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A Graduate Recital in Piano

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A Graduate Recital in Piano

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

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Abstract

Heather Gillis presented a full graduate piano recital on Friday, March 10, 2023. The recital was performed at 8:00 p.m. in Davis Hall in 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 Performance and Pedagogy. The program consisted of works by Sergei Prokofiev, Robert Schumann, and Joseph Haydn. This abstract contains further discussion of performed works.

Sarcasms, Op. 17 by Sergei Prokofiev

Russian composer and pianist Sergei Prokofiev (1891 – 1953) was born in Sontsivka, Ukraine. Exhibiting musical talent from his early childhood, Prokofiev completed his first compositions at age five. He was admitted to the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1904, when he was thirteen years old. There, Prokofiev studied composition and orchestration with Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov and conducting with Nikolay Tcherepnin. Despite his opportunities to study under esteemed pedagogues, Prokofiev's experience as a young artist was defined by lack of adherence to rules.

The nature of the young, rebellious composer exhibits itself throughout *Sarcasms, Op. 17*. Prokofiev composed this five-movement work for solo piano throughout 1912 – 1914, during the “Russian period” of his career (1891 – 1917),¹ and later published it in 1916. Regarded as one of the composer's most dissonant works, the movements of *Sarcasms* have been described by Eteri Andjaparidze as “throbbing unleashed rages,

¹ Stephen C.E. Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 7.

contemptuous quips, jeers, anarchic pranks.”² In his formal education, Prokofiev was exposed to a traditional musical environment, which contributed to his growing defiance against the expectations he experienced as a composer. In his autobiography, Prokofiev once categorized his own compositions along “five lines of musical development,” which include “the “classical line,” the “modern trend,” the “toccata, or motor’ line,” the “lyrical line,” and the “scherzoish line.”³ The scherzo, which as a musical genre connotes vigorousness and playfulness, here involved a sense of laughter and mockery, according to the composer.⁴ In a discussion of the aesthetic of Prokofiev’s piano music, Stephen Fiess writes that it

would not be complete without mention of his sense of humor. Prokofiev frequently delighted in musical irony: parodies of dances and marches, unexpected twists in melody and harmony, grotesque use of the low register of the piano, and ridiculous insistence upon incongruous elements.⁵

An exhibition of musical ironies and incongruous harmonies, *Sarcasms* realizes the aesthetic of “scherzoishness.”

The first movement, marked *Tempestoso*, or ‘tempestuous,’ exhibits two compositional aspects which may be observed in four subsequent movements. The first aspect is the loose structure of the movements, in which two main themes are presented and later fragmented. The second compositional aspect of the movements of *Sarcasms* is the varied tonal areas, which do not necessarily reflect accidentals provided in the key

² Eteri Andjaparidze, liner notes to *PROKOFIEV: Ten Small Pieces / Sarcasms / Visions Fugitives*, CD, Naxos, 8.553429, © and ® 1997.

³ S.I. Shlifstein, ed. *S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), 36-37.

⁴ Anne-Marie McDermott, liner notes to *PROKOFIEV, S.: Piano Sonatas Nos. 1-9 / Sarcasms, Op. 17*, CD, Bridge Records, BCD9298, © and ® 2009.

⁵ Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev*, 5.

signature. For the opening of the first movement, four measures of hollow octaves on a melodic tritone create a sense of unease until a right-hand theme is supported by a more concrete harmonic structure in the left hand. The movement is unified in its varied themes with consistent use of the major seventh interval. However, the second theme reveals the maturity of the young composer through a luscious, ascending melody with a surprising presence of major triads. The same theme presents itself in a modulated key in the second theme. The first statement of this theme is written with A-flat acting as its tonal center; followed by a restatement of the section with A-natural acting as its tonal center. Chromatic modulation results in a complete inverse of accidentals, creating climactic tempestuousness.

