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Exploring the Eclectic Piano Works of Mathew Fuerst

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EXPLORING THE ECLECTIC PIANO WORKS OF MATHEW FUERST

by

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EXPLORING THE ECLECTIC PIANO WORKS OF MATHEW FUERST

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The purpose of this dissertation is to introduce its readers to contemporary classical composer Mathew Fuerst through an analysis of his five piano works: Three Etudes for Piano (1999), *The Drift of Things* (2009), *Nocturne (Walking Along the Danube at Night in Budapest)* for two pianos (2013). This resource provides Fuerst's biography, his compositional style and briefly explores György Ligeti, one of the great influences on Fuerst's compositional style. Each of his piano pieces is discussed in terms of genre, expressive issues and techniques, form, harmony, melody, rhythm, and texture.

This study is a resource for pianists who consider analyzing or performing Fuerst's piano works.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The piano has been an important compositional medium for centuries, spanning stylistic eras, cultures, continents, and genres. Current composers around the world still turn to the piano as a vehicle for their musical ideas. Contemporary piano works encompass a broad variety of structures and characteristics. Composers distinguish their repertoire in terms of genre, technique, form, harmony, melody, rhythm, and texture. The diversity of compositional styles in contemporary piano music makes it difficult to organize pieces into strict categories.

In addition to the variety of piano music available to artists, the setting of music has expanded beyond the salon and concert hall to include a number of virtual platforms and streaming services. Modern pianists are fortunate to have access to many choices that will impact their performances. However, while established repertoire has been thoroughly studied for the benefit of a performer's pedagogy, technique, and interpretation, much of the contemporary literature has not yet been examined in detail due to recency and quantity.

Mathew Fuerst is an active classical composer and pianist living in the United States. He has written a variety of instrumental works, including string quartets, violin sonatas, and orchestral music. His Violin Sonata No. 3 is gaining popularity due to frequent international performances by Canadian violinist Jasper Wood and pianist David Riley. In addition to those great instrumental works, Fuerst has composed pieces for piano: Three Etudes for Piano (1999), *The Drift of Things* (2009), and *Nocturne (Walking Along the Danube at Night in Budapest)* for two pianos (2013). The titles of these five piano works evoke the traditional classical genres etude and nocturne. Also, *The Drift of Things* is reminiscent of program music that grew in popularity during the Romantic period in the nineteenth century.

Although Fuerst borrowed structural elements from existing forms, he created a distinctive musical style in terms of technique, form, harmony, melody, rhythm, and texture. The progression of his compositional approach is evinced by the differences between these five pieces, which span three separate decades, with ten- and four-year gaps between.

The purpose of this document is to introduce readers to contemporary classical composer Mathew Fuerst through an analysis of his five piano works. This document will acquaint a new audience of pianists with the fascinating literature of Mathew Fuerst, and the analysis will help them to interpret the composer's unique musical indications and extended piano techniques. Because this is the first document to study Fuerst's piano works, the author's interview with the composer is a valuable resource. A complete list of compositions can be found in Appendix.

CHAPTER 2: Mathew Fuerst

Biography

Mathew Fuerst was born on July 25, 1977 in Covina, California.[1] His family moved from California to St. Charles, Illinois in 1983 when Fuerst was six years old. His mother enjoyed piano lessons as a child, so she bought a piano after the move, resolving to take lessons again. Fuerst recounts his youthful interest in the piano, experimenting with the sounds of the keys, and asking his mother for lessons. She was reluctant to agree, knowing the arguments over practice that would follow, but relented after six months of endless requests. At age seven, Fuerst began taking piano lessons with Larry Dieffenbach until he enrolled at Interlochen Arts Academy in 1992.[2] His eagerness to compose followed shortly.

In the program notes of his Violin Sonata No. 3, Fuerst wrote that Beethoven's third symphony made him decide to become a composer:

> "When I was nine or ten years old, I was introduced to the music of Beethoven, playing a simplified version of his Ode to Joy theme on the piano. I remember liking this piece very much, and I saved up my allowance money to buy a record I thought was the Beethoven symphony containing the theme. I ended up unknowingly buying the wrong symphony and the record I bought was a recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 (*Eroica*). After listening to the record I decided that I wanted to be a composer."[3]

At the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, he began composition lessons at the age of fifteen. During the school year, his Concertino for Piano and Chamber

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[1]Yuri Bortz, "Selective American Perspectives on Issues of Twenty-First-Century Musical Progress." (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2005), 9.

[2]Mathew Fuerst, email message to author, August 27, 2019.

[3]Fuerst, Violin Sonata No. 3*,* program notes, 2011.

Orchestra was commissioned by the Interlochen Arts Academy, and premiered by Fuerst on National Public Radio broadcasting in 1993.[4]

Fuerst received his bachelor's degree in composition from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York in 1999.[5] While attending the school, he studied composition with many teachers including Christopher Rouse, David Liptak, Joseph Schwantner, Sydney Hodkinson, and Augusta Read Thomas, and piano with Alan Feinberg.[6] Years later, on March 1, 2016, Feinberg performed Fuerst's Violin Sonata No. 3 with his daughter, Maeve Feinberg, at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts.[7] After he graduated from the Eastman School of Music, Fuerst wrote and performed his first solo piano work, Three Etudes For Piano, as a student at the La Schola Cantorum summer festival in Paris, where he studied with composer Samuel Adler in 1999.[8]

In August 1999, Fuerst moved to New York City to earn a Master of Music degree and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Composition from the Juilliard School, where he worked with Robert Beaser and John Corigliano.[9] At Juilliard, he received two successive Palmer-Dixon Prizes for best composition.[10] During the pursuit of his doctoral degree, he also merited the Morton Gould Young Composers Award from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) Foundation,

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[4] "Whitaker New Music Readings" American Composers Orchestra, accessed Aug 5, 2019, https://www.americancomposers.org/rel20030407.htm.

[5] "Bio", Mathew Fuerst official website, accessed August 5, 2019, https://mathewfuerst.com/bio/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Selected Performances", Mathew Fuerst official website, accessed August 5, 2019, https://mathewfuerst.com/performances/.

[8] "Bio."

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

and was selected as a finalist in the Whitaker Competition presented by the American Composers Orchestra in 2003.[11]

After achieving his doctoral degree in 2006, Fuerst elected to spend approximately two years in New York City teaching piano and composing as a freelance musician.[12] Beginning in 2008, Fuerst taught at Hillsdale College in Michigan for eight years. During his tenure, he received third prize at the 2nd International Antonin Dvorak Composition Competition in Prague, Czech Republic in 2011.[13] He is currently an Associate Professor of Music at Doane University in Crete, Nebraska, where he has worked since 2016.

Compositional Style

From a young age, Fuerst was rigorously trained as a classical pianist. He was seven years old when he started piano lessons, and fifteen when he began studying composition. He was highly interested in classical music, stating that he listened exclusively to classical music until he was eighteen years old, and that the first pop album he bought was by R.E.M.[14] His solid musical foundation and passion for classical music from a young age inspired him to compose a variety of pieces using classical forms, including three violin sonatas, two string quartets, a symphony for full orchestra, and the five tremendous aforementioned piano works.

With the exception of his piano etudes, most of Fuerst's works were commissioned by renowned musicians, including friends with whom he attended Eastman and Juilliard. His three violin sonatas and a short showpiece, Diabolical

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[11]Fuerst, Curriculum Vitae.

[12]Fuerst, email message to author, August 27, 2019.

[13]Fuerst, Curriculum Vitae.

[14]Yuri Bortz, "Selective American Perspectives on Issues of Twenty-First-Century Musical Progress." (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2005), 18.

Dances for violin and piano, were commissioned by Jasper Wood and David Riley. These artists have forged a significant friendship with Fuerst, about which he recalled:

> "David Riley and I were at the Eastman School of Music at the same time, though we didn't really meet until my senior year. He was finishing up his doctorate at the time, and we were introduced to each other by Kevin Puts. After I moved to New York, one night I was hungry and went for a slice of pizza at a place called Big Nick's that was a short walk from the Juilliard dorms, and there was Dave! We started talking a bit and it turned out he had moved to NYC at the same time I did. We started hanging out, and over time he heard my music. He liked it and mentioned that he worked a lot with a Canadian violinist named Jasper Wood (who he met while they were student at the Cleveland Institute of Music). He spoke to Jasper about me and my music, and they commissioned me to write a work."[15]

After getting to know Fuerst and immersing themselves in his music, Riley and Wood asked him to write a piece for them. The Violin Sonata-Fantasie No. 1 became Fuerst's first "professional commission."[16]

Other musicians who have commissioned works by Fuerst are previous members of the Chiara String Quartet. They studied at the Juilliard school with Fuerst and began collaborating when they reunited in Nebraska. Fuerst's wife received an offer from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln when he was teaching at the Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. At that time, the Chiara String Quartet were the artists-in-residence at the University of Nebraska, and Fuerst reunited with the quartet in 2016 following his family's move to Lincoln. He wrote two solo violin pieces for Rebecca Fischer: *alphabet overdrive* in 2018, and apple silence in 2019. Hyeyung Yoon and Gregory Beaver commissioned Trio for violin, cello, and piano and Sonata for violin and cello in 2020.

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[15]Fuerst, email message to author, August 27, 2019.

[16]Fuerst, *Mathew Fuerst: Works for Violin & Piano,* 2015, Albany Records, compact disc liner notes, 1.

Regarding his compositional style, Fuerst considered it difficult to describe because it has evolved over the years. However, he also stated that "there are some traits that are consistent"[17] throughout his works:

> "A lot of my music are chaconnes or some variant of a chaconne in which the progression is expressed both on the small scale (harmony to harmony) and large scale (the tonal center of each section over the length of the work ends up matching the root of the chaconne progression). The Nocturne is a good example of this."[18]

The chaconne is a Baroque musical form comprised of a continuous variation, usually in triple meter, having a repeated bass line or harmonic progression. One of most renowned chaconnes is found in J. S. Bach's Violin Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004. The theme is eight measures long, written in triple meter. The chaconne form was frequently employed in the Classical period as well as in the Baroque period. A good example of a piano chaconne is Beethoven's 32 Variations in C Minor for piano, WoO 80.[19] This piece embraces the traditional chaconne style with a harmonic progression (i-V-V/iv-IV-Ger+6-i-V-i) and triple meter.

Fuerst's chaconne writing style varies slightly from traditional chaconne writing style. The sequences or themes he constructs are usually longer than the standard eight measures. For example, the second movement of his Violin Sonata No. 3 is presented in chaconne style with a sixteen-measure theme. The second movement of his Trio for Vibraphone, Cello, and Piano (2017) has also a fourteen-measure theme.

Rather than adhering to the norm of writing chaconnes in triple meter, Fuerst uses a vast array of meters in his works. Simple meters, compound meters, and even

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[17]Fuerst, email message to author, August 27, 2019

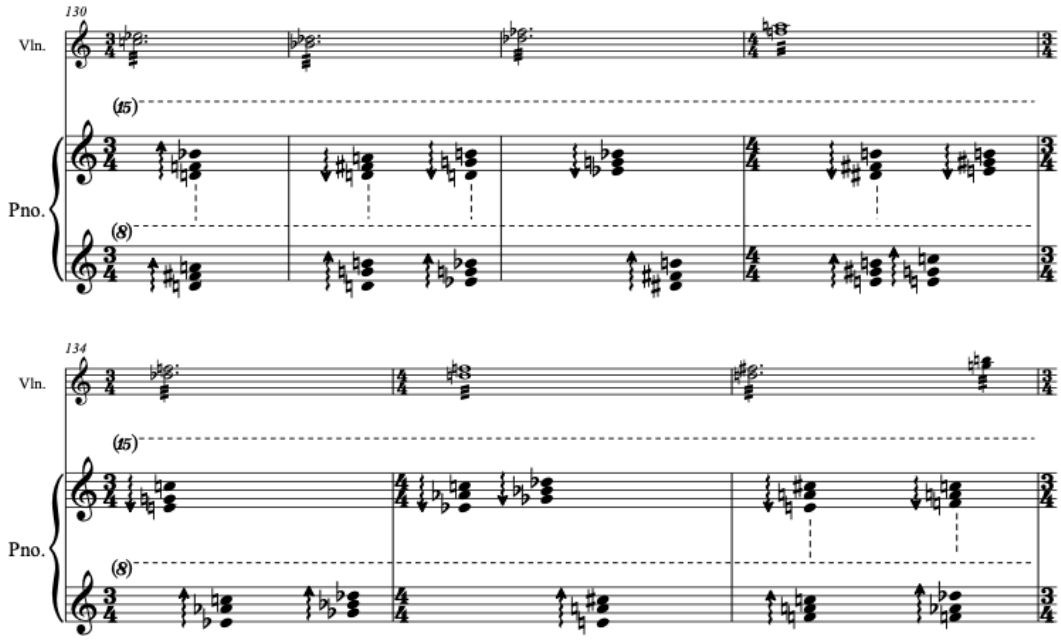
[18]Ibid.

[19]Maurice Hinson, "Chaconne," in *The Pianist's Dictionary,* (Bloomington, Indiana University, 2004, 27.

asymmetric meters such as 7/16, 13/16, or 17/16 can be found in Fuerst's chaconnes. The composer frequently changes meters throughout his pieces, a tendency that first appeared in a very early piece, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors*. Occasionally, Fuerst omits a time signature in his works. For instance, neither his second piano etude, *Chaconne*, nor the first movement of String Quartet No. 2 have time signatures at the beginning.

Concerning the harmonic language of his repertoire, the composer mentioned, "my music is generally harmonically and rhythmically driven which gives it its energy. Recently (since the Violin Sonata No. 3) it has been very triadic without using traditional harmonic progressions one learns in theory class."[20]

The triads indicated above are primarily major chords in root or inversion position.



Example 2.1: Fuerst, Violin Sonata No. 3, mm. 130-136. Nonfunctional harmonies.

This reliance on nonfunctional harmonic structures appears throughout the composer's oeuvre. Although Fuerst acknowledged that his triadic writing has developed since his Violin Sonata No. 3 in 2011, outlines of triads such as a major

[20]Fuerst, email message to author, August 27, 2019.

third or a perfect fifth without third can be found even in his early works. For example, perfect fifths appear intermittently in a piano part in his Clarinet Quartet from 2004. Moreover, his first piano piece, Etude No. 1, *Colors,* written in 1999, has perfect fifth motions in the left hand throughout the piece. The musical elements of this etude will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The triads employed by Fuerst follow specific sequences not based on traditional harmonic progression. In the functional harmony of Western music, each chord serves a purpose within a specific key, such as tonic, subdominant, or dominant. Fuerst eschews typical harmonic progressions by omitting key signatures and using accidentals to create triads that do not conform to a key. As a result, these triads do not have traditional harmonic functions, but instead comprise unified sequences throughout his works. These repeated sequences of triads naturally form the foundations of chaconnes.

As mentioned above, Fuerst utilizes complex meters and rhythms to shape his compositions. In addition to uncommon asymmetric meters, he distinguishes his rhythmic style through polyrhythms.[21] These polyrhythms manifest in a variety of ways, such as two against three beats, or nine against fifteen beats. Syncopations and hemiola are commonly used in his works. The ambiguity wrought by the instability of these complicated rhythmic settings and changing meters brings tension to the audience.

Most of Fuerst's works are under ten minutes long, but these short pieces are intense and impactful. He freely uses extreme dynamics spanning *ppppp* to *fffff*, and a wide register of the piano, from A0 to C8 for his solo piano works. In addition to the expansive dynamics and register, Fuerst crafts musical tension through dissonance.

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[21]Fuerst, *Totentanz,* program notes, 2018.

The composer employs various piano techniques to this effect, including tone clusters, string tremolo, and glissandi, the latter of which is sometimes notated in ranges rather than pitches.

To clarify his unordinary technical expectations, Fuerst provides detailed instructions that help performers understand his intentions. The instructions in his piano works elucidate notations, pedaling, dynamics, and tempo. Occasionally, he lists several options from which performers can choose, in order to contribute their own thoughts and interpretations, making each performance different. In ensemble and orchestral works, the instructions outline how to coordinate timing among the performers, as well as dynamics and tempo.

Fuerst's compositions have been inspired by diverse factors such as personal experiences, arts, and other composers. Some works reflect his feelings about his beloved family. His *Nocturne* for two pianos was inspired by the scenery of the Danube River in Budapest, where he honeymooned with his wife.[22] In the same vein, he expressed his excitement after his twin daughters' birth in Trio for Vibraphone, Cello, and Piano in 2017.[23] As for influence from other arts, the title of his solo piano piece *The Drift of Things* came from a passage from Robert Frost's poem *Reluctance*, and the raw, impromptu musical characters evoke Miles Davis' album *Bitches Brew* and Jackson Pollack's paintings.[24] Fuerst acknowledges two types of influence from other musicians, "first with those who I have worked with or know, and then who I do not know but whose music has inspired me or at least music I greatly admire."[25] This assessment of personal and professional musical influences is a microcosm of the

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[22]Fuerst, *Nocturne,* program notes. 2013.
[23]Fuerst, *Trio for Vibraphone, Cello, and Piano,* program notes. 2017.
[24]Fuerst, *The Drift of the Things,* program notes. 2009.
[25]Fuerst, email massage to author, August 27, 2019.

composer's overall inspirations: some are very personal, meaningful to a select few people, while others are intended to be understood by a wider audience.

Fuerst was fortunate to meet a number of great composers during his student years at Eastman. Students who study composition rotated from one teacher to another every year or even every semester so that all students "were exposed to a wide range of musical aesthetics and techniques."[26] As a result, he studied with five professors at Eastman including David Liptak, Christopher Rouse, Joseph Schwantner, Sydney Hodkinson, and Augusta Read Thomas. At Juilliard, he studied with Robert Beaser for four years, and John Corigliano for one year. Fuerst stressed that "Beaser had some of the most profound influence on me as a composer. He really helped me understand how to develop ideas and motives."[27] Corigliano's teachings also made a powerful impact, Fuerst reflected, "Corigliano's approach to form along with some of the conversations we had about music changed my music completely from the time I studied with him to today."[28] He still remembers the conversation with Corigliano that transformed his relationship with form. Corigliano asked Fuerst, "Matt, you are a twenty-first century composer. What does writing a fugue mean in the twenty-first century versus the twentieth or nineteenth or eighteenth?" This question forced Fuerst to consider the reasons he might choose a particular formal structure, given his understanding of the historical context and norms associated with each structure, as well as its potential for evolution.

Among the impactful composers with whom Fuerst never studied, first and foremost was Beethoven, whose works initially kindled his desire to be a composer. Additionally, Fuerst was influenced by favorite composers Olivier Messiaen and

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[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid.

Johannes Brahms. Other composers who have guided his works include Karlheinz Stockhausen, Boulez, Krzysztof Penderecki, Ravel, Conlon Nancarrow, Thomas Adés, and György Ligeti. According to Fuerst, Ligeti has had one of the greatest effects on both his piano writing and his work in general.

> "Ligeti has been, and remains, a huge influence on me. My senior year at Eastman I performed the first three movements of his Piano Concerto with the new music group Ossia which became Alarm Will Sound after they graduated, and that experience greatly informed my approach to both composition and my approach for writing on the piano. I think my use of meters and rhythmic patterns show that influence. The most obvious influence of Ligeti in my work can be found in the third etude: *Omaggio a Ligeti*."[29]

György Ligeti

As previously mentioned, the majority of music written by Fuerst was influenced by Ligeti. Briefly exploring the life and musical style of Ligeti will help to understand how the music of Fuerst evolved over time while using Ligeti's musical elements.

Ligeti is one of most important avant-garde composers of the twentieth century. Ligeti was born in Diciosânmartin (now Târnăveni) in Romania in 1923, and shortly thereafter, his family moved to Kolozaxvár (now Cluj-Napoca). He started studying music with Ferenc Farkas at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in at the age of eighteen. In 1944, he served for a year in the labor corps before resuming musical studies at the academy in Budapest in 1945. After graduating, he began to teach harmony and counterpoint from 1950 onward.[30]

Due to the political circumstances dividing Eastern and Western Europe, Ligeti was only encouraged to write music in a folk style. As a result, he penned

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[29]Ibid.

[30]Paul Griffiths, "Ligeti, György (Sándor)," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2021, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.unl.edu/search?q=ligeti&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true.

many choral folk songs for public consumption, as well as unexpected pieces such as *Musica ricercata* (1951-3), a set of eleven piano pieces. The first piece used only two pitch classes, the second comprised three pitch classes, and as a result of this cumulative structure, the last piece made use of all twelve pitch classes.[31]

Beginning in 1955, the government began to loosen its restrictions, and the Western and East European states opened up to each other. This politically relaxed climate opened the door for cultural exchange, and Ligeti was able to experience unfamiliar Western music such as the Second Viennese School. Around that time, his interest was captured by the twelve-tone technique and electronic music of Anton Webern and Pierre Boulez.[32] However, the government in Hungary shortly became unstable, which affected artists. Painters were not able to exhibit their works and writers were not able to publish in a climate of dangerous unrest and artistic suppression. Due to the poor circumstance for artists, Ligeti decided to flee from Hungary to Vienna, where he could compose without any interference by the government.[33]

Shortly thereafter, Ligeti traveled to Cologne, Germany, and met Karlheinz Stockhausen, who helped him find work as a composer. Feeling the inspiration of Stockhausen and Boulez, Ligeti started writing electronic music. He also wrote two orchestral works, *Apparitions* (1959) and *Atmosphêres* (1961), which established his reputation.[34] In particular, *Atmosphêres* showcased Ligeti's new compositional technique, which he called "micropolyphony." Each instrument performed a melodic line in canon so that audiences heard the homogeneity of the whole; in other words,

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Richard Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination,* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003, 66.

