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CAPRICCIO IN D MAJOR

Vytautas Smetona

This brief work was composed in January of 1982. Harmonically and structurally, it is unabashedly from the common practice era. More specifically, it receives much of its inspiration from the *Three-Part Inventions* of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Perhaps unlike the *Three-Part Inventions* of Bach, however, a ternary structure emerges with suggestions of an incipient sonata allegro form. Also, the piano texture is more reminiscent of Brahms than of Bach. Hemiola and polyrhythms are utilized which give the work its rhythmic impetus; contrapuntal devices abound. A joyous work, in the middle section one “hears” the sun become obscured as the mood briefly turns more serious. The work concludes on a positive and triumphant note.

WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER, BOOK I

Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp Major

Johann Sebastian Bach

This particular prelude and fugue is among the most lyrical and joyous of Bach’s canon. The brilliant prelude is linked to the accompanying fugue in an

unmistakable manner by the descending C-sharp major triad in second inversion (G-sharp, C-sharp, and E-sharp). Bach wrote the initials “S.D.G.,” *Soli Deo Gloria*, that is “Glory to God alone,” at the end of his church compositions as well as some of his secular works. Interestingly, one finds “S.D.G.” written at the end of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Sometimes Bach linked his preludes and fugues in a clear manner whereas at other times it was done in an obscure and subtle fashion. Chopin idolized Bach and Mozart and the influence of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* on Chopin is noteworthy. Indeed, motivic relationships are so numerous and striking that one may characterize Chopin’s *24 Preludes, Opus 28* as a veritable “homage to Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*.” Perhaps this is not surprising when one considers that Chopin composed his preludes primarily on the Island of Mallorca in Spain from 1838 to 1839 at an abandoned monastery, bringing, other than personal belongings, the *Well-Tempered Clavier* of Bach. Note, for example, the famous so-called “Raindrop” Prelude, that is, the *Prelude in D-flat Major, Opus 28, NO 15*. The

main theme is taken from the first three notes of Bach's *C-sharp Major Prelude, Well-Tempered Clavier*, which is also the main part of the fugue's subject.

INTERMEZZO IN B-FLAT MINOR, OPUS 117, NO. 2

Johannes Brahms

Brahms composed the three intermezzi in 1892 during his "autumnal" period. These beautiful and eloquent works were described by the composer as "lullabies to my sorrows."

The second, in B-flat minor, is a monument to Brahms' inspiration, inventiveness, and mastery of form. His fecund development of a simple two-note motive is a *compositional tour de force* that recalls the powerful economy achieved by Beethoven in the first movement of his titanic *Fifth Symphony*.

Emphasizing the work's intimate character, the indications "dolce" and "espressivo" appear frequently. Brahms's treatment of the second subject is an example of his penchant for rhythmical translation or construction of polyrhythms. The second subject, in D-flat major, combines two

successive, descending repetitions of the main motif. Brahms, through the use of slurs in the treble and syncopation in the bass, creates the impression that the melody begins on the strong beat when it actually starts on the weak beat. This device adds a certain agitation to the lyrical and relaxed second subject.

FANTASIE IN C MAJOR, OPUS 17

Robert Schumann

In this monumental work, Schumann reaches a level of eloquence and technical mastery that he would never exceed. Completed in 1836, the *Fantasia* was written with Beethoven in mind, not only as extra musical or programmatic inspiration – the work's three movements are meant to reflect Beethoven's life – but in the practical order: Schumann had hoped to use at least some of the proceeds from the publication of the work to help fund construction of a monument to Beethoven in Bonn. The monument to Beethoven was, primarily through the efforts of Franz Liszt, to whom Schumann dedicated his *Fantasia*, eventually completed in 1845 and unveiled with great fanfare. The ceremony's attendees included Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

Quotations of works by Beethoven appear in the first and last movements. In the first, a brief fragment from the last song in Beethoven's *Song Cycle, Opus 98*: "An die ferne Geliebte," appears in two places, not one as commonly believed. The first two occurrences are in the middle section of the first movement, "Im Legendenton," measures 156 to 157 and again in measures 158 to 159. The next four occurrences are in the coda beginning at measure 295.

The theme of the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7* is quoted twice by Schumann in the third movement of the *Fantasie*. It appears for the first time beginning in measure 30 and is stated in octaves in the bass. It appears for the second time beginning in measure 87 and is again stated in octaves in the bass.

