

Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata,
Op.26

by Jayoung Hong

2010

Submitted to the graduate degree
program in the School of Music and the
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata, Op.26

By

Jayoung Hong

Submitted to the graduate degree program in the School of Music and the
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts.

Committee members

J. H.
L. H.
K. H.
C. H.
Anschutz

Date defended: March 26 2010

The Dissertation Committee for Jayoung Hong certifies
That this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata, Op.26

Committee:

Date approved: March 29 2010

Abstract

In his Piano Sonata Op.26, Samuel Barber combines the use of traditional forms, such as Sonata-form and fugue, with twentieth century technique of composition, such as quasi twelve tone writing and motivic development. These tools are used to create four beautiful and characteristic movements that are technically challenging, but also a delight to audiences. Because of this, Barber's Piano Sonata Op.26 is one of the great works of the twentieth century.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this process:

My committee members- Dr. Jack Winerock, Dr. Kip Haaheim, Dr. Charles Freeman, Dr. David Johnson, and Dr. Steven Spooner.

My friends Peter Purin and Robert Craig for helping with so many things.

My husband Kwang Nam Choi, my delightful son Yoonsoo Choi, and my parents for all their love and support.

My God for everything.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Movement I: Allegro energico	2
Movement II: Allegro vivace e leggero	9
Movement III: Adagio mesto	11
Movement IV: Allegro con spirit	14
Bibliography	25

Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata, Op.26

Samuel Barber (1910-81)'s Piano Sonata is one of the most important composers of twentieth century American piano music. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1910, into a musical family. He began to study music at six and entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia at thirteen. When he was nineteen he made his public debut as a composer and had immediate success in the United States.

His Piano Sonata Op.26 was composed for the League of Composers on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1950. The sonata was first presented in public in the same year by Vladimir Horowitz, who hailed it as a masterpiece of American musical literature and an innovative work for the piano. It was written in the middle of Barber's long career, during which much of his music fused his lyrical, elongated melodic style with new compositional devices. The sonata has levels of chromaticism and dissonance not approached in earlier works: however, the forms remain traditional. The work is emotionally more profound and pianistically further advanced than Barber's earlier piano pieces. Barber employs his own version of twelve-tone writing, which is found in the first and third movements. His music is seldom static; even when the harmonies are ambiguous, the contrapuntal texture is alive.

Barber chose to set all the movements in conventional forms; the first is cast in sonata form, fast and energetic. The second movement is a delicate scherzo, set in rondo form. The expressive third movement is the most demonstrative of Barber's encounters with the innovations of the early twentieth century such as 12 tone technique. The fugue, formally similar to those of Bach, serves as the finale. This sonata ranks among the most outstanding piano works produced in the twentieth century.

First Movement; Allegro energico

The overall organization of the first movement of Barber's Op.26 Sonata may be outlined as follows:

Exposition (mm.1-50)

First theme (mm.1-19)

Transition (mm.20-22)

Second theme group (mm.23-50)

Development (mm.51-109)

First section (mm.51-74)

Second section (mm.75-87)

Third section (mm.88-109)

Recapitulation (mm.110-148)

First theme (mm.110-126)

Transition (mm.127-128)

Second theme group (mm.129-148)

Coda (mm.149-166)

The primary theme is mm.1-19.

Allegro energico ♩ = 120

Piano

Example 1. Sonata, first movement, mm.1-5

The second theme group is mm.23-50.

Example 2. Sonata, first movement, mm.22-28

There are five basic motives and examples of quasi 12 tone aggregates used in this movement.

A. Motives

The opening **motive A**, which features a descending half-step with a short-long rhythm, permeates the first movement. The principal theme consists entirely of motive A, which is repeated, inverted, or transposed.

Allegro energico ♩ = 120

Piano

1

f

A

Example 3. Sonata, first movement, m.1

Motive B is an arpeggiated triplet figure which is composed of quartal triads.

a tempo

B

9

mf

Example 4. Sonata, first movement, mm.9-10

Motive C is a chromatically expanding double note figure.

