THREE NEOCLASSICAL COMPOSITIONS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO: STRAVINSKY’S

DUO CONCERTANTE, PROKOFIEV’S VIOLIN SONATA NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, AND

POULENC’S VIOLIN SONATA OP. 119

by

JONG AH MOON

(Under the Direction of Levon Ambartsumian)

ABSTRACT

In the early part of the twentieth century, the Neoclassical style was a strong influence on
violin works by composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Francis Poulenc, and Sergei Prokofiev.
Through a recording project and an accompanying document, I will introduce distinctive styles
of Neoclassical violin music within three works: Stravinsky’s *Duo concertante* (1932),
Prokofiev’s Violin Sonata No. 2 in D Major, Op. 94 bis (1943), and Poulenc’s Violin Sonata, Op.
119 (1942-1943). Through the performance and discussion, I explore ways to interpret these
works in light of their Neoclassical elements.

INDEX WORDS:  Neoclassicism, Neoclassical violin music, Igor Stravinsky, Sergei
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Neoclassicism is a music trend developed in the early twentieth-century. Flourishing in the era between the two World Wars, economic depression, the development of audio and recording technology, and anti-romanticism affected composers who pushed for changes to combine contemporary musical devices with structured traditional music. Certain twentieth-century composers used compositional techniques, musical gestures, structure of forms, and other stylistic elements from earlier periods in their newly composed works, especially seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century music. In the early 1920s, composers of various countries were trying to move away from late-Romantic German music which was ultrachromatic, excessively expressive, and employed huge orchestras. In this document, I start by defining Neoclassicism, tracing the origin of the term and discussing features that developed in the style. As this document supports my recording, I present distinctive approaches to Neoclassicism within three selected works: Igor Stravinsky’s *Duo concertante* (1932), Sergei Prokofiev’s Violin Sonata No.2 in D Major, Op. 94 bis (1943), and Francis Poulenc’s Violin Sonata, Op. 119 (1942-1943).

Purpose of Study

After playing Prokofiev’s Violin Sonata No. 1 (1938-1946) in my second recital at the University of Georgia, I became interested in studying his Violin Sonata No. 2. During my

studies, I noticed a difference in style between Nos. 1 and 2. It was difficult for me to find an appropriate conceptual framework for the Second Violin Sonata until I studied the stylistic features of Neoclassicism. My research led me to study other Neoclassical composers. Stravinsky was one of the quintessential Neoclassical composers, and his composition, Duo concertante intrigued me. The name of each movement references an earlier music style. For example, the title of the fourth movement is Gigue, evoking the dance found in Baroque suites. The term Neoclassicism was first applied to Stravinsky in 1923, but the Neoclassical trend started earlier with the French Les Six, in particular, with the work of Erik Satie. Poulenc joined Les Six, and he was influenced by Satie and Stravinsky’s Neoclassicism. Poulenc’s Violin Sonata exhibits elements of Neoclassicism such as combination of traditional French music with flexible structures and tonalities. Each of these three pieces incorporates Neoclassical elements in distinctive ways. I record these three works, using my study of Neoclassical elements to inform my interpretation. The order of the program is organized by dates of compositions. The following summarizes the information for the recording portion of the project.

Recording Information

Collaborative Pianist: Lee, Mi-Jin.

Recording Engineer and Supervisor: Neo Music Production

Date of Recording: July 23, 25, 30, and 31, 2012

Order of Program with Track Numbers:

Prokofiev Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in D Major, Op. 94bis.

