Preperations on a Graduate Viola Recital

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PREPERATIONS FOR A GRADUATE VIOLA RECITAL

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PREPERATIONS FOR A GRADUATE VIOLA RECITAL

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to discuss three works of the viola repertoire and their specific performance practices and musical aspects. The paper discusses the historical background of the pieces, harmonic and form structure, and suggested performance practices for each work.
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Chapter One: Felix Mendelssohn- *Sonata in C minor for Viola and Piano*

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was one of the world’s most gifted and prolific musical prodigies. Felix’s music education began when he was nine years old while his family was visiting Paris. He and his sister Fanny began taking piano lessons with Marie Bigot, a well-known pianist who had the admiration of Haydn and Beethoven.¹ When the family returned to Germany it was discovered that the young and highly intelligent Felix had quite a gift for music so his father decided to personally oversee his education. While taking piano lessons with Ludwig Berger and violin lessons with the court violinist C.W. Henning, Felix was also tutored privately by a history professor by the name of G.A.H. Stenzel, from the University of Berlin. Mendelssohn received most of his formal musical training at the Berlin Singakademie in his youth.

Mendelssohn’s Sonata for Viola and Piano in C minor was completed on February 14, 1824 when he was only fifteen years old. Mendelssohn was fond of the viola and played one of the viola parts in the premier of his String Octet.² While completing the viola sonata he was also finishing his first symphony as well as other small chamber works. He borrowed the minuet movement from the sonata and included it in the third movement of his first symphony.³ For reasons unknown, Mendelssohn deemed the work, along with his Clarinet Sonata and Sextet op. 110, unworthy of publication and the Sonata for Viola and Piano was hidden away from the public. In 1966 the work was rediscovered amongst his manuscripts and the work has enjoyed much popularity since then.

The first movement is entitled *Adagio, Allegro Molto* and is in sonata form. Mendelssohn uses typical key modulations throughout this movement that range from C minor, E-flat major, G minor, and C major before returning to the home key of C minor at the end. The second movement is entitled

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Menuetto and is a standard minuet structure with the A section taking place in measures 1-122 and the B section, or Trio, taking place from measures 123-182. The ABA form is completed by a repeat back to the A section at the end of the Trio. The last movement is a theme and variations with the theme stated in the first eight measures, first by the piano and then by the viola. There are eight variations in total with an Allegro Molto section after the eighth variation serving as a coda for the movement. The eighth variation is unique in that it serves as a cadenza like variation for the piano who up until this part of the sonata has served a secondary role to the viola. Mendelssohn wrote a light piano accompaniment for the sonata which enables the viola’s sound to not be overpowered by the bigger sound of the piano. The piano plays large virtuosic runs in this variation for long sections at a time and is mostly uninterrupted by the viola who occasionally enters with legato melodic lines. This variation is also unique in that it is the only variation that is in C major. Mendelssohn modulates to C major only for this variation before returning to the opening key of C minor at the Allegro Molto.

In preparing this work many of the suggested bowings were re-worked to accommodate the performer and phrase structures. For instance, the passage from measure 54 to measure 74 consists of long running eighth notes slurred into groups of 16. This passage has a forward motion that leads into the next phrase at measure 75 but the suggested bowing tends to slow this motion down since a slower bow speed must be used to fit all of the eighth notes in at once. To help keep this forward motion the bowings were re-edited to group eight eighth notes into one bow which allowed the performer to use more of the bow in a faster motion. The Menuetto is much lighter in style than the first movement. This lighter style is established by a reoccurring motive shown in the example below:

![Menuetto Motive](image)

Figure 1.1: Second movement Menuetto Motive

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4 Felix Mendelssohn. Sonata in C minor for Viola and Piano. Amadeus Verlag, 1990, p. 4
In this motive small lifts were added before and after the indicated short notes that are marked with a staccato marking. These small lifts create very small pauses between the notes which help them sound short and thus keep in the style of the movement. These lifts were also used in the first, third, and seventh variations of the last movement where there are also short notes indicated. The third movement’s theme contains a series of eighth notes that contain a tied pair of eighth notes that cross over measures.\footnote{Felix Mendelssohn. \textit{Sonata in C minor for Viola and Piano}. Amadeus Verlag, 1990, p. 6}

