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The 23 Greatest Solo Piano Works

Course Guidebook

Professor Robert Greenberg
San Francisco Performances



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Professor Robert Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1954 and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1978. Professor Greenberg received a B.A. in Music, magna cum laude, from Princeton University in 1976. His principal teachers at Princeton were

Edward Cone, Daniel Werts, and Carlton Gamer in composition; Claudio Spies and Paul Lansky in analysis; and Jerry Kuderna in piano. In 1984, Professor Greenberg received a Ph.D. in Music Composition, with distinction, from the University of California, Berkeley, where his principal teachers were Andrew Imbrie and Olly Wilson in composition and Richard Felciano in analysis.

Professor Greenberg has composed more than 45 works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Recent performances of his works have taken place in New York; San Francisco; Chicago; Los Angeles; England; Ireland; Greece; Italy; and the Netherlands, where his *Child's Play* for String Quartet was performed at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Professor Greenberg has received numerous honors, including three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet The Composer grants. He has received recent commissions from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Strata Ensemble, San Francisco Performances, and the XTET ensemble. Professor Greenberg is a board member and an artistic director of COMPOSERS, INC., a composers' collective and production organization based in San Francisco. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label.

Professor Greenberg has performed, taught, and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is currently Music Historian-in-Residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994, and is a faculty member of the Advanced Management Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. He has served on the faculties of the University of California, Berkeley; California State University, East Bay; and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music History and Literature from 1989 to 2001 and served as the director of the Adult Extension Division from 1991 to 1996.

Professor Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years he was host and lecturer for the symphony's nationally acclaimed Discovery Series), the Chautauqua Institution (where he was the Everett Scholar-in-Residence during the 2006 season), the Ravinia Festival, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Villa Montalvo, Music@Menlo, and the University of British Columbia (where he was the Dal Grauer Lecturer in September 2006).

In addition, Professor Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has recently spoken for such diverse organizations as S. C. Johnson, Canadian Pacific, Deutsches Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser Permanente, the Strategos Institute, Quintiles Transnational, the Young Presidents' Organization, the World Presidents' Organization, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Professor Greenberg has been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Inc.* magazine, *The Times* of London, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, the University of California alumni magazine, *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, and *Diablo* magazine.

For many years, Professor Greenberg was the resident composer and music historian for NPR's *Weekend All Things Considered*; he currently plays that

role on NPR's *Weekend Edition, Sunday* with Liane Hansen. In February 2003, Maine's *Bangor Daily News* referred to Professor Greenberg as the Elvis of music history and appreciation, an appraisal that has given him more pleasure than any other.

Professor Greenberg's other Great Courses include *The 30 Greatest Orchestral Works*; *How to Listen to and Understand Great Music, 3rd Edition*; *Concert Masterworks*; *Bach and the High Baroque*; *The Symphonies of Beethoven*; *How to Listen to and Understand Opera*; the *Great Masters* series; *The Operas of Mozart*; *The Life and Operas of Verdi*; *The Symphony*; *The Chamber Music of Mozart*; *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*; *The Concerto*; *Understanding the Fundamentals of Music*; and *The Music of Richard Wagner*. ■

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The 23 Greatest Solo Piano Works

Scope:

The *23 Greatest Solo Piano Works* is a guide through more than 200 years of keyboard music, and in 24 lectures, it will give you the knowledge and insight to enjoy and appreciate the stunningly diverse literature of piano music. In addition to the study of the music, the course digs deeply into the artistic and social environments that shaped the music itself, shedding light on what inspired these great works and how they were created.

Beginning with the towering figures of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, the course moves on to the piano music of such great 19th-century masters as Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff and finally to visionary modernists including Scriabin, Debussy, Copland, and Prokofiev.

While all of the works featured in this course are worthy of being called among the “greatest,” there are—admittedly—many other “greatest solo works for the piano” that could have been addressed in this course. The selections were governed by three basic ground rules.

- The works included have stood the test of time, meaning that they are part of the standard piano repertoire—works that can be heard in concert, works that have been published, works that are readily available on recordings.
- A single composer is represented by a maximum of two major works. This is in order to fulfill a larger goal of the course, which is to explore a stylistically and historically varied body of some of the greatest works ever written for piano, works that offer the collateral advantage of illustrating the development of the piano as an instrument and pianistic technique as a skill.
- Sets of works published together count as a single work. The only exception to this is the two lectures that focus on Debussy: “The Sunken Cathedral,” from his first book of *Préludes*, and another on the remainder of Debussy’s *Préludes*, Book One. (Given his

incredible innovations as both a composer and as a composer for the piano, this bit of Debussy worship is entirely appropriate.)

The principal backstory of this course is the technological development of the piano and the concurrent evolution of piano music that exploited its developing capabilities. Parallel with the unfolding of the musical repertoire, you will follow the technological development of the piano, from the German-built pianos manufactured by Gottfried Silbermann in the 1730s to the modern grand pianos built by Steinway and Sons in the 1870s.

This, therefore, is not just a course about music played on the piano but one about music written specifically for the piano by composers who were, not coincidentally, among the greatest pianists who ever lived—composers who exploited the instrument’s ever-growing dynamic range, touch, and sonority.

The nature of piano music coevolved with piano technology. Consequently, the technical and expressive content of the music surveyed in this course vary depending on the nature of the pianos available to the composers. For example, it would never have occurred to Mozart—whose piano spanned five octaves—to use the upper and lower notes available on a modern piano, which spans seven-plus octaves. In addition, the double escapement mechanism, pioneered in the 1820s, made fast, repeated notes possible and allowed Liszt to create a sort of piano music that could never have been played on earlier pianos. Debussy used the resonance and overtones of the modern grand piano to create shimmering—otherworldly musical environments that would likewise have been unthinkable on earlier pianos.

A particularly exciting feature of the course is the performance of custom-recorded musical examples by three concert pianists who performed and recorded them at The Great Courses studio. Their appearance in the course provides the opportunity to discuss the significant differences between a talented pianist and the true concert pianist, who is a supremely (one might say ruthlessly) disciplined professional. Like being a champion athlete, being a professional pianist requires strength, conditioning, technique, commitment, precision, mental toughness, and a fiercely competitive spirit.

The course is strengthened and enriched by the wonderful performances of three concert pianists: Magdalina Melkonyan, Woobin Park, and Eun Joo Chung.

For the most part, the works featured in this course appear in chronological order. However, this course is not conceived as a single, sequential unit of 24 lectures. The course can be consumed as a single entity, Lectures 1 through 24, or as a compendium of discrete lectures to be enjoyed in any order one chooses.

Three lectures (9, 11, and 16) stand somewhat apart from the others. Discussed in these lectures is the extraordinarily innovative pianism of the three composers who, more than any others, defined the piano as we understand it today: Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Claude Debussy. These lectures do focus on a single work or set of works—respectively, Chopin’s *Ballade in G Minor*, Liszt’s *Years of Pilgrimage*, and Debussy’s *Préludes*, Book One—but they examine their composers’ revolutionary pianism as much as the music itself.

By the end of the course, you will have come to see that a piano is a one-person orchestra. From the keyboard music of Johann Sebastian Bach through the piano music of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, Mussorgsky, Rachmaninoff, Debussy, Scriabin, Albéniz, Ravel, Copland, Prokofiev, and hundreds of other composer old and new, the repertoire of the piano spans a historical and expressive depth far beyond that of any other single instrument. ■

Piano Starts Here!

Lecture 1

In this course, Lectures 2 through 23 will each deal with a single work or a set of works published together. Lectures 9, 11, and 16 stand somewhat apart from the others. These three lectures are dedicated to discussing the extraordinarily innovative pianism of the three composers who, more than any others, defined the piano as we understand it today: Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Claude Debussy. While these lectures focus on a single work or set of works, they will examine their composers' revolutionary pianism as much as the music itself.

The Composers and the Piano

- A “concert pianist” is a professional pianist who makes his or her living playing concerts. (A “concert” is a live performance during which people pay good money to hear a professional pianist play.) This course features three concert pianists, who will provide custom-recorded musical examples: Magdalina Melkonyan, Woobin Park, and Eun Joo Chung.
- In this course, 19 different composers are represented, and every one of those 19 composers was a competent pianist. Of the 19, 11 were world-class concert players: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Brahms, Isaac Albéniz, Alexander Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, and Prokofiev; 5 were accomplished professionals: Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Aaron Copland; and 3 were—at the very least—passably competent: Franz Schubert, Modest Mussorgsky, and Antonin Dvořák. Of all these composers, the only one who didn't initially train as a keyboard player was Dvořák.
- This is not just a course about music played on the piano but about music written specifically for the piano by composers who were, in most cases, among the greatest pianists who ever lived.



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The harpsichord, a keyboard musical instrument, led to the invention of the piano.

- The exception is Johann Sebastian Bach, who had a checkered relationship with the piano. Bach—who lived from 1685 to 1750—was, without any doubt, the greatest keyboard player of his time. His main axes were the organ and the harpsichord. The piano was still in its techno-infancy when Bach got to know it, and overall, he was not particularly impressed.
- The two works by Bach included in this survey—Book One of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *Goldberg Variations*—were originally performed on the harpsichord. However, for more than 200 years, these works have been, much more often than not, played on the piano. Given their performance history, it can be asserted that Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and *Goldberg Variations* are piano as well as harpsichord works, and as such, they must be numbered as being among the greatest piano works ever composed and, thus, deserve a place in this course.

- To a not-insignificant degree, this will also be a course about the piano, an instrument that changed tremendously over the first 170 years of its existence. The 9-foot-long, 1,000-pound concert grand piano that today is considered the “standard” concert instrument came into existence well after the lives and careers of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, and Schumann.
- Invented around 1700 by a Florence-based harpsichord builder named Bartolomeo Cristofori, the piano was an evolving technology until the 1870s, when the modern concert grand came into existence. Thus, the nature of piano music coevolved with the piano. Consequently, the technical and expressive content of the music surveyed in this course will vary depending on the nature of the pianos available to the composers.

The Harpsichord and the Early Piano

- The harpsichord was invented around the year 1400. By 1700, harpsichords were as ubiquitous as electric keyboards are today. A harpsichord is a mechanical harp, a wing-shaped instrument in which the strings of a horizontally set harp are plucked from a keyboard.
- When a harpsichord key is pressed, it levers upward a slat of wood called a jack. Mounted on the jack is a pick that is made from either a quill or a piece of hardened leather. The plectrum “plucks” a string as it rises past it. When the key is released, the jack-and-plectrum assembly falls back into place by gravity. A small hinge folds the plectrum assembly upward, and thus, it passes the string without replucking it, at which point a damper stops the vibration of the string.
- The nature of a harpsichord’s action precludes it from getting progressively louder and softer or of **accenting**—that is, making some **notes** louder than others. Pushing down harder on the keys of a harpsichord will not make the instrument play louder; all that will do is create a wooden thump.

- The loudness of a harpsichord is not determined by the speed with which the plectrum moves, but by the actual mass of the plectrum itself. The mass of the plectrum is built into a harpsichord; it's not something that can be modified during a performance. Therefore, a harpsichord is incapable of **graded dynamics**—of getting progressively louder or softer.
- For many members of the 17th-century Italian musical community—a community increasingly enamored of the lyric expressivity of opera on one hand and the violin on the other—the limitations of the harpsichord became increasingly problematic.
- The inventor of genius who solved the harpsichord problem (and in doing so became the Hewlett, Packard, Wozniak, and Jobs of baroque era instrumental innovation) was Bartolomeo Cristofori, who was born in Padua in 1655.
- In around 1688, Cristofori was hired by Prince Ferdinando de' Medici of Florence to maintain the family's harpsichords and build new ones. In 1700, Cristofori built an instrument that sought to address the **dynamic** shortcomings of the harpsichord that employed leather-covered “hammers” to strike—rather than a plectrum to pluck—the strings.
- For this instrument, Cristofori created an entirely new sort of action, one that varied the speed of the hammers (and, therefore, the loudness of the strike) depending on how hard a key was pressed. Cristofori called the instrument a *gravicembalo col pian e fort*, meaning a “big harpsichord with soft (*pian*) and loud (*fort*),” a “pianoforte,” a “soft-loud.”
- Initially, Cristofori considered his *gravicembalo col pian e fort* to be a modified harpsichord. It took both Cristofori and the musical community around him roughly 25 years to realize that he had, in reality, invented an entirely new instrument, one capable of an entirely new degree of expressive nuance.

- When Cristofori died in 1731 at the age of 76, his “pianoforte” was just starting to catch on. The following year, 1732, saw the publication of the first music composed specifically for the piano: 12 **sonatas** by the Italian composer Ludovico Giustini.
- It was also in 1732 that a German organ and harpsichord builder named Gottfried Silbermann built his first piano. Silbermann’s early pianos were copies of Cristofori’s design. However, over time, and thanks in no small part to the feedback Silbermann received from a local keyboard player and composer named Johann Sebastian Bach, Silbermann’s pianos became known as the most reliable and playable on the market. So dominant did Silbermann’s pianos become that by the late 18th century, he was being credited with having invented the thing.
- We can forgive Beethoven his chauvinism, because Gottfried Silbermann was—directly and indirectly—responsible for basic design of most of the pianos Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven played in their lifetimes.
- One of Gottfried Silbermann’s most important pupils was his nephew Johann Andreas Silbermann (1712–1783), whose workshop was in Strasbourg, in northeastern France. Among his apprentices was a young wizard named Andreas Stein (1728–1792), who went on to create what is now known as the “Viennese action” and was accordingly the principal designer of what today is generically called the “Viennese fortepiano,” the five-octave instrument for which Haydn, Mozart, and the young Beethoven composed.
- Andreas Stein founded a piano-building dynasty. His daughter Nanette (1769–1833) was a skilled piano builder. Nanette continued the family business after her father died under her married name of Streicher. The Streicher company built pianos for Beethoven and went on to play an instrumental role in the development of the piano across the 19th century. The firm—run to the end by the Streicher family—remained in business until 1894.

- Over the course of these lectures, you will learn about the technological history of the piano, from the German-built pianos manufactured by Gottfried Silbermann in the 1730s to the modern grands built by Steinway & Sons in the 1870s. However, because this is a course about piano music and not piano technology, all of the musical examples will be played on a modern Steinway.

Important Terms

accent: The emphasis of certain notes over others.

dynamics: Degrees of loudness—e.g., piano (quiet), forte (loud)—indicated in a musical score.

graded dynamics: Markings used to indicate a progressive increase in loudness or softness, respectively, crescendo (getting louder) or decrescendo/diminuendo (getting softer/quieter).

note: A sound with three properties: a single, singable fundamental frequency; timbre; and duration.

sonata: Piece of music, typically in three or four movements, composed for a piano (piano sonata) or a piano plus one instrument (violin sonata, for instance).

J. S. Bach—*The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book One

Lecture 2

Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* remains the single most influential and pedagogically important keyboard work ever composed. It was *The Well-Tempered Clavier* that kept Bach's name alive during the decades of obscurity that followed his death in 1750. Throughout the second half of the 18th century and well into the 19th century—what we've come to refer to as the classical period and the romantic era—*The Well-Tempered Clavier* was considered to be the basic manual for keyboard training for players of all ages.

Introduction to *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

- On March 2, 1783, an article appeared in a German periodical called “C. F. Cramer’s Magazine of Music,” which was written by an organist named Christian Gottlob Neefe. In 1781, Neefe had been appointed court organist for the Rhineland city of Bonn, at which time he took on as a student a 10-year-old local named Ludwig van Beethoven.
- Wolfgang Mozart was introduced to *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by his Viennese patron Baron Gottfried van Swieten in 1783. It was an introduction that changed Mozart’s life. Mozart immediately arranged five of Bach’s **fugues** for two violins, viola, and bass, catalogued as Köchel 405. Frédéric Chopin was weaned on both books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*—all 48 preludes and fugues.
- What is referred to as *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is actually two separate sets of compositions, known as Book One and Book Two. Each book contains 24 sets of paired preludes and fugues: one prelude and fugue in each **major** and each **minor key**.
- Book One is a mix-and-match collection that evolved from a series of preludes that Bach compiled for his son Wilhelm Friedemann in 1720. In 1722, he went public with a collection of 24 preludes and

fugues. Between 1738 and 1742, Bach composed a second set of “24 new preludes and fugues,” which was issued as Book Two.

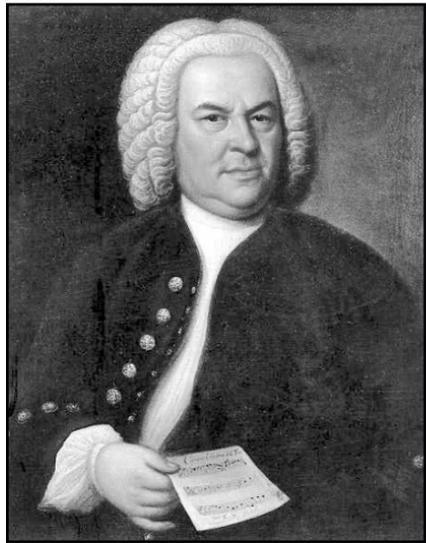
- That Bach intended both books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* to be performed on a range of keyboard instruments is evident from his own title: He did not call the piece “The Well-Tempered Harpsichord” but, rather, “The Well-Tempered Clavier,” meaning quite generically “The Well-Tempered Keyboard.”

The Nature of the High Baroque Aesthetic

- The period of time we refer to as the baroque era—from 1600 to 1750—saw the beginnings of modern science, as the “natural philosophers” of the age sought to catalog the wonders of the physical world and understand their workings through deductive method and not supernatural explanation. It was the era of Hume, Locke, Descartes, and Leibniz—of Galileo, Kepler, Malthus, and Newton.
- Typical of his time, Newton’s work was a blend of religious faith and hard science. He believed that beneath the seeming random chaos of the visible universe there existed stable, systemic order—the hand of god, a universal operating system.
- At its essence, a fugue investigates and catalogs the musical properties and capabilities of its **theme**, a specially designed **melody** called a **subject**. In a fugue, the subject is examined from various angles by repeating it in different keys and in different voices. By definition, a fugue is a **polyphonic** construct—that is, a work for two or more simultaneous melodic parts of equal importance.
- No matter how simple or brain-numbingly complex it may be, a fugue will always feature three basic structural elements: an **exposition**, a series of subject restatements, and a series of transitions between those restatements called episodes.
- The exposition is the first part of any fugue, during which the fugue subject is stated successively in each constituent part until all of the parts have entered. In the exposition of Bach’s Fugue no. 2 in

C Minor from Book One of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the fugue is cast for three voices.

- Following the exposition, a fugue will feature any number of subject restatements in various different keys. These restatements are preceded by transitions called episodes, which are typically built from bits and pieces of the subject and are tasked with modulating to the key of the next restatement.
- Every tuning system is based on the primacy of the octave. An octave is the sonic relationship created when one object vibrates twice as fast as another. An octave is a sonic manifestation of the simplest of ratios—a 1:2 ratio.
- As every possible **pitch** that exists within the span of a single octave is duplicated in octaves above and below it, every pitch system will divide the octave into a series of smaller **intervals**, which are then duplicated in upper and lower octaves.
- Since the first ancient Greek music theorists fired up their writing styli in order to codify Western musical practice as it then existed, the interval of a perfect fifth has been that musical entity used to divide the octave into discrete pitches.
- After the octave, the next most consonant is a sonic manifestation of a 2:3 ratio, an interval called a perfect fifth. This collection of



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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) is one of the most celebrated baroque-era composers to have ever lived.

seven pitches became known as the Pythagorean collection. The tuning system that creates the Pythagorean collection is called “just intonation.”

- Just intonation served the needs of Western music quite nicely until the 15th century, at which point growing expressive demands led to an across-the-board rethinking of Western pitch resources and tuning. After rising through five more pitches, each a perfect fifth above the last, the 13th pitch was the same as the first pitch.
- After much experimentation, a system called “well-tempered tuning” came into use during the 17th century. A well-tempered tuning is one in which all of the fifths are tempered almost the same.
- By the 1850s, equal temperament had become the standard and remains so to this day. In equal temperament, each of the fifths is tempered to exactly the same degree. Instead of representing a “pure” 2:3 ratio, equally tempered fifths are all 2/100s of a **semitone** flat.

Bach’s Influences

- Bach was powerfully influenced by the work of the organist, theorist, and Lutheran religious philosopher Andreas Werckmeister (1645–1706). Werckmeister—who experimented widely with tunings and actually coined the phrase “well-tempered”—believed that scriptural authority justified his technical theories. Like Werckmeister, Bach believed that music of every kind—religious and secular—was an audible manifestation of God’s presence and perfection.
- The three principal musical styles of the high baroque were the so-called Italian style, French style, and German style. The Italian style was preconditioned by the vocality of opera. An example is the exposition of Fugue no. 3 in **C-sharp** Major. Fugue no. 7 in **E-flat** Major employs another such Italianate subject.
- The French style was best known for its highly embellished melody lines and dance rhythms. In addition, French baroque keyboard

music was well known for something called the *style brisé*, which means the “broken style,” in which **chords** are broken, or strummed, in a manner derived from the strumming of lute music. An example is the opening of Prelude no. 8 in E-flat Minor.

- The German style was characterized by compositional rigor: polyphonic intricacy, harmonic complexity, and thematic concision. For example, Fugue no. 4 in C-sharp Minor—set for five voices—features a diamond-hard subject of stunning brevity.
- Brief though it is, the subject that drives this fugue is also programmatic. Its four pitches describe the four parts of the cross: The first pitch, a C-sharp, depicts the left-hand horizontal beam. The next two pitches, a B-sharp and an E, are the lowest and highest; they depict the vertical beam. Finally, the last pitch, a D-sharp, depicts the right-hand horizontal beam:
- In German notation, the letter “B” represents the pitch B-flat and the letter “H” represents the pitch B **natural**. By designing his C-sharp minor fugue subject as he did, Bach made explicit his own identification with the cross and Christ’s suffering on the cross.

Bach’s Encyclopedic Works

- Bach’s encyclopedic works include both books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *Goldberg Variations*, *The Art of the Fugue*, and many others. The preludes in Book One of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* constitute, all by themselves, a virtual encyclopedia of old and new keyboard genres and compositional techniques.
- Preludes nos. 3, 13, and 15 are two-part inventions. As an example, listen to the first half of Prelude no. 13 in F-sharp Major. Preludes nos. 9, 18, 19, 23, and 24 are three-part inventions. As an example, listen to the first half of Prelude no. 18 in G-sharp Minor.
- Preludes 2, 3, 5, 6, and 21 are cast as toccatas. The word “toccata” comes from the Italian *toccare*, which means “to touch.” Any piece

thus named is a fast, virtuoso work that puts a performer's dexterity and "touch" in high relief. As an example, listen to the toccata that is Prelude no. 5 in D Major.

- Listen to the opening of the gorgeous and powerfully moving Prelude no. 4 in C-sharp Minor. The technique with which Bach brings 8 of the 24 fugues to their climax is referred to as climactic thematic saturation through stretto.
- The word "stretto" is the past participle of the Italian noun *stringere*, which means "to tighten or squeeze." In a fugue, a stretto is a squeezing together of appearances of the fugue subject. Stretti typically appear at or near the end of a fugue, where, by overlapping the subject with itself, a climactic degree of thematic saturation is achieved. For example, listen to the subject of Fugue no. 1 in C Major. The stretto that brings this fugue to its climax appears seven **measures** before the fugue concludes.

Important Terms

chord: Simultaneous sounding of three or more different pitches.

exposition: The first part of a sonata form, during which the principal themes are introduced.

flat: Accidental (sign/symbol) placed to the left of a note indicating that the pitch should be lowered by a semitone.

fugue: Important baroque musical procedure in which a theme (or subject) is developed by means of various contrapuntal techniques.

interval: Distance between two pitches, e.g., C–G (upward) equals a fifth.

key: Collection of pitches that relate to a specific major or minor mode.

major: Modern term for Ionian mode; characterized by an intervallic profile of whole tone–whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone–whole tone–semitone (symbolized as: T–T–S | T–T–T–S).

measure: Metric unit; space between two bar lines.

melody: Any succession of pitches.

minor: Modern term for Aeolian mode; characterized by an intervallic profile of whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone (symbolized as T–S–T | T–S–T–T).

natural: Accidental (sign/symbol) placed to the left of a note, indicating that the note should not be sharpened or flattened; a white key on a keyboard.

pitch: A sound with two properties: a single, singable fundamental frequency and timbre.

polyphonic texture/polyphony: Texture consisting of two or more simultaneous melody lines of equal importance.

semitone: Smallest interval in Western music; on the keyboard, the distance between a black key and a white key, as well as B–C and E–F.

sharp: Accidental (sign/symbol) placed to the left of a note, indicating that the pitch should be raised by a semitone.

subject: The theme of a fugue.

theme: Primary musical subject matter in a given section of music.

J. S. Bach—*Goldberg Variations*

Lecture 3

The *Goldberg Variations* was conceived as a harpsichord piece. Nevertheless, that fact has not prevented it from becoming a mainstay of the piano repertoire, recorded by many of the greatest pianists of the last 70 years. Typical of Bach, the individual variations within the *Goldberg Variations* display an encyclopedic variety of keyboard genres and compositional techniques. There are dances, canons, toccatas, an invention, a fugue, a French overture, and a quodlibet. This riot of compositional diversity notwithstanding, the *Goldberg Variations*—as a total work of art—constitutes perhaps the single most radical example of the high baroque’s obsession with unity, order, and control.

The Theme

- The *Goldberg Variations* consist of a theme, which Bach calls an “aria” (or an “air”), followed by 30 variations and then a reprise of the theme. Despite the fact that the *Goldberg Variations* consists of 32 separate **movements**, we do not actually perceive the work as consisting of 32 separate movements. Rather, we perceive a series of concentric groups of variations, which create, on both the smallest and largest **scales**, a series of apparent “departures” and “returns.”
- The 30 variations of the *Goldberg Variations* consist of a series of concentric groupings, or cycles, of variations. At the smallest micro level are the four phrases within each of the 30 variations—120 phrases in all. At the miniature level are the variations themselves—30 in number. At the midi level, Bach groups the variations into sets of three, thus creating 10 larger cycles. At the macro level, Bach divides the variations into two distinct sets of 15 variations. Finally, at the universal level, the entire work stands as a universal cycle—a life cycle—a unified singularity.

- At every level—from the micro to miniature to midi to macro—the *Goldberg Variations* resonates with the baroque belief that the complexity of the visible universe was controlled and given order by the singularity: God.
- The key to understanding the amazing, expressive, spiritual, and metaphysical power of the *Goldberg Variations* is an awareness of the concentric formal cycles that make up the piece and how they interact and combine to create a whole that is infinitely greater than the sum of its 32 parts.
- Typical of a baroque-era variations work, the theme of the *Goldberg Variations* is not a **tune**—that is, a memorable melody—but, rather, a bass line and the harmonies supported by that bass line. Such a work is variously called a passacaglia, or a chaconne, or a ground bass.
- The *a–a–b–b* phrase structure articulated by this bass line represents the most ubiquitous musical structure of the baroque era: binary dance form. Each variation will feature the same bass line outlining the same binary dance form, and as a result, over the course of the piece, we will hear the same 32-measure-long bass line 32 times, one after the other. Bach’s great compositional challenge is to overcome the potentially numbing regularity of the repeated bass line and create diversity and variety around it.
- Bach chose to set this first thematic iteration of the bass line as a sarabande, which is a slow, three-step dance of Spanish origin. Bach’s sarabande is exquisite and diaphanous, one that strikes a perfect balance between the physicality of dance and the lyricism of song.
- In the opening phrase *a* of the theme, there is a temptation to call the melody of the sarabande the “theme,” but the melody is not the theme; the theme is the bass line and phrase structure beneath the sarabande melody. In actuality, the sarabande is the first outward manifestation of the bass line, harmonies, and phrase structure—which are, collectively, the theme.

The Concentric Cycles

- In regard to the concentric, interactive cycles that make up the *Goldberg Variations*, the micro cycle consists of the four symmetrical phrases of the thematic bass line: *a-a-b-b*. The miniature cycle consists of the entire thematic bass line, repeated 32 times in succession. The midi cycle divides the 30 variations into 10 groups of three variations—that is, 10 trinities. At the macro level, Bach divides the *Goldberg Variations* exactly in half.

- If listeners are to perceive a structural division halfway through the *Goldberg Variations*, two things must happen: Variation 15 will have to sound like an ending of some sort, and variation 16 will have to sound like a new beginning—which is exactly what happens.
- The opening *a* section of variation 16 has a moderate **tempo**, sweeping scales, and long-short rhythms, all of which combine to create a majestic, pompous mood. Any musically aware European living in 1741 would have immediately recognized this music as being in the character of a French **overture**, a ubiquitous baroque genre invented in the 1650s in order to welcome the king, Louis XIV to the theater. The sweeping majesty and pomp that characterize the opening of a French overture were intended to reflect the magnificence of the king himself.



Bach's title for the keyboard piece we know as the *Goldberg Variations* is quite instrument-specific: "Aria with Diverse Variations for Cembalo" (meaning harpsichord).

