

A PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE OF SELECTED COMPOSITIONS
FOR PIANO BY VINCENT PERSICHETTI

By

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ABSTRACT

Vincent Persichetti composed in a wide range of contemporary musical idioms. He incorporated twentieth-century harmonies into traditional forms and into classical piano writing. This paper seeks to emphasize the advantages of his music for piano pedagogy. Chapter Two concentrates on the composer's life, compositional style, contribution and rewards, and it includes a short list of piano compositions. Chapter Three examines and analyzes four selected pieces by Persichetti: *Little Piano Book*, Piano Sonata No. 9, *Poems for Piano* No. 2 "Soft is the Collied Night," and *Four Arabesques*, Op. 141, No. 1 *Affabile*. The *Poem*, the *Arabesque*, and the miniatures in *Little Piano Book* are smaller pieces, intended for amateur and intermediate pianists. The Ninth Sonata is a more substantial composition for advanced pianists. These pieces provide a broad image of Persichetti's piano compositions. This study of selected works by Persichetti shows that his music is excellent pedagogical material for piano students as well as outstanding music to be performed in the concert hall.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Vincent Persichetti combines both traditional as well as modern composition techniques in his massive piano output. He incorporates many twentieth-century extended harmony, texture, tonality, rhythm, form, sonority, and melodic treatment into his piano composition, although he tends to avoid the most avant-garde tendencies of his time. Persichetti does not compromise his natural musical language and personal aesthetic approaches. He reflects the silliness, whimsy, and innocence of a child through polychords, irregular meters, absence of meters, dissonant but simple counterpoint.

Approximately one-third of his compositions are written for piano. Persichetti wrote twelve substantial piano sonatas, the sonata being one of the most important piano genres in the twentieth century. Alongside his piano sonatas, there is a tremendous treasure of more compact compositions. The shorter pieces by Persichetti, however, are magnificent piano pieces to teach. These include six *Sonatinas*, twelve *Poems for Piano*, *Serenade No. 2 Op. 2*, *Variations for an Album Op. 32*, *Serenade No. 7 Op. 55*, *Parades Op. 57*, *Little Piano Book Op. 60*, *Parable XIX for Piano Op. 134*, *Reflective Studies Op. 138*, *Little Mirror Book Op. 139*, four *Arabesques Op. 141*, three *Toccatinas Op. 142*, seven *Mirror Etudes for Piano Op. 143*, and *Winter Solstice Op. 165*. His extended production of piano works consists of music in different styles, ranging from dance, theme and variations, characterized miniature, and technical exercise.

Persichetti denies having the intention of writing pedagogical materials.¹ These compositions are not intended to be a piano method; they are serious musical creations written to be played on recitals, and other performance venues. While having mentioned that the composer does not propose to write pedagogy pieces, music by Persichetti is sophisticated, refined, and highly artistic. Yet, Persichetti's piano compositions are a treasure to pianists and piano teachers.

At the time Persichetti grew up as a young musician, piano was the prince of instruments that every household treated as a "household orchestra and god," and "highly respectable piece of furniture."² However, in the past fifty years, the "prince of instruments" was "dethroned." The piano manufacturing industry and the traditional piano recital have faced serious challenges. The change in the piano world have transformed the society's leisure habits.³

However, the decline of piano production did not hinder the development of piano education. Through modern recording techniques, radio and television broadcasting, and the Internet, piano music has reached a broader scope of audience and reflected a deeper musical culture. The conservatoires around the world produce an endless stream of graduates who can perform at a high level virtuosically and musically, as well as teach beginner pianists with their expertise.⁴ Amateur pianists are hence better taught owing to the increasing amount of qualified teachers. The programs of institutions and organizations such as the Music Teachers National Association, the College Music Society, and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music often motivates piano music education too.⁵ These renowned organizations hold regular symposiums, conferences, masterclasses, competitions and examinations. Pianists and piano

¹ Vincent Persichetti and Rudy Shackelford, "Conversation with Vincent Persichetti," *Perspectives of New Music* 20, No. 1/2 (Autumn 1981–Summer 1982): 112, <http://www.jstor.org/www2.lib.ku.edu/stable/942408> (accessed February 2, 2016).

² Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵ *Ibid.*

teachers around the world benefit from these events and enrich their knowledge on piano playing. They also connect with other pianists and piano teachers to share their experiences. Persichetti's *Parable XIX*, Op. 134 was premiered on March 30, 1976 during the annual conference of Music Teachers National Association in Dallas, Texas.

It is challenging for modern pianists to integrate contemporary compositions into their recitals and programs. Pianists have such a vast repertoire list to program a concert or recital without even considering a piece from modern time. While teaching piano music from the seventeenth to eighteenth century, piano teachers tend to rely on traditional pedagogical materials, like technical exercises by Carl Czerny, Jon Schmitt, and Charles Louis Hanon, sonatas by Muzio Clementi, Jan Ladislav Dussek, and Friedrich Kuhlau. The mentioned compositions are some of the most acclaimed pedagogical materials. These pieces contain passages that build up students' playing techniques and provide a background to teach music theory aspects. There are many places that train finger independency and strength, yet at the same time many theoretical elements such as formal design, basic functional harmonic progressions are expressed through the mentioned compositions. However, they are inadequate in preparing pianists for the most up-to-date language of modern classical music. Some of these compositions are written as early as in the eighteenth century. Most of them are written in traditional diatonic scales, functional harmonies, regular meters, and strict formal designs. Though piano teachers can possibly come up with their own pedagogical materials in contemporary style, most piano educators are not equipped with sufficient composition technique to write quality music at performance level, or are simply short of time to create new music. Persichetti has provided us with a great wealth of piano compositions. There is a great variety of musical elements and compositional techniques demonstrated in his works. His music connects

traditional with modern music idioms, and is interesting, inspiring and innovative. Persichetti has provided piano teachers with modern but accessible twentieth-century repertoire for early intermediate through advanced piano students.

In this document, I will explore the pedagogical value of selected compositions by Vincent Persichetti and how to use them with our students.

Chapter II

Biography of Vincent Persichetti

American composer, music educator, lecturer and pianist Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987) was born and died in Philadelphia. He was the son of an Italian father and a German mother. Although not born into a musical family, Persichetti’s father was supportive of his musical talent. Persichetti gave his first public piano performance at only six years old and it was broadcast on one of the Philadelphia radio stations. He received musical training at the Combs Conservatory, Philadelphia Conservatory, and the Curtis Institute of Music. In these schools, Persichetti studied piano, composition, double bass, organ, music theory, and conducting, under the tutelage of Gilbert Combs, Russell King Miller, Olga Samaroff, Paul Nordoff, and Fritz Reiner. He also served as the director of publications for Elkan-Vogel, Inc. beginning in 1952. The publisher became a subsidiary of the Theodore Presser Company in 1970.

