
Senior Projects Fall 2021

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Fall 2021

The Meaning of Music

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Bard College

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Caleb L. Carman

The Meaning of Music

Performance, Composition

Synopsis:

This project combines solo performances of music on piano, collaborative playing/rehearsing, improvisation, and composition. In both parts of the project, I share my performances of François Couperin, J. S. Bach, Schubert, and Ravel, and include my own compositions alongside. I tackle certain pieces that lie within the 'long eighteenth century' and demonstrate how improvisation is an integral part of music-making for composers. I believe in order to fulfill my own desires as a musician, I need to develop my aptitude in multiple areas — performance, composition, improvisation, chamber music, etc. — in such a way that the practice of one furthers the excellence and enjoyment I can achieve in another. This program is a preview to similar programs I intend on creating for future projects.

Many thanks to my professors and instructors for getting me to where I am now, as well as to my parents who are always so supportive.

Caleb L. Carman

First Senior Recital

Bard College

'Dizziness'

Caleb L. Carman (b. 1999)

Rea Ábel, alto flute

[Interlude]...

Piano Sonata no. 19, D. 958

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

II. Adagio

III. Menuetto and Trio: Allegro

IV. Allegro

Caleb L. Carman, piano

Notes:

Dizziness

This fast composition for solo flute, which I entitled 'Dizziness' after having finished writing it, is part of a commission of flute pieces from a range of composers for students of Tara O'Conner's class. An exciting challenge for me as a composer is to work with a solo line, no harmonies, and find out what is possible. The harmonic landscape has to be implied, somehow. This composition explores modes, chromaticism, and shifting tonal centers, but at no point is it in a key. If anything, the flattened second degree of the mode implies a sort of Phrygian, or a perpetual dominant cadence in the minor mode, similar to a lot of klezmer music. The piece is in the genre of perpetual motion, but I make sure to include a portion that involves silence and builds suspense.

Piano Sonata no. 19, D. 958

Schubert's late works make up some of the most profound music I know. The last three solo piano sonatas are among the greatest compositions for the instrument, and this C minor sonata displays an interplay between tragedy and grace. The style of the work is reminiscent of the piano sonatas of Beethoven, but Schubert's melodic character and use of peculiar harmonic shifts are set in a language all his own.

The slow movement is a lyric Adagio in 2/4 in A-flat, the submediant of the key of the sonata, c minor. As a rondo form movement, Schubert shares his dark innermost feelings in between the reprises of the main theme, which is solemn and caressing. The theme returns in different guises each time, affected by them as if Schubert himself is disturbed by the visions he has at night. This scheme is similar to other slow movements in the same key (See Beethoven's *Pathétique*, movement two.)

The third movement minuet and trio offers a respite from the surrounding movements. It is light and elegant, but also eruptive and energetic. It is punctuated by modulations,—especially to the submediant—accented dissonances, and syncopations on the third beat. In the trio, especially affecting are the mercurial shifts between major and minor.

The final fourth movement is quite a wild ride indeed. There are so many shifts in character, and it is in the guise of much of Schubert's 'heavenly length' final movements. It is a wicked, *totentanz* tarantella. It seems as though Schubert is trying to depict, in his final moments, his descent into the underworld.

Caleb L. Carman, piano

Second Senior Recital

Bard Hall, 2:30 pm

Tombeau de Couperin (selection)

Ravel, Maurice (1875-1937)

1. Prelude

Ordre 6^{ème} de clavecin in B \flat Major from *Second Livre*

Couperin, François (1668-1733)

1. Les Moissonneurs

2. Les Langueurs-Tendres

3. Le Gazoüillement

4. La Bersan

5. Les Barricades Mystérieuses

6. Les Bergeries

7. La Commère

8. Le Moucheron

Improvisation

Toccatà in D minor, BWV 913

Bach, Johann Sebastian (1685-1750)

Pause

“Dream” for Piano and Violin (2021)