These ties are used throughout the movement so to preserve this theme the ties were played by “leaning into” the tied notes. The most difficult section of the third movement is the \textit{Allegro Molto} section which contains a series of sixteenth note runs. These runs can be a bit chromatic at times so identifying where the half steps are can clear up any confusion in the left hand. Playing these runs in alternate rhythms is also helpful in being able to play this passage quickly as it is indicated to be played quickly.
Chapter 2: Rebecca Clarke- *Sonata for Viola and Piano*

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) was one of the most distinguished female English composers of the 20th century. She was an accomplished musician at a young age and at the age of sixteen entered the Royal Music Academy in London to study violin. She would later pursue the viola as her main instrument, for which she composed many works, and achieved a considerable amount of fame as a concert violist. Clarke’s father, who was known to be a cruel man, disapproved of her attending the Academy despite supporting her musical achievements. His disapproval was further exacerbated when her harmony teacher Percy Miles proposed to her. Upset by the proposal Clarke’s father removed his daughter from the Academy and banished her from the family home. Rebecca did not marry Percy Miles and eventually moved to the United States where she continued to compose for only a short amount of time. Years of being told she was not fit for the musical world because she was a woman took an emotional toll on Clarke, who suffered from depression for the vast majority of her life. She stopped composing in her mid-20s and lived the remainder of her life as a caretaker for children.

The Sonata for Viola and Piano, composed in 1919, was the last of her major works. At this time she was living in the United States and was coincidently neighbors with the great music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. At the request of her neighbor she entered her Sonata for Viola and Piano in Coolidge’s Composition Competition where she was fortunate enough to have tied for first place with Ernest Bloch’s *Suite for Viola*. The judging committee however implored Ms. Coolidge to name Bloch the winner; this was an effort to avoid any sign of favoritism and possibility tainting the credibility of

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the newly established competition. Much speculation arose during the competition as it was nearly unheard of for women to be talented composers. Some of the judges mistakenly credited the Sonata for Viola and Piano to Maurice Ravel because of its Impressionistic vocabulary while others thought Rebecca Clarke was just a pseudonym for Bloch himself. The sonata received its premier in 1919 at the Berkshire Music Festival to critical acclaim but after its premier it was seldom performed. The work was revived in a celebration of Clarke’s 90th birthday in 1976 and since then the Sonata has become a major staple of the viola repertoire.

The sonata as a whole is a fantasy like structure in which there is no clear form. The first movement opens with a trumpet-like fanfare stated by the viola in the first twelve measures and appears to be in the key of E minor. There is however a lack of D-sharps and G-sharps in this section so these first twelve measures are given a modal quality, more specifically, Dorian. The tonic note “E” is established by this opening motive:

![Figure 2.1: 1st movement Opening Motive](image)

Clarke’s use of the perfect 5th involving the A to E in this motive help establish E as the tonal center in the introduction. The rhythms used in this motive are also used throughout the movement in different iterations. When the introduction ends at rehearsal #1 the harmonic vocabulary of the rest of the first movement becomes chromatic.

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The second movement is in 6-8 time and uses whole tone and chromatic scales to derive linear harmonies in the viola part. The movement first briefly uses the whole tone device in the piano at measure 5. This whole tone theme is used again at the end of the movement at rehearsal #24 but is re-introduced an octave higher. At rehearsal #16 Clarke begins using chromaticism through rehearsal #18 in the accompaniment line which alternates between the viola and the piano in this section. The piano takes up the main theme at rehearsal #16 which is then passed to the viola at rehearsal #17. The theme is often led into by chromatic runs in both the viola and piano and is then colored by natural harmonics in the viola part.

