ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE USE OF FOLKLORIC ELEMENTS IN PIANO MUSIC BY GRIEG, MACDOWELL, RAVEL, BARTÓK AND PROKOFIEV

Natnaree Suwanpotipra, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Professor Larissa Dedova, School of Music

The idea of expressing one's national identity was popular among composers from the mid-19th century. In turn, folk music that originated from one's native country became a musical source of influence for many composers. With the vast number of regions, cultures, and traditions in Europe and the United States, composers were able to create and experiment with many new ways to incorporate elements of folk music into their work, many of which contributed to the piano repertoire. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore folkloric are used in piano music of composers from five regions, and how those composers came upon these influences. Grieg does not only use Norwegian folk music directly in his works, but also composed music that reflects the Norwegian nature and scenery. MacDowell's interest in literature and folklore led him to tales told in the southern region of the United States, one of which is included in this dissertation repertoire. Ravel and Prokofiev's works also draw upon tales, sometimes even for children, written by famous literary figures of their country or

influenced by their cultures. Lastly, Bartók's collection of folk music from remote regions in Hungary that he researched and transcribed himself became a basis for many of his works.

The repertoire of this dissertation is presented in a two-CD album recorded in the Dekelboum Concert Hall at the University of Maryland, College Park. The recordings will be made available in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

THE USE OF FOLKLORIC ELEMENTS IN PIANO MUSIC BY GRIEG, MACDOWELL, RAVEL, BARTÓK AND PROKOFIEV

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Preface

This dissertation represents the culmination of my doctoral studies at the University of Maryland. It consists of two parts: recordings of selected works by five composer and this written document. The program was recorded by Ricky Furr at the Dekelboum Concert Hall of the Clarice Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park, in two sessions on May 16th, 2021, and March 4th, 2022. Three pairs of microphones were used. The main array was a pair of small diaphragm condensers in an ORTF configuration, positioned about ten feet from the piano. A pair of ribbon microphones in Blumlein configuration was positioned by the tail of the piano to give a closer sound that could be blended with the main pair. The last pair of large diaphragm condensers in an ORTF configuration was positioned further back in the hall for room and reverb sound. A Steinway concert grand piano model D was used for all recordings.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents for introducing me to music and the piano, which became one of the most valuable aspects of my life, and for their unconditional love and support throughout my journey. I would also like to thank my teacher, Professor Larissa Dedova, for her guidance, for making me into a better musician and person, and for believing in me. To my husband, Matt, I thank you for everything you have done to be there for me and for being a part of my musical inspiration.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge my previous piano teachers, Daniel Pollack, Gustavo Romero, Dr. Eri Nakagawa, Robert Boer, and Narissara Pitaksereechai, for leading me through the different stages of my musical training. I would also like to express my gratitude to the committee members of my dissertation for their time and involvement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Folk art cannot have a fertile influence on a composer unless he knows the peasant music of his native country as thoroughly as he does his mother tongue. In this way folk music will flow through the veins of the composer and the idiom of peasant music will have become his own musical language, which he will use spontaneously, involuntarily, and naturally, just as poet uses his mother tongue."

-Béla Bartók[1]

Folk music represents various types of music of different genres, origins, histories, and societies. The term "folk" refers to "traditional beliefs, legends, etc. of a culture." In Europe and America, folk music is often used to describe music that is passed down through oral tradition.[2]

This dissertation, in combination with the recordings, briefly presents and explores the use of folk elements in solo piano music of the selected composers: Edvard Grieg, Edward MacDowell, Maurice Ravel, Béla Bartók, and Sergei Prokofiev. To cover a broader understanding of how folkloristic elements are used in solo piano music, the works were chosen to show the different ways composers incorporates them; whether these elements are representative for the composer's native land or from another culture entirely. Some examples are direct quotations of folk melodies in Bartók's *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* the influence of folk tales in works by MacDowell's *Fireside Tales*, and both in Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*. Composers of the Romantic period became fascinated with the idea of nationalism and how they could incorporate music that is unique to their country or a

[1] Barbara Nissman, *Bartók and the Piano: A Performer's View* (Lanhan, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 83.
[2] Don Randel, ed., *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 323.

different country in their works. In order to recognize how folk music is used in a work, musical elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and form will be discussed. Influences on each composer's life and how they came about discovering folk music of their region will also be presented.

Chapter 2: Program Notes

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Edvard Grieg was born in Bergen, a city on the southwest coast of Norway, on June 15th, 1843. He was the fourth of five children to Alexander and Gesine Judith Grieg, who both grew up with music and knew how to play the piano.[3] His mother, previously Gesine Judith Hagerup, was quite an accomplished pianist herself. She had formal musical training and was known as a pianist and poet in Bergen. One could say that he had his mother to thank for his literary and musical ability.

Grieg started his first piano lessons at the age of six with his mother and showed extraordinary musical talent right away. But it wasn't until he met Ole Bull, a famous Norwegian violinist also from Bergen, that his life took a significant turn. Bull was referred to as a Norwegian "folk hero" because of his efforts to start the Norwegian National Theater, a venue to perform and promote Danish plays, as well as his success touring across Europe and even America.[4] With a young boy's excitement to meet the famous virtuoso, Grieg had the chance to play for Bull and in turn, was recommended to pursue his studies at Leipzig Conservatory.[5] He went on to study at Leipzig within months of this interaction and his teachers there included Louis Plaidy, E. F. Wenzel, E. F. Richter, Robert Papperitz, Moritz Hauptmann, Ignaz Moscheles and Carl Reinecke, who wrote that Grieg had a talent for composition.[6] Grieg's interest in Norwegian folk music may not have awakened yet

[3] John Horton, *Grieg* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1974), 2.
[4] Ibid, 6.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 12.

but it could be traced back to his early years in Bergen and meeting Bull, who will later be of huge influence.

After his studies at Leipzig, Grieg went on a path to find his purpose. He returned to Bergen for a short period but since Copenhagen, at the time, was still the center of Norwegian intellect, culture, and art, Grieg soon spent the next few years in Denmark. It was during this time in Denmark, where he met Nina Hagerup, his cousin, whom he marries in 1867.[7] Also from Bergen herself, Nina was said to have a beautiful voice that inspired Grieg to write more songs.[8]

Grieg spent time with Bull again in the summer of 1864, which is believed to be one of Grieg's first exposures to Norwegian folk music as Bull had been transcribing traditional fiddle-dance tunes.[9] However, when Grieg returned to Copenhagen that year, he met the new and rising Norwegian national musical figure and composer, Rikard Nordraak, who composed the music to "Yes, we love this country," Norway's national anthem set to words by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Nordraak's cousin and a distinguished Norwegian writer. Nordraak's music disregarded Germanic and traditional composition techniques by bringing in as many elements of folk music as he could. These elements include simplicity, drone basses, intricate ornamentations, pedal notes, sharp dissonances, dotted rhythms, uses of open intervals of fourths and fifths, irregular accents, and more, all of which became more and more obvious in Grieg's music as he matured.[10] In 1865, leading musical figures

[7] John Horton and Nils Grinde, "Grieg, Edvard (Hagerup)," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed March 6, 2022, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.
[8] Horton, *Grieg*, 16.
[9] Ibid, 18.
[10] Ibid.

including C. F. E. Horneman, Lous Hornbeck, Gottfred Matthison-Hansen, Nordraak and Grieg formed *Euterpe*, a new music society dedicated to popularizing Scandinavian music.[11] Grieg and Nordraak's acquaintances grew as they both decided to devote their purpose to promoting and expressing the "spirit of Norway." He finished his first set of Lyric Pieces, Op.12 in 1867.[12]

Grieg spent some time in Christiana, now known as Oslo, and in 1868, received a letter from Franz Liszt, whom he has not met yet, praising one of his early works, the Violin Sonata Op.8.[13] Liszt's approval, in a way, opened many doors for Grieg. He returned home to Bergen and came upon a collection of Norwegian folk music compiled by an organist named Ludvig Mathias Lindeman. Lindeman's *Ældre og nyere Fjeldmelodier* or "Mountain melodies old and new" were transcriptions of vocal and instrumental music transcribed onto a piano score.[14] Grieg then realized "fully the variety and wealth of the traditional music of his native land"[15] and learned from Lindeman how to apply them to his own music. Grieg found a different path as a composer. Big instrumentation or classical forms did not appeal to him anymore. He continued to write in smaller settings: lyric songs, shorter piano works, and folk music arrangements for voices, piano, and orchestra. It is interesting to note that Grieg returns to Lindeman often for more materials throughout his life. He eventually became the "forefront of Norwegian cultural"[16] and musical life because of his associations with Henrik Ibsen, a playwriter, and Bjørnson.

[11] Ibid, 20.
[12] Horton and Grinde, "Grieg, Edvard (Hagerup)."
[13] Horton, *Grieg*, 32-33.
[14] Horton, *Grieg*, 33-34.
[15] Ibid, 34.
[16] Ibid, 36.

