

A Study of the Solo Piano Works by Owen Middleton (b. 1941)

With a Recording of Selected Works from 1962-1993

by

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ABSTRACT

Owen Middleton (b. 1941) enjoys an established and growing reputation as a composer of classical guitar music, but his works for piano are comparatively little known. The close investigation offered here of Middleton's works for piano reveals the same impressive craftsmanship, compelling character, and innovative spirit found in his works for guitar. Indeed, the only significant thing Middleton's piano music currently lacks is the well-deserved attention of professional players and a wider audience. Middleton's piano music needs to be heard, not just discussed, so one of this document's purposes is to provide a recorded sample of his piano works. While the overall repertoire for solo piano is vast, and new works become established in that repertoire with increasing difficulty, Middleton's piano works have a significant potential to find their way into the concert hall as well as the private teaching studio. His solo piano music is highly effective, well suited to the instrument, and, perhaps most importantly, fresh sounding and truly original. His pedagogical works are of equal value. Middleton's piano music offers something for everyone: there one finds daring virtuosity, effusions of passion, intellectual force, colorful imagery, poetry, humor, and even a degree of idiomatic innovation. This study aims to reveal key aspects of the composer's musical style, especially his style of piano writing, and to provide pianists with helpful analytical, technical, and interpretive insights. These descriptions of the music are supported with recorded examples, selected

from the works for solo piano written between 1962 and 1993: *Sonata for Piano*, *Childhood Scenes*, *Katie's Collection*, and *Toccata for Piano*. The complete scores of the recorded works are included in the appendix. A chapter briefly describing the piano pieces since 1993 concludes the study and invites the reader to further investigations of this unique and important body of work.

DEDICATION

To Leslie

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project would not have been possible without the concerted efforts of the many mentors, colleagues, and friends who contributed to its final shape. First of all, I would like to thank Owen Middleton for his generosity and openness throughout the course of my investigations. I would also like to thank Anne Middleton for her warm, southern hospitality. To Jerry Bush, who deserves credit on so many levels, I would like to express my sincerest admiration and my deepest gratitude. Most especially, he has my thanks for encouraging me to pursue Middleton's music and for lighting the way. To Amy Holbrook I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for her tireless efforts in helping me to shape and edit this written document. To Robert Hamilton, I offer my life-long gratitude for his teaching, and especially for his thoughtful coaching of the repertoire on the recording. I offer many thanks to Andrew Campbell, Robert Spring, and Joshua Gardner for their vital support. Finally, I would like to thank Andrew O'Brien and Charles Szczepanek, for their helpful suggestions throughout the recording sessions.

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PREFACE

Owen Middleton has already been the subject of a study by Gregory Newton, whose groundbreaking 2007 dissertation, “An American Original: The Guitar Music of Owen Middleton,” has been an important source for this research project. In addition to his careful study of the composer’s renowned compositions for the guitar, Newton has penned a detailed biography of the composer, has given comprehensive consideration of the composer’s style, and has created a catalogue of the composer’s complete oeuvre that remains virtually up-to-date.

Given the substantial nature of Newton’s research, this project will necessarily have a more narrow focus. Readers interested in the composer’s life story will find a well-written treatment of it in Newton’s document. Those interested in a more exhaustive description of the composer’s style, including its evolution, will likewise find it there. This document will focus on the composer’s solo piano output.

At the outset, the composer’s style will be briefly discussed, with special reference to his piano works. Next, the composer’s relationship to the piano will be clarified. Chapters 4-7 focus on the works included on the recording. Each of these chapters will be structured in a similar way—beginning with a discussion of the genesis of the work under discussion, continuing with detailed description, and concluding with information about the work’s reception, where appropriate.

In conjunction with Newton's study, the primary sources for this research project consist of interviews with Middleton, as well as with Jerry Bush, who has had the most experience performing the composer's piano music of any living musician. While the interview with Middleton is dated April 1, 2010, the author has had the benefit of frequent communication with the composer from that time up until the completion of the project. In one sense, the interview between the author and the composer has been ongoing for over a year. In addition to interviews, the author has had access to the composer's sketchbooks, which have afforded many insights.

To aid the performer in studying the music on the recording, the composer has generously permitted that the scores of each of the pieces be included in this document. These scores are located in the appendix. The score of the *Sonata for Piano* included is a facsimile of the original edition, which the composer prepared by hand using an onionskin, a type of translucent paper popular at the time that could be used for duplicate printing. The scores provided for *Childhood Scenes* and *Katie's Collection* are revised editions prepared by the composer using computer software. (*Childhood Scenes* was the last piano work to be prepared using the onionskin process.) By the time the composer wrote *Toccata for Piano*, his work habits had evolved to the point where he less often used sketchbooks or handwritten drafts, instead working out his ideas at the computer. No handwritten score of the *Toccata* exists.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Owen Middleton (b. 1941) enjoys an established and growing reputation as a composer of classical guitar music, but his works for piano are comparatively little known. His guitar works have been performed around the world, in such storied venues as Wigmore Hall, London, and Carnegie Hall, New York.¹ In 2010, Middleton's music was required repertoire at the Fourth International Guitar Festival in Grotniki, Poland.² His piano works are not as well traveled. His guitar music has been published both in the United States and abroad by major companies, including Belwin-Mills, New York; E. C. Kerby, Toronto; Edition Daminus, Germany; The Guitar Foundation of America, Los Angeles; and Lathkill Music Publishers, U.K.³ To date, all of the composer's piano music is self-published. Middleton's contributions to classical music have earned him an ASCAP Standard Awards Panel prize in every year from 2001 to the present.⁴ This award derives principally from his contributions to the guitar literature.

Owen Middleton has commanded respect as a composer of music for the classical guitar, but he remains relatively obscure in other

¹ Owen Middleton, *Composer, Author, and Teacher*. July 29, 2011. <<http://owenmiddleton.wordpress.com/about/>>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

mediums. We can attribute his achievements in part to a unique ability to write original and idiomatic works for his native instrument. What else accounts for the success of Middleton's music?

Certainly one important factor in the success of Middleton's guitar music would have to be its publication, not just in print but also in sound recording, early in his career. Alice Artzt, a renowned American guitarist, recorded two movements from Middleton's *Suite for Solo Guitar* on her 1973 release entitled *Alice Artzt Plays Original Works for Classical Guitar* (Gemini Records),⁵ later re-released on the Hyperion label as *20th-Century Guitar Music*.⁶ Around the same time, E. C. Kirby published Middleton's *Five Studies for Guitar*, his first published work for any medium.⁷ The attention brought by Artzt's recording, the subsequent publication of the *Suite*, and then the 1981 Carnegie Hall premiere of the same work by Francis Perry, while not launching the composer to instant worldwide fame, all created a significant following among professional guitarists.⁸

Middleton's guitar music certainly uses the instrument well, but this cannot be the only reason for its success. Indeed, many of his works

⁵ Gregory Newton, "An American Original: The Guitar Music of Owen Middleton" (D.M.A. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2007), 96.

⁶ Alice Artzt, *20th-Century Guitar Music*, Hyperion Records A66002, 1980, Analog disc. Works by John Duarte, Manuel de Falla, Tom Eastwood, Hans Werner Henze, and Alexandre Tansman also appear. The sleeve notes were written by Duarte. Middleton's "Processional" and "Virginia Reel" from the *Suite for Solo Guitar* conclude the disc.

⁷ Newton, 139.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 95-97.

test the boundaries of the guitar in ways that have raised the bar of technical accomplishment for professional players, essentially redefining “idiomatic” for the instrument. In the introduction to his dissertation, “An American Original: The Guitar Music of Owen Middleton,” Gregory Newton offers the following view:

Not only has he thoroughly explored the guitar’s established idioms, he has also created many new ones, all within the context of a uniquely personal musical language. He has long since achieved the enviable goal of possessing a powerful voice which is at once highly individual and entirely American.⁹

If, as Newton suggests, Middleton’s most important qualities are his innovation and his originality, then these qualities must extend beyond his works for the guitar. Do the same merits that guitarists find in his music attend his output for piano, an instrument for which he has also contributed a number of works through the years?

The close investigation offered here of Middleton’s works for the piano reveals the same impressive craftsmanship, compelling character, and innovative spirit found in his works for the guitar. Indeed, the only significant thing Middleton’s piano music currently lacks is the well-deserved attention of professional players and a wider audience. Middleton’s piano music needs to be heard, not just discussed, so one of this document’s purposes is to provide a recorded sample of his piano works. To date, Middleton’s piano music has traveled only as widely as

⁹ Newton, 1.

public performance will allow, and the number of pianists who have had serious involvement with his output to date remains small.

While the overall repertoire for solo piano is vast, and new works find their way into that repertoire with great difficulty, Middleton's piano works have a significant potential to succeed in the concert hall as well as the private teaching studio. His solo piano music is highly effective, well suited to the instrument, and, perhaps most importantly, fresh sounding and truly original. Middleton's music does not sound like a pale imitation of the work of the great pianist-composers of the past. At the same time, his idiosyncratic, modern language is rooted in classical parlance and a detailed, personal knowledge of the piano and piano playing, traits that can overcome the reservations of even the most recalcitrant traditionalist. Jerry Alan Bush, who has performed Middleton's solo piano music for over a decade and been the recipient of a number of dedications, expresses the merits of Middleton's music well:

He is modern, but I would not say avant-garde. His music never loses its subjectivity. No matter how dissonant it is, no matter how disjunct it appears at first glance, it has a definite formal structure and a definite harmonic scheme. Middleton has a great flair for effects without turning a piece of music into nothing but effects, without losing the substance. I think it's a great art, and many people lack it.¹⁰

Middleton's pedagogical works are absolutely equal to his professional-level works in their musical value. The painstaking craftsmanship of the smaller pieces reveals his passionate belief that

¹⁰ Jerry Bush, interview by author, audio recording, 31 March 2010, Mobile, AL.

children deserve engaging music to play as much as adults. They do not sound generic, nor do they sacrifice artistic merits on the altar of the marketplace. Though not easy, these works are bound to be immediately attractive to musically talented youth, in whose hands they are eminently attainable.

Middleton's works for solo piano are second in number only to his works for solo guitar. Though he wrote only a little solo music for the piano in the first several decades of his career, he has added a number of works since 1992, beginning with the first piece he wrote for Jerry Alan Bush, *Toccata for Piano*. Throughout his career, he has utilized the piano for chamber music involving a variety of performing forces. To date, Middleton's total output for solo guitar comprises 16 works. In addition, he has written 12 chamber works that involve the guitar, for a total of 28 works. This total does not take into account his numerous guitar arrangements. For piano, he has penned 9 original solo works, including his pedagogical pieces. If one counts all of Middleton's uses of piano in the chamber setting, including songs, ensemble pieces with instruments and voices, and choral works, these works add around 25 pieces, for a total of 34 works involving the piano. Overall, Middleton's body of work for piano demonstrates his abiding interest in the instrument and his desire to make lasting contributions to its repertoire.

Middleton's solo piano music offers something for everyone: there one finds daring virtuosity, effusions of passion, intellectual force, colorful

imagery, poetry, humor, and even a degree of idiomatic innovation. This study aims to reveal key aspects of the composer's musical style, especially his style of piano writing, and to provide pianists with helpful analytical, technical, and interpretive insights. These descriptions of the music are supported with recorded examples, selected from the works for solo piano written between 1962 and 1993. A chapter briefly describing the piano pieces since 1993 concludes the study and invites the reader to further investigations of this unique and important body of work.

CHAPTER 2

MIDDLETON'S STYLE: TRAITS & EVOLUTION

When asked to compare Owen Middleton's style of writing to that of other contemporary or American composers, pianist Jerry Alan Bush, Professor of Music at the University of South Alabama and long-time champion of the composer's piano works, said, "I would call him a modern eclectic. I don't find an overall parallel between him and any other composer. His music is in a decidedly 20th/21st-century style, but Owen has always amazed me in the mastery he has of so many different things."¹¹ These comments attest to the uniqueness of Middleton's style as well as the multiplicity of its aspects. Indeed, Owen Middleton's greatest gifts might well be his combination of originality and versatility, and his ability to draw inspiration from the many kinds of music that have influenced him throughout his life, but without ever sounding like anyone or anything other than himself.

Middleton's style has always been characterized by strong and independent lines, a legacy of his compositional studies at Florida State University. However, the composer's relationship with counterpoint has not remained static. Middleton sees an evolution in his style towards a paradigm similar to that observable in other composers, even great composers like Mozart, whose famous Symphony No. 41 elegantly

¹¹ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

illustrates Middleton's point.¹² Utilizing a *cantus firmus* from Johann Joseph Fux's treatise *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) as his principal theme, Mozart latches onto it not merely for the purpose of showing his contrapuntal mastery (as he does in the final movement), but because he could transform it into a wonderfully striking musical idea.¹³ Further expounding on this point, Middleton describes his mature stylistic criterion this way:

What I admire most is having several ideas going on at the same time that are interesting, that grab your attention. That is my ideal. If I can have two voices doing that, that's wonderful; if I can have three, that's even better. However, the quality of the ideas is of central importance. That's what I learned from Carlisle Floyd. You have to conceive of an *arresting* idea. You can't just start with anything. My counterpoint these days is not strictly dissonant counterpoint. The object is not necessarily to write elegant counterpoint as much as it is to make the lines terribly interesting. If I can do that, then the counterpoint part, although I am not going to make any gross errors, or have any weak movements between voices, will take care of itself. Everything that starts has to call attention to itself and be somewhat independent. The inner-workings of the counterpoint are not that important; they used to be more so than they are now.¹⁴

As one traces the attributes and development of Middleton's style, the evolution of his relationship with counterpoint is crucial. While it

¹² Owen Middleton, interview by author, audio recording, 1 April 2010, Mobile, AL.

¹³ William Klenz traces the long history of the employment of the *cantus firmus* melody in Mozart's Symphony No. 41 in his article "Per Aspera ad Astra, or The Stairway to Jupiter," *The Music Review* 30, no. 3 (1969): 169-210. Susan Wollenberg makes the connection to Fux's treatise in "The Jupiter Theme: New Light on its Creation," *The Musical Times* 116 (1975): 781-783.

¹⁴ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

remains important in all of his music, its hierarchical position changes. Along with this, there is a gradual assimilation of a variety of musical influences, both classical and non-classical, into his style, which Middleton views as a synthesis of these many influences. The strongest of these date from his youth and include classical music, jazz, blues, 1950s rock n' roll, and folk music, to name just a few. The influence of jazz would seem to be greater than some of the others, as witnessed by Middleton's own comments:

Much of my early experience with music was in the popular music realm. As a kid, playing the piano, I thought I wanted to be a jazz pianist when I grew up. I loved to listen to Bebop, Dave Brubeck, and the old 40s and 50s cool jazz. I was just enraptured with that, and I tried to play in that style. Every kind of music—jazz, blues, folk music, popular music, and classical music, too— is in my background. My style is in many ways a synthesis of many styles of music in my own voice. These other styles operate on a subconscious level.¹⁵

Middleton's unique brand of "Americana," as it appears in guitar works like *Victorian Song* and piano works like *Decoration Day* and *Cradle Rock*, reflects his synthesis of a variety of American popular musical styles. However, Middleton is not always conscious of drawing from these sources. He rarely engages in direct quotation, and even when he does it is almost always fragmentary. In *Decoration Day*, Middleton drew inspiration from Civil War songs, but he never quotes any actual tunes. Rather, having assimilated the character of those songs internally, he was able to produce original melodies that subtly evoked the style. He

¹⁵ Ibid.

did his job so well that he even fooled the performer, Jerry Bush, who felt sure he “should have recognized something.” *Cradle Rock* provides a notable exception, as the entire lullaby “Rock-a-Bye Baby” is quoted twice in the work. Middleton describes his mysterious art of internalizing a style and evoking it with his own voice this way:

All of these styles of music that I’ve had experience with and enjoyed are a part of me. Now, when I forged my own style at FSU, all of that stuff went with me. Sometimes I am aware of it coming out of me, sometimes I’m not. It’s like certain contrapuntal tricks that I use. Sometimes I am conscious of doing them, other times it’s just what I call “saturation with an idea,” much like what happens in a good jazz improvisation...the performers are not necessarily conscious of doing those things, it is just coming out of them. That’s how music is.¹⁶

Middleton can also occasionally draw inspiration from new and unexpected sources. Bush notes an “Impressionistic” element in Middleton’s *Ondine*, but the music of Ravel and Debussy has not been a particularly strong influence on Middleton’s overall style. Instead, it would appear that Middleton drew from whatever elements of musical Impressionism that suited his already well-established vocabulary and incorporated them for the purpose of creating his own musical telling of the familiar mermaid tale, with a gracious nod to his predecessors.

Newton divides Middleton’s output into three main periods. The first of these comprises the works Middleton composed in Tallahassee while a student, between 1962 and 1965, and the second includes the works written during his years in New York and Pennsylvania, from 1966

¹⁶ Ibid.

to 1976. After a nearly ten-year hiatus, Middleton returned to composing music in 1985. Having already returned to his hometown of Mobile, Alabama, in 1977, the works of Middleton's third period comprise those written from that time to the present day.¹⁷

Newton's period scheme is both elegant and useful. The periods neatly coincide with places where Middleton has lived, and each period has discrete style traits easily identifiable, even if one surveys only works for the piano. The *Sonata for Piano*, characterized by dissonant counterpoint, is emblematic of Middleton's "first period." The *Childhood Scenes*, with their considerably more consonant harmony, displaying extended tonality with frequent modernistic touches and less rigorous use of contrapuntal artifice, are representative of the "second period." The *Toccata for Piano*, with its polytonal harmony, sharp dissonances, and blending of free counterpoint with tertian harmonies, well represents the "third period."

It is important to note that the period that contains the greatest amount of creative activity for piano is the third. Middleton's *Sonata for Piano* is the only work for solo piano in the "first period." In his "second period," his works for guitar far outnumber those for any other medium, and there are only two works for piano there, the *Childhood Scenes* and *Katie's Collection*.

¹⁷ Newton, 32-64.

Classifications of a composer's creative output, of course, bear revisiting and can be given a number of different interpretations. Some may dispute the definition of a period that consists only of student works. There are several points in favor of this with Middleton, who takes great pride in his earliest completed compositions and regards them as being in every way his own. The emphasis on counterpoint found in these early works will continue to be an important component of his later style. Middleton's preference for dissonant intervals, his love of melodies made up of wide, expressive leaps, and his driving motor rhythms are all present in the *Sonata*. So are quartal harmonies, a trait that Newton attributes to the influence of Hindemith.¹⁸ Middleton's partiality to Bach often shows itself in neo-Baroque touches. This trait, though not common to all his works, is certainly discernible in the *Sonata*, and again in later works like *Toccata for Piano* and *Improvisations*. The use of learned devices in the *Sonata*, such as inversion and retrograde of pitch motives, will recur in many later compositions, often to create specific musical effects. Serial technique, though not universal in Middleton's music, will also be revisited in piano works like *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing*.

