Scholarly Notes to Accompany a Compact Disc Recording Project: An Interpretive Analysis of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Capriccio on the Absence of the Beloved Brother, BWV 992,* Ludwig van Beethoven's *Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, Op. 110,* Frédéric Chopin's *Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38,* and Nino Rota's *15 Preludes*

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis project consists of three components: 1. a solo piano recital; 2. a compact disc recording of the recital program; and 3. comprehensive scholarly notes to accompany the compact disc. The recital was given at the University of Alberta's Convocation Hall on January 17, 2015 at 8:00 p.m. The compact disc was recorded prior to the recital at the University of Alberta's Convocation Hall on a Hamburg Steinway Model D-274 Concert Grand Piano. These scholarly notes present an interpretive analysis of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Capriccio on the Absence of the Beloved Brother, BWV 992* (ca. 1702), Ludwig van Beethoven's *Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, Op. 110* (1821), Frédéric Chopin's *Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38* (1836-39), and Nino Rota's *15 Preludes* (1964).

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750): *Capriccio on the Absence of the Beloved Brother, BWV 992* (ca. 1702)

Perhaps the most celebrated of Johann Sebastian Bach's early works is the *Capriccio sopra la lontananza de il fratro dilettissimo (Capriccio on the Absence of the Beloved Brother), BWV 992* a programmatic piece unique in the composer's instrumental output. This work, written when Bach was a teenager, was traditionally associated with the departure of his brother, Johann Jacob, who left Germany in 1704 to enlist in the Swedish army of King Charles XII as an oboist. However, scholars now doubt this longstanding connection due to what Christoph Wolff describes as "a widespread but inauthentic adjustment to the title" from *de il fratro* (of the brother) to *del suo fratello* (of his brother).[1] According to Wolff, the Latin word *"fratro"* need not be understood in a literal sense as it could pertain to any type of close fraternal relationship. He points out that a plausible dedicatee is Georg Erdmann, Bach's schoolmate whom the composer addressed as "esteemed Mr. Brother,"[2] who left St. Michael's Latin School in Lüneburg after graduating in 1702.[3]

Although the identity of the *"fratro dilettissimo"* remains unknown, there is no doubt that this work depicts farewell scenes with a "beloved brother." It is presumably modelled on Johann Kuhnau's *Biblical Sonatas* (published 1700), overtly programmatic

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[1] Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 74.

[2] Hans T. David, and Arthur Mendel, eds. *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents,* rev. and exp. by Christoph Wolff (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); quoted in Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 75.

[3] Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 75.

keyboard pieces that musically illustrate stories from the Old Testament.[4] Like Kuhnau's sonatas, each of this work's short movements is prefaced by a heading that verbally describes the composer's programmatic intentions:

1. *Arioso. Adagio. Ist eine Schmeichelung der Freunde, um denselben von seiner Reise abzuhalten* (Is a coaxing by his friends to deter him from his journey).

2. *Ist eine Vorstellung unterschiedlicher Casuum, die ihm in der Fremde könnten vorfallen* (Is an envisaging of calamities that could befall him in foreign parts).

3. *Adagiosissimo. Ist ein allgemeines Lamento der Freunde* (Is a general lament of his friends).

4. *Allhier kommen die Freunde, weil sie doch sehen, dass es anders nicht sein kann, und nehmen Abschied* (Here come the friends, since they see that it cannot be otherwise, and take their leave of him).

5. *Allegro poco. Aria del Postiglione* (Air of the postillion).

6. *Fuga all'imitatione della posta* (Fugue in imitation of the post-horn).

As stated in the heading, the first of these six movements, a gentle *Arioso* marked *Adagio*, musically portrays the efforts of friends to dissuade the *fratro* from undertaking his journey. The movement is comprised of similarly constructed short elided phrases containing much imitation, repetition, and ornamentation. Many of these phrases end

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[4] Other works of the time which may have influenced Bach are Johann Jakob Froberger's programmatic keyboard pieces (ca. mid-seventeenth century), Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's *Mystery (or Rosary) Sonatas* (ca. 1676), and Johann Jakob Walther's *Hortulus chelicus* (1688). Froberger's programmatic keyboard pieces, such as *Lamento sopra la dolorosa perdita della Real Mstà de Ferdinando IV, Rè de Romani* and *Tombeau fait à Paris sur la mort de Monsieur Blancrocher*, just to name two, musically depict events described by the composer in written explanations of the works. Biber's *Mystery (or Rosary) Sonatas*, a collection of fifteen sonatas for violin and basso continuo, musically portray important moments in the life of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Walther's *Hortulus chelicus*, a collection of twenty-eight works for violin and basso continuo, contains pieces such as *Serenata a un coro di violini, Galli e galline, Scherzi d'augelli con il cucci*, and *Leuto harpeggiante e rossignuolo* that musically imitate a variety of instruments and birds.