The Trinities

- There are 10 variational trinities in the *Goldberg Variations*—from trinity 1 (which consists of variations 1, 2, and 3) through trinity 10 (which consists of the final three variations, numbers 28, 29, and 30). Each of these trinities is a self-contained structural unit.
- The first variation of each trinity—with the exception of variation 16—is a character piece, which means that they are primarily dances. Variation 16, which begins trinity 6, is a French overture. These character pieces are melodically conceived, which means that they feature clear thematic melodies.
- Variation 7 initiates trinity 3 and is a loure, or a moderately slow dance of French origin in compound duple (6/8) **meter**. Bach's loure has a graceful, courtly elegance and is highly embellished in what is considered the French style. Keep in mind that every variation is built on the same cyclically repeated bass line.
- With one exception, the second variation of each trinity is a toccata, which is a fast, virtuosic work that puts a performer's dexterity in highest relief. The toccatas in the *Goldberg Variations* are harmonically conceived, which means that they consist of harmonic progressions outlined by virtuosic keyboard figuration.

The Canons

- With one exception, each of the 10 trinities concludes with a canon, which is a piece of strict imitative polyphony in which one or more voices follow a lead voice at some interval of time. (Think of *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.)
- If the trinities are the musical heart of the *Goldberg Variations*, then the canons are collectively the spiritual soul of the trinities. These are canons with a twist; in each successive canon, the following voice begins another step further away from the leading voice.
- Variation 3 offers the first canon. It is a canon at the unison, which means that the following voice “sings” exactly the same pitches

as the leading voice. With one exception, the canons are presented in the upper two voices while accompanied below by embellished versions of the bass line.

- Variation 6 concludes the second trinity. It is a canon at the second, meaning that the following voice begins a step above the leading voice.
- The third canon, variation 9, is a canon at the third, because the following voice appears three notes above the leader. The fourth canon, variation 12, is a canon at the fourth; the fifth canon is a canon at the fifth, and so on, through the ninth canon, which is a canon at the ninth. Variation 30, the variation that concludes the 10th and final trinity, is special.
- Because of the ever-growing intervallic distance between the leader and the follower, each of the canons will be characterized by a different level of **dissonance**. Over the years, this has rendered them ripe for all sorts of numerical, allegorical, and metaphysical discussion. Given Bach's proclivity toward numerical symbolism, such discussions are entirely appropriate.
- The canon at the fifth, variation 15, is the variation that brings the first half of the *Goldberg Variations* to its conclusion, the variation that immediately precedes the French overture that is variation 16. Bach does a number of things in variation 15 that make it very special.
- First, variation 15 is set in minor—specifically, G minor. It is the first variation in the *Goldberg Variations* to be so set. Combined with its slow tempo, the minor **mode** imbues this variation with a sense of quiet profundity and mystery.
- Second, variation 15 is not just a canon at the fifth, in which the following voice begins a perfect fifth above the leading voice; it is also a canon in **inversion**, meaning that the following voice is a mirror image of the leading voice.

- The third thing that makes this canon special is the overwhelming musical and spiritual importance attached to the interval of a fifth. Bach’s well-tempered tuning system—like the modern equal-tempered system—is based on a circle of perfect fifths. The primal power of the perfect fifth carried with it a huge degree of spiritual significance for the baroque musical community. Thus, the perfect fifth was perceived as a metaphor for “the absolute concord which is God.”
- The 10th and final trinity—variations 28, 29, and 30—breaks the pattern established in the earlier nine trinities. Bach wants to create the maximum degree of momentum going into the 30th and final variation, and he does this by preceding that final variation with not just one but two toccatas.
- The 30th and final variation is not a canon but, rather, a quodlibet—a medley of popular tunes. The upper two voices of this variation incorporate two contemporary popular songs, *I’ve Not Been with You for So Long* and *Kraut und Rüben* (meaning “Cabbage and Beets”).
- Following the jolly 30th variation, the opening sarabande returns exactly as heard at the beginning of the piece—except it doesn’t sound the same. That is because we now hear within it an implicit world of possibilities and experience we could not have perceived at the beginning of the piece. We are older and wiser now, and the serenity and sense of a circle closed we hear in the reprise reflect the serenity and closure one might feel looking back at a life well lived.

Important Terms

dissonance: A musical entity or state of instability that seeks resolution to consonance.

inversion: Loosely applied to indicate a reversal in melodic direction. Harmonic inversion is a situation in which a chord tone other than the root is in the bass.

meter: Group of beats organized in a regular rhythmic pattern and notated in music as a time signature.

mode: A type of pitch collection (or scale).

movement: Independent section within a larger work.

overture: Music preceding an opera or play, often played as an independent concert piece.

scale: All the pitches inside a given octave, arranged stepwise so that there is no duplication. The names of the chords built on the scale steps are: tonic, supertonic, mediant, subdominant, dominant, submediant, and leading tone.

tempo: Relative speed of a passage of music.

tune: Generally singable, memorable melody with a clear sense of beginning, middle, and end.

Mozart—Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457

Lecture 4

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's creative predisposition toward lyric music informed every aspect of his compositional voice, including his choice of piano over the harpsichord. Mozart's style of keyboard playing was learned at the harpsichord—a minimum of extraneous movement, play from the wrist, sit centered at the keyboard—but his mature keyboard music is piano music. Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457, could not be successfully performed on a harpsichord; rather, this is music conceived of and composed for the piano.

Mozart's Piano Sonatas

- Mozart composed 19 “piano” sonatas. The first—set in C major and catalogued as Köchel 279—was composed in 1774, when Mozart was 18 years old. The last, in D major, K. 576, was composed in 1788. It remains a matter of debate as to whether the first five of these sonatas—composed in 1774 and 1775—were composed for the harpsichord or the piano.
- It's probably a safe bet to say that they were composed to be played on either instrument. However, starting with the Sonata no. 6 in D Major, K. 284—composed in 1775—the remainder of the sonatas were clearly composed for the piano.
- The classical keyboard sonata, of which Mozart's are presumably representative, is a typically three-movement construct in which the first movement is a moderate-to-fast **sonata form**, the second movement a lyric respite from the dramatic rigors of the first, followed by a fast third movement, more often than not cast as a **rondo**.
- While we in the 21st century perceive Mozart as being a mainstream exponent of the **classical** style, Mozart's contemporaries certainly did not. Mozart's mature works were considered by his

contemporaries to be unnecessarily difficult to perform and just plain too long.

- For example, Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Minor of 1784 runs 561 measures without its repeats. Most of Haydn's piano sonatas run from between 300 to 400 measures in length; even Haydn's massive (for him) Piano Sonata in E-flat Major of 1794 runs 450 measures, 111 measures shorter than Mozart's.



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- The truth is, there's nothing typically "classical" about Mozart's mature music, so if we want to find solo piano music equal in dramatic scope and length to Mozart's C Minor Sonata, we will have to look forward to Ludwig van Beethoven, whose own groundbreaking Piano Sonata in C Minor—also known as the *Pathétique*, composed in 1798—runs 582 measures, the same length as Mozart's.
- Mozart single-handedly turned the piano sonata from a small-scale genre intended for amateur amusement into a large-scale, virtuosic genre. When compared to the massive piano sonatas of the 19th century—starting with Beethoven's—Mozart's might seem relatively understated. But comparing Mozart's piano sonatas to those of the 19th century is a fool's exercise; instead, we should be comparing Mozart's piano sonatas with those of his own contemporaries.
- Only then will we realize that it was Mozart who began the process of enlarging the scale, virtuosity, and artistic importance of the piano sonata. Mozart's piano sonatas were Beethoven's essential models, just as Beethoven's sonatas became the essential models for Schubert, Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) is often celebrated as one of the greatest composers of Western music.

Movement One: Sonata Form

- Sonata form is a **musical form** in which multiple contrasting themes—typically two—are introduced in a section called the exposition. Materials presented in the exposition are then “developed” in a section called the **development**. The themes return in their original order in a section called the **recapitulation**. Finally, a **coda** will usually bring such a movement to its conclusion.
- Typical of Mozart, theme 1 of his Piano Sonata in C Minor features an embarrassment of melodic riches. It consists of three distinct parts, any one of which would have been adequate for the rather “thrifter” Haydn or Beethoven to build an entire theme.
- Part 1 of Mozart’s theme consists of the alternation of two contrasting elements. The first of these elements—that musical idea that initiates the sonata—was very familiar to Mozart’s audience. Mozart opens with a boldly rising arpeggio (that is, a “broken harmony”) played in octaves, a gesture that was universally known as a “Mannheim rocket”—an opening musical gambit that was made cliché by the house composers for the Mannheim court orchestra, which was considered, between roughly 1740 to 1780, to be the greatest orchestra in Europe.
- The “rocket” was a gesture that Mozart would use to striking effect in the opening of the fourth movement of his Symphony in G Minor of 1788. Beethoven used a Mannheim rocket to begin his Piano Sonata no. 1 in F Minor of 1795, calculating that a “rocket” would be a most conspicuous way to begin his first published piano sonata.
- In the first part of Mozart’s theme 1, the rising, frankly ithyphallic rocket alternates with a quiet, trilling phrase of more feminine quality. The first part of theme 1 is where Mozart lays out—in its first eight measures—the expressive extremes of the movement. The second part of theme 1 features drooping, deathly, descending **chromatic** lines over a throbbing tremolo in the bass.

- There are many resemblances—expressive, spiritual, and musical—between Mozart’s Piano Sonata in C Minor and Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in C Minor of 1798. One of the more obvious resemblances between the two pieces is the second part of Mozart’s theme 1 and Beethoven’s movement 1, theme 1.
- Mozart’s thematic phrase consists of *descending* chromatic lines heard over a throbbing tremolo in the bass. Beethoven’s theme 1 consists of *ascending* chromatic lines heard over a throbbing tremolo in the bass. The third part of Mozart’s theme 1 combines melodic material drawn from part 1 with the throbbing accompaniment of part 2.
- After a brief modulating bridge, theme 2—set in E-flat major—begins. Like theme 1, it is a theme of extraordinary melodic variety cast in three parts. The first part of theme 2 features a lilting, graceful tune set against an undulating, broken-chord accompaniment in the pianist’s left hand.
- This sort of accompaniment, which is ubiquitous in classical-era keyboard music, is called an Alberti bass, named for the Italian composer Domenico Alberti, who did not invent but popularized it.
- The second part of Mozart’s theme 2 constitutes a free variation of the first part and is cast as a dialogue between the treble and bass of the piano. Finally, the third part of theme 2 recalls theme 1, as dramatic, rising chromatic octaves alternate with scurrying scales and arpeggios.
- The recapitulation of Mozart’s first movement contains the following main sections: theme 1, modulating bridge, theme 2, **cadence** material, and finally the coda that brings the movement to its conclusion.
- As you listen to this, be aware of the nature of Mozart’s keyboard writing: With its powerful use of octaves, its accompanimental

tremolos, its graded dynamics (meaning getting louder and softer), and its stark contrasts between loud and soft, this is pure piano music.

Movement Two: Rondo Form

- Rondo is a musical form or process in which a principal theme—the rondo theme—is stated and then returns periodically, like a refrain, after various contrasting episodes. The rondo theme is the A section in a musical structure that can be schematicized as A–B–A–C–A plus a coda.
- Both the contrasting B and C sections of the movement feature lush, lyric themes as well, and the two returns of the rondo theme see the theme embellished. The overall effect of the movement is one of constantly changing, expressively rich thematic melody.
- The second movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in C Minor is also structured as a rondo, A–B–A–C–A plus coda. Both Beethoven’s rondo theme and Mozart’s second contrasting episode are set in A-flat major.

Movement Three

- This is a spectacular movement. Structurally, it is an odd duck: Some sources consider it a rondo, others a sonata form, and still others as a hybrid called rondo-sonata. The movement features three sharply contrasting themes and virtually no transitional passages to soften the impact of those contrasts.
- The schizoaffective first theme, theme A, is cast in two spectacularly contrasting parts. The first part, quiet and melancholy, sees a series of drooping, syncopated **motives** heard over the simplest of accompaniments. This part is followed by the loud, manic second part of the theme, which twice pulls up short and stops completely after a series of explosive dissonances. This music, in turns, is hyper-agitated, explosively dissonant, disoriented, and melancholy.
- A single **harmony** effects the “transition” (if we can really call it that) to theme B, which, though initially set in E-flat major

(an ostensibly more upbeat key), is filled with a terrific sense of urgency—in part due to the constant fluctuation between “piano” (soft) and “forte” (loud) that we hear throughout the theme.

- The final thematic element, theme C, is a despairing little melody consisting almost entirely of weepy little semitones. Theme C features the same sorts of explosive dissonances and silences first heard in theme A.
- Rather surprisingly, given its relative brevity compared to themes A and B, it is this quietly despairing theme C that is tasked with concluding the movement. Theme C is followed by the movement- and sonata-ending coda.
- If we had to schematicize this third and final movement, the schematic would be A–B–A–C–B¹–A–C plus coda—which is sort of random. As such, Mozart’s idiosyncratic approach to large-scale form becomes a basic part of this movement’s expressive message. Without the familiar structural landmarks provided by familiar musical forms, listeners cannot anticipate events, which significantly magnifies the movement’s dark expressive power. Such a purposely alien formal landscape is antithetical to the classical style and looks forward not just to the music of Beethoven, but even beyond—to the highly personalized formal structures of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Important Terms

cadence: A harmonic or melodic formula that occurs at the end of a phrase, section, or composition and conveys a momentary or permanent conclusion—in other words, a musical punctuation mark.

chromatic: A pitch that lies outside of whatever key area presently anchors a passage.

classical: Designation given to works of art of the 17th and 18th centuries, characterized by clear lines and balanced form.

coda: The closing few measures of a composition; usually not a part of the main theme groups of the standard form of a composition but a finishing theme added to the end to give the composition closure.

development: The second large part of a sonata form movement, during which the themes are developed in a generally unstable harmonic environment.

harmony: The musical art (and science) of manipulating simultaneous pitches.

motive: Brief succession of pitches from which a melody grows through the processes of repetition, sequence, and transformation.

musical form: The manner in which a given movement of music is structured.

recapitulation: The third large part of a sonata form movement, during which the themes return in their original order.

rondo form: A classical-era form that sees a principal theme (the rondo theme) return like a refrain after various contrasting episodes.

sonata form: A classical-era formal process posited on the introduction, development, recapitulation, and reconciliation of multiple contrasting themes.

Beethoven—The *Appassionata* Sonata

Lecture 5

Although we are so accustomed to the image of Ludwig van Beethoven the pianist, he actually began his professional musical life as an organist. Beethoven had a frightening propensity to annihilate pianos, but that wasn't because he disliked them; he did it because he wanted to wrest from them the power and sonority he heard and felt as an organist. Among the gaggle of works that were breakaway works for Beethoven is his Piano Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57, also known as the *Appassionata* (which means “passionate”), composed between 1804 and 1806.

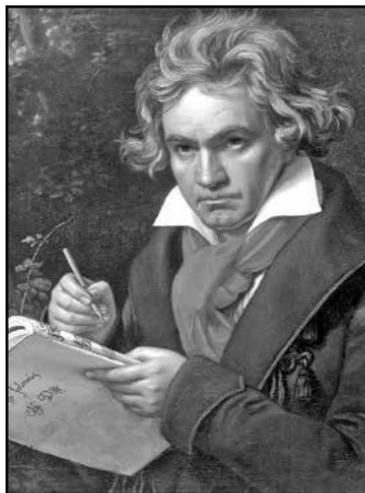
Movement 1: Sonata Form

- The first theme is astonishing in its simplicity and dramatic power. It consists of two elements. The first element is a falling, then rising, F-minor harmony, played in both hands two octaves apart. The effect is of something dark and ominous slithering about in some cavernous place.
- The second element of the theme consists of a dismal, imploring figure featuring a trill and followed by an **open cadence** (meaning an unresolved dissonance). Instead of the dissonance being resolved, the first element of the theme is heard again, now a **half step** higher, outlining a G-flat major harmony.
- It concludes with another open cadence—another unresolved dissonance. Instead of the dissonance being resolved, a lengthy closing phrase follows, in which the imploring, trilling figure is heard lower, then higher, each time followed by an ominous half-step motive that sounds like a funeral drum.
- The studied avoidance of any resolution in this closing passage creates a mood of existential frustration, after which an explosive arpeggiated figure leads to yet another unresolved dissonance followed by yet another pause.

- Thus far, this movement has asked a lot of questions—with its unresolved dissonances and pauses—but has yet to provide a single “answer” in the form of a harmonic resolution. And for all of its pounding, no answers are forthcoming during the second half of the theme either, during which the falling/rising F-minor harmony is viciously declaimed by crashing chords.
- The modulating bridge that follows just starts without any resolution to mark the end of theme 1. It’s a brief but agitated passage characterized by repeated E-flats, the **dominant** pitch of the approaching new key of theme 2, A-flat major.
- Finally, we hear the first **closed cadence**, the first real resolution in the movement, as the repeated E-flats in the bass ease into an A-flat major chord in preparation for the entrance of theme 2. Initially, theme 2 seems to be everything that theme 1 is not—lyric, graceful, and set in a major key. Stately and regal though theme 2 appears, it is in reality theme 1 in lamb’s clothing.
- These themes do not just resemble each other; they are, in truth, two different sides of the same musical personality. Despite the fact that theme 2 begins in A-flat major, it darkens and concludes in A-flat minor, with a long, falling line that descends into the same cavernous depths from which theme 1 emerged. The genius of this second theme is that Beethoven has managed to introduce a gentler, more lyric expressive element into the exposition without sacrificing its essentially tragic nature.
- The descent that concludes theme 2 gives way to a furious cadence theme that just erupts from the piano. The exposition ends, once again, without a resolution—without a defining harmonic event—by simply coming to a pause on two A-flats spaced five octaves apart.
- Beethoven does not call for a repeat of the exposition, and instead, the movement plunges headlong into the development section. By definition, a “development section” is characterized by harmonic instability. The exposition—with all of its unresolved

dissonances—was not a pinnacle of harmonic stability itself, but the harmonic irresolution of the exposition is nothing compared to the onslaught of harmonic instability we hear in the development section.

- As the development section nears its conclusion, the rate of **modulation**—that is, of key change—becomes so rapid that our sense of **tonality** is shredded. Diminished seventh chords—the most dissonant harmony in Beethoven’s vocabulary—sweep up and down the piano like gale-force winds. Finally, hammering groups of three repeated notes—the funeral drum previously observed—drive the harmony back toward the **home key** of F minor for the beginning of the recapitulation.
- Low, throbbing Cs, which go on for two full measures, initiate the recapitulation. We desperately await a resolution to F minor at the beginning of the recapitulation, but we wait in vain. Even as theme 1 begins, the low C continues to thrum away in the bass, robbing us of an unambiguous resolution to F minor. At the beginning of the recapitulation, the harmonic and spiritual frustration fundamental to this movement continues unabated.
- We move next to the second half of the lengthy and magnificent coda that concludes the movement. The second half of the coda begins with an expansion of the stormy, drumming music that brought the development section to its conclusion. It is a windswept passage.



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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) composed exquisite music in the period between the classical and romantic eras.

- The final section of the coda—marked *più allegro*, or “faster”—begins with an explosive resolution (finally!) to the home key of F minor. Theme 2 then begins quietly but soon becomes loud and brutally dissonant. Next, violent, gunshot-like groups of three repeated chords climb up and down the piano.
- Finally, theme 1 rises and falls one last time, disappearing into the depths, accompanied by a shivering tremolo. The final six measures of the movement consist solely of the three pitches that make up an F-minor chord. Instead of an unambiguous statement of harmonic conclusion, the music just sort of fizzles out. The effect is frustrating, and while we know that the movement is over, we also know that the “story” is not.
- Whatever Beethoven intended the dark-toned and harmonically ambiguous music of this movement to mean, no one can deny the power of such music to evoke deep metaphorical meaning. The entire sonata is about questions—questions projected by harmonic ambiguity, questions that are never answered. In the end, as will be revealed in the third movement, all that is left is death.

Movement 2: Theme and Variations Form

- The second movement is the eye of the musical hurricane, a desperately needed break between the stormy, hyper-intense outer movements. The theme is a gentle, chorale-like melody structured in two parts, with each part immediately repeated: A–A–B–B.
- This theme and the three variations that follow are all rooted in the key of D-flat major and within the predictable confines of classical **theme and variations form**. As such, this second movement stands in the greatest possible contrast with the expressive turmoil, harmonic instability, and formal idiosyncrasy of the outer movements.
- In this second movement, the coda begins with an abbreviated version of the theme presented in a sort of cubist manner, with each phrase heard in a different register of the piano. The music

comes to an open cadence (an unresolved dissonance), and instead of the expected resolution, two diminished seventh chords—those incredibly dissonant harmonies that were used in the opera house to evoke terror—suddenly and unexpectedly appear, the first one pianissimo and the second one fortissimo.

- As for the “expected” resolution, once again, our expectations have been thrown bodily into the Danube. These two diminished sevenths introduce a level of harmonic disruption and expressive darkness equal to that inspired by receiving a registered letter from the IRS. But before we even have a chance to react, a vicious series of diminished seventh chords drill through our crania and obliterate entirely any remaining vestiges of calm that might have still lingered from the second movement.
- Our ears thus wiped clean, the third movement introduction begins, consisting of a quiet, rippling descending line in F minor that slowly but steadily gains momentum.

Movement 3: Sonata Form

- Theme 1 begins with a rising-and-falling sixteenth-note line that in the opera house would represent a storm. Slowly, a series of short-long motives is superimposed over the roiling “storm” music, which eventually come together to create a droopy little melody.
- The modulating bridge that follows is dominated by the storm element of theme 1. Theme 2 is a twitching little theme in C minor, a theme that offers no relief from the relentless darkness of the movement to this point.
- The cadence material the concludes the exposition combines the storm element of theme 1 with explosive, cadential chords and concludes with a huge rising/falling G-flat diminished seventh arpeggio that spans six octaves, nearly the entire width of Beethoven’s six-and-a-half-octave piano.

- As per the first movement, there is no exposition repeat in the third movement. However, and most uncharacteristically, Beethoven does indicate that the development section and the recapitulation be repeated, which guarantees that the unrelentingly dark, stormy, and harmonically unstable music of the development section will become the dominant element of the movement.
- The intestine-twisting, heart-stopping coda is cast in four parts. In part 1, the driving cadential music that concluded the recapitulation is whipped into a frenzy by the indication *sempre più allegro*, meaning roughly “faster, faster, faster!”
- The second part of the coda—marked “**presto**,” meaning “very fast”—introduces an entirely new theme. Although it is rather late in the game to be introducing new themes, Beethoven wants this ferocious *totentanz*—this “dance of death” in F minor—to be pretty much the last thing we remember when the sonata concludes. The expressive message is that the only answer, in the end, is death.
- From this point, it’s a maniacal, careening sprint to the end of the movement. In part 3 of the coda, the storm element of theme 1 screams past with accents on the second **beat** of every measure. Finally, in part 4, a cadential phrase in F minor collapses into the depths of the piano, followed by an explosive series of F-minor chords, which provide the only unambiguous conclusion to a movement in the entire sonata.

Important Terms

beat: Smallest pulse to which we can comfortably move our bodies. *See also meter.*

closed cadence: Equivalent to a period or an exclamation mark; such a cadence ends on the tonic and gives a sense of rest and resolution.

dominant: Pitch and chord five pitches above a given tonic pitch/chord. The dominant harmony is the chord most closely related to the tonic chord in a given key; the dominant chord will almost always immediately precede an appearance of the tonic chord.

half step: *See semitone.*

home key: Main key of a movement or composition. *See also key.*

modulation: The process of changing key during the course of a piece of music.

open cadence: Equivalent to a comma; such a cadence pauses on the dominant harmony without resolving the tonic harmony, creating tension and the need to continue.

presto: Very fast.

theme and variations form: A classical-era formal process that exhibits a systematically varied theme in a series of variations.

tonal/tonality: Sense that one pitch is central to a section of music, as opposed to atonal/atonicity.

Beethoven—*Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120

Lecture 6

There is a general consensus that the two greatest works ever written for keyboard are Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations* of 1741 and Ludwig van Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* of 1823. The *Diabelli Variations* is a work in which Beethoven reveals in Anton Diabelli's nondescript waltz an unforeseen variety of musical possibilities and expressive states. This is, in turn, what Beethoven's mature compositional art had always been about—about finding transformational, developmental, and variational gold in the commonplace, about creating palaces of sound from tiny, nondescript musical bricks, about discovering the world in a grain of sand.

Diabelli's Project

- Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* was the brainchild of the Vienna-based music publisher, editor, and composer named Anton Diabelli, who was born outside of Salzburg in 1781 and died in Vienna in 1858. He started his music publishing business in 1817 and quickly built a reputation as a savvy businessman by arranging and publishing a wide variety of popular music—dance music, operatic excerpts, and popular theater songs—for amateurs, to be played at home.
- Sometime in the first half of 1819, Diabelli sent a **waltz** of his own composition to 50 composers living in Austria, inviting each composer to write a single variation on the theme. Diabelli's plan was to publish the set as an anthology entitled "Patriotic Artist's Club," with the profits to benefit widows and orphans of the Napoleonic Wars.
- When Ludwig van Beethoven received Diabelli's theme, his initial reaction to the project and the theme was not good. Beethoven dismissed the theme as a *schusterfleck* (a "cobbler's patch"). Diabelli's theme consists of four phrases that can be schematicized

as *a-a-b-b*, which is considered binary form. The theme has no charm.

- Beethoven started thinking about the harmonic framework of the theme. It begins with four measures of a **tonic** C-major chord followed by four measures of a G-dominant seventh. The harmonic turnover then begins to accelerate, as first the subdominant and then the dominant are **tonicized**. Finally, the harmonic turnover goes into hyperdrive as the submediant is tonicized followed by a full modulation to the dominant. It is this harmonic compression that caught Beethoven's attention and convinced him to write a set of variations of his very own.
- For Beethoven, it was not Diabelli's thematic melody but, rather, the underlying harmonic structure that became the theme of his variations. The result is a set of variations of unprecedented harmonic nuance and complexity.
- In early 1819, at some point after dismissing Diabelli's theme as a "cobbler's patch," Beethoven decided to accept Diabelli's offer after all. But Beethoven made it clear that his contribution would be a set of variations, the number of which had yet to be determined. Beethoven put aside his work on the *Missa Solemnis* and began work on the variations, and by the summer of 1819, he had completed 23 of them. But then he stopped and put the variations aside for nearly four years in order to complete the *Missa Solemnis* and compose his final three piano sonatas. He



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A waltz composed by Anton Diabelli (1781–1858) is what Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* is based on.

finally returned to the variations in February 1823 and finished the set in March or April.

Beethoven and Bach

- No music was more important to Beethoven both early and late in his life than that of Johann Sebastian Bach. While Bach's large-scale vocal and orchestral music fell into obscurity after his death in 1750, his keyboard music did not, and it was used as a pedagogic tool throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Beethoven grew up playing Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and Bach's organ music.
- Beethoven was almost certainly given a hand-copied edition of Bach's *Goldberg Variation* by one of his Viennese patrons, probably the diplomat named Baron Gottfried van Swieten. In 1817, the *Goldberg Variations* was published in Zurich, two years before Beethoven began the *Diabelli Variations*. The point is that Beethoven knew the *Goldberg Variations*, and it exerted a primary influence on the *Diabelli Variations*.
- Three variations in the *Diabelli Variations* were explicitly inspired by Bach, all of them placed later in the set: numbers 24, 31, and 32. As the *Diabelli Variations* progresses, it grows closer to the spirit of Bach. Variation 24 is a slow, quiet fugue, with the devotional sensibility of an organ prelude.
- Variation 31 was inspired by the 25th variation of the *Goldberg Variations*. Both variations are slow, set in **triple meter** and in minor; both are highly embellished and sublimely expressive. Bach's variation is haunting and tragic; it begins with a series of gentle roulades, each followed by a sighing descent. Beethoven's variation 31 likewise begins with a series of gentle roulades, each followed by a sighing descent.
- The next and second-to-last variation—number 32—reflects, as well, Beethoven's assimilation of the ethos and technique of Johann Sebastian Bach even as it brings the *Diabelli Variations*

to its climax. The variation is a fugue of extraordinary power and complexity.

- In a work by Bach, a lengthy and complex fugue (like this one) would symbolize the Utopian achievement of truth, wisdom, balance, and faith. As such, in Bach, a fugue like this one would conclude the work in which it appeared—but not in Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations*.
- About two minutes in, the fugue suddenly breaks off. A rippling diminished seventh arpeggio purges the fugue from our ears and is followed by a mysterious series of harmonies that dissipate the energy and prepare us for what is to follow. The conclusion to the fugue is both strange and wonderful. It transports us to the 33rd and final variation, which dwells in a place of transcendent peace.

Larger Organization

- Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* consists of 34 discrete sections of music—a theme followed by 33 variations. Given the majesty and momentum of the piece and Beethoven’s propensity to build grand musical structures from the smallest of musical ideas, it is virtually impossible to perceive the *Diabelli Variations* as consisting of 34 separate parts related only to the theme itself.
- Beethoven’s inspiration for the *Diabelli Variations*—Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*—is designed with the precision of a Swiss chronometer: Bach’s 30 variations are explicitly organized in 10 groups of three and two larger groups of 15. The variational grouping in the *Diabelli Variations* is not as symmetrical. Rather, Beethoven’s groupings have to do with moment-to-moment narrative flow and are not the product—as they are in the *Goldberg Variations*—of a carefully conceived, precompositional blueprint.
- The 33 variations of Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* are grouped into three parts. Variations 1 through 10 constitute the first part, variations 11 through 20 the second part, and variations 21 through 33 the third part. In order to perceive these divisions, the last

variation in each of these groups has to sound somehow like an ending, and the first variation in each group has to sound somehow like a beginning.

