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# A master's recital in piano

Brittany K. Lensing  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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A MASTER'S RECITAL IN PIANO

An Abstract of a Recital  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Music

Brittany K. Lensing  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 2013

This Study by: Brittany K. Lensing

Entitled: A MASTER'S RECITAL IN PIANO

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music

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Date

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Dr. Dmitri Vorobiev, Chair, Thesis Committee

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Date

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Dr. Theresa Camilli, Thesis Committee Member

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Professor Sean Botkin, Thesis Committee Member

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Date

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Dr. Michael J. Licari, Dean, Graduate College

RECITAL APPROVAL FORM

This Recital Performance By: Brittany K. Lensing

Entitled: A MASTER'S RECITAL IN PIANO

Date of Recital: September 20, 2013

has been approved as meeting the recital requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music

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Date

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Dr. Dmitri Vorobiev, Chair, Thesis Committee

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## ABSTRACT

Brittany Lensing, pianist, presented her graduate recital at 6:00 in the evening on Friday, September 20, 2013, in Davis Hall of the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center at the University of Northern Iowa. This recital was given in partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree in piano pedagogy and performance. The program included works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, and Sergei Prokofiev. The following abstract will consist of historical and musical commentary on the programmed pieces.

Prelude and Fugue No. 12 in F minor, BWV 881, WTC Bk. 2.....J.S. Bach  
(1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach has become known as the crowning figure of the Baroque era. He composed for every genre with the exception of opera. Over the course of his life he wrote over 1,000 catalogued works for various instruments and genres.<sup>1</sup> The term “Baroque,” which comes from the Portuguese word for a misshapen pearl, was originally used to describe the ornate architecture found in German, Austrian, and Italian churches of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In music, it is used to describe a highly ornamented style with a harmonic basis that emerged around 1600 and ended about the time of Bach’s death in 1750.<sup>2</sup>

In the year of 1722 Bach wrote a set of 24 preludes and fugues in every key to compliment the new Well-Tempered tuning system. Twenty years later, he wrote another

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Wolff, et al, "Bach," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online.*

<sup>2</sup> Claude V. Palisca, "Baroque," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.*

set of 24 preludes and fugues, making a total of 48, which comprise both volumes of **The Well-Tempered Clavier**. These preludes and fugues demonstrate Bach's genius in use of variety and counterpoint. No two preludes are alike and every fugue is constructed in a different fashion.<sup>3</sup> This massive collection served as an influence to composers such as Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich who in turn wrote their own collections of preludes for every key.

Prelude no. 12 in F minor from book 2 is written with a singing and expressive style that is termed as *Empfindsamer Stil*, which was popularized by Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. Throughout this piece there are two main ideas: one consisting of parallel thirds and sixths, and the other characterized by runs of sixteenth note figures in the right hand with expressive suspensions in the left hand. This Prelude opens with a sigh motive (two note slur), a telling characteristic of the gallant style, and is in binary form.

The Fugue also opens with a sigh motive, but the increased tempo gives a sense of driving intensity that continues until the end. The first appearance of the subject in this three voice Fugue happens in the soprano followed by its tonal answer in the alto with the last statement of the subject occurring in the bass. After a restatement of the subject and answer in the relative major, fragments of the subject are used in sequences, which bring

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<sup>3</sup> Angela Hewitt, liner notes to *Bach: The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

the piece to close in the tonic key. There are no instances of *stretto* in this Fugue, only the subject in its basic form.

Sonata No. 23, Op. 57 (Appassionata).....Ludwig Van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

- I. *Allegro assai*
- II. *Andante con moto*
- III. *Allegro ma non toppo*

Ludwig Van Beethoven considered his Sonata no. 23 op. 57 in F minor to be his greatest sonata up until the time he composed the sonata op. 106.<sup>4</sup> The title associated with this sonata, “Appassionata,” was not originally given by Beethoven, but was added later by the publisher. This sonata was written during the same period as the “*Eroica*” symphony and the “*Kreutzer*” violin sonata and was dedicated to Count Franz Brunsvik, one of Beethoven’s close friends.<sup>5</sup>

Beethoven was one of the few composers whose fame in his own time has endured to the present day. While he is considered to be one of the greatest composers in music history, his background was less than spectacular. Beethoven received his first musical instruction from his father who was prone to bouts of drunkenness and being incredibly strict with his son’s music education. Beethoven’s circumstances were also challenging in his later years as he started to lose his hearing about the age of 30. Despite the hardships he faced, including thoughts of suicide, he continued to compose

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Czerny, *On the Proper Performance of All of Beethoven’s Works for the Piano*, ed. Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna: Universal Editions, 1970), 58.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold, Denis and Barry Cooper, "Beethoven, Ludwig van," *The Oxford Companion to Music*. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press.

and created works that contained levels of unprecedented expression and passion that revolutionized the standard forms of every genre for which he wrote.<sup>6</sup>

The opening theme of the first movement begins with outlining an ominous F minor triad, which is then restated a half-step higher in Gb major. This slow, creeping presentation of chromatically changing harmonies creates a tone of tension. Immediately following this suspenseful opening, the movement explodes in to a virtuosic display that spans the entire range of the keyboard. Although this movement is in sonata form, the exposition is not repeated, but goes straight in to the development. After a cadenza-like transition to the recapitulation, the first theme is restated over a repeated bass note. The tension that is built over this repeated bass note is brought to a dramatic climax and then drops down to a quiet ending.