with a falling figure, a downward leap of a third, fourth, or fifth. When performing these figures, I have chosen to slightly lengthen the first note in order to emphasize their pleading and coaxing nature. Likewise, most phrases contain an anticipatory-note figure, two sixteenths followed by an eighth. At times, specifically when this figure is repeated, I have decided to play it a little more forcefully with the purpose of conveying its persistent nature. Finally, almost all of the phrases are enhanced by numerous ornaments, some of which I have chosen to play before the beat in order to convey the gentleness of the music to the greatest effect.[5]

The contrasting second movement, an urgent and unsettled four-voice fugato, musically depicts various misfortunes the brother could encounter in foreign lands. In this movement, a short theme, which has an indecisive ending and a cyclic quality that lends itself to reiteration, is treated imitatively. Throughout the entire movement, concentrated fugal writing, particularly a continuous rapid succession of thematic entries, creates a sense of crowding and imperativeness. As well, remarkable tonal adventurism, specifically a fast modulatory descent from the movement's opening key of G minor through the circle of fifths (G minor - C minor - F minor - B-flat minor - E-flat major - A-flat major/F minor) to the concluding key of C major, produces a destabilizing and disorienting effect. Interestingly, the end of the movement is elided and the final C major chord, which is the dominant of F minor, leads directly and without respite into the following F minor movement.

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[5] According to Frederick Neumann, when an ornament is placed on a note that is to be graced but not weighted and thus serves a connective function rather than an accentual or intensifying one, it should be played before the beat to produce an effect of grace and elegance and to avoid the effect of stiffness and clumsiness that would result from an onbeat execution. Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music: With Special Emphasis on J.S. Bach* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 445.

The sorrowful third movement, a passacaglia consisting of a four-measure ground bass followed by eleven variations, musically illustrates the lamenting of his friends. Marked *Adagiosissimo*,[6] this uncommonly slow movement contains expressive melodic sighing motives and descending chromatic bass lines, both of which are conventional symbols of sadness and grief. As the score of this movement is quite sparse, containing only a few figured bass symbols and no more than two voices at any given time, performers have interpreted it in a wide variety of ways, ranging from minimal to elaborate realizations. After consulting literature on the realization of partimenti,[7] I have decided to use a stylistically appropriate edition (G. Henle Verlag) that adds harmonic texture to the music without distorting its structure or character.

In the brief fourth movement, which functions as a tonal bridge between the third and fifth movements, the friends accept the inevitable reality of the brother's departure and come to bid him a joyous farewell. The sombre mood of the preceding F minor lament is immediately replaced by one of gaiety as the fourth movement begins brightly and unexpectedly in E-flat major. When performing, I emphasize this significant change of character, which persists until the end of the work, with a change of articulation from a more sustained to a more detached style, as well as with a change of dynamics from a quieter to a louder level. The music of this movement, which swiftly modulates through

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[6] According to Paul Badura-Skoda, Bach differentiated between tempos in a manner that was uncommon in the Baroque era. The tempo marking *Adagiosissimo*, which appears no more than five times in the composer's output, is a modification and intensification of the term *Adagio.* Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 77-79.

[7] The books I have consulted, which discuss the realization of partimenti in great detail, are Robert O. Gjerdingen's *Music in the Galant Style* and Giorgio Sanguinetti's *The Art of Partimento: History, Theory, and Practice*. Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 465-480. Giorgio Sanguinetti, *The Art of Partimento: History, Theory, and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 99-164.

six tonalities in eleven measures, is constructed almost entirely upon a single eighth-note figure treated in canonic imitation. After building to a rousing climax in the key of F major, the dominant of the work's main tonality, this monothematic and cyclic movement comes to a close with a very emphatic cadence.

In the sprightly fifth movement, which reintroduces the home key of B-flat major, the song of a postillion is heard. Throughout this short asymmetrical binary movement, marked *Allegro poco*, a downward leaping octave figure representing a post-horn call continuously interrupts the postillion's three-voice homophonic song. In the sixth and final movement, which is the longest of the set, the aforementioned post-horn call returns in a three-part fugue, recurring throughout as a regular countersubject to a fanfare-like subject and answer. It has been stated that the overall structure of this early fugue has little in common with the composer's more mature keyboard fugues.[8] This is because in his later fugues Bach often employs contrapuntal techniques, makes use of modulatory episodes, and includes a final entry of the subject in the home key. Conversely, in this fugue, the theme is not subjected to contrapuntal techniques besides a partial stretto, the episodes are extremely short and non-modulatory except the last, and there is no final complete entry of the subject in the tonic key. Nevertheless, this rousing movement, which ends triumphantly in B-flat major, provides a satisfying conclusion to one of Johann Sebastian Bach's most celebrated early compositions.

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[8] Richard D.P. Jones, *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach, Volume I: 1695-1717* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): *Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, Op. 110* (1821)

In the late summer of 1821, while recovering from a prolonged attack of jaundice after an extended period of illness, Ludwig van Beethoven began composing his *Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110*, the central work in a group of three piano sonatas (Opp. 109-111) written between 1820 and 1822 for the music publisher Moritz Schlesinger. Fuelled by the improvement of his health after a dismal time during which he was often too ill to compose, Beethoven focused his energies on his penultimate piano sonata and completed the autograph of Op. 110 by December 25, 1821. It was published by Schlesinger in July of 1822 without a dedication, though Beethoven intended to dedicate it to his dear friend Antonia Brentano. Like his other late period works, which were composed when Beethoven was completely deaf and isolated from society, this sonata is characterized by a deeply personal and introspective nature as well as by a highly unified and innovative formal structure.

