

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SELECTED ICONIC CHAMBER MUSIC WORKS WITH
 PIANO FROM THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH
 CENTURIES

Li-Tan Hsu, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2012

Dissertation directed by: Professor Rita Sloan
 School of Music

Chamber music repertoire featuring the piano blossomed from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century. The quantity of works increased greatly during this time and the quality of these works reached the highest level. Among the many symbolic works that were composed were sonatas for a single string instrument with piano, piano trios, quartets, and quintets as well as two-piano works and four-hand duets. Being able to study and perform many of these iconic works before I graduated was one of the major goals I set for myself as a collaborative pianist. The abundance of repertoire has made it easy to choose works considered “iconic” for my dissertation’s three recitals. Iconic is defined as “very famous or popular, especially being considered to represent particular opinions or a particular time” in the online Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus © Cambridge University. The compositions featured in the recitals were composed from 1842 through 1941, including works by Schumann, Brahms, Fauré, Rachmaninoff, Ravel, and Lutosławski.

Choosing the repertoire with my fellow performers in mind was an important part of this dissertation. In addition to trying to make balanced programs which include variety, working with different instruments and performers is one of the most fulfilling parts of the musical experience for me as a collaborative pianist. Joining me for the concerts were members of the Aeolus String Quartet (violinist Nicholas Tavani, violinist Rachel Shapiro, violist Greg Luce, and cellist Alan Richardson), pianist Hsiao-Ying Lin (a doctoral student from the Peabody Conservatory), and my colleagues from the Peabody Institute Preparatory Division (faculty violinist Dr. Christian Tremblay and cellist Alicia Ward), and Derek Smith, Associate Principal violist of the Annapolis Symphony Orchestras). The three recitals were performed in the Gildenhorn and Ulrich Recital Halls at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. They are recorded on CD and available on compact discs, which can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

**Selected Iconic Chamber Works with Piano
from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

By
Li-Tan Hsu

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2012

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RECITAL PROGRAM – First Dissertation Recital

March 4th, 2012. 5:30pm
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center,
University of Maryland, College Park

Li-Tan Hsu, Piano
Alicia Ward, Cello
Hsiao-Ying Lin, Piano
Dr. Christian Tremblay, Violin

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano, Op. 19 (1901)

- *Lento-Allegro moderato*
- *Allegro scherzando*
- *Andante*
- *Allegro mosso*

intermission

Witold Lutosławski (1913 – 1994)

Variations on a Theme of Paganini for Two Pianos (1941)

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano (1914)

- *Modéré*
- *Pantoum: Assez vif*
- *Passacaille*
- *Final: Animé*

RECITAL PROGRAM – Second Dissertation Recital

May 6th, 2012. 8:00pm
Homer Ulrich Recital Hall, Tawes Building,
University of Maryland, College Park

Li-Tan Hsu, Piano
Dr. Christian Tremblay, Violin
Derek Smith, Viola
Alicia Ward, Cello
Aeolus Quartet

Gabriel Fauré (1845 – 1924)

Piano Quartet No.1 in C Minor, Op. 15 (1883)

- *Allegro molto moderato*
- *Scherzo (Allegro vivo)*
- *Adagio*
- *Allegro molto*

intermission

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44 (1842)

- *Allegro brillante*
- *In modo d'una Marcia (Un poco largamente)*
- *Scherzo (Molto vivace)*
- *Allegro ma non troppo*

RECITAL PROGRAM – Third Dissertation Recital

October 7th, 2012. 5:00pm

Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center,
University of Maryland, College Park

Li-Tan Hsu, Piano
Hsiao-Ying Lin, Piano
Aeolus Quartet

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

La Valse for Two Pianos (1919)

intermission

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello, and Piano in F Minor, Op. 34 (1864)

- *Allegro non troppo*
- *Andante, un poco Adagio*
- *Scherzo: Allegro*
- *Finale: Poco sostenuto – Allegro non troppo – Presto, non troppo*

