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Graduate recital in violin

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GRADUATE RECITAL IN VIOLIN

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

Naima Burrs

University of Northern Iowa

July 2018

This Study by: Naima Burrs

Entitled: Graduate Recital in Violin

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Music

Date Dr. Ross Monroe Winter, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date Dr. Julia Bullard, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Patrick Pease, Interim Dean, Graduate College

This Recital Performed By: Naima Burrs

Entitled: Graduate Recital in Violin

Date of Recital: April 02, 2018

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ABSTRACT

Naima Burrs performed her Master of Music Recital in violin on April 2, 2018, at 8:00 pm in the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Art Center's Davis Hall. She was assisted by pianist Mariya Akhadjanova. The program selected included César Franck's Sonata in A Major for piano and violin (1886), Keith Jarrett's Elogy for violin and string orchestra (2000), Three Pieces for Violin and Piano (1967) by Dorothy Rudd Moore, and Song (2002) from Tango, Song and Dance by Andre Previn.

The world famous violinist Joshua Bell once said, "When you play a violin piece, you are a storyteller..." the works on the recital were selected with the goal of developing the narrative of telling a musical story. The *Sonata in A Major for piano and violin* by César Franck is from the standard violin repertoire. In this incredible piece of music, each movement has its own distinct "flavor." Franck explores many moods and feelings by developing a particularly warm and often dramatic dialogue between the two instruments.

The remainder of the program features some lesser known works for the violin, including works by two African American composers: *Elogy for Violin and String Orchestra* (2000) by Keith Jarrett, and *Three Pieces for Violin and Piano* (1967) by Dorothy Rudd Moore. Keith Jarrett is

regarded as an equally gifted jazz and classical pianist/composer, and his compositions are particularly interesting as they are often a hybrid of the two styles in terms of harmonic language and colors. Dorothy Rudd Moore is regarded as a pioneer - one of her generation's leading female composers of color. Her compositional output includes chamber music, art song and more. The final lesser-known work is from *Tango, Song and Dance: Song* (2002) by the German-American composer, André Previn. Previn is known and respected equally as a pianist, conductor and composer. Once married to the world-renowned violinist, Anne-Sophie Mutter, much of Previn's violin music is dedicated to or written in honor of her.

This collection of composers encompasses many different backgrounds, each with their own unique perspective. Despite their differences, they all share the fact that their compositions tell a story, and the violin is just the voice by which that story is told. It is important to not only explore each of the pieces from the point of view of the performer, but of the composer as well. Some topics include: What events took place in their life that might have influenced their composition? What struggles or successes contributed to their style, and in what way? For the composers who dedicated their composition to a specific person, does that imply anything about the piece and its process? Many sources exemplify the importance of influence, whether it

be personal or environmental, on the overall scope of a composer's output.

Through the exploration of these topics, we not only learn about the composers and their works, but also about the violin and its uses across many cultures and generations.

Keith Jarrett: *Elegy for Violin and String Orchestra*

Keith Jarrett was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania on May 8, 1945; the first of five sons born to Irma and Daniel Jarrett. His maternal grandparents were of Austrian and Hungarian descent; his paternal family African-American. Music was quite prominent in his family. Jarrett's grandmother was a pianist, his grandfather was a violinist, and his great-aunt was a piano teacher. His father was extremely fond of music but due to the fact that he was raised during the Depression, he was never granted the opportunity to study music.¹ Jarrett's mother had some musical experience and it was their goal as parents to expose their children to as many things as possible.

From an early age, it was apparent that Jarrett possessed prodigious musical abilities and his mother was eager to find a teacher to help foster his talent. As an infant, Jarrett was able to repeat melodies

¹ Ian Carr, *Keith Jarrett: The man and his music* (London: Paladin, 1992), 2-3.

and improvise at the piano but his mother wanted to be sure that he learn to read music so that he wouldn't be "limited" to strictly playing by ear.² Jarrett went on to give numerous recitals as a young child. At age 11, Keith's parents divorced and life changed drastically for the family. As the family was used to being a secure and stable unit, the divorce changed their world completely. The difference was drastic, as Carr states "Suddenly, Keith's smooth progress was disrupted by hardship, poverty, family strife and insecurity."³

As we explore Jarrett's music, his life experiences resonate quite beautifully. In the *Elegy*, which was dedicated to his maternal grandmother, is full of lyricism presented in a spoken nature; the pulse is consistent within each second, though the meter is constantly changing.