Persichetti was a “complete musician.”⁶ His contribution to classical music was demonstrated in many ways. As a successful music educator, he taught at the Combs Conservatory, Philadelphia Conservatory, and Juilliard School of Music. He became the

⁶ William Schuman, “The Complete Musician: Vincent Persichetti and Twentieth-Century Harmony,” *Musical Quarterly* 47, No. 3 (July, 1961): 379, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/740169> (accessed March 20, 2016).

chairman of the Juilliard's composition department (1963) as well as of the literature and materials department (1970). He served and taught at Juilliard for forty years and among his students are, Leonardo Balada, Leo Brouwer, Richard Danielpour, Kenneth Fuchs, Philip Glass, Lowell Lieberman, Peter Schickele, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Elena Ruehr, William Schimmel, Michael Jeffrey Shapiro and Robert Witt. Throughout his life, Persichetti received numerous honors and awards, including Guggenheim Fellowships, grants from both the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities and National Society of Arts and Letters, and the Pulitzer Prize for his *Piano Quintet*, composed when he was only twenty-five.

Persichetti received over fifty commissions from famous ensembles and foundations in the United States, including the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Louisville Symphony, the Koussevitsky Foundation, the Naumburg Foundation, the Martha Graham Dance Company and the Pittsburgh Contemporary International Music Festival. Piano compositions represent one-third of his composition output. It is reported that Persichetti had a strong preference for writing piano works.⁷ His piano compositions are supremely idiomatic for pianists. This is not surprising because Persichetti was an excellent pianist. Persichetti's music is a combination of sensitive lyricism and expressiveness, and a joy in sheer pianism.⁸ His twelve piano sonatas, composed between the years 1939 and 1980, are some of the most noteworthy as well as enjoyable and idiomatic piano compositions of the twentieth century repertoires.

Persichetti's musical language is mainly tonal and homophonic, though modal scales, polytonality and polyphonic passages were often utilized. These compositional techniques show

⁷ Eulalie Wilson Jeter, "The Study, Analysis and Performance of Selected Original Two-Piano Music of Contemporary American Composers" (EdD diss., Columbia University Teachers College, 1978), 97-99, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/302936511?accountid=14556> (accessed March 20, 2016).

⁸ F. E. Kirby, *Music for Piano: A Short History* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1995), 419.

the influences of Béla Bartók, Aaron Copland, Igor Stravinsky, Paul Hindemith, and others. Polychords are often used in Persichetti's music in a coloristic way. Variety in musical texture is achieved by different harmonic devices, such as contrapuntal writings, simple melody against Alberti bass, homorhythmic chordal writing. His music is usually made up of short fragments of motives, and short rhythmic patterns rather than long chains of musical phrases. With his gift in piano performance, Persichetti composed breathtaking passages of rapid scales, running notes, arpeggios, trills, and big leaps that show off a performer's technical facility. However, his music showed a preference for lyrical melodies and colorful harmonies, rather than the primitive style of Béla Bartók or Igor Stravinsky, or the serial techniques favored by Arnold Schönberg and his followers. Persichetti has proven through his music that "stylistic similarities can be compatible with widely divergent technical means."⁹

Persichetti wrote a book entitled *Twentieth Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. It was published by W. W. Norton & Company in 1961. He demonstrated some innovative ideas and hypotheses in contemporary music composition in this book. It also provided us with a strong source for analyzing his music as well. The book helps us understanding his principles in selecting chords, notes, and other components in twentieth-century harmonies.

⁹ Robert Evett, "The Music of Vincent Persichetti," *The Juilliard Review* 2/2 (Spring 1955): 15.

Chapter Three

Pedagogical Value of Persichetti's Piano Music

Overview

Piano and keyboard music has been one of the most popular genres since the eighteenth century. As keyboard instruments became more responsive and dynamic, composers sought to compose more complex keyboard music in terms of playing techniques and emotional involvement. The quicker response of keyboard action, and the invention of the double-escapement inspired composers to compose virtuosic pieces with rapid running passages. The stronger the metal frame and strings became, the longer a note could last and the louder a note could sound. More delicate hammers enriched the quality of sound upon attack and made it possible to create countless nuances.

With the advent of Romanticism in the nineteenth century, music was treated as an art form expressing personal emotion. This was the golden age of piano composition. Music became an autobiography or an intimate tool for personal expression. In the twentieth century the influence of composers such as Arnold Schönberg, Igor Stravinsky, and Béla Bartók led to changes in compositional techniques such as percussive piano writing and an interest in twelve-tone music.

Vincent Persichetti has an extensive output of piano compositions, ranging from large works such as the *Piano Sonatas*, *Piano Concerto*, *Piano Concertino*, *Sonata for Two Pianos*, to short works such as *Etudes*, *Poems for Piano*, *Piano Sonatinas*, *Arabesques*, *Toccatinas*, and other piano miniatures. His compositions are an exemplary contribution to the twentieth century piano music. Whereas sonatas, etudes, sonatinas, arabesques and toccatas are examples of the

traditional genres and forms, Persichetti successfully incorporated contemporary compositional style into these well-established conventions. Sometimes people find twentieth-century music difficult to learn and appreciate because of unfamiliar and surprising harmonies, because of a large number of intervals and dissonances that may not resolve, and because of complex and often irregular rhythm. This is at least partially because we are trained primarily in traditional triadic harmonies, counterpoint and regular rhythms. Persichetti is a twentieth-century composer who incorporates modern harmonies and rhythms in a traditional style of composition. However, he is eager to experiment with all styles from classical and serialism, to American jazz, folk tunes, and avant-garde. Nonetheless, listeners and performers find Persichetti's music as accessible as Mozart's: they are pleasingly constructed with lyrical, vibrant melodies and colorful harmonies. From his early musical training Persichetti developed a lifelong love for the music of Haydn and Schumann, whom he cited as important compositional influences.¹⁰

Little Piano Book, Op. 60

Throughout the entire history of piano music many pieces have been written for children. They are considered and indeed intended to have pedagogical value, in teaching stylistic playing, improving performance skills, and exploring elements in music theory. Composers since the seventeenth century wrote music for professional as well as amateur pianists. J.S. Bach composed some of the earliest pedagogy pieces in history for his son, published as *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*; Carl Czerny composed roughly twenty sets of studies for piano students; Robert Schumann dedicated the *Album für die Jugend*, Op. 68 to his three daughters in 1848; Béla Bartók wrote *Mikrokosmos*, Sz. 107, supplying one hundred and

¹⁰ Vincent Persichetti and Rudy Shackelford, "Conversation with Vincent Persichetti," *Perspectives of New Music* 20, No. 1/2 (Autumn 1981–Summer 1982): 109, <http://www.jstor.org/www2.lib.ku.edu/stable/942408> (accessed February 2, 2016).

fifty-three educational pieces for beginners (and even for professional pianists). These compositions for amateur pianists are relatively short. Many of them aim to tackle technical issues. With them students can enjoy playing piano pieces in different styles from strict contrapuntal writing to easy folk tunes.

