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GRADUATE VIOLIN RECITAL

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Music

Yixuan Huang

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

May, 2016

GRADUATE VIOLIN RECITAL

Yixuan Huang

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Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my big appreciation to my parents. Their unconditional love offered me power to overcome any difficulties.

GRADUATE VIOLIN RECITAL

An Abstract of the Thesis by
Yixuan Huang

This thesis consists of a violin recital and the accompanying program notes. The graduate violin recital includes the following repertoire: Johann Sebastian Bach, First Violin Sonata in G minor; Tomaso Antonio Vitali, Chaconne; Samuel Barber, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 14. These works display a variety of styles in different period, ranging from baroque to the twentieth century. The program notes for each piece contains biographical sketch, analysis of the work, and performance concerns.

Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg, Kansas
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

GRADUATE RECITAL

YIXUAN HUANG, VIOLIN
Assisted by
BARBARA YORK, PIANO

Thursday, April 21 2016
Sharon Kay Dean Recital Hall Recital Hall
7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

First Violin sonata in G minor, BWV 1001

J. S Bach
(1685-1750)

- I. Adagio
- II. Fugue

Chaconne in G minor

Tomaso Antonio Vitali
(1663-1745)

INTERMISSION

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 14

Samuel Barber
(1910-1981)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Andante
- III. Presto in moto perpetuo

This recital partially fulfills requirements for the Master of Music degree for Miss Yixuan Huang. The Department of Music is a constitution of the College of the Arts and Sciences.

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CHAPTER I

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Biographical sketch

As one of most revered composers today, Johann Sebastian Bach's music had been played all around the world as the touchstone for great musicians. Behind Bach's high achievements in composing was his lifelong hard work only for a living with little fame and money.

Even Bach's childhood was filled with pain and suffering. Although he was lucky to be a member of a great musical family, less than ten-year-old Bach became an orphan, as both his parents passed away in the same year¹. He moved to live with his eldest brother, Johann Christoph Bach, who became his guardian and music teacher as well. Under the instruction of J.C. Bach, little Bach learned to play the clavichord. Despite being forbidden to touch the music paper, what enlightened him most would be the music he secretly copied from famous composers under dim light at night. It seemed that Bach's early music education was mainly self-taught for no one privileged him a better study opportunity. Not being the favorite pupil of any influential figures, nor

¹ Williams Peter, *The Life of Bach*, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004, page 13.

having studied abroad in world-class universities as lots of successful composers did, transcribing the music score remained one of the effective ways for Bach to learn composing.

Johann Bach later attended St. Michael's School in Lüneburg where he received the training in singing and playing the organ and harpsichord. Gradually growing up into an outstanding keyboardist, Bach successively served several musical posts in different churches in Weimar as the organist or music director, shortly after he was graduated. Not just a good keyboard performer, Bach was also a prolific composer. At this time, a large number of keyboard music had been written in different kinds, including toccatas, preludes, fugues, and concertos. For instance, the "Little Organ Book" and the "Well-Tempered Clavier" were two big collections for keyboard pieces. In these Weimar years, as attracted by Italian composers, such as Vivaldi and Corelli, Bach's music conveyed a wide range of styles on a big scale. He adopted a dramatic way from Vivaldi to organize the music with great vitality by means of repetition, rhythmic impetus, and simple harmony. Its longer music length was realized by allowing the music to be fully developed, and ending with a convincing conclusion.

In 1717, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, a music lover who admired Bach's talents, appointed Bach as his Kapellmeister². To the prince's greatest satisfaction, during the next nine years, Bach finished many profound pieces, such as the "Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin", "Brandenburg Concertos", and "Cello Suites". Also in these Cöthen years, however, Bach experienced the sudden death of his first wife, and one year after, he married again to Anna Magdalena Wulken, a gifted soprano and later Bach's copyist, who preserved much of her husband's unknown music. At that time, French and

² Williams Peter, *The life of Bach*, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004, page 76.

Italian genres became a new way for Bach to learn composition details. For example, in Bach's "Partita No.3 for solo violin BWV³ 1006", the Gigue was the only traditional Partita movement left as the finale. The added galanteries, including Bourree, Gavotte and Minuet, were all evidence of how Bach enjoyed the fascination of French dance. Furthermore, influenced by Corelli, Bach adopted Italian genre—concerto grosso—in his famous "Brandenburg Concertos". In that collection of six instrumental works, music was not written for a single soloist, but for a small group of instruments with full orchestra, alternating thematic material.

In 1723, Bach was hired as the music director and cantor at the Thomas School in Leipzig, the city where Bach lived for the rest of his 27 years. His duties contained directing performances in four churches, offering regular classes and individual singing classes. As Bach usually chose to perform his own cantatas, he made a point of supplying new cantatas. For this reason, about three hundred cantatas were composed, and over one hundred of them survived, such as "Geist und Seele wird verwirret BWV 35", "Schwingt freudig euch empor BWV 36" and "Die Freude reget sich BWV 36b". Those extant vocal compositions maintained the high and aristocratic tone in such a transcendental sense, like bringing the sound from another world. Moreover, the counterpoint had been redefined to a large extent by Bach. For example, in his "The Art of Fugue", contrapuntal structure set no limit to the number of countersubjects when melodic lines were interwoven.