As his career takes off, he spent the next two decades touring all over Europe, as both conductor and performer, and composing actively and continuously until his death in 1907. In turn, Grieg became a symbol of Norwegian music to the rest of the world. Grieg writes in a letter to Henry Theophilus Finck,

> "Norwegian folk life, Norwegian sagas, Norwegian history, and above all Norwegian nature have had a profound influence on my creative work ever since my youth. It was only later, however, that I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the Norwegian folk song. When I wrote the piano pieces in op. 3 and especially in op.6, in which a national element often appears, I knew, so to speak, virtually nothing about our folk songs. This is an important fact in view of certain German assertions to the effect that I am nothing more than a copy-machine of Norwegian folk music."[17]

The Lyric Pieces (selected)

A collection of sixty-six small pieces for solo piano, the *Lyric Pieces* are unique and are still considered as one of Grieg's most successful works that beautifully portrays his nationalistic styles and expression of Norwegian folk music. The *Lyric Pieces* are also divided into ten opus numbers ranging from op.12, being the first set, to op.71, being the last. Each set contains six to eight pieces, some shorter and some longer in length. Each piece is also titled with descriptive words to help evoke the mood or scenes thus, one must treat each piece with extreme sensitivity and creativeness.

Composed in 1864[18], the first set, even though the shortest of the collection, received much success during its time. Opening the set is *Arietta*, a beautiful three-voice work with a simple, yet memorable short melody. These short two bar phrases

[17] Finn Benestad, ed., William Halverson, trans., *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends* (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), 226.
[18] Horton and Grinde, "Grieg, Edvard (Hagerup)."

are typical of Norwegian folk music melodies as repetition is often used to help make tunes memorable. Pedal points are also another element of folk music that appears here, weaved into the bass line. *Arietta* reappears in a different form at the very end of the whole collection.

The third set of the collection, op.43, was published in 1887. The opening piece, *Butterfly,* is one of Grieg's most known piano pieces. Represented in its title, this piece is filled with sixteenth note passagework and quick gestures that mimic the movement of a butterfly. Similarly, the fourth piece titled *"Little Bird"*, also uses quick, trill-like gestures of smaller intervals no more than a fourth, to mimic bird calls and their behavior. One could analyze deeper into both pieces and find compositional techniques that refer to folk music, such as the use of short phrases and dotted rhythm, but these pieces could be looked at as more of "character" pieces that allude to the appreciation of nature within Norwegian life.

Another famous piece from the whole collection is *To Spring,* which finalizes this wonderful set. *To Spring* evokes a mood of joy and excitement, in a subtle manner, for the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Even though Grieg marked the beginning tempo with *Allegro appassionato,* he begins the piece with *pianissimo,* suggesting some sort of longing. Set in F-sharp major, the beginning repetitive chords in the right-hand act like water droplets, melting from the ice-cold winter. The music eventually intensifies, but not without limits, before welcoming a beautiful and warm climax and fades away at the end. *To Spring* is another example of Grieg's way of manifesting the Norwegian life.

The *Lyric Pieces*, op. 54, set continues to show more development and maturity in Grieg's use of nationalistic styles. These pieces show more of the late-Romantic techniques of polyphony, harmony, and texture. A thrilling piece that contributed to Grieg's fame is the third piece, *March of the Trolls*. *Trolls* in Norse mythology are often described as unfriendly, unintelligent, dangerous, and odd-looking. In general, *trolls* play a large role in folk and fairy tales in Norway and these stories are usually passed down orally. Not only is *March of the Trolls* programmatic, but it also uses various folk elements within its writing. For example, open fifths in the bass are heard almost throughout the whole piece. Open fifths are typical accompaniment styles in folk music. At the beginning, the open fifths are played separately, but alternating continuously, still producing an open fifth sound.

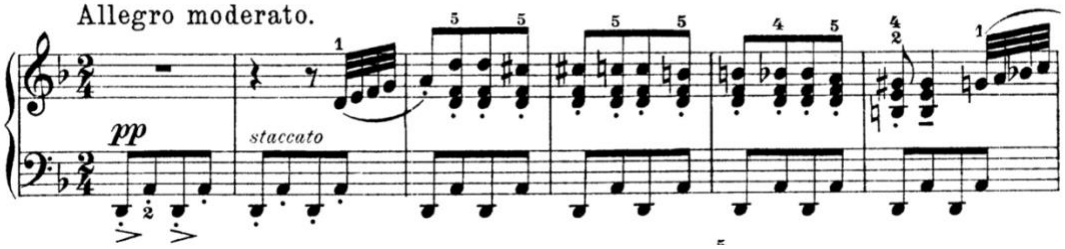

Figure 1. Grieg, *March of the Trolls*, op.52, no.3, measures 1-6

In the middle section, the open fifths in the left hand continues but is also used for harmonic support.

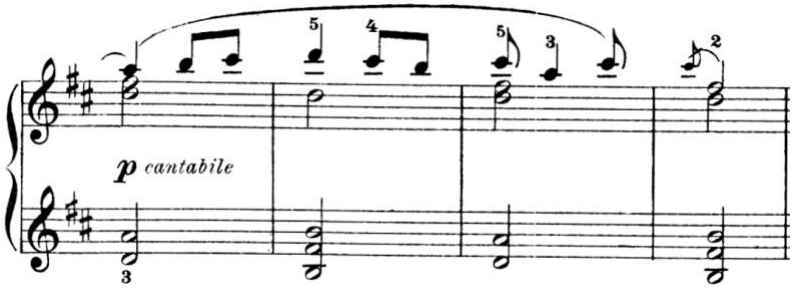

Figure 2. Grieg, *March of the Trolls*, op.52, no.3, measures 71-74

There's also a sudden key change from D minor to D major key, with a hint of G major, in the middle section. Structurally simple, in ABA form, *March of the Trolls* never fails to be an effective showpiece.

In direct contrast to the previous virtuosic piece, *Notturno* sets an opposite mood and is somewhat more "romantic." It is implied to use *rubato* throughout the piece to eliminate accents on downbeats because Grieg ties the accompaniment part over the main beats. Norwegian folk elements are not too obvious within *Notturno* but can still be found. Repeated use of open fourth and fifth intervals permeate the piece. The opening melody in the right hand falls a fourth down from A to E. It is then repeated with an added G-sharp in the next phrases. This "falling" gesture appears again in measures 17 and 20, in the interval of a fifth, emitting quite a "Norwegian" bass. The impressionist passagework in measures 15 and 18 are a fourth apart and alludes to bird calls.

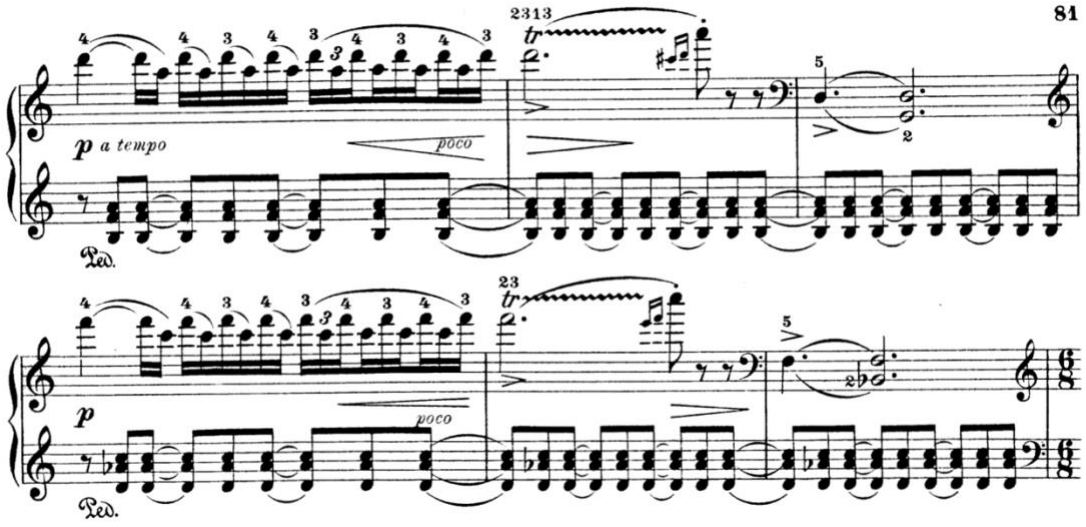

Figure 3. Grieg, *Notturno*, op.57, no.4, measures 15-20

Homesickness, the last piece of the op.57 set, is one that is quite underplayed. The title speaks for itself already as Grieg was writing this when he was abroad, possibly longing for his home. The piece is in ABA form and drawing from typical Norwegian folk song, the A section is melancholic. The melody does not contain any big leaps and the phrases are short and repeated. However, the B section provides a bright contrast. It is reminiscent of a specific Norwegian dance called *springar*. *Springar* is a Norwegian couple's dance in triple time accompanied by a fiddle.[19] The melody in the B section is based on the Lydian mode, which is used by many folk dances.[20]

