A study of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Toccata in E minor, BWV 914; Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op. 10, No. 3 in D major; Claude Debussy’s Pour le piano L. 95; and Frederic Chopin’s Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23

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A Recital Abstract Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Music

Hanna Stolper

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December, 2022

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Entitled: A study of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Toccata in E minor, BWV 914; Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op. 10, No. 3 in D major; Claude Debussy’s *Pour le piano* L. 95; and Frederic Chopin’s Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23

has been approved as meeting the Recital Abstract requirements for the Degree of Masters of Music

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Toccata in E minor, BWV 914 by J.S. Bach

Historical Context

Johann Sebastian Bach was born on March 21, 1685 in Eisenach, Germany and was the youngest of eight children. Bach came from a family of musicians which had several composers including his children such as Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach. In 1723, Bach was employed as the Thomaskantor at St Thomas’s in Leipzig. He worked on compositions for the Lutheran churches of the city as well. From 1726 to 1730, he published some of his keyboard and organ music as well, including his 48 Preludes and Fugues in the Well Tempered Clavier, which were written between 1722 and 1741, English Suites, French Suites, Partitas, The Goldberg Variations, and other various works such as his Manualiter Toccatas.

From 1706 to 1717, Bach composed a set of seven Toccatas. Although the toccatas were not originally grouped into a collection by Bach, the pieces were eventually grouped and often performed together under the Manualiter Toccatas. The term Manualiter Toccatas refers to a work for a keyboard instrument to only be played with the hands. Each toccata included contrasting material throughout the piece such as fugal passages, instrumental recitatives and rhapsodic material. This differed from the more familiar prelude and fugue format.

The word “toccata”, which comes from the verb toccare, means “to touch.”

Toccatas are often relatively extensive pieces that combine improvisatory introductions

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2 Barbara Cleo Mirano, A study of J.S. Bach’s Toccata in E minor, BWV 914, 13
with multiple contrapuntal passages, however the genre was not strictly defined at the time. German and Italian toccatas were often short preludial pieces which display technical adeptness from the performer. Bach’s *Manualiter Toccata* were inspired by the toccatas of Frescobaldi and Buxtehude, who also influenced the Italian, German, and French toccatas that became popular in later years.

The *Toccata in E minor*, BWV 914, consists of four sections, or episodes, which were standard for the *Manualiter Toccata*. Bach wrote this toccata around the time that he was beginning to experiment with improvisational keyboard works which is clearly displayed throughout the piece.

**Introduction**

The toccata opens with an Introduction which consists of a four-note motive, each beginning on the offbeat of beat one. The material that follows this motive in a slightly higher register which gives the impression that these are different voices having a dialogue with one another. These phrases continue throughout the Introduction still avoiding a strong pulse on the first beat of each measure. As the episode progresses, it modulates through A major and B major, and finally returns to E minor. In measure 11, we hear a clear downbeat with an octave E on beat one in contrast to the previous 10 measures. This octave propels the piece to end the episode in E major with the Picardy third raising the G to a G#.

**Un Poco Allegro**

The second episode is marked as *Un Poco Allegro*, meaning “a little fast”. This episode is a four voiced fugue beginning with the tenor and alto voices. Both the subject and countersubject begin at the same time creating a suspension between the voices. Two
measures later, the soprano and bass voices enter with the soprano voice containing the counter subject and the bass voice containing the subject. The episode continues to elaborate on the subject and countersubject as voices pass them around, continuing to create numerous suspensions. Typical of a Fugue, this episode uses devices such as stretto and modulations. The end of the episode concludes with a Picardy third once again, this time containing a suspension which resolves on the final chord.

**Adagio**

The third episode is marked *Adagio*, and is the most improvisatory of all four episodes with arpeggiations, scales, and frequent mood changes indicated by the harmonic progression. The episode begins with an arpeggiated E minor chord setting a dark mood. This is then followed by a recitative like passage which leads to another arpeggiated chord. This continues throughout the first seven measures which cadences in E major. The mood changes once again leading into b minor followed by another recitative line. This continues throughout as it modulates between closely related keys. The material changes towards the end of the episode as it introduces a pedal point in dotted rhythm working through a harmonic progression. This leads the piece to, once again, end in a Picardy third, similar to the previous two episodes.

