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Graduate recital in violin

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GRADUATE RECITAL IN VIOLIN

An Abstract

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music

Bethany Washington

University of Northern Iowa

May 2020

This Study by: Bethany Washington

Entitled: Graduate Recital in Violin

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music in Violin Performance

Date

Dr. Steve Sang Koh, Chair, Recital Committee

Date

Dr. Julia Bullard, Recital Committee Member

Date

Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, Recital Committee Member

Date

Dr. Jennifer Waldron, Dean, Graduate College

This Recital Performance by: Bethany Washington

Entitled: Graduate Recital in Violin

Date of Recital: March 27, 2020

has been approved as meeting the recital requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music in Violin Performance

Date

Dr. Steve Sang Koh, Chair, Recital Committee

Date

Dr. Jullia Bullard, Recital Committee Member

Date

Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, Recital Committee Member

Date

Dr. Jennifer Waldron, Dean, Graduate College

ABSTRACT

Bethany Washington scheduled her graduate violin recital for March 27, 2020 at 6PM with pianist Dr. Vakhtang Kodanashvili. Due to COVID-19 quarantine regulations, she met the alternative requirements provided by her graduate committee instead of presenting a live recital. The repertoire selected for her recital included *Sonata No. 2 in A Minor*, BWV 1003 by Johann Sebastian Bach, *Graceful Ghost Rag* by William Bolcom, *Sonata No 5 in F Major* by Ludwig van Beethoven, and *Resurrection Prelude and Rondo* by Denzel Washington. These works were selected not only because they cover a wide range of musical genres and styles, but also because they present a variety of technical and expressive challenges.

Sonata No. 2 in A Minor, BWV 1003 – Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) completed *Six Violin Sonatas and Partitas* in 1720 while living in Cöthen, Germany. While Bach was primarily a keyboardist, he was also an accomplished violinist, leading several ensembles as Kapellmeister and Concertmaster throughout his musical career. His solo violin sonatas and partitas were respected during his time and after his death. The solo works are challenging, particularly because of all the chords and double stops. It is clear while learning them, though, that Bach understood the layout of the fingerboard and how to write effectively for the violin. Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, talks about the value of these sonatas as a teaching tool in a letter to German musicologist Johann Forkel. C.P.E. Bach states, "One of the greatest violinists told me once that he had seen nothing more perfect for

learning to be a good violinist, and could suggest nothing better to anyone eager to learn, than the said violin Solos without bass.”¹ Forkel later expressed the same sentiment in his biography about Bach. Forkel wrote, “For a long series of years, the violin Solos were universally considered by the greatest performers on the violin as the best means to make an ambitious student a perfect master of his instrument.”²

Sonata no. 2 in A Minor (BWV 1003) has four movements: *Grave*, *Fuga*, *Andante*, and *Allegro*. This sonata is particularly suited for the sonority of the solo violin since all of the open strings are notes in the descending A minor scale. The first movement, *Grave*, has a slow, lyrical melody enhanced with chords, ornamentation, and rising and falling scales. To a listener, it sounds effortless and improvisatory, but every turn and ornamental figure is meticulously written out for the musician. The minor key and slower tempo give this movement an overall feeling of melancholy, but the scales create a turbulence that shows fleeting moments of hope, before falling back down to resigned sorrow that eventually transitions to peace and acceptance. The *Grave* is in binary form with a coda. The first section modulates to E minor, the dominant, and the second section returns back to the home key of A minor.³

The *Fuga* begins with a short two-bar subject and shows Bach’s mastery of both counterpoint and composing for the violin. It is truly amazing to see how Bach developed a two-measure subject into a two hundred and eighty-nine bar fugue. As Johann

¹ Dok III p.285, NBR pp.396-7 cited in David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* (S.l.: Yale University Press, 2019), p.14.

² Johann Forkel, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life, Art, and Work* (1802), p. 472, cited in David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* (S.l.: Yale University Press, 2019), p.15.

³ David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* (S.l.: Yale University Press, 2019), p.124.