In Bach's final years, he was almost blind due to two unsuccessful eye operations. On 28th July, 1750, the world had been deprived of one of the greatest composers—Bach passed away from a stroke in Leipzig. His God-given talent produced such a vast amount

³ BWV [Bach Werke-Verzeichnis]: The index for the composition of Johann Sebastian Bach.

of masterpieces, including so many genres for different occasions. Whenever people listened to Bach's music, it was like a spiritual dialogue with him but also with the people themselves.

Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin

Historical background

After he moved to Cöthen, Johann Sebastian Bach completed a set of six works for solo violin in 1720. Not being valued during Bach's lifetime, this collection was posthumous published by Nikolaus Simrock⁴ in 1802. Even though the music was released, these six suites were being ignored for a long time, until violinist Joseph Joachim⁵ began to perform them in public. Today as an essential part of violin repertoire, almost every violin player will practice at least one of those six pieces.

This collection alternated between sonatas and partitas. Sonatas consisted of four movements in slow-fast-slow-fast pattern. The first two movements were composed in form of prelude and fugue as a settled couple. Not strictly following the structure of the four parts—Gigue, Courante, Sarabande and Allemande—the three partitas combined traditional Baroque design with forms of French dance music.

⁴ Nikolaus Simrock (1751-1832): a German horn player and music publisher.

⁵ Joseph Joachim (1831-1907): a famous Hungarian violinist, conductor, and composer.

Analysis of Bach First Violin Sonata, BWV 1001

Adagio

The Adagio is shaped in ternary form in G minor. The first part consists of nine bars, while the main theme only took two bars (Ex 1). This means the whole first movement is based on those two measures, including two motifs: vertical block chord and horizontal scale. The scale can also be considered as broken chords, so the entire Adagio is actually made up by one chord after another. Bach's genius is that he could arrange the harmony with cultivated melody in it. Music gradually modulates to D minor key and concludes on the tonic chord at the first beat on bar nine.



Ex 1

For the contrasting part, Bach presents richer variations by using constant modulations and adding more dissonance. Music starts in the key of G minor, after the sixteen notes sequences (Ex 2), the A flat note first appears on the bass line, which indicates the E flat major mode. At bar twelve, the tonic chord finally emerges in the arpeggio (Ex 2), therefore, the new key is confirmed. After the fermata E flat chord, the prelude turns into C minor key and lasts for five measures until the second part ends.

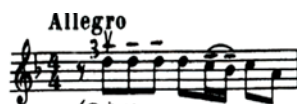


Ex 2

[illegible]

As the G minor key returns, the music moves into the third part. Not repeating the primary theme in the first part, the composer expands the scale pattern and picks up the first G minor chord from the beginning to conclude this brief prelude.

The fugue composing style reveals imitative counterpoint technique on which Bach was the leading expert. Considering Bach's creativity, each section—subject, countersubject and episode together has unlimited arrangement. This grand violin Fugue is developed on the basis of only one-measure motif in G minor. Started on dominant note "D", a conjunct motion of four descending notes forms the thematic pattern (Ex 4). After this, a colorful journey is about to begin in the form of abundant variations of repetitions.



Ex 4

First, the most common way is placing the motif on different lines in sequence (Ex 5). The pattern is arranged on the dominant “D” on the top line, and then it is repeated on tonic “G” and subdominant “C” in the middle voice. Even though it is like a competition for mutual imitation, each line gets a chance to be the leading role.



Ex 5

Second, Bach adopts more than one line to emphasize the subject and less for the countersubject (Ex 6). As shown in following example six, the top two lines are the changed thematic pattern in parallel interval of sixth, and the lower two lines functions as countersubject.



Ex 6

Third, the subject is partly inverted (Ex 7). In the original theme, the Repeated “D” note is the highest pitch, and the sixteenth notes are downward. In this case, the sixteenth reaches the peak at two top lines.



Ex 7

On the other hand, the melody in each episode is carefully designed. It seems that those single melodic lines presents some new original music; however, they actually are

the implicit repetitions of the primary theme (Ex 8), the evolved form of the main melody.



Ex 8

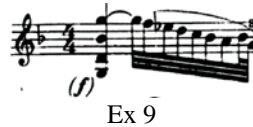
Adagio and Fugue: Interpretation

To perform these two movements, it is necessary to learn the fact that there are some differences between the baroque violin and modern violin. Violins in baroque style are fitted with gut strings, a shorter fingerboard, and without chin rest and shoulder rest. Today's violin serves a more curved bridge and played on mental strings. What exerted a great effect on the sound projection was the baroque bow. This kind of bow bent outward in the middle and is shorter in length. Therefore, the sound is lighter and softer, best for dance suites. By contrast, the modern bow is designed to accomplish more dramatic dynamic changes and expressive requirements. So here comes the problem.