The most famous piece in the entire collection, and the longest in length, is the *Wedding Day at Troldhaugen*. Troldhaugen is Grieg and Nina's summer home right outside of Bergen, where Grieg spent numerous summers. Originally titled "The Well-wishers are Coming,"[21] Grieg performed this piece at their wedding anniversary at Troldhaugen on June 11, 1892. It was a big celebration with over a hundred guests. *Wedding Day at Troldhaugen* can been seen in a programmatic way. The tempo marking "Tempo di Marcia…" suggests some sort of march that is about to begin. Open fifths, which reappear many times and in different sections throughout the piece, including the end, is typical of Norwegian folk music, as we've seen in previous pieces in this collection. And rhythm is sometimes manipulated into a dotted rhythm as well. The music quickly intensifies in the middle section, possibly

[19] Nils Grinde, "Springar," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed March 7, 2022, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.
[20] David Monrad-Johansen, *Edvard Grieg*, trans. Madge Robertson (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1945), 317
[21] Einar Steen-Nøkleberg, *Onstage with Grieg*, trans. William H. Halverson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 318.

anticipating the guests joining the march and arriving at their celebration. A drone-like, E-flat pedal note is extended throughout the entire section before the transition into the brilliant climax where the melody from the beginning is exemplified. In the middle section, the piece quickly turns around and changes in time signature, mood, color, tempo, and more. This calm yet beautiful and lyrical section gives a rubato feel without the need to execute it. Open fifths in the bass return at the beginning of this section and at the end. A recapitulation of the first section returns and the music fades away, portraying people leaving the venue. Open fifths also reappear at the very end, before a big concluding chord to finish the piece. An always well-received work, the *Wedding at Troldhaugen* is not only one of the more technically demanding pieces in the collection, but it is written in such a way that really speaks to Grieg's musical influences.

The final set of the collection was published in 1901 with the opus number 71. It consists of seven pieces, all of which are very different from each other. The melody of the first piece, *Once Upon a Time*, is based on a Swedish folk song, *Ack Värmland du sköna*, or "Dear Old Stockholm."

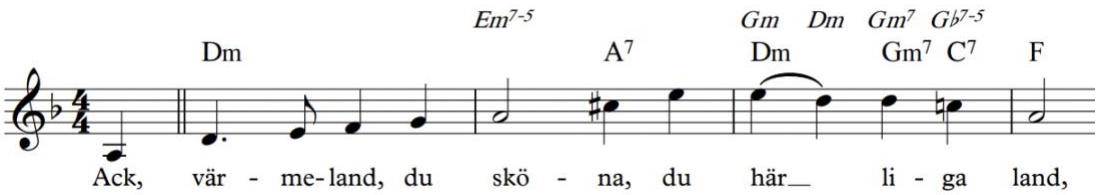

Figure 4. Opening melody of a Swedish folk song, *Ack Värmland du sköna*,

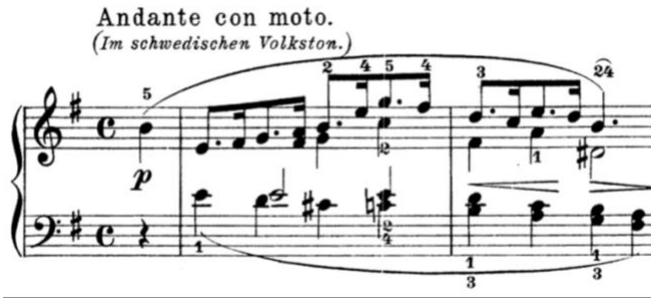

Figure 5. Grieg, *Once Upon a* Time, op.71, no.1, measures 1-2

In the middle section, Grieg writes *"Im norwegischen Springtanzton,"* which translate to "In Norwegian spring dance." The second section is now in triple time, with a faster tempo, and in its parallel major key of E, it suggests the Norwegian *springar* folk dance music. Here, open fifths are used all over along with repetitive and short phrase structures. The music of the opening section then returns in its entirety without the repeats.

The second and third piece are the two shortest in length of the set. Even though both are contrasting in every way possible, they both extensively use open fifths in the bass and are representative of their programmatic titles.

Halling is "a Norwegian folk dance in a moderately fast duple meter, usually danced by one dancer at a time and accompanied on the *Hardinfele*," a type of folk fiddle.[22] *Halling*, also known as Norwegian Dance, op.71, no.5, is one of a many that Grieg has written. Others being the op.17, no. 7 and 20, *Lyric Pieces* op.38, no.4, *Lyric Pieces* op.47, no.4, and op.72, no.4. This piece begins with a very typical *Halling* dotted rhythm in the left hand, which continues almost entirely throughout. To create a sense of swinging and off-beat rhythms of the dance, Grieg constantly

[22] Don Randel, ed., *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 374

changes where he places accents on beats 1 and 2 in the melody. Along with the short rhythmic melody and accents, the music is easily memorable. Repeated pedal notes throughout each harmonic changes provide a sense of drone-bass element to the piece, even at the technically challenged section after the glissando. They abruptly get faster before returning to *Tempo I* in the last two measures with a grand gesture.

Grieg could not have been more masterful than ending the entire collection of *Lyric Pieces* with a piece that ties back to the very first piece that started it all. The last piece, titled *Remembrances*, reminisces the *Arietta* from op.12. The melody is now transformed into a waltz, with more harmonic complexity, including two sharp key changes: E-flat major, D major, B-flat major, and back to E-flat major. This lyrical yet elegant work creates a special moment when heard at the end of the collection as it concludes one of Grieg's momentous works over a period of 34 years.

Edward MacDowell (1861-1908)

Of English and Scottish descent, Edward MacDowell was born in New York in 1861. Although born in the United States, he spent quite some time in Europe (Paris and Frankfurt) from 1876 to 1888, studying, teaching, composing, and performing. All of MacDowell's works were composed only between a 12-year period from 1880 and 1901.[23] A successful pianist himself, over half of MacDowell's oeuvre is composed for piano. It is interesting to note that the first and last published works were also for the piano. He referred to himself as a "tone-poet" and did not

[23] H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 139.

find interest in writing in traditional forms, with exception to some works such as the four piano sonatas and two piano concertos.[24] In turn, he explored music that evoked economical narratives with programmatic titles, without clear form or structure, all of which are most present in his shorter works and collections for the piano.

After the Civil War and the heavy influence of German traditions, music in America began to explore various influences such as folkloristic elements, Russian and French modes, and other exotic styles.[25] MacDowell became one of the American composers who delved into influences of national and regional cultures and traditions. His inspirations are often taken from typical Romantic imaginations of legends, landscapes, seascapes, and fairy tales. Later in this life, he gravitated towards American landscapes and cultures, in reaction with American composers writing their own "impressions" of their native land.[26] MacDowell's late sets of piano pieces, where each and individual piece has its own descriptive titles, include *Woodland Sketches* op.51, *Sea Pieces* op.55, *Fireside Tales* op.61, *and New England Idyls* op.62 and are most well-known.

Fireside Tales Op.61

An admirer of literature, MacDowell enjoyed folk, fairy, and children's tales. The *Fireside Tales*, op.61, consist of six pieces and were published in 1902. It was the second to last published work during his lifetime, almost concluding the culmination of his late character pieces.

[24] Ibid, 138.
[25] Ibid, 142.
[26] Dolores Pesce and Margery Morgan Lowens "MacDowell [McDowell], Edward (Alexander)," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed March 17, 2022, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

No.1, An Old Love Story

Marked, "Simply and tenderly," this piece opens with a warm yet melancholic melody. The use of open intervals, such as fifths and sixths, in the left hand provides harmonic support without being overcrowding in texture. The middle section is contrasting in almost every way possible by using various techniques including a key change, wider range of the piano, dynamics, chromaticism, and accompaniment styles. The beginning section returns with slight changes, almost as if one is reminiscent of an "old love story," and the piece ends with a modified plagal cadence of a (minor) iv chord to I.

No.2, Of Br'er Rabbit

Joel Chandler Harris, known for *Uncle Remus,* was an American author and folklorist. Harris wrote *Uncle Remus*[27], a collection of African American folktales, that features a fictional character under that name telling various stories.[28] Out of the collection is one, well-known character called *Br'er Rabbit* (Brother Rabbit). *Br'er Rabbit* is a trickster character that uses his wits to outplay anything in his way. As MacDowell had much fondness for tales of all kinds, there is no doubt that this piece was inspired by *Br'er Rabbit.*

[27] Harris' works have received criticism and controversy since its time of publication. While I acknowledge the problems of race and cultural appropriation related to the work, the issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
[28] R. Bruce Bickley, "Joel Chandler Harris," New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed March 17, 2022, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/joel-chandler-harris-1845-1908/.

The music of this piece is filled with staccatos and fast improvisatory runs. The humor and wittiness of *Br'er Rabbit* is portrayed through the offbeat accents, abrupt dynamic changes, jumping gestures, and short phrases. MacDowell even reuses the opening motif in different keys to create the feeling of tricked when it is not heard in the home key of D major. Although not easily executed, *Of Br'er Rabbit* is delightful and masterful piece to listen and perform.

