

Achievement in Music Level 12 Exam

August 2, 2021

Program Notes by Michael Chen

Johann Sebastian Bach, Partita in B-flat major, BWV 825

The Partitas written by Bach consists of six keyboard suites published individually beginning in 1726. Collectively they're just some of the most beautiful music ever produced for the keyboard. Each has a distinct character: and this first Partita in Bb is dominated by a kind of serene joy. The structure is that of the standard Baroque dance suite: a characterful opening movement, followed by an allemande, corrente, sarabande, and a show-stopping gigue, with some miscellaneous dances inserted before the gigue. It's also worth noting two motifs that bind this suite together: nearly all the movements have melodies built from a broken Bb chord, and the motif of a melody rising through the interval of a fourth also features heavily.

Ludwig Van Beethoven, Sonata No.17 in D Minor, Op.31 No.2, Mvt. 3

The Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor, also referred to as The Tempest, consists of 3 movements starting with Largo—Allegro, then Adagio, and finishing off with Allegretto. The Tempest was composed by Beethoven during a hard time in his life. Sonata No.18 was composed following No.17, after overcoming the difficulties in his life. Therefore, the contrast between the two pieces is drastic, and each piece gives a very different feeling. The third movement is in sonata form and is in the home key of D minor. It is at first flowing with emotion and then reaching a climax, before moving into an extended development section which mainly focuses on the opening figure of the movement, reaching a climax at measures 169–173. The recapitulation, which is preceded by an extensive cadenza-like passage of sixteenth notes for the right hand, is followed by another transition and then another statement of the primary theme. The refrain undergoes phrase expansion to build tension for the climax of the movement at measure 381, a fortissimo falling chromatic scale.

Frédéric Chopin, Etude in Ab major, Op.25 No.1

The popular Etude Op.25 No.1 consists entirely of rapid arpeggios and harmonic modulations based on A-flat major. Robert Schumann praised this work in a dissertation on the Etudes, calling it "a poem rather than a study" and coined for it the alternate name "Aeolian Harp". This Etude comprises a right-hand melody and supportive bass line, the accompaniment consisting of broken chords, provided by the inner voices of both hands, usually in semiquaver-tuplets. The left hand introduces polyrhythms from time to time. The principal melody is presented by the right hand on the first note of each group of sextuplets, with occasional counter-melodies provided by the inner voices. The distinctive theme is presented in A-flat major. Through metamorphic modulations to closely related keys, it eventually arrives at a brief episode in the remote key of A major, but culminates with an intense climax in the home key, and a momentary reference to the original thematic material, which flows easily into the coda.

Claude Debussy, Clair de Lune

Debussy's music is noted for its sensory content and frequent usage of atonality. The French literary style of his period was known as Symbolism, and this movement directly inspired Debussy both as a composer and as an active cultural participant. Clair de Lune, the 3rd piece in Debussy's Suite bergamasque, perfectly displays his ability to convey sensory details in his pieces. This piece had one of the greatest contributions to Debussy's fame in the early stages of his career. The piece takes its title from an atmospheric poem by the French poet Paul Verlaine which depicts the soul as somewhere full of music 'in a minor key' where birds are inspired to sing by the 'sad and beautiful' light of the moon. The gentleness of the melody provides an elegant contrast to the suite's sprightly second and fourth movements. The slow tempo combined with the slurred notes and use of the pedal gives the piece an airy and calm characteristic



Michael Chen graduated from New Trier High School this year. He plans to continue his academic career at the University of Southern California and prepare for med school. He began playing piano at the age of six and has been playing for 12 years now. He has had a wide range of piano teachers and participated in many piano competitions and events, all building up to the player he is today. In addition to piano, he also plays percussion for his school's symphonic wind ensemble. Outside of music, Michael enjoys playing badminton and working out with his friends. He also spends a lot of time with his family and works on many of his own creative projects and hobbies.

Michael would like to thank his parents for always cheering him on and keeping him persistent when faced with challenges in music and in other aspects of his life. He would especially like to thank Mrs. Cohen for being so flexible and supportive in the past years, and for contributing to his growing passion for music.