Program Notes: Lu Zhang Degree Recital

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Music in Music, Performance

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May 2023
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Abstract

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This thesis presents the repertoire of my recital on May 4, 2023, which consists of four pieces from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Impressionist periods respectively. I will review historical journals and essays and analyze each piece, providing supporting musical examples. This thesis aims to provide basic historical background and overall structure to help the audience and learners of these pieces to better understand the music.
Prelude and Fugue No. 14 in F-sharp Minor, BWV 883 from *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book II

Polyphonic music was a major part of the late Baroque style, and this movement was led by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), a composer, organist, and one of the leading musical figures of all time. Robert L. Marshall said: “Bach's music was the culmination of the so-called Baroque era during the first half of the [18th] century.”¹

Essentially, by the 1770s, Bach’s music had already gained a reputation as a highly-skilled body of work of complex counterpoint. His composition *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, also known as the “48,” was frequently referenced as a prime source for studying various techniques, such as fugue, stretto, canon, and invertible counterpoint. As a result, it became a popular resource for musicians seeking to hone their skills in these areas.²

*The Well-Tempered Clavier* is categorized into two books with twenty-four pieces per book into two books with twenty four sets of Prelude and Fugue for each book, resulting in forty-eight pieces in total. The first book, completed in 1722, is more upbeat, while the second book is more serious, and was completed in 1744. The Prelude and Fugue in F# Minor, BWV 883 is from the second volume.

Prelude:

The emotional color of this prelude is slightly sad; the opening theme is slow and deep in its singing tone. In this prelude, the theme reoccurs freely several times (Example 1). There are a lot of triplets, syncopated rhythms, and melodic 16th notes. This prelude has three

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sections: the exposition (mm. 1-12) modulating into the dominant C-sharp minor, developmental part with frequent modulations, and the recapitulation section starting from measure 30 which repeats the theme of the first section, reestablishing the main key.

**Example 1: Prelude in F-sharp Minor**

mm. 1-2.  

![Example 1: Prelude in F-sharp Minor mm. 1-2.](image1)

mm. 12

![Example 1: Prelude in F-sharp Minor mm. 12.](image2)

Fugue:

This is a three-voice fugue with six episodes. The subject opens in the alto, with its tonal answer in the soprano in m. 4. Following these two entries, there is a bridge from mm. 7-8, then the last subject in the exposition appears in the bass in m. 8. The episode in mm. 11-14 are sequences that use with rhythmic motives taken from the opening of the subject (Example 2).

**Example 2: mm. 1 and mm.10-12**

![Example 2: mm. 1 and mm.10-12.](image3)

After one entry of the subject in the soprano in m. 16, the second episode enters in m. 19. This episode has a lot of modulation, which ends in B minor in m. 28 and starts the subject in the alto. Also, after one subject enters in the bass in m. 34, episode IV takes place in m. 37, with newly introduced materials. It modulates to various keys until B minor again, which is the same arrival key as the previous episode. Then in m. 51, the subject takes place in the alto,
followed by the subject in the soprano in F-sharp minor. Episode V modulates to C-sharp minor with a subject entry in m. 60 in the bass, then episode VI goes back to the tonic and leads to the final statement of the fugue in m. 60 in the soprano.

As the structure is laid out, in between episodes II to VI, there is only one or two subjects, which makes this fugue episode-dominate. Also, even though the episodes modulate, they always arrive at the key the next subject is in. There is no stretto, augmentation, diminution of the subject.
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333

Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn are three of the most famous representatives of the Classical period. The Classical period is considered by current musicians and scholars as one of the most valuable and enduring eras. Michael Hampe stated in his book, “that in Mozart, more elements occur simultaneously than in the works of other composers. His abrupt emotional shifts and rapid changes in musical expression necessitate an extremely quick inner change in order to predict the next phrase.”

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was a great composer of the classical period who made notable contributions to the development of piano playing. He composed eighteen piano sonatas. His sonata compositions fall into three periods: early (1774-1775), middle (1777-1778), and late (1784-1788). The Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333 is a piano work from his middle period, composed in Paris in the summer of 1778. The loss of his mother and financial constraints caused Mozart to think more deeply than usual during this period, and he had some thoughts about his life and destiny.

The first movement (Allegro) is a passionate and emotional Allegro movement. It is written in standard sonata form, with the exposition, development, and recapitulation also in conventional harmonic design. In the exposition, the first and second themes have the same opening gesture of a descending scale. The mood also stays similar, but the texture is slightly different with the first theme having Alberti bass accompaniment in the left hand and

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the second theme having chordal texture at the opening. The development is also in the
convention of that time - not so long or elaborated. But it has plenty of first-theme material
and the closing theme material, featuring a dramatic minor-mode section as its central part.

The second movement (Andante cantabile) is a beautiful, lilting aria that opens with a
soft piano statement of the main theme. Compared with the first movement, the second
movement is more languid and slower. Unlike many other sonatas, the slow movement of this
piece is in a standard sonata form. The development is also short, and the recapitulation has
the same material with melodic elaboration, and it stays in tonic. Mozart never used long
slurs to mark the phrases. This is especially clear in the second movement where there are
slur breaks between measures, yet the phrase should not be broken up. When performing this,
the pianist should play this with nice legato until the end of the phrases. (Example 3).