No. 3, From a German Forest

As titled, *From a German Forest* depicts one's imagination or recollection of walking through the woods. The piece opens with a melody, clear and defined, without any clashing dissonances or distractions, as if one is starting to enter the forest. The music is sometimes interrupted with short phrases of chromaticism and temporary harmonic changes, possibly mimicking a change in atmosphere or attention to a new object or scenery. The opening melody returns in the bass, where MacDowell wrote "like men's voices." It is a hymn-like four-part texture and after a short interruption reminiscent of the beginning, the piece fades away by gradually releasing one to two notes of the final chord at a time.

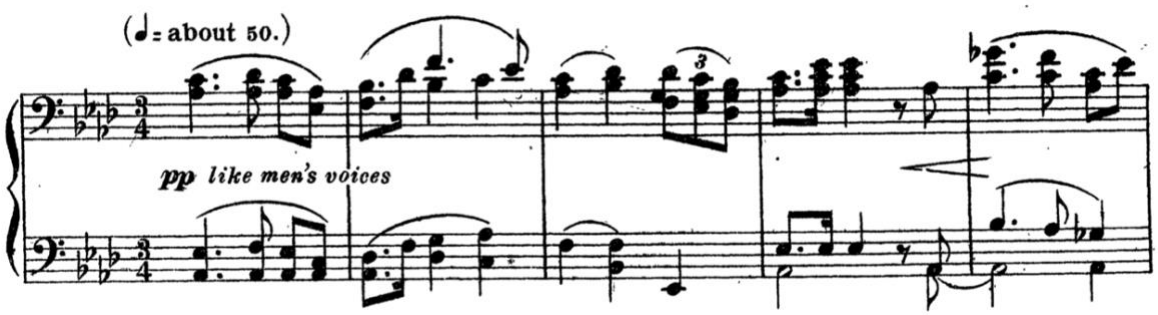

Figure 6. MacDowell, *Fireside Tales*, op.71, no.1, From a German Forest, measures 30-34

No. 4, Of Salamanders

Speaking to the themes of nature and animals in folk tales, this piece depicts the movements of salamanders through its use of intricate runs. How these quick gestures change in shape are also abrupt, yet melodic and pronounced. With dynamic markings no louder than mezzo piano, this delicate piece is a gem even by itself.

No.5, A Haunted House

This dark, eerie, and mysterious piece could be one of the best representations of how MacDowell was captivated by tales. To achieve this "ghost-like" effect, MacDowell specifically marked he wanted the pedals to be used, including how many pedals should be pushed down and when to release them. The piece uses large, but mostly open, chords and very gradual but steady intensification in dynamic and range to create an ominous mood. MacDowell only places the peak of each section where the dynamic is marked fortissimo and on the higher range of the piano. Even though the middle section is contrasting in texture, the "haunting" effect is still maintained through to the end.

No.6, By Smouldering Embers

Smouldering Embers is the sixth and final piece of the set. This tender and yearning piece clearly alludes to *An Old Love Story* from the beginning as they are both set in triple time and the shape of each opening melodies are almost identical. A short middle section is filled with two-note slurs, with accents on the first beat, suggesting a sense of tiredness and the end of the "tales." The opening music returns,

note for note, but only for five and a half measures without a chance to develop further. *Smouldering Embers* ends, fading away as each phrase becomes shorter and shorter.

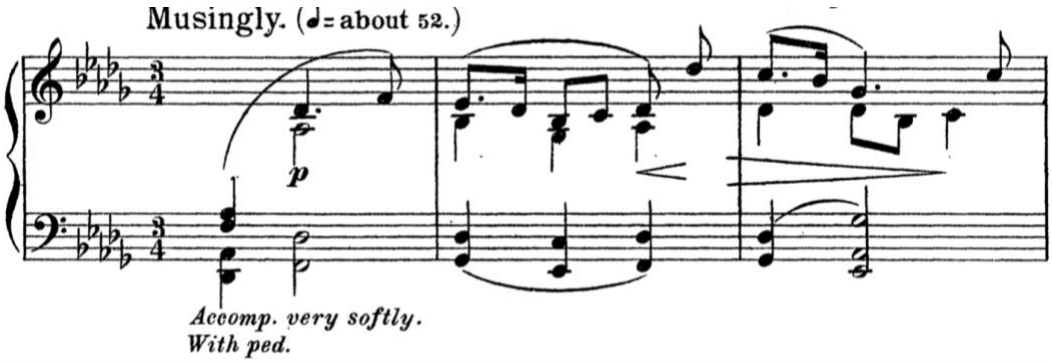

Figure 7. MacDowell, *Fireside Tales*, op.71, no.6, Smouldering Embers, measures 1-4

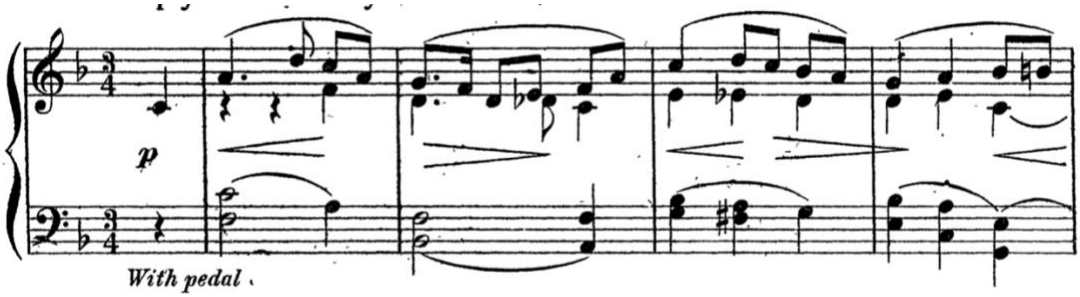

Figure 8. MacDowell, *Fireside Tales*, op.71, no.1, An Old Love Story, measures 1-3

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Ravel was born in the Basque town of Ciboure, located in southwest France, but moved to Paris with his family when he was just three months old. He started music lessons at the age of seven and in 1889, was admitted to the Paris Conservatory.[29] Ravel studied piano with various teachers at the conservatory but did

[29] Roland-Manuel, Cynthia Jolly, trans., *Maurice Ravel*. (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), 18-19.

not achieve as much success as his classmates. He took composition lessons with Gabriel Fauré in 1897, who had a huge influence on Ravel as a composer.

That same year he enrolled in the conservatory, Ravel went to the World Exhibition that was held in France. He saw cultures and music from various regions of the world, but what caught his attention the most were the Asian and Southeast Asian exhibits. The music of the *gamelangs* intrigued him with their unique tunings, pitches, and intervallic scale structures. Gamelans are often referred to as a musical ensemble consisting of gongs, gong-chimes, metallophones, and drums.[30] These "exotic" sounds inspired many European composers to incorporate them into their music.

At the end of the nineteenth century, French composers became known for their impressionistic style. The term impressionism was originally introduced in visual art to characterize works of "blurred" images that "convey the general impressions" of a scene.[31] In music, impressionism aims to achieve similar effects such as exploring instrumental timbres, avoiding clear and structural forms, static pacing, play of colors, and light ornamentation and figures. Along with the use of vast folk idioms and Ravel's literary interests, Ravel's musical output, not just for the piano, is comprehensive.

Ma Mère l'Oye (Mother Goose Suite)

[30] Don Randel, ed., *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 342.
[31] Ibid, 405.

Initially composed for piano four hands, Ravel started writing The Mother Goose Suite in 1908 but it was not published until 1910. The first piece was written and dedicated to the Godebski' children, Mimi and Jean, children of Ravel's friends. Mimi recalled:

> "Of all my parents' friends I had a predilection for Ravel because he used to tell me stories that I loved. I used to climb on his knee and indefatigably he would begin, 'Once upon a time…' And it would be *Laideronnette* or *La Belle et la Bête* or, especially, the adventures of a poor mouse that he made up for me. I used to laugh uproariously at these and then feel guilty because they were really very sad."[32]

The rest of the pieces were added in 1910, turning it into the suite we know of today.

Ravel titled the suite after Charles Perrault's 1697 "Histories of Stories from Times Past, with Morals: Tales of Mother Goose" but not every piece was based on Perrault's stories.[33] In 1912, Ravel orchestrated it into a suite for orchestra and a ballet.[34] Unlike the orchestral suite, which contains the same five movements in the piano four hands version, the ballet is ordered differently and includes additional movements. The ballet begins with two new pieces, a *Prélude* and *Danse du route et scène* (Dance of the spinning wheel and scene). During the dance, a character known as Princess Florentine pricks her finger on a spinning wheel and falls into a deep sleep. It is even marked on the score that the spinning wheel is placed on the foreground to the right of the stage. In the Pavane of Sleeping Beauty, a fairy appears

[32] Emily Kirlatprick, "Therein Lies a Tale': Musical and Literary Structure in Ravel's Ma mère l'Oye," Context 34 (2009), 94
[33] Ibid, 81.
[34] David Ewen, *The World of Twentieth-Century Music* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 627.

on stage and bestows the princess with three dreams, Beauty and the Beast, Little Tom Thumb, and The Little Ugly Girl-Empress of the Pagodas. A prince then breaks the spell on the princess in the final movement, The Fairy Garden. Four different interludes are also added in between the last five movements.