The image shows a musical score for a piano sonata, first movement, measures 16-17. The score is written for two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. In measure 16, the right hand plays a series of double notes: B-flat4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The left hand plays a single note: B-flat3. In measure 17, the right hand continues with double notes: B-flat4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B-flat3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3. The left hand plays a single note: B-flat3. A bracket labeled 'c' spans the double notes in measure 17. A bracket labeled '5' spans the notes in the left hand of measure 16. The number '17' is written below the bass staff in measure 17.

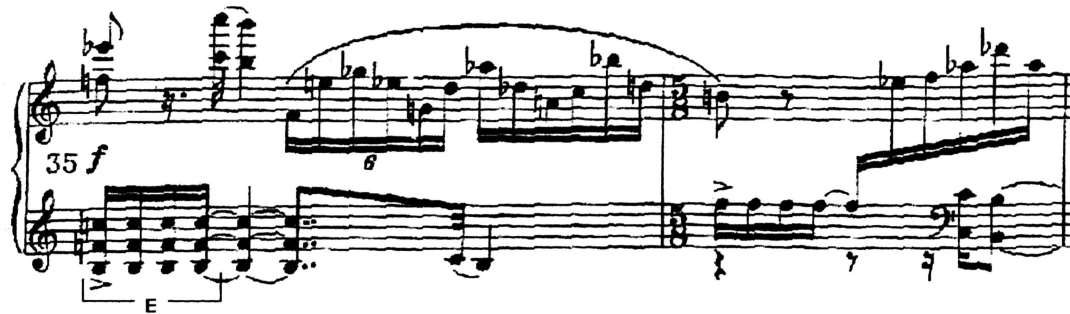
Example 5. Sonata, first movement, mm.16-17

Motive D is a melodic fourth pattern which is possibly an outgrowth from theme II, mm.23-24.

The image shows a musical score for a piano sonata, first movement, measures 28-29. The score is written for two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. In measure 28, the right hand plays a melodic fourth pattern: B-flat4, A4, G4, F4. The left hand plays a single note: B-flat3. In measure 29, the right hand plays a melodic fourth pattern: B-flat4, A4, G4, F4. The left hand plays a single note: B-flat3. The letter 'D' is written above the melodic fourth patterns in both measures. The dynamic marking 'p' is written below the right hand in measure 28. The number '28' is written below the bass staff in measure 28.

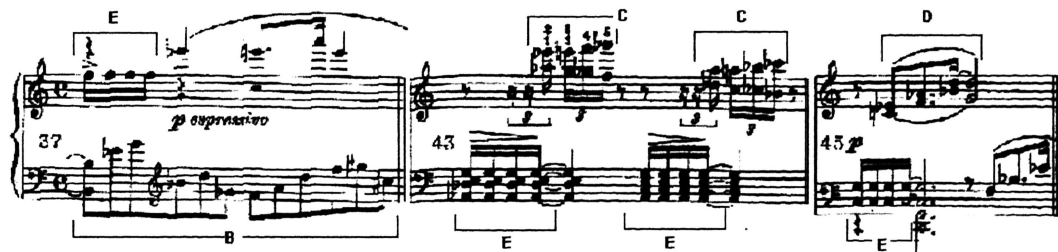
Example 6. Sonata, first movement, mm.28-29

Motive E is a repeated figure in sixteenth notes with the last note being syncopated.



Example 7. Sonata, first movement, mm.35-36

The closing motive E dominates this section and provides a background for all the motives presented thus far. Here are three examples;



Example 8. Sonata, first movement, m.37, m.43, m.45

B. Quasi 12 tone

There are five examples of 12 tone “rows” or aggregates used in this movement. They are not used to compose in a serialist manner, like Arnold Schoenberg, would compose, but instead fit into more pitch-centered patterns.

