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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Three Recitals

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Stephen Edward Lewis

Committee in charge:

Professor Aleck Karis, Chair
Professor Angela Booker
Professor Natacha Diels
Professor Brian Goldfarb
Professor Philip Larson

2017

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University of California, San Diego

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Three Recitals

by

Stephen Edward Lewis

Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Aleck Karis, Chair

Three Recitals is a thesis that discusses programming, technical, musical, and thematic issues involved in my three degree recitals for my DMA program in Contemporary Music Performance in Piano. My first recital consisted of music by Béla Bartók, Claude Debussy, Arnold Schoenberg, and Roger Reynolds, and explored issues of modernity, nature, machines, and mindfulness. My second recital explored music by Béla Bartók, Johannes Brahms, and Elliott Carter in a collaborative chamber program

involving my friends and colleagues in the music program at UCSD. My final program involved music by Johannes Brahms, Claude Debussy, Luciano Berio, and Ludwig van Beethoven and explored issues of meaning, structure, and surface detail. Together, my recitals constitute a principled exploration of important musical and social ideas through the lens of music for solo piano and chamber groups from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

THREE RECITALS

Introduction

In this paper, I will first discuss the three degree recitals I performed for the D.M.A. in Contemporary Music Performance in Piano at UC San Diego, studying with Professor Aleck Karis. For each recital, I will discuss the rationale for my programming decisions and the technical and musical skills I learned in each, along with my reflections on the pieces and how they fit together and the ideas they explored or exemplified. Following this, I will discuss my assessment of my recitals after the fact.

In planning my recital programs, I balanced several priorities when making program choices. First, I wanted programs that I could feel passionate about; this would both help me put the utmost into practicing for the programs and also let this enthusiasm shine through in the performance. Next, the programs needed to present me with new musical and technical challenges to help me grow as a pianist. Finally, I wanted to develop programs that would hold together as an event, with a balance of musical styles and affects as well as deeper and broader thematic elements to bind the recitals together.

Early Modernist Piano: Machine, Nature, and Person

Performance date: May 19th, 2013

Sonatina by Béla Bartók
imAge/piano by Roger Reynolds
Images, book I by Claude Debussy
"Reflets dans l'eau"
"Hommage à Rameau"
"Mouvement"
Suite for piano, Op. 25 by Arnold Schoenberg
Sonata by Béla Bartók
Encore: **Intermezzo in A major, Op. 118, no. 2** by Johannes Brahms

In selecting the works for this program, I wanted to fill in a gap in my pianistic education: early 20th-century Modernist piano music, including Debussy, Bartók, and Schoenberg. My previous piano education had left a gap in piano repertoire spanning this period. Having studied piano with a traditional French teacher while at the Oberlin Conservatory, my repertoire was primarily drawn from the common practice era, with my degree recitals including music by J.S. Bach, Chopin, Beethoven, Brahms, and Ravel. At the same time, I began performing many post-World War II conducted ensemble pieces with the Contemporary Music Ensemble as well as conducting my own music compositions (I was a double major in piano and in composition). My piano teacher at the time demurred from teaching me any post-Ravel music (aside from Alberto Ginastera's exciting but non-experimental First Piano Sonata), claiming that since she did not play such music herself, that she would be no help for me. At the time, I was not too worried about this oversight, since I love the standard practice piano repertoire and I was receiving a good education in recent music through composition studies and by performing in the Contemporary Music Ensemble.

Aside from exploring a historical gap in my repertoire, this program also featured two personal artistic goals that had gone unfulfilled: learning and performing a major work by Debussy and also the Sonata by Bartók. With Debussy, my Oberlin piano teacher had essentially refused to teach his music to me. She (strangely) categorized her students as either Debussy players or Ravel players, and she had pegged me as a Ravel player. I studied and performed Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin*, *Sonatine*, *Jeux d'eau*, and his Piano Trio—a very rewarding and demanding list, to be sure, but we never worked on any Debussy. When I would bring it up, she was adamant that my talents were best suited for Ravel; I disagreed, but could do little to convince her to change her mind. At UCSD, Aleck Karis thought this attitude was absurd, and so I programmed Debussy's first book of *Images*, a milestone work for him that helped cement the label "Impressionist" through the evocations of water found in the first piece in the set, "Reflets dans l'eau."

My interest in the Bartók Sonata extended further back: my high school piano teacher had often spoken of it as a major masterpiece that was so technically difficult, in especially peculiar ways, that it actually posed a real danger of injury to anyone who tried to play it but was not yet sufficiently advanced. He himself had played it on one of his graduate recitals as a young man and encouraged me to practice hard so that one day I would be ready to play it. While at Oberlin, I had felt unready for this piece, and thinking back I do not see why except that, as many of us young pianists did, I suffered from a form of impostor syndrome.[1] Nevertheless, it took a transformative experience for me to

[1] I remember chatting with my fellow piano majors just before we all graduated after five years together (five years being common for double majors), and we all realized that we

feel ready to take on the Sonata: spending two years as a freelance pianist in Madison, Wisconsin. During that time, I performed in dozens of collaborative recitals and discovered a deep confidence in my abilities both as a performer and in my technical skills on the keyboard. Those experiences imbued me with faith in myself to perform anything I put time and effort into, and, upon starting my DMA, I first thought of Bartók's Sonata as a worthy point of departure.

With these two pieces selected, the rest of the program began to fall into place. First, I decided to open my recital with Bartók's brilliant yet brief Sonatina as a companion and foil to his Sonata that would close the concert. Bartók's Sonatina, composed nearly a decade before the Sonata, shows more directly his interest in Hungarian and Eastern European folk music, containing direct references to local bagpipes, dance forms, and melodic modes. It contrasted and complemented the longer Sonata, in which these influences had been abstracted to a greater degree in a far more dissonant, percussive musical language.

I chose UCSD faculty composer Roger Reynolds' *imAge/piano* to include on my program in part because it shared a name with the Debussy set, but also because of its mechanical affect. Early in my time back at UCSD, I had looked through piano solo music by all of the UCSD faculty composers in order to see if any of it appealed to me. Reynolds' work was my favorite, and it happened to complement my program as well.

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all had felt the same way when we arrived at Oberlin: that, surely, some mistake had been made during the audition process, that surely we would be discovered to be not good enough to warrant studying at Oberlin. Of course, when we were first years, none of us dared reveal such vulnerability to each other; when we finally did so at the end, it was a huge relief.

Finally, the Suite for Piano by Arnold Schoenberg seemed to complete my program. His first fully twelve-tone work, Schoenberg's Suite consisted of a style of piano writing that pointed forward to more recent approaches. It was also published around the same time as Bartók's Sonata (the Suite in 1925; the Sonata in 1926), and both were examples of Neoclassical works (works that imitated the earlier styles and forms of the Classical era, rather than the more recent Romantic and early Modern eras) by composers who are not often thought of as Neoclassical.[2] Schoenberg's Suite is more notable for its twelve-tone composition technique, in which the twelve chromatic tones are placed into a specific order and then doled out in exactly that order, again and again, throughout the work. This system was one that Schoenberg developed to provide structure to his earlier experiments in atonal music, or music in which the sense of tonic, or harmonic resolution, has been removed and in which dissonant intervals and chords are treated no differently than traditional consonances.[3] The systematizing of atonality into tone rows helped Schoenberg create longer musical forms through providing a structure to work with. It is likely that this is also why Schoenberg's first fully twelve-tone work takes the form of a Suite, or collection of dance types, as the dance types themselves also provide a specific set of characteristics that would provide a structure to his music.