Carman, Caleb (b. 1999)

with Manar Hashmi, violin

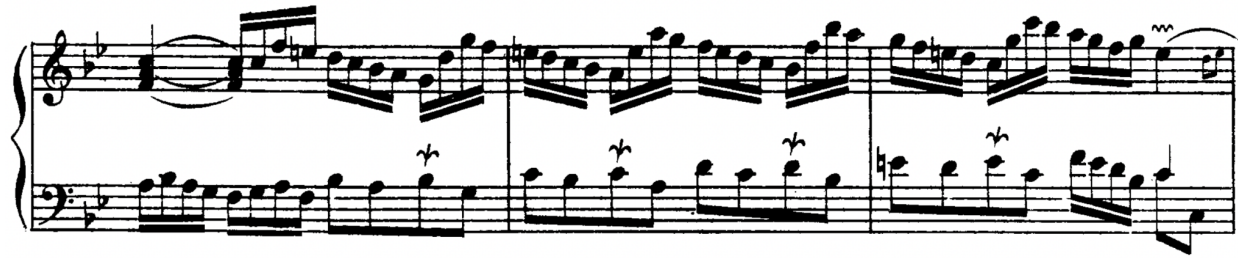
About the music:

Ravel, in **Tombeau de Couperin**, uses Baroque genres in a musical voice that is unmistakably his own. Each movement is dedicated to someone he knew who died fighting in the First World War. The piece throughout is imbued with an austere sadness for friends he lost, expressed in the form of an homage to the genres and forms of the past and to his home country, France. The work, to him, is both a nostalgic farewell to simpler times, as well as an affirmation of national cultural pride. The first movement, the Prelude, starts out as a kind of two-part invention, with trills and mordents. However, I am too enamored by Ravel's rich textures and harmonies to be caught up in whatever is 'Baroque-sounding' about this music. Nevertheless, the piece does work nicely as an introduction to music by the work's namesake.

In contrast to the Ravel suite, which is clouded by a pale, cool tone, this suite for harpsichord by François Couperin wipes away the tears and brings us back into daylight. Couperin wrote 27 suites for harpsichord in a series of four books, and this suite, the sixth of all of them, begins his second volume. Every movement is either in one of two forms: rondo and binary dance form. Among its rondos, this suite includes the famous work, "Les Barricades Mystérieuses." The movement is memorable for its low register in combination with its hypnotic, thick four-voice texture. My guess is that Couperin, having composed this movement, appended the title afterward in an attempt to abstractly evocate how beautifully strange this music is. Also notable is "Les Bageries" (The sheepfolds) for its gentle, pastoral quality. This movement requires special care for its lyrical quality and benefits from lots of variation in rhythm and ornamentation.

By sheer coincidence, at some point in my purview of different pieces I undertook in deciding what I wanted to play for this program, I came across a stunning realization: both Couperin's suite and J. S. Bach's

Tocatta in D minor, BWV 913 share these measures almost exactly in common:



(Couperin, 1717)



(Bach, 1705)

We know Bach eventually came to know Couperin's suite; its sixth movement, *Les Bergeries*, makes an appearance in Bach's *Notenbuchlein* for Anna Magdalena. But Bach's toccata came first, so did Couperin plagiarize Bach? No, but neither can this be chalked up to pure luck. My thoughts on this are that the similarity between these pieces is due to some phrases in music evolving into a kind of common parlance between composers (This is quite similar to how 'the lick' is sometimes treated among jazz musicians). Moreover, the figure is a conventional, partimento-style way of realizing a bassline, which in this case is a rising 5-6 pattern. In this light, the similarity is revealing in that it is not merely a shared idiom, but a reflection upon a deeper, more fundamental shared syntax that existed throughout the long eighteenth century, despite the geographic and stylistic rift that exists between these two composers. It is important that we, as listeners of this music, hear the music not only for its originality and character but also for its adherence to a broader set of rules that make it behave like a language.¹

¹ The inherent syntactical structure of music, especially from the long eighteenth century, is a fascinating topic that warrants further study. Leonard Bernstein tried, unsuccessfully, to find a Chomskyan grammar within music. The danger is that by trying to find a 'grammar' in music, you immediately risk marginalizing non-conventional or experimental music as 'incorrect', when real art is always ahead of what the experts can analyze. Moreover, since many of the conventional modes for defining musical structure come from the

In a departure from Couperin, Bach makes his bassline chromatic, which makes its star appearance right before the grand conclusion of the piece:



This toccata is a great example of how Bach, even early in his compositional career, uses basic building blocks of counterpoint to build a larger piece of music. One of those building blocks is the segment of invertible counterpoint at the octave in Fig. 1:



(Fig 1)

The usefulness of invertible-counterpoint cells such as this one is apparent to anyone who is familiar with fugal writing. Not all subjects, when combined with other voices, will work equally as well when the parts are re-arranged; a consonant, stable fifth will invert into an unstable fourth, and a series of parallel 6/3 chords which sound great in three voices might result in parallel fifths if the two upper parts are inverted. In the case above (Fig. 1), since we are restricted to octaves, thirds, and sixths in first species, invertible counterpoint at the octave can take place without any problems:

Original:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Inversion:	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

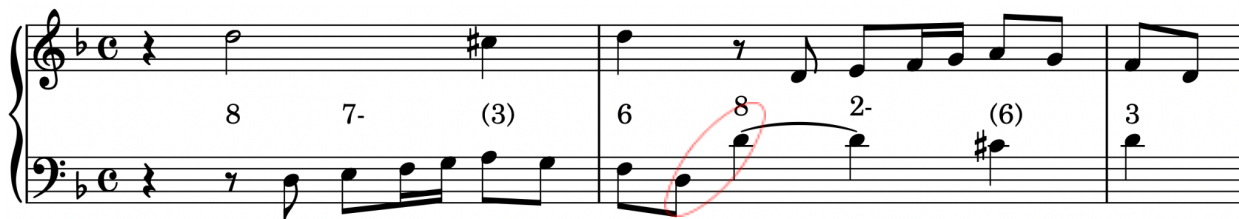
analysis of Western music — period, phrase, exposition, and so forth — it becomes very difficult to apply those concepts to non-Western genres without producing a model that's very Eurocentric, thus preventing a 'universal grammar' in the true Chomskyan sense.

An important and common elaboration of this structure is to add suspensions and make what is part of a two-step cadence (Rotem and Kirschenbaum), as in Fig. 2:



(Fig. 2)

The suspended voice, for melodic intensity, is sometimes preceded by an octave leap, so the harmonic resolution down by a step is also a melodic resolution. This elaboration forms the basis for both fugal sections of the piece, as well as part of the opening (Fig. 3-4).



(Fig. 3)



(Fig. 4)

Other famous examples of Bach's music with this schemata include his Two-Part Invention in A minor, BWV 784, the first and last movements of his (C. P. E. Bach's?) Trio Sonata in G Major, BWV 1038 (which is an arrangement of the Sonata for Violin and Continuo in G Major, BWV 1021), and the opening chorus of the Cantata 'Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben', BWV 147.

Bach is able to hide the main theme of the piece in the third measure of the rhapsodic opening. If we extrapolate a harmonic skeleton from beats three and four, we can see that underneath is our friend, the two-step cadence.



(Fig. 5.1)

(Fig. 5.2)

(Fig. 5.3)

Bach's toccatas, for the most part, share structural similarities that give us insight into his process for these works. Bach's keyboard toccatas follow the North German multi-sectional model of toccata writing, as in those of Buxtehude, Johann Adam Reincken, and Nicolaus Bruhns (Wolff, chapter 3). This one follows a schema of *passagework - adagio - presto - fugue - adagio - presto - fugue*. Similarly, to take another example, the Toccata in G minor, BWV 915, follows the schema *passagework - adagio - fugue - adagio - fugue - finale* — virtually identical. We can hear how Bach structures these early pieces as if they are written-out keyboard improvisations. The back-and-forth way a piece alternates between material that is free and that which is fugal is suited for improvisation in that it doesn't need to refer to itself outside of time in order to progress; the ideas follow from one to the next in a linear fashion, and no large sections lend themselves to repetition as in a ritornello-form concerto or aria movement. What we get instead is a contrapuntal nugget of an idea (Fig. 5.1) that Bach can then reinterpret and serve as the framework for two separate fugal expositions.

“Dream” for Piano and Violin (2021)

When we are in a dream-like state, we become familiarized with scenarios that only make sense as we are dreaming them up. Ideas are abstracted from their concrete reality and freely associated in our minds. When we listen to music, I believe our minds behave in a similar way. Sometimes I hear music in my own dreams. My piece “Dream” uses uneven meters, arpeggiated textures, chromaticism, and distant key relations to create a dream-like state. The middle of the piece is more normative-sounding, perhaps suggesting a return to being grounded in reality while awake.

About the artists:

Caleb L. Carman is a composer, pianist, and improviser. He is finishing up his studies at Bard College. He has played lots of chamber music, Baroque music, and solo piano music. He has composed works for orchestra, chamber music, and theater music. He lives on the Upper West Side in Manhattan, New York.

Manar Hashmi (violin) is a first-year student at Bard College. She has been playing the violin since 2012 and has participated in many musical projects including performances of new music, chamber music, musical theater music, her own original music, opera music and ballet music, as well as a significant repertoire of Baroque music. Manar has been devoting herself to trying as many new and interesting music-related things as possible while at Bard. She is on track to major in composition.

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