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Research Paper for a Master's Recital of Viola: Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009 by J.S. Bach, Sonata in F Minor, Opus 120, No. 1 by Johannes Brahms, and Concerto for Viola, SZ. 120, BB. 128 by Bela Bartok

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RESEARCH PAPER FOR A MASTER'S RECITAL OF VIOLA: SUITE NO. 3 IN C MAJOR, BWV 1009, BY J. S. BACH, SONATA IN F MINOR, OPUS 120, NO. 1, BY JOHANNES BRAHMS, AND CONCERTO FOR VIOLA, SZ. 120, BB.128 BY BÉLA BARTÓK

by

Rachael Szewc

B.M., University of Maine, 2017

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Department of Music
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Michael Barta, Chair
Edward Benyas
Dr. Jessica Butler

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Rachael Szewc, for the Master of Music degree in Music, presented on April 7, 2020, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: RESEARCH PAPER FOR A MASTER'S RECITAL OF VIOLA: SUITE NO. 3 IN C MAJOR, BWV 1009 BY J. S. BACH, SONATA IN F MINOR, OPUS 120, NO. 1 BY JOHANNES BRAHMS, AND CONCERTO FOR VIOLA, SZ. 120, BB.128, BY BÉLA BARTÓK

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Michael Barta

This research paper will provide extended program notes for the graduate viola recital of Rachael Szewc, performed on February 1, 2020, 5:00 pm at First United Methodist Church in Carbondale, IL. It will cover Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009, by J. S. Bach, Sonata in F minor, Opus 120, No. I, by Johannes Brahms and Concerto for Viola, Sz. 120, BB 128, by Béla Bartók. Each chapter will include a brief biography of the composer, historical background and an analysis of the pieces, as well as, additional pertinent information.

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SUITE NO. 3 IN C MAJOR, BWV 1009

J. S. BACH

The Cello Suites, BWV 1007-1012, of J. S. Bach are a staple part of the violist's repertoire. It is hard to imagine a time when the Cello Suites or their revered composer were considered obscure or outdated, however, this was true almost from Bach's death until the 20th Century. Bach composed the Suites while serving as c*apellmeister* in Cöthen, Germany. They were created in the style of the French Baroque dance suite, which was highly fashionable during this time. Unfortunately, with the end of the Baroque Era, the dance suites, Bach and his music were quickly forgotten. They remained unnoticed until their revival in the 20th century and are now considered some of the greatest works written. Eric Siblin describes the importance of these suites. "But for cellists the six suites quickly became their alpha and omega, a rite of passage, the Mount Everest of their repertoire."[1] Out of the six suites, *Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009* is one of the most selected suites to study and perform. Its joyous, celebratory nature, paired with the comfortable key of C Major makes it well suited for many performance situations.

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) penned the Cello Suites during what many historians consider to be the most productive and happiest period of his life.[2] During this time, he was *capellmeister* for the court of Prince Leopold in the provincial German town of Cöthen. Bach arrived in Cöthen (1718) with a young family and in the wake of a disastrous relationship with his former employer

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[1]Eric Siblin, *J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece: The Cello Suites* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2009), 6.

[2] Otto L. Brettman, *Johann Sebastian Bach: As His World Knew Him* (United States of America: Birch Publishing Group, 1995), xix.

with whom he had found himself constantly in dispute. In his early thirties, he had already held several lucrative jobs and had established himself throughout Germany as an organ virtuoso. In Cöthen, he found a supportive employer and satisfactory financial situation. The town appreciated the arts and Bach enjoyed a stable job. Prince Leopold was an amateur musician, as well, and the two developed an amiable relationship of mutual respect. Bach happily remained in this position until the Prince's eventual marriage and declining financial situation diverted his attention away from music and led Bach to seek new employment.[3] During this time, Bach is credited with writing the *Six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001-1006* (1720), the *Brandenburg Concertos, BWV 1046-1051* (1721), and the first volume of *The Well- Tempered Clavier, BWV 846-869* (1721). He also composed a profuse amount of keyboard, organ and sacred works.