- The first large group concludes with variation 10, which is the most brilliant of all the variations—a whirlwind of break-neck speed, filled with trills, tremolos, and staccato octave scales. The gentle, delicate, roulade-filled variation 11 that follows sounds like a new beginning, a blossom opening at dawn.
- This second grouping of variations concludes with variation 20. With its incredible degree of harmonic ambiguity, its placement low in the piano and its rhythmic stasis, variation 20 offers an enigmatic stillness unique to the piece. The fast, loud, trilling, and registrally all-encompassing variation 21 that follows creates a shocking degree of contrast that, once again, sounds like a new beginning.
- Generally, the first group of variations—numbers 1 through 10—is cumulative, with each successive variation growing out of some aspect of the one that preceded it. Generally, the second group of variations—numbers 11 through 20—displays an increasing degree of disassociation and contrast, climaxed by the enigmatic variation 20. Generally, the third group of variations—variations 21 through 33—moves toward Bach, toward the explicit references to Bach that are variations 31 and 32. Variation 33 stands apart from this Bach revival.

Variation 33

- Beethoven labels variation 33 *tempo di menuetto moderato*, meaning “in the moderate tempo of a **minuet**,” which is a moderate three-step dance of French origin that became, during the classical era, something of a cliché—a predictable (if elegant) middle movement that evoked the elite, aristocratic ballrooms from which it had emerged. Beethoven had no use for the minuet’s aristocratic pretensions, so early in his career he did away with composing them entirely.

- So, at the very end of his last major keyboard work, Beethoven evokes an antique musical genre and expressive sensibility that years before he had personally rendered obsolete. The exquisite nostalgia evoked in the opening of variation 33 looks back to a time before the previous 32 variations, to a time before Diabelli’s theme—before Beethoven’s deafness and before Napoleon—to an idealized past of order and elegance, youth and beauty.
- Beethoven concluded his 32nd and final piano sonata—the Piano Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111, completed in January of 1822—with the same sort of minuet-inspired nostalgia. That two-movement piano sonata ends with a massive, 18-minute-long theme-and-variations-form movement based on a moderately slow, lightly dancing, triple-meter theme set in C major. Like the Piano Sonata in C Minor of 1822, the *Diabelli Variations* of 1823 concludes in C major on a note of good cheer and peace.

Important Terms

minuet: A dance of the 17th and 18th centuries, graceful and dignified, in moderately slow three-quarter time.

tonic: Home pitch and chord of a piece of tonal music. Think of the term as being derived from “tonal center” (tonic). For example, if a movement is in C, the pitch C is the tonic pitch, and the harmony built on C is the tonic chord.

tonicization: The process of creating a temporary tonic by articulating a dominant-to-tonic progression of a key other than the one currently in use.

triple meter: Metrical pattern having three beats to a measure.

waltz: A dance of Austrian/Viennese origin in triple meter.

Schubert—Piano Sonata No. 21 in B-flat Major

Lecture 7

Franz Schubert was a competent pianist of the old school. Schubert’s “piano music” is not the product of an experimental virtuoso; it does not push the piano to its outer limits (as does so much of the piano music of Beethoven, for example). Nor does Schubert’s piano music celebrate virtuosity for its own sake (like the piano music of Liszt, for example). Rather, the great bulk of Schubert’s piano music—including his Piano Sonata no. 21—is music first and piano music second.

Movement One: Sonata Form

- The Piano Sonata no. 21 in B-flat Major is pure mature Schubert: expansive and leisurely; filled with lengthy, songlike themes; and characterized by warm, graceful surfaces. The tone and spirit of the music betray not a hint of Schubert’s physical condition, which was, at the time of its composition in September of 1828, increasingly dire. (He died just two months later, on November 19, 1828.)
- Sonata form is the classical-era formal construct that evolved to accommodate the presentation, development, and reconciliation of two or more principal themes. The first large section is called the exposition; it is during the exposition that principal themes are “exposed.” Typically two in number, these contrasting themes are presented in different keys. This means that a typical sonata form exposition will feature two key areas: the key of the first theme, which is the home (or tonic) key, and the key of the second theme, which is the contrasting key.
- The second large section of a sonata form movement is called the development section. In a typical development section, the music heard during the exposition is fragmented, recombined, overlapped—in a word, “developed.”

- The third large section of a sonata form movement is the recapitulation. In the recap, the themes typically appear in the same order as in the exposition. However, in the recapitulation, they will be set in the same key, meaning that theme 2 will appear in the home key of theme 1. In this way, the once harmonically contrasting themes are reconciled to one another, and this reconciliation allows the movement to end in the same key in which it began.
- In any piece of music, it's not the form but the way in which a composer tweaks, bends, and even mutilates the form that creates intrinsic interest. We put aside our expectations of sonata form because Schubert does some pretty atypical things in his first movement, so the challenge is to hear what he does with the ears—with the expectations—of his own contemporaries.
- The exposition of this sprawling, 19-minute-long first movement sonata form features not just two principal themes set in two principal keys, but three themes, each set in its own key. Our examination of this movement will focus on the following two elements of the exposition.
 - We will observe that the themes—three in number—are lengthy, self-standing entities that contain within themselves the sort of harmonic variety and melodic development that other composers reserve for their development sections.
 - We will observe the fact that transitions—such as the modulating bridge that separates themes 1 and 2—are kept to a bare minimum. This movement—this entire sonata, like pretty much all of Schubert's late music—is about its long, songlike themes and not its transitions.
- Theme 1 is cast in three parts, which can be schematicized as A-A¹-A². In the first part, the elegant, stately thematic melody in B-flat major is twice punctuated with a gently rumbling trill on a G-flat at the very bottom of the piano. The explanation for the rumbling trill on the pitch G-flat arrives with the beginning of the

second part of theme 1, which is set in the key of G-flat major. This varied, almost developmental second part of the theme concludes with a harmonic shift back toward the home key of B-flat major. The majestic third and final part of theme 1, set back in B-flat major, brings the theme to its conclusion.

- Taken all together, that’s an incredibly long theme, about two minutes in performance. And theme 2, which is about to follow, is nearly as long. This sort of thematic scale is a key element of Schubert’s mature art, in which his themes are typically self-standing entities that exhibit as part of their substance a full gamut of expressive and developmental writing. For Schubert, much more often than not, the themes are the fully realized personalities that constitute the essential “reason to be” of a given movement.
- After the 43-measure-long theme 1, the four-measure-long modulating bridge flies by so quickly that we might miss it if we weren’t paying attention. The harmony transits to the key of F-sharp minor, the second principal key in this three-key exposition. This shockingly abrupt harmonic leap to the key of F-sharp minor has actually been carefully prepared by Schubert. The pitch F-sharp is the **enharmonic** equivalent of G-flat, which means that F-sharp and G-flat are the same pitch.
- We’ve been hearing G-flats since the beginning of the movement—first in the low, rumbling trills and then as the key area of the second part of theme 1. Thus, the precipitous move to F-sharp



Franz Schubert (1797–1828) was a compulsive composer who would no sooner complete one piece than start the next.

minor doesn't sound nearly as shocking as it might. Theme 2 begins in F-sharp minor and concludes with a modulation to F major, which is the third key area in this three-key, three-theme exposition.

- Theme 3, set in F major, is a dancing, arpeggio-dominated melody built from triplet eighth notes that up to now had been heard accompanimentally. Finally, a leisurely, pause-filled, and eventually fragmented cadential passage brings this over five-minute-long exposition to its conclusion.
- Based on this examination of the exposition, we can draw three conclusions—conclusions that apply as well to the entire movement.
 - This music is overwhelmingly thematic in nature. In an exposition that runs 125 measures, there are precisely four measures of purely “transitional” music.
 - Within each of the themes is a degree of harmonic and thematic development that we might ordinarily expect to find in a development section.
 - The thematic melodies themselves are ravishing; they seem to unwind forever, with each new phrase a revelation. They are the sorts of long, effortless, vocally conceived melodies that lie at the heart of Schubert's song-inspired compositional voice.

Movement Two: Andante

- The movement is structured in three parts, which can be schematicized as A–B–A¹. The beginning of the opening A section in C-sharp minor was addressed earlier in this lecture. This time, we note two observations. First, the harmonies change very slowly, creating a sense of time standing still. Second, the theme itself appears in the middle register of the keyboard, surrounded by ringing notes above and strumming notes below.

- Following the contrasting B section, the timeless C-sharp-minor A section resumes. As before, the music projects a mood of wistful melancholy. But then, roughly one minute into the return, there occurs a small miracle: a sudden and entirely unexpected shift down a half step from C-sharp minor to the key of C major. Gentle and quiet though the moment is, it is, nevertheless, breathtaking in its impact. This is very characteristic of Schubert’s harmonic imagination and dramatic timing.

Movement Three: Scherzo

- Schubert labels this three-part, A–B–A–form movement as being *allegro vivace con delicatezza*—meaning “fast, lively, and delicate”—and except for the very brief B section, fast, lively, and delicate it is.
- After the harmonic stasis of the second movement, this third movement would seem to be harmonically all over the map, all the time. The opening **scherzo**—the first “A” section—brilliantly and delicately moves through eight different key areas in its one-minute length.

Movement Four: Rondo

- The large-scale form of this rondo is A–B–A–C–A–B–A (the first A being the rondo theme). This movement is often referred to as being a sonata rondo because the central episode—C—is not a contrasting passage but, rather, a development of the themes gone before it. These themes, in turns, are dancing, lyric, and explosively dramatic—all marked by a harmonic subtlety and variety.
- The dancing rondo theme itself is a harmonic case in point. Though presumably set in the home key of B-flat major, not one of the six large phrases that make up this theme actually begins in B-flat. The theme begins with an octave G, the dominant pitch of C minor. From there, the opening phrase of the rondo theme proceeds in C minor, until it turns on a dime and concludes in B-flat major.

- Then, the opening octave G returns, and the theme resumes in C minor. Like the first phrase, this second phrase concludes in B-flat major before barreling headlong into the third phrase, which begins on an E-flat major chord and concludes in G minor.
- The fourth thematic phrase begins with the same octave Gs and starts up again in C minor. It concludes in B-flat major and then barrels headlong into the fifth phrase, which begins on an E-flat major chord before zipping through a multitude of keys, starting with A-flat major and concluding on a G-major chord, the dominant chord of C minor.
- The sixth and final phrase of the rondo theme begins again with the octave Gs, starts up in C minor, and momentarily touches B-flat major before moving on to F-major in preparation for the first contrasting episode. This sixth phrase contains more harmonic sleight of hand per measure than many entire movements by other composers.
- Within this rondo, the first large contrasting episode—B—consists of two very different thematic elements. The first is gentle and lyric and is underlain with a rippling accompaniment. The second half of the first contrasting episode—B—could not be more different. It consists of an entirely new theme that begins explosively and passionately in F minor.
- These three themes—the rondo theme and the two themes that constitute the first contrasting episode—span a huge expressive gamut, from dancing to lyric to explosively passionate. They provide the grist for the development section that is the second contrasting episode—C—and they will all be heard again before the conclusion of the movement.
- That conclusion, the coda, is a brief but most satisfying curtain closer, and it constitutes the last solo piano music Schubert ever composed.

Important Terms

enharmonic: Pitches that are identical in sound but with different spellings, depending on the key context, e.g., C-sharp and D-flat.

scherzo form: Meaning literally “I’m joking,” scherzo is the designation Beethoven gave to his modified use of minuet and trio form.

Chopin—*Préludes*, Op. 28

Lecture 8

Frédéric Chopin's preludes—like all of his piano music—are true “piano music,” music written idiomatically for the piano. No matter how easy or difficult the piece, no matter how idiosyncratic the fingering, Chopin's piano music “fits the hand,” meaning that the music was conceived with the physiognomy of the human hand in mind and how the hand lies on a keyboard. Chopin's mature music was conceived for a very different piano than those available to Mozart. Chopin, unlike Mozart—or even Beethoven—was composing for a full metal-harped piano, an instrument capable of much more volume and resonance than the wooden-harped pianos of a generation before.

Rubato

- *Rubato* is Italian for “robbed time.” The rubato technique requires a performer to rob time from one note in order to give it to another. By such delicate displacement of the beat, Chopin the pianist could create a degree of rhythmic fluidity and lyric nuance that allowed him to make the piano sing.
- Rubato cannot be notated; the tiny gradations of beat and tempo would be impossible to write down. Like swinging a tune, rubato is something a player learns by ear and by “feel.” For Chopin, rubato came naturally; it was an element of traditional Polish music.
- Chopin's *Prélude* no. 7 in A Major, Op. 28, is an example of rubato. This shortest of all Chopin's preludes demands the sort of rhythmic flexibility and exhibits the sorts of lyricism, harmonic complexity, and expressive nuance that are collectively the hallmarks of Chopin's compositional voice.
- Chopin's notation about the rhythm of the prelude tells us that the piece is set in triple meter, which the accompanimental left hand clunks out with clocklike regularity. The tempo marking—

andantino—is ambiguous, as it can mean either a little slower than **andante** (moderately slow) or a little faster than andante. The melodic material above the accompaniment exhibits a rhythmic pattern that is repeated verbatim eight times over the course of the prelude’s 16 measures.

- This rhythmic pattern—a dotted rhythm on the first beat in triple meter—is the characteristic rhythm of the Polish dance called the mazurka. While Chopin doesn’t call this prelude a “mazurka,” it can be played as one by ever so slightly accenting the second beat of each measure. It was for this reason that the 19th-century pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow nicknamed this prelude “The Polish Dancer.”
- On paper, the apparent regularities of this prelude would seem to indicate music of mechanical repetitiousness. But of course, mechanical it is not, because a proper performance will employ a judicious bit of rubato. The dotted eighth-sixteenth note figures on the downbeats should be played as though they were tightly wound springs, releasing with a slight push to the notes that follow. The two quarter notes and half note that follow each of the dotted rhythms is something called a written ritard, in which progressively longer note values indicate a waning of rhythmic momentum.
- The momentum is reestablished when the following pickup kick-starts things, leading to the next dotted eighth-sixteenth note figure, which is followed by another written ritard, and so forth. Thus, in performance, there should be a constant—if subtle—rise and fall of rhythmic momentum, of rhythmic tension and release.
- The harmonic language of the prelude further focuses our attention on the dotted eighth-sixteenth note figures. Every one of those dotted eighth notes falls on a downbeat, the first and most powerfully felt beat in each measure, and every one of those dotted eighth notes is something called an appoggiatura, which is a non-chord tone—a dissonance—that falls on a strong beat, a dissonance that then resolves on a weaker beat. In the case of this prelude, the

appoggiaturas resolve upward to the sixteenth note that follows the dotted eighth. For example, the harmony in measure 1 is the dominant chord of the tonic A major, an E-dominant seven chord.

- The C-sharp on the downbeat of measure 1 is a dissonance; it resolves upward to the chord tone D on the sixteenth note that follows. The chords that fall on beats 2 and 3 and the downbeat of measure 2 repeat the harmony and have the effect of settling things down until the next appoggiatura on the downbeat of measure 3. These appoggiaturas create an exquisite sense of tension and yearning by beginning every other measure with a dissonance.



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Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849) composed solo piano works of exquisite subtlety and nuance—works that sound as if only he could have written them.

24 Préludes

- In 1836, Franz Liszt introduced Chopin to a divorcée named Amantine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin, Baroness Dudevant (who lived from 1804 to 1876). The baroness was a novelist, playwright, and feminist who wrote under the pen name of George Sand. At the time they met, Chopin was 26 and Aurore/George was 32. If we are to believe contemporary gossip, Chopin was at first repelled by her, but by 1838, they were living together, and their relationship continued until 1847.

- Their famously disastrous family vacation on the island of Majorca took place during the winter of 1838 to 1839. It rained nonstop, their rental house was damp and moldy, and Chopin’s troubled lungs almost gave out.
- Thankfully, Chopin was neither dead nor dying, and despite his health, he worked on his *Préludes*. It was in Majorca that George Sand personally observed Chopin’s compositional agonies. It was while in Majorca that Chopin completed the preludes and sent them off to his publisher. And while it is true that he had begun working on the set back in 1836, it was on Majorca that the set took on its final form.
- That final form is based on the 24 preludes—one in each major and minor key—of Johann Sebastian Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Of course, the big difference is that Bach’s preludes are indeed preludes—short, freeform works that precede fugues. For Chopin’s contemporaries, the idea of a self-standing prelude made no sense.
- Each of the 24 preludes represents a single “emotional setting.” In his desire to identify the emotion that each prelude represents, the 19th-century pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow went so far as to title each of the preludes. Von Bülow’s titles range from “Heartfelt Happiness” (no. 19) to “Suicide” (for no. 18) and from “A Pleasure Boat” (no. 23) to “Funeral March” (no. 20). We will use von Bülow’s titles as a guide as we seek to identify the emotion that a selection of preludes represents.

Prélude No. 1 in C Major: “Reunion”

- The “reunion” described by von Bülow is certainly not one with a former spouse. The breathless and ecstatic opening gives way to a tender conclusion. This is joyful music—the perfect way to begin the set.

Prélude No. 4 in E Minor: “Suffocation”

- This prelude was composed in Majorca in November of 1838. Cast in two large phrases—A and A¹—it consists of a slow-moving

melody set over throbbing, falling chords in the accompaniment. The irregular manner in which the accompanying chords change adds a tremendous degree of expressive nuance to this prelude, which is informed with a sense of despair, one that Hans von Bülow characterized as “suffocation.”

- Along with the dour Prélude no. 6 in B Minor, this prelude, in E minor, was played at Chopin’s funeral, which was held on October 30, 1849. Acceding to Chopin’s deathbed request “to play Mozart for me,” among the other works performed was Mozart’s *Requiem*.

Prélude No. 5 in D Major: “Uncertainty”

- Despite the fact that this prelude does indeed conclude in the advertised key of D major, it spends the bulk of its time flitting about a tremendous number of different key areas during its 40-second life, particularly the key of D minor. The “uncertainty” that is von Bülow’s nickname has to do with this harmonic ambiguity, unresolved until the prelude’s very last chord.

Prélude No. 15 in D-flat Major: “Raindrop”

- This 15th prelude is the longest in the set; it runs about five minutes in performance. It also comes with more anecdotal baggage than any other prelude, thanks to George Sand, who wrote a description of the circumstances in Majorca under which the prelude was presumably composed.

“[The prélude] came to him through an evening of dismal rain. Maurice and I had left him to go shopping. The rain came in overflowing torrents. We [returned] in the middle of a flood. We hurried, knowing how our sick one would worry. Indeed he had; weeping, he was playing his wonderful prélude. Seeing us come in, he got up with a cry, then said, ‘I was sure that you were dead.’ When he recovered his spirits he confessed to me that while waiting he had seen it all in a dream: that he was dead himself [and] heavy drops of icy water fell in a regular rhythm on his breast. When I made him listen to the sound of the drops of water falling in

rhythm on the roof, he denied having heard it, angry that I should interpret [the *prélude*] in terms of imitative sounds. [So, while] his composition was surely filled with raindrops, they had been transformed in his imagination into tears falling upon his heart from the sky.”

- Unfortunately, George Sand never specified precisely which prelude she was referring to, but posterity has decided that it is the D-flat major.

Prélude No. 16 in B-flat Minor: “Hades”

- Von Bülow’s nickname is a reference to the fact that this is a hellaciously difficult piece to play. Chopin indicates that the prelude is to be played *presto con fuoco*, meaning “very fast and with fire.” The pianist’s task is to play the four pages of nonstop sixteenth notes at the indicated tempo, which comes out to a speed of nine sixteenth notes per second. Anything faster and a piano will ignite.

Prélude No. 20 in C Minor: “Funeral March”

- Of all von Bülow’s nicknames, “Funeral March” is the most obviously appropriate. This slow, dark prelude plods along in quarter notes, with a new harmony occurring every quarter note. More than any other of Chopin’s Op. 28 preludes, it is no. 20 that has taken on a life of its own.
- The Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni composed a theme-and-variations-form work based on this prelude. In 1903, Sergey Rachmaninoff composed his own set of variations based on this prelude, a piece appropriately entitled *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*.

Important Term

andante: Moderately slow.

Chopin—Ballade in G Minor, Op. 23

Lecture 9

It is a waste of time trying to distinguish between Chopin the composer and Chopin the pianist. They were, in fact, the same. Chopin composed at the piano. He required the feel of the keys beneath his fingers and the actual sound of the piano in his ears to write his music, music of stunning originality. Chopin's very special way of playing the piano, in which different fingers were associated with different sorts of melody lines, grew out of his very special way of hearing music. Or did Chopin's music grow out of the way he played the piano? It's a chicken-or-egg question that does not need to be answered. Chopin the composer and Chopin the pianist coevolved.

Chopin at the Piano

- The 21-year-old Chopin arrived in Paris in late September of 1831 seeking fame and fortune. He found both, very quickly, which comes as no surprise, given that at 21 he was already a fully formed composer and, along with Franz Liszt, the greatest pianist on the planet. He arrived with a passel of new works in hand; among them were his two piano concerti and 11 of the 12 Études for Piano, Op. 10.
- Among the friends Chopin made early on in Paris was Camille Pleyel, who was—along with Sébastien Erard—France's most important piano manufacturer. Chopin adored Pleyel's pianos and used them whenever he could. Camille Pleyel was likewise thrilled with his new Polish friend, and it was under Pleyel's marquee that Chopin made his Paris public debut, at the Salle Pleyel, on February 26, 1832. It was a most auspicious debut; among the many important attendees were Franz Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn, Ferdinand Hiller, and Luigi Cherubini.
- What the attendees heard at the Salle Pleyel was a sort of music and a sort of piano playing they had never heard before. Chopin employed a technique called rubato. They heard a pianist with a

remarkably flexible approach to rhythm, what Franz Liszt called “a tempo swaying and balancing.” They heard a pianist whose legato, meaning Chopin’s ability to string adjacent notes together, “could make the piano sing as vividly as any vocalist.”

- They heard a pianist with an exquisitely shaded approach to dynamics. Chopin’s loudest notes rarely got above forte, but the subtle degrees of quietness with which he played made those not-really-very-loud moments sound like thunder. Finally and most importantly, what the audience at the Salle Pleyel heard in Chopin was a pianist and composer who created an entirely new sort of piano music for what was an entirely new sort of piano.

Chopin’s Ballades: New Music for a New Piano

- Between 1835 and 1842, Chopin composed four works he entitled “Ballade.” They are among the longest solo piano works he ever composed, ranging in length from between 7 and 11 minutes. They remain among the most challenging works to play in the standard repertoire.
- The word “ballad”—or, in French, *ballade*—is one of those generic terms that has meant different things at different times. For Chopin, a “ballade” was a lengthy poem that told a narrative story replete with different characters and even dialogue. By entitling these four musical works as “ballades,” Chopin ascribed to them a dramatic/narrative character, although it is an emotional narrative that they describe rather than a literary one.
- Chopin’s Ballades are often described as being cast in sonata form, and they do indeed feature multiple contrasting themes that are—to some degree—developed and recapitulated, but it would be best to think of the Ballades as having been informed by, but not rooted in, sonata form.
- Harmonically, formally, and expressively, these pieces go far beyond the rituals of sonata form, particularly in their apotheosis-like character, meaning that the first, third, and fourth ballades are



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With the exception of two early piano concerti, a few miscellaneous works for piano and orchestra, an early 'cello sonata, and a few songs, Frédéric Chopin's output consists entirely of works for solo piano.

all dramatically back weighted—in that their rate of change and dramatic intensity accelerates until their final, glorious, apotheosis-like conclusions.

Ballade in G Minor

- The Ballade in G Minor begins with a slow introduction consisting of a meandering melody written in octaves. The introduction concludes with an open cadence: a harmonic dissonance that anticipates a resolution to the home (or tonic) key of G minor.
- In particular, you should be aware of the following two things while listening to the introduction: Its meandering, unaccompanied melody has a genuinely voice-like quality, and the fact that this introductory melody is set in octaves gives it tremendous pianistic resonance and weight.
- The introduction subtly prepares the ear for the climactic octaves that conclude the ballade. In the explosive concluding apotheosis of the ballade, upward-rippling scales lead to a cataclysmic inward

collapse in octaves, a collapse that spans the entire seven-octave range of Chopin's piano.

- Chopin indicates that this closing collapse—in which both of the pianist's hands are playing octaves—be performed fortississimo, or “very, very loud.” Chopin could not have conceived such a passage had he been writing for a six-octave, wooden-harped piano, which would have splintered into toothpicks under such an assault. But he was composing for a 7'5"-long metal-harped Pleyel, an instrument with thunder to spare, and Chopin spared it not.
- However, Chopin's Pleyel was also capable of an extraordinary degree of quiet nuance, which is put into high relief during the first theme that follows the introduction. Despite being notated in compound duple meter, theme 1 has a vaguely waltz-like sensibility about it. It is a long, intensely lyric theme that starts with a whisper, builds to a magnificent bravura (meaning “virtuosic”) climax, and then fades away.
- The theme begins with dissonant, tightly wound melodic figures that find resolution and release in the longer notes that follow. The theme is “through-composed,” meaning that its constituent phrases grow and develop continuously until a climax is reached followed by a brief refractory period and the conclusion of the theme.
- In order to perform this theme with the lyric flexibility and sonority it demands, a pianist—aside from playing all the right notes—is going to have to do three things. First, in order to achieve the rhythmic flexibility that the theme demands, a pianist will have to employ rubato—that is, a judiciously lengthening and shortening of the rhythms. It will not do to play this theme in strict time. In the words of Franz Liszt, the tempo must “sway and balance.”
- The second thing that a pianist must do to perform this theme properly is play the thematic melody legato, meaning “tied together.” For a pianist, this means not releasing one melody note

until the next one has been played, with the result being a smooth, unbroken melodic continuity.

- Finally, a pianist must use the sustain pedal in a most artful manner, in order to draw ever-varied sonorities from the piano and, by doing so, allow the music to breathe. On a modern piano, the right-hand pedal is called the “sustain” or “damper” pedal. When it is depressed, all the dampers are lifted away from all the strings, allowing the strings to vibrate freely until the pedal is released.
- The sustain pedal has rightly been called “the soul of the piano.” It allows pianists to smoothly connect widely spaced notes that could not be connected through fingering. The sustain pedal allows the sonority of a piano to blossom like a flower or explode like a bomb. When carefully employed, the sustain pedal allows a piano to breathe. However, when overused by a lead-footed barbarian, the sustain pedal will occlude the music under performance.
- In traditional sonata form, theme 1 is followed by a passage called the modulating bridge, a passage tasked with transitioning to the second theme and to the new key area in which the second theme will be heard. Chopin’s modulating bridge is something much more than that; it is a piece within a piece—a fantasia—an improvisation of melodic ideas first presented in the introduction.
- Chopin’s fabulous second theme in E-flat major would have been instantly recognizable to his contemporaries as a barcarole, a theme composed in the style of a folk song sung by Venetian gondoliers. The exposition concludes with a gentle cadence theme that grows directly out of the boatman’s song of theme 2.
- The literature refers to what follows as the development section, but by referring to a passage of music as a sonata-form development section, we bunch it together with a vast number of other development sections that all do more or less the same thing—that is, systematically fragment material presented in the exposition in an

essentially unstable, meaning modulatory, harmonic environment. That is most certainly not what Chopin does.

- In reality, Chopin’s erstwhile “development section” is a massive variation or extension of the exposition. It begins with theme 1, heard in the key of A minor, which is followed immediately by a huge and heroic version of theme 2, heard initially in the key of E major. When listening to this, be aware that this is modern piano music from top to bottom—music that moves from hushed intimacy to thunderous passion at the drop of a note.
- The remainder of this so-called development section consists of a vastly expanded version of the so-called modulating bridge followed by a passionate version of theme 2 followed by the cadence theme. We heard these same events—in the same order—in the exposition, though now they are presented in an evermore-dramatic context.
- The recapitulation begins with theme 1 stated back in the tonic key of G minor, which is standard sonata-form operating procedure. From that point on, however, nothing is “standard” about the recapitulation. Following theme 1, Chopin dispenses entirely with the modulating bridge and theme 2 and the cadence theme and, instead, powers directly into the ripsnorting coda that brings this ballade to its concluding apotheosis.

Schumann—*Kreisleriana*

Lecture 10

Romanticism meant the emergence of a new sort of European literature during the 19th century. The cutting-edge composers of the 19th century believed that the future of music was tied to merging music with literature in order to create a composite art form greater than either music or literature alone. For such composers, this meant instrumental music that would somehow depict emotions, paint pictures, and tell stories in purely instrumental terms. No 19th-century composer believed more completely in the necessity of combining music and literature with intimate self-confession than did Robert Schumann, who was born in 1810 and died in 1856.

Romantic-Era Melody and Harmony

- The self-expressive urge intrinsic to romanticism demanded that composers create ever-new musical means to describe the ever-new expressive content of their music. Speaking generally but accurately, thematic melodies became longer, more complex, and less prone to follow a strict phrase structure.
- Likewise, harmonic practice became more complex as composers sought to create evermore original, evermore evocative musical environments. For example, the aching melancholy we hear so often in the music of Frédéric Chopin is typically a result of harmonic resolutions delayed or avoided entirely or by exquisitely subtle modulations to new keys.
- The startling juxtapositions of contrasting moods and broad splashes of color we hear in the music of Robert Schumann are more often than not the result of bold and unexpected harmonic pivots, meaning sudden harmonic shifts between distantly related keys.

