

MPKS 472b Assignment #3

Qilin Ye

May 2, 2021

Bartók

The first movement is in sonata form, beginning with groups of machine-like chords with very stable tempo for eighth chords. As the piece transitions into development, the incessant repeating chords seem gone, replaced by softer single-note melody on the right hand. The recapitulation resembles the exposition, but this time with a clearer appearance of the theme. The first movement ends with an accelerated coda[?] Interestingly, while the tempo within each main block is predominantly $\frac{2}{4}$, Bartók constantly changes the tempo in transition paragraphs — for example $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{2}{8}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, and $\frac{5}{8}$ — and only to settle them once the next theme has been reached.

The second movement begins with a soft *E*-ostinato, which reminds me of *Le Gibet* from our previous assignment. It then leads to a first theme of wide chords. After a brief return to the ostinato, the music gradually moves to a second theme, which is characterized by denser chords on the right hand and, more importantly, left hand's pedal tone on low *D*. Although the majority of chords are of quarter notes, the time signature constantly changes: $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, $\frac{7}{4}$, $\frac{8}{4}$, and even $\frac{3}{2}$ have been used.

The third movement is much different from the first two — it begins straightforwardly with a folk dance, and the tonicity is much clearer. Also full of eighth chords and varying time signature, this movement, however, has a much more joyful nature. Once the main theme has been introduced, Bartók moves on to create variations including, but not limited to, texture, dynamics, and keys. Two of the variations featured decorations, further shaping the playful nature of the piece. (The first variation with decorations reminds me of *Catalogue des Oiseaux* very much.) Once again, the piece also ends with an accelerated coda.

So far, I have very little exposure to atonic music, so I am not very attracted to the first two movements; I do like the third though.

Griffes

The first movement is in sonata form, alternating between blocks *A* and *B* marked with theme below:

Allegretto con moto

Tranquillamente espressivo

Griffes constantly mixes minors with tritones to create dissonance, and he barely resolves them. Even when the piece turns major, it would only last one measure before tonal shifts take place again, for example:

The first movement “ends” with a climax, but it still does not resolve the last chords, which directly leads to the second movement. A rather short piece, the second movement has a miniature $A - B - A'$ format where B blurs the boundary between $\flat B$ minor and major. It ends with a dramatic crescendo and accelerated which leads (once again) directly to the last movement.

B-section of second movement

The final movement is again in clear *A–B–A* form, whereas *A* might have borrowed the main theme from the first movement, and *B* clearly refers back to the second movement's *B*. The extra timpani effect gives this movement a more ominous implication.

Griffes, surprisingly, gradually shifts the piece to *D* major in recapitulation. After three movements, he finally un-blurs the boundary between major and minor tonality and concludes the sonata by landing in *D* major.

Comparing with Bartók's sonata, I prefer Griffes' slightly more, especially the last two movements. Maybe I will one day play this set.

Barber

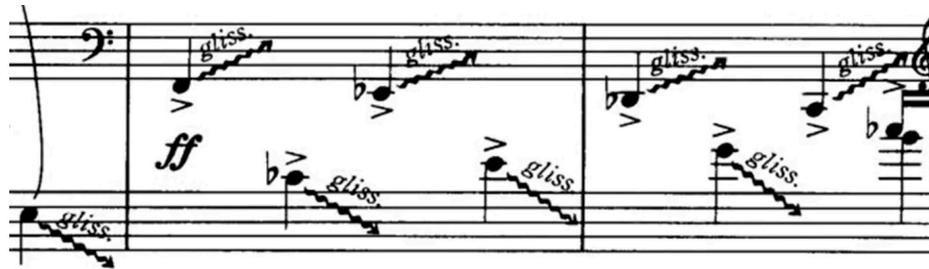
This sonata also follows a standard sonata form. The first movement can be clearly divided into exposition-development-recapitulation and a coda. The second movement is in strong contrast with the first one; it is a much lighter scherzo. Although atonal like any other movement, each block in the scherzo features a pitch center; *A*-block features *G*, *B*-block features *C* major, and *C*-block features $\flat E$ [?] The third movement is clearly of ternary form (and also a coda). The last movement, as suggested by the name, is based on a fugue. The piece employs subjects, countersubjects, episodes, and modulation just like a normal fugue would, but this one has an unusually long coda at the end, almost occupying one third of the piece's total length, and it ends with an augmented version of the first motive.

This again is too atonal for me... I would not really play this, not before I gain sufficiently knowledge and appreciation toward less tonal music.

