

TRADITIONAL FORMAL STRUCTURES AND 20TH CENTURY SONORITIES:
A SUCCESSFUL PAIRING IN THE SOLO CELLO SONATAS OF
LIGETI, CRUMB, AND STEVENS

by

MARTIN GUEORGUIEV

(Under the Direction of David Starkweather)

ABSTRACT

The solo cello sonata setting represents a unique musical intersection of creative ideas between György Ligeti, George Crumb, and Halsey Stevens – composers with distinctly different backgrounds whose careers took them on three diverse musical paths. Their sonatas, completed between 1953 and 1958, exemplify the composers' desires to establish a new model of musical expression – one that combines 20th century Neo-classicism with the emerging ideas of 1960's Modernism. This study highlights different approaches adopted by each composer in the treatment and realization of traditional forms as supporting vehicles for a highly chromatic musical language, sometimes devoid of tonal center or tonal organization. The study provides an overview of how pitch class sets, motivic cells, and 20th century musical elements such as octatonic, hexatonic, and whole-tone collections are employed, and their role within the overall form of each composition.

INDEX WORDS: György Ligeti, George Crumb, Halsey Stevens, solo cello sonata, formal structures

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B.M., Lynn University, 2002

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. David Starkweather for his guidance and insight during the process of researching and completing this document, and for sharing his time and knowledge with me over the years of my studies at The University of Georgia. I would also like to thank the members of my committee – Dr. Jolene Davis, Dr. Milton Masciadri, Dr. Mark Neumann, and Dr. Stephen Valdez, for their support and assistance. I am grateful to European American Music Distributors LLC, sole U. S. and Canadian agent of Schott Music for granting me permission for use of excerpts from the printed score of György Ligeti's *Sonate für Violoncello Solo* (© 1990 by Schott Music All Rights Reserved. Used by permission). I am also grateful to C. F. Peters Corporation for their generosity in granting me permission for use of excerpts from the printed scores of George Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* (Copyright © 1958 by C.F. Peters Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission) and Halsey Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* (Copyright © 1967 by C.F. Peters Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission). I would like to thank my wife and family for their continuous and unwavering support throughout my studies.

Martin Gueorguiev

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine in detail the combination of traditional formal structures with the unique sonorities and rhythmic elements of 20th century musical language as demonstrated in the sonatas for solo cello by György Ligeti, George Crumb, and Halsey Stevens. The study highlights the different approaches adopted by each composer in the treatment and realization of traditional forms as supporting vehicles for a highly chromatic musical language, sometimes lacking a tonal center or tonal organization. This work also provides an overview of how pitch class sets, motivic cells, and 20th century musical elements such as octatonic, hexatonic, and whole-tone collections¹ are employed, and their interaction with each other and within the overall form in each of these works. The detailed discussion of each of the three sonatas also examines the place of the sonata for solo cello within the overall compositional output of each composer, as well as within the cello repertoire, and is prefaced by a brief biographical survey of György Ligeti, George Crumb, and Halsey Stevens. The study emphasizes the common elements found in each of the three sonatas, and the unique components that contribute to the individuality and merit of each composition.

¹ From this point on, these collections will be referred to as OCT, HEX and WT respectively.

Need for Study

There are a number of published books, articles, and dissertations dedicated to the analyses and performance practices of the sonatas for solo cello by György Ligeti, George Crumb, and Halsey Stevens.² This study, however, provides a detailed account of the interaction and co-existence of musical elements from vastly different historical periods in each of the sonatas, and the resulting multi-faceted compositional approach of all three composers. These three works have several features in common. The musical content of each composition represents a mixture of traditional formal structures and contemporary harmonic palettes. The sonatas were completed in the 1950's, and each composer employed older musical forms such as *Fantasia*, *Toccata*, *Ciaccona*, *Scherzo*, and *Theme and Variations* as separate movements. In addition, each piece is labeled a sonata when in essence none of the works are organized following the conventional three- and four-movement sonata settings of the Classical and Romantic periods – the sonata by Ligeti has two movements, Crumb's has three, and Stevens' has five separate movements.

The solo cello sonatas of Ligeti, Crumb and Stevens, with the exception of the first movement of the Ligeti, were composed between 1953 and 1958.³ The works exemplify the composers' desires to look for a new mode of musical expression – one that combined 20th century Neo-classicism with the emerging Modernism of the 1960s and 1970s. The solo cello sonata setting represents a unique musical intersection of creative ideas between Ligeti, Crumb and Stevens – composers with distinctly different backgrounds whose musical careers eventually took them on three rather diverse musical paths. This study will allow musicians and listeners to

² For a complete listing of writings on these works, see Selected Bibliography.

³ The opening *Adagio* from Ligeti's sonata was completed in 1948.

better comprehend the musical value of each sonata by offering an analytical and historical view of the forces at play in each composition.

Methodology

This study discusses the three sonatas in chronological order by their date of composition. Each piece is examined and discussed regarding the following elements: formal structures being employed, and their development and realization in a new, different manner; presence of unifying cyclical elements; interaction of formal structures with musical sonorities; reception of the piece by musical critics and audiences; and place of the sonata within the complete compositional output of each composer.

The discussion of the sonatas for solo cello is preceded by a brief biographical summary of the lives, musical styles, and achievements of Györgi Ligeti, George Crumb, and Halsey Stevens.

This study provides an overview of the common threads found in these three works, including stylistic influences, treatment of structural elements, musical characteristics, and individual distinguishing qualities.

The scores of the three pieces will be used throughout this study for illustration purposes.⁴

⁴ Full reference to the scores can be found in the Bibliography.

Organization

Chapter 2 provides a brief biographical background for each composer. Chapters 3-5, the main body of the work, is dedicated to a detailed discussion and analysis of the important formal and musical features present in each sonata, the critical reception of the composition, and its place in the cello repertoire. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the common elements shared by these compositions, as well as the unique qualities of each work.

CHAPTER 2

BRIEF OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF THE LIVES, MUSICAL STYLES, AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF LIGETI, CRUMB, AND STEVENS

György Ligeti

György Sándor Ligeti was born on May 28, 1923 in the small country town of Dicsőszentmárton, Transylvania. For centuries Hungarians had governed this area, but following the end of WWI, Hungary was forced to relinquish it to Romania.⁵ Art had always played a role in the Ligeti family – his parents were well educated Jews from Budapest, his grandfather was a mural painter, and one of his great-uncles was the celebrated violinist Leopold Auer.⁶ Under the direction of his father, who worked as a banker but was also a lifelong science enthusiast,⁷ Ligeti was poised to pursue an education in the science field, and it wasn't until 1937 that he began piano lessons. In 1941, after successfully passing the entrance exams in physics and mathematics at the University of Kolozsvár,⁸ Ligeti was denied admission due to the anti-Jewish restrictions put in place by the local government.⁹ In the wake of this discriminatory rejection, he applied to the Kolozsvár Conservatory and was surprisingly granted admission when the conservatory's director overlooked the enrollment restrictions.¹⁰ Ligeti's studies were interrupted with the

⁵ Richard Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 3-6

⁶ Ibid., 3-4

⁷ Ibid., 4

⁸ Because of its bi-national and bi-lingual population, the Hungarian city of Kolozsvár was also known as the Romanian city of Cluj

⁹ Steinitz, *György Ligeti*, 17

¹⁰ Ibid.

escalation of WWII, and in January 1944 he was mobilized and placed into a Jewish labor battalion stationed in the city of Szeged. Being away from home saved him from an almost certain death, because soon after Germany's invasion of Hungary in March 1944, the new pro-Nazi government began a thorough elimination of its Jewish population.¹¹ Ligeti's father, brother, aunt, and uncle were all taken to the concentration camp in Auschwitz and eventually killed. Only his mother survived, mainly because of her skills as a doctor.¹² After the end of WWII, Ligeti entered the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest as a full-time student. In this new world, Nazi anti-semitism was replaced with the cultural and intellectual oppression by the post-war socialist ideology. Following Russia's crushing of the Hungarian revolution of October 1956, Ligeti and his wife Vera escaped to Austria in December of 1956. After settling in Vienna, Ligeti became actively involved in the musical scene in Western Europe. He visited Cologne and befriended the leading composers in the electronic music field, including Karl-Heinz Stockhausen and Bruno Maderna.¹³ In the next three decades, Ligeti remained actively involved in Europe's musical avant-garde and established himself as a respected educator, frequently lecturing and presenting his music at events such as the Darmstadt Festival in Germany. Beginning in 1961, he began regular visits to teach at the Royal Swedish College of Music in Stockholm, and from 1973 to 1989 held the position of Professor of Composition at the Hamburg Music Academy. In 1972, Ligeti made his first visit to the United States, taking a one-year position as Visiting Lecturer and Composer-in-Residence at Stanford University. Here he had his first encounters with computer music and the works of leading American composers such as

¹¹ Ibid., 19-20

¹² Ibid., 20

¹³ Ibid., 75

Steve Reich and Harry Partch.¹⁴ In 1982, Ligeti was offered the position succeeding Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatory, but chose to remain in Hamburg instead.¹⁵

The music of György Ligeti can be divided into two main periods – compositions from his days in Hungary, and the music he wrote after his exile in 1956. The early works exemplify the influence of Bartók and the Hungarian folk tradition. The repressive intellectual atmosphere of that time dictated a more traditional compositional approach, yet as his *Sonate für Violoncello Solo* (1948-53) and *String Quartet No.1 – Métamorphoses nocturnes* (1953-54) showed, Ligeti had a unique way of writing conservatively. In the years after his relocation in Western Europe, Ligeti explored with great success the field of avant-garde music and its theatrical qualities. Among the most experimental and controversial works from that period were his *Poème symphonique* (1962) for 100 metronomes and his opera *Le Grand Macabre* (1974-78) – a composition that encompassed 13 years from its commission to its completion.¹⁶ In 1967 Ligeti's music gained world wide exposure when excerpts from his works were used in Stanley Kubrick's movie *2001 – A Space Odyssey*. A financial windfall did not accompany this attention since Kubrick used Ligeti's music without his permission and refused to pay royalties for it.¹⁷

The exceptional achievements of Ligeti as both composer and educator have been recognized with numerous awards and accolades. In 1996 he received the Music Prize of the International Council;¹⁸ in October 2000 he was presented with the Sibelius Prize in Helsinki; and in November 2001 Ligeti received the Kyoto Prize for Arts and Philosophy – one of the

¹⁴ Ibid., 190-193

¹⁵ Ibid., 255

¹⁶ Ibid., 217

¹⁷ Eventually, in 1973 MGM studios agreed to pay Ligeti a compensation of \$3500. Steinitz, *György Ligeti*, 163

¹⁸ <http://www.sonyclassical.com/artists/ligeti/bio.html> (accessed August 16, 2008).

most prestigious awards given to individuals for their contributions to the arts, science and technology.¹⁹ György Ligeti died on June 12, 2006 in Vienna at the age of 83.²⁰

George Crumb

George Henry Crumb was born on October 24, 1929 in Charleston, West Virginia in a family of musicians. Through his participation in regular musical events at home, Crumb developed an affinity for the music of composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms among others.²¹ His education included a Bachelor's degree from Mason College of Music in Charleston (1950), a Master's degree from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (1953), a two-year period at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin as a Fulbright Fellow, and a D.M.A. degree from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (1959). In Crumb's early career he held a teaching position at the University of Colorado in Boulder (1959), and an appointment as a composer-in-residence at the Buffalo Center for the Creative and Performing Arts.²² In 1965 he joined the University of Pennsylvania²³ where he stayed for over thirty years until his retirement.²⁴

Through his compositional output, George Crumb established himself as an advocate for expansion of the sound palette and extension of performance techniques, along with the use of

¹⁹ Steinitz, *György Ligeti*, 361-362.

²⁰ <http://www.schott-musik.de/shop/persons/featured/11540/> (accessed August 16, 2008).

²¹ Richard Steinitz, "Crumb, George." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, (accessed August 19, 2008).

²² Ibid.

²³ Paul Griffiths, "Crumb, George (Henry)." In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alyson Latham. *Oxford Music Online*, (accessed August 19, 2008).

²⁴ <http://www.georgecrumb.net/life.html> (accessed August 19, 2008).

musical quotations and pastiche.²⁵ Following the success of some of his early works like the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* (1955) and the *Variazioni* for orchestra (1959), Crumb achieved worldwide acclaim and recognition with *Night of the Four Moons* (1969) and *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970) – vocal works based on the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca.²⁶ The 1970s were a period of great achievements as Crumb successfully explored the electric and amplified instrumental medium. Three works stand out from that time – *Black Angels* (1970) for electric/amplified string quartet, *Vox Baleanae* (1970) for electric flute, electric cello, and amplified piano, and *Makrokosmos, Vol. 1 and 2* (1972-3) for amplified piano. In recent years, Crumb has turned once again to vocal music with the four-part song cycle *American Songbook* (2001-04) for soprano, piano and percussion quartet.²⁷

The musical accomplishments of Crumb have been recognized with numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for his large orchestral composition *Echoes of Time and the River*²⁸ in 1968, the Prince Pierre de Monaco Gold Medal in 1989, the Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition for *Star Child* in 2001, and the Musical America “Composer of the Year” award in 2004. Presently, Crumb resides in Pennsylvania with his wife of more than fifty years.