- While the harmonic language of composers like Chopin and Schumann was still rooted in traditional tonality, their harmonic vocabulary became increasingly complex and varied. It was a harmonic vocabulary capable of evoking tremendous metaphoric meaning to anyone whose ears were attuned to its subtleties.



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Robert Schumann (1810–1856) composed many of his best-known piano works for his wife, a pianist by the name of Clara Schumann.

A Love Story

- Clara Wieck, Schumann’s piano teacher’s daughter, turned 16 on September 13, 1835. She was a rare young woman: talented, intelligent, playful, and strikingly beautiful—at ease among adults and increasingly aware of her power over men. The 25-year-old Robert Schumann was at her 16th birthday party, and it was on that day that, by his own admission, he fell in love with her.
- When Clara’s father, Friedrich Wieck, found out about Robert and Clara, he went absolutely haywire. He threatened to kill Schumann and categorically forbade the two to ever see each other again. Wieck hauled Clara away on an extended concert tour, intent on keeping her far away from Leipzig and Robert Schumann.
- For the next four years, Clara’s father used every weapon in his arsenal to get rid of Schumann, including threats, slander, and even physical assault. In the end, Robert and Clara had to take Wieck

to court and sue for the right to be married. After a long and brutal legal battle, the court found in favor of Robert and Clara. They were married, finally, on September 12th of 1840.

- Nothing occupied and affected Schumann more in the years between 1836 and 1840 than his desperate passion for Clara, which was the inspiration for the great majority of the music he composed during that period.

***Kreisleriana*, Op. 16**

- Clara turned 18 on September 13, 1838. In honor of his daughter's 18th birthday, Friedrich Wieck conceded two points to Schumann: Robert and Clara would be allowed to see one another, providing that it were in a public place, and to write to each other when she was on tour. Schumann, who was a grown man of 27, found these provisos humiliating and was convinced—rightly, as it turns out—that they were nothing but a temporary concession to Clara's desires.
- Over the next year, Schumann's spirits rose to manic heights and fell to depressive depths, depending on his perception of his relationship with Clara. It was during one of his manic jags in 1838 that Schumann composed a set of eight pieces for piano in five days and called it *Kreisleriana*. When Friedrich Wieck got word that Schumann intended to dedicate the piece to Clara, he freaked out. At Clara's behest (and to her great relief), Robert withdrew the dedication and rededicated the piece to Frédéric Chopin, who had just dedicated his own Ballade no. 2 to Schumann.
- The title *Kreisleriana* refers to a fictional musician created by E. T. A. Hoffman by the name of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler. Hoffmann himself led a Jekyll-and-Hyde existence, working as a respected judge for the Prussian civil courts during the day only to become a carousing, story-telling man-about-town at night. The good Kapellmeister Kreisler, a certifiable schizophrenic, was Hoffmann's alter ego, someone who, like Hoffmann himself, moved

back and forth between a conservative establishment he loathed and his devotion to free thought and art.

- Kapellmeister Kreisler appears in three novels by Hoffmann. The first of these novels was written in 1813 and is entitled *Kreiseriana*. Schumann had been enthralled by the character of Kreisler since he was a child, and as an adult, he had come to personally identify with Kreisler as a musician and as a man driven half mad by his passion for Clara.
- Schumann's *Kreiseriana* consists of eight short movements. Like Kapellmeister Kreisler and Robert Schumann himself, *Kreiseriana* is bipolar, exhibiting violent mood swings not just between the movements but within them as well.
- As an example of this musical bipolarity, we turn to movement 1. This opening piece is cast in three large parts that can be schematicized as A–B–A. Schumann indicates that the A sections be performed in a manner “extremely animated.” Set in the key of D minor and characterized by unremitting rhythmic drive, these A sections feature roiling, rising, incessant triplets in the right hand, supported and punctuated by a syncopated left hand that obsessively gooses the music forward. The effect of the opening phrase is nothing less than a twitching yelp of passion, rising from the middle of the keyboard to the very top.
- The central B section of the movement is so different from the outer sections that it almost seems a non sequitur. The B section consists of a quiet, tender melody in B-flat major accompanied by harp-like arpeggios. The extreme degree of contrast between the A and B sections of this movement must be interpreted metaphorically, because there's no purely musical reason to explain it.
- The obsessive angst of the A sections and the delicate, dreamlike quality of the B section are two sides of the same expressive coin. The A sections describe the anxiety—even terror—that Schumann felt when contemplating the situation with Clara, while the B

section describes the dreamlike bliss Schumann felt when actually thinking about Clara herself. *Kreisleriana*, for Schumann, is nothing less than an analyst's couch; it is music that gives voice to his innermost feelings and fears.

- The second movement is structured as a rondo: A–B–A–C–A¹ with a brief coda. The rondo theme is one of the most gorgeous melodies ever written. It has the rise and fall of a gentle sigh and is said to represent Schumann's feelings of tenderness and passion for Clara. The rondo theme is set in B-flat major and is labeled "very inwardly and not too quickly."
- The energized and passionate first contrasting episode is set in B-flat major while the somewhat gentler second contrasting episode is set in G minor. The final restatement of the rondo theme—A¹—begins with a passage filled with an amazing degree of chromaticism. As this passage progresses, it loses almost entirely any sense of key area, of harmonic grounding. It is a metaphor for Schumann's own loss of center, of emotional grounding.
- Next occurs a harmonic event of such beauty and expressive power that it leaves us breathless as Schumann himself. The harmonic motion congeals in the key of F-sharp major, and the rondo theme begins anew.
- The phrase set in F-sharp major is immediately (and enharmonically) repeated in G-flat major. The G-flat harmony is then reinterpreted as something called an **augmented** sixth chord, which then resolves to a B-flat 6/4 chord. The moment of resolution from G-flat to B-flat is so sublimely satisfying that it can only be called orgasmic. This passage displays just the sort of extended harmonic practice that was used to depict the extended expressive imagery characteristic of so much 19th-century music.
- Movement 3—marked "very agitated"—is understood to represent Schumann's restless and mercurial nature. Movement 4 is understood to represent Schumann's depth of feeling. Movement 5—marked

“very lively” and set in G minor—is understood to represent Schumann’s moodiness and rapid changes of heart.

- Movement 6—which is marked “very slowly” and set in B-flat major—is understood to represent Schumann’s steadfastness of character. In contrast to the slow and gorgeously lyric movement set in B-flat major, the next one—movement 7—is fast, agitated, and set initially in C minor. The first part of this movement is understood to represent Schumann’s impetuosity and wildness.
- This manic, rapid-fire music suddenly comes to a screaming halt, as a measured, chorale-like passage in E-flat major brings the movement to its conclusion. That’s quite a contrast between the beginning and the end of this movement. Schumann would seem to be saying that beneath his wildness and impetuosity, there is strength and calm.
- Finally, movement 8—marked “fast and playful” and set in G minor—is understood to represent Schumann’s nobility of character and spryness of spirit. This closing number is alternately furtive and heroic.
- *Kreisleriana* paints a portrait of Schumann’s state of mind in 1838—a state of mind overwhelmingly affected by his feelings for Clara Wieck. The piece is nothing less than a spiritual diary, as each movement represents some fragment or fragments of Schumann’s personality and desires, of his conscious and unconscious life.

The Tragic End

- Robert and Clara’s love story had a tragic end. In 1831, at the age of 21, Schumann contracted syphilis from a prostitute, and for the next 23 years, he suffered from a series of increasingly severe neurological illnesses until, in February of 1854, he went mad. On February 27, 1854, Schumann—tormented by hallucinations—attempted suicide by jumping off a bridge in Düsseldorf into the Rhine River.

- He was rescued, but his mind was gone. He was placed in an asylum near Bonn, about 50 miles south of Düsseldorf. It was there that he spent the final few years of his life, muttering and babbling and wasting away. He died on July 29, 1856. Clara, who had been at his side for two days, had gone to the train station to pick up a friend. She returned to the hospital only to be told that Robert had died.

Important Term

augmentation: The process of systematically extending the note values of a given melodic line.

Liszt—Years of Pilgrimage

Lecture 11

The primary goal of this lecture is to explore Franz Liszt’s phenomenally innovative approach to the piano—his full-contact pianism. The musical examples for this exploration will be drawn from the first two volumes of a three-volume set of works called *Années de pèlerinage*, or *Years of Pilgrimage*. This lecture will selectively mine the two volumes, entitled “First Year: Switzerland” and “Second Year: Italy,” for examples of Liszt’s pianistic innovations. However, that should not preclude you from listening to these masterworks in their entirety.

Franz Liszt: A Showman Like None Other

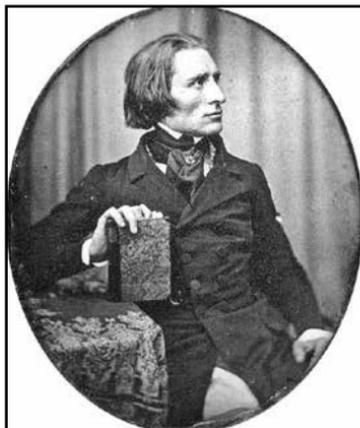
- Franz Liszt (1811–1886) was the first “modern” pianist: the first pianist and composer to completely appreciate (and exploit) the fact that the new metal-harped piano was not just a new sort of piano but an entirely new instrument altogether. Liszt’s great pianistic contemporaries—Frédéric Chopin, Johann Hummel, and Ignaz Moscheles—still considered the piano (even the metal-harped piano) to be a chamber instrument, meant to be played in a small room or salon before a select audience. But not Liszt. He made his fame and fortune by democratizing the piano: by touring throughout Europe and performing in big public concert halls.
- Liszt was the greatest virtuoso of the 19th century and very possibly the greatest pianist of all time. The great bulk of Liszt’s music is for solo piano. His solo piano music is about three things: It’s about the metal-harped piano that came into existence at exactly the time he was entering his musical maturity; about a degree of virtuosity that becomes an artistic end unto itself; and about Liszt himself—an overt celebration of the composer as hero, the virtuoso as God.
- The three sets of pieces entitled *Years of Pilgrimage* were inspired by Liszt’s travels across Europe. The first volume was published in 1855 and is entitled “First Year: Switzerland.” The second volume,

entitled “Second Year: Italy,” was published in two parts: the first in 1858 and the second in 1861. The third volume was published in 1883. Taken together, these three volumes put pretty much every aspect of Liszt’s groundbreaking pianism on display.

- On April 20, 1832, Niccolò Paganini—perhaps the most technically accomplished violinist of all time—gave a concert at the Paris Opera House. In the audience was a not-quite 21-year-old Hungarian-born pianist named Franz Liszt.
- Liszt was transfixed, and he had an epiphany that changed his life: He realized that Paganini did not just play the violin better than anyone else but that Paganini played the violin as well as it could be played. He also realized that the “Paganini of the piano” had yet to materialize. There and then, Liszt decided that his mission in life was to become the “Paganini of the piano.”
- At the time he heard Paganini play, Liszt was already a first-rate pianist with some high-end credentials. Over the following 6 years, Liszt practiced almost nonstop, discovering and then solving almost every conceivable challenge associated with playing the piano.
- In this, Franz Liszt was very much the right man at the right place at the right time, because at exactly the time he figuratively threw himself into the piano—the 1830s—the proto-modern piano, with a full-metal harp and a modern mechanism, was emerging from the Paris workshops of the companies Pleyel and Erard.
- Unlike Paganini, whose instrument had been perfected 200 years before, Liszt was defining what was possible on an instrument that was just coming into existence. The music Liszt composed to exploit the new metal-harped piano amounted to cutting-edge software created for a brand-new technology.
- Liszt was more than just the greatest pianist of his time. He parlayed his pianism into a performing persona the likes of which Europe had never before seen. He became the most recognized performing artist

of the 19th century. He came to be considered a living god, and he created something approaching madness wherever he performed.

- However, many of Liszt’s contemporaries were disgusted with his “act”: They found it not just tasteless but detrimental to the art of music as they understood it. Liszt’s most outspoken critics were his fellow pianists, who were most likely envious of his success. The fact is that Liszt’s pianism was of a different order, a level of pianism that was capable of driving audiences to ecstasy.



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- Liszt’s concert tours took him to every corner of Europe, during which hundreds of thousands of people had the opportunity to hear and see him perform. In 1839, the 28-year-old Liszt—refusing to share the stage with anyone—invented the solo recital. He called them “soliloquies.” When Liszt announced that such a soliloquy would take place in the Assembly Hall of the People in St. Petersburg before an audience of 3,000, the local critics initially considered it a joke. They changed their tune after they heard the concert.

Franz Liszt (1811–1886), together with Frédéric Chopin, defined what was possible to do on the new metal-harped pianos of the 1830s.

Liszt’s Pianos of Choice

- Liszt’s pianos of choice were those built by Sébastien Erard in Paris. By the 1830s, these Erard pianos could boast of having three technologies/characteristics that had not existed 15 years before.
- First, the Erards featured a mechanism called a double escapement, which allowed a note to be repeated even if the piano key had not risen all the way back to its full height. This allowed notes to be

repeated very rapidly, a capability that Liszt exploited audaciously. There is no way Liszt could have conceived of the music found in “*Tarantella*” from “Second Year” of *Years of Pilgrimage*—with its incredibly fast repeated notes—had he not had access to an instrument capable of playing them.

- Second, the Erards Liszt played had cast-iron harp frames. The metal frame was invented in the 1820s, and it changed the piano forever. Never again would pianos be the relatively light, portable, wooden instruments they had been since their invention in 1700. A metal-harp frame supported more and thicker strings—steel strings—and offered increased rigidity to larger soundboards. Such pianos were heavy as a horse and significantly louder and more resonant than their wooden ancestors.
- The over-the-top virtuosic passage that is “After Reading Dante,” found in “Second Year” of *Years of Pilgrimage*, simply could not have been conceived or played on a wooden-harped piano, which has neither the requisite number of keys nor the physical strength to hold up under the megatonnage of the music’s assault.
- Third, the Erards were particularly known for their sonority and volume, admittedly achieved at the expense of quiet nuance. It should come as no surprise that the small and sickly Frédéric Chopin chose to play a Pleyel, an instrument known for its nuance rather than its big sound—an instrument Liszt dismissed as a *pianino*, a “little piano.”

Liszt at the Piano: Freedom for the Fingers

- Liszt’s revolutionary approach to the piano involved breaking through the wall of traditional pianism—the traditional view of what was physically possible at a piano. By and large, contemporary pedants and piano teachers hated Liszt, whom they accused of “destroying the true art of piano playing.” Great innovators always disturb the status quo and, by doing so, raise the hackles of those who represent the status quo.

- Franz Liszt knew that he was the piano’s indispensable man: a uniquely gifted, uniquely dedicated pianist whose development as a pianist corresponded exactly with the emergence of the proto-modern piano. In his effort to define the outer limits of what was possible, Liszt made it his life’s mission to see just how far he could push his own body and the new piano.
- Admittedly, on occasion, his musical imagination was not equal to his technical accomplishments, but the bottom line is that Liszt’s technical accomplishments of the 1830s and 1840s laid the groundwork for all subsequent schools of pianism, and thus, it has been argued that Franz Liszt “was the first modern pianist.”
- At the heart of Liszt’s pianistic revolution was his concept of absolute digital independence. For example, Liszt practiced every scale with the fingering of every other scale. What he was looking for—and what he achieved—was a degree of finger dexterity and independence completely new to piano playing.
- A sample passage from the “Gondolier’s Song” from “Second Year: Italy” begins with a rippling, high-velocity, two-handed descent. The “Gondolier’s melody” follows, played by the third, fourth, and fifth fingers of the right hand, while the thumb and second finger of the right hand play a trill. At the same time, the left hand supplies a gentle, watery accompaniment. From there, ripple and trill upon ripple and trill curl and seethe around the melody in a miraculously delicate and miraculously difficult interplay. It is digital dexterity raised to the level of high art.
- Liszt’s dexterity was such that any one of his fingers was interchangeable with any other; his dexterity went far beyond the old-school doctrine of finger equalization. Liszt did not conceive of his digital equipment as consisting of two hands with five fingers each but, rather, as a single unit consisting of 10 independent fingers. By interlocking and overlapping his hands, Liszt could make it appear as if he were everywhere at once on the keyboard.

Liszt—Sonata in B Minor

Lecture 12

Early in his career, Liszt was encouraged by his friends to “branch out” into orchestral music. The young Liszt responded to his friends by describing the importance of the piano to his body, mind, and soul. In his Sonata in B Minor, Liszt fulfills entirely his desire to turn the seven octaves of the piano not just into an orchestra, but into a vehicle for the heroic and the sublime. This lecture will focus on perceiving the large-scale sonata-form structure of Liszt’s Sonata in B Minor.

Liszt in Weimar

- In 1848, Franz Liszt settled in the central German city of Weimar, where he accepted the position of Kapellmeister—music director—for the court and city. He was tired, and after 10 years of incessant touring, he knew he had to rest. He also had artistic ambitions that he could not pursue on the road: He wanted to branch out and compose orchestral music; he wanted to learn to conduct; and he wanted to teach and to proselytize for the new romantic music.
- Despite the fact that Bach, Schiller, and Goethe had all lived and worked in Weimar, at the time Liszt moved there in 1848, it was a dusty backwater. That an international star like Liszt would move to Weimar to take over what was an extremely modest musical establishment came as a shock to many of his contemporaries.
- But Liszt was smart and sly and knew exactly what he was doing, and within just a few years, he had turned Weimar into “the Mecca of the avant-garde movement in Germany.” He gathered about him a veritable court of students, writers, propagandists, spokespersons, rich hobbyists, and sycophants that came to be known collectively as the New German School or the Futurists. With Liszt in the lead, the Futurists dedicated themselves to creating a new art in which music and literature would be inextricably merged, in which feeling was given free reign.

Sonata as Genre versus Musical Form

- Liszt lived and worked in Weimar for 13 years, from 1848 to 1861. Despite the fact that most of the music he composed during those years was for orchestra, the crowning glory of Liszt's Weimar years is for solo piano: the Sonata in B Minor.
- Liszt began the sonata late in 1852 and inscribed it as being completed on February 2, 1853. It is a huge, magisterial, virtuosic, and remarkably modern work—over 30 minutes long and set in a single movement.
- This raises the question as to why Liszt saddled the piece with what was, by 1853, the quaintly old-fashioned designation “sonata”? Liszt would have understood the word “sonata” to mean two different things: one of them an instrumental genre and the other a musical form. As an instrumental genre, a “sonata” is a multimovement composition for solo piano or solo piano plus one other instrument.
- “Sonata form” refers to a specific musical form, one that features two (or more) principal, contrasting themes. The melodically and harmonically contrasting themes are presented in a section called the exposition; the materials presented in the exposition are then in some way “argued” in a section called the development; the themes then return in their original order but in the same key in a section called the recapitulation; and finally, a coda typically brings such a movement to its conclusion.
- Given the title Sonata in B Minor, our first impulse might be to think that it is a piano sonata and thus expect it to adhere to the time-honored traditions of a piano sonata, with its multiple movements and such. However, Liszt didn't call the piece “Piano Sonata in B Minor”; he called it, simply, “Sonata in B Minor.” In reality, the piece is a single, sprawling, sonata-form movement. Had Liszt been of a mind, he might have more accurately (but much less poetically) named his piece the “B Minor Sonata Form.”



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Franz Liszt was the first performer to play entire programs from memory.

The Sonata's Introduction

- The sonata begins with a diabolic introduction in five parts, during which Liszt lays out the thematic grist for the entire piece. The first part of the introduction takes place in the deep, cavernous spaces of the bottom of the piano, as repeated octave Gs are followed by ominous descending figures.
- The second part of the introduction expands on and intensifies the first part. In the second part, the repeated octaves of part 1 leap upward in short-long rhythms. In part 2 of the introduction, the formerly ominous descending figures become violent and precipitous.
- With the almost fanfare-like second part as a setup, part 3 introduces a new melodic idea: a devilish, Mephistophelian cackle heard deep in the bass.

- In part 4 of the introduction, hell begins to break loose, as rising two-chord units in the treble strain against falling lines in the bass, falling lines intent on dragging the harmonies down to wherever.
- The climactic fifth and final part of the introduction combines the violent and precipitous music of part 2 with the Mephistophelian cackles of part 3.

A Work Based on Goethe's *Faust*

- Among Liszt's many inventions was the term "program music," which is instrumental music that seeks, in some way, to evoke specific moods and emotions, or to depict specific imagery, or even to tell a literary story. The opposite of program music is absolute music, which is music that presumably can be understood in purely musical terms without resorting to extramusical explanation—Mozart's **symphonies**, for example.
- Of course, any absolute distinction between absolute music and program music is impossible, because musical inflection—like spoken language—will inevitably evoke an associative response of some sort in the ears, hearts, and minds of its listeners. Our textbooks might tell us that Mozart's symphonies are absolute music, although it is impossible not to feel profound gloom during the fourth movement of the G Minor Symphony, K. 550, and euphoria during the fourth movement of the "Jupiter" Symphony.
- The real issue is one of compositional intent. Mozart did not set out to explicitly evoke any literary stories or visual imagery in his symphonies. Franz Liszt, however, who more often than not gave his compositions literary titles, did indeed set out to explicitly evoke literary stories and/or visual imagery in his instrumental music.
- While the title Sonata in B Minor invokes sonata form, it does not describe any programmatic content. Nevertheless, the music itself—with its extremes of contrast—invokes all sorts of metaphors that in turn evoke a narrative story. Various narratives have been attributed to the sonata: It has been described as an autobiographical

document; as an allegory based on Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and as a work based on Goethe's *Faust*.

- The Faustian interpretation is by far the most compelling. We will identify and explore the themes using a Goethe's *Faust*-derived vocabulary: Theme 1 will represent Mephistopheles (a demon in the employ of Satan himself; theme 2 will represent the flawed but heroic Faust; and theme 3 will represent the young, virginal, self-sacrificial Gretchen.

Exposition

- The exposition introduces the three thematic protagonists—Mephistopheles, Faust, and Gretchen—as themes 1, 2, and 3. Rippling, crazed, and virtuosic, theme 1 is built from parts 3 and 4 of the introduction: the Mephistophelian cackle of part 3 and the rising two-chord units of part 4.
- A furious modulating bridge follows, one that expands on elements of the introduction. The majestic and heroic theme 2 is set in D major, the personification of Faust. This lush and passionate theme grows out of the first notes of the introduction. Part 1 of the introduction began with two repeated Gs. Theme 2 develops this idea, consisting as it does of a series of repeated two-note units, units that rise toward heavenly redemption over the course of the opening of the theme.
- Theme 3 represents Gretchen, the sweet-as-maple-syrup nubile whose goodness and purity will redeem Faust. And despite the fact that her gentle, lyric music would seem to be light-years removed from that of the heroic (if flawed) Faust, Gretchen's theme is based on the same repeated notes as Faust's theme. There can be no doubt that the close relationship between themes 2 and 3 is intended to be a metaphor for the spiritual and emotional relationship between Faust and Gretchen.
- Over the course of the movement, these three themes are presented in a dazzling and virtuosic array of permutations; they alternate

with each other, overlap with each, and are transformed constantly by their interactions, as Liszt follows—in his imagination—the dramatic interactions and developments of the Faust story. The miracle is that the sonata works perfectly well as a piece of abstract music; that is, it makes sense as pure music—its “program” aside.

Development Section

- The development section begins roughly 12 minutes into the movement. The beginning of the development section—marked “slowly and sustained”—offers one of the rare moments of tranquility in the sonata. Things do not stay this peaceful for very long.
- The tender parts of the music are drawn from Gretchen’s theme. In a moment of high drama, Faust’s theme—theme 2—attempts to climb ever higher and struggles with vicious downward lines in the bass, an explicit evocation of Mephistopheles’s attempts to drag Faust down to hell.

Recapitulation

- The recapitulation begins in the depths of the piano with part 1 of the introduction. A fantastic hunk of music follows, as Liszt transforms what had been parts 2 and 3 of the introduction into a fugue based on devilish Mephistophelian melodic ideas.
- The bristling fugue that follows is nothing less than a *totentanz*, or “dance of death.” The pianist Alfred Brendel writes: “I do not know what to admire most: the introduction of the fugue at this point; how the three-part writing gradually grows back into [a] ‘symphonic **texture**’; the Mozartean effortlessness of its polyphony; [or] the originality that sets this fugue apart from baroque stereotypes.”

Coda

- The first one-and-a-half minutes of the five-minute-long coda is an oxygen-depleting, muscle-tearing, phalanges-snapping exercise in virtuosity, a passage that begins with an evermore fervent, evermore thunderous evocation of Gretchen (that is, theme 3) and concludes

with a final, teeth-rattling, ecstatically heroic statement of Faust's theme—theme 2.

- From this point, the sonata ends quietly and magically. That was not Liszt's original intention. In his original manuscript, the sonata concluded with a 25-measure apotheosis, to be played fortississimo—as loudly as possible. Liszt then crossed out those last 25 measures and put in their place a 32-measure passage that gradually fades away to pianississimo—as quietly as possible. Liszt's second impulse was brilliant. The last moments of the sonata are cast not in B minor but, rather, in B major.

Important Terms

symphony: A multimovement work composed for an orchestra.

texture: Number of melodies present and the relationship between those melodies in a given segment of music; they include monophony, polyphony (counterpoint), heterophony, and homophony.

Brahms—*Handel Variations*, Op. 24

Lecture 13

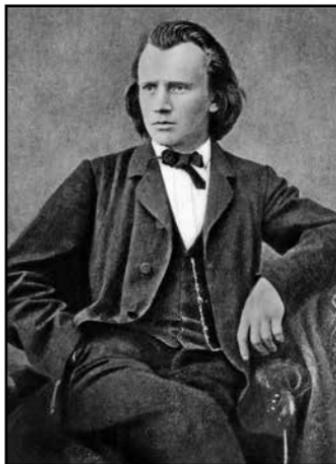
The full name of the piano work that is the subject of this lecture is “Variations and Fugue on a Theme by G. F. Handel” (1861). In modern times, this title raises not an eyebrow. It sounds like various other “concert music” titles—generic, passionless, and lacking any indication of the expressive content of the piece. At a time when most other composers were doing their best to come up with titles that reflected the expressive spirit and substance of their works, the 28-year-old Johannes Brahms remained intent on employing the blandest titles possible.

Brahms’s Influences

- There is a graceful, if archaic, formality to the theme on which Brahms builds his magnificent *Handel Variations*—a theme written by Georg Frederic Handel in the 1730s. It has the measured pace of a processional, a simple and regular harmonic rhythm, and is cast in that most ubiquitous and predictable of all baroque-era structural templates, binary dance form: A–A–B–B.
- Brahms appropriated the theme from the third movement of Handel’s Harpsichord Suite in B-flat Major, a movement entitled “Air with Variations.” The Harpsichord Suite was published in London in 1733, and Brahms—who was a serious collector of music manuscripts—owned a first edition of the piece. Typical of harpsichord music, Handel’s thematic melody is filled with embellishments.
- Such embellishments are characteristic of harpsichord music. Unlike a piano, a harpsichord can neither accent notes nor sustain them for any period of time. The only way to emphasize or sustain notes on a harpsichord is to embellish them.
- The first thing Brahms’s title, *Handel Variations*, tells us is that the movement is cast in theme and variations form, a form in which a theme is stated and then varied in the sections that follow.

Theme and variations form is a classical-era (that is, 18th-century) construct, one that demands strict adherence to a preexisting formal template.

- Theme and variations form is precisely the sort of old-style, presumably rigid musical form that romantics like Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner, for example, rejected out of hand, claiming that it constrained feeling and put form before expression.
- Brahms's fugue occupies the work's final four-and-a-half minutes. It is worth discussing the fact that Brahms composed this set of variations capped with a fugue. It was one thing to include fugue-style music within a larger work—even Liszt did that in his Sonata in B Minor—but by including “Fugue” in his title, Brahms links his piece incontrovertibly with works composed during the baroque era 140 years before.
- By entitling his work “Variations and Fugue,” Brahms was not just indicating that the work contains a fugue but was also staking out his claim to the past—to his spiritual link to Bach and Handel (a link made abundantly clear by basing the work on a theme by Handel).
- In addition, by composing a theme-and-variations-form movement capped by a fugue based on a theme by Handel and then saying so in his title, Brahms was purposely rubbing bad-smelling stuff in the noses of arch-romantics like Liszt and Wagner, whose musical politics he hated and who, for their part, despised Brahms for his “apparent” conservatism.



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**Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
predominantly focused on
composing chamber music,
choral music, and music for
solo piano.**

- In reality, Brahms’s so-called conservatism is a red herring. In terms of his melodic and harmonic usage and the expressive zap his music delivers, Brahms is every inch a feeling-is-believing romantic-era composer. However, he never lost his affection for certain time-honored musical processes and forms, and he believed that fancy titles and over-the-top expressive blather were no substitute for old-fashioned musical craft.
- Unlike such self-professed “futurists” as Liszt and Wagner, Brahms did not believe that a composer had to sacrifice traditional formal discipline in order to be “modern.” In fact, his music is a brilliant synthesis of the best of the old combined with the best of the new.
- Brahms’s two great influences for his *Handel Variations* are Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* of 1741 and Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* of 1823. Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* were also inspired by Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, so this is a case where all three of these composers wrote works that follow the same approximate outline.
- All three works are for solo keyboard. All three works feature a splendiferous multitude of variations: Bach’s contains 30 variations, Beethoven’s contains 33 variations, and Brahms’s contains 25 variations plus the closing fugue. In all three works, the composers group the variations together in such a way as to create a larger musical structure.
- Most significantly, all three works are what was called during the baroque era a ground bass (or a passacaglia or a chaconne—these designations are basically interchangeable). A ground bass is a variations-type procedure in which the theme is not the melody heard at the beginning of the piece but, rather, the bass line and harmonies beneath that melody. The challenge in such a piece is not to embellish and transform the melody during the variations but, rather, to create ever-new melodic material above the bass line.