The profoundly lyrical first movement, which is in sonata form and marked *Molto cantabile, molto espressivo*, begins in A-flat major with a gentle theme to be played *con amabilità* (with amiability). It is comprised of two distinct but closely related parts: a chorale-like phrase containing rising perfect fourths that anticipate the fugue subject of the final movement, and a single-line melody supported by a simple accompaniment of repeated chords. When interpreting this theme, a performer is confronted with the question of how to play *con amabilità.* According to William Meredith, this uncommon marking, which has been defined in different ways by various dictionaries, applies to the state of mind of the performer rather than to a particular performance technique. Thus, the composer is instructing the pianist to envision a tender, loving, and amiable

relationship at the beginning of this sonata.[9] When playing this theme, the relationship I envision is the one Beethoven had with Antonia Brentano, the intended dedicatee of this sonata and the possible intended recipient of his 1812 letter addressed to the 'Immortal Beloved.' This narrative line, coupled with the general human significance of the words *con amabilità*, enables me to focus and control the gesture needed to play such a deeply simple and exposed theme. Following this first theme is a light, arpeggiated thirty-second-note transition that leads to a second theme group consisting of several short ideas in the dominant key of E-flat major. Among these ideas is a climactic phrase in which the hands move in contrary motion to the extremes of the piano while playing scalar figures that span the interval of a sixth. These sixths in scalar motion, as well as the parallel fourths from the first theme, are the two most important motives in the entire sonata for they occur in every movement of the work in either an ascending or descending fashion.[10]

At the end of the second theme group, a mysterious descent in open octaves from E-flat to D-flat to C leads to a very brief development section that consists simply of a descending sequence on a fragment of the first theme over recurrent sixteenth note figures. More like a retransition to the tonic than a development, this darker section commences in F minor and moves swiftly through D-flat minor and B-flat minor to A-flat major where the recapitulation begins with the first part of the opening theme accompanied by the delicate arpeggiated material of the transition. A developmental feel

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[9] William Meredith, "Beethoven's Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110: Music of Amiability, Lament, and Restoration," *The Beethoven Journal* 17.1 (2002): 24.

[10] Charles Rosen, *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 235.

resulting from a lack of harmonic stability infiltrates this section as the second part of the opening theme appears in D-flat major and modulates through its minor to F-flat major, notated more conveniently as E major.[11] The transition and an anticipation of the second theme are then heard in E major, after which an enigmatic modulation brings the music back to the home key and the entire second theme group is reprised with some modifications. A beautiful coda, which is "at once a reminiscence and a foreshadowing,"[12] recalls the beginning of the sonata's first theme and prefigures the opening of the finale's fugue subject before the final cadence is resolved by two short, quiet, and somewhat inconclusive A-flat major chords.

The contrasting second movement, a vigorous scherzo and trio in duple time marked *Allegro molto*, begins immediately after the first in the key of F minor. Many scholars believe Beethoven based the scherzo of this movement on two popular songs of his day: "Unsa Kätz häd Katzln ghabt" ("Our cat has had kittens") and "Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich" ("I'm a slob, you're a slob").[13] Several of these scholars argue the composer's use of these songs lends humour to the movement.[14] Conversely, others contend Beethoven's quotation of the songs was unintentional and does not impart

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[11] Donald Francis Tovey points out the composer prefers the less complex notation of E major with its four sharps to the impractical notation of F-flat major with its eight flats. Donald Francis Tovey, *A Companion to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas: Bar-by-bar Analysis*, with preface and notes by Barry Cooper, rev. ed. (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1998), 258.

[12] William Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 345.

[13] This idea was first proposed by A.B. Marx in his biography of the composer. Adolph Bernhard Marx, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Leben und Schaffen*, 5th ed. (Berlin: O. Janke, 1901), 416.

[14] Martin Cooper and William Kinderman are among these scholars. Martin Cooper, *Beethoven: The Last Decade, 1817-1827* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 190-191. Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 246.

comicality to the movement.[15] In my opinion, as the thematic material of these supposed quotations was not initially clearly defined and took shape only gradually in the composer's sketches,[16] whether or not he intended to cite the songs is certainly open to question. Since the melody of the first alleged quotation (mm. 1-4) contains a descending scalar idea spanning a sixth, and the melody of the second (mm. 17-20) contains descending filled-in parallel fourths, Beethoven could simply be using motives from the first movement of the sonata rather than deliberately quoting particular songs. Even if we accept the idea that Beethoven's citation of these songs was intentional, for me their function in this work is not one of comicality because the movement is much more fittingly described as a serious expression of conflict and contrast rather than a light-hearted expression of levity. Throughout the scherzo, the composer creates a sense of excitement and agitation, beginning with a quiet phrase in F minor answered by a loud phrase in C major, followed by a series of syncopations with *sforzandi* on weak beats, a *ritardando* succeeded by a sudden return to full tempo, and a dramatic two-bar period of silence. In my opinion, all of these elements, which are not intrinsically humorous especially given the prevalent minor mood of the scherzo as well as its elided ending into the serious final movement, create a sense of dynamic, tonal, and rhythmic conflict and contrast.