Vincent Persichetti's *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60 was premiered in November 1954 at the Philadelphia Conservatory by ten-year-old Lauren Persichetti, the daughter of the composer. The entire set of music was first recorded by Marga Richter in 1955 as a part of a program of piano music for children by living American composers.¹¹ These pieces were written for friends, relatives, and acquaintances of the composer.¹² Persichetti once mentioned that he never intentionally composed a “teaching” or “educational” piece,¹³ nonetheless, he indicated in the foreword to the music, “The *Little Piano Book* is a collection of easy keyboard pieces that may be performed separately or in groups of any selection. They can serve as a preparation for the larger contemporary works and may be useful both as teaching and concert material.”¹⁴ Walter Simmons in his book classified this set of pieces, alongside with *Four Arabesques*, Op. 141, which are being discussed in the following section of this document, as “Music for Piano Students.”¹⁵

There are fourteen short piano miniatures in the *Little Piano Book*, bearing titles of *Berceuse*, *Capriccio*, *Dialogue*, *Masque*, *Statement*, *Arietta*, *Humoreske*, *Fanfare*, *Interlude*, *Prologue*, *Canon*, *Epilogue*, *Fugue*, and *Gloria*. The descriptive titles provide performers with imaginative space and remind listeners of a variety of compositions from previous centuries.

¹¹ Walter Simmons, *The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin: Voices of Stone and Steel* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 216.

¹² Vincent Persichetti and Rudy Shackelford, “Conversation with Vincent Persichetti,” *Perspectives of New Music* 20, No. 1/2 (Autumn 1981–Summer 1982): 112, <http://www.jstor.org/www2.lib.ku.edu/stable/942408> (accessed February 2, 2016).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Vincent Persichetti, foreword to *Little Piano Book* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 2015).

¹⁵ Walter Simmons, *The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin: Voices of Stone and Steel* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 216.

Each piano piece in the *Little Piano Book* features some of the following compositional techniques: displaced harmonies, pandiatonicism, traditional contrapuntal writing, and irregular phrase lengths. Some of the pieces from the the *Little Piano Book* drill on specific piano techniques as well. Neither the pedaling nor the fingering, however, perhaps the most important indications for a pianist, are provided on the music. With all of the above elements, this collection has become “a classic in the standard teaching repertory and provide a good introduction to twentieth-century sonorities and writing styles.”¹⁶ Allan R. Kaplan transcribed the entire collection for brass quintet of two trumpets, a French horn, a trombone, and a tuba. The transcription was published by Theodore Presser Company in 2007.

A. *Character Pieces*

One may consider every miniature in the *Little Piano Book* as a character piece (some of them, however, are indeed more “characterized” than others). Just like a handwriting practice book, this kind of character pieces is bound within a set context. They provide amateur students a platform to express certain emotions or to depict described scenes through music. No. 1 *Berceuse* is a lullaby dedicated to Persichetti’s daughter. The melody is based on a repeated rhythmic pattern, and develops with descending appoggiaturas of half steps or whole steps, illustrating a bed-side scene. No. 2 *Capriccio* recalls the piano work by Johannes Brahms that bears the same title. *Capriccio* is basically a free-form composition with buoyant character. This *Capriccio* is a fast piece with perpetual repeated notes. Jean-Philippe Rameau’s composition, *La Poule*, is a character piece from the seventeenth century. The openings of Rameau’s *La Poule* and Persichetti’s *Capriccio* share similar approaches (Ex. 1).

¹⁶ Jane Magrath, *The Pianist’s Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1995), 453.



Ex. 1. Persichetti, *Capriccio* from *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60, mm. 1–4 (above); Rameau, *La Poule*, mm. 1–3 (bottom).

No. 4 *Masque* is one of the most vigorous pieces among the whole set. It evokes a scene of the masked ball in Europe, a courtly entertainment that flourished in the sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries. Persichetti requires the performer to repeat the entire *Masque* twice. The dynamic of the piece reduces gradually towards the end, as if the masque participants are departing. No. 6 *Arietta* is an unmeasured piece, indicated with *Alla recitativo* and *espressivo* (Ex. 2). Persichetti leaves pianist a high degree of freedom to perform it. This piece combines singing and speaking quality as notated in the title and tempo marking. It is constructed upon a descending bass line. *Arietta* is a good introductory piece to teach legato playing, singing style, and elements of opera or stage works. No. 7 *Humoreske* shares the same title with the compositions by Robert Schumann and Antonín Dvořák, but they are completely different from each other. It is a short, blithesome piece with frequent changes of melodic contour.

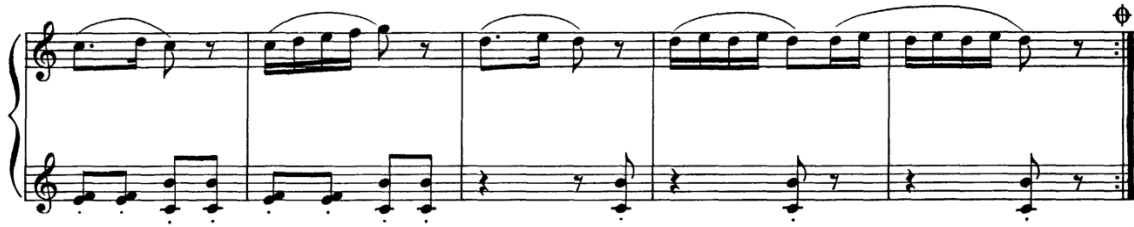


Ex. 2. Persichetti, opening of *Arietta* from *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60, unmeasured.