Mattheson further explains, “one often finds the most excellent workings-out upon the fewest notes, or shortest fugue subjects, almost as the best sermons can be made on three or four words of text.”⁴

The subject is comprised of eighth and sixteenth notes, and it flows with a feeling of inevitability from key to key. The *Fuga* begins in A minor, with cadence points in E minor that lead back to A minor. After this return to tonic, Bach modulates to C major, the relative major. Next, the fugue arrives in E minor, the dominant, with a large cadence that marks the halfway point of this fugue. The second section of this fugue continues in E minor, before modulating into D minor. After a strong D minor cadence near the end of the fugue, Bach finally returns to A minor, before ending in A major with a Picardy third. Throughout all these keys changes, Bach manipulates the short subject through different voices and inversions, creating a contrapuntal masterpiece.

After this triumphant journey to A major, the *Adagio* movement begins in the relative major key (C major), giving the movement an “atmosphere of peace and warmth.”⁵ This movement is characterized by the eighth notes that continually pulse underneath the melody, like a heartbeat. The simple phrases and the soothing, rhythmic bass line provide respite after the “lengthy and elaborate”⁶ fugue. The expressive melody, clear accompaniment, and eight-bar phrases create a song-like movement that violinist

⁴ Dok.II p. 264, NBR p. 327-8, cited in David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* (S.I.: Yale University Press, 2019), p.123.

⁵ Jaap Schroder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 111.

⁶ David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, p.127.

Jaap Shroder compares to an “aria.”⁷ The fugue may be more compositionally and technically stunning, but I think that this movement is truly the heart of this sonata. The movement is clearly in binary form, with different first and second endings for both sections. It provides a unique challenge to the performer, who needs to keep the lyrical melodic line constant while simultaneously playing the rhythmic bass line.

The final movement of this sonata, *Allegro*, brings us decidedly back to the home key of A minor. This movement consists almost entirely of sixteenth notes, with a few thirty second notes that add a dance-like, lilting quality to the steady pulse. This movement is also in binary form, though the second section is almost double the length of the first section. The movement starts out with two phrases that each echo and “give a sense of expansiveness and large scale, enhanced by the long stretches of static harmony at the beginning and ends of strains.”⁸

Graceful Ghost Rag – William Bolcom

William Bolcom (b. 1938) is one of the foremost American composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. He was a pupil of Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen, and has been a recipient of a National Medal of Arts Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and a Grammy Award. He composes prolifically and also performs and records his own works. He was the “Ross Lee Finney Distinguished University Professor of Composition” at the University of Michigan until his retirement in 2008.

⁷ Jaap Schroder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 109.

⁸ David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, p.128.

Bolcom's music is eclectic and mixes different styles and genres together. His works use ragtime, blues, and pop song references but are based within the classical tradition. Regarding Bolcom's writing style, violinist/musicologist Tze Lim explains, "Eclecticism in music has sometimes been criticized as sounding artificial...Bolcom, however, has the natural ability to blend all the various elements and creates truly coherent and convincing masterpieces."⁹ Bolcom grew up taking composition and piano lessons but was always fascinated by the violin. He took a few violin lessons, but those were not as "successful"¹⁰ as his piano lessons.

Nonetheless, Bolcom has composed numerous works for violin and strings including four violin sonatas, eleven string quartets, and eight works for solo violin and piano, as well as an adaptation of *Graceful Ghost Rag*. *Graceful Ghost Rag* was originally a part of *Three Ghost Rags* (1970) for solo piano. Then, it was adapted for a trio of clarinet, violin and piano, as a movement of *Afternoon Cakewalk Suite* (1979). Finally, in 1983, Bolcom arranged it for solo violin and piano as a wedding present for his friend, Sergiu Luca. In each iteration, the rag pays homage to Bolcom's father.¹¹

Graceful Ghost Rag begins and ends in A minor, unlike most minor rags which transition and end in a major key. The form is AABB(variation of AA)CCA, where CC is the trio section.

⁹ Tze Yean Lim. *Works for Violin and Piano by William Bolcom: A Study in the Development of His Musical Style*. (D.M.A. Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2002.) p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid. p 7.

¹¹ "Program Notes." American Double: Program notes for our Repertoire. <http://www.americandouble.com/repertoire/details.html>.

