

Interpreting Flamenco-Associated Gestures in Moritz Moszkowski's Caprice espagnol, Op. 37

Qi Yue

School of Music, Capital Normal University, Beijing 100048, China

Abstract: *First published in 1885, Moritz Moszkowski's Caprice espagnol, Op. 37 combines Romantic piano virtuosity with an imagined Spanish sound world. This article examines how its textures, articulations, accents, and metric organization can be heard as flamenco-associated gestures. After mapping the work's large-scale form, the analysis tests three interpretive correspondences: repeated-note attack and guitar strumming; registral leaps and plucked articulation; and rhythmic-dynamic contrasts and choreographic imagery. Because no documentary evidence is presented to demonstrate direct borrowing from a particular flamenco palo, these correspondences are framed as analogical interpretations rather than source attributions. The analysis argues that the work's Spanish effect arises less from quotation than from the pianistic transformation of timbre, rhythm, and bodily gesture.*

Keywords: Moritz Moszkowski; Caprice espagnol; Flamenco; Piano analysis.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND ANALYTICAL SCOPE

Moritz Moszkowski (1854–1925) was born in Breslau (then in Prussia; now Wrocław, Poland). After early study in Breslau and Dresden, he trained in Berlin at the Stern Conservatory and Theodor Kullak's Neue Akademie der Tonkunst, where he later taught. His successful Berlin debut in 1873 launched a European career as pianist, conductor, teacher, and composer.

Caprice espagnol, Op. 37 was first published by C. F. Peters in Leipzig in 1885. The work combines Romantic virtuosity with rhythmic, articulatory, and timbral signs that can be heard as an imagined Spanish style. Rapid repeated notes, registral leaps, arpeggiated chords, dotted and triplet figures, and cadenza-like passagework contribute to this effect.

Flamenco had consolidated as a recognizable genre in Andalusia during the nineteenth century and was professionalized through the *café cantantes* from the 1860s into the early twentieth century. UNESCO describes flamenco as an artistic expression that joins *cante* (song), *baile* (dance), and *toque* (guitar playing), with Andalusia as its heartland. Moszkowski's 1885 publication falls within this period of consolidation, but chronological overlap alone does not prove direct borrowing.

Accordingly, this study combines formal analysis of the score with an analogical reading of texture, articulation, timbre, and rhythm. It does not claim that Moszkowski quoted a specific flamenco melody or *palo*, nor does it establish a documented encounter between the composer and a particular flamenco tradition. The term “flamenco-associated” therefore denotes an interpretive resemblance between pianistic gestures and conventions of *cante*, *baile*, and *toque*. Score-based observations—measure numbers, keys, textures, and recurring figures—are distinguished from interpretive claims such as strumming or dance imagery.

2. FORMAL DESIGN AND MUSICAL MATERIALS

At the largest scale, Caprice espagnol comprises an introduction (mm. 1–4), an opening part (mm. 5–209), a contrasting middle part (mm. 210–344), and a recapitulation with coda (mm. 345–513). This compound ternary design contains rondo-like returns, a fast–slow–fast tempo profile, and repeated shifts of tonal center. The introduction presents rapid repeated notes divided between the hands; a crescendo drives this figure forward and establishes material that recurs throughout the work.

2.1 Thematic Presentation and Development in the Opening Part

The opening part is itself a compound ternary design with an internal return, comprising Sections A, B, and A¹. Table 1 summarizes its tonal and phrase structure.

Table 1: Formal design of the introduction and opening part (mm. 1–209)

Part	Opening Part																
Section	Intro.	A				B					A'						
Phrase		a	a'	a ²	a ³	b	b'	Trans.	c	c'	a	a'	a ²	a ³	a ⁴	Trans.	
Measures	1-4	5-12	13-20	21-28	29-36	37-44	45-56	57-68	69-84 101-116	85-100 117-132	133-140	141-148	149-156	157-166	167-178	179-209	
Key		A minor			C major	F major		C major			A minor				C major		

Source: Author's analysis based on the public-domain score.

Section A (mm. 5–36) consists of four parallel eight-measure phrases, a, a¹, a², and a³. In phrase a, the right hand continues the introduction's repeated-note alternation while the left hand articulates the tonic triad as a staccato arpeggiation. Phrase a¹ transposes the material down a fourth; a² returns to the earlier register with a changed harmonic progression; and a³ moves from A minor toward C major, preparing Section B.