Schumann's *Fantasie* is in three movements. In his conception, it was a "grand sonata."

I. *Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen*
(To be played fantastically and passionately throughout)

This movement, written in a rather free sonata allegro form, is truly a work in

the "grand manner." It is characterized by intense lyricism, sweeping climaxes, and passionate outcries. It also exhibits Schumann's technical mastery and subtle motivic development, both within individual movements and throughout the entire work.

For example, the first two notes of the descending five-note main theme of the first movement serve to tie the three movements together. In the third movement, they appear prominently in the fourth measure and again in measures 135 and 137. They also appear in the beginning of the second movement (second and third notes of the main theme of the second movement, transposed up a minor third) as well as in the middle section beginning at measure 141. The first two notes of the descending five-note theme also appear and are developed in the section marked *Im lebhaften Tempo* beginning at measure 105.

The sweeping *accompanimenta* figure that begins the work is much more than it appears. It not only outlines the descending-five note main theme, it also foreshadows, via the second note of each

of the two groups of four sixteenth notes, the “A” and “D” or ascending fourth, the theme that appears in what may be considered the movement’s “development” section, Im Legendenton, beginning at measure 129, which is also foreshadowed by the ascending syncopated ascending fourths beginning at measure 33.

The ascending fourth and descending five-note sequence are combined to produce the movements “second subject,” one of the “Clara themes” (Schumann’s wife, the former Clara Wieck). This also appears in a somewhat transformed manner beginning in measure 61 and in a not-so-transformed manner in the movements “development” section at measure 181.

After a “recapitulation,” the work concludes with a brief and pacific coda that commences with the fragment from Beethoven’s song cycle. The movement ends quietly, but not ethereally.

II. Massig – Durchaus energisch (Moderately – energetic throughout)

The second movement is triumphant in character and is the most polyphonic

and rhythmically complex of the three. The pervasive dotted eight-sixteenth rhythmic pattern in the outer sections recalls the second movement of Beethoven’s *Sonata in A Major*, Opus 101, and gives it the feel of a march in fast tempo.

The movement is cast in ternary form, A, B, A’, followed by a tremendous coda. In the middle or “B” section, which begins at measure 114, Schumann exhibits his use of rhythmical dislocation, where melodic elements appear on weak beats and create the impression that the bar line has been shifted. Nevertheless, Schumann occasionally brings us back to “terra firma” with melodic elements that appear on strong beats. An interesting juxtaposition can be found in the section marked *Scherzando* beginning at measure 141, and the coda, *Viel bewegter*, beginning at 232. The melodic notes in the section beginning at measure 141 all fall on the weak beat whereas the same melodic element appears in the coda but in this case the notes of the melody fall on the strong beat. The coda ends with heroic skips and crashing chords.

III. Langsam getragen – Durchweg leise zu halten

(Slow and sustained – quietly throughout)

The final movement is introspective, lyrical, and quietly thoughtful but punctuated nevertheless by a number of declamatory episodes where the dynamic level reaches *fortissimo*. Perhaps it recalls late Beethoven – the third movements of Opus 101 and Opus 109, for example.

The third movement is composed in a rather individual or free form consisting of: (1) an introduction; (2) the main section; (3) a repetition of the main section in a different key with some modifications; and (4) a coda which recalls the introduction. The movement ends quietly, but, like the first movement, not ethereally. While the last two measures of the third movement are nearly identical to the last two measures of the first movement, the last two chords are identical.

FUNÉRAILLES (OCTOBER 1849)

Franz Liszt

(from Harmonies poétiques et religieuses)

Funeraillles is from a cycle of ten piano pieces composed by Franz Liszt in the late 1840s. Although the subtitle “October

1849” can refer to the month and year of Chopin’s death, there is evidence to suggest that Liszt had in mind victims of the October 1848 Hungarian uprising against Hapsburg rule. The emotional states of *Funeraillles* are almost Wagnerian in scope (*Götterdämmerung* comes to mind) and range from somber resignation to ecstasy.

The works consists of four sections. The first is a lugubrious, syncopated introduction with thundering chords that recall the passing of a funeral procession. The second section consists of two contrasting themes that are tied to one another as well as to the introduction by the interval of a falling minor second. The third section is “heroic” with tremendous octave passages that recall the middle section of Chopin’s *Polonaise in A-flat Major, Opus 53*, with one important difference being that the octaves in the A-flat *Polonaise* are written in four where as the octaves of *Funeraillles* are in three. The final section brings together material from the three previous sections. After a brief, volcanic fulmination, the work comes to a quiet close with three stark, repeated chords.