Figure 2.2: 2nd Movement theme in Piano, Viola with natural harmonics

At rehearsal #18 Clarke returns to using the whole tone scale and introduces a pentatonic scale as well. This pentatonic scale can be clearly seen six measures after rehearsal #18 on the last eighth note G-flat. (See figure below)

Figure 2.3: 2nd movement, Pentatonic Scale

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11 Clarke, p. 15 (piano score)
12 Clarke, p. 5
She makes this pentatonic scale more apparent by introducing a new rhythmic gesture consisting of duple eighth notes. This section then leads into a new theme at rehearsal #19 where Clarke goes back to a chromatic melodic line this time played by the viola. The last movement is entitled *Adagio* and revisits material from the first movement. It opens with its own theme first established in measures 1-8 but moves to variations of the theme utilized in the first movement.

In preparing this piece as a whole, identifying the intervallic relationships and the rhythmic motives is of the utmost importance. In the Mendelssohn and Weber the harmonic and melodic structures are very apparent at first glance but that is not the case with the Clarke sonata. Since this work is Impressionistic tonal centers and chord structures are ambiguous, so breaking the notes down to their interval relationships help identify where Clarke is emphasizing a certain tonal center or phrase. For instance she uses the motive of a perfect fifth from A to E quite frequently throughout the piece to identify E as the tonal center. The rhythm is just as important as the interval relationship in this piece so care must be taken to play the rhythm accurately. Clarke changes meter often throughout the piece so practicing subdivisions can help distinguish the division in changing meters. The mood of the piece must also be taken into consideration since the Impressionistic style is about creating an image for the listener. Clarke assists the performer in this aspect by adding at the top of the score a line from Alfred de Musset’s poem “*la Nuit de Mai*”: “Poète, prends ton luth; le vin de jeunesse Fermente cette nuit dans les veins de Dieu.”¹³ This quote translated to English states “poet take up your lute the wine of youth this night is fermenting in the veins of God”. In interpreting this quote the performer is giving a guiding light into how to interpret the piece as a whole.

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¹³ Clarke, p.1
Chapter 3: Carl Maria von Weber - Andante E Rondo Ongerese, Op. 35

Carl Maria von Weber was one of the most popular and influential German composers of the early 18th century. He grew up in a performing arts household as the son of a musician and a mother who was an actress. His music education first took place with Michael Haydn when the family lived in Salzburg and later with Klacher, the court organist. Weber’s greatest impact on the world of music is his contribution to opera, to which he contributed such works as Euryanthe and Oberon. When he was growing up he spent a lot of time in theaters, drawing inspiration from plays for his operatic works and incidental music, such as for the play Turandot. Weber was not fond of Italian influences on music, so he set out for a unique German sound. He began using local folk melodies in his operatic and instrumental works in an effort to gain a German sound. His efforts in gathering German folk music would later greatly influence many subsequent composers such as Wagner, Liszt, and Mahler.14

The Andante und Rondo Ongarese Op. 35 was a work originally written for viola and orchestra which he composed for his brother Fridolin, an accomplished violist and violinist, in 1809. 15 When his friend the bassoonist Georg Friedrich Brandt, for whom he wrote his Bassoon Concerto in F, heard the work he suggested that he transcribe it for the bassoon. Weber completed the transcription in 1813 and was premiered on February 19th of that year to much success.16 The work was rather poorly transcribed and paled in comparison to the Bassoon Concerto but it did achieve great success in its bassoon incarnation. The viola version was seldom played after it was transcribed for bassoon but it has since been revived in its original viola form in the 20th century.

16 Warrack, p.152.
The Andante movement of this work begins in the key of C minor and is a theme with a series of variations in 6-8 time. The opening theme is stated by the viola in the first 17 measures after which follows four variations and a small coda six measures before the Rondo movement. The Rondo movement of this work, as the title suggests, is in rondo form but is not a typical rondo due to its non-repeating episodes between each return of the rondo theme. Weber sets the Rondo in 2-4 time and modulates the key to C major giving this section a much lighter mood. The theme is stated in the first 12 measures of the Rondo and returns in its exact form four measures after rehearsal #6 and twelve measures before rehearsal #9 in the score.