Adagio

Using today's straight and longer bow, players should avoid aggressive and heavy sound caused by pressing the right hand too much or by string crossing. The key to play this prelude well is the rational distribution of bow length. The moving of the bow for each block chord in Adagio should be a natural slow motion from the lower part of

strings to the higher; in other words, the chords are to be heard as two connected double stops. For this reason, a large part of the bow should be saved for higher notes to achieve the balanced sound. For instance, the first chord at the beginning (Ex 9), the upper part of chord, B flat and G, requires double longer duration than that of lower part of double stops because the chord needed more time to die out, and then switches to a new passage.



If the chord is played with the left hand already prepared on the strings, the sound would be much cleaner and more stable. As for the single line between every chord, the melody should obtain a certain inclination to flow downwards or upwards towards the chord. This relies on the increase of bow speed to cooperate.

Fugue

Since the Fugue is an exhibition of contrapuntal art, the main task for the performer is to highlight the primary melodic line. When necessary, the playing has to overturn the tradition. For example, the interpretation of bar 82-83 would be rare (Ex 10). The chord should be performed from top note to the lower one so as to emphasize the theme on bass line.



Furthermore, Bach was also an amazing organist, and his violin sonata offered some keyboard flavor. At measure 87-90 (Ex 11), the first downbeat of each bar was akin to the bass continuo. Thus, these notes should sustain a little bit longer with accent in order to keep them ringing in the air.



Ex 11

These unaccompanied violin sonatas, to a large extent, are the showpieces of the performer's musicality. It is like a mirror for the violin techniques but also the inner part of the musician's heart.

CHAPTER II

TOMASO ANTONIO VITALI

Biographical Sketch

Tomaso Antonio Vitali was a composer and violinist from Italy in the Baroque era. As the eldest son of Giovanni Vitali, also a composer and violinist, Vitali most likely learned the violin under his father's instruction. He studied composing with Antonio Maria Pacchioni⁶ in Modena and later worked as a teacher in the Este court orchestra, then spending most of his rest life there. Besides that most well-known "Chaconne in G Minor", Vitali's works included "trio sonatas op.1 and op.2", "Sonata de Camera" and some other violin sonatas.

⁶ Antonio Maria Pacchioni (1654-1738): Baroque composer, famous for his polyphonic church music.

Chaconne in G minor for Violin and Continuo

Historical Background

This beloved and virtuosic masterpiece remained itself a mystery as it was an atypical chaconne and possibly not even composed by Vitali. There was only a handwritten line that marked “Parte del Tomaso Vitalino” on its first page, therefore, the scholars questioned if this piece should be attributed to Tomaso Vitali. Given its style, the wide ranged modulations into a distant key had nothing to do with the Baroque music, in which even the change of key signature was rare. But in this chaconne, music could switch from two flats to six sharps. Furthermore, the repetition of the bass line led to the doubts of its musical form—maybe not a chaconne but a passacaglia.

Since a lot of violin compositions were reworked on the original Vitali chaconne, there were many different editions produced. The most used one was from Léopold Charlier, the violinist and professor at the Royal Conservatory of Liège. Charlier's arrangement substantially modified the variations by omitting and changing the order. At the same time, he filled in double-stops, octaves, and complex bowings to heighten the difficulty of the musical expressiveness as a showpiece. Most interesting was that he added an eight-measure keyboard introduction at the beginning (Ex 1). Those extra measures turned the music closer to the romantic style and were favored by many soloists.

Transcribed by Léopold Charlier

The primary theme is first stated by soloist in G minor (Ex 1). Later on, the melody only transforms a little, the key changing or slight chord embellishment when it repeats, so as to make it easier to be recognized.



At the second time, the melody modulates to B flat minor and plays agitatedly at a lower register. When this main theme emerges again, the music expands into a fortissimo dynamic in the higher pitch of A minor. The fourth time, marked with expression of “largamente”, the soloist not only plays the thematic line, but also the whole chord at the first downbeat of each bar (Ex 2) to emphasize the phrasing.



13

When the main melody has been heard for the last time, the music explodes with huge energy. Though employs the octave double stops to thicken the single melodic line in violin part, the accompanied continuo receives its first and the only chance to play the main theme. It can not be more thrilling to hear all the parts in unison at that final moment! These little adjustments on the main theme at each time are a good way to show the composer's many thoughts on music novelty.

The variations are like a fancy kaleidoscope of musical series. The changes are focused on the rhythm, tempo, bow techniques and expression. It appears frequently in Charlier's edition that the rhythmic pattern transfers from duple, triples to sixteenth (Ex 3). Since more notes gathered, the melody becomes more intensive, creating the illusion that it speeds up.



Ex 3

In the case of bow techniques, Charlier enjoys the interchange between the Staccato and Legato, Détaché⁷ and Martelé⁸ (Ex 4). Each of the techniques is clearly presented in a settled four-bar unit, one segment after another, with the same length but different content, which builds up the whole grand piece. As shown in the following example, the first line is the Martelé group, using separate bowings, marked with a dot above the notes; the next four bars are for Détaché, indicated by a short dash.