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[2] Debussy, with his final, unfinished, composition project of Six Sonatas for Various Instruments, could also fall into this category, although his Images are not examples of Neoclassicism.

[3] In fact, Schoenberg's approach to twelve-tone music deliberately and thoroughly eschewed most relics of tonality, such as major and minor triads, traditional seventh chords, and even octave doublings; in his late music, however, Schoenberg uses tone rows in such a way that many of these tonal relics reemerge (such as in his Piano Concerto, that ends on a C major chord in first inversion).

This recital program presented me with a range of technical challenges to overcome. The most extreme were located in Bartók's Sonata. In the first movement, Bartók frequently uses gestures made up of legato octaves at a fast tempo, an extreme technical challenge (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Bartók Sonata, I, legato octaves

The solution to this technical challenge was counterintuitive. Normally, legato octaves are performed by using the third, fourth, and fifth fingers of the hand to connect the octaves together while the thumb moves swiftly along, but necessarily not truly connecting. Here, the tempo demanded a speed that required an alternative approach: using mostly the same fingering for each octave (1-5), and moving with a quick bouncing

motion from each octave to the next, with an overall sweep of the wrist to create the illusion of legato playing through melodic shaping.

The first movement also featured lengthy passages where both hands are playing in highly extended position—that is, where the fingers need to be spread out over the length of an octave (Figure 2). This extended position is one in which the risk of injury is

Figure 2: Bartók, Sonata, I, extended hand positions

greatly increased, as the hand and parts of the wrist must remain tense. This tension causes rapid fatigue, and fatigue can lead to tendonitis or carpal tunnel syndrome. To overcome this barrier, I needed to practice very slowly over a long period of time, to allow my muscles to gain strength and flexibility and also to learn how to make these awkward motions as efficient and relaxed as possible. As an added difficulty, in these passages the hands tend to be playing *over* each other, creating increased coordination issues.

The last movement of the Sonata also includes significant technical demands relating to extended hand positions. Here, the tempo is much faster and the extended chords are repeated quite rapidly. Together, these pose a major risk of repetitive injury for the same reasons as outlined above. Again, the solution was initial slow, careful practice followed by determining the best way to play these passages with as much relaxation and ease as possible. In Figure 3, note also the chords in the right hand that involve playing three notes with the thumb while all the other fingers are playing an octave higher; the technical demand of extended positions perhaps implies that Bartók, who performed these works himself frequently and well, had especially large hands capable of playing such textures with ease.

Figure 3: Bartók Sonata, III, extended hand positions

Thematically, this program investigates musical depictions of nature, industry, and the human experience. This trio of topics is seen most clearly in the Debussy *Images*, whose three pieces correspond to these categories: “Reflets dans l’eau” to nature, “Hommage à Rameau” to humanity and history, and “Mouvement” to industrialization and machines. For Debussy, this last area is presented in a positive light, if ultimately

mysteriously, with a rapidly repeating ostinato bubbling away beneath chords that sound both open and optimistic. This openness comes from the chords being made up of a fifth and an octave (in modern rock parlance, these are “power chords”), while the optimism comes from the C major modality. In the other two works, both nature and human history are presented in a nostalgic light.

Neither Bartók nor Schoenberg were as naïve or optimistic about industrialization as Debussy by the time they composed their respective works on my recital. Both had lived through World War I, seeing the potential of machines realized in widespread carnage and death. Schoenberg’s style of musical development is so dense and saturated that it can be compared to both the frenzied pace of life with automobiles, airplanes, and telephones and also to an Expressionistic stream-of-consciousness, following each fleeting thought and emotion as it springs into one’s mind. The frenetic pace of both the musical ideas and the change from one musical idea to another in the “Praeludium” and the “Gigue” especially reflect a world in which personal anxiety is constantly activated by the pace of industrialized life.

Bartók’s music is less Expressionistic in its evocation of machines; his Sonata’s first movement revels in the brutality of mechanical processes, their relentlessness and mercilessness. He achieves this through consistent melodic repetition of the same note and the use of driving, dissonant accompaniment patterns. In addition, Bartók also asks for an unusual musical shape: to crescendo strongly through the end of each gesture. Classical music in general tends towards arch-like shapes to phrasing; rising tension towards the middle or Golden Mean of a phrase, followed by a falling away by the end (for example, the main theme in the Sonata, Op. 111, first movement, despite its

commanding affect, has this type of shape built into the melody itself). With this unusual dynamic shape, Bartók is imitating the non-human, non-organic character of machinery, something that later 20th-century composers would also ask for.[4]

Figure 4: Bartók Sonata, I, repeated melodic note in main theme

In the last movement of the Sonata, Bartók finds innovative ways of composing with tone clusters, or chords build up of major and minor seconds. These chords imitate the sounds of unpitched noises found both in percussion instruments as well as in machinery. Figure 5 shows an example of this in the left hand at the section marked "Agitato."

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[4] One famous example is Helmut Lachenmann, who calls for string instruments to perform strong crescendos on single bowed notes, followed by an abrupt dampening of the string; the effect is supposed to mimic the effect of reversing the envelope a "normal" musical note in *musique concrète* by playing a recording of the "normal" note backwards. In both Bartók and Lachenmann, the effect is strange and uncanny when performed well.

Figure 5: Bartók Sonata, III, tone clusters in left hand

Debussy, Schoenberg, and Bartók explore complicated issues of modernity in their works on this recital program. The relationship between self and nature, self and technology, and our inner and outer lives have remained a central problem of life through the present. The creation of faster means of communication has not fundamentally changed society, but instead merely intensified that which was already a growing concern in the early 20th century. The path towards personal peace, wisdom, and freedom from the incessant barrage of information and the powerful sense of homelessness such a barrage induces is through mindfulness and awareness. What early Modernist composers like Debussy, Schoenberg, and Bartók share is an attitude that music can help with awareness and mindfulness through being demanding and not merely beautiful or entertaining. Although this leaves them open to criticism for being elitist, it is clear that one of the latent forces that can combat the negative forces, such as living in “bubbles” and the flood of fake news, in today’s world is for every individual to develop habits that

seek deeper answers through an increased awareness of what is actually happening, how one actually feels, and how one actually relates to the world. Schoenberg's atonal music is difficult to listen to not only because of the dissonance, but because its constant flux calls attention to our own anxious minds and our own feelings of helplessness in the face of a complex, swift world. Bartók's brutal affect is a helpful reminder that machines are merciless and inexorable in their amplification of human malice or negligence, and that to wield such power demands heightened responsibility lest we commit grievous acts against one another. This thematic underpinning in my recital lends it coherence and a central message calling for reflection and action, and shows one way in which a recital can be constructed to communicate such ideas.

Overall, I was quite happy with how this recital came together and how I performed it. There were a few issues of note accuracy that arose in the Bartók Sonata, but these were due to fatigue from a difficult program. In order to help mitigate this in the future, I would seek out additional opportunities to perform the recital in advance of an important performance like a DMA degree recital. This is standard practice in the piano world; before playing at Carnegie Hall, many pianists will perform their recitals in many smaller venues first to gain ease and fluency not just with the pieces themselves but also with the recital as a whole, including the stress and excitement of live performances in different acoustical spaces.