RECORDING TRACK LISTING
First Dissertation Recital – CD 1

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano, Op. 19 (1901)

[CD 1, Track 1] Lento-Allegro moderato

[CD 1, Track 2] Allegro scherzando

[CD 1, Track 3] Andante

[CD 1, Track 4] Allegro mosso

Witold Lutosławski (1913 – 1994)

[CD 1, Track 5] Variations on a Theme of Paganini for Two Pianos (1941)

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano (1914)

[CD 1, Track 6] Modéré

[CD 1, Track 7] Pantoum: Assez vif

[CD 1, Track 8] Passacaille

[CD 1, Track 9] Final: Animé

RECORDING TRACK LISTING
Second Dissertation Recital – CD 2

Gabriel Fauré (1845 – 1924)

Piano Quartet No.1 in C Minor, Op. 15 (1883)

[CD 2, Track 1] Allegro molto moderato

[CD 2, Track 2] Scherzo (Allegro vivo)

[CD 2, Track 3] Adagio

[CD 2, Track 4] Allegro molto

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44 (1842)

[CD 2, Track 5] Allegro brillante

[CD 2, Track 6] In modo d'una Marcia (Un poco largamente)

[CD 2, Track 7] Scherzo (Molto vivace)

[CD 2, Track 8] Allegro ma non troppo

RECORDING TRACK LISTING
Third Dissertation Recital – CD 3

[CD 3, Track 1] Lecture

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

[CD 3, Track 2] *La Valse* for Two Pianos (1919)

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello, and Piano in F Minor, Op. 34 (1864)

[CD 3, Track 3] Allegro non troppo

[CD 3, Track 4] Andante, un poco Adagio

[CD 3, Track 5] Scherzo: Allegro

[CD 3, Track 6] Finale: Poco sostenuto – Allegro non troppo – Presto, non troppo

PROGRAM NOTES

The great Russian composer and pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote only a few chamber works. Among them, the Sonata Op.19 for Cello and Piano is considered one of his most successful compositions. Written in 1901, after the completion of his famous Second Piano Concerto and the Suite No. 2 for Two Pianos, the work is dedicated to the composer's good friend, the cellist Anatoliy Brandukov, who later served as the best man at Rachmaninoff's wedding. Some scholars have suggested that Rachmaninoff was inspired by Chopin's only sonata for cello and piano, Op.65, while others have found a proclivity towards Schumanesque melodic lines. It has also been stated that the virtuosic piano part buries the cello and causes issues with balance between the instruments. Although the writing between the two instruments has often been considered uneven by a number of critics, the sonata remains firmly in the standard repertoire and continues to be one of the greatest and most popular works in the genre. According to Barrie Martyn, in his book *RACHMANINOFF – Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, the original title for the work was "Sonata for Piano and Cello" rather than for "Cello and Piano", as we see it today.¹

This sonata has four movements. They are based on a traditional model: a slow introduction before the main body of the allegro first movement, a scherzo-trio, a slow movement, and a finale. Throughout the sonata, the cello almost always retains a luxurious vocal line. The two instruments have a conversation in the first sixteen bars, and the melancholy main melody persists throughout the rest of the first movement. The

1 Martyn, Barrie: *RACHMANINOFF – Composer, Pianist, Conductor*. London, England: 1990, 136.

second movement is the scherzo movement in which the outer sections are restless and driven while the middle trio section is in lyrical contrast. The third movement, one of the most touching slow movements in the sonata repertoire, alternates between major and minor modes that mirror conflicting emotions. Lastly, the triumphant fourth movement can be heard as a portrayal of buoyant Russian pride.

