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“CHARACTERISTICS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA’S TWELVE-TONE
WRITING IN CIACCONA, INTERMEZZO, E ADAGIO”

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Robert Bui

Committee in charge:

Professor Charles Curtis, chair
Professor Erik Carlson
Professor Lei Liang

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“CHARACTERISTICS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA'S TWELVE-TONE
WRITING IN CIACCONA, INTERMEZZO, E ADAGIO”

by

Robert Bui

Master of Arts in Music

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Charles Curtis, chair

Luigi Dallapiccola is a composer of the 20th century noted for a unique perspective of dodecaphonic technique. In this writing, I will investigate his early cello work “Ciaccona, Intermezzo, e Adagio” (1945) through structural and harmonic analysis. Each of the three movements features unique formal concepts and employments of a 12-tone row, somewhat dissimilar between movements and quite unique in comparison to other composers of 12-tone music. After a chronological scrutiny of major sections of each movement, interpretative and cellistic demands will be pondered in order to result in a theoretically engaged and informed successful performance.

Luigi Dallapiccola has certain tangible influences from the large names in 12-tone writing— say Schoenberg and Webern— yet, he is capable of identifying his unique voice within the confines of serialism. To understand his idiomatic use of dodecaphonic technique, this writing examines Luigi Dallapiccola’s early cello work, “Ciaccona, Intermezzo, e Adagio” (1945) through a structuralist lens to contextualize the distinguishing features of Dallapiccola’s serial vocabulary. The writing will both scrutinize the theoretical analysis and its subjective perception to the player and listener.

It is important to note that this piece falls early in Dallapiccola’s total output. It was only “the first twelve tone composition of Dallapiccola to be performed” (Fearn 99), and is an early marker to his developing compositional voice. Brian Alegant, in “The Twelve-Tone Music of Luigi Dallapiccola,” characterizes Dallapiccola’s writing to be divided in five phases where this piece belongs to the first phase (1942-1950) (after a pre-serial phase). Yet, we can observe much of his compositional development in this piece alone, despite the completion of this piece being so early in his career. This collaboration with Gaspar Cassadó on the technical matters of the piece with proved to be one that established the work’s place in the important contributions of 20th century cello repertoire. (Scigliuzzo)

I will take apart each movement chronologically, detailing certain aspects of the material that contribute to his modern approach, yet simultaneously traditional sounding result. This may manifest in facets such as an embedded pitch centrality (reminiscent of tonal harmony), periodic phrase structure, natural melodic contour, and many other elements to discuss. Furthermore, after a thorough investigation of pitch language, I will provoke the questions of what could be done in the performative realization in the seat of the cellist to either emphasize or deemphasize the boundaries set by the pitch content.

Ciaccona

This early piece, like many of the “earliest compositions of Schoenberg [is] employed in conjunction with traditional musical forms,” (Fearn 99) and an easy example of this is the first movement, the Ciaccona, modeled similarly to a baroque chaconne. The first four measures reveals the prime row in dyads, if we were to count from bottom to top in dyads, the prime form of the row would be [(C,F#),(E,D),G,Ab,Bb,B,(Eb,Db),F,A], or numerated as [(0,6)(4,2),7,8,10,11,12,(3,1),5,9]. This initial presentation of a harmonic sequence is consistent as if it were a baroque chaconne.

Con larghezza (♩ = 40)

sempre pesante

(+) (+) (+) (+)

fff molto ritmato e ben tenuto III e IV Corda

Esecuzione:

martell.

Figure 1.1: the first 4 bars of the Ciaccona expose the prime row in dyads.

The concluding sixteenth notes of the excerpt lead straight into the following phrase. The construction of the row puts the length of the breath mark into question— should the performer put a substantial separation to break the two row phrases, or is the connected rhythmic construction meant to deliberately obscure the point at which the row breaks? This obscurity between interpretational choices appears to be a revolving theme of the piece.

The movement, full of many variations of retrograde and inversion in somewhat melodic liberty, is mixed with both a sense of gravitation and harmonic neutrality. Within the first tetrachord, a whole tone collection (C,F#,E,D) marks the beginning of the phrase, as well as in