Example 3: mm. 14-15 and mm. 66-67

The third movement (Allegretto grazioso) is an upbeat movement, full of energy and
humor. The third movement contrasts sharply with the second movement. The structure is
sonata-rondo form, which, along with rondo and the sonata form, is one of the typical
structures for the finale of a sonata. The first theme appears three times. For performance
practice, each time should have different dynamics or any type of interpretation to add
tastefulness to the music. The second theme starts in m. 24. Unlike the first theme material, it
repeats the opening idea several times without truly developing. The accompaniment also uses Alberti bass instead of quarter notes like in the first theme. The only place that has newly introduced material is m. 76, which is considered a part of the development of the sonata-rondo. Unlike many sonatas, this movement has written-in cadenzas from mm. 171-198, and its nature is adapted from the concerto.

Ornamentation is very common in Mozart's compositions, and in this sonata, there are a large number of trills and grace notes. These ornamental additions make the music more dynamic. As Paul Henry Lang said: “Ornamentation stands for much more that its first meaning. It can fruitfully interact with the works to which it is applied; it has a wide range, from little grace notes to great decorative concepts; and it is capable of heightening beauty.”

This is how we should treat ornamentation not only in Mozart’s music, but in all music.

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Johannes Brahms: Rhapsody in G Minor, Op. 79, No. 2

The Romantic period began in the late 18th century and continued throughout the 19th century. It is represented by composers from many countries, such as Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, and Brahms. Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was a German Romantic composer, but many people consider Brahms to be more conservative than his peers, pointing to the traditions of the classical period. Yet, it is widely recognized that Brahms combined classical and romantic elements. However, referring to him as a "neo-classicist" is not entirely accurate because it suggests that he prioritized one aspect of his art over the other.\(^7\) Sara Ruth Watson claimed: “Biographers - Walter Niemann, for example - have indicated that the young Brahms followed the romantic tradition, the older Brahms the classical.”\(^8\)

The Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 79, No. 2 was composed by Brahms in 1879 and is one of Brahms' most popular piano compositions. Brahms had not composed for piano for fourteen years before composing Op. 79, making it a remarkable piece from his later years.\(^9\) In the case of the G minor Rhapsody, the piece is very passionate. It follows a structured A-B-A format that resembles that of a sonata. In this piece, Brahms’ tangled, repeatedly struggling thoughts and feelings are very clear throughout. The piece is full of intense mood changes, challenging melodic leaps, and compelling visual images, elements that conceal the important influences of Brahms' loneliness and feelings of detachment from others, his tragic life experiences, his turbulent and controversial past, and his complex and conflicted feelings for

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8 Watson, “Romantic Brahms,” 70.
Clara,\textsuperscript{10} such as represented in measures 22-30 (Example 4). Here, the left-hand octave jumps are marked by the dotted rhythms. The rhythm becomes more and more compact, and the intensity strengthens and weakens depending on the emotions expressed. Also, there are several repeated repressions of emotion, but then it explodes with intensity in bar 27 (Example 5)

\textbf{Example 4: mm. 22-30}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example4.png}
\end{figure}

In this piece, the rhythmic texture consists of a large number of triplets. The use of triplets in the Rhapsody in G Minor highlights Brahms' mastery of rhythmic patterns. This is a feature that can be observed in many of his works. In this particular piece, the appearance of triplets imbues the music with a sense of fluidity and continuity, which plays a significant role in driving the constant development of the music.\(^{11}\)

For the overall structure, this rhapsody adapts compound ternary ABA, with the first A ending with a double bar line. The A alone has three sections with different materials and characters. The first material presents a grand emotion with a sweep; the second material is affirmative and somewhat march-like; the third material shows melancholy, which leads to the last material that prepares for the jubilation at the end of the section. All these present contrasting and dramatic effects with their various types of texture, use of register, range, dynamics, and articulation. The B section uses a similar texture as the A section without a

drastic contrast, but the tonality does not stay stable for long as it modulates constantly, which creates ambiguity and unsettledness. The only material from the A section that was not applied in the B section is the second material that is march-like.
Achille-Claude Debussy: Children’s Corner

There is evidence to suggest that the term “impressionism” had only been used previously in relation to David Hume’s (1711-1776) philosophical system, and was not associated with any form of art, including painting.\textsuperscript{12} Impressionist music, originated in the late 19th century, refers to a genre of music that emerged under the influence of “Symbolist literature” and “Impressionist painting.”\textsuperscript{13} Impressionistic music feels mostly abstract, free and colorful; it is not as regimented as classical music or as rigorous as music of the Baroque period. Music during the impressionistic period featured certain dissonant and unstable elements. When we talk about Impressionistic music, Claude Debussy (1862-1918) is one of the main representatives of this period. Between 1890-1899, Debussy published a number of piano works that gained the attention of many critics and historians in the following decade. It was during this period that the concept of Impressionism first emerged in discussions about music, largely due to Debussy's influence. Thus, it can be said that the attention to Impressionism in music was not present before Debussy’s time but rather emerged as a result of his creative input.\textsuperscript{14}

Claude Debussy composed \textit{Children’s Corner} in 1906-1908, a musical suite for solo piano. Debussy wrote this suite for his daughter, whose life and playful details he observed and paid close attention to. He recalled these details as an adult and wrote this work with a strong impressionistic tone.\textsuperscript{15} These six pieces are all very childlike and most of them are


\textsuperscript{14} Byrnside, “Musical Impressionism: The Early History of the Term,” 524.