The second movement, marked *Allegro rubato* in a simple triple meter, presents a stark contrast to the first movement. Accidentals are not provided in the key signature, and although these are present in every measure, there is an obvious lack of a tonal center throughout the movement. While the first movement is driven by a steady, machine-like tempo, the second movement is propelled forward only by *a tempo* markings in between *rallentando* and *accelerando* markings. Additionally, a sense of urgency and anticipation may be explored through dynamic contrast, presented first in the section marked *Piu mosso*, or ‘moving more.’ These dynamic markings may be considered ‘terraced,’ as transitions between dynamic levels are not gradual, but sudden. A third and final instance of terraced dynamics, ranging from *piano* to *fortissimo*, draws the movement to a climatic close. Dissonant rolled chords, to be played as ascending sweeps, resembles the sound of a high-pitched shriek, or mocking laughter.

The third movement, in simple quadruple meter, plunges motivic elements back into the bass range of the piano. Marked *Allegro precipitato*, or ‘fast and sudden,’ this movement conveys a sense of unrest until a final pitch resolves the tension to a single B-flat that acts as the tonal center. Congruent with Prokofiev’s use of chromatic harmonies in his early works, this movement features bitonal key signatures.⁶ The upper staff, for the right hand in the bass range, is marked with three sharps, suggesting the key of F-sharp minor, while the lower staff, to be played with the left hand, is marked with five flats, suggesting the key of B-flat minor. While dual key signatures are eventually cancelled with natural signs, this convergence does not create a sense of finality, as the following section lacks a tonal center entirely. Chromaticism defines the movement, but it especially defines the B section in which a new theme is presented. Prokofiev adds layers to the musical texture with a definite melodic quality in the right-hand, above an eighth-note counter melody in the left hand. Marked *Un poco largamente*, or ‘Widening a little,’ this passage presents what is arguably Prokofiev’s most sophisticated writing within the entire work. A four-voice texture recalls an older tradition of choral or fugal writing, yet Prokofiev modernizes the compositional technique with syncopated rhythms and non-traditional harmonic content. For only four measures of a climatic *fff* passage, dual key signatures return with one flat suggesting the key of D minor in the right hand, and with three sharps suggesting the key of F-sharp minor in the left hand. After this brief transitional passage, the movement closes in the previous dual signatures of F-sharp minor and B-flat minor, respectively.

⁶ Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev*, 24-25.

The fourth and fifth movements individually demonstrate stark contrast between insistent *forte* and restrained *pianissimo* dynamics. As if making a mockery, Prokofiev conveys a heightened sense of grandiosity through use of the extreme upper register of the piano, later to be reckoned by a state of lowliness as themes muddle through the extreme lower register of the piano. As an interpretive lens, the performer might entertain storytelling throughout the two final movements. With an increased use of pedal and overlapping sonorities, a greater atmospheric quality may be achieved. Movement four, in simple quadruple meter, marked *Smanioso*, or ‘eager,’ presents an eager character in the A section only. While the B section relies upon a steady tempo, both sections are characteristic of Prokofiev’s preference for accentuated and syncopated rhythms, recalling Beethoven’s “rhythmic surprises.”⁷ The second section requires awareness of the pulse to be performed clearly. Because each measure bears a unique rhythmic pattern, it is essential to maintain a sense of the downbeat so that rhythmic stability is not lost among harmonies sustained over bar lines. In addition, the fourth movement is unique in terms of touch sensitivity. The final section of the movement, which fragments the initial theme, is marked *ppp*, signaling a lightly swept glissando for the right hand in the upper register. The glissando is also marked with a *ritardando* and *una corda* pedaling, creating a surprisingly delicate texture amidst Prokofiev’s otherwise boisterous writing.

The fifth and final movement expresses Prokofiev’s preference for multi-meter signatures with an opening varying between 2/4 and 3/8 meters.⁸ Without accidentals present in the key signature, harmonies in the left and right hands are marked with

⁷ Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev*, 41.