B. Technical Drills on Fast Running Notes

Every pianist has fingers of differing lengths. It is important to build up an essential sense of key attack since the beginner's level in order to play evenly with all fingers. In contrast to the conventional ways of drilling students in finger independence, Persichetti does not implant lengthy and tough scale or arpeggio passages into his composition.¹⁷ He breaks down techniques into basics in lieu of a strenuous practice. Playing rapid running notes is a common challenge to pianists. Consequently No. 2 *Capriccio* was composed to build proficiency in repeated notes. In order to attack each note clearly, it encourages students to develop an awareness of sensitive touching. No. 4 *Masque* is a swift piece, and at the same time a good piece in preparing students to play scales. The fast sixteenth notes are written in five-finger groups, the first five notes of a scale. The pattern of alternating adjacent pitches is a good exercise in preparation for trill playing, generously promoting arm rotation (Ex. 3).

¹⁷ Conventional ways to tackle finger independence may include repetitive practices on scales, arpeggios, or relying on exercises by Hanon, and Pischna, which are exercises on difficult finger pattern.



Ex. 3. Persichetti, *Masque* from *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60, mm. 6–10.

C. Sound Quality and Control

Modern piano performances truly benefit from the Industrial Revolution. The metal piano frames and strings are produced with greater strength, able to withstand a higher load of string tension, so that piano performers are able to produce bigger and more sustaining sound than ever before. Playing softly might seem effortless, but music would probably lose its attraction due to a lack of sound projection and concentration. Advanced piano technology, however, does not guarantee the performer a good sound. A good sound projection always requires precise manipulation of fingers, arms, shoulders, and in fact, of the whole body.

Persichetti is a prolific composer, writing a significant number of big band and brass pieces too. The *Little Piano Book* resembles the sound of brass instruments, and this is probably the reason why Allan R. Kaplan transcribed the complete *Little Piano Book* for brass quintet. No. 5 *Statement*, No. 8 *Fanfare*, No. 10 *Prologue* and No. 14 *Gloria* are brass-like pieces. The close-positioned and dense writing of block chords and triads recalls the brilliant, blazing timbre of brass instruments. These pieces are outstanding materials to teach students how to produce a great sound. Instead of banging on the keyboard, these pieces show how important it is to coordinate each part of the body, and relax every muscle while striking on the keys. The brass-quality in these four pieces helps students to “reproduce” sound of brass instruments made from blowing through mouthpieces. In terms of twentieth-century harmonic devices, No. 10 *Prologue*

is also an outstanding piece to demonstrate the sound of polychords (discussed below). No. 9 *Interlude* and No. 12 *Epilogue* are sluggish pieces but soft in dynamic. The *Interlude* is composed with two staves of treble clef, at a relatively high register. The *Epilogue* is a mourning piece with chordal writing, emphasizing the inner voice in the last four measures.



Ex. 4. Persichetti, *Fanfare* from *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60, mm. 1–4.

D. Contrapuntal Pieces

Contrapuntal writing, especially fugue, was without doubt one of the most celebrated composition techniques since the sixteenth century. Composers challenged themselves on composing in contrapuntal style, fugue in particular. After the golden age of contrapuntal composition from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, fugue faded out and was rarely seen as an individual composition. Rather, composers merged fugal writing into their composition. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart concluded his Symphony No. 41 in C major, *Jupiter*, K. 551 with a five-voice fugato finale; Ludwig van Beethoven started his String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131 with a fugue; in the twentieth century, Béla Bartók composed *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, Sz. 106 with a fugue as the first movement. In any period of history, fugue or fugal writing was seen as the most refined artwork in music. People acknowledged the beauty of strict counterpoint and the interplay between voices. Together with pieces in contrapuntal style in a reduced scale, such like canon, imitation, and round, contrapuntal pieces

were often respected as pedagogy materials. Béla Bartók composed his *Mikrokosmos* with pieces titled *Imitation and Counterpoint*, *Imitation and Inversion*, *Canon at the Octave*, *Dance in Canon Form*, and four *Chromatic Inventions*. Many of them appeared in the very early volumes of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*. Contrapuntal playing benefits student not only on reading scores, but also aural skills of listening for melodic lines in lower voices. Furthermore, students build up their awareness of hand coordination through contrapuntal pieces. Persichetti had a broad pedagogical vision for writing music in contrapuntal style, and included them in his *Little Piano Book*.

No. 3 *Dialogue* consists of accompaniment in lingering thirds, supporting the melodic line moving in 5/4 time. The voices imitate each other, evoking a scene of people talking to each other. No. 11 *Canon* is written strictly in canonic style. Slurs break the regular subdivision of beats and create a challenge for hand coordination. No. 13 *Fugue* is based on a subject in Lydian mode and develops into a two-voice fugue (Ex. 5). This fugue is not written diatonically. Thus, it creates a challenge for pianists to announce each appearance of the theme. It trains pianists to hear better in order to project every announcement of the subject and fragment of the subject. It is an excellent introductory piece on fugue in equipping students to play substantial fugues or inventions at later stage. I believe Persichetti insists on writing in strict contrapuntal technique because it is one of the keystones in music history. Playing contrapuntal pieces is very important for young piano students in order to establish solid skills and techniques.



Ex. 5. Persichetti, *Fugue* from *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60, mm. 1–5.

In the later compositions by Persichetti, he employed contrapuntal devices, particularly strict mirror inversion between hands, such as, *Reflective Keyboard Studies for Piano*, Op. 138, *Little Mirror Book*, Op. 139, *Mirror Etudes*, Op. 143, and the Piano Sonata No. 12, Op. 145. Ronald Rulon Shinn in his research examined the effect of three approaches in practicing piano, left hand alone, hands together in parallel motion, and hands together in mirror imaging.¹⁸ And the data shows that when a pianist practices hands together in mirror inversion, it shortens the time to master a difficult passage.¹⁹ Pianists, composers and pedagogues include Béla Bartók, George Kochevitsky, Seymour Fink, Guy Duckworth, Rudolph Ganz, Ernst Bacon advocated the use of mirror inversion in learning new repertoire; mastering difficult passage work; developing hand equality; advancing keyboard comfort, balance, topographical accuracy, and touch control; and heightening acceptance of twentieth-century sounds.²⁰ Tobias Matthay highly respected the benefit of playing contrary motion. He recommended piano beginners to learn studies and pieces that process contrary motion melodically.²¹

¹⁸ Ronald Rulon Shinn, “The Mirror Inversion Piano Practice Method and The Mirror Music of Vincent Persichetti” (DMA diss., The University of Alabama, 1990), 1, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303816256?accountid=14556> (accessed March 20, 2016).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46–51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14–22.