[33]Ibid, 69.

[34]Griffiths.

they heard a mass of sound instead of single musical lines.[35] Later, *Atmosphêres* was featured in Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968).

A few years later, Ligeti crafted an orchestra piece, *Clocks and Clouds* (1973), the title of which is derived from the title of an essay by Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper (1902-94). In this essay, "Of Clouds and Clocks: An Approach to the Problem of Rationality and the Freedom of Man," Popper argued that "determinism and indeterminism are reconcilable" in nature.[36] Ligeti portrayed these two doctrines as precise rhythmic patterns and disorganized sound.

In his late period, Ligeti became fascinated by complex rhythm. African polyrhythm, the irregular rhythms of Eastern Europe and Middle Eastern folk music, and Nancarrow's polyrhythmic studies considerably influenced Ligeti's music.[37] His early compositional techniques such as micropolyphony and disarray sound, were heard less often; however, polymeter and multi-tonality became more prevalent in his late works.[38]

Ligeti's Piano Concerto and three sets of piano etudes are among the most important and challenging works of his late period. These two compositions feature Ligeti's new approaches, such as complex rhythms and asymmetrical sequences. The Piano Concerto (1985-1988) commences with two different time signatures. The piano and percussion parts are in 12/8, while the rest of the instruments are in 4/4. The piano part contains a repeated asymmetric sequence, which is 3-3-3-2-3-3-3-4-2-2-2 in eighth notes.

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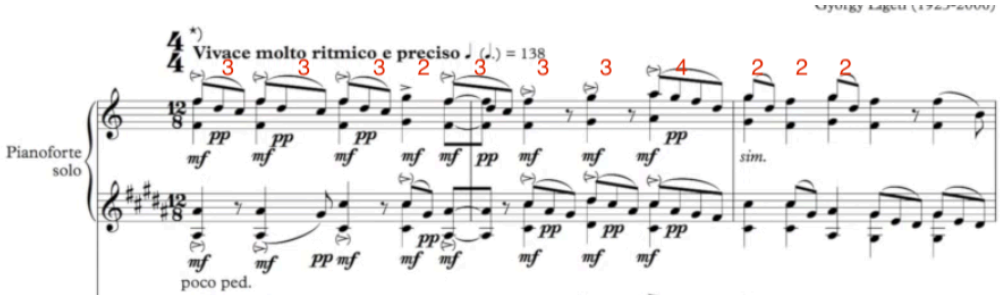
[35]Ibid, 98.

[36]Steinitz, 198.

[37]Amy Bauer, *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds,* ed. Louise Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx (Woodbridge, U.K: The Boydell Press, 2011), 136.

[38]Ibid., 212.



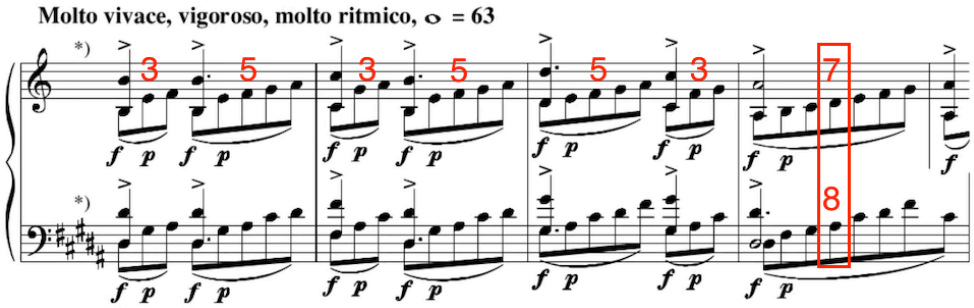
Example 2.2: Ligeti, Piano Concerto, first movement, mm. 1-3.

This sequence suddenly disappears in m. 31 by exchanging the piano and orchestral time signatures. These irregular subdivisions are called aksak (limping) rhythm, which is a rhythmic structure of folk music from Middle East. This rhythm was defined by twentieth-century Romanian composer Constantin Brăiloiu, and used by Bartok.[39] Aksak rhythm often manifests as a combination of 2+3 with extensions, but Ligeti modified this rhythm to make it longer and more complicated. The use of these unequal beats automatically generates syncopation and hemiolas, which are prevalent throughout the work. In his desire to craft a highly elaborate soundscape, Ligeti's melodic structure consists of complementary modes, in which the right hand plays a heptatonic mode of only white keys, while the left hand plays a pentatonic mode built on black keys. These complementary modes can be found in his first piano etude, *Désorde*.

Ligeti's set of eighteen piano etudes exhibit his virtuosic techniques and are performed by many pianists today. These etudes encompass various rhythmic techniques such as African polyrhythm, aksak rhythm, and hemiolas. They also utilize Ligeti's late-period melodic strategy of complementary modes. As mentioned above, *Désorde*'s set is the same as his Piano Concerto. It begins with complementary modes in the irregular sequence 3-5-3-5-5-3-8. While there is no time signature, the

[39]Steinitz, 258.

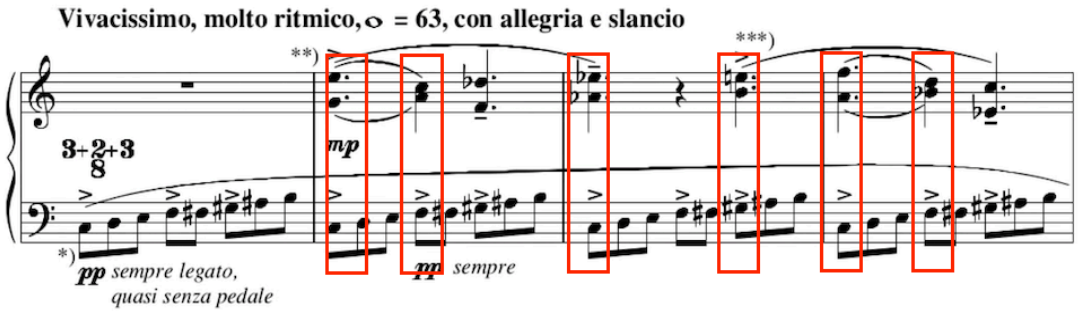
placement of eight eighth notes within one measure implies 4/4 or 8/8. However, one deleted note in the last unit of the right-hand sequence throws the pattern into conflict with the left hand in m. 4. After the rhythmic displacement disruption, the accented notes no longer line up between hands.



Example 2.3: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 1*, Désorde*, mm. 1-4. Irregular sequence and dislocated layers.

Etude No. 4, *Fanfares*, is a well-known piece with a perpetual octatonic ostinato in aksak rhythm 3-2-3 throughout. Ligeti placed several indications of his intentions for accents and dynamics on the score. This etude employs a vast dynamic range, from *pppppppp* to *ffffff*. Without these extreme dynamics, the perpetual motion of the piece would be monotonous, but as written, the dynamic changes add a sense of drama.

Ligeti relies on triads and seventh chords to bring a sense of familiarity to this and his other late etudes. In a work rife with twentieth-century chromaticism, atonality, and rhythmic chaos, these triads serve as aural guideposts, regardless of their level of functionality. These major and minor triads are formed between both hands, in passing, while the left hand repeats its eighth note ostinato. This clever voicing shows the humor within Ligeti's compositional style.



Example 2.4: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 4, *Fanfares*, mm. 1-4. Major triads.

Ligeti and Fuerst

As Ligeti is a huge influence on Fuerst's music, there are several similarities within the composers' works, including the prevalence of triads and chaconnes found in most of Fuerst's piano pieces. Other practices Fuerst adopted from Ligeti include extreme dynamics, complex rhythms, omission of key signature, and clusters and other dissonant chords.

1. Extreme dynamics

Ligeti is one of the contemporary composers who pioneered an expanded dynamic range. He stretched the normal dynamic conventions from *ppp* and *fff* to *pppp* and *ffff*. These extreme dynamics appeared in his early works, such as the orchestra piece entitled *Apparitions* and String Quartet No. 1. In his later works, Ligeti imposed dynamics as quiet as *pppppp* in the Cello Concerto and as loud as *fffffff* in his Piano Etude No. 13, *L'Escalier du Diable*.[40]

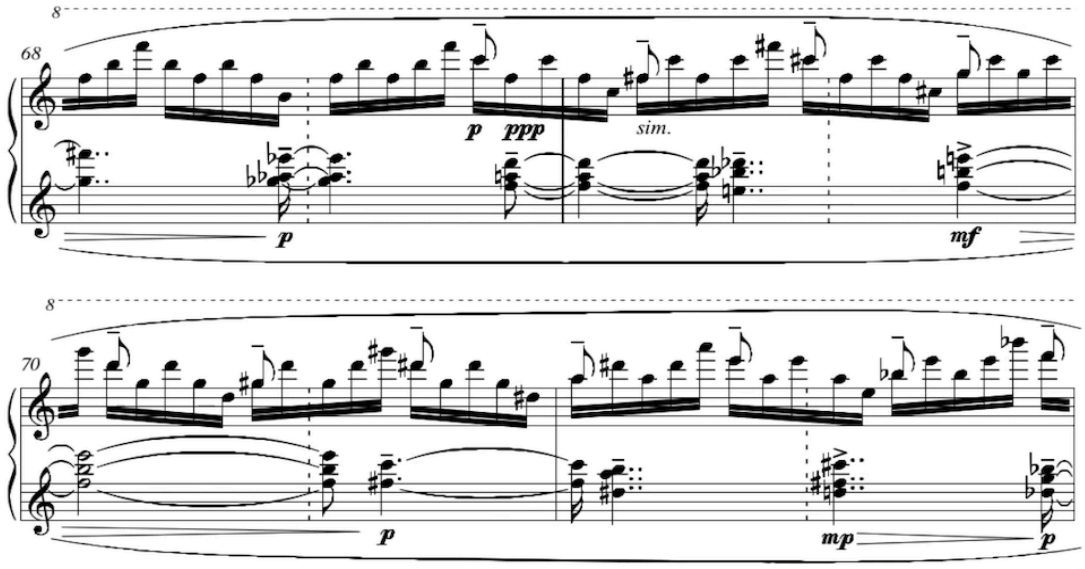
Dynamics spanning *ppppp* to *fffff* can be found in Fuerst's compositions as well. He penned *pppp* in m. 143 of the piano part of *Broken Cycles* for percussion and piano. His String Quartet No. 2 features *ffff* at m. 155. *The Drift of Things* includes *fffff* at m. 174 and *ppppp* in the final measure. The wide array of dynamics portrayed

[40]Steinitz, 103.

in Fuerst's compositions provide a sophisticated and enthralling timbre for the audience.

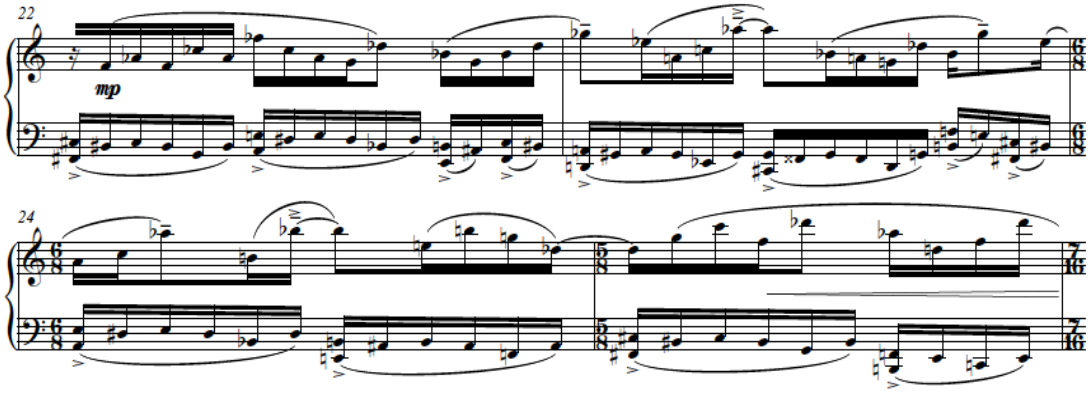
2. Complicated rhythms

Ligeti is known for writing complicated rhythmic patterns. Many of his piano works have incorporate polyrhythm and irregular rhythmic groups including aksak rhythm, syncopations, and hemiola. These offbeat and complex rhythmic patterns obscure the downbeat, and this aural issue is intensified when both hands play different rhythmic groups. Piano Etude No. 6, *Automne á Varsovie*, epitomizes the conflict between hands when one plays hemiola and the other plays a quicker rhythmic group in 4/4.



Example 2.5: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 6, *Automne á Varsovie*, mm. 68-71. Hemiola set against a contrasting rhythm in the other hand.

Fuerst's piano compositions possess rhythmic challenges akin to those of Ligeti's works. Meters change frequently, sometimes as often as every measure, and notes are grouped irregularly. As Ligeti did, Fuerst favors simultaneous contrasting rhythms. For instance, Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, requires the pianist to accent different beats and offbeats that do not line up between the hands.



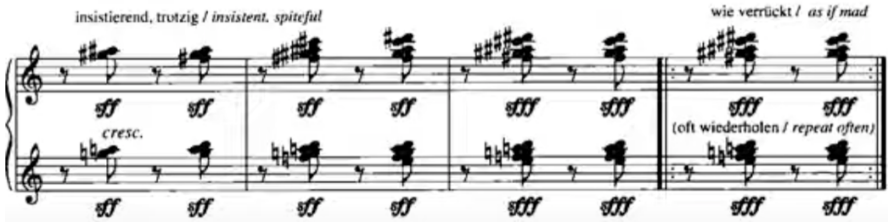
Example 2.6: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 22-25. Opposing accentuations.

3. Lack of key signature

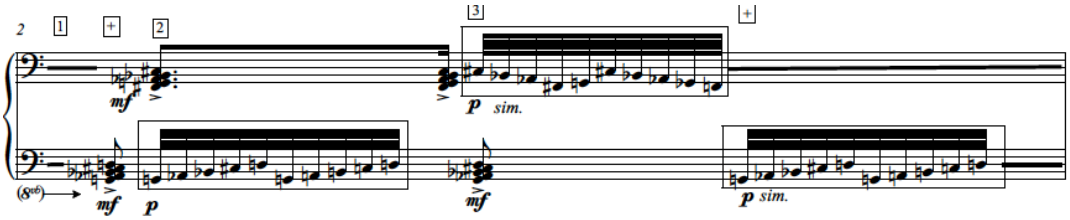
Both composers typically eschew key signatures, which means that traditional harmonic progression is not considered an important element in their works. Instead, they employ accidentals as needed to form harmonies. Myriad accidentals cause the scores of Ligeti's and Fuerst's works to appear more complicated than classical music.

4. Clusters and dissonant chords

Ligeti and Fuerst occasionally make use of clusters in their piano music. These clusters can play an important role in emphasizing beats between silences or complicated runs of notes, as shown in Examples 2.6 and 2.7, respectively.

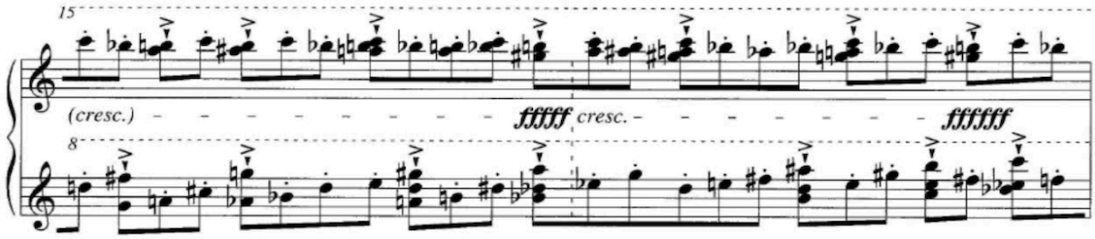


Example 2.7: Ligeti, *Musica Ricercata* No. 10, mm. 109-112. Tone clusters emphasizing offbeats.

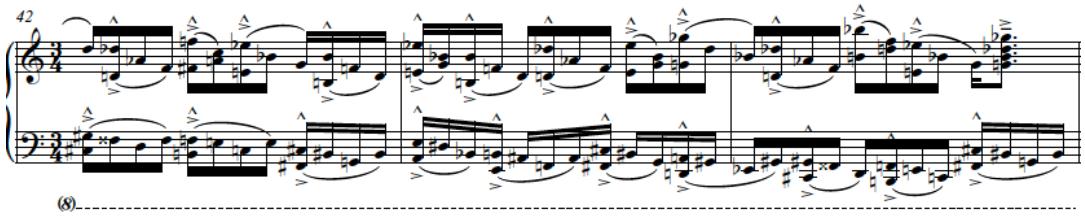


Example 2.8: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, m. 2. Clusters anchoring beats between rapid scalar patterns.

In the absence of traditional harmonic progressions, dissonant chords prevail in the works of these two composers. Notably, the semitone, considered the most dissonant interval in Western music, is heavily used. Semitone intervals appear in a variety of formats, such as the root-position minor second, major seventh, or major seventh chord with additional notes between.



Example 2.9: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 13, *L'escalier du diable*, m. 23. Minor second in the right hand and major seventh in the left hand.



Example 2.10: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 42-44. Diminished octave (semitone) in the right hand.

Conclusion

Ligeti's compositional style is a mixture of the avant-garde and traditional. He frequently forgoes time signatures and key signatures but makes use of traditional harmonies such as triads in his late period works. His complex rhythms were adopted

from folk music around the world. In addition, he maintains traditional forms, such as the sonata-allegro form in the first movement of the Piano Concerto and which was ubiquitous during the Romantic period.

As mentioned above, Ligeti's music has made a massive impact on Fuerst. One of Fuerst's distinguishable writing styles is the pervasive use of nonfunctional triads, which was a hallmark of Ligeti's compositional style in the late period. Also, like the African polyrhythms and aksak rhythms of Ligeti's compositions, complex rhythms and hemiola can be found throughout Fuerst's works.

Further, Fuerst's distinctive musical style has developed throughout his life including his personal experiences, exposure to great musicians, arts, and even pop music. With those influences, Fuerst became one of the fascinating and unique composers in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 3: Overview of Compositions

Mathew Fuerst has written a great variety of music for several instrumental genres, including solo instrumental works among them five pieces for solo piano, small chamber ensemble pieces, and large ensemble works. As a pianist, Fuerst includes piano in the vast majority of his works. Some of his compositions have publicly available professional recordings. This chapter will provide a brief account of his professional recording information, as well as an overview of his major works that include piano.

Recordings

Fuerst has released several tremendous recordings, including his arrangements of original works. His very first official recording was an arrangement featured in Jasper Wood's album *Ives: Works for Violin & Piano*, released in 2005. Fuerst arranged seven songs by Charles Ives, including *Night of Frost in May* (S. 309), *Weil' auf mir* (*Eyes So Dark*, S. 398), *Kären* (S. 285), *Feldeinsamkeit* (*In Summer Fields*, S. 250), *Rosamunde* (S. 337), *Omens and Oracles* (S. 317), and *Berceuse* (S. 220) for violin and piano. Although Ives wrote the original piano part for each song, Fuerst increased the prominence of the parts by extending them.

The composer's next recording, *Polarities: Exploring the Contemporary Expanse*, is a collection of contemporary composers' works. The album features Fuerst's first full orchestral piece, *Symphony* (2008, rev. 2013). Compositions by Katherine Saxon, Chi-Hin Leung, and Alex Freeman are also included. This album was released in 2014 through Navona Records.

In 2015, the first full album of Fuerst's original works was released, titled *Works for Violin and Piano*. This recording includes his three violin sonatas,

Diabolical Dances for violin and piano, and his solo piano piece*, The Drift of Things*. Fuerst's friends, Jasper Wood and David Riley, were the soloists for this recording.

In recent years, Navona Records released two collections of contemporary works that highlight Fuerst's compositions. His *Broken Cycles* for piano and percussion was included in the album, *Ripples* in 2016. Also, 2018's Moto Quarto featured *Totentanz* for violin, cello, and piano, played by Trio Casals.

Chamber Music

Sonata-Fantasie No. 1 for violin and piano (2001)

Sonata-Fantasie No. 1 is one of Fuerst's earliest works, preceded only by Three Etudes for piano (1999). This piece was written during the composer's years at Juilliard, and commissioned by his friends, Jasper Wood and David Riley. Later that same year, they premiered the piece in Lexington, Virginia.

Fuerst performed Alexander Scriabin's Piano Sonata No. 9 (*Black Mass*) while a student at the Eastman School, and fell in love with Scriabin's music. He researched each of his piano sonatas and decided to borrow the title of Scriabin's Sonata-Fantasie No. 2 for his violin and piano piece. While writing this piece, he endeavored to eschew traditional classical structures; thus, the title Sonata-Fantasie fits well with his intention. According to the composer, this work embodies two different sides of nature: aggressive and violent, and quiet and tender.[41]

This work is a single movement lasting approximately six minutes. The title "*fantasie*" connotes no specific musical form; however, the piece contains two contrasting sections. One is fast, loud, and furious; the other is slow, calm, and static. These two parts interchange throughout, before fading to a slow, quiet close. Like

[41]Mathew Fuerst, *Sonata-Fantasie No. 1 for Violin and Piano*, program notes, 2001.

Scriabin's Piano Sonata No. 9, this piece is highly chromatic. The piano and violin trade off playing a continuous chromatic scale ostinato, while the other instrument executes a chromatic melody. The harmonies include some minor ninth and minor second chords that hearken back to another Scriabin work, the *Black Mass* Sonata. The unstable, uncertain atmosphere cultivated by the melodic and harmonic dissonance is fortified by frequent changes to the time signature, keeping the listener on edge.