²⁵ Richard Steinitz, “Crumb, George.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, (accessed August 19, 2008).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ <http://www.georgecrumb.net/chrono.htm> (accessed 19 August, 2008).

²⁸ Ibid.

Halsey Stevens

Halsey Stevens was born on December 3, 1908 in Scott, New York. His early studies were at the Homer Academy in New York,²⁹ and he went on to earn a Bachelor's degree (1931) and a Master's degree (1937) in composition at Syracuse University.³⁰ Stevens continued his education at the University of California at Berkeley (1944) where he studied briefly with Ernst Bloch.³¹ His celebrated career as an educator began at Dakota Wesleyan University (1937-1941), followed by an appointment at Bradley University (1941-1946). During WWII Stevens served in the Navy Reserve and was stationed at San Francisco.³² After the war he held a teaching position at the University of Redlands (1946), and at the University of Southern California from 1946 until his retirement in 1976. During his years at USC, Stevens maintained a busy schedule as a visiting professor with positions at the University of Washington (1958), Yale University (1960-61), and the University of Cincinnati (1968) among others.³³ A respected musicologist, Stevens authored a critical biography of Béla Bartók,³⁴ and published numerous articles and music reviews.

Stevens wrote for the entire musical spectrum – vocal and choral works; solo and chamber music for strings, piano and winds; music for band; and full orchestral scores. His early compositions were in the spirit of late German Romanticism, a trait Stevens himself attributed to his studies with William Berwald at Syracuse University.³⁵ Works representing his early style are the *First Symphony* (1945, rev. 1950) and the *Quintet for Flute, Piano and Strings* (1945). The

²⁹ <http://www.halseystevens.com/bio/index.html> (accessed August 20, 2008).

³⁰ Richard Swift, "Stevens, Halsey." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, (accessed August 20, 2008).

³¹ Ibid.

³² <http://www.halseystevens.com/bio/index.html> (accessed 20 August, 2008).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*. Oxford University Press, 1953.

³⁵ <http://www.halseystevens.com/ownwords/prognotes.htm> (accessed August 21, 2008).

later works of Stevens present a mature, open-minded approach that reflects the innovations and development in contemporary music. The composer readily revealed the influence many composers (Brahms, Hindemith, Prokofiev, and Ravel, to name a few) had on his later works.³⁶ Stevens devoted special attention to combining new musical ideas with his earlier compositional style, employing different types of scales (modal, pentatonic, octatonic), and giving a larger role to rhythm and its treatment as a motivic element.³⁷ Among the compositions from his later period are *Symphonic Dances* (1958, commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony), *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* (1958), and *Clarinet Concerto* (1969). Halsey Stevens did not write programmatic music, believing in the need for the listener to create an independent image of the music surrounding him.³⁸

Throughout his life and career, Halsey Stevens was honored with a number of awards and recognitions. He received two Guggenheim Fellowships (1964-65 and 1971-72), the Abraham Lincoln Award from the American Hungarian Foundation (1978), the USC Distinguished Faculty Award (1973), and in 1976 was named Professor Emeritus at the University of Southern California.³⁹ Stevens died on January 20, 1989 in Long Beach, California at the age of 80.⁴⁰

³⁶ <http://www.halseystevens.com/ownwords/reflections.htm> (accessed August 21, 2008).

³⁷ <http://www.halseystevens.com/ownwords/prognotes.htm> (accessed August 21, 2008).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ <http://www.halseystevens.com/bio/index.htm> (accessed August 21, 2008).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

GYÖRGY LIGETI'S *SONATE FÜR VIOLONCELLO SOLO* (1948-1953)

The Story of the Sonata

If there was ever an omen of things to come, the compositional process of Ligeti's solo cello sonata turned out to be a precursor of the piece's difficult existence. It took Ligeti five years to complete the composition, but it then remained unknown until 1979 due to problems with two separate dedicatees (one for each movement), an official rejection, and a complete performance ban by the governing powers in Hungary. Today, the troubled early history of the sonata only enhances its emotional and musical qualities for both performers and audiences.

The story of the sonata began like so many other artistic endeavors – under the powerful inspiration of love. The first movement – *Dialogo* – was written in 1948 while Ligeti was a student at the *Liszt Academy* in Budapest. It was intended as a short piece and written with a young female cellist in mind – Annus Virány – towards whom the composer had strong, though unshared feelings.⁴¹ Surprisingly, the young cellist failed to comprehend the nature of the dedication and never performed the piece.⁴² It was not until 1953 that Ligeti completed the work as we know it today by composing a much more demanding and technically challenging fast movement to complement the Adagio from 1948. The second movement – *Capriccio* – was

⁴¹ Steinitz, *György Ligeti*, 51

⁴² Ibid.

written upon the request of another young cellist, Vera Dénes,⁴³ and this time the piece was prepared to be presented to the public. There was, however, one major hurdle to be cleared. The sonata, just like any other piece composed in the early 1950s, needed to pass a strict evaluation at the hands of the recently established Hungarian Composers Union.⁴⁴ Unfortunately for most composers at that time, due to the new governing regime's strict communist line of thought, the judging process concentrated mainly on the ideological values behind the music rather than the purely musical aspects and qualities of each composition. The rigid rules imposed by the Hungarian cultural ministry aimed to curb any attempt at artistic expression that was deemed to be *avant-garde* and anti-proletarian. Ligeti's cello sonata was found to be too progressive, and was denied performance and publication rights. Permission was granted for a recording to be made by Vera Dénes, but it was never broadcast and consequently the composer could not benefit financially from the piece at the time.⁴⁵ For another twenty-five years, the sonata remained absent from the musical stage until it finally made its world debut in 1979, played by Rohan de Saram at the English Bach Festival in London.⁴⁶ The score of the sonata was published by *Schott Music* in 1990 and was dedicated to the Swedish musicologist Ove Nordwall.

Analysis

György Ligeti's *Sonate für Violoncello Solo* consists of two movements. The opening *Adagio* is a short movement featuring two themes that are in continuous interaction, as suggested

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 52.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

by the title of the movement – *Dialogo*. Based on their register, placement, and range, the two themes are often described by performers as *male* and *female*. In this study, however, they will be referred to as *low voice* (LV) and *high voice* (HV). LV has a calm, reserved, even a bit somber quality, and is solidly positioned in the minor mode. Its initial statement in m. 2 is in G minor, and its restatement in m. 4 is in D minor (Example 3.1).



Example 3.1: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, mm. 2, 4

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HV, on the other hand, in its initial statement in m. 6 has a lighter, more innocent character, mainly due to being realized in D major (see Example 3.2). It features a more active and eloquent melodic line in a louder dynamic, and is scored in a higher and brighter register.



Example 3.2: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, m. 6

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The two themes are rhythmically alike, and both move with a step-wise motion, which provides a soothing sense of calm and a subtle folk-style quality. The few leaps in each melodic line are often immediately filled, and do not interrupt the downward direction of either line. As a student at the *Liszt Academy*, Ligeti predominantly wrote choral music, thus it is not surprising that the vocal nature of the melodies is quite apparent. The 3-note opening motive of each phrase demonstrates the difference in their character – LV moves up, HV moves down – and their common roots: both are members of the same set class [013], with HV being an inversion of LV.

Structurally, the *Adagio* can be divided into two sections: from the beginning through m. 9, and from *Poco più mosso* (m. 10) to the end of the movement. The first part features two clear tonal areas – G minor, represented by LV, and D major, the pitch center of HV. The themes are pitted against one another, yet their statements are kept separate and in alternation. Their separation is ensured by the presence of a “moderator” of sorts, a most intriguing structural element in this movement – set class [037].⁴⁷ It is very likely that Ligeti envisioned this more as a series of major/minor triad figures than as a particular set class, but regardless of how one chooses to label it, [037] has a unifying role in the *Adagio*, and its presence dominates the entire

⁴⁷ Set class [037] represents the prime form of every major and minor triad. For a detailed discussion on prime form, see *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* by J. Strauss, 3rd edition, p. 57.

movement. It appears 30 times in a wide variety of roles. Examples 3.3 – 3.6 demonstrate four of these.



Example 3.3: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, m. 1;
[037] as prelude to the upcoming conversation between LV and HV

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Example 3.4: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, mm. 4-6;
[037] as moderator between LV and HV

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Example 3.5: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, m. 8;
[037] as underlying harmonic support for both LV and HV

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Example 3.6: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, m. 16;
[037] as the closing feature of the movement, in three descending statements

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Following the last appearance of LV in the opening part of the *Adagio*, the movement shifts into a faster mode marked *Poco più mosso* (m. 10). Here the polite conversation from the opening is transformed into a very lively and eloquent argument. Elements of the two themes begin to overlap. Both LV and HV are very passionate, richly elaborated, and no longer restricted to their initial registers. In this section, [037] becomes purely an accompanimental figure for the melody. Its use as a harmonic support provides a great sense of open space, contrasting with the step-wise nature of the melodies. The open fifths and fourths of [037] infuse the music with an exquisite touch of Ravelian harmonic language. At *Poco più mosso*, the harmonic rhythm moves much

faster. This provides a sense of direction while the themes make their way in a developmental fashion thru a series of keys: G minor (m. 10), G major (m. 11), C minor (m. 12), E-flat major (m. 13), C major (m. 14), and back to G minor (mm. 15-16), before settling on a D major triad to close the movement. The combination of a more active harmonic rhythm and the agitated melodic material gives the music drive and purpose, aided by the clear, almost strophic phrasing, and the continuous harmonic support of [037].

The *Poco più mosso* section of the *Dialogo* is of great importance in determining the overall formal structure of the movement. At first glance, the impression created by its musical content is of an impassioned and invigorated restatement of the two main themes of the *Adagio*. A closer look reveals that the entire second part of the *Dialogo* serves as a development section for the musical ideas of the opening. There are a number of developmental elements present to support such an analysis. Both themes of the *Adagio* are present, just as they would be in a Classical period development. LV and HV are actively involved in a series of brief modulations. The entire *Poco più mosso section* is harmonically unstable, featuring a progression through several different key areas before finally arriving at a D major triad to close the movement. In addition, [013] is now isolated from LV and HV, and is subjected to extensive melodic development, on occasion appearing in both voices simultaneously. This is a developmental technique, as [013] was a central element of both themes in the *Adagio*. The movement can be viewed as a statement of two themes, one set in a minor key area (LV), and the other set in a major key area (HV), followed by a development of both themes. Harmonically, LV and HV have a i – V (G minor – D major) relationship, and they are separated by a transitional gesture ([037]). Each theme is given its own register range and both maintain their individual characteristics throughout the opening section of the *Dialogo*.

After taking all of these elements into consideration, two structural approaches emerge as possible explanations of the form of the *Dialogo*. Analysis as a through-composed work is supported by the small scale, the brevity of all structural elements (themes, transitions, etc.), the lack of clearly established contrasting tonal areas for an extended period of time, and the overall harmonic direction of the movement –from its beginning in G minor to its conclusion on a D major triad. In the overall context of the work, the movement can also be seen in relationship with the following *Capriccio*. Since the two movements are meant to be played without interruption, and given their shortness,⁴⁸ they present a slow introduction and a fast paced conclusion. This Baroque style of Adagio and Allegro is emphasized by the harmonic connection between the movements –the *Dialogo* settles its minor-major duality with a final cadence on a D major triad, which in essence turns out to be a rather conventional dominant preparation for the G Major *Capriccio*. Among the factors that make such analytical reading problematic are the obvious difference in the musical language of each movement, and the historic timeline of the piece since the two movements were composed five years apart.

Viewing the first movement as an abbreviated and modified sonata form structure is supported by the presence of two contrasting themes in the opening section. The restatement of the two themes gives the impression of a written-out repeat of the exposition. This is followed by developmental treatment of those themes in the *Poco più mosso* section, which also includes the motivic development of [013]. The brief and well-disguised return of the first theme (LV) at the end of the movement (see Example 3.7) is in the initial key area of G minor and resembles a miniature recapitulation.

⁴⁸ Combined, the two movements take about 9 minutes to perform, as indicated by the Schott Edition score.