Variational Groupings

- The 25 variations of the *Handel Variations* clump together into six large groups of variations. We perceive these groupings as a series of waves: Generally speaking, they start out quietly and build to a climax; the next group begins quietly and then, once again, builds to a climax, and so forth.

Variations Group 1: Variations 1–4

- Variation 1, with its unadorned harmony and occasional embellishment, acts as a temporal bridge, one that transports the music from the early 18th to the mid-19th century.
- Variation 2 sees the upper voice set in slithery, chromatic triplets, and just like that, we have arrived at the musical world of the mid-19th century.
- Variation 3—marked *dolce*, meaning “sweetly”—is most Schumann-esque, as the hands alternate back and forth in a manner typical of Robert Schumann’s piano music.
- Variation 4, in which the full resources of the romantic piano are fully unleashed, brings the first large part of the piece to its climax.

Variations Group 2: Variations 5–10

- The six variations of group 2 are cast as three pairs. Variations 5 and 6 are both quiet and set in B-flat minor.
- Variation 5 has the flowing, melancholy sensibility of Chopin’s music. Variation 6—still in B-flat minor—is a ghostly canon in octaves.
- Variations 7 and 8 are paired as well. Set back in B-flat major, they are both vigorous bits of riding music, based on a rhythmic pattern of eighth-sixteenth-sixteenth.

- The concluding variations of group 2 are both royal in mood and employ triplets. Variation 9 is filled with all sorts of chromatic elaboration. The jackhammer-like variation 10 covers the entire keyboard, top to bottom, and brings this second group of variations to its climax and conclusion.

Variations Group 3: Variations 11–13

- Variations 11 and 12 are both quiet and lyric. Variation 13 brings this third group of variations to its conclusion. It is nothing less than a soulful Hungarian Gypsy rhapsody, set in B-flat minor and replete with a thrumming, cimbalom-like accompaniment. (A “cimbalom” is a Hungarian hammered dulcimer.)

Variations Group 4: Variations 14–18

- The five variations of group 4 are conceived as a single, continuous passage. The first of these variations—variation 14—explodes out of the gate with parallel sixths in the right hand set against a walking bass in the left. The last of these variations—variation 18—brings this fourth group to a relatively quiet conclusion.

Variations Group 5: Variations 19–22

- The fifth group of variations features a series of character pieces. For example, variation 19 is cast as a *siciliana*—an elegant, moderately paced baroque-era dance in **compound meter**. Group 5 concludes with the music box–like variation 22.

Variations Group 6: Variations 23–25

- The three variations of this sixth and final batch constitute a continuous buildup toward the climactic fugue that will conclude the piece. Listen to variations 23, 24, and 25 straight on through; this excerpt should have you hyperventilating by its conclusion.

Fugue

- The fugue is both a development section and a coda, and it gives Brahms the opportunity to do all sorts of things that he could not have done earlier during the more strictly controlled variations.

In his description of the fugue's conclusion, Brahms's biographer Malcolm Macdonald notes: "The immense cumulative power of this Fugue, gathered up in a chiming dominant **pedal**, issues in a coda of granitic splendor, the vertical and horizontal demands of theme and harmony equally fulfilled in a majestic convergence of descending chords and ascending fugue-motifs."

Brahms and Clara Schumann

- In February 1854, four-and-a-half months after Brahms met Robert and Clara Schumann, Robert attempted suicide by jumping off a bridge in Düsseldorf into the Rhine River. He was rescued, but his mind—ravaged by syphilis—had snapped entirely. He was committed to an insane asylum, where he died two-and-a-half years later.
- At the time of Robert's suicide attempt, Clara Schumann was 34 years old. She was the mother of six children and was pregnant with number seven. She was distraught and entirely overwhelmed. When the not-yet 21-year-old Brahms heard what had happened, he rushed to Clara's side and pledged to stay with her until the baby was born and Schumann had recovered. Visitors came and went, but it was Brahms who stayed. He helped take care of the kids, took on some piano students, and—of course—they fell in love.
- Robert Schumann died on July 29, 1856, and was buried two days later. Properly chaperoned, the now 23-year-old Brahms and the almost 37-year-old Clara took a vacation together to Switzerland. We do not know what they said to each other, but Brahms had already decided—despite all that they had gone through during the previous two-and-a-half years (perhaps because of it)—that he could not marry Clara.
- Clara Schumann was the great love of Brahms's life, and they remained friends for the rest of their lives. As a pianist, Clara championed Brahms's music to her dying day. Brahms completed the *Handel Variations* in early September of 1861. It was a birthday gift for Clara, whose 42nd birthday fell on September 13. In lieu

of a dedication, Brahms's manuscript is headed "Variations for a beloved friend." Clara gave the premiere performance of the work in Brahms's hometown of Hamburg on December 7, 1861.

Important Terms

compound meter: Any meter that features a triple subdivision within each beat.

pedal: A single pitch or harmony sustained or repeated for a period of time.

Brahms—Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118

Lecture 14

Brahms found his mature compositional voice as a young man, in his late 20s. Brahms structured his works along the formal lines of the 18th century. These formal procedures—and the craft and intellectual discipline they represent—are the objective aspect of his compositional style. However, Brahms’s melodic and harmonic language and expressive content were fully contemporary, fully romantic. The heart of Brahms’s musical language is the intuitive, inspiration-driven, subjective aspect of his style. In essence, Brahms was an objective subjectivist.

Brahms and the Piano

- Brahms started his musical life as a piano prodigy. At the age of 12, his pianistic studies began to share equal time with composition lessons. Soon enough, Brahms became a composer for the piano. Sadly, we cannot know what Brahms’s early compositions sounded like, because he destroyed each and every one of them.
- The earliest of his works to survive is his Scherzo in E-flat Minor for Piano, which was composed in 1851, when he was 18 years old, and published—thanks to Robert Schumann—in 1853 as Op. 4. The other “earliest” of his works to survive—three grand piano sonatas and three sets of songs for piano and voice—all date to 1853. The preeminent role of the piano in all of these pieces is logical; they are works Brahms composed to play himself.
- As Brahms matured and his career as a composer developed, the primacy of piano in his compositions gave way, as he established himself as a composer of chamber music, choral music, and—finally—orchestral music.
- Brahms composed his last orchestral work—the Double Concerto in A Minor for Violin and ’Cello—in 1887. Four years later, in

1891, the 58-year-old Brahms finally returned to the instrumental genre that had brought him to the dance 40 years before: solo piano.

- Brahms composed four sets of solo piano works between 1891 and 1893: the Seven Fantasias, Op. 116; the Three Intermezzi, Op. 117; the Six Pieces of Op. 118; and the Four Pieces of Op. 119. These are all relatively short works, by and large intimate in tone. They represent a withdrawal from the public world of the orchestra to a very private, introspective, and personal place.
- It is a place both nostalgic and progressive, because even as Brahms was getting back in touch with his roots as a composer of solo piano music, the music itself is some of the most thematically, rhythmically, and harmonically modern music written of that time, music that pushes the traditional tonal language to its breaking point—and sometimes beyond.
- Brahms completed the Six Pieces for Piano in 1893. They are dedicated to Clara Schumann, who was the first person “not named Brahms” to see them in manuscript.

No. 1: Intermezzo in A Minor

- Brahms’s use of the title “Intermezzo” is extremely idiosyncratic. “Intermezzo” means “in the middle”; an **intermezzo** is an interlude, a musical number of generally limited compositional content and expressive character that occurs in between two more “significant” chunks of music.
- Like Chopin’s preludes—works that stand by themselves and are, in reality, a prelude to nothing—Brahms’s intermezzi are self-standing works that stand in between nothing.
- We could interpret Brahms’s use of the word “intermezzo” poetically; we could claim that he used the designation to indicate interludes of sublime loveliness in our otherwise beauty-starved, workaday lives, but Brahms himself would likely tell us that we were being ridiculous for even suggesting such a thing. In truth,

a Brahmsian “intermezzo” is simply a relatively short piece, typically gentle and meditative character.

- This opening intermezzo, marked “not too fast, but very passionately,” has the character of a dramatic overture and is thus a most appropriate piece to begin the set.

No. 2: Intermezzo in A Major

- The Intermezzo in A Major is a wistful, exquisitely beautiful piece that is fairly easy to play and, thus, the most frequently performed of the Op. 118 set. Nevertheless, it is filled with compositional virtuosity: with all sorts of contrapuntal techniques, rhythmic and harmonic ambiguities, and motivic development, all of which are so beautifully incorporated into the substance of the work that they are de facto invisible—a brilliant example of the art of concealing art.
- The Intermezzo is cast in three-part, A–B–A form. The thematic melody on which the entire piece is based is heard in the upper voice at the very beginning of the piece. This thematic melody consists of three particular elements, all of which will be developed: two melodic motives and a rhythmic/harmonic idea.
- Melodic motive 1 consists of just three notes; when first heard, those notes are C-sharp, B, D. That motive is heard twice at the beginning of the thematic melody, the second version being an expansion of the first.



Johannes Brahms was born on May 7, 1833, in a run-down apartment house in Hamburg's red-light district.

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- The second motive follows immediately. It consists of a leaping, dotted-rhythm (meaning long-short) ascent followed by an essentially stepwise descent.
- The third notable element of this thematic melody is a very subtle but very important rhythmic/harmonic idea.
- The intermezzo is set in triple meter—that is, in three. The intermezzo is not a waltz, with the rhythmic emphasis on the first and strongest beat of each measure; in reality, the emphasis is on beat 3, which adds a tremendous degree of rhythmic fluidity and unpredictability to the music.
- The harmony reinforces the emphasis on beat 3. For example, the opening harmony—on beat 3—is a **consonance**, whereas the harmony that falls on the following beat 1 is a dissonance, something called a 6/4 chord. In this way, Brahms destabilized many of the first beats—the down beats—and in doing so, shifts harmonic primacy to beat 3.
- About 45 seconds into the piece, a transitional passage sees the emphasis shift from beat 3 to beat 1 and then back to beat 3 again, creating a wonderfully subtle bit of cross-rhythm. This opening A section of the movement reaches its climax with this music.
- The sighing, descending melody of the first part of that climactic music is an extension of the descending thematic motive heard at the beginning of the piece. Meanwhile, in the bass, the opening thematic motive subtly but powerfully pushes the climax forward.
- The melancholy middle, or B, section of the movement is initially set in F-sharp minor. But, of course, in reality, the B section is a further development of melodic material first heard at the very beginning of the intermezzo.

- Even though this analysis has only skimmed the surface of this intermezzo, the larger point is that this is music of incredible craft and compositional integrity as well as music of unearthly beauty.

No. 3: Ballade in G Minor

- At its most generic, a musical “ballade” is a one-movement work with both dramatic and lyric qualities. It is to this most generic definition of “ballade” that Brahms refers in his title for this work.
- Like most of the pieces of Op. 118, this ballade is cast in three-part, A–B–A form. The outer A sections are most dramatic; they feature bristling, swaggering music heard in chords that alternate between the pianist’s hands.
- The lyric music follows in the B section—a gorgeous, rolling, vaguely Hungarian-sounding passage that stands in polar contrast with the galumphing A section.

No. 4: Intermezzo in F Minor

- The earthy, delicate, sentimental, lyric, loving, profoundly human Brahms comes out in his music. An example of this is the passionate conclusion of his Intermezzo in F Minor. This is wonderful music.

No. 5: Romance in F Major

- Cast in A–B–A form, the opening (and closing) A sections have the natural radiance of folk song, albeit a very sophisticated folk song. The opening A section of the romance in F Major might best be described as a song without words.
- The folklike flavor of this romance becomes even more pronounced in the B section, during which a simple, gracious, ever-further embellished tune is heard over a thrumming pedal D.

No. 6: Intermezzo in E-flat Minor

- Brahms indicates that this intermezzo be played “moderate to slowly and sadly.” This intermezzo is one of the most forward-looking works Brahms ever composed. Its harmonic ambiguity pushes it past traditional tonality, and its continuously developed thematic material and motivic saturation have become a textbook model for 20th- and 21st-century composers.
- If this work had been by Franz Liszt, with his fondness for programmatic titles, he probably would have entitled it something along the lines of “Obsession.” The intermezzo is a work based on the “obsessive” repetitions, variations, and reharmonizations of a single motive. That germinal motive is presented all by itself at the start of the piece. The resemblance of this sinuous, melancholy motive to the Catholic prayer for the dead—the famed 13th-century *Dies Irae*—is obvious.
- Heard beneath Brahms’s deathly thematic motive is a dissonant, diminished seventh-chord arpeggio. It is a dissonant arpeggio that effectively destroys any sense of tonal center. Indeed, across the opening A section of this piece—cast in A–B–A form—there is only the slightest hint of tonal centricity beneath the murmuring repetitions of the thematic motive.
- The middle B section of the intermezzo is defiant and increasingly violent in tone and spirit. Set in the key of D-flat major, it would seem to represent “the good fight” against the darkness and despair projected by the opening A section. Alas, it is a good fight that cannot be won, and at its climactic moment, the *Dies Irae*—inspired thematic melody returns, at which point, in the words of Brahms’s biographer Malcolm MacDonald, “This inspired work subsides into its former tragic monologue, dying out eventually in exquisite but bleak despair.”
- Brief though it is, Brahms’s Intermezzo in E-flat Minor is a first-order masterwork and one of the most important single pieces Brahms ever composed.

Important Terms

consonance: A musical entity or state that can be perceived as a point of rest.

intermezzo: An instrumental interlude between the acts of a performance.

Mussorgsky—*Pictures at an Exhibition*

Lecture 15

P*ictures at an Exhibition* is a suite, or collection, of character pieces inspired by an exhibition of Russian art and design by Modest Mussorgsky’s friend, the artist and architect Viktor Alexandrovich Hartmann, who lived from 1834 to 1873. Recurring periodically across the span of piece is a movement entitled “Promenade,” which depicts Mussorgsky himself as he strolls through the exhibition. This movement is pure 19th-century Russian national music—music characterized by a decidedly non-Western European approach to rhythm and harmony. Mussorgsky’s studied avoidance of the sorts of harmonic, contrapuntal, developmental, and formal procedures associated with German music guaranteed that *Pictures at an Exhibition* would have a sound utterly its own.

Mussorgsky and Hartmann

- Mussorgsky met the artist and architect Viktor Hartmann in 1870, when he was 31 years old and Hartmann was 36. They became fast friends, in no small part due to their shared devotion to the “cause” of Russian art.
- Hartmann died from an aneurism in August of 1873 at the age of 39. In his memory, the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg staged a Hartmann retrospective in February and March of 1874; the exhibition featured over 400 of Hartmann’s paintings and designs, a number of which were on loan from Mussorgsky himself. (Sadly, most of those 400 works have disappeared. Either they remain undiscovered or they have been lost due to neglect. Mussorgsky, for one, would be heartbroken to know this.)
- Mussorgsky attended the exhibition and was inspired—in his own words—to “draw in music” what he considered Hartmann’s best pieces. In doing so, he created *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The binding compositional element of the piece is a movement entitled

“Promenade,” which by Mussorgsky’s own admission describes his “stroll” through the exhibition.

- The “Promenade” is heard in various guises a total of five times, interspersed among 10 programmatic movements, each a musical depiction of one of Hartmann’s paintings, drawings, or designs.
- The “Promenade” is pure 19th-century Russian national music. Mussorgsky indicates that the opening promenade be played “moderately fast, and in Russian style.” By “Russian style,” Mussorgsky refers to the asymmetrical rhythm of the promenade, a rhythmic asymmetry characteristic of the Russian language and Russian folk music.
- The promenade begins with four metric units of 11 beats each, with each 11-beat unit subdivided into a group of 5 plus 6. We will look long, hard, and in vain to find any such rhythmic asymmetry in Western European music composed in the 1870s.
- In the fifth and final appearance of the promenade, the rhythmic asymmetry goes into hyperdrive. This final promenade, like the first one, begins with four units of 11, with each set of 11 being subdivided as 5 plus 6. Following that are two units of 6, followed by another 11, a 6, another 11, two 6s, then two 7s, then a 3, another 11, and finally a 13. Here’s how it all adds up: $11 + 11 + 11 + 11 + || 6 + 6 + || 11 + 6 + || 11 + 6 + 6 + || 7 + 7 + 3 + || 11 + 13 ||$.



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Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881) began piano lessons at the age of 6, and by the age of 10, he was able to perform various works by Franz Liszt.

Mussorgsky's Choice of Pictures

- Some of the “pictures” Mussorgsky chose to depict are downright bizarre. And if Mussorgsky wants to musically depict a visually bizarre image, he’s going to need to come up with music that is as bizarre as the visual image he wants to depict. That means composing music that goes outside the box—music that breaks the rules, music that fits no preexisting context, music that some listeners will find crude and ugly.
- For example, the first “picture” following the opening promenade is called “Gnomus,” which is Latin for “the gnome.” This is not referencing one of those red-hatted lawn gnomes but, rather, a sketch by Hartmann depicting a nutcracker in the shape of a twisted, deformed dwarf with huge teeth.
- Mussorgsky’s music lurches back and forth, as might the poor, dentally challenged gnome on his bandy legs. Presumably cast in the key of E-flat, there is, in reality, little sense of traditional tonal centricity in this music. If it sounds creepy to us today, with all the horror movie scores we’ve heard, just think how weird this would have sounded to audiences in 1874.
- According to the Russian musicologist Emilia Fried, Mussorgsky’s “Gnomus” is also an intensely humanist statement: “Mussorgsky’s piece is grotesque, with a touch of tragedy, a convincing example of the humanization of a ridiculous prototype. In the music portraying the dwarf’s awkward leaps and bizarre grimaces are heard cries of suffering, moans and entreaties [for mercy].”
- Another of the stranger images Mussorgsky set to music is one entitled “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks.” The piece is based on Hartmann’s drawing of costumes for a projected ballet, depicting children wearing egg-shaped outfits and birds’ head masks. Mussorgsky’s wonderfully comic music snaps and crackles with whimsy and a birdlike lightness.

- The strangest and most pianistically progressive movement in all of *Pictures at an Exhibition* is “The Hut on Hen’s Legs: Baba Yaga.” Baba Yaga was a storybook witch who terrified generations of Russian children at bedtime. Her hut, hidden deep in the forest, was perched on chicken legs so that it could turn to face anyone who was unfortunate enough to stumble upon it. She rode cackling through the woods on a huge wooden mortar propelled by an equally formidable pestle, which she used to grind the bones of the naughty children on whom she dined.
- Mussorgsky’s portrait of Baba Yaga is spectacular, particularly in his use of the piano, which becomes a percussion instrument.
- One of the less fantastic and more realistic of Mussorgsky’s Hartmann-inspired images is “Bydło,” which depicts a huge, lumbering Polish oxcart. Like many of Mussorgsky’s musical images in *Pictures at an Exhibition*, “Bydło” has been subject to various interpretations over the years. Western listeners tend to hear it simply as a stereotypically heavy bit of Slavic peasant music, a sort of terrestrial “Song of the Volga Boatmen.” For Soviet musical authorities, it depicted nothing less than “the nobility and suffering of the peasant [class] and the hardships [borne by] that patient and perseverant toiler.”
- The movement entitled “Tuileries”—with its rapid movements and generally high range—depicts children playing and arguing in Paris’s Tuileries Garden.
- The most controversial “picture” in *Pictures at an Exhibition* is entitled “‘Samuel’ Goldenberg and ‘Schmuyle.’” The movement was said to be based on two pictures: one of them depicting a wealthy Jew (Samuel Goldenberg) and the other a poor Jew (Schmuyle, whose lack of material resources extends to having no last name).
- Mussorgsky’s proclivity for writing music based on the contours of speech is put in high relief in this movement. Samuel Goldenberg,

the wealthy Jew, speaks first. He speaks in a deep, “rich” voice and with a measured pace, with a melody line just “oriental” enough to identify him as a Jew.

- Schmuyle then speaks. He is presumably begging Goldenberg for money; his voice is high, wheedling, and whining, and his vocal line is filled with rapid repeated notes that are understood to represent either his chattering teeth or shivering body.
- In the end, Goldenberg blows Schmuyle off. According to Mussorgsky scholar Michael Russ: “Goldenberg—a nasty, wily and mean character—gives nothing to Schmuyle, simply sending him off with a flea in his ear.”
- The controversy regarding this movement has to do with Mussorgsky’s own virulent anti-Semitism. Russian aristocrats of his era were expected to be anti-Semitic, but Mussorgsky went over the line; in particular, his letters to wannabe composer Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev—who was himself a terrible anti-Semite—are really awful.
- Modern research has revealed that the portraits of the Jews on which Mussorgsky based this piece were never part of the Hartmann exhibit in the first place. It was Mussorgsky himself who “named” the Jews in the pictures and Mussorgsky himself who, most revealingly, put quotations around the names “Samuel” and “Schmuyle” in the title of his piece.

The Grand Finale: “The Great Gate of Kiev”

- Hartmann’s picture depicts his design for the city gates of Kiev, which he designed in the “ancient Russian ‘massive’ style” and capped with a huge cupola shaped like a Slavic war helmet. Hartmann designed the gate to commemorate Tsar Alexander II’s narrow escape from assassination in St. Petersburg on April 4, 1866. Hartmann’s design, which he considered the best work he had ever done, won a national competition, although the gate itself was never built.

- Mussorgsky’s “picture” features two thematic entities. The first is a majestic processional, music that grows out of the “Promenade.” The second thematic element is a solemn **hymn** based on a Russian Orthodox chant. There’s a textural element that we should be aware of as well, and that is chiming, bell-like scales heard initially over the majestic processional music.
- The two thematic elements and the bell-ringing music together build up to a magnificent coda based on the majestic processional. Given Mussorgsky’s nationalist leanings, this music is about much more than just a city gate in Kiev; it is about nothing less than the magnificence and might of mother Russia herself.

Important Term

hymn: A religious song.

Debussy—“The Sunken Cathedral”

Lecture 16

Claude Debussy wrote two books of preludes for piano. Debussy’s preludes owe a clear debt to Johann Sebastian Bach and Frédéric Chopin. Like Chopin, Debussy composed a total of 24 preludes. Like Chopin, Debussy’s preludes are self-standing works. Like Chopin, Debussy’s preludes constitute a virtual catalog of his pianistic and compositional innovations. Unlike Chopin (and Bach), Debussy’s preludes do not feature all 24 major and minor keys, one prelude per key. This issue of “key area” was, for Debussy, increasingly immaterial, as his music ventured beyond the tonal harmonic system.

Préludes, Book One, No. 10: La Cathédrale engloutie (“The Sunken Cathedral”)

- A prelude called “The Sunken Cathedral” is an example of Debussy’s pianistic and compositional innovations. This prelude, composed in 1910, is based on the legend of the mythical city of Ys, built in the Douarnenez Bay in Brittany.
- According to legend, the city was swallowed by the waters of the bay due to the extremely naughty behavior of its princess, named Dahut, whose hobby was staging orgies and then killing her lovers at daybreak. According to the legend, on certain mornings, the Cathedral of Ys rises from the sea to warn of approaching storms, its bells tolling and its priests praying, only to sink back below the surface.
- This is the story Debussy suggests in his prelude. The musical means with which he creates atmosphere, evokes events, and moves from one event to the next are stunningly original.
- The prelude begins with a lengthy passage of rising octaves, fifths, and fourths—which are meant to evoke a type of 10th-century church music called parallel organum. Played pianissimo—meaning “very quietly”—this music suggests an ancient, religious,

predawn environment, as the slowly rising motion of this parallel organum depicts as well the slow, upward motion of the still-submerged cathedral.

- The mysterious sense of weightlessness we hear in this opening can be attributed to the fact that not a single one of its harmonic units contains an interval of a third. There are no complete **triads**—just rising octaves, fifths, and fourths. Instead of using complete triads, he composed open intervals. The effect is one of harmonic suspension.
- We don't know what key we are in or whether the mode is major or minor. The bass line does not move in such a way as to create any sense of tendency, of tension and rest; instead, it simply descends by step, from G to F to E.
- Buried within these rising gestures is a tiny melodic idea—called a motive—that in some form or another will underpin the entire prelude. It consists of a rising major second followed by a rising perfect fifth, and we will call it the “bell motive.”
- Following the rising organum, a series of octave Es quietly rings out. Then, a thematic melody slowly emerges. The melody has the character of a plainchant, and it is meant to evoke the quiet, muffled praying of the priests. This plainchant-like melody is heard against repeated, bell-like Es high on the piano keyboard.
- The repeated Es that accompany the plainchant-like melody do not mean that we are now in the key of E major or E minor. In fact, the pitch collection employed by the plainchant-like melody is a C-sharp Dorian mode, an ancient modal construct that lacks entirely the sort of harmonic “tendency” (meaning tension and release) inherent to the more modern (and familiar) major and minor modes.
- At the conclusion of the plainchant-like melody, the bass line slips downward from the E to a D to a C, and finally to a B, at which

point a rolling, wavelike left hand and harmonized bell motives in the right would indicate the glistening cathedral rising from the depths and into the brilliant light of day. Note the occasional bell-like harmonies that punctuate this passage, built as they are from clusters of notes that are, in fact, the notes of the bell motive heard simultaneously.

Motives and Motivic Development

- This first one-third of the prelude tells us much of what we need to know about Debussy's revolutionary compositional style. Debussy was a superb compositional technician. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his use of motivic development, which provides the steel-mesh framework for his glowing, atmospheric musical surfaces.
- For example, the bell motive is heard melodically, or as a bass line, or as a chord, in almost every one of the prelude's 89 measures. Generally and accurately speaking, Debussy's music displays a degree of motivic unity and integration that would have made Beethoven proud—a fact that would have irked Debussy to no end had he considered it.

Thematic Melodies and Pitch Collections

- More often than not, Debussy builds his thematic melodies from pitch collections other than major and minor. For example, the plainchant melody is modal, built as it is on Dorian mode.
- Much has been made—and rightly so—of Debussy's exposure to a Javanese gamelan (that is, a Javanese percussion orchestra) he heard at Paris's *Exposition Universelle* in 1889. And while Debussy never explicitly employed gamelan melodies in his music, the five-pitch pentatonic scale employed by the gamelan was a regular feature in his music.
- At other times, he used an eight-pitch collection called an octatonic scale and a six-pitch collection called a whole-tone scale—anything

to avoid the familiar sounds of major and minor and the traditional tonal harmonic expectations that go along with them.

Rhythm

- While Debussy could write powerfully pulsed music, his primary rhythmic impulse was toward the “atmospheric.” More often than not, his rhythmic profiles have the character of a slowly unfolding continuum, in which metric regularity—the so-called tyranny of the **bar line**—is rarely in evidence. This French language–like rhythmic fluidity is a key to the expressive impact of Debussy’s music.
- Debussy’s rhythmic suppleness creates a floating, magical, otherworldly sensibility. It also creates a distinctly non-Western effect, as time in Debussy’s music is often perceived not as linear but as existential, meaning that the “goal” of a phrase or section is less important than the sensual beauty of the moment.

Harmonic Structures

- Debussy employs familiar harmonic constructs: chords built primarily out of octaves, fifths, fourths, and thirds. This is the primary reason that his music sounds so “consonant,” especially when compared to the music of other early-20th-century modernists like Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky.
- But we should not be fooled by the relative consonance of Debussy’s harmonic usage, because while he might employ familiar-sounding harmonic structures, he does not deploy them in familiar ways.
- For example, the prelude reaches its climax with a clangorous passage that depicts the cathedral, its bells ringing, fully emerged from the sea in the bright light of day. This celebratory event is evoked with a melody based on the bell motive heard over a repeated C deep in the bass. Unlike the mysterious opening of the prelude, each of the harmonies in this passage is a complete triad.

- Despite its triadic structures and the pervasively consonant sound of this passage, it is not functionally tonal: The harmony never changes; there are no cadences or resolutions; there is no differentiation made between consonance and dissonance; there is no harmonic progression. In fact, the chords—which simply move in lockstep with the melody—play no “functional” role whatsoever; they are there to fill out the texture and create color and sonority.
- The melody itself, which is a development of the organum-like opening, is set in neither major nor minor but, instead, in Mixolydian mode, another ancient scalar construct. The fact that the bass is totally immobile helps ensure that this passage will remain harmonically static. Thus, the triads heard throughout the passage are familiar harmonic structures deployed in an unfamiliar manner.
- This passage is also about the resonance of the piano and the fantastic bell-like accumulation of overtones that results from holding down the sustain pedal while playing these huge, sonorous chords and the deep thrumming pedal C heard beneath them.
- Following that bell-ringing climax, a brief transition leads to a last version of the plainchant theme. And now, the cathedral slips back beneath the surface of the water and disappears from sight with a deep, gurgling trill. Debussy depicts the cathedral’s submergence with a descending string of dissonant chords.