Sonata-Fantasie No. 2 for violin and piano (2003)

After two years, Wood and Riley asked Fuerst for a new violin and piano work. In conceiving this piece, he was determined to create a violin sonata that was as different from the first sonata as possible. As a result, Fuerst embraced traditional formal structure, composing a four-movement sonata. The mood of this piece is lighter than the first sonata. The first three movements are very brief, lasting approximately a minute each, and the last movement is more extended. According to Fuerst, this structural idea came from Hungarian classical composer György Kurtag's *Quasi una Fantasia for Orchestra* (1987-88).[42]

The piano part of the first movement, *Apparition*, was originally conceived as accompaniment for a song he composed and later discarded. The light, ascending sound of the music motivated Fuerst to reuse it and add the violin part. In the middle of the movement, the violin plays triad arpeggios such as B minor and G major along with the piano, giving the movement a temporarily tonal sound. The second movement, *Aphorism*, is only ten measures in length, comprised of a conversation of perfect fifths being traded between the instruments. Movement three, entitled

[42]Fuerst, *Sonata-Fantasie No. 2 for Violin and Piano,* program notes, 2003.

Fragment, is in ABA form. This is the most aggressive and abrupt of the four movements. The low-register clusters in the piano part and rapid running passage in the violin part generate a degree of tension not present in the previous movements. The final movement, *Passacaglia*, uses a repeated bass line as a theme in the piano part. This theme becomes more obscure leading up to the virtuosic violin cadenza. The middle section of the violin cadenza resembles a melody appropriate to a Baroque style passacaglia. After the cadenza, the piano part reprises the theme again until the end. In contrast to Fuerst's first violin sonata, this sonata has considerably more traditional musical elements, such as triadic harmonies and formal structures.

Clarinet Quartet for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (2004)

This Clarinet Quartet was commissioned by the New York City Ballet's Choreographic Institute and written with Principal Dancer Albert Evans. The first performance was presented as a pas de deux by the institute.[43] The performance inspired the Washington Ballet to program the piece during their *Love: 7x7* series in that same year. Additionally, the quartet served as one of the opening gala performances of the New York City Ballet.[44]

This piece is a single movement in a modified ABA form and features a recurring four-note motive throughout the work.[45] The motive consists of an ascending minor third, ascending perfect fifth, and descending minor third. The clarinet solo in the A section, which opens with a lingering whole note, offers a

[43]Fuerst, *Clarinet Quartet for Clarinet, Cello, Violin, and Piano,* program notes. 2004.

[44]"Biographies," Navona Record, accessed Jan 3, 2021, https://www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6237/biographies---moto-quarto---trio-casals.html.

[45]Fuerst, *Clarinet Quartet for Clarinet, Cello, Violin, and Piano,* program notes. 2004.

mysterious and pastoral mood. After the solo, the motive appears in a slow tempo, with overlapping, staggered entrances in each instrument. The B section opposes the A section in character. The tempo is fast, and the motive is played in perpetual motion. Clusters and semitone dissonances in the piano part, coupled with glissandi in the string parts, give the movement an unstable tension. Upon returning to the slow A section, the violin's harmonics, the piano's arpeggiated major seventh, the cello's thoroughbass, and the clarinet's final four-note theme create a hollow and questioning atmosphere.

Diabolical Dances for violin and piano (2006)

This work is the third commission by Wood and Riley. They requested a short showpiece, so the composer decided to create a virtuosic piece for the violinist and pianist. Historically, the violin has often been considered a devil's instrument because of the Medieval legend that Satan selected the violin to entice people to go to hell. Therefore, demanding violin works frequently contain programmatic elements related to the devil, such as Giuseppe Tartini's *Devil's Trill Sonata*, Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*, and the Charlie Daniels Band's song *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*.[46] Fuerst thought that the title was appropriate for his technically demanding piece.

Diabolical Dances is a five-minute work in a fast tempo. It begins in the unusual meter of 8/10 with a 3-3-4 rhythmic grouping, but the time signature changes throughout the work. The most challenging element of the piano part is the accents. The left hand primarily has accents on the downbeat, while the right hand's accents are irregular. In addition to the incongruous accentuation, dense chords are continuously played toward the end of the piece. The violinist faces the challenge of

[46]Fuerst, *Diabolical Dances for violin and piano,* program notes. 2006.

successive double stops in a fast tempo. The virtuosity of this piece is dramatic and astonishing the audience.

Violin Sonata No. 3 for violin and piano (2011)

This third violin sonata is the most performed among Fuerst's compositions that include piano. For this sonata, he felt immense pressure to write a piece that would be the pinnacle of his body of work. While writing Violin Sonata No. 3, Fuerst faced the happiest and hardest time of his life to date: he was planning a wedding with his soon-to-be wife Rachel and was considering quitting composition. At that time, he "was going through a period of extreme uncertainty in the quality and direction of his work."[47] After processing this concern about his career, he eventually decided to remain in the field and only focus on what he wanted to hear and innovate through his work. Fuerst described his affection for this, "because of what I hope to accomplish with the piece and the pressure I felt, this work took over a year to compose. Looking at the piece now, I feel it is my most optimistic work and my proudest achievement to date."[48] Given his ambitions and efforts for this sonata, it materialized as one of his longest works, spanning just over twenty minutes. The three movements are arranged in a fast-slow-fast order, just like a Classical sonata.

The composer's original conception of the first movement, Fantasy, was to use sonata-allegro form. However, he felt that the sound of the movement was like an academic exercise, so he decided to write a chaconne based on major triads instead. According to Fuerst, "the first movement was the most difficult to compose and there were seven different versions nearly finished before the completion of the movement

[47]Fuerst, *Violin Sonata No. 3 for violin and piano,* program notes, 2011.
[48]Ibid.

heard now."[49] The structure of the movement is unexpected, subverting the listener's expectations. Fuerst devised a twelve-chord progression of major triads that appears and mutates constantly throughout the movement: G-B-E♭-B♭-D-F♯-C♯-A-C-E-A♭-F. Recalling Ligeti's notion of *Clocks and Clouds*, Fuerst intended for the soundscape of this movement to start out like a cloud and gradually become grounded. Therefore, the movement begins with a quiet and tranquil atmosphere, as the violin part plays the first sequence of twelve major triads. After seven measures, the piano part echoes the sequence, and the canonic motion conjures interesting dissonances. The order of the sequence changes shortly, omitting some triads and modulating, with rhythmic, dynamic, and register changes further altering the original progression. In the middle of the movement, the piano and violin finally play the chord progression in the original order in unison; this sequence is the climax. After the climax, Fuerst utilized a clever device near the movement's end. The tranquil mood and setting of the opening returns, but the order of the sequence is in retrograde, F-A♭-E-C-A-C♯-F♯-D-B♭-E♭-B-G. Chaconne style music can be perceived as monotonous and boring because of their repetitive structure. However, Fuerst's novel approaches to the traditional style, including the nonfunctional harmonic sequence that borrows the tools of serialism to create new soundscapes, ensure his chaconne is unpredictable and fresh.

The second movement, *Liebeslied* (*For Rachel*) was written as a wedding gift for the composer's wife and was played at their wedding. This movement is also written in chaconne style, with a sixteen-measure theme in a slow tempo. The chord progression is from his String Quartet No. 1 (2010), which Rachel loved. Fuerst

[49]Ibid.

developed and expanded the chord progression from the original piece, and as a result, this movement is a lingering nine minutes long. The melodic theme is performed on half and quarter notes at the beginning. The note value shortens to sixteenth notes towards the climax at the center of the movement. Those sixteenth notes, designated *ff* in the violin part, are marked "Joyous" by Fuerst, the dynamic and mood clearly informing the audience of the climax. Afterward, the note values lengthen, recalling the stretched theme from the beginning of the movement and creating a musical bookend as *Liebeslied* (*For Rachel*) draws to a close. The compositional decision to reprise the opening material at the end of the movement hearkens back to the first movement.

Fuerst strove to present a virtuosic and splendid finale in the last movement. In the program notes for this sonata, he explained his artistic considerations for this movement:

> "I initially used Brahms' last movement of his Piano Quartet in g minor, op. 25 as a formal inspiration, and simultaneously wished to emulate the fantastically exciting ending of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3, one of my favorite pieces. Before writing it, I spent a great deal of time listening to both Hungarian gypsy violin playing (particularly the fast sections of a Csárdás) and American fiddle music, hoping to emulate the fast, exciting playing found in both idioms. That being said, I did not wish to copy the specific sounds of these idioms, but simply the type of violin playing."[50]

As the subtitle, *Moto Perpetuo*, indicates, a wave of perpetual motion traverses the movement. The eighth notes and sixteenth notes never stop until the end. This endless running passage evokes Brahms' aforementioned piano quartet. At the ending, both instruments play the same staccato, forte G major triad as found in Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3. Aside from thirty measures in the middle section,

[50]Ibid.

triads are prevalent throughout this movement. As Fuerst acknowledged, his music became very triadic after this violin sonata.

Broken Cycles for Percussion and Piano (2014)

Broken Cycles for Percussion and Piano, composed in 2014, is another of Fuerst's chaconne style compositions. However, for this piece, he decided to "combine a chaconne and the minimalist method of additive technique, an example of which can be found in Frederic Rzewski's wonderful Coming Together."[51] The additive technique is achieved by starting with a small group of repeating notes and expanding the motive by adding an additional note to every part or section cumulatively, so that the small group gets bigger and more complicated over time. This compositional tool can be found in many minimalist works such as Dennis Johnson's *November* and Philip Glass's *Two Pages*, as well as the repertoire of Frederic Rzewski. Instead of adding an additional note, Fuerst added a chord to each repetition, slowly building the chaconne progression. For example, the first section contains only one chord, the second section comprises the first two chords, and the third section depicts the first three chords. This setting is reminiscent of Ligeti's early piano work, *Musica ricercata*, which adds pitch classes cumulatively in each movement. However, Fuerst put not only the chords of the progression but also other unrelated chords in each section. With regard to this complicated structure, Fuerst gave a hint in the program notes: "Each section is begun on a new tonal center that relates to the chaconne progression so that if one were to look at the tonal center of each section the result would reveal the chaconne progression."[52] As a result, the completed chord progression appears in the middle of the piece. This hidden set

[51]Fuerst, *Broken Cycles* for Percussion and Piano, program notes, 2014.
[52]Ibid.

demonstrates the humor within Fuerst's compositional style. This work was commissioned by Fuerst's former colleagues, Stacey Jones and Brad Blackham, and premiered at Hillsdale College.

Trio for Vibraphone, Cello, and Piano (2017)

After Fuerst moved to Nebraska to embark upon a career change, he started collaborating with his former classmates, the Chiara String Quartet, whom he had met at Juilliard School. At that time, the quartet was the Hixson-Lied Artist-in-Residence at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Glenn Korff School of Music. This trio was commissioned by Dave Hall, who is currently professor of percussion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Gregory Beaver, a cellist in the Chiara String Quartet. Around the same time, Fuerst's twin daughters, Mira and Aliza, were born. Fuerst "wanted to write a work that expressed my excitement and joy, while at the same time showcasing the virtuosity and expressive beauty of Dave and Greg's playing. As a result of this, the work has a more optimistic tone to it."[53]

The first movement is in a modified sonata form, which has two subjects in the exposition. Triads are once again prominent; therefore, both subjects contain triadic harmonic material. However, the subjects differ in tempo, articulations, and dynamics. The first subject is more energetic and vigorous, boasting staccato sixteenth notes in a fast tempo. Frequent meter changes increase the atmosphere of excitement. On the other hand, the second subject is much more static and sedate, utilizing longer rhythmic values such as whole notes and half notes. The legato articulations and *pp* dynamic provide further contrast from the first subject. The second movement is in variation form. The chord progression that forms the

[53]Fuerst, *Trio for Vibraphone, Cello, and Piano*, program notes, 2017.

foundation of this movement had been in the composer's notebook for many years, and he finally found the opportunity to use it. The third movement is a lullaby for Fuerst's daughters.[54] Overall, this work provides a brighter and more peaceful sound than his previous compositions. Consonant harmonic structures and the warm timbre of the vibraphone make this work charming and adorable.

Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano (2020)

This trio is one of Fuerst's most recent compositions. Since Fuerst settled in Lincoln, Nebraska, he has been working actively with members of the Chiara String Quartet. Aside from this trio piece, he has written Sonata for Violin and Cello for Hyeyung Yoon and Gregory Beaver, and two violin solo pieces, *alphabet overdrive* and *for you little ringlet one*, for Rebecca Fischer.

According to Fuerst, the Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano was one of the most difficult works to write thus far. His writing plan underwent numerous changes until the trio was completed:

> "I have probably more music nearly completed and thrown out than twice the length of the final score. The piece went through many changes: originally I was planning a 4 movement work, then it became a 3 movement work, then a 2 movement work with a piano cadenza to start and a cadenza for violin and cello between the two main movements, then a 2 movement work with a cadenza for violin and cello in between, and finally, it has become a 4 movement work again (ah, full circle!). The first movement, which was written first, went back and forth between being the first movement and being the last movement."[55]

The first movement is a chaconne, a familiar structure from many of his major works. This chaconne reveals the chord progression at the beginning and eliminates one chord with each repetition, until only one harmony remains. This harmonic layout

[54]Ibid.
[55]Fuerst, email message to the author, July 14, 2020.

is the opposite of *Broken Cycles*. As a result, the progression disappears into thin air[56] as glissandi are played by every instrument.

The second movement was inspired by bad situations that occurred during the Covid-19 quarantine. After cities shut down around the country, people were thrown into chaos. Unfortunately, some people looted and vandalized stores and restaurants in May of 2020, and Lincoln was no exception. The local synagogue where Fuerst and his family attend services was vandalized. In the face of his anxiety at the situation, this ternary movement came out as aggressive and violent. Accents, staccato articulations, extreme dynamic changes, and dense chords unveil Fuerst's intentions for this movement. Regarding the harmonic connection to the first movement, he explained, "the chords are the retrograde inversion of the chaconne theme from the first movement. Don't try to find some hidden patterns in the placement of each chord: to create a greater degree of anxiety for the audience member (hopefully) I literally rolled a die to determine how long each chord was held for."[57] After the A section's retrograde inversion, the B section utilized the first twelve-tone row that the composer ever wrote, when he was only twelve years old. The last section is not identical to the A section, but it employs the same rhythm. Fuerst cut some parts originally written for the last section so that it would be easier for performers to learn.[58]

The third movement is entirely different from the second movement. It is only thirty-seven measures long, maintains a slow tempo, and the melody is sparse and spacious, with fewer notes than the previous movement. The violin plays the chord progression from the first movement while the piano accompanies the violin. The

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[56]Ibid.
[57]Ibid.
[58]Ibid.

actual main idea is stated in the piano at the very end of the movement, serving as a bridge to the finale.

The last movement of this trio is a five-part rondo. Each section features materials from previous movements. The A section contains materials from the first and third movements, and the B section is a harmonization generated from the twelve-tone row the second movement. The C section is restated directly from the beginning of the trio. This cyclic technique creates unity and cohesion among the movements. Fuerst drew upon musical elements found in many of his other works when crafting this piece; for example, the chaconne structure, use of triads, and recycling of earlier musical materials exemplify his personal compositional style. Therefore, this piece clearly shows Fuerst's compositional evolution and is his most mature work to date.

CHAPTER 4: Three Etudes for Piano (1999)

This chapter will provide an analysis and performance guide for Mathew Fuerst's *Three Etudes for Piano*. The first two etudes were written in during the summer of 1999, when the composer was in Paris attending a summer festival at the Schola Cantorum. The third etude was composed when he returned to New York City later that same year. Regarding the compositional style of this etude set, Fuerst explained, "they are not really representative of my writing these days, but I remember John Corigliano really liked them."[59] Like other traditional etudes, these are quite short, but nonetheless make significant technical demands on the performer. Although Fuerst asserted that these etudes are not typical of his current compositional approach, each etude has a unique character that foreshadows his mature writing style. He strove to use diverse compositional techniques for each piece, some of which he never used again, while others became significant parts of his later style. Because some of these techniques are unusual, Fuerst frequently provides performance indications in the score to help performers understand his intentions. This etude set is a stunning work that demands an extended virtuosic technique while showcasing the musical voice of a young composer.

Etude No. 1, *Colors*

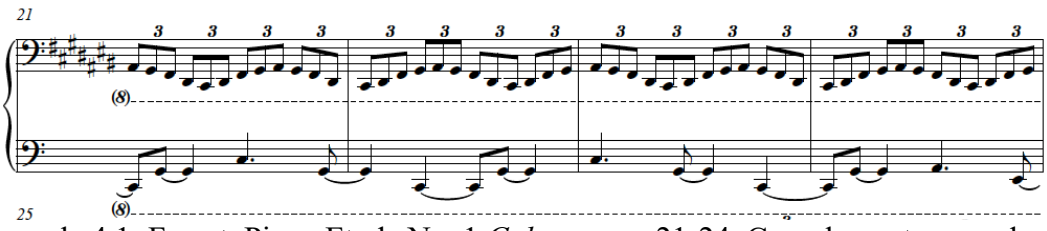
As the title indicates, the first etude, *Colors*, depicts the various sound colors of the piano. Although there is a recurring chord progression, this piece focuses on timbre across the wide range of the piano. This experiment is reminiscent of the impressionistic compositions of French composer Claude Debussy. Color and pure sonority are the basic musical values of Debussy's music, rather than traditional

[59]Mather Fuerst, email message to author, March 18, 2018.

harmonic structures. To achieve his desired sound colors, Debussy employed fast arpeggio-like figures, delicate dynamics, and bold pedaling. In a similar manner, Fuerst also used arpeggios throughout this etude, and extreme dynamics spanning from *pppp* to *fffff*. During the four-minute duration of the piece, the sound steadily increases from the quietest dynamic to the loudest. Those varied sounds in the extreme dynamics mainly occur in the lower register. The pedaling indication extends from the beginning to the end without change, creating an ambiguous and foggy tone.

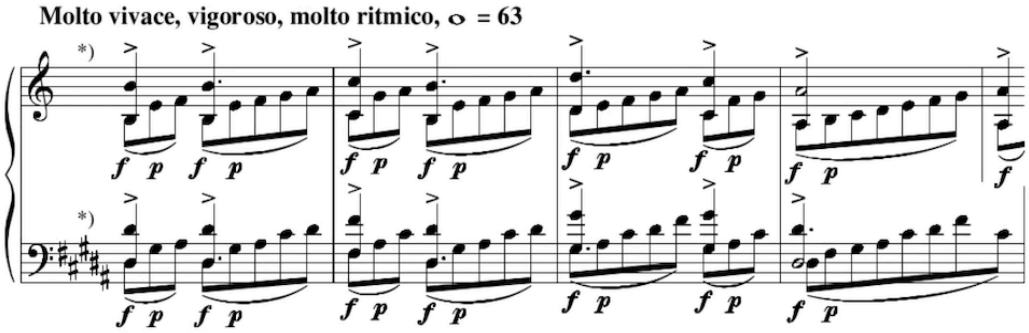
Despite the amorphous sound, Fuerst's score indicates his intention that this piece be played in strict time. Adding to the complexity of the etude's soundscape, polyrhythm permeates the work.

Interestingly, *Colors* is the only etude in the set that has a key signature. Rather than dictating a specific key center, Fuerst uses two separate signatures for the staves, creating complementary modes.



Example 4.1: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1 *Colors,* mm. 21-24. Complementary modes.

This setting can be found Ligeti's Piano Etude No. 1, *Desórdre*, in which the right hand plays only white keys and the left hand plays only black keys throughout the work.



Example 4.2: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 1, *Desórdre*, mm. 1-4. Complementary modes.

Instead of adhering to Ligeti's strict modal structure, Fuerst permits the hand position to change freely and often during the etude. At the beginning, the right hand plays black keys while the left hand plays white keys, but both hands play only black keys at the end.

Colors observes no predefined form, but it has a repeated chord progression, outlined in the figure below. Although there are no clear sectional or structural divisions indicated in the score, the etude can be divided into four sections. The following table denotes the structure of *Colors.*

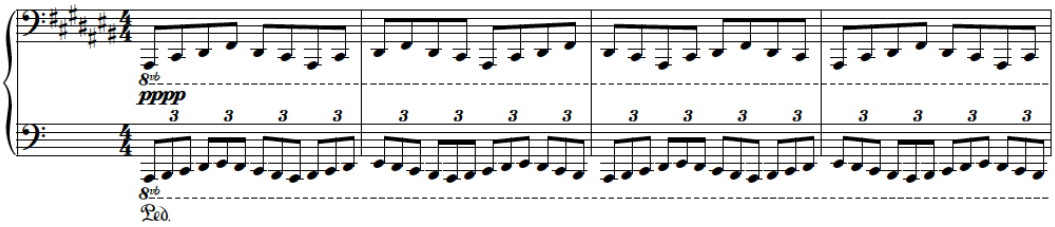
Measures	**Section**	**Chord progression**	**Description**
1-19	Introduction	None	Complementary modes.
20-61	A	C-A-E-C-G-E-B-G-D-B-F♯-D-A-F♯	The right hand plays a black-key scale while the other hand plays an interval of a perfect fifth of the chord progression until m. 49; white-key or black-key scales appear at m. 50
62-89	A'	C♯-A-E-C-G-E-B-G-B-F♯-D-A-F♯	Due to the hands switching modes, the progression starts with C♯, and the first D chord is omitted while white-key and black-key modes are played
90-91	Ending	C♯	C♯ arpeggios are repeated; last note is held anywhere from 8-12 seconds

Figure 4.1: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors*, Structure.