Example 3.7: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, m. 14-16

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The overall formal structure is built with miniature elements, including extremely compressed transitions ([037]), a clear developmental section, a truncated recapitulation (missing the second theme), and a conclusion that is as sudden and constricted as everything preceding it. The most important and strongly influential element in support of a sonata-form type structure is the harmonic language of the *Dialogo*. Despite its lack of a clearly established tonic, the movement features a number of tonal areas that match features of sonata form. Overall, the i–V (g minor – D major) relationship is strongly pronounced throughout the movement. Combined with the series of modulations and resulting harmonic instability of the *Poco più mosso* section, this resembles the procedure usually found in a traditional sonata form movement (Example 3.8).

Exposition

m.2	m.6	m.7	m.8	m.9
Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 1
g minor	D major	g minor	D major	gm –Dm

Development

m.10	m.11	m.13-14
Theme 1 ~	Theme 2 ~	Themes 1+2
g minor	G major	Eb m~ Cm

Recapitulation

m.15	m.16
Theme 1	
g minor	D major

Example 3.8: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, form

The *Capriccio* opens with a G-centered first theme based on a [0157] gesture (Example 3.9).



Example 3.9: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, first theme, mm. 1-6

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An improvisational transition episode leads into the second theme (mm. 41-56), which is built on D and combines whole-tone scale⁴⁹ elements (mm. 41-44, low voice) and modal elements (Example 3.10).



Example 3.10: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 37-62;
second theme mm. 41-56

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The folk style character of both themes, highlighted by the modal and whole-tone scale elements, is further enhanced by their rhythm. Almost the entire *Capriccio* is notated in 3/8 meter,⁵⁰ with running sixteen notes tirelessly moving through the melodic material. The two themes feature contrasting folk-like dance rhythms, with the first theme (Example 3.9) and the consequent transition employing linear, two-measure long patterns, and the second theme (Example 3.10)

⁴⁹ The Whole-tone scale (WT) features a succession of whole steps (whole-tones) within the range of one octave. Based on the pitch content of the scale, two separate WT scales can be identified: the even scale {0,2,4,6,8,10}, and the odd scale {1,3,5,7,9,11}. For a detailed discussion on WT scales/collections, see *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* by J. Strauss, p. 147-149.

⁵⁰ There are only three measures notated in 4/8 meter (mm. 40, 83, 219), and one measure that is in free meter (m. 138).

using a bariolaged melody (mm. 41-56). Starting in m. 57, an embellished repetition of the second theme using tremolo seamlessly bridges into the middle section of the movement (m. 74). The following episode serves as a developmental area for motives from both themes, before introducing new thematic material in m. 96 (Example 3.11).



Example 3.11: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 90-102;
new thematic material mm. 96-102

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This new material is related to the second theme with its similar use of an ostinato pattern. It gradually builds toward the climax of the *Capriccio* in m. 126. As the music hangs suspended in the air, the LV from the *Dialogo* reappears in a flashback of how everything began. The statement is interrupted by a forceful aftershock of the preceding climactic events (Example 3.12).



Example 3.12: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 131-142

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The fast tempo resumes with a powerful return of Theme 1, again built around G, followed by a transitional episode featuring [026] motives derived from the first theme. Unlike the first time, the second theme is stated only once (also based on G), and combines the ostinato pattern and the parallel fifths of its two versions from the first part of the movement (Example 3.13).



Example 3.13: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 191-202

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Another seamless transition leads into a shortened development section that substitutes the new thematic material from the earlier episode with a long, diminishing melodic gesture before the music comes to a complete and rather anti-climactic stop in mm. 247-48 (Example 3.14).



Example 3.14: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 239-252

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The *Dialogo*, however, does not reappear. Instead, there is one final, forceful outburst combining elements from both main themes that eventually resolves into a G major triad [037] (Example 3.15) to close the movement.



Example 3.15: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 259-265

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An in-depth look at the melodic and harmonic events in the *Capriccio* clearly suggests the presence of a sonata-form structure. A number of elements support such an analysis. The opening section of the movement (mm. 1-73) features two contrasting themes, separated by a transitional episode. The themes have a I-V key relationship, common to Classical period sonata form expositions. There is a “development” section (mm. 74-142) where both main themes are represented. Following the climax of the *Capriccio* in m. 126, the first theme (LV) from the *Dialogo* reappears in m. 138, presenting an interruption in the sonata form structure reminiscent of the similar interruptions used by Beethoven in the Pathétique Sonata mvt. 1, and the String Quartet Op. 130 mvt. 1. The thematic material of the opening returns in m. 143, with themes 1 and 2 now in the same key area of G, forming a harmonically conventional “recapitulation” (mm. 143-205). An episode with developmental qualities, including a diminishing ostinato pattern (mm. 206-248) concludes the “recapitulation” section. In addition, the movement closes with a section that acts very much like a coda (mm. 249-265), employing motivic elements from both themes 1 and 2.

There are several points in conflict with a sonata form structure, all found in the “development” section of the *Capriccio*. The return of the “development” section in the second part of the movement (mm. 206-248), offers a strong argument point for the presence of some type of a two-part (AB) form or a three-part (ABA) form with an abbreviated middle section. The drive toward the climax of the movement in m. 126 builds from newly introduced thematic material. This new theme, however, is replaced by a gradually diminishing ostinato pattern in the “second development” section.

In summary, the harmonic relationship between the two main themes, and the existence of exposition, development, and recapitulation areas, along with a clearly defined coda,

overwhelmingly support the presence of a sonata form structure in the *Capriccio*. Similar analysis is found in Richard Steinitz's book on Ligeti's life and works,⁵¹ although Steinitz does not offer any factual evidence to support his statement. What makes the sonata form of the *Capriccio* particularly interesting is the application of pitch-class sets, small motivic cells, and 20th century musical elements such as whole-tone scales. Ligeti successfully modified the formal structure, infusing it with the modern atmosphere of new sonorities and folk-influenced rhythmic elements. The main themes are positioned in a I-V harmonic configuration, with their melodic content featuring set class and whole tone scale elements that maintain their close relationship,⁵² yet they seem very distant from one another in comparison to what one would find in a Classical sonata form. Ligeti's boldest re-configuration of the form is found in the transitions from theme to theme, and between the individual sections of the movement. Rather than making logical harmonic connections, an element of surprise results from short, almost improvisational approaches, and sudden, dramatic interruptions. As seen in Example 3.16, the final result is a short, tightly wound movement, featuring all the characteristics of sonata form structure.

⁵¹ Steinitz, *György Ligeti*, 51.

⁵² Parts of Theme 1 melodic material (mm.3-4, 11-12) are members of the [026] set class, which is a subset of [02468] – the upper voice of Theme 2.

Exposition

m.1	m.13	m.41	m.57
Theme 1	transition	Theme 2	transition
G area		D area	

Development Section

m.72	m.96	m.126 //	m. 138 //
Themes 2+1	New material c area	Climax	<i>Dialogo</i> returns

Recapitulation

m. 143	m. 155	m. 191	m. 199	→
Theme 1	transition	Theme 2	transition	
G area		G area		

Coda

m. 206	m. 223	//	m. 249
Dev. Section	New material (anti-climactic)		Themes 1+2
Themes 2+1	G# area		

Example 3.16: György Ligeti – *Sonate für Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, form

In conclusion, a detailed structural analysis of the composition shows that both movements of Ligeti's *Sonate für Violoncello Solo* exhibit multiple characteristics of sonata form. These, however, are highly modified, 20th century versions of sonata form, infused with contemporary melodic and harmonic elements. Despite the five-year period separating their composition, *Dialogo* and *Capriccio* are connected through numerous musical and structural features, and together form a coherent and compact composition.

Critical Reception and Place in the Cello Repertoire

Since its world premiere in 1979, Ligeti's *Sonate für Violoncello Solo* has enjoyed a warm reception by both critics and audiences. Its rich and evocative opening movement, full of elegant nostalgia and passionate pleas, along with the folk-influenced and strikingly virtuosic *Capriccio*, have made it a prominent part of the 20th century repertoire. The high technical demands of the sonata have shielded it from becoming a part of the educational cello repertoire, as it is quite intimidating and challenging, both technically and interpretively. This was fully recognized when the piece was included in the qualifying round of the celebrated *Rostropovich Cello Competition* in 2005.⁵³ Besides being a virtuosic composition, this work offers a unique perspective on the early stages of Ligeti's development as a composer. The clear contrast of musical elements and stylistic features employed in each movement tests the performer's ability to maintain the overall musical unity of the composition. All of these elements place the sonata squarely among the most important works of the 20th century cello repertoire, along with Zoltán Kodály's *Sonata for Solo Cello op.8* (1915) and Benjamin Britten's *Suites for Cello Nos. 1-3* (1964-71).

⁵³Søren Beech, "Master Class: Music & Musicians – A Ligeti Masterwork." *Strings*, November, 2006, 32, 34-5.

CHAPTER 4

GEORGE CRUMB'S *SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLONCELLO* (1955)

The Story of the Sonata

George Crumb is one of only a handful of contemporary American composers to have earned the respect and acclaim of music critics and audiences worldwide. Composed in 1955, the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* represents his early compositional style, characterized by the combination of different musical elements and the resulting new compositional techniques – or as Edith Borroff describes them:

“...looser techniques, more or less integrated and more or less tonal.”⁵⁴

The composition offers a glimpse of Crumb's keen interest in referential collections and their combinatorial potential with other referential collections as well as with the formal structures of previous centuries.

The sonata comes from a period during which Crumb wrote most of his music involving acoustic string instruments; previously he had completed his *String Trio* (1952), *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1953), and *String Quartet* (1954).⁵⁵ At the time of the cello sonata's composition, Crumb was a Fulbright Fellow at the *Berlin Hochschule für Musik*, studying with Boris

⁵⁴ Edith Borroff, *Three American Composers* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 199.

⁵⁵ <http://www.georgecrumb.net/chrono.html/> (accessed November 7, 2008).

Blacher.⁵⁶ The sonata was dedicated to Crumb's mother Vivian – a very capable cellist who performed extensively as chamber and orchestral musician in the composer's place of birth, Charleston, West Virginia.⁵⁷ The first performance of the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* was given by Camilla Doppmann on March 15, 1957 in Ann Arbor, Michigan,⁵⁸ and C. F. Peters published the score in 1958.

Analysis

George Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* features three movements. The first movement – *Fantasia* – is named after a type of composition that began to appear among musical writings as early as the 16th century. Such pieces have often been described as lacking any particular formal structure – a type of improvisatory vehicle supporting an unconstrained expression of various moods and feelings. The evolution of the *Fantasia* in the past four centuries, and its use by composers of all periods, has highlighted its multiple musical personalities.⁵⁹ George Crumb's take on the subject offers a unique combination of the free-spirited, contrasting emotions typical of a *Fantasia* with a very solid and clearly laid out three-part form.

The first movement of the sonata can be divided into three sections: A (mm. 1-18); B (mm. 19-33); and A1 (mm. 34-48). The beginning of each section and the movement's final

⁵⁶ Richard Steinitz. "Crumb, George." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/06903> (accessed November 7, 2008).

⁵⁷ Borroff, *Three American Composers*, 192.

⁵⁸ <http://www.georgecrumb.net/comp/cello.html> (accessed November 9, 2008).

⁵⁹ Denis Arnold and Lalage Cochran, "Fantasia." In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2413> (accessed November 9, 2008).

chord are marked by a set class [0146] sonority. These chords play a unifying role in the *Fantasia* (Example 4.1).⁶⁰



Example 4.1: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1 - [0146] sonority
m. 1 (first chord); m. 19 (downbeat); m. 34 (second beat); mm. 47-48

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The musical content of the movement is very chromatic, with numerous referential collections being used independently and in combination with one another. Despite the fact that Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* is significantly removed from traditional tonality, it is clear that the sonata is far from atonal. The presence of referential collections, along with the important role of certain set classes, offers the best route for theoretical analysis and harmonic comprehension of the piece. Following a short pizzicato progression that opens the movement, the main melodic motive is introduced (Example 4.2):

⁶⁰ Similar analysis can be found in E. Borroff's book *Three American Composers*, p. 203.



Example 4.2: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1, mm. 3-4

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The pitches of the motive are members of set class [01347], which is a prominent subset of the octatonic collection.⁶¹ This particular set class becomes a central feature of the movement as well as a unifying element between the *Fantasia* and the *Toccata* (the last movement of the sonata).

After a restatement of the pizzicato chords, a complete OCT 1,2 is introduced (C₄ in m. 8, and A₄ in m. 11 are not part of OCT 1,2),⁶² clearly establishing the musical language of the movement.

