

A Survey of Classical, French, and Wartime Violin Sonatas

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who continue to love and support me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to express my gratitude to my committee chair and professor, David Halen. He supported my doctoral studies at the University of Michigan from the moment I auditioned, and continued to be the most encouraging, dedicated, and influential mentor during my time here.

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ABSTRACT

Three violin recitals were presented in lieu of a written dissertation.

Beginning with Janáček's Violin Sonata, which was composed during the outbreak of World War I, the first recital featured wartime compositions. Copland's Violin Sonata and Prokofiev Violin Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, composed during the Second World War, were also performed to reveal the different ways in which composers were affected.

Monday, February 11th, 2019, 7:30 pm, Britton Recital Hall, University of Michigan.

Leoš Janáček *Sonata for Violin and Piano*; Aaron Copland *Sonata for Violin and Piano*;
Sergei Prokofiev *Violin Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, op. 80*.

The second dissertation recital showcased three French violin sonatas by Francis Poulenc, Claude Debussy, and César Franck. Performing violin sonatas by these three particular composers presented the extent to which compositional outputs varied, despite having been composed by composers of the same nationality.

Monday, March 11th, 2019, 7:30 pm, Britton Recital Hall, University of Michigan.

Francis Poulenc *Sonata for Violin and Piano, FP 119*; Claude Debussy *Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor*; César Franck *Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major*.

The final dissertation recital focused on the development and growth of violin sonatas during the Classical and Romantic periods. Sonatas by Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms were performed to highlight the changes, as well as similarities, in violin sonatas from 1784 to a century later in 1886.

Friday, April 19th, 2019, 5:30 pm, Stamps Auditorium, University of Michigan.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart *Sonata for Piano and Violin in B-Flat Major, K. 454*;

Ludwig van Beethoven *Sonata for Piano and Violin in C Minor, Op. 30, No. 2*; Johannes Brahms *Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Major, Op. 100*.

Recital 1 Program

Monday, February 11th, 2019, 7:30 pm
Britton Recital Hall
University of Michigan

Sonata for Violin and Piano

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

Sonata for Violin and Piano

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Intermission

Violin Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 80

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Recital 1 Program Notes

The idiom “a picture is worth a thousand words” refers to the concept that a picture can express a detailed idea. Building upon that notion, the same concept could be applied to a musical composition, as well. A composer’s work has the ability to portray ideas and states of mind, and even has the potential to be more emotionally provoking than words alone.

My first dissertation recital featured three violin sonatas that were all composed during wartime by composers of different nationalities. Given the fact that they were all composed during either World War I or II, it was eye opening to discover the various living conditions and circumstances of each composer as they all experienced something different. Thus, the works presented in this program reflect these composers’ different responses to wartime.

Leoš Janáček: *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1914)

Janáček was born in 1854 to a family of musicians in a small town in Moravia. Naturally, Janáček began his musical studies at an early age and was taught to play the piano, organ, and violin. With his family constantly pushing him towards a musical career, he lived with much uncertainty until his mid-20s, when he realized that music

was, in fact, his calling. Eventually, in 1885 he began song collecting, and after spending a few weeks in Russia in 1896 he grew to love Russian music and culture even more. Unfortunately, with the sudden outbreak of World War I in 1914, Janáček had to cancel his travel plans, as well as destroy all evidence of his pro-Russian interests. As a result, he began working on the Violin Sonata as a response to the war. It is important to note that Janáček was a Russophile, as were many other Czech intellectuals and patriots. Especially with Austrian rule looming over their country, Janáček awaited the arrival of the Russian army with high hopes that they would help the Czech attain its nation independence. Therefore, in combination with the outbreak of war and high hopes for independence, the sonata portrays nationalism, uncertainty, and anxiousness. For example, the opening violin solo, which sounds like a call song, can be heard as the loud outbreak of war, as it begins with a declamatory sforzando on a long held D-flat, followed by an upward gesture, which coincides with a crescendo. The melody that follows consists of many alternating upward and downward motions, which Janáček combines with hairpin dynamics to create a sense of uncertainty. Whereas the first movement portrays the outbreak of war, the last movement is indicative of the Russian armies entering Hungary. This is heard through the chorale-like theme from the opening of the last movement when it is reiterated by the violin on the G-string towards the end of the movement, in combination with the anxious high tremolos on the piano. Additionally, Janáček relies on repetitive short and abrupt motives in order to further portray the outbursts of the war.