⁸ Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev*, 41.

accidentals and with accents, yet a performer may still accentuate the downbeat to convey a sense of the metric changes. These, too, provide the performer with a framework for storytelling. Marked *Precipitosissimo*, or ‘very precipitously,’ the movement opens suddenly with uneven rhythm and a *fortissimo* dynamic, creating the effect of mocking laughter. The performer may expound on this character in the B section, marked *Andantino*. This section contains peculiar performance instructions, including *irresoluto*, or ‘irresolute;’ *lamentevole*, or ‘complaintive;’ and *con duolo*, or ‘with sorrow.’⁹ Contrasting characters are exposed primarily through articulation and melody, amidst a thin musical texture and understated harmonies. The performer may imagine a scene in which the character is hesitant or fearful, and may convey a reluctant attitude by playing the right hand melody with rubato, while the left hand keeps a steady beat. Finally, the player must be willing to entertain the performative and dramatic aspect of *Sarcasms*. To make musical sense of this work requires embodying its emotive quality. This, among dynamic explosions and dramatic articulations in the earlier movements, demonstrates the affective quality of Prokofiev’s *Sarcasms*.

***Nachtstücke*, Op. 23 by Robert Schumann**

German Romantic composer and music critic Robert Schumann (1811 – 1856) was born in Zwickau, Saxony. Renowned for his solo piano compositions and his insightful writings on contemporary music, the 1830s were a particularly illustrious decade in the composer’s life, in which he produced some of his most substantive works. Among Schumann’s masterpieces of the 1830s, including *Carnaval*, *Fantasiestücke*,

⁹ Sergei Prokofiev, *Sarcasms*, Op. 17, ed. Levon Atovmyan (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955), 19.

Kreisleriana, and *Humoresque*, Schumann composed *Nachtstücke* (Night Pieces) just months after *Humoresque* in 1839. Originally titled *Leichenphantasie*, or “Corpse Fantasy,” the work was a response to the death of the composer’s brother, Eduard, in the same year. A diary entry from this period records Schumann’s ‘remarkable premonitions’ during April of 1839,¹⁰ in which he noted:

There’s a passage there that I kept coming back to—where it is as though someone were weighed down with sorrow and groaning ‘Oh God’—as I composed I kept on seeing funeral processions, coffins, lost, despairing people, and when I had finished and was long searching for a title, I always lit upon: Corpse Fantasy. Isn’t that odd? As I was composing, I was often so shaken that the tears poured out....¹¹

Nachtstücke was published in 1840, just after the publication of E.T.A. Hoffman’s *Eight Tales*: a book with two halves, each containing four stories. From this, Schumann drew inspiration when he observed that in *Eight Tales* there are “repetitions that seem compulsive, nightmarish, relentless or accursed; only in the last story in each half does repetition bring release.”¹² The four-movement structure of Schumann’s *Nachtstücke* follows a similar format.

Compared with Schumann’s other works of the same decade, *Nachtstücke* is seldom performed, perhaps due to the repetitive nature of the work. Each of four movements repeats rhythmic and melodic patterns in a manner which musicologist Laura Tunbridge recalls as “chronically depressed, compulsively making the same movements over and over again.”¹³ The first movement, titled “Trauerzug” (Funeral Procession),

¹⁰ John MacAuslan, “Schumann’s Music and E.T.A. Hoffman’s Fiction” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 195.

¹¹ Laura Tunbridge, “Piano Works II: Afterimages,” In *Cambridge Companions to Music*, ed. Beate Perrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 95.

¹² MacAuslan, “Schumann’s Music and E.T.A. Hoffman’s Fiction,” 201.