However, Newton makes it clear that the works composed in Tallahassee are the product of Middleton's concentrated study of composition, with an emphasis on developing compositional technique.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

As such, it is not difficult to argue that concerns about developing a more personalized style may have been secondary for a time. Taking this view, Newton's "first period" could be described as works of "apprenticeship." Though they lack nothing in craftsmanship or originality, they are not yet fully revelatory of Middleton's style. Many of the stylistic influences drawn from his youth, especially those that might be collectively called his Americana, are noticeably absent from the *Sonata*. We cannot readily detect jazz, blues, American popular music of the 1950s, or any other assimilated element in Middleton's first work. The personal voice that is already speaking clearly in his *Childhood Scenes* is not fully heard in the earlier piano work. Further evidence in favor of calling Middleton's "first period" his "apprenticeship" is its relative brevity (three years). Other than the *Sonata for Piano*, only three other works qualify—the *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* (1963), *Duo for Clarinet and Flute* (1964) and *A Symphony in One Movement for Strings, Brass, and Percussion*—the last of which constituted Middleton's master's thesis.²⁰

Following this new line of thought, works from the defined "second period" might be described as "post-apprenticeship" or "early style" works. They certainly breathe an entirely different atmosphere. In this period, Middleton devotes most of his attention to the guitar and seeks a truly personal voice as a composer. Most importantly, he allows more of the musical experiences of his pre-college life, especially his early encounter

²⁰ Newton, 37.

with jazz, 19th-century American song, folk music, and popular music idioms from his childhood, to inform his writing, with the confidence that he can now do so without merely copying or imitating the music of others. This process of maturation must have begun while the composer was still in school, but the departure from Tallahassee and move to New York played their part in accelerating it. Works from the period necessarily depart from the rigors of his studies, as he allows himself room to explore “outside the box.”²¹ Since this is a twelve-year period of artistic growth as well as considerable creative activity, it is impossible to describe the period monolithically. For example, Newton notes that in works like the *Sonata for Guitar*, Middleton is trying to push the guitar beyond its traditional boundaries by including as much of his contrapuntal style into the music as possible.²² Some later guitar works, like *Tombeau*, seem to retreat from those boundaries.²³

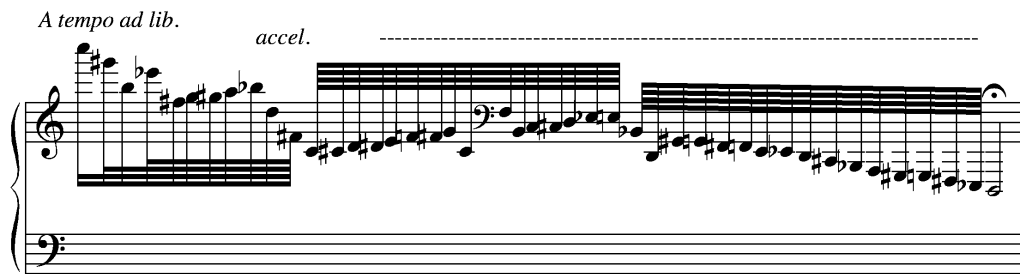
Middleton’s “third period” may be viewed as simply his “mature style.” Here he becomes the master of his own unique art form. For pianists, the sharp contrast between *Childhood Scenes* and *Toccata for*

²¹ Newton notes that many of the stylistic differences present in Middleton’s “second period” are explained by the adaptation of his contrapuntal style to the medium of the guitar, which imposed limitations on it. Furthermore, he reduced the level of harmonic dissonance to take advantage of the guitar’s open strings. The reduction in counterpoint and dissonance, were, in Middleton’s words, “Making do with what the guitar is.” Newton, 38.

²² *Ibid.*, 157.

²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

Piano is somewhat misleading. Within the guitar output, a development toward the later style is evident,²⁴ not only in the composer’s attempt to infuse the maximum amount of counterpoint, but also in the evolutionary expansion of his melodic range.²⁵ This latter trait is, perhaps, less easily observed in the composer’s piano output than within the guitar output. The early *Sonata for Piano*, after all, made liberal use of the piano’s treble and bass range, if not the entire keyboard. However, the cadenza-like passage near the beginning of the *Toccata for Piano* certainly exemplifies the evolution in the composer’s melodic breadth, not to mention virtuosic boldness (Example 2.1). No single-line melody in the *Sonata* ever covers such a wide range as this one.



Example 2.1 *Toccata for Piano*, m. 9

Most importantly, in the third period, Middleton discovers a polyharmonic idiom and uses it as a means of enriching his harmonic palette. For Newton, the primary emphasis in defining the “third period”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

was this discovery of “polytonality,” as well as the synthesis of important attributes from the first two periods:

Hastened by the fascination with polytonality, the second change to take place is a gradual synthesizing of his first two compositional periods. The ‘severely contrapuntal’ approach of the first period returns, now mixed with the temperate and more tonal counterpoint of the second. The strident harmonies of the first period reappear, now blended with the amiable, more consonant language of the second.²⁶

To further clarify this transformation, however, it must be emphasized that the counterpoint, though it may resurge and become as dissonant as before, will no longer be as strict. Furthermore, the presence of “amiable” harmonic language is, perhaps, less noticeable in some of the later piano works (excluding pedagogical works) than in works for other instruments. Middleton strongly emphasizes that his style depends greatly on whom he is writing for, and for what medium. The piano, which offers a wide opportunity for harmonic exploration, encourages the composer to sustain a higher level of dissonance than generally found in works for the guitar. Indeed, late piano works like *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing* and *Improvizations* are every bit as dissonant as the earlier *Sonata*, and the latter perhaps even more so. More “amiable” language blending in with dissonance can be found in works like *Decoration Day* and *Ondine*.

²⁶ Ibid., 40. Middleton and Newton both use the terms “bitonality” and “polytonal” to describe the composer’s later style. However, the term “polyharmony” may be more accurate, as the composer is building large chord structures rather than unfolding multiple keys simultaneously in his work. Middleton credits his new idiom in part to the influence of jazz, which liberally utilizes harmonic extensions in a similar manner.

Hence, Middleton's style has evolved from the atonal idiom based on strict dissonant counterpoint, associated with his apprenticeship, to a pandiatonicism with tertian harmony, and onward to a kind of blending of the two. However, terms like atonality and pandiatonicism cannot fully describe Middleton's distinctive and inimitable tonal language.

Middleton's music, even the "atonal" works, almost always exhibits localized tonalities, if not an overall key. The *Sonata for Piano*, which is based on a 12-tone row, nonetheless concludes palpably in D-sharp minor. Even the *Improvizations*, perhaps Middleton's most densely chromatic and dissonant piano work to date, occasionally references key centers. Newton's solution to the problem of describing such a special kind of tonal language is to adopt Middleton's own clever term "pan-chromaticism," which the composer once used in response to a question from a reporter.²⁷

Newton expounds on the term this way:

Middleton's style can be described as pan-chromaticism with tonal centers, the shifting of tonalities a direct consequence of Carlisle Floyd's guidance...Middleton's interest is in impassioned chromaticism with ongoing tonal movement and direction.²⁸

Jerry Bush's observations confirm this description:

He is modern, but I would not say avant-garde. His music never loses its subjectivity, no matter how dissonant it is, no matter how disjunct it appears at first glance, it has a definite formal structure and a definite harmonic scheme.²⁹

²⁷ Newton, 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁹ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

Newton has identified several other key traits of Middleton's style that are worth noting. One is the composer's love of the unexpected in the realm of rhythm. Meter changes are common in his music, though in his later works he often uses accent marks to achieve the same effect.³⁰ A classic example of Middleton's use of changing meters is found in the *Toccata* (Example 2.2). Here, the composer inserts a measure of 5/8 followed by a measure of 2/4 in place of the expected 4/4 measure. The result is a kind of additive rhythm, where the passage is made one eighth-note longer than expected.



Example 2.2 *Toccata for Piano*, mm. 31-34

Irony and humor are also very characteristic of Middleton's style. Examples of the two traits abound in his piano music. Bush remarks of Middleton that "He can write things that are knee-slappingly funny."³¹ Obvious humor, such as is found in piano works like *Cradle Rock* and his first opera *Donkey Hotey*, runs parallel with more subtle irony, such as is found in *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing*. For all of that work's violent and cataclysmic fury, Middleton actually had in mind the rather overblown

³⁰ Newton, 56.

³¹ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

“dire predictions” associated with “Y2K,” and he was poking fun at society’s momentary hysteria.³²

Given the high number of piano works that appear to draw inspiration from extra-musical sources, the question of Middleton’s relationship to programmaticism comes to the fore. Some of Middleton’s works, like the early *Sonata*, are entirely abstract. Others, like *Childhood Scenes*, have a complex and subtle relationship with extra-musical ideas and narratives. However, the reason that so many recent works have programmatic elements is easily explained by the composer’s long-held conviction that his style should be adapted to the person for whom he is writing:

Jerry Bush likes that extra-musical aspect. He is very much about telling a story, and he likes to have a story. As a matter of fact, that’s part of how he learns music and how he keeps everything so beautifully together. It’s one of his personal musical interpretive techniques. Bush and I have that symbiotic relationship such that when I think about writing music for him I try to have a story or extra-musical idea...My own penchant would be to write absolute music.³³

Given the stylistic diversity evident in the works of Owen Middleton, defining a representative sample of his output is a difficult task. Nonetheless, the works recorded here come from each of the three style periods defined by Newton, and they offer the best illustration of his stylistic evolution possible short of recording all of his works for piano.

³² Owen Middleton, interview by author.

³³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

MIDDLETON AND THE PIANO

Middleton's primary instrument has been the guitar for many years. While the piano was his first instrument, he was not destined to make a career at the keyboard, and his professional experience with it is limited primarily to his teaching piano lessons in Tallahassee and New York during the early years of his career.³⁴

There are several reasons why Middleton turned away from the piano professionally. Newton notes Middleton's growing frustration with the piano during his college days, in part engendered by his lack of clarity on how to practice, and also from his intent to focus on composition.³⁵ Indeed, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the former reason, as Middleton frequently laments that "None of my [piano] teachers ever bothered to tell me how to learn. I had somewhat of a disconnect between playing music and learning music at the piano, but I got a fresh start at this with the guitar."³⁶

After meeting and studying with Alexander Bellow in New York, Middleton came to the realization that the guitar was an instrument he had the potential to master, one upon which he could build a career. Bellow's sound pedagogy was a revelation to Middleton, and it sparked a

³⁴ Newton, 15-18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁶ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

life-long passion in him for that subject. Bellow not only taught Middleton how to play the guitar, but he also strongly encouraged him to write music for the instrument. Middleton's career as a guitar performer, teacher, and composer owes much to Bellow's profound influence.

However, all of this may present a misleading view of the composer's relationship to his "first" instrument. For one thing, while Middleton's keyboard accomplishments are modest by a professional pianist's standards, he nonetheless has much more than a passing familiarity with the keyboard. Jerry Bush notes that "Of course, the fact that he is a very capable pianist doesn't hurt anything. He knows what the instrument will do, and is not afraid to experiment with it, and indeed, to tax it in some respects."³⁷

Middleton's relationship with the piano takes him back to some of his earliest childhood memories. He notes, "My relationship with the piano goes so far back that, for me, my imagination and the piano are the same thing. It is a direct link."³⁸ His mother's habit of singing and playing with him fostered a growing curiosity and creativity. The strength of these memories is evident in some of his mature creations, which draw inspiration from the childhood experience. His guitar work *Victorian Song* draws stylistically from Victorian-era songs that his mother used to sing to

³⁷ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

³⁸ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

him in his childhood. “I dedicated the piece to Mamma, who sang with me and played the old songs.”³⁹

Middleton’s formal piano studies date back to his childhood, when his paternal aunt, Catherine, taught him his first lessons utilizing the John Thompson method. Though the lessons were not particularly long-lived, and though he was not a very serious student at the time, Middleton well remembers being inspired by his aunt’s musical abilities, particularly her powerful organ playing and improvisations, which he experienced at Government Street Presbyterian Church.⁴⁰ “I was really overwhelmed by that experience. To hear her improvising at the organ was just thrilling.”⁴¹ It was in these early years that his own noteworthy improvisational skills began to emerge. Later on in his teen years, Middleton enjoyed trying to emulate the jazz improvisations of artists like David Brubeck, whose recordings were a great source of inspiration.⁴² Middleton also exercised his keyboard improvisation skills in a garage band he formed with friends in his high school years called the “Hoodoo Blues.”⁴³ Throughout his youth, Middleton was more interested in exploring his own musical

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Newton, 9-10.

creativity at the keyboard than he was in formal lessons, which he found rather tedious.

When Middleton gradually came to the conclusion that he was going to pursue music as a major field of collegiate study, he returned to the piano and to formal studies again, first at Southwestern at Memphis⁴⁴ with Gladys Cauthen.⁴⁵ With her he remembers studying Bach's Two-Part Inventions in C and F, as well as a wide variety of other repertoire, including short pieces by Brahms and Mozart.

Middleton's piano teachers at Florida State were Mary Winslow and Franciszek Zachara. At the pinnacle of his accomplishments, Middleton played such works as Beethoven's Sonata in E Major, Op. 14 N. 1; Bach's Fugue in D major (WTC II), which he liked so well that he later transcribed it for guitar quartet; and the D-sharp minor Fugue (WTC I).

In answer to a question about whether he considered himself a pianist, Middleton said, "I wouldn't call myself a pianist. (chuckling) With friends like Milton Hallman, I was always embarrassed to call myself a pianist. Put it this way: I could make music at the piano, with a score or without."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Southwestern at Memphis is a former name of Rhodes College, a private liberal arts college in Memphis, Tennessee. The word "college" was not in the name at the time Middleton attended the school.

⁴⁵ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

All of this has significance for Middleton's particular style of writing for the piano. If the composer had chosen to write only within the scope of his own technical accomplishment at the keyboard, all of his works might remain within the difficulty range of the *Childhood Scenes*. The early *Sonata* is certainly beyond this, but it was also written while the composer was under the guidance of his professors. When we come to Middleton's *Toccata for Piano*, we meet the composer coming back to writing solo piano works after a hiatus of nearly twenty years. Now he attempts to write music that satisfies his appetite for bravura and musical depth, but he still hopes to remain within the bounds of possibility:

This is the way I like to work with a performer, and I don't get to do it often because people assume, unfortunately, that if I wrote it, it should be played exactly that way. Sometimes I will put something in the music that I am not even sure is that possible or plausible, and what I am hoping is that the performer will tell me that, and I get to learn something. Unfortunately, many performers don't bother to tell me these things.⁴⁷

This uncommon attitude has allowed Middleton to write piano music that satisfies both his own creative impulses and the needs of performers. As such, his piano music, while very demanding, almost always remains within a scope of technical difficulty that professional pianists will accept; and even when it strays, he offers one further caveat to cover the gap:

There are a lot of passages in my music where I am trying to get a particular effect. The writing may have a lot of very complex rhythms, so complex as to be practically impossible to execute perfectly, but perfection is not what I am after. I am after achieving a particular effect. When I want a particular effect, I write in such a way as to make it inevitable that, as you attempt to play what I've

⁴⁷ Ibid.

written, the intended effect will come across to the listener. If you execute such a passage perfectly, the effect will come across, *but even if you don't*, the effect will still come across.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

SONATA FOR PIANO (1962)

Middleton wrote his *Sonata for Piano* (formerly entitled *Prelude and Allegro*, then *Introduction and Allegro*) during the early part of his studies at Florida State University, and the work shows how quickly the young composer was absorbing important compositional lessons. His first completed work for any instrument, it is emblematic of his early style in its uncompromisingly contrapuntal texture, atonality, and its almost relentless dissonance.

The *Sonata* reveals much about the rapid progress of Middleton's training in 1962. Transferring to Florida State in the spring of that year, Middleton's first classes were with Harold Schiffman, then a young faculty member and acknowledged disciple of Roger Sessions. Gregory Newton, in his groundbreaking dissertation on Middleton, remarked that "It was from Harold Schiffman that Owen Middleton learned the craft of composition."⁴⁹ He learned very quickly, as his *Sonata for Piano* was already substantially finished before he had completed a full year of study at the university.

It is interesting how Middleton and Schiffman independently describe the context of the young composer's instruction. Middleton describes his experience with Schiffman as formative, especially his study of strict counterpoint, which Schiffman taught from his own manual,

⁴⁹ Newton, 34.

adapted from Fux. (Middleton himself went on to write a counterpoint manual inspired by his experience with Schiffman.) Middleton reports that it was in Schiffman's counterpoint class that "everything suddenly made sense."⁵⁰

Schiffman, now in his 80s, still has a few memories of Middleton's time at Florida State and confirms many of Newton's findings. He recalls that Middleton "excelled" in his written music theory studies with him and offered the following details about his own teaching approaches:

I was the junior member of the composition faculty at the time, so I would put the youngsters through a heavy dose of counterpoint and form, then they would go to [John] Boda for the easy part—composition coaching. My approach to teaching counterpoint and form was hands on for the student (in other words, by ear, for the student). It was a form of ear training...The counterpoint was strict species counterpoint using my own text, but somewhat based on Fux. I also taught fugue under Dohnányi's influence. The form instruction was based to some degree on Schoenberg's *Models for Beginners*. My teaching of harmony and voice leading was influenced by Bruckner's "law of the nearest way."⁵¹

In response to a question about the potential influence of Roger Sessions on his teaching approaches, Schiffman offered the following:

Much of what I taught was in a course, both undergraduate and graduate, called "Music Since World War II." It dealt with composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen, Messiaen, Ligeti, Penderecki, and others. I also taught a course on Schoenberg, but only at the graduate level. However, Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern crept into my undergraduate classes occasionally. Not much Sessions. However, I did use Sessions's *Harmonic Practice* some of the time.⁵²

⁵⁰ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

⁵¹ Harold Schiffman, interview by author, e-mail, 22 March 2011.

⁵² Ibid.

For Middleton, a combination of Schiffman and Bach formed the strongest influence on him when he wrote the Sonata.⁵³ The emphasis was on creating strong lines and on making the most out of his opening material. The presence of serial techniques in the work is indicative of Schiffman's modernist emphasis as a teacher, but this is a secondary issue. Middleton admits to attempting to incorporate many of the techniques he was acquiring in his classes into the work, though, as he emphasizes, "always with the intent of making music. I would not have put serial elements into the piece merely out of intellectual curiosity."⁵⁴

This one-movement sonata begins with a slow introduction that evinces both a serious tone, bordering on cerebral, and a highly expressive and darkly dramatic quality that borders on expressionistic. Throughout the work, the intellectual and emotional qualities are kept remarkably in balance, so that neither is heard to overcome the other. The *Allegro* portion of the work follows the *Moderato* introduction *attacca*. The introduction has a ternary shape, and the form of the *Allegro* can be described as sonata, a fact that influenced Middleton to change the name of the work.

Middleton has said that all of the music in this one-movement work derives from the opening two measures (m. 1 through the first bass clef pitch of m. 3), and analysis shows this to be a true statement (Example

⁵³ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

In fact, a number of trichord motives, as well as tetrachords, are derived from the Introduction Theme (Example 3.2). The trichord motives are overlapping, so three of them can be extracted from the first six pitches of the melody:

- $[0,1,5]$ or $[0,4,5] = x$
- $[0,1,6]$ or $[0,5,6] = y$ (Viennese Trichord)
- * $[0,2,7] = z$ (Quartal/Quintal Chord)

*The inversion of any quartal/quintal chord would yield another $0,2,7$.



Example 3.2 *Sonata for Piano*, mm. 1-3, Trichord and Tetrachord Motives

Two overlapping tetrachord motives derive from the last seven pitches of the theme, stretching from the last pitch of m. 1 to the first bass clef pitch of m. 3. The first tetrachord consists of simple chromatic motion. While not apparently remarkable, chromatic descent will actually be used prominently for formal demarcation in the *Allegro*, and will even stand out melodically from time to time. The second tetrachord constitutes the tail of the Introduction Theme, which rises a major third followed by two half steps. This tetrachord is mostly utilized in the Introduction. Both tetrachords are characterized by chromatic motion.

- $[0,1,2,3] = A$ (chromatic motion)
- $[0,1,2,6]$ or $[0,4,5,6] = B$

These trichord and tetrachord motives, as well as longer segments of the Introduction Theme, appear both melodically and harmonically throughout the movement, contributing to the work's distinctive harmonic and melodic color.

INTRODUCTION (mm. 1-36)

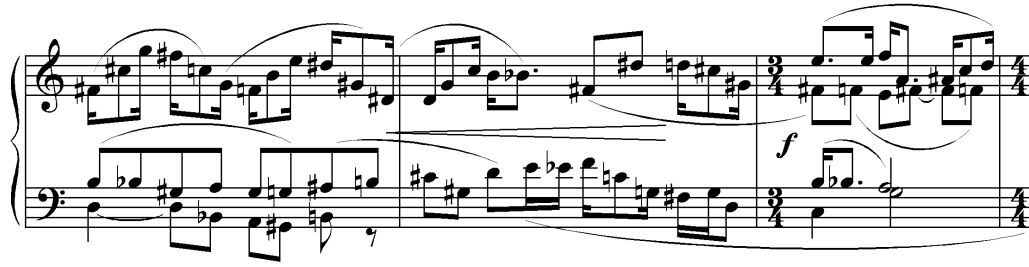
The slow introduction has a ternary shape (A¹ B A²), with A¹ in mm. 1-17, B in mm. 18-24, and A² in mm. 25-36. Parts A¹ and A² begin alike with the Introduction Theme. From the beginning, the music takes on the character of a ricercare. After the right hand's opening statement, the left hand enters in imitation of the head motive, though in an altered, slower rhythm and transposed down one half step (m. 3). This imitative treatment of the head motive continues the feeling of an unfolding ricercare. The G₄ at the beginning of the left hand's imitative entry is the last pitch of the theme, as well as the ending of the tetrachord motive B. Thus the left hand states the disjunct head motive, then proceeds with a version of B (in retrograde) in m. 4.