1. Introduction (mm. 1-19)

As mentioned above, Fuerst's Etude No. 1 consists of complementary modes. Contrary to Ligeti's *Desórdre*, the right hand plays a black-key scale in duplets and

the left hand plays the A Dorian pentatonic scale in triplets from the beginning until m. 7 (see Example 4.2). At the opening, Fuerst indicates that "the pedal should be held down throughout the whole etude so that the individual notes should not be heard, but instead the music should sound like a low, quiet rumble."[60] He does not specify which pedal should be held down, but the sustain pedal is ideal for the blended sound. In addition, the soft pedal would help generate the required *pppp* dynamic in the low register, if used in combination with the sustain pedal. There is no dynamic change in the introduction, so both pedals should be held until m. 19. From m. 8 until the end of the section, the modes in the left hand keep changing, cycling through B Mixolydian, C Ionian, and C Dorian.



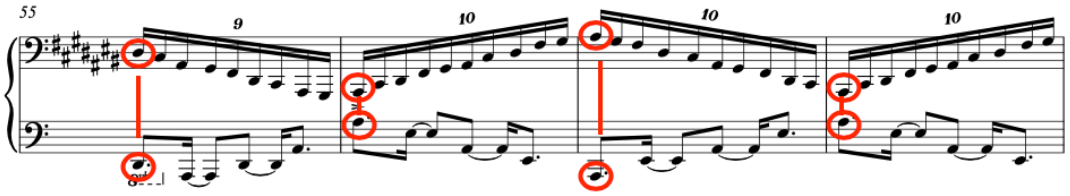
Example 4.3: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors,* mm. 1-4. Complementary modes.

2. Part A (mm. 20-61)

The chord progression appears in a syncopated pattern in the left hand while the right hand continues the black-key scale. The dynamics increase gradually from *pppp* to *mp* by the end of the part. Beginning at m. 50, the key signature switches, so that the left hand plays black keys and the right hand plays white keys; this exchange occurs several times. The rhythms of the right hand appear in different subdivisions, such as 9, 10, or 14 against the syncopated left hand. These complex polyrhythms make it challenging for performers to synchronize their hands. To coordinate these passages, one must first execute the left-hand syncopation accurately. Once the

[60]Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors.* 1999.

rhythm becomes comfortable, a useful practice strategy is to play only the first note of each bar's left-hand part, lining it up with the first note of each uneven grouping in the right hand. Because the scalelike passages of the right hand create a mass of sound, the left hand should be heard precisely.



Example 4.4: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors,* mm. 55-58. Practice method to synchronize the hands.

3. Section A′ (mm. 62-89)

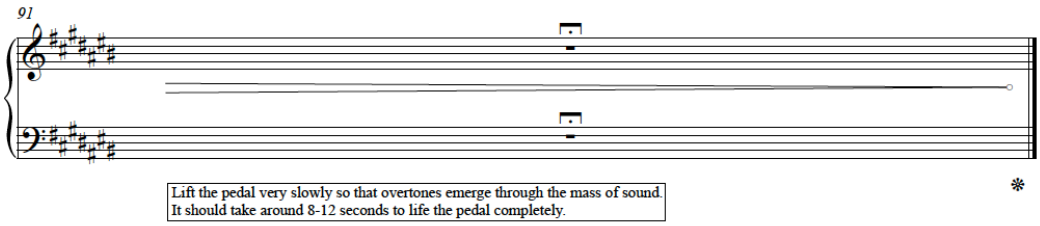
Because the left hand plays black keys at the beginning of this section, the recurring chord progression starts with C♯ instead of C. In Section A′, the note values of the chord progression shortened from duplets to eighth-note triplets, and eventually to sixteenth notes. Concurrent with these rhythmic changes, the dynamic also grows to *fff*.

4. Ending (mm. 90-91)

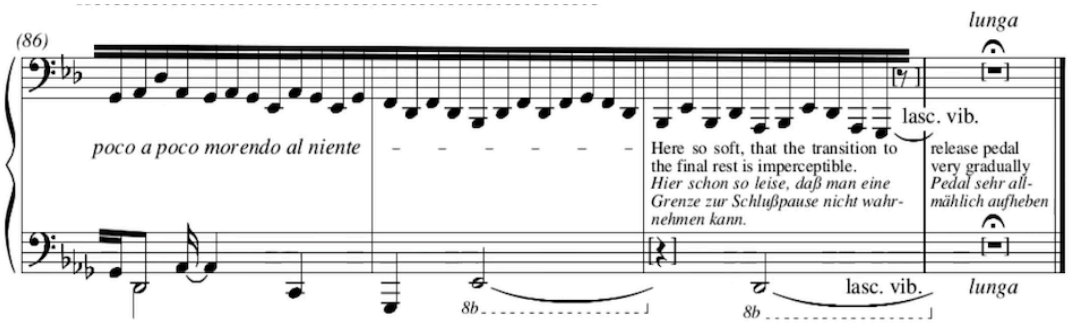
Both hands play the black keys at the end of the movement, and C♯ arpeggios dominate in 10/4 meter. The sixteenth-note sextuplets in *ffff* provide a rapid, sonorous climax to finish out the piece. In the final measure, Fuerst indicates that overtones should emerge through the mass of sound by lifting the pedal very slowly.[61] As a result, the last measure contains no notes, but only a decrescendo to be held for several seconds as the pedal slowly rises. This pedaling technique resembles the

[61]Ibid.

ending of Ligeti's Piano Etude No. 7, marked *lunga* with a gradual pedal release. This overtone technique resembles the ending of Ligeti's Piano Etude No. 7.



Example 4.5: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors*, m. 91. Overtone ending.



Example 4.6: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 7, *Galamb Borong*, mm. 86-89. *Lunga* ending.

In the chord progression established by the composer, the roots of every three successive chords form major or minor triads. Those consecutive triads share common intervals of thirds and fifths between them.

Chord Progression	C A E	C G E	B G D	B F♯ D	A F♯ C♯	(C♯) A E	C G E	B G B	F♯ D A F♯
Triad	A Minor	C Major	G Major	B Minor	F♯ Minor	A Major	C Major	G Major	D Major
Interval	Minor third – Perfect fifth – Major third – Perfect fifth – Major third – Minor third – Perfect fifth – Perfect fifth								

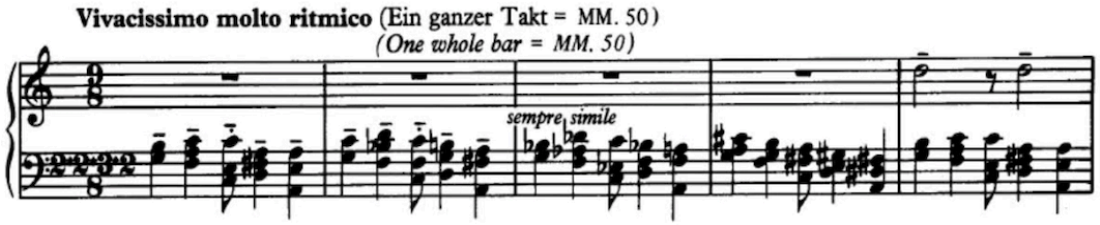
Figure 4.2: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 1, *Colors*, Harmonic relationships.

Etude No. 1 emerges from Fuerst's early work, but it illustrates his later style thoroughly in terms of triads and chaconne form. Although the triads do not appear directly as stacked harmonies and the harmonic progression repeats just once, this work proves that hallmarks of Fuerst's later style are hinted at in his early material;

therefore, the composer's musical style has developed gradually throughout his career.

Etude No. 2, *Chaconne*

Although Fuerst wrote a number of pieces that might be considered chaconnes, this etude is the only one that Fuerst actually titled as chaconne. Ligeti also wrote some chaconne style works, such as the last movement of Viola Sonata and *Hungarian Rock* for harpsichord. In *Hungarian Rock*, the repeated ostinato consists of five foundational notes in one measure. The short bass line is repeated throughout the piece, but the harmonies change every measure.

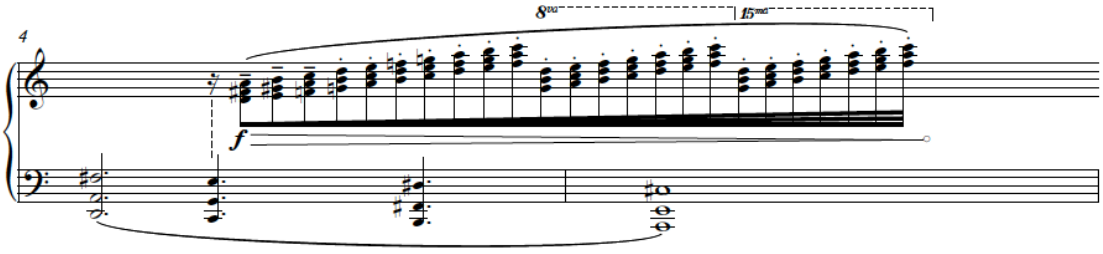


Example 4.7: Ligeti, *Hungarian Rock*, mm. 1-5. Repeated bass line with different harmonies.

On the other hand, for his chaconnes, Fuerst wrote repeated ostinati based on harmonic progressions. Among his chaconne style compositions, Fuerst's Etude No. 2 presents a strict and unchanging chord progression of root-position triads. Although the harmonic progression is nonfunctional, the slow tempo at the beginning ensures that the triads are heard clearly, so that the audience can familiarize themselves with the sequence of sounds.

Fuerst unequivocally used nontraditional elements and notation in this etude. For instance, there is no time signature until section A″. During the twentieth century, time signatures were no longer mandatory, and composers such as Boulez, Ligeti, and John Corigliano embraced this trend. In Etude No. 2, instead of a time signature,

Fuerst utilized feathered beaming for the scales on the right hand, that the performer should play the passage at an increasing or decreasing tempo depending on the directions. This technique can be found in many of John Corigliano's compositions, such as Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, String Quartet, and *The Red Violin Caprices for Violin.* Regarding his feathered beaming, Fuerst instructed, "the right hand should be played in an improvisatory-like manner."[62] As a result, he omitted bar lines in the right hand, but the bar lines in the left hand were placed after every three chord changes, at whole note chords, or in mm. 19 and 24.

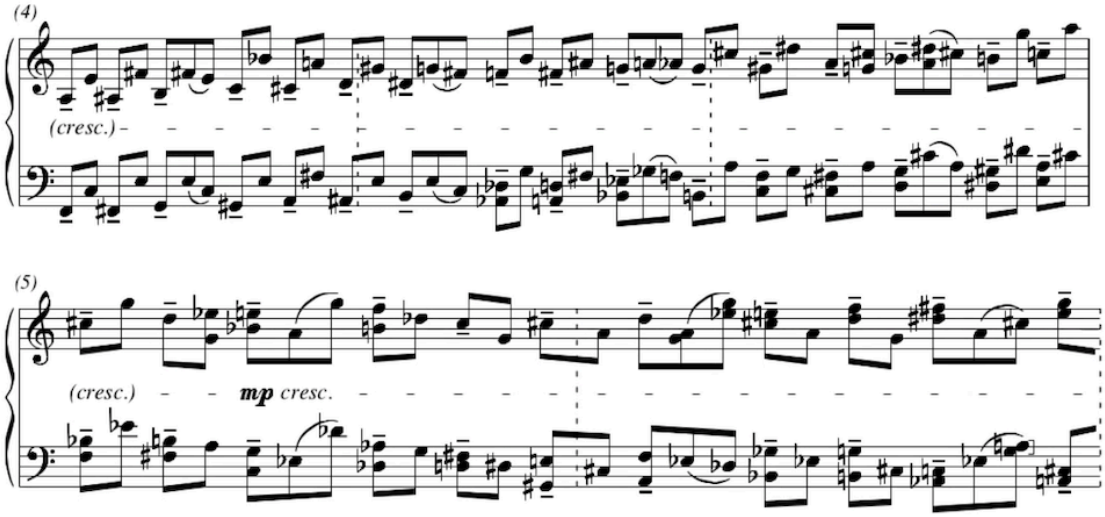


Example 4.8: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 2 *Chaconne,* mm. 4-5. Barlines in the left hand.

Those barlines can help performers adhere to a steady tempo while the right hand plays the improvisatory passage. The absence of a time signature does not automatically signify an erratic pulse, and Fuerst intended for the etude to have a mechanically functional pulsation.

After his first etude, Fuerst eschewed the use of a key signature in his compositions. Rather, he employed accidentals as needed to form triads. As it was with time signatures, omitting key signatures became a trend among twentieth-century composers. Therefore, some contemporary works appear to be more complicated than classical music because of myriad accidentals. For example, in Ligeti's Piano Etude No. 13, *L'escalier du diable*, many accidentals are seen due to the lack of key signature.

[62]Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 2, *Chaconne,* 1999.



Example 4.8: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 13, *L'escalier du diable*, mm. 4-5. Accidentals.

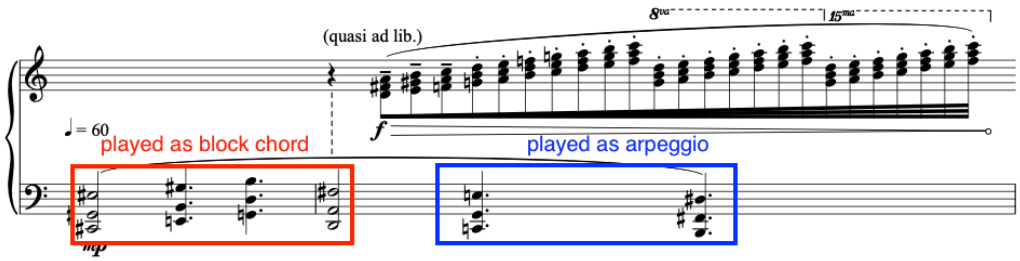
The following table describes the structure of Fuerst's Etude No. 2, including chord progressions and changes in each subsequent section.

Measures	**Section**	**Chord Progression**	**Description**
1-7	A	C♯-E-G-D-C-B-E-C-G-D-C-B-A-G-C♯-E-D-C-B	The left hand plays the chord progression while the right hand plays stacked triads in ascending and descending diatonic scales. The triads should be played in an improvisatory-like manner, following the tempo indications of the feathered beaming.
8-14	A′	Same as A	The chord progression remains the same, but the ascending and descending scales are played appear in faster, shorter bursts
15-24	A″	C♯-E-G-D-C-B-E-C-G-D-C-B-A-G-C♯-E-D-C-B- C♯-E-G-D-C-B-A	The improvisatory line yields to a passage of sixteenth notes played in strict meter in the right hand. The tempo becomes increases.
25-26	Ending	G-F-E-D	The left hand plays a descending sequence of chords while the right hand plays an ascending scale akin to the beginning.

Figure 4.3: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 2, *Chaconne*, Structure.

1. Section A (mm. 1-7)

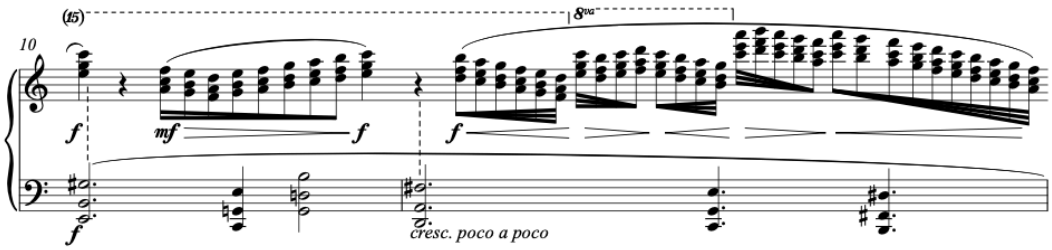
The chaconne's chord progression begins in the left hand. The third of each triad is placed one octave higher, so the triads appear as major tenths from the root to the third. Fuerst concedes that "chords may be rolled but played as blocked chords is preferable."[63] Performers who have small hands may need to roll the inverted chords, or they can play blocked chords with both hands during a pause in the right-hand line. Also, performers should maintain a steady pulse in the left hand while the right hand plays the triadic scales freely.



Example 4.9: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 2, *Chaconne*, m. 1. Performance suggestion.

2. Section A′ (mm. 8-14)

While the chord progression is repeated, the feathered beaming passage is divided into smaller groups in lieu of a long scalar passage. While the opening measures of this section continue the trend of ascending scales, the section also includes more groups of descending triads, necessitating rapid motion in the right hand.

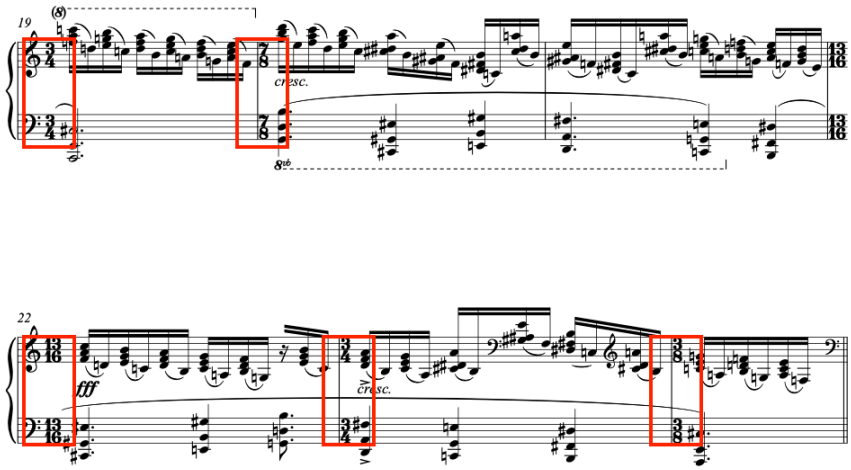


Example 4.10: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 2, *Chaconne*, m. 10. Small groups in the right hand.

3. Section A″ (mm. 15-24)

[63]Ibid.

In this part, many elements from the previous sections change or are replaced by new figures. The chord progression remains the same as before, but the note values shorten to increase the tempo. Also, a variety of time signatures appear in rapid succession, in simple and compound meters. The biggest change in this section is the replacement of the right hand's feathered beams with sixteenth-note seventh chords that are idiomatic for performers.



Example. 4.11: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 2, *Chaconne*, mm. 19-24. Time signature changes.

4. Ending (mm. 25-26)

The ascending feathered beaming returns while, in the left hand, the triads play a new descending chord progression, which is G-F-E-D. In this final passage, the piece achieves its dynamic pinnacle, *ffff*. This hearkens back to Fuerst's first etude, which also has a similar climax at the end.

In this short piece, Fuerst works with diverse rhythmic and linear figurations, although he was only twenty-two when he crafted Etude No. 2. The composer was not afraid to use nontraditional techniques, such as feathered beaming and the omission of key and time signatures. Along with these novel techniques, he applied his own compositional traits, the use of chaconne form and nonfunctional triadic sequences, to create this singular composition.

Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*

This etude is the most technically and rhythmically challenging of Fuerst's three etudes. As the title expresses, elements of Ligeti's late writing style, such as complicated rhythmic patterns and dissonant harmonies, are showcased. The experience of performing Ligeti's Piano Concerto in 1999 informed Fuerst's compositional style, especially Ligeti's use of rhythmic patterns. The original title of the last etude was not *Omaggio a Ligeti*, but he decided to change the title because of the similarity of this etude to Ligeti's compositions. Fuerst crafted complicated rhythms throughout the piece, drawing upon changing meters, use of additive meters, syncopations, aksak rhythm, and displacement of accentuation between hands. These rhythmic elements are distinct compositional features of Ligeti's late period.

Rather than using major or minor triads as a harmonic structure, Fuerst primarily utilized diminished triads with some minor triads. Moreover, rather than doubling the root of each chord, he placed a diminished octave interval above the root, which is an inversion of a half-step below each chord's base note. As a result, clusters of thickly layered dissonance prevail throughout the piece. Inevitably, no traditional harmonic progressions are present in this etude.

In contrast to Fuerst's previous etudes, the dynamics of Etude No. 3 generally remain loud. The dynamics of the first two etudes gradually grow from quiet beginnings, but this etude begins with forte. Given the composer's harmonic and dynamic choices, this is the most dissonant and aggressive of the three etudes.

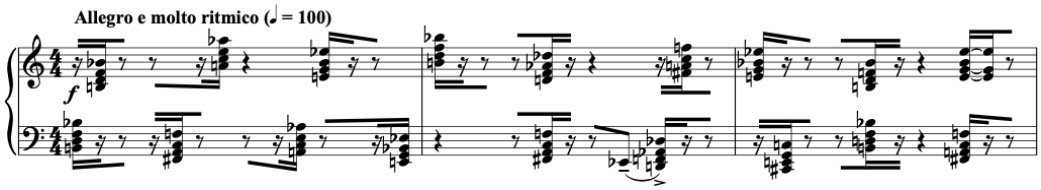
The following table denotes the structure of *Omaggio a Ligeti*.

Measures	Section	Description
1-13	A	Minor or diminished triads with diminished octave appear in both hands.
14-65	B	The left hand plays a 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes and the right hand plays dissonant chords.
66-81	C	Both hands exchange their parts from the B section; therefore, the left hand plays dissonant chords while the right hand plays the 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern.

Figure 4.4: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, Structure.