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[15] William Meredith and Adam Ockelford are among these scholars. Meredith, "Beethoven's Sonata in A-flat Major," 24. Adam Ockelford, "Relating Musical Structure and Content to Aesthetic Response: A Model and Analysis of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 110," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 130.1 (2005): 99.

[16] Lynn Marie Matheson points out that the melodic contour of the first supposed quotation, as well as the rhythmic configuration and registral placement of the second supposed quotation, took shape only gradually in Beethoven's sketches. Lynn Marie Matheson, "The Genesis of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A-flat, Op. 110" (M.A. diss., University of Victoria, 1989), 55-58.

A sense of conflict and contrast is also felt in the trio, which begins in D-flat major, for it contains sudden dynamic changes, relentless syncopations, and constant contrary motion that often forces the crossing of hands. This technically challenging section consists primarily of phrases containing rapid descending eighth-note passagework in the right hand combined with off-beat ascending quarter notes in the left hand. It is followed by a return of the scherzo, which is an exact reprise save the addition of a *ritardando*, after which the movement concludes with a short coda consisting of half-note chords separated by half-rests. The last of these, an F major chord with a fermata, leads seamlessly into the final movement of the sonata.

As if this Tierce de Picardie were a dominant, the uniquely structured and relatively weighty finale begins without a break in B-flat minor. Three solemn and sombre introductory bars, marked *Adagio ma non troppo*, lead to an unbarred recitative in A-flat minor containing seven changes of tempo, a profusion of expressive directions, an excursion to F-flat major (notated more conveniently as E major), as well as a series of *una corda* and *tutte le corde* alternations. The much discussed climax of this extremely improvisatory passage, widely regarded as an imitation of the clavichord's expressive effect of *Bebung*,[17] contains curious repeated high A-naturals 'tied' in pairs. While most believe the second note of each pair should be sounded, some feel these notes should not be played because they are tied. In my opinion, Beethoven's own fingering (4, 3) indicates the second note is to be repeated quietly, as a rebound or release of the first, without allowing the key to rise fully to the surface. At the end of the recitative, a bar

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[17] *Bebung* is a vibrato effect produced on the clavichord by varying the finger pressure on a key while it is being held after having been struck.

and a half of pulsating sixteenth notes in 12/16 time, marked *Adagio ma non troppo*, build the tonic chord of A-flat minor from the fifth downwards.

These throbbing and incessant sixteenth-note chords become the accompaniment for the ensuing *Arioso dolente/Klagender Gesang* (Sorrowful arioso/Lamenting song), which begins and ends in A-flat minor. This dark tonality had been used by Beethoven only once before in the third movement of his *Sonata No. 12 in A-flat major, Op. 26*, titled *Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe* (Funeral March on the Death of a Hero).[18] The *arioso dolente* of Op. 110 shares with this movement a similar sense of great tragedy and intense anguish. Its poignant and continuous melody begins with a descending line spanning a sixth, which scholars have recognized as a quotation of the opening nine notes of the introduction to the aria *Es ist vollbracht (It is finished)* from Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. John Passion, BWV 245.* As the character and setting of the two passages are quite similar, this intertextual link strongly impacts the way in which we understand the seriousness and solemnity of this section. After four phrases of four bars, the sorrowful melody and its pulsating accompaniment come to a rest and the *arioso dolente* concludes quietly in A-flat minor with a forlorn cadential phrase in bare octaves.

A three-voice fugue in 6/8 time, marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, soon ensues in A-flat major as an inspiriting answer to this lamenting song. Many scholars have noted the rising perfect fourths of the fugue subject, which provide a sense of renewed strength, are prefigured in the opening theme of the first movement. An interesting parallel has also been drawn between these fourths and a prominent motive outlining ascending

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[18] Jeremiah W. McGrann, liner notes for *Magnificent Landscapes: A Journey Through Beethoven's Last Piano Sonatas*, Penelope Crawford, pianist, Musica Omnia MO-0308, 2010.

perfect fourths in the *Dona nobis pacem (Grant us peace)* section of Beethoven's contemporaneous *Missa Solemnis, Op. 123*.[19] This intertextual link is a direct communication of the composer's expressive intention that the same sense of hope for liberation from suffering is shared by the fugue of the sonata and the *Dona nobis pacem* of the mass. However, when the fugue reaches its climax on a *fortissimo* dominant seventh chord of A-flat major and does not resolve as anticipated, it suddenly becomes clear this hopeful feeling cannot be sustained. Rather than moving to the tonic of the home key, the dominant seventh is reinterpreted enharmonically as a German sixth chord and resolves unexpectedly to a G minor chord in second inversion. A descending arpeggio, which lacks the strength to rise, brings the fugue to a halt and leads to a reprise of the *arioso dolente* in the desolate key of G minor.

