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Abstract

My thesis comprises two components: a recital and a research paper. The first part, a recital of about forty-five minutes to an hour, represents the creative aspect and the bulk of my preparation and work. The second part represents the historical and analytical research I undertook to better interpret and understand the meaning and structure of the works I performed. As a result, my thesis combines research and creative elements, creating a final product that shows both my musical depth and my intellectual and academic ability.

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Introduction

As a pianist who started playing at the age of five, I began my undergraduate studies with what I thought was a solid foundation of musical knowledge. However, as a senior I now look back on the level of true musical understanding I had as a freshman and realize how shallow my interpretation was. Since taking theory, history and continuing piano lessons, I have been able to add more critical thinking to my activity as a performer. The program of my senior recital includes the F-sharp minor Prelude and Fugue by J. S. Bach; the Piano Sonata No. 28, Op. 101, by Ludwig van Beethoven; the Ballade No. 4 by Frédéric Chopin; and the Toccata Op. 11 by Sergei Prokofiev. The works chosen for this program represents a culmination of the progress I have made throughout my undergraduate career, as they have presented a significant challenge in their contextual understanding, interpretation, and technique. For example, in the F-sharp minor Prelude and Fugue, the key signature denotes several characteristics that may vary in temperament. F-sharp minor can be associated with a dark and evil character; a sad, yearning feeling; or a distressed and anguished spirit (amongst many other characters). As the performer, I must decide what kind of character I wish to express in the piece and how to perform it in a way that will evoke feelings to support this character. Beethoven wrote the Op. 101 sonata in the last period of his life, so what he was experiencing at that time highly influences the way the piece is understood. The events in his life and how his philosophies were changing are reflected in the different compositional techniques that are used in the sonata, so an immense difficulty has been working towards understanding the piece in the context of its time. The pieces of my senior recital have also presented various technical difficulties that have required a flexible and innovative approach at coming up with creative ways to find solutions. The technique required of

each of these pieces is so engrained with the music's character and moods that it does not work to simply practice technique alone. I often find myself getting caught up with difficult technical spots that I forget that the technique are all smaller parts that lend themselves to forming the overall character of the piece. Since beginning to learn my senior recital program, I have made improvements in deepening my interpretation and understanding of music that I learn and perform.

The research and writing aspect of my thesis has been a challenge to discern what is most important to highlight and how to organize the information in a concise and informative manner. It has been enlightening and illuminating to discover facts I never knew about these composers and their pieces and has certainly helped inform my understanding and performing of them.

I. Johann Sebastian Bach and *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany on March 21, 1685. He died in Leipzig on July 28, 1750. In *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, Richard D. P. Jones writes that Bach did not seem to have received any formal tuition in the rudiments of composition in his early developments as a composer (Jones 1997, 136). He received instruction in musical technique, but “taught himself composition mainly by copying out the works of other composers” (Smallman 2011). Richard Jones also writes that Bach was found illicitly copying his brother Johann Christoph’s book of keyboard pieces by composers such as J. J. Froberger and J. Pachelbel (Jones 1997, 137). Despite this supposed lack of formal instruction in composition, J. S. Bach was the “supreme musical genius of the late Baroque period” (Smallman 2011) and his contribution of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* to the music world has influenced countless composers such as Beethoven, Chopin, and Schumann since their publication.

The *Well-Tempered Clavier* is a staple of any pianist’s repertory, whether high school student, professor, or professional performing artist. Almost all undergraduate and graduate schools and conservatories require a prelude and fugue from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Thus, any pianist aspiring to perform professionally or pursue their studies to a higher level must study this set of prelude and fugues. Malcolm Boyd defines the *Well-Tempered Clavier* as “the title of two sets of 24 preludes and fugues in all major and minor keys, BWV 846-93, popularly known as the ‘48’” (1999, 515). It was modeled on J. C. F. Fischer’s *Ariadne musica*, a set of 20 short preludes and fugues that ascend from the keys C to B in an ascending chromatic order (515). Bach made his plan identical to Fischer’s and added the five keys missing from Fischer’s set: C#, D#-minor (E-flat minor), F#, G#-minor (A-flat minor), and B-flat minor (515).