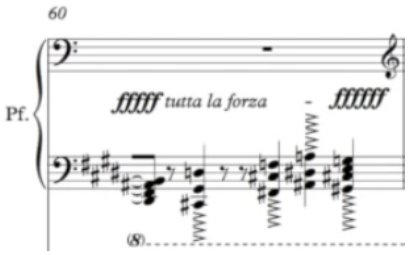
1. Section A (mm. 1-13)

This section consists of sparse dissonant chords in both hands. These chords are usually diminished triads with the addition of the half step below the root in the upper octave.

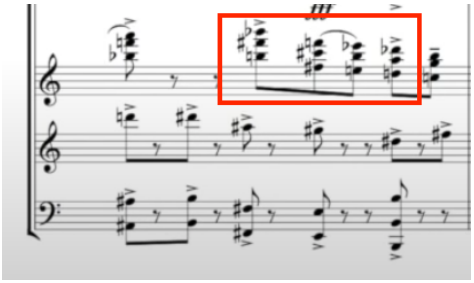


Example 4.12: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 1-3. Diminished triads with diminished octave.

This unusual diminished octave interval also can be found in Ligeti's Piano Concerto, in the piano and orchestra parts.



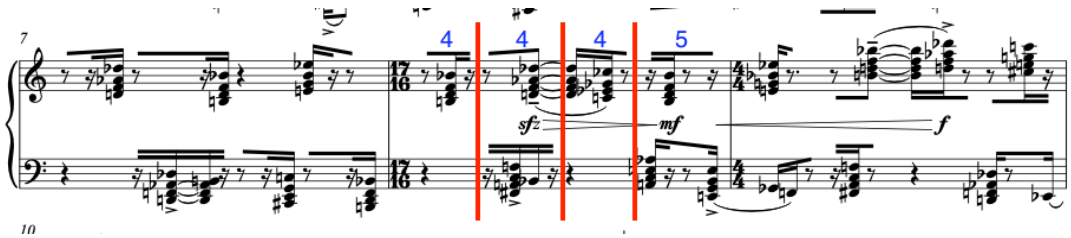
Example 4.13: Ligeti, Piano Concerto, first movement, m. 60. Diminished octaves in the left hand in the piano part.



Example 4.14: Ligeti, Piano Concerto, first movement, m. 118. Diminished octaves in the woodwind part.

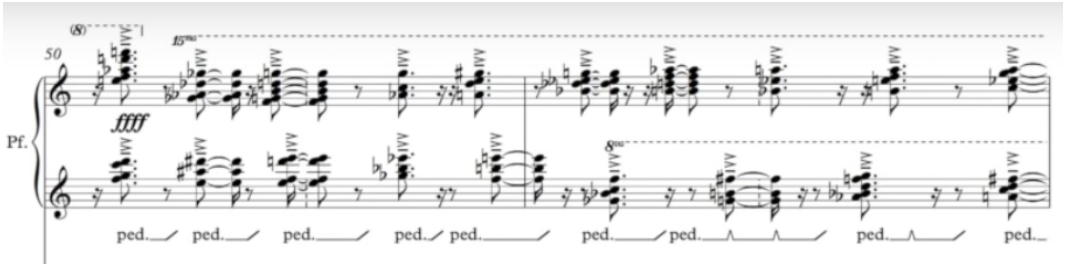
In contrast to the recurring triadic progressions of the first two etudes, the dissonant chord structures throughout the whole etude, *Omaggio a Ligeti* appear, without any specific harmonic pattern. However, accentuated bass notes in the left hand appear in the D major scale.

This A section is the most challenging part of the piece because of the complicated rhythmic passage. Although this etude begins in a familiar 4/4 meter, syncopation and off-beat accents occur frequently, along with rests on the strong beats. These rests do not appear simultaneously in both hands, which further obfuscates the meter and makes this section more intricate. Peculiarly, an odd meter, 17/16, disrupts the four rhythmic groups of sixteenth notes at m. 8, creating a 4+4+4+5 pattern. Therefore, performers should be aware of this uncommon measure and carefully subdivide each beat.



Example 4.15: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 7-9. Irregular meter.

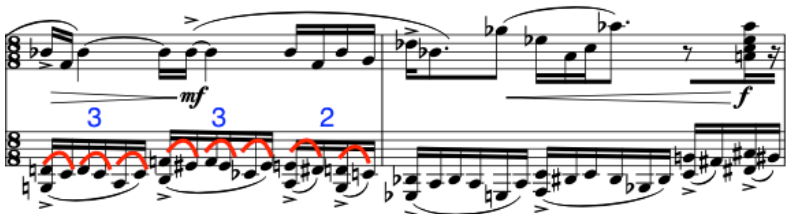
The complicated rhythmic setting due to the absence of the downbeat was also one of Ligeti's favorite writing devices in his late period, as seen below.



Example 4.16: Ligeti, Piano Concerto, fourth movement, mm. 50-51. Rests on downbeats.

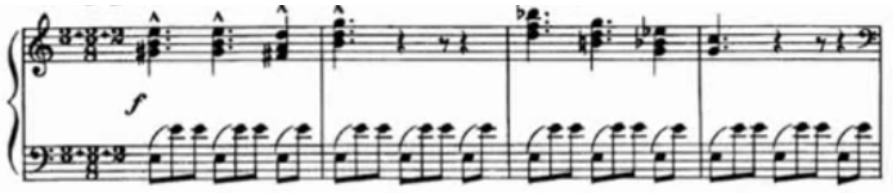
2. Section B (mm. 14-65)

In the B section, an irregular rhythmic group appears in the left hand. It begins in 8/8, which could be easily considered 4/4. However, Fuerst designated 8/8 meter to specify the breakdown of the pulse as two compound beats and one simple beat, rather than four simple beats. Fuerst arranged the sixteenth notes as 6+6+4. When the sixteenth notes switch to eighth notes, the rhythmic group is simplified into 3+3+2.



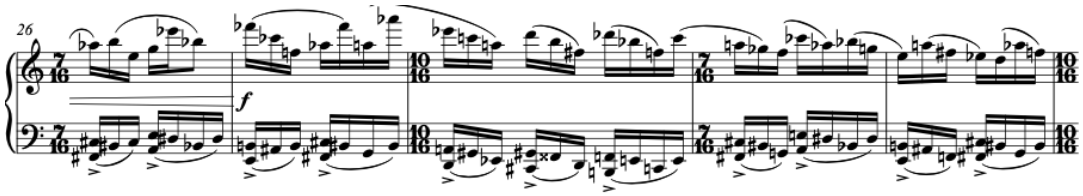
Example 4.17: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 14-15. 3+3+2 rhythmic group.

This rhythmic subdivision is called aksak rhythm, famously used by Bartók in works such as Mikrokosmos, No. 153, Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm.



Example 4.18: Bartók, Mikrokosmos, No. 153, *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm*, mm. 1-4. 3+3+2 rhythm.

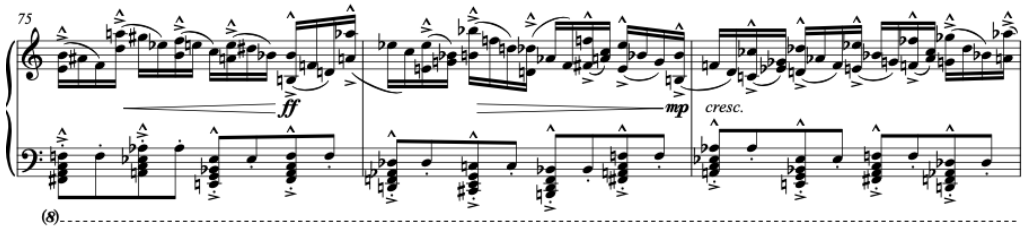
Fuerst drew upon many unusual meters in this section, including 7/16, 8/16, 10/16, 11/16, and 13/16, beginning in m. 26. Rather than adhering to 6+6+4, the sixteenth notes in this metrically tumultuous passage are divided into smaller groups, such as smaller groups of three or four notes.



Example 4.19: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 26-30. Unusual meters and shorter rhythmic groupings.

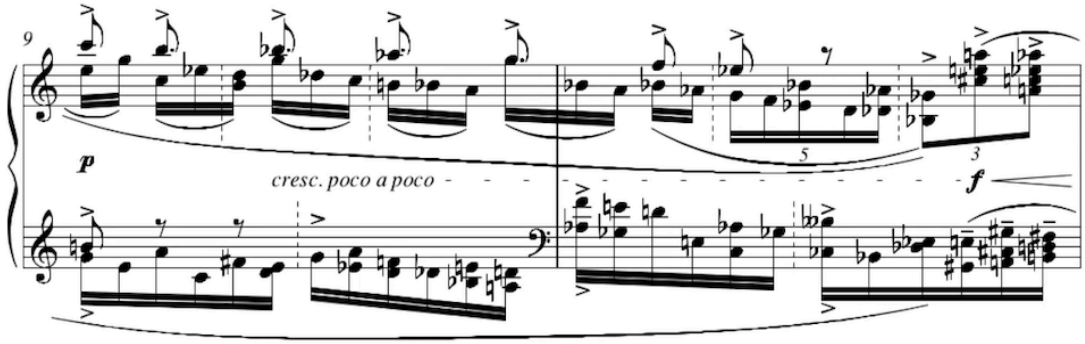
3. Section C (mm. 66-81)

The diminished octave chords reappear in the left hand while the right hand plays the 3+3+2 rhythm. The 3+3+2 rhythm is in the eighth note value, but the rhythm is in the sixteenth note value in the C section. The rhythmic pattern appears strictly until m. 74, but it becomes less strict from m. 75. Rapidly changing meters and irregular rhythmic patterns yield hemiola in the right hand. The left hand contrarily plays downbeat chords, so the pattern of accents does not line up between the hands. To coordinate this passage, the accents of the right hand should be practiced separately. Because the rhythmic pattern is not consistent, notating the number of sixteenth notes in each group would be helpful for practice.



Example 4.20: Fuerst, Piano Etude No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, mm. 75-77. Divergent rhythmic patterns between the hands.

In Ligeti's Piano Etude No. 5, *Arc-en-ciel*, conflictingly accented rhythmic groups appear in both hands as well.



Example 4.21: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 5, *Arc-en-ciel*, mm. 9-10. Contrasting rhythmic patterns in both hands.

The third etude unequivocally illustrates Fuerst's advanced rhythmic writing skill in comparison to his first two etudes. The composer created different and seemingly opposed rhythmic and harmonic elements in each section, which interact to produce a novel sound. Etude No. 3 adopts many of Ligeti's musical features, such as dissonant chords and complex rhythm. However, Fuerst distinguishes his piece from Ligeti through the use of atypical and rapidly changing meters. The rhythmic complexity and fast tempo promote *Omaggio a Ligeti* as a worthwhile addition to the repertoire, ideal for showing off the pianist's virtuosity and metric solidity.

Conclusion

Because this set of etudes was written in his youth, these works reveal Fuerst's compositional tendencies early in his career. This composition could be considered experimental, because each etude contains various musical techniques, some of which the composer never employs again, and some of which are later incorporated into his mature style. Fuerst boldly employed nontraditional techniques and dissonant sounds, while retaining such traditional aspects as triads and chaconne style. These

interwoven traditional and nontraditional features forge a unique character within this interesting set.

CHAPTER 5: *The Drift of Things* (2009)

After writing three piano etudes, Fuerst attended Juilliard for approximately six years to earn a master's and doctoral degree. The composer was productive in his field while at school, writing several chamber pieces, including two violin and piano sonatas. He received many awards for these chamber works, and released a recording with Wood and Riley, but he had not written a solo piano piece for a while. After graduating from Juilliard, Fuerst worked as a freelancer in New York City for two years, and in 2008, he accepted a teaching job offer at Hillsdale College in Michigan. This career move was a considerable change of pace; ruminating on his first year at Hillsdale, Fuerst recalled, "as much as I was enjoying my new job and teaching college students, I had a very hard transition leaving my home in New York City and moving to a small, rural town like Hillsdale."[64] While he was adjusting, his friend Vicky Chow contacted him to write a new piano piece for her.

Vicky Chow is an active pianist based in New York and performs with the sextet Bang on a Can. Chow was born in Vancouver, Canada, and started studying at Juilliard at the age of seventeen. While at Juilliard, Chow demonstrated her passion for new music by performing contemporary pieces by such composers as John Adams, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley. According to Chow, "I decided to put together a concert featuring all of the composers I knew. Since my interest in new sounds was relatively new at the time, I knew only five composers. The composers were Ryan Francis, Mathew Fuerst, Felipe Lara, Wei-Chieh Lin, and Zhou Tian."[65] When Chow approached Fuerst about writing a piece for her, he felt that "this was a great opportunity to try to capture some of the difficulties and anxieties I had as I was

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[64]Fuerst, *The Drift of Things,* program notes. 2009.

[65]Chris McGovern, "Vicky Chow," The Glass Blog, accessed February 23, 2021, https://chrismcgovernmusic.wordpress.com/2011/12/13/vicky-chow/

adjusting to my new life."[66] Finally, ten years after the completion of his three piano etudes, he composed the solo piano piece entitled *The Drift of Things*. Chow premiered the piece in New York in May 2009.

Fuerst drew inspiration from three different works of art when crafting *The Drift of Things*. The first influence was *Bitches Brew* by Miles Davis. Fuerst stated that "I was introduced to Miles Davis' album *Bitches Brew* around the same time as my move to Hillsdale and was impressed by the improvisatory power and raw energy of the music."[67] For the same reason, he was attracted to Jackson Pollock's paintings, which are spontaneous and unconstrained. To create a raw and spontaneous style on the piano, Fuerst wrote passages in which "the rhythm, direction, and range of a gesture are given, but not the specific pitches."[68] A poem by Robert Frost also impacted Fuerst's composition. The title, *The Drift of Things*, was borrowed from a line in Frost's *Reluctance*:

"Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?"[69]

Along with these inspirations from the visual, literary, and musical arts, Fuerst based the form of his piece on the mathematical concept of the golden ratio. Fuerst noted that, in opposition to the seemingly unstructured improvisational elements, "I still wanted to try to create balance structurally. To achieve this, I calculated the climax to happen at the Golden Section of the work by writing the ending first,

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[66]Fuerst, *The Drift of Things,* program notes. 2009.
[67]Ibid.
[68]Ibid.
[69]Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1969)*,* 30.

counting the number of eighth notes used, then figuring out how many eighth-note beats I would need in the piece to make it work."[70] The golden section is a mathematical relationship containing two unequal parts. The ratio between the smaller and larger part is the same as that between the larger part and the entire original.[71] This ratio is expressed as approximately 1:1.618. The golden section frequently occurs in nature and has been reproduced in many areas such as architecture, fine art and even musical forms. In the twentieth century, composers such as Debussy and Bartók consciously employed the golden section to distinguish formal sections.[72] For example, *Reflets dans l'eau*, the first piece in Debussy's piano suite Images, is ninety-five measures long. The first section is fifty-nine measures long and the second section is thirty-six measures long. Multiplying the length of the larger section by the ratio 1.618 yields an approximation of the total number of measures, ninety-five. In the same manner, multiplying the length of the short section by the golden ratio yields the length of the longer section (36 x 1.618 ≈ 59).

Bartók utilized the golden section in the first movement of *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, which totals eighty-nine measures. The first section is comprised of fifty-five measures before the climax, and the second section consists of thirty-four measures. The ratio between these parts is 1.618, as is the ratio of the entire movement to its first section. For *The Drift of Things*, rather than basing his ratio on number of measures, Fuerst used the interval of an eighth note. From the beginning to the climax, there are 1199 eighth-note beats. After the climax to the

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[70]Fuerst, *The Drift of Things,* program notes. 2009.

[71]Ruth Tatlow, "Golden Number," *Grover Music Online,* accessed February 25, 2021, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

[72]Ruth Tatlow and Paul Griffiths, "Numbers and Music," *Grove Music Online,* accessed February 25, 2021, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.unl.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000049579.

ending, there are 741 eighth-note beats. Those numbers adhere to the ratio of the golden section. The following graph shows the golden section of *The Drift of Things*.

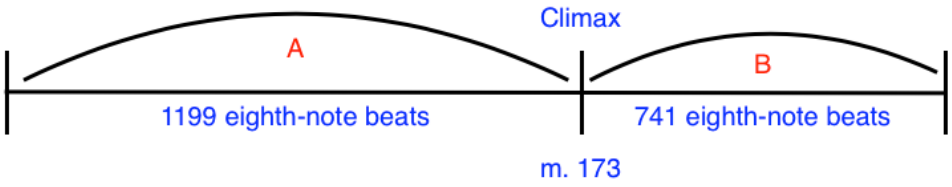


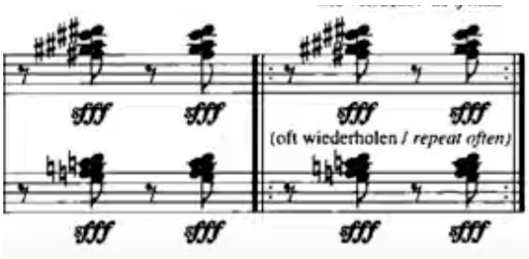
Figure 5.1: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*. The golden section.

Apart from the binary nature of the two aforementioned sections, *The Drift of Things* has no traditional form. Instead, Fuerst created four distinct passages that repeat throughout the work.

1. Tone cluster + chromatic scale

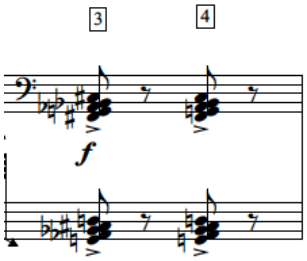
This passage is built upon tone clusters and chromatic scales. A tone cluster is made of a group of adjacent notes which are played simultaneously. Usually played using the fist, palm, or forearm, clusters have been used in many contemporary piano works.[73] Many contemporary composers such as Henry Cowell, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Ligeti used clusters in their piano works. Cowell's *The Tides of Manaunaun* for piano contains many clusters with large intervals, necessitating the use of the palm or forearm. On the other hand, many of the tone clusters in Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata* No. 10 have five notes placed within an octave. These clusters can be played with fingers without using palm or forearm or "fingers only."

[73]"Cluster." *Grove Music Online.* 2001; Accessed February 25, 2021, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.unl.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000005992.



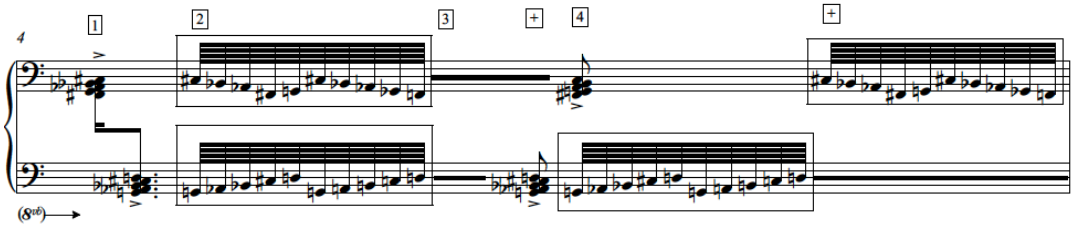
Example. 5.1: Ligeti, *Musica Ricercata,* No. 10, mm. 111-112. Tone clusters.

The aforementioned narrow clusters are similar to the figures found in *The Drift of Things*.



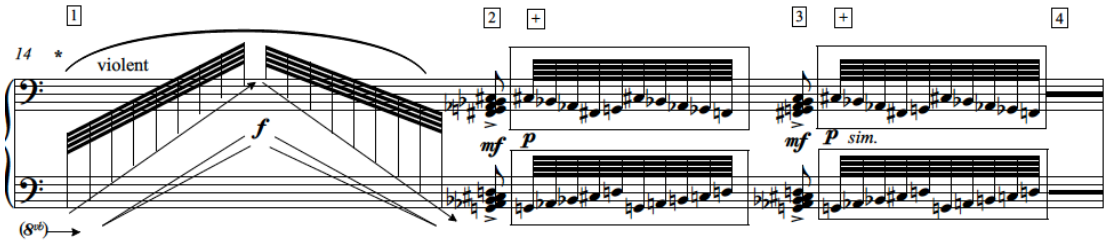
Example 5.2: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, m. 19. Tone clusters.

In this piece, accented tone clusters and strong dynamics create an atmosphere of disarray sound. In the midst of the chaos, the tone clusters must fall on the correct beat in 4/4 time. Fuerst inscribed beat numbers on each beat and + on off-beats so that performers can track the meter by the numbers. In lieu of rests, the clusters are punctuated by sixty-fourth-note scalar patterns, which are played seamlessly until the next cluster comes. These scales are placed in boxes, and Fuerst's notes inform the pianist that "all music in boxes should be played as quickly as possible and the hands should not be coordinated with each other." Therefore, it can be assumed that the chromatic scales present a rumbling soundscape rather than individual notes.



Example 5.3: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, m. 4. Tone clusters and chromatic scales.