J. S. Bach's Cello Suites are considered some of the clearest forms of the Baroque dance suite that we possess today.[4] Bach grew up during the reconstruction of Germany following the Thirty Years War. As Germany sought to regain its culture and status among other European countries, they turned to the examples of France and Italy. French language, theater, music and dance flourished during this period in Germany. As a young student, Bach would have been heavily exposed to this influence.[5] German courts hired French dance masters and hosted French balls to demonstrate elevated, refined social status and advance German culture. French dance

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[3] Siblin, *J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece: The Cello Suites,* 101.

[4] Alan Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Exploration, Volume I: Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 8-9.

[5] Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1991), 3-4.

masters were highly revered in German society and were considered the same class as doctors, lawyers, and businessmen. Bach was often presented in courts, knew many French dance masters, and would have been familiar with the practiced of French Dance.[6]

The tradition of the French Baroque dance suite began in the 15th Century and continued through the 18th Century.[7] It was most likely perfected in the 1650s, in the court of King Louis XIV.[8] These dances were highly choreographed and required refined technical skills, lessons and hours of practice. Many of the dance steps were derived from ballet. It was a highly elite form of socializing that observed strict customs and rules.[9] Baroque suites typically were grouped into four movements: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. Bach included these standard dances, but also added a Prelude and an additional movement that featured a Bourrée, Minuet, or Gavotte. His suites are united by the same forms and dances, however, each individual suite has its own unique aspect as well.[10] It is important to note that Bach's dance suites were not intended to be danced. The French Baroque dance merely served as an inspiration for Bach's composition.

Suite No. 3 in C Major is joyful and lively. There are large, unifying aspects, as well as small, fine details that can be examined.[11] The clearest unifying factor from a large-scale perspective is the central key of C Major. This key makes use of the tonic and dominant notes as open strings, providing a bright, full sound. It also uses a wide two octave range that is

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[6]Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach,* 9.

[7] Alan Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume I: Text,* 8-9.

[8] Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach,* 4.

[9] Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, 4-5.

[10] Alan Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume I: Text*, 83.

[11]Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume I: Text*, 83.

established in the opening bars. Allen Winold describes this opening. “The Third Suite Prelude establishes the two-octave span with a two-beat descending scalar figure linked by a one-beat chordal figure. This dramatic flourish is repeated with telling effectiveness at the end of the Prelude.”[12] (See Figures 1-2) The two-octave span is also clearly stated in the opening of the Allemande and Courante movements (see Figures 3-4) and outlined in the initial chord of the Sarabande (see Figure 5).[13]

Figure 1. Opening of the Prelude

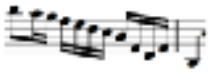

Figure 2. Ending of the Prelude

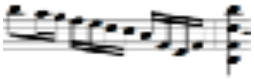

Figure 3. Opening of the Allemande

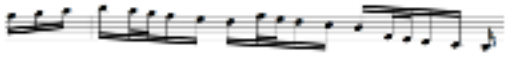

Figure 4. Opening of the Courante

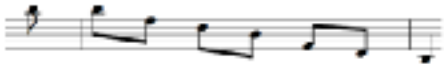

Figure 5. Opening of the Sarabande

[12] Winold, *Bach‘s Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text,* 85.

[13] Winwold, *Bach’s Cello Suites: Analysis and Exploration, Volume 1: Text*, 85-86.