²¹ Tobias Matthay, *The Visible and Invisible in Piano Technique* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932),

E. Harmony Exploration

Persichetti utilized various contemporary composition techniques into his music. The composer did not avoid introducing peculiar harmonies to early piano learners: there are evidences of modern harmonies like polychord, quartal harmony, and bi-tonality in every single miniature of the *Little Piano Book*. Persichetti integrated elements of neo-classicism, primitivism, and avant-garde into his music. It opens up the horizon of the twentieth and twenty-first century piano students, and provides them opportunities to appreciate the beauty of atonality and pandiatonicism. No. 8 *Fanfare* and No. 10 *Prologue* were both composed with non-functional harmonies and polychords. Cadences were like punctuation in music, and without support from traditional harmonic progressions of tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant, the establishment of periods and cadences must be brought by other means. Olli Väisälä suggests that intervals of seconds are less preferred as a consonant harmonic interval. But on other hand, intervals of seconds are favored as voice-leading intervals.²² Besides, he continues, when suggesting cadences, complex chords with more sevenths than seconds from lower notes to higher notes serve as more stable points of harmonic closure than complex chords with more seconds than sevenths from lower notes to higher notes.²³ In example 6, the last two chords create a good sample of a cadence in contemporary musical language. The second-to-last chord has more seconds than sevenths from lower notes to higher notes, and the last chord has more sevenths than seconds from lower notes to higher notes.

²² Olli Väisälä, "Concepts of Harmony and Prolongation in Schoenberg's Op. 19/2," *Music Theory Spectrum* 21, No. 2 (Autumn, 1999): 235–236, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/745863> (accessed May 10, 2016).

²³ *Ibid.*, 230–234.

Adagio pesante



Ex. 6. Persichetti, *Prologue* from *Little Piano Book*, Op. 60, mm. 1–4.

Piano Sonata No. 9, Op. 58

The sonata was one of the most prominent genres for piano during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, Domenico Scarlatti composed sonatas as teaching materials for his students, including those for Carlos de Seixas and Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal's royal family. Thirty of his sonatas were first published as *Essercizi per gravicembalo* (Exercises for harpsichord) in 1738. Scarlatti's sonata provided an extensive gamut of piano playing techniques, including running passages, scales, repeated notes, hand crossing, and overlapping. In the following century, Joseph Haydn composed keyboard sonatas for the court members and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart improvised sonatas on keyboard and wrote out later as materials for pupils or publishers.²⁴ Sonatas at that time generally bore a regular three-movement design. Most of them started with a fast sonata-allegro movement, followed by a minuet and trio and/or a lyrical slow middle movement, and concluded with a finale movement in rondo, sonata-rondo or minuet and trio form. By the time of Ludwig van Beethoven, sonata became a genre for composers to exemplify their creativities and innovations. Beethoven endeavored to expand the structure, texture, key relationships, emotional content, and sonority within sonata movements. The piano sonata developed from an educational piece to an

²⁴ Stewart Gordon, *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and Its Forerunners* (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, 1996), 125.

artwork, and became a kind of composition to reflect personal affection. It became the supreme outcome of creativity and no longer solely provided pedagogical material.²⁵ Since the nineteenth century, fewer piano sonatas were composed, and works entitled “piano sonata” were formulated from the eighteenth-century piano sonata structure.²⁶

Vincent Persichetti composed twelve piano sonatas, which could be seen as a monument of this genre. His sonata compositions were compact and varied. To name a few, the First Piano Sonata displayed a prevalent taste of Austrian expressionism, in which the sonata began with a twelve-tone row, the passacaglia bass line in the last movement had a very strong serialism flavor. The Second Piano Sonata was very traditional in formal design, the first movement was in sonata-allegro form, and the third movement, a rondo. The Third Piano Sonata was written under the shadow of the Second World War and was the only sonata that bore programmatic title. The Twelve Piano Sonata was nicknamed *Mirror Sonata*, written solely on mirror inversion technique.

The Ninth Piano Sonata, Op. 58 has a single-movement design. Although there are four tempo indications of *Moderato*, *Allegro agilita*, *Larghetto*, and *Allegro risoluto*, the whole sonata continues without a break. In fact, there has been a tradition of writing multiple movements within a single movement: Liszt’s Piano Sonata in B minor, Prokofiev’s Piano Sonata No. 1 and Piano Sonata No. 3, and Scriabin’s Piano Sonata No. 5. The four tempo changes in Persichetti’s Piano Sonata No. 9 cast the four sections in fast-slow-fast movement design as were the sonatas in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this sonata, Persichetti illustrates the distinctive aspects of twentieth-century music. These include, but are not limited to, harmony, melody, texture, and form. This sonata is a relatively short, lightweight and a

²⁵ On the other hand, sonata in a smaller scale, sonatina, flourished at this time and were targeting piano amateurs.

²⁶ Gordon, 198.

divertimento type of composition. Yet this sonata is one of Persichetti's most inventive, imaginative, and meticulously constructed pieces.²⁷

A. Harmony

Harmony is one of the fundamental elements of music. Having deviated from the traditional rules of functional harmonic progressions, twentieth-century composers sought ways to suggest musical climax and harmonic resolutions. Thus it was not surprising that clues of tonalities were lessened in Persichetti's Ninth and Tenth Sonata, and even abandoned in the Eleventh Sonata.²⁸ Persichetti, in his *Twentieth-Century Harmony* wrote,

Other factors must be considered in creating harmonic progression: the textural influence of intervals characteristic of specific types of harmony, the effect of frequently occurring melodic motifs upon harmonic phrase shapes, the behavior of the tri-tone in both horizontal and vertical situations, the placement of chords in a presiding or vanishing toned center, and the recovery of harmonic equilibrium after swift changes of compositional devices.²⁹

In the Ninth Piano Sonata, Persichetti employed a variety of harmonic devices to create a sense of harmonic progression. These involve quartal harmonies, polychords, and extended chords.

Chords of fifths, sevenths, ninths, and elevenths are often emphasized, and they are noticeably exposed throughout the whole sonata. While dissonances are now emancipated from the traditional restrictions, Persichetti, like other twentieth-century composers, considers the extended harmonies as new nuances. He makes the following statement in his book, "the seventh and ninth members of chords are traditionally dissonant tones but they have been freed of some

²⁷ Walter Simmons, *The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin: Voices of Stone and Steel* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 207.

²⁸ Laurence Farrell, "Vincent Persichetti's Piano Sonatas from 1943 to 1965" (PhD diss., The University of Rochester, 1976), 106, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/302838019?accountid=14556> (accessed February 2, 2016).

²⁹ Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 186.

of their former restrictions. These chords have become stable entities in themselves with their dissonant tones not necessarily prepared or resolved.”³⁰

Chords of seconds may be presented as stacks of major seconds, mixed major and minor seconds or chromatic tone clusters. In the Ninth Piano Sonata they often appear in the fast sections, and are carefully placed so as to provide strong rhythmic drive.