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Along with Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt, Claude Debussy (1862–1918) is one of history’s most original composers of piano music.

- Each of these chords is a dissonance—a dominant seventh chord that wants to resolve. For example, the first harmony in the descent is a D-sharp dominant seventh chord. According to tonal practice, this dissonance should resolve to a G-sharp chord and thus to a state of rest.
- But Debussy’s D-sharp dominant seventh chord does not resolve; it just slips down to a C-sharp dominant seventh chord that does not resolve either. Instead, it slides down to a B dominant seventh chord (which does not resolve), which slips down to an A dominant seventh chord (which does not resolve), which bounces back up to a C-sharp dominant seventh chord (which does not resolve), and which falls down into a G-sharp dominant seventh chord (which will not resolve either). These chords play no traditional harmonic role whatsoever. Debussy uses them in descending parallel motion because they evoke “the sinking cathedral” and because he likes the way they sound.

Bass Lines

- In traditional, “functional” tonality, the bass line has two mutually reinforcing jobs: to underpin the harmonic progressions it supports and to do its harmonic duty melodically, meaning that the bass line should be a line—a melody of some sort, thus rendering the foundation of the musical edifice melodically active in its own right.
- Debussy was not interested in traditional chord progressions. Rather, he was interested in creating stretches of static music during which thematic development could occur and **timbre**—or tone color—could be enjoyed as a sensual pleasure.
- In lieu of harmonically functional bass lines, Debussy employed three different sorts of bass structures. The simplest were pedals, or drones—sustained or repeated pitches used to underpin fairly long stretches of music. The low C that was repeated under the bell-ringing climax was just such a pedal tone.

- The second sort of bass structure Debussy employed were **ostinatos**, brief melodic ideas repeated over and over again. For example, at the conclusion of the prelude, a muffled version of the bell-ringing climax rumbles out from the very bottom of the piano, a quiet memory of what it once was. The muffled, bell-ringing music is accompanied by a murmuring ostinato set at the very bottom of the piano. Layered above the ostinato is the bell-ringing music.
- For all of its rhythmic activity, the passage is harmonically static; the harmonic underpinning never changes. There is no progression from rest to tension, and therefore, there is nothing to resolve. The passage is neither coming nor going. It simply exists, reveling in itself and the moment.
- The third of Debussy's bass line strategies are those passages in which the bass line does move, when transiting between passages underlain by pedals or ostinatos. Such bass lines will typically move by ascending or descending step or by what are called symmetrical intervals (meaning a string of major or minor thirds). The primacy of the perfect fifth that had ruled the harmonic syntax of Western music since the 15th century is nowhere in evidence in such stepwise and symmetrical bass lines.

Timbre

- More than anything else—more than its programmatic story, its themes, its harmonic structures and stasis—"The Sunken Cathedral" is about the piano. It is not about the piano in the technical sense of Chopin and Liszt; rather, it is about the sonority and the timbre (tone color) of the piano—the piano's resonance and overtones; its bell-like upper register and rumbling, almost organ-like lower register; and its ability to create a halo of sustained sound around an unfolding idea as demonstrated at both the beginning and end of the prelude, during which the music appears from and disappears into what Debussy calls "a gently sonorous haze."

Important Terms

bar lines: Notational device: two vertical lines that enclose a measure and are equivalent to one metric unit.

ostinato: A brief melodic idea that is repeated over and over again.

timbre: Tone color.

triad: A chord consisting of three different pitches built from some combination of major and/or minor thirds.

Debussy—*Préludes*, Book One

Lecture 17

Debussy composed a total of 24 preludes for piano, which were published in two books of 12 preludes each—the first in 1910 and the second in 1913. In this lecture, you will examine five preludes from Book One of Debussy’s *Préludes* with two goals in mind. The first goal is to focus on the programmatic content of the prelude under study and the manner in which Debussy evokes that content. Second, with each of the preludes you will examine, you will focus on one of Debussy’s compositional innovations and, in doing so, create a cumulative sense of Debussy’s mind-blowing compositional originality and pianism.

Prélude No. 1: “Dancers of Delphi”

- This prelude was inspired by an ancient sculpture in the Louvre, depicting three maenads, or bacchantes, as in “female followers of Bacchus.” Despite their reputation for crazed sex and cannibalism, Debussy’s prelude (like the piece of sculpture on which it is based) depicts a dignified dance set initially in triple meter.
- Debussy’s innovation is his harmonic usage. About three-quarters of the way through the prelude, Debussy articulates a simple little melodic idea. Debussy does not harmonize this bit of melody in anything approaching a traditional tonal manner; instead, he harmonizes it in an entirely new manner.
- Each of the chords in Debussy’s harmonization is a major triad, a traditional construct that can be traced back to the 14th century. Nevertheless, Debussy employs these triads in a manner entirely new. In traditional tonal harmony, such triads (or chords) progress one to the next, with each chord playing a role relative to what came before it and what follows.
- For example, the role (or function) of some chords is to create a sense of rest, meaning consonance. The function of other chords

is to create dissonance—that is, harmonic tension. The function of still other chords is to transit between consonance and dissonance, between rest and tension.

- Not one of the chords in Debussy’s chord progression bears any harmonic relation to the next. There is no sense whatsoever of a traditional, **functional harmonic** progression. Rather, the effect is pure color—a smear of harmonic sound used for its own sake.
- Debussy’s innovation is his use of traditional harmonic structures in idiosyncratic, nontraditional ways. The reason that Debussy’s music does not sound overtly dissonant is his predilection for using traditional harmonic constructs, such as major triads. But we should never think that the generally consonant surface of Debussy’s music indicates a lack of modernity; in fact, his music is shockingly modern, as demonstrated by the brief bit of harmonic usage just examined.

Prélude No. 2: “Voiles”

- “Voiles” means two things, either of which might have been Debussy’s inspiration for this prelude. It can mean “veils” (as in coverings) or “sails” (as in canvas wind catchers). Debussy biographer Leon Vallas opts for the latter, claiming that the piece is full of “floating effects that suggest sailing boats anchored to a fixed point.” It can also be argued that the piece is about veils: specifically, the manner in which Debussy veils—that is, obscures—any sense of tonal centrality during the majority of the piece.
- The overwhelming bulk of the prelude is built from a six-pitch collection called a whole-tone scale. Unlike traditional major and minor collections, which contain seven different pitches and feature a mixture of whole steps and half steps between adjacent pitches, a six-pitch **whole-tone collection** features only whole steps—whole tones—between its adjacent pitches.
- A whole-tone collection is called a symmetrical collection, meaning that no matter where it starts, the same order of intervals will be

heard between adjacent pitches—in this case, whole tones. What this means is that a whole-tone collection has no intervallic hierarchy and, therefore, no harmonic tendency; because no single tone stands out, a whole-tone collection creates neither tension nor rest.

- Debussy’s use of a whole-tone collection in this prelude creates the sort of blurred effect that is the essence of the word “veil.” In its 64 measures, there is only a single six-measure passage that does not employ a whole-tone collection, and that six-measure passage constitutes the climax of the movement. It is set using a pentatonic collection, which is a five-pitch collection. The dramatic, pentatonic climax is followed by a quiet, rippling return to the whole-tone music.
- Debussy’s innovation here is actually twofold. First, it has to do with using nontraditional pitch collections—in this case, a whole-tone collection and a pentatonic collection—in place of the traditional major and minor collections. Second, Debussy creates contrast in this prelude not through contrasting themes or key areas but, rather, by employing entirely different sorts of pitch collections.

Prélude No. 3: “The Wind in the Plain”

- Debussy evokes the “wind in the plain” using an ostinato anchored by a pedal tone. An ostinato is a brief bit of melody that is repeated over and over again. A pedal tone is a single pitch that is sustained or repeated, usually in the bass. In order to depict his titular “wind in the plain,” Debussy employs an ostinato (played by the pianist’s right hand) over a pedal tone (played by the pianist’s left hand).
- Debussy then inserts a skippy-twitchy little theme between the ostinato and pedal. To play this entire passage effectively, the ostinato and pedal must recede into the background while the twitchy melody must be projected into the foreground.
- Debussy’s innovations in this piece are of huge import. In lieu of traditional harmonic progressions and a moving bass line, he



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After having graduated from the Paris Conservatoire, Claude Debussy spent two years in Rome, where he met Franz Liszt.

employs ostinatos and pedals to underpin and accompany his thematic material. The result is harmonic stasis: The harmony does not move or transport; it simply exists. These sorts of ostinatos and pedal tones are of decidedly non-Western inspiration. Generally but accurately speaking, traditional Western tonal music is narrative music. Traditional tonal harmonic progressions, which move from rest to tension and then back to rest, create a sense of progressive movement through time in Western tonal music. However, in much world music, accompanimental underpinnings are static: They do not change, and therefore, they do not progress.

- In such music—North Indian raga and Indonesian gamelan, for example—time is not perceived as being linear but, rather, as being cyclical. In such music, listeners are free, like wanderers in a garden, to experience the beauties around them without being hurried along by harmonic progressions intent on moving them to the next location.

- Such ideas and issues regarding non-Western music preoccupied Debussy’s mind and ear. He might very well have heard a Javanese gamelan (that is, a percussion orchestra from the Indonesian island of Java) as early as 1887, when the Dutch government gave one to the Paris Conservatoire. He most definitely heard a gamelan in 1889 at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris (the world’s fair that saw the construction of the Eiffel Tower) and then again in 1900 at Paris’s next world’s fair. For Debussy, gamelan music was a revelation.

Prélude No. 6: “Footprints in the Snow”

- The “footprints” to which Debussy’s title refers is an ostinato that appears in almost every measure of this 36-measure prelude. In reference to this ostinato figure, Debussy’s performance instructions read: “This should have the sonorous value of a melancholy, ice-bound landscape.”
- Soon enough, a dour, meandering melody is superimposed above the ostinato. However, the ostinato soon rises out of the accompaniment, at which point it becomes apparent that the ostinato is not merely an accompanimental figure but the principal theme of the prelude as well. In the first third of the prelude, be particularly aware of the bleak, monochromatic environment created by the obsessive repetitions of the ostinato—this accompaniment that becomes a theme.
- The sort of motivic saturation Debussy achieves in this prelude is reminiscent of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, in which, likewise, hardly a measure goes by without the real or implied presence of Beethoven’s all-too-famous “fate motive.”
- The comparison of Debussy to Beethoven is apt, despite whatever annoyance Debussy would feign had he heard it. The fact remains that Debussy was a superb technician who, like Beethoven, built his works from the simplest of thematic materials.
- Like Beethoven, Debussy was a master harmonist who could constantly cast his thematic ideas in new light through subtle

harmonic shading. Like Beethoven, Debussy's thematic ideas undergo almost constant variation; indeed, it is the art of continuous variation that lies at the heart of both Debussy's and Beethoven's music.

Prélude No. 12: “Minstrels”

- We conclude with this 12th and final prelude, which, using appropriate showbiz lingo, is a “light-hearted romp through the varied and loony antics of a minstrel show.” The “minstrel show” was a type of variety show born in America in the 1830s, a show that featured comedy skits, dog-and-pony acts, juggling, parodies of popular plays, dancing, and music. Before the Civil War, such shows were performed by white people in “blackface”—that is, in black makeup—and after the war, they were as often as not performed by African Americans in blackface.
- The racial stereotyping inherent to minstrelsy was, of course, repulsive—symptomatic of a time that has passed. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that minstrel shows were decried from both the left and the right: Abolitionists assailed them for their inherent racism and for falsely depicting “happy slaves” while, at the same time, proponents of slavery attacked them for portraying runaway slaves sympathetically and slave owners as being cruel and pompous.
- Debussy's prelude sidesteps the racial issues entirely. Instead, it projects the humor, energy, variety, and turn-on-a-dime musical hodgepodge that occurred over the course of a minstrel show, which were all the rage in Paris at the turn of the 20th century.
- Over its 2-minute course, Debussy's “Minstrels” shifts musical gears constantly, from its laconic beginning to a jittery and humorous cakewalk to a dance hall cancan to a drum tattoo.
- This is delightfully humorous music, music that reflects an aspect of Debussy that his friends knew well: his scalpel-sharp sense of humor. It is also cinematic music, music that shifts and crosscuts

and snaps in and out of focus. In this, it is pure 20th-century music, and one could well argue that Debussy was the first major composer to be influenced by the then-brand-new art of cinema.

Important Terms

functional harmony: Harmonic usage that was standardized and codified into a fully coherent system during the baroque period. This method is still used by modern arrangers and orchestrators. The basic concept used in functional harmony is the fact that all harmonic sounds used in music may be classified into three large groups. These groups derive their names from the three important roots of the traditional harmonic system: the tonic, the dominant, and the subdominant.

whole-tone collection: Divides the octave into six equal segments; a whole-tone scale ascends and descends by major seconds, or whole tones.

Albéniz—*Iberia*

Lecture 18

Despite the fact that Isaac Albéniz was from the north of Spain, the son of a Basque father and a Catalan mother, it was the south—Andalucía—that seduced him with its exotic, multicultural spirit and music. So despite the fact that Albéniz entitled his masterwork for piano *Iberia* (a geographical designation that includes the modern states of Spain, Portugal, and Andorra), 11 of its 12 movements are about Andalucía. The goal of this lecture is to identify musical elements characteristic of Andalusian folk music. This Andalusian musical investigation will be illustrated with examples drawn from Albéniz’s *Iberia*.

Stereotypical Aspects of Andalusian Music, Part 1: Mode

- The definition of the term “mode” is seven pitches that can be used as the building blocks for melody and harmony in a given piece of music. The most familiar such seven-pitch modes are “major” and “minor,” which together were the principal pitch palette in Western music from roughly 1600 to 1900.
- But there are many other seven-pitch modes, some of which go back to ancient times. One of those modes is today called the Phrygian mode, one of the so-called Church modes, which were used extensively in the plainchant (or Gregorian chant) of the early Christian Church. More recently, the Phrygian mode has come to be identified with the folk music of Spain.
- The identifying sound of the Phrygian mode is a half step between the first and second degree of the collection and a whole step between the seventh and first degree, creating a most characteristic sound. It is an instant Spanish-music melodic stereotype, which is, in truth, an instant Andalusian musical stereotype.
- There are a number of variants of the Phrygian Spanish sound, which should more appropriately be called Phrygian Andalusian

sound. For example, we often hear the third degree of the Phrygian mode raised to create music in which the key sonic element is the interval of an augmented second that occurs between the second and third degrees of the collection. This augmented second sounds vaguely Middle Eastern, vaguely Arabic.

- Finally, there's another version of the collection, alternately called the Spanish Gypsy scale or the flamenco scale. This scale has its roots in the music of the Spanish Romanies—the Gypsies—who settled in Andalucía in the 15th century. These Spanish gypsies—known as Gitanos—emigrated from the Punjab and Rajasthan regions of northern India around the year 1000 and arrived in Al-Andalus via northern Africa.
- The music and culture of the Gitanos—part Indian, part Arab, part whatever—melded with the preexisting cultural stew of Andalucía to create a cultural hybrid that is, today, considered the Andalusian identity, an identity crystallized in a music called flamenco.

Stereotypical Aspects of Andalusian Music, Part 2: The Guitar

- Scholars of Spanish folk music refer to the various Phrygian and Gypsy modes as the E modes because, much more often than not, Spanish folk music begins and ends on the pitch E. This might seem odd at first, but not when we consider that the highest and lowest strings on the six-string Spanish guitar—the principal folk instrument of Spain—are both tuned to E.
- In fact, the strings of the Spanish guitar—also known as the classical guitar and the concert guitar—are all tuned to pitches contained within an E Phrygian mode: E, A, D, G, B, and E. It is because of the natural characteristics of the guitar that so much Spanish folk music is set in modes based on the pitch E.
- While the various ancestors of the guitar can be traced to ancient Greece, Persia, North Africa, and western Europe, the guitar as we know it today—a gorgeous, figure-eight-shaped beauty bearing six strings—is a Spanish instrument, an instrument

initially created to accompany a song-and-dance music called flamenco. Albéniz's *Iberia* might be a piano piece, but it is nevertheless filled with imitations, evocations, and celebrations of the guitar.

Stereotypical Aspects of Andalusian Music, Part 3: Flamenco

- “Flamenco” is a genre of Spanish song and dance that originated in Andalucía. Flamenco is an extraordinary hybrid of native Spanish, North African, Arab, and especially Gypsy influences. Flamenco consists of four elements: *cante* (meaning singing), *toque* (which is the especially percussive style of guitar playing typical of flamenco), dancing, and *palmas* (percussive hand clapping).
- Flamenco is considered—along with jazz—the most viscerally exciting music to be found on the planet. The word “flamenco” is Spanish for “flamingo,” which is native to southern Spain and is also native to the migratory route followed by the Romani people from India to Spain. While the exact connection between the bird and the artistic tradition is unknown, there can be no doubt that flamenco dancing—with its angular, stylized movements and red costuming—does indeed resemble the flamingo.
- The single most characteristic aspect of flamenco is its rhythmic complexity. By definition, flamenco is a polyrhythmic music, in which various contrasting rhythmic layers—some of them sung, some of them played on guitars, some of them clapped, some of them danced—are layered, one atop the next. From a rhythmic point of view, flamenco has much more in common with African



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For much of his career as a composer, Isaac Albéniz (1860–1909) was faced with very critical responses to his music.

drumming than it does with western European music. It is a rhythmic complexity and energy that can be found in almost every measure of Albéniz's *Iberia*.

Stereotypical Aspects of Andalusian Music, Part 4: Dances

- If rhythm lies at the heart of flamenco, then so does dance. As we might expect, Albéniz's *Iberia* is a veritable compendium of Andalusian dances.

No. 3: “The Body of Christ in Seville”

- *Iberia* synthesizes every aspect of Albéniz's artistic nature: his passionate love for Andalusian art and music; his nationalistic Spanish pride; his exceptional compositional technique; his prodigious pianism; and his fascination with the contemporary Parisian avant-garde, most notably the music of Claude Debussy. The 12 pieces that make up *Iberia*—“impressions,” as Albéniz called them—are grouped into four books of three pieces each.
- Of all 12 pieces in *Iberia*, this is the only one that tells a programmatic story. The story is that of the Feast of Corpus Christi as celebrated in the Andalusian capital of Seville. The “Feast of the Body of Christ” commemorates the ritual of the Eucharist, during which Jesus, at the last supper, instructed his disciples to remember him by blessing and consuming bread and wine that he said were his body and blood. The feast is a solemn occasion and is celebrated on Thursday of Holy Week, the day before Good Friday.
- Albéniz's piece describes the Corpus Christi-day procession as it wends its way through Seville, during which a statue of the Virgin is carried through the streets accompanied by marching bands, singers, and perhaps even a penitential flagellant or two. The piece begins with a series of quiet drum flourishes, as the procession—off in the distance—begins.
- The “march theme” emerges in the distance. It is quiet at first, but as it gets closer, it slowly gets louder. The march continues to build in volume and intensity for roughly another minute, when a climax

is reached, as cries of ecstasy resound beneath the march—all of it played fortissississimo.

- The march eventually disappears from view, leaving the “cries of ecstasy” music to take center stage. The middle section of the piece consists of a mystical, gloriously beautiful contemplation of Christ’s sacrifice. The melody evokes that most profound of all Andalusian musical styles—the *cante jondo*, meaning the “deep song”—accompaniment by strumming flamenco guitarlike music.
- The march eventually returns, and after a virtuosic climax (during which the march is transformed into an ecstatic three-step dance), the music recedes and quiets, with church bells chiming in the distance. The conclusion is sublime: The stillness of music indicates that while night has come, the magic of the day lingers on.

No. 6: *Triana*

- Triana is a quarter—or *arrabal*—of Sevilla, located on the west bank of the Guadalquivir River. For hundreds of years, Triana was the Gypsy quarter of Sevilla and is considered to be the “cradle” of flamenco.
- The opening of *Triana* is pure flamenco, filled with humor and energy, simulated “guitar strumming,” and the percussive clatter of castanets, hand clapping, and heel-to-floor dancing.

No. 8: *El Polo*

- Albéniz indicates in the score that *El polo* is “an Andalusian song and dance” and went so far as to write on his manuscript that the *polo*—which is a type of Spanish song—“should not be confused with the sport of the same name.”
- Albéniz’s musical *polo* is a melancholy and harmonically complex piece, one that nevertheless betrays its flamenco roots with its dancing rhythm and offbeat accents.

No. 12: *Eritaña*

- The 12th and final piece in the set, *Eritaña* is named for a tavern on the outskirts of Grenada that was famous for its flamenco. The conclusion of *Eritaña* is breathtaking, finger busting, and thrilling.
- *Iberia* contains some of the most difficult, over-the-top virtuosic music ever written for the piano. Albéniz, in the throes of creation, realized how difficult this music was going to be to play, and it aggrieved him no end. *Iberia* is difficult, but in the right hands, it is glorious—among the most gripping works ever composed for the piano.

Ravel—*Valses nobles et sentimentales*

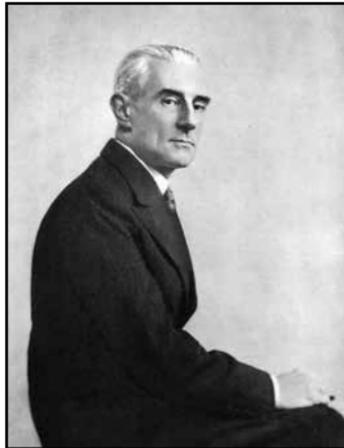
Lecture 19

The waltz is many things: a popular dance; a body of music that employs the rhythm of that dance; and a grand metaphor for the Austrian Empire—its joy, its character, its aspirations, its disintegration and death, and the horrors its disintegration and death wrought on the world. This lecture will examine each of the waltzes in Maurice Ravel’s *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. Along with identifying the expressive mood of each waltz, this lecture will identify the particular compositional hook that characterizes each waltz.

The Waltz and *Valses nobles et sentimentales*

- As the waltz gained popularity as a dance, composers wrote evermore waltz music, including “stylized waltzes,” waltz music not intended for dancing but, rather, for listening. For example, Frédéric Chopin’s 18 waltzes—composed between 1831 and 1849—are stylized dances intended, as they are, for concert performance.
- Chopin notwithstanding, the first major set of stylized waltzes was composed by a native Viennese—Franz Schubert, who wrote roughly 100 waltzes for solo piano between roughly 1815 and 1826. Among the best known of Schubert’s waltzes are two collections: the 34 *Valses sentimentales*, Op. 50 (of 1823), and the 12 *Valses nobles*, Op. 77 (of 1826). These waltzes were composed for amateur pianists, and therefore, unlike Ravel’s waltzes, they are fairly easy to play.
- However, what Ravel copied from Schubert—aside from his titles—is the spectacular range of Schubert’s moods and a concentrated, every-note-counts compositional aesthetic.
- In an autobiographical sketch, Ravel confirmed his inspiration for his *Valses nobles et sentimentales*—or “Waltzes Noble and

Sentimental”—and discussed, as well, its less-is-more aesthetic: “The title *Valses nobles et sentimentales* sufficiently indicates my intention of composing a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert. The virtuosity [of my earlier piano music] gives way [in the *Valses*] to a markedly clearer kind of writing, which crystallizes the harmony and sharpens the profile of the music.” Ravel cut down on the “degree of pianistic difficulty” in the waltzes in favor of “a clearer kind of writing, which crystallizes the harmony and sharpens the profile of the music.”



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- Ravel’s set consists of seven waltzes (some noble and some sentimental, though Ravel does not indicate which), followed by a shimmering, ghostlike epilogue in which the principal themes of the waltzes pass by in a nostalgic haze.
- The first waltz is as much a fanfare as a dance; it kicks things off brilliantly and nobly. It is also a perfect example of the sort of “crystalline harmonic and textural clarity” that Ravel refers to in his autobiographical sketch. The music of the first waltz is dazzling. Its razor edge comes from its sharply accented rhythms and its harmonic language, which, for all its chromaticism, is firmly anchored in G major.
- In Ravel’s autobiographical sketch, he describes the premiere of the waltzes on May 9, 1911, at the Salle Gaveau in Paris: “The *Valses nobles et sentimentales* were first performed amid [catcalls] and boos at a concert of the Independent Musical Society, in which the

As a composer, Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) was a perfectionist: Every note had to count, and every musical surface had to gleam.

names of the composers were not revealed. The audience voted on the probable authorship of each piece.”

- The only person who knew for sure who had composed Ravel’s waltzes was its performer (and dedicatee), Louis Aubert. The audience was invited to vote on the authorship of all the works on the program, and the results were published in a periodical called *The Musical Courier* on May 16, 1911, 6 days after the concert.
- The audience—which consisted primarily of professional musicians and critics—did not do a very good job of identifying the composer. The authorship of Ravel’s waltzes was credited to, among others, Eric Satie, the Hungarian Zoltán Kodály, the now-forgotten French organist and composer Théodore Dubois, and the French film composer Lucien Wurmser.
- For the 6 days between the concert and the revelation of authorship, Ravel listened deadpan to the jeers leveled at the piece by his friends and the critics, who hadn’t a clue that Ravel was the composer. When the truth was revealed, those friends and critics who had trashed the piece suddenly found all sorts of qualities in it that they had somehow failed to notice when they first heard it. In other words, they reversed their negative judgments.

Waltz No. 1

- The mood of the first waltz is noble and fanfare-like. Its compositional hook involves huge, sharply articulated, two-fisted chords that ring and resonate on the piano like clanging bells.

Waltz No. 2

- The mood of the second waltz is sentimental and melancholy. Its compositional hook involves grace notes in the thematic melody that anticipate the beat and that—with exquisite subtlety—desynchronize the pianist’s hands and create a dragging sense of world weariness.

Waltz No. 3

- The mood of the third waltz is noble (only because it is certainly not sentimental), light, and playful, with a hint of chinoiserie (meaning stereotypically Chinese-like music).
- Its compositional hook is hemiola, which is a rhythmic device involving a pattern of accents that implies a momentary change of meter. For example, in order to perceive triple meter—or “waltz time,” as it is often called—we need to hear some sort of accent every three beats, accents that effectively group the beats into groups of three. A hemiola would put an accent on every second beat, momentarily creating the effect that the meter has changed from triple to duple.
- In the playful opening of Ravel’s third waltz, be aware of the hemiola-filled rhythmic pattern: || 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 | 1–2 | 1–2 | 1–2 | 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 ||

Waltz No. 4

- The fourth waltz begins without a pause. Its mood is sentimental and gently nostalgic. Its hook is a fluttering, descending melody—the rhythms of which cross the bar line, effectively creating a six-beat metric unit. These six-beat-long metric units create a languorous and floating effect, an effect that stands in polar opposition to the punchy, hemiola-dominated rhythms of the previous waltz.

Waltz No. 5

- The mood of the fifth waltz is sentimental and lyric. The waltz’s compositional hook is its intense chromaticism, which creates a sort of blurry smear of harmonic and melodic sound. The result—and Ravel will have to pardon us for using a word he hated—is the most “impressionistic” of the waltzes that make up the piece.

Waltz No. 6

- The mood of the sixth waltz is noble and zippy. The hook is once again rhythmic, as a punchy, rising, triple-meter tune in the pianist’s right hand (|| 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 | 1–2–3 ||) is heard—

as often as not—against a hemiola accompaniment in the left hand (||: 1–2 | 1–2 | 1–2 :||).

Waltz No. 7

- The seventh waltz is magnificent, in turns both sentimental and noble. In terms of its compositional hook, this longest waltz in the set is a grand summation of all that has come before it. Over the course of its A–B–A form we will hear the rhythmic complexities of the third, fourth, and sixth waltz; the rippling impressionistic blur of the fifth waltz; and at its climactic moments, the brilliant fanfares of the first waltz.

Waltz No. 8

- The final movement—the eighth waltz—is labeled in score as being an “epilogue.” It is a magical and mysterious chunk of music, one that changes entirely our perception of the piece to this point. Up to now, Ravel’s *Valses nobles et sentimentales* has been a **suite**—a collection of dances, a piece little different in structure from the dance suites written for harpsichord by Ravel’s French compositional ancestors in the 17th century.
- All of that changes in the epilogue. In a ghostly haze, thematic materials from the earlier waltzes drift forward and fade. Like the first waltz, this epilogue is cast in G major. But unlike the first waltz, there is no dance or glide or fanfare here, and the epilogue ends as if in a dream. This epilogue makes it clear that *Valses nobles et sentimentales* is not merely a dance suite but, rather, a piece about the waltz as a metaphor for a vanished world. Nostalgic and ghostlike, this epilogue acknowledges that the Viennese world that created the waltz was, by 1911, but a dream.

Historical Relevance

- Even though Ravel composed *Valses nobles et sentimentales* in 1911, long before the start of World War II and three years before the beginning of World War I, Ravel came to have paradoxical feelings toward the Viennese waltz.

- Ravel was a voracious newspaper reader and was proud of his leftist leanings. He understood what was going on in Europe in 1911. He knew about Mayor Karl Lueger of Vienna and the growing menace of institutional anti-Semitism. Ravel knew about the naval arms race in progress between Great Britain and Imperial Germany.
- He knew that Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany was as dangerous and unstable as a gunslinger on a 3-day binge. He knew as well that France was spoiling for a fight in order to avenge the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War and to take back those parts of Alsace and Lorraine that had been ceded to Germany in 1871.
- Maurice Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* is about the coming catastrophe, as it dreams—longingly but vainly—for times past, just as his *La valse*, composed nine years later, is about the catastrophe that did, in fact, occur.
- One can rightly assert that Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* is simply a great piece of music and that, like all great art, it transcends its time. But taken in its historical context, it becomes a supremely moving historical document as well.