Boyd states that an early version of Part 1 was completed by about 1720. The unfinished fugues were entitled “fughetta,” and half of the preludes were shorter than in the finished versions (1999, 515). Bach finished Part 2 in about 1742, about twenty years after he finished Part 1 (515). “This later collection was, in part, based on a set of five preludes and fughettas in C, d, e, F and G (BWV 870a and 899-902), which dates from the 1720s or before, and on a set of four fughettas in C, c, D and d, transmitted by the Bach pupil J. F. Agricola” (515).

The meaning behind the title *Well-Tempered Clavier* is related to methods of tuning, or “temperament” (Boyd 1999, 515). Boyd writes “from a theoretical standpoint, The *Well-tempered Clavier* demonstrates the range of key that becomes possible using what were then relatively modern methods of tuning, or ‘temperament’” (515). Well-tempered means “appropriately tuned,” which for leading German theorists at that time, was achieved by using all 24 keys (515). Boyd also explains that the term “clavier,” which means keyboard, leaves the work accessible to keyboard players of any kind of instrument (harpsichord, clavichord, or organ) (516). J. S. Bach composed this set of works with two purposes in mind. The title-page of book 1 reveals these purposes: “For the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning and for the pastime of those already skilled in this study” (516). Bach used the set of works as a “prime vehicle for advanced study” (516). Boyd also provides the example of H. N. Gerber, who was one of Bach’s students in Leipzig from 1724-1727, who learned Bach’s work in the order Inventions, Suites and the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (516).

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the second of Bach’s three sons, said that Böhm, Reincken and Buxtehude, Frescobaldi and J.C.F. Fischer were all early influences upon his father (Jones 1997, 137). Bach’s love for Buxtehude is often told in the famous story of how in 1705, the twenty-year old Bach walked 250 miles to Lübeck to hear Buxtehude play the organ (Pearlman

2011). C.P.E. Bach also observed that “his father ‘Through his own study [of their works] and reflection alone [i.e. without formal tuition] ... became even in his youth a pure and strong fugue writer” (Jones 1997, 137). Jones surmises that the reflective side of Bach’s musical personality and the passion for order are what attracted him at a young age to the art of fugue and counterpoint (137). The early fugues that Bach wrote are awkward to play because there is an absence of technical fluidity for the hands to play. Jones provides an explanation for this through C. P. E. Bach’s enlightening division of his father’s work into two categories: “those for which he took the material from improvisations at the keyboard and those which were composed without instrument, but later tired out on one” (Jones, 138). The fugues in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* use contrapuntal techniques such as stretto, double counterpoint, triple counterpoint, quadruple counterpoint, inversion, augmentation and diminution (Boyd 1995, 517). In Book 2 of the set, “Bach’s stylistic range is further extended in both historical directions, in keeping with his growing interest both in sixteenth century vocal polyphony and in music written ‘in accordance with the latest taste’” (517).

II. Ludwig van Beethoven and Sonata No. 28, Op. 101

Ludwig von Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany on December 17, 1770. He was born into a family of musicians employed at the court of the Electorate at Cologne, which was in Bonn. His father, a proficient pianist and violinist gave Beethoven his first piano and violin lessons. His general education ended after completion of elementary school. Thus, his formal education was brief in comparison to other composers. Any free time after school was devoted to music, so the brevity of his formal schooling and the time allotted to music may explain gaps in his academic ability, such as his inability to calculate simple multiplication. Trained in the classical traditions of Mozart and Haydn, Beethoven learned and understood the precedents but took them one step further to create his own sense of form. Once, a friend pointed out parallel fifths in his C-minor String Quartet, Op. 18, no. 4, and that ‘rules’ did not permit them. Beethoven’s response was “Then I permit them.” “For despite his respect for vital tradition,” as Wilfrid Mellers observes, “he knew that he was the instrument through which tradition must be remade” (Mellers 1983, 10).

Historians divide Beethoven’s life and works into three time periods. The first period encompasses his birth until 1802, the second period 1802 until 1812, and the third from 1813 to 1827. These three time periods serve to distinguish between different stylistic characteristics in Beethoven’s works and also distinguish between major biographical points in his life. One can often discern a correlation between certain works and the emotions that he was going through at the time. “There can be no doubt that with Beethoven – not to speak of other composers – a very close relationship existed between his creative energies and his emotional life” (Mellers 147). Op. 101, composed in 1816, is one of the five late sonatas, all of which were composed in the last period of Beethoven’s life, from 1813 to 1827.