The suite also has many fine details that should be acknowledged, such as chord progressions, as well as, rhythmic and melodic gestures. Below is an observation of details from each movement:

Prelude- the term "prelude" typically refers to the opening movement of a larger work. It comes from the German verb *präludieren*, which means "to improvise." In Baroque times it could be used as an introduction or warm up, a way to test the instruments or acoustics, for pedagogical purposes or for improvisation.[14] It opens with a bold descending scale and arpeggio motive that firmly sets the key of C Major. The emphasis of the entire movement is I-V-I, however, there is some use of the I-IV-V-I pattern. Bach used even, rhythmic gestures throughout and commonly utilized linear chords to melodically outline the melody, rather than the harmony.[15] Bach frequently created melodic sequences by writing 1–2 bar melodic gestures and repeatedly transposing them up to five times into related pitches.[16]

Allemande- the term "allemande" is French for the word, "German." French composers frequently wrote allemandes as either concert pieces or dances. Bach chose to follow the dance examples.[17] This movement features a lively dancelike melody in binary form with an upbeat. Groups of melodic sequences and rhythmic gestures are very important to the character of this movement. Melodic sequences are often repeated in groups of three (see Figure 6), while rapid

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[14]Winold, *Bach's Cello Suite: Analysis and Explorations, Volume I: Text*, 12.

[15] Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Explorations and Analysis, Volume 1: Text* , 25.

[16] Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text*, 25.

[17] Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text,* 35.

8th and 16th notes create eight different rhythmic patterns that Bach features for the entire movement.[18]

Figure 6. The opening of the Allemande begins with a descending pattern of 16th and 32nd notes that repeats three time.

Courante- the Courante is written in binary form like the Allemande and other dance movements in this suite. The term itself refers to the word for "running." It begins with a wide two octave gesture that is reminiscent of the opening phrase of the "Prelude." The movement utilizes running, steady 8th notes throughout and mostly remains in I-V.

Sarabande- the Sarabande is a dance form that originated in Latin and South America before being adopted into European culture. While many European countries favored a fast dance, the French and German Sarabande was slow and graceful. Bach's Sarabande from Suite No. 3 begins by slowly outlining a two-octave C Major chord. This sets the mood for a low, intense version of the Baroque sarabande dance. It is unambitious in both the form and chordal structure. This movement is in binary form and stays close to the common I-V-I chordal progression. The focus of this movement is on the wide ranging, smooth melody.

Bourrée I and II- the Bourrée originated as a country dance for men before being introduced into the French court. This movement is written in two different sections that are both composed in binary form. The sections are typically performed in ABA pattern. Bourrée I is written in a major key with a lively, upbeat character, while Bourrée II is written in the relative

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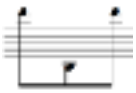
[18] Winwlold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text*, 41.

minor key and has a dark, slightly slower character than the first. Both Bourrées have strong rhythmic and melodic gestures. This movement is well-balanced and enjoyable, making it the most common movement of Suite No. 3 to be performed alone.[19]

Gigue- this rustic dance was most likely invented in the British Isles before its adoption by the French court as part of their refined dance suite. It was commonly written in triple meter. Bach's Gigue from Suite No. 3 featured regular rhythmic 8th and 16th note patterns. Its wide range and sudden leaps lend a memorable character to this closing movement. The leap of an octave plus a third in m. 52 is especially noteworthy, because it emphasizes the wide C Major range that has been important throughout this suite.[20] (See Figure 7)

Figure 7. Leap of an octave plus a third



Although J. S. Bach's Cello Suites are incredibly prevalent today, there are no known original manuscripts in existence. Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, created a complete version of the suites based off a fair copy. She was known to be a very meticulous and careful copyist. Because of this, and her marriage to Bach, this manuscript is considered the most authoritative. The copy was discovered bound together with a copy of the violin Sonatas and

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[19] Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume I: Text*, 80.

[20] Winold, *Bach's Cell Suites, Analysis and Explorations, Volume I: Text*, 77.

Partitas that historians believe she sent to a family friend.[21] This manuscript leaves few indications of the finer details, such as bowings, tempo, or dynamic markings. Musicians mostly interpret the suites as they feel is appropriate. According to Eric Siblin: "They have no 'indications' from the composer... The Cello Suites are a blank slate, a Rorschach test, that allows cellists to put their own stamp on Bach and interpret the music as they see fit-or how they think Bach would have wanted his music."[22] This has led to an endless variety of interpretations and many debates about the correct performance practices.