In mm.3-4, the melody in the upper voice is a descending chromatic scale that covers all twelve notes. In m.9, an arpeggiated quartal triad is used. This is sequenced three times up a minor third, which creates the aggregate.

Quartal triad

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment in measure 9. The upper staff (treble clef) contains a descending chromatic scale. The lower staff (bass clef) contains an arpeggiated quartal triad. The triad is sequenced three times up a minor third. The tempo marking "a tempo" is written above the staff. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The measure number "9" is written in the lower left corner of the staff.

Example 9. Sonata, first movement, m.9

In m.20, the pitches in the odd number positions ascend chromatically from B natural. The even number pitches descend chromatically from B flat. Together, they cover all 12 tones.

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment in measures 20 and 21. The upper staff (treble clef) contains a chromatic scale starting on B natural and ascending. The lower staff (bass clef) contains a chromatic scale starting on B flat and descending. The tempo marking "a tempo" is written above the staff. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The measure numbers "20" and "21" are written in the lower left corner of the staff.

Example 10. Sonata, first movement, mm.20-21

In m.21, an arpeggiated pattern, comprised of four augmented triads, uses all 12 tones.

In m.22, an arpeggiated pattern similar to m.21 continues. The order of pitches within each triad is changed, the order of the augmented triads is kept the same. In the final augmented triad the G# is altered to a G-natural and this aggregate becomes the accompaniment to the second theme. The last half of the second theme, mm.25-27, is the augmented retrograde of the accompanying twelve-note series: the retrograde starts on C, the second note of m.25.

Example 11. Sonata, first movement, mm.22-28

Second movement; Allegro vivace e leggero

In contrast to the first movement's seriousness, the second movement is in a light scherzo-like texture. The overall form is a five-part rondo, ABACA, with some modification. Three transitions, each approximately ten to fifteen measures in length, bridge a number of the sections.

Section A (mm.1-26) pitch center=G

Transition group (mm.27-30, mm.31-47)

Section B (mm.47-70) begin in C major (ends up using the complete aggregate)

Bridge passage (mm.71-80)

Section A (mm.81-102) pitch center=G

Section C (mm.103-113) pitch center=Eb

Transition (mm.114-125)

Variation of "A" (mm.126-139)

Section A (mm.140-155) pitch center=G

Codetta (mm.156-165)

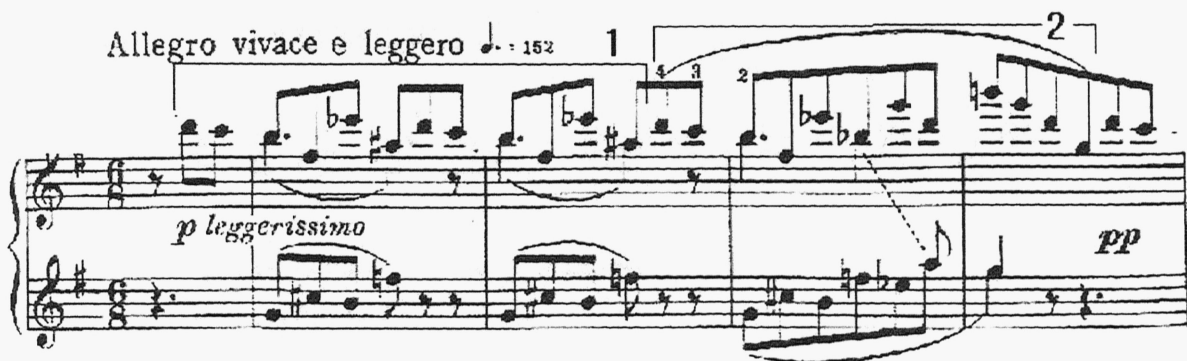
There are three motives in the second movement and they are rhythmically very similar.

A. Motives

1. Motive 1 and 2

Motive 1 is repeated three times and achieves its final form on the third repetition.