¹³ Tunbridge, “Piano Works II: Afterimages,” 95.

begins in marching tempo, as a funeral dirge. The longest of four movements in simple quadruple meter, it provides little rhythmic variety, favoring a consistent texture throughout, and an overall tempo which marches dutifully. Instead, contrast results from changes in tonality, with a shift from minor to major presented after the first statement of the theme. These shifts between diminished and minor harmonies to major harmonies provide an example of the composer's frequent shifts in harmonic language. Though this change is obvious between the first three themes, it is masked by the underlying consistency in pulse. As an additional unifying element, each melodic theme is comprised of descending melodies, suggesting that both the minor and the major tonalities bear the theme of death and descension. This downward spiral presents an interpretive challenge to the performer. To prevent the repetition from feeling monotonous, the performer must imagine what subtle varieties in phrasing and dynamics would add depth to the narrative. Within the overall form ABACAA', the C section presents the greatest interpretive challenge. A double bar presented at measure 49 begins a four-measure phrase which modulations between each of its six statements. In the Peters Edition, which was selected for the performance of this program, no dynamic variation is present. To provide contrast, the performer may assign different timbres to each modulation through crescendo, tone color, and rubato as appropriate for the Romantic style.

The second movement, titled "Kuriose Gesellschaft" (Strange company) features a luxurious use of rubato fitting for the Romantic style. Representing Schumann's use of repetition, the form of the second movement follows an inverse pattern of ABCBA (sometimes called "arch form"), following a pattern of shifting key areas in F major, A-flat major, D-flat major respective with the sections. Implied by frequent *ritardando*

markings, the surges in tempo could be interpreted as irregular flow of conversation between members of the “strange company.” A sense of rubato in the second movement must be carefully prepared and organically executed. Like the melodic use in the first movement, the second movement presents descending melodies generally. Greater contrast is achieved through Schumann’s use of upward melodic leaps, creating a sense of striving toward a resolution. The second movement personifies Schumann’s compositional characteristics, as the musical texture is intricately woven with harmonies. A transitional passage in the second theme features four-voice counterpoint with chromatic motion, as presented in measures 43-45 and in 112-114.

Example 1. Four-voice counterpoint in Schumann’s *Nachtstücke*, second movement, measures 112-114.

The image shows a musical score for measures 112-114 of the second movement of Schumann's *Nachtstücke*. The score is in G-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a 'ritardando' marking above the staff. The right hand has a melodic line with fingering (5, 3, 1, 5, 4, 3, 5, 4, 3, 2) and the left hand has a chromatic bass line with fingering (2, 3, 4, 2, 3, 1, 4, 5, 4, 3). The score is written for piano and includes a treble and bass clef.

Secondly, Schumann’s drastic shifts in musical character are present throughout. This is especially apparent at the return of the main theme, which occurs after a *ritardando* followed by a sudden *sforzando* and *a tempo* marking.

The third movement, titled “Nächtliches Gelage” (Nocturnal reveries) features themes which are, arguably, the most diverse among the four movements. Amidst the form ABACA, the first section is characterized by rich sonorities in D-flat major, with billowing arpeggiated gestures in the left-hand bass range, and overall vitality recalling

the tempo marking, *Mit großer Lebhaftigkeit*, or ‘with great vivacity.’ The second theme is presented in the relative minor, which features a song-like melody sustained over currents of eighth-note rhythms, divided between the left and right hands. The performer will benefit from capitalizing on the mounting tension caused by sudden change to staccato articulation and a change in tempo, marked *Noch lebhafter*, or ‘even livelier.’ Schumann prepares the modulation with an uncommon tonal shift from D major to D-flat major, which is connected through the dominant function of each key area, and further support by secondary-dominant functional harmonies.