Another unique work, Witold Lutosławski's Variations on a Theme of Paganini for Two Pianos (1941), is the only set of "Paganini" variations written for two pianos. The work is based on Paganini's 24th Caprice for solo violin with almost the same order and effect as the original but remade completely through the virtuoso treatment of the two pianos, both individually and together. Therefore, this piece might be considered the most authentic interpretation of the well-known tune, which has been set by composers such as Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Blacher, Ginastera, Rochberg, and others. The work has become one of Lutosławski's most-performed and best-known works. Written during World War II, the variations premiered in a nightclub, the only place Germans allowed classical music to be performed in Poland during wartime. Just like Paganini's Caprice for the violin, Lutosławski's two-piano version requires a high degree of technical proficiency from the performers.

Also written during a World War, this time the First, the Trio for Piano, Violin, and Cello by French composer Maurice Ravel was written in 1914, just within a week after the start of World War I. Like Rachmaninoff, Ravel was not comfortable composing chamber works, and, also like Rachmaninoff, his chamber music output remained relatively small. This trio features all sorts of paranormal techniques for the piano and especially the strings. Some examples are natural and artificial harmonics and right- and

left-hand pizzicato in the strings, use of extreme ranges in all the instruments, use of string octaves and piano glissandi, etc., all of which contribute immensely to the coloristic effects throughout the trio.

The work has four movements – *Modéré*, *Pantoum: Assez vif*, *Passacaille: Très large*, and *Final: Animé*. The first movement is in 8/8 meter, which is constructed as follows: 3+2+3/8, a typical Basque dance rhythm. The first theme is initially stated by the piano followed by the strings in the Greek church-mode Dorian, adding an exotic flavor to the movement. The second theme has a rather bleak atmosphere that is based on an “A” pedal. This movement, however, ends in C major. The second movement, “*Pantoum*”, uses a Malayan rhyme scheme. Although the phrase structure does not follow the designated outline exactly, Ravel still captures vividly the repeating element derived from the form. French poets around Ravel’s time, with whom Ravel would have been familiar, used the “Pantoum” template extensively. Ravel being a composer of many *mélodies*² would have been very familiar with the French poetry of the time. The third movement, the *Passacaille*, a once-popular form from the Baroque period originating in Spain, uses the ostinato melody throughout the movement. The theme is either in the bass line or the main melody. The finale is in the meter of 5/4. Ravel employs parallel chords in the movement and the melodic line derives mainly from pentatonic scales with minimum passing notes. In short, Ravel’s piano trio is a hybrid of exotic influence. The first movement in Basque rhythm and the use of the passacaglia for the third movement are obviously Spanish-influenced, while the Oriental effect is prominent in the Malayan *Pantoum* of the second movement and the pentatonic scale use in the last movement. There are also rhythmic threads that connect the four movements: the first and last

2 Johnson, Graham, and Stokes, Richard: *A French Song Companion*. Oxford, London: 2000, xix.

movements are in non-symmetrical meters, whilst the second and third movements are in triple-meters. Nevertheless, both meter types create the swaying feel found in dance. The Trio is highly demanding for the instrumentalists individually and for the group as an entity, and is without a doubt one of the most extraordinary and important chamber works of all time.

Another French composer, Gabriel Fauré, was much more prolific when it came to composing chamber music. One of his most important chamber works is his first piano quartet. It is not hard to see why the work stands where it does in the history of piano chamber music. Starting with the important Classical-era piano quartets and quintets, there are two Mozart piano quartets, Mozart and Beethoven wind and piano quintets and a Beethoven piano quartet, a rendering of his quintet with three strings rather than four winds. From the Romantic era, there are three Brahms piano quartets, three Mendelssohn piano quartets, a Schumann piano quartet and two Dvorak piano quartets. France did not have the same long tradition in the larger forms of piano chamber music as did the Germanic countries so that Fauré's two piano quartets are almost in a class by themselves, with the first one being much more popular and much more frequently performed than the second. Besides the historical significance of this piano quartet, the work itself is unique. Fauré's lyricism is present from the beginning to the end of the piece. He is a prominent French *mélodie* composer and it is easy to see how important his lyrical melodies are in this work. The first movement opens the march-like offbeat piano accompaniment with seemingly endless melodic lines played by strings in unison. Fauré also favors Greek modes or church modes. He used Greek Aeolian mode in the main theme of the first movement that brings out a folk element. The second movement is a