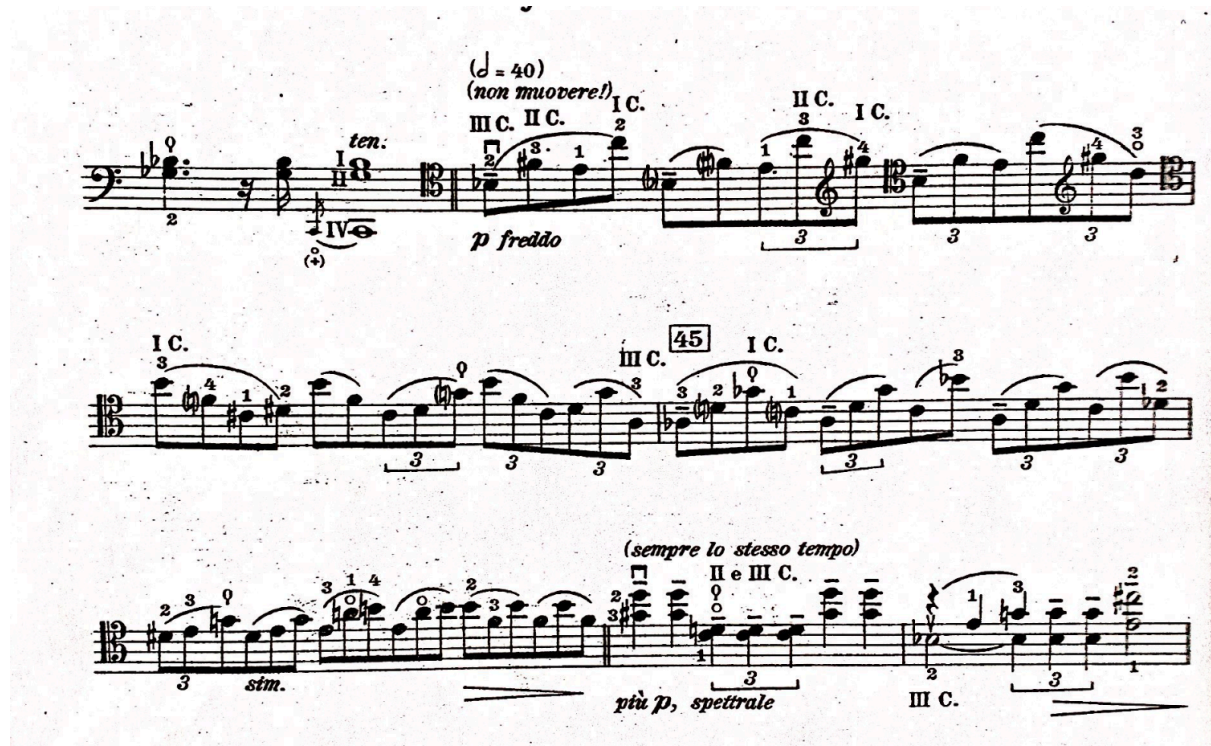


Figure 1.2: in the middle of the Ciaccona, this markedly slower section suspends the motion of both the performer and the harmony

measure 9, where another whole tone collection oscillates, neutralizing the harmonic field. The most clear example in the movement is in measure 43, marked “freddo” and “non muovere!”, where the whole tone landscape sustains, seemingly having the listener and performer be lost as to where the sense of gravity might have gone. “Freddo” and “non muovere” are among many interesting expressive marking left by the composer. How might a performer play “freddo” (cold)? One interpretation may be a color with higher overtones and fewer of the characteristic warm fundamental sound of the instrument. Another, to complement “non muovere,” may be to match the harmonic field and play inexpressively as if fully frozen in time.

In contrast, there are also many moments in the music featuring a sense of a “polarity.” There is a sense of lyric beauty in which certain pitches have a refined relationship and natural pull to one another. The most clear argument in favor of this is the natural gravitation towards the pitch C. The beginning measures’ oscillating pitches “seem to suggest that the Ciaccona

theme is coming to cadence in a C tonality, and the introduction of a pedal tone C in the final measure, seems to confirm this” (Fearn, 101). This is also confirmed in the return of the theme in the final iteration at mm84, and the terminal dyad of a major 3rd, a C and E. If there is this sort of reminiscence of tonality within the writing, this raises the question of tuning. A performer must make the choice of whether the writing should be tuned justly, as in lowered major thirds and accidentals influencing the gradation of the tuning, or whether the writing should be equally tempered, as if these twelve tones had true equal weight.

One may ponder additional questions regarding the tuning: what is the role of the accidentals in this writing? With some clear diatonic indicators scattered throughout the entire work, the performer is left to choose whether the sharps and flats chosen have an effect on the tuning, as in tonal music, or whether they are a mere notational convenience to aid the legibility of the music.

II. Intermezzo

The Intermezzo, despite being the shortest of the three movements, presents a rich array of construction. It begins with a clear horizontal presentation of the row split into two hexachords [F#,B,C,A,D,Eb], followed by [Db,F,E,Ab,G,Bb]. They are both delivered with a dry, short pizzicato, then punctuated neatly with a rhythmically offsetting col legno stroke. The phrases are periodic and neatly symmetrical; what follows the prime presentation of this row is simply the inversion of the row, balancing the upward contour by bringing it back down. Interestingly, these hexachords are also derived from octatonic collections. Relating back to the idea of “polarity,” this prime row and its following inversion feature an axis of symmetry: The prime and its inversion share the same initial two pitches (F# and B), the same terminal pitches (G and Bb) as well as two more in the middle at the same time (D and Eb). All of the same characteristics apply to the transposed version of the row in mm111. This begs the question of whether these two rows should be phrased as if they are two distinct phrases to

10

Intermezzo

Allegro, con espressione drastica
(♩ = 175, ♩♩ = 68)

N.B. pizz. *f marcato*

col legno (*battuto*)

95

pizz. 1 2

col legno (*come sopra*)

pizz. 4 2 1 4 2

col legno

pizz. 3 2

II C.

