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### ***Piano Sonata No. 7 in D Major, Op. 10 No. 3***

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) remains one of history's most famous composers, admired not only for the changes and innovations he brought to classical music, but also because of the wide variety of emotion and drama in his music. Additionally, having lived and worked during the overlap of what is generally thought to be the end of the Classical Era and the beginning of the Romantic, Beethoven is often considered a bridge between these two major styles of Western classical music.

Beethoven's musical output naturally changed and evolved a lot throughout his lifetime, perhaps even more obviously so than the average composer due to the overlap of styles. Therefore, we often categorize his works into his "early," "middle," and "late" periods, each with notable features, characteristics, and a distinct musical language. Beethoven's early works, generally considered to be written before around 1802, are very much written in the tradition of the Classical style, following in the footsteps of composers such as Mozart and Haydn. Despite this, these early works already contain some elements reminiscent of his later style. His seventh piano sonata in D Major (1798) serves as a good example of this.

The first movement, a lively and rather intense *Presto*, is full of contrasting characters that change rather quickly, creating a diverse and colourful landscape for both the performer and the audience. The second movement, *Largo e mesto*, is unusually tragic for such an early work, foreshadowing Beethoven's later periods. The third movement is, in contrast, a very pleasant minuet and trio in D Major, both untroubled and lively. Finally, the last movement is playful and humorous, with many unexpected twists, turns, abrupt starts and stops, and other surprises before fading away into the distance.

### ***Piano Sonata No. 1 (1952)***

Perhaps the best-known Argentinian composer in the classical piano repertoire, Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) grew up during a period of extreme civil unrest in his home country. He clashed several times with the government throughout his lifetime, being vocally critical of the country's military government and its inhibition of artistic expression. He was also fired from his own conservatory after refusing to allow it to be renamed after then-President Juan Perón's wife Eva and had many of his works censored during Perón's time in office. Later, his opera *Bomarzo* (1967) was banned due to its references to sex, nudity, and violence. In an act of rebellion, pointing out that many operas explicitly referenced these same themes, Ginastera himself prohibited any of his own pieces from being performed in Argentina until the ban on *Bomarzo* was lifted in 1972.

Due to the political situation in Argentina, many of Ginastera's works were better known and more often performed in the United States and he completed many major American commissions throughout his career. Ginastera eventually emigrated to Geneva, Switzerland, where he lived until his death in 1983.

Although Ginastera's music is not explicitly political, he incorporates many ideas and values of his Argentinian identity into a musical form that is distinctly European. Argentinians had long since been divided over the clash between their native identity and a fascination with the European Enlightenment in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, leading to a desire to somehow both preserve their native values and culture and embrace Western ideas of modernity and innovation. Ginastera's music serves as a good example of this compromise of two different cultures that was taking place all sectors of Argentinian life.

Ginastera stated that he intended his first piano sonata (1952) to be folk-like without directly quoting any folk tunes. The first movement seems to take inspiration from the *Misa Criolla*, a Spanish mass accompanied by South American sounds and rhythms, with its opening in four parts, suggestive of a chorale texture. This melody is contrasted immediately by a driving, rhythmic response in the bass. The second movement, while not a twelve-tone composition, presents a repeating twelve-tone row with both hands in unison. The movement alternates between a hazy, mysterious twelve-tone texture and a driving, song-like ("*cantando*") interlude. A clear reference to the guitar, one of Argentina's most popular and representative instruments, is presented multiple times in this movement with the "guitar chord," where the six notes corresponding to the six strings of the guitar are played in rapid succession in a way that suggests a guitar being strummed. The third movement is perhaps the most obviously inspired by the sound of the guitar, with the slow, improvisatory opening theme that sounds like strings slowly being plucked. This movement is also clearly twelve-tone inspired, with fragments of the row being presented and developed throughout, but we are not given the full row until the very end, creating an odd sense of finality. The final movement is a fast and driving toccata, likely inspired by the *malambo*, a traditional Argentinian dance. The movement, written in 6/8, alternates between duple and triple meter within the bar, which creates the *malambo*'s characteristic rhythmic drive.

### ***Gaspard de la Nuit***

Arguably one of Ravel's most famous works, *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908) is a three-movement suite inspired by Aloysius Bertrand's collection of poems of the same name (1836). Each movement is a musical representation of one of Bertrand's poems and is prefaced by the corresponding poem.

Bertrand's poems are, within the context of his book's narrative, part of a manuscript collection of poetry written by a strange old man who discusses the meaning of Art. The collection is titled *Gaspard de la Nuit, Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* (*Gaspard of the Night, Fantasies in the Manner of Rembrandt and Callot*), referencing the opposing philosophies on art of Paul Rembrandt and Jacques Callot. When the narrator of Bertrand's story searches for the old man, *Monsieur* Gaspard de la Nuit, to return the manuscript to him, he is told that he is likely in Hell since he is the devil himself.