The fourth and final movement of *Nachtstücke* contains four-voice counterpoint of widely spaced intervals, which are suggested to be rolled while applying the sustain pedal for harmonic support. The spacing of individual melodic lines causes this movement to sound like a chorale tune; fitting for a moderate-tempo movement titled, “*Rundgesang mit Solostimmen*.” The translation of this title, “Roundelay with solo voices,” suggests a simple song with a refrain, reiterating Schumann’s proclivity to repetition. To designate the refrain, the form ABA’CA’’ may be observed, while recognizing that subsequent statements of the A theme contain differences in the latter four of eight total measures. Though in a four-voice setting the melody is usually placed in the top voice, Schumann’s presentation favors not one melody in the soprano voice, but also a countermelody in the tenor voice. The performer must be sensitive to the duet between the soprano and tenor lines, while allowing the bass voice to be sustained in the harmony for its full duration. A sense of space and broadening is achieved not only on the vertical plane of the harmonic interval, but also on the horizontal plane of beat consistency interspersed with eighth rests. Though in previous movements there was

tension due to diminished harmonies and surging rubato among chromatic lines, in the fourth movement, there is no urgency. Rather, it functions as a subdued farewell to Schumann's *Nachtstücke*, recalling a sense of "release" that Schumann observed in E.T.A. Hoffman's *Eight Tales*.

Sonata No. 52 in G Major, Hob. XVI:39 by Joseph Haydn

Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809), born in Rohrau, Austria, spent his musical career in a palace synonymous with his reputation as a composer. Haydn spent nearly thirty years composing for the noble Esterházy family at the Esterházy palace in Eisenstadt, as well as in Vienna during the family's travels. Haydn's surroundings, due to the structural design of the pristine campus, mimicked the symmetry and elegance that characterized the classical era in which he composed music.¹⁴ Haydn played a crucial role in the development of the string quartet, the symphony, and the piano trio and sonata, contributing a large body of compositions which has lasting influence in twenty-first century music performance.

Sonata No. 52 in G Major, Hob. XVI: 39, was published in 1780 as a set of six sonatas dedicated to the talented sisters Franziska and Maria Katherina von Auenbrugger. Referred to as the 'Auenbrugger Sonatas' (Nos. 35-39, plus No. 20), this set demonstrates a shift to a new era in Haydn's compositional practice. Haydn's previous sonatas were composed for the harpsichord, and it is uncertain whether Haydn had access to a

¹⁴ Vladimir Feltsman, liner notes to *HAYDN, J.: Keyboard Sonatas Nos. 31, 32, 33, 34, 52, 53, 58, 59*, CD, Nimbus Alliance, NI6242, © and © 2013.

fortepiano before 1778.¹⁵ This set was published, ‘*Per il clavicembalo o Forte Piano*,’¹⁶ to designate use for either the harpsichord or the fortepiano instruments. Incorporation of this instrument exerted influence on Haydn’s methods through notation of dynamic markings which the fortepiano could produce.

The first movement of Haydn’s Sonata No. 52 in G major, marked *Allegro con brio*, or ‘fast and with vigor,’ manifests the humorous reputation of the composer. For the opening, Haydn recycled material from his own *Scherzando* second movement of Sonata No. 36 from the ‘Auenbrugger’ set.¹⁷ Haydn maintained this theme in the first movement of the G major sonata, but altered it with use of variations form, in which themes are presented in the relative and parallel minor keys. Throughout, themes occur within a short, eight-measure duration; each separated by double bar lines with repeat signs. Because of Haydn’s intentional restatement of themes, it seems he may have been making a joke out of the variations form. The performer may benefit from acknowledging this characterization, to emote the music with charm, lightheartedness, and teasing. Conversely, if the spirit of the work is ignored, then the restated themes pose the potential problem of monotonizing the material. To avoid this, the performer may consider varying the dynamics, though some are editorial in addition to Haydn’s own markings. The performer may also take liberty to improvise, using Haydn’s mordents, trills, and appoggiaturas as a guide for improvisation in the classical style.

¹⁵ Bernard Harrison, *Haydn's Keyboard Music: Studies in Performance Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

¹⁶ Marc-André Hamelin, liner notes to *HAYDN Piano Sonatas*, vol. 2, CD, Hyperion Records, CDA67710, © and ® 2009.

¹⁷ Marc-André Hamelin, liner notes to *HAYDN Piano Sonatas*, vol. 2.

