritten as D $\flat$ , A $\sharp$  rewritten as B $\flat\flat$ . The simple explanation is that the pitches, as spelled, fit the given chords. However, mm. 18–26 involve both notational and actual enharmonicism, so the instructor may wish to return to this later.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, a usage not encountered in the Beethoven involves two versions of a pitch sounding against each other. These examples reinforce the point that accidentals must be notated in every register. In m. 15, there is a B $\flat$  in one octave against a B $\sharp$  in another; in m. 13, an A $\flat$  abuts an A $\sharp$  in the same register. My students rarely have seen this type of notation, so it generally astonishes them, and they immediately want to hear these passages played. They always expect them to sound crazy and are surprised that they do not!

I finish the discussion by playing sections of the Nocturne from a YouTube recording (Rubenstein) that scrolls the score as the music plays; please see the Supplemental Materials for a link to the video.

For extra in-class discussion or out-of-class work that is not too difficult, the instructor can ask students why Chopin wrote a C $\flat$  in m. 63, or a B $\flat\flat$  in m. 64, or a G $\sharp$  in m. 73.

This is always a favorite lesson plan of mine and seemingly of the students as well. It helps them understand the various roles of accidentals in context, and gets them excited about the topic and the music, which is what I always strive to accomplish.

### Notes

- 1 This is actually a IV/IV(iv), and part of a descending tetrachord progression from mm. 1 to 9.
- 2 The G $\sharp$  and C $\sharp$  major harmonies are secondary dominants tonicizing vi in the temporary keys of E major and A major, respectively. These are also both instances of a V<sup>7</sup>/vi moving to a IV chord, which in actuality should be viewed as a  $\bar{V}^7$ /vi moving to a VI/vi, a deceptive resolution. One can preview the concepts of tonicization and modulation here, or return to these passages when those topics arise.
- 3 Some variation does exist on the cancelation of a double sharp; some editorial practices exist where a double sharp is canceled through the use of a single sharp by itself. (See the section on cancelation of double flats later in this lesson.)
- 4 This is a great example to return to when discussing actual enharmonicism. These measures occur at the end of the development section. Preceding m. 125 the music has been cycling through a harmonic sequence, arriving at E $\flat$  minor in m. 124. The switch to an F $\sharp$  dominant seventh chord in m. 126 (where one might have expected a G $\flat$  dominant seventh) sets up the retransition back to C major for the recapitulation.
- 5 I do not discuss the B $\flat\flat$  in m. 18 or 20 (RH) in this lesson.
- 6 These measures are in D $\flat$  minor, including a circle of fifths in mm. 21–26, cadencing in D $\flat$  major in m. 26. In actuality, the E<sup>7</sup> in m. 23 is F $\flat$ ,  $\flat$ III/D $\flat$ , and the A major chord in m. 24 is B $\flat\flat$ ,  $\flat$ VI/D $\flat$ . These are instances of notational enharmonicism – enharmonic respelling for ease of reading. However, the c<sup>o7</sup> in m. 22 is exploited for its enharmonic possibilities: it functions both as a vii<sup>o7</sup> of D $\flat$  and a vii<sup>o7</sup> of F $\flat$ .