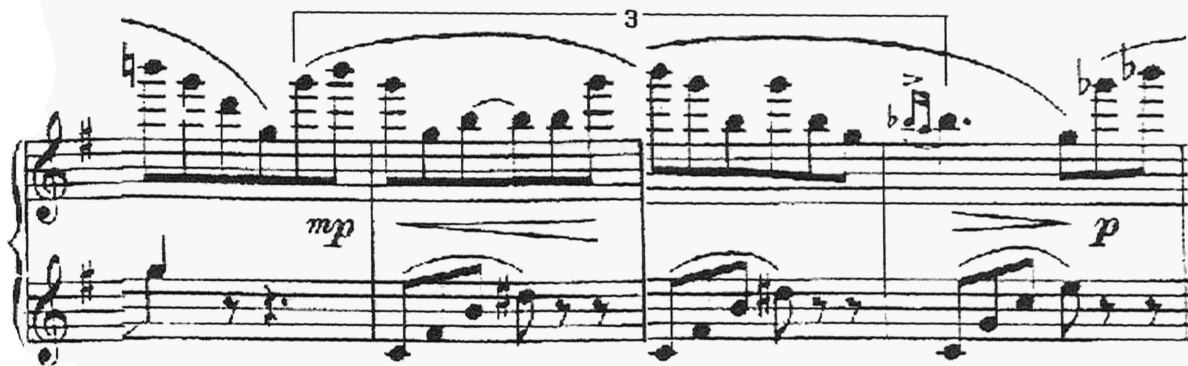
Interestingly, the falling half step motive of the first movement is embedded within both motives 1 and 2.



Example 12. Sonata, second movement, mm.1-4

2. Motive 3

The second phrase employs Motive 3, which is built on an arpeggiation of a major triad. Motive 3 is then repeated in a different key.



Example 13. Sonata, second movement, mm.8-11

The “B” Section of the Rondo begins at m.47. The main material used here is motive 3

and its inversion (m.51). Motive 3 is accompanied by a waltz rhythm in the left hand.



Example 14. Sonata , second movement, mm.50-54

Third movement; Adagio mesto

The third movement uses a traditional ternary form

Introduction (mm.1-2)

Section A (mm.3-10)

Transition (mm.11-14)

Section B (mm.15-27)

Section A (mm.28-36)

Codetta (mm.37-39)

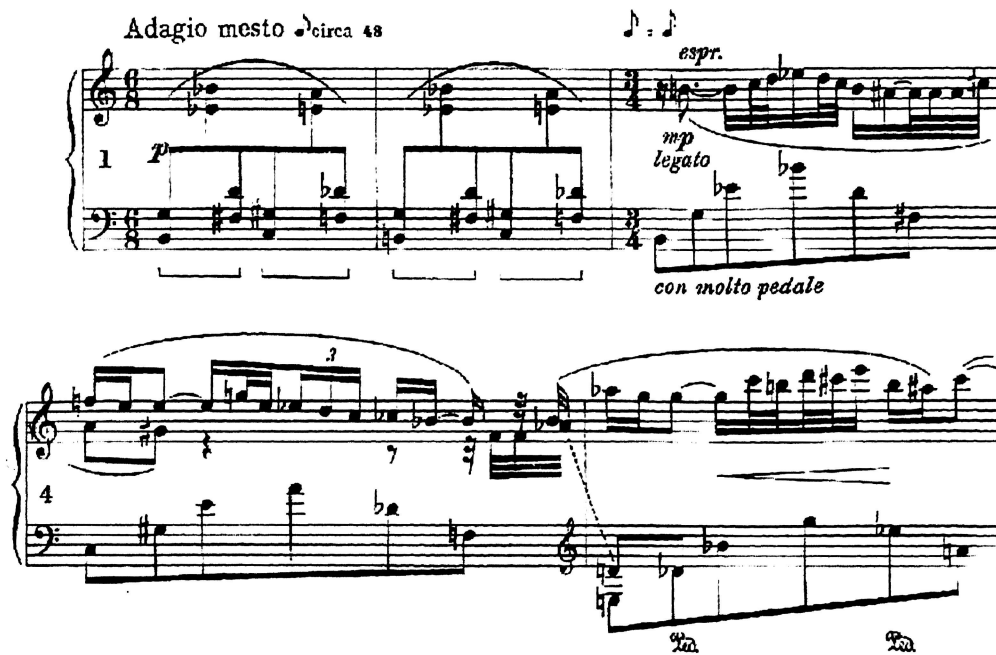
The movement, in addition to having a ternary form, is a dirge with an underlying passacaglia construction throughout.¹