The late piano sonatas all have certain characteristics that unify them. Beethoven introduced new elements, knowing full well that he was taking a new direction in his music that had nothing to do with what he had previously composed (Kirby 2003, 127). In this time period, Beethoven began exploring the extremes of the keyboard register. This is exemplified in the Arietta movement of Op. 111, where a prolonged trill gradually climbs higher and higher into the highest register. Fugues were used in three of the sonatas, reflecting his study of learned counterpoint and inversion. The last movement of Op. 101 contains a double fugue and the trio section of the second movement consists of counterpoint academic in nature. Variation form also appears in two of the sonatas, both with simple themes. Elements of the fantasia are also prominent in the late sonatas. Beethoven associated the fantasia element with cyclic form (Kirby 127). For example, in Op. 101, the third movement dissolves into a return of the first movement theme, whose brief recurrence then immediately dives into the opening of the fourth movement. He also experimented with the traditional structure of the sonata. This can be seen in Op. 101 with the absence of a grandiose character in the opening movement and the replacement of a typical slow second movement with a march.

During the “late” period, Beethoven experienced a series of personal calamities. He lost hope in ever marrying and starting a family when his love affair with an unknown married woman ended in a catastrophe. He also gave up hope over ever winning custody of his nephew Karl after a five-year legal struggle with his sister-in-law Joanna. On top of all these tragedies, his deafness was worsening day by day, eventually ending his activities as a public pianist and contributing to his increasing isolation from society (Stanley 2000, 4). Through his letters and writings, one can witness his withdrawal from the world both socially and compositionally. He had decided to give up all that he deemed superfluous and trivial so that he could dedicate his

whole being to his art. He now believed in a philosophy where personal sacrifice was vital: “Everything that is called life should be sacrificed to the sublime and be a sanctuary of art” (Solomon 2004, 3). In his writings, he wrote extensively of the heavens’ boundlessness and “frequently invoked the celestial to symbolize beauty and pure feeling” (Solomon 4).

As Beethoven’s deafness was becoming more and more pronounced, the sounds that he could once hear from the piano were now all in his mind. As mentioned previously, the exploration of the extremes of the keyboard register became something Beethoven was preoccupied with in the late sonatas. The resulting sounds often resemble harmonies and tonalities that seem as if they emanate from the heavens. A story recounted by Russell Hunter, who heard Beethoven play the piano in 1825 gives an illuminating glimpse into what may have been going on in the composer’s mind during the late years:

The moment he is seated at the piano he is entirely unconscious there is anything in existence but his instrument, and considering how deaf he is, it seems impossible he should hear all he plays. Accordingly, when playing very piano, he often does not bring out a single note. He hears it himself in his mind’s ear. Whilst his eye, and the almost imperceptible motion of his fingers, show that he is following out the strain through all its dying graduations, the instrument is actually as dumb as the musician is deaf. (Mellers 54)

Mellers explains this anecdote as being indicative of the types of sounds Beethoven was creating for instruments that had not been invented yet, or merely were not able to produce them.

I would now like to shift focus from a historical discussion to an analysis of Op. 101 in order to demonstrate how understanding historical context helps to bring clearer understanding of the theory behind the music. Beethoven dedicated Op. 101 to his favorite pupil, the baroness Dorothea Ertmann and the tenderness felt in this piece could very well be attributed to their close relationship. Beethoven’s instructions for the first movement, *Etwas lebhaft, und mit der*

innigsten Empfindung (somewhat lively, and with innermost sensitivity) brings about a tenderness that is held throughout the movement. It is reflective, contemplative and peaceful. Beethoven described this sonata as “a series of impressions and reveries” (Aimard 2009). This dreamlike world seems removed from earth, perhaps suspended between the celestial heavens and the earth.

There are numerous accounts in Beethoven’s journals that indicate references to his questioning of the divine authority above. As Beethoven retreated into an inner world, away from the chaos of society, he was also embarking on a spiritual journey to answer the many questions he had about the entity in the skies above. Beethoven wanted to “sound unplumbed depths of expressivity” (Solomon 6), and there are several moments in Op. 101 where expressivity reaches towards the heavens, bringing about a sense of ethereality and timelessness. This can be seen in mm. 29-34 in the first movement where for the first time there is a sense of established tonality (see example 1).