Quartal chords are prevalent in the Ninth Piano Sonata. Indeed, the interval of the fourth plays a significant role in this sonata. The first movement starts with fourths and quartal harmonies (Ex. 7). These notes together create a strong sense of a pentatonic scale, hence, a taste of the oriental as described by Persichetti (Ex. 7, m. 3).³¹ The interval of a fourth stands out in the beginning of the third movement, where the melodic line outlines this particular interval.



Ex. 7. Persichetti, Piano Sonata No. 9, Op. 58, I, mm. 1–3.

A polychord is the simultaneous combination of two or more chords from different diatonic scales.³² The combination of chords contributes to new nuances for listeners, creating a broad palette of new tone colors. Persichetti labels the polychords of a major and a minor triad as “pale,” “resonance,” “brilliance,” “acid,” and “heavy.”³³ These associations help us understand the composer’s compositional process. Polychords are found in every movement in the Ninth

³⁰ Ibid., 74–75.

³¹ Ibid., 94.

³² Ibid., 135.

³³ Ibid., 142.

Piano Sonata. The last movement kicks off with a polychord that combines an F-major triad and an F-sharp major triad. Further, the chord spacing in the bass clef is much wider than that of right hand. Persichetti believes a chord gains greater resonance with this arrangement of chord spacing.³⁴ The refrain of the double-variation form in the second movement is harmonically interesting. For instance, the first two measures can be analyzed as a polychord of a lingering melody of E^{maj13} in treble clef against F^{#m7} and E^{maj7} in the bass clef. These two measures can also be analyzed as two individual extended chords of F^{#m13} in measure 114 and E^{maj13} in measure 115 (Ex. 8). Nonetheless, I am more convinced that Persichetti intended to create a poly-harmony effect. First, Persichetti gives performers a pedaling direction, “light pedal with changes of harmonies.” Moreover, polychords are seen more obviously in the later measures. Within the same section, there are very prominent appearances of polychord, for example, polychords of B major seventh/G major seventh, and C-sharp minor/F major in measure 120.

The image shows a musical score for Persichetti's Piano Sonata No. 9, II, measures 113-15. The score is in 2/4 time, marked 'Allegro agilitè' with a tempo of ca. 144. It features a treble clef with a melody and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment. The treble clef part is marked 'mp cristallino' and the bass clef part is marked 'tre corde'. A pedaling instruction 'con ped. (light pedal with changes of harmony)' is written below the bass clef. The score shows a polychord in measure 114 and a single chord in measure 115.

Ex. 8. Persichetti, Piano Sonata No. 9, II, mm. 113–15.

B. Melody

The relationship between harmony and melody is very crucial in Persichetti's composition. Among the relations of harmony to other musical elements, the relationship

³⁴ Ibid., 140.

between harmony and melody can be one of the most important relations.³⁵ Music can be understood as fundamental as melody, harmony, or rhythmic pattern; nevertheless, music is seldom exposed merely as harmony.³⁶ Melody and harmony are interrelated. Harmonies form when multiple different melodic lines sound together; while at the same time, melodies are created when chords proceed one after another. Persichetti wrote, “Separate chord tones of any progression have melodic tendencies; even the most isolated chord is full of melodic potential.”³⁷ Melody certainly influences harmony and gives direction to harmonic progression. It helps to sustain a phrase, and supporting the composition as a whole. Similarly, it is not surprising that Richard Wagner displayed the importance of melody in a musical work, and he was fascinated by the concept of “endless melody.” Endless melody drove his music dramas and kept the structure of a music drama tight. He included this concept in his essay on the future of music, *Zukunftsmusik*, which was published in 1860. Persichetti wrote in his book, “...harmonic movement may be created by generous chromaticism in all the voices and the emphasis placed upon a total melodic motion obliterating intervallic construction of chords... A melodic line, whether an inner or outer voice, often acts as a directional guide for harmonic progression.”³⁸ Persichetti commented that melody might also bring energy and “urges” consonant and stable harmonies to move.³⁹ Persichetti wrote the Ninth Piano Sonata melodies after deep thought. From the very first note until the last note of the sonata, the composer makes great effort to project phrases and sections with beautiful and attractive melodies. Sometimes, the melodies are

³⁵ Laurence Farrell, “Vincent Persichetti’s Piano Sonatas from 1943 to 1965” (PhD diss., The University of Rochester, 1976), 108, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/302838019?accountid=14556> (accessed February 2, 2016).

³⁶ Exception would be textual music of sound mass, for example, Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1959) and György Ligeti’s *Atmosphères* (1961) and *Requiem* (1963–65).

³⁷ Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 189.

³⁸ Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 185.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

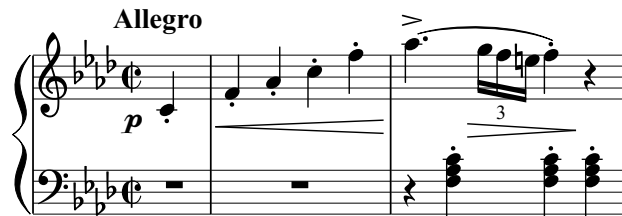
short, simple motives with hints of melodic interest. Melodies are found not just in the top most voice, sometimes in inner voices as well. The melodies often have varied presentation, with inspiration of quartal harmonies and fourths (see Ex. 7 above), jazzy syncopated rhythm (Ex. 9), or as simple as a broken chord (see Ex. 8 above).



Ex. 9. Persichetti, Piano Sonata No. 9, I, mm. 28–30.

Melody may be presented as a basic harmonic unit. As early as in the First Viennese School of the eighteenth century, composers composed melody based on notes in a basic triad. In Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1, he initiates the first movement with a rising F minor triad (Ex. 10). At the very beginning of the third movement in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466, a rising Mannheim Rocket of D minor acts as the primary component of the main theme and triggers the finale. In the twentieth century this kind of melody may occur as arpeggiated quartal sonorities or mixed thirds and fourths upon development. In Persichetti's music, he tended to outline large tertian chords in melodic lines.⁴⁰ In the Ninth Piano Sonata, melodic writing in accordance to harmonies is very much in evidence. The melody of the second movement is presented as a basic harmonic unit, an arpeggiated E^{maj13} chord (see Ex. 8 above).

⁴⁰ Laurence Farrell, "Vincent Persichetti's Piano Sonatas from 1943 to 1965" (PhD diss., The University of Rochester, 1976), 148, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/302838019?accountid=14556> (accessed February 2, 2016).



Ex. 10. Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1, I, mm. 1–2.