(Example 4.3):



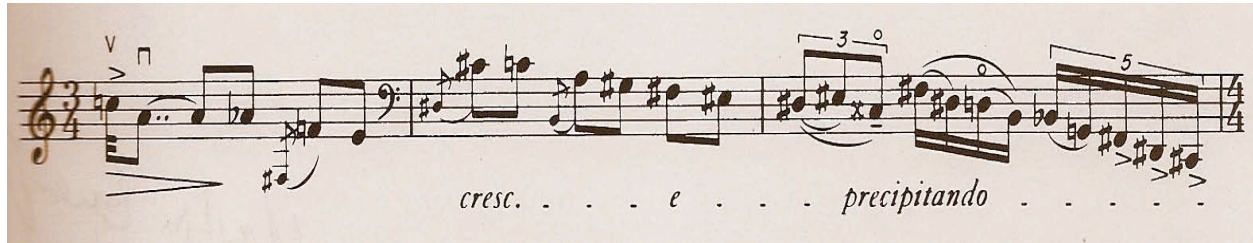
Example 4.3: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1, mm. 7-11

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⁶¹ An overview of Octatonic and Hexatonic scales can be found in Appendix A. For a thorough discussion on the combinatorial qualities of these referential collections, see *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* by J. Strauss, p. 144-150.

⁶² The American Standard Pitch Notation will be used in describing exact pitch and octave placement. For more information on this notation method, see <http://www.dolmetsch.com/musictheory1.htm>

The transition from section A to section B (Example 4.4) is accomplished by exploring the combinatoriality of OCT 2,3 and HEX 2,3 collections through their common tones {2,3,6,11}⁶³:



Example 4.4: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1, mm. 16-18

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The use of hexatonic collections proves to be another element of connection between the *Fantasia* and the *Toccata*. As seen in Example 4.5, the B section begins with a [0146] motive that is subsequently combined with elements from the HEX 2,3 collection, and together they begin the build-up towards the culmination point of the movement in mm. 24-25.

⁶³ See Appendix A for illustration of the common tones of OCT 2,3 and HEX 2,3.



Example 4.5: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1, mm. 19-24

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The transition back to the opening material is accomplished through highly chromatic downward motion featuring arpeggiated minor sevenths and outlined minor thirds in the upper register (mm. 26-27), and major thirds in double stops in the lower register (mm. 30-32). The descent maintains intensity with the use of dissonant sonorities and constantly changing meters (see Example 4.6).



Example 4.6: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1, mm. 25-35

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Section A1 reverts to the sonorities of the opening, employing a variety of OCT subsets (most notably [0146] and [01347]). Its calmness and linear melodic motion offer not only a welcome respite from the preceding musical material, but also set the stage for the contrasting character of the second movement.

Rhythmically, the *Fantasia* is dominated by the opening theme's main rhythmic figure “short-long” (downbeat of mm. 3 and 4 – see Example 4.2) – yet another element that makes an important connection between the first and last movements. Combined with the melodic interval of a minor third, this element becomes the signature motive of the first movement. In his writing on Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, Christopher Wilkinson argues that the entire movement is based upon the interval of a descending minor third⁶⁴ – an accurate assessment regarding melodic organization, but at the same time a much too exclusive approach to the structural analysis of the piece considering the strong presence of referential collections throughout the

⁶⁴ Christopher Wilkinson, “Sonata for Solo Cello,” <http://www.georgecrumb.net/comp/cello.html> (accessed November 11, 2008).

Fantasia. The use of [0146] at the beginning of each of the three main sections and at the end, combined with the specific role given to OCT and HEX sets and subsets, delineate a well-organized ternary form (A – B – A1) in this movement (Example 4.7).

A		transition	→
m. 1	m. 3	mm. 15-18	
[0146]	[01347]	OCT 2,3 + HEX 2,3	
B		climax	transition
m. 19	m. 23	mm. 24-25	mm. 26-33
[0146]	HEX 2,3	[0246] – [01357]	chromatic descent
A1			
m. 34	m. 36	mm. 42-43	mm. 47-48
[0146]	[01347]	[0124]	[0146]

Example 4.7: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 1, form

The *Fantasia*, despite its somewhat relaxed tempo marking – Andante espressivo e con molto rubato (quarter note = 60) – plays out as a highly charged and emotionally diverse composition, and ends with a wonderful sense of closure. At the same time, on a higher structural level, the music maintains a feeling of openness, an underlying need to be continued, which Crumb exploits to its fullest by maintaining an overall cohesion between the three movements of the sonata.

The second movement of the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* is titled *Tema Pastorale con variazioni*. It is filled with 20th century harmonic and melodic elements, yet employs a formal

structure originating from the Classical period. The *Tema*, marked *Grazioso e delicato*, is a condensed rounded binary structure featuring two distinct sections separated by a repeat sign. As seen in Example 4.8, Crumb's harmonic realization does not exactly follow conventional rounded binary form procedures, yet it maintains the integrity of the harmonic structure by using a fifth relationship.

A	:	B	climax	A	
m.1	m.7	m.8	mm.10-11	m. 12	m.15
[027]	E major			[027]	A major
	Cadence				Cadence

Example 4.8: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 2, Tema

Section A is an antecedent-consequent phrase pairing that explores the open melodic space outlined by the initial melodic gesture, concluding with a cadence on an E major sonority (Example 4.9).



Example 4.9: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 2, mm. 1-7

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Section B (see Example 4.10) begins with an elaboration on a rhythmic motive taken from the consequent phrase of Section A. It prepares a swift and elegant ascent to the *Tema*'s culmination point in m. 10, followed by a return to the antecedent phrase material from the A section, and closing with a cadence implying A major.



Example 4.10: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 2, mm. 8-15

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Harmonically, the theme fluctuates between E major and A major without committing definitively to either key area, and it does not exhibit the “I–V” relationship usually found in the A section of a binary structure. There is, however, an interesting occurrence of a harmony that emphasizes the lowered supertonic of the subsequent E major cadence (m. 7). The same harmonic element is present at the end of the B section (m. 15), this time preceding an A major cadence (Example 4.11):



Example 4.11: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 2, mm. 6-7, 14-15

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In her discussion of the Crumb cello sonata, Edith Borroff describes this unusual cadential approach as “...not functional, but [is] anti-tonal...”⁶⁵ – a statement which, considering the overall harmonic structure of the theme, makes perfect sense. Yet, the triadic stability of the cadences, reinforced by the major third of each chord (see Example 4.11) contradicts an “anti-tonal” labeling of the harmonic procedure at hand – instead, it implies that Crumb employs an unconventional and fresh approach to an older, well-known structure without disturbing the overall flow and direction of the music.

The rhythmic character of the *Tema*, with its dotted rhythms and 6/8 meter, resembles a *siciliana*, as discussed by Michael Broyles in his program notes on the Crumb cello sonata.⁶⁶ This is supported by the calm, almost idyllic nature of the melody, and by Crumb’s label for the movement – *Tema pastorale con variazioni*. The melody itself features a strong sense of downward pull, juxtaposed with a rising opening gesture spanning a major ninth that

⁶⁵ Borroff, *Three American Composers*, 203.

⁶⁶ Michael Broyles, “Programme notes in CD Booklet,” *Deutsche Grammophon* 431 813-2.
<http://www.georgecrumb.net/comp/cello-p.html> accessed November 14, 2008.

consequently appears at the beginning of every phrase of the *Tema*. Another prominent melodic feature of the theme is a descending minor second. It appears eleven times in the 15 measures of the *Tema*. On several occasions this motive is paired with a *short-long* rhythmic figure that recalls the *Fantasia* and is heard frequently in the third movement *Toccata*.

Variation I offers a linear, *moto perpetuo* type realization of the musical material of the theme. The B section here peaks on exactly the same pitch (F sharp₅) as the *Tema*, and similarly descends smoothly back to its opening motive. Continuous alternation of groups of 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 sixteenth notes within the 6/8 meter creates a sense of constant rhythmic fluctuation and metric instability.

Variation II offers a playful and elegant rendition of the theme, featuring meter changes in almost every measure while always maintaining the eighth note as constant. This once again creates a feeling of instability and unease. Marked *pizzicato* in its entirety, this variation contrasts with the smoothly rolling Variation I. When performed successfully, it showcases Crumb's exceptional ability to fully exploit all shades and colors of his *Tema*.

Variation III (see Example 4.12) presents Crumb's most lyrical and introspective setting of the theme. This meditative atmosphere is enriched with several quasi-improvisational passages that create a sense of detachment from the *Tema* without sounding completely foreign to the preceding music. This variation recalls the *Fantasia* with its emphasis on the interval of a minor third (mm. 1 and 11), as well as with its eerily similar climax point in m. 11.



Example 4.12: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 2, Var. III

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Variation III, and in essence the entire movement, closes with a short *Coda* featuring an almost exact return of the *Tema*'s musical material. The muted sound of the *Coda* complements the feeling of detachment that emerged from Variation III, and showcases yet another timbre of the theme's musical material.

In spite of its 20th century sound, the second movement of Crumb's cello sonata makes great use of traditional rounded binary form to achieve unity among its separate entities. Each variation maintains the cadence patterns of the *Tema*, and all three employ the same E major – A major key progression. Melodically, every variation except No. 3 opens with the [027] motive

(see Example 4.13), which is first presented in the theme, and plays a central role in the melodic shape of the *Tema*.

Tema	Var. I	Var. II	Var. III	Coda
[027]	[027]	[027]	[016]	[027]

Example 4.13: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 2,
opening melodic gestures

The music of the *Tema pastorale con variazioni* is neither tonal nor atonal. It is an eclectic mixture of ideas that seemingly does not fit with the rounded binary form being used. However, once combined, they offer a unique fusion of old and new, of tradition and innovation.

George Crumb’s *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* closes with a fast, virtuosic movement labeled *Toccata*. As in the opening *Fantasia*, this movement employs a ternary formal structure (A – B – A1). The *Toccata* first appeared among music compositions in the 16th century, predominantly as a keyboard-related genre. An entry in *Grove Music Online* describes it as “a piece intended primarily as a display of manual dexterity, often in free form and almost always for solo keyboard instrument... a large number of pieces labeled “Toccata” incorporate other more rigorous forms such as fugue or sonata form.”⁶⁷ The combination of a ternary structure with the generally free-flowing, virtuosic writing in Crumb’s *Toccata* correlates directly with the above description of the early compositions in this genre.

As mentioned previously, ternary form is one of many features in common between the *Fantasia* and the *Toccata*, however the slow introduction to the closing movement, despite the

⁶⁷ John Caldwell, “Toccata.” In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/28035> (accessed November 18, 2008).

presence of multiple subtle references to preceding musical elements, offers a clear point of contrast between them. The short introduction of the *Toccata* (Example 4.14) features an incomplete ascending HEX 3,4 scale that builds up to an elaborate preparation of a long, dramatic F sharp₅, only to abandon it without any resolution, returning to its starting pitch.



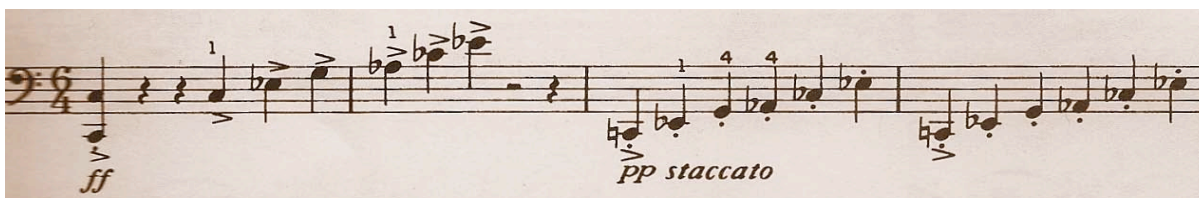
Example 4.14: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, introduction

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At this moment, it almost feels like the movement has reached its peak before it has actually begun, except that the lack of resolution prevents this from being a true culmination point. As stated earlier, this slow introduction is filled with important details that relate to musical ideas from the first two movements, as well as to what will be presented in the following measures. The HEX collections used here are an important part of the *Fantasia*; set class [014], heavily emphasized in the slow introduction, is also a subset of the OCT collection that plays a major

part in the melodic make-up of the first movement. Another important detail is that the highest point of the slow introduction (F sharp₅) is exactly the same pitch as the high points of the middle movement (m. 10 of the *Tema* and m. 10 of Var. I). The descent from it mirrors the motion we saw in the *Tema* – a descending arpeggio spelling two minor triads. In the *Toccata*, the descending motion is extended by two octaves. This motion by arpeggiated minor triads [037] in turn becomes the building block for the A section of the *Toccata*. And finally, the pitch shape of the slow introduction is in an arch-like structure – in this case, from the low C octaves in the beginning through the ornamented E-flat₅, up to the extended stop at the high F sharp₅ and then back down to the initial low C₂ in m. 2 (see Example 4.14). The elaborate diminished triad of the slow introduction (C – E-flat – F sharp) returns later as a motive in the B section of the *Toccata*.