Ex. 1



This prolonged tonic chord finally provides the listener with a sense of arrival and ease, especially after the second subject has been ever-reaching and yearning, that at its highest point, spans five octaves (m. 24). The syncopation of these chords obscures the meter but creates a rhythmic lull of peace and calm. The texture of these chords encompasses full octaves in both

hands, producing an open, consonant sound that resonates as if from the heavens. Another example of this celestial sound is found in the second movement, mm. 30-34 (see example 2).

Ex. 2

The image displays a musical score for Example 2, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system includes a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff. The second system includes a grand staff and a single bass clef staff. The music is in 3/4 time and features a semi-canon. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble clef starting at measure 30, marked with a 'Ped' (pedal) instruction. The second system shows a similar melodic line in the treble clef, with a bass clef staff below it. The music is characterized by a rising melodic line and a sustained pedal effect.

This semi-canon resembles one found earlier in the movement at m. 12, but instead of a descending line, the canon at m. 30 rises towards the skies. Beethoven also indicates a sustained pedal, causing the major tonalities to float and blend into each other. He also implies a *dimuendo* by providing a *pianissimo* marking towards the end of the line. This line is a sharp contrast to the grounded march that has been the entire movement up until this point and perhaps Beethoven's intention was to provide a fleeting glimpse of heaven amongst music that is otherwise tremendously grounded on earth.

Beethoven as a composer made much use of the pastoral in his music, made most clear in his "Pastoral Symphony" No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68. According to *Grove Music Online*, the pastoral is defined as a literary, dramatic or musical genre that depicts the characters and scenes of rural life or is expressive of its atmosphere (Chew and Jander). It is a genre that stems from a long literary tradition. Although there is no clear dramatic framework, examples of the pastoral include writings about shepherds or herdsmen and poetic depictions of rural life in contrast to

urban life (Hatten 2004, 80). With regards to the musical tradition of the pastoral in the eighteenth century, any movement in a major key with a simple character could be characterized as pastoral (Hatten 82). Hatten categorizes features of the pastoral as typically including the following items: 1) compound meters (most often 6/8), 2) pedal points on the dominant, 3) harmonic stasis through V7 arpeggiations using consonant diatonic harmony and slower harmonic rhythm, 4) relatively simple melodic contour, 5) contrary motion whose unfolding creates “wedge” shape, 6) rocking accompaniment, 7) parallel thirds, 8) consonant appoggiatura, 9) elaborated resolution of dissonance, and 10) major mode with quiet dynamics.

Robert Hatten uses Op. 101 as a means to explore the pastoral as an expressive genre, as opposed to viewing it as a topic. In Hatten’s view, when the pastoral is used as a topical field, it can be used as an interpretative frame for a cycle of movements, “prescribing an overall outcome (or perspective on that outcome) regardless of intervening events” (96). He advocates that the pastoral explains formal features and expression of the sonata and guides interpretation and understanding of the cycle as a whole. The first movement of Op. 101 contrasts the pastoral with the tragic to create a dramatic structure. By juxtaposing the pastoral with moments of crisis, the pastoral is given a “greater seriousness and the elevation of style in turn supports the interpretation of the pastoral as a poetic conceit for a spiritual state of innocence (or serenity) subject to the disturbances of tragic experience (or remembrance)” (96). The two primary moments of tragic climax in the first movement are found in the middle of the development and in the transition to the coda (see example 3 and 4).

Up until this point in the development, there has been a constant rhythmic and dynamic struggle to reach a destination. There are small surges of *forte*, each a measure long at m. 42 and 43, but each surge is immediately undermined by *subito piano* markings.

Ex. 3

Ex. 4

The primary tragic climax at m. 50 (example 3) is the culmination of these small surges. Climactic emphasis of this moment is reinforced by a strong and sustained dynamic surge, lasting two measures, although ultimately it will again be undermined by *subito piano*. The second tragic climax, mm. 85-87 (example 4), is also undermined by decaying dynamics before the music is able to reach the cadential tonic in m. 92.

