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Junior recital: Program notes

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Junior recital: Program notes

Abstract

The following program notes provide a brief historical background and harmonic analysis of the pieces performed at my Junior Recital. These pieces include several solo piano pieces, a piano duet, and a saxophone/piano duet.

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JUNIOR RECITAL: PROGRAM NOTES

By

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Junior Recital: Program Notes

Variations in G Major, WoO70

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Born in Germany, as a child, Beethoven was his father's student and was quickly recognized as a musical prodigy. At the age of twenty-two, Beethoven began studying piano with Haydn. He soon became one of the greatest composers in the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras, incorporating more feelings and emotion into his music than any previous composer. By the early 1800s, Beethoven began losing his hearing. As a musician, this troubled him greatly, nearly ending his career and life. However, Beethoven wrote, "Ah, it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me." With that, Beethoven continued to compose, despite his growing deafness, and composed some of his greatest pieces.

The theme of Beethoven's *Variations in G Major*, WoO70 is "Nel Cor Più" from Paisello's opera, *La Molinara*. The comedic opera centers around a beautiful and mischievous woman, Rachelina, who is sought after by two suitors and is unsure of which one she will choose. Their feud is entertaining for Rachelina, but is dangerous for the two men, since they are at risk of being banned. Through the opera, the two men follow the ploys and secrets of Rachelina in hopes of disguising this feud from both of them. Eventually, the suitors unravel the secret, causing mayhem for all three. By the end, however, the dispute is settled and Rachelina is happily married to one of the suitors.

Upon watching the opera in Vienna in 1795, Beethoven was inspired to write two piano variations, one based on the duet "Nel cor più non mi sento," sung by Rachelina with each of the suitors at different points in the opera. The lyrics and translation of "Nel cor più non mi sento," is as follows:

Italian text:

*Nel cor piu non mi sento
Brillar la gioventu
cagion del mio tormento
amor sei colpa tu
Mi pizzichi, mi stuzzichi
mi pungichi, mi mastichi
che cosa e questo ahime
pieta, pieta, pieta
amore e un certo che
che disperar mi fa.*

English text:

*Why feels my heart so dormant
No fire of youth divine?
Thou cause of all my torment
O Love, the fault is thine!
He teases me, he pinches me
He squeezes me, he wrenches me
What tortures I must bear!
Have done, Have done, Have done!
Thou, Love, art surely one
Will drive me to despair!*

As the theme for Beethoven's variations, the melody is the voice of Rachelina singing of the heartache of love and not knowing which suitor to choose. The first variation is playful and full of deceptive patterns and weak beat accents, representing the "game" Rachelina is playing with the suitor. In variation two, the moving notes in the bass notes represent one of the suitors expressing his love for Rachelina and the pain he is experiencing from not receiving her love in return. Variation three features the exchange of the melody between voices, playing out the feud

between the two suitors. Suddenly, Rachelina's and the suitor's depression reenters in the fourth variation. This variation is written in the parallel minor key and contains considerable room for expression. Variation five is the lightest and most playful variation, reminding the audience that Rachelina is enjoying playing games with the two suitors. The climax of the feud between the suitors is played out in variation six as the right and left hand fight to be heard over each other and the melody is passed between the soprano and bass voices. By the end of the variation, all voices begin to calm down and become much more controlled, resolving with a classical authentic cadence (V-I chord progression)— and the happy marriage of Rachelina and a suitor.

Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, No. 2 *Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)*

Chopin was born in Poland but moved to Paris at the age of twenty to search for advanced piano instruction for his great talent. Due to outbreak of war, Chopin was never able to return to his home country of Poland. Despite this, he experienced great nostalgia for Poland and his family back home. As a result, Chopin composed, reflecting his Polish nationalism, most notably in the style of the polonaise.

The polonaise is a type of dance that has been a part of Poland's musical history since the coronation of King Henri d'Anjou in 1573. During the coronation ceremony, it was customary for the royals to march in a great procession with music accompanying the rhythm of the march. The polonaise evolved over time, but it is still distinguished by a distinct rhythm.

Chopin's Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, No. 2 is preceded by his Polonaise in A Major, Op. 40, No. 1, better known as "The Military Polonaise." This piece has been described as Chopin painting an image of the regal Polish knights, dressed in "magnificent, gem studded armor," telling the story of knights courageously bringing home victory.