typical scherzo-trio structure. The main theme of the scherzo features string-pizzicato chords with the piano tune bouncing in and out of the rhythmic ostinato, while the piano and strings switch roles the second time when the strings play the melodic material in the trio section. The *Adagio*, the third movement of the work, again displays Fauré's vocal genius. The strings are often in unison. The tragic nature of the movement climaxes at the end of the movement where the strings play sustained chords and the piano sings the fragile melodic line that requires the most beautiful legato we pianists can ever play. The last movement exhibits yet another contrast between the strings and piano. The strings again in unison bring out the main theme in a dotted rhythm, whereas the piano has smooth triplet figures. Both devices can create energy but can also contradict each other. Assembling conflicting materials that turn into a popular chamber work, Fauré's first piano quartet is a masterpiece of the late French Romantic period.

Schumann was one of late nineteenth-century German-composers who produced substantial chamber music repertoire. He not only composed many important chamber works with piano but also put together the piano and a full string quartet to create what we consider today as the first real "piano quintet." Schumann also elevated the role of the piano in the piano quintet in being an equal partner with the string quartet. His piano quintet was composed in 1842, famously nicknamed "The Chamber Music Year."³ Ironically, the abundance of chamber music coincided with the first crisis in his marriage as he struggled to identify himself in the relationship personally and professionally. As a result, he turned to composing chamber music. His three string quartets, the piano

3 Daverio, John: *Robert Schumann – Herald of a "New Poetic Age"*. New York: 1997, 242.

quintet, the piano quartet, and *Fantasiestücke* for piano, violin, and cello, were all composed then.

This quintet has four movements following a traditional layout: an Allegro sonata-form first movement, a slow second movement, a Scherzo-Trio third movement, and a fast Rondo finale. The first movement starts with the whole ensemble in a very marked rhythm in half notes that creates the type of exuberant energy only Schumann would write. He then varied the motive thereby producing a lyrical transformation, reminding us how great and natural a *lied* composer he was. The second theme is a fluent melody in the dominant key, the lightness of which can easily remind one of a spring breeze. Yet again, the development changes its character and now in its stormy passages. Schumann created quick shifts of mood that may be seen as the possible foreshadowing of his unstable mental state in later years. Schumann gave the second movement the indication of “a march.” The nature of the key and character of this movement definitely suggests a funeral march. The whole movement alternates between the funeral march and an extremely dreamy contrasting theme. The third movement is a scherzo-trio with a theme that comes from the piano’s ascending scale that demands greatly of a pianist. The interplay between the strings and the piano show Schumann’s understanding of textural use to contrast the instruments. The trio enters with a tune that seems folk-like. The last movement has a sturdy, buoyant, masculine theme that makes it easy to identify the composer. In this movement, Schumann’s creativity is at the forefront. He takes the theme and modulated into several different keys, some foreign, some near, thereby producing different colors and characterizations. He uses the theme of this movement to create the first fugal section. Using fugue technique again, he then brings back the theme

from the first movement to conclude the whole work. The technique that brings previous themes back in the other movements of a work is called “cyclic.” Later composers were to enjoy use of this technique a great deal. One of the most famous examples is Franck’s violin sonata, another iconic chamber music work.

Reminiscent of the dance-like moments in his trio, Ravel’s *La Valse* retains its significance in the chamber music repertoire for two pianos. The work’s most demanding feature involves creating the color of the different instruments that Ravel had in mind which are clearly heard in his orchestrated version of the work. The piece illustrates Ravel’s understanding of orchestration and shows how the piano can imitate the sound qualities and create the effects of strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion.