1. Moderato

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2. Scherzo

3. Andante

4. Allegro con brio

Stravinsky *Duo concertante*

5. Cantilène

6. Églogue I

7. Églogue II

8. Gigue

9. Dithyrambe

Poulenc Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 119

10. Allegro con fuoco

11. Intermezzo

12. Presto tragico
CHAPTER 2
THREE NEOCLASSICAL COMPOSITIONS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Description of Neoclassicism

Neoclassicism was a movement rejecting some elements of late Romanticism, but composers sometimes incorporated dissonant and atonal elements associated with Expressionism. After the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, there was political tension between France and Germany, and an anti-German movement sprung up in Paris. Before the Franco-Prussian war, Wagnerian music predominated in Europe, and France was no exception. However, as France was invaded by Prussia in 1871, anti-German sentiment affected French musicians. They tried to distance their style from Wagnerian music, and actively sought alternatives to it. Accordingly, composers in France such as Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and Claude Debussy (1862-1918) gave greater attention to earlier French composers such as Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) and François Couperin (1668-1733), and revived the traditional forms and structures associated with their works. The Neoclassical trend began as a nostalgic movement in Paris, and it expanded its legacy to more creative approaches to contemporary music. Neoclassical composers took musical elements from Baroque and Classical period music, which used balanced forms and structures. These composers sought for controlled and balanced

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4 Ibid., 24-25.
expressiveness along with an expansion of common practice tonality by incorporating modality, new scales, and atonality. Thus, contemporary sonorities became more accessible to the listener. Neoclassicism signifies styles of music that reject a focus on personal expression and extra-musical symbolism prioritized in late-Romantic and Expressionist movements. 

Igor Stravinsky and Neoclassicism in *Duo concertante*

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) composed ballet music based on Russian folk themes and motifs, in his earlier period (1882-1914). In 1914, Stravinsky went into exile in Switzerland, moving to France in 1920. He became concerned about his new environment including the new audience in Paris. The exile from his country was the beginning of his new musical period of “samplings, experiments, and amalgamations.” This section discusses how Stravinsky’s exile to France affected his music, particularly the development of his Neoclassical style. The permanent exile from Russia after October revolution of 1917 led Stravinsky to the new music style of Neoclassicism. Because Stravinsky had experienced serious financial difficulties, he called for small groups of instruments. For example, his *L’Histoire du soldat* (1918) calls for an ensemble similar to that used in the Baroque period, and in *Pulcinella* (1919), he borrowed the instrumentation of a small Baroque concerto grosso. Further, Stravinsky did not limit his Neoclassicism to borrowing forms and structures from Baroque and Classic period. I will discuss Stravinsky’s references to the ancient Greek and Roman cultures in his Neoclassicism, as expressed in *Duo concertante.*

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7 Antokoletz, 268-269.
Duo concertante was written for the violinist, Dushkin, who inspired Stravinsky to composed violin music for his recital. Stravinsky said, “I had formerly no great liking for a combination of piano and strings, but a deeper knowledge of the violin and close collaboration with a technician like Dushkin had revealed possibilities I longed to explore.”

Stravinsky was introduced to the violinist Samuel Dushkin in 1931, and they became friends. Dushkin (1891-1976) was an American violinist, who studied with Leopold Auer (1845-1930) and Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962). As Dushkin was a great violinist, Stravinsky became interested in exploring the possibilities of the violin as a solo instrument. After Stravinsky wrote his first violin concerto for Dushkin in 1931, he decided to compose more violin music for Dushkin’s recital program. As the violin was not a familiar instrument to Stravinsky, Dushkin cooperated on Stravinsky’s violin compositions with his technical advice. Duo concertante (1932) was his second collaboration with Dushkin.

Stravinsky’s fascination with the violin was expressed through his use of various colors of violin sound. His choice of title shows that Neoclassicism for Stravinsky was not limited to the trend toward exclusively eighteenth-century music. Concertante references a Baroque musical genre. Additionally, the five movements have names derived from a variety of sources, from Baroque dances to poetic traditions, including ancient Greek poetry; Cantilène, Églogue I, Églogue II, Gigue, and Dithyrambe. I will focus on their names that came from ancient poetry. In particular, the first movement is a good example to discuss how to interpret Neoclassic elements derived from ancient poetry.