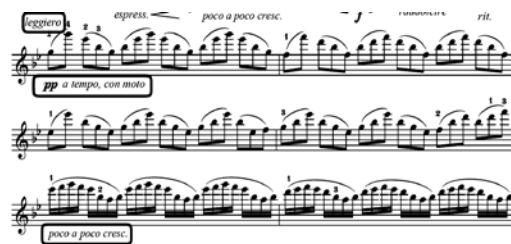
⁷ Détaché: means "separated", a kind of bow technique can be applied to any notes not linked by a slur.

⁸ Martelé: means "hammered", a type of détaché stroke with a lightly hammered attack.



Ex 4

On the score, those expression marks records the shifts of sentiments in detail. Even every four bars, the color of the phrases are varied (Ex 5). As shown below, in the first four-bar group, the melody requires being in dolce pianissimo, the next group being in leggiero, and the next even more vivid. These emotional nuances between each group provides the charm that a baroque piece should not possess.



Ex 5

It is these contrasts of rhythm, bow techniques and expression marks that leads to its fascinating musical qualities. Its ongoing popularity is evidenced by the huge numbers of available recordings.

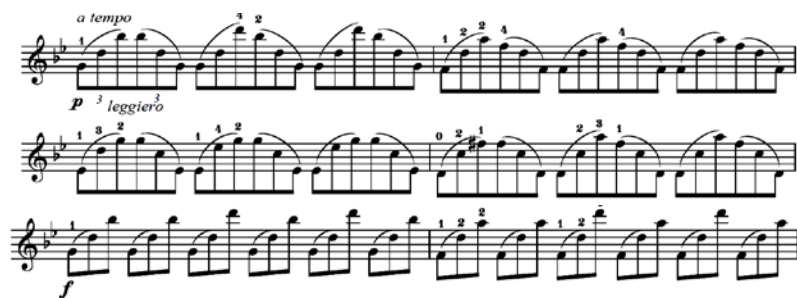
Vitali Chaconne: Interpretation

Attracted by its unique beauty, Vitali's Chaconne has been valued and interpreted by so many violin virtuosos, such as Sarah Chang, American violinist, and David Oistrakh, prominent Soviet violinist. Both legendary violin performers have their own understandings of this piece which are entirely different. Because of the mysterious history behind this Chaconne, in general, Oistrakh interprets the music in a Baroque style

with stable tempo and less dynamic contrast. However, Chang classes this piece as a romantic showpiece for her virtuosic techniques, by which the hidden romanticism in the music can be revealed.

First, two soloists respond differently to dynamic marks. Oistrakh plays this Chaconne humbly and stably, letting the music itself speak and depict the implicit baroque beauty, like any Bach music he has ever performed. His playing fully illustrates his respect as his interpretation is strictly according to printed marks. In his performance, the contrast between different dynamics can not be achieved by tempo change but by diversity of articulation. But for Chang, the dramatic effect brings by sudden transformation of the speed should never be overestimated; not only is it an effective way to reveal Chang's superb skills, but also the main approach to exhibit the characteristic of romantic style. Thus, in Chang's playing, dynamic and tempo are changed simultaneously. For instance at bar 77 (Ex 6), this variation is in piano dynamic while four bars after, a new one followed marked "forte". Oistrakh's first piano variation is a sprightly one as he takes full advantage of bow technique—Spiccato. When another variation replaces, Legato⁹ bowing is employed without tempo change. Connected bowing releases more energy, which makes the music intense. Chang, however, tends to use more bow even at the first piano part. As soon as the dynamic is switched to forte, she presses the bow even more and plays in a faster tempo. At such a rapid speed, the triplets sounds like eighth notes, including a double stop and a dotted note.

⁹ Legato: violin bow technique that used for connected notes linked by a slur.



Ex 6

Another significant difference between two interpretations is the understanding for the same expression requirement. At bar 159 (Ex 7), “grandioso” is clearly marked under the notes. This term for Chang means aggressiveness by playing louder and faster. She projectes the sound so hard and connected all double stops as an indivisible whole. For Oistrakh, the words “broad” and “stable” can equal “grandioso” here. As he maintains the same tempo as before, he separates each double stop in order to achieve the clear phrasing. When he plays the triplet part, the music is required to be “piano” and “poco a poco animato”. Chang’s playing becomes more energetic regardless of the “piano” mark, which leads to a climax. But Oistrakh’s playing combines both two terms. Without any noise from string crossing, his music sounds are so clean and in order, without intentional manipulation.



Ex 7

In a word, the Oistrakh’s interpretation is more rational and implicit. Compared to Chang’s style, he adds less color but is more serene so that more room is left for listeners

to perceive the music themselves. As for Chang, she is exactly clear about how to follow the listening expectations from audiences and she will never let them down. It is a symbol of her youth regarding her very colorful interpretation filled with a sudden outburst of enthusiasm.