**Fugue: Allegro**

The final episode is a three voice Fugue marked Allegro. In the exposition, the subject enters in the alto voice in the tonic key. This is soon followed by the subject entering in B minor in the soprano voice, with the alto voice containing the counter subject. This continues as the tenor and bass enter with the subject, and the soprano and alto voices harmonize on the counter subject. In the development, the episode passes
between three-part and two-part texture between the entry of each subject. The three voices all restate the subject in the conclusion, and the texture begins to thicken. Similar to the Introduction and *Adagio*, the Fugue ends with an improvisatory line which outlines E major as it finally concludes with a Picardy third.

**Discussion of Work**

Bach gives each episode of the toccata a tempo marking, with the exception of the introduction. The range of tempos gives the performer freedom to explore the differences of each episode and create one unified piece.³ To determine the tempo of the introduction, it may be beneficial to observe the pattern of tempo changes throughout the toccata. The second through fourth episode alternate between fast and slow, which can lead one to believe the introduction should be slower or more broad. The *Adagio* has the least strict tempo of the four episodes as it is written in a fantasia style. Both the *Un poco allegro* and the fugue have steadier and faster tempos which support their contrapuntal texture.⁴

Similar to the differences in tempo, the texture is also different throughout each episode. The articulation and dynamics in performance enhance these differences and can be used to match their texture and mood. For example, in the *Un poco allegro*, the performer may choose to detach the eighth notes and keep the sixteenth notes connected. This also may be the case in the fugue as well. The constant movement of the sixteenth notes does not allow for any detachment of the notes, so to create a difference in sound, the larger note values are performed with more separation. The *Adagio* is more expressive and rhapsodic in the arpeggios and scales which should be played legato.

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³ Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of J. S. Bach’s Toccata in E Minor”, 16
⁴ Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of J. S. Bach’s Toccata in E Minor”, 16
Badura-Skoda states, “many of the arpeggios in Bach’s keyboard music should also be played legato.” This directly applies to the arpeggios written in the third episode and explains why the performer should not detach the notes of the arpeggios.

**Sonata Op. 10, No. 3, in D major by Ludwig van Beethoven**

**Historical Context**

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770. Beethoven was born into a musical family and was taught by his father, Johann van Beethoven who instructed him. Some would consider his instruction to be harsh and intense. Under Beethoven’s next teacher, Christian Gottlob Neefe, Beethoven published his first work, which was a set of keyboard variations. He moved to Vienna at the age of 21 and studied composition with Haydn. At the age of 22, Beethoven continued his musical training with the composer and conductor, Christian Gottlob Neefe. Beethoven began to compose for orchestra and string quartet settings in 1800, and produced his First Symphony. Beethoven began to lose his hearing in his mid-20s, however he continued to compose, despite the hearing loss, resulting in many other well-beloved works. He finished composing his final piano sonata in 1822, but continued to compose other works with his last piece being *The Ninth Symphony.*

Beethoven’s work can be split into three periods. His first period began as he arrived in Vienna in 1792 where he had mastered the ‘Viennese style.’ His piano sonatas in this period were larger in scale with some sonatas having four movements rather than three. His compositional style was very dramatic, using extreme dynamics and tempi.

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5 Bardura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, 123
The final piano sonata he composed in this period was the well-known *Pathétique* sonata, Op. 13.

Beethoven’s middle period, from 1802 to 1812, was when he began to realize he was experiencing deafness. His works in this period show heroism and struggle, which can be seen in his 3rd through 8th symphonies and several piano sonatas which include the *Waldstein* Sonata and *Appassionata* Sonata.\(^6\)

The late period began around the year 1810 as his deafness was reaching its peak. He had begun to study works of Palestrina, Bach, and Handel resulting in advanced polyphony in all of his compositions at this time.\(^7\) In this period, he composed his last five piano sonatas, Diabelli Variations, and his final Ninth Symphony.