Aaron Copland: *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1943)

Born in 1900 in Brooklyn, Copland's name grew to be synonymous with American music. He composed with the audience in mind, and often combined classical styles with characteristics of folk and jazz music. The famous fanfare that was heard at President Obama's 2009 inauguration was composed by Copland and has always been widely used throughout history for such purposes. The "Fanfare for the Common Man" is just one of many examples that reflects Copland's American style.

His violin sonata was composed in 1943- right around the same period as some of his most famous works, such as *Appalachian Spring* and his Third Symphony. This violin sonata carries a dedication to his friend, Lieutenant Harry H. Dunham, who lost his life during World War II. Therefore, it is strikingly different from Janáček's sonata, as Copland's features a greater amount of lyricism, nostalgia, and elegiac moments. The tonal ambiguity in the opening of the first movement lends a hand in creating a sense of tragedy paired with reminiscence, as it explores both G and D as potential tonal centers. The second movement is almost bare and plainchant-like as the piano simply holds the octave A with simple ascending and descending quarter notes. This plain and simple writing is suggestive of Copland writing in memoriam of his friend. The third movement has a more rigorous approach with a hoedown quality that may be heard as distinctly "American." Nevertheless, Copland returns to the pastoral opening material of the first movement, therefore ending the sonata with a touch of reminiscence that acts as a final salute to his fallen friend.

Sergei Prokofiev: *Violin Sonata no. 1 in F Minor, op. 80 (1938-1946)*

Born in 1891, Prokofiev lived and studied in Russia until the Russian Revolution of 1917. After the Revolution, he left his homeland and traveled to the U.S, Germany, and Paris. However, in 1936, he was lured back to the Soviet Union under false pretenses that he would be treated “fairly” by the government. This proved not to be the case beyond the first few years, and Prokofiev ultimately had to endure living through Stalin’s *Great Terror* and the Nazi invasion during World War II.

Prokofiev began this composition in 1938, just one year before the start of World War II, and continued to work on it throughout the entire war, having completed it shortly thereafter in 1946. This is quite significant as he generally produced compositions quickly; for example, his second violin sonata only took him one year to write. This particular sonata does not depict the outbreak of war as Janáček’s does, nor does it carry Copland’s elegiac and sentimental mood. Rather, it focuses on the absolute terror that Stalin’s reign brought, as well as the horrifying living conditions he endured as friends and colleagues were being arrested and never seen again. Fear is heard throughout the first movement as it begins with ominous music in the piano, followed by a curt motive in the violin. The end of the first movement is known for its *freddo* marking in which Prokofiev recreates the sounds of bone-chilling winds in a graveyard. In contrast, the second movement is more violent; rather than portraying fear and terror, it illustrates war and its aggressiveness through the stomping motive that consists of just one pitch. Through its calm and lyrical music, the third movement seems to represent nighttime in a household, when there was the potential for quiet and peace. The fourth movement,

however, returns to a stronger, motion-driven, percussive motive. Prokofiev reminds listeners of the terror that Stalin's reign brought by returning to the *freddo* section at the end of the fourth movement. This intense, dark, and somber work gives listeners a glimpse into Prokofiev's life at the time.

Recital 2 Program

Monday, March 11th, 2019, 7:30 pm
Britton Recital Hall
University of Michigan

Sonata for Violin and Piano, FP 119

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Intermission

Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major

César Franck (1822-1890)

Recital 2 Program Notes

For my second recital, I focused on three violin sonatas by French composers. Classical musicians are often quick to recognize when a particular composition is French as it has a particular color and impressionistic quality to it. Therefore, I specifically chose three very diverse compositions that illustrate the range and versatility of French music in the early modernist era.

Francis Poulenc: *Sonata for Violin and Piano, FP 119 (1942-43)*

Born in Paris in 1899, Poulenc's expansive oeuvre features songs, choral works, piano compositions, and more. However, his Violin Sonata is the only major composition he wrote for the instrument, as he found it difficult to compose for it. It was composed in 1942-1943 while he was living in Noizay under German occupation. These two years fall within his more mature compositional period, in which he began to prefer lyricism and enjoy poetry, in addition to his nurturing religious feelings.

His admiration and understanding for poetry is seen in this sonata, as the work was written in memory of poet Federico Garcia Lorca. The second movement bears a quotation from Lorca: "The guitar makes dreams cry," and the third movement's title "finale tragico" refers to the poet's death during the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. As a result, the work carries clear Spanish connections. In addition, Poulenc's newfound

desire for lyricism during this time period is heard in the second movement through its expressive melodies. While the sonata was written in memory of the poet, it was also written for violinist Ginette Neveu, whose tragic death in 1949 caused Poulenc to make revisions to the sonata. Aside from its lyricism and distinct Spanish flavor, the sonata also carries many instructions to play “très violent” or “rude.” Nevertheless, it also has mournful qualities.