\textsuperscript{15} Lijia Sun, “A Study of Debussy's Piano Suite "Children's Garden,“ MA thesis, (Hebei Normal
upbeat, with themes of toys, snowflakes, and so on. The sympathetic attitude towards children and their lives in French music is a result of a particular artistic awareness that focuses on the emotional experiences of children. This perspective helps people better understand the aesthetics of impressionism, as it demonstrates a natural narrative of the development of an intimate relationship.16

I. “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum”

Lija Sun said, “it is a typical work with a complex three-part structure, modeled on one of the Italian composer Clementi exercises, “Gradus ad Parnassum, Op. 44” is still used as a finger exercise.”17 “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum” is a representation of the self-important and rigid approach taken by the creators of educational programs and methodologies. Furthermore, it is a critique of the entire academic community, including professors and individuals who are highly knowledgeable in their fields.18 From the first piece, the performer can feel the influence of the impressionist school, as the rhythm and texture no longer remain uniform in the piece (Example 6).

Example 6:

\[\text{Example 6:}\]

\[\text{Example Image}\]

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II. “Jimbo’s Lullaby”

The piece starts in the key of B-flat major. Due to the appearance of the note C flat in m. 34, the key changes to G-flat major, but eventually returns to B-flat major.

This composition portrays the scene of Debussy's daughter cradling a young elephant and listening to a soothing melody as she gradually drifts off to sleep. As it is a lullaby, the volume of the piece is intentionally kept soft and gentle. The piece imitates the slow and steady movement of an elephant. However, measures 39-58 shift to a cheerful tone, and the music slowly returns to the initial silence at the end. This also symbolizes the quiet sleep of the composer’s daughter.

III. Serenade for the Doll

In “Debussy’s Piano Music: Some Second Thoughts and Source of Inspiration,” Robert Orledge claims: “The Serenade for the Doll, the third of the Children’s Corner suite, was probably the first to be composed, being published as a separate piece in 1906.” This tune is about the theme of dolls and is an overall relaxing tune. Most of the entire piece is staccato, which also highlights the lively, mischievous, and cute feeling. Additionally, Debussy encourages the use of the soft pedal. He incorporated the piano's sound to mimic different instruments, including the guitar, in his early compositions. By using staccato, he created a guitar-like sound on the piano, similar to a bell that triggers a sense of familiarity. A bell needs a touch to ring, but Debussy used staccato to imitate the guitar. There are traces of

this influence in this piece (Example 7). Virginia Raad claims that in this piece, the performance here requires the player to “pluck,” as the guitar is emulated, usually as plucked seconds, thirds, and fourths.\textsuperscript{22}

Example 7: mm. 90-95

IV. The Snow is Dancing

The overall feeling of this piece is like snowflakes flying all over the sky. The entire piece is mostly in sixteenth notes, with the first note being the melody note from measure 3 to measure 6 (Example 8).

Example 8: mm. 3-6

According to Raad, “The Snow is Dancing” is a small toccata, yet it is difficult, as all the sixteenth notes are indicated “doux estompe” (soft and patterned) with portamento. Then, \footnote{22 Virginia Raad, “Claude Debussy’s Use of Piano Sonority Part II,” American Music Teacher 26, no. 3 (January 1977), 10.}
the right hand alternates with the same pattern, as the left-hand thumb continues to sustain the melody that expresses melancholy.23

V. The Little Shepherd

This piece is the slowest piece in the suite. The first phrase of the theme is in monophony played by the right hand, which happens three times in this piece. The first phrase seems to describe a shepherd boy relaxing in a wide and quiet environment surrounded by birds and flowers, so the melody is to be played softly, gently, and expressively.24

VI. Golliwog’s Cakewalk

E. Robert Schmitz claims: “Golliwog, the little black doll created by Florence Upton in 1895, and whose name is possibly derived from ‘golliwog.’”25 The piece uses a lot of syncopated rhythms, which Debussy used to portray the dancing puppeteers. From measure 60 onwards, where marked “avec une grande emotion,” the tempo is marked slow and the dynamic is soft. After many repetitive patterns alternating with each other, the recapitulation in m. 90 takes place not in the original tempo, but marked “toujours retenu,” and it gradually gets to the original tempo after two measures of the theme. The recapitulation is shortened but with almost the same materials as the opening. The piece ends powerfully and dramatically in ff.

23 Raad, “Claude Debussy’s Use of Piano Sonority Part II,” 7.
Bibliography