The musical material of the Introduction Theme continues to saturate the unfolding introduction, and the tension builds from m.5 to m. 8 through an increase in texture, dynamics, and range (Example 3.3). In m.5, the first seven notes of the Introduction Theme recur in the melody, and then in m. 6, the left hand derives from tetrachord B while the right hand reaches an expressive height of D₆. In m. 7, the texture expands to three voices, and the head motive appears in the inner voice. The dynamic

level increases to *forte* in m. 8, then immediately recedes in m. 9, while the melody has falling chromatic motion (tetrachord A) that precedes a new melody in m. 10.

Example 3.3 *Sonata for Piano*, mm. 4-9

In mm. 10-17, Middleton focuses on a diminution of the head motive rhythm (Example 3.4). This rhythm combines with melodic contours derived from the disjunct motion of m. 1 and conjunct motion of m. 2. The music continues to build intensity on two levels—the cerebral and the emotional. The music’s saturation with the head motive rhythm and the pitch contours of the Introduction Theme contributes to this build-up. So do the *crescendo* to *forte* in m.12, and the ever-expanding chromatic melody, which once again reaches a height of D6 in m. 14. Frequent falling half steps in the melody, often part of appoggiatura-like melodic gestures, further add to the expressive force of the music.



Example 3.4 *Sonata for Piano*, mm. 10-12

The A¹ section of the ternary introduction concludes with simple chromatic motion, in an outward wedge shape (m. 16), accompanied by a *poco stringendo* and a dynamic surge to *forte*. A short pause separates this chromatic outburst from the contrasting middle section that follows, *subito piano* and in a new, homophonic texture consisting of a flowing melody with chordal accompaniment.

At the beginning of the B section, all of the three-note chords in the left hand (mm. 18-24) are derived from the three trichord motives x, y, and z (Example 3.5). These quarter-note chords in the bass support a more lyrical and expansive right-hand melody in the treble, providing a respite from the contrapuntal texture of the outer sections. The poignant melody here begins by recalling the right-hand line from mm. 3-4, though disguised by transposition, a larger opening interval (a m6 rather than a P5), and steady eighth notes at the beginning rather than triplet eighths. A fragment of the Introduction Theme, beginning with the head motive and transposed to start on D6, ensues in mm. 20-21. This melody leads into a cadence featuring static motive x harmony in mm. 23-24 that closes out the B section.

Example 3.5 *Sonata for Piano*, mm. 18-22

After that brief rest, the head motive returns in m. 25, thereby signaling return (A^2). This time, the homophonic texture interrupts the contrapuntal music after five measures (m. 30). The closing measures (mm. 30-36) of the *Moderato* recall the lyricism of the B section. Here the quasi-improvisatory melody becomes a kind of cadenza in preparation for the imminent *Allegro*, a function supported by the static harmony. The melody's energy gradually dissipates, making fragmentary references to the Introduction theme (especially the head motive) along the way, finally lingering on a repeated falling perfect fourth (C5 to G4), while the *smorzando*, *ritardando*, and *diminuendo* to *pianissimo* all prepare the surprise entrance of the *forte Allegro* theme.

ALLEGRO (mm. 37 – 174)

The opening bars of the *Allegro* sound like a violent, temperamental outburst after the quiet and reflective close of the introduction. While the *Allegro* will evince the same cerebral and austere atmosphere of the introduction, clearly this will not be at the expense of emotional qualities. The tightly constructed music carries with it a strong aura of angst, passion, and dark drama. The tripartite form of the *Allegro*, strongly resembling a Sonata-Allegro, continues to derive its harmonic and melodic content from the Introduction Theme.

The Introduction Theme and its associated motives saturate the beginning of the *Allegro* (Example 3.6). The characteristic melodic contour at the opening of the *Allegro* is its falling perfect fourth, followed by chromatic descent and a rise of a perfect fourth, all derived from the Introduction Theme in m. 1. These basic contours will be utilized in the development.

Example 3.6 *Sonata for Piano*, mm. 35-40

Although atonal, the *Allegro* portion of the sonata can be described in sonata-form terms. Its exposition clearly falls into four sections, which can be compared to the conventional PTSK division. Through various means, Middleton achieves the effect of “bridge” and even of “modulation.” He announces the arrival of the exposition’s component parts with various passages containing simple chromatic descent:

Exposition 1 st section	mm. 37 – 51	Two statements of “P” theme beginning in m. 37 & m. 44. Quasi-tonal cadence on G in m. 48, confirmed by pedal point. Chromatic descent away from G bass in m. 51 (Tetrachord A).
Exposition 2 nd section	mm. 52 – 62	Transition: Unstable feel created by long rising Sequence based on “P” theme. R.H. melody climbs to C#6, then descends chromatically.
Exposition 3 rd section	mm. 63 – 73	A new theme emerges, deriving partly from the introduction theme in rhythmic diminution & other uses of the x and z motives. The texture features right-hand triplets and left-hand octaves. The “P” theme returns in m. 67, now seemingly in a “new key” a P4 away. Once again, descending chromatic motion signals progress to “K.”

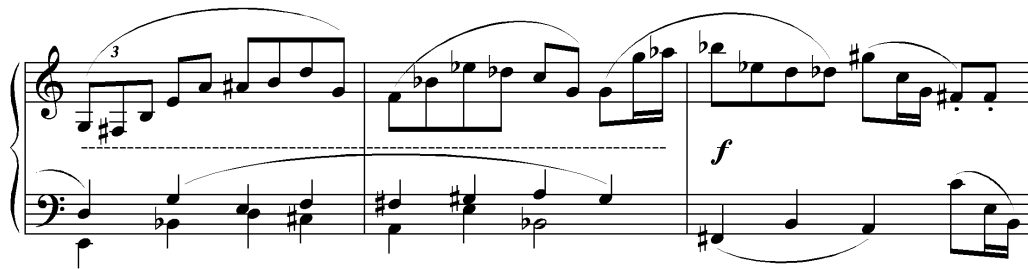
Exposition 4th section mm. 73 – 81 The closing material of the exposition once again focuses on x, y, and z. The main distinguishing feature here is high treble tessitura in both hands. The right hand begins on a high point of F#7, and achieves an even higher G#7 before descending through arpeggiations of x and y to a resting point on x (in head motive form) in m. 80.

Several musical features distinguish the development, mm. 82-128, from that which precedes and follows. For one, Middleton marks a slightly slower tempo (*Poco Meno Mosso*). The triplet figures, which saturated the exposition, are replaced almost entirely with duplet eighth notes. These features alone contribute to a strong feeling of contrast that would be typical of ternary forms. In the next subsection, Middleton creates some sense of development in a 46-measure span.

In the opening bars of the development passage, there is a full statement of the tone row for the first time, in the left hand (mm. 82-84). Meanwhile, the right hand is busy recalling the basic contours of the Allegro “P” theme, especially its initial intervals of the falling perfect fourth followed by minor second, and a later rise of a perfect fourth, but now replete with repeated notes. In this way, Middleton is developing his material by combining the left-hand tone row, a portion of which was first heard as the Introduction Theme, with right-hand intimations of the *Allegro* theme.

From m. 85 to m. 93, the left hand continues to articulate rows, while the right hand’s counterpoint is based on row fragments. The most aurally recognizable fragments of the row are, of course, those containing

the head motive of the Introduction Theme, which frequently appears from m. 92 to m. 99. An imitative treatment of the head motive in m. 96 (third and fourth beats) helps to give the passage a feeling of saturation with this motive (Example 3.7). This imitative statement is infused with a distinctive rhythm and ends (in the right hand) with a repeated note gesture, both of which will predominate in the next section of the development.



Example 3.7 *Sonata for Piano*, mm. 94-96

Throughout this passage, the right hand's nearly incessant motor rhythm and wide-ranging disjunct melody, combined with ambling tone rows in the left hand, lend a feeling of restlessness and wandering typical of a sonata development.

In m. 97, the right-hand melody, again punctuated with repeated notes, is reminiscent of the opening of the development. Another statement of the head motive (this one containing a falling augmented fourth rather than a perfect fourth), transposed to begin on C5, begins in m. 98 and leads into a 5/4 measure where the right hand's slackening of rhythmic motion on repeated-note B-flats seems to foreshadow a cadence.

The end of m. 99 feels like a significant point of rest due to the rhythmic punctuation and the quarter-note C ending, a sort of melodic cadence, though it is primarily the rhythmic element that promotes a cadential interpretation. The left hand's imitative gesture at the end of the bar weakens the effect somewhat.

Sensitivity to opportunities for phrasing is an important component of a convincing rendition in this restless development. From m. 82 to m. 99, the music does not have any obvious points of rest, but it is nonetheless important to let the music breathe periodically. The relative weight given to phrase endings and the discernment of "cadences" may differ depending on individual interpretation. Furthermore, each hand frequently acts independently, so that phrase endings between the hands will not always coincide and phrase elisions are common. The performer may not find all of the slur markings in the score useful for the purposes of musical interpretation in this passage.

For example, mm. 82-84 might be treated as one phrase in terms of dynamic shape, but this phrase may or may not be elided into the music that follows. Mm. 85-88 may be treated as a four-bar phrase with several short phrase members within it. Some of these phrase members might begin on the anacrusis, such as the G-sharps at the end of m. 85 and 86. This phrase may be felt to elide into the next, the last pitch of m. 88 being construed as the first note of a new phrase.

Mm. 89-92 might be rendered as another four-bar phrase with three distinct phrase members, one in m. 89, the next in m. 90, and the third comprising mm. 91-92. Dynamic shaping in mm. 89 and 90 will enhance the rise and fall of the right-hand melody. Though not marked, a subtle *crescendo* and *diminuendo* between mm. 91-92 would help set up the long *crescendo* to *forte* in mm. 92-96. A *diminuendo* to *piano*, again not marked, might be an effective immediately after this *forte*.

The remainder of the development can be divided roughly into two passages spanning mm. 100 – 114 and mm. 115 – 128 . The new dactyl rhythm that emerged in the first development passage continues in m. 100, as does melodic material that resembles the head motive. The contrapuntal texture reaches its densest point in mm. 101-102, where the score indicates a *poco ritenuto* that allows for a more expressive rendition of the four voices. The performer can create even more breathing space at the close of m. 102 than at other phrase endings. Beginning in m. 104, the dactyl rhythm gains more prominence, now associated more frequently with motive z than with motive x. The texture becomes notably more homophonic, with occasional reference back to the imitative contrapuntal treatment earlier in the development. Another important opportunity for phrasing comes in m.108-109, where the right-hand melody once again rests on C, and the left hand's phrase ends one beat later, on the downbeat of m. 109. Then motive z predominates in the continued statements of the dactyl rhythm. The increased use of the less dissonant motive z in the right

hand reduces the tension resulting from the more dissonant music based on motive x, and though it is destined to be short lived, the relief is nonetheless welcome.

The next musical moment resembles a kind of false preparation for the recapitulation. In m. 112, the left-hand harmony becomes more static, as it did at the end of the *Moderato*. Here it is oscillating between motive x and motive z and seems to be preparing a significant structural event (i.e., the recapitulation). However, a third development passage lies between here and the true recapitulation to follow.

The last span of development reverts back to contrapuntal texture, and the Introduction Theme's head motive makes many appearances (seventeen total). In mm. 120 – 123, Middleton develops the exposition material from mm. 63 – 66, where the use of left-hand octaves and right-hand triplet figuration was strikingly similar. The high tessitura and arpeggiation of x (in head motive form) recall the end of the exposition. Here, the head motive repeats twelve times in the right hand, the twelfth statement in an augmented rhythm that prepares the recapitulation.

DEVELOPMENT PASSAGES

Passage One	mm. 82-99	Duplet eighths replace triplet eighths; <i>poco meno mosso</i> ; left hand tone rows; motives x and y predominate; repeated notes common; introduction head motive appears several times. Melodic "cadence" on C in m. 99.
Passage Two	mm. 100 – 114	Texture expands to four voices in mm. 101-103; motive z begins to emerge more from the dissonant background after m. 104, and the texture becomes more homophonic.

Triplets begin to reemerge; texture is contrapuntal once again; high tessitura & arpeggiation of motive x (in head motive form) in mm. 125-126 recall the end of the exposition; right hand states the first three notes of the head motive twelve times from mm. 125-128, the twelfth time in augmentation.

The recapitulation begins as a virtually note-for note reprise of the exposition (mm. 129-138 = mm. 37-46). In m. 139, the passage of wedge-shaped chromatic motion does not culminate in the four powerful cadence chords as before (mm. 47-48). Middleton avoids that cadential gesture, and instead writes a passage in which *Allegro* material in the right hand is once again combined with material derived from the Introduction Theme in the left hand. Beginning in m. 144, Middleton utilizes melodic inversion, such that mm. 144-147 are an inversion of mm. 38-41 of the exposition. From m. 151 to the end of the work, Middleton creates a kind of textural inversion of his exposition's closing material (mm. 62-66) by employing octaves in the right hand and triplet figuration in the left hand. This passage is one of the most challenging in the work, due to its rapidly changing left-hand triplet patterns. In the final bars, the left hand reiterates motive y, with D# on the bottom (mm. 170-173). The pedal D# in these measures is paired with the A# a fifth above, thus giving a very slight sense of dominant-tonic motion. The work ends with violent force on a canonic statement of motive y in right and left hands.

Reception of the Sonata

The *Sonata for Piano* was Middleton's first completed work, and its success provided a needed surge of confidence in his abilities and choice of vocation. Milton Hallman agreed to play the work, and his live performance for Middleton's entrance into the statewide composition competition of the Florida Composers League was recorded.⁵⁵ The performance took place at Opperman Recital Hall at Florida State University, and Roger Sessions was in attendance at the request of Harold Schiffman.⁵⁶ Middleton won an award with this work, the first of two that the League would bestow on him. The connection with Hallman is also significant. Middleton has developed several important relationships with accomplished pianists in his career, and this was the first. Milton Hallman, now an Emeritus Professor of Music at Louisiana State University, was then a fellow student. Middleton reports, "I asked him to play it for the competition on a Thursday, and Saturday week he performed it brilliantly. At the time (and even now) I consider that some sort of miracle."⁵⁷ The work's contrapuntal style may have appealed especially to Hallman, who is

⁵⁵ Mr. Middleton and the author retain an audio tape recording of this performance.

⁵⁶ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

a devotee of Glenn Gould.⁵⁸ To date, no one else has publicly performed the Sonata since Hallman's performance nearly fifty years ago.

⁵⁸ Milton Hallman, *Facing the Music* (Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster, 1996), xxx.

CHAPTER 5

CHILDHOOD SCENES (1966)

Middleton's *Childhood Scenes* are his best-known piano pieces, having been performed a number of times through the years. These pieces, along with the next set he composed, *Katie's Collection*, were written with his own pianistic abilities in mind. Their medium difficulty, tertian harmonic idiom, and tonal architecture make them among his most accessible works for audiences and pianists alike.

A picturesque set of five piano miniatures, *Childhood Scenes* were written while the composer was living and working in New York City.⁵⁹ The composer remarks that he wrote the pieces as a way of “getting out of town without having to buy a ticket.”⁶⁰ Each movement bears a descriptive title that reflects an aspect of the composer's boyhood experience in coastal Alabama. These titles may have occurred as afterthoughts in some instances and as genesis ideas in others. While the titles are not, in most cases, intrinsic to one's experience of the music, they do reflect the composer's life and are, at least in this small way, a part of the composer's work, as a kind of personal signature. The musical ideas, whether or not they come first in the creative process (and they almost always do), are central to the experience of the music, taking precedence over extra-musical connections and perfectly comprehensible without them.

⁵⁹ The complete score of *Childhood Scenes* is included in the appendix.

⁶⁰ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

Nonetheless, knowledge of the extra-musical images associated with the pieces of this set may help to inform a convincing interpretation.

“Under the Persimmon Tree” (*Pendulous*, 3/4) reflects Middleton’s boyhood experience of sitting under such a tree during a lazy summer’s afternoon. Pianist Jerry Bush has embellished the story to include the idea that the boy in the story gets a stomachache from eating one too many of the persimmons. This interpretation probably stems from the movement’s dissonant harmony, which imparts a vague sense of uneasiness underneath the otherwise peaceful solitude evinced by its simple, undulating rhythm and static harmony. The marking “Pendulous” is apt, as the music, indeed, seems to “droop,” and the melody’s intimations of faint moaning all support Bush’s programmatic idea. While the movement eventually comes to rest on a G-major chord, the bitonal Gb-Bb dyad haunts this closure, like a faint feeling of pain in the pit of the stomach.

“Cornfield Chase” (*Brisk!* 4/4) was initially entitled “Huckabee’s Cornfield,” which was a real place during Middleton’s childhood, but is now an urban area of the city of Mobile (Florida Streets & Old Shell Road in midtown). The feeling of rambunctious childhood play is deftly elicited by the playful, snappy rhythms reminiscent of country music and the “call and response” interplay between hands, such as in mm. 12-17. The quartal melody at the beginning, common to Middleton’s idiom, suggests the tunings of country fiddles or banjos. The opening melody’s interval

content and rhythm are constantly manipulated in both hands, all the way to the movement's "surprise" ending.

"The Diamond Desert" (*Poco Allegretto*, 12/8) may be considered a marriage of a musical idea to an experience in such a way that the cause-and-effect relationship is impossible to discern. "Diamond Desert" is (or rather, was) a real place. The composer retains a memory of summers spent at his parents' "River Place," near the Dauphin Island Parkway in Mobile. As a boy, Middleton and his friends used to march into the woods in search of a patch of ground that glittered with what may have been quartz. Many can relate to the childhood fantasy of hunting for hidden treasure. The music has a lilting, march-like quality, but also a sense of irony, as though the dearly sought-after treasure is revealed, upon closer inspection, to be a mirage, a kind of "fool's gold." Jerry Bush's idea of the story entails a trip to the beach, though the original location of the "Diamond Desert" was in a wooded area not far from the shore.

The feeling of being on a fool's errand is enhanced in several ways in this ternary movement. The constant manipulation of the left hand's opening motive lends a wandering, searching quality to the music. The right hand "twinkles" like the glittering diamonds the boys seek. While the work has a tonal center of E-flat, the bass never rests on the tonic pitch at the cadences. Instead, B-flat in the bass lends a 6/4 sound to the cadences in m. 17 and m. 48. The ultimate doom of the errand is related by this deliberate denial of full harmonic closure. The B section of the movement

(mm. 19-36) begins with a new quartally-constructed melody that totally abjures the E-flat tonality of the outer sections and strongly suggests an ongoing search for treasure that repeatedly brings disappointing results. The left-hand melody surges and recedes from dynamic high points three times before the music returns to the E-flat tonality in m. 37, now recalling the melodic contours of the B section's melody before ending as it began with intimations of the opening motive.

“The River Place” (*Moderato*, 4/4) is a real house. Built by Middleton's grandfather, it was his family's summer cottage and later his own home upon his return to Mobile in 1977. He has since sold the property, but it continues to have sentimental value to him as the focal point of many childhood memories. The lyrical D-major melody of this movement is one the most memorable in his piano output. Like all of Middleton's accessible works, it manages to convey poignant sentiment without a shred of sentimentality. Its frequent and often distant modulations reveal a modernist approach to tonal writing, reflecting his pandiatonicism.

Of all the descriptive titles in *Childhood Scenes*, one is so powerfully suggestive that it would seem to be almost obligatory to one's understanding of the music. This title is “Snipe Hunt” (*Presto*, 2/4). Middleton admits to its being a genesis. Indeed, one cannot fully understand the movement's ternary unfolding without the story. Among the childhood games Middleton played was that of “hunting for snipes.”

This childhood game is familiar to many. The snipe was a mythical bird that groups of children would go hunting for in the woods. For each hunt, a novice is given the job of bagging the fabled bird. The true nature of the game is revealed when the novice is left very much alone, “holding the bag.”

The outer sections of this ternary movement show Middleton at his creative best. Using an extended right-hand trill figure as a kind of ostinato/pedal point, Middleton has the pianist’s left hand frequently cross over the right, back and forth depending on the tessitura of the melody. The cadence in m. 50 provides a brief respite from the otherwise incessant ostinato. Middleton urges the performer to play the B section (*Sostenuto; Misterioso*) very slowly and with a keen feeling of desolation, reflecting the novice’s fear and isolation. “That passage is desolate, and the slower you play it the better for the feeling of desolation.”⁶¹ One can also detect a hint of the blues in this mournful melody.