The expression of despair is intensified in the return of the *arioso* by the inscriptions *Ermattet, klagend* (Exhausted, lamenting) and *Perdendo le forze, dolente* (Losing strength, sorrowful). The long lyrical melodic line is now laden with sigh figures and constantly broken into short fragments by tiny ubiquitous rests as if one is sobbing or gasping for breath. This musical depiction of extreme distress is reinforced by the tonality of G minor, which we feel as depressive because it is a semitone lower than the first A-flat minor *arioso dolente* and because it immediately follows the optimistic A-flat major fugue. We expect this dispiriting feeling to persist until the end of the second *arioso dolente* but when the forlorn cadential phrase in bare octaves reappears and unexpectedly closes with a G major chord instead of a bare final tonic, there is a significant change of expression. Despair turns to hope as this chord is repeated nine

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[19] Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 248.

times with increasing strength over the course of two measures. A feeling of "striving against resistance"[20] is created as these chords, marked *crescendo*, gradually escalate in volume while the *una corda* pedal remains depressed. This passage is followed by an ascending G major arpeggio, marked *diminuendo*, which leads to a return of the fugue subject in inversion.

The resumption of the fugue, marked *poi a poi di nuovo vivente/nach und nach wieder auflebend* (little by little coming back to life) and *sempre una corda,* begins quietly in G major. After the inverted subject is heard in all three voices, the original subject, now metrically transformed and at times intervallically modified, appears simultaneously in diminution and augmentation in G minor. Following a modulation to C minor, after twenty-four bars without any dynamic indications and with the soft pedal continually depressed, a long *crescendo* begins and the pianist is instructed to gradually lift the *una corda*.[21] The process of returning to life, which has clearly commenced with this increase in volume, is continued with an increase in speed as a series of shortened versions of the subject appear in double diminution in E-flat major.[22] Toward the end of this passage, they come to support an intervallically modified final statement of the inverted subject and lead with both accelerating speed and volume to a glorious return of the subject in its original tempo, form, and key. Infused with new life, the original

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[20] Timothy Ehlen, "Genre References in Beethoven Sonatas," in *The Pianist's Craft: Mastering the Works of Great Composers*, ed. Richard Paul Anderson (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 57.

[21] Beethoven indicates *poi a poi tutte le corde* (little by little lift the soft pedal [from one to two to three strings]). This effect cannot be obtained on a modern piano as the present day *una corda* can shift the action only between two and three, or one and two, strings.

[22] Though marked *Meno allegro/Etwas langsamer*, this passage paradoxically conveys the impression of greater velocity as the eighth-note values of the initial diminuted subject are halved. The indication of a slower tempo simply results in not doubling the speed of the previous material.

subject, which is no longer set in a contrapuntal texture, resounds in bass octaves and is accompanied by constant sixteenth-note figuration that persists until the end of the movement. After being heard in all three voices, the original subject is extended sequentially into the high register and rises to a triumphant *fortissimo* climax over a tonic pedal point. This astonishingly original and emotionally intense work by Ludwig van Beethoven, which moves from amiability, to conflict, to despair, struggle, and triumph, is brought to a brilliant close with a scintillation of A-flat major arpeggios followed by a final emphatic tonic chord.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849): *Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38* (1836-39)

Composed between 1836 and 1839, *Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38* is the second of Frédéric Chopin's four ballades, one-movement pieces for solo piano written over a period of twelve years. With these works, Chopin broke new ground for he was the first to use the title "ballade" in reference to purely instrumental compositions. As suggested by the title, these pieces were inspired by ballads, narrative poems and songs of folk origin about legendary or historical events often involving tragic or supernatural subject matter.[23] During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ballads enjoyed great favour as texts of folk ballads were frequently translated, used as models for original works by leading poets, and set as solo songs with piano accompaniment by prominent composers. Therefore, Chopin's use of the title "ballade" implies an association with literary and musical ballads, which in turn suggests his ballades possess a certain narrative quality.

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[23] F.E. Kirby, *Music for Piano: A Short History* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1995), 182-183.

Though the title is evocative of storytelling in a general sense, Chopin never linked any of his ballades to specific poems or provided any hints of extramusical programs. Nevertheless, these four piano pieces have been met with a diversity of narrative interpretations since the time of their publication. In an issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,* dated November 1841, Robert Schumann made a connection between Chopin's ballades and the ballads of the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. According to Schumann, during a visit to Leipzig, Chopin "mentioned that certain poems of Mickiewicz had suggested his Ballades to him."[24] Despite the fact that nothing in Schumann's statement links any one poem to any one ballade, scholars have since then attempted to match each of the ballades with a specific poem. The second ballade has often been associated with the poem "Świteź" (Lake of the Willis), which tells the tale of how young maidens are transformed into water lilies in order to escape the lusts of invading Russian soldiers. A parallel, though likely unintentional, can easily be drawn between the ballade's innocent *Andantino* theme and the beautiful maidens, as well as between the tempestuous *Presto con fuoco* theme and the violent Russians.