Section B (mm. 37–132) comprises phrases b, b¹, c, and c¹, together with a twelve-measure transition. Its tonal plan moves from F major (mm. 37–68) to C major (mm. 69–132). Phrase elision links the end of Section A to the beginning of Section B (Example 1). Repeated-note writing yields to dotted syncopations and ornaments, while the left-hand texture develops from arpeggiated chords into recurring eighth- and sixteenth-note figures. The transition at mm. 57–68 uses chordal texture to lead into c; the c/c¹ complex then intensifies through contrary motion and sequential repetition before closing in C major.



Example 1

Section A¹ spans mm. 133–209 and restates and expands the opening material. Phrases a through a³ occupy mm. 133–166; a⁴ (mm. 167–178) extends the ascent across a wider registral span, reaching C7. A transition (mm. 179–209) passes between the hands, relaxes through *ritardando*, and then rises rapidly toward the return of A minor.

2.2 Lyrical Contrast in the Middle Part

The middle part follows a simple binary design comprising Sections C and D. Its slower tempo, softer dynamics, and more cantabile profile provide the principal contrast with the opening part. Table 2 shows its phrase and tonal plan.

Table 2: Formal design of the middle part (mm. 210–344)

Part	Middle Part									
Section	C				D					
Phrase	d	d ¹	d	d ²	e	e ¹	e ²	e ³	e ⁴	e ⁵
Measures	210-217	218-225	226-233	234-245	246-253	254-261	262-277	278-285	286-293	294-344
Key	F major	E major	F major	G major	F major					

Source: Author's analysis based on the public-domain score.

Section C (mm. 210–245) consists of d, d¹, d, and d². The sequence F major–E major–F major–G major creates a

shifting tonal field, while a descending chromatic line and recurrent circling figures produce a more inward character.

Section D (mm. 246–344) develops six related phrases and a closing transition. Staccato double notes, thirty-second-note figures, and wide lateral leaps generate a compact, playful surface. In later variants, double-note leaps expand into octaves and single-note leaps thicken into double-note writing, increasing the technical demands. From m. 310, a slurred double-note melody in the right hand alternates with staccato chords; the passage broadens before the repeated-note figure returns and rises chromatically to E.

2.3 Thematic Return and Closure

The recapitulation returns to the opening Allegro and comprises Section A, Section B¹, and the coda (Table 3).

Table 3: Formal design of the recapitulation and coda (mm. 345–513)

Part	Recapitulation								
Section	A				B ¹			Coda	
Phrase	a	a ¹	a ²	a ³	b ¹	b ²	Trans.	Part I	Part II
Measures	345-352	353-360	361-368	369-376	377-384	385-411	412-444	445-476	477-513
Key	A minor				C major			A major	

Source: Author's analysis based on the public-domain score.

Section A (mm. 345–376) is a varied reprise of the opening Section A. Its four phrases begin in A minor and turn to C major with a³. Section B¹ (mm. 377–444) then develops b-related material. Beginning around m. 412, alternating right-hand octaves and left-hand single notes surge upward in arpeggiated sixteenth notes; repeated intensification drives the music into the coda.

The coda (mm. 445–513) has two parts. The first transforms material from Section D in A major and projects it in octaves. The second, marked *Presto*, alternates right-hand chords with left-hand single notes, accelerates toward a registral high point, and then descends rapidly. Five closing octave chords confirm A as the final tonal center.

3. INTERPRETING FLAMENCO-ASSOCIATED GESTURES

Flamenco joins song, dance, and guitar playing, but its repertory is metrically and stylistically diverse. The following analysis therefore identifies local correspondences rather than treating every “Spanish” sign as proof of flamenco origin. The most persuasive correspondences concern percussive attack, repeated or leaping textures, accentual energy, and the imagined motion of dance.

3.1 Guitar-Associated Timbres

The image shows a musical score for guitar, labeled 'Example 2'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a treble and bass staff. The treble staff has a series of eighth notes, some beamed together, and some marked with 'x' (flamenco-style attack). The bass staff has a series of eighth notes, some beamed together. There are markings for 'rit.' (ritardando) and 'a tempo' (return to tempo). The second system also has a treble and bass staff. The treble staff has a series of eighth notes, some beamed together, and some marked with 'x'. The bass staff has a series of eighth notes, some beamed together. There is a marking for 'marcato' (marked). A section of the music in the second system is enclosed in a box, highlighting a specific rhythmic pattern.

Example 2

Flamenco guitar technique includes forms of strumming and plucked articulation that can project crisp attack, rapid repetition, and strong rhythmic impulse. A piano cannot reproduce the physical action of *rasgueado*, but

Moszkowski's repeated-note textures can create an analogous continuity of percussive attack. Similarly, registral leaps can suggest the separation and rebound of plucked tones without literally transcribing a guitar technique.