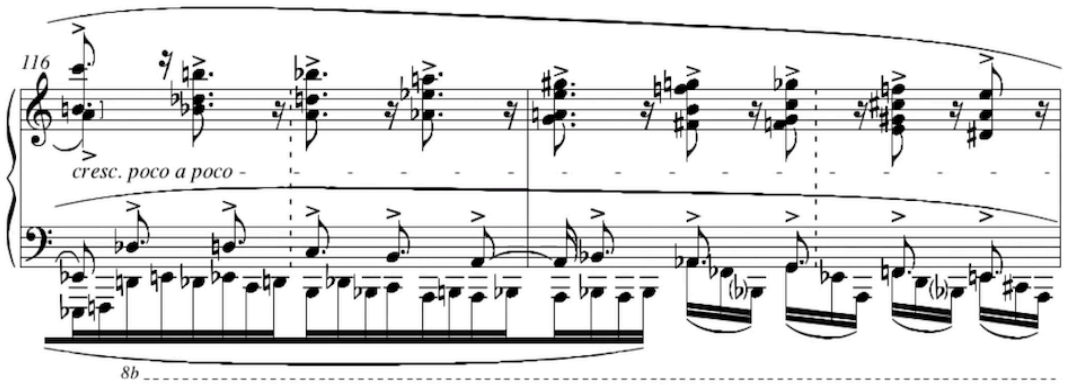
Fuerst deviates from these two main elements with a short passage that does not have a specific pitch. As mentioned before, Fuerst desired to craft a raw and spontaneous sound. As a result, he placed several unpitched moments within the different passages of the piece. Fuerst suggested two options for the performance of this figure: either play it as a glissando, or as clusters. This passage is in only one beat, so it should be played very quickly.



Example 5.4: Fuerst*, The Drift of Things*, m. 14. No discernible pitch.

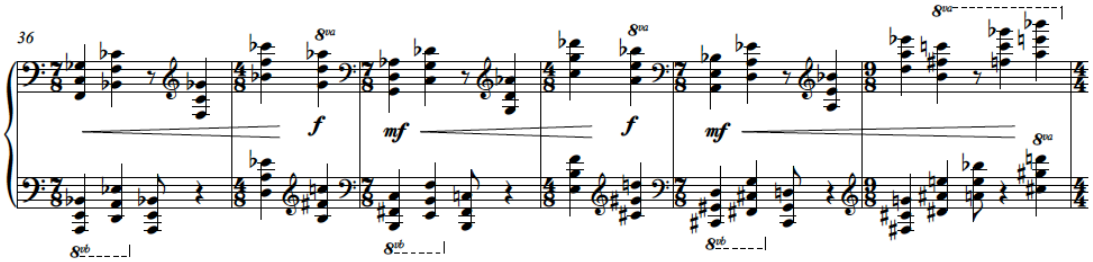
2. Minor ninth chords

In his third etude, Fuerst built his harmonies upon successive diminished octave chords, which are dissonant. In this piece, he composed comparably dissonant consecutive minor ninth chords. Because the two notes of the minor ninth interval are adjacent, the resulting chord produces an uncomfortable and harsh sound. Fuerst increased the tension by dictating louder dynamics at dissonant moments. Similar chords can be found in Ligeti's etude No. 5 *Arc-en-ciel.*



Example 5.5: Ligeti, Piano Etude No. 5, *Arc-en-ciel*, mm. 116-117. Successive minor ninth chords in the right hand.

In addition to the minor ninth interval, each chord in Fuerst's piece contains a perfect fifth above the root. These chords jump around the range of the piano, so performers must place their hands quickly after sounding the previous chord. This chordal passage lasts six measures, with meter changes featuring 7/8, 4/8, and 9/8 occurring at every measure.

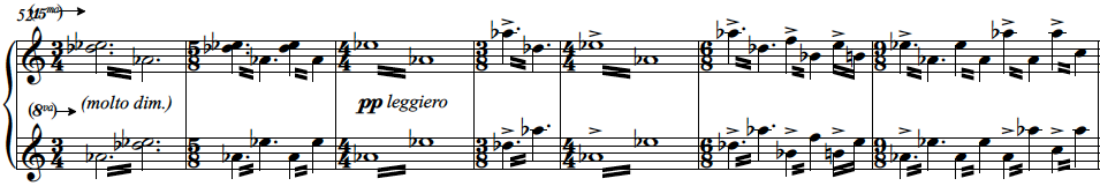


Example 5.6: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 36-41. Minor ninth chords.

3. Tremolo

This tremolo passage is the most consonant and peaceful moment throughout the work. With quiet dynamics and use of the sustain pedal, Fuerst also employs musical terms such as leggiero and misterioso, implying that this passage should be harmonious and light in mood.

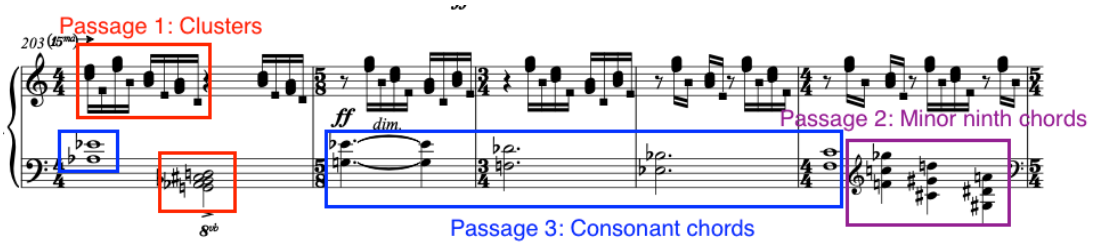
The intervals between the tremolos are wide compared to the first section's clusters and chromatics, and far less tense than the minor ninth chords; they are primarily perfect fourths, perfect fifths, major sixths, and perfect octaves. On the other hand, this passage shares one distinct feature with the minor ninth section: the meter changes every measure. The sequence of meters changes when the tremolo section returns.



Example 5.7: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 52-58. Tremolos.

4. Diatonic chord + cluster

This passage is an amalgam of passages 1, 2, and 3. The right hand plays clusters of five notes reminiscent of passage 1 while the left hand performs elements from each passage.



Example 5.8: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 203-207. The elements of the three passages.

The right-hand clusters begin removing notes toward the end of the passage, until finally only B and C are played. In contrast, the left hand plays a broad range of notes and figures. These include the clusters from passage 1, the minor ninth chords from passage 2, and the consonant tremolos from passage 3, reconfigured here as static chords. The note values of the right-hand clusters lengthen across the passage, beginning with sixteenth notes, changing to eighth-note triplets, and finally slowing to eighth notes. The elements of the left hand also vanish: the clusters from passage 1 disappear note by note, and the minor ninth chords dissolve later. As a result, only the consonant chords of passage 3 remain in the left hand by the end of the section. Similar to the previous passages, meters change frequently. In this passage, Fuerst employs unusual time signatures such as 5/4, 7/4, 11/8, and 13/8. The emphasis on prime numbers is a hallmark in Fuerst's work, and was previously seen in his first piano etude, *Colors*. For that piece, the composer used prime numbers in subdivisions of the right hand, such as 11, 13, and 17.

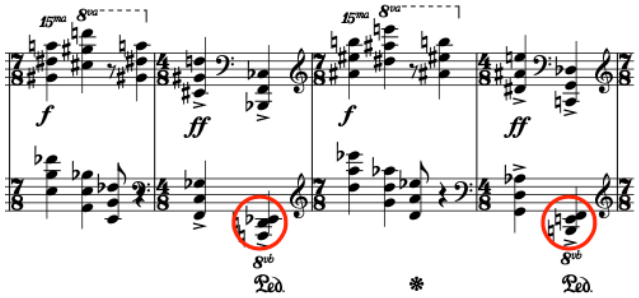
There is no traditional structure in *The Drift of Things*, but the four passages appear in a specific order.

Section	Passages	Measures
A	1	1-22
	2	23-28
	1	29-35
	2	36-41
B	1	42-51
	3	52-60
	1	61-68
	3	69-81
	1	82-102
	3	103-127
C	1	128-139
	2	140-151
	3	152-165
	Climax	166-173
D	4	174-255

Figure 5.2: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, Structure.

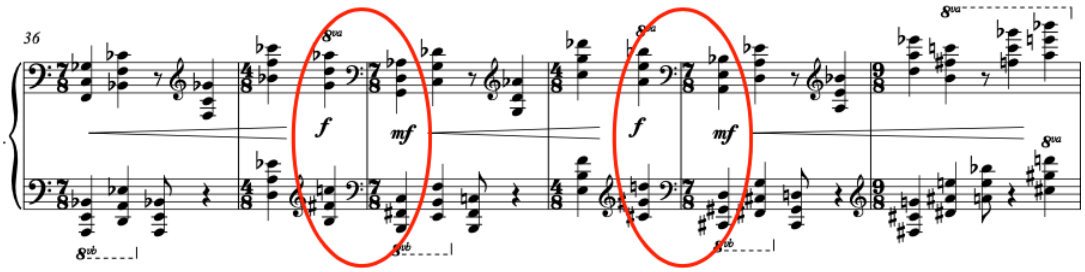
1. Section A (mm. 1-41)

In the A section, passages 1 and 2 appear in alternation. The first iteration of passage 1 starts on the lower register between G1 and C♯3, with a dynamic of *fff*. The low, chaotic sound represents the composer's anxieties while adjusting to his new life, transplanted from a big city to a small town. However, this passage is the most rhythmically stable section of the piece. Fuerst typically uses frequent meter changes in his music, but this passage remains in 4/4 time, which is unusual. On the other hand, the second passage has meter changes every measure. Another contrast between the passages of section A is the second passage's dramatic change in register: in a mere six measures, the descending motion of both hands spans the upper to lower octaves of the piano, necessitating leaps between each chord. Most minor ninth chords have the same stretched hand position, but there are two chords that contain a diminished fifth interval in the left hand. Therefore, performers should be keenly aware of the changing hand positions in this section.



Example 5.9: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 23-26. Changing hand position in the left hand.

The second occurrence or first repeat of passage 1 is much shorter but more aggressive because of the dynamic indications *fff* and *sfffz*. The second occurrence of passage 2 shows a rapid ascent in both hands from the bottom to the top of the keyboard; this trajectory repeats with different chords. The final chord of each 4/8 bar is followed by a large leap to the low range, so performers should practice these rapid changes in range separately. Additionally, performers must take care not to rush between the chords.

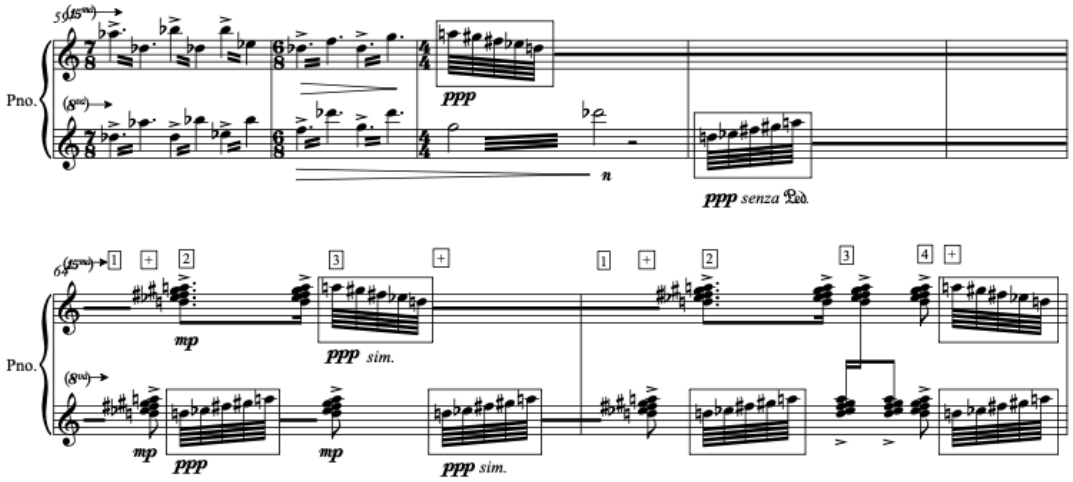


Example 5.10: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 36-41. Large gaps between chords.

2. Section B (mm. 42-127)

In section B, passages 1 and 3 appear three times each. Passage 1 occurs in the higher register in gentle dynamics such as *mp* or *pp*, unlike the strong opening of the piece. Fuerst suggests that performers use the soft pedal in this section because the density of note clusters and scales can easily come across too loud for the prescribed dynamics. However, he also stresses that the occurrences of passage 1 should not use

the sustain pedal. On the other hand, passage 3 is performed with much use of the sustain pedal. The consonant tremolos in the high register seem to depict Fuerst's relief or resolution as he settles into the new chapter of his life. As mentioned above, this passage is the most beautiful and delicate moment. Along with passage 3, the first repeat of passage 1 is presented in the quietest dynamic so far. Also, the register is higher than previous repeats.



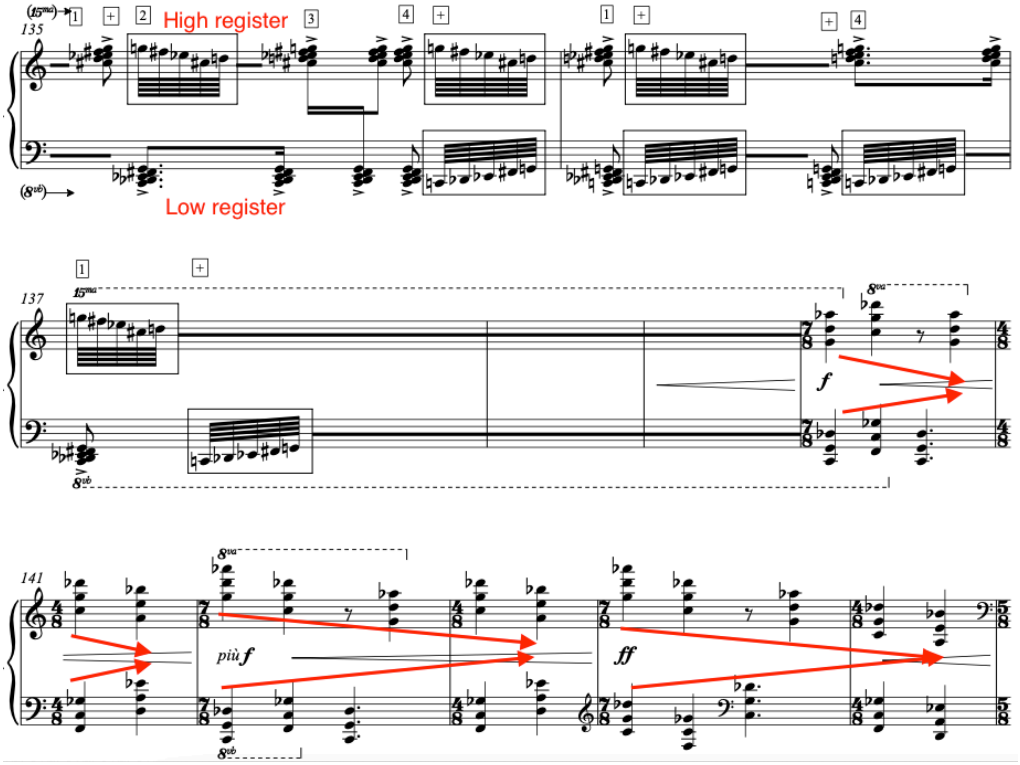
Example 5.11: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 59-65. The quietest moment in passage 1.

In m. 103, he indicates senza pedal for passage 3 as opposed to the previous passage 3. Rather than eschewing the sustain pedal, Fuerst advises that performers use a half-pedaling technique throughout the passage. Because the harmonies change more rapidly during this passage, the initial indication was for senza pedal, but after talking with the composer, he changed it to half-pedaling in this section. This pedaling produces a clean sound by releasing the pedal as soon as harmonies change and then pushing it right back down.

3. Section C (mm. 128-173)

In section C, the three passages appear in order. In passage 1, the right hand plays in the higher register and the left hand plays in the lower register. Passage 2 is extended; before, it featured similar descending and ascending motion in both hands,

but this time the hands move in contrary motion, beginning far apart and working toward the center.



Example 5.12: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 135-145. Contrasting motion in each hand.

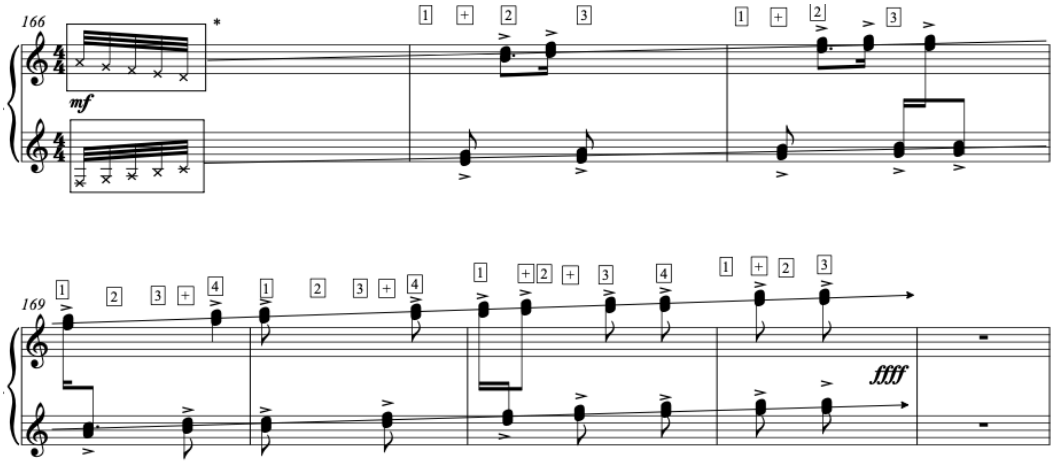
Following passage 2, passage 3 appears in the lower register, serving as a transition to the climax, which begins in the lower register. Changing harmonies occur more frequently in the left hand than before. Therefore, performers should change the sustain pedal as often as the harmonies change.

At the beginning of the climax, Fuerst wrote a rhythmic gesture in contrasting motion that does not specify pitches. His detailed instructions for performers specify that:

> "the pattern in the box should continue as the performer gradually ascends the keyboard. It should sound like the box notation material from earlier in the work, except now presented as a slow *gliss* [sic]. The clusters should be played as the cluster chords before, and the performer should make sure to

> continue the box notation material when not playing the clusters. The gesture should ascend all the way up the keyboard." [74]

This climax lasts seven measures and moves from *mf* to *ffff*. The soundscape of the climax should be sharp and clear, without the use of pedal. After the chaotic material of the climax, there is a silent measure in 4/4. This measure engenders aural uncertainty for listeners, who are likely expecting a resolution rather than an abrupt pause. To increase the drama of the moment, performers can prolong the silence of m. 173 before proceeding to the final section.

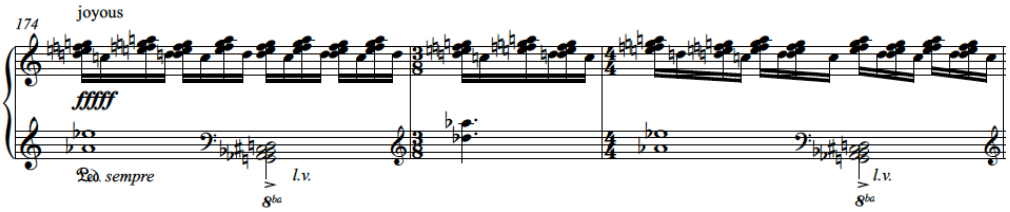


Example 5.13: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 166-173. Climax.

4. Section D (mm. 174-255)

After the silence, the D section begins with tone clusters in the right hand, and consonant chords and tone clusters in the left hand. These elements are derived from passages 1 and 3. In another startling dynamic gesture, this part begins with *fffff*, which is the loudest dynamic in the piece. Fuerst put 'joyous' at the beginning of the section, which perhaps depicts his bright future as an educator at the college.

[74]Fuerst, *The Drift of Things,* program notes. 2009



Example 5.14: Fuerst, *The Drift of Things*, mm. 174-176. The beginning of section D.

From mm. 187-234, the minor ninth chords from passage 2 appear spontaneously in the left hand. After they disappear, the dynamic gradually becomes quieter until the end. While this section utilizes elements from each passage in both hands, they fade away one by one along with the dynamics. The relatively sparse texture generates a somewhat diatonic sound near the end. Finally, the piece ends in *ppppp* with an A-flat chord in the left hand while the right hand plays C and B. To play *ppppp*, performers can use a soft pedal so that it is easy to control without slowing down, as Fuerst instructs non ritardando at m. 253.

Conclusion

This work is distinct among Fuerst's oeuvre for its use of the golden section, the absence of such stylistic hallmarks as chaconne and nonfunctional triads, and the prevalence of some of his other favored elements, including frequent meter changes and extreme dynamic contrast. Other notable compositional devices not seen in Fuerst's previous piano works include tone clusters and tremolos, which emulate Ligeti's style. The composer's use of the full range of the piano showcases the diverse timbres and dynamics of which the instrument is capable. Unlike his first two etudes, this piece begins with an aggressive sound but ends in a calm atmosphere. This eight-minute piece offers pianists the opportunity to explore a variety of different physical and artistic techniques, while providing audiences with a highly unique soundscape and atypical structure to consider.

CHAPTER 6: *Nocturne* (*Walking Along the Danube in Budapest at Night*) (2013)

After completing *The Drift of Things*, Fuerst produced such magnificent chamber compositions as Violin Sonata No. 3 (2011) and String Quartet No. 2 (2012). The composer returned to his favored compositional devices for these pieces: major triads pervade the first movement of Violin Sonata No. 3, while the second movement is presented in chaconne style. More elaborately, his String Quartet No. 2 is "a chaconne using a 12-tone row as the basis for the root of each triad used."[75] As Fuerst's mature musical writing style was becoming fully developed, he wrote his third piano piece, *Nocturne* (*Walking Along the Danube in Budapest at Night*) in 2013. This work was commissioned by Solungga Fang-Tzu Liu, a piano professor at Bowling Green State University, and Brad Blackham, Fuerst's former colleague at Hillsdale College. Bowling Green State University started its New Music Festival in 1980 and has hosted distinguished composers such as John Adams, John Cage, John Corigliano, Philip Glass, and Terry Riley.[76] At the festival, composers and performers showcase concerts, lectures, and an art exhibition. In 2013, Fuerst was hosted by the New Music Festival as one of the guest artists. For this festival, he decided to write this nocturne for two pianos, which is quiet, slow, and tender, as opposed to many of his previous compositions, which are fast and energetic.[77] *Nocturne* is the only piece for two pianos that Fuerst has ever composed. Interestingly, Ligeti also wrote one set of three pieces for two pianos, although he composed five additional piano pieces for four hands.