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The first movement’s title is *Cantilène*, known in English as cantilena, and it references an ancient French lyrical poetry. The term also can refer to a cradle song with a smooth and lyrical melody line.\(^\text{10}\) Stravinsky applied both characters in here. It is in ABA form. The first A section (mm. 1-14) is an opening monologue section. Stravinsky wrote a steady, angular *piano* sixteenth note pattern for the violin, while the piano plays droning tremolos in *pianississimo* (Ex. 1). Because it has neither lyrical melodic lines or interesting rhythmic gestures, the A section is more about pure instrumental sound than musical expressions.

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Example 1. Stravinsky, *Duo concertante, Cantilène*, mm. 1-17
On the other hand, the middle section B (mm. 15-54) shows lyrical melody line. It is characterized by expressive violin double stops, and the returning A section (mm. 55-64) brings back the opening monologue motifs. Stravinsky used harmonics at the end of this movement in the violin (Ex. 2). Because of the airy sound of harmonics, it sounds like humming, perhaps creating a reference to the Italian term *cantilenare*, which means “to hum.”

Example 2. Stravinsky, *Duo concertante, Cantilène*, mm. 57-64

The second and third movements’ titles are *Églogue I* and *Églogue II*. *Églogue*, known in English as “eclogue,” is a pastoral genre of Greek poetry.¹¹ Stravinsky states that, “The spirit and form of my Duo Concertante were determined by my love of the pastoral poets of antiquity and

their scholarly art and technique.”¹² Églogue I and Églogue II express different styles of pastoral characteristics through Baroque and Classical period compositional techniques such as pedal points, toccata-like figuration, and ostinatos. Églogue I is in binary form. In the first section, the violin plays a drone like bagpipe music, and the sustained open strings D and A function as a pedal point. The collaborating piano plays toccata like ostinato motives (Ex. 3). Interestingly, Stravinsky did not put bar lines until the beginning of second section. It helps the piano play a continuous line with ostinato motives, and the long sustaining double stop on the violin supports the piano.

Example 3. Stravinsky, *Duo concertante*, *Églogue I*, mm. 1-5
At the second section, the violin changes its sound by using the bow stroke. Stravinsky wrote durational down bow pattern in the violin’s double stops that create a more active character (Ex. 4). Also, the mood of the second section contrasts with that of the first section. He used frequent meter changes and staccatos to create an energetic atmosphere.

Example 4. Stravinsky, *Duo concertante, Églogue I*, mm. 6-11

Stravinsky also used imitation technique from Baroque counterpoint in *Églogue II*. There is an imitation between piano and violin. The melody of the piano’s right hand (mm. 22-23) imitates the violin’s melody (mm. 19-21) with embellished notes (Ex. 5). *Églogue II* begins with the violin’s delicate melody in high register, and it moves to low register. The violin’s melody is slower and more lyrical than *Églogue I*, and Stravinsky’s lyricism flourished in *Dithyrambe*.
Example 5. Stravinsky, *Duo concertante, Églogue II*, mm. 19-22

The last movement, *Dithyrambe* is an ancient Greek strophic song for Dionysus, the god of wine and good living. Stravinsky used a high register on the violin, within 4/16 time signature in a slow tempo. The violin’s lyrical melody builds up a long phrase of *crescendo* and arrives at the highest register in *fortissimo*. As Stravinsky titled this movement as *Dithyrambe*, which is the ancient Greek hymn song, *fortissimo* is not aggressively but solemnly played.

Sergei Prokofiev and Neoclassicism in Violin Sonata No. 2 in D Major

Prokofiev’s quintessential Neoclassical work, Classical Symphony Op. 25 (1916-1917), was composed two years earlier than Stravinsky’s representative Neoclassical work *Pulcinella*.

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In the symphony, the well-balanced sonata-allegro forms in the first movement and the final movement point towards Prokofiev’s reference to Classical period structures, mostly derived from Franz Joseph Haydn. Prokofiev studied composition with Rimsky-Korsakov, and he was the only major composer to return to his country after the October Revolution, twenty years after he moved away. During Prokofiev’s Socialist Realism period (1936-1953), he turned to Neoclassicism. Like other Soviet works of the time, his music is characterized by simplicity and realism, distinct from the experimental music trends in Europe and America. Prokofiev used features of tonality to support his lyrical and folk-like melodies, and his use of well-balanced harmonic structures and traditional forms also demonstrates the simplicity of Soviet music of the time. However, he combined experimental music elements from his earlier works with Classical formal strategy of contemporary Soviet works. He continued using contemporary elements such as heightened dissonances and chromatic alterations within his traditionally organized structures.