The *Adagio* second movement, written in triple meter and in C major, allows the performer liberty in terms of ornamentation. Performing the second movement requires attentive listening to shape melodic lines over a relatively sparse, broken-chord texture in the bass. The scholar Bernard Harrison identifies notational ambiguities within Haydn's sonatas, arising from the absence of a dotted or double-dotted rhythm. In the second movement, Haydn composed a lusciously ornamented melody, which sometimes falls into the category of notational ambiguity. Measures 9 and 33 feature a sustained trill for three beats, followed by an ascending major scale. Though combined note values present identical phrasing and melodic function, measure 9 is notated with a half note followed by a quarter note (Example 1), while measure 33 is notated with a dotted half note (Example 2). Making the case for inaccurately written rhythms, Harrison used the example of double-dotted rhythms which are inconsistent in Haydn's writing. While notational discrepancies may be attributed to editorial or publishing mistakes, these are apparent elsewhere in Haydn's writing, and may be observed on the synchronization of two or more beats, the notation of the upbeat, or on rhythms which do not make mathematical sense.¹⁸

Example 2. Trill presentation in Haydn's Sonata in G Major, Hob. XVI: 39, second movement, measure 9.¹⁹



¹⁸ Harrison, *Haydn's Keyboard Music: Studies in Performance Practice*, 101.

¹⁹ Joseph Haydn, *Keyboard Sonata in G major, Hob.XVI:39*, ed. Carl Adolf Martienssen (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1937), 58.

Example 3. Trill presentation in Haydn's Sonata in G Major, Hob. XVI: 39, second movement, measure 33.²⁰



In this example, it is possible that the discrepancy was the composer's intention to vary the trill presentation slightly, with a grace note in measure 33, instead of a quarter note. Thus, the resolution of the trill is reduced in its duration, and the resolution of the scale is prolonged until the following measure.

The final movement, returning to the key of G major, presents a simple binary form in compound duple meter. Among the three movements, the third movement conveys the most animated and lively spirit. The *Prestissimo* tempo marking contributes to this, as it is the only such marking throughout Haydn's sonatas.²¹ Within the tempo, technical challenge is presented because the action of the modern piano is heavier than that of Haydn's pianoforte. Articulation comprises an important role in conceptual understanding, as the movement contains syncopated rhythms which otherwise disturb a sense of rhythmic hierarchy. Tenuto and staccato markings, as well as slurs, guide the performer to an understanding of a melodic structure in the absence of a regular downbeat pulse and substantial harmonic progression. The presentation of the melody, adorned with ornamentation and intervallic leaps, combined with reduced harmonies in

²⁰ Haydn, *Keyboard Sonata in G major, Hob. XVI:39*, 60.

²¹ Vladimir Feltsman, liner notes to *HAYDN, J.: Keyboard Sonatas Nos. 31, 32, 33, 34, 52, 53, 58, 59*, CD, Nimbus Alliance, NI6242, © and ® 2013.

the left hand, recalls the sound of Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas. The performer may assume the same direct touch required of Baroque keyboard playing, while maintaining a sense of lightness to capture the essence of Haydn's classical sound.

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presents

Heather Gillis, Piano
In a Graduate Recital

In partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Master degree in Piano Performance & Pedagogy
From the Studio of Vakhtang Kodanashvili

Sarcasms, op. 17

Tempestoso
Allegro rubato
Allegro precipitato
Smanioso
Precipitosissimo — Andantino

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891 – 1953)

Nachtstücke (Night Pieces), op. 23

Trauerzug (Funeral procession)
Kuriose Gesellschaft (Strange company)
Nächtliches Gelage (Nocturnal reveries)
Rundgesang mit Solostimmen (Roundelay with solo voices)

Robert Schumann
(1811 – 1856)

Sonata No. 52 in G Major, Hob. XVI:39

Allegro con brio
Adagio
Prestissimo

Joseph Haydn
(1732 – 1809)