Use of quasi-12 tone writing

This movement is one of the most tragic of Barber's slow movements. It is based on

¹ Tischler, Hans, "Barber's Piano Sonata, op.26," Music and Letters, 33:353, October, 1952

two twelve-tone aggregates. The first aggregate is presented in the first two measures and then in single notes in the following two measures in the bass. In mm.1-2 the aggregate is arranged in two hexachords that have the same prime form (014589). These hexachords are both transpositionally and inversionally symmetrical. In mm.3-4, the same hexachords are presented as an augmented triad in the bass line. The second aggregate occurs in the bass in mm.5-6 and is constructed of three diminished seventh chords. The two aggregates are used as accompaniment to a beautiful melodic line.



Example 15. Sonata, third movement, mm.1-5

Section B, mm.15-27, is much like a development. It states no new thematic material but rather recasts the melodic material of section A in a more embellished manner. The basic meter of the section is 6/8, compared to the 3/4 of section A. The texture of section B is thicker due to the addition of voices (primarily octave doublings).

Example 16. Sonata, third movement, mm.14-17

The return of section A, m.28, is more contrapuntal and complex than the original version. M.28 is characterized by an increase in the importance of the middle voice. The relationship between the upper two voices is imitative, with the upper voice being the leader.

Example 17. Sonata, third movement, mm.28-29

The final three measures (mm.37-39) of the movement, comprising the codetta, are similar to each other melodically and rhythmically. In the right hand, the third and fourth notes are interchanged with the fifth and sixth. The left hand line has a G# to G emphasis that reminds us of the descending half step that is the most important motivic interval of the entire sonata.

Example 18. Sonata, third movement, mm.36-39

Fourth movement: Allegro con spirito

The general character of the fourth movement of the sonata is a fugue that uses jazz-inspired harmonies and rhythms. The structural form of the fugue is:

First section (mm.1-36)

Exposition (mm.1-12)

Episode 1 (mm.13-16)

Restatement 1 (mm.17-26)

Episode 2 (mm.27-36)

Second section (mm.37-89)

Restatement 2 (mm.37-54)

Episode 3 (mm.55-63)

Restatement 3 (mm.64-80)

Episode 4 (mm.81-89)

Third section (mm.90-146)

Restatement 4 (mm.90-94)

Episode 5 (mm.95-98)

Restatement 5 (mm.99-106)

Coda (mm.107-146)

The basic tonality of the fugue is E-flat minor, as in the first movement. The subject of the fugue is quite long and is divided into two parts, motive **a** and motive **b**.

Fugue Subjects a, b

Fuga

a b

Allegro con spirito $\text{♩} = 104$

poco f

3

p

poco f

Example 19. Sonata, fourth movement, mm.1-4

The countersubject is introduced in m.4 in the treble. It is repeated down a step and then expanded to larger intervals in m.5. In m.10 the countersubject appears both above and below the subject.

Countersubject C

Example 20. Sonata, fourth movement, mm.3-6

Development of Primary Melodic Material

In the exposition, mm. 1-12, the fugue subject is presented four times.

Episode 1 is an imitation of the countersubject. M.13 contains stretto imitation in two voices; m.14 is stretto imitation with inversion; mm.15-16 adds a third voice.

Restatement 1, mm.17-26, uses motives a, b and c in various contrapuntal techniques.

In Episode 2, mm.27-28, the texture is in four voices, with the bass in augmentation of the tenor.