Prokofiev composed his Flute Sonata in D Major, Op. 94 in 1942, and he arranged it for violin and piano in 1943 for his friend David Oistrakh, and retitled it Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in D Major, Op. 94bis. This version was premiered in 1944 by Oistrakh. Its D Major key is reminiscent of his first Neoclassic work, Classical Symphony. The structure of this music also reflected elements from earlier periods. The second violin sonata has four movements, slow-fast-


16 Antokoletz, Twentieth-Century Music, 314-315.

17 Ibid., 316.
slow-fast, and it was influenced by formal ideals of the Baroque period such as *sonata da chiesa*. However, the first movement, Moderato, is a Classical sonata form with a repeated exposition. In my document, I will focus on Classical characteristics of this work such as its tonality and the structure of movements, and I will perform it in my recording in a manner that avoids excessive emotional expression.

As I mentioned before, the first movement has strict Classical sonata form consisting of an exposition (mm. 1-41), development (mm. 42-88), recapitulation (mm. 89-115), and coda (mm.115-130). Each of these three section has a similar length, around forty measures. Also, the harmonic structure is simple and clear. The first subject of the exposition (mm. 1-20) is in D Major, and the second subject (mm. 21-40) is in A Major, a traditional dominant relationship. The exposition has a beautiful lyrical melody, and performers should be aware of dynamic changes. Prokofiev wrote *forte* only in four bars in the violin part (mm. 15-18). At the pick up to m. 15, the violin jumps to a high register with *crescendo*. The *forte* is played on the violin for four bars, and the piano has *decrescendo* a bar before the violin’s *diminuendo* (Ex. 6). As a result, the quietness and lyricism of the exposition contrasts with the stronger and more expressive development section.
Example 6. Prokofiev, Sonata No. 2 in D Major, first movement, mm. 1-19
At the end of the development section, the recapitulation is connected by chromatic descending figures in the piano and softly leads into the lyrical melody of the first subject in the violin (Ex. 7).

Example 7. Prokofiev, Sonata No. 2 in D Major, first movement, mm. 83-92
The recapitulation ends calmly followed by a coda, which has an interesting chord progression (Ex. 8). In mm. 119-122, the violin and piano play between B-flat minor and D major, and from m. 123, the piano stays in B-flat Minor chord. In mm. 126-130, B-flat minor descends to D major chord, Bb/m (i) - Ab/m - Gb/M - F (V) - E/m - D/M. In mm. 126-128, B-flat minor arrives at F major (i-V), and it goes to D major at the end. In terms of Neo-Riemannian theory, they are in parsimonious voice leading relationships. The example 8 shows the relationships and chord progressions. Prokofiev resolved the ambiguous ending of the first movement in the final movement by using the perfect cadence (D/M: IV - V - I).

Example 8. Prokofiev, Sonata in No. 2 in D Major, first movement, mm. 122-130

The second movement is a fast Scherzo in ternary form in A Minor, and the third movement is a lyrical, a binary form in F Major. For the last movement, Prokofiev used the
sonata-rondo form, with exposition (mm. 1-71), development (mm. 72-121), and recapitulation (mm. 122-160) followed by a coda (mm. 161-174). The exposition consists of A (mm. 1-29) - B (mm. 30-53) - A’ (mm. 56-66) - B’ (mm. 67-71), and the development introduces new theme C (mm. 72-121). The recapitulation consists of A” (mm. 122-144) - B” (mm. 145-160), and Coda.