CHAPTER III

SAMUEL BARBER

Biographical Sketch

One obvious feature of musical world in twentieth century was its diversity. Each way of composing could find a position for itself. As one of the shining stars, American composer Samuel Barber found his own style to characterize his music. Unlike his contemporaries, Copland and Harris, whose music was derived from their social consciousness or national identity¹⁰, Barber inherited the Romantic tradition, but incorporated the aspects of contemporary musical culture. His personal purpose for writing music was to express his feelings, so all of his modern techniques, even the twentieth-century approaches, served only for musical beauty and expression.

Born in a small town of West Chester in 1910, Barber grew up in a distinguished American family. He already had self-awareness of being a composer when he was only nine, as he announced in the letter to his mother that he was meant to write music. Little Barber was strongly influenced by his aunt, Louise Homer, who was a leading singer in Metropolitan Opera, and his uncle, Sidney Homer, a composer of American art songs. Sidney especially encouraged his nephew to compose and even acted as Barber's mentor

¹⁰ Border Nathan, *Samuel Barber*, New York: Shirmer, 1954.

until his death. Therefore, Homer's artistic principle, spontaneity and sincerity, formed the basic aesthetic values of Barber's compositions¹¹. Before he went to college, Barber had already set foot in the composing field, and his lyrical songs, for instance "Child and Mother", "Mother Goose Rhymes", and some instrumental compositions, "Sadness," "Melody in F" for piano, all manifested his definition for music: to express his feelings. This early music usually contained a clear diatonic melody with triads as accompaniment, and he used simple forms with a coda at the end. As Barber did not plan the vertical chord based on rules or logic, dissonant harmonies only happened occasionally, caused by line cross.

When the Curtis Institute of Music first opened to recruit students in 1924, fourteen-year-old Barber was accepted. For the next nine years, his incredible talents made him the center of attention as he not only focused on composition, but also piano and voice. He also read widely and took literature courses with a great passion for the English novel. Even more incredibly, Barber was very accomplished in foreign languages as he could speak French and he learned German for four years and Spanish for one semester. That vast amount of literature input was like accumulated treasure and later burst out as hundreds of lyrical songs, which became one of Barber's most powerful tools to express his delicate emotions. For example, the lyrics of his songs, "Dance" and "The Daisies" were chosen from James Stephens' Collected Poems. Barber studied composition with Rosario Scalero, whose teacher was a close friend of Brahms, Mendelssohn and Schumann. Scalero's emphasis on both conventional techniques and contemporary approaches affected the way Barber composed. It was during these school years in Curtis that Barber already composed some his best known pieces: "Serenade for

¹¹ Heyman Barbara, *Samuel Barber: the composer and his music*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

String Quartet op 1”, “Essay for Orchestra op 1”, “Overture to The School for Scandal”, and “Dover Beach op 3”. Broadly lyrical lines and polyrhythmic passages were the obvious characteristics for the music of this period. At the same time, Barber’s music possessed more charisma, as his composing was not a process of imitation anymore. Barber was pioneering a unique road only he could walk on. By the time Barber wrote Dover Beach, the music already naturally conveyed tiny expressive differences.

During those two years Barber worked in Rome at the American Academy, he stepped into his transitional period of composing. Only aged 28, Barber quickly built up his international recognition as his two pieces, “Essay for Orchestra” and “Adagio for Strings”, were premiered by NBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Arturo Toscanini¹². But meanwhile, Barber’s father suffered serious illness and the Second World War was soon to break out. Due to these changes, Barber’s music became more identifiable: more dissonant passages with harmonic intension, a major contrast between each bittersweet theme, and contrapuntal texture. Some pieces of this period were the “Concerto for Violin and Orchestra op 14”, “Essay for Orchestra op2”, “Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra op 22”, and “Knoxville: Summer of 1915 op 24”.

As the Barber’s style matured, he combined more contemporary techniques to satisfy his expressive purposes. His works exhibited more obvious angular melodic lines, chromaticism, and dissonance. For example, influenced by Stravinsky, Barber’s ballet “Medea” was rhythmically oriented, and his “Piano Sonata” used twelve-tone technique. Another sign of Barber’s maturity was his success of his first opera, “Vanessa”. This grand opera was like a gathering of all kinds of expressiveness that Barber could offer. It

¹² Arturo Toscanini: An Italian conductor. He was one of most acclaimed musicians in 20th century.

was rooted in romantic traditions but explored the fresh expression in lyrical melody and form. Heyman wrote about the importance of “Vanessa”:

“Musically, the significance of “Vanessa” in Barber’s development is not that it explores a new language, but rather that it is the summation of his musical powers brought together effectively in a full-length dramatic work.”¹³

In the last decade of Barber’s career, he was depressed and isolated. He suffered his first and only major failure--rejection of his second opera, “Antony and Cleopatra”. The difference between Barber’s and Zeffirelli’s¹⁴ opinions of the opera led to this fiasco. Furthermore, his life-long companion, Gian Carlo Menotti, moved out of their home of twenty-five years, as they grew apart on their separate music roads. Despite all this, Barber continued to compose his expressive lyrical music. He wrote five significant pieces in his late years. There were the “Lovers, Fadograph of a Yestern Scene”, “Third Essay for Orchestra”, “Ballade for Piano”, and “Canzonetta for Obeo and String Orchestra”.