<u>Soft Hammers: Chamber Works by Carter, Brahms, and Bartók</u>

Performance date: April 6th, 2014

Of Challenge and of Love for soprano and piano, by Elliott Carter
Piano Trio in B major, Op. 8 (rev. 1889) by Johannes Brahms
Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion by Béla Bartók

My second degree recital was planned as a chamber recital in which I would get to work on interesting projects with my colleagues and friends among the graduate students in the Music Department. I had worked often with Tiffany Du Mouchelle, the soprano who sang Elliott Carter's *Of Challenge and of Love* with me, since I began my degree programs. We had previously worked together on a performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and in many informal rehearsals and coachings. Brahms' Piano Trio was an extension of a previous recital with cellist Jennifer Bewerse in which we performed Brahms' Cello Sonata #1 in E minor, Op. 38. I had also worked with violinist Batya Macadam-Somer extensively as both a pianist and composer. Finally, Bartók's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion was a perfect opportunity to work with pianist Kyle Adam Blair and percussionists Steve Solook and Dustin Donahue.

In this program, Carter's *Of Challenge and of Love* presented the steepest rhythmic and musical challenges. The first song, "High on the Tower," displays a rhythmic/metric scheme typical for Carter by combining an irregular *moto perpetuo* texture in running triplets in a larger meter grouped into units of three quarter notes, thus making nine rapid triplets per basic large beat of the measure. At the same time, the soprano is singing her melody in yet another meter. In Figure 6, Carter includes an alternative metrical interpretation above the soprano line that reveals his plan of two

simultaneous meters, 6/4 (two beats of a dotted half note or nine triplet eighth notes each) for the piano accompaniment and 4/4 for the vocal line. Note how the accents in the piano accompaniment add a syncopated element on top of the basic complexity to be found in the meters and textures themselves.

Figure 6: Carter, “High on the Tower”, mm. 5-8

“High on the Tower” is in a relatively straightforward ABA’ form. The B section begins with a metric modulation, a common technique Carter uses where a rhythmic subdivision

from one section becomes reinterpreted within a different metrical structure, usually creating the sense of a suddenly different tempo. In this case, the eighth-note triplets from the A section become quintuplet sixteenth notes in the B section, with the meter switching to 4/4 (Figure 7).[5] In this section, a common rhythmic challenge are evenly played 3:5 polyrhythms, as well as maintaining a sense of the 4/4 meter when the running quintuplet sixteenth notes form accented groups of 7 notes, creating another apparent polymetric situation (this can be seen in the accents in the lower staff in mm. 17-18).

Figure 7: Carter, “High on the Tower”, metric modulation

The third song in the set, *“Am Klavier (At the Piano)”*[6], demands a more complicated rhythmic sense in a far more subtle, introverted texture. Throughout the majority of this song, there is a continuous pattern in the piano part consisting of a

[5] The “meno mosso” in the score is referring to the tempo of the *quarter notes*, which have gone from quarter note=180 to quarter note=108. To find the speed of a triplet eighth note at a tempo of quarter note=180, one multiplies the tempo by the number of subdivisions, or 180*3, which gives 540. The same calculation to find the speed of the quintuplet sixteenth notes in m. 18 gives us 108*5, or 540.

[6] This title is rendered as John Hollander published it, with italics and the English translation in parentheses.

sextuplet subdivision of the quarter note beat that is articulated on every *fifth* of these sextuplet sixteenths. Thus, there is a recurring polyrhythmic pattern that lasts for five quarter-note beats. This can be most clearly seen in m. 5 of Figure 8 below; the pattern begins on the downbeat of m. 5 and begins its new cycle on beat 2 of m. 6.

Figure 8: Carter, *Am Klavier (at the Piano)*, 5:6 polyrhythm

In mm. 5-6, the soprano is already singing in rhythms that do not line up easily with this cyclical polyrhythm; for most of the song, the piano adds additional layers that also are out of sync with the polyrhythm, as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Carter, Am Klavier (at the Piano), mm. 9-10

The fourth, and longest, song in *Of Challenge and of Love*, “Quatrains from Harp Lake,” combines musical aspects of the four other songs into an episodic musical setting. This makes “Quatrains from Harp Lake” the trickiest of the songs to make coherent and effective in performance. As with many songs that set long poems, the music shifts along with the poetic images and ideas. This makes the poem itself provide the strongest connection within this song. Carter helped make “Quatrains from Harp Lake” feel integral to the set by basing the musical material of the other four songs on episodes taken from the fourth song. That makes “Quatrains from Harp Lake” feel like an appropriate summation of *Of Challenge and of Love* as a whole.

The B major Trio, Op. 8 by Brahms is a fascinating example of an early work returned to in old age and extensively revised. Vast sections of the first movement, including the entire second theme, development section, and coda, along with major sections of the third and fourth movements, were completely recomposed in 1889, making the original and new versions of the work distinctly different pieces. The new second theme in the first movement resembles the Intermezzo in B minor on my third recital program, and the two ideas were composed relatively close in time (1889 for the Trio, 1892 for the Intermezzo).

The Trio presents typical technical and musical challenges for Brahms’ chamber music. As with all of Brahms’ music involving piano, these are significant and require facility in playing thick, heavy textures with ease and grace. The Scherzo movement in particular contains difficult repeated note passages and a sweeping double arpeggio at

high speed—probably coincidentally, these are the central technical problems in Maurice Ravel's notoriously difficult "Scarbo" from *Gaspard de la nuit*. As with all of Brahms' chamber works involving piano, finding proper balance with the string instruments, which are naturally far quieter than the piano, demands keen ears and experience in collaborative playing.

Bartók's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion presented significant technical, ensemble, and endurance problems. The Sonata's two outer movements are filled with large, dense chords, often at fast tempos and loud volumes. For example, the very first, fanfare-like statement of the main melodic motive after the slow introduction involves such large chords played at a high speed. An added difficulty here is that the changing chord types demand that the pianists' hands change configuration while moving, in a very brief amount of time, from one chord to the next (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Bartók, Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, I, large chords

The remainder of the first movement leaves few moments of respite, with many more passages like Figure 10, as well as extended passages using double-note techniques including parallel sixths, fourths, thirds, fifths, and octaves. The last movement, despite being lighter in character, makes similarly steep technical demands.

The issue of fatigue is not primarily about complete collapse, but instead of not being able to control one's sound and phrase shaping adequately. The Sonata for Two

Pianos and Percussion is a difficult work to render successfully, given how much of it is consistently loud and driving in character. The pianists and percussionists need to be able to control their sound to bring variety of sound and phrasing that shows direction to the unrelenting barrage of notes in the first movement. This becomes far more difficult if the pianists lack enough endurance to make it through. Endurance is partly a matter of developing tone in muscles of the hands, wrists, arms, shoulders, and torso, but is more about having a clear mental map of the entire Sonata so as to know how much effort to exert in order to make it through.