MAZURKA IN F MINOR, OPUS 7, NO. 3

Frederic Chopin

This mazurka is the third of Chopin's five mazurkas Opus 7 which were composed from 1830 to 1831. All of Chopin's mazurkas are written in 3/4 time and frequently have heavy accents on the second or third beats – a characteristic of the mazurka folk dance – but frequently contain elements of waltz rhythm.

Some of Chopin's most inspired outpourings are found in his mazurkas. The *Mazurka Opus 7, No. 3* is written in ternary form with an "A" section that begins with a brief, mysterious introduction marked *sotto voce* (literally "under voice" or "soft voice") that segues into a section marked *con anima* (literally "with spirit"). The third beat is heavily accented in every other measure. The "B" section consists of three parts: a first marked *stretto* (literally "tight" or "close") followed by *dolce* ("sweetly"); a second characterized by a dotted eighth-sixteenth-quarter-quarter rhythmic pattern frequently found in his mazurkas (the beginning of the *Mazurka Opus 7, No. 1* immediately comes to mind); and a third, lyrical section. The "A" section returns and comes to a quiet close

MAZURKA IN C-SHARP MINOR, OPUS 30, NO. 4

Frederic Chopin

This mazurka is the fourth of four mazurkas Opus 30 composed between 1836 and 1837. It is of larger scope than the *Mazurka Opus 7, No. 3*. It is also written in ternary form that is treated more freely than the ternary form of the *Mazurka Opus 7, No. 3*. The "A" section consists of a brief, polyphonic introduction followed by a somewhat sober theme in C-sharp minor with ornamental and rhythmic components, where the rhythmic component features the familiar dotted eighth-sixteenth-quarter-quarter pattern. The second part of the "A" section has a bass that is written entirely in the dotted eighth-sixteenth-quarter-quarter rhythmic pattern and a melody in the treble consisting of a falling third melodic pattern followed by the dotted eighth-sixteenth-quarter-quarter rhythm. The "B" section, which has a waltz rhythm, is lively and rises to an energetic climax. It is repeated once. The "A" section returns but the second part is replaced by a coda and the mazurka comes to a close characterized by silent resignation.

NOCTURNE IN D-FLAT MAJOR, OPUS 27, NO. 2

Frederic Chopin

Chopin composed his two nocturnes Opus 27 in 1836. The second, perhaps somewhat Italian in character and written in D-flat major, is in 6/8 time. It is constructed around two themes. The first, in D-flat major, is tranquil and ornamented. It is immediately followed by a second theme, in B-flat minor, which is more intense and stated in double thirds and sixths.

An episode related to the first theme follows the exposition of the second theme and is followed by a second, more heavily ornamented occurrence of the first theme. A second, more extensive episode related to the second theme appears and rises to a high level of intensity. After this there is a final appearance of the first subject, even more heavily ornamented, that features extensive *fiortitura* passage work. The second subject appears for the final time and segues into a coda with chromatically descending falling diminished fifths that create the impression of musical tear drops, followed by a brief duet in the treble and ethereal, *dolcissimo* rising double sixths that dissolve the nocturne into silence.

BALLADE NO. 1 IN G MINOR, OPUS 23

Frederic Chopin

This epic creation was composed by Chopin in 1831 and reveals his technical mastery, depth of inspiration, and ability to produce musical structures that generate intense emotional force. Although the form of the *Ballade* bears a certain similarity to sonata allegro with the order of re-entry of the first and second themes reversed, it is really Chopin's own handiwork. It consists of successive, transformed alternations between the first theme group and a second theme group followed by a tumultuous coda.