The introduction's rapid sixteenth-note alternation (Example 2) is the clearest case. Its repeated pitch, division between the hands, and crescendo produce a continuous, sharply articulated surface. Heard analogically, this surface evokes the rhythmic drive of strumming; analytically, however, the evidence supports a timbral resemblance rather than a demonstrable quotation of rasgueado.

The single-note leaps in Section D offer a contrasting guitar-associated image (Example 3). Their detached attack and quick transfer across registers make the line sound lighter and more elastic than the repeated-note material. The passage may therefore be heard as an evocation of plucked articulation, while its specific pitches and keyboard distribution remain thoroughly pianistic.



Example 3

3.2 Dance, Meter, and Choreographic Imagery

Flamenco baile is technically complex and expressive; historical and pedagogical descriptions sometimes associate heavier footwork with male performance and gentler arm movement with female performance, although actual practice is far more varied. The labels *bailaora* and *bailaor* are therefore used below as choreographic metaphors, not as fixed claims about gender or as evidence of a literal dance program.

Flamenco meter cannot be reduced to 3/4 and 3/8. Its *palos* include unmetered, binary, ternary, cross-metric, and twelve-beat cyclic organizations, with accentual hierarchies that do not always coincide with Western notions of strong and weak beats. In *Caprice espagnol*, the triplet figuration and displaced accents shown in Example 4 provide a local resemblance to flamenco's accentual vitality; by themselves, however, they do not identify a specific *palo*.



Example 4

Measures 181–204 (Example 5) form the article's first choreographic reading. Continuous alternation between the hands, softer dynamics, and smooth exchange of register create a fluid contrast with the opening section. In

performance, relaxed wrists and seamless transfer can shape long arcs across the keyboard. These qualities may be associated with the poise of a bailaora, but the association remains an interpretive image grounded in gesture rather than an explicit program.



Example 5

Measures 278–285 (Example 6) juxtapose forceful octave chords, lighter staccato responses, and triplet motion. Within a choreographic reading, the contrast can suggest two dancers whose weight, attack, and direction differ yet remain coordinated. The passage's musical evidence is the alternation of texture and energy; assigning these gestures to male and female partners is a metaphorical interpretation rather than a score fact.



Example 6

A third image appears in mm. 75–85 (Example 7), where left-hand seventh chords and right-hand triads alternate and rise sequentially. At *ff*, concentrated fingertip weight and economical motion clarify the broad line and powerful attack. The passage can be heard as projecting the grounded force often associated with a bailaor, while the analysis again distinguishes that association from the objective features of sequence, register, dynamics, and chordal alternation.



Example 7

4. NATIONAL STYLE AND ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE

Caprice espagnol does not depend on an identifiable quotation of Spanish folk melody. Instead, it builds an imagined national style from rhythmic impulse, guitar-associated attack, registral design, and choreographic contrast. These elements are absorbed into Romantic harmony and a virtuoso piano texture, so the result remains idiomatic to the keyboard even when it evokes another performance tradition.

The work's most effective transformations occur at the level of gesture. Repeated notes turn percussive continuity into a technical and formal motive; detached leaps convert plucked attack into keyboard elasticity; triplets and displaced accents generate bodily momentum; and contrasts of register, articulation, and dynamics support choreographic imagery. Such correspondences explain the Spanish effect more precisely than a general appeal to "national character."

This distinction also limits the historical claim. The piece should not be presented as an ethnographic transcription of flamenco or as evidence that Moszkowski reproduced a specific palo. It is better understood as a late-nineteenth-century act of stylization: a German-based composer reimagines selected signs of Spain for the concert piano. That process can produce vivid cross-cultural art while still requiring critical attention to the difference between cultural source, musical topic, and perceptual association.

5. CONCLUSION

The score analysis confirms a carefully proportioned large-scale design and a dense network of recurring pianistic figures. Within that design, repeated-note attack, detached registral leaps, triplet and accentual energy, and contrasting textures support a coherent reading of flamenco-associated gesture. Moszkowski's Spanish effect arises primarily through transformation rather than quotation: timbre, rhythm, and imagined bodily motion are translated into pianistic terms.

At the same time, the evidence does not establish direct borrowing from a particular flamenco genre. The article's contribution is therefore interpretive and analytical, not documentary. By separating score facts from cultural association, the reading clarifies both the work's expressive power and the limits of claims about national style. Further research could compare the piece with contemporary Spanish-topic repertory and investigate reception or archival evidence capable of testing a more specific historical connection.

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