C. Texture

Texture in the Ninth Piano Sonata is more homophonic than the texture of other twentieth-century compositions, in fact, this is exactly the characteristic of Persichetti’s music. The well-balanced texture provides an easier access to contemporary music, which has been harmonically “distorted” compared to traditional harmonies. In this sonata, texture and tonal register adjust the viscosity of harmony. As Persichetti suggests, a slight shift in register changes the meaning of the musical idea.⁴¹ The second theme group of the first movement is a cheerful melody in thirds. The piano sounds rich and full in this middle register. The double thirds supply the melody with “soft” consonances, and results in a *pastoso*, mellow tone color as indicated.⁴² This theme is transformed and transposed up a minor 7th in the second movement. The change in register brings a new impression to the same musical material. It is now more expressive compared to that of the first movement. It is immediately followed by a one-measure reminiscence of the theme in original register. The cyclic theme in *staccato* reminds us of the organic sound of the first movement. In the beginning of the second movement, the melody and accompaniment figure shift to a higher register. The register shift helps projecting *agilite* and *cristallino* quality where piano sounds thinner and nimble in the higher register (see Ex. 8 above).

⁴¹ Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 186.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14. Persichetti described major and minor thirds as “soft” consonances.

D. Form

Formal designs are always the blueprints of musical compositions. Melodic motives, harmonic successions, and rhythmic patterns are elements that contribute to formal designs. Persichetti believes that a compositional process may be meaningless unless thematic statements are identifiable.⁴³ In the Ninth Piano Sonata, Persichetti showcases his instinct, taste, and style: formal design is the outward equivalent of these ideas. In the first movement, Persichetti composes with a model of sonata form. The exposition contains a first theme (m. 1) and a secondary theme group (m. 17 and m. 28); it is followed by a development that begins with a celestial tune on higher register (m. 54), and a re-transition in measure 100; the recapitulation comes back with the first theme. The secondary theme group is missing in the recapitulation. It seems to imitate the sonata-form design as in the nineteenth century. The second movement is in double-variation form of two themes, A-B-A-B'-A'.

Inter-movement and intra-movement thematic relationships provide unity for the entire sonata. The second theme (see Ex. 9 above) of the secondary theme group is foreshadowed in m. 17–18. This theme undergoes transformation in the development section of the first movement (mm. 64–70, 93–97). This primary theme recurs in other movements of the sonata. Variants on this primary theme are also presented in the B sections of the second movement (Ex. 11). The last four measures of the third movement recall the ascending arpeggiated melody of 13th chords in the second movement (mm. 206–9). The uprising opening quartal harmony figure in the first movement is reiterated note-by-note in the coda of the fourth movement (m. 294). The above-mentioned points of thematic transformation interlock the four movements and inseparably connect various formal sections. The sonata concludes with a confirmatory F-sharp major statement and rounds up four movements with a suggested F-sharp major tonality. The Ninth

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 275–76.

Piano Sonata exhibits the sensitivity of the composer to deviate from our common practice in formal designs. However, Persichetti is able to create a feeling of “inevitability of form” at the same time.⁴⁴



Ex. 11. Persichetti, Piano Sonata No. 9, II, mm. 124–26 (above), and mm. 143–44 (bottom).

Other Significant Piano Compositions

Poems for Piano, No. 2 “Soft is the Collied Night”

In the nineteenth century, composers adopted the term “poem” in musical work. Franz Liszt invented the symphonic poem, a single-movement composition depicting scenes and landscapes, philosophical ideas, stories of heroes and people, mood, love and other concepts.⁴⁵ The symphonic poems were programmatic, the main content very musically expressive, evoking the concept of a poem. Alexander Scriabin gave the title “poem” to his piano compositions frequently after 1903. He composed five sets of *Two Poems for Piano*, Op. 32, Op. 44, Op. 63,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 276.

⁴⁵ Keith T. Johns and Michael Saffle, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 10–11.

Op. 69, Op. 71, *Poème tragique* Op. 34, *Poème Satanique* Op. 36, *Poème* Op. 41, and *Vers la flamme* “*Poème*” Op. 72. These compositions might evoke certain poetic subjects, but had no further correspondences to actual poems.

Persichetti composed sixteen *Poems for Piano*, published in three volumes, Op. 4, 5, and 14. For each *Poem for Piano* he quoted a single line from the poem that inspired him, setting them as titles for the sixteen *Poems*. It was also reported that reading poetry was one of Persichetti’s most favorite pastimes. The composer seldom read novels or newspapers, or watched television, but read poetry in his spare time.⁴⁶ In a conversation with Ruby Shackelford, Persichetti discussed the connection between literature and music, “Music and literature are linked by virtue of their movement in time, but in music duration is absolute. While a standard agreement can often exist as to the meaning of words in literature, sounds in music defy translation. Music is an autonomous art. Words about music tend to confuse the issue.”⁴⁷ Persichetti believed that program music emulates the poet’s concentration and simplicity. It is to create a musical parallel to one’s mood after reading a poem. The music stands on its own to reflect the idea and focus of a piece of literature.

The second of the *Poems for Piano*, entitled “Soft is the Collied Night,” is based on the poem “*Fountains*” by the English poet James Elroy Flecker. The music is in rounded binary form (ABA’). It is symmetrical and provides a sense of accordance with the poem, which speaks of the reflections of the sky in a pond. In many ways the composer reveals “reflections” in the music. The downbeats of measure 1, 3, and 5 unfold a triad of G major, G-B-D in treble clef, while the bass descends from D, B, to G simultaneously (Ex. 12). In measures 12 to 14, the top

⁴⁶ Walter Simmons, *The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin: Voices of Stone and Steel* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 216.

⁴⁷ Vincent Persichetti and Rudy Shackelford, “Conversation with Vincent Persichetti,” *Perspectives of New Music* 20, No. 1/2 (Autumn 1981–Summer 1982): 125, <http://www.jstor.org/www2.lib.ku.edu/stable/942408> accessed February 2, 2016).

notes in the right hand (F, C and E) are imitated by the bass line immediately in the next beat (Ex. 13). The U-turn figure in measure 14 is imitated in the next measure by the inner voice (Ex. 14). All these little details intertwine and provide a pleasing description of a fountain. The middle “timidly” section from measure 18 is a metaphor of “wind” and “goldfish play.” The wind motif in measures 19 and 27 is based on synthetic scales, Neapolitan Scales of E-flat major and G major as described by Persichetti.⁴⁸ The D-Dorian scale appears in measure 23 to depict the wind also. The sprightly moving line in dotted rhythm seemingly represents the movement of goldfish (Ex. 15).