Middleton confides that he wrote these pieces initially for himself to play. However, his close friend John Fussell Harrison was honored with the dedication of this work, and he championed it. Harrison (and his then-wife, Becky) lived in Lennox, Pennsylvania, at the time. Now an Emeritus Professor at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, he was a close friend of Middleton’s from their college days at Florida State University.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Middleton's friend Bonnie Bromberg, a fellow graduate of FSU living in New York at the same time, also played *Childhood Scenes* for Middleton (though not in public). Jerry Bush has performed the work a number of times, first as part of a recital given for the Promenade Concert Series at Auburn University—Montgomery in 1994. He has since reprised them two more times, in 1996 and again in 2005. Bush's 1994 performance was well received, and Middleton's pieces garnered a positive review in the *Montgomery Advertiser*:

...rarely does one hear a new piece that is as well crafted and instantly likable as Mr. Middleton's.....from the chorale-like opening, the piece (River Place) proceeds to an emotional openness that is profoundly touching. Sentimental, nostalgic, and moving, the piece possesses lovely harmonies that, at times suggest the loveliest movements of Ned Rorem's compositions...Mr. Middleton knows how to write for the piano.⁶²

Bush affirms the work's positive reception, which he attributes to its vivid imagery:

The *Childhood Scenes* are always very well received, because they are so colorful. They have descriptive titles, and they reflect their descriptive titles well. Anyone who has grown up around this area wouldn't need the program explained to them. They would find it easy to picture the dappled sun on the board roof and the river flowing along in 'River Place,' or the boys trudging around the beach in the 'Diamond Desert.'⁶³

Though Harrison is not the only pianist to play *Childhood Scenes*, Middleton says, "He championed them, and they're his pieces."⁶⁴

⁶² *Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), 15 May, 1994.

⁶³ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

⁶⁴ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

CHAPTER 6

KATIE'S COLLECTION (1974)

Middleton wrote *Katie's Collection* for his first childhood piano teacher, Aunt Cay (Catherine Ann Middleton), and she played them for him. Middleton himself has played them for groups of friends, and he says that he actually also wrote them somewhat for himself. Largely conceived at the keyboard, they fall into a genre that also encompasses *Childhood Scenes* and the later *Sonatina for Piano*. They reflect Middleton's life-long passions for the piano and pedagogy, as well as his penchant for keyboard improvisation. Many of the seminal ideas that form these pieces may have come directly through Middleton's fingers.

The pieces in *Katie's Collection* also fall into a category of works that are, as he puts it, "accessible to talented individuals." "These pieces are not technically hard, but everything I write is musically hard. I cannot write predictable or trite things."⁶⁵

Inspiration for *Katie's Collection* came from several directions. His former teacher, Carlisle Floyd, had just published his *Episodes*, a two-volume set of piano teaching pieces. This collection, along with the pedagogical piano music of Béla Bartók, a composer deeply admired by Middleton, motivated him to pursue the challenge of writing original music for students.

⁶⁵ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

“Most of the pieces focus on five-finger positions. Yet even though the notes look like they are simple, the music is still challenging,” Middleton says.⁶⁶ Indeed, all of his music requires sensitive musicianship to be effective.

With *Katie’s Collection*, Middleton challenged himself to come up with the most original and musically sophisticated ideas that he could within the confines of pedagogical writing. Sketches for the work in Middleton’s composition notebooks are revealing of his painstaking process and artistic concerns. If he could not shape an idea into a convincing piece of music, he abandoned it, even if it fulfilled the pedagogical aims. For example, Middleton hoped to write a cross-hand piece called “Rubber Ball,” but later abandoned it when it did not come up to his artistic standards.⁶⁷

All the movements have a superficial connection to keyboard idioms (especially pedagogical ones) familiar to piano teachers as well as students. However, even a brief encounter with these pieces at the keyboard reveals that there are unusual features embedded in each movement, such as asymmetrical phrase and period structure, especially the use of three-phrase periods; unexpected repetition of musical ideas;

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Middleton’s sketchbooks reveal a number of unfinished movements that might have become part of *Katie’s Collection* or even added to the previous suite *Childhood Scenes*. The sketchbooks also reveal that the composer frequently changed his mind as to movement titles and the ordering of movements within the two sets.

“wrong-note” dissonance; and frequent meter changes. Middleton seems especially fond of using the lowered second scale degree for various effects, a trait also found in Floyd’s *Episodes*. The major-minor play, pandiatonicism, and remote modulations found in *Katie’s Collection* also recall similar devices from Floyd’s work. In short, anything unexpected is utilized.

Katie’s Collection comprises nine short pieces ranging from elementary to upper-intermediate level.⁶⁸ These pieces offer the young student the opportunity to encounter pedagogical music that is well-crafted, distinctly American, and highly original, and that utilizes contemporary idioms. Melody and harmony show touches of modal and whole-tone patterns. Irregular and changing meters are used. Pedaling needs to be sensitive and artistic, and use of the pedal is often welcome even where it is not marked.

The first piece, “Melody” (*Flowing*, 4/4), is entirely on white keys. It takes one of Bartók’s seminal ideas, namely bimodal texture, as a starting point. With what sounds like F Lydian in the left hand and D Dorian in the right hand (played in contrary motion to the left), the music unfolds in a three-phrase period that gradually settles on A Aeolian at the end.

“Ditty” (*Moderato*, 3/4) is a charming ternary movement in a two-voice texture. The music begins with a playful, anapest rhythm whose

⁶⁸ The complete score of *Katie’s Collection* is included in the appendix.

placement on the anacrusis obscures the triple meter. The F-major melody unfolds as a mixture of the anapest rhythm with *legato* quarter notes. In the B section (mm. 5-8), Middleton writes a variant of the F-major tune that utilizes various kinds of chromatic coloring. In m. 8, he subtly evokes a whole tone scale. The changes of time signature to 4/4 and back to 3/4 further obscure the meter.

“Holiday” (*Happy! Alla breve*) utilizes what Middleton calls his own sort of “Boogie-Woogie” bass, in reality a kind of non-tertian Alberti bass accompaniment. Blue notes further the celebratory, jazzy atmosphere, such as the A-flats in the melody that also provide major-minor play. The flattened notes in the melody in mm. 20-21 lend an almost bitonal feel.

“Sad Song” (*Slow, 5/4*) is another two-voice piece that uses a simple five-note left-hand pattern to assert its irregular meter, while the right hand begins its counterpoint in contrary motion to the left. In measure five, the meter changes to 4/4, but this adds to the sophistication, as the left hand continues its five-note pattern while the melody’s relationship to it shifts.

“Gypsy Dance” (*Fast! 3/4*) features frequent accents, meter changes, contrary motion between hands, and fast tempo. Two musical ideas alternate with each other throughout. The first, in G major (mm. 1-4), has a meter change from 3 to 4 in each of its iterations. The second (mm. 5-8) hovers on the dominant D, but A-flats provide a modal coloring that make the melody sound almost Locrian. A central section suggests G

Aeolian and creates a softer and blurrier digression from the principal theme. The brightest possible tempo should be selected to enhance the vibrant character of the dance. From m. 1 to m. 12, the pedal should be applied in odd-numbered measures and removed in even-numbered ones to avoid blurring the scalar melody.

“Trapeze” (*Waltz Tempo*, 3/4) shows Middleton’s characteristic use of irony. The piece deliberately sounds “corny” and “goofy” and “square.”⁶⁹ Teachers familiar with the myriad of teaching pieces written on circus themes will immediately recognize these qualities. However, a closer inspection reveals many subtleties. The sophisticated harmonic color created by the subtly shifting notes in the right and left hands immediately makes this piece more interesting to the listener than the typical circus piece. The lilting waltz pattern is replete with “crunchy” seconds between the hands (B/C, C/D), contributing to the movement’s ironic quality. The music continues to poke fun at its own genre in mm. 12 – 14, where the drumming of D-E in the right hand goes on much longer than expected. Beginning in m. 28 (the B section of this ternary form), the left hand takes the tune. Middleton is determined that each hand should have something interesting in it at all times, which enhances both the musical and the pedagogical value.

⁶⁹ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

“Reverie” (*Andante*, 4/4) is, in Middleton’s words, a kind of “teenage romance” piece.⁷⁰ Perhaps the most artistically demanding work in the set, this piece has a wide-ranging melody, far beyond five-finger patterns, that requires not only sensitivity to phrasing and balance between left-hand melody and right-hand accompaniment, but also sophisticated pedaling—all of which indicate a middle-to-upper intermediate level of difficulty, as opposed to the more elementary demands of earlier pieces in the set. The piece modulates quite remotely, from B major to D-flat and back again, with change of key signature from five sharps to five flats.

“Frolic” (*Playful*, 3/4, originally entitled “Pogo”), like “Reverie,” is on quite a different level of difficulty from other pieces in the set, the principal challenge here being the requirement to negotiate frequent leaps and position changes in the left hand. Additionally, the work explores a number of distant keys in very quick succession. Starting in m. 17, the movement traverses G major, E major, and C-sharp major, and finally comes to rest in F major at the close. Hence, the movement ends in a different key from the one in which it began.

“Etude” (*Allegro*, 2/4) reflects the legacy of Czerny and the exercise-style composition, and at first glance it is more technique than music. However, like all the other movements of this work, there are unexpected features. Each hand has its own five-note pattern and is in contrary

⁷⁰ Ibid.

motion with the other hand. The perpetual motion provides the student's fingers with the technical challenge of an exercise, but the double-stemmed melody in the right hand demands expressive treatment. There are abrupt and unexpected shifts to distant patterns, most especially the shift to the black keys in m. 11. The Del Segno indication requires this shift to be negotiated twice. Liberal but judicious pedaling as well as artistic dynamic shaping are needed to give the music warmth. Without them, the piece would lose its artistic qualities and would sound like a dull exercise, indeed.

CHAPTER 7

TOCCATA FOR PIANO (1993)

Middleton's *Toccata for Piano* was the first of several works written for pianist Jerry Alan Bush.⁷¹ This virtuoso showpiece signifies the forging of a working relationship between Bush and Middleton that has remained viable for over a decade. Besides *Toccata for Piano*, Middleton has dedicated four piano works to Jerry Bush: *Decoration Day* (1998), *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing* (2000), *Ondine* (2001), and *Cradle Rock* (2005).

The genesis of *Toccata for Piano* begins with a work Middleton wrote for Mobile organist Valrey Early. Middleton composed his *Festival Toccata* in 1992 for the dedication of the new pipe organ at Central Presbyterian Church in Mobile.⁷² At a rehearsal in preparation for Early's recital, Bush was in attendance, and he subsequently expressed interest in having a toccata-style piece written for him. Middleton humorously recalls Bush's later quipping that "you should be careful what you wish for," a remark on the work's significant technical demands.⁷³

Stylistically, *Toccata for Piano* falls into what Gregory Newton calls the "third period" of Middleton's output. Works in this period reveal a

⁷¹ The complete score of *Toccata for Piano* is included in the appendix.

⁷² Early performed the *Festival Toccata* several times in the early 1990s. The work contains a fugue that Early declined to perform, and so that portion of the work has never been heard.

⁷³ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

tendency to reconcile the rigors of atonal contrapuntal writing with tertian harmonic idioms, and they also evince a strong penchant for bitonal effects.⁷⁴ In this particular work, elements of neoclassicism are detectible, blending with contemporary idioms. In addition, Middleton will introduce a few new idioms of his own.

Jerry Bush exercised some influence on *Toccata's* structure, as he specifically requested that the work have a kind of slow introduction before the *Allegro*. This request actually furthers the neoclassical element, as toccatas from the Baroque period nearly always began with a free, fantasia-style passage in a slower tempo. In his thirteen-bar introduction, Middleton reveals the chief characteristics of the work. He opens with a left-hand repeated-note figure ornamented by a mordent, accompanied in the right hand by a C-major chord that against the bass C-sharp instills a bitonal feel from the very beginning of the work. Middleton did not conceive of the left-hand melodic gesture as a “mordent,” but this and several other features strongly suggest a Baroque character. The dissonant counterpoint in mm. 1-5 between the descending bass line and the rising right-hand chords is a distinctive gesture that frequently recurs in the work and will be referred to as the “*Lento* Theme.”

Middleton especially favors harmonic constructions that combine sonorities at dissonant intervals with one another, such as setting right-

⁷⁴ Newton, 54. The use of the term “bitonal” comes from Middleton and Newton. The term “bi-chordal” or “bi-layered” might be a more appropriate description of Middleton’s particular use of divided sonorities.

hand triads a tritone, major seventh, or minor seventh away from a bass note. After the opening bass melody bottoms out on E (with a B-flat minor right-hand harmony) in m. 3, the chords continue, now as triads in both hands, coming to rest on a widely separated B-flat major/A major chord in m. 5. The bass melody starts up again, and mm. 5-7 present a variant of the opening four measures. The rapid melodic flourish in m. 8 is one of several in the work that juxtapose groups of black-key and white-key notes. When divided between the hands, the virtuosic effect is easier to achieve than it sounds. The furious outburst in m. 8 continues with a clangorous set of ascending right-hand triads that conflict with the bass. A long descending flourish of *ad libitum* finger work begins on C7 and falls all the way to D1 (m. 9). Altogether, the recurring mordent figure, slow tempo, and improvisatory character evoke elements of the Baroque toccata/fantasia, while the dissonant harmonic counterpoint lends the music an acerbic modernity.

The final four bars of the introduction anticipate the *Allegro* by previewing its main idea, a figure consisting of a new type of bass melody against right-hand triads. Although the dotted rhythms of the introduction's bass melody are replaced with staccato notes in even rhythm, the combination of bass line and parallel triads continues the bi-layered effect of the slow introduction and will be a significant feature of the whole Toccata. The music hints at an impish character that will be a dominant quality of the *Allegro Molto*.

Although Middleton originally began the Toccata with the *Allegro* and added the slow introduction later at Bush's request, the introduction contains almost all of the seminal ideas that are part of the following *Allegro*. The resulting cohesiveness of the work is a significant achievement in itself and a sign of how the composer has mastered the art of thematic unity in his later works.

The main body of the Toccata evinces a ternary structure with elements of development in the B section, for an overall form of A¹ B A². The B section also briefly recalls the tempo, character, and distinctive musical material of the slow introduction. The final A² ends with a bombastic passage that presents the most explosive octave and chord passagework in the entire work.

The main idea of the *Allegro Molto*, the "Allegro Theme," is presented in mm. 14-25. Here the music takes on a mischievous character, with attention being drawn alternately to the staccato, quarter-note bass melody and its off-beat, triadic right-hand accompaniment, both an outgrowth of the *Lento*. Scherzo-like qualities will continue to emerge as the *Allegro Molto* unfolds. In mm. 14-15, the left-hand melody is emphasized by the *forte* marking, while the right-hand chords are marked *piano*. Middleton reverses the dynamic balance from the left hand to the right hand in the third measure of the Allegro Theme (m. 16), then allows the two hands to assume dynamic parity in m. 18. The pianist may not find this dramatic shift in dynamic balance to be effective in performance.

However, the main point of the markings is to enhance the feeling of a bi-layered texture.

In m. 21, the left hand melody crosses over the right-hand chords, then quickly returns to the lower position in m. 22. This 2/4 bar ends with a repetition of an F-major triad with a D-flat against its C, and is followed by a rising chromatic line divided between the hands. Next, in mm. 26-38, the Allegro Theme is reprised with only slight variation of detail. Essentially, the first twelve measures of the *Allegro* are immediately repeated.

In mm. 39-44, the mordent figure (now also sometimes an inverted mordent) from the slow introduction is introduced into the *Allegro*. Rather than being used for contrast, the mordent figure is “folded in,” adding another idea or “layer” to the texture. This is in keeping with Middleton’s general compositional aim of having at least two, and, if possible, three separate musical ideas going on simultaneously. The frequent use of textural inversion in this passage contributes to a playful character that will continue to emerge in the next passage.

Legatissimo groups of sixteenth notes and syncopations played against an accompaniment of “walking” eighth notes lend a more playful quality to the music in mm. 45-54, which will be referred to as the “Scherzando” passage. The frequent downward leaps in the left hand and upward leaps in the right hand contribute to the scherzo-like character, and add a layer of gymnastic challenge to the passage. Beginning in m. 45,

the left hand makes reference to the Allegro Theme,⁷⁵ while the right hand introduces a new quartal outline in the sixteenth notes. A dramatic rising sequence in mm. 45-48 is interrupted by a downward quartal flourish, and then a second rising sequence culminates in *forte* statements of the mordent figure in m. 54.

Mm. 55-65 serve both as a digression from the previous passage and as a preparation for an innovative scalar passage that immediately follows. A sequence based on the sixteenth-note groups and walking bass builds from m. 55 to m. 58 and again from m. 60 through m. 65. The two sequences are divided by a downward quartal flourish. Significantly, the intimations in the Scherzando passage of the “bumpy” off-beat triads from the *Allegro* theme are now absent. The two sequential passages must be executed with the left hand placed over the right hand, and careful attention should be given to projecting the left-hand eighths, which should be rendered *marcato*, above the right-hand sixteenth notes.

Middleton introduces a novel idiom in m. 66. Pianists are accustomed to the study of scales in octaves, thirds, and sixths. However, scales in sevenths are another matter. The sense of dramatic build-up to this moment, created by the previous two sequences, serves to highlight its place in the *Allegro* as a pivotal passage of virtuosic display. Two

⁷⁵ The left hand’s reference to the Allegro Theme here is dual in nature. In the first half of m. 45, for example, the exact pitches from m. 19 are recalled, and the steady eighth notes recall the staccato left-hand melody of the Allegro Theme, now in diminution. In the second half of m. 45, the left hand imitates both the bass melody and its off-beat right hand accompaniment.

statements of the scales in sevenths occur, each followed by a downward quartal flourish. Mm. 72-77 recall the *Allegro* theme, with its characteristic mordent figures and textural inversion.

The closing passage of the A section encompasses mm. 78-94. Beginning with the *legatissimo* sixteenths against “walking” eighths derived from the Scherzando, the left hand unfolds a more expansive melody than previously heard (mm. 78 – 84). The first two-measure segment rises from D2, then the bass melody begins on E2 and rises three octaves over five measures. The *crescendo* through this ascent culminates in a *forte* sequence of downward quartal flourishes in sixteenths that alternate with brief recalls of the off-beat syncopations from the Allegro Theme.

The A¹ section of the Toccata ends with a brilliant exhibition of sparkling finger work that, once again, relies on alternating groups of white and black keys. Similar to m. 8, this passage should be divided between the hands for ease of execution, until both hands must play together in m. 91. At that point, the passage becomes partly chromatic. The grand gesture terminates on a height of B6, followed by a sharply contrasting major third E-flat-G. The music then, seemingly exhausted, comes to rest with just a few more sporadic iterations of left-hand broken chords.

Mm. 95-134 constitute the B section of the Toccata. This section can itself be subdivided into two parts due to a significant tempo change. The

first, from m. 95 to m. 108, recalls the *Lento* introduction and is played *Lento Assai* until a pause in m. 103. A four-measure *accelerando* brings Tempo I back briefly in m. 108-109. *Un Poco Meno Mosso* is marked in m. 109, slowing the tempo for the remainder of the B section.

The *Lento Assai* passage in mm. 95-108 recalls much of the material and the improvisatory qualities of the opening *Lento*. In mm. 95-99, two short melodic phrases, the second accompanied by left-hand counterpoint, are interrupted by the same rapid melodic flourishes found at the beginning of the work, again juxtaposing groups of black-key and white-key notes. The left hand also hints at the off-beat triads of the *Allegro* at the end of m. 99. Mm. 101-103 strongly recall the triadic passage from mm. 4-5 of the introduction. A short cadenza consisting of a rising line marked *accel. -----molto* in m. 104 crescendos to *fortissimo*. This passage, like the shorter flourishes, can also be divided between the hands according to the black-key and white-key groups for easier execution. (The left hand takes the first bass pitch and then all black-key groups, while the right hand takes white-key groups.) Mm. 106-107 remind the listener of mm. 9-13, where the *Allegro* Theme first emerged, but now the theme begins slowly and accelerates, rather than starting and stopping. The *accelerando* leads to a brief outburst of the mordent figure (*Tempo I*) before *Un Poco Meno Mosso* abruptly changes the direction of the B section, delaying the anticipated return of the *Allegro*.