In response to the Polonaise in A Major, Chopin composed the Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, No. 2 in 1839. Artur Rubinstein compares these pieces by saying that "the Polonaise in A major is the symbol of Polish glory, whilst the Polonaise in C minor is the symbol of Polish tragedy." The Polonaise in C minor contains drastic and sudden changes in dynamic and rhythm, symbolizing both the anger and sadness Chopin felt because he was not able to return home and the nostalgia for Poland as Chopin reflects on the beauty of his homeland.

Chopin includes "an angrily ironic response to the obsequious Polonaise 'Witaj królu' (Hail, O King!) composed ten years earlier by Karol Kurpiński for the coronation of Tsar Nicholas as the so-called King of Poland, suggesting that this polonaise is a response to the coronation of Tsar Nicholas. Chopin's unhappy response is evidenced by the dark, minor key in the Polonaise in C minor. In the trio, his anger is briefly shaken off as it modulates to A-flat major. The melody is now light and carried in the upper voice, in contrast to the low melody of the theme. Most of the trio is soft and pensive; however, the composer's anger reappears sporadically, giving the listener the feeling that its return is imminent. In fact, this anger is magnified in the reprise. The familiar opening theme returns in the left hand now accompanied by an equally angry countermelody, both of which are played fortissimo.

4 Fantasies on American Folk Songs

Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier, Op. 4, No. 3

The New River Train, Op. 4, No. 2

Douglas Townsend (1921-2012)

Townsend, an American composer and musicologist, first taught himself composition, counterpoint, and orchestration, and eventually winning a nationwide contest for student composers. He studied composition with several successful composers, including Aaron Copland, and had considerable success. After finishing his education, Townsend taught at several universities in New York and Connecticut, until he became an editor at Musical Heritage Review. Townsend completed influential research on 18th- and 19th- century music, resulting in editions, recordings, and performances. Townsend's compositions number in over one hundred works, including several orchestral works, chamber music pieces, choral works, film and television scores, three operettas, and one opera, all featuring forms and traditional forms and tonality.

The third movement of Opus 4, "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier," is originally a 17th century Irish folk song, but became popular during the American Revolutionary War. The lyrics lament the sacrifices made by men, going off to war, and women, selling their goods and losing their loved ones, during war.

Lyrics:

*There she sits on Buttermilk Hill
Oh, who could blame her cryin' her fill
Every tear would turn a mill
Jonny has gone for a soldier*

*Me-oh-my she loved him so
It broke her heart just to see him go
Only time will heal her woe
Johnny has gone for a soldier*

*She sold her rod and she sold her reel
She sold her only spinning wheel
To buy her love a sword of steel
Johnny has gone for a soldier*

*She'll dye her dress, she'll dye it red
And in the streets go begging for bread
The one she loves from her has fled
Johnny has gone for a soldier*

Johnny has gone for a soldier...

Written in A minor, the duet begins with a slow lament in the secondo part with descending stepwise movement in both hands, which can be heard as the sadness of the soldier as he's leaving home. When the primo part enters, it is the simple and despairing melody of the original

folk song, reflecting the feelings of anxiety the woman is feeling as her soldier is leaving. Shortly thereafter, both duet parts are playing together, expanding on the feelings of hopelessness felt by both people. Eventually, the secondo part takes over the melody of the folk song, reflecting the tragedy of war he is about to face, while the primo part introduces new melodic material that sounds as if the woman is quietly mourning the situation. Suddenly, both parts become more complex rhythmically and melodically, indicating the climax of the piece and coinciding with the climax of the war. Almost as quickly as the music intensified, the piece returns to the melody of the folk song with periods of quiet mourning and intense grieving. The secondo part returns with the opening lament, reiterating the despair he felt when leaving—and ending with an unfinished feeling, perhaps indicating his death. The primo part returns playing the first phrase of the folk song while also playing funeral bell tones in the high register, representing funeral bells. The movement ends with a major chord, signifying peace in that while he died for his country and there is a glimmer of hope for the future.

The second movement, “The New River Train,” is a traditional American folk song about the New River Line that was part of the Norfolk and Western Railway Systems, serving the town of Fries, Virginia, from 1895-1985. The folk song was claimed by the Ward family of Galax, a family of musicians famous for performing American folk songs, as part of their repertoire in 1895 and was first recorded in December 1923 by Henry Whitter.

Lyrics:

*I'm riding on that new river train
I'm riding on that new river train
That same old train that brought me here
It's gonna take me back again*

*Darling you can't love one
Darling you can't love one
You can't love one and have any fun
Oh darling you can't love one*

The song is now used as a children’s song for teaching counting. For example, the second verse would be “Darling you can’t love two, etc.”