After J. S. Bach's death, his music quickly faded into obscurity. As the arts transitioned into the Classical Era, the Baroque style was considered outdated. Even after the late Romantic Bach revival, the Cello Suites remained largely forgotten. They were commonly used as etudes for pedagogical purposes, but they were never performed as an entire suite. Allen Winold says: "For nearly two centuries after this baritone masterwork was composed, only a small circle of professional musicians, and Bach scholars knew of this epic music. And those who did thought they were more technical exercises than anything fit for the concert hall."[23] It wasn't until the cellist Pablo Casals released his legendary recording of the Cello Suites in the 1940s and promoted them, that they began to be recognized as valuable concert pieces. As a teenager, Casals stumbled across an old copy of the Suites in a music store when he was searching for new music to play at gigs. He quickly connected with the pieces and began to practice them every day. He refrained from sharing them in public for at least twelve years though, and it was over

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[21] Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text*, 9.

[22] Eric Siblin. *J.S. Bach, Pablo Casals and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece: The Cello Suites* (New York: Atlantice Monthly Press, 2009), 117.

[23] Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text*, 5.

half a century before he released his now legendary recording.[24] Amadee Daryl Williams describes Casals' devotion to Bach's suites. "Casals wanted to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that these unaccompanied works should be valued as something more than 'etudes.' To Casals, they mirrored the very heart and soul of Bach's creativity."[25]

Casals's work brought new fame to Bach's Suites. His enthusiasm was soon shared with the violist Lillian Fuchs. Originally a violinist, Fuchs lost the opportunity to play solo Bach literature when she switched to viola. After hearing her brother practicing the Cello Suites, Fuchs decided that they could be equally playable on her instrument.[26] She dedicated several years to practicing and introducing the suites into the viola repertoire. In 1947, Fuchs became one of the first violists to perform Bach publicly and was the first to release a complete viola recording. She became an authoritative figure on the study of Bach's Cello Suites and her guidance was sought after by both cellists and violists.[27] Today, musicians are indebted to the tireless commitment of Casals and Fuchs for their rediscovery and reintroduction of Bach's Cello Suites into the modern musical repertoire.

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[24] Winwold, *Bach's Cello Suites: Analysis and Explorations, Volume 1: Text*, 115.

[25] Amadee Daryl Williams. *Lillian Fuchs, First Lady of the Viola*, 90.

[26]Williams, *Lillian Fuchs, First Lady of the Viola*, 87.

[27] Williams, *Lillian Fuchs, First Lady of the Viola,* 95.

CHAPTER 2

SONATA IN F MINOR, OPUS 120, NO. 2

JOHANNES BRAHMS

It is undeniable that viola repertoire is woefully limited and that much of what is available was originally written for another instrument. There are, thankfully, many skillfull transcriptions of pieces arranged for viola. Several, including Johannes Brahms's Two Sonatas, Op. 120, were produced by the composer himself. These sonatas were intended for his good friend, Robert Mülhfeld, a clarinetist. Shortly after the initial completion of the clarinet versions, Brahms arranged them for viola. The original title, published in June of 1895, introduced them as, *Zwei Sonaten für Klarinette (oder Bratsche) und Pianoforte von Johannes Brahms, Op. 120, No. 1 F moll, No. 2 Es dur.* This title includes viola as one the two solo instrument options.[28] Brahms's masterful arrangement of these sonatas for the viola utilized its dark, rich qualities and exploited many techniques unique to string instruments, making them a beloved part of the viola's repertoire.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) wrote the clarinet sonatas towards the end of his life. At this point, he had enjoyed a successful career as a solo pianist, chamber musician, composer, conductor, and teacher. Brahms was welcomed into the most elite circle of European artists, musicians, writers and their supporters. His closest friends, including the Schumann's and Joseph Joachim, were some of the finest musicians of his time. Brahms's career was financially stable, his work was recognized worldwide, and his influence was widely established among younger

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[28] Lee Kyungju, "An Analysis and Comparison of the Clarinet and Viola Versions of the Two Sonatas for Clarinet (or viola) and Piano Op 120 by Johannes Brahms" (Universtiy of Cinncinnati, 2004), 16.

musicians.[29] By the 1890s, however, Brahms lost many close companions. This deeply affected him and he decided to retire from composition.[30] During this time, Brahms also developed a friendship with the Duke of Meiningen, who frequently invited him to stay at his castle. On one of these visits in 1891, Richard Mülhfeld caught Brahms's attention.