The tense and unresolved slow introduction tumbles down into the main motive of the movement at the beginning of the *Allegro vivace*. Rhythmically, the *Toccata* is governed throughout by a continuous quarter-note motion, and this allows for a seamless transition between the sections of the movement. Whether it is clearly articulated or under a slurred bowing, the pulse of the music always remains clearly present. As seen in Example 4.15, the main melodic motive of the *Toccata* is constructed by combining two minor triads [037] into an ascending, almost complete HEX 3,4 (it is missing 4).



Example 4.15: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 2-5

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A statement of set class [014] (m. 6) separates the appearances of the arching diminished triad C – E-flat – F sharp from the slow introduction (mm. 7-8, mm. 12-13). In these cases, the diminished triad is disguised as a pair of ascending/descending HEX, each consisting of two minor triads (see Example 4.16).



Example 4.16: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 2-14

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All four HEX collections are used in the A section of the *Toccata*,⁶⁸ with occasional interruptions of set classes [014] and [025]. The continuous upward motion of the A section that leads into the B section is achieved through the interaction of the four HEX collections and their common tones. A smooth transition in mm. 36-43 arrives at the B section of the movement. As seen in mm. 37-38 of Example 4.17, HEX 3,4 overlaps through OCT 2,3, with their common tones {0,3,8,11}⁶⁹ providing continuity.



Example 4.17: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 36-43

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In this transition, Crumb once again explores the combinatoriality of the HEX and OCT collections through their common tones, similar to an episode in the opening movement (see Ex. 4.4). The B section of the *Toccata* is almost entirely constructed with musical material from the *Fantasia*: OCT subsets, most notably [01347], which are also the main melodic motive of the first movement; minor triads [037]; subsets of the OCT and HEX collections; and subsets of set class [01347]. All of these become essential ingredients of the harmonic language of the closing movement.

⁶⁸ In almost every case, there is a single pitch-class missing from the collections, due to the common tones of the minor triads being combined.

⁶⁹ See Appendix A for illustration of the common tones of HEX 3,4 and OCT 2,3.

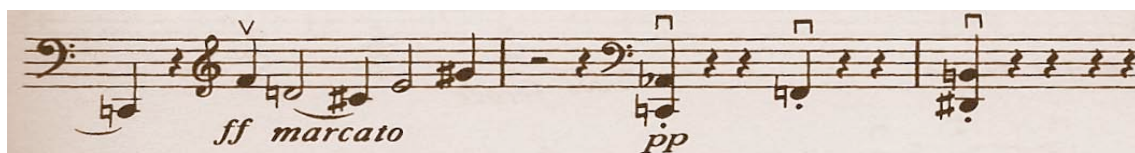
Another point of reference back to the first movement is the rhythmic figure that supports the [01347] motive in mm. 43-44 (Example 4.18).⁷⁰ It is an augmented version of the *short-long* figure from m. 3 of the *Fantasia*. In the first movement it was a 32nd note followed by a double-dotted quarter-note. In the last movement it is transformed into a quarter-note followed by a half-note.



Example 4.18: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 43-44

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A new musical idea [036] is introduced in m. 57 (A-flat₂ – F₂ – B₂, see Example 4.19), providing melodic variety, as well as a sense of instability and rhythmic contrast.



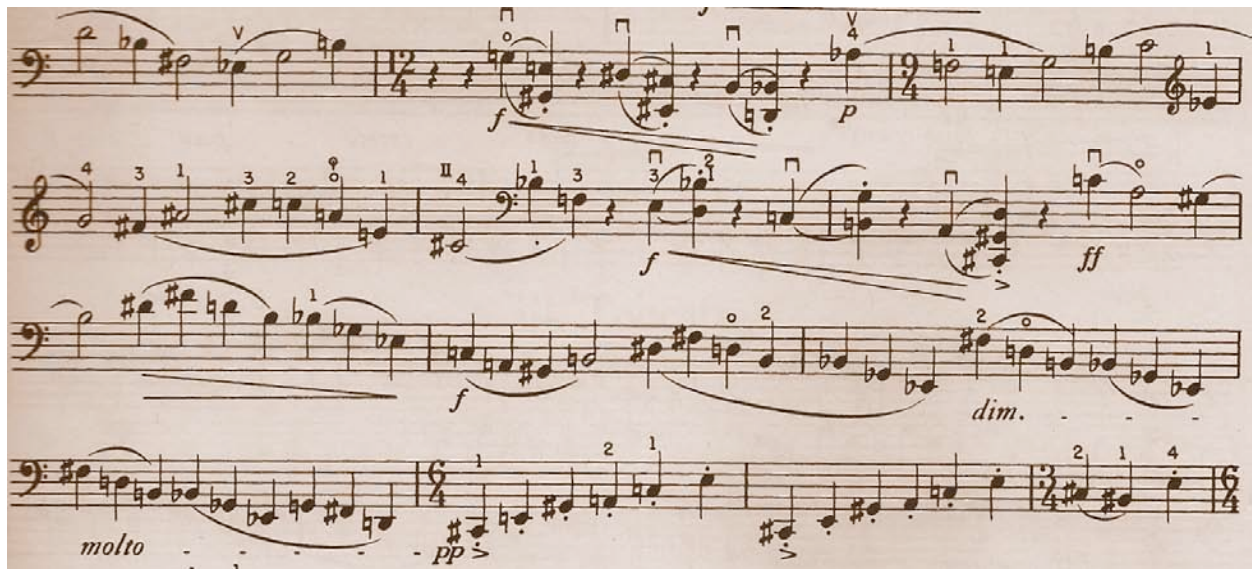
Example 4.19: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 56-58

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This diminished triad sonority [036] is related to the slow introduction of the *Toccata* where it provided the overall diminished triad arch shape. Once it appears in the middle section of the

⁷⁰ [01347] is present from D flat₅ in m. 43 through E₅ in m. 44.

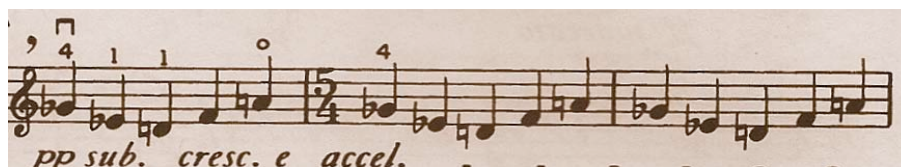
movement (double stops in m. 72; F₃, D₃, B₂ in mm. 75-76), the [036] motive establishes a dialog between the linear OCT-originating material and the more vertical, unstable sonorities containing diminished triads. The return of the opening material (A1) in m. 81 is rather anti-climactic, carefully prepared with a long elaborate descent in both register and dynamics, using HEX 2,3 (Example 4.20, mm. 77-80).



Example 4.20: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 71-83

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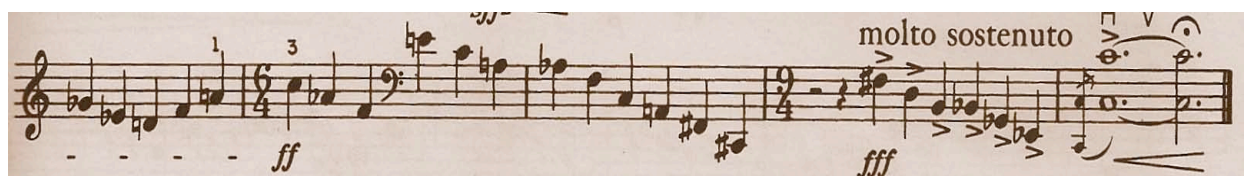
The A1 section begins on the “wrong” pitch of C sharp₂, a half step higher than the initial statement in m. 2 (Example 4.20). This results in a different collection, HEX 0,1. The closing section of the movement brings back the familiar [01347] motive, first heard in the Fantasia, reinforcing again the unity of the composition and its cyclic qualities (Example 4.21).



Example 4.21: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 103-105

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The *Toccata* ends with one final foray through OCT 2,3 (mm. 106-107), HEX 0,1 (mm. 107-108), and HEX 2,3 (m. 109) collections, arriving at the exact chord with which it began – a low register C₂ - C₃ octave (Example 4.22).



Example 4.22: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, mm. 106-110

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This movement is a great example of Crumb's interest in referential collections and their combinatorial qualities, as well as his implementation of a ternary formal structure within a *Toccata* – a genre normally not recognized for its formal content. As illustrated in Example 4.23, the three sections of the form are easily identifiable.

Slow Intro	A		transition →
m. 1	m. 2	m. 17	mm. 36-43
HEX 3,4	HEX 3,4	HEX 0,1	HEX 3,4 – OCT 2,3
HEX 2,3	HEX 2,3	HEX 2,3	
	B		transition →
	m. 43	m. 57	mm. 72-81
	[01347]	[036]	HEX 2,3
	[037]	OCT 1,2	
	A1		
	m. 81	mm. 103-104	mm. 106-109
	HEX 0,1	[01347]	OCT 2,3
	HEX 3,4		HEX 0,1 HEX 2,3

Example 4.23: George Crumb – *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, mvt. 3, form

Despite its short duration (the score suggests a performance time of approximately 10 and a half minutes), the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* by George Crumb features three structurally sound movements held together through a number of unifying musical elements. As a result, there is a cohesion that spans the entire composition from the opening movement's spirited rhythms and nuanced octatonic and hexatonic sonorities through the calm, highly chromatic *Tema pastorale con variazioni*, and closing with the rhythmically driven *Toccata* that returns to the octatonic and hexatonic tonal language of the *Fantasia*.

Critical Reception and Place in the Cello Repertoire

Due to its unique musical language, innovative use of formal structures, and exciting last movement, George Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* has been widely accepted by critics and audiences alike. The sonata offers perspective on Crumb's progression as a composer and the development of his own musical mode of expression. This piece is perhaps less technically demanding than the solo cello works of Zoltán Kodály and Benjamin Britten, but it is nevertheless a challenging composition that requires advanced instrument control and good comprehension of 20th century compositional techniques. This composition can be found in the discographies of many of today's leading cellists such as Truls Mørk, Matt Haimovitz, Peter Wispelwey, and Frans Helmerson.⁷¹ A performance of Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* offers a test not only of the cellist's musicianship but also of the audience's sophistication.

⁷¹ <http://www.georgecrumb.net/comp/cello.html> (accessed December 10, 2008).

CHAPTER 5

HALSEY STEVENS' *SONATA FOR VIOLONCELLO SOLO* (1958)

The Story of the Sonata

The *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* by Halsey Stevens has five movements and was composed during Stevens' tenure (1946-76) at the University of Southern California. This was a period in which Stevens composed numerous chamber music works for various instrumentations and settings. Works of note include the *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1950), *Suite for Solo Violin* (1954), *Septet for Wind and String Instruments* (1957), and *Seven Duets for Violin and Cello* (1967).⁷² In addition to the solo cello sonata, Stevens composed several other pieces for the cello, including *Intermezzo, Cadenza and Finale for Cello and Piano* (1949, revised 1950), *Five Duos for Two Cellos* (1954), *Romanian Dance for Cello and Piano* (1960), and *Sonata for Cello and Piano* (1965).⁷³ The *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* was dedicated to the renowned cellist Gabor Rejto – a colleague of Halsey Stevens at the University of Southern California where he was professor of cello. Rejto gave the first performance of the work on January 5, 1959 at the Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles,⁷⁴ and later recorded the work for the Composers

⁷² <http://www.halseystevens.com/published/chamber.htm> (accessed December 12, 2008).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Osvaldo Polatkan, review of *American Masters – Halsey Stevens: Symphonic Poem Dances, Sonata for Violoncello Solo, Symphony No. 1*, http://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/album.jsp?album_id=53074 (accessed December 12, 2008).

Recording, Inc. (CRI) label.⁷⁵ The score of the piece, edited by Gabor Rejto, was published by C. F. Peters in 1967.

Analysis

The first movement of Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* features three contrasting musical ideas. Halsey Stevens describes the structure of the movement in his preface to the C. F. Peters edition of the piece: "The *Introduzione* presents three thematic ideas, elements of which recur in later movements – though the work is not cyclical."⁷⁶ The first theme (Example 5.1) has a free, quasi-improvisatory quality, making an eclectic mixture of lyrical and declamatory elements.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Halsey Stevens, *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, ed. Gabor Rejto, (New York: C. F. Peters: 1967), 2.



Example 5.1: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, mm. 1-13, first theme, mm. 1-12

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The second theme is more rhythmic, with a strong vertical sense due to its double and triple stop notation (Example 5.2).