Finally, the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion is a trickier chamber work for lining up attacks between the pianists and percussionists. All of the instruments involved have very sharp, percussive attacks. This makes it imperative that simultaneous attacks happen at *exactly* the same time. When collaborating with vocalists or string instruments, the sharp attack of the piano and the softer attacks of the voice and the bow allow for a slight amount of variation for simultaneous attacks to still sound simultaneous (unless the attacks that must line up involve plosive consonants or pizzicati on the string instruments). In the Sonata, every time the two pianos need to play together, it must happen *exactly* together or two distinct attacks will be heard. As a practical matter, this tends to be the most difficult to attain in *slow* passages, such as the very opening; when moving along at a fast speed, the tempo and constant subdivisions help foster an overall rhythmic sense that makes ensemble easier to attain—counting rhythms accurately is mostly a physical sensation and act. In slow tempos, the counting of rhythms must be a *mental* act, and using our bodies to cue each other becomes essential lest our internal metronomes lead us slightly astray.

Overall, this recital was a program of three large-scale chamber works that I was excited about performing with my friends and colleagues. At nearly 90 minutes, it is the longest of my three recitals and, overall, the most technically demanding and tiring. In the future, I would not program these three works together, but would find a balance of works that allow for me to not be too fatigued at any point. In the end, the Bartók Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion did suffer somewhat from my fatigue due to it following two other demanding works. Yet I still felt there was much to be proud of in all three pieces on this recital, and I am excited to find opportunities to perform these works again in the future.

Surface/Structure | Transcendence/Meaning(lessness): Brahms, Debussy, Berio, and Beethoven

Performance date: May 21st, 2017

Vier Klavierstücke, Op. 119 by Johannes Brahms
Douze Études by Claude Debussy
"Pour les agréments"
"Pour les sonorités opposées"
"Pour les arpèges composés"
Seqeunza IV by Luciano Berio
Sonata in C minor, Op. 111 by Ludwig van Beethoven

My final DMA recital includes two works that, like the Bartók Sonata on my first recital, were lifelong goals for me. Brahms' Op. 119 Klavierstücke were works I grew up listening to on the Time Life classical music record series, while Beethoven's Sonata in C minor, Op. 111 was a work I saw both my high school piano teacher, David Johnson, as well as my early pianist hero, New Zealand native David James, perform while I was a teenager. Both of them impressed upon me how difficult the Beethoven Sonata was, both technically and musically, and I knew, with un-teenager-like humility, that it would be a long time until I was prepared to perform it. In fact, I am very well-prepared to play it now; I had previously learned and performed 16 of Beethoven's 32 sonatas, including the other two "late" sonatas, Opp. 109 and 110, as well as his C major Piano Concerto, and several each of his Violin Sonatas and Cello Sonatas. I could draw upon this deep relationship with Beethoven's music to finally learn and perform Op. 111.

In selecting the Debussy and Berio for this concert, I began by wanting to continue to work on music by Debussy given my late start with his works. At first, I thought of playing book two of his *Images*, but later I decided to work on several of his

Études because they were from a later period and presented different challenges (the second book of *Images* are wonderful pieces, but are very similar in some ways to the first book). Berio's Sequenza IV appealed to me due to similarities I saw between its use of both harmonies and grace-note figurations and the Debussy Études I chose to work on.

One of the central thematic elements for this program is the relationship between deep musical structure and surface-level musical detail. In musical analysis, a common path towards "understanding" a musical work involves delving beneath the surface to find larger musical structures and connections across the span of a work. This is somewhat akin to structuralist narrative theory: taking a specific story and identifying the characters by their archetypes (protagonist, antagonist, deuteragonist, etc.) and reducing specific episodes to their structural bases (inciting action, rising action, climax, denouement) in order to see the commonalities between otherwise widely divergent stories. In music, this often leads to the flawed notion that that which lies deeper in a musical work is more important than what is on the surface. Of course, without the surface, nothing "deeper" could be perceived nor discerned, and the idea of a "deeper" structure or meaning is something that listeners *interpret* from the only thing that is actually *present*: the sound itself, or the *surface*.

In the Debussy and Berio, it is clear that the handfuls upon handfuls of quick "grace" notes are fully integral to the basic language of these works. These efflorescences create a musical development of gesture that is as important as the harmonic and phrase structures. Debussy's titles for his Études make this clear: "For ornaments" and "For composite arpeggios." While these titles can be interpreted as mere technical descriptors, Debussy was in fact trying for something more fundamental: that these types of musical

activity, which in earlier Classical music were considered “ornamental,” or, ultimately, superfluous, are in fact deeply fundamental and expressive in their own right. Berio, in his Sequenza, is able to expand on this even further given that his music is even less tied to the vestiges of tonality than Debussy’s; Debussy still composed within harmonic hierarchies in his Études, even when they are highly idiosyncratic and unique to Debussy’s imagination; Berio, in his atonal environment, has no center he needs to honor. In fact, Berio needed to create his own harmonic coherence of a kind, through the use of cycles of three different self-similar chord types: poly-triads, dissonant chords made of fourths, fifths, sevenths, and ninths, and tone clusters.[7] Yet his attempts to lend harmonic coherence were meant to enhance the power of the gestural development rather than to recreate the hierarchical nature of tonality.

In the B minor Intermezzo from his Op. 119 Klavierstücke, Brahms makes a daring experiment in pushing the limits of harmony through a focus on the gestural act of playing the piano. The opening bars, with their slowly descending arpeggios comprised of thirds, accumulate into ninth and eleventh chords. Ninth and eleventh chords are rare in tonal classical music, and the dissonances involved need to be handled in specific ways depending upon how they arise. In this Intermezzo, though, they arise not through voice-leading but through the gesture of slowly depressing keys in an idiomatic pattern that fits well in the pianist’s hands (Figure 11).

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[7] I previously discussed this in my qualifying exam paper on Berio’s Sequenza IV.

Figure 11: Brahms, Intermezzo in B minor, Op. 119, no. 1, descending arpeggios

Looking at the gesture more closely, there are two parts: the top/first note belongs to the melody, a series of sigh gestures. The other notes float down underneath the melody note by thirds, creating the aforementioned ninth and eleventh chords. With this daring texture, Brahms is inverting a typical and commonplace technique of piano writing: arpeggios *ascending* over a *bass* note. Works such as J.S. Bach's C major Prelude from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I, or Chopin's C major Étude, Op. 10, no. 1 and also his C major Prelude, Op. 28, no. 1, provide famous examples from hundreds of others. In these historical precedents, the bass note provides a foundation upon which the arpeggios derive their harmonic meaning, placing the gestures firmly within the tonal system. In this Intermezzo, by simply inverting this pattern, Brahms flirts with atonality, or at least a confusing lack of tonal situatedness.

Brahms' obsession with descending thirds in this Intermezzo can also be seen in other works from his later life. His Fourth (and final) Symphony's opening theme is built of descending thirds, while several variations in the Symphony's finale are constructed to feature continuous chains of descending thirds. In addition, the second theme in the first movement of his B major Trio, Op. 8 (featured on my second DMA recital) is also built

of descending thirds. Brahms' use of thirds in this manner represents an extreme questioning of the Romantic era's infatuation with modulating to mediant key areas, or keys that are a third away from the tonic. This technique had been occasionally heard in Western music for hundreds of years, with composers like Guillaume de Machaut, Orlando di Lasso, Carlo Gesualdo, and more recent composers including Haydn and Mozart. For the majority of these composers, mediant relationships functioned as kinds of deceptive cadences and were typically quickly resolved back to the modal or tonal center. However, it was with Beethoven that the practice became more deeply imbedded and explored in relationship with the tonic. In his sonata-form movements, Beethoven began to modulate not to the conventional dominant key area but rather to mediant key areas. He used a wide variety of types of mediants in these movements, such as from I to VI/vi in his Sonata Op. 31, no. 1, from i to III/iii in his *Appassionata* Sonata Op. 57, from I to III in his *Waldstein* Sonata, Op. 53, and from i to VI in his Sonata, Op. 111 and in his Ninth Symphony. The Sonata, Op. 111 also features a modulation from I to bIII within a brief development section placed between variations.