The passage from m. 109 to m. 127 continues to freely develop the *Lento* and *Allegro* material. Beginning in m. 109, the bass presents a new, expansive melody. The mordent at its start recalls the *Lento*, and the off-beat triads in the right hand recall the opening of the *Allegro*. In m. 112, the treble takes on melodic interest as well. During these measures of essentially two melodies, careful attention is needed to voicing and balance to bring out the polyphonic character despite the right-hand chords. On the downbeat of m. 118, the passage achieves an expressive high point, with the left hand once again recalling the *Lento* and continuing with a flowing melody while the right hand recedes back into accompaniment. The slightly slower tempo facilitates performance in these passages, but the frequent hand-crossing still requires careful practice.

Mm. 129-134 signal the return of the *Allegro* in several ways. As in the end of the *Lento* (mm. 10-13), the effect here is one of sputtering into motion, and this intimation of the manner in which the *Allegro* theme was first approached prepares the listener for A². The dramatic use of silence has a desired attention-getting effect, furthering the listener's expectation of return.

The A² section is far from a literal reprise, but most of the main musical ideas reappear. The *Allegro* Theme returns at m. 135 as in the opening, mm. 14-25, but with some variations; notably, the mordent figure now embellishes the bass quarter notes. The *Allegro* Theme is not repeated

here; instead, an abbreviated transition in mm. 145-148 leads to a return of the Scherzando music, significantly altered but still recognizable as such, in mm. 149-160.

The closing theme from A¹ that began in m. 78 is recalled in mm. 161-183. Again, there is significant alteration, but parts of the expansive bass melody are recognizable, and the passage builds to a *forte* climax as before. The closing once again has a sudden change of tempo (*Largo, Maestoso*), this time with a clangorous passage of *fortissimo* chords that brilliantly slow the growing momentum.

The final climactic passage of the Toccata provides opportunity for electrifying technical display. Marked *Poco Allegro e poco a poco accelerando*, the passage begins with the bass quarter notes and off-beat triads from the Allegro Theme, rising both in register and in dynamics. In m. 195, a sweep of interlocking left-hand octaves and right-hand chords in triplet eighths drives to a scintillating climax on a C-sharp Major/D-Major chord in m. 200. The final four bars consist of descending octaves spiced with unexpected “wrong-note” dissonances that cascade down the keyboard and drive the bi-layered idiom of the piece to the very end.

Technical Difficulties In the Final Passage of *Toccata for Piano*

The final passage of the work is scored in a manner that may not lend itself to convincing performance. The music from m. 195 to m. 199 consists of ascending octaves and chords that accelerate the Allegro

Theme's opening figure in mm. 188-194 from eighths to triplet eighths. For the composer, the important issues are the off-beat accents, the bi-layering of bass line and triads, and variation in pattern from measure to measure. For pianists, this passage is likely to be felt as awkward at best, impossible to execute at worst. Of particular concern for pianists is the lack of any regularity or pattern in these measures, which renders the ongoing *accelerando* not feasible. The addition of a sudden downward leap in m. 197 further inhibits the *accelerando*.

The final four bars of the coda also contain an awkward alteration to an otherwise natural sequence of descending octaves. In the last two quarter notes of m. 201, the right hand must leap into a lower register, then immediately back up by the downbeat of m. 202, a feat unlikely to be accomplished at speed. The same leaps recur in mm. 202-203. Frequently, Middleton substitutes sevenths for octaves, furthering the composer's sprinkling of dissonances, while also inhibiting the pianist's ability to play the passage in a "sweep."

Jerry Bush, the only current exponent of *Toccata for Piano* other than this author, has performed the work to great acclaim. At his 2005 Faculty Recital, which was dedicated entirely to music by Middleton, Bush performed the work as the recital finale, and the recording of this performance is revealing with respect to the coda. Live performances, despite the longevity of recordings of them, remain an essentially ephemeral art, an experience never to be duplicated. As such, some slight

discrepancy between the printed page and performance is expected, and any such discrepancy is not commented upon unless it does obvious injury to the effectiveness of the performed work. In the case of *Toccata*, Bush's performance aptly demonstrates that the effectiveness of a piece is sometimes due as much to the performer as to the composer.

By the time of this 2005 recital, Bush had already performed the work on a number of occasions, including a Mobile premiere in 1996 and a performance at New York City's Carnegie Hall in 2001. Bush makes several key alterations, audible in the recording, that imbue the coda passage with the "big effect" appropriate for a climactic moment in a toccata.⁷⁶ First, beginning in m. 194, Bush reduces the number of measures of ascending octaves and chords from five to four, eliminating the momentary octave descent of Middleton's passage. Next, the "off-kilter" feel of Middleton's passage (created by the intentional lack of regularity in the pattern) is replaced by a more regular alternation of left and right hands. A seemingly improvised passage of interlocking octaves and chords drives the passage to its exhilarating high point in m. 200.

It seems likely that Bush further alters the coda's final four bars by removing the awkward presence of some of the sevenths, replacing them with octaves. However, his execution is too rapid to be clearly heard. It also seems likely that Bush eliminates the awkward right hand jump in m.

⁷⁶ Jerry Bush, *Piano Music of Owen Middleton*, Department of Music, University of South Alabama, 2005, digital disc.

202 and m. 203, allowing for a much more rapid performance of these bars.

Bush seems to have reconstructed the passage to suit a particular desired effect and enhance the playability of the work. The passage is meant to be brilliant, exciting, virtuosic, and climactic. To the casual observer, Middleton's notes are by no means unplayable. However, the passage as notated significantly inhibits the *accelerando*. In short, the passage may either be played much more slowly and as written, or in an altered way with the desired degree of *accelerando* and brilliance intact.

Reception of *Toccata for Piano*

The performance history of Middleton's *Toccata for Piano* reveals much about the work's success with audiences, and also touches on several important events in the history of the reception of his piano music. Jerry Bush premiered the *Toccata for Piano* in 1996, several years after its completion. "I discovered to my chagrin," says Bush, "that the work was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be."⁷⁷ Bush regrets the delay in the work's premiere, but the additional time gave him an opportunity to assimilate the composer's language and become more familiar with other works in Middleton's output.

Bush performed the *Childhood Scenes* together with the *Toccata for Piano* on his 1996 faculty recital entitled "25th Anniversary Recital."

⁷⁷ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

Bush placed the Toccata just before intermission, not knowing what to expect in terms of audience response. However, as Bush describes it, “...the place absolutely went wild.”⁷⁸ The audience reaction was so enthusiastic that Bush, in retrospect, wished he had placed the work at the end of the program.

The next performance of the work took place at Weill Recital Hall, at the Carnegie Hall complex in New York. The concert, entitled “Lagniappe: Chamber Music of the Gulf Coast,” was a performance by faculty members of the University of South Alabama, Department of Music, featuring music by composers from the Gulf Coast region. Jerry Bush invented the program title. “I thought ‘Lagniappe’ was appropriate since we were giving the audience more than they bargained for.”⁷⁹ In addition to the *Toccata for Piano*, Jerry Bush also collaborated with voice professor Katherine Barnes-Burroughs on Middleton’s set *Three Songs on Poems by Eugene Walter*.⁸⁰ Bush recalls the occasion vividly:

It may be the most fun I’ve had as a performer ever. I found it very energizing. Playing in New York is, by and large, like ‘carrying coals to Newcastle.’ New York has heard *everything*, but they hadn’t heard this music. In that respect, we were at a decided advantage in that we were performing original works of recent vintage that had never been heard there before. I think, casting modesty aside for a moment, that their reception of the *Toccata* spoke very eloquently

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of how they viewed it. It was an electrifying reception. The crowd was amazing. We had a full house at Weill Recital Hall.⁸¹

The response to the “Lagniappe” program dispels any doubts about how a New York audience might be expected to treat a group of performers from the Deep South:

My experience with East Coast audiences is that they are tremendously gracious, very receptive, and always sort of surprised. We have even received fan letters from New Yorkers who had attended the concert, expressing their appreciation.⁸²

Bush’s third performance of the *Toccata for Piano* took place in 2005, at a piano recital that he dedicated entirely to Middleton’s music:

It was the most difficult program that I have ever put together. The only pieces on the program that I did not consider to be of advanced difficulty were certain movements of the *Childhood Scenes* and the slow movement from the *Sonatina*, which gave me a much needed break from the enormous challenges of the second half.⁸³

At this performance, Bush played all of the works previously dedicated to him. He also premiered *Cradle Rock*, the most recent work written for him. Middleton narrated the program, in a humorous conceit of his speaking from “beyond the grave.” This idea stemmed from a comment by Bush that he wanted to play a program of Middleton’s music in order to “honor him while he is still alive.” Middleton spoke of himself in the past tense for the entire recital, offering spoken program notes from backstage. The program concluded with the *Toccata for Piano*, which by now had

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

earned the nickname “New York Toccata.” For an encore, Bush played “Reverie” from the composer’s pedagogical set *Katie’s Collection*.

Toccata for Piano remains one of Middleton’s most effective solo piano pieces. Its moderate length (around 8 minutes) and brilliant ending make it an ideal program closer. However, the work is very challenging and requires patient preparation by the performer, particularly one unfamiliar with the composer’s unique harmonic language. Stylistically, the *Toccata for Piano* is quite unlike its successor *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing*, which does not end brilliantly and is less of a showpiece than the first Toccata. Speaking of *Toccata II*, Bush offers the following: “Audiences respond to it, but not with the immediacy with which they will readily respond to the first Toccata, which is a guaranteed show stopper.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

SOLO PIANO WORKS SINCE 1993

Decoration Day (1998)

Middleton wrote *Decoration Day* between 1996-1998, and it has since become one of Jerry Bush's favorite works by the composer. In addition to finding it to be one of the most enjoyable to play, Bush greatly esteems the piece:

I think *Decoration Day* is one of the most important suites written by an American composer in recent years. It should be really well known. It's programmatic, to a point, and tremendously effective. It challenges without utterly defeating the pianist.⁸⁵

Middleton's goal in composing *Decoration Day* was to create a multi-movement, cyclical piece that would fulfill Bush's desire for a larger work with rhapsodic and programmatic qualities. For inspiration, Middleton did think of Charles Ives's *Decoration Day*, but the inspiration stopped at the title:

His *Decoration Day* is just a quiet thing. I really didn't get anything out of his piece, but I thought it was a good poetic concept. I thought I would write a piece in several movements, and take as a starting point the idea of emotional states, how a person might feel in losing a loved one in conflict...in a time of war.⁸⁶

In the printed score, Middleton makes clear the connection with the celebration of Memorial Day:

Decoration Day was a day set aside after the Civil War to honor the nation's war dead, mainly in Northern communities; in parts of the South the holiday was called Confederate Memorial Day. In 1977

⁸⁵ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

⁸⁶ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

Congress declared this general observance Memorial Day and made it a national holiday. Today, of course, Memorial Day honors all those great souls who died for the rest of us from the nation's earliest conflicts to the latest.

I have chosen the earlier Decoration Day title for this piece to allow me to reach back with imagery and musical themes; to combine these elements with more contemporary ideas; and thereby to include our past, present, and maybe even some of our future!

The five movements of Decoration Day are explorations of some of the emotional or psychological states there might be for a veteran, a soldier's widow or child, or any of us as we pay homage on such a meaningful day.⁸⁷

The five movements of Middleton's *Decoration Day* are entitled "Remembering," "Seeking," "Biding," "Marching," and "Reveling-Reconciling." Middleton weaves distinctive themes, evocative of Civil War era songs, throughout the 20-minute work, which is aptly subtitled "A Fantasy." All of the seminal thematic ideas in the work are presented in the opening movement entitled "Remembering" (*Andante*). Collectively, the various themes of this movement can be referred to as the "Remembrance music." The first of these, a quiet, poetic, and reflective tune played above a low pedal point, brings a sense of psychological depth to the beginning of the work through its wide spacing between the bass and melody lines, as though the listener is penetrating into the private, interior space of a protagonist (Example 8.1). A strong sense of narrative and memory is evoked in the melody, which unfolds in C major above the B-flat bass, lending an authentic feeling of bitonality to the opening. In

⁸⁷ Owen Middleton, *Decoration Day: A Fantasy for Piano* (Mobile, AL: Luckenbach Editions, 1997).

answer to a question about whether the use of bitonal effects was intentional and meant to evoke the idea of conflict, Middleton said,

It was not part of my original thinking...but it later occurred to me that it might be helpful, and I did utilize the idea. For example, in the final movement “Reveling-Reconciling” I put in some Romantic touches of traditional harmony to help represent the idea of resolution of conflict.⁸⁸

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the piece "Remembering" from "Decoration Day". Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system (mm. 1-4) is marked *Andante* and *mf*. The bass line features a low B-flat pedal point. The second system (mm. 5-8) is marked *poco stringendo* and *A Tempo*. The third system (mm. 9-11) includes a *lunga* marking above a long note. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 8.1 *Decoration Day*, “Remembering,” mm. 1-11

A second and even more lyrical tune, closely associated with the first and still played over the low B-flat pedal, begins in m. 13 (Example

⁸⁸ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

8.2). This melody, a continuation of the opening poetical idea, but now proceeding in the key of B-flat in concert with the bass, will also be woven into the fabric of the work. Utilizing a common Romantic device, Middleton will allow his themes, particularly these first two, to undergo various thematic transformations in support of the programmatic ideas suggested by each movement's title.

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 12 to 15, and the second system covers measures 16 to 20. The music is in B-flat major and 4/4 time. The right hand plays a melodic line with various ornaments and dynamics, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with sustained chords and moving lines. Pedal instructions and dynamic markings like 'mp' and 'p' are present.

Example 8.2 *Decoration Day*, “Remembering,” mm. 12-20

A rhapsodic feeling, created by rapid ascending and descending arpeggios and trills in the right hand, emerges in m. 24 (Example 8.3). This new idea is immediately combined with the opening “Remembrance” theme beginning in m. 31 (Example 8.4).

Example 8.3 *Decoration Day*, “Remembering,” mm. 24-26

Example 8.4 *Decoration Day*, “Remembering,” mm. 30-33

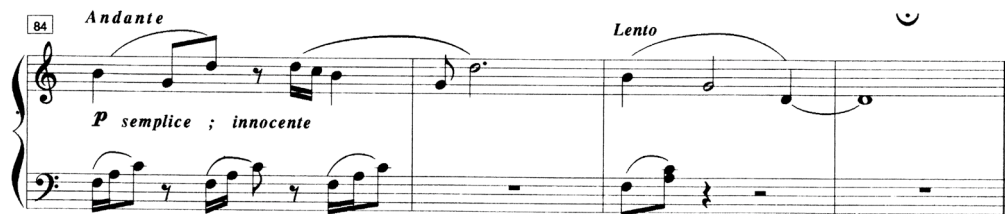
The music of “Remembering” ebbs and flows like a free, Romantic-style fantasy. Grand gestures, some serving as musical depictions of the violence and tumult of war, frequently appear at climactic points in the movement, contrasting sharply with the calm atmosphere of the opening. Mm. 80-83, for example, are an unmistakable evocation of cannon blast (Example 8.5). The big effect achieved in passages like this is not

dissimilar to the massive polychords near the end of the *Toccata for Piano*, but here the symbolic meaning adds a new dimension to the sonic experience.



Example 8.5 *Decoration Day*, “Remembering,” mm. 79-83

Middleton also suggests (with characteristic irony) the psychological devastation of war in sections like mm. 84-87 at the close of the movement (Example 8.6). Marked *semplice, innocente*, this melody is a transformation of the opening theme. Here, the composer says, “Your mind has slipped a gear. You’re in the twilight zone there for a minute. I was going for the idea of an out of body experience, almost psychotic.”⁸⁹



Example 8.6 *Decoration Day*, “Remembering,” mm. 84-87

In the second movement, “Seeking,” the characteristic feeling is one of being unsettled and agitated (Example 8.7). As Middleton explains it, “You’re trying to grapple with this internal angst that you feel, and you’re

⁸⁹ Ibid.

looking for answers.”⁹⁰ The very complex rhythm and atonal passagework here are difficult to comprehend and to play. However, this is a prime example of Middleton’s writing in such a way as to achieve an effect. The effect, rather than perfection, should be the performer’s goal. The opening “Remembrance” theme emerges from the chaos in m. 18 (Example 8.8). This short movement ends in a rising chromatic flurry of notes, signifying that the search goes on (Example 8.9).

The musical score for Example 8.7, "Seeking," mm. 1-4, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1 and 2, and the second system contains measures 3 and 4. The music is written in 2/4 time. The upper voice (treble clef) features a complex, atonal passagework with many accidentals and a rising chromatic line in the upper voice. The lower voice (bass clef) provides a rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment. Dynamics include forte (f) and mezzo-forte (mf). The score is marked with a fermata over the final measure (m. 4).

Example 8.7 *Decoration Day*, “Seeking,” mm. 1-4

⁹⁰ Ibid.



Example 8.8 *Decoration Day*, “Seeking,” mm. 16-18



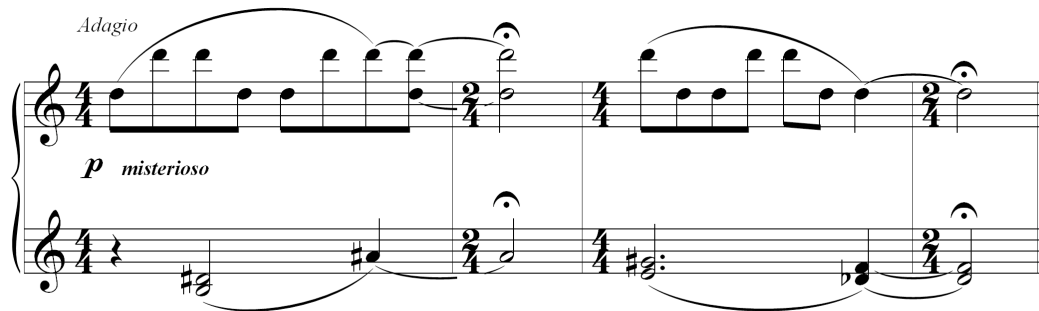
Example 8.9 *Decoration Day*, “Seeking,” m. 46

In “Biding” (*Adagio*), Middleton’s favorite movement, the composer is attempting to create the feeling of “losing track of time” (Example 8.10). As the composer explains it:

The music is much like a ticking clock, but the tick is out constantly. I hoped to create an atmosphere of time dilation. We’re happiest when we’re not aware of ourselves or real time, where time (psychological time) has been changed. For example, you might get absorbed in a piece of music and think that several minutes have gone by, but in fact only a minute went by. The idea of the movement is, of course ‘waiting.’ Waiting for news, waiting for loved ones to return. Bush understood this well and nailed it in the performance.⁹¹

⁹¹ Ibid.

When played with effective *rubato* and attention to colorful sound, the beguiling harmony in this movement, while moving at a seemingly glacial pace, never fails to capture the listener’s attention.



Example 8.10 *Decoration Day*, “Biding,” mm. 1-4

From the outset of “Marching” (*Allegro*), we are bombarded by a marching band, complete with fife and drum (Example 8.11). The wide spacing of the doubled melody reminds the listener of the first “Remembrance” theme, and, in fact, the melody here does hearken back to the beginning of the work.⁹² In the anacrusis to m. 9, Middleton presents the main March theme of the movement (*Allegro moderato*). The melody’s falling then rising contour in m. 9 recalls the opening “Remembrance” melody, which has appeared in many forms prior to this movement (Example 8.12). The composer cleverly evokes snare drum riffs in various passages written so that the pianist’s hands play just a major or minor second apart (Example 8.13).

⁹² The opening three bars of “Marching,” especially the disjunct F-C-F melody there, can be heard as deriving from m. 8 of “Remembering,” as shown in Example 8.1.

Allegro ♩ = 100

f

4

tr

Example 8.11 *Decoration Day*, “Marching,” mm. 1-6

Allegro moderato ♩ = 120

tr

alla marching band

7

10

Example 8.12 *Decoration Day*, “Marching,” mm. 7-13

46

tr

Example 8.13 *Decoration Day*, “Marching,” mm. 46-48

Some melodies in this movement sound so like Civil War music as to fool the listener into thinking that an actual tune is being quoted, as in the melody in mm. 20-26 (Example 8.14). Here the characteristic use of dotted rhythm and chromatic neighboring tones, and the melody's emphasis on tonic and dominant tones, all suggest a rowdy wartime song, perhaps even a call to battle. However, the modernistic harmonic setting of the tune adds considerable irony to the passage. "Marching" ends quietly, with echoes of the snare drums and fifes, as though in the distance.