Recent scholars, who give little value to the dubious connection between Mickiewicz's poems and Chopin's ballades, present other narrative interpretations of the second ballade. The most detailed and discussed of these is Jonathan Bellman's reading of the ballade as a narrative of the martyrdom of Poland. According to Bellman, the *Andantino* F major theme represents an idealized Poland before the insurrection of 1830, and the *Presto con fuoco* A minor theme symbolizes the sudden and furious onslaught of the Russians. At the end of the work, when a fragment of the *Andantino* theme returns in

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[24] Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), 143.

A minor, the key of the Russians, the Polish defeat is complete as there is clearly no hope of a return to the home key of F major.[25] Bellman's detailed narrative interpretation has been contested by some scholars because he assumes Chopin perceived the work in programmatic terms and wanted to tell a specific story.[26] Regardless of the composer's intent, Bellman's reading provides an interesting way of thinking about the thematic and tonal organization of this composition.

The highly original structure of the second ballade, which is based upon the opposition of two contrasting themes and tonalities, has attracted a wide range of disparate analytical approaches.[27] In my opinion, this work in 6/8 time is divided into five main thematic sections (ABAB and coda) and is characterized by a progressive tonal scheme that begins in F major and ends in A minor. The first section, marked *Andantino*, opens quietly and ambiguously with repeated Cs in both hands. From these repeated unisons emerges an innocent and gentle siciliano-like theme in F major, which forms the basis of this pastoral section. Though centred in F major, this self-contained section includes two passages that allude to the ballade's impending tonal conflict by moving to A minor, the work's opposite tonal polarity. At the end of this section, over repeated perfect authentic cadences in F major, a melodic oscillation between the pitches A and F

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[25] Jonathan D. Bellman, *Chopin's Polish Ballade: Op. 38 as Narrative of National Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 164-165.

[26] Zofia Chechlińska, review of *Chopin's Polish Ballade Op. 38 as Narrative of National Martyrdom*, by Jonathan D. Bellman, *Fontes Artis Musicae* 59.2 (2012): 198-99.

[27] John Rink discusses these different analytical approaches at length in an article about Chopin's four ballades. John Rink, "Chopin's Ballades and the Dialectic: Analysis in Historical Perspective," *Music Analysis* 13.1 (1994): 99-113.

provides another hint of the ensuing tonal problem before the theme fades away with six softly reiterated As over an F major arpeggio.

After a brief pause and without any modulation, the second section, marked *Presto con fuoco*, suddenly bursts forth in A minor with a tempestuous and violent étude-like theme containing rapid figuration and booming octaves in contrary motion. The immediate change of tempo from *Andantino* to *Presto con fuoco*, tonality from F major to A minor, and dynamics from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, all contribute to creating an extreme sense of contrast between the first and second sections. This feeling of dramatic contrast is heightened by the *Presto con fuoco* theme's use of conflicting metric groupings, fast changes of direction, and unstable harmonies, which together generate a frenzied energy and chaotic atmosphere. After this theme is presented in A minor and sequenced in G minor, a transitional passage consisting of richly harmonized chords over a running accompaniment modulates from D minor through F minor to the dominant of A-flat minor. This harmony is sustained for eight measures over a pedal point but its expected resolution to A-flat minor is avoided and, as the section subsides through a long *diminuendo* and *rallentando*, a chromatic modulation brings about a return to F major.

The recurrence of F major coincides with the beginning of the third section and a reappearance of the *Andantino* theme. Though there is a return to this theme's tempo and tonality, there is never a return to its innocent simplicity. The first phrase of the theme begins as before but breaks off abruptly after less than six measures. Following a dramatic pause, F major is abandoned immediately as the second of the two A minor passages from the opening section is heard. Like before, it leads back to F major but this time a deceptive cadence prepares the way for a developmental passage that is partly

based on the *Andantino* theme. This highly modulatory passage is comprised of two roughly identical halves divided by several measures in E major: the first passes through D-flat major, G-flat major, and B-flat major; the second proceeds through C major, F major, and G minor. At the end of this tonally unstable section, loud accelerating octaves in the bass lead to a return of the *Presto con fuoco* theme.

The reappearance of the *Presto con fuoco* theme marks the beginning of the ballade's fourth section. This turbulent theme is first reintroduced in D minor and then repeated in A minor, the key in which the work will henceforth remain. Though from this point there will be no escape from A minor, this key is not clearly established with a strong cadence until the very end of the piece. Following the reprise of the *Presto con fuoco* theme, a motive based on the *Andantino* theme appears in thunderous bass octaves beneath a complex double-note tremolo figure in the right hand. Here, for the first time, material from the *Andantino* section is drawn into the *Presto con fuoco* section as "innocence and violence are tragically united."[28] This synthesis of conflicting material is succeeded by *fortissimo* trills in both hands, which lead into the final section of the work.