Important Term

suite: A concert work consisting of a collection of dances extracted from a longer ballet.

Scriabin—Piano Sonata No. 5

Lecture 20

Aleksandr Scriabin's 10 piano sonatas, written across the span of his compositional life, are collectively his defining works. This single set of compositions demonstrates his fascinating and sometimes unsettling artistic trajectory, from a late-romantic composer of tonal music to a brilliant (if slightly crazed) modernist. Composed in 1907, Scriabin's Piano Sonata no. 5—the focus of this lecture—is cast as a single movement and is about 12 minutes in length. Although the piece uses traditional key signatures, it exists, in truth, at the very outer limits of traditional tonality.

Tonal Centricity: Consonance and Dissonance

- Scriabin's Piano Sonata no. 5 of 1907 is the most frequently recorded of Scriabin's 10 piano sonatas. The great Soviet pianist Sviatoslav Richter once described it as the most difficult piece in the entire piano repertoire. At the time he completed it, Scriabin himself considered it the best piano piece he had ever composed. Amazingly, he composed the sonata in an astonishingly fast 6 days.
- The roiling opening of the introduction is intended to depict the secret yearnings Scriabin summons forth from the dark depths in order to bring them to life. The introductory music lies completely outside traditional tonal practice; it lacks entirely any sense of traditional tonal centricity, meaning harmonic gravity.
- Tonal centricity is created when harmonic instability—dissonance—resolves to harmonic stability—consonance. However, Scriabin's introduction is uniformly dissonant. It employs harmonic and melodic ideas filled with intervals—pitch relationships—that in traditional tonal music would be considered as unstable.
- The oscillating tremolo in the deep bass outlines a dissonant interval called a tritone. Layered atop the tritone is a trill, pitched a dissonant minor second above the bottom note of the triton. And all

of that is interspersed with upward-ripping gestures that outline yet another dissonant interval called a major seventh.

- “Dissonance” is not an absolute term but, rather, a relative term; dissonance only means something relative to consonance. Lacking any relative consonance, Scriabin’s introductory passage, then, creates a nontonal environment, in which its gestural character—as it shreds the piano from bottom to top—is its essence.
- Much of Scriabin’s Piano Sonata no. 5 is grounded in harmonic tradition, so what we have is a very modern piece of music, one in which tonal music and nontonal music coexist, a product of Scriabin’s theosophical belief that his musical imagination can and must synthesize all of nature in order to experience divine revelation.

Sonata Form

- For all its outward modernity, Scriabin’s one-movement Piano Sonata no. 5 is cast in sonata form, a formal procedure invented in the mid-18th century. A sonata form movement is one in which two or more principal, contrasting themes are presented, developed, and ultimately reconciled to each other.
- The opening section of a sonata form movement—during which the multiple, contrasting themes are introduced—is called the exposition. Materials from the exposition are then developed in a section called the development, after which the themes return in their original order (but with important changes) in a section called the recapitulation. A coda will usually bring such a movement to its conclusion.
- The formal orthodoxy, or template, of sonata form serves Scriabin well in his Piano Sonata no. 5, because it helps to give coherence and a measure of tradition to Scriabin’s otherwise most untraditional musical materials. The goal of your listening is to perceive exactly this dichotomy of new and old—the idiosyncratic nature of Scriabin’s musical materials and how those materials are deployed in sonata form.

Exposition

- Theme 1—labeled “*presto con allegrezza*,” meaning “very fast, and with joy”—is a bouncing, ecstatic theme set in the key of F-sharp major. Using the terminology of sonata form, the passage that follows is the modulating bridge, a chunk of music tasked with transiting to the second theme and changing the key in anticipation of that second theme.



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The piano and orchestral music of Aleksandr Scriabin (1872–1915) is known for its uncustomary harmonies.

- In a harmonic environment as fluid as this one, perceiving modulation—that is, key change—will be difficult. Scriabin’s bridge alternates a long-breathed melodic idea that anticipates theme 2 with pulsating chords drawn from theme 1.
- As we would expect in a sonata form movement, theme 2, set here in B-flat major, is the more lyric of the two principal themes. Lush, leisurely, and luxuriant, the theme features sinuous accompanimental lines that are the aural equivalent of the plant-inspired vocabulary of art nouveau, an art movement with which this sonata is exactly contemporary.

The “Mystic Chord”

- Underpinning much of the magical second theme is a harmony that is an ever-so-slight variant of a harmony that has come to be known as Scriabin’s “mystic chord.” As he matured, Scriabin’s melodies and harmonies were increasingly built from variants of the mystic chord.

- At a time when composers like Debussy, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky were all trying to break away from the expectations of traditional tonality, the mystic chord and its various permutations were Scriabin’s harmonic solution, his way of creating a basic harmonic sound that existed outside of traditional tonality.
- The mystic chord doesn’t seem to imply consonance or tonal centricity—that is, not one of its pitches can be perceived as representing a state of rest. But neither is Scriabin’s mystic chord dissonant in a tonal sense, in that it does not sound as if it needs to resolve. In truth, the mystic chord is neither consonant nor dissonant; it represents neither rest nor tension—it just exists.
- The tonal harmonic system had been the solar plexus of the Western musical language since the 15th century. At its most basic, the tonal system is a metaphor for the complementary opposites that frame our existence: rise and fall, tension and release, activity and inactivity, struggle and repose, the turmoil of life and the eternal rest of death.
- At the heart of the tonal system are two harmonies or chords, one that represents tension and the other rest. Scriabin’s mystic chord is constructed in such a way as to imply neither tension nor rest.
- Scriabin himself did not call this harmony the “mystic chord,” which is a term that was coined in 1916—after Scriabin’s death—by the English music critic Arthur Hull. Scriabin called it “the chord of the pleroma.”
- Much of Scriabin’s late music—reliant, as it is, on the mystic chord—is going to be characterized more by harmonic stasis than forward motion. In its mystic chord–created harmonic stasis, Scriabin’s music will remind us of Debussy’s on one hand and, philosophically at least, the mantra-like music of India on the other.

- The exposition of Scriabin’s Piano Sonata no. 5 is brought to its conclusion with a rousing bit of closing music based loosely on theme 1.

Development Section

- The development section is cast in three large parts. The first part features the introduction and theme 1; the second part features the introduction and theme 2; and the third part further expands on theme 2, as well as the closing material that concluded the exposition.
- Part 3 of the development section begins with an expansion of the closing material heard at the conclusion of the exposition and then concludes with a magisterial, teeth-rattling version of theme 2 that brings the development to its climax.

Recapitulation

- On paper, Scriabin’s recapitulation is a textbook affair: Theme 1 returns, followed by the modulating bridge, theme 2, and the closing material. However, there is nothing “textbook” about the way the recap sounds. Scriabin compresses everything: The introductory music is gone, and everything that follows is compressed and intensified, building inexorably to the grand climax that is the sonata-concluding coda. In the compressed recapitulation, what took roughly four minutes to pass in the exposition now takes just over two minutes in the recapitulation.

Coda

- Scriabin indicates that the coda be played “*con luminosita,*” meaning “with luminosity.” Scriabin just loved to use expressive designations that referred to light and color. According to some commentators, such designations were not just expressive directives but references to Scriabin’s synesthesia.
- Much has been made about Scriabin’s presumed synesthesia, a condition whereby Scriabin purportedly saw colors while listening to music. Scriabin had a lot of issues, but synesthesia was not one of them. The color system he invented and for which he is known—a

system that associated certain colors with certain pitches—was a carefully worked out scheme based on the circle of fifths and the primary colors as described by Sir Isaac Newton in his *Opticks*, otherwise known as “ROY G. BIV”: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.

- In Scriabin’s system, C was red, G (a fifth above C) was orange, D (a fifth above G) was yellow, A was green, E was blue, B was indigo, and F-sharp was violet. The remaining five pitches described shades of purple progressing to rust, leading back to the red of the pitch C.
- So much for Scriabin’s storied color synesthesia: In reality, his color system was invented so that in the course of a musical performance, colors could be projected that corresponded with the pitches being heard. To this end, he worked with an inventor named Alexander Mozer to create a color organ, which, like so many of Scriabin’s plans, never quite worked.
- The coda of Scriabin’s Piano Sonata no. 5 is cast in four brief parts. The first part is based on theme 1; the second features a magisterial and throbbing version of theme 2; the third part—marked “*presto*,” meaning “very fast”—returns to theme 1; and the fourth part, which flies by in the blink of an eye, features the upward-ripping, dissonant gesture that began the sonata back in the introduction. Taken all together, this coda constitutes an apotheosis: an ecstatic, barely disguised instance of excitement that brings the sonata to its conclusion.
- While the formal structure of Scriabin’s Piano Sonata no. 5 might be traditional, its musical content is something altogether different—or, in other words, original. There’s nothing else that sounds like this music.

Rachmaninoff—*Études-tableaux*

Lecture 21

Sergey Rachmaninoff is often referred to as Tchaikovsky’s “heir” and the last of the Russian romantic composers. Like Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff’s music is dominated by its luxuriant thematic melody. Unlike Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff’s melodic palette leans toward the elegiac—more often than not, dark and brooding—and in this way, it sounds stereotypically “Russian.” In this lecture, you will be exposed to a selected number of the *études* in Rachmaninoff’s *Études-tableaux* by first identifying their programmatic content and then observing—where appropriate—what aspect, or aspects, of pianism are exploited in each work.

A Study of Pictures

- A piece of music called an *étude*—or “study”—is one that exploits some aspect or aspects of instrumental technique. Before the 19th century, keyboard *études* were nothing but finger exercises. That all changed in the 1830s with the piano *études* of Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt, whose *études* are both technical studies and superbly wrought musical compositions.
- Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) took things yet another step in his two sets of *Études-tableaux*—“picture studies”—of Opus 33 and 39, completed in 1911 and 1917, respectively. Each of the 17 *études* (eight in Op. 33 and nine in Op. 39) is, in some way, programmatic: Each evokes a particular mood, paints a picture, or tells a story.
- In a letter to the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi, Rachmaninoff indicated, for example, that Op. 33, no. 7 represents a fair; Op. 39, no. 2 depicts the sea and seagulls; and Op. 39, no. 6 depicts the story of Little Red Riding Hood.
- No matter what the mood or picture being painted, Rachmaninoff’s *Études-tableaux* are filled through and through with his extraordinary pianism. Rachmaninoff was one of the greatest pianists who ever

lived, and at six feet and six inches tall, he had the frame and the hands to seemingly cover the entire keyboard all at once.

- Rachmaninoff’s title, *Études-tableaux*, indicates that these compositions are both keyboard “studies” and programmatic works. Rachmaninoff, who was generally loath to identify programmatic specifics in his music, did indeed identify the programmatic content of 5 of the 18 études in a letter to the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi, who orchestrated them in 1929 at the request of Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Our thanks to Maestro Rachmaninoff for thus making things easy for us, as we will examine the five études he identified.



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Étude-tableau, Op. 39, No. 6: “Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf”

- The sixth étude of Op. 39, which depicts the story of Little Red Riding Hood, is an example of Rachmaninoff’s picture painting and his pianism. The étude begins with two snarls low in the piano. A skittish Little Red Riding Hood is depicted high in the piano, with rapid right-hand figuration.
- After Little Red Riding Hood’s entrance and her initial “conversation” with the wolf, for the next minute and a half or so, the wolf does most of the “talking.” As the étude proceeds, a sense of terrible danger increasingly pervades its expressive atmosphere. The piece concludes with Little Red Riding Hood’s increasingly panicked music, followed by one last ominous bit of the wolf’s music.

Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) was a piano prodigy, with a phenomenal memory and the ability to almost instantly memorize any music.

- In the version of the story Rachmaninoff sets, there's no woodsman conveniently strolling by to rescue Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf has the last word—or snarl, as the case may be—as he swallows the inquisitive little girl whole, followed by a self-satisfied belch.

***Étude-tableau*, Op. 33, No. 6: “The Fair”**

- Like almost all of the *Études-tableaux*, Op. 33, no. 6 is cast as a three-part, A–B–A form. We can assume, based on the joyful character of this étude, that Rachmaninoff liked fairs.
- The étude projects two programmatic elements. The first is the hustle and bustle of activity of the fair itself: a sensory feast depicted by a tremendous amount of musical activity, in particularly long swatches of rapidly moving chords and tremolos in the pianist's right hand. The second programmatic element is quite personal, and that would be Rachmaninoff's own emotional reaction to the sights and sounds of the fair: a joyful excitement projected by the fanfare-like nature of the thematic material and the key of E-flat major, in which the étude is set.
- The B section that follows offers a playful contrast before the rocking-and-rolling return of the final A section brings the étude to its conclusion.
- As an étude, Op. 33, no. 6 is primarily a study in endurance—those long, rapid tremolos and shifting chords in the right hand are oxygen-depleting, lactose acid-inducing killers—and balance, as the pianist must project all the myriad parts of the piece (of the “fair”) without garbling them into a mass of undifferentiated slop (which is no small challenge).

***Étude-tableau*, Op. 39, No. 2: “The Sea and the Seagulls”**

- The expressive mood Rachmaninoff projects in this étude is the polar opposite of “The Fair”; in “The Sea and the Seagulls,” he projects a mood of bleak desolation.

- The construction of this étude is simplicity itself. It consists of two basic elements. The first is a steady, rolling triplet line heard initially in the pianist's left hand.
- These sorts of steady-state triplets are stereotypical water-and-wave music, and they are heard—in one hand or the other—throughout almost the entire étude. Hints of the *Dies Irae*, the Catholic prayer for the dead, imbue this water-and-wave music with a deathly pallor.
- The second element of the étude is “the birds,” which are depicted in a long-breathed melody that virtually floats above the triplets. Rachmaninoff achieves this floating effect by projecting two separate rhythmic strata: The melody representing the birds does not line up rhythmically with the water-and-wave triplets below.
- Slowly but inexorably, this melancholy music builds up to a despairing, angst-filled climax, and increasingly quiet music follows. From that point, the étude concludes as it began, hushed and desolate.

Étude-tableau, Op. 39, No. 7: “Funeral March”

- In his letter to Ottorino Respighi, Rachmaninoff described this étude as: “A funeral march. The initial theme is a march; the other theme represents the singing of a choir. Beginning with the sixteenth notes in C Minor, a fine rain is suggested, incessant and hopeless. This movement culminates [in] the chimes of a church.”
- The opening theme represents the funeral march, and the second theme represents the singing of the chorus. It is the rain—a rain of tears, one that starts out as a drizzle but becomes a cataclysmic torrent—that drives this étude to its climax.
- The harmonic language of the funeral march sections is extremely advanced. It is a harmonic language most reminiscent of that employed by Rachmaninoff's friend and Moscow Conservatory classmate, the pianist and composer Alexander Scriabin.

- In fact, the musical connection between this *étude* and Scriabin's music is not coincidental. Something Rachmaninoff failed to tell Respighi was that this *étude* was inspired by Scriabin's funeral, which occurred not long before Rachmaninoff composed the *étude*.
- Rachmaninoff biographers Sergei Bertesson and Jay Leyda wrote: "On April 14, [1915], Alexander Scriabin died of blood poisoning. Years later, Rachmaninoff [still] recalled the minute details of Scriabin's funeral—the rain, the crowd, the fresh grave—and his decision that day to devote his tour of the coming season to Scriabin's piano works."

Étude-tableau, Op. 39, No. 9: "March"

- This march, heroic and virtuosic, provides a fittingly explosive conclusion to the *Études-tableaux*. Once it gets off the ground, the march features a single rhythmic idea: an eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes. This rhythm is punched out over and over again with the ferocity of a Muhammad Ali left jab.
- However, the rhythm keeps shifting relative to the meter; sometimes the eighth note falls on the beat, and sometimes the sixteenth note falls on the beat. The result is a fabulous concoction of rhythmic ambiguity and shifting accent—a powerfully rhythmic march that can't quite seem to stay in rhythm.

Prokofiev—Piano Sonata No. 7

Lecture 22

Not including six juvenile piano sonatas and one left unfinished at his death, Sergey Prokofiev completed nine numbered piano sonatas. They are, collectively, the cornerstone of the 20th-century piano sonata literature. Prokofiev composed his Piano Sonata no. 7 in 1942. On paper, it looks like a traditional, classically proportioned piano sonata. Like Mozart's piano sonatas, it is cast in three movements, with a first movement in sonata form, a slow second movement, and a brilliant third movement finale. In terms of its actual musical content, Prokofiev's Piano Sonata no. 7 has nothing to do with 18th-century classicalism—it is new 20th-century music.

Prokofiev's Public versus Private Works

- By 1939, Prokofiev had come to realize that he was going to have to be two composers in one: With one hand, he would write explicitly “Soviet” works—public works that satisfied the ideologues—while, with the other hand, he would compose the music that he wanted to compose—private works that would be tolerated in light of the more patriotic stuff.
- In the fall of 1939, Prokofiev was working on a cantata for chorus and orchestra subtitled “Hail to Stalin,” a work intended as a tribute to “the great leader and teacher” on the occasion of his 60th birthday. At the same time, he was composing his Piano Sonatas nos. 6, 7, and 8, each of which is pure modern Prokofiev and a masterwork.
- These three sonatas are generally referred to as Prokofiev's “War Sonatas,” despite the fact that he began all of them long before the Soviet Union went to war with Germany in June of 1941. Piano Sonata no. 6 was completed in 1940, no. 7 in 1942, and no. 8 in 1944. They remain among the most modernistic piano works Prokofiev ever composed.

- Some commentators—running with the “War Sonata” idea for all its worth—attempt to ascribe their astringent musical language and expressive power to the war itself. For example, the pianist and Yale School of Music professor Boris Berman writes in his book *The Piano Sonatas of Prokofiev* that: “While the Sixth Sonata reflects the nervous anticipation of World War II and the Eighth looks back to those terrible events retrospectively, the Seventh Sonata projects the anguish and the struggle of the war years as they were experienced in real time.”



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At the age of 13, Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953) and his mother moved to St. Petersburg so that he could attend the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he spent 10 years.

- Whatever “anguish” Prokofiev might have been feeling when he began his Piano Sonata no. 7 in 1939 had nothing to do with a war that hadn’t yet begun—but it might very well have had a lot to do with a war for his own soul.
- Prokofiev completed the Piano Sonata no. 7 in April of 1942. Despite the titular claim that the piece is in “B-flat major,” the sonata is overall dark and ominous in mood. The sonata is cast in three movements.

Movement 1

- The first movement is set in sonata form, meaning that two contrasting themes will be presented in the opening section (the exposition), and they will then, in some way, be developed in the development section and recapitulated in the recapitulation.

- Prokofiev’s theme 1 is an angular, ferocious, and grotesque march that begins without an introduction and sounds nothing like the home key B-flat major.
- Among Prokofiev’s oldest friends and most important artistic collaborators was the theater director, actor, and producer Vsevolod Meyerhold. In 1938, Meyerhold and Prokofiev began a collaboration to create a new opera entitled *Semyon Kotko*. On June 20, 1939—just as Prokofiev was completing the score—the 65-year-old Meyerhold was arrested, a victim of Stalin’s Great Terror. He was brutally tortured and then executed by firing squad seven-and-a-half months after his arrest, on February 3, 1940.
- Meyerhold’s wife, the actress Zinaida Raikh, fared even worse. On the night of July 15, 1939, 25 days after Meyerhold’s arrest, “unknown assailants” broke into her apartment. Dmitri Shostakovich describes what happened: “They killed her. Seventeen knife wounds; she was stabbed in the eyes. Raikh screamed for a long time, but none of the neighbors came to her aid. No one dared go into Meyerhold’s apartment.”
- Nothing was taken from the apartment. The assailants—of course—were never found. Instead, the apartment was split into two, and the “new” apartments were given to two ranking members of the NKVD, the precursor to the KGB.
- Prokofiev was stunned by the deaths of Meyerhold and Raikh. If he had chosen “not to see” before, he could not hide from the truth now: that he had voluntarily returned to a society of unspeakable brutality and that in doing so he had put not just himself but his family—his wife and two sons—in terrible danger.
- Just weeks after Zinaida Raikh’s murder, Prokofiev was “informed” that he would compose a cantata entitled “Hail to Stalin” in celebration of Stalin’s 60th birthday. And just weeks after that, Prokofiev began composing his Piano Sonatas nos. 6, 7, and 8. It is the opinion of Prokofiev biographer David Jaffé that: “having forced

himself to compose a cheerful evocation of the ‘nirvana’ Stalin wanted everyone to believe he had created [in “Hail to Stalin,” Prokofiev then, in these three sonatas], expressed his true feelings.”

- Back to the first movement, in sonata form, of Prokofiev’s Piano Sonata no. 7. Following a relatively quiet modulating bridge, an expansive and introspective theme 2 emerges. Like theme 1, theme 2 is essentially nontonal, and the themes share a similar opening contour. Here’s the melodic “contour” that initiates theme 1.
- The resemblance between the themes notwithstanding, there is a fundamental contrast between them. Theme 1 is a grotesquerie, a caricature of brutal, militant force. Theme 2 is a pained and personal rumination on that brutality, entirely introverted in its expressive effect.
- A thrumming, increasingly loud and dramatic passage of closing music concludes the exposition and leads directly into the dissonant, frenzied, theme 1–dominated development section, music that can—without any fear of overstatement—be equated to Prokofiev’s battle for his own soul.
- The recapitulation begins not with theme 1 but, rather, with the modulating bridge. An abbreviated version of theme 2 follows. The coda that concludes the movement, based on theme 1, ends not with a bang but with an unsettling whimper. “Exhaustion” is the word that best fits these final moments—physical and spiritual exhaustion.

Movement 2

- Prokofiev’s second movement is a 6-minute-long cry of pain. The opening and closing A sections are based on a song by Robert Schumann entitled “Sadness,” from his cycle *Liederkreis*, Op. 39 of 1840. Prokofiev’s second movement and Schumann’s song begin the same way—set in the same key, E major.
- The words of Schumann’s song—and, therefore, the words Prokofiev tacitly implies at the beginning of the second movement—would

seem to have been custom made for Prokofiev's own state of mind. The following are the words, by the poet Joseph Eichendorff.

I can sometimes sing
as if I were happy,
but secretly tears well up.

The nightingales
sing their songs of unfulfilled longing
from the depths of their dungeons.

Everyone delights who listens,
because they do not understand the pain:
the deep sorrow of the song.

- As the second movement progresses, the quiet, Schumann-inspired opening evolves into a terrible and sustained cry of pain and sorrow. This climactic shriek is followed by the slow fadeaway to the opening music and, finally, the conclusion of the movement.

Movement 3

- For all its diabolic power, this third movement comes as a tremendous relief after the emotional intensity of movements 1 and 2. This third movement is a toccata, meaning a fast, virtuosic movement intended to show off the digital dexterity of the performer.
- The theme of this movement is its rhythm—an unrelenting 7/8 meter that plows forward regardless, a 7/8 meter that is subdivided in a 2 + 3 + 2. The closest thing to a melodic theme in the movement is an ostinato—a repeated pattern of notes—heard in the bass at various points of the movement.
- Despite its brevity (it runs just a bit over three minutes), this third movement is a showstopper, among the most rousing finales in the entire piano repertoire.

Copland—*Piano Variations*

Lecture 23

Aaron Copland's *Piano Variations* is an epochal piece. It is "American" to its bones, a piece of music that combines Copland's formal training and a modernist compositional impulse with a ragtime- and jazz-inspired approach to rhythm, melody, and harmony and the relentless, machine-age energy, pace, and power that radiated from New York City in the 1920s. By the mid-1930s, Copland's spare and angular compositional style had come to be perceived as a perfect musical metaphor for the "wide open spaces" and pioneer spirit of America.

"American" Music Comes of Age

- Eclecticism is as American as apple pie. In a culture defined by its racial and ethnic multiplicity, any music that claims to be "American" must, somehow, reflect that multiplicity. Such an American concert music emerged during the first decades of the 20th century, when American-born composers began to synthesize jazz, ragtime, Anglo American and Hispanic folk music, popular song, and elements of American musical theater into their concert works.
- The music of Aaron Copland exemplifies this emergence. Copland, formally trained in the European concert tradition, was determined to create a uniquely "American" body of work. To that end, his music drew freely from such diverse traditions as jazz, North American and Latin America folk music and dance, and European modernism.
- Copland composed his *Piano Variations* in 1930, when he was 30 years old. For all the popularity of his "populist" ballet scores like *Appalachian Spring*, for all the patriotic bombast of his *Fanfare for the Common Man*, for all his film scores and chamber compositions, *Piano Variations* is Copland's great masterwork—the

most important piano work by an American composer. Its greatness rests on two pillars.

- The first is purely self-referential, and that is the beauty, power, and invention of the music itself. The second pillar of greatness is what the piece represents historically and stylistically: a diamond-hard synthesis of western European musical modernism; a steely, New York City skyline–inspired, art deco–like angularity and clarity; west African microtonal melody; and ragtime- and jazz-inspired rhythmic practice, themselves derived from west African drumming.
- In every sense, Copland’s *Piano Variations* is the great American piano work, written at precisely the time American composers were attempting to define what constituted “American music.”
- A distinctly American compositional music tradition emerged in the 1920s for four main reasons. The first reason had to do with the maturation of American culture and society. With westward expansion and industrialization complete, the American public increasingly turned its attention to quality-of-life issues. As we know, few things can elevate our quality of life more completely than music.
- The second reason is that the long-standing bias in favor of German and Austrian music was undone by America’s participation in World War I against Germany and Austria.
- The third reason was the isolationist spirit that followed World War I, a spirit that focused on things homegrown, such as ragtime, jazz, American musical theater, and American folk music.
- Finally, by the 1920s, such indigenous American music as ragtime, jazz, American musical theater, and folk music had developed and been codified to the point that they could be embraced and synthesized into an American concert music.

- More than anything else, it was the musical synthesis of west Africa and Europe that came to define American music, a synthesis that produced the spiritual, blues, ragtime, jazz, and rock ‘n’ roll. This synthesis of Africa and Europe lies at the very heart of Copland’s *Piano Variations*.

Theme

- Copland’s *Piano Variations* was composed in 1930, at just the time that jazz was solidifying its hold on the mainstream consciousness of America. Copland’s theme—melodically angular, rhythmically irregular, and constantly shifting between major and minor—is a brilliant abstraction and intensification of west African polyrhythm and microtonal melody, music conditioned by Copland’s absorption of the language of ragtime and jazz.
- In the score, Copland indicates that the player should: “strike each note sharply.” The effect is percussive, and each note stands in the highest relief. In a ragtime or jazz performance, it is just such percussive accentuations that serve to create a polyrhythmic layer above the regular beat created by the bass line.
- Copland conceived his theme with a jazz-inspired vision of explosive percussivity and then stripped away everything but the high-relief accented notes. It is in this way that Copland’s theme becomes an abstraction and an intensification of the sort of rhythms and articulation characteristic of jazz and ragtime.
- The thematic melody is cast in three phrases, with each phrase longer than the previous one. This thematic melody is based on a four-note motive that will drive the entire piece. It’s a melodic idea that implies a harmonic alternation of C major, C minor, and C-sharp minor.
- The net effect of the constant oscillation between major and minor that we hear from the first page to the last of Copland’s *Piano Variations* is to evoke exactly the “blue notes”—the simultaneously major and minor notes—that grew out of west African melodic

practice. This is particularly apparent in the harmonic language of the piece, in which these major and minor intervals are heard simultaneously.

- For example, as the theme draws to its conclusion, an explosive harmony punctuates the conclusion. The harmony is a blues chord—a simultaneously C major and minor harmony that has no precedent in western European harmonic practice but many, many precedents in blues and jazz practice.
- Copland's *Piano Variations* is not blues, nor is it jazz. Instead, it is profoundly influenced by the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic language of blues and jazz. In fact, it is a musical synthesis that mirrors, in some way, the racial and ethnic synthesis that is the American nation.



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American composer Aaron Copland (1900–1990) composed in an expressive modern style that incorporated the contemporary trends.

Variations

- Copland's angular theme is followed by 20 variations and a closing section called a coda. Copland's variations are cumulative, which means that each new variation builds on the one that preceded it so that the piece is characterized by constant developmental momentum.
- Keep in mind that Copland's theme and the subsequent variations are based on a four-note motive that will be heard melodically as well as harmonically. In varying this motive melodically, Copland employs a technique throughout the variations called octave displacement, which means shifting a melody note (or notes) into higher or lower octaves. The leaping about due to octave

displacements has much to do with the angularity and abruptness that is so characteristic of the *Piano Variations*.