Rzewski

There are many interesting techniques and elements Rzewski employs to express his specific musical ideas, some of which include:

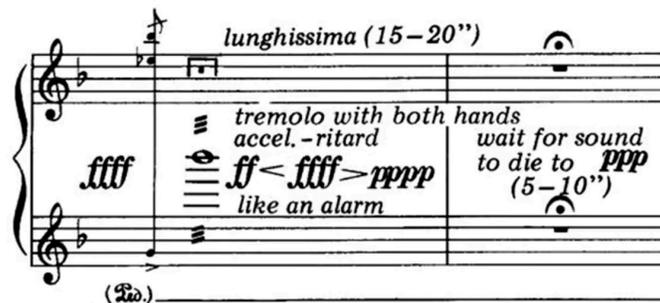
- (1) Continuous use of glissandos (var.10):



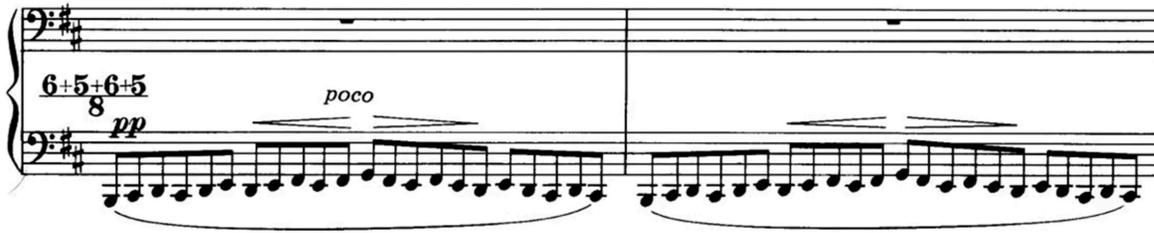
- (2) Strict tempo on one hand vs. completely unmarked tempo on the other (var.17):



- (3) Extremely long tremolo with exaggerated fermata (var.24):



- (4) Very "special" time signature to emphasize the flow of music (var.27):



- (5) But of course, I know you are not looking for what's listed above. The list of real factors that distinguish Rzewski's variations from traditional sets start here. Using after-vibration of a loud attack as harmonics (var.5):

Var.5 √ N.B. Dreamlike, frozen

(N.B.) Play chords staccato, then catch harmonics with pedal

(N.B.) √ = A mode of attack consisting of a swift, sudden grabbing motion in which not all of the written notes are necessarily played and some other notes may be accidentally struck; a little like picking berries, or fruit.

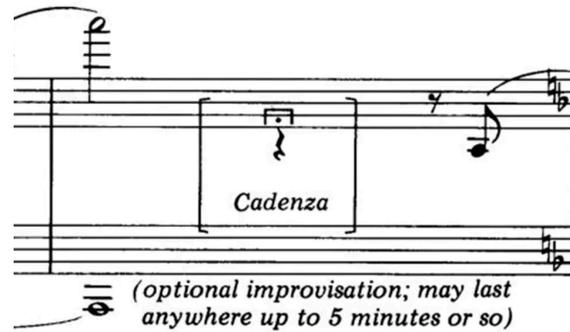
- (6) Slamming piano lid & incorporation of whispers and vocal components (var.12):

(optional) slam keyboard lid

(optional) whistle

(optional) short vocal cry

- (7) An opportunity for the performance to improvise up to 5 minutes (before main theme reappears), and the performer in this video actually did it!



In addition to its extreme demand of physique as well as virtuosity, there is yet another important factor that makes this piece less practical than it should be: audience's ability to focus. Due to its length, it is probably very challenging for those without professional musical training to listen to an hour-long piece without any break.

Lima

The most notable technique Lima "infused" is the incorporation of actions on strings. For example



where clearly the performer pressed down the strings to prevent vibration, or



where the performer performed a "glissando" on the strings. (These can be further confirmed by the notes the composer/editor added at the end of the piece in this video.)

Last Question

- (1) John Corigliano, *Fantasia on an Ostinato for Piano*. In this piece Corigliano tries to obtain a balance between the sense of minimalism and the lack of structure and material in minimal music. He achieves this by introducing the famous theme from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

- (2) William Bolcom, *The Poltergeist*. Some of the harmonic progressions resembles classical and romantic styles, although Bolcom also adds plenty of dissonance to the main theme. In addition to that, the excerpt (right hand) below actually reminds me of Chopin's $\sharp C$ minor Waltz's middle passage.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves. The top staff is the right hand, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#), indicating the key of D major or C# minor. The tempo/mood is marked 'leggiero'. The dynamics are marked 'pp' (pianissimo). The right hand part features a series of eighth-note patterns, often beamed together, with some dissonant intervals. The left hand part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

- (3) Stephen Hough, *Three Mozart Transformations after Poulenc*. The title is self-explanatory... Had Hough not received classical training, he most likely wouldn't have come up with such idea at all.