Barber’s success lay in his emotional content in his music, and he could always find the natural ways to express his ideas. The music legacy he left would be everlasting.

¹³ Heyman Barbara, *Samuel Barber: the composer and his music*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992,Page 390.

¹⁴ Franco Zeffirelli: An Italian director and producer of operas. He prepared the libretto of Antony and Cleopatra.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 14

Historical Background

In 1939, Barber was working on a violin concerto, which was commissioned by a wealthy Philadelphia merchant for his talented son, Briselli. After Barber sent him the first two movements, this young prodigy complained about its simplicity and required it to be more brilliant so that the last movement finally became a crazy left-hand finger dance, which led to the Briselli's relinquishment to premiere this concerto. Furthermore, the third movement was finished shortly before the date that Poland was invaded by Germany, which was the prelude of the Second World War, so the agitated thematic quality of the finale was a response to the turbulence and panics before the world disaster. This whole violin concerto was finally finished at his home in America after he was warned by the government to come back because of the war crisis. Since Barber realized the finale was technically demanding, several performers, like Herbert Baumel, Barber's classmate at Curtis, Ralph Berkowitz, a friend of Barber, were invited to demonstrate that it was a playable movement.¹⁵ It was Albert Spalding¹⁶ who premiered this violin concerto in 1941 with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

This violin concerto became a major turning point in Barber's composing style and it was famous for its discrepancy between the first two movements and finale, which indicated Barber's new techniques in his later compositions. The lyricism was brilliantly

¹⁵ Flood Elizabeth, *Analysis, Interpretation and performance of the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra by Samuel Barber*, Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection, 1997, page 7

¹⁶ Albert Spalding, an American violinist and composer in 20th century.

and effectively conveyed in the first two movements, creating a beautiful and warm picture, but in the third movement, the intensity was built up all of a sudden by using angular rhythmic pattern.

Analysis of Barber's Violin Concerto

The three movements as a whole are like a dramatic opera: Act one introduces the characters through lyrical themes in different styles; in part two, an aria reveals impending nightmare by employing erratic tonality; in the finale, an inevitable fight happens with capricious rhythmic design and ends in brilliance and craze.

First Movement

The first movement is composed in sonata-allegro form. The exposition contains two themes and each of them includes two parts. By only using these two melodic ideas, Barber conceives a whole grand first movement. (Ex 1)



Ex1

The first theme is a wonderful example of Barber's lyrical expressiveness. Started without any orchestral introduction, this long melodic line, like a singer's intimate monologue, enters at the very first beat with a simple G major tonic chord accompanied by orchestra. Then at part B, music is fused with G minor harmony, gently rising up and down, but the advent of a series of broken sevenths (Ex 1) bring the intension. The music finally releases at note "B" after two-measure sixteenth notes with tempo rubato played only by soloist (Ex2), and this "B" is also the dominant note of the key in second theme. Therefore, these two measures are like the bridge that connects two themes.



Ex 2

Distinct from the previous one, the primary second theme is like a folk tune first introduced by clarinet in E minor. The Phrygian mode suggests as "F" natural has already been employed twice in this melody (Ex 3), which adds an exotic flavor to the music. Moreover, the dotted rhythmic pattern "♩." individualizes this theme with dance-like characteristic.



Ex 3

The second subordinate theme is based on a motive that consisted of perfect or augmented fourths in E minor, with interchanged playing by solo violin and clarinet. Marked to be "grazioso e scherzando", this motive eventually grows up into a rapid scale

passage leading to the climax of the entire movement when the orchestra takes over the melody (Ex 4).



Ex 4

It is in the development part that Barber enhances the lyrical expressive quality in such an ingenious way. It seems that the composer favors the first theme so much that he takes almost the whole section to fully develop it, while the second theme has only been suggested within couple of measures. At the beginning, music is required in a faster tempo and switches key to B flat major. After the orchestra plays motives derived from the first theme, the solo violin takes over the melody which is an augmentation of the material from first theme B (ms. 15-18), rising one octave higher (Ex 5). This ascending figure creates such a painful and heartbreaking moment that explains how the composer releases the emotion in his own expressive way.



Ex 5

Along with D major chord on the base line, the primary second theme is presented by winds and piano at the end of developmental section (Ex 6). Not being transformed, it emerges as the dominant preparation for the later recapitulation. The very last G major chord indicates the return of the tonic key.



Ex 6

The recapitulation part shares the same thematic structure as exposition. This time, however, Barber appoints the orchestra to bring back the first theme A. By playing in unison, the different orchestral instruments offer their own colors to the same music. Thus, even richer feelings are produced. Next, the solo violin restates the first theme B in an obscure tonal color blending the G major-minor mode, the same way as it appears in exposition. It is until the second theme that Barber firmly establishes the dominant status of G minor key. Even though it is recapitulated in a parallel minor, the music is in a relatively stable tonality, adding an expression of melancholy. After following the formal structure in exposition, the solo violin plays a cadenza-like passage while the timpani and lower strings holds the long E flat (Ex 7). The beginning of this passage is derived from the second measure of first main theme while the later ascending figure is from the seventh chord pattern in the second primary theme.