A solo piano arrangement of the four hands version was used in this dissertation recording. It was transcribed by Jacques Charlot, a nephew of the music publisher, Jacques Durand.

No.1, *Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant* (Pavane of Sleeping Beauty)

The suite opens with a slow pavane. In contrast to Ravel's Pavane for the Dead Princess, the term "pavane" here is used to allude to a lullaby of a "sleeping" princess.[35] The piece, only twenty measures long, opens with a short melody that is memorable and put in its simplest form without any additives. The music is based on the A aeolian mode[36] and speaks to the "simplifying and paring down" style of Ravel's writing, also known as the *dépouillé* effect.[37]

No.2, *Petit Poucet* (Little Tom Thumb)

The second piece, Little Tom Thumb, is also based on Perrault's "Tales of Mother Goose." Ravel quoted Perrault at the beginning of this piece. Here is an English translation:

"He thought he would easily find his way by means of the bread that he had scattered everywhere he had been; but … birds had come and eaten everything."[38]

[35] Kirlatprick, 81.
[36] Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 41.
[37] Kirlatprick, 86.
[38] Mawer, 41.

The music contains continuous use of eighth notes throughout the entire piece, portraying the image of Little Tom Thumb's never-ending wandering. This "wandering" is most obvious in the first four measures of the piece as it changes time signatures every measure, expanding it by one quarter-beat at a time.

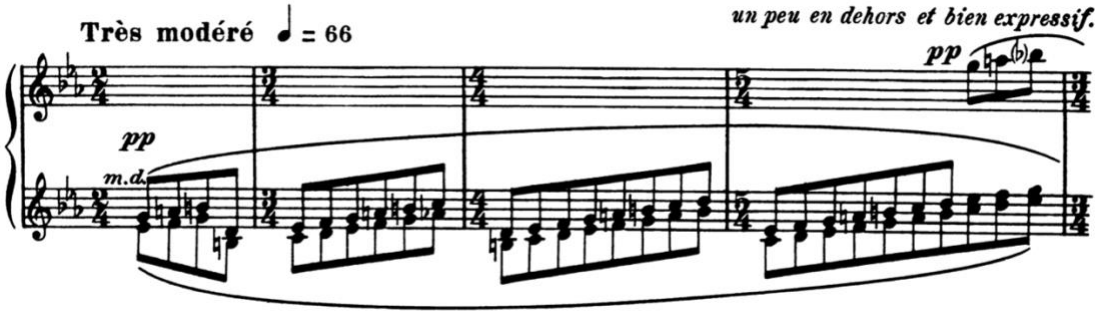

Figure 9. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.2 Little Tom Thumb, measures 1-4

Elements of nature are displayed when the right hand imitates chromatic bird calls and cuckoo "sighs."[39] After the return of the opening measures, Tom Thumb eventually finds his way home, signified by the return to C major, the piece's home key.

No.3, *Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes* (The Little Ugly Girl, Empress of the Pagodas)

"She undressed and climbed into the bath. Straight away, pagodes and pagodines [tiny make-believe people] began to sing and play instruments: some had theorbos made from a walnut shell; some had viols made from an almond shell; for it was necessary to proportion the instruments properly to their size."[40]

[39] Ibid.
[40] Mawer, 42.

Quoted from the heading of the third piece, *Laideronnette* was based on the tale, *The Green Serpent,* in Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's 1698 "New Stories, or Fairies in Fashion."[41] This story is about a princess who is cursed with ugliness, whose beauty can only be restored through the love of a prince.[42] Evidence of Javanese music influence are as follows. The left-hand notes are taken from a pentatonic scale. The right hand has mechanical-like gestures which mimics Javanese instruments.[43] As the piece is in ABA form, the middle section is a contrast of the outer sections, mostly by changing textures. It is interesting to note that the different melodies that appear throughout the piece represent different characters from the tale, such as the princess and the serpent. The A section returns with a triumphant ending of arpeggiated chords in the high register of the piano.

No.4, *Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête* (Conversations of Beauty and the Beast)

The piece is based on a tale by Marie Leprince de Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast,* from her 1756 "Children's collection".[44] The conversations between the Beauty and the Beast from Beaumont's tale is quoted at the beginning of the score as follows:

> - "When I think of your kind heart, you do not appear to me so ugly"
> - "Oh! Lady, yes! I have a good heart, but I am a monster."
> …
> The Beast had disappeared and she just saw at her feet a prince more handsome than Love who thanked her for having broken spell.[45]

[41] Kirlatprick, 82.
[42] Ewen, 627.
[43] Mawer, 40-41.
[44] Kirlatprick, 82.
[45] Mawer, 43.

The voices of Beauty and the Beast are easily recognizable throughout the piece. Beauty's theme introduces the piece with a sweet, lyrical, and tender melody in the treble register and is accompanied by a familiar waltz-style accompaniment, distinctive of Erik Satie's Gymnopédies that was published in 1888. The Beast's theme enters with the sudden harmonic change in measure 49. Here, the melody is written in the low bass register of the piano, played by the left hand.

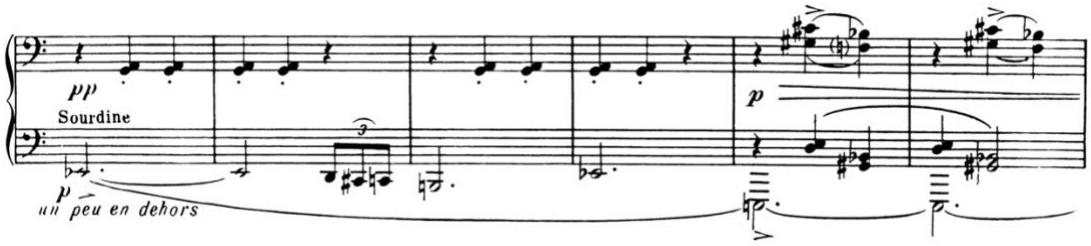

Figure 10. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.4, Conversations of Beauty and the Beast, measures 49-54

At measure 69, the two voices start to have a conversation with each other as both themes overlap. The harmonies here are quite unsettling due to the use of extreme chromaticism and unresolved harmonic progressions.

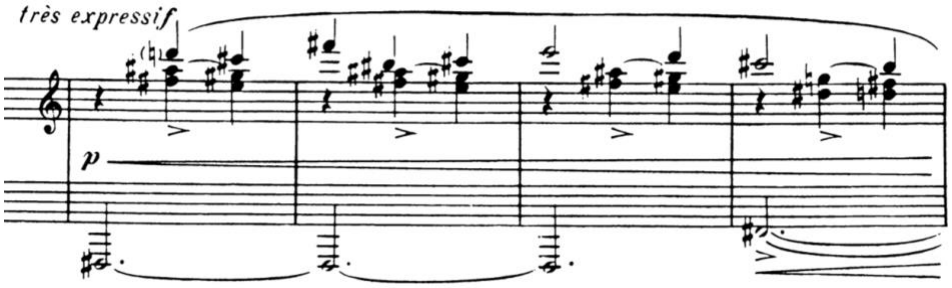

Figure 11. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.4, Conversations of Beauty and the Beast, measures 69-72

Not until after the climax, the two themes are combined in the key of F major, at measure 106, to represent a unity between the two characters.

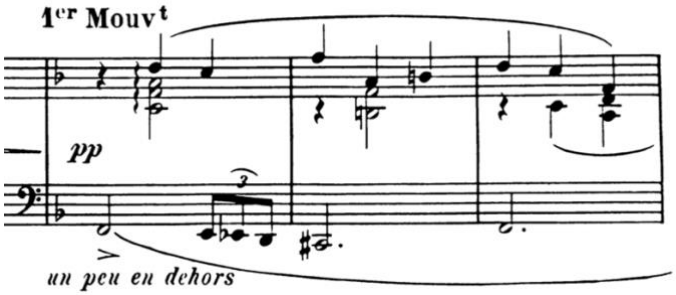

Figure 12. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.4, Conversations of Beauty and the Beast, measures 106-108

At measures 142-146, the disappearance of the Beast is represented by an abrupt silence of the fermata and the transformation into a prince happens at the glissando.

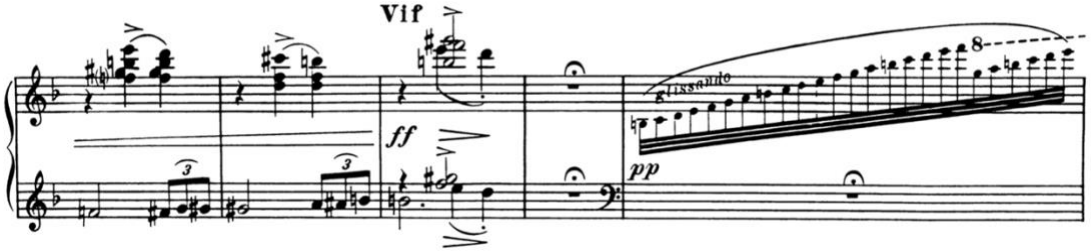

Figure 13. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.4, Conversations of Beauty and the Beast, measures 142-146

The piece fades away as both themes reappear in various forms. Most importantly, the Beast's theme is now in the higher register.