Marked *agitato*, the bravura coda, which finally dispenses with the key signature of F major, begins frenziedly with new material that becomes increasingly chromatic. This new material leads to a climactic return of the *Presto con fuoco* theme, now wonderfully transformed, which drives the music relentlessly toward an anticipated close in A minor. However, the drive to the cadence is dramatically interrupted as the music suddenly comes to a halt on a *sforzato* French sixth chord and a fragment of the *Andantino* theme reappears in A minor. Marked *pianissimo* and *tempo primo*, this "final

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[28] Victor Lederer, *Chopin: A Listener's Guide to the Master of the Piano* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 2006), 130.

whispered reference"[29] to the opening theme makes no attempt to return to F major but instead simply surrenders to the key of the *Presto con fuoco* theme. After a pause, the work comes to a bleak close with a quiet perfect authentic cadence in A minor.

The conflict between the second ballade's two contrasting themes and tonalities tells a story in sound. While specific stories, such as the tale of young maidens who escape the lusts of Russian soldiers or the narrative of the martyrdom of the Polish nation, provide an interesting manner of pondering the thematic and tonal structure of this work, it is unknown whether or not the composer had one in mind. Perhaps he simply used the title "ballade," without associating the piece with any particular poem or providing any suggestion of an extramusical program, because a specific story is not necessary for the understanding of the work and because he wanted to give free reign to one's imagination. Therefore, there could potentially be as many narratives for Frédéric Chopin's second ballade as there are performers and listeners.

Nino Rota (1911-1979): *15 Preludes* (1964)

Nino Rota is a preeminent film composer who has written some of the most memorable and highly recognizable music of the twentieth century. During his prolific career, he composed more than one hundred and fifty film scores for virtually all of the noted directors of his time. The list includes music for classics such as Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960), Luchino Visconti's *Il Gattopardo* (1963), Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1970), just to name a few.

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[29] Jim Samson, *Chopin: The Four Ballades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 52.

His musical output also encompasses numerous operas, ballets, symphonies, and concertos, as well as dozens of other piano, chamber, choral, and orchestral works.

Rota was born on December 3, 1911 in Milan, Italy into a highly musical family. His maternal grandfather, Giovanni Rinaldi, was a well-known composer and his mother, Ernesta Rinaldi, was an accomplished pianist. Rota grew up surrounded by music and had outstanding musical facility. He began playing the piano at the age of four and composing at the age of eight. By the age of twelve, he had already written an oratorio and its public performance established his reputation as a child prodigy. In 1924, Rota began formal studies at the Milan Conservatory with Ildebrando Pizzetti. He moved to Rome in 1926 to continue his studies with Alfredo Casella at the National Academy of Santa Cecilia. After graduating in 1930, he went to the Curtis Institute of Philadelphia on a two-year scholarship to study composition with Rosario Scalero and conducting with Fritz Reiner from 1931 to 1932. In the United States he discovered the great Hollywood films and American popular songs. On his return to Italy, Rota embarked on a teaching career that led to the directorship of the Bari Conservatory, a title he held from 1950 until his death in 1979.

Although he gained fame as a composer of film music, Rota was also an esteemed composer of pure instrumental music. He considered film music and pure instrumental music to be of the same rank and refused to make hierarchical distinctions between the two: "I do not believe in different classes and levels of music. In my opinion, the definition of light, semi-light, and serious music is fiction."[30] Rota's extensive use of

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[30] The translation of this quotation is my own. *"Non credo a differenze di ceti e livelli di musica. Secondo me, la definizione di musica leggera, semileggera, seria è fittizia."* Pier Marco De Santi, *La musica di Nino Rota* (Rome: Laterza, 1983), 38.

self-borrowing, particularly the re-utilization of material from his film music in his pure instrumental music and vice versa, points to his equal regard for both genres of music. Many of his works, both cinematic and purely instrumental, are recognizable and improvisatory. Despite being well aware of the musical trends of his time, Rota chose to compose in a distinctively personal style deliberately geared toward the public: "The artist must always think of the public. A musician must compose with the desire to be understood by the greatest possible number of people [...] I am not afraid to be melodic and listenable or – how it has been written – a curiously outdated character in the contemporary musical scene [...] The important thing, for me, is that the music be immediately perceivable; that it have canons of immediacy."[31]

Among Rota's works for solo piano, which amount to no more than fourteen opus numbers including juvenilia despite the fact that the piano was his primary and favourite instrument,[32] *15 Preludes* is perhaps the piece that best displays his unique compositional style. Written in 1964, the *15 Preludes*, along with the *Fantasia in sol* (1944-45) and the *Variazioni e fuga nei dodici toni sul nome di Bach* (1950), are the most significant works of his solo piano output. The fifteen miniatures that make up Rota's collection of preludes present a wonderful kaleidoscope of characters and moods ranging from animated to tranquil, joyful to melancholic, elegant to robust, and humorous to serious. Several of the preludes have a cinematic touch, especially those with a circus-like

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[31] The translation of this quotation is my own. *"L'artista deve pensare sempre al pubblico. Il musicista deve comporre con la volontà che lo comprenda la maggiore quantità possibile di persone [...] Io non temo di essere melodico e orecchiabile o – come si è scritto – un personaggio curiosamente inattuale nel panorama della musica contemporanea [...] L'importante, per me, è che la musica sia subito percepibile; abbia cioè, i canoni dell'immediatezza."* Ibid., 48.