Along with these moments of crisis, Beethoven employs a variety of techniques to emphasize the ideas of yearning and undercutting. To achieve the pastoral as a genre, Beethoven creates a “systematic network of oppositions” (Hatten 2004, 99). This system of oppositions, in a broad sense, is between yearning and undercutting. These ideas pervade the first movement, such that except for the few moments of rest, there is a constant resistance between the ever-rising lines (yearning) and the avoidance of authentic cadences and evasion of climaxes (100). The lines that strive to reach higher and higher cannot be allowed to arrive a destination, as that

would mean a break in the eternal sense of continuity with which the first movement is imbued (100). Thus, these striving lines are counterbalanced by undercuttings. As the yearnings grow more prominent and gain in significance, the undercuttings that subdue them also grow in significance in their role as being a necessary opposition. Beethoven's use of reversal (yearning) and undercutting is significant because he uses them as a means of thematic development, as fragmentation and sequence were used in earlier sonatas by other composers (113).

The beginning of Op. 101 suggests uncertainty in several aspects. As Andre Schiff points out in a series of lectures on the Beethoven sonatas, Op. 101 begins as if it is a continuation from the ending of the sonata before, Op. 90 (Schiff 2006). The sonata opens on a dominant, and the melody unfolds in a way that makes the tonality of the opening vague. Thus, Beethoven establishes a tonality that invites pondering, which adds to the reflective and inquisitive character of this sonata. But despite the absence of a clearly established tonality, the mood and character compel the listener from the very first phrase. The opening melody sings sweetly but in a private and intimate manner that is maintained throughout. A dreamlike, pastoral setting is unveiled through each following statement that poses a question that remains unanswered. Beethoven himself described this movement as a "sort of dream-like song" (Mellers 1983, 147). In this regard we can find a foreshadowing of Wagner's idea of the "infinite melody," or *unendliche Melodie*. Indeed, in the lecture recital on Op. 101, Andras Schiff states that Op. 101 was Wagner's favorite sonata because he believed it was an excellent example of *unendliche Melodie* (Schiff 2006). Beethoven's ability to surpass 'square melodies' is shown in the beginning of the exposition. The unestablished tonality at the beginning "is not just a modulation already beginning in the consequent phrase of the first idea that overcomes the rigidity of the four-bar unit. What is mainly responsible for this is the fact that the modulating consequent phrase at the

same time supplies the first part of the second idea, so that this shares its motif with the first idea” (Mellers 1983, 145). As Klaus Kropfinger explains,

It is precisely ‘this melody’s subtlest and innermost nuances’ which [...] undergo an ‘infinitely richer’ development through ‘infinite melody.’ It is [...] the motivic inter-relations which determine the bold extent of the melody. It then ‘pours through the whole work’ in a continuous stream, overcoming the ‘narrow form’ of operatic melody once and for all. (1991, 109)

This thematic-motivic technique and conciseness of musical idea was a natural part of Beethoven’s conception that also lent itself to “infinite melody.”

III. Frédéric Chopin and the Fourth Ballade

James Parakilas argues that Chopin started the instrumental ballade tradition in 1836, when his first Ballade appeared in editions as either “Ballade” or “Ballade ohne Worte” (Ballade Without Words) (1992, 19). The genre of ballade comes from a long, established literary tradition, but never before had the title “ballade” been used for an instrumental work. Chopin’s composition of the first Ballade was also preceded and written during a time period when other composers were setting music to preexisting stories. Felix Mendelssohn’s *Song Without Words* had just been published a year before in 1835, and Hector Berlioz was also writing symphonies explicitly connected to programs and literary models (Parakilas 1992, 19). Parakilas points out that an important difference between Chopin’s Ballade and other “stories in sound” is the stress on a crucial situation in the ballade. The ballade offered “action centered on a single situation,” whereas most “stories in sound” depend on subjects rich in setting and characterization (20). This “single situation” can also be seen as the central setting of the ballade. A mutual dependency of formal structure and theme can be seen in the ballade “in which the initial event contains the seed of the conclusion and the conclusion answers directly to the initial event” (39). Because a glimpse of the conclusion is previewed at the beginning, the tension from this constrained force is maintained throughout the story until the end, where it is allowed to reassert itself in full (39). This can be seen in the glorious ending of the fourth Ballade, provided in example 1. Samson describes this as a powerful apotheosis that is then followed by “a bravura closing section which ... seems to exorcise earlier conflicts and tensions in a white heat of virtuosity” (1992, 67). He calls the ending of the fourth Ballade among “the most majestic perorations in all Chopin.”