Jarrett's use of color is particularly interesting. The composition is based around the C major/c harmonic minor scales, often quickly shifting between the two. Sometimes the solo violin soars above the orchestra while at other times, it participates in a dialogue between the sections. The lyrical melodies are contrasted by moments of tension and urgency. Jarrett's use of the violin in the cadenzas shows great variety. In the first cadenza, the use of dissonance is particularly striking,

² Ian Carr, *Keith Jarrett: The man and his music* (London: Paladin, 1992), 3.

³ Carr, *The man and his music*, 10.

alternating between double stops of minor ninths and sevenths; this creates a sense of struggle and conflict. In the second cadenza, Jarrett marks the section as “urgent” with musical groupings of two and four notes vs. triplet figures; the cadenza naturally intensifies through rhythmic acceleration.

As the music flows between major and minor tonality, the final phrase played by the violin outlines a c minor arpeggio followed by two c minor chords in the accompaniment to close the piece. Although the mood that is set is extremely somber, we are oddly given a sense of finality. The voice of the violin varies throughout this entire work. The violin leads us through a musical journey as we experience moments of joy, pensive singing, urgency, and even respite. Perhaps, *Elegy* is a musical representation of Jarrett’s own life experiences.

Dorothy Rudd Moore: *Three Pieces for Violin and Piano*

Dorothy Rudd Moore was born June 4, 1940 in New Castle, Delaware. She was heavily influenced musically by her mother who was a singer. Through this influence, Moore began writing songs at a very young age. She had a great deal of interest in composition and started her musical education by taking piano lessons to develop her talents.

Moore went on to study music and was a graduate of Howard University (1963), one of the nation’s Historically Black Universities. She

was awarded the Lucy Moten fellowship which granted her the opportunity to study in France with Nadia Boulanger. Moore later married cellist and conductor, Kermit Moore, making them quite an important musical couple.⁴ Her compositional output includes a variety of works: song cycles, chamber music, orchestral music and one opera.⁵ Her music is unpublished but available through the American Composers Alliance.

Three Pieces for Violin and Piano is a short but musically dense work. The first movement, “Vignette”, starts with a smooth syncopated motive in the piano that continues throughout the movement. With the meter in 6/8, the music produces an easy swaying motion. This is quickly interrupted with outburst-like gestures in the violin, in a somewhat combative exchange between voices, but always returning to the feeling of calm.

The rhythmic shifts are particularly difficult within this movement. Meters of 5/8 and 7/8 already produce an off-balanced feel, and Moore makes it even more complex by giving the violin and piano different rhythmic emphases throughout the measures. This technique creates a very unique sound, as the instruments fit together like an intricate jigsaw puzzle.

⁴ Don Michael Randel, *Harvard Biographical Dictionary of Music*, Dorothy Rudd Moore: composer, poet, and singer, 2003.

⁵ Ibid.

The second movement, “Episode”, features a sparse introduction in the piano in a very slow tempo (40 beats per minute), making the pulse practically inaudible for any listener. This movement possesses a lyrical quality found in the violin’s melody, balanced by sustained chords and quick staccato bursts in the piano. Perhaps Moore is referring to those outbursts in the title of the movement.

The third movement, entitled “Caprice”, is the most playful of the set. Marked *Presto* with the dotted half = 100, the violin and piano share a quick and lively dialogue.

Throughout this work, the violin’s voice is smooth, angular, subtle, active, and dark. Moore uses the full range of the instrument often by featuring large intervals that showcase the different timbres; the violin is extremely versatile in her compositional style.

André Previn: “Song” from *Tango, Song and Dance*

André Previn was born April 6, 1929 in Berlin Germany; the youngest member of an affluent Jewish family. At an early age it was discovered that André had perfect pitch, so his parents enrolled him in the Berlin Conservatory of Music at the age of six. With the threat of war near (World War II), the family moved to Paris where Previn studied at the Paris conservatory; later moved to the United States. At the age of 14, Previn became a U.S. citizen and immersed himself in all things

American, finding a great interest in jazz. He continued to study piano, composition and theory to foster his talent and interests. To date, Previn is recognized as one of the most respected jazz and classical musicians, gracing the stage as not only a performer and collaborator but also as a conductor.