Many problems arose in preparing this piece as there were several mistakes made by the publisher in this edition. In rehearsing with my pianist there were several sections in the piece in which rhythms and pitches in the viola part were not lining up with the piano part. This led me to look at a few other editions that in comparison to this edition had different notes and rhythms in certain measures. The other editions were identical to each other in terms of pitch and rhythm so I was led to believe that there were errors printed in the edition I was using. The first major mistake in this edition, which is the International version edited by William Primrose17, can be found at the bottom of the first page in a statement marked with an asterisk. This statement announces that this work was originally for Bassoon and orchestra which as history tells us is incorrect. In addition to this there is a series of errors in both the viola and piano scores. The first musical error can be found five measures before rehearsal #3 where the measure contains a quarter note followed by a quarter note slurred to two eighth notes. In checking with other editions mainly the Schott Music International viola edition18 and the Everette et Schaffern bassoon edition19, that measure should contain a dotted quarter note followed by a quarter note slurred into two sixteenth notes. The second error can be found on the second measure after rehearsal #3. On the

second beat of this measure there is a written C, E-flat, G, and C but in comparison to the other editions it should read C, G, F, and E-flat. The third error is found in the Rondo seven measures before rehearsal #6. Here the first sixteenth note on this measure in the viola part is printed as an E-sharp but the piano score has it printed as an E-flat which is incorrect. At the top of the fourth page of the viola part there is an eight bar rest but should be marked as a nine bar rest.

The most difficult section in the Rondo occurs at rehearsal #9 and it is suggested that when learning this piece that the performer start at this section. This variation is entirely made up of fast sextuplet arpeggios that span the entire range of the viola. The viola part has the sextuplets slurred into sets of twelve but it is more helpful to both the violist and pianist if they are slurred into sets of six so the pulse can be felt more clearly. Intonation is a very difficult task in this section as at times the viola must jump from an extremely high position back down to first position in a matter of seconds. Isolating the shifts with alternating rhythms is helpful in assuring that the correct position is shifted. It is also helpful to maintain light finger pressure in the left hand to allow it to move a lot quicker on the fingerboard. When practicing this section it is important to identify what chord the arpeggio is outlining and its quality in order to have all the octave iterations of the arpeggio sound the same. It is also helpful to practice runs where groups of notes are on the same string so that the performer may identify where a string crossing is to be made and how it should be played. The piece ends with a small fragment of the Rondo stated by the viola followed by another set of sextuplet sixteenth note runs that outline the G major and C major chords. In comparing performances/recordings and speaking with other violists, it is common practice to cut these last few runs out and jump directly to the last three measures. These measures are omitted due to their extremely high range and speed, which render these musical ideas unidiomatic for the viola.

When I first programmed this recital I initially picked these works because I had heard them either in a recording or live performance and had really enjoyed them. I had little knowledge of their
historical backgrounds but as I began to research them I found they all had a common thread. All three of the pieces discussed in this paper were absent from the viola repertoire for quite some time before their rediscoveries in the 20th century. Since their rediscoveries all three works have enjoyed much popularity in the viola repertoire because of the uniqueness of their style. Much of the viola repertoire comes from the 20th Century and none of these works fall into that category. Both the Mendelssohn and Weber are from the late classical and early Romantic period which produced very few viola works. The viola was an unpopular instrument for that time period because its poor projection made it difficult to stand out against other instrumental forces. The Mendelssohn viola sonata however, was written with great sensitivity to the instrument and now serves as an excellent piece for learning the style of this time period. The *Andante and Rondo Ongerese* is one of a few show pieces written for viola and is also a great example of the late Classical, early Romantic era style. There are also few works written for viola of the Impressionistic style and the Clarke serves as a great example of it. There are even fewer works in general written by a woman before the 20th century so once again the Clarke sonata stands out in the repertoire. All of these works are great for a performer wishing to move away from the traditional viola repertoire.


Curriculum Vitae

Julia Gutierrez was born in El Paso, Texas where she completed most of her formal education. She entered the University of Texas at El Paso in the fall of 2003 where she earned a Bachelor of Music in Orchestral Performance. She studied both violin and viola with Dr. Stephanie Meyers but has since chosen viola as her main instrument. She has been a member of several fine orchestras of the southwest which include the Juarez Symphony Orchestra and the El Paso Symphony Youth Orchestra, of which she was a founding member and current volunteer.

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