



Music at the Corcoran presents...

BEETHOVEN AND HIS INTERPRETERS: A STUDY ON MOONLIGHT SONATA

A NEXT CAPSTONE BY
SHEILA ALBERTSON
PIANO, HARPSICHORD, AND VOICE

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**BEETHOVEN AND HIS INTERPRETERS:
A STUDY ON MOONLIGHT SONATA**
a NEXT capstone by Sheila Albertson
piano, harpsichord, and voice

Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# minor, op. 27, no. 2 Ludwig van Beethoven

I. Adagio sostenuto (1770-1827)

II. Allegretto

III. Presto agitato

Danzas Argentinas

Alberto Ginastera

I. Danza del viejo boyero

(1916-1983)

II. Danza de la moza donosa

III. Danza del gaucho matrero

Les pièces de clavessin

Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre

Suite in A minor: Chaconne

(1665-1729)

Les Baricades Mistérieuses

François Couperin

(1668-1733)

Selve amiche

Antonio Caldara

(1670-1736)

with Prof. John Albertson, guitar

Wouldn't It Be Lovely

Frederick Loewe (1901-1988)

from *My Fair Lady*

lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner

with Nica Albertson, piano

Someone to Watch Over Me

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

from *Oh, Kay!*

lyrics by Ira Gershwin

with Prof. John Albertson, guitar

About the Performer

Sheila Albertson is a senior at the George Washington University majoring in Music and minoring in Biology. After graduating in Spring 2020, Sheila plans to continue her studies at George Mason University, pursuing a master's degree in Education.

Thank You

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–Sheila Albertson

Notes on the Program

Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# minor, op. 27, no. 2 **by Ludwig van Beethoven**

Background:

The formal title of the Moonlight Sonata is Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# minor, op. 27, no. 2, "Sonata quasi una fantasia," which translates to "Sonata in the manner of a fantasia. The German music critic Ludwig Rellstab made a remark that the first movement reminded him of "moonlight shining on Lake Lucerne," and this comment caught fire. Within the decade publishers changed the name to "Moonlight Sonata."

Beethoven composed this composition in 1801 while in his early thirties, when he started to lose his hearing. Some speculate that Beethoven wrote this piece for his 17-year-old piano student Giulietta Guicciardi, but it is much more likely

his inspiration came from a darker place. Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* had a scene in which Don Giovanni kills the commander, and the melody from the first movement of Moonlight Sonata sounds very similar to that in this scene. Rather than a romantic feel, this movement has a funereal feel, as some speculate it coming from a death scene.

A fantasia is free-flowing and improvisatory in nature, and this title sets the tone for the entire piece. The moonlight sonata is known for its "mysterious, gently arpeggiated, and seemingly improvised first movement" (Schwartz 1). Using arpeggios sequentially was a common improvisatory style of the time. The fantasy music genre is very improvisational, as can be seen through the many cadenza-like passages throughout the piece.

The sonata inspired Frédéric Chopin to write *Fantasia-Impromptu*, as a tribute to Beethoven.

Form:

The sonata of the classical period was written in three movements. Typically, the tempo for each movement went in the order fast, slow, fast. However, Beethoven breaks away from this tradition by creating the order to be slow, medium, fast, saving the most powerful movement for last. The three movements are:

- I. Adagio sostenuto
- II. Allegretto
- III. Presto agitato.

The first movement, Adagio sostenuto, is quiet and somber. The entire movement's dynamics are in the piano, or soft, range. The movement's lack of forte is restrained for Beethoven, as most of his works nearing the end of his life are loud and exuberant. The triplet ostinato rhythms continue throughout the movement. When the melody arises in the piece, it is fleeting and sparse. It practically glistens, like light peeking through the darkness. The first movement's form is in typical sonata form, with an exposition, a short development, recapitulation, and coda. It has cadenza-style passages, mimicking an improvisatory style. The first movement is in C# minor, the second movement is in the parallel major of D-flat major, and the third movement returns back to C# minor. D-flat and C# are enharmonic.

Bringing out the top note and making the inner notes softer is essential to playing this movement properly. By doing so, the melody line can shine, while the inner notes are there to provide texture. Using the body to move with the hands is a vital step to playing the piece well. Particularly in Moonlight, the right hand arpeggiated up a scale in the development section, which requires I move my body with the motion of my hands.