100

col legno (+) 3

1 3

Figure 2.1: the opening of the Intermezzo features the prime presentation and inversion immediately back to back, in a clean symmetry

emphasize their separation or they should be phrased as one unified sentence, where the downward contour of the second, inverted row perfectly complements the first row.

The Intermezzo is in a very clear ternary form with a middle trio. It is a sharp contrast in character, yet with strings of relation. The third pitch of the original row is displaced to the fifth position and a new emphasis is placed on the interval of a perfect 4th (Fearn 103). There are fragments and reminiscences of the prime row, for example in m143 with similar contour and intervals. For even further unification, at the return of the first idea (m153), Dallapiccola simply swaps the pitches from the opening section and the section at m102. In other words, what results is that the melodic shape in the iteration at m162 simply uses exact pitches from the beginning prime row ([F#,B,C,A,D,Eb],[Db,F,E,Ab,G,Bb]).

This movement also adds weight to the argument of a subtle C-tonic presence. The first section of the ternary “cadences” in a G+D dyad and the final section “cadences” in a C+G dyad, as if this were a dominant tonic relation. Even the frequency open C string moments marked “sff” add a certain punctuation which emphasizes a certain polarity to C.



Figure 2.2: the rhythmic gesture in 162 matches that of m102, only with the row material swapped

III. Adagio

The final movement's row form is also articulated initially in discrete hexachords. The first hexachord is presented in an arc of slowly evolving stacked fifths [E,B,F#,C#,G#,D#]. This interest in how stacking perfect intervals to saturate the whole 12-tone collection may perhaps be of influence from Schoenberg in his *Harmonielehre* (Kämper 265). After the "colorless" and upfront presentation of these simple fifths, the complementary hexachord is presented in less than half of the time (less than 4 measures total, in a faster tempo) and in a contrasting diatonic and more expressive manner. The remaining pitches are [D,F,C,G,A,Bb]; the D flat in m213 does not belong to the row but rather is an expressive liaison to lead to the following section, an inversion of the stacked-fifths hexachord. In measure 221, as expected, Dallapiccola also inverts the diatonic hexachord to fulfill the complete row.

The following section in m226 is the strongest contrast where Dallapiccola presents a new row chromatically saturating around the pitch G. Mead writes that "it is not a single row but rather a set of rows, or a hexachordal area, or an axis of inversion that plays the role of a point of reference" (Mead 124). This contrasting section is where the oscillating axis of symmetry comes in to contrast what has been heard just prior.



Figure 3.2: a canon developing a single gesture of the movement. The blue follows the embedded row pattern

the original stacked-5ths hexachord neatly falls in the open strings (m262), reminiscent of the opening of the Berg Violin Concerto. The ending adds credit to argument of a type of “C” polarity, mentioned in both the previous movements, as the piece ends with the repeated C pedal in m263 taking until the final low pizzicato notes. As mentioned by Mead, there is an embedded “deep devotion to a kind of musical lyricism” in the writing of Dallapiccola, which helps characterizes Dallapiccola’s voice, even in this early work.



Figure 3.3: near the ending of the Adagio, where the pedal C remains and the open fifths gesture closes the section

VIOLINKONZERT

I. **ALBAN BERG**

ANDANTE (♩ = 56)

poco cresc. - - - - -

Introduction (10 Takte)

*) In den Stimmen ist die 1. Klarinette in B, die 2. Klarinette in A notiert

Figure 3.4: Berg Violin concerto opening, where the open fifths gesture is markedly similar to that of Dallapiccola

Overview

In the entire span of the work, one helpful way to mark Dallapiccola's writing is the approach of this so-called "cross partition." The pitches are arranged in a "rectangular design" where the "vertical columns of a cross partition are derived from the source row's segments whereas the horizontal rows contain non-adjacent elements of the source row." This is helpful to explain the construction of the rows when the pitches (particularly in the first movement) are presented simultaneously in dyads or when whole melodies are drawn out from segments of the row at a time. Regardless of which terminology or technical definition to analyze the rows, the most substantive conclusion with this work is how Dallapiccola uses the row as an expressive vehicle, to generate a "host of associations and echoes within" the music. (Fearn 101). The music has beauty in its conjunction between the traditional forms, full of modern freedom and variation. This opens a much longer conversation that ponders how this piece shall be interpreted, in a modernist or traditional lens, or to abandon this sort of binary as this piece seems to live within the fringes.

He manages to create music in polyphonic canon that is both trackable as a 12-tone line or perhaps even a roman numeral diatonicism. He carefully molds symmetrical phrase structures that simultaneously fulfill a 20th century inversion/retrograde variation that naturally follows melodic contour of the century prior. He additionally had the ability to modernize the 17th century “chaconne” form into his own dodecaphonic version, full of both harmonic neutrality and a sense of polarity— neither of which express an explicit tonic/dominant relation nor a full departure from pitch centricity, but somewhere in the liminal space. The resulting output is a masterful work that both pushes boundaries in solo cello repertoire of the century, and establishes an expressive groundwork for his forthcoming compositions.

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