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[75]Fuerst, *String Quartet No. 2,* program notes. 2012.

[76]"Groundbreaking artists highlight BGSU New Music Festival," Bowling Green State University, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.bgsu.edu/news/2013/10/groundbreaking-artists-highlight-bgsu-new-music-festival.html.

[77]Fuerst, *Nocturne,* program notes. 2013.

The subtitle, *Walking Along the Danube in Budapest at Night*, was sparked by Fuerst's Budapest honeymoon with his wife, Rachel. They went for a walk along the Danube River one evening and Fuerst "wanted to capture the mysterious and beautiful effect the city has at night, particularly the illuminated buildings and their reflections on the river."[78] This sentiment translated perfectly to the creation of a nocturne.

A nocturne is a night piece that usually embodies a quiet and dreamlike atmosphere. John Field coined the name of this genre, and Frédéric Chopin was greatly responsible for the genre's evolution and proliferation during the nineteenth century. Later, many other pianist-composers wrote nocturnes for piano, such as Franz Liszt, Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, and Sergei Rachmaninoff.[79] Nocturnes are generally short, in ternary form and feature highly ornamental vocal melodic lines support by patterned accompaniments. Due to this simple structure, nocturnes are considered songs without words. Chopin's nocturnes are written in bel canto style, which exhibits a beautiful melody and virtuosic elements with an accompaniment.[80] Each nocturne of Chopin's is different in terms of meters and keys, but they are generally in an ABA ternary form.

Fuerst explained to the author that this piece is a chaconne in which the tonal center of each section matches the root of the chaconne progression.[81] Therefore, the chord progression is sublimated within the structure. This piece starts with a blocked major ninth chord that emulates the sound of bells tolling.[82] This bell section reappears almost exactly at the end of the nocturne. Although Fuerst wrote this piece

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[78]Ibid.

[79]Maurice Hinson, "Nocturne," in The Pianist's Dictionary, (Bloomington, Indiana University, 2004), 122.

[80]Burkholder, James Peter, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 616.

[81]Fuerst, email message to author, August 27, 2019.

[82]Fuerst, *Nocturne,* program notes. 2013.

in a chaconne style, which is atypical for a nocturne, some traditional elements were utilized, including slow tempo and pervasively soft dynamics. Additionally, if one argues that the piece is in ternary form, it would be structurally similar to Chopin's nocturnes. At ten minutes, Fuerst's nocturne is quite a bit longer than the standard, but the tranquil and peaceful atmosphere of the night prevails in this work.

This piece can be divided into five sections bookended by the opening and closing bell sections, as outlined in Figure 6.1 below.

Measure	Section	Tonal center	Description
1-10	Introduction	X	Major ninth chords appear in both parts. The second piano plays whole-note triplets while the first piano plays syncopated duplets.
11-67	1	D	In the beginning, sparse and spontaneous notes appear between lengthy silences; later, the texture thickens to intervals and chords.
68-107	2	A	Broken triads in triplet rhythm comprise the first piano part, while the second piano plays duplets in 2/4.
108-148	3	E	The triads are performed as in section 2, but with frequent meter changes.
149-168	4	B	The meter returns to 2/4, as in section 2.
169-190	5	A	The tempo slows, and blocked triad

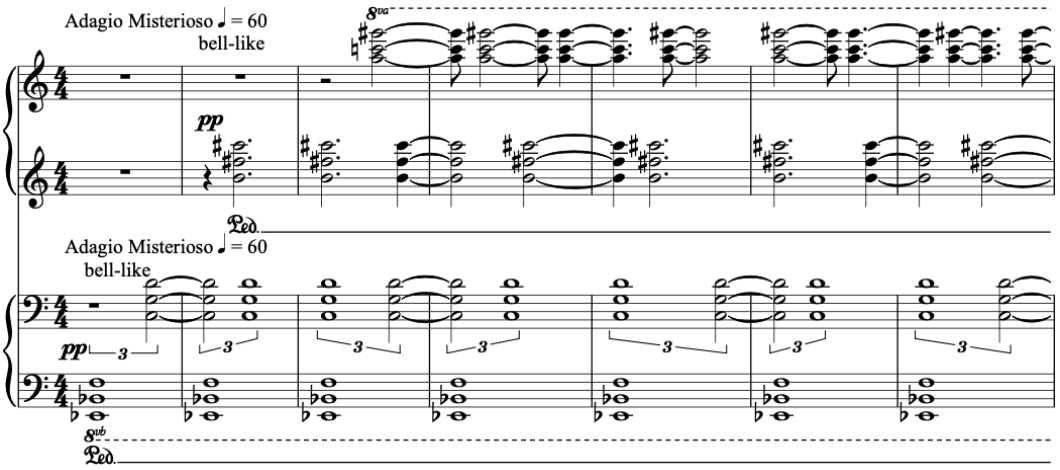
			chords appear, as in section 1.
191-202	Ending	X	It is nearly identical to the introduction, but quieter.

Figure 6.1: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, Structure.

Introduction (mm. 1-10)

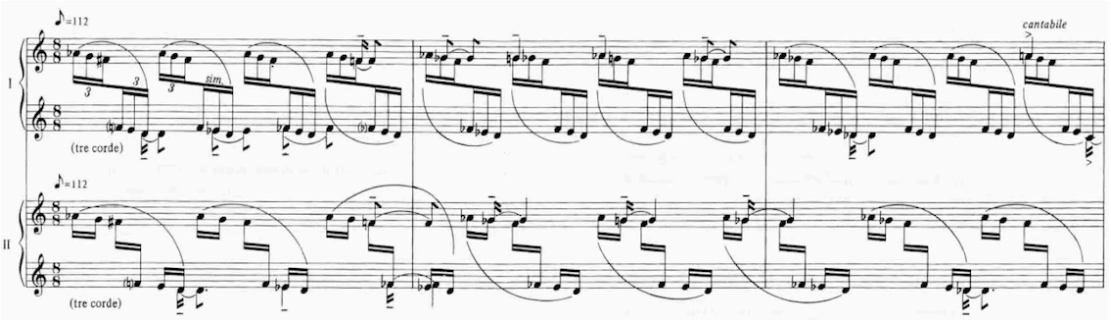
This piece begins with the sound of distant bells tolling. There is no chord progression initially, but dissonant blocked chords appear. The second piano plays major ninth chords with a perfect fifth from the root, while the first piano plays major ninth chords in the left hand and major seventh chords with flat thirds in the right hand. Those chords continue until m. 10 with the sustain pedal. To create a bell-like sound, Fuerst calls for the damper pedal throughout this introduction without changing. Performers should use a light touch to achieve the *pp* dynamic and produce a soft ringing. Small-handed pianists can play these wide chords with both hands, since chordal entrances alternate between staves.

The challenging part of the introduction is to coordinate timing between the two pianos due to the rhythmic complexity. In 4/4 time, the first piano plays duplets while the second piano plays triplets, so they seldom enter on the same beat. Both parts are highly syncopated, which further obscures the meter. The setting of duple against triple creates polyrhythms between the performers.



Example 6.1: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 1-7. Rhythmic complexity.

Polyrhythm is a distinctive facet of Ligeti's writing style and is present in his piece for two pianos. In No. 3 of 3 Pieces for 2 Pianos, the first piano part contains triplets, while the second piano plays duplets in 8/8.

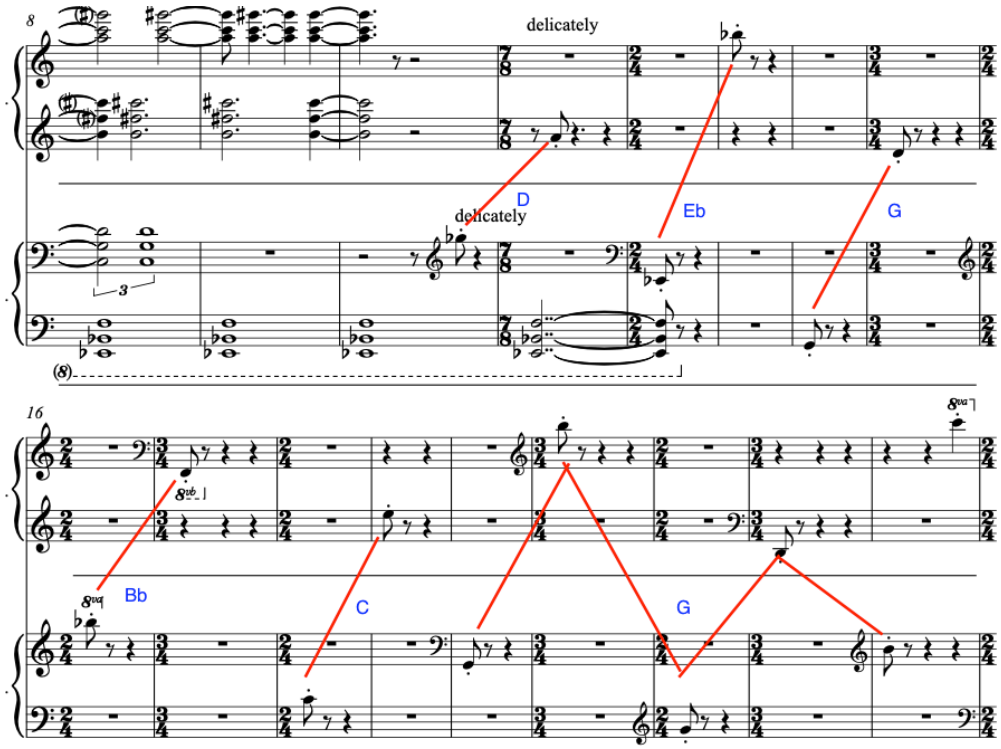


Example 6.2: Ligeti, *3 Pieces for 2 Pianos*, No. 3, mm. 1-3. Polyrhythms between two pianos.

Section 1 (mm. 11-67)

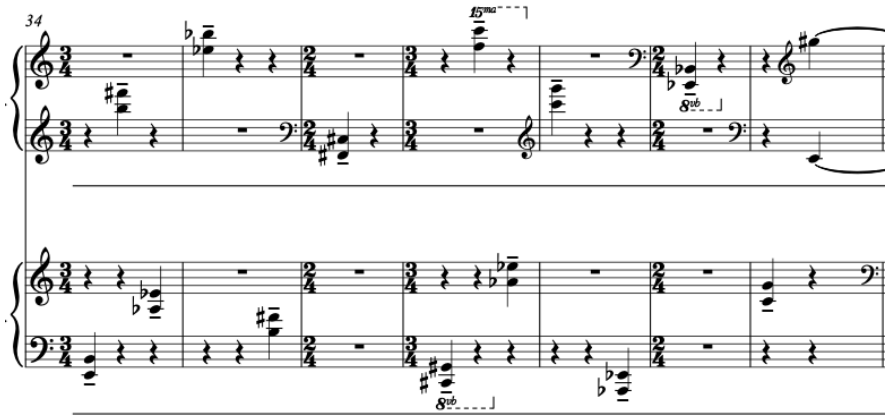
The first section contains five different motives. As the section progresses, increasingly more notes are introduced, and the resulting texture is more harmonically stable. There is only one note performed per measure by either pianist, in alternation, until m. 24, at which point each pianist plays one note per measure with the exception of mm. 26 and 29. These successive notes have elements of triads, and the second piano always plays the first note of each chord. This passage starts with on G♭, which is the enharmonic of F♯. The next note A is a major third from F♯. These two notes

can be parts of either an F♯ minor triad or a D major triad. This section ends a D major chord which relates the two notes. Meter changes occur frequently, which is a common aspect of Fuerst's writing style. Most entrances occur on downbeats so that performers can count easily despite the sparse texture. These spontaneous patterns of notes resemble minimalism, which usually simplifies rhythms, melodies, and harmonies.



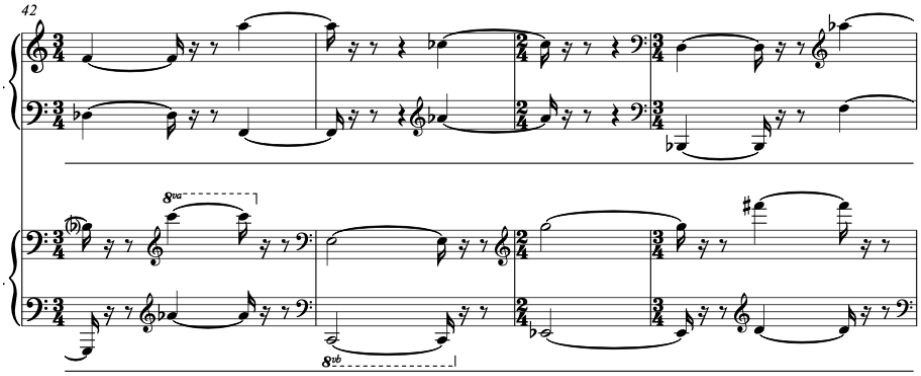
Example 6.3: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 8-24. Elements of triads.

From mm. 32-40, both pianos play blocked perfect fifth intervals in widely divergent parts of the piano's range. Performers must pay attention to the octave indications and practice rapidly traversing the range.



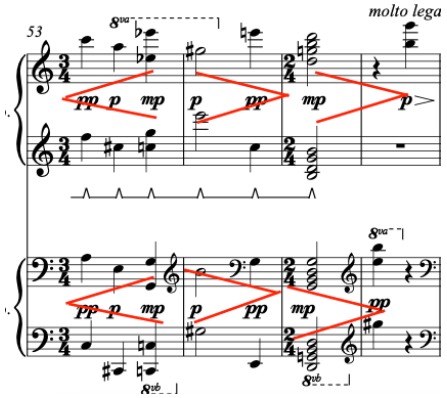
Example 6.4: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 34-40. Different octaves.

From mm. 40-48, major third, minor third, and perfect fifth intervals are played in different octaves in both pianos. While these harmonies are constructed from parts of triads, none are complete triads, as each lacks a note. Fuerst indicated no dynamic change from the beginning of section 1.



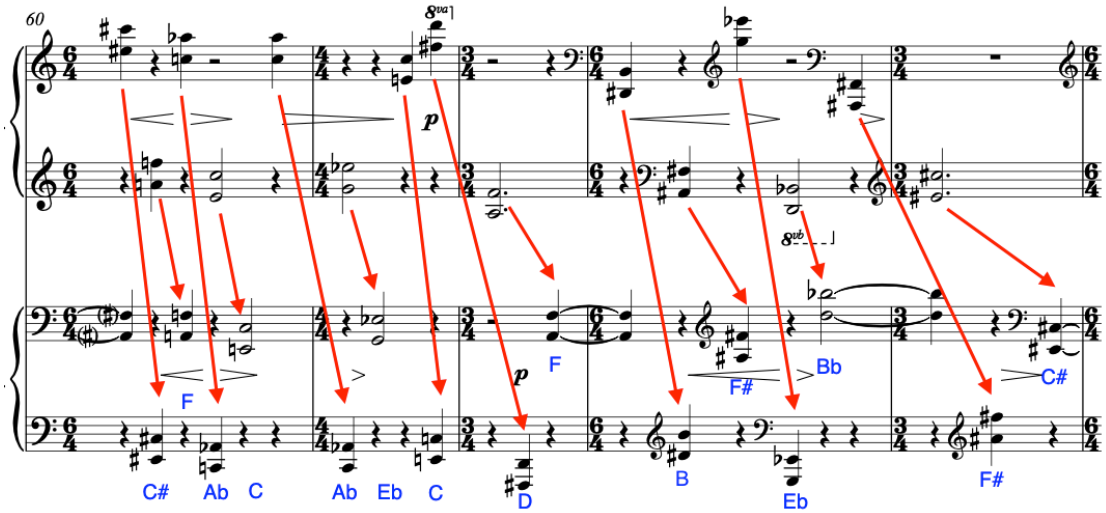
Example 6.5: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 42-45. Major third, minor third, and perfect fifth intervals.

Finally, during mm. 48-55, complete triads are presented by both pianos, which play the same chords simultaneously. Also, sudden shifts in dynamics appear as *pp*, *p*, and *mp* beneath each chord, in lieu of crescendo and decrescendo markings. To assist with visualizing the dynamic line, performers may write the crescendo and decrescendo markings in their part.



Example 6.6: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 53-56. Dynamic markings.

The complete triads last until m. 55, after which the roots and thirds of the triads appear in second inversion without fifths from mm. 56-67. The chord progression is presented in a close canon: the first piano sounds the first chord in the progression, and the second piano follows one beat behind. Fuerst did not employ pedal markings at this point because of the dissonance created by two chords sounding at the same time. Therefore, performers may choose to use the sustain pedal and shift on every chord but shifting must be fast and smooth to simulate the ringing of bells.

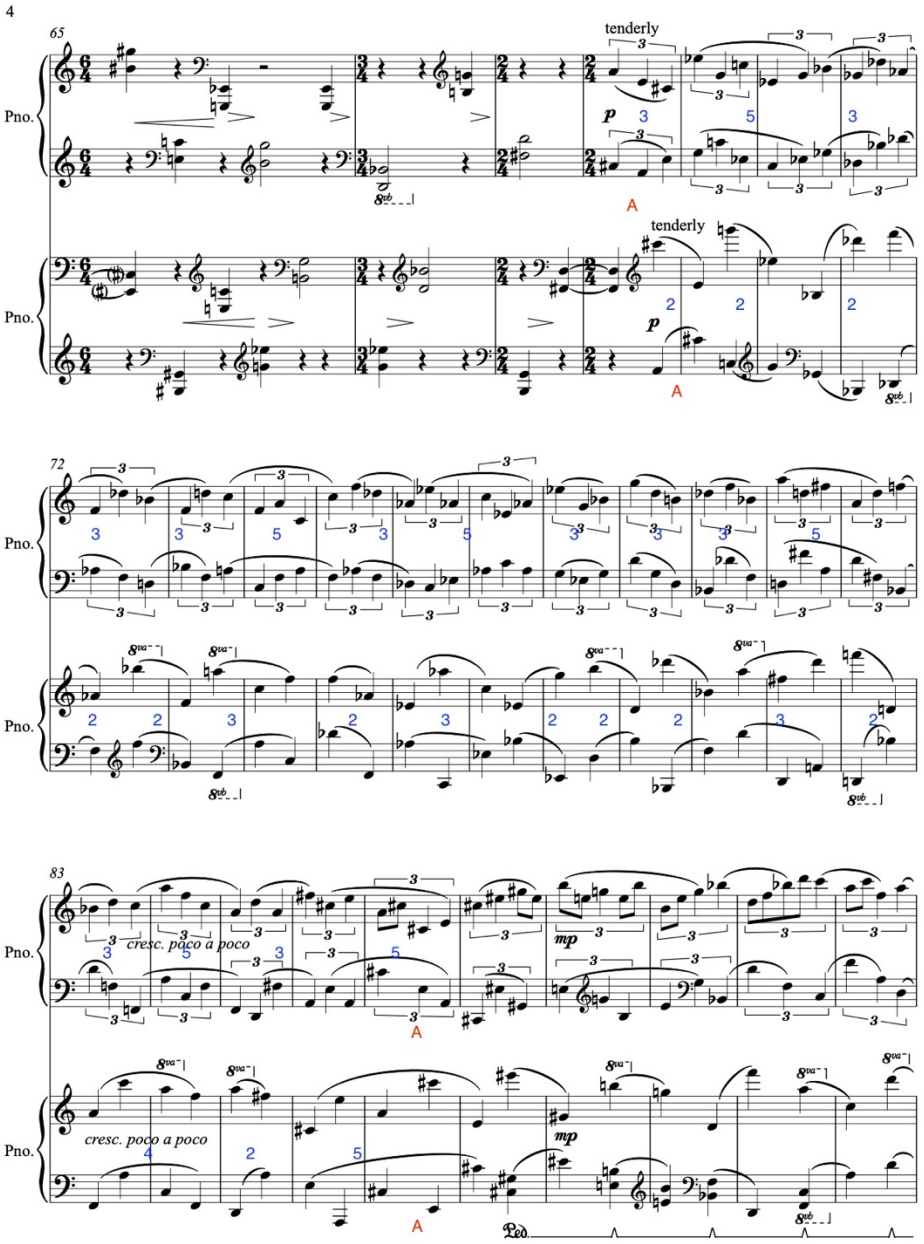


Example 6.7: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 60-64. Triads with missing fifths.

The section ends at m. 67 with a D major chord, which is the same as the initial chord in the progression. This return to the opening harmony indicates that the tonal center of this section is D major.

Section 2 (68-107)

The introduction of section 2 reintroduces the polyrhythm between the two pianos. The first piano plays triplets against the second piano's 2/4 duplets. While section 1 featured many meter changes, section 2 maintains the same meter throughout. Although this section seems simple, Fuerst wrote an odd sequence of notes to add rhythmic complexity. As mentioned before, Fuerst often uses irregular note groupings that create challenging and intriguing rhythms for performers. In this section, he groups the notes in 3 or 5 in the first piano, while the notes in the second piano are organized into groups of 2, 3, 4, or 5. Both parts contain the same chord progressions, but each sequence comprises different groups of notes in a unique sequence. The first piano's sequence is 3-5-3-3-3-5-3-5-3-3-3-5-3-5-3-5, while the second piano's sequence is 2-2-2-2-2-3-2-3-2-2-2-3-2-4-2-5. The first and final chords of this opening sequence group are A major.