Beethoven composed the piano sonata No. 7 in D major, Op. 10, No. 3 in 1796 and expressed his understanding of the classical Viennese style through this sonata. In this sonata, one can see moments of despair, bombastic orchestral passages, and even Beethoven’s sense of humor.\(^8\)

**I. Presto**

The first movement of this sonata is marked *Presto*. This movement expresses bursts of energy and virtuosity in comparison to lyrical moments.\(^9\) The exposition of the movement begins with an opening four note motive which is used throughout the piece. The first phrase moves upward after this four note motive ending in a fermata. The following phrase begins with the same four note motive before moving downward with first inversion chords. The third phrase also begins with the four note motive, this time in

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\(^6\) Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of J. S. Bach’s Toccata in E Minor” 19

\(^7\) Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 10, No. 3 in D major” 24

\(^8\) Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 10, No. 3 in D major” 23

\(^9\) Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of J. S. Bach’s Toccata in E Minor”, 23
broken eighth-note sixth intervals. This is followed by a restatement of the first phrase with syncopated eighth-note octaves. The second theme begins in measure 23 in a contrasting, softer mood from the beginning. This theme contains the four note motive from the beginning, but now in B minor. The development plays around with the motive with a broken chord ostinato in the right hand which leads into the restatement of the first theme. The recapitulation restates the same theme from the beginning and moves to the second theme being in D major. The movement ends with a short lyrical and harmonically intriguing codetta.10

II. Largo e mesto

The second movement of this sonata is very different from the mood of the first as it reflects pain and hopelessness.11 This movement is marked Largo e mesto, which means broad and sad. The first measure begins with a six-note melody in the right hand while the left hand has supporting, thick textured chords. After a few measures, a more lyrical passage comes in which displays sadness and pain. This is due to the harmonic progression and follows the lyrical hand material. The piece continues to go back and forth between thick textured sections and lyrical sections. The mood completely shifts when the piece goes from D minor to F major. There are still disrupting angsty moments within the lighter section, which eventually draws the movement back to the broad and sad material from the beginning.

III. Menuetto: Allegro

The third movement is a minuet and trio that are now back in D major. The mood of the movement is much more peaceful than the previous movement. This minuet is in

10 Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of J. S. Bach’s Toccata in E Minor”, 29
11 Barbara Cleo Mirano, “A study of J. S. Bach’s Toccata in E Minor”, 35
triple meter and opens with an eight-bar question phrase followed by an eight bar answer. The next phrase leaps down to a lower register and works its way back up to the higher register of the piano where it stays for a while before working its way back to the middle register. The movement has a lot of two note slurs, insinuating a sighing motion followed by a staccato chord which should be completely detached. The trio is in G major and features a dialogue between a staccato left hand movement and broken chord eighth-note patterns in the right hand. The piece ends with the return of the minuet with no repeats.

IV. Rondo: Allegro

The fourth movement begins with a three-note gesture that is featured all throughout the piece. This gesture is surrounded by more virtuosic materials. The movement has a modulation to B flat major which is similar to the first movement, Presto. This is then followed by the three-note gesture in F major. The gesture comes back two more times in different variations before leading to a coda. We can hear echoing of this three-note gesture throughout the entire ending while the left hand has oscillating sixteenth note patterns. The piece finally ends with a big arpeggiation up and down the keyboard to a final single note to end the sonata.

Discussion of Work

The tempos Beethoven assigned to each movement greatly reflect the spirit of the piece. The first movement is the fastest of all four as it is marked Presto. This is the most lively of all four movements and should be played not only faster, but with significantly more energy. The second movement, marked Adagio, allows the performer a break from this and provokes more emotion. This movement is all about displaying the sadness and pain that the other three movements lack. The third and fourth movements are both
marked Allegro. They are not as fiery and fast as the first movement but still should display lots of forward motion and energy as well. The dynamic range of the piece is diverse, reaching pianissimo and fortissimo in most movements. Standard to most repertoire, the ascending scale lines seen in both the first and fourth movements should be played with a crescendo, and the descending lines with a decrescendo. In the Adagio, most of the dynamics stay within the softer dynamic spectrum with a major focus on the melodic line. Even in the louder places, there should still be significantly more melody with proper voicing with the remaining notes.