Example 5.2: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt 1, mm. 22-36; second theme, m. 23 (starting on the third beat) through m. 35

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The third theme of the *Introduzione* (Example 5.3) has a calm and distant character, resulting from its linear structure and flat dynamic profile.



Example 5.3: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt 1, mm. 44-53; third theme, m. 45 (starting on the second beat) through the second beat of m. 53

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The initial statement of Theme 1 is introduced by deliberate ascending motion towards a D₃-A₃ open fifth. From this sonority, A eventually emerges as the harmonic axis of the first theme, with the melodic material built around it (see mm. 6-12 in Example 5.1). The first theme is followed by an extended transitional section (last beat of m. 12 – m. 22), which elaborates on musical and rhythmic ideas from Theme 1. The strong rhythmic organization and overall sense of direction of the second theme, beginning on the third beat of m. 23, offers a clear contrast to the first theme's improvisatory character.

The main rhythmic motive of Theme 2 is the “short-long” figure of sixteenth note – double-dotted quarter note. The double and triple stop notation further emphasizes the rhythmic drive of this section. Melodically, the second theme consists of two phrases, 8 and 5 measures long respectively. The first phrase begins in m. 23 in the key area of G major, moving away before cadencing on an a minor sonority in m. 30. The second phrase goes directly into the return of Theme 1 in m. 36. The abbreviated restatement of Theme 1 is centered harmonically on C, and features a shortened transition into the third theme.

Theme 3 (m. 45) offers a striking rhythmic and melodic contrast to the first theme. Rhythmically, it consists entirely of eighth-note triplets. This continuous and fluid motion, along with the soft dynamic marking (*pp* throughout) contributes to the music’s distant and emotion-free character. The melody features a linear realization that initially moves around its central pitch E. Following an improvisational ascent to the highest point of the movement in m. 53, the opening gesture of Theme 3 is restated an octave lower (m. 54), before the music flows almost directly into first theme material. The *Introduzione* closes with one final statement of Theme 1 in m. 57. The melodic content of the theme is slightly varied, but its implied harmonic center (A) and register are the same as at the beginning of the movement. The ascending motion from m. 1 that introduced Theme 1 is now inverted (mm. 63-64) and placed after the last appearance of the theme, creating a feeling of closure to the movement.

The formal structure of the *Introduzione* resembles a five-part Rondo or a Ritornello form. Theme 1 (A) appears three times, with its harmonically central pitch of A moving up a minor third to C in the second statement, then returning back to its original pitch area of A for the third statement. The resulting A – C – A harmonic motion of the three appearances of Theme 1 supports an analysis of the form as a Ritornello rather than a Rondo, due to the theme’s return

in a different key. Theme 2 (B) is harmonized in G major, and Theme 3 (C) in e minor. Both themes present contrasting melodic and rhythmic ideas, and enhance the improvisational qualities of the movement. Example 5.4 illustrates the formal structure of the *Introduzione*.

Theme 1 (A)	transition	Theme 2 (B)	
m. 1	m. 12-23	m. 23	m. 30
A		G major	A minor cadence
Theme 1 (A)	transition	Theme 3 (C) → restated	
m. 36	mm. 43-44	m. 45	m. 54
C		E minor	
Theme 1 (A)			
m. 57			
A			

Example 5.4: Halsey Stevens –*Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, form

The second movement of Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* employs variations on an ostinato bass theme. The *Ciaccona*, better known under its French name *Chaconne*, became a popular genre with composers in Europe in the early 17th century. Its origins, however, are

believed to have been in the area known today as Mexico.⁷⁷ In its early existence (prior to 1800), the *Ciaccona* was predominantly a dance whose musical realization employed variations. In the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries, it evolved into a set of variations over an ostinato-bass pattern.⁷⁸ Halsey Stevens' *Ciaccona* showcases many of the elements usually found in such compositions: a clearly marked and identifiable triple meter, an eight measure-long ostinato pattern, and an ever-present musical connection between the variations, assuring the cohesiveness of the movement. The continuity of the composition is further enhanced by Stevens' phrase structure, which on several occasions features a pick-up note in the final measure of a variation leading into the following variation.

The initial statement of the ostinato pattern is followed by ten variations. Structurally, Variation 4 is the only one shorter than the eight measures-long ostinato (it has seven measures), and Variation 10 is the only one to exceed the length of the ostinato pattern, having ten measures. Stevens uses an interesting rhythmic structure in the ostinato – the *Ciaccona*'s traditional rhythmic emphasis on the second beat of the measure does not appear until the last three bars of the eight-measure phrase. Instead, the first five measures feature a minuet-like strong downbeat, followed by lighter second and third beats. This gives the *Ciaccona* a playful, dance-like quality, as well as presenting a direct reference to the genre's original style (see Example 5.5).

⁷⁷ Alexander Silbiger, "Chaconne." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05354> (accessed December 19, 2008).

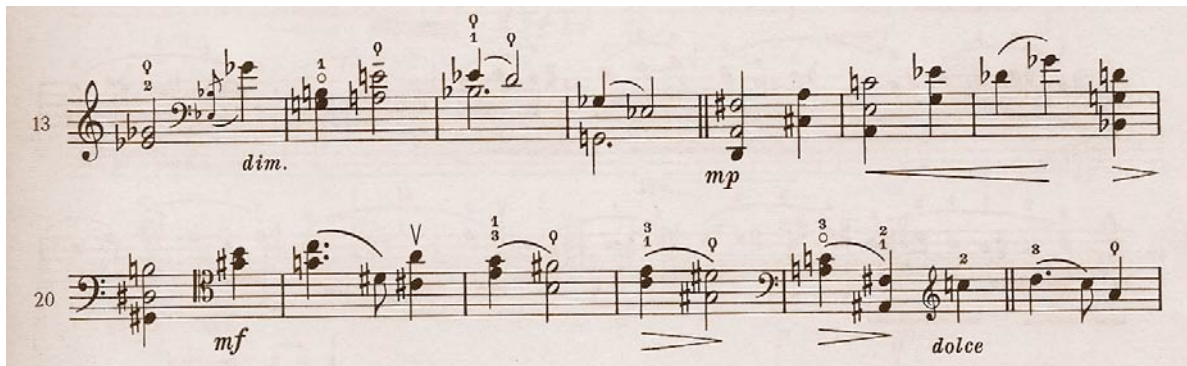
⁷⁸ Ibid.



Example 5.5: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2 mm. 1-12;
ostinato pattern mm. 1-8

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Rhythmically, the *Ciaccona* can be divided into three larger sections: the initial statement plus Variations 1-3, Variations 4-6, and Variations 7-10. The first section (mm. 1-32) is built mainly with larger note values (quarter and half notes), and maintains a reserved character (Example 5.6).



Example 5.6: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 13-25

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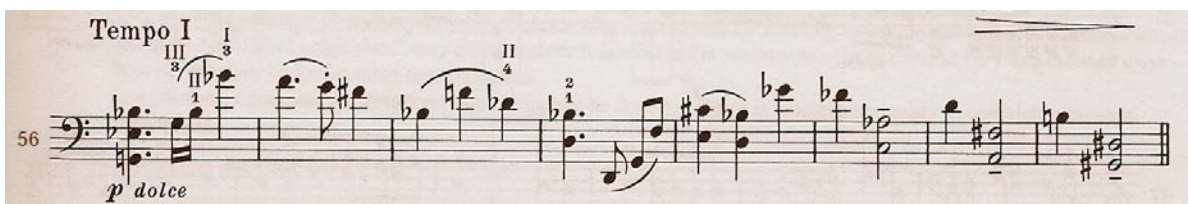
The middle section of the movement (Example 5.7) is more agitated, employs faster-paced rhythm including running sixteen-notes, and features the climax point of the *Ciaccona* in Variation 5 at mm. 45-46.



Example 5.7: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 42-47

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The final section (Example 5.8) returns to the character of the initial section, with its larger note values and slower-paced motion:



Example 5.8: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 2, mm. 56-63

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The rhythmic pace of the *Ciaccona*'s three sections (slow – fast – slow) is aligned with the overall ternary structure of the movement, which is illustrated in Example 5.9:

A	B	A1
Theme + Var. 1-3	Var. 4-6	Var. 7-10
mm. 1-32	mm. 33-55	mm. 56-89

Example 5.9: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello, Solo*, mvt. 2, form

Harmonically, the *Ciaccona* uses a 20th century language. The ostinato pattern does not employ a specific key signature or key area. Instead, the harmony fluctuates around the pitch of F sharp. The following variations retain F-sharp as their central pitch to varying extent, with the exception of Variations 3 and 7. Variation 7, which also marks the return of the slower-paced first section, features melodic material similar to that found in the opening statement of the ostinato pattern (see Example 5.8). However, the central pitch of the melody here moves from G at m. 56 to G-sharp at m. 63, in contrast to the F-sharp-centered opening melody (see Example 5.5). In this movement, Halsey Stevens successfully combines an older genre and a traditional compositional technique with contemporary musical language. The structure of the variations and the overall continuity of the music are maintained despite the free harmonic approach in the treatment of the ostinato pattern. The alternating rhythmic emphasis between the first and second beats enhances the contemporary feeling of the melodic material, and complements the harmonization of the ostinato pattern.

The third movement of Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* is a short *Scherzo* in ternary form. The A – B – A1 structure is manipulated in a 20th century fashion: the three parts of the form are condensed, and the thematic material within the A and A1 sections is organized in an unconventional manner. The opening A section is long and elaborate, and features two

contrasting themes. Theme 1 (m. 1), based on the pitch D has a linear character that carefully extends its melodic range from D₃ to a high point reaching F₅ in m. 21 (Example 5.10).



Example 5.10: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, mm. 1-12; theme 1
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A brief transition follows (see Example 5.11), utilizing melodic elements of Theme 1, and creating rhythmic variety through changing meters.



Example 5.11: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, mm. 19-30
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Theme 2 (Example 5.12) is introduced in m. 33, and immediately establishes contrasting, rhythmically dominated melodic material. The vertical nature of the music here is emphasized by the composer's marking *brusco* (sharp, short and abrupt),⁷⁹ along with the use of double stops.



Example 5.12: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, mm. 31-42;
theme 2, mm. 33-44

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The opening theme returns in m. 45, now based on the pitch A and acts as a transition into the middle section of the *Scherzo*. A long, gradual *diminuendo*, beginning in m. 56 (Example 5.13) prepares the arrival of the B material in m. 61.

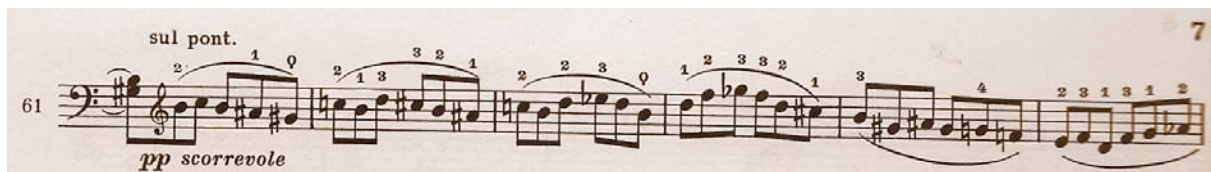


Example 5.13: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, mm. 55-60

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⁷⁹ <http://www.dolmetsch.com/defsb4.htm> (accessed January 8, 2009).

The B section of the form is significantly shorter, and features only one theme (see Example 5.14), which is in complete contrast with the preceding musical ideas. This new musical material is derived from the sonata's opening movement. In the *Introduzione* this episode is centered on E and is marked *pp*. Here, the melody centers on B, and in addition to the *pp* marking, the theme is to be played *sul ponticello*. The combination of these elements, along with the *scorrevole* (gliding from one note to another) marking,⁸⁰ results in a very distant, almost detached episode that gives the B section a dream-like character.



Example 5.14: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, mm. 61-66;
B section theme

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The return to the opening material is achieved through a gradual transition from *sul ponticello* back to *modo ordinario*. A diminishing melodic pattern begins a long *crescendo* in m. 77, and following a brief turn towards the B section *pp* character, the A1 material arrives triumphantly in m. 88. The A1 section of the structure is remarkable due to the ordering of its thematic content. Halsey Stevens cleverly places Theme 2 ahead of Theme 1 here, for its rhythmic, dance-like character offers a distinct contrast with the *Scherzo*'s middle section. In addition, Theme 1 (now based on the pitch G) and Theme 2 are in constant interaction, alternating musical fragments while maintaining the musical direction of the composition (Example 5.15).

⁸⁰ <http://www.dolmetsch.com/defss1.htm> (accessed January 8, 2009).



Example 5.15: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, mm. 85-102

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The *Scherzo* concludes with a coda-like episode featuring a brief statement of Theme 1, centered as in the opening of the movement around the pitch D, and leading into an open-fifth closing sonority.

