

# Achievement in Music Level 12 Exam

July 26, 2021

## Program Notes by Sophie Liu

### ***Johann Sebastian Bach, Prelude and Fugue in C# Major WTC I***

From style and technique to musical expression and diversity, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* truly showcases Bach's virtuosity and influence in modern music. With a collection of preludes and fugues written in all 24 major and minor keys, the works of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* were widely circulated throughout Europe, and elements of its composition can even be heard woven into the works of the high classical era. The Prelude and Fugue in C# Major was the third composition in *The Well-Tempered Clavier Book 1*, and its arrangement is slight of irony. Through the beginning of every staff, the piece is adorned with seven sharps, making it written in one of the most rare and difficult keys: C# major. Meanwhile, the enharmonic of C# major, Db major, only has five flats and produced the same sound, yet Bach chose to compose the piece using the considerably less preferable key. Though this key proved to be complicated sometimes, the Prelude contrasts with melodious simplicity in a series of broken chords switching between hands. The three-voice Fugue is no less lively, carried by its cheerful subject featuring intervals of 6th, and extensive sequences and episodes that express the feeling of joy dancing.

### ***Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata No. 26 in Eb Major, Op. 81a, 1st Movt.***

Of Beethoven's three compositional periods, the "middle" or "heroic" period that dates between 1803-1814 is defined by the development of Romantic musical ideas, the struggle and heroism, incorporated in Beethoven's changing composition style. Out of the total 35 sonatas he composed in his life, "Les Adieux" or "Das Lebewohl" was the first movement of the 26th and was written near the conclusion of his "middle" period in 1810. "Les Adieux," was a programmatic work dedicated to Beethoven's patron, Archduke Rudolph, who had to leave the city during the French attack on Vienna. Its three movements were intended to be published with its German subtitles, "Das Lebewohl," "Abwesenheit," and "Das Wiedersehen," ("Farewell", "Absence," and "Reunion") which Beethoven believed to have better expressed the true feeling of the piece than the French "Adieux"; in fact, written above the first three chords of the Adagio section, are the syllables "le-be-wohl" ("Fare-thee-well"). Like a sigh, the Adagio section expresses his initial saudade while painting the scene of the Archduke Rudolph's departure. As the introduction concludes with pianissimo, the Allegro main section commences with a time signature change and the juxtaposition of forte. The "development" is filled with beautiful melodies and rich harmonies and discords as the motive of "le-be-wohl" pushes forward. From the last quarter of the piece is the extended coda, in which the image of "farewells" and the emotions of the moment fade into the distance, and is finalized with two strong chords.

### ***Johannes Brahms, Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 79, No. 1***

In the summer of 1879, during his stay at Pörttschach, Brahms composed one his most frequently performed and popular concert works, *Two Rhapsodies, Op. 79*. Together, *Two Rhapsodies, Op. 79* are Brahms' largest single-movement works, aside from his Scherzo, Op. 4, with No. 1 in B minor extending approximately 8.5 minutes. Despite having the title of "Rhapsody," which means "songs stitched together," both rhapsodies had clear structural forms; the first of the two particularly resembling a sonata-rondo form (ABACABA). In the first section of Rhapsody in B minor, characteristics of a sonata structure are displayed in its ternary form (ABA). Beginning with a strong start, this piece immediately evokes the feeling of liveliness and anticipation, fitting for its title of *Agitato*. Harmonies and hints of the main theme are then repeated in the quieter passage of the development and this transitions to the recapitulation with rapid, rising scales. Following the first section, is the melodious B major section, a beautiful blend of voices from both the left and right hand notes. As the first section makes a literal return, the piece finishes with a coda that reflects on the main melody of the B major section.

### ***Samuel Barber, Excursions, Op. 20, No. 4***

One of Barber's most popular pieces for the piano was his first published solo piano piece, *Excursions, Op. 20*. Following neo-Romantic style compositions, his 'Excursions' featured rhythmic characteristics and dramatic

expression, and had the basis of traditional, classical forms, while also reminiscent in their connection to American folk material. From the boogie-woogie style of a five-part rondo to the slow blues, and to the themes and variations of a cowboy ballad and barnyard dance, Barber recreates each work into regional American idioms. In particular, the fourth movement and finale that completes the set of *Excursions* represents an “exuberant and joyous barn dance”. From the very beginning, the blocked chords are idiomatic to that of a harmonica, followed by fast-paced, repeating sixteenth notes similar to the feeling of a fiddle. The alternation of tonic and subdominant harmonies, represented by the motives of the fiddle and harmonica come to life even further with the addition of the piece’s tricky rhythms and jazzy texture. As the closing section of the movement begins, there’s the embellishment of grace notes compared to the very first measure, and the piece is finalized with an arpeggiated chord known as the “blues ninth chord,” demonstrating another instance where it’s idiomatic to the harmonica. Through the melodic lines and chordal harmonies, Barber sets the scene for a stylized barn dance, complete with the American idiom of a fiddler and harmonica or accordion accompaniment.

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**Sophie Liu** is an incoming freshman at Adlai E. Stevenson High School and has been playing the piano for a little over 10 years. She vaguely remembers being awestruck by the sight of a piano at the age of 4 ½ and is forever grateful to have experienced this musical journey, whether it was playing for fun or participating in local piano competitions. Besides the piano, she occasionally experiments with the viola and has been a member of her school’s orchestra for the past 4 years. When she’s not wasting time, losing herself in reveries, Sophie enjoys painting, reading, and listening to endless playlists of instrumental soundtracks. She also likes to spend time with her family and bake a variety of cakes for them.

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