In addition to large formal modulations to mediant keys, Beethoven also became more obsessed with chord progressions that move by thirds. In his monumental *Hammerklavier* Sonata, Op. 106, not only does the second theme modulate from I to VI as in Op. 31, no. 1, he also bases the harmonic movement of the development section entirely upon descending thirds, or successive mediant relationships. This pattern is returned to in the introduction to the last movement, as well as in the key areas of the final fugue. As Charles Rosen points out, Beethoven applies this process so literally that

the music in this B-flat major work ends up focusing on the extremely remote key of B minor, a key reached through long chains of descending thirds.[8]

Beethoven's work with mediant relationships provoked later Romantic composers to explore with more freedom the expressive possibilities of mediant modulations. For many Romantic works, the mediant relationship of I with bVI became a powerful signifier for the *sublime* in music. This was inspired by a famous and famously exposed modulation of this type in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. In the last movement, after the full chorus has entered and sang through the early verses of Schiller's "Ode to Joy," the music reaches a half-cadence on the dominant, A major. The music here is very loud, and all motion has stopped to sustain this full-throated A major chord. Then the chord changes to F major, which would be the mediant bVI to A major's I. This moment does feel sublime, and it is in advance of Beethoven's introduction of "Turkish" musical ideas into the symphony. Beethoven meant the inclusion of musical signifiers of other cultures to be a musical analogy to the "Ode to Joy's" call for universal brotherhood. To set this up harmonically, Beethoven used the sense of the sublime that can be felt in the I-bVI relationship.

From where does this sense of the sublime arise? Context ultimately matters the most, and I-bVI shifts at important structural moments will feel more powerful than those that simply happen within a phrase in passing. However, there is a harmonic basis for the feeling of the sublime within this harmonic relationship. When music moves from I to bVI, or from C major to A-flat major for one version of this, several things happen. First the original *tonic* note, C, remains in the new chord of A-flat major but is

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[8] Rosen, Charles. "Beethoven." *The Classical Style*, W.W. Norton, pp. 409-434.

recontextualized to be the third of the new chord. The continued presence of the C in both chords lends coherence and connection between the two chords. However, the *tonic* has shifted down a major third from C to A-flat, to a note that is *not* in the C major scale. This is a distant key, a long distance to suddenly move. The perception of both sameness (with the mutually-present C in both chords) and vastly different location (due to the shifting tonic note) is akin to the recontextualization inherent in the idea of the sublime: that one is still oneself, but with a sudden awareness of our true (small) size and true insignificance next to nature. The sublime was a common interest of Romantic composers, and this relationship became commonplace.

In Brahms' music, the movement of chords by thirds investigates the ground between the mediant relationship as the sublime and Beethoven's use of third relationships in his *Hammerklavier* Sonata as a means for challenging the basic centrality of the tonic in a work. This latter usage is not only a technique wherein distantly related keys can be reached, but also a difficulty for the sense of meaning in a tonal work. One mediant change can evoke the sublime; too many changes, and the subject loses all sense of orientation.[9] As the exemplar of the 19th-century idea of absolute music, or music whose artistic value rests on its autonomy from any extra-musical props, Brahms music presents significant problems to the idea of meaning and value in music. His use of thirds

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[9] This sense of disorientation in tonal music with constant modulation to distantly related keys is the reason why many music historians, theorists, and composers have located the origins of atonality in the operas of Richard Wagner (Brahms' older contemporary and bitter enemy), especially *Tristan und Isolde*. Many stretches in *Tristan und Isolde* modulate so frequently and consistently, typically through mediant relationships, that any sense of basic tonal centricity is lost to any who lack perfect pitch and an excellent situational memory—and if the sense of tonality depends upon extraordinary talents such as these, then it may as well no longer exist for most listeners.

in both melodic and harmonic progressions is part of a strategy to explore and discover what musical expression lies in this murky, difficult terrain.

In his Vier Klavierstücke, Brahms also explores mediant relationship extensively in two other pieces: the Intermezzo in C major and the Rhapsodie in E-flat major. In the Intermezzo, the climactic gesture of the first large section is a precipitous descent by thirds in octaves between both hands (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Brahms, C major Intermezzo, Op. 119, no. 3, descending 3rds

The harmonic basis of the primary theme in this piece also plays around with diatonic mediant relationships. The first two measures are ambiguous, to a certain extent, as to whether the A's in the right hand melody are upper neighbor tones or are brief A minor triads, whose root is a third below C major After two measures of playing around with this ambiguity, the music relieves this tension by moving to E minor, the mediant triad; this measure feels like a relief, or resolution, in part because now there is no ambiguity with the A; here, it would clearly be a non-harmonic tone. In Figure 13, note also how Brahms subtly undermines the first clear C major triad in root position, on the downbeat of the fourth measure, by inverting the ambiguous melodic A from the first two bars to

the bass and creating an A minor seventh chord, or vi7; this delays complete resolution back to C major, I, while also playing out a potentiality of the opening bars with the role of the note A.

Figure 13: Brahms, C major Intermezzo, Op. 119, no. 3, beginning

After the subtle and experimental use of thirds in the B minor and C major Intermezzi, the Rhapsodie in E-flat major presents them in a near-caricature of the Romantic ideal of the sublime. In fact, the affect of the Rhapsodie recalls the earnest Romantic idealism found in Brahms' early works (the opening of the first movement of the B major Trio from my second recital provides a perfect example of this). Part of this pseudo-caricature includes multiple passages that are passages that use chords related by descending thirds to move between two structural harmonies that *themselves* form a mediant relationship. In Figure 14 below, the three-bar phrase uses chords descending by thirds to move from B-flat major to G major, a mediant relationship. Thus, Brahms is creating something akin to a musical fractal, wherein the larger gesture is filled out recursively by smaller versions of itself.

Figure 14: Brahms, Rhapsodie in E-flat major, Op. 119, no. 4, recursive mediants

This recursive structure applies to the key areas of the Rhapsodie's major sections. In order, they go from E-flat to C minor to A-flat major to C minor/major back to E-flat major.

In Brahms music, I always discern a struggle to transcend the limitations of tonality, form, and expression. The Rhapsodie presents a bold ending, switching to the minor mode for a violent and tragic conclusion. Is this a type of transcendence, or is it an admission that Brahms could not find transcendence in his music, and ends with a symbolic suicide instead? The problem with seeking transcendence through the sublime is that the feeling of the sublime is not permanent; likewise, a musical work has a beginning and an ending. Sublimity includes a sensation of timelessness, the subjective feeling of no time passing. This is only a feeling, however, and it does not last. In music, the length of the feeling of the sublime depends not only on the composer, but also on the performer(s) and the listener(s) all being receptive.