Bolcom says the Rag was “written almost as if designed for Kreisler himself,”¹² and it uses techniques like double stops, pizzicato, harmonics, and glissandi that are also common in Kreisler’s works. The form uses slight variation to create interest within repetition. After the violin and piano play the A section together, the violin plays it again with double stops while the piano simply accompanies. In the B section, the piano begins by playing the entire melody alone, then, during the second repetition, the violin joins in with an accompanying obbligato line. Next, we get a true variation section, with the violin playing first a line of constant sixteenth notes, then plucking constant sixteenths while the piano plays the melody. This almost “improvisatory”¹³ section moves into a syncopated line that follows a descending line that gently brings us back to the opening theme. The theme is played one final time before the trio section.

In the trio section, the piano starts with the theme, and the violin accompanies with sparse pizzicato, before briefly bowing the melody. The trio moves to F major, the submediant, which follows the traditional form and key structure of ragtime music. After the trio, the A theme comes back with pizzicato double stops followed by artificial harmonics in the violin. After a brief cadenza moment in the piano, both instruments fade away on a final arpeggiated A minor chord.¹⁴ The rag is simple, and hauntingly beautiful. It has moments of grief and pain, but also moments of dance, and life. Its

¹² “William Bolcom, liner notes to *Second Sonata/Duo Fantasy/Graceful Ghost*” cited in Tze Yean Lim. *Works for Violin and Piano by William Bolcom*. p. 62.

¹³ Tze Yean Lim. *Works for Violin and Piano by William Bolcom*. p. 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 62-67.

accessibility makes it easy to see why there are so many versions of it and why it is Bolcom's "single most famous work."¹⁵

Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonata No. 5 in F Major op. 24 (*Spring*)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) wrote for almost every instrument and genre. His music bridges the gap between the Classical and Romantic periods and is filled with markers of his unique style. Historians have divided his life into three periods, with his music pushing more and more musical boundaries, primarily regarding form, in his later periods. Overall, Beethoven's music is rhythmically interesting, and his melodies and themes are usually derived from small rhythmic fragments, in a way similar to Bach's fugues. Beethoven's music is full of dynamic contrast and *sforzandos*, accents, and specific articulation markings. He lived almost half of his life with some degree of hearing loss and became completely deaf in 1818. Beethoven composed *Sonata No. 5 in F Major "Spring"* in 1800-1801, shortly after he began to notice his hearing loss.¹⁶

Beethoven did not give this sonata its nickname, "Spring," but this title was in use as early as 1860. American musicologist Lewis Lockwood suggests that this "shows that listeners from early on were seeking an appropriate metaphor for the special features of this work, its consistent melodic elegance and ingratiating musical qualities."¹⁷ This sonata was originally paired with another sonata, Opus 23, but it was not possible to bind

¹⁵ Andrew Lindemann Malone. William Bolcom: Three Ghost Rags, for piano. Allmusic.com. Accessed March 22, 2020.

¹⁶ Joseph Kerman, et al. "Beethoven, Ludwig van." Grove Music Online. 2001; Accessed 18 Mar. 2020.

¹⁷ Lewis Lockwood. The Beethoven Violin Sonatas: History, Criticism, Performance. (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 24.

two separate sonatas under one opus number, so the two sonatas were split up and each received their own opus number. Opus 24 has four movements, which was a relatively new development in the genre.

The first movement, *Allegro*, opens with a singing melody, accompanied by a gentle alberti bass in the piano. After the first statement of the melody, the violin and piano trade roles and the piano plays the melody while the violin plays the accompaniment. Written in sonata-allegro form, the second theme is “rhythmic and energetic,” which is a nice contrast to the “simple and elegant” first theme.¹⁸ This sonata is truly a duet between two equally important instruments, and throughout the first movement the piano and violin trade off roles and pass melodic lines back and forth. Sometimes it is a gentle, easy conversation, and other times a spirited, intense conversation, punctuated by accents and filled with interruptions.