The overall formal structure of the *Scherzo* is illustrated in Example 5.16:

A				
m. 1	mm. 23-32	m. 33	mm. 45-60	
Theme 1	transition	Theme 2	transition	
D				
B		A1		
mm. 61-76	mm. 77-87	m. 88	m. 97	mm. 110-126
<i>sul pont.</i> episode	transition	Theme 2	Theme 1	Coda (Theme1)
B			G	D

Example 5.16: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 3, form

In the absence of strong harmonic relationships among the parts of the form, Stevens employs thematic contrast as an organizational tool within the ternary structure. The A – B – A1 form is used in an innovative manner, yet its integrity is preserved. The composer himself describes the movement's form as "...modified arch-form, its 'keystone' being a scurrying *ponticello* passage derived from the first movement."⁸¹ Contrary to its name and small size (the score indicates performance time of 2 minutes and 15 seconds), the *Scherzo* presents a serious opportunity to observe Stevens' outstanding compositional acumen, and his sensitive treatment of the cello's wide range of timbre.

The fourth movement of Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo, Notturmo*, offers the calmest and most melancholic musical material so far. The introspective aspect of the music is further enhanced by the muting of the cello throughout the entire movement. The ternary form of

⁸¹ Stevens, *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, p.2.

the movement reflects its close musical and historical relationship with the *Nocturnes* of 19th century Romanticism. Stevens' *Notturmo* features three sections that move from the subdued opening *Lento assai* through the brighter, more transparent *poco piu mosso* section, before reaching the culmination of the movement and its peaceful resolution in the closing section marked *Tempo I*.

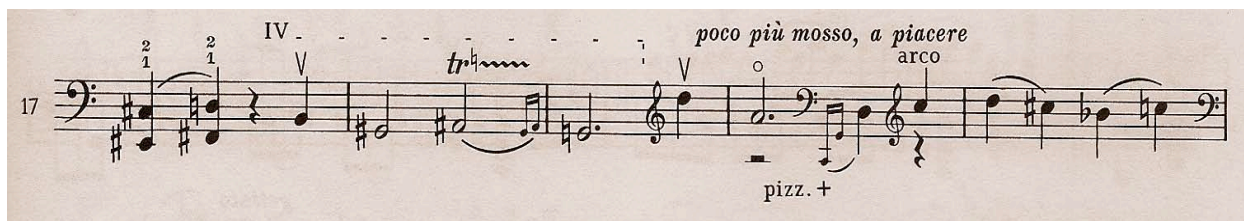
The A part of the form consists of two phrases arranged in an antecedent-consequent relationship and notated in double stops (Example 5.17). The antecedent phrase (mm. 1-9) is rhythmically stable, moving in continuous, often parallel quarter-note motion. The consequent phrase (mm. 9-14) has a slightly freer rhythmic makeup, and a more diverse dynamic contour. The antecedent-consequent relationship is expressed through registral and dynamic contrasts between the two phrases, resulting in one unified and elegant musical motion.



Example 5.17: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 4, mm. 1-16

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The A section closes with an elegant descending line marked *delicato* that leads into a conclusive cadence at m. 19 (Example 5.18).



Example 5.18: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 4, mm. 17-21

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The B part of the ternary structure is lighter, less dissonant (mainly because it is written out as a single voice), and features two melodic gestures, as in the A section. The antecedent idea (last beat of m. 19 – m. 27) is scored in the upper register of the instrument, while the consequent (last beat of m. 27 – m. 35) descends gradually from A-flat₄ to F₂. The thicker texture of the transition back to the opening material (mm. 35-44) is due to the return of double stops (Example 5.19).

Example 5.19: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 4, mm. 37-46

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The A1 section re-establishes the darker character of the A section with a varied repetition of the antecedent phrase from the beginning of the *Notturmo* before reaching its emotional climax in m. 52. The movement concludes with a brief consequent idea (Example 5.20, mm. 53-56) that becomes part of a melodic and dynamic descent. This is similar to the A section's cadential approach discussed in Example 5.18.



Example 5.20: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 4, mm. 51-61

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The ternary form used by Stevens in the *Notturmo* is quite conventional, with all of its elements carefully developed and easily identifiable. Due to the lack of a governing tonal center or key area, the movement's musical integrity is based on the cohesion of its ternary structure, which in turn is strengthened by the presence of the antecedent-consequent phrase relationships found in all three sections of the form. Example 5. 21 illustrates the *Notturmo*'s structure:

A

m. 1	m. 9	mm. 15-19
antecedent	consequent	descending motion/cadence

B

m. 19	m. 27	mm. 35-44
antecedent	consequent	transition

A1

m. 45	m. 52	m. 53	mm. 53-61
antecedent	climax	consequent	descending motion/cadence

Example 5.21: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 4, form

The last movement of Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* is an energetic sonata form *Finale*. Structurally, this is Stevens' most conservative treatment of a traditional form in this sonata, with the two main themes exhibiting a key relationship typical for Classical period sonata form. The *Finale* highlights his ability to enliven an older element of music (in this case, sonata form) by infusing it with the sonorities of the 20th century.

The first theme of the exposition is loosely set in A major. As seen in the comparison in Example 5.22, the rhythm of the opening gesture has similarity with the opening theme of the first movement *Introduzione*.



Example 5.22: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 1, mm. 1-3; mvt. 5, mm. 1-4

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The top notes of the first four chords (C sharp₄, A₃, D₄, C sharp₄) forms the central melodic motive of the *Finale*, while the rhythmic figure underneath becomes the main rhythmic motive. These two motives are developed throughout the movement using techniques comparable to Beethoven's treatment of the *Symphony No. 5* opening motive. For instance, in the exposition of the *Finale*, Stevens employs fragmentation, metric variation, and rhythmic variation (see example 5.23).



Example 5.23: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5; mm. 9-10 (fragmentation), mm. 18-21 (metric variation), mm. 22-23 (rhythmic variation)

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Harmonically, Theme 1 (Example 5.24) never seems to be fully committed to the key of A major, although it is always present to some degree. In terms of rhythm, the use of changing meters and accents create a Bartók-like atmosphere that permeates the entire movement.



Example 5.24: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5 mm. 1-12,
theme 1 mm. 1-11

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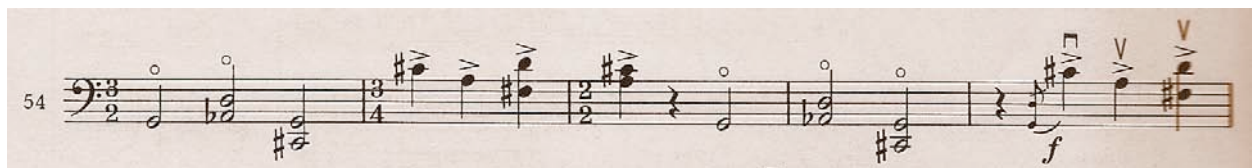
The musical nod to Béla Bartók is not surprising given Stevens' lifelong interest in the life and music of the great composer. Following a prolonged episode that presents multiple versions of Theme 1's opening motive (mm. 11-26), a brief transition introduces the second theme of the exposition in m. 33 (Example 5.25).



Example 5.25: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5, mm. 27-36
theme 2 mm. 33-36

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Theme 2 (m. 33) initially appears to be in the key of C major, although it quickly becomes chromatic and tonally unstable (see Example 5.25). The linear melodic content of the second theme (mm. 33-36) is in strong contrast with the musical material presented earlier in the movement, despite its first three notes (m. 33) being a rhythmic augmentation of the *Finale*'s opening motive. Stevens explores this rhythmic relationship in the closing section of the exposition (mm. 54-57) where the two motives are combined as the movement makes a seamless transition into the development section (Example 5.26).



Example 5.26: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5, mm. 54-58

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As if seeming to be a repeat of the exposition, the development section begins with an exact repetition of Theme 1 before briefly manipulating some of the consequent transitional material. Following this, Theme 2 is treated to a more traditional development, along with the ever-present opening four-note motive (Example 5. 27).



Example 5.27: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mm. 75-83

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The remainder of the development is tonally unstable, with thematic material from both themes navigating through a number of key areas including C minor, F minor, and E minor before closing on an E-flat major sonority in m. 109 (Example 5.28).

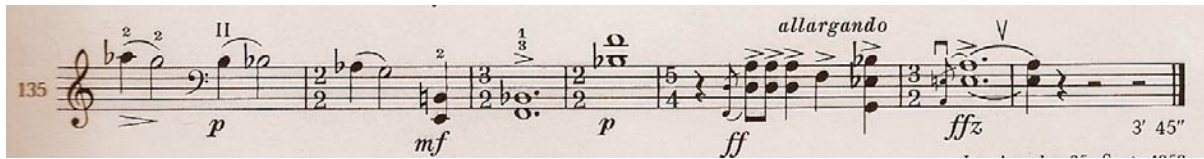


Example 5.28: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5, mm. 108-113

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The recapitulation section of the movement is very compact, and follows conventional tonal procedures. Theme 1 returns in the opening key of A major (mm. 110-121) and is followed by new transitional material based on the main rhythmic motive (mm. 127-131). An abbreviated Theme 2 (mm. 132-138), also in the key of A major, appears to change the atmosphere for a

moment. The *Finale* closes with a decisive and ceremonial statement (see Example 5.29) of the main melodic and rhythmic motive of the movement.



Example 5.29: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5, mm. 135-141

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It is clear from this analysis that the *Finale* employs a rather conventional sonata form. When compared with the preceding four movements, Steven's approach to the structure in this movement is his most thoughtful and detailed in terms of modifications and variations of the form. This is the only movement where the overall tonal plan and key relationships between the main thematic ideas provide the music with harmonic coherence and stability. Example 5.30 illustrates the formal structure of the *Finale*.

Exposition

mm. 1-11	mm. 27-32	mm. 33-42	mm. 54-58
Theme 1	transition	Theme 2	transition
A major		C major	

Development

m. 58	m. 75	m. 109
Theme 1	Theme 2	cadence
A major	f sharp minor	E flat major

Recapitulation

mm. 110-121	mm. 127-131	mm. 132-138
Theme 1	transition	Theme 2
A major		A major

Example 5.30: Halsey Stevens – *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, mvt. 5, form

The five movements of Halsey Stevens' *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* provide an example of a 20th century approach to formal structures from centuries past. The sonata features a five-part rondo, three separate ternary form movements (one of them employing the variation principles of the *Ciaccona*), and a sonata form *Finale*. All of these forms are approached with a 20th century palate without jeopardizing their structural qualities. The overall unity of the composition is enhanced by the presence of thematic material from the *Introduzione* in some of the consequent movements (*Scherzo*, *Finale*). Any possibility of cyclical composition approach

is put aside by the composer himself in his preface to the sonata's score.⁸² The combination of these elements with Stevens' own musical language results in a unique and exciting composition. It is modern design and execution built on traditional foundations.

Critical Reception and Place in the Cello Repertoire

Despite a warm reception by both critics and audience of its premiere in 1959,⁸³ the *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* has rarely found a place on concert programs. In fact, the piece is largely unknown among cellists, which is probably the main reason for its limited exposure. The sonata was first recorded commercially by Gabor Rejto, the dedicatee of the composition. A technically demanding composition, Stevens' sonata lacks the brilliance and folk-like charm of Kodály's *Sonata for Solo Cello*⁸⁴ and Cassadó's *Suite for Violoncello Solo*,⁸⁵ or the interesting timbral and harmonic world that characterize Hindemith's *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*,⁸⁶ and Britten's *Three Suites for Cello*.⁸⁷ The motivic development found throughout the work shows strong stylistic ties with the compositional approach seen in Beethoven, Brahms, and Bartók, thus the sonata has developmental elements in common with the *Suites for Solo Cello Nos. 1-3* by Bloch⁸⁸ and Reger's *Three Suites for Violoncello Solo*.⁸⁹ Regardless of its relative obscurity, Stevens' sonata belongs among the 20th century cello masterworks and is likely to eventually gain its proper place in the repertoire of concertizing cellists.

⁸² See p. 54 for exact quotation of Stevens' words.

⁸³ <http://www.halseystevens.com/published/chamber/htm> (accessed January 16, 2009).

⁸⁴ Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967) composed his *Sonata for Solo Cello* in 1915.

⁸⁵ It is believed that Gaspar Cassadó (1897-1966) completed the *Suite for Violoncello Solo* in the mid-1920's.

⁸⁶ Paul Hindemith (1895-1964) wrote his *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* in 1923.

⁸⁷ The *Three Suites for Cello* by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) were composed between 1964 and 1971.

⁸⁸ Ernst Bloch (1880-1959) composed his *Suites for Violoncello Solo Nos. 1-3* in 1956-57.