At the end of 1919, Maurice Ravel composed *La Valse*, the *Waltz*, using sketches he had made as early as 1906. The first sketch was a symphonic poem titled *Wien*, the German name for Vienna, in tribute to Johann Strauss, the “Waltz King,” who had died only seven years earlier. Ravel’s career as a composer was interrupted when he joined the French military in World War I. By the time he returned to *La Valse* after the war, Vienna and every phase of European life had been drastically and forever changed. His original idea for the piece could not avoid being altered as well. It was not until then that he resumed working on the piece originally inspired by Strauss. Ravel now called it simply *La Valse*, and spoke of it as “a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz.”⁴ The Ballet impresario Serge Diaghilev asked [Ravel](#) to write a piece for the *Ballet Russes* for a program to be shared with [Stravinsky](#)’s *Pulcinella*. However, the two-piano version of *La Valse* never met with Diaghilev’s approval. Therefore this work heightened the dispute between the composer and the producer, whose relations had not been good since their

4 Orenstein, Arbie: *Ravel – Man and Musician*. New York: 1975, 188.

disagreements over *Daphnis et Chloé*. Ravel finally completed the score in the spring of 1920; at the same time he prepared versions for piano solo, and for two pianos. It was the two-piano version that was first performed in public by Ravel himself and Alfredo Casella, a fellow composer and pianist, in Vienna on October 2, 1920; the orchestral premiere was given in Paris on December 20 of the same year by the Lamoureux Orchestra under Camille Chevillard. The work is dedicated to his friend, painter Misia Sert, who tried to mend the fences between the composer and the ballet maestro. This reconciliation was destined not to happen.

Ravel's waltz is both sentimental and sinister, as seen in the ambiguous rhythmic pulse which passes through several different waltz sequences, each culminating in an increasingly powerful crescendo and ending in climaxes. Along the way come disturbing accelerations and ritardandos, which make it particularly unsuitable for ballroom dancing. It also contains dynamic extremes, attempting to create an atmosphere of violence, decadence, and disintegration.

Although Diaghilev never changed his mind about *La Valse* as a ballet, it has since been produced as a ballet on a number of occasions. The Royal Flemish Ballet in Antwerp gave the first choreographic performance on October 2, 1926. Ida Rubinstein, for whom Ravel subsequently composed his *Boléro*, danced *La Valse* in Paris on several occasions, each with different choreography and décor. Ravel apparently approved most of the danced versions presented in his lifetime, but objected to one staged in 1929 because the choreographer and designer disregarded the specific time and place indicated in his preface to the score:

Viennese waltz rhythm. Drifting clouds allow a restricted vision of waltzing couples. The clouds gradually disperse and we see an immense room filled with a

whirling crowd. As the rhythm becomes clear the scene takes on more illumination, until the light of the chandeliers bursts forth. An imperial court, about 1855 . . .

Under the evocative exterior of this music is a menacing undercurrent. By midpoint in the work the waltzing couples seem to be, as one writer put it, “dancing on a volcano.”⁵ In the context of its post-war creation, it seems not at all farfetched to find the closing pages of this score not only “the motif of death” cited by Arbie Orenstein in his discussion of this and Ravel's other post-war compositions, but the reflection of a shattered dream as the world symbolized by the imperial court crumbles into dust.

La Valse is in A-B-A form, one of Ravel's favorite designs for his compositions. In this piece, Ravel employed many innovative piano techniques. He used the extreme range of the piano, for instance, using the lowest notes on the instrument a few times. He also used special effects like glissandi, tremolos, and tone clusters. The use of various compositional devices present in this piece, helping to recreate the color one can easily hear in the orchestral version. The interaction between the two pianos is closely interwoven.

A close friend of Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms was also one of the composers who was most interested in composing chamber music, especially chamber music with piano. Besides his string quartets, quintets, and sextets, he also wrote five pianos trios, three piano quartets, a piano quintet, and many duos (sonatas). He composed chamber music throughout his life, from his first piano trio Op.8 (1854), to his last chamber works, two viola sonatas Op.120 (1894). His chamber works, regardless of whether they contain three or four movements, all have very clear structural architecture. Some of the compositional devices which Brahms favored can be found in the piano

⁵ Stuckenschmidt, H.H.: *Maurice Ravel*, trans. Samuel R. Rosenbaum. Philadelphia: 1966, 188.

quintet: the use of colorful harmonic relationships, i.e., using a mediant key in the second movement, the use of a Hungarian tune in the last movement, and the use of free and imitative counterpoint and fugal sections.