The musical score for Example 8.14, "Marching," mm. 17-27, is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 17-20) shows a melody in the right hand with a dotted rhythm and chromatic neighboring tones, and a bass line with a strong dotted rhythm marked *f*. The second system (mm. 21-23) continues the melody and bass line, with the melody marked *f*. The third system (mm. 24-27) concludes the passage with a quiet ending, marked *p*.

Example 8.14 *Decoration Day*, "Marching," mm. 17-27

The final movement of *Decoration Day*, “Reveling-Reconciling,” begins with an ironic waltz whose melody is, once again, a transformation of the opening “Remembrance” theme (Example 8.15). The ironic qualities here entail “wrong-note” dissonance as well as frequent interruptions of the pulse. The programmatic idea is one of “partying to forget your troubles.” Gradually, the movement drifts back to the “Remembrance” music as presented in the first movement. The rhapsodic arpeggio idea reappears in m. 68 (Example 8.16). Then the lyrical melody that first appeared in m. 13 of “Remembering” helps bring the work to a satisfying close in B-flat Major, with just a touch of dissonance in the penultimate measure, where E-natural colors the otherwise traditional harmony, before resolving to an F in the final bar (Example 8.17).

The image displays a musical score for Example 8.15, consisting of two systems of piano music. The first system covers measures 1 through 5, with a tempo change from *Andante* to *Waltz Tempo* indicated above the staff. The melody is marked *mf semplice; innocente*. The second system covers measures 6 through 10, with a box containing the number '6' above the first measure. The melody in the second system is marked *mf* and ends with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The bass line in the second system features a rhapsodic arpeggio idea.

Example 8.15 *Decoration Day*, “Reveling-Reconciling,” mm. 1-10

68

p

simile

mf

70

p

Example 8.16 *Decoration Day*, “Reveling-Reconciling,” mm. 68-71

99

p

104

pp

Example 8.16 *Decoration Day*, “Reveling-Reconciling,” mm. 99-108

According to Jerry Bush, *Decoration Day* has had the most positive audience reception of any piano work Middleton has written for him other than the *Toccata for Piano*.⁹³ In terms of technical difficulties, the work compares favorably with that earlier work:

It's a very substantial piece, and it's not a bit easy. However, its difficulty is more diffuse than that of the *Toccata*, because the technical passages are spread over a larger area. There are a lot of lyrical moments. There is some very beautiful writing in it, and once again some things that are treacherous.⁹⁴

Bush's mention of "things that are treacherous" may refer to extended trills (as in "Marching") and various passages of cross-hand playing that must be executed quickly, a common feature in many of Middleton's advanced-level works.

Perhaps the most significant performance of *Decoration Day* since its premiere at the University of South Alabama in 2000 is the one Bush gave at a Southern Regional Conference of the College Music Society in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on February 28, 2002. His lecture presentation was entitled, "A Southern Microcosm: Owen Middleton's *Decoration Day*."

According to Bush,

They were delighted with it. In a thirty-minute presentation, I demonstrated from each of the movements and explained the meaning behind it. Then I performed the work. The piece really spoke for itself. Subsequently Middleton (who was not present) received communications from attendees expressing their appreciation.⁹⁵

⁹³ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Sonatina for Piano (1998)

Middleton wrote *Sonatina for Piano*, his most recent pedagogical piano piece, for the students of his long-time friend and fellow musician Spencer Fellows and his wife, Jennifer Fellows. It was premiered by three of their pupils, each taking one movement, at their spring studio recital in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1998. Middleton attended the performance.

This charming, three-movement work uses popular idioms and tonal harmony, what Middleton calls his “traditional harmony with modernisms.”⁹⁶ He also had in mind that he would use classical forms, such as sonata form in miniature for the first movement (*Allegro*), ternary form for the lyrical second movement (*Andante cantabile*), and a sort of rondo in the finale (*Bright!*).

The happy, fanfare-like beginning of the first movement’s theme sets the tone for the entire *Sonatina* (Example 8.17). Essentially “monothematic,” this movement’s sonata form is articulated through the various appearances of this theme. For example, an appearance in B-flat Major marks the beginning of the second key area of the exposition (Example 8.18). The development first takes the theme to the parallel key of B-flat minor (Example 8.19), then modulates to G-flat major/E-flat minor through the use of a circle of fifths sequence in mm. 51-58. A brief bridge passage replaces the G-flats and D-flats with naturals, and takes us swiftly home to E-flat major and the recapitulation.

⁹⁶ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

Allegro

Example 8.17 *Sonatina for Piano*, 1st movement, mm. 1-10

Example 8.18 *Sonatina for Piano*, 1st movement, mm. 26-30

Example 8.19 *Sonatina for Piano*, 1st movement, mm. 45-59

After conceiving of the bright tune for the first movement, and casting that movement in sonata form in miniature, Middleton turned to his own religious choral music for inspiration in the *Andante cantabile* second movement. The second movement is based on the introit “Come, My Soul, Thou Must Be Waking,” for solo voice and organ, from the composer’s *Music for Worship*.⁹⁷ Middleton arranged the tune first by

⁹⁷ *Music For Worship* is a collection of six short choral and solo vocal pieces by Middleton to be used as introits and benedictions. They were written for and used by the choir at Central Presbyterian Church in Mobile, AL, of which the composer was a long-term member.

supporting the melody with a new piano texture (in place of the original organ-style accompaniment) and then expanding the short, two-phrase piece into a ternary form (Example 8.20). One of Middleton's favorite composers is Robert Schumann, and the texture he chose for this movement reminds one of the German master's shorter pedagogical pieces, which often have slow-moving quarter note melodies with flowing eighth note accompaniment.

The musical score consists of three systems of music. The first system is marked *Andante cantabile* and *mf*. The second system continues the piece. The third system is marked *poco f* and *Poco Rit.*. The score includes various fingering numbers (1-5) and articulation marks such as slurs and accents.

Example 8.20 *Sonatina for Piano*, 2nd movement, mm. 1-9

The middle section of the form presents a version of the tune in the minor mode, starting in A minor and later moving to D minor, featuring vividly colorful harmony that aptly fits the composer’s description of “traditional harmony with modernisms” (Example 8.21).

Example 8.21 *Sonatina for Piano*, 2nd movement, mm. 19-27

The final movement of the *Sonatina for Piano* begins as a near-verbatim solo piano arrangement of Middleton’s children’s choir piece, *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (Example 8.22).⁹⁸ The choral work is in a popular idiom that closely resembles John Rutter’s style, and features

⁹⁸ *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (1991) was originally written for the Mobile Singing Children, directed by Bonnie Jean and Valrey W. Early. Middleton found that the piano part of the choral work already fit many of the parameters he wanted for the finale of the *Sonatina*, including classical style, intermediate difficulty, and a tune that complemented the character of the first movement well.

frequent unison writing and gentle but lively syncopations. Middleton expands the choral piece with a few extra digressions from and returns to the principal theme, making an instrumental rondo out of the original choral work. He also allows some of the statements of the theme to stray to keys further from the original D-Major tonic than the choral work does.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system begins with the instruction *Bright!* and a dynamic marking of *f* (forte), with the performance instruction *staccato; "mallet" touch*. The music is in D major (two sharps) and 3/4 time. The first system contains measures 1 through 5, with fingerings 4, 2, 1, 2, 1 indicated above the notes. The second system contains measures 6 through 9, with fingerings 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1, 4, 2, 1 indicated above the notes. The third system contains measures 10 through 11, with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking over measure 10 and an *A Tempo* marking at the start of measure 11. The dynamic marking *mf* (mezzo-forte) is present in measure 11. Fingerings 5, 1, 2, 4, 2, 1, 2, 1 are indicated above the notes in measures 10 and 11. The bass line includes fingerings 2, 1, 3, 1, 4, 2, 3, 1, 1, 5.

Example 8.22 *Sonatina for Piano*, 3rd movement, mm. 1-11

Spencer Fellows collaborated closely with the composer on the *Sonatina for Piano*, making a number of suggestions to help enhance the playability of the work by his students. The result is a piece of upper-

intermediate difficulty whose attractive themes and popular idiom are calculated to attract today's students.

Since its 1998 premiere in Bethesda, Maryland, Jerry Bush has played the *Andante cantabile* movement several times. Most recently, Robert Holm performed the entire Sonatina on a recital entitled "Piano Sonatinas of the 20th Century," on June 9, 2011, at the University of South Alabama. Holm's program also included sonatinas by Ravel, Bartók, Kabalevsky, and Khachaturian.

Toccata II: Millennium Crossing (2000)

If the word "toccata" denotes a virtuosic work requiring bravura and technical prowess, then *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing* is exemplary of the genre. However, Middleton's second piano toccata stands in stark contrast to its predecessor in almost every other respect. For one thing, it coheres around a programmatic idea that largely overshadows the standard toccata idiom. On the whole, it also lacks the relentless, motoric quality typical of a toccata, though there are plenty of passages within the piece that have that quality, affording opportunities to showcase dazzling finger work.

Toccata II: Millennium Crossing begins (Example 8.23) with a striking idea that Middleton calls "an alarm."⁹⁹

I was trying to capture the panic atmosphere of the time, and to create musical effects of that kind. The piece begins with an alarm,

⁹⁹ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

that later goes into the bass, becoming a locomotive...In between you have a lot of learned devices like inversions and retrogrades, used to create ‘pandemonium.’¹⁰⁰

Although it would be easy to take the music very seriously, the composer’s intent was always comic, from the genesis of the “alarm theme” all the way to the work’s completion in 2000.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. The top system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The right hand part is marked 'f marcato' and contains three measures of music, each with a different fingering (1, 2, 3) and a dynamic marking of 'f'. The left hand part is marked 'f' and contains three measures of music, with a dynamic marking of 'f' and a tempo marking of '8va'. The bottom system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The right hand part is marked '8va' and contains four measures of music, with a dynamic marking of 'f' and a tempo marking of '8va'. The left hand part is marked 'f' and contains four measures of music, with a dynamic marking of 'f' and a tempo marking of '8va'. The score ends with a 3/4 time signature change.

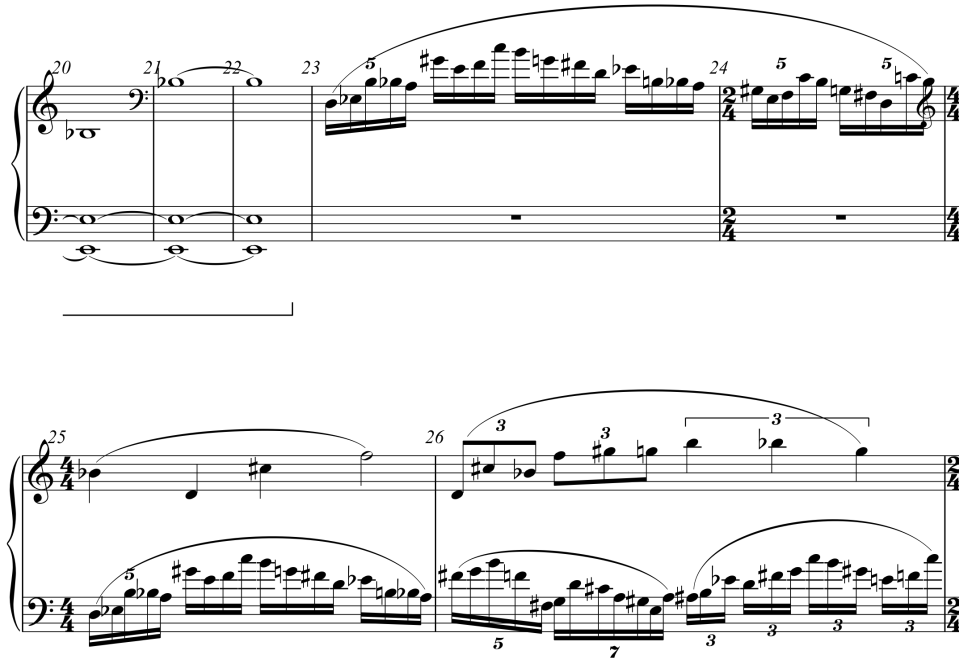
Example 8.23 *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing*, mm. 1-5

Commenting on his incorporation of tone rows in the work, Middleton emphasized that the purpose behind including the rows was the musical effect they created. The composer notes, “I used tone rows and manipulated them to add another layer of confusion, anxiety, and chaos.”¹⁰¹ The rows also add technically challenging finger work to the piece. For example, in the first passage containing a row (mm. 23–26), the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

composer strings several iterations of a row together in sixteenth notes in each hand, sending the pianist’s fingers scurrying to find all of the notes (Example 8.24).



Example 8.24 *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing*, mm.20-26

The ending of *Toccata II*, which the composer meant to portray a train speeding over the “millennium crossing,” later acquired a very different meaning to Jerry Bush, who premiered the work on March 25, 2001 (Example 8.25). In answer to a question about *Toccata II*, Bush commented:

[I]t turned out, with all of its crashes and destructive force, to bear an uncanny resemblance to what we were all seeing on September 11, 2001. All I could think about in the horror of that fateful day was the ending of the *Toccata*, where everything just seems to crumble. I was struck by the way in which the music almost seemed to speak

prophetically about the agony and violence of the events we were all witnessing at the time.¹⁰²

229 230 231 232

233 234 235 236

237 238 239 240 241

ff

fff

ppp

Example 8.25: *Toccata II: Millennium Crossing*, mm. 229-241

Bush's comments on his experience of learning and performing *Toccata II* are revealing of the work's demands and are worth retelling here:

It remains one of the most violent pieces that I have had any occasion to deal with. It is really almost cataclysmic. You are all over the place with wild tremolos, and leaps, and every conceivable rhythmic device, and some intervallic structures that are very demanding for the hand. It's not easy to play, and it is far less grateful for the audience than the other Toccata. Audiences respond

¹⁰² Jerry Bush, interview by author.

to it, but not with the immediacy with which they will readily respond to the first Toccata, which is a guaranteed show stopper.¹⁰³

Ondine (2001)

For his next work dedicated to Jerry Bush, Middleton selected a subject that he knew would be of particular interest to him. Bush has long had an affinity with the Impressionistic style, and his recording entitled *25th Anniversary Concert* contains a colorful rendering of Debussy's "Ondine" from the *Preludes, Book 2*.¹⁰⁴ Middleton explains the genesis this way:

I was, in a way, updating the Impressionistic style into my language, and also paying tribute to Ravel and Debussy. Not that I was trying in any way to compete with them (chuckling).¹⁰⁵

Jerry Bush, for his part, was pleased with the result:

Ondine is another great favorite of mine. I am very, very fond of it. It's another work in the great tradition of Ondines which carry all the way back to Chopin's A-flat Ballade, and then of course comes Debussy's prelude "Ondine" from the second book of *Preludes*, and then Ravel's "Ondine" from *Gaspard*. This is yet another facet of this same general character or type. It's a wonderfully colorful and basically Impressionistic piece.¹⁰⁶

Blurry pedal effects, glissando-like runs, long trills, and rippling arpeggios that mimic the watery effects common in the works of Ravel and

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Jerry Bush, *25th Anniversary Concert*, Department of Music, University of South Alabama, 1997, digital disc.

¹⁰⁵ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

¹⁰⁶ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

Debussy abound in this roughly 8-minute-long fantasy (Examples 8.26).

Middleton also utilizes elbow playing to symbolize a descent into the watery depths, the only example of such an effect in his piano output (Example 8.27).

The musical score for Example 8.26, *Ondine*, mm. 1-10, is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 1-4) is in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a dynamic marking of *p*. It features a trill in the right hand and a descending line in the left hand. The second system (mm. 5-8) is in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a dynamic marking of *f*. It features a trill in the right hand and a descending line in the left hand. The third system (mm. 9-10) is in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a dynamic marking of *mp*. It features a trill in the right hand and a descending line in the left hand.

Example 8.26 *Ondine*, mm. 1-10

Example 8.27 *Ondine*, mm. 62-65

Jerry Bush premiered *Ondine* on March 9, 2003, on his annual faculty recital at the University of South Alabama. He later reprised the work on his 2005 faculty recital.

Cradle Rock (2005)

A quintessential example of Middleton's sense of humor, *Cradle Rock* seems to have been a bit of fun for the composer from beginning to end. At the outset, Middleton drew his inspiration from a familiar lullaby:

As I understand it now, the poem 'Rock-A-Bye Baby' dates from colonial times, when people observed that Native American women would rest their infants in low trees, in the branches. So I thought it was interesting to know that origin, and the way it colors our understanding of the 'tree tops' mentioned in the poem. Of course, if a baby fell out of the top of a tall tree it would kill the child; but I can easily see why the native women would have rested their babies as they did in the low branches, as that would be a comfortable

place to lay a baby. I didn't know the true origins of the lullaby at the time I wrote *Cradle Rock*. Rather, I was thinking of the irony and absurdity of the poem and making a humorous musical setting of it.¹⁰⁷

The composer's creative focus on humor colored all aspects of the project. The image of a precariously placed cradle pervades the opening, which includes a complete statement of the familiar "Rock-A-Bye Baby" tune, interrupted by chromatic flare-ups (Example 8.28). Deciding on the title *Cradle Rock*, Middleton opted to include some crude references to rock n' roll in the work (Example 8.29). This, in turn, led him to inscribe the dedication on the score "For Jerry (Lee) Bush," which Bush graciously allowed. The work ends as the poem demands, with a downwardly cascading glissando followed by a "thud" (Example 8.30).

¹⁰⁷ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

For Dr. Jerry (Lee) Bush

Cradle Rock

Poco Allegretto

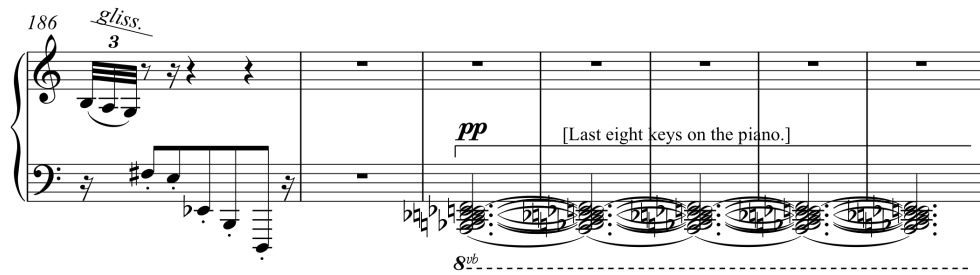
Owen Middleton

Musical score for the first system (measures 1-12) of "Cradle Rock". The score is in 3/4 time and D major. It features a piano (pp) accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Poco Allegretto" with a metronome marking of 100. The music consists of a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The first system covers measures 1 through 12, with measure numbers 6 and 9 indicated at the start of their respective staves.

Example 8.28 *Cradle Rock*, mm. 1-12

Musical score for the second system (measures 30-33) of "Cradle Rock". The score is in 3/4 time and D major. It features a mezzo-forte (mf) accompaniment. The music consists of a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The first system covers measures 30 through 33.

Example 8.29 *Cradle Rock*, mm. 30-33



Example 8.30 *Cradle Rock*, mm. 186-192

Not content that the music had fully expressed his comic side, Middleton subsequently composed a sort of explanatory and descriptive poem, which was printed in the program at the work's premiere:

If words would do, why music? Conversely too.
 But *Cradle Rock* is about many things: irony, absurdity, banality.
 Music needs no liner notes; but then, in this case, adding verbiage seems almost logical. CR's points are familiar but a bit off; maybe French, a little different. Or maybe Neo-Dada. Duchamp revisited. As complex as you would like it to be, and a little wacko. Fetching and off-putting; cogent and incongruous.

A lovely old tune sings away. Anarchists, *sotto voce*, cause temporary breakdown of logic and focus. Faux Rock and roll; numbing banality contrasts and ridicules shaky efforts to stay on nursery rhyme course; anything but polite, it stays too long. *Rock-A-Bye Baby* isn't for *innocente*, but is a lullaby for babies. What do they know? Falling from heights a primal fear for monkeys and their relatives. Ancient memories of the primeval forest.