Richard Mülhfeld first joined the Meiningen orchestra in 1873 as a violinist. He later switched to clarinet, where he sat as principal, and was occasionally featured as a soloist. Mülhfeld was well respected by conductors and noticed by many great musicians, including Richard Wagner. Mülhfeld inspired Brahms to return from his retirement and compose his *Clarinet Trio and Quintet, Op. 114 and 115*, and his two Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120. Brahms "...thought him the finest wind player he had ever heard, calling him the 'Nightingale of the Orchestra.'"[31] Mülhfeld's playing fascinated Brahms. The two met often to discuss the mechanics of the clarinet and Mülhfeld frequently demonstrated with examples. Brahms became well acquainted with the clarinet's capabilities. "Brahms especially admired the polish and feminine sensitivity of his playing (for which he nicknamed Mülhfeld 'my primadonna'); and the works he wrote for him offer comparatively few opportunities for displays of vertiginous bravura, but continual ones for the exercise of refined musicality, intimate expression, and

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[29] George S. Bozarth and Walter Frisch, "Brahms, Johannes," *Grove Music Online* (2001): 5. Final Years and Legacy, accessed January 6, 2020, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.siu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51879

[30] Kyungju Lee, "An Analysis and Comparison of the Clarinet and Viola Versions of the Two Sonatas for Clarinet (or Viola) and Piano Op 120 by Johannes Brahms, 12.

[31] Colin Lawson, *Brahms: Clarinet Quintet* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 32.

beautiful tone."[32] Mülhfeld's friendship, playing, and expertise certainly heavily influenced Brahms as he composed his two sonatas.

The two Clarinet Sonatas were written for Mülhfeld during the summer of 1894. They were given to him shortly after completion with the dedication, "Mr. Richard Mülhfeld, the master of his instrument, with sincere appreciation, remembrance, J. Brahms, Ischl, in the summer, 1895."[33] The sonatas were presented to the Duke of Meiningen in September and Mülhfeld later collaborated with Clara Schumann. The two publicly premiered them in Vienna on January 7, 1895.

The first of the two sonatas, Sonata No. 1, Op. 120 in F minor contains four movements. The two outer movements are active while the graceful inner movements balance the sonata.[34] Movement I, *Allegro appassionato*, is strong and passionate. It begins with the piano outlining the tonic chord starting on the dominant C, rising to F, and slowly descending to F. The viola further establishes the tonic key by beginning on a C before descending from A-flat to F.[35] While both voices move within the same tonic chord, the piano works scalarly and the viola chordally. The calm second theme of the exposition is introduced by the piano in m. 38. Viola joins with an upward motion three measures later and progresses into an emphatic *marcato* motive. The development begins in m. 137 with an *espressivo* theme that develops into turbulent characters.

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[32] Malcolm MacDonald, *Brahms* (New York: Schrimer Books, 1990), 361.

[33] Kyungju Lee, *An Analysis and Comparison of the Clarinet and Viola Versions of the Two Sonatas for Clarinet (or Viola) and Piano Op 120 by Johannes Brahms*, 15.

[34] Malcom MacDonald, *Brahms,* 369.

[35] Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Chamber Music of Brahms* (Ann Arbor: J. W. Edwards, 1960), 248-251.