Brahms began work on the Quintet during 1862, the same year he decided to move to Vienna from his hometown of Hamburg where he was frustrated by the slow development of his professional life. Originally the quintet was composed for string quintet with two cellos, the same scoring as Schubert's incomparable C major Quintet. By February of 1863, the String Quintet had been revised as a Sonata for Two Pianos, which Brahms performed with Karl Tausig at a concert in Vienna on April 17th, 1864 and it has survived in this form as Op. 34b, published in 1865. The premiere was not successful. One final time, during the summer of 1864, Brahms rewrote the work and composed it for piano, two violins, viola, and cello, an ensemble suggested to him by the conductor Hermann Levi.

The Quintet's opening movement, stormy and tragic in mood, is in sonata form. The main theme is stated immediately in unison by violin, cello and piano, and then repeated by the entire ensemble. Brahms provides a great output of thematic ideas in the exposition. An analysis by Ivor Keys shows that everything is spun out from the first eight measures and this shows Brahms' talent for thematic variation and developments.⁶ The second theme, started from a repeated triplet figuration, is more subdued and lyrical in nature than the previous melody. Brahms is particularly keen on rhythmic complexity, especially his use of two beats against three for a driving pulse with a great deal of cross-rhythms. The closing theme achieves a brighter tonality to offer a brief respite from the movement's generally strong emotions. Brahms exploits the rich variety of piano

⁶ Keys, Ivor: *Brahms Chamber Music*. Seattle: 1974, 9.

technique as well as the full resources of the string quartet for a complex texture in the development section, and brings in the recapitulation on a great wave of sound. Musical lines pass from one instrument to another with an almost delicate fluency, at times combining multiple themes. The movement remains mainly dark throughout.

The second movement, *Andante*, could not be more different. It is gentle, simple, and hopeful. It is a quiet interlude with a romantic character. The rhythmic conflict and the contrapuntal complexity of the opening movement are absent. Instead, there is the distinct elegance of the piano with the reserved accompaniment of the strings. The central section highlights the music with a kind of enchanting light that seems to fall from heaven. The cello then draws the light and transforms it into energy, bringing the A section back. A simple three-part song form, also called ternary form, cultivates a soft dance. The second movement can be seen as a reflection of Schubertian style. The outer sections of the A-B-A design are in sweet and diatonic harmonies, while the movement's central portion uses an octave-gap melodic motive.

The *Scherzo* changes everything again. It is one of Brahms' most electrifying statements. Gloomy, tense, nearly obsessive, it rolls until it falls into the vigorous march with a syncopated undercurrent that wells up into a *fugato*. It contains three motivic elements: a rising theme of vague rhythmic identity; a march-like procession in full chordal harmony; and a “snapping” motive in strict, dotted rhythm. These three components are conjoined throughout the movement, with the dotted-rhythm theme being given special prominence in a fugal section. The lyrical trio section grows from a theme that is a transformation of the scherzo's chordal march. It particularly serves to bring out

the “muscular majesty” that recalls Schumann but with a gigantic power that only Brahms mastered.

The Finale opens with a soberly slow introduction using chromatic harmonies. The body of the movement, in fast tempo, is in sonata-rondo form. Despite the buoyant, Gypsy flavor of the thematic material, this theme is an incredible dramatic device. The rondo form juxtaposes a series of sequences that alternate with the theme. In the final rushing coda, Brahms combines his materials using ingenious transformations, which drive the entire movement into a monumental conclusion. The tragic character of Brahms’ piano quintet persists until the last chord.

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