Claude Debussy: *Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor* (1916-17)

Debussy was born in France in 1862, and by the time he was eleven years old he began his studies at the Paris Conservatory. Having won the Prix de Rome at age 22, Debussy eventually became one of the most influential French composers. Since his compositions often evoke certain moods and feelings, he is frequently associated with Impressionism, although he did not like to be labeled by this term. However, his use of compositional devices such as whole-tone scales, pentatonic scales, and blurred rhythms and timbres, all contribute to the overall Impressionist feeling.

In 1914, Debussy planned to compose a set of six sonatas for a variety of instruments, the first being for cello and piano in 1915. That same year, he wrote the second sonata for flute, viola, and harp. In 1916-17, with the raging war across Europe, Paris was being bombed by Germany, and Debussy wrote the third sonata of the proposed six, for violin and piano, while battling colon cancer. Unfortunately, this Violin Sonata ended up being the last as he passed away in 1918. Taking into consideration the circumstances surrounding the composition, it is extraordinary to see how the sonata is so colorful, moving, and optimistic at the same time.

Both Poulenc and Debussy studied Brahms's Violin Sonatas as a model; yet, the compositional outputs are radically different. In contrast to Poulenc's instructions to play violently or rough, Debussy relies heavily on techniques such as "sur la touche," or playing at the fingerboard, to create the particular timbre that he desired. While Poulenc's sonata features richer melodies, Debussy's features more of the impressionistic qualities that are often associated with French composers.

César Franck: *Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major* (1886)

Another contrasting French composition, Franck's Violin Sonata is permeated with instructions to play "molto dolce," "sempre dolce," and "dolcissimo." It is interesting to note that while it was Poulenc and Debussy that studied Brahms's Violin Sonatas as models, Franck's Violin Sonata is more similar to Brahms's as a result of his Romantic style of writing.

Although Franck was born in Liège (now in Belgium), he is often regarded as a Belgian-French composer because of his roots in the French musical world. His journey in Paris began in 1835 when his father brought him there to study, and in 1837 he became a student at the Paris Conservatory. Later, in 1872, he even became a French citizen in order to accept his appointment as professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory.

In regards to tonality and structure, Franck's sonata is most reminiscent of traditional forms and tonality in comparison to Debussy or Poulenc. This sonata consists of four movements with the first movement being in abbreviated sonata form and the second movement in sonata form. The third movement is a Recitative-Fantasia with the

following finale movement in sonata rondo form. Contrary to Debussy and Poulenc's sonatas, there are clearer tonal relationships and a stronger presence of traditional forms.

The violin sonata is a later work, written in 1886, as a wedding gift for violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. This composition is the only solo work that Franck composed, but has been rearranged for numerous instruments as a result of its popularity. Perhaps the sonata's success and reputation is a result of Franck's ability to create the ultimate romantic music that listeners can enjoy through its long themes with rich piano writing. Additionally, Franck's compositional style of cyclic-writing in this sonata creates connections amongst the four movements through the repetition and recycling of themes, thus, giving listeners the opportunity to recognize and recall earlier musical materials.

Recital 3 Program

Friday, April 19th, 2019, 5:30 pm
Stamps Auditorium
University of Michigan

Sonata for Piano and Violin in B-Flat Major, K. 454

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Sonata for Piano and Violin in C Minor, op. 30, no. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Intermission

Violin Sonata no. 2 in A Major, op. 100

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Recital 3 Program Notes

My final dissertation recital focused on three violin sonatas from two time periods, which played a crucial role in the development of sonata writing for the violin and piano. The three sonatas I chose to span a century, and to feature both the Classical and Romantic eras. Through this particular repertoire, I was able to explore how writing for this medium changed, while also examining what remained similar. In addition, my studies also provided insight on what the norms of the time period were, and whether the composer deviated from what was expected.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Sonata for Piano and Violin in B-Flat Major, K. 454* (1784)

Names such as Mozart and Beethoven are ones that are recognized by nearly most of society today. This is understandable, given that Mozart was a musical genius that began composing at the age of five, and in his short life produced an expansive oeuvre that would continue to be of significant importance to composers and listeners for centuries.