“Song” is the middle movement of a work entitled *Tango, Song and Dance*, written in 1997 and dedicated to Anne Sophie Mutter. The outer two movements, “Tango” and “Dance”, are lively and energetic, featuring complex rhythms and virtuosic showmanship required of the soloists. “Song” is quite the contrast because it is challenging in a different way. I find it interesting because in describing this movement, Previn says “Not much needs to be said about the middle movement the title Song is self-explanatory. The violin predominates throughout, and the accompaniment is simple and direct.”⁶ Though I agree that the music has a simplistic quality, Previn is able to create great warmth and musical depth within this movement.

The movement is centered around D major, with clear “landing” points to emphasize tonic. The piano part consists of mostly blocked chords with harmonic planing or parallel harmony, interwoven with some single melodic lines. The contrasting middle section has a developmental

⁶ Previn, Andre, *Tango, Song, and Dance*, G. Schirmer, Inc., 2002.

quality because the violin features interesting harmonies written in an improvisatory way. This movement is a wonderful blend of styles, written in a classical form and featuring some unique added-tone harmonies and jazz-like sounds. The violin's voice is as lyrical as any standard romantic work yet Previn's influence is evident.

César Franck: Sonata in A major for Piano and Violin

César Franck was born December 10, 1822 in Liege, Belgium. From an early age, Franck was musically proficient and was entered in the Belgium Conservatory at age 8. Soon after, Franck traveled and performed on tour and later attended the Paris Conservatory.

Franck is known as a pianist, organist and composer. He was an integral part of the movement to “give French music an emotional engagement, technical solidity, and seriousness comparable to that of German composers.”⁷

The *Sonata in A major for Piano and Violin* is one of Franck's most well-known works and one of the most beloved works in all of violin and piano repertoire. Written in 1886, it was a wedding present for Eugène Ysaÿe, one of the most virtuosic violinists to ever live. This says a great deal about the composition because the piece must include enough excitement, flare, and contrast to be appreciated by someone with

⁷ Britannica Academic. *Cesar Franck*. Accessed: March 21, 2018.

Ysaÿe's ability. This work is full of challenging violin lines, and the piano serves as anything but just an accompaniment.

The first movement, marked *Allegretto ben moderato*, is set in 9/8 compound time and full of sweeping melody. The violin and piano share a wonderful dialogue and it is complete with beautiful piano interludes.

The second movement, marked *Allegro*, is a technical feat for both instruments. Completely rhapsodic in nature, the violin and piano battle between sweeping lines and urgent syncopated imitation in canon. The piano starts the movement with a bit of murmuring that blossoms into the presentation of the thematic material, heavily embellished with flourishing all over the keyboard. The violin answers with the theme and the two instruments battle to the finish.

In the third movement, "Recitativo and Fantasia", the mood is much more improvisatory as the score is marked with *fantasia* and *stretto* throughout; a constant tug and pull. In preparing this movement, it is important to focus on the idea of tension and release, which sums up the general concept.

Movement four is the perfect conclusion to such a well-rounded and intensely dramatic piece. Back in the home key of A major, Franck presents a simple, sweet, and singing melody that sits in the upper voice of the violin. With another canonic presentation of a melody, the violin and piano are interwoven in a beautiful call and response interaction.

Franck takes the melody and cycles through A major, G-sharp major, E major, and B-flat minor before presenting the dramatic half note figure from movement two to tie it all together. The original fourth movement melody returns and the canon continues. Both the violin and piano expand to the top of their *tessitura* before finishing in their lowest octave, unified.

Conclusion

Although the violin has a general timbre that is identifiable by many, the way in which its voice is featured is very specific to the composer's style paired with the interpretation of the performer. The composers featured on the recital vary by race and ethnicity, gender, musical background, location, and even century of composition in some cases. Each piece was inspired by or in dedication of someone, which contributes to the difference in style and musical storytelling. With such a diverse grouping, it is especially apparent how versatile the violin is.

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School of Music
University of Northern Iowa

presents

Naima Burrs, violin
in a Graduate Recital

assisted by:

Mariya Akhadjanova, piano

In partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Master of Music degree in Violin Performance
From the Studio of Ross Monroe Winter

Elegy

Keith Jarrett
(b. 1945)

Three Pieces for Violin and Piano

Dorothy Rudd Moore
(b. 1940)

Vignette
Episode
Caprice

Tango, Song, and Dance

André Previn
(b. 1929)

II. Song

Intermission

Sonata in A major for Piano and Violin

César Franck
(1822-1890)

Allegretto ben moderato
Allegro molto
Recitativo-Fantasia: Ben moderato
Allegretto poco mosso