Ravel chose three of Bertrand/Gaspard's poems: *Ondine*, *Le Gibet*, and *Scarbo*, the full English translations of which can be found below. The programmatic nature of the suite and the musical representations of specific lines of the poems make this piece a particularly interesting listening experience.

*Ondine* is about a siren who unsuccessfully attempts to lure a man underwater to join her, "to be the spouse of an Ondine and escort her to her palace, to become the lord of the lakes." The man, however, is in love with someone else and tells her so, and she "shed some tears, gave a burst of laughter and vanished in a showery gush." The siren's song, introduced in the third measure, can be heard clearly throughout the piece as a simple, continuous melody. Accompanying the simplicity of the song are surging figurations that invoke sounds of water and waves. The piece ends abruptly, dissolving into nothingness, just as Bertrand's poem describes.

*Le Gibet* ("The Gallows") is a slow, meditative movement reflecting the image of a hanged corpse in the desert as bells toll in the distance. The repeated ostinato b-flat represents the bells, constant and unaffected by the ongoings around it. The stillness and remoteness of the scene is further supplemented by Ravel's instructions: "*Sans presser ni ralentir jusqu'à la fin*" ("Without pressing forward or slowing down until the end"). Despite the moments of lyricism in the piece, it remains almost shockingly cold and distant; sentimentality is reserved for the living, of which there are none in this desolate landscape.

The final movement, *Scarbo*, is infamously technically difficult. Ravel intended to write a piece more challenging than Balíkirev's *Islamey*, at the time considered the most difficult piece in the piano repertoire, following also in the footsteps of virtuoso Romantic composers such as Paganini and Liszt. Ravel himself remarked, "I wanted to make a caricature of romanticism. Perhaps it got the better of me." The poem describes a mischievous goblin who sneaks around at night, disappearing and reappearing abruptly and terrifying the narrator in his bed. Ravel creates this terrifying quality in the piece by keeping much of it under-the-surface, abruptly cutting off phrases, and incorporating various elements of mania and instability intended to surprise, scare, and unsettle the audience. At the end of Bertrand's poem, the narrator describes, "... his face blanched like melting wax – and suddenly his light went out." The music ends similarly, with a quick arpeggiated figure that disappears abruptly into silence.

On the following page are Bertrand's poems, translated from French by Matthias Müller.

### **Ondine**

- "Hark! – Hark! – It is I,  
Ondine brushing with watery  
pearls across the quivering  
diamonds of your window  
beshone by the moon's  
mournful rays: and here, the  
châteleine, in her shimmering  
gown gazing from her  
balcony at the balmy starlit  
night and the lovely  
slumbering lake.

Every wave is a sprite  
swimming in the current,  
every current is a path  
winding toward my palace,  
and my palace stands, fluidly  
built, in the depths of the lake  
in the triangle of air, earth  
and fire.

Hark! – Hark! – My father is  
thrashing the croaking water  
with a green branch of alder  
and my sisters caress with  
their frothy arms the dewy  
islands of grasses, waterlilies,  
and gladioli, or mock the frail  
and bearded willow angling  
in the water."

Having murmured her song,  
she implored me to receive  
her ring on my finger, to be  
the spouse of an Ondine and  
escort her to her palace, to  
become the lord of the lakes.

And when I replied that I  
loved a mortal, sulky and  
vexed, she shed some tears,  
gave a burst of laughter and  
vanished in a showery gush  
that rippled white across my  
blue window panes.

### **Le Gibet**

Ah! Could it be the night's  
wind's chilly scream I hear,  
or the hanged man heaving a  
sigh on the gallows' forks?

Could it be the call of some  
cricket hidden in the moss  
and the barren ivy with which  
the forest out of pity cloaks  
its feet?

Could it be some fly on the  
hunt sounding its horn around  
these ears now deaf to the  
blowing of the mort?

Could it be some scarab  
plucking on its fitful flight a  
bloodied hair from his bald  
skull?

Or could it be some spider  
weaving half a length of  
muslin as a cravat for this  
strangled neck?

It is the bell knelling on a  
town's walls below the  
horizon, and the carcass of a  
hanged man reddened by the  
sinking sun.

### **Scarbo**

Oh, how often have I heard  
and seen him, Scarbo, when  
at midnight the moon shines  
in the sky like a silver coin  
on an azure banner  
besprinkled with golden  
bees!

How often have I heard his  
laughter droning in the  
shadows of my alcove, and  
his claw scraping on the  
silken curtains of my bed!

How often have I seen him  
descend from the ceiling,  
twirl on one foot and tumble  
across the room like a spindle  
fallen off a witch's distaff!

Did I then believe he'd  
vanished? The gnome would  
swell between the moon and  
me like the spire of a Gothic  
cathedral, a gilded bell  
tinkling on his pointed hat!

But soon his body would turn  
blue, translucent like a  
candle's wax, his face paled  
like a fading stump – and  
suddenly he melted away.