Francis Poulenc and Neoclassicism in Violin Sonata Op. 119

Poulenc owes much of his exposure to Neoclassical ideas to Erik Satie and his followers. After the First World War, Satie tried lyrical and witty modal contexts (his answer to Wagnerism). This stylistic experimentation suggested a new musical trend to French composers. Satie sought clear textures and defined structures in his music, aligning him with an ideal of Neoclassicism. After the successful ballet music Parade by Satie, young French composers gathered with Satie and were influenced by him. As advocated by Cocteau’s manifesto, Le Coq et l’Arlequin, the music of Les Six pursued a distinctively French style independent from the Romanticism of Wagner and Debussy’s Impressionism. The name Les Six was given to the group by the critic Henri Collet in 1920. The members were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhoud, Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre. Les Six led the movement of Neoclassicism even before Stravinsky’s landmark Neoclassical work, Octet, composed in 1923. Poulenc joined Les Six, and was the last member of Les Six to continue this trend, Neoclassicism. Poulenc, as a member of the French Les Six, proposed a Neoclassical style in French music that reacted against the late Romanticism of Wagner and the Impressionism of Debussy. Poulenc’s Neoclassicism is not focused on the revival of traditional common practice era tonality music but on presenting contemporary elements in flexible traditional forms. Thus, he did not hesitate to

19Ibid., 244.
use brilliant contemporary elements such as chromatic scales and polytonality. He also used light and entertaining characteristics juxtaposed with the more “serious” sonata form.

Poulenc composed the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 119 during 1942 and 1943. He dedicated this music to the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. The fingerings and bowings were written by Ginette Neveu. She was a French violinist who studied with George Enescu and Carl Flesch. Poulenc composed this violin sonata for Ginette, and after her death he edited the last movement. Simplicity, directness, and objectivity formed the elements of Neoclassicism for Les Six, and Poulenc demonstrated these aesthetic qualities in his violin sonata. Poulenc was famous for infusing the tradition of Parisian popular chanson with the elegant style of French café music. As a result, the second movement possesses very lyrical and delicate melodies with unexpected dissonances, common types of French music. His Neoclassical style is a combination of traditional and contemporary elements of harmonic structure and expression.

The first movement, Allegro con fuoco consists of an exposition (mm. 1-96), development (mm. 97-129), and recapitulation (mm. 130-160). Because Poulenc’s Neoclassicism is progressive as a member of Les Six, he did not use strict Classical sonata form and key areas, but instead used flexible structures and key relationships. The exposition does not have a functional harmonic progression, and the first subject does not stay in D minor. However, Poulenc used repeated dotted note rhythms to create the unity in the first movement. Thus, Poulenc used the traditional composition techniques such as imitation between the violin and piano and Alberti bass accompaniment patterns as elements in his Neoclassical style. In the exposition, the first subject (mm. 1-29) presents energetic dotted rhythms. The chords of

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harmony are based on D minor. Poulenc wrote the instruction *fortississimo* and *très violent* (very violent) in the violin part in m. 3, so the violin could express the first subject with energetic and strong sound (Ex. 9).
Example 9. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 1-6

The bridge section (mm. 30-40) between the first subject and second subject begins with G major, and it has softer dynamic piano in the violin and mezzo forte in the piano (mm. 30-34). It moves to parallel key, G minor, and brings back the energetic character (ff and pizz) of the first subject shortly in mm. 35-40 (Ex. 10).
Example 10. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 30-43
The second subject (mm. 41-86) present more melodic character with soft sound than the energetic first subject. At the beginning of the second subject, Poulenc wrote \textit{très doux} (very mild), and it has vocal musical melodies. Because Poulenc composed a lot of vocal music, in the lyrical melodic lines, he used the traditional composition techniques such as imitation came from traditional French chanson. The Example 11 shows the imitations between the violin and piano. The piano imitates the violin’s melody in an octave lower (mm. 41-44) and in a half step down (mm. 49-56).
Example 11. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 40-59
Also, he used broken chords such as *Alberti bass* which was commonly used in the eighteenth-century for an accompaniment music (Ex. 12). Between mm. 61 and 67, the violin plays *Alberti* figures in opposite motion to the broken chords in the piano. Also, there is an imitation between the violin and piano. The violin imitates the piano’s right hand melody (m. 61) in a half step down (m. 67).
Example 12. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 60-74
At the end of the exposition (mm. 87-96), Poulenc wrote *decrescendo* in mm. 94-96, but the powerful ending remains, with chromatic ascending line in the violin (Ex. 13). In addition, he wrote the instruction *strictement sans pédale* (strictly without pedal). Therefore, the piano creates dry timbre that helps keep the tension of the ending.