While many of Chopin's works became hugely popular during his lifetime, the ballades remained as a part of the lesser-performed works. Even professional pianists tended to shy away from the ballades, while certainly amateur pianists also did not attempt to perform the ballades as well (Samson 1992, 33). Samson notes that a widespread nineteenth-century view of Chopin was, "while great in small things, he was small... in great ones." Along with this view of the composer was another that he was "incapable of continuous effort" (33). Perhaps this view can explain why Chopin's larger works remain less performed than his other smaller works. Samson notes that in Chopin's time and now, the fourth Ballade "has retained its reputation for technical difficulty and inaccessibility well into our present century" (33).

There has been much debate about the form of Chopin's ballades. In his article "Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative," Michael Klein states, that "although comparison among the ballades reveals some similarities in form, no single model governs the entire set" (2004, 30). Klein suggests, "If Chopin were making a response to sonata form, it was an individual and original one" (30). Samson argues that Chopin reinterprets "sonata-based formal functions ... in the light of a particular dramatic and expressive aim" (8). While it cannot be known what Chopin's original dramatic and expressive aims were for the fourth ballade, I would like to delve deeper into Samson's formal analysis of the ballade.

Samson summarizes the structure of the fourth Ballade by stating "the directional qualities of a sonata are counterpointed against the 'static' repetition structure of a variation set" (63). He argues that the exposition contains two themes, the first one (mm. 7-22) in the tonic, F minor, and the second theme (mm. 80-99) in the subdominant, B-flat major. There is a short middle section that is similar to a development, but is much more lacking in substance and weight (mm. 99-134). The first and second themes both return in the reprise, however theme 1

returns in the tonic while theme 2 returns in the submediant major (see examples 5 and 6).

Samson states the variation aspect of this large-scale work is “suggested by the successive treatments of theme 1” (63).

Ex. 5

The image displays a musical score for piano accompaniment, consisting of four systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with a fermata over the first measure of the first system, and the tempo/mood is indicated as *mezza voce*. The first system is numbered 7, and the subsequent systems are numbered 10, 14, and 18. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the right hand and a more complex harmonic structure in the left hand, including chords and moving lines. The vocal line consists of a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The score is presented in a standard musical notation style with a white background and black ink.

The image displays a musical score for Chopin's Ballade No. 4, measures 80 through 97. The score is written for piano and is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. It is divided into four systems. The first system (measures 80-85) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 86-92) includes several measures marked with "Ped." and an asterisk (*), indicating pedaling instructions. The third system (measures 93-96) continues the contrapuntal texture. The fourth system (measures 97-100) concludes the passage. The score features complex counterpoint with multiple voices in both the treble and bass staves, often using slurs and ties to connect notes across measures.

Chopin incorporates contrapuntalism in many passages of the fourth Ballade. The contrapuntal passages are often within variations of the first theme, but the counterpoint can also be found in the opening measures of the introduction. Samson notes that the counterpoint is evidence of Chopin's rethinking of his art during the 1840s (1992, 17). After 1840, Chopin's output of works significantly diminished. He became much more self-critical about committing to a final draft of any given piece (shown by the manuscript sources of his later music). Georges Sand, Chopin's partner for ten or so years, wrote "he alters and retouches the same passages endlessly and paces up and down like a madman" (Samson 1992, 17). Samson also goes on to

say that during those years Chopin was in the process of reevaluating his compositional technique and philosophy. He also studied counterpoint treatises by Cherubini and Kastner. Not much is known about Chopin's early piano lessons, but we do know that his earliest teacher introduced him to the music of J. S. Bach (Samson 1996, 51). Throughout his life, he also continued to study Bach, so it is not surprising to find counterpoint in the fourth Ballade.