The second movement is a minuetto and trio. Minuets were written to be danced to. "A minuet has three beats in a bar and generally moves along at a leisurely pace. Composers as far back as Jean-Baptiste Lully wrote them for the courts of kings and queens, where wealthy and upper-class people would gather to indulge in fine food and drink, strive to make a good impression on the ruling monarch, or simply make sure they were seen in the right places" (Mello 1). "The trio element evolved as a technique to make the minuet last

longer and is simply another minuet stuck in the middle. Composers helped audiences identify the trio by scoring it for three instruments only - and that's where the name 'trio' comes from" (Mello 2). The basic minuet form is minuet, trio, minuet (A-B-A form).

The second movement is playful in nature. It is technically challenging in that there are many details. The piece sounds like a dance and requires a waltz-like approach to the piano. I have also learned to use legato while holding down two notes, which extends the time the top note is played. In the second section of the second movement, there are octave leaps in the right hand which I have learned to bounce with my body. Again, using the body here is important as it effects the overall sound.

The third movement is dark and heavy, similar in mood to the first movement, but much faster and ferocious. It is fast, fluid, and exciting. The powerful sound in this movement comes from a few bursts of sforzandos, but the arpeggiated notes are all in piano dynamic marking. When the sforzandos do hit, they are really intense and loud. This movement is quite technically advanced. It is in sonata form. The recapitulation returns to the exposition, and the coda to finish.

"Beethoven placed the most important final stormy movement in the last. This movement, as what Charles Rosen said, is 'the most unbridled in its representation of emotion. Even today, two hundred years later, its ferocity is astonishing.' The writing of this movement contains lots of strongly accented notes and dynamic changes. Beethoven used crescendo a lot to move the passage from piano to fortissimo and to create the sense of a very powerful sound" ("Instrumental Storytelling Reflection").

Works Cited

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Danzas Argentinas by Alberto Ginastera

Danzas Argentinas was composed during Ginastera's first period in 1937, to reflect objective nationalism. The title of the work is nationalistic in nature, titled Argentinian dances. The titles of the works are indicative of the different types of dances performed from various regions of Argentina. Each of these dances are in 6/8 time, and each movement has a different tempo marking: fast-slow-fast.

- I. Danza del viejo boyero, "Dance of the Old Herdsman"
- II. Danza de la moza donosa, "Dance of the Beautiful Maiden"
- III. Danza del gaucho matrero, "Dance of the Outlaw Cowboy"

The first movement is titled "Dance of the Old Herdsman," with its syncopated and horse-like rhythms, similar to a man herding cattle on horseback. The piece is in bitonal mode. The right hand is in E phrygian, which is in the key of C major. The left hand is playing the pentatonic scale in D-flat major. Performing the first movement, I keep a dance-like quality in my body movements, as it is a very playful movement. This movement is organized around the middle climax portion of the piece, measures 34-45, with both A and B themes. In the first A section the rhythm is very jumpy, and the left hand is replicating the strings of a guitar, while the right-hand chords are sparse and have two variations. The B section has the left hand playing six notes and the right hand sparsely playing the chord. At the very end of the piece the left hand plays a six-note chord, E-A-D-G-B-E, like plucking the strings of a guitar. The first movement ends on the note E, which is the tonic of the Phrygian scale and the lowest string note on the guitar.

The second movement is Ginastera's most well-known movement. It is titled "Dance of the Beautiful Maiden," indicative of a beautiful maiden dancing. In this second movement, I pay attention to phrasing the right-hand melody, and keeping the left hand as quiet as possible. The second movement is in three-part A-B-A form. The A section starts slow, delicate and soft. The B section starts off in two note intervals and gradually enters full octaves, gathering in intensity and loudness. The A section returns softly, and is a very beautiful, melodic melody.

The third movement is titled "Dance of the Outlaw Cowboy" and starts off at a high tempo. This movement has interesting syncopated rhythms and technically the most challenging of the three movements. This movement begins with the A section moving quickly and quietly. In the B section, I focus on bringing out the top note in the triad, since the left hand is moving a lot and otherwise it sounds busy and strange. In the C movement, I can really hear the Argentine influence and dance-like structure come into play. This feeling of syncopated rhythms and jolts from the first movement comes back in the third. The piece ends with dynamics quadruple-forte and a tremendous glissando to bring the dance to a close.