“The New River Train” begins with the secondo part playing a quiet, repetitive, syncopated rhythm—reminiscent of the sound of a distant train approaching. The primo part enters a few measures later with the simple melody of the folk song. As the piece continues, more chord tones are introduced, making the melody more intense, indicating the near approach of the train. The next time the melody is repeated, it is in the middle voice of the primo part, surrounded by repetitive motives in the other three hands. The secondo part then plays the melody, while the primo part adds harmonic motives, increasing the loudness and intensity. At this point, all parts are extremely involved, passing the melody back and forth, indicating the exciting arrival of the train. The piece suddenly becomes quiet and mysterious, with an anticipatory feeling. This represents the train being stopped, as the passengers board the train. Once the train is loaded, the secondo part returns with the melody of the folk song. As the piece comes to a close, melodic motives are played by both parts and travel up the piano, until the primo part is quietly playing

alone, representing the train's departure and travel into the distance. The piece ends with a surprising V7-I chord progression.

Prelude No. 2

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Born in New York to Russian immigrants, George Gershwin's original family name was Gershovitz and then Gershvin when his parents moved to America. It was not until Gershwin became a professional musician that he changed his name to Gershwin. When George was twelve, his family bought a piano, and he soon showed a talent for improvising and began taking piano lessons. Gershwin, however, was not interested in formal education and never finished high school. He did, however, eventually study composition with Henry Cowell and music theory with Joseph Schillinger. By the 1920s, Gershwin was considered one of the most talented and successful musical theater composers. He wrote musicals with his brother, Ira, who some consider to be talented through the impressive work of George. In addition to composing musicals, Gershwin also composed pieces for piano and jazz band, solo piano, and orchestral works.

"Prelude No. 2", one of his successful solo piano pieces, is part of a set of three preludes. Originally, Gershwin planned to compose twenty-four preludes for this group, reduced it to seven in manuscript form, again reduced to five in public performance, and then cut to three when the set was published in 1926. *Preludes for Piano* was dedicated to his friend and music colleague, Bill Daly. Gershwin and Daly frequently collaborated with Broadway scores and both composed songs for two of the same shows. Daly often arranged, orchestrated and conducted Gershwin's music, and Gershwin often went to him for musical advice.

The second prelude, in C-sharp minor, entitled *Andante con moto*, is in a distinctly jazz style and features a smooth, repetitive baseline. The melody begins rather simply but eventually expands both in melodic content and dynamically, portraying a cabaret singer singing about the man that left her. The melody is repeated again, but this time doubled at the octave with an additional walking line in the right hand, adding more power and intensity, expressing the woman's even more intense feelings of sadness on the verge of anger. The second section changes to F-sharp major, is played at a slower tempo, and has very contrasting thematic material. Instead of the woman singing about her love leaving her, this section represents the man realizing the mistake he made in leaving her. Following this second section, the opening bass line and melody return, with a bit more intensity than the original statement. It is during this last section that the woman realizes her strength in her newfound independence. The piece ends with a slow ascent to the top of the keyboard followed by two jazzy and mysterious notes in the left hand.

I've Got Rhythm

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

"I've Got Rhythm," composed by George Gershwin and lyrics by Ira Gershwin, was originally written in 1930 for their musical, *Girl Crazy*. The musical follows the story of Danny Churchill, who was sent to Arizona by his father to manage his family's ranch, instead of pursuing alcohol and women. Despite his father's attempts, Danny turns the family property into a dude ranch,

bringing in showgirls from Broadway and the ranch becomes popular across the country. By the end of the musical, Danny falls in love with the local postmistress, Molly Gray. In the context of the musical, Kate Fothergill, one of the Broadway girls, sang this optimistic and uplifting song, at the end of Act I.

Lyrics:

*I got rhythm
I got music
I got my love
Who could ask for anything more?
I got daisies
In green pastures,
I got my love
Who could ask for anything more ?*

*Ol' Man Trouble,
I don't mind him.
You won't find him
'Round my door.
I got starlight,
I got sweet dreams,
I got my love,
Who could ask for anything more?
Who could ask for anything more?*

Written in duple time in the key of D-flat major, this piece became a jazz standard because of its distinctive rhythmic changes. In the first three phrases, "I got...", syncopation is used. The following phrase, "Who could ask for anything more," is played on the beat. Similar rhythm changes persist throughout the piece. The chorus, played at the beginning, is in a 34-bar AABA form, followed by four measures with chromatic motion used to modulate to F major. Once in F major, the first half of the chorus is repeated again with even more grandeur. There are two measures of fill, written with a pulse in triple time instead of duple. The chorus is finished with the melody in the left hand and a dramatic *sf* chord to punctuate the end.