There are glimpses of the opening and *marcato* themes, but with much darker shadows. Overall the structure of the movement is fluid and continuous. There are no clear boundaries between sections, but the recap occurs with a brief reintroduction of the opening theme in m. 305. The coda begins at the *sostenuto ed espressivo* and the last ten bars of the movement refer to the opening technique that outlines the tonic chord. This time, however, the voices descend to the dominant note of C.[36]

The second movement is tranquil, providing a welcome contrast to the passionate first movement. This movement is in ternary form. It opens in A major with a soft descending arpeggio line in the piano. The second section begins in m. 23. There is movement around the subdominant key of D flat major. This section is more active that the first, with many eighth and sixteenth notes, but remains graceful. The first theme returns in m. 48. The second movement is lightly textured and delicate throughout.[37]

The third movement is a light *intermezzo* with graceful, rolling lines. Daniel Gregory Mason describes the character of the third movement: "There is a tireless freshness of impulse about the way it constantly renews itself; and when, after the rhythmic augmentation with which the tune pauses, the tune returns in the piano...it is a dull listener who does not glow with some of the gratification that fills the players."[38] Notably, the viola and piano reverse roles during the

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[36] Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Chamber Music of Brahms* (Ann Arbor: J. W. Edwards, 1960), 248-251.

[37] Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Chamber Music of Brahms* (Ann Arbor: J. W. Edwards, 1960), 251-253.

[38]Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Chamber Music of Brahms* (Ann Arbor: J. W. Edwards, 1960), 253.

trio section. The piano carries the melody while the viola provides support. There is much interaction between the piano and viola throughout.

The final movement is lively and youthful. The piano boldly begins this movement and establishes the key of F major with three accented "F's." There are many contrasts between the phrases, with expansive half notes and leaping, short eighth note motives, as well as graceful, smooth expressions.

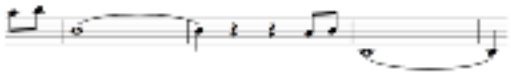
Many transcriptions for viola come from clarinet literature. Their similar ranges and mellow voices make these arrangements suitable. Brahms highly favored the viola and often gave it important parts in his chamber music.[39] He also transposed the clarinet parts for viola in his Op. 114 and 115 works. Brahms made a few alterations to the viola version of his sonatas in order to adjust the piece to the viola's capabilities, but the piano parts remain unchanged. The most frequent changes in Sonata No. 1 are the lowering of octaves in some of the viola passages. These occur in mm. 26–35/I, 92–95/I, 125–131/I, 180–186/I, 197–198/I, and 4–7/IV.[40] Brahms may have chosen to change these octaves to feature the viola's rich, dark register. It also improved passages that would have disadvantaged the viola in its original octave due to uncomfortable string crossings, fingerings or leaps.[41] By lowering the octave in mm 4–7/IV, Brahms also featured the viola's ringing open C string. (See Figure 8)

Kyongju Lee, *An Analysis and Comparison of the Viola and Clarinet Versions of the Two Sonatas for Clarinet (or Viola) Op 120 by Johannes Brahms*,[39] 17.

[40] Kyongju Lee, *An Analysis and Comparison of the Viola and Clarinet Versions of the Two Sonatas for Clarinet (or Viola) Op 120 by Johannes Brahms*, 21.

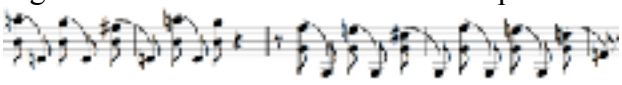
[41] Kyongju Lee, *An Analysis and Comparison of the Viola and Clarinet Versions of the Two Sonatas for Clarinet (or Viola) Op 120 by Johannes Brahms*, 32.

Figure 8. The lowering of the octave in measure 2-4 utilizes the viola's open C string.



Additionally, the double stops in mm 147–150/I are a technique unique to stringed instruments. This allowed the viola to showcase its range and powerful qualities. (See Figure 9)

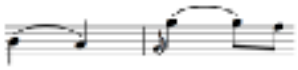
Figure 9. Brahms added the double stops to showcase a technique unique to stringed instruments.