Ex. 13. Persichetti, *Poems for Piano*, Vol. 1, No. 2, mm. 12–14. Imitation of the top line in the bass.



Ex. 12. Persichetti, *Poems for Piano*, Vol. 1, No. 2, mm. 1–5. Unfolding of G major triad in outer voices.

⁴⁸ Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 44.



Ex. 15. Persichetti, *Poems for Piano*, Vol. 1, No. 2, mm. 14–15. Imitation of the U-turn figure in middle voice.



Ex. 14. Persichetti, *Poems for Piano*, Vol. 1, No. 2, mm. 18–22.

This *Poem* creates an imaginative space for students. The reflections through contrapuntal devices of imitation and inversion, and the imaginary figures of “wind” and “goldfish,” contribute to a pedagogical goal and make piano playing more enjoyable. And at the same time, it expresses the language of the twentieth century music.

Four Arabesques, Op. 141, No. 1 Affabile

“Arabesque” is borrowed from visual and choreographic arts. The term was first applied to an ornamental frieze or border done in the style of Arab architecture. The characteristics of such art (foliate and curlicue) are now evoked by various forms of music. One may associate arabesque in music (floridly melodic) with three distinctive musical ideas: 1) the contrapuntal decoration of a basic theme; 2) an elaboration by *gruppetti* and scale figures; and 3) rapidly

changing series of harmonies.⁴⁹ The *Arabesque* No. 1 by Persichetti is a reminiscence of the first *Arabesque* by Claude Debussy. Clearly the two composers adopted the third expression of arabesque in composing their respective first arabesques (Ex. 16).

The image displays two musical excerpts side-by-side. The top excerpt is titled "Andantino con moto" and is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes triplet markings in both the treble and bass staves. The bottom excerpt is titled "Affabile (♩=c. 132)" and is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and includes piano (*p*) markings in the bass staff. Both excerpts show complex harmonic structures with overlapping lines and sustained notes.

Ex. 16. Debussy, *Arabesque* No. 1, mm. 1–3 (above); Persichetti, *Arabesques* No. 1, mm. 1–4 (bottom).

Persichetti composed the *Four Arabesques*, Op. 141 in 1978. No. 1 *Affabile* is written “highly pianistically, primarily linear, and with dissonant harmonic framework.”⁵⁰ This piece shows polychords of two major seventh or two minor seventh chords, in which the root of the top chord is a third above the seventh of the lower chord, maintaining a strict stacking of thirds. These polychords create an illusion of thirteenth chords. Each chord is built up by alternating major thirds and minor thirds (Ex. 16, bottom). In measures 19–22, the polychords are built up with a major seventh chord with a minor seventh chord, separating perfect fourth. It simply suggests various types of ninth chords. The harmonies of this *Arabesque* are ear-catching, radiant, and pioneering. The harmonic writing opens up a new horizon of harmony appreciation.

⁴⁹ Simon Trezise, *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 144–45.

⁵⁰ Jane Magrath, *The Pianist’s Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1995), 457.

Persichetti's first *Arabesque* is excellent pedagogy material for demonstrating rotation. There is no one place where the chord exceeds an octave. Young pianists with smaller hands might benefit from this *Arabesque*. It encourages right-hand rotation movement particularly. The figures are characterized by ascending broken chords, which favors the right hand rotation movement from "in to out," from the thumb to the fifth finger. The pioneer in promoting rotary movement in piano playing, Tobias Matthay, suggests that successful piano playing always requires certain levels of rotation exertion.⁵¹ The idea of rotation is not only a visible movement, but hidden actions within one's imagination. Matthay believes forearm-rotation movement is the most important element of all, pianistically, physiologically, and pedagogically.⁵² This piano technique is fully exemplified through Persichetti's *Arabesque* No. 1. A natural forearm-rotary motion promotes convincing touch, and hence, attractive sound.

⁵¹ Tobias Matthay, *The Visible and Invisible in Piano Technique* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 51–52.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 49.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Vincent Persichetti's music has won the hearts of many audiences. His preference for neo-Romantic and neo-Classical language promotes an easier access for musicians, piano students, teachers, and audiences to embrace some of the most contemporary musical styles. Persichetti's musical compositions open a door to modern musical art. His music is not simply craft, but also art, poetry, imagination, and expression. It is always a challenge for most piano teachers to choose right music for beginners and elementary piano players. Students tend to become bored or discouraged due to their short attention span. Persichetti's compositions, however, keep students engaged by their unique qualities.

How does this study add to piano pedagogy? Classical music has been a highbrow form of art for many decades, and still is. As a piano teacher, I used to reflect: how does music relate to daily life? How can one appreciate and learn classical music effectively?

As an answer, I am confident that every single piece of music has a soul, and a deep thoughtful mind behind it: the creator, the composer. Persichetti's piano music is likable and approachable. His sixteen *Poems for Piano* accompany existing literature with musical gestures. The four *Arabesques* reflects Arab art with colorful harmonies, and the twelve piano sonatas is like *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo or *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, a compilation of "classics" in literature. Persichetti's piano music has brought forth our understanding of contemporary music from an inaccessible, abstract art to an accessible art of mixed elements. As a performer I have a strong belief that Classical music performance is a path to connect with the composer, a path to perceive the feeling of a composer at the time he or she composed. I consider

this the most essential step towards making convincing music. While a primary goal of an educator is to bring the best out of our students, other goals are to cultivate students' understanding the world, to interact with different cultures, to share passion towards music, and to equip them to experience music in their own dimensions. Students will learn to express their feelings through music, the common language of the world. By means of performance, students are taught to communicate with their audiences.

I observe that many pianists and listeners nowadays reject contemporary music, finding it non-pictorial and non-representational. However, this is not true in Vincent Persichetti's music. He refuses to adopt serialism, and has an excellent musical sense to compose pretty tonal music with only mild dissonances. His music is full of gorgeous melodies and colorful harmonies, and should be appealing to wider audiences. Nonetheless, it is peculiar that conservatives and scholars find his music too much like Paul Hindemith. They see his music of "impeccable craftsmanship but no personality," or "a minor figure, overshadowed by the likes of Copland and Harris."⁵³ Such rejection and scorn have hindered Persichetti's music from being recorded and broadcast during the composer's lifetime. Not until two decades after his death did his music begin to be performed.⁵⁴ I believe it is time for us to revive the music by this 'little figure,' not only to expand our canon of classical music, but to disseminate and teach from all dimensions of contemporary music.

⁵³ William Schuman, "The Complete Musician: Vincent Persichetti and Twentieth-Century Harmony," *Musical Quarterly* 47, No. 3 (July, 1961): 321, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/740169> (accessed March 20, 2016).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

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