

Achievement in Music Level 12 Exam

August 31, 2021

Program Notes by Jenny Huang

Johann Sebastian Bach, Toccata in E Minor, Prelude and Fugue, BWV 914

As one of his earliest keyboard compositions, *Toccata in E Minor* draws heavily from Bach's experience with the polyphonic techniques of the organ and harpsichord. The shortest of Bach's seven "manualiter" toccatas—which are played with only the hands and without the pedal, it is structured into four distinct parts. Unlike the openings of the other manualiter toccatas, the Prelude of *Toccata in E Minor* opens with a strong, slow, and solemn statement in the bass, integrating semitones to invoke a deep sense of mourning and grief. In contrast, the final movement of the Toccata is a fast and brilliant fugue in three voices, set in perpetual motion by the motif of its sixteenth notes. The subject of the piece bears great similarity to that of an anonymous fugue found in a previously dated Italian manuscript, but has been enhanced and refined by Bach.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata No. 18 in E Minor, Op. 31, No. 3, Mvt. 1

Beethoven's works are customarily divided into early, middle, and late periods, based on both the chronology and style of his music. Despite being composed at the beginning of his middle period, the first movement of Op. 31, No. 3, *Allegro*, adheres to many of the classical conventions that characterized the works of Beethoven's early period. It follows standard sonata form, uses the Alberti bass accompaniment pattern, and consolidates aspects of writing reminiscent of Mozart. The light and jocular melodic line of the first movement makes Op. 31, No. 3 one of Beethoven's more cheerful piano sonatas. Its evocative opening expresses a call to attention, and reemerges intermittently throughout the score in a manner that is recognized as distinctly Beethoven.

Franz Liszt, Étude No. 3 in D-flat Major, "Un Sospiro"

Hungarian romantic composer Franz Liszt's elegant Concert Étude No. 3 is more commonly referred to as *Un Sospiro*—Italian for "a sigh". A study in crossing hands, the graceful melody of the piece weaves between the left hand and right hand while smooth arpeggios flow in the background. The melodic pattern modulates into A major as the piece progresses, growing increasingly complex and passionate with each dramatic rise and fall of the cascading harmony before descending to C-sharp minor and then back to D-flat major to return to the delicate, fluttering notes of its melodic line. The piece is arguably one of Liszt's most beloved works, considered by some pianists as one of the most beautiful piano pieces ever composed.

Samuel Barber, Excursions, Op. 20, No. 1

In his *Excursions*, neo-Romantic composer Samuel Barber combines the unique qualities of contemporary American folk material with eighteenth and nineteenth century Romantic forms. In the first movement, the percussive style of piano blues is integrated into a classic five-part rondo form, containing three refrains separated by two episodes. The repeating ostinato introduced in the left hand bass—reinforced by counterpoint in the right hand a measure later—gives the piece a sense of constant driving force, and the rhythm of the main melodic pattern further adds movement and momentum and harmonica or accordion accompaniment.

Jennifer Huang is currently a sophomore attending Stevenson High School. She has been studying piano since the age of five and has been playing for almost ten years, participating in local festivals and competitions. Outside of her involvement with piano, she likes to read, visit new places with her friends, and spend time with her family. She also enjoys baking, and is currently working on perfecting her macaron recipe.

Jennifer has been studying with Ms. Jennifer Cohen for nearly six years and is extremely grateful for her infinite patience and constant encouragement. The group classes, recitals, and other events Ms. Jennifer has organized have made her piano-learning experience enjoyable and gratifying. She would also like to thank her parents for their support in her musical journey and her friends for their willingness to listen, critique, and play along.