No.5, *Le jardin féerique* (The Fairy Garden)

Unlike its predecessors, the last piece is not based on a specific tale but instead serves as the culmination of the entire suite. One could imagine entering an enchanted garden with magical creatures and fairies as told in children's tales. The music is hymn-like, with longer melodic phrases, as opposed to the opening piece. One main rhythm remains consistent throughout and appears in different melodic shapes. A few examples below:

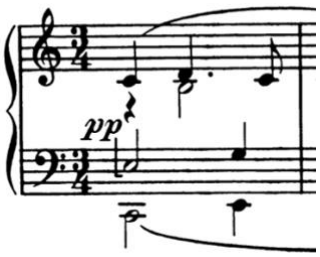

Figure 14. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.5, The Fairy Garden, measure 1

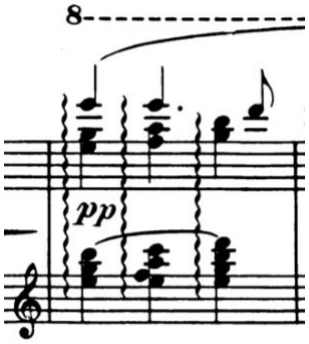

Figure 14. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.5, The Fairy Garden, measure 23

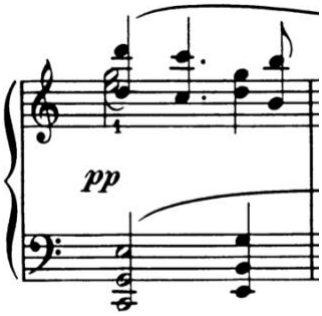

Figure 14. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.5, The Fairy Garden, measure 40

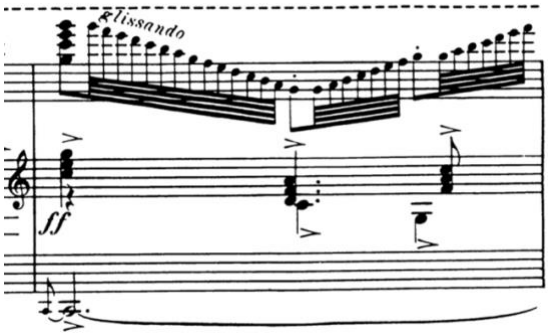

Figure 14. Ravel, *Mother Goose Suite*, no.5, The Fairy Garden, measure 50

The use of arpeggiated chords in both hands in extremely high registers of the piano creates a "magical" fairytale-like illusion. Finalizing the piece are bell-like figurations, which could be looked at in two ways, chiming either the celebration of the tales or the end of story time.

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

Bartók was born on March 25th, 1881, in a town called Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary, now Sinnicolau Mare in Romania. He showed musical interest at a very young age and started piano lessons with his mother. He was also composing by the time he was nine.[46] In 1899, he was admitted to the Royal Hungarian Academy in Budapest to study piano with Stephen Thomán, a pupil of Franz Liszt, and composition with Hans Koessler.[47] Bartók devoted most of his time in Budapest to teaching, composing, researching, and performing. Although he still toured across Europe and the United States, his life there was modest and quiet. He moved to the United States in 1940 and continued composing even though his health declined drastically, dying in 1945.

The majority of Bartók's music stems from his passion and interest in true and authentic Hungarian folk music. The folk music that composers like Liszt and Brahms used were different from Bartók's because those were just popular Gypsy

[46] Ewen, *The World of Twentieth-Century Music,* 27.
[47] Macolm Gillies, "Bartók, Béla," in *Grove Music Online,* ed. Deane Root, accessed March 18, 2022, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

music written by amateurs such as members of the Hungarian middle class.[48,49] After hearing a peasant girl sing an unusual tune during his vacation in 1904, Bartók started to travel across Hungary, even to remote regions of the country, to collect music and melodies. Zoltán Kodály, another Hungarian composer who occasionally joined Bartók on his journeys, became friends with him and eventually shared a mutual goal to bring forward authentic Hungarian folk music to the rest of the world. Serving "as the foundations for a renaissance of Hungarian art music," as said by Bartók, both Kodály and he were unfolding Hungarian's musical heritage like Bach did for German music.[50] Bartók's extensive research resulted in *The Hungarian Folk Song*, an influential study, first published in Hungarian in 1924 and in English in 1931. It contains all the information he discovered from different Hungarian peasant music to transcriptions of melodies and tunes with lyrics.

> "Folk art cannot have a fertile influence on a composer unless he knows the peasant music of his native country as thoroughly as he does his mother tongue."[51]

Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs, Op.20

Completed in 1920, the *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* contains 8 pieces, each based on one folk melody. According to Barbara Nissman's *Bartók and the Piano,* Bartók's solo piano works make use of folk elements in various ways such as starting phrases on strong beats to reflect the accentuation found in Hungarian

[48] Barbara Nissman, *Bartók and the Piano: A Performer's View*, 84.
[49] The term "Gypsy" is an ethnic slur for Roma, who lived among Hungarians and other people of the region. It is certain that gypsy music has influenced Hungarian folk music in some way. This statement refers to Bartok's perspectives on comparing gypsy music to the Hungarian music he researched and does not represent the author of this dissertation's view on this topic.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid, 83.

language, meter changes, and the frequent use of tritones and perfect fourths.[52] Bartók also avoids the use of key centers that utilizes the concept of tonic and dominant harmonies and progressions. To steer away from classical harmonies, he also emphasizes the equality of all twelve tones so that there is no "functional hierarchy" within the scale.[53]

> "A folk melody is like a living creature; it changes minute by minute, moment by moment…. There is not set uniformity; there is the same diversity in perpetual transformation."

Bartók often repeats a musical idea a few times as basis for his writing. Evident in the first piece, the melody stated in the first four measures is repeated in its entirety three times, but with each time, it appears with slight variation. The folk melody that the first piece is based on is from No.30 in his *Hungarian Folk Music*.

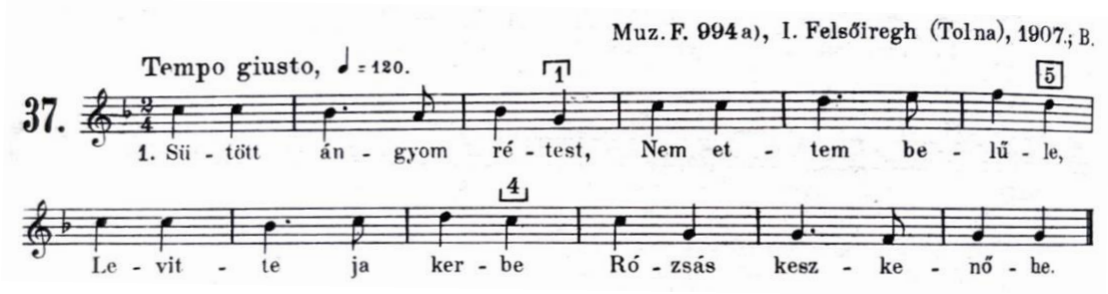

Figure 15. Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk Music* (1931), no.37

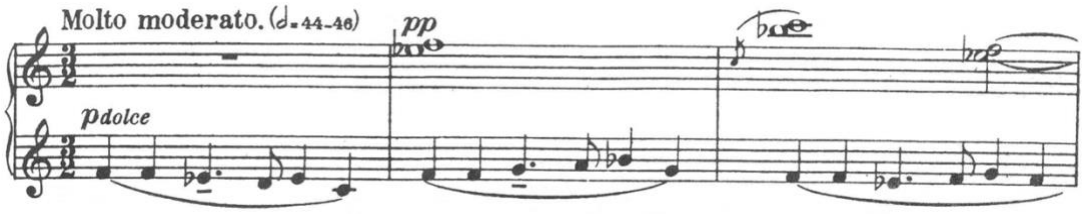

Figure 16. Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, I, measures 1-3

[52] Ibid, 90-95.
[53] Ibid, 92.

Bartók's categorized his folk tunes into two styles, marked *tempo giusto* and *parlando* in each transcription. *Tempo giusto* refers to the melodies that are associated with motions such as dancing and working and has a straightforward rhythmic drive. *Parlando* refers to speech and singing ,which has a freer rhythm, and sometimes has breaks after each phrase to mimic a singer taking a breath.[54]

The third piece, also in the *parlando*-rubato style, is based on folk tune No.40. The melody is again repeated three times in different ways, but it is now accompanied with a slightly more active left hand. This accompaniment can be seen as a folk instrument, such as the fiddle, bagpipe, or cimbalom, accompanying a singer.