Suite in A Minor: Chaconne by Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre

Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de La Guerre was a French musician, harpsichordist, and composer born in Paris in 1665 and died in 1729. The Suite in A minor has nine parts, and the seventh part is *Chaconne*, written in 1687 in Paris.

Notes inégales refers to a performance practice, mainly from the Baroque and Classical music eras. This means to swing the rhythm, so rather than playing the eighth notes straight time, you swing every other note. However, once the piece enters the second page, sixteenth notes are introduced, and the rhythm is played straight. The *Chaconne* begins with a refrain that get repeated numerous times throughout the piece. In between each refrain are the couplets, with four couplets in total. The first two couplets are in swing rhythm with eighth notes, the second two couplets are straight rhythm incorporating both eight and sixteenth notes.

There are numerous accidentals in this Baroque style of music. Trills are placed on every other note, and it is proper form to approach the trill from the note above. The grace notes are meant to be played with more emphasis than in classical music where the grace note is supposed to be short and quick.

Les Baricades Mistérieuses by François Couperin

The name of this piece translates to “The Mysterious Barricades,” and Couperin composed it for harpsichord in 1717. The style of piece is *style brisé*, characteristic of French Baroque Keyboard music. The work is in rondeau form, in four parts, creating an “ever-changing tapestry of melody and harmony, interacting and overlapping with different rhythmic schemes and melodies,” (Service, Tom).

Unlike the Chaconne that is in swing rhythm, or *notes inégales*, Les Baricades Mistérieuses is in *style brisé*, or “broken style.” This style has many chords broken up and the notes are held down while other notes are played over it. It is also known as “lute style,” as a musician plucking the strings of a lute one by one. Similar to the Chaconne, this piece has a refrain which gets repeated many times in between the couplets. There are three couplets, each one with three phrases. In order to play this piece without it sounding too repetitive, it is important to have consistent phrasing.

Selve Amiche by Antonio Caldara

Antonio Caldara was an Italian Baroque composer. He worked as a chorister at St. Mark’s in Venice. Later working for Mantua from 1699 to 1707, and then in 1707 in Barcelona as the chamber composer for Charles the Third. His success stemmed mainly from his vocal music. His other works include operas *Sofonisba* and *Tito e Berenice*, oratorios *Santo Stefano* and *Maddalena*, and other works such as *Alma del Core* and *Crucifixus*. *Selve Amiche* was written in the early eighteenth century.

Original Text (Italian)

Selve amiche, ombrose piante
Fido albergo del mio core.
Chiede a voi quest’alma amante
Qualche pace al suo dolore.

Translation (English)

Friendly woods, shady plants,
Loyal shelter for my heart,
This loving soul asks from you
Some peace from my grief.

Wouldn't It Be Lovely by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe

This piece was written for the 1956 Broadway play *My Fair Lady*. This song is sung by flower girl Eliza Doolittle and her street friends. The stage version was sung by Julie Andrews. Loewe was an Austrian-American composer. He collaborated with Lerner on a series of Broadway musicals, including *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot* (1960), and *GiGi*. Lerner was an American lyricist and librettist. Lerner and Loewe's first hit was *Brigadoon* (1947). Lerner worked with Kurt Weill on stage musical *Love Life* (1948) and worked with Burton Lane on the movie musical *Royal Wedding* (1951).

The story of *My Fair Lady* is about Eliza Doolittle, a cockney flower girl who takes speech lessons from professor Henry Higgins, a phonetician, so that she may pass as a lady. The original Broadway and London show starred Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews. The song "Wouldn't It Be Lovely" was performed early in Act 1 soon after Eliza meets Higgins. Eliza and her friends wonder what it would be like to live a comfortable life.

Someone to Watch Over Me by George Gershwin

Gershwin was an American composer and pianist who composed pieces both in pop and classical music genres. Among some of his famous pieces include *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), *Fascinating Rhythm* (1924), *I Got Rhythm* (1930), the opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and *Summertime*. Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, and started his career in music as a song plugger at first. Gershwin wrote the piece "Someone to Watch Over Me" for singer Gertrude Lawrence in the musical *Oh, Kay* (1926). "Someone to Watch Over Me" was recorded by Frank Sinatra in 1946 for his first album. Ella Fitzgerald recorded this piece in 1951. The context of this piece in the play is the girl singing to her ragdoll asking for "someone to watch over me."

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