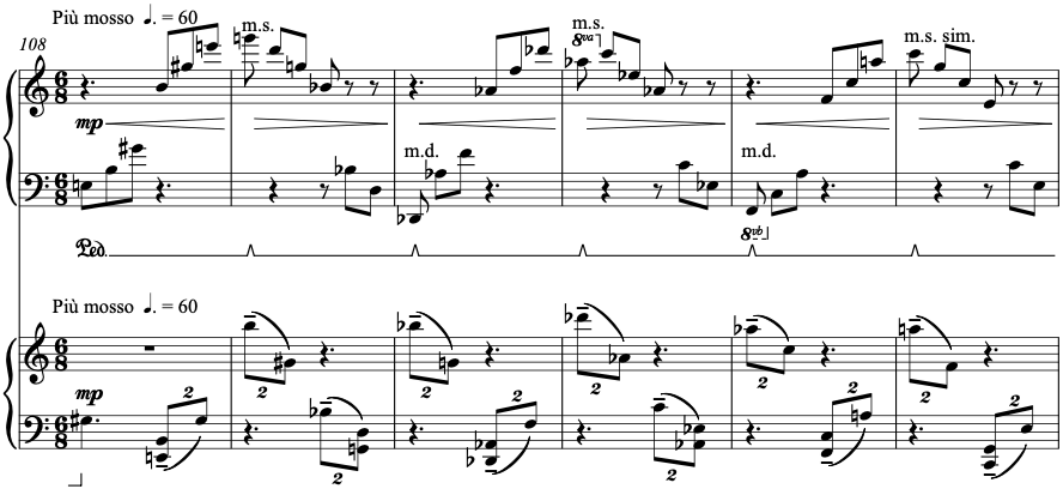


Example 6.8: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 65-92. Sequence groups and A major tonal center.

The second sequence group starts and ends in C♯ major. The relationship between the tonal centers of the first and second sequences is a major third, or the root and third of A major. Thus, A major appears to be the aggregate tonal center of section 2.

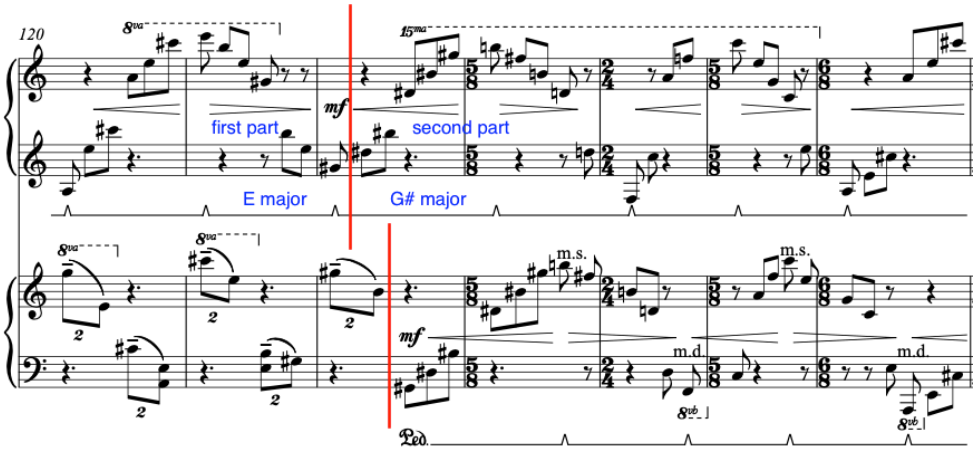
Section 3 (mm. 108-148)

Section 3 can be divided into three patterns. Polyrhythm carries over from the previous section into the first part of this section, which boasts the simplest of three rhythm patterns. The first piano has E major eighth-note arpeggios, while the second piano plays the chord progression in 6/8 duplets. The first piano's arpeggios move up and down in an arc shape, so Fuerst wrote swelling and subsiding dynamics that follow the melodic contour. This pattern lasts until m. 122 and ends on an E major chord, bookending this segment of section 3.



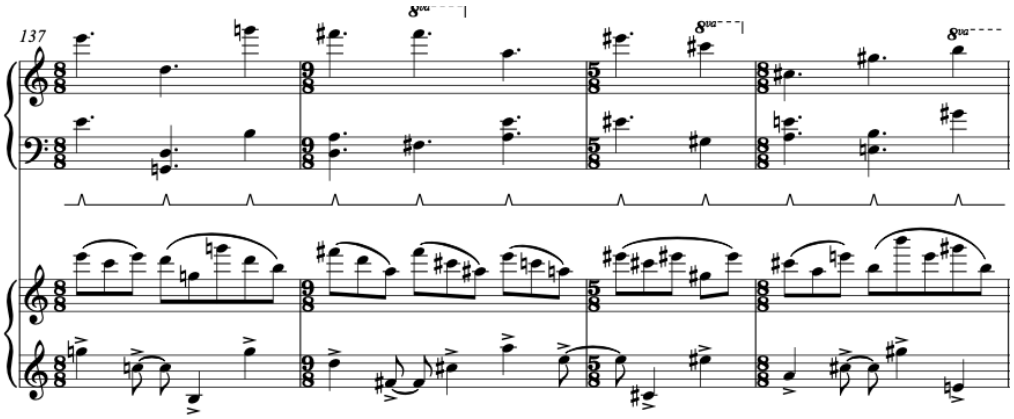
Example 6.9: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 108-113. Polyrhythms between the two pianos.

From m. 122 until the end of the section, meter changes occur every measure and the second piano plays arpeggios along with the first piano. In a canon reminiscent of section 1, the second piano plays the chord progression one beat behind. This part starts and ends in G♯ major, which is the third of the E major triad.



Example 6.10: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 120-126. Ending in E major in the first part and beginning in G♯ major in the second part.

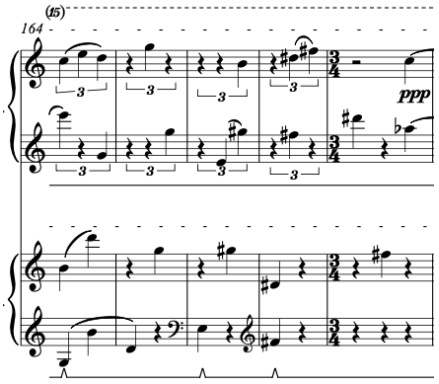
In the last part of section 3, beginning in m. 134, the first piano only plays triads in dotted quarter note rhythms, while the second plays eighth notes in a variety of meters such as 5/8, 8/8, and 9/9. The meter continues to change in every measure. Due to the offbeat accentuation in the left hand of the second piano, hemiola prevails until the end of section 3. This use of hemiola as a rhythmic device first appeared in Fuerst's third etude, *Omaggio a Ligeti*. Dynamically, section 3 is the loudest part of the nocturne, with a forte marking indicating to the audience that this is the climax. This segment ends in E major, which is the tonal center of section 3.



Example 6.11: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 137-140. Offbeat accentuation in the left hand of the second piano.

Section 4 (mm.149-168)

This section resembles section 2 in terms of the odd grouping of notes and polyrhythms, but uses a new chord progression, which begins and ends in B major. Toward the end of section 4, rests appear more frequently, recalling the sparse rhythms of the introduction and informing listeners that the ending is coming.



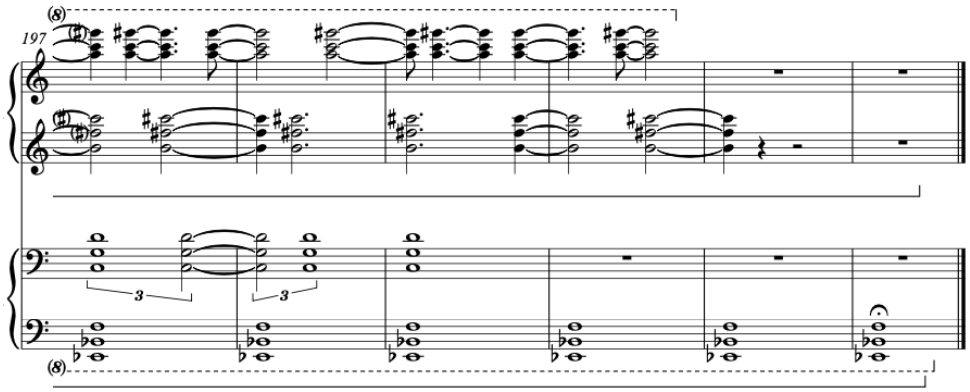
Example 6.12: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 164-168. Increasing rests near the end of section 4.

Section 5 (mm. 169-190)

As the motivic material reverses in a mirror image of the previous sections, section 5 is similar to the third and fourth patterns of section 1. Following the third section's climax, notes gradually disappear. From mm. 177-190, each measure contains only one blocked chord. At m. 191, the first piano plays an A major chord, which is the tonal center of section 5, while the second piano plays its material from the introduction.

Ending (mm. 91-202)

The ending is identical to the introduction with the exception of two additional measures, which only contain major ninth chords in the left hand of the second piano.



Example 6.13: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 197-202. Ending with two extra measures.

Conclusion

Fuerst's two-piano piece, *Nocturne* (*Walking Along the Danube in Budapest at Night*), showcases his most mature compositional style of the three pieces discussed in this document. While the composer used nontraditional techniques such as irregular and changing meters in the other piano works, herein, he married those experimental features with traditional elements such as triads and a chaconne style. The structure of Fuerst's nocturne is a symmetrical arch form; combined with its sprawling length, these elements set it apart from other nocturnes.

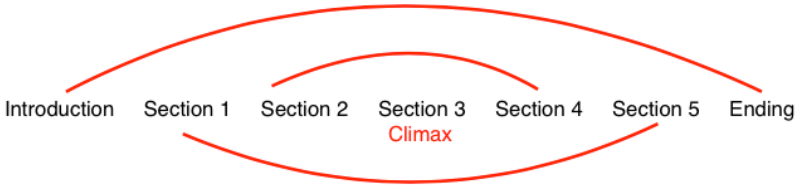
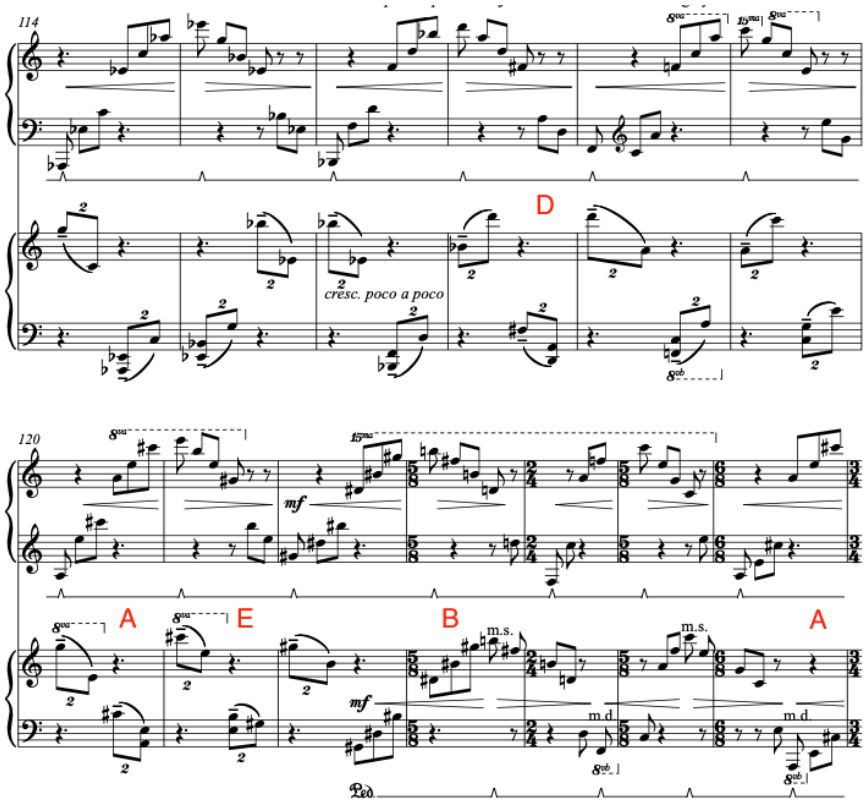
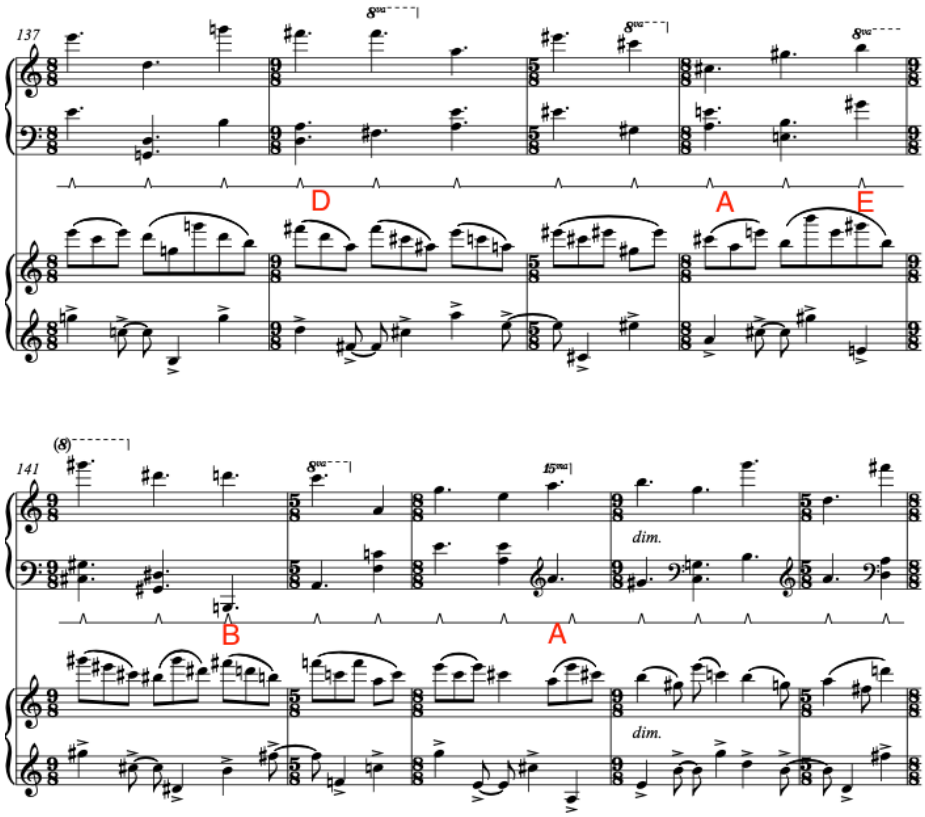


Figure 6.2: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, symmetrical structure.

Another unique aspect of this piece is that, despite its chaconne style, Fuerst obscured the chord progression within the overarching tonal centers of each section: D-A-E-B-A. After finding this chord progression, one can uncover hidden progressions throughout the nocturne. However, the interruption of extra chords, omission of chords, and addition of accidentals further obfuscate the progression.



Example 6.14: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm.114-126. Chord progression.



Example 6.15: Fuerst, *Nocturne*, mm. 137-145. Chord progression.

Notably, and to a greater extent than his earlier works, triads abound within this piece, both directly in the harmonies of both pianos and in the key relationships within sections. In an homage to Ligeti, traits such as polyrhythms, syncopations, and irregular grouping of notes can be found in this composition. Fuerst's *Nocturne* is rich with singular compositional choices and motivic material that is both challenging and beautiful.

CHAPTER 7: Final Thoughts

The repertoire of contemporary piano music is ever-expanding, filled with works that utilize a variety of compositional and pedagogical techniques, possess distinct styles, and often transcend classification within a single genre. The addition or omission of traditional elements yields simple and complex works. On the other hand, the capabilities of the piano continue to be developed through the conception of extended techniques. Modern artists are influenced by these common and novel practices, as well as by other composers, politics, culture, or personal experiences. Composers merge their influences with their personal style to produce unique works.

Fuerst has stated several times that Ligeti is one of the most influential composers on the development of his personal style. As a pianist-composer, Fuerst has crafted a number of significant works, including three unique pieces for solo piano. These piano compositions exemplify the progression of his major compositional techniques, including chaconne style and prevalence of nonfunctional triads, both of which are common elements in Ligeti's works. Fuerst's earliest work in the genre, Three Piano Etudes, embraces a number of experimental features and pay direct homage to Ligeti. Etude No. 1, *Colors*, employs complementary modes and polyrhythm, as does Ligeti's Etude No. 1, *Desórdre*. The first indication of Fuerst's interest in chaconne style is found in Etude No. 2, *Chaconne*, in which the composer utilized such unusual techniques as feathered beaming and omitted time signature. In No. 3, *Omaggio a Ligeti*, complicated rhythms resulting from unusual meters, offbeat accentuations, aksak rhythm, syncopations, and hemiola thoroughly imitate Ligeti's common features. Overall, this piano etude set exhibits Fuerst's particular attraction to Ligeti's musical characters.

By the time Fuerst wrote his second solo piano piece, *The Drift of Things*, he had faced some major life changes. He moved from New York City, where he had studied for ten years, to a small town to teach. *The Drift of Things* expresses not only his feelings of anxiety as he adjusted to his new and sometimes difficult lifestyle, but also a raw and spontaneous style inspired by Jackson Pollock's paintings and Miles Davis' album, *Bitches Brew*. Fuerst applied extreme dynamics, another typical facet of Ligeti's music. In addition, he produced aggressive dissonant sounds by using tone clusters, chromatic scales, semitone chords, and unpitched passages. Contrary to these chaotic musical elements, Fuerst mandated strict time and rhythmic accuracy. Fuerst portrays his interest in mathematical elements in this work. He drew upon the golden ratio to build his sections, based on the number of eighth notes in each section as compared to the entire work. Additionally, he favored prime numbers in irregular time signatures such as 5/4, 7/4, 11/8, and 13/8.

His latest piano work, *Nocturne* (*Walking Along the Danube in Budapest at Night*) for two pianos, showcases Fuerst's most mature writing style while hearkening back to two major traits from previous works: chaconne style and triads. He employed a subtle chaconne style, outlining the chord progression through the tonal centers of each section. Also, successive triads without key signature are a primary feature of this piece. Finally, a plethora of complex rhythmic devices are utilized, including syncopations, hemiola, polyrhythms, offbeat accentuations, and rapidly changing meters.

While Ligeti's writing features made a substantial impact on Fuerst's style, he differs from Ligeti with regard to harmonies. The majority of Ligeti's piano music has a dissonant and disorganized soundscape, especially in the late period. By distinction, Fuerst's piano works consist of dissonant and consonant sounds at the same time. By

using consonant intervals such as perfect fourths and fifths or major thirds, his compositions provide familiar sounds for performers and audiences. Instead of pursuing an avant-garde style, the composer combines diverse musical factors from old conventions to new approaches in his outputs. Therefore, his piano works are worthy additions to the repertoire for pianists who want to perform virtuosic contemporary music which combines both avant-garde elements and traditional features.

Fuerst is not only a gifted and passionate pianist-composer, but also a generous person who cares about his family, friends, and other musicians. His friendships and familial ties are among the most important inspirations and motivations for Fuerst's musical career. Furthermore, he highly appreciates and assists people who are interested in or want to perform his music. His numerous collaborations with friends who are musicians continue to generate magnificent chamber works for a variety of instrumentations.

The author's goal with this study is not only to introduce a broader audience to Fuerst's piano works, but also to his demanding and praiseworthy pieces for other instruments. The growing repertoire of contemporary instrumental music is quite diverse, and the works of Mathew Fuerst have earned a distinguished place among them, showcasing a variety of contemporary and classical elements that have been forged into a unique compositional style, and requiring virtuosic technique to challenge students and seasoned performers alike.

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APPENDIX

List of Compositions

Solo Piano Works

- Three Piano Etudes (1999)
- *The Drift of Things* (2009)

Instrumental Solo Works

- Sonata for solo viola (2015)
- *Apple silence* for singing violin (2018)
- *Alphabet overdrive* for singing violin
- *For you little ringlet one* for singing violin (2018)

Chamber Music

- Sonata-Fantasie No. 1 (2001)
- Sonata-Fantasie No. 2 (2003)
- Clarinet Quartet (2004)
- *Diabolical Dances* for violin and piano(2006)
- *Passacaglia* for chamber ensemble (2006)
- String Quartet (2010)
- Violin Sonata No. 3 (2011)
- String Quartet No. 2 (2012)
- *Calendar Variations* for cello and piano (2013)
- *Nocturne (Walking Along the Danube at Night in Budapest)* (2013)
- *Three Stories* for woodwind quintet (2014)
- *Broken Cycles* for percussion and piano (2014)
- *Totentanz* for flute, cello, and piano (2016)
- *Mirror Fanfare* for symphonic wind ensemble (2016)
- *Particles and Waves* for two trumpets and horn (2017)
- Totentanz (version for violin, cello, and piano) (2017)
- Trio for vibraphone, cello, and piano (2018)
- *Berg Caprice* for flute and violin (2019)
- Trio for violin, cello, and piano (2020)
- Sonata for violin and cello (2020)

Orchestra

- *Portrait* for large orchestra (2002)
- Symphony (2008)
- *Four Nocturnes* for cello and student string orchestra (2012)

- *Concert Metamorphosis on Beck's "Why Did You Make Me Care?"* for chamber orchestra (2012)