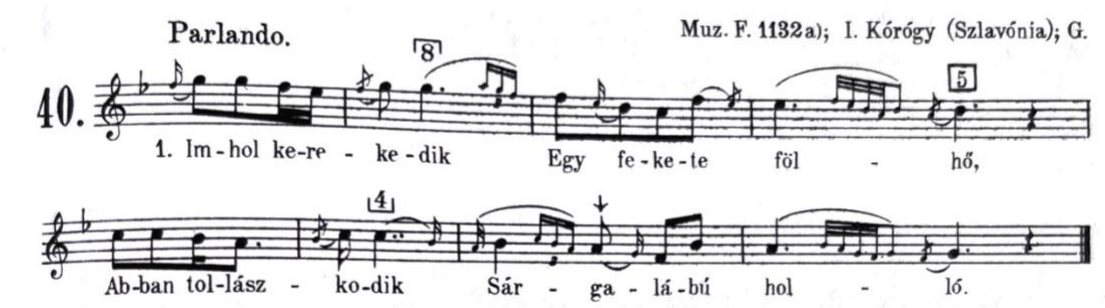

Figure 17. Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk Music* (1931), no.40

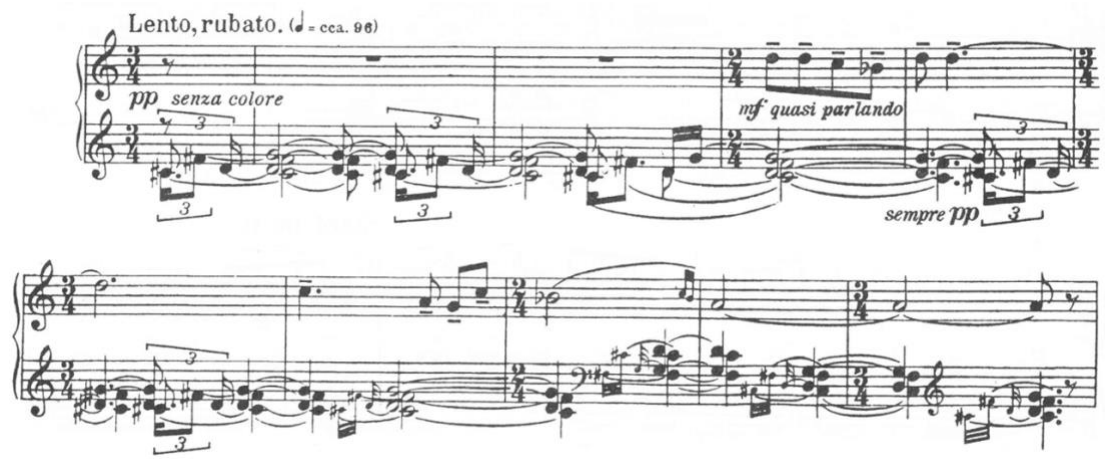

Figure 18. Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, III, measures 1-9

[54] Ibid, 91.

Both the fourth and fifth pieces are fast in tempo and quick in gestures, representative of the *tempo giusto* style. The melody of the fourth piece is from folk tune No. 244 and appears a total of five times.

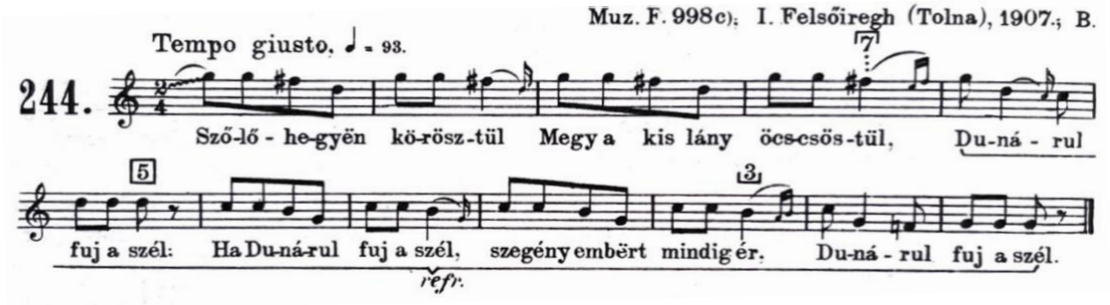

Figure 19. Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk Music* (1931), no.244

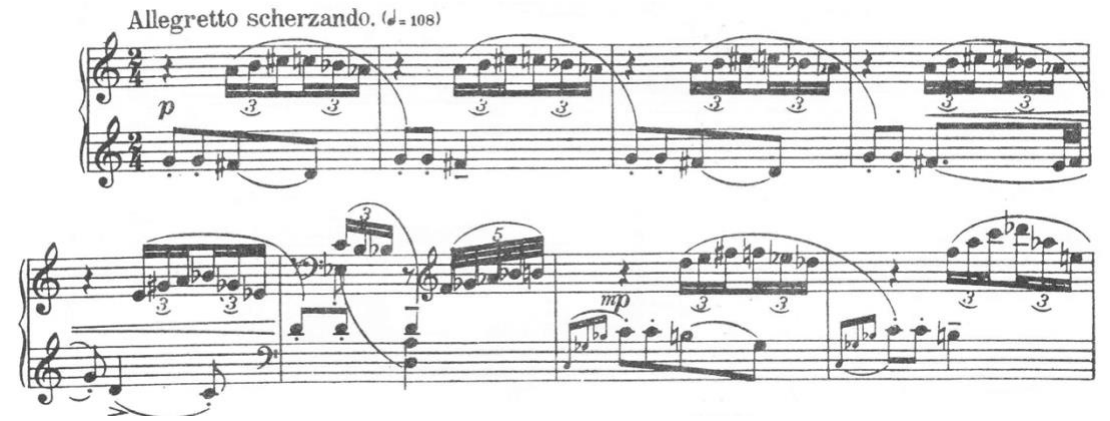

Figure 20. Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* IV, measures 1-8

The use of quick, arpeggiated gestures in the beginning imitates an instrument such as a cimbalom or dulcimer. The folk tune No.64 does not appear at the beginning but from measure 6.

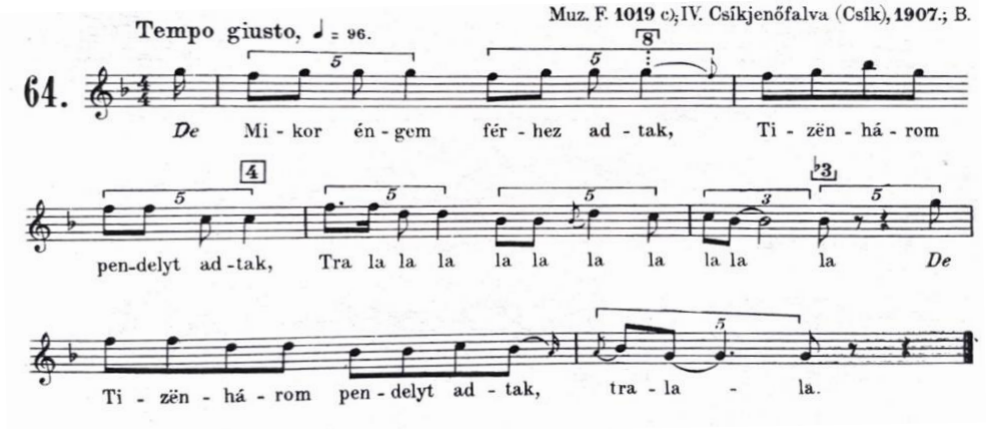

Figure 21. Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk Music* (1931), no.64

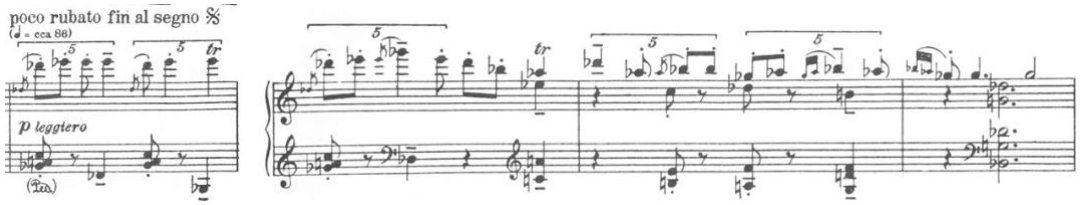

Figure 22. Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* VI, measures 6-9

The seventh piece, written first as a tribute to Debussy's death in 1918, is marked "in memory of Claude Debussy" in the score. It reflects the slightest hints of impressionism., which is achieved through the use of varying colors, rubato, and extreme registers. Without rest, the last piece is marked to be played "attacca". The *tempo giusto* folk tune no.46 enters in its entirety once at measure 6 but its reappearances throughout the piece is quite fragmented. Bartók disseminates the folk melody and uses each fragment as a motif to build on in different sections. Constantly changing in tempo, meter, mood, and more, this technically challenging finale requires much accuracy, speed, and readiness from a performer.