Mozart wrote a total of 36 sonatas for violin and piano. Despite his short life, his compositional style for this genre can be divided into distinct periods because of his rapid growth in composition. Around the time that he was six years old, the concept of

sonata writing was popular as it provided entertainment. However, during this time, it was more common to find a talented pianist rather than a skilled violinist. Therefore, the accompanied keyboard sonata was a popular genre and Mozart had to compose what would be successful. By the time Mozart was in his 20's, he was inspired by a set of duets for harpsichord and violin by Joseph Schuster. In these duets, Schuster favored an equal relationship between the harpsichord and violin, as opposed to Mozart's previously composed accompanied keyboard sonatas that featured prominent keyboard parts with minimal accompaniment provided by the violin. Beginning with his sonata in G Major, K. 301, we begin to hear his attempt at a more equal writing for the two instruments, as inspired by Schuster. Nevertheless, it was seen just as the beginning of his newer style. True equality between the two instruments is seen in his more mature works, for example, the sonata in B-Flat Major, K. 454.

The Sonata for Piano and Violin in B-Flat Major, K. 454 is a prime example of Mozart's mature compositional style that treats the piano and violin as equals. Written in 1784, he wrote this particular sonata to be played by Regina Strinasacchi, a famous violinist of the time. Mozart was well aware that Strinasacchi was a virtuoso, and his sonata is accordingly demanding. As a result, K. 454 is one of his most ambitious sonatas for piano and violin, not only in terms of length as most of his previous sonatas contained two movements as opposed to the three movements found in K. 454, but also in terms of musical depth and technique. The musical content is much more elaborate as it features longer, more intricate, conversing between the violin and piano, as well as much more detailed dynamic and articulation markings.

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Sonata for Piano and Violin in C Minor, op. 30, no. 2* (1801-02)

Like Mozart, Beethoven also had different compositional periods, which scholars often divide into the Early, Middle, and Late periods. The first five violin sonatas (op. 12 nos. 1-3, op. 23 no. 4, and op. 24 no. 5) were all written during his Early period. In 1802, the year in which scholars often identify as the start of his Middle period, he composed his op. 30 set of 3 violin sonatas (nos. 6-8). This is the same year that he wrote his famous *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he expresses his despair regarding his impending deafness that forced him to isolate himself from society. In this document, we are also able to get a glimpse into his character, which shows his dedication to music and hope for universal brotherhood.

While his violin sonatas from the Early period adhere more to the Classical style and form as seen in Mozart's, his op. 30 sonatas start to point more towards his own style. Specifically, his op. 30 no 2, is the only violin sonata written in C Minor. The key C Minor is significant as he often chose this key for works that were full of tempestuous pathos. For example, C Minor is the key of his popular Symphony No. 5, as well as his op. 13 "Pathetique" piano sonata.

Op. 30, no. 2 is written in four movements—a layout he employed in only two other violin sonatas (op. 24 and op. 96), his other violin sonatas all consist of the traditional three movements in fast – slow – fast pattern. It also surpasses Mozart's desire to treat the two instruments as equals as the piano part in this particular sonata is of greater difficulty. Additionally, the piano starts each movement with the violin repeating

the melody measures later, and in the fourth movement simply doubles the piano part for a few measures at a time before being allowed to repeat a melody. Although Mozart's K. 454 is considered to be his grandest violin sonata, Beethoven's op. 30, no. 2 is more large-scale and filled with thicker textures and drama, in comparison to Mozart's. This simply falls in line with history as there continued to be developments in compositional writing, as well as growth in performance skills, from 1784 to 1802.

Johannes Brahms: *Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Major, op. 100 (1886)*

Born in 1833, Brahms is regarded as a highly influential and prolific composer; so much so that he is frequently grouped with J.S. Bach and Beethoven, to be known as the "Three B's." Although he was born in the Romantic period and is known for his innovations and identifiable Brahmsian textures, much of his music follows the fundamentals set by earlier Classical composers, such as Mozart and Beethoven. However, his identifiable, thick, texture comes as a result of his unique synthesis of complex rhythmic and harmonic developments, and is what sets his music apart from the Classical Era.

While Mozart composed his first violin sonata as a six year old, and Beethoven at the age of twenty-eight, Brahms did not write his first violin sonata until he was forty-five years old. Six years later, while spending the summer of 1886 in Thun, he composed the second violin sonata in the traditional three movements. The first movement follows the well-established structure of sonata form; the second movement combines both a slow and fast section, which almost seems to be his combination of what could have been movements 2 and 3 of a four-movement work like Beethoven's. The third movement, marked *Allegretto grazioso*, completes the traditional fast – slow – fast layout. Brahms's

sonatas thoroughly points to a more Romantic style of writing by virtue of its luscious and fuller textures, its richly developed compositional forms, and its keen sense of chamber music writing.