⁸⁹ Max Reger (1873-1916) wrote his *Three Suites for Violoncello Solo* between 1892 and 1903.

CHAPTER 6

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONG THE WORKS EXAMINED

The solo cello sonata medium represents a fascinating musical intersection of creative ideas among György Ligeti, George Crumb, and Halsey Stevens. It is an unlikely crossroad for three composers of vastly different personal and musical backgrounds and subsequent professional careers, for whom these works represent their only foray into the genre. Their approach to the sonata principle, along with their treatment of the instrument, resulted in three works having numerous similarities, thus creating an intriguing connection among the three compositions.

All three composers are acknowledged for their achievements in various fields of music: musical scholarship (Stevens),⁹⁰ teaching (Ligeti, Stevens, Crumb), and compositional innovations (Ligeti, Crumb). Their cello compositions, despite some initial success (in the cases of Crumb and Stevens), brought them relatively limited acclaim and recognition. György Ligeti eventually built a successful career in the field of electronic music. George Crumb went on to earn numerous awards for his compositions for amplified string instruments, prepared piano, and particularly some vocal and orchestral works. At the time of his sonata's composition, Halsey Stevens was already a well-respected choral and orchestral composer, with an established reputation as a teacher and scholar. Of the three, Stevens devoted the most time to writing for the cello (a complete study of cello compositions by Halsey Stevens is available in a D.M.A. thesis

⁹⁰ Halsey Stevens is widely recognized as one of the leading scholars on the life and music of Béla Bartók.

by Edward Dixon).⁹¹ In addition to the *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, he composed seven other pieces for cello and piano, along with one work for two cellos.⁹² Ligeti and Crumb, on the other hand, did not write any other music for the cello (with or without piano), only employing the instrument in small chamber ensembles and as a member of the string quartet. In terms of their place within each composer's creative development, the sonatas by Ligeti and Crumb were early compositions from their student days, while Stevens wrote his sonata near his fiftieth birthday.

An interesting common element among the three compositions featured in this study is how all three composers chose to label their work "sonata," even though none of them followed the conventional three or four-movement sonata structure that was prevalent during the Classical and Romantic periods. Ligeti's sonata features two short and connected movements, while Stevens' composition consists of five individual movements. George Crumb's three-movement sonata comes close to the Classical period model, although its thematic content, harmonic structure, and inter-movement relationships place it squarely in the 20th century musical realm.

The treatment of older formal structures in these three works is strikingly similar. In each sonata there are examples of innovative compositional approach – forms are frequently condensed, sometimes even with missing sections, and on several occasions new thematic material is introduced at unusual places within the form, both structurally and harmonically. All three compositions exhibit limited dependence on tonal elements. Instead, important themes, episodes, and sections are centered on certain pitches or key areas. For instance, in the first and third movements of his *Sonata for Solo Violoncello*, George Crumb employs pitch-class sets, OCT, and HEX collections instead of keys or tonic areas as organizing principles of the thematic material, without disturbing the cohesion of the ternary structures that support each movement.

⁹¹ Edward E. Dixon. "The Violoncello Works of Halsey Stevens" (D.M.A. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1989).

⁹² <http://www.halseystevens.com/published/chamber.htm> (accessed February 8, 2009).

Although these three sonatas similarly do not make use of key signatures, each work represents the composer's individual musical language. Ligeti's sonata is very chromatic, employing pitch-class sets, whole-tone scales, and subtle folk-like elements to govern the melodic material. Crumb's harmonic language features OCT and HEX collections, along with pitch-class set motives and some triadic harmonies. The sonata by Halsey Stevens, despite its highly chromatic content, displays a harmonic language more akin to the early 20th century than the 1950s, and is in essence the most conservative composition of the three. In spite of the presence of cyclical elements in all three sonatas, neither of them should be considered *cyclical* in the traditional sense.⁹³ Instead, as detailed by the analysis in the preceding chapters of this study, these elements provide continuity between the contrasting musical and harmonic textures of each movement. Halsey Stevens' approach to this aspect of motivic unity is more subtle and limited, with few motives reappearing in subsequent movements. In the case of George Crumb's sonata, the outer movements are clearly dominated by the OCT and HEX collections and their intricate relationship.

Another common thread among the sonatas is the inclusion of an independent, self-sufficient type of composition within the multi-movement structure. György Ligeti's sonata features a virtuosic *Capriccio*, suggesting a possible reference to the compositions of Nicolo Paganini. Richard Steinitz offers an explanation of the second movement's title in his book on the life and works of Ligeti: "...the description alludes to Paganini's violin caprices, whose mercurial brilliance Ligeti had encountered as a child."⁹⁴ In the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* by George Crumb, the first and third movements are named *Fantasia* and *Toccata* respectively, two genres predominantly for the keyboard that originated in the 16th century. Finally, the *Sonata for*

⁹³ Halsey Stevens himself refutes the notion of his sonata being *cyclical*. For more information, see Chapter 5 (Example 5.35).

⁹⁴ Steinitz, *György Ligeti*, 51.

Violoncello Solo by Halsey Stevens features a *Ciaccona* and a *Notturmo*, two older genres that were popular with composers and audiences in the Baroque and Romantic periods respectively.

Stylistically, each of these works exhibits elements of influence from Béla Bartók. In Ligeti's sonata, it is the improvisatory, folk-like nature of the *Capriccio*'s themes, and their rhythmic make-up. George Crumb's *Tema Pastorale con variazione* (movement two) features three variations that treat the theme's melodic material with quasi-Bartókian timbral variety and range. In the sonata of Halsey Stevens, Bartók's influence is notable in the use of changing meters and the resulting rhythmic ambiguity in parts of the *Scherzo* and throughout the *Finale*.

The acoustic limits of the cello are continually challenged by all three composers, seemingly without concern for the psyche of the performer. The sonatas offer a wide range of progressive, highly challenging techniques: sliding three-voice *pizzicati/glissandi* and double-stops *sul tasto tremolo* (Ligeti); four-voice *pizzicati*, double stops, and fast *pizzicati* (Crumb); and fast-paced *sul ponticello* and high register double-stops (Stevens). As a result, the solo cello sonatas of Ligeti, Crumb, and Stevens are only accessible to highly advanced players. The compositions of György Ligeti and George Crumb have become firmly established in the cello repertoire. In the case of Halsey Stevens, however, the difficulty of the composition, combined with its more conservative nature, have contributed to its lack of repute.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The topic for this study exemplifies the very essence of music – its ability to regenerate and to inspire, to enliven and to excite, and to bring together forces seemingly incapable of co-existence. The pairing of traditional formal structures and 20th century sonorities plays an important role in the transition from the trends of Neo-classicism toward the ideas of Modernism. The composers included in this study represent both sides of this spectrum. Halsey Stevens composed extensively, employing a vast array of traditional instrumental and vocal genres and settings, without truly distancing himself from his initial musical direction - one deeply rooted in the ideas of the late Romantics. György Ligeti and George Crumb, on the other hand, found their calling in the freedom of expression and unlimited acoustic possibilities that characterized the musical avantgarde of the 1960s and 1970s. In this regard, the three solo cello sonatas offer an opportunity for side-by-side comparison between three different personalities whose compositions before and after had little in common.

A majority of compositions from the second half of the 20th century avoid being tied to formal structures from previous periods in music's history by incorporating a musical language that dominates the composition, in essence becoming the structure that supports the entire piece. These three sonatas offer proof that old and new can work together, that sonata form is still relevant and can be part of the modern musical palette, and that pitch-class sets and referential

collections can be incorporated within the framework of a large section or an entire formal structure without overwhelming or distorting the unity of the composition.

The analysis of György Ligeti's *Sonate für Violoncello Solo* underscores the composer's desire to write in a progressive manner by exploring new harmonic textures, and combining them with modified versions of sonata form. Ligeti successfully transformed two distinctly individual movements, written almost five years apart, into a cohesive two-part composition. The close alliance between the contrasting melodic and emotional content of the *Dialogo* and the *Capriccio* is assured through numerous motivic connections, as well as through their conventional harmonic relationship. Unfortunately, for over twenty-five years this composition remained a victim of a shortsighted political ideology that deemed it too modern for its time and did not allow for it to be performed. As our assessment gains insight with the passage of time, musicians and audiences are more fully able to comprehend and appreciate the creative powers at work in Ligeti's sonata.

All three movements of George Crumb's *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* make use of formal structures and genres from previous centuries. In addition to giving the light and elegant *Tema pastorale con variazioni* a modern harmonic outlook, Crumb converted two improvisational and free flowing keyboard genres dating back to the 16th century (*Fantasia* and *Toccata*) into structurally sound contemporary compositions. Harmonically, the sonata showcases the exciting possibilities presented by the use of referential collections. Crumb incorporated OCT and HEX elements as significant thematic material within the ternary forms of his *Fantasia* and *Tocatta*. The combinatorial qualities of these elements provide seamless transitions between sections, as well as logical connections between movements. Since its early critical success, the *Sonata for Solo Violoncello* has earned a place among the most important and exciting pieces for solo cello.

It is a favorite choice for young American cellists who must present a work by an American composer at the Tchaikovsky Competition.

At first glance, the *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* by Halsey Stevens seemed out of its element next to the sonatas of Ligeti and Crumb. A detailed analysis, however, reveals many innovative musical qualities. The eclectic mixture of movements employs a variety of ternary forms, a ritornello, and a sonata form. Stevens infused a highly chromatic musical language into this collection of older structures, creating a composition that celebrates music's past by transforming it into the present. Carefully placed motivic references provide continuity and unity throughout the piece, and the use of both *Ciaccona* and *Notturmo* give it a multi-faceted historic character. After more than fifty years of existence, the *Sonata for Violoncello Solo* by Halsey Stevens remains relatively obscure. It deserves more recognition by cellists, and may eventually find a deserved place in the repertoire.

The solo cello sonatas by Ligeti, Crumb, and Stevens collectively succeed in finding common ground for elements representing both the history of music and its future, embracing the predictable and the unexpected. In essence, in the 1950s these compositions were conceived with new modes of musical expression, moving forward, yet still offering a design with roots in tradition.

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APPENDIX A

OCTATONIC AND HEXATONIC SCALES

Octatonic Scales

The Octatonic scale (OCT) features a succession of alternating half steps (semi-tones) and whole steps (whole-tones) within the range of one octave. Based on the location of the lowest half step within the octave, three different octatonic scales can be identified:

OCT 0,1 – the bracket lists the included pitches: {0,1,3,4,6,7,9,10}



OCT 1,2 – {1,2,4,5,7,8,10,11}



OCT 2,3 – {2,3,5,6,8,9,11,0}



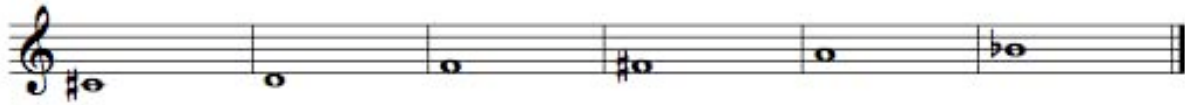
Hexatonic Scales

The Hexatonic scale (HEX) features a succession of alternating half steps (semi-tones) and minor thirds within the range of one octave. Based on the location of the lowest half step within the octave, four different hexatonic scales can be identified:

HEX 0,1 – the bracket lists the included pitches: {0,1,4,5,8,9}



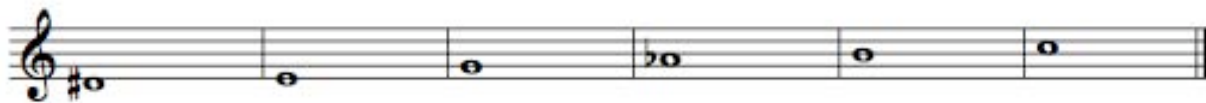
HEX 1,2 – {1,2,5,6,9,10}



HEX 2,3 – {2,3,6,7,10,11}

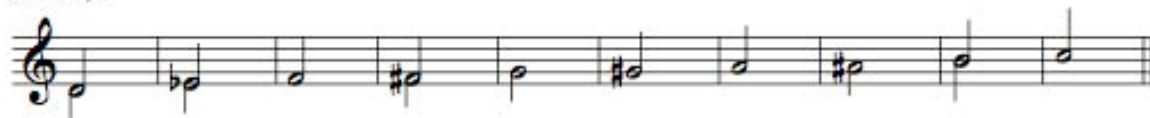


HEX 3,4 – {3,4,7,8,11,0}



Common tones between OCT 2,3 and HEX 2,3:

OCT 2,3



HEX 2,3

Common tones between OCT 2,3 and HEX 3,4:

OCT 2,3



HEX 3,4