[32] Francesco Lombardi, liner notes for *Nino Rota: Piano Music*, Michelangelo Carbonara, pianist, Brilliant Classics 9097, 2008.

character or those with a nostalgic mood, both of which are typical features of the composer's film music.[33]

In *15 Preludes*, which is identifiable with Frédéric Chopin's set of twenty-four independent character pieces, *Preludes, Op. 28* (1836-39),[34] Rota retains many features of the prelude genre such as brevity, unity, and an improvisatory quality. Most of the pieces also present an overall conventional phrase structure and a typical binary or ternary formal design. While adhering to the essential characteristics of a genre established by his predecessors, Rota displays a distinctively personal musical style in this set of preludes. He does so in part by employing, without ever completely departing from an established tonal center, compositional techniques often found in the works of early twentieth composers such as the colouristic use of polytonality, non-diatonic scales, and altered harmonies.[35] In several of the preludes (Nos. 7, 9, and 15), Rota superimposes two tonal areas a minor second apart, one of which always predominates over the other, producing a colouristic polytonal effect. In many of the preludes (Nos. 1-3, 5, 7, 10, 12-15), Rota incorporates non-diatonic scales, including whole-tone, hexatonic, and octatonic scales, to add variety to the well-defined tonal structure of the pieces. In all of the preludes, Rota includes altered harmonies, often expressed in the

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[33] Richard Dyer has interestingly pointed out that the fourth prelude can be directly linked to Rota's film music: a theme known as 'The Immigrant' from his score for Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II* (1974) is a reworking of this fourth miniature. Richard Dyer, *Music, Film and Feeling* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

[34] With his set of miniatures, Chopin transformed the prelude, which until the nineteenth century served an introductory function, by allowing it to stand as an independent character piece. Like Chopin, Rota presents his preludes as a collection of self-contained pieces, each of which conveys a particular mood or emotion.

[35] Cristian Massimiliano Pastorello, "Nino Rota's Fifteen Preludes for Piano Solo: An Analytical and Interpretative Study" (D.M.A. diss., University of Connecticut, 2010), 28.

form of dissonant chords, as substitutes for more conventional ones, increasing the harmonic tension and interest of the music.[36] Another salient compositional technique frequently employed by Rota in this work is the juxtaposition of parallel major and minor tonalities. This distinctive compositional feature, which is prominently presented in several of the preludes (Nos. 3, 10, and 15), in combination with the abovementioned compositional techniques of the early twentieth century, impart a highly personal musical style to the work.

The tonal order of Rota's *15 Preludes*, unlike the arrangement of pieces in Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier, BWV 846-893* (1722, 1742) and Frédéric Chopin's *Preludes, Op. 28*,[37] does not display any obvious tonal plan. However, in my opinion, their tonal sequence suggests a sectional subdivision within the set. The first group consists of the first three preludes, all of which are in the key of C (Nos. 1 and 2: C minor, No. 3: C major/minor) and in 4/4 meter. A break from the reiterated tonal center of C is provided by the fourth prelude, which moves to E major. A sense of relaxation is also supplied by a shift from the fast tempos of the first three preludes to the slow tempo of the fourth prelude. The fifth prelude initiates the second group of the set, which consists of three preludes centered around G major (No. 5: G major, No. 6: A minor, No. 7: G major). The idea that the second group begins with the fifth prelude is strengthened by its change of meter from simple to compound, which is the first shift of meter in the

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[36] Ibid., 41-47.

[37] The twenty-four pairs of preludes and fugues in each book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier, BWV 846-893* and the twenty-four miniatures in Chopin's *Preludes, Op. 28* cycle through all of the major and minor keys. The pieces in Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier, BWV 846-893* are arranged in pairs (major and parallel minor) and proceed up the chromatic scale (C major and C minor, C-sharp major and C-sharp minor, D major and D minor, etc...). The pieces in Chopin's *Preludes, Op. 28* are arranged in pairs (major and relative minor) and proceed through the circle of fifths (C major and A minor, G major and E minor, D major and B minor, etc...).

set. A demarcation point is provided by the eighth prelude, the middle piece of the set, which returns to the opening key of C minor. Its slow tempo supplies much contrast to the faster preludes that precede and follow it. The ninth and tenth preludes, which are in the key of G (No. 9: G minor, No. 10: G major), form the third group, while the following three preludes, which are centered around D minor (No. 11: D minor, No. 12: B-flat major, No. 13: D minor) and all in 4/4 meter, make up the fourth group. The fourteenth prelude in F minor, in which compound meter returns for the first and last time since the fifth piece, and the fifteenth prelude in B-flat minor,[38] constitute the final group, creating a sense of dominant to tonic for the closing section of the set. Thus, it seems the composer put considerable care into the tonal as well as the metric and temporal ordering of this work. Undoubtedly, *15 Preludes,* with its wide range of characters and moods, apparent cinematic touch, and great variety of compositional techniques, provides a remarkable display of Nino Rota's distinctive and multifaceted musical style.

[38] The fifteenth prelude opens in E-flat major but closes in B-flat minor.

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