The soothing song steamrolls the undisciplined imagery. Save us from evil!
 Ideas develop probing the underworld, warning of naiveté. Deep feelings ferment below, pressure valves go off demanding attention then pass back down below through passionate gestures; still restless and confused; a little touchy and searching for the nut, the purpose.

Then the delicate little song bares its soul, transforming objections into poignant play. Point made, *Rock-A-Bye* retires. The marauder is on his own. Do what you will! Predictably, another exuberant peak. Point made, the doubter gives up the protest and loses it in a gentle fall to the far ground below. Ignorant bliss reconciles trepidations while glimpses of dark and light suggest the randomness of outcomes. Quantum mechanics, *n'cest pas?*¹⁰⁸

Middleton emphasizes, with typical light-heartedness, that he doesn't consider himself a poet. "I was in that kind of wacky mood when I was

¹⁰⁸ Owen Middleton, program notes from *Piano Music of Owen Middleton*, Department of Music, University of South Alabama, 2005.

writing *Cradle Rock*, hence the ‘poem.’ I don’t call it poetry, but doggerel. It’s really just a verbal expression of what the piece is like.”¹⁰⁹

Jerry Bush premiered *Cradle Rock* on December 4, 2005, on his faculty recital entitled “Piano Music of Owen Middleton.” Bush admits, “I didn’t take to the style immediately.”¹¹⁰

Improvizations (2007)

Middleton’s most recently completed piano work represents a significant change in direction for the composer. After writing a number of essentially programmatic works for Jerry Bush, Middleton longed to get back to a more abstract style, and he thought of dedicating a piece to Robert Holm, another piano faculty member at the University of South Alabama.

From the beginning of his work on *Improvizations*, Middleton’s *modus operandi* was similar to that which gave rise to his earliest piano work, *Sonata for Piano*. Namely, he began with a few basic musical motives and allowed the entire work to grow from these motives. There is also a similar emphasis on counterpoint in the two works, but this trait is even stronger in *Improvizations*, with procedures like double fugue and pervasive imitation contributing to a strongly neo-Baroque idiom. Unlike the earlier *Sonata*, Middleton avoids traditional forms in *Improvizations*,

¹⁰⁹ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

¹¹⁰ Jerry Bush, interview by author.

instead attempting to write in a through-composed manner similar to an unfolding, free jazz improvisation. The work's energetic, syncopated rhythms further this jazzy atmosphere. Also unlike the early *Sonata*, *Improvizations* consists of four movements: "Invention" (*Allegro Deciso*), "Contrapunctus" (*Andante*), "Lachrymae" (*Andante, Rubato*), and "Joker" (*Allegro*).

Middleton has described his early *Sonata for Piano* as "daunting" for the performer, due to its austere, contrapuntal style.¹¹¹ This description, however, might better fit the *Improvizations*, whose contrapuntal and rhythmic intricacy, textural density, and dissonant idiom all surpass the earlier piece. These qualities, coupled with the lack of any obvious element of return, also make *Improvizations* daunting for an audience. While rich and rewarding with repeated hearings, the *Improvizations* are almost forbidding to the uninitiated—highly abstract, ultra-dissonant, and ultra-modern.

Middleton's harmonic palette is enriched in *Improvizations* with tone clusters, which appear in the work along with his usual polychordal structures. For example, the unique harmonic structures in mm.137-139 of "Invention" contain both polyharmonic writing and clusters (Example 8.31).

¹¹¹ Newton, 236.

Example 8.31 *Improvizations*, “Invention,” mm. 137-139

The emphatic left-hand gesture at the opening of “Invention” snarls and growls at the listener, while syncopated right-hand dyads add biting dissonance and obscure the meter, subtly suggesting a jazzy quality (Example 8.32). The music is both austere and energetic at the same time. A number of seminal motives presented at the start of this movement are carried through the other three movements of the work, with the exception of “Lachrymae,” which is based on an earlier choral piece by the composer.¹¹² The first idea we encounter in “Invention” is a rapid, rising scalar figure in the left hand (m. 1) that is followed immediately by a triadic shape (as shown in Example 8.32). The right hand enters with a figure in thirds that accompanies the left hand melody. Rising and falling figures in parallel thirds can be found throughout the work. The next two motivic ideas are presented simultaneously at the beginning of m. 4: a disjunct melody, first presented as an oscillating major 6th, enters in the right hand, and descending chromatic motion serves as its left-hand counterpoint. The last seminal idea comes in m. 8, where an emphatic

¹¹² Owen Middleton, interview by author.

gesture containing chromatic neighbor tones occurs. All of these ideas are constantly manipulated, so that their later appearances are by no means obvious to the listener. Instead, the music constantly unfolds and evolves, never returning to any previous material. Only tempo changes help to articulate sectional divisions in the movement.

Example 8.32 *Improvizations*, “Invention,” mm. 1-9

“Contrapunctus” evinces a strong Baroque feeling and contains a double fugue whose two subjects are eventually combined. The first subject, shown in Example 8.33, has a slow, quarter-note pulse, which stands in contrast to the second subject, shown in Example 8.34, which has a faster, eighth-note pulse.

2. Contrapunctus

Andante

Owen Middleton
ASCAP

$\text{♩} = 66$



Musical score for Contrapunctus, mm. 1-10. The score is in G minor, 3/4 time, and marked Andante. It features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, while the left hand plays a more active, rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked Andante with a metronome marking of quarter note = 66.

Example 8.33 *Improvizations*, “Contrapunctus,” mm. 1-10



Musical score for Contrapunctus, mm. 35-36. This section shows a continuation of the complex texture. The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, while the left hand plays a more active, rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked Andante with a metronome marking of quarter note = 66.

Example 8.34 *Improvizations*, “Contrapunctus,” mm. 35-36

In addition to combining the two subjects, Middleton also folds the motives from “Invention” into the texture. In m. 42, for example, the first subject is played by the left hand, while the right hand plays the second subject. In m. 43, the scalar motive from “Invention” makes a number of

appearances, followed by the oscillating, disjunct motive in m. 44 (Example 8.35).

Example 8.35 *Improvizations*, “Contrapunctus,” mm. 42-44

For the slow movement, “Lachrymae,” Middleton lifted a melody from his 1990 choral work entitled *Song of the Princess* (on Poems of Tennyson).¹¹³ Subtitled “Five Songs from ‘The Princess’ by A. Tennyson,” the choral work was based on the “songs” from Tennyson’s famous 1847 poem, which Middleton extracted and set to music for soprano, SATB choir, and piano accompaniment. The specific song quoted in “Lachrymae” is “Tears, Idle Tears,” a soprano solo in the earlier choral work. The melody makes its first appearance in m. 10 of the movement

¹¹³ Ibid.

(Example 8.36). “Lachrymae” is essentially a piano improvisation upon the song, which builds to a rhapsodic climax in mm. 65-67 (Example 8.37).

Adagio Mosso
♩=48
10. *p* 3
11. *mp* 3
12. *mp* 3
13.

Example 8.36 *Improvizations*, “Lachrymae,” mm. 10-13

Tempo I
♩=66
65. *ff* 3 *rit.* *accel.* 66. *A Tempo*
67. *Allargando*
♩=56
68.

Example 8.37 *Improvizations*, “Lachrymae,” mm. 65-68

The final movement, “Joker,” is a wild and daring scherzo that takes its melodic ideas from the seminal motives of “Invention,”¹¹⁴ especially the neighbor-tone idea (m. 1) and the rising scalar figure and triadic outline in m. 3 (Example 8.38). As this virtuosic movement draws to a close, jazzy

¹¹⁴ Owen Middleton, interview by author.

syncopations add to the excitement and anticipation (Example 8.39), and unexpected rests in the final bars articulate the ending, which has the pianist's hands at extreme ends of the keyboard (Example 8.40).

Joker

Owen Middleton
ASCAP

Allegro ♩=100

The musical score for 'Joker' by Owen Middleton consists of four measures. Measure 1 begins with a piano (f) dynamic and a forte (f) accent. The right hand plays a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the left hand plays a bass line with a syncopated rhythm. Measure 2 continues the eighth-note pattern in the right hand and the bass line in the left hand. Measure 3 shows a change in the right hand's pattern, with a slur over the first two measures and a change in the eighth-note pattern. Measure 4 concludes the sequence with a final eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Example 8.38 *Improvizations*, “Joker,” mm. 1-4

181 **Allegro** ♩=90

pp 182 *f* 183 *p*

184 *f* 185 186 187

188 *sfz* *p* 189 190

Example 8.39 *Improvisations, "Joker,"* mm. 181-190

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Joker" in measures 194-197. The score is written for piano and is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 194 and 195. In measure 194, the piano starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. In measure 195, the dynamic increases to forte (*f*), and the right hand continues with a more complex melodic line. The second system covers measures 196 and 197. In measure 196, the right hand has a complex chordal structure with slurs and accents, while the left hand has a simple bass line. In measure 197, the right hand continues with a similar chordal structure, and the left hand has a simple bass line. The score ends with a double bar line.

Example 8.40 *Improvizations*, "Joker," mm. 194-197

CHAPTER 9

EPILOGUE

In June of 2011, Owen Middleton and his wife Anne moved to a new home in suburban Asheville, North Carolina. With each move in the composer's life have come new directions. Having now retired from his teaching position at the University of South Alabama after thirty years of service, Middleton plans to enjoy a change of pace, the beautiful landscape of the North Carolina mountains, as well as more time and space in his life for composition.

Middleton is currently in progress on a new piano work to be dedicated to the author. This composition has two working titles—*Suite* or *Improvizations II*, the latter title indicating that the piece will be another of the abstract variety. The work will comprise five movements: Prelude, Dance, Fantasy Adagio, Toccata, and Rondo. All of the movements derive their material from a dance-like variation from the composer's 1995 guitar work *Honoring Song: Variations on an American Indian Theme*.

In addition to continuing to compose, Middleton now teaches music courses part-time at the Reuter Center, a life-long learning arm of the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Here he offers guitar courses, and he may also offer lecture courses on various musical topics of interest. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of Middleton's new environment is the possibility of meeting and collaborating with other professional musicians in the Asheville area. An increasing number of former professional New

York musicians are retiring in the area, opening up many opportunities for artistic collaboration. Middleton is especially ambitious to pursue performances of his operatic work in the region.

Owen Middleton remains an active composer and teacher in his retirement. However, even if he never wrote another note of music, he would still command a place of respect in the classical music field. For guitarists, Middleton has contributed works that are now considered standard repertoire for college-level study. While this outcome seems unlikely for his piano music, hopefully this research project will help bring some well-deserved attention to his solo piano works, as well as encourage further research and exploration into the broader scope of this deserving composer's significant and varied oeuvre.

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Includes *Improvizations* (piano).

APPENDIX A

TRACK LISTING FOR THE COMPACT DISC RECORDING

<u>Track</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Time</u>
1	<i>Sonata for Piano</i>	8:18
	<i>Childhood Scenes</i>	
2	Under the Persimmon Tree	2:08
3	Cornfield Chase	1:02
4	The Diamond Desert	2:24
5	The River Place	1:45
6	Snipe Hunt	2:11
	<i>Katie's Collection</i>	
7	Melody	1:08
8	Ditty	1:34
9	Holiday	1:25
10	Sad Song	1:02
11	Gypsy Dance	0:55
12	Trapeze	1:19
13	Reverie	2:45
14	Frolic	1:30
15	Etude	1:32
16	<i>Toccata for Piano</i>	8:21
	TOTAL:	39:19

BARTON MOREAU, PIANO

Recorded on July 26, July 28, and August 1, 2011 in Katzin Concert Hall at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona.

Engineer: Charles Szczepanek
Co-Producers: Barton Moreau & Charles Szczepanek

APPENDIX B

MUSICAL SCORES OF THE WORKS ON THE RECORDING

NO. 108 15/11/40
© 1940

SONATA FOR PIANO

OWEN MIDDLETON
MUSIC

FOR HILTON HALLINAN

Modest.

dim. *p* *cres.*

14

Musical notation for measures 14-15, featuring a treble and bass clef with complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

16

Musical notation for measures 16-17, showing a continuation of the melodic and harmonic material.

17

crac e stringendo ----- 5

For.

Musical notation for measures 17-18, including performance instructions like *crac e stringendo* and *For.*

19

Musical notation for measures 19-20, featuring triplet markings in the bass line.

21

Musical notation for measures 21-22, continuing the piece with various rhythmic values.

23

p poco rit

ms a tempo

Musical notation for measures 23-25, including performance instructions like *p poco rit* and *ms a tempo*.

Handwritten musical score system 1. Treble and bass clefs. Key signature: one sharp (F#). Time signature: 3/4. Dynamics: *pp*, *crac*. Includes slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical score system 2. Treble and bass clefs. Key signature: one sharp (F#). Time signature: 3/4. Dynamics: *mf*, *f*. Includes slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical score system 3. Treble and bass clefs. Key signature: one sharp (F#). Time signature: 3/4. Dynamics: *crac*, *f*. Includes slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical score system 4. Treble and bass clefs. Key signature: one sharp (F#). Time signature: 3/4. Dynamics: *dim.*, *p*, *rit.*. Includes slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical score system 5. Treble and bass clefs. Key signature: one sharp (F#). Time signature: 3/4. Tempo: *Allarg.* (♩ = ♩). Dynamics: *pp*, *attaca*, *f*. Includes slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical score system 6. Treble and bass clefs. Key signature: one sharp (F#). Time signature: 3/4. Dynamics: *dim.*. Includes slurs and accents.

First system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*. Trills and triplets are present.

Second system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*. Trills and triplets are present.

Third system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*. Trills and triplets are present.

Fourth system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*. Trills and triplets are present.

Fifth system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*. Trills and triplets are present.

Sixth system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*. Trills and triplets are present.

71

Handwritten number 71. Musical score system 1, measures 1-2. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 1 and a slur over measures 1-2. Bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 1. A '3' is written above the first measure.

73

Handwritten number 73. Musical score system 2, measures 3-4. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 3-4. Bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. The marking 'Psub.' is written below the first measure.

75

Handwritten number 75. Musical score system 3, measures 5-6. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 5-6. Bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. The marking 'Cresc. 3' is written below the second measure.

77

Handwritten number 77. Musical score system 4, measures 7-8. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 7-8. Bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. A '3' is written below the first measure.

79

Handwritten number 79. Musical score system 5, measures 9-10. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 9-10. Bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. The marking 'decresc.' is written below the second measure.

81

Handwritten number 81. Musical score system 6, measures 11-12. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 11-12. Bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment. The marking 'Poco Meno Mosso' is written above the first measure.

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, some with slurs. The lower staff is in bass clef and provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

The second system continues the musical piece. The upper staff shows a continuation of the melodic line, while the lower staff maintains the accompaniment. There are some dynamic markings and articulation marks present.

The third system features more complex rhythmic patterns in both staves. The upper staff has some sixteenth-note runs, and the lower staff has a more active bass line.

The fourth system includes a 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking in the upper staff, indicating a gradual increase in volume. The notation continues with intricate melodic and harmonic details.

The fifth system contains a '5' marking in the lower staff, possibly indicating a fingering or a specific rhythmic pattern. The musical notation remains consistent with the previous systems.

The sixth system concludes the musical content on this page. It features a final melodic phrase in the upper staff and a corresponding accompaniment in the lower staff.

121

124

127

128

129

130

Handwritten musical score for piano, consisting of six systems of two staves each. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The score features various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and triplets. Handwritten annotations include 'mf' and 'dim' in the first system, and '145', '150', and '155' in the left margin. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

157

161

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OP. 101, No. 1

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© 1962 by Tallahassee

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. There are several triplets marked with a '3' and a bracket. The system ends with a double bar line.

The second system of music also consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music continues with similar rhythmic complexity. The system ends with a double bar line. To the right of the staves, the handwritten text "Fall 1962" and "Tallahassee" is written.

An empty musical staff system consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef).

An empty musical staff system consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef).

An empty musical staff system consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef).

An empty musical staff system consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef).

for Füssell Harrison
Childhood Scenes
1. Under The Persimmon Tree

Owen Middleton
ASCAP

Pendulous

p *legatissimo*

mf

p *mf*

mp

mf *mp*

The musical score is written for piano in 3/4 time, featuring a single melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The piece is marked 'Pendulous' and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a 'legatissimo' instruction. The score is divided into five systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Dynamics vary throughout, including mezzo-forte (*mf*) and mezzo-piano (*mp*). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

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The image shows a page of piano sheet music, page 135, consisting of six systems of staves. Each system contains a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The dynamics are marked as follows: *f* (forte) in the first system, *p* (piano) in the second system, *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the third system, *p* (piano) in the fourth system, *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the fifth system, and *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo) in the sixth system. A *Rall.* (Ritardando) marking with a dashed line is placed between the fifth and sixth systems. The music features various note values, including quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and slurs. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the sixth system.

2. Cornfield Chase

Brisk!

The musical score for 'Cornfield Chase' is written in 4/4 time and consists of five systems of piano accompaniment. The first system begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), with a tempo marking of 'Brisk!'. The first two measures are marked *p* (piano), and the third measure is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The second system features a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic in the right hand and a *p* dynamic in the left hand. The third system has *mf* dynamics in both hands, with a *p* dynamic in the left hand at the end. The fourth system has *mf* dynamics in both hands, with a *p* dynamic in the left hand at the beginning. The fifth system has *mf* dynamics in both hands, with a *p* dynamic in the left hand at the beginning. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The image displays a musical score for piano, organized into six systems. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *f* (forte). The score includes several measures with *pp* markings, followed by *f* markings, and then *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte) markings. There are also markings for *fp* (forzando) and *pp* (pianissimo) in different sections. The notation includes slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins. The piece concludes with a final cadence marked with a double bar line and repeat dots.

3. The Diamond Desert

Poco Allegretto

The musical score for "The Diamond Desert" is presented in four systems, each consisting of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The piece is in 12/8 time and features a melodic line in the treble clef and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass clef. The first system begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a *legatiss.* marking. The second system shows dynamics of *mp* and *p*. The third system features *p*, *mp*, and *p* dynamics. The fourth system includes *mp*, *p*, and *mp* dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic hairpins.

First system of a piano score. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth notes, starting with a *p* dynamic and moving to *mf poco marcato*. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and moving bass lines.

Second system of a piano score. The right hand continues the melodic line. The left hand features a *8va* marking above the first measure. Dynamics include *mp* with crescendo and decrescendo hairpins.

Third system of a piano score. The right hand has a melodic line with some chromaticism. The left hand has a more active bass line. Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, and *mf* with hairpins.

Fourth system of a piano score. The right hand continues the melodic line. The left hand has a bass line with *piano* markings. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, and *f* with hairpins. The system concludes with the tempo marking *A Tempo*.

poco rit.

8va

mp

This system features a piano piece with a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with eighth notes and some accidentals. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and some moving lines. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present. A dashed line above the staff indicates an octave transposition (*8va*).

A Tempo

p

mp

mf

8va

This system continues the piano piece. The tempo is marked *A Tempo*. The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes. The bass staff has chords and some moving lines. Dynamic markings include *p*, *mp*, and *mf*. A dashed line above the staff indicates an octave transposition (*8va*).

mp

mf

p

8va

This system continues the piano piece. The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and some accidentals. The bass staff has chords and some moving lines. Dynamic markings include *mp*, *mf*, and *p*. A dashed line above the staff indicates an octave transposition (*8va*).

Rall.

pp

This system concludes the piano piece. The tempo is marked *Rall.*. The treble staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and some accidentals. The bass staff has chords and some moving lines. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present.

4. River Place

Moderato

P legato

Poco piu risoluto

mf

mp

The musical score for '4. River Place' is presented in five systems of grand staff notation. The first system is marked 'Moderato' and 'P legato'. The second system continues the piece. The third system is marked 'Poco piu risoluto' and 'mf'. The fourth system features a key signature change to one flat (B-flat major) and a time signature change to 3/4. The fifth system is marked 'mp' and continues in the new key and time signature. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

mf

Broader *Rit.*

p

Tempo 1

poco rubato e affrett.

Rit. *Slower*

p

Rall.

pp

5. Snipe Hunt

Presto

The musical score is written for piano in 2/4 time, marked *Presto*. It consists of five systems of music, each with a right-hand part (RH) and a left-hand part (LH). The RH part features a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the LH part provides a more rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics are indicated by *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into four measures per system. The first three systems show a steady increase in volume from *p* to *mf*. The fourth system shows a decrease in volume from *mf* back to *p*. The fifth system shows a final *mf* dynamic followed by a *p* dynamic. The piece concludes with a final chord in the LH part.