While the first movement is bright and welcoming, the second movement is intimate and tender. *Adagio molto espressivo* moves to B-flat major, the subdominant, and presents a heartfelt melody in the piano, which is then passed along to the violin. The movement follows an ABA structure, followed by a long coda.¹⁹ Like the first movement, the piano and violin seamlessly weave together throughout the movement, passing the melody and harmony parts back and forth. It is also possible to think of this movement as a subtle theme and variation movement, however, the ABA form better explains the

¹⁸ Midori Goto. “Ludwig Van Beethoven: *Sonata In F Major Op. 24 “Spring.”* Last modified 2004. Accessed March 18, 2020. <http://www.gotomidori.com/program-notes-2/>.

¹⁹ Lewis Lockwood. *The Beethoven Violin Sonatas*, p. 36.

exploratory middle section found between measures 17-37, where the theme is never fully present.²⁰

The third movement is, in a way, the most memorable movement. Though it is by far the shortest, its character is the most distinctive. The playful *Scherzo* returns to the home key of F major and begins with an offset rhythmic imitation between the piano and the violin. Described as “wrong-footed”²¹ or “a game of tag,”²² this use of imitation certainly leaves an impression on audience members and shows Beethoven’s humor. During the trio section, the violin and piano unite together with lively scales, arriving triumphantly at the peak together, before returning to the disjointed opening once more.

The fourth movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*, matches the “lyrical and graceful”²³ style of the first movement. The rondo’s main theme is first presented by the piano, then the violin steps in and plays the melodic theme. While the theme plays around with chromatics and accidentals, the movement is still solidly in F major. While this movement certainly still has Beethoven’s signature on it, which can be heard in the subito dynamics, *sforzandos*, and rhythmic interjections, there are also moments where we can clearly hear Mozart’s influence on Beethoven in the simple opening theme and accompaniment, and the clarity throughout the movement.

The Sonata as a whole invites the listener into a musical world filled with beauty and a childlike playfulness. The collaboration between the violin and piano creates an open space, where music is shared freely, which increases the effect of the music on the

²⁰ Midori Goto. “Ludwig Van Beethoven: *Sonata In F Major Op. 24 “Spring.”*”

²¹ Lewis Lockwood. *The Beethoven Violin Sonatas*, p. 37.

²² Midori Goto. “Ludwig Van Beethoven: *Sonata In F Major Op. 24 “Spring.”*”

²³ Lewis Lockwood. *The Beethoven Violin Sonatas*, p. 37.

audience. The melodies have an innocent, pure quality, and even the introspective and at times sorrowful second movement is filled with uplifting moments. It is clear to see why this sonata is a favorite among both musicians and audiences.

Resurrection Prelude and Rondo – Denzel Washington

When I thought about what I wanted to program on my graduate recital, I knew I needed to have something composed by my husband, Denzel Washington. He is the reason I applied at the University of Northern Iowa and has been by my side helping me throughout the last two years. Since my recital was scheduled to take place about two weeks before Easter, I decided to program *Resurrection Prelude and Rondo*, a two-movement, solo violin work that is based on a Biblical text telling the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, which Christians celebrate on Easter Sunday.

Denzel Washington draws inspiration from a “variety of composers, such as Charles Ives, Edward Elgar, and Igor Stravinsky.”²⁴ He composed *Resurrection Prelude and Rondo* in 2019 for an album of Easter hymns that we recorded and released in 2020. The album, *Promises Fulfilled* shares a name with the second movement of this work.

The first movement, *In Gethsemane*, “paints a sound picture of Jesus' suffering and anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane as found in Matthew's 26:36-46.”²⁵ Written in B minor, Washington takes advantage of the darker tones and colors that the minor key provides. He uses advanced techniques throughout the movement including parallel

²⁴ Washington, Denzel. “Team.” Dlwmmuse.com. Accessed March 03, 2020.
<https://www.dlwmmuse.com/team>.

²⁵ Washington, Denzel. “Notes on In Gethsemane.” Personal Communication (email to author.) March 2, 2020.

seconds, artificial harmonics, and pizzicato. These techniques also highlight the painful emotions described in the Biblical passage. The opening theme “evokes tense emotions with steep ascending and descending leaps that draw the ear to focus on the dissonance.”²⁶ The ascending melody is followed by descending seconds, which symbolize Jesus’ “despair”²⁷ in the garden.