Ex 7

Second Movement

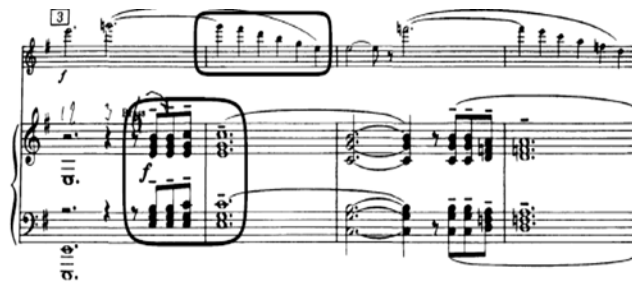
Barber's emotional intent becomes stronger in the second movement. Written in ternary form (ABA'), like a song structure, its beauty lies in the simple and clear thematic lines, flowing between different tonalities.

Part A is characterized by its blurring alternation between major and minor key. Being suggests for two bars in C sharp minor key (Ex 8-1), the oboe presents the first main theme on the E major chord, but concludes on a C sharp minor chord (Ex 8-2). Five bars later, the theme is transposed to a major third higher, still in C sharp minor key, however, and finishes on the E major triad (Ex 8-3). At measure 14, the cello repeats the main theme and E major replaces the C sharp minor key again. It is interesting to find out that the theme begins on a major chord, usually the tonic or dominant triad, while it will modulate to the paralleled minor key at the end. Just like the fleeting feelings, stable tonality is not able to express Barber's changing thoughts.

The image displays a musical score for the Second Movement, Example 8. It features two systems of music. The top system includes staves for Oboe (Ob.), Flute (Fl.), and Cello (Cello). The Oboe part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic and a 'r. h.' (right hand) instruction. The Flute part is marked with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic and an 'espr.' (espressivo) instruction. The Cello part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The bottom system includes staves for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), and Cello (Cello). The Violin I part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic and a 'r. h.' instruction. The Violin II part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The Cello part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The score is written in C sharp minor key, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 4/4. The music is characterized by simple and clear thematic lines, flowing between different tonalities.

Ex 8

In section B, obscure tonality is still an important aspect to convey the emotions. After the horn and timpani holds the long dominant “B”, the solo violin states the new theme B in a pattern of descending figure and three-note motif (Ex 9). This makes it possible to travel through different keys. The original key is E minor, and after a series of modulation, the music eventually lands on F major. Even though the bass line keeps the long F note, there are a lot of accidental sharps and flats adds into the violin solo melody, which forms a more colorful F major.



Ex 9

In the third section, Barber turns back to the major-minor interchange between E major and C sharp minor, but also fuses two themes together. It is theme A that reappears at first, played by violin solo. This time the modulation starts from E major, then C major, E major and to C sharp minor. The next descending sequences symbolize the theme B returns and the pattern has been repeated three times, which means music modulated to another three new keys: C sharp, E minor and E major. Compared to the melodic lines in first movement, both themes in second movement are in an even more extended melodic line with frequent modulation, corresponding to Barber’s desire to express. It is like two characters that sang their own arias, narrating the potential danger and uncertainty in their lives.

The third movement

The disaster finally comes in the finale. The capricious nature of this movement is defined by its triplet rhythmic pattern, the change of meters, the irregular accents and the dissonant harmony. Because this rondo music is required to be played in such a breathless tempo, it is, therefore, almost a showpiece for virtuosic techniques as a furious response to the hidden crisis, presented in the previous two movements. This movement is also a good example for modern composing techniques in the twentieth century. Its simplicity and rhythmic figures mark another approach for Barber's expressiveness.

Having discarded the prolonged lyrical line, Barber employs the succinct constant triplets to form the theme A and the orchestra only played chords or thematic fragments. This theme becomes the most recognizable angular melody as it appears four times in the finale, three times by the soloist and once by the orchestra (Ex 10). For the first two times, Barber composes it based on a motif of a four-note group but in triplet rhythmic pattern in A minor. When those countless triplets appears one after another, the syncopated chords played by the orchestra creates the irregular accents (Ex 10). These unusual strong beats leads to more excitement in this passage and, therefore, reinforces its impulsive characteristic.



Ex 10

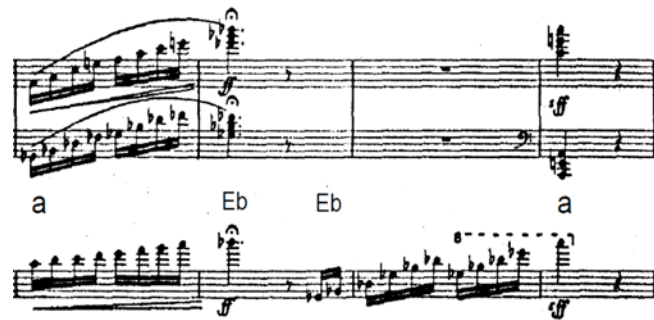
When the theme A returns for the third time, the string section takes the lead to play the main melody, then the brass are involved presenting triplet as the accompaniment, and one bar later, the winds followed, offering the syncopated chords. It is like a storm that gradually grows up into a hurricane and serves as a climax of this movement. Until the solo violin figures out that the arpeggiated chords will be the best way to replace the string section, the turbulence has weakened, and leaves only the winds to continue the triplet pattern with the soloist. But at this point, Barber is not content with the ubiquitous triplet, so he changes the meter from 4/4 to 3/4 in order to break the phrase and provide the breath (Ex 11). This indicates that the lyricism, widely used in the former movement, gives way to a rhythmic pattern, which is regarded as another completely new method for Barber's expressive intent.