Beethoven's Sonata in C minor, Op. 111, brings together the separate threads represented by the Debussy and Berio works, with their focus on the surface over the deeper structure, and the Brahms, with its obsession with musical meaning and the

sublime. The first movement throughout shows Beethoven playing with musical signs and signifiers—the introduction begins with the double-dotted rhythm of a Baroque French overture but also with the sweeping arpeggios and sudden dynamic contrasts of Beethoven's own early and middle period music, creating a semantically and expressively rich combination (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 111, I, French overture and arpeggios

Later, the double dotted rhythms hover, uncertainly, between keys and chords, the typically decisive affect of these rhythms subverted by the harmony (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 111, I, double dotted rhythms

Finally, the introduction closes with an evocation of a funeral march; already, in only the introduction, the music has shifted from regal defiance to lugubrious darkness through an

extraordinary balancing act of conflicting musical signifiers and chromatic harmonies (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 111, I, funeral march evocation

When the Allegro “properly” starts, the theme is doled out in a curiously piecemeal fashion, including sudden *ritenente* passages that imply that the music is *contemplating creating itself as it is creating itself* (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 111, I, main theme creating itself

This is a logical extreme for Beethoven, whose music is often considered to be an expression of will (such as the will to overcome fate in his Fifth Symphony). Here, one sees not only the will's power and certainty, but also its doubt. Beethoven makes use of *sforzandi* on each beat of the 4/4 meter at various points to strongly emphasize conventional musical order over the discursive and borderline chaotic nature of the musical material and development in this movement (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Beethoven, Sonata Op. 111, I, *sforzandi* on every beat

Beethoven also continues to play with conventional musical signifiers in the Allegro, including explicitly writing out turns as quintuplets (Figure 20) and subjecting harmonic progressions to extreme textural and dynamic shifts (Figure 21).

Figure 20: Beethoven, Sonata Op. 111, I, quintuplet turns

Figure 21: Beethoven, Sonata Op. 111, I, textural, dynamic shifts

The Arietta, by contrast, feels immediately more stable and serene. This is not only because of the change of key to C major, but also due to its calm, steady texture that is maintained throughout the theme. In fact, the length of the theme of the Arietta by itself in my performance is nearly 3 minutes, or an entire third of the first movement. The sense of the passage of time is significantly changed from the stormy first movement to the serene second movement.

This Sonata bears a similarity to one of its companion works, the Sonata in E major, Op. 109. Both sonatas end with a theme and variations movement, with the theme a slow and stately melody divided into two repeated halves. Yet the Arietta in Op. 111 feels far more abstract and universal in affect, while Op. 109 is personal and emotional. The Arietta has this feeling due to its soaring melody, with many larger leaps, but also to its elliptical nature. The Arietta may feel serene, secure, and purely beautiful, but it in fact is incomplete melodically; the Arietta never lets the melody return to where it wants

to go, to the tonic. Instead, it and all of its variations always end on the dominant note. This leaves the Arietta and its variations curiously unresolved.[10]

After four variations (with the fourth in effect being a double variation), the Arietta finally begins to move towards a cadence through several common closing harmonic and textural gestures. The final of these is the trill on the supertonic note (D in this case). This is a completely, utterly conventional musical gesture for its time, and to anyone listening it would signal that finally, the unresolved melody would come to rest on the tonic and the essentially structure of the movement would be done. However, the trill persists for far too long, eventually wandering through C minor to E-flat major—a mediant relationship with the overall tonic of C major. This is a similar type of mediant relationship as discussed above with the Brahms, and here it too presents a type of transcendence; here, not only has the sense of tonal center been transcended, but it happened *through* a musical convention that typically would lead to the *confirmation* of the tonic key. The effect here is not unlike the way in which a word, repeated dozens of times, begins to feel uncannily lacking in rightness and meaning. The subsequent descending fifths sequence—another conventional musical gesture, this time one that creates musical momentum towards a cadence—again is dwelt in for too long, and its associations melt away. When Beethoven finally returns to the proper key with the main theme returning, one leaves with a sense that transcendence may not, in fact, offer any real answers to life's problems and that only a reengagement with the reality of the world

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[10] There is at least one simple answer as to why: if the Arietta felt complete in and of itself, then the very long and slow second movement would probably not stay engaging; by leaving the main theme unresolved, Beethoven ensures that we will keep listening, hoping for resolution at last.

and the relationships that build it up will suffice to bring about closure and resolution. In the end, the long sought-for resolution to the tonic in the melody only happens in the final second of the piece.

My third DMA recital raises important questions: is transcendence possible without a strongly conventional system from which to transcend? What is the purpose of transcendence, given that all pieces of music (as with all lives) will inevitably end? Can a work in an atonal style engage with these ideas, or do works that are necessarily *sui generis* lack the cultural and social meanings necessary to provide a basis for true transgression? Or, as Debussy might say, are these questions missing the point, and real transcendence is in leaving the prison of the mind and truly experiencing sensation, giving no more mind to structure and narrative than our dreams do?

As a performer-composer-listener, I hope and strive to perform this program so that all of these approaches to transcendence and sensation, to surface details and deep structures can be felt and heard by audiences. In my own practices in mindfulness, I find that none of these is the answer, but they are all *parts* of the answer.

In the end, my performance of this program was marred by unforeseen circumstances that ended up being outside of my control. However, I rallied and compelled myself to not falter, and I am proud of what I accomplished under the conditions. Nevertheless, I hope to repeat this program often in the future, attaining a level of ease and perfection in my playing that will help audiences interface with and experience these issues of transcendence more fully.

Appendix

Program Notes from the 1st DMA Recital

Béla Bartók composed his **Sonatina (1919)** at the same time as he was working on the pantomime *The Miraculous Mandarin.* The opening of the lurid and violent *Mandarin* evokes the frenzy of modern-day city traffic, full of speeding cars and trucks. Bartók was disturbed by the advancement of technologies like the automobile, finding such realities of 20th-century living dangerous (being born in 1881, Bartók witnessed the proliferation of automobiles firsthand). The Sonatina recalls an earlier era in Eastern European culture, when the bagpipe and violin were among the most advanced instruments commonly available. The encroachment of technological modernity was one of Bartók's reasons for traveling around Eastern Europe with fellow Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály to collect and catalogue folk music: they both feared that modern musical broadcast and reproduction would threaten the future of oral folk music traditions. The music they documented became an important influence for Bartók, who based the Sonatina on five folk tunes he collected from Transylvania. Two of these themes appear in the first movement, "Bagpipers," with the piano's left-hand imitating the drones of Romanian bagpipes. The third theme, which Bartók described as being played "on the G and D strings of a violin," appears in the "Bear Dance." The two remaining tunes, also originally for the violin, are the basis of the final movement.

In **Roger Reynolds' *imAge/piano* (2004)**, the "*A*" stands for "articulate." *imAge/piano* is uncharacteristically brief for Reynolds, consisting of minute yet meaningful developments of a series of complex, asymmetrical pitch collections. The

work divides into halves, with the pitch collections of the first half repeated as finely chiseled arpeggiations and decays. These decays, which themselves are arpeggiated, are an especially interesting feature of *imAge/piano,* with Reynolds specifying the order of pitch release. A series of short refrains recurs throughout.