The *Ballade* begins with a seven bar introduction which is related to the first theme group and, what is not immediately obvious, the second theme group, and by extension, the coda. Note, in particular the following relationships:

- The first two measures and the first theme, measures 8 and 9
- Measure 3 and measure 36 of the first theme group
- The A-flat, G, and F-sharp in measure three and the material, of mournful character, that appears in the coda beginning at measure 216

- Measures 6 and 7 and measures 68 and 69
- Measures 3 and 4 and measures 72 and 73
- The second half of measure 4 and the second half of measure 82

The first theme group consists of two parts, both in G minor: measures 8 to 35 and measures 36 to 64. It is followed by the second theme group in E-flat major. The first part of the first theme group returns beginning at measure 94 in A minor followed by a transformed, heroic appearance of the second theme group in A major. This is followed by a transformed version of the second part of the first theme group beginning at measure 126. The second theme group returns in the original key of E-flat major over a wide-spanning, arpeggiated figuration in the bass. The final appearance of the first theme begins at measure 194 and builds to an intense climax followed by a driving, inexorable coda marked *presto con fuoco* ("rapidly with fire"). The coda is derived from: (1) the second part of the first theme group (note in particular the relationship between the end of measure 39 and measures 210

to 211 and 214 and 215); (2) measure 3; and (3) the second part of the first theme from the first theme group. The *Ballade* comes to a cascading, thunderous conclusion with a tremendous scale in descending chromatic double octaves. As a final observation, one should note Chopin's use of polyrhythms and metrical translation in the coda. In the treble, accented notes fall on the weak beats of each measure (beats 2 and 4) whereas there are rests on the strong beats (beats 1 and 3). In the bass, the single notes outlining the harmonies which are to be emphasized fall on the weak beats and the static, repeated chords fall on the strong beat. It is as if Chopin translated the downbeat in the treble "one beat to the right" and left the bass unchanged, thus effectively producing four strong beats rather than two.



Vytautas Smetona

Vytautas Smetona was born in Cleveland OH. His parents, Birute and Julius, and paternal grandparents narrowly escaped the 1940 Soviet invasion and subsequent occupation of Lithuania. Vytautas' grandfather, Antanas Smetona, was the last President of independent Lithuania. The family arrived and settled in the United States in 1941 via a route through Germany, Portugal, and Brazil. Smetona's father, Julius, was an attorney, and his mother was a musician.

Smetona's principal teachers were his mother, Birute, and brother, Anthony. He studied theory and composition with the noted composer Starling Cumberworth. Birute was a concert pianist whose teachers included Robert Casadesus, Yves Nat, and Leonard Shure. She appeared as soloist with the noted German conductor Franz von Hoesslin. Smetona's older brother, Anthony, was also a pianist and a graduate of the Mannes College of Music and the Juilliard School. His teachers included Rosina Lhévinne, Nadia Reisenberg, and Leonard Shure. He was a laureate at a number of international piano competitions and made his European orchestral debut with the Hamburg Symphony in the Brahms *B-flat Piano Concerto*.

Smetona made a successful New York debut at Town Hall in 1976. This was followed by three additional New York recitals, all favorably reviewed by the *New York Times*. He made his London debut at Wigmore Hall in 1980. This was followed by a live recital over radio station WQXR in New York City.

Among the orchestras with which Smetona has appeared as piano soloist are the Baltimore Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, and the St. Louis Symphony. His recording debut, *Vytautas Smetona Plays Chopin Liszt, and Rachmaninoff*, was released in 1979 and favorably reviewed in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. *Audio Magazine's* Edward Tatnall Canby wrote as follows about the album: "Fantastic technique, and better than that, a big concept of his music".

His musical career was interrupted in March of 1983 after a final performance given at Xavier University in Cincinnati OH. He returned to school, earned master's degrees in mathematics and operations research, and became a Fellow in the Society of Actuaries. He established a consulting firm but never lost touch with music, an oasis of beauty, as he continued to reflect and study. After a prolonged absence, he has once again become active in musical life.

This recording, **ALL THE WAY BACK**, is his first release since 1979 and features an original composition, *Capriccio in D Major*, together with music of Bach, Brahms, Chopin, Liszt, and Schumann

Smetona has an avid interest in composing as well as performing. He has written a number of original works including his *Canonic Variations and Fugue* for strings. Most recently, he completed *A Country Song* (a work whose title belies the fact that it is a serious composition with contrapuntal elements written in the style of the common practice period) which appears in "Back", a music video featuring Smetona. He is currently finishing his *Fantasy* for piano.

In addition to his musical and professional accomplishments, Smetona is a fitness and sports enthusiast. As a college tennis player, he participated in the NCAA Division III singles championship. After graduation, he was the top ranked men's singles player in Northeastern Ohio and was ranked top ten in men's singles in the Midwest. He once extended a former NCAA Division I singles champion to three sets in a best of three set qualifying match for an Association of Tennis Professionals grand prix tournament.