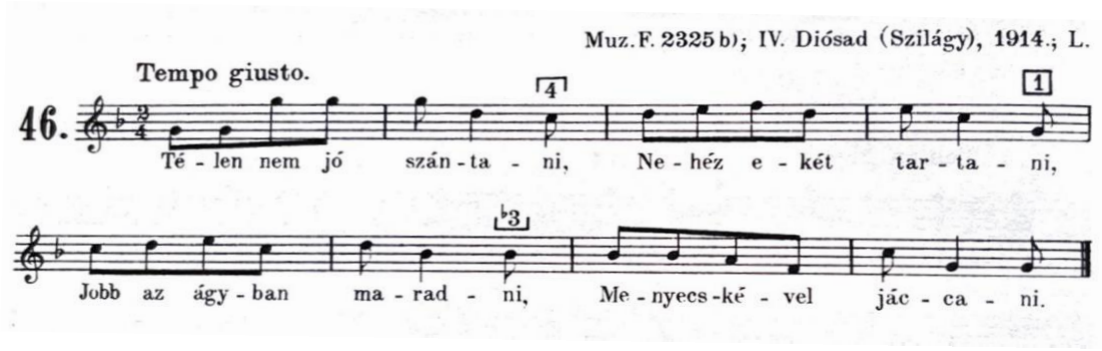

Figure 23. Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk Music* (1931), no.46

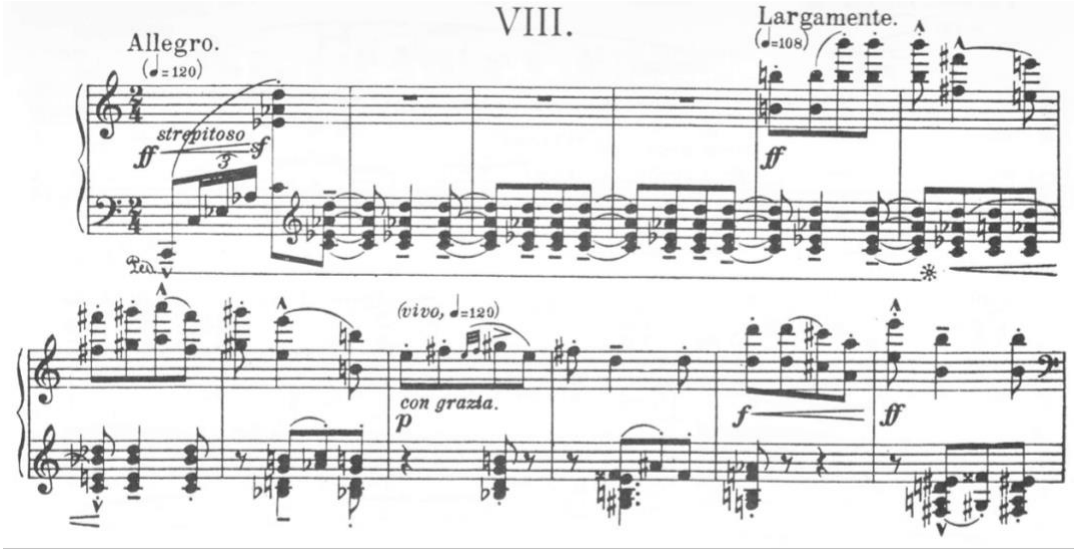

Figure 24. Bartók, *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs,* VIII, measures 1-12

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1918)

Born on April 23rd, 1891, in Sontsovka, Ukraine, Prokofiev's early years were filled with exposure to music, especially from the piano. Prokofiev recalls how he "often fell asleep to the strains of a Beethoven sonata being played by my mother four rooms away from mine."[55] His mother was a pianist and was also his first piano

[55] S. Shlifstein, *S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminisces* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1900), 26.

teacher. With the ability to explore the piano and music at such a young age, Prokofiev showed much talent in composition as he wrote many pieces for the piano as well as two operas by ten years of age. Prokofiev attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1904 and studied with Anatoly Lyadov for harmony, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov for orchestration and Anna Esipova for piano.[56] Although the classes with Lyadov and Rimsky-Korsakov were not to his liking, he focused on piano and graduated with the highest honor as he believed that performing his own compositions was a way to gain recognition as a composer. Prokofiev toured the United States from 1918-1922, during which he was asked to compose new piano pieces to be published by a New York publisher. He composed *Tales of an Old Grandmother* and *Four Pieces* op.32 for them but ended up not agreeing to their terms.[57] After the United States, he spent many more years based in Paris as a performer and composer before returning to the USSR in 1936. In the final period of his life, political turmoil in his home country forced Prokofiev, and other Soviet composers, to write with populist characteristics as restricted by officials. Prokofiev's use of folkloric elements can also be seen as a way for him to align with the Soviet institution. Prokofiev died on the same day as Stalin in 1953.[58]

***Tales of an Old Grandmother,* op.31**

[56] Dorothea Redepenning, "Prokofiev, Sergey (Sergeyevich)," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed March 18, 2022, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.
[57] Shlifstein, 52.
[58] Ewen, 579.

Tales of an Old Grandmother, translated from "Skazki staroy babushki," was composed in 1918 and consists of four miniatures. Dmitry Shostakovich reminisced that

> "Prokofiev's love for Russian fairy-tales, a world that had enchanted him in his early youth, expressed itself in music of true lyrical beauty (*Old Granny's Tales* and, in the latter years of his life, *Tale of the Stone Flower*)."[59]

Evident in many of Prokofiev's works, such as *Peter and the Wolf* op.67 and *Cinderella* op.87, his fascination for fairy and folk tales plays a large role in his compositional creativity. It is unfortunate that *Tales of an Old Grandmother* did not receive much success during Prokofiev's lifetime even though he performed it himself many times. Filled with lyrical Russian folk-like melodies, rich harmonies, and evoking images, *Tales of an Old Grandmother* is a gem in itself that deserves more recognition. Heinrich Neuhaus recalls that "Few modern composers can produce such an unbroken, expressive, melodic line, full-blooded yet emotionally clear (suffice it to recall his *Old Granny's Tales*, etc)."[60]

All set in a minor key, the general structure of all four pieces is a loose ternary form. The first piece, marked Moderato, begins with a short introduction followed by rolled chords with unusual harmonies. Alternating chords allude to a sense of swinging or rocking, possibly suggesting a grandmother's rocking chair. The middle section is the first appearance of a lyrical melody, angular yet sustained, unique to Prokofiev's writing. Rhythmic freedom to mimic folk song singing is written out by using smaller and smaller note values, evident in measures 29-36.

[59] Shlifstein, 194.
[60] Ibid, 229.

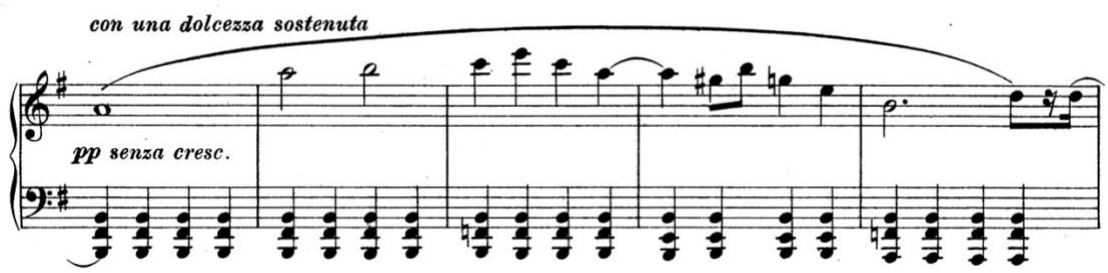

Figure 25. Prokofiev, *Tales of an Old Grandmother*, I, measures 29-36

As a whole, the first piece can be seen as an introduction to the "tales" to come. The second piece is the shortest of the set but filled with ever changing colors. The ostinato eighth note accompaniment is constant throughout the entire piece, possibly suggesting a folk-like instrumental accompaniment. It is simple, yet a challenge to control. In contrast, the rhythm of the melody in the third piece alludes to a recitative-style writing, reflecting more of a speech-like folk song accompanied with a march-like accompaniment. It is repeated twice but with a countermelody in the second repetition. The final piece continues the speech-like melody, portraying some sort of narration in the tale. After the first section concludes, the music changes in meter for the first time in the set. This middle section features a lyrical melody in the left hand and a motoric accompaniment in the right, both in the piano's higher register, resulting in a mystical and ethereal atmosphere. The piece ends with a short reiteration of only the beginning portion of the initial melody. Even though the motive behind his work is unknown, Prokofiev wrote on the score to help one understand the piece, translated to English: "some memories are gone from her memory, and some never will."

Conclusion

This dissertation project gave me the opportunity to experience and explore how folkloric elements are incorporated into western art music in different ways and within solo piano repertoire. While researching and learning more about where the melodies, rhythms, and even inspirations of each work came from, I was able to expand my interpretations of those pieces even further, with the goal of how to better represent the composer's intentions in my playing. It has also inspired me to discover more piano repertoire that stems from cultures and traditions as well as to specifically look for folk elements in pieces that I have or will learn in the future. My research has also shown more light to how valuable and individualized each piece is, no matter if it is short in length, a part of a bigger set or just a standalone piece. I hope my dissertation will draw attention to the folk elements and influences in piano music and that I will continue to share my what I have learned in this project, through my teaching and performances.

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