Example 13. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 87-96
The development does not develop the subjects of the exposition. Poulenc introduced a contrasting subject in the development section. In development section, he wrote more expressive music with flexible tempo changes through *tempo rubato* (Ex. 14). He wrote *cédez* (*ritardando*) in m. 106, and also he used *suivre le piano* (follow the piano) in violin section in m. 114 (Ex. 15) and m. 123 (Ex. 16) where the piano is instructed to play *à l’aise* (at ease). Poulenc wrote brilliant *arpeggios* for the piano, so for balanced musical expression, the violinist should listen carefully to the piano’s *arpeggios*.

Example 14. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 102-107
Example 15. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 111-116

Example 16. Poulenc, Violin Sonata Op. 119, first movement, mm. 119-123
The recapitulation begins with a brief first theme on the piano, and the whole section is short compared to the long exposition. Poulenc created a violent ending with violin’s strong *fortissimo* in *pizzicato*. He wrote *très sec* that means very dry. It helps to build a mysterious mood before the contrasting second movement.

The second movement is subtitled “*La guitare fait pleurer les songes*” (The guitar makes the dreams weep), referencing a poem by Lorca Poulenc. He used *pizzicato* on the violin and repeated notes to produce a guitar-like sound. The second movement has the lyricism of a French chanson. The last movement brings back the fast and strong characteristics from the first movement.
CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Neoclassicism is a complex twentieth-century music trend that returned to balanced forms and genres from earlier styles, especially the classical period through evoking ancient materials such as pastoral poetry and Greek songs, and combining classical harmonic structures with contemporary dissonances. The composers Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Poulenc are representative of the Neoclassical style in the violin repertoire: Stravinsky’s *Duo concertante*, Prokofiev’s Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2, and Poulenc’s Violin Sonata, Op. 119. I focus on the different styles of Neoclassicism employed by these three composers, and the particular nature of each work.

Stravinsky’s Neoclassicism covers a wide range. In *Duo concertante*, he focused on ancient and Baroque music. His approach to Neoclassicism concerns not only compositional techniques, but also the concept of music. He revived these forgotten genres, employing them in naming the five movements in *Duo concertante*: ancient French lyrical poetry (*Cantilène*), Greek pastoral poetry (*Églogue I* and *II*), Baroque dance music (*Gigue*), and the Greek strophic song (*Dithyrambe*). Prokofiev, meanwhile, concentrated on structures: in his Violin Sonata No. 2, he used Classical forms with well-balanced harmonic structures. The first movement is in sonata form in D major, and the second movement is in ternary form (ABA’) in A minor. Prokofiev used Scherzo in the second movement instead of the conventional third movement for this form. His third movement is a rounded binary in F major, and the last movement is in sonata-rondo form,
the typical last movement form in Classical works. Poulenc’s Violin Sonata Op. 119 features more flexible forms and tonalities than the other two pieces discussed. As a member of Lex Six, Poulenc’s works show the influence of traditional French music, combined with contemporary elements. Poulenc used traditional devices from the French chanson such as imitation between the piano’s right hand and the violin’s melody. He also used *Alberti bass* figures, from the Classical style, for the violin. Moreover, frequent tempo fluctuations, *tempo rubato*, and flexible forms and tonalities show contemporary stylistic features of Poulenc’s Neoclassicism.

These three Neoclassical violin sonatas demonstrate a comparison between composers in the Neoclassical style. Thus, this analysis and recording might encourage performers to create interpretations that respect the Neoclassical elements within these three works.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Scores


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Neoclassicism


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