Examples of counterpoint can be found in mm.1-7, mm. 50-54, mm. 58-71, mm. 120-134, mm.135-145, mm. 177-184 and a few brief moments in the coda. I have chosen a few of these passages to describe. The contrapuntal passage that begins at m. 50, shown in example 7, gives a brief preview of the more complicated counterpoint that follows this passage, and continues for the rest of the piece. The counterpoint in the upper voices produces a beautiful singing duet in a falling fifths sequence that is full of longing and yearning.

Ex. 7

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Chopin's Ballade No. 4. The first system, labeled '50', shows a piano introduction with a trill in the right hand and a descending line in the left hand. The second system, labeled '53', shows a more complex contrapuntal texture with multiple voices in both hands. Both systems include figured bass notation below the staves.

What follows is the second variation of Theme 1 (mm. 58-72). The upper voices are in counterpoint throughout the passage, which builds up to an intense climax at m. 72. Chopin

varies the embellishing counterpoint for each statement so that each phrase has its own character. Another significant contrapuntal passage begins at m. 121. Samson describes from this point to the reprise as “one of the most magical passages in Chopin” (1992, 66). Another interesting contrapuntal section is at m. 135, where Chopin provides the fourth variation of theme I, in a “progressive ‘polyphonicisation’ of its principal thematic material” (1992, 66). Statements of theme I are provided following a minor third sequence, which after three repetitions, returns to the tonic.

As mentioned earlier, the introduction of the piece is contrapuntal. At first, the soprano emerges, seemingly out of the heavens, repeating unison octaves on G. As the line continues and a crescendo builds, an alto voice is introduced and at the same time the bass also emerges with a quick, decaying line (shown in example 8). The bass then joins the upper voices in a beautiful duet. The bass encompasses its own melody in the line, divided between a lyrical line in the lower register and the filling accompaniment in the higher register (mm. 2-7). Samson writes that “Like Bach, Chopin could construct *moto perpetuo* figuration which generates a real sense of harmonic flow while allowing linear elements to emerge through the pattern, often in counterpoint with the melodic bass” (1996, 67). This idea of the melodic bass is found throughout the ballade. It also points at all the lines that Chopin creates that sound amidst each other. Perhaps these lines are what create the lyrical narrative that the Ballade is supposed to encompass. Samson calls the fourth Ballade “poetry in translation, but a superior translation made through sounds alone” (1992, 33). The counterpoint in mm. 121-123 involves the main strands from theme I standing out in “contrapuntal combination” (Samson 1992, 66) (see example 10). After the theme gets a little obscured, one of the lines is transformed into the most

endearing moment of the piece, when there is an “unobtrusive return of the introduction in the remote foreground region of A major” (66).

Ex. 8

Andante con moto

The musical score for Ex. 8 consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The tempo is marked "Andante con moto". The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system includes a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The third system begins with a *ritenuto* marking. Pedal markings, consisting of the word "Ped" followed by an asterisk, are placed below the bass staff in measures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and chordal textures.

Ex. 9

The musical score for Ex. 9 shows measures 121 through 124. The key signature remains three flats. A *cresc.* (crescendo) marking is present in measure 123. The music continues with complex rhythmic and harmonic patterns.

IV. Sergei Prokofiev's Toccata in D minor, Op. 11

“While my mother was awaiting my birth, she played the piano for as long as six hours a day,” Sergei Prokofiev has said. “Thus, the future little human being was formed to the accompaniment of music.”¹

To summarize the principal elements of his musical composition, Prokofiev created a list of five items: 1) the classical, with specific regard to Beethoven's piano sonatas 2) the search for innovation and new harmonic idiom to express emotion 3) the toccata or motor element, especially involving incessant repeated rhythmic pattern 4) the lyrical and 5) the satirical or grotesque (Kirby 2003, 325). Prokofiev described the toccata element as a “machine or motor like” (Seroff 1968, 75) and as having its roots in Schumann's Toccata in C Major, Op. 7. Three of these elements can be seen in the D minor Toccata. The piece is centered on the toccata or motor compositional element, but the rising and falling long lines often bring out a lyrical melody and the tonalities that create different sounds also create emotions.

The Toccata was composed in 1912 and published in 1913². Sergei was twenty-one years old when he wrote this piece. The Toccata is a whirlwind of a piece, characterized by perpetual driving motion from beginning to end. It is a virtuoso piece that has been performed by virtuosic performers, such as Martha Argerich. Harlow Robinson describes the piece as a “marvelously acerbic and biting exercise, jumping with harsh dissonances and making extravagant demands on the performer” (1987, 87). Robinson also suggests the technical demands of the piece as an explanation to why Prokofiev did not perform the piece in public until 1916.