"For Good" from *Wicked*
Stephen Schwartz (b. 1948)

Schwartz, the composer and lyricist of *Wicked*, was born in New York City, studied piano and composition at the Julliard School of Music while in high school, and attended Carnegie Mellon University, graduating with a B.F.A. in Drama. He soon began working in the Broadway theatre. He has written the music and lyrics for many musicals, including *Godspell*, *Pippin*, and *Magic Show*. In addition, Schwartz also has worked in film, collaborating with Alan Menken on the score for several Disney movies, including *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Enchanted*. In 2003, the Broadway musical, *Wicked*, opened on Broadway and has been performed over 5,500 times, making it the ninth longest-running Broadway show.

Wicked is based on the novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, written by Gregory Maguire. Both the musical and the book tell an alternative story to the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. The musical is told from the perspective of the two witches of the Land of Oz, beginning before and continuing after Dorothy's arrival in Oz. Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, and Glinda, the Good Witch, continuously struggle throughout the musical with contradicting personalities and opinions, competition over a man, reactions to the realization of the Wizard's corrupt governing, eventually leading to Elphaba's public fall from grace.

The musical begins with Glinda in flashback telling the story of how she and Elphaba became best friends in college. They become roommates and constantly argue. After both Glinda and Elphaba accidentally treat each other well, they begin to see each other in a more positive light and start to become friends. Glinda decides that she is going to help green-skinned Elphaba become popular. After a chaotic situation in class, and given only a book of spells, Elphaba and Glinda are told to make their way to the Emerald City to meet with the Wizard. They learn that the Wizard is actually a corrupt leader and Elphaba reacts in opposition, leading her to receive the name "The Wicked Witch of the West" and Glinda named as "Glinda the Good." Through a series of unfortunate events, including the capture of Dorothy, Elphaba continues to live up to her new title, despite her intention to do good. Glinda tries to convince Elphaba to turn to the good and eventually they forgive each other for all wrongdoings and acknowledge how much of an influence they were on each other as "For Good." To escape, Elphaba pretends to have died, convincing Glinda who then spreads the news that the Wicked Witch of the West has died. The town celebrates and continues calling her Glinda the Good. Elphaba is actually alive and escapes Oz with her love, although she is saddened that she will never be able to see Glinda again.

Lyrics:

*[Glinda:]
I've heard it said,
That people come into our lives
For a reason
Bringing something we must learn.
And we are led
To those who help us most to grow
If we let them
And we help them in return.
Well, I don't know if I believe that's
true
But I know I'm who I am today
Because I knew you.*

*Like a comet pulled from orbit
As it passes the sun,
Like a stream that meets a boulder
Halfway through the wood.
Who can say if I've been changed for*

*the better
But because I knew you.
I have been changed for good.*

*[Elphaba:]
It well may be
That we will never meet again
In this lifetime.
So, let me say before we part:
So much of me
Is made of what I learned from you.
You'll be with me
Like a handprint on my heart.
And now whatever way our stories
end
I know you have rewritten mine
By being my friend.*

Like a ship blown from its mooring

*By a wind off the sea.
Like a seed dropped by a sky bird
In a distant wood.
Who can say if I've been changed for
the better
But because I knew you...*

*[Glinda:]
Because I knew you...*

*[Both:]
I have been changed for good.*

*[Elphaba:]
And just to clear the air
I ask forgiveness
For the things I've done,
You blame me for.*

*[Glinda:]
But then I guess,
We know there's blame to share.*

*[Both:]
And none of it seems to matter
anymore.
Like a comet pulled from orbit
(like a ship blown from its mooring)
As it passes the sun.
(by a wind off the sea)
Like a stream that meets a boulder
(like a seed dropped by a bird)
Halfway through the wood.
(in the wood)
Who can say if I've been changed for
the better.
I do believe I have been changed for
the better.*

*[Glinda:]
And because I knew you...*

*[Elphaba:]
Because I knew you...*

*[Both:]
Because I knew you
I have been changed..
For good.*

The song begins with Glinda singing to Elphaba about how she has been changed by Elphaba. In the second verse, Elphaba reciprocates these feelings to Glinda. They then alternate singing, "Because I knew you," and sing together, "I have been changed for good." In the next verse, the women begin by alternating phrases until they join in a duet together, really emphasizing the positive impact they've had on each other. In our arrangement, the saxophone is playing the voice part so the lyrics are not heard; however, the music effectively portrays the meaning of the lyrics.