The second movement is a theme and variations based on a two-part theme with three variations. While the melody itself is only a simple statement, the harmonic motion provides a warm and peaceful effect, which provides a moment of rest from the drama of the first movement and the relentless character of the third. The rhythmic motion of each variation becomes gradually faster as the note values are shortened in duration. A restatement of the original theme brings this movement to a close, ending with a surprising cadence. Instead of the expected tonic chord, the final harmony is a diminished seventh chord that serves as a link to the third movement.

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<sup>6</sup> Arnold, "Beethoven, Ludwig van."

The final movement opens with insistent repetitions of the diminished seventh chord from the second movement. After this short and dramatic introduction, the main theme appears and is characterized by a quiet and dark running sixteenth-note figure that creates a perpetual drive to the end. The form of this movement is interesting in that it is in sonata-allegro form, but instead of repeating the exposition, Beethoven writes a repeat for the development and recapitulation.

6 *Klaveirstücke*, Op. 118.....Johannes Brahms  
(1833-1897)

1. Intermezzo: *Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato*
2. Intermezzo: *Andante teneramente*
3. Ballade: *Allegro energico*

Johannes Brahms was a pianist/composer whose music held a significant role during the Romantic period. Unlike the work of Listz or Wagner, Brahms' music stands as testimony to Eduard Hanslick's controversial argument that music should not contain programmatic content, but should be enjoyed for its pure beauty and form. Brahms avoided using virtuosic brilliance to thrill audiences, but preferred to create works with sound craftsmanship and structural integrity.<sup>7</sup> His pieces are characterized by polyphonic textures and large chords, which demonstrate his obsession of writing with intervals of thirds and sixths. In addition to creating rich melodies and harmonies, Brahms was also fond of using rhythm as part of his musical language. Techniques such as hemiola, cross-rhythms, and accented off-beats have a prevalent role in almost all of his works.

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<sup>7</sup> John Gillespie, *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 257.

Brahms' Op. 118 is comprised of six pieces written in 1893 and is his penultimate set of solo pieces written for the piano. Intermezzo op. 118 no. 1 begins in A minor and is in binary form. Its powerful and dramatic opening creates a striking introduction to the set. This piece has hints of part-writing and prepares the listener for the following piece by ending in A major, the tonality of the second Intermezzo. The second Intermezzo is perhaps the most melodious in this set. The middle section of this piece is in the relative minor and is characterized by independent inner voices. The third piece in this set is a Ballade. This piece is in the typical ternary form and opens with a distinctive martial like theme in G minor. The middle section sharply contrast the opening by not only being written in the distant key of B major, but also with its singing, long breathed melody.

Sonata No.7, Op.83.....Sergei Prokofiev  
(1891-1953)  
II. *Andante coloroso*  
III. *Precipitato*

Among the nine sonatas composed by Sergei Prokofiev, the 7th sonata has remained the most popular. It was composed in 1942 along with nos. 6 and 8. These works became known as Prokofiev's "War Sonatas." According to biographer Daniel Jaffé, the character of this sonata can be seen as Prokofiev's reflection upon the terror and sorrow that resulted from the events under Stalin's leadership.<sup>8</sup> This piece had such an enthusiastic reception in various social circles that, ironically, it was recognized by the Soviet Union with the highest award a composer could receive - the Stalin Prize.

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Jaffé, *Sergey Prokofiev* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 160.

Prokofiev was a revolutionary composer in that he forged his own idiom at the piano by exploiting the rhythmic energy of the toccata and motoric patterns. He is considered the heir to Liszt in that he took Romantic tradition in pianism to the 20th century and went beyond its known limits, making his own brand of virtuosic excitement. While his music does contain a new style of rhythmic energy, percussive harmonies and virtuosic display, he continues to make use of traditional musical forms. The stylistic features in his music include: Neo-classicism, Neo-Romanticism, Expressionism, *Stile meccanico*, and Humor. Prokofiev once referred to his five lines of musical development as the “classical line” the “lyrical line” the “modern trend” the “toccata line or motor line” and the “scherzoish line.”<sup>9</sup>

The second movement begins with a lyrical melody in the inner voice and is Neo-Romantic in style. This peaceful, opening theme is actually a quotation of Schumann’s song *Wehmuth* (sadness) from *Leiderkreis*, Op. 39. The text to this song is “I can sometimes sing as if I were glad, yet secretly tears well and so free my heart.”<sup>10</sup> The middle section contrasts this beautiful and melancholy opening with its chromaticism, fleeting scales, and large dramatic chords, which may be likened to the sound of Russian bells. This movement then closes with a restatement of the opening theme.

The third movement is the most impressive. It is in an asymmetrical meter of  $\frac{7}{8}$ , which offers the listener a sense of agitation. Additionally, the large chords, ostinato bass,

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<sup>9</sup> John David Campos, *Program notes for a graduate piano recital: Preludes, Book I: Debussy, and Sonata no. 7 in B-flat major, op. 83: Prokofiev.*

<sup>10</sup> Jaffé, 172.

and *perpetuum mobile* style add to its dazzling impact. Like the first movement, the melody consists of broken segments stitched together and covered by rhythmic elements and dissonant chords. The rhythmic element of this movement creates a mood that reflects a relentless fervor for perseverance. This movement is a fitting example of Prokofiev's expressionist and motoric styles and can be likened to an expressionist toccata.

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**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**School of Music**

**Brittany Lensing\***, Piano

**Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center**

**Friday, September 20, 2013**

**Davis Hall, 6:00 pm**

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V. *Andante con moto*

VI. *Allegro ma non troppo*

~ *Intermission* ~

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\*From the Studio of Dmitri Vorobiev

This recital is in partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree requirement in Piano  
Performance and Pedagogy