**Pour le piano, L. 95 by Claude Debussy**

*Historical Context*

Claude Debussy was born August 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1862 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. He is seen as one of the first influential impressionist composers in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Debussy attended one of France’s leading music colleges, the Conservatoire de Paris where he studied piano and composition. He composed various orchestral, piano, and chamber works for a combination of instruments as an Impressionist composer. His works include his own unique style of harmony and orchestral coloring. In his 30 years of composing, Debussy wrote works that inspired composers including Béla Bartók, Olivier Messiaen, and George Benjamin.

Debussy’s *Pour le piano* suite consists of three movements, Prelude, Sarabande and Toccata, and was completed in 1901. This work was regarded as Debussy’s first mature piano composition.
Prelude

The first movement, the Prelude, is marked *Assez animé et très rythmé*, which means ‘with spirit and very rhythmically.’ The piece begins with the theme in the bass, with the right hand having a broken eighth-note chord pattern. After a section with the continuation of this right hand and left hand movement, this time including a long pedal point, we hear the original theme resurface with thick textured chords marked fortissimo. These are followed by a “glissandi that Debussy wanted to be dispatched like ‘d’Artagnan drawing his sword’.” The pedal point returns in the middle section this time with different content above. The piece returns to the original theme passage along with the thick textured chords and glissandos. The conclusion begins with a section marked *Tempo di cadenza*. The movement ends with large fortissimo chords which span over half the keyboard.

Sarabande

The second movement, Sarabande, is marked *Avec une élégance grave et lente*. The Sarabande was originally found in his *Images Oubliees*, which were composed in 1894 which contained six compositions. These were written as a three cycle piece for piano with the Sarabande being second in the set.

Toccata

The last movement is a toccata marked *Vif*, which means lively. This movement is “energetic, extroverted and graceful.” Despite its virtuosic nature, the toccata’s focus is

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not to be in tempo, but rather maintain clarity within the constant running sixteenth notes. This movement of *Pour le piano* greatly displays the performer's touch and technique.

**Discussion of Work**

In *Pour le piano*, Debussy focused on creating a range of articulation throughout, which is seen mostly throughout the *Prelude*. The *Prelude* begins with a long legato section, but is contrasted by a detached thick chordal section. Throughout the piece there are moments where both hands are performed with different articulation creating a more percussive effect with the detached notes. The fast and perpetual motion throughout the piece can come across as blurry if not well articulated. This is similar to Bach’s toccatas as the piece is more transparent, and the performer should consider the keyboards in the Baroque era and how the touch is clear and articulate. With the differences in texture and various voices happening in large spans across the piano at the same time, it is easy to lose the melody in the density of the notes.

Along with a large articulation range, there is also a wide range of dynamic levels as well. The *Prelude* and *Toccata* have swelling in dynamics and feature a lot of accents throughout. These accents, as well as tenutos, are often placed on the melodic notes to further emphasize what voice should be brought out the most. The Sarabande stays on the softer end of the dynamic range. Similar to the second movement of the Beethoven sonata, the top voice is often the voice that should be brought out the most, with the voices underneath being in the background. There are many rolled chords throughout the piece which creates a challenge in bringing out the outermost voices. This is due to range between the notes and the need to keep each note of the rolled chords even rhythmically and tonally to play the keys.
Debussy’s style of harmony and orchestral coloring is widely due to his primary focus on opera and orchestral music. In works such as *Sirènes* and *Nuages*, Debussy featured a wide range of color due to the wide range of instrument pairings.\(^{14}\) *Nuages* has moments with only harps and trumpets creating a unique color. He was able to orchestrate different and unusual instrument pairings and keep the same color throughout a passage of the piece. This is the same in the *Pour le piano* which was his first big piano work around this time in his life. The colors created with Debussy’s orchestration is reflected in this work by using harp-like arpeggios and display of percussive sounds.

**Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23 by Frédéric Chopin**

*Historical Context*

Frédéric Chopin was born March 1, 1810 in Zelazowa Wola, Poland and grew up in Warsaw where he received piano lessons and composition lessons from Jozelf Elsner. Chopin was considered a child prodigy and began composing before the age of 20. Chopin’s compositions include solo piano nocturnes, preludes, etudes, ballades, piano concertos, and chamber pieces.

Chopin’s Ballade No. 1 was composed in 1833 while he was in Vienna, and later published after he settled in Paris. Chopin was one of the first to compose a piece in the ballad genre. The word Ballade comes from the word *balada*, which means dance or dance song.

The piece begins with a short introduction with an arpeggiation of a first inversion A-flat major chord. This is followed by the first theme of the piece which appears in G minor and is quite melancholy. This theme develops and becomes more virtuosic as it

propels forward with a gradual accelerando. This leads to the second theme in E-flat major and displays a complete mood shift from the first theme. The first theme appears again briefly in A minor and leads into a restatement of the second theme, this time in E major. The restatement of the second theme is now more heroic and exuberant compared to its last appearance. The interlude begins and dances through various keys and lots of chromaticism before leading back into the second theme one last time in E-flat major. The first theme also appears one more time before shifting moods again into the fiery coda. The coda is marked *Presto con fuoco* which means ‘fast, with fire’. The piece ends with double octave chromatics scales in contrary motion, followed by a loud and concluding tonic chord.\(^{15}\)

**Discussion of Work**

Chopin’s Ballade No. 1 in G minor tells a story overall. This story is shown through the two themes and how they interact harmonically displaying the change in character and emotions. The piece is said to have been inspired by Adam Mickiewicz’s poem, *Konrad Wallenrod*. Schumann even commented that Chopin drew inspiration from “certain poems by Mickiewicz.”\(^{16}\) The poem tells of a Lithuanian pagan, Wallenrod, being captured by Christians, and narrates his devious plan of tricking the Teutonic Knights into a military defeat between Poland and Russia. He is sentenced to death, but decides to flee. Wallenrod’s wife refused to flee with him despite his impending execution. Because of this, Wallenrod ends his own life.


The Ballade reflects the characters in this piece by assigning a theme to both Wallenrod and his wife. The dynamics enhance this story by showing the mood of the themes and the characters they represent. The first theme, which is Wallenrod’s theme, is played with the least dynamic range being melancholic and more subtle. The second theme, which is Wallendrod’s wife's theme, is a completely different mood showing contentment. This contrast in mood is helped by the modulation from G minor to E-flat major. The second theme consists of louder dynamics and a faster tempo. Two of the times this theme appears, the texture is significantly thicker creating a challenge for the performer to play faster, representing their dialogue becoming more heated. With the assistance of key changes, the interlude is virtuosic and reaches across a large range in dynamics, and the chromaticism plays up and down leading the performer to crescendo as it rises and decrescendo as it falls. This section of the piece represents the war Wallenrod partakes in between the Polish and Russia. The coda is a fast and fiery spot of the piece. The dynamics are on the loud end of the spectrum and is one of the fastest sections of the piece. The coda represents Wallenrod’s decision to end his own life before he is executed by the Russians. This passage is difficult for the performer to accurately play and voice each of the important melodic notes hidden within the thick texture and capture the imagery of Wallendrod’s fate. The coda ends with large virtuosic scales with intermittent death march-like chords creating a contrast in moods, finally ending with a chromatic descending of parallel octaves.
Bibliography


Hanna Stolper, Piano

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the MM degree in Piano Performance
From the studio of Dr. Vakhtang Kodanashvili

Toccata in E minor, BWV 914  
J.S. Bach  
(1685-1750)

Sonata in D Major, Op. 10, No. 3  
Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

Presto  
Largo e mesto  
Minuet  
Rondo

Intermission

Pour le piano, L. 95  
Claude Debussy  
(1862-1918)

Prelude  
Sarabande  
Toccata

Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23  
Frédéric Chopin  
(1810-1849)

Davis Hall, at 8:00 P.M.  
Friday, November 18, 2022