Lastly, Brahms added grace notes to the viola version. These created a chordal effect or aided a smoother transition from a lower to higher octave.[42] (See Figures 10-11)

Figure 10. The grace notes create a chordal effect.

Figure 11. These grace notes aid in a smoother transition between octaves.



Although originally written for the clarinet, the viola version is equal to its counterpart. Brahms's thorough knowledge of both the clarinet and viola is evident in the way that he composed and adjusted for each instrument. These sonatas are rich in depth, expression and emotion, and require high technical skill to adequately perform. The challenges presented in the

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[42] Christina Marie Swanson, *Adding to the Viola Repretoire by Arranging: A Study on Methods of Arranging Viola from Clarinet, with an Original Arrangement of the Saint-Saens Clarinet Sonata in E-flat, Op.* 167 (University of Arizona, 2003), 22-23.

piano part also require a virtuosic collaboration between the viola and piano. The fluidity and contrast offered in each movement makes it appreciated by the listener and the performer. Johannes Brahms's masterful transcriptions of the Clarinet Sonatas for viola are a valuable addition to the viola's repertoire.

CHAPTER 3

CONCERTO FOR VIOLA, SZ. 120, BB. 128

BY BÉLA BARTÓK

Béla Bartók's Concerto for Viola and Orchestra became a staple for solo violists from the moment of its premiere in 1949. Lacking the wide range of concerto options that violinists, or other more popular instruments enjoy, violists instantly added the piece to their repertoire. The concerto's technical difficulties that demand powerful mastery were a welcome challenge to both professionals and advanced students. Conductors and audiences alike appreciate the unique piece that showcased an instrument rarely featured. Bartók's concerto launched the viola into the realm of virtuoso soloists and became the most popular concerto for that instrument.[43]

Despite its popularity, the viola concerto's completion and publication is shrouded in ambivalence. When Bartók died in 1945, the viola concerto was left uncompleted in a sketch on thirteen pages of manuscript paper. His friend and former student, Tibor Serly, painstakingly pieced together these manuscript pages and orchestrated it in what he believed to be the way the concerto would have been completed. Bartók's son, Peter, later revised Serly's publication.[44]

Although, many aspects of the concerto's completion remain unclear, its origins are undebated. William Primrose, a well-known Scottish violist, approached Béla Bartók to commission a new viola concerto in the winter of 1944–1945. During this time, Bartók was a

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[43] Tibor Serly, "A Belated Account of the Reconstruction of a 20th Century Masterpiece." *College Music Symposium* 15 (1975): 7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375086.

[44] Peter Bartók, "Correcting Printed Editions of Béla Bartók'a Viola Concerto and Other Compositions." In *Bartók Perspectives: Man, Composer, and Ethnomusicologist,* edited by Elliott Antokoletz, Victoria Fischer and Benjamin Suchoff. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 245-259.

relatively obscure composer, known mostly to musicians and ethnomusicologists for his research in folk music. He was one of many artists who had fled to the United States to escape war ravaged Europe. Primrose was discouraged by many, including his manager, to approach Bartók. He considered several better-known composers, including Hindemith and Stravinsky. After hearing Yehudi Menuhin's recording of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2, however, Primrose was inspired. Bartók was hesitant to agree. Although financially in need, he felt uncomfortable with the viola's capabilities. Primrose suggested that Bartók come to his upcoming performance of William Walton's Viola Concerto. Unfortunately, Bartók was too ill to attend, but listened to the live broadcast. Primrose performed so skillfully that Bartók was convinced.[45]

Bartók struggled for several months to find inspiration for his new piece.[46] He was simultaneously composing his Piano Concerto No. 3 as a birthday present to his wife and suffering from terminal leukemia. In August of 1945, Bartók wrote a now famous letter to Primrose. He told Primrose that the Viola Concerto draft was ready and estimated that the orchestration would be done shortly.[47] "I am very glad to be able to tell you that the Viola Concerto is ready in draft, so that only the score has to be written, which means a purely mechanical work, so to speak