25

27

bass in augmentation

29

Example 21. Sonata, fourth movement, mm.25-30

In restatement 2, mm.37-54, almost the entire section occurs over various pedal tones. The harmony over the pedal tones gradually becomes thicker and more dynamic. Mm. 40-54 also display motives a and c in augmentation, imitation and inversion.

39 *mf* *espressivo*
sostenuto Ped.

41 *poco f, espressivo*

43 *cresc.* *marcato*

45 *ff*

Example 22. Sonata, fourth movement, mm. 39-46

Mm.55-63, constituting episode 3, are constructed solely out of motive, c. The lower voice is slower and more lyrical in nature.

A sudden tonal shift to C major at m.64 occurs at the beginning of restatement 3. From here through m.81, Barber uses all of the motives in various guises of repetition, imitation, and augmentation.

Example 23. Sonata, fourth movement, mm.70-75

Episode 4, mm.81-89, contains greater amounts of intervallic doublings of lines than episode 2. Mm.88-89 stands out with large double forte tone clusters consisting of up to six

notes per chord.

88

ff

r.h. ff

90

marcato

mf

r.h.

mf

a

b

Example 24. Sonata, fourth movement, mm.88-91

Restatement 4, constituting mm.90-94, is the briefest section and develops motives a and b.

Episode 5, comprising mm.95-98, is constructed using motive c, and is notable for meter changes. Motive c is treated in a chromatic descending sequence in mm.95-97. In m.98, there

is a very interesting metrically free cadenza, which is a sequenced and figuration descending by fourths and fifth.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is labeled 'Cadenza' and begins at measure 98. It features a complex, metrically free passage with descending intervals of fourths and fifths. The tempo is marked 'accel.' (accelerando). The second system begins at measure 98 and shows a restatement of a motive. The tempo is marked '♩ = 120 a tempo'. The notation includes various rhythmic values and articulation marks.

Example 25. Sonata, fourth movement, mm. 98-101

Restatement 5, m.99-106, features a striking augmentation of motive a. Rhythmically, this motive presents constant eighth notes. The texture is homophonic and the melody is in the top voice.

The coda, mm.107-146, initiates a gradual build-up in rhythmic drive. The fourth movement culminates with the last presentation of the augmented motive a.

131
(Ossia:)
con forza
senza Ped.
marcatissimo
senza Ped.

136

141

Example 26. Sonata, fourth movement, mm.131-146

Barber combines the use of traditional forms, such as Sonata-form and fugue with twentieth century techniques of composition, such as quasi twelve tone writing and motivic development. The result of this is four beautiful and characteristic movements that are technically challenging, but also a delight to audiences. For these reasons, Barber's piano sonata Op.26 is one of the great piano works of the twentieth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Broder, Nathan. *Samuel Barber*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1954.

Hennessee, Don. *Samuel Barber: A Bio-Bibliography*. Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1985.

Heyman, Barbara. *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Wayne C. Wentzel, *Samuel Barber: A Guide to Research*. New York: Routledge, 2001

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Heist, Douglas R. "Harmonic Organization and Sonata Form: The First Movement of Samuel Barber's Sonata Op.26." *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 27 (January-June 1990): 25-31

Tischer, Hans. "Barber's Piano Sonata Op.26." *Music and Letters* 33 (October 1952): 352-354

Tischer, Hans. "Some Remarks on the Use of Twelve-Tone and Fugue Technics in Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1952): 145-146

Laird, Paul R. "Samuel Barber." *American Music* 17, no.2 (Summer 1999): 238-240

Kirkpatrick, John. "Sonata for Piano by Samuel Barber." *Notes*, Second Series 7, no.3 (June 1950): 448-449

Svard, Lois. "Complete Piano Music by Samuel Barber." *Notes*, Second Series 42, no.3 (March 1986): 645-646

PERIODICALS

"Sonata to Honor League." *New York Times*, September 24, 1947, p.20.

SCORE

Samuel Barber, Sonata for Piano (New York: G.Schirmer, 1950)