I think one of the most challenging aspects of this movement are the rests. The main theme has four quarter note rests throughout the six-bar phrase, and these rests are repeated each time any part of the main theme returns throughout the piece. Since this is a piece for unaccompanied violin, it can be challenging to find the balance between resting and breathing and keeping the tension throughout the phrase. The performer needs to be careful that each fragment of the phrase leads to the next fragment, and creates a long phrase, instead of stopping and restarting every time there is a rest.

Promises Fulfilled continues the Biblical narrative referenced by *In Gethsemane*. While it does not have a specific Biblical reference attached to it like *In Gethsemane*, it is clear that this movement is a continuation of the Biblical story of Jesus’ death through crucifixion, and resurrection three days later. Washington explains, “This composition evokes the joy of salvation that is made available because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”²⁸ The joyous rondo is in A major, and is lighthearted, simple, and brings a smile to my face every time I hear it. Washington follows the traditional ABACA¹B¹A¹ rondo form and concludes the movement with a coda. While Washington introduces a

²⁶ Washington, Denzel. “Notes on In Gethsemane.”

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Washington, Denzel. “Notes on Promises Fulfilled.” Personal Communication (email to author.) March 2, 2020.

few minor keys in the B and C sections, the piece still retains an overall feeling of light cheer, emphasized with every return to A major.

This movement is filled with scales that dance around the melody, and lead in and out of the key changes. It has fewer advanced techniques and is laid out in a logical way that is easy to follow. Due to the rondo form, by the end of the movement, the A theme feels familiar and comforting because of its repetition. The piece is centered in the key of A major, returning triumphantly to the bright A major key after diversions to F-sharp minor, A minor, and C major. Throughout the movement, Washington continues to build momentum through double stops and quicker note values. I think the climax and best moment of the piece happens after a brief fermata in measure 81. The A theme finally returns in A major again, and instead of staying in a middle register, it climbs up and is played an octave higher. This moment perfectly encapsulates the inevitability and joy of the entire movement. After this climactic repetition of the A theme, the theme flows into the coda, filled with flashy scales that slowly descend and bring the melodic line back down, until a gradual, measured, ritardando leads to a final “A-men” figure that pays homage to traditional hymns.

Conclusion

The repertoire picked for this recital includes time-tested standards of the violin canon, a more recent work by an acclaimed American composer, and a newly composed work that I premiered. All of the works present their own challenges technically and musically. Bach’s solo works require a mastery of double stops, while Bolcom’s piece

requires a complete shift in style. *Graceful Ghost Rag* blurs the line between a “classical” concert piece and the relaxed, “jazzy” ragtime style of playing. Beethoven’s sonata requires an intense knowledge of the music, down to every articulation and dynamic in the violin part as well as the piano part, while Washington’s work requires an open mind, and a willingness to take an active part in creating music from notes on a page.

These pieces all presented technical challenges as well. Bach’s solo violin sonata is filled with chords and double stops. *Graceful Ghost Rag* had harmonics, slides and double stops. Beethoven’s Sonata required careful tuning with the piano and had challenging finger patterns. Washington’s work had less common double stop intervals, and the unique challenge of being the first performer to interpret the music and turn the notes on the page into sound. All of the works require careful bow control and an accurate and expressive left hand. I have found value in learning every one of these pieces and am excited to add them to my repertoire.

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<https://www.dlw muse.com/team>.

School of Music

University of Northern Iowa

presents

Bethany Washington, violin
In a Graduate Recital

assisted by:
Vakhtang Kodanashvili, piano

In partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Master of Music degree in violin
From the Studio of Dr. Steve Sang Koh

Sonata No. 2 in A Minor, BWV 1003

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

- I. *Grave*
- II. *Fuga*
- III. *Andante*
- IV. *Allegro*

Graceful Ghost Rag

William Bolcom
(b. 1938)

Intermission

Sonata in F Major, op. 24 (Spring)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Adagio molto espressivo*
- III. *Scherzo: Allegro Molto*
- IV. *Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo*

Resurrection Prelude and Rondo

Denzel Washington
(b. 1995)

- I. In Gethsemane
- II. Promises Fulfilled

Davis Hall, 6:00 P.M. March, 27, 2020