Ex 11

The last statement of theme A is in an incredibly fast speed because not only the soloist is required to play in rapid tempo, but the rhythmic pattern is changed again. The dominant triplets are replaced by the sixteenth notes and the original four-note group is

accented, accompanied by Irritated orchestral chord. At the last moment, Barber alters the traditional I-V-I harmonic progression because of a harsh tritone, and the E flat minor resolves to A minor, as the special “dominant” to tonic. When the dissonant E flat minor chord suspends in the air, it is a decisive interruption to the endless triplet rhythm. While Barber still respects the tradition that the last chord stays on the tonic A, implying the nightmare was finished (Ex 12).



Ex 12

Barber violin concerto: Interpretation

As all the technical demands are served for Barber’s expressiveness, the performer must possess an outstanding sense of musicality to convey exquisite feelings in this violin concerto. For this reason, the ultimate pursuit of interpretation is to master the advanced techniques for the expressive quality.

It is essential to play the primary theme in a smooth melodic flow to achieve musical intent in first two movements. Therefore, the shifting and string crossing should be avoided whenever possible. In the case of the opening theme (Ex 13), the use of adjacent position and replacement fingerings can prevent the distortion of the fluent music line. Especially, the second and fourth position should receive full attention in

order to arrange more notes on the same strings, so as to eliminate some shifting and string crossing. For instance, at measure four, the note F is played on second position by the first finger. On the other hand, the replacement fingering, which means the same adopted different fingerings or vice versa, plays an important role as well. Like at measure five, same pitch G is initially played by fourth finger but then changed to the third, and the same finger switches on F sharp and G at measure six. This kind of fingering reduces the disturbance of the melody smoothness so that more expressiveness is achieved.



Ex 13

The broken fourths in the first movement are a novel passage (Ex 14). These successive fourths may cause a lot of discomfort to the right hand, as they are presented on four strings or three strings while the chords changes. Because the traditional training is usually focused on the triadic intervals, this new combination of fourth becomes a challenging pattern. One way to practice it is to divide the chord into three double stops, and find the relative pitch between each interval.



Ex 14

In the second movement, the broken chords are favored again, not the fourth interval but the interchange between major ninths, tenths and diminished eleventh (Ex 15). This called for extended hand positions and the fingers are better retained in the

same gesture. To feel the little different distance of each interval is like the expression of changing thoughts so that every one of them is unique and required for their own speed, dynamic and color. Especially at the time the double stop appears to combine with the broken chords, this is a sign that Barber asked for richer emotional expression.



Ex 15

Because Barber expects the brand new rhapsodic style in the third movement, his expression marks becomes an extremely important clue about what he intends to convey among those nonstop triplets. Therefore, the bow must be very flexible and responsive to the different emotional demands. Sometimes it can be confusing to determine what specific bow techniques to use, like Spiccato or Martelé, but as long as the bowings are based on the expressive requirements, there can be various approaches. For instance, at the beginning, the music is marked to be “leggero”, consequently the corresponding bowing can be Détaché at middle part of the bow or Spiccato at the best bounce point. Moreover, before the premiere by the renowned Philadelphia Orchestra, several trials are held to prove the feasibility of the last movement. Herbert Baumel, a student of Lea Luboshutz,¹⁷ is invited to play with the Curtis Institute Orchestra under the direction of Fritz Reiner¹⁸ in a demonstration. Concerning to this trial, Barbara Heyman writes in her book, “Samuel Barber: the Life and his Music”:

¹⁷ Lea Luboshutz (1885-1965), a Russian violinist was appointed to the Curtis Institute of Music in 1927.

¹⁸ Fritz Reiner (1888-1963), was a Hungarian conductor of opera and symphonic music.

“Fritz recalls that Barber was especially concerned about rhythmic execution—that long note values be played with precision and dotted half notes held for their entire duration.”

The mentioned long note and dotted half note appears in theme C (Ex 16), stated only by flute, oboe and clarinet. But for the violin solo, the challenging part of rhythmic execution will be to always keep the sound of triplets even.



Ex 16

This concerto for violin and orchestra contains so much complex emotion and is akin to an opera. Its prolonged lyricism and dramatic rhythmic pattern makes this piece very impressive, and it becomes one of Barber’s most frequently performed works. The performer must intuitively follow the composer’s musical sense so as to precisely represent his expressiveness.

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