- Variation 1 starts low on the keyboard and gradually expands upward. It is set initially as a canon; the theme begins in the pianist's right hands and then follows, four beats later, in the left hand.
- In variation 2, the basic motive begins to be heard harmonically.
- Variations 4, 5, 6, and 7 together constitute a large dramatic buildup and bring the first large part of the piece to its climax. Copland achieves this buildup and climax a number of ways: Rhythms become more incisive and varied; more and more registral space is enveloped; and huge, dissonant harmonies built from the basic motive explode. Variation 7 concludes—and with it, the first large part of the piece—with a brilliant and piercing E-major chord.
- Variations 8 through 13 are, in turn, mysterious, lyric, majestic, melancholy, and playful. Together, these six variations represent the central section of the piece.
- The third and final large group of variations—numbers 14 through 20—feature some of the most influential piano writing of the 20th century. Copland, who was always a less-is-more sort of composer (he liked to refer to his compositional style as being “thrifty”), strips away all nonessentials in these variations and, in doing so, creates piano textures of diamond hardness and clarity.
- In variation 14, upward-rippling arpeggios alternate with accented, quarter-note basic motives; low C pedal tones; and skittering, rhythmically irregular eighth-note lines.
- In variation 15, skittering, irregular eighth-note lines alternate with rippling chords and arpeggios.

- In variation 16, various permutations of the basic, four-note motive alternate with gunshot-like chords built from the basic, four-note motive.
- In variation 17, skittering octaves played fortissimo alternate with scurrying four-note motives and quietly repeated E-major chords.
- Variation 18 offers a last bit of quiet before the final onslaught, as rippling sixteenth-note basic motives (played pianissimo) alternate with widely spaced versions of the basic motive (played piano).
- Variation 19 features sonorous, chordal music that starts slowly and quietly but gathers tremendous force as it progresses.
- Variation 20—the longest in the set—is filled with **syncopations**, virtuosic octaves and concludes explosively deep in the piano.
- The coda builds to a huge, sonorous climax and concludes with a magisterial version of the theme.

Important Term

syncopation: Displacement of the expected accent from a strong beat to a weak beat and vice versa.

The A-List

Lecture 24

Up until this lecture, this course has excluded the sort of short, relatively easy piano works that are the mainstay of the pedagogic and amateur repertoire. Accordingly, the works that you will explore in this lecture represent—collectively—a “single” conceptual work: piano pieces intended primarily for amateurs. As such, the title of this lecture, “The A-List,” refers—with no disparagement implied—to “The Amateur List.” Specifically, this lecture will survey nine works chronologically, from Mozart’s Piano Sonata in C Major of 1788 to Debussy’s “Clair de Lune” of 1890.

Mozart: Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545

- Mozart’s Piano Sonata in C Major is the 16th of Mozart’s 19 numbered piano sonatas. Mozart entered the work into his thematic catalog on June 26, 1788, when he was 32 years old. In the catalog, he described the piece as being “*eine kleine Klavier Sonate für Anfänger*,” meaning “a little piano sonata for beginners.” While it is the single best-known piano work by Mozart today, it was unknown in his lifetime and wasn’t published until 1805, 14 years after his death.
- Mozart’s sonata is a perfect example of the cliché that big things come in small packages. The first movement is a crystal-clear sonata form, in which the essential pedagogic element—rising and falling scales—are heard during the modulating bridge and development section. Mozart’s principal themes are models of brevity, memorability, and elegance.
- Theme 1 is but four measures long and consists of just two phrases and 15 notes—but it might very well be the most succinct and memorable thematic melody ever composed, with enough rhythmic variety and harmonic interest to power a tune four times longer.

- It is not unusual for composers to compose pedagogic music, and some composers built their entire careers around writing pedagogic music. In Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545, the highest of art and pedagogic utility coexist in perfect balance.

Beethoven: “Für Elise”

- “Für Elise” (Bagatelle no. 25 in A Minor) is cast as a rondo, which means that a principal theme—the rondo theme—returns periodically after various contrasting episodes. Along with the opening theme of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5 and the “Ode to Joy Theme” from the Symphony no. 9, the rondo theme of “Für Elise” is the most famous melody Beethoven ever composed.
- “Für Elise” was first published in 1867, 40 years after Beethoven's death. The manuscript had been discovered by a German music scholar named Ludwig Nohl, who noted that Beethoven's manuscript was inscribed “For Elise on 27 April as a memento from L. v. Beethoven.”
- But who is Elise? The two principal candidates are a German soprano named Elisabeth Röckel and a rich, titled Austrian lady named Therese Malfatti. According to the German musicologist Klaus Kopitz, Elisabeth Röckel was part of Beethoven's inner circle around the year 1810 and might have gone by the nickname “Elise.”
- However, the general consensus is that “Elise” is Therese Malfatti. She was a competent musician who was proposed to by Beethoven in 1810, when she was 18 years old. Her rejection was immediate and absolute.
- The likely story is that “Für Elise” was composed as an offering for Therese during Beethoven's abortive courtship. As for the title, the speculation is that given Beethoven's nearly illegible handwriting, Nohl simply misread and then miscopied the inscription, turning “Für Therese” into “Für Elise.”

Beethoven: Minuet in G Major, WoO 10, No. 2

- In *The Music Man*, Professor Harold Hill is a bogus music teacher. His teaching “method” is something he calls “the think system”: He tells his students that if they can think hard enough about a piece of music, they will be able to play it. The piece of music about which they are instructed to think is Beethoven’s Minuet in G Major, WoO 10, no. 2.

Schumann: “Traumerei,” from *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15

- In 1945, Schumann’s “Traumerei”—which means “Dreaming”—was selected by some forgotten apparatchik at Radio Moscow to be played in the background during a moment of silence at 6:55 pm on May 8, 1945, in memory of the victims of the Soviet Union’s war against Nazi Germany.
- Schumann’s work evokes a mood of aching melancholy, loss, and nostalgia—a mood very different from that evoked by the military or funeral music that might well have been chosen. Schumann’s “Traumerei” was immediately embraced by the Soviet people, who felt in its sweetness and longing not just their own grief but a healing sense of peace as well.
- “Traumerei” became the go-to piece played by Soviet military bands at World War II memorial ceremonies. According to the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, it was even performed at Stalin’s funeral.
- It is fascinating that the music of a 19th-century German composer should become a memorial to the 26.6 million Soviets who lost their lives in a war against Germany. But, really, it’s just another example of the universal power of great art, which knows no boundaries or borders.

Mendelssohn: “Spring Song,” Op. 62, No. 6

- For many people who grew up in the United States in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, their first exposure to opera and concert music was not in an opera house or a concert hall but, rather, through the cartoons that used to be played at movie houses before the featured

movie. The repertoire of opera and concert music provided a huge, preexisting catalog of out-of-copyright music that could be used to accompany the new, synchronized-sound cartoons that were introduced the late 1920s.

- The most used of all concert works in the cartoon world is Felix Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, Op. 62, no. 6 of 1842, also known as "Spring Song." The first cartoon to use the "Spring Song" in its soundtrack was released in 1931. Appropriately entitled "Mendelssohn's Spring Song," it was directed by Cy Young (of Disney fame) and animated by Lillian Freedman. It features various small critters—a family of birds, a butterfly, amorous spiders, a caterpillar, and a frog—all cavorting to the music.
- At Warner Bros, the legendary team of cartoonist Tex Avery (who created—among other characters—Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, and Daffy Duck) and his music director Carl Stalling used the "Spring Song" as a sort of leitmotif throughout their cartoons. Idyllic, out-of-doors scenes were almost inevitably accompanied by the "Spring Song," and many of the hunting sequences featuring Elmer Fudd use the "Spring Song" as well.

Chopin: "Minute Waltz" (Waltz in D-flat Major, Op. 64, No. 1)

- While it is theoretically possible to play the notes of Chopin's Op. 64, no. 1 in one minute, such a pace cannot constitute anything resembling a musical performance or anything approaching Chopin's artistic intent. In fact, the piece—entitled "Minute Waltz"—wasn't intended to be played in a minute; it is a case of an epic mispronunciation.
- The piece was known as the "small" or "miniscule" waltz almost from the moment of its publication in 1847 by the Leipzig-based house of Breitkopf & Härtel. An early English edition entitled the piece the "Minute Waltz"—as in "small" or "brief"—not as in 60 seconds.

- Actually, the waltz has a legitimate, Chopin-sanctioned nickname: “Waltz of the Little Dog.” This nickname was bestowed on the waltz by Chopin’s beloved, the writer George Sand (whose birth name was Amantine Dupin). The little dog in question was George Sand’s pooch, named Marquis, and its title was inspired by the dog’s proclivity to chase his own tail.



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Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894) was one of the most important Russian musicians of the 19th century.

Rubinstein: Melody in F

- Anton Rubinstein (who lived from 1829 to 1894) was one of the most important Russian musicians of the 19th century—a pianist, a conductor, and an educator of the highest renown. He founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 and, by doing so, put Russia on the European musical map.
- Rubinstein composed 20 operas, 6 symphonies, 5 piano concertos, 2 ’cello concertos, and a violin concerto; numerous other orchestral works and **tone poems**; oratorios, a ballet, a copious number of songs and chamber works; and many, many works for solo piano. The only one of Rubinstein’s works consistently heard outside of Russia today is his Melody in F, Op. 3, no. 1, a modest little piano piece written in 1852, when he was just 23 years old.

Dvořák: Humoresques

- Antonin Dvořák (born in 1841 and died in 1904) was a compositional synthesist, who blended the melodic and rhythmic sensibilities of his native Czech music with a high-end Germanic compositional technique and the expressive palette of romanticism. The result is an irresistibly tuneful, technically polished, expressively powerful

body of music. In his own lifetime, Dvořák was the single most popular composer of instrumental music.

- It was Dvořák’s international popularity and his reputation as a “nationalist” composer that led him to be hired in 1892 as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City, where he worked for 3 years.
- During his stay in the United States, he composed some of his greatest music, including his Symphony in E Minor (known today as “The New World Symphony”), the **String Quartet** in F Major (known as the “American Quartet”), the String Quintet in E-flat Major, and the ‘Cello Concerto in B Minor.
- In 1894, Dvořák returned home to Bohemia for summer break. He carried with him a sketchbook filled with themes presumably inspired by his American experience. During that summer of 1894, he composed a set of eight humoresques based on these “American” themes. He completed the set on August 27, 1894, and it was published a few months later.
- A humoresque is a genre of light music characterized by a mood of fanciful humor. Dvořák’s *Humoresques* are brilliant, none more so than the seventh, which is, according to the American music critic David Hurwitz, “probably the most famous small piano work ever written after Beethoven’s ‘Für Elise.’”

Debussy: “Clair de Lune”

- In 1890, the 28-year-old Debussy composed a set of four piano pieces, which he entitled *Suite Bergamasque*. The third of the four pieces was a slow, atmospheric piece called “Promenade Sentimental.” Having completed the *Suite Bergamasque*, Debussy put it on the shelf, where it sat for 15 years, until 1905.
- In the 15 years between 1890 and 1905, Debussy went from being a relative unknown to a famous composer. By 1905, there was a big demand for Debussy’s music, and so it was that the Paris-based

publishing house of E. Fromont approached Debussy with a request to publish the *Suite Bergamasque*.

- Debussy was torn: On one hand, he really wanted the money; on the other hand, (writes Debussy scholar Paul Roberts): “Debussy’s early piano style bears little relation to the works of his maturity, and he became loath to publish [the *Suite Bergamasque*] at all.”
- Money and good sense won out. Debussy reworked the pieces, retitled two of them (“Promenade Sentimental” became “Clair de Lune”), and then handed the set over to the publisher. Had the set not been published, it might very well have suffered the fate of so many unpublished manuscripts: It might have been given away, lost, or just thrown out.

Important Terms

string quartet: A performing ensemble consisting of two violins, a viola, and a cello. (2) A musical composition written for that ensemble.

tone poem: Also called a symphonic poem. A one-movement orchestral genre that develops a poetic idea, suggests a scene, or creates a mood. The tone poem is generally associated with the romantic era.

Timeline

- 1722..... Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book One
- 1741..... Johann Sebastian Bach, *Goldberg Variations* (1741)
- 1784..... Wolfgang Mozart (1756–1791), Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457
- 1788..... Wolfgang Mozart, Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545
- 1796..... Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), Minuet in G Major, WoO 10, No. 2
- 1806..... Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57, *Appassionata*
- 1810..... Ludwig van Beethoven, “Für Elise”
- 1823..... Ludwig van Beethoven, *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120
- 1828..... Franz Schubert (1897–1828), Piano Sonata No. 21 in B-flat Major
- 1836..... Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), Ballade in G Minor, Op. 23
- 1838..... Robert Schumann (1810–1856), *Kreisleriana*
- 1838..... Robert Schumann “Traumerei,” from *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15
- 1839..... Frédéric Chopin, *Préludes*, Op. 28

- 1842..... Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847), “Spring Song,”
Op. 62, No. 6
- 1847..... Frédéric Chopin, “Minute Waltz” (Waltz in D-flat Major,
Op. 64, No. 1)
- 1852..... Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894), Melody in F
- 1853..... Franz Liszt (1811–1881), Sonata in B Minor
- 1855..... Franz Liszt, *Années de pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)*,
First Year
- 1858..... Franz Liszt, *Années de pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)*,
Second Year
- 1861..... Johannes Brahms (1833–1897), *Handel Variations*,
Op. 24
- 1874..... Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881), *Pictures at
an Exhibition*
- 1890..... Claude Debussy (1862–1918), “Clair de Lune”
- 1893..... Johannes Brahms, Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118
- 1894..... Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904), *Humoresques*, No. 7
- 1907..... Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915), Piano Sonata No. 5 in
F-sharp Major, Op. 53
- 1909..... Isaac Albéniz (1860–1909), *Iberia*
- 1910..... Claude Debussy, *Préludes*, Book One
- 1911..... Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), *Valses nobles et sentimentales*

- 1917 Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873–1943), *Étude-tableau*, Op. 39
- 1930..... Aaron Copland (1900–1990), *Piano Variations*
- 1942..... Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953), Piano Sonata No. 7 in
B-flat Major, Op. 83

Glossary

accent: The emphasis of certain notes over others.

accidental: A notational sign/symbol that modifies a pitch. *See also sharp, flat, and natural.*

adagio: Slow.

allegro: Fast.

andante: Moderately slow.

asymmetrical meter: Exhibits no particular repeated metric pattern.

atonal/atonality: Music lacking the sense of a central pitch, as opposed to tonal/tonality.

augmentation: The process of systematically extending the note values of a given melodic line.

bar: *See measure.*

bar lines: Notational device: two vertical lines that enclose a measure and are equivalent to one metric unit.

basso continuo: Those instruments in a baroque-era ensemble (typically a chord-producing instrument and a bass instrument) whose job it was to articulate with unerring clarity the bass line and play the harmonic progressions built atop the bass line.

beat: Smallest pulse to which we can comfortably move our bodies. *See also meter.*

cadence: A harmonic or melodic formula that occurs at the end of a phrase, section, or composition and conveys a momentary or permanent conclusion—in other words, a musical punctuation mark.

cadenza: Passage for solo instrument in an orchestral work, usually a concerto, designed to showcase the player's skills.

chord: Simultaneous sounding of three or more different pitches.

chromatic: A pitch that lies outside of whatever key area presently anchors a passage.

classical: Designation given to works of art of the 17th and 18th centuries, characterized by clear lines and balanced form.

closed cadence: Equivalent to a period or an exclamation mark; such a cadence ends on the tonic and gives a sense of rest and resolution.

coda: The closing few measures of a composition; usually not a part of the main theme groups of the standard form of a composition but a finishing theme added to the end to give the composition closure.

col legno: Striking the strings with the wood side of the bow.

compound meter: Any meter that features a triple subdivision within each beat.

concerto grosso: A multimovement work in which multiple soloists are accompanied by, and sometimes pitted against, the orchestra.

conjunct: Melodic contour that generally features steps between pitches; such a melody will usually sound smooth and controlled.

consonance: A musical entity or state that can be perceived as a point of rest.

deceptive/false cadence: Equivalent to a colon or semicolon; such a cadence brings resolution but not to the expected tonic harmony.

development: The second large part of a sonata form movement, during which the themes are developed in a generally unstable harmonic environment.

diminution: The process of systematically shortening the note values of a given melodic line.

disjunct: Melodic contour that generally features leaps between pitches; such a melody will usually sound jagged and jumpy.

dissonance: A musical entity or state of instability that seeks resolution to consonance.

dominant: Pitch and chord five pitches above a given tonic pitch/chord. The dominant harmony is the chord most closely related to the tonic chord in a given key; the dominant chord will almost always immediately precede an appearance of the tonic chord.

double exposition form: Sonata form adapted to the needs of a concerto.

double scherzo: A five-part form in which there are two middle B sections separated by three A sections: A–B–A–B–A.

dynamics: Degrees of loudness—e.g., piano (quiet), forte (loud)—indicated in a musical score.

elegy: A song expressing sorrow for one who has died.

enharmonic: Pitches that are identical in sound but with different spellings, depending on the key context, e.g., C-sharp and D-flat.

exposition: The first part of a sonata form, during which the principal themes are introduced.

expressionism: The contemporary art movement that celebrated inner emotional states as the highest truth.

fermata: Pause.

flat: Accidental (sign/symbol) placed to the left of a note indicating that the pitch should be lowered by a semitone.

frequency: Rate of vibration of a string, column of air, or other sound-producing body.

fugato: A fugal exposition inserted into a movement that is not otherwise a fugue.

fugue: Important baroque musical procedure in which a theme (or subject) is developed by means of various contrapuntal techniques.

functional harmony: Harmonic usage that was standardized and codified into a fully coherent system during the baroque period. This method is still used by modern arrangers and orchestrators. The basic concept used in functional harmony is the fact that all harmonic sounds used in music may be classified into three large groups. These groups derive their names from the three important roots of the traditional harmonic system: the tonic, the dominant, and the subdominant.

fundamental frequency: Rate of vibration of the full length of a sound-producing body and the sound created by that full-length vibration.

graded dynamics: Markings used to indicate a progressive increase in loudness or softness, respectively, crescendo (getting louder) or decrescendo/diminuendo (getting softer/quieter).

half step: *See semitone.*

harmony: The musical art (and science) of manipulating simultaneous pitches.

home key: Main key of a movement or composition. *See also key.*

homophonic texture/homophony: Texture in which one melodic line predominates; all other melodic material is heard as being secondary or accompanimental.

hymn: A religious song.

inclusive art: An art in which distinctions between popular, sacred, and concert music are immaterial when compared to its universal power to move and enlighten.

intermezzo: An instrumental interlude between the acts of a performance.

interval: Distance between two pitches, e.g., C–G (upward) equals a fifth.

inversion: Loosely applied to indicate a reversal in melodic direction. Harmonic inversion is a situation in which a chord tone other than the root is in the bass.

key: Collection of pitches that relate to a specific major or minor mode.

largo/lento: Very slow.

major: Modern term for Ionian mode; characterized by an intervallic profile of whole tone–whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone–whole tone–semitone (symbolized as: T–T–S | T–T–T–S).

measure: Metric unit; space between two bar lines.

melody: Any succession of pitches.

meter: Group of beats organized in a regular rhythmic pattern and notated in music as a time signature.

minor: Modern term for Aeolian mode; characterized by an intervallic profile of whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone (symbolized as T–S–T | T–S–T–T).

minuet: A dance of the 17th and 18th centuries, graceful and dignified, in moderately slow three-quarter time.

minuet and trio form: A three-part musical form consisting of a minuet (“A”), followed by a contrasting minuet (“B,” called the trio), followed by a return to the original minuet (“A,” called the da capo). Minuet and trio was the only baroque-era form to find its way into the instrumental music of the classical era.

modal ambiguity: Harmonic ambiguity, in which the main key is not clearly identified.

mode: A type of pitch collection (or scale).

modulation: The process of changing key during the course of a piece of music.

motive: Brief succession of pitches from which a melody grows through the processes of repetition, sequence, and transformation.

movement: Independent section within a larger work.

musical form: The manner in which a given movement of music is structured.

natural: Accidental (sign/symbol) placed to the left of a note, indicating that the note should not be sharpened or flattened; a white key on a keyboard.

note: A sound with three properties: a single, singable fundamental frequency; timbre; and duration.

open cadence: Equivalent to a comma; such a cadence pauses on the dominant harmony without resolving the tonic harmony, creating tension and the need to continue.

open form: A movement in which thematic ideas are introduced and immediately developed in a continuous sequence.

opus number: A number supplied by a publisher to indicate the order in which a composition (or set of compositions) is published.

orchestral unison: A technique by which multiple instruments simultaneously play the same pitch but in different registers (ranges).

ostinato: A brief melodic idea that is repeated over and over again.

overture: Music preceding an opera or play, often played as an independent concert piece.

pedal: A single pitch or harmony sustained or repeated for a period of time.

pitch: A sound with two properties: a single, singable fundamental frequency and timbre.

pizzicato: Plucking, rather than bowing, a stringed instrument.

polyphonic texture/polyphony: Texture consisting of two or more simultaneous melody lines of equal importance.

presto: Very fast.

recapitulation: The third large part of a sonata form movement, during which the themes return in their original order.

recitative: Operatic convention in which the lines are half sung, half spoken.

ritornello form: A refrain procedure in which a theme returns in part, called a fragmentary refrain, over the course of a movement. This form is among the most common of all baroque-era instrumental procedures.

rondo form: A classical-era form that sees a principal theme (the rondo theme) return like a refrain after various contrasting episodes.

scale: All the pitches inside a given octave, arranged stepwise so that there is no duplication. The names of the chords built on the scale steps are: tonic, supertonic, mediant, subdominant, dominant, submediant, and leading tone.

scherzo form: Meaning literally “I’m joking,” scherzo is the designation Beethoven gave to his modified use of minuet and trio form.

semitone: Smallest interval in Western music; on the keyboard, the distance between a black key and a white key, as well as B–C and E–F.

sequence: Successive repetitions of a motive at different pitches; compositional technique for extending melodic ideas.

sharp: Accidental (sign/symbol) placed to the left of a note, indicating that the pitch should be raised by a semitone.

solo concerto: A multimovement work in which a single soloist is accompanied by, and sometimes pitted against, the orchestra.

sonata: Piece of music, typically in three or four movements, composed for a piano (piano sonata) or a piano plus one instrument (violin sonata, for instance).

sonata form: A classical-era formal process posited on the introduction, development, recapitulation, and reconciliation of multiple contrasting themes.

string quartet: A performing ensemble consisting of two violins, a viola, and a ’cello. (2) A musical composition written for that ensemble.

subject: The theme of a fugue.

suite: A concert work consisting of a collection of dances extracted from a longer ballet.

symphonic poem: Orchestral work in which the form is determined by the story being told.

symphony: A multimovement work composed for an orchestra.

syncopation: Displacement of the expected accent from a strong beat to a weak beat and vice versa.

tempo: Relative speed of a passage of music.

texture: Number of melodies present and the relationship between those melodies in a given segment of music; they include monophony, polyphony (counterpoint), heterophony, and homophony.

theme: Primary musical subject matter in a given section of music.

theme and variations form: A classical-era formal process that exhibits a systematically varied theme in a series of variations.

timbre: Tone color.

tonal/tonality: Sense that one pitch is central to a section of music, as opposed to atonal/atonicity.

tone poem: Also called a symphonic poem. A one-movement orchestral genre that develops a poetic idea, suggests a scene, or creates a mood. The tone poem is generally associated with the romantic era.

tonic: Home pitch and chord of a piece of tonal music. Think of the term as being derived from “tonal center” (tonic). For example, if a movement is in C, the pitch C is the tonic pitch, and the harmony built on C is the tonic chord.

tonicization: The process of creating a temporary tonic by articulating a dominant-to-tonic progression of a key other than the one currently in use.

triad: A chord consisting of three different pitches built from some combination of major and/or minor thirds.

trio sonata: Baroque-era genre of chamber music consisting of two soprano instruments, a bass instrument, and a chord-producing instrument (called the continuo). The most common trio sonata instrumentation was two violins, a cello, and a harpsichord.

triple meter: Metrical pattern having three beats to a measure.

tune: Generally singable, memorable melody with a clear sense of beginning, middle, and end.

waltz: A dance of Austrian/Viennese origin in triple meter.

whole-tone collection: Divides the octave into six equal segments; a whole-tone scale ascends and descends by major seconds, or whole tones.

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Selective Annotated Bibliography

This bibliography recommends books in three categories: the history of the piano, the history of pianism and pianists, and recommended biographies of the principal composers discussed in this course. Finally, don't miss the video recommendation at the end of the bibliography.

The Piano

Good, Edwin M. *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos*. 2nd ed. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001. Good's is the standard text on the technological development of the piano from its invention in 1700 to the present day. But much more, it is a superb social history of the piano and its ongoing impact on music in the Western world. Lavishly illustrated.

The Pianists

Schonberg, Harold. *The Great Pianists*. Revised and updated. New York: Fireside, 1987. Schonberg, famed music critic for *The New York Times*, was a true student of the pianist. Given that many of the greatest pianists discussed in this book are among the greatest composers of piano music, this book is not just about the development of piano playing but about the ongoing evolution of piano *music* as well.

The Composers

Albéniz

Clark, Walter Aaron. *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

J. S. Bach

Wolff, Christoph. *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.

Beethoven

Solomon, Maynard. *Beethoven*. 2nd rev. ed. New York: Schirmer Books, 1998.

Brahms

Swafford, Jan. *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

Chopin

Zamoyski, Adam. *Chopin: Prince of the Romantics*. London: Harper Press, 2011.

Copland

Copland, Aaron, and Vivian Perlis. *Copland: 1900 through 1942*. New York: St. Martin Press, 1984.

Debussy

Vallas, Léon. *Claude Debussy: His Life and Work*. New York: Dover, 1973.

Liszt

Walker, Alan. *Franz Liszt, Volume I: The Virtuoso Years (1811–1847)*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.

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Solomon, Maynard. *Mozart: A Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

Mussorgsky

Taruskin, Richard. *Mussorgsky*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Prokofiev

Robinson, Harlow. *Sergei Prokofiev*. New York: Viking, 1987.

Rachmaninoff

Bertensson, Sergei, and Jay Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Ravel

Roland-Manuel, Alexis. *Maurice Ravel*. New York: Dover Publications, 1972.

Schubert

Newbould, Brian. *Schubert: The Music and the Man*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

Schumann

Daverio, John. *Robert Schumann: Herald of a New Poetic Age*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Scriabin

Bowers, Faubion. *Scriabin*. Two volumes. Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International, 1969.

Video Recommendation

Note by Note: The Making of Steinway L1037 (2007). A wonderful, movie-length DVD. Product description: *Note by Note* follows the creation of a Steinway concert grand, L1037, from forest floor to concert hall. Each piano's journey is complex, spanning 12 months, 12,000 parts, 450 craftsmen, and countless hours of fine-tuned labor. Filmed in key Steinway locations, *Note by Note* is a loving celebration not just of craftsmanship, but of a dying breed of person who is deeply connected to working by hand. In the end, this is an ode to the most unexpected of unsung heroes. It reminds us how extraordinary the dialogue can be between an artist and an instrument crafted out of human hands but born of the materials of nature.

Music Credits

The following solo piano compositions (either full pieces or excerpts) were performed by Magdalina Melkonyan.

J. S. Bach, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book One.

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, *Appassionata*.

Beethoven, *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120.

Schubert, Piano Sonata No. 21 in B-flat Major.

Chopin, *Préludes*, Op. 28.

Schumann, *Carnaval*, Op. 9, No. 11.

Schumann, *Kreisleriana*.

Liszt, *Années de pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)*.

Brahms, Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118.

Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Debussy, *Préludes*, Book One, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8.

Debussy, *Préludes*, Book One, No. 10, “The Sunken Cathedral.”

Mozart, Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545.

Beethoven, “*Für Elise*.”

Beethoven, Minuet in G, WoO 10, No. 2.

Rubinstein, Melody in F.

Chopin, Waltz in D-flat Major, Op. 64, No. 1.

Dvořák, *Humoresques*.

Mendelssohn, *Song without Words*, Op. 62, No. 6.

Debussy, “Clair de Lune.”

Schumann, “Traumerei,” from *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15.

The following solo piano compositions (either full pieces or excerpts) were performed by Woobin Park (www.woobinpark.com).

J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations*.

Mozart, Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457.

Chopin, Ballade in G Minor, Op. 23.

Liszt, Sonata in B Minor.

Ravel, *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, Nos. 1–8. Published by Universal Music Publishing Group.

Scriabin, Piano Sonata No. 5 in F-sharp Major, Op. 53.

Rachmaninoff, *Études-tableaux*, Op. 39. Published by Boosey and Hawkes.

Prokofiev, Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83. Published by G. Schirmer.

Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 2, S.244/2.

The following solo piano compositions (either full pieces or excerpts) were performed by Eun Joo Chung (www.eunjoochung.com).

Brahms, *Handel Variations*, Op. 24.

Copland, *Piano Variations*. Published by Boosey and Hawkes.

Beethoven, Sonata in C Minor, Op. 13.

Additional Music

Albéniz, *Iberia*. Performed by Nicholas Unwin. Recording courtesy of Chandos Records Ltd.

Beethoven, *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120, Variation No. 1. Performed by Beth Levin. Recording courtesy of Centaur Records, Inc.

Chopin, *Préludes*, Op. 28, Nos. 2, 16, and 19. Performed by Louis Lortie. Recording courtesy of Chandos Records Ltd.

Rachmaninoff, *Études-tableaux*, Op. 33, No. 7 in E-flat major. Performed by Xiayin Wang. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Recording courtesy of Chandos Records Ltd.

Wagner, *The Ride of the Valkyries*. Performed by the Apollo Symphony Orchestra. Courtesy of Music Loops.

“Copenhagen” from *New Orleans Jazz Volume 3*, courtesy of Ted Shafer, leader of Ted Shafer’s Jelly Roll Jazz Band.