¹ Quoted in Seroff (1968, 11).

² Dates according to S. Schlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev: Dokumente, Briefe, Erinnerungen* (Kirby 1995, 359).

One can listen to the composer's own recording of the piece to get a better idea at his interpretation of the piece and how technique affected the performance. There are many random small accents in the opening passage of repeated notes by interchanging hands. These uneven accents can often come from not being able to get to the correct placement in time or from tension in a part of the body that results in uncontrollable jerks during playing. These moments of unevenness appear throughout the Toccata. But the small accents and unevenness certainly do not mean that the composer could not play the piece. It is clear from the composer's shaping and dynamics that he had a clear image of how he wanted the piece to sound. Each line follows a long and clear trajectory, whether it is rising or falling and the *crescendos* and *dimuendos* are all proportional in their growth and decay. Prokofiev's performance takes a much slower tempo than famous recordings of today. This decision could have come from an interpretive viewpoint or perhaps the tempo was the fastest that the composer could perform at. The only indication from Prokofiev about tempo is *Allegro Marcato* at the beginning of the piece and *accelerando* at the end of the piece.

Learning this Toccata presents many difficulties to the performer. The unrelenting, underlying difficulty is efficiency of motion. This difficulty pervades the Toccata to the point where it resembles an etude that studies rapid repeating notes and efficiency of motion. Often times the notes are clustered into tight-knit groups, such as at m. 49 or m. 70. These groups of notes are positioned in close proximity to each other so even the slightest positioning away from the right spot could lead to a wrong note. There are not many jumps in the right hand line, which make memory slightly easier, as my professor has always said jumps to a different spot on the keyboard are the easiest place for a memory lapse. However, the chromatic relationship between each group necessitates an accurate positioning of the fingers. The fingers must always be relaxed

or tenseness will result in a jerky sound or misplacement on the keyboard that may lead to a wrong chord.

The close proximity of all the notes in addition to the vigorous tempo of the piece forced me to explore different practicing methods. I first began learning the piece in a race-to-the-end kind of manner that quickly proved itself to be ineffective. In the past when I have encountered a fast passage of rapid notes, I have found that a one-to-one ratio of slow and fast practice usually lends itself to success. However with this toccata, the need for slow practice was enormous. The first method of practice was treating each sixteenth-note as if it were a quarter note, in order to examine precise positioning of the hands and fingers. Thus, most of the time spent practicing this piece was at a frustratingly slow tempo, and a great challenge was resisting the temptation to practice fast. I experienced many times how practicing fast hurt the efficiency of motion that I was working so hard to attain. Another significant method of practice was treating the groups of notes as impulses. This method combined slow and fast practice as I would play one group of notes rapidly and then immediately physical quit, and relax my entire hand, wrist and arm by resting on the keyboard. Though it took countless hours, this impulse method ensured accuracy of notes and accuracy of getting to the position of the next chord. It was also difficult not to get caught up in solely the technical aspect of the piece. At one point in a lesson, my professor reminded me that despite the business of the notes and frenzied character of the piece, there were lyrical lines that should be sounding above all the commotion.

The lyrical aspect of this Toccata complements the technical aspect. There are few moments in the piece where the notes are not a part of a melodic line. The melodic lines are often chromatic, as the piece is made up of many chromatic relationships. Thus, the lines are often building by half steps, which seem to truly emphasize when the lines are growing and backing

away. A good example of chromatic relationships that build the melody is at m. 24, shown in example 11. The soprano voice builds higher and higher by chromatic pairs while the bass resists her reach by plunging downwards, also by chromatic pairs. Syncopation also takes place to highlight the struggle between the two voices when one of the bass pairs is cut to one note and the line becomes syncopated within the meter.

Ex. 10



Another tremendously lyrical moment in the piece is at m. 111, where there is a semi-canon between the two hands (see example 12).

Ex. 11



Prokofiev's Toccata embodies many of the compositional elements that he would later continue to develop as he grew older. This work was written when he was just beginning to discern exactly what his musical style was.

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