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff (treble clef) contains a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. The lower staff (bass clef) features a sparse accompaniment with chords and a few moving lines, including a half-note chord in the second measure.

The second system continues the piano accompaniment. The upper staff maintains the eighth-note pattern. The lower staff has chords and a few notes, with a half-note chord in the second measure.

The third system includes a first ending bracket in the upper staff, spanning the first two measures. The lower staff continues with chords and notes, including a half-note chord in the second measure.

The fourth system features a forte (*fp*) dynamic marking in the lower staff, starting in the third measure. The upper staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

The fifth system starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in the lower staff. It concludes with a crescendo (*Cresc.*) marking in the lower staff, indicated by a dashed line.

sempre cresc. -----

First system of a piano score. The right hand features a continuous eighth-note arpeggiated pattern. The left hand plays a series of chords, with a fermata over the first measure.

Second system of the piano score, continuing the arpeggiated right hand and chordal left hand.

f

Third system of the piano score. The right hand continues with arpeggios, and the left hand features a series of chords with accents. A fermata is present over the final chord.

p subito

Fourth system of the piano score. The right hand continues with arpeggios, and the left hand features a series of chords. A fermata is present over the first measure.

Rall. -----

Fifth system of the piano score. The right hand continues with arpeggios, and the left hand features a series of chords. A fermata is present over the first measure.

sempre rall.

molto *Sostenuto; Misterioso*

pp legatissimo

First system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music consists of several measures with chords and melodic lines, including accidentals like sharps and flats.

Second system of musical notation, starting with *Tempo I* and a piano *p* dynamic. It includes a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment.

Third system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with *cresc.* (crescendo) markings. The treble clef has a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the bass clef has a more sparse accompaniment.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with *sempre cresc.* (sempre crescendo) markings. The treble clef continues with eighth notes, and the bass clef has chords and some tremolos.

Fifth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with *sfz* (sforzando) markings. The treble clef has a long melodic line, and the bass clef has a rhythmic accompaniment.

To Catherine Ann Middleton
Katie's Collection
Nine Piano Solos

Owen Middleton
ASCAP

1. Melody

Flowing

The first system of musical notation for 'Melody' consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The upper staff features a melodic line with a slur over the first four measures. The lower staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Below the bass staff, there are four fermatas, each with the word 'smile' written underneath.

The second system of musical notation continues the piece. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures. The lower staff continues the eighth-note accompaniment. A mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic marking is placed above the upper staff in the third measure.

The third system of musical notation concludes the piece. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures. The lower staff continues the eighth-note accompaniment. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is placed above the upper staff in the first measure, and a piano-piano (*pp*) dynamic marking is placed below the lower staff in the final measure. Above the upper staff, the instruction 'poco rall.' is written.

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2. Ditty

2

The musical score for "2. Ditty" is presented in piano format across four systems. The first system is marked *Moderato* and *mf*. The second system includes dynamics *f* and *p*, and a *Rit.* marking. The third system is marked *A Tempo* and *mf*. The fourth system is marked *Rall.* and *p*. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. The right margin of the page features a vertical strip of black and white rectangular blocks.

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3. Holiday

Happy!
f legato

p subito *f*

Poco Rit. ----- *A Tempo* *Rall.* -----

mf *p*

A Tempo *Rall.* -----

f *mf* *p* *Slow*

The musical score consists of five systems of piano and vocal staves. The first system is marked 'Happy!' and 'f legato'. The second system begins with 'p subito' and 'f'. The third system contains no specific markings. The fourth system features tempo changes: 'Poco Rit.' leading to 'A Tempo' and then 'Rall.'. Dynamics include 'mf' and 'p'. The fifth system includes 'f', 'mf', and 'p' dynamics, and ends with the tempo marking 'Slow'. The piano accompaniment is primarily eighth-note patterns, while the vocal line features melodic phrases with slurs and ties.

4. Sad Song

4

The musical score for "Sad Song" is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piece is in a minor key and 3/4 time. The first system is marked "Slow" and "p legato espr.". The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system features a dynamic shift from "mf" to "p" and includes a measure with a whole rest in the treble clef. The fourth system concludes the piece with a final cadence. The right edge of the page shows a vertical strip of black and white rectangular marks, likely from a scanner or binder.

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5. Gypsy Dance

The musical score for "5. Gypsy Dance" is presented in five systems, each with a piano (right) and bass (left) staff. The piece begins with a tempo marking of *Fast!*. The piano part features a melodic line with accents and slurs, while the bass part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth-note patterns. Dynamics include *ff* (fortissimo), *p subito* (piano subito), and *f* (forte). The score includes various time signatures such as 3/4, 2/4, and 3/8. The piece concludes with a final cadence in 3/4 time.

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with several accents (>) and a dynamic marking of *p subito*. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with accents (>) and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The music is in 3/4 time and features a mix of eighth and quarter notes.

6. Trapeze

Waltz Tempo

The second system of the musical score consists of three staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a *simile* marking. The middle staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with a dynamic marking of *poco f*. The music is in 3/4 time and features a mix of eighth and quarter notes.

7

The image shows a page of musical notation for piano, consisting of five systems of two staves each. The notation is in a common time signature. The first system begins with a treble clef and a bass clef. The first measure of the treble staff has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second measure of the treble staff has a dynamic marking of *mf*. The third system has a dynamic marking of *ppco f* in the bass staff. The notation includes various note values, rests, and accidentals.

First system of musical notation, consisting of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The upper staff contains a melody of quarter notes, and the lower staff contains a bass line with chords and eighth notes.

Second system of musical notation, consisting of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The upper staff contains a melody of quarter notes. The lower staff contains a bass line with chords. The word *mf* is written above the first measure of the bass line, and the word *simile* is written above the second measure of the bass line.

Third system of musical notation, consisting of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The upper staff contains a melody of quarter notes. The lower staff contains a bass line with chords.

Fourth system of musical notation, consisting of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The upper staff contains a melody of quarter notes, ending with a double bar line. The lower staff contains a bass line with chords, ending with a double bar line.



7. Reverie

Andante

p

rit.

simile sempre

f

p

cresc.

sempre cresc.

The musical score for '7. Reverie' is written for piano in a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a tempo marking of 'Andante'. The first system features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The second system continues with a *rit.* marking and the instruction *simile sempre*. The third system shows a change in tempo and meter, with markings for 3/4, 4/4, and 5/4. The fourth system includes dynamic markings for *f* (forte) and *p* (piano), along with a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking. The fifth system concludes with a *sempre cresc.* (sempre crescendo) marking. The score is presented in a grand staff format with treble and bass clefs.

f *f*

mp *p*

mf

f *p* *mp*

p

poco rit. *A Tempo* *Rall.*

mp *p* *pp*

8. Frolic

Playful

The musical score for '8. Frolic' is written in 3/4 time and consists of five systems of piano accompaniment. Each system contains a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a bass line with triplet eighth notes and a treble line with chords. The second system is marked mezzo-piano (*mp*) and continues the triplet bass line. The third system returns to piano (*p*) and includes a crescendo hairpin. The fourth system is marked mezzo-piano (*mp*) and features a decrescendo hairpin. The fifth system is marked forte (*f*) and concludes with a final triplet eighth note in the bass line.

First system of musical notation, featuring a treble and bass clef. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over the notes) and slurs connecting groups of notes.

Second system of musical notation, including dynamic markings *mp* and *cresc..*. The notation shows a progression of chords and moving lines in both staves, with triplet markings in the bass line.

Third system of musical notation, featuring a dynamic marking *f*. The music continues with complex rhythmic patterns and slurs, primarily in the bass line.

Fourth system of musical notation, including a dynamic marking *p*. The notation shows a mix of chords and moving lines, with triplet markings in the bass line.

Fifth system of musical notation, including dynamic markings *f* and *pp*. The system concludes with a double bar line and a final chord in the treble clef.

9. Etude

Allegro

p *mf*

p

poco f

p *cresc.*

f *dim.*

D.S. *Fine*

e rall.

For Dr. Jerry Alan Bush

1

Toccata

Owen Middleton

Lento

Piano

p *mf* *p*

starting-slow-accel.-----

pp *ppp* *mf* *ff*

11

A tempo ad lib. *accel.* -----

11

Allegro Molto-- Rall.----- *Allegro molto--- Rall.-----*

f *p* *f* *p*

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Allegro Molto

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The tempo is marked *Allegro Molto*. The first system begins with a treble staff marked *p* and a bass staff marked *f*. The second system features a treble staff marked *f* and a bass staff marked *f*. The third system has a treble staff marked *f* and a bass staff marked *f*. The fourth system has a treble staff marked *f* and a bass staff marked *f*. The fifth system has a treble staff marked *p* and a bass staff marked *f*. The score includes various time signatures: 5/4, 4/4, 2/4, and 4/4. There are also dynamic markings *p* and *f*, and articulation marks such as accents.

First system of musical notation. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble staff begins with a 5/4 time signature and contains several chords and a melodic line. The bass staff begins with a 5/4 time signature and contains a bass line. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present in the first measure of the treble staff.

Second system of musical notation. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble staff begins with a 3/8 time signature and contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff begins with a 3/8 time signature and contains a bass line. There are dynamic markings of *f* in both staves.

Third system of musical notation. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble staff begins with a 2/4 time signature and contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff begins with a 2/4 time signature and contains a bass line. There are dynamic markings of *f* in both staves.

Fourth system of musical notation. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble staff begins with a 4/4 time signature and contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff begins with a 4/4 time signature and contains a bass line. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present in the second measure of the treble staff.

Fifth system of musical notation. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble staff begins with a 4/4 time signature and contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff begins with a 4/4 time signature and contains a bass line.

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system shows a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a bass clef with a key signature of two flats. The second system continues with similar notation, including a *cresc.* marking. The third system features a change in time signature to 2/4 and includes a *p* marking. The fourth system has a *f* marking and shows a change in time signature to 3/4. The fifth system concludes with a *p* marking and a final 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings throughout.

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a bass line. A *cresc.* marking is present in the bass staff. The second system continues the melodic and bass lines. The third system includes a *p* dynamic marking and shows a change in time signature from 4/4 to 3/4. The fourth system features a *f* dynamic marking in the treble staff and a *p* marking in the bass staff, with a time signature change from 3/4 to 4/4. The fifth system has a *f* dynamic in the treble and a *mf* dynamic in the bass, with a time signature change from 4/4 to 3/4.

The musical score consists of five systems of piano music. The first system features a 3/4 time signature and a 4/4 time signature, with a dynamic marking of *f*. The second system includes dynamic markings of *pp subito* and *mf*. The third system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The fourth system features a 2/4 time signature and a dynamic marking of *f*. The fifth system includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*, and concludes with a 4/4 time signature. The score is written for piano with treble and bass clefs.

Musical notation for the first system, featuring a treble and bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. It includes a 9-measure slur and various accidentals.

Musical notation for the second system, including a piano reduction with a 9-measure slur, a 10-measure slur, and a "Rall." marking.

----- *molto* *Lento Assai*
Musical notation for the third system, starting with "molto Lento Assai" and "p" dynamics, transitioning to "f agitato".

semplice
Musical notation for the fourth system, including "semplice" and "pp" dynamics, and a 7-measure slur.

First system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music is in 4/4 time and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment.

Second system of musical notation, continuing the grand staff. It includes dynamic markings *pp*, *p*, and *ff*. A hairpin crescendo is shown. Above the staff, the instruction "accel. -----molto" is written. The system concludes with a fermata over a chord.

Third system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. It includes dynamic markings *pp* and *f*. Above the staff, the instruction "Starting slow --accel. -----" is written, followed by a fermata and the marking "Tempo 1". The music transitions from a slower tempo to a more regular one.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. It includes the dynamic marking *p*. Above the staff, the instruction "Un Poco Méno Mosso" is written. The system shows a change in tempo and includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic marking.

Fifth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff. It includes the dynamic marking *mf*. The system shows a change in tempo and includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic marking. The music concludes with a final chord.

First system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music is in 4/4 time and includes various chords and melodic lines.

Second system of musical notation, continuing the piece with complex chordal textures and melodic passages in both hands.

Third system of musical notation, showing further development of the musical themes with intricate harmonic structures.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a mix of rhythmic patterns and chordal accompaniment.

Fifth system of musical notation, concluding the page with a *Rall.* section followed by an *A Tempo* section. The *Rall.* section includes a fermata and a 7-measure rest in the treble clef. The *A Tempo* section features a dense, fast-moving chordal texture.

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system has two staves with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The second system has two staves with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The third system has two staves with a bass clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The fourth system has two staves with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The fifth system has two staves with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *pp*. The time signature changes throughout the piece, including 4/4, 3/4, 5/4, and 2/4.

System 1: Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. Key signature: two flats (B-flat, E-flat). The piece begins with a series of chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand. The time signature changes to 4/4 in the second measure.

System 2: Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *p* and *mf*.

System 3: Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand has a complex accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *p*.

System 4: Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents. The left hand has a complex accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. Dynamic markings include *p* and *mf*.

System 5: Treble and bass staves. Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents. The left hand has a complex accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. Dynamic markings include *p*, *mf*, and *f*.

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. Dynamics include *f* and *pp subito*. The second system continues the melodic and bass lines. The third system shows a *cres.* marking. The fourth system is marked *sempre cresc.*. The fifth system includes a *f* dynamic and ends with a 3/4 time signature.

First system of musical notation. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of chords with accents (>) and rests.

Second system of musical notation. The right hand features a continuous sixteenth-note pattern. The left hand provides a bass line with eighth notes and rests.

Third system of musical notation. The right hand plays chords with a sixteenth-note accompaniment. The left hand plays chords with a bass line. A fermata is placed over the first two measures of the left hand.

Fourth system of musical notation. The right hand continues with a melodic line. The left hand features a bass line with a fermata and a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic marking. A slur connects two *ff* markings in the left hand.

Poco Allegro e poco a poco accel. -----

p *mf*

f

Sempre accel. -----

Prestissimo

The first system of music is written on a grand staff with a treble clef. It begins with a series of chords and triplets, marked with accents and the number '3'. The tempo is indicated as *Prestissimo* above the staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals.

ff

The second system of music is written on a grand staff with a treble clef. It begins with a series of chords and triplets, marked with accents and the number '3'. The dynamic is indicated as *ff* (fortissimo) below the staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals.

APPENDIX C

NEWSPAPER REVIEW OF JERRY BUSH'S

1994 RECITAL AT AUBURN UNIVERSITY – MONTGOMERY

Promenade season ends on a high note

By Randy Foster

May 15, Jerry Alan Bush, *Promenade Concerts, Auburn University at Montgomery.*

Simply put, Jerry Alan Bush's Promenade Concert represented a spectacularly chosen repertoire and boasted equally spectacular performances of some devilishly difficult pieces.

Dr. Bush, a professor of music at the University of South Alabama who has received numerous honors as have his students, is a frequent adjudicator and master clinician, and was designated a Mobil-Citiburn Ambassador to the 1993 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

Sunday's concert, the last in the Promenade season, included music by Johann Sebastian Bach, Frederic Chopin, Claude Debussy and Franz Liszt. It also included the Alabama premiere of "Childhood Scenes" by Owen Middleton, who is on the faculty of USA.

Two short dance-inspired pieces opened the concert. Bach's "Saratoga" from the "The English Suite in G minor, BWV 808" was clean and precise, possessed elegant ornamentation, and had a deep spirituality about it.

Chopin, exiled in Paris, longed for his native land. One of the ways he expressed this longing was through the writing of polonaises. Dr. Bush captured the shifting moods of the "Polonaise in C minor, Op. 40, no. 2" with care and the work of his left-hand in melodic passages was beautiful. Dr. Bush was impressive in his ability to capture stylistic subtleties and distinguish among

REVIEW

Impressionistic music seems to deal in a world of mist and shade. In two books of preludes, Debussy explored the piano's ability to paint these sound pictures. Dr. Bush chose five pieces, three from Book I and two from Book II, that allowed him to display his acute musicianship, his impressive technical acumen, and his strong communicative skills. He also gave commentary from the keyboard prior to each of these pieces.

Especially delightful from the Debussy set were the Flamenco guitar figures in "The Interrupted Serenade," the ethereal ruminations of "Fogs" in which Dr. Bush's hands seemed to whisper over the keys, and the concise characterizations of every aspect of the story in "Ondine," where the gleaming sunlight on water was palpable. Finally, in "Fireworks," the extreme technical demands on the performer were amply met in Dr. Bush's accurate, festive reading.

The concert ended with two war horses by Liszt. Dr. Bush paid loving attention to the contours of "Sonetto 104 di Petrarca." The rapid changes from subtitle to overwrought seem to mirror the way in which one responds to a beloved. The patriotic, virtuosic "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15" was played with obvious relish. Based on the Hungarian national song, this piece must grow from a tempo not so slow that the contrasts are obscured, but not so fast that the technical demands become blurred. Dr. Bush chose an appropriate tempo and was dazzling in his presentation of the

The centerpiece of the concert was the Alabama premiere of Owen Middleton's "Childhood Scenes." This reviewer always takes pleasure in hearing new music. Rarely, however, does one hear a new piece that is as well-crafted and instantly likable as Mr. Middleton's.

The composer draws together five memories from his childhood in South Alabama to create this suite. The moods range from the nostalgic and tender to the impish.

"Under the Persimmon Tree" suggests that personal, private place of childhood refuge and has a slightly ascerbic, unsettled quality. Figures that suggest boys' jumping running and (often) falling down highlight "Cornfield Frolic." Impressionistic touches are the hallmark of "Diamond Desert." Especially lovely are the octaves that seem to gleam above the balance of the texture.

"River Place" is a touching evocation of a place of comfort, ease, and no pretense. From the chorale-like opening, the piece

proceeds to an emotional openness that is profoundly touching. Sentimental, nostalgic, and moving, the piece possesses lovely harmonies that, at times, suggest the loveliest moments of Ned Rorem compositions. The finale, "Snipe Hunt," has a propulsive first section that contrasts with a short Gershwin-esque middle section. There is a recapitulation and a "Boo" at the end that is as distinct to the listener as the last time you observed that kind of prank (or played it yourself).

Performer and composer are both well-served by this composition. Mr. Middleton knows how to write for the piano. Dr. Bush respects, and seems to love, the work of his colleague. What more could each want? Happily, Sunday's concertgoers were the beneficiaries of this pairing.

Mr. Foster is on the music faculty of Carver Creative and Performing Arts Center and is organist at St. James Methodist Church.

APPENDIX D

JERRY BUSH'S 2005 FACULTY RECITAL PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

FACULTY BENEFIT RECITAL
FOR THE USA MUSICAL ARTS SOCIETY

PIANO MUSIC OF
OWEN MIDDLETON

JERRY ALAN BUSH, Pianist

with commentary by the composer

Childhood Scenes (1966)

Under the Persimmon Tree

Cornfield Chase

The Diamond Desert

River Place

Snipe Hunt

***Decoration Day (1999)**

Remembering

Seeking

Biding

Marching

Reveling-Reconciling

INTERMISSION

***Tocatta: Millennium Crossing (2000)**

***Cradle Rock (2005)—first performance**

Sonatina (1997)

II. Andante cantabile

***Ondine (2002)**

***Toccata (1993)**

*composed for and dedicated to Dr. Bush

RECITAL HALL
LAIDLAW PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
Sunday, December 4, 2005
3:00 P.M.

APPENDIX E
PERMISSION TO USE MUSICAL SCORES

Owen Middleton

Composer (ASCAP)
Author
Teacher
Classical Guitarist

October 1, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to declare that Mr. Barton Moreau, a doctoral candidate at Arizona State University has permission to use, perform and /or copy selections of my unpublished music for purposes pertaining to the completion of his doctoral dissertation and for promotion of the commercial compact disk recording accompanying said dissertation.

For any further clarification, you may contact me at the address and/or phone listed below.

Sincerely,



Owen Middleton
60 Westfield Way
Candler, NC 28715

828-633-0477, residence
251-6043516, cell

APPENDIX F
IRB EXEMPTION

To: Robert Spring
MUSIC

fk **From:** Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 03/10/2010

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 03/10/2010

IRB Protocol #: 1003004921

Study Title: A Study and Recording of Solo Piano Music by Owen Middleton

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.