Claude Debussy's *Images*, book I (1903) serves as the heart of this program. These three character pieces--*Reflets dans l'eau*, *Hommage à Rameau*, and *Mouvement*--take pianistic developments of Chopin and Liszt to a new level of refinement, requiring an attention resonance that would influence much of the other music on this program. Bartók and Schoenberg were both affected by Debussy's advances in harmony (Bartók's debt to the latter is well-known; Schoenberg's appears in the use of whole-tone scales, octatonic scales, and quartal harmonies in his tonal and freely atonal music). In and of themselves, the three pieces in *Images* represent different eras of human history: *Reflet dans l'eau*, the natural time before modern science; *Hommage à Rameau*, that of pre-industrial human knowledge; and *Mouvement*, the age of industry with its incessant repetitive processes. Debussy imbues the natural past with beauty, the human past with wisdom and gravitas, and the industrial present with optimism and energy.

Arnold Schoenberg's Suite, Op. 25 (1925) is one of his earliest fully twelve-tone compositions. Its use of the Baroque dance suite as a formal model raised eyebrows among his peers at the time, as it suggested a Neo-classical bent. The Suite skips capriciously from one mood, one reference, one expressionistic reaction to the next. The "Prelude" has a surfeit of ideas (all based on the tone row) that simply cannot wait their turn—and so they pile up until the music is forced to stop and regroup. The "Gavotte" and "Musette" are linked, with the former's stately dance beat barely containing its

intricate details, while the latter's G-D-flat "drone" allows such detail free rein to be as hyperbolic and phantasmagorical as it likes. Phantasmagory also suits the "Intermezzo," (a title deliberately anachronistic in its reference to Schumann and Brahms) which attempts lush Romanticism but instead evokes a psychosis reminiscent of *Pierrot Lunaire,* each note dripping in blood. This movement is similar to Bartók's night music style, with the accompaniment pattern's evocation of the sounds of nocturnal insects. The "Menuet" is relatively stable, with the reassuring 3/4 meter prevalent *almost* throughout; its "Trio" features an obstinate, mechanical canon. Returning to the manic energy of the "Prelude" and "Musette," the final "Gigue" is a fine demonstration of Schoenberg's ability to compose exciting music in complex meters. It stands as a complicated, inexplicable machine constantly in danger of shaking itself to pieces.

Bartók's Sonata (1926) was composed along with his First Piano Concerto and his *Out of Doors* Suite as showpieces for touring as a concert pianist. At the same time, the three works mark the first complete synthesis of Bartók's musical style from his various influences. The themes of all three movements of the Sonata obsess over repeated notes and the permeable boundary between accompaniment, ostinato, and melody. The first movement recalls his earlier *Allegro Barbaro* in character, while also invoking Stravinsky's *Les noces* and the first two pieces from Debussy's *Images*. The second is a dirge, with heavy repeated notes played over a dissonant bagpipe-inspired drone. Concluding the work is a dance-like showpiece that features Bartók's use of the piano as a percussion instrument.

Program Notes from the 2nd DMA Recital

Elliott Carter's **"Of Challenge and of Love"** (1994) is a song cycle that sets five poems by John Hollander, composed when Carter was well into his 80s. With this work, Carter softened his complex style somewhat without abandoning his basic rhythmic and harmonic practices. Hollander's text expresses it best:

Then above that sea of immense complexities

The clear tenor of memory I did not know

I had enters;

Especially prominent are the lyrical, sustained melodies of the soprano part and the frequent perfect fifths and occasional triads of the piano accompaniment. In composing "Of Challenge and of Love," Carter began with the fourth song, "Quatrains from Harp Lake." Reflecting the poem, this song is the longest and most episodic in its setting. The other songs all spring from one or more of the episodes.

In the revision of his **Trio in B major, Op. 8** (1854; revised 1889), Johannes Brahms brings the young and mature versions of himself into direct contact. The term "revision" hardly does justice to the completely new themes and developments Brahms composed for this work. In the first movement, the heroic (and heroically long) opening theme is left intact from the 1854 version; nothing else is. The second theme, made up of Brahms' recurring descending thirds motive, is taut, concise, balanced, and ambiguous through every musical dimension. The trajectory of this movement is one of reconciliation, with Brahms gradually transforming the 1889 theme into the 1854 theme by the coda. The second movement, in which Brahms seems to channel the capricious spirit of Mendelssohn, is, except for a new coda, in its original form from 1854. Handel

and Beethoven are the inspirations for the third movement's original outer sections, depicting a suspension of time. The contrasting middle episode is new to the 1889 version, including a pulsing pedal point reminiscent of his recent D minor Violin Sonata.

The finale in both versions provides the work's greatest surprise: despite beginning in B major, the work ends decisively, tragically in B minor. This formal plan is so atypical of multi-movement works that it calls for extra-musical interpretation. The original version was composed in 1854 - the same year that Brahms' mentor and champion Robert Schumann attempted suicide and was committed to a mental hospital. The audaciously negative ending still appealed to the older Brahms, who had increasingly been given to fatalistic and valedictory musical narratives. The opening theme, always hovering just short of resolving to a stable harmony, was original to the 1854 version. The vigorous second theme is new, and perhaps reflects the occasion of the premiere of the revised version, which took place in Boston; the second theme bears more than a passing resemblance to "The Star-Spangled Banner," although its accompaniment is cast in Brahms' "Hungarian" style.

Béla Bartók's **Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion** (1937) was composed immediately after the Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta. In the manner of the previous work, the Sonata continues Bartók's treatment of the piano as a percussion instrument. Whereas the piano plays a relatively minor role in the MSPC, in the Sonata they predominate. He had already composed passages in both the First and Second Piano Concertos that create dialogues between the piano and various percussion instruments (in the Second, the piano and timpani have a lengthy duet; in the First, the piano completely joins ranks with the percussion in the slow movement). Bartók's complete output for

piano from "Allegro Barbaro" onward shows a commitment to exploring the piano's percussive nature; this Sonata is the apotheosis of this approach.

The Sonata shares an overall form similar to that of the MSPC. While the MSPC is in four movement and the Sonata in three, the sequence of slow-fast-slow-fast stays the same. In the Sonata, the first movement begins with a lengthy slow introduction before a transition into the "Allegro troppo." The slow introduction progressively reveals a sinuous nine-note chromatic melody. This is followed by the main motive of the "Allegro troppo" section: a syncopated pulse of repeated notes. The first movement's form is a marriage of the tradition sonata-allegro form with Bartók's "arch" form, in that the recapitulation presents the themes from the exposition in reverse order (visually, it would be represented: A B C Development C B A). This formal approach provides a grounding in tradition and a strong sense of symmetry, but also an amount of unpredictability.

The second movement is an example of Bartók's "night music" style, relatively short and simple compared to the first movement. Especially noteworthy is a melody played softly by the pianos in parallel chords made up of 10 of the 12 chromatic pitches at once. This beautiful, quasi-electronic sound prefigures later music by Olivier Messiaen, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and many others.

The last movement's clever, witty spirit balances the serious nature of the first movement. Here Bartók rarely challenges the 2/4 meter, instead using frequent tempo changes for variety. The opening melody, played by the xylophone, uses the so-called "acoustic" scale (a major scale with a raised 4th and lowered 7th scale degree). Besides the scale's own character, Bartók also makes frequent use of its two halves, which are a whole-tone scale fragment (C-D-E-F sharp) and an octatonic scale fragment (F sharp-G-

A-B flat), as opposing harmonic states. The end of the work fades slowly away, coalescing into a blatant C major chord that rings out over the percussion's last phrase.

Program Notes from the 3rd DMA Recital

Johannes Brahms composed his **Vier Klavierstücke, Op. 119** in 1892 at the same time as the pieces in his Opp. 116, 117, and 118. Together, these sets represent Brahms' final works for piano and are widely loved by pianists for their subtlety and richness of expression; their balance of passion, nostalgia, and resignation. The Intermezzo in B minor takes one of Brahms' frequent compositional devices—the melodic use of descending thirds, as heard in the main theme of his Fourth Symphony—to a harmonic and textural extreme. The descending thirds are held and sustained, resulting in ambiguous ninth and eleventh chords that hover somewhere outside of traditional tonality. The middle section, a slow waltz, continues the autumnal feeling of the opening. The Intermezzo in E minor is furtive and agitated, a complex rhetorical argument that mostly bubbles beneath the surface. Its middle section is another waltz, but this time it seems more distinct than in the B minor Intermezzo; appearances are deceiving, however, as this waltz is actually a close variation on the opening theme. The C major Intermezzo again presents a contradiction: a breezy, carefree romp that is made up of highly irregular and sophisticated syncopations and phrase lengths. What could well sound fussy, though, feels natural and delightful. The Rhapsodie bursts out in an extroverted trek through many episodes of unbridled Romantic excess. Notably, the Rhapsodie uses an early example of the arch form that would later be used extensively by Béla Bártok, who was, not incidentally, an admirer of Brahms.

Claude Debussy was critical of the rigorous, rational German method of constructing musical works, preferring instead to evoke the mysterious logic of dreams in his music. Harmonies, melodic motives, and rhythmic devices recur again and again in Debussy's music, imitating the images that repeat in our dreams throughout our lives. In his **Études** (his final significant piano composition), Debussy produces some of his most successful imitations of dream logic. The Étude for ornaments ("agréments") links a series of distinct musical ideas in its middle section with a vague ostinato, much as doors in dreams often open to far distant (or even imaginary) places, while the Étude for opposed sonorities evokes the soundscape of dreams, going from unreal austerity to impossibly powerful sounds and back again. The Étude for composite arpeggios carves a narrative of references, beginning with an opening both startlingly modern and yet reminiscent of Chopin, moving through gentle dance rhythms, virtuosic Romantic sweeps, Spanish guitar serenades, and an ending dripping with nostalgia for the sublimity of Romantic mediant modulations, which by 1915 had long been a musical cliché. Debussy's focus on the sensuality of perception and the fluidity of musical form show him yearning to transcend the relentless teleology of the tonal music he was raised on; in his Études, he had some of his best successes.

Luciano Berio's Sequenza IV for solo piano deals with a very different problem than the other three pieces on this program: how to create coherence when not bound by any architectonic and teleological musical system (that is, meaningful differences that propel music forward or hold its motion back). In other words, how could Berio create a sense of *rightness* and *appropriateness* for events that happen in the Sequenza? If this were not to be successful, the Sequenza would simply be a collection of stuff that

happens, and, based on how rigorously Berio developed strategies to lend it coherence, this was clearly not acceptable to him as an outcome. Berio's solution was to craft material that imitated the basic functioning of tonality but located in an atonal environment. First, there is a limited set of chords heard throughout the work that repeat in a rough cycle over and over again, with some especially important chords demarcating formal divisions much like the tonic, dominant, and other chords do in tonal music. Next, Berio draws the notes for the many fast figurations throughout the work from these same chords, adding non-harmonic notes in order to flesh out compelling gestures—again, this is modeled on tonal music. However, a major component of tonality was still lost in Berio's approach: why should any of these particular chords have any particular hierarchical relationship with any of the other chords? Berio found three solutions here that are quite common in much atonal, non-serial music: first, the assertion of an order that is repeated often enough to be the basis for anticipation; second, making use of a variety of chord types, from quasi-tonal juxtapositions of two triads to dense, chromatic chords to chromatic clusters of various sizes, allows for difference to be felt and anticipated; finally, Berio used *symmetry* as a brake on musical motion; whereas asymmetry tends to cause motion through unequal distribution of musical information, symmetry presents no good reason to keep moving forward. The major cadences in the Sequenza are moments that feature highly symmetrical chords and textures, with symmetry happening both vertically and horizontally.

The **Sonata in C minor, Op. 111** is the capstone on **Ludwig van Beethoven's** output of 32 published piano sonatas over his musical career. It is easy to see, in retrospect, why this particular work would be his final sonata: after hearing it, it is easy to

wonder whether there is anything else to say. The sonata is made up of only two movements, a relatively uncommon structure for Beethoven (although Opp. 54, 78, and 90 all provide precedents). The first movement is a stark, stormy outburst dominated by a fixed sequence of fully diminished seventh chords and by a texture constantly threatening to burst into fugue. The overall mood of this movement is familiar from other famous sonatas by Beethoven—the *Appassionata*, the last movement of the *Moonlight* Sonata, the *Pathètique*—but here everything is condensed and abrupt. In Beethoven's early and middle period, his distinctive "surprises" exist in terms of dynamic and textural shifts, rather than in different styles or affects; here, the abrupt changes show Beethoven imitating the *empfindsamer Stil* of composers like C.P.E. Bach. The stormy, stately introduction blends the Baroque French Overture with the Romantic imitations of nature through lightning and thunder effects, while the brief coda is a Beethovenian reimagining of the extended plagal cadences of the Renaissance and Baroque eras (both the introduction and the coda would influence Frédéric Chopin, who admired this sonata, in his second Sonata and his "Revolutionary" Étude respectively). This reengagement with earlier styles of music (especially that of Palestrina, J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, Handel, Haydn, and Mozart) is common in many of Beethoven's late works.

The second movement is called an "Arietta," or small aria, and in its style it resembles the noble arias of Handel's operas. The melody of the aria is deceptively simple, with a broadly singing diatonic melody that never comes to rest on the tonic, but instead always ends on the dominant. This leaves the theme oddly elliptical, a feeling of incompleteness that Beethoven exploits in profound ways later in the movement. At first, the Arietta proceeds as a set of variations, each one speeding up the fastest rhythmic

values by a factor of two but keeping the overall tempo the same. This type of variation is akin to an evolving fractal, though the fastest and most vigorous variation surprises modern listeners by sounding uncannily like jazz with its fast, swung syncopations. But the most extraordinary moment may be the trill: when arrived at, the long trill on the supertonic signifies the approach of a strong cadence—this is a convention found throughout music of the Classical era and signals the arrival of the long-delayed resolution. Here, though, the trill hangs on for too long, shifts modes (for the first time in this movement) towards C minor, and eventually wanders off to the completely different key of E-flat major, a moment underlined by an extraordinary triple trill. The section that follows, an extended descending fifths sequence that repeats too many times, shows the danger of transcendence: becoming completely unmoored, adrift, and lost. This quietly chaotic state is ultimately resolved when the main theme returns in C major, now intent upon extending and finishing its melody on the tonic. In typically Beethovenian manner, this resolution *still* gets delayed until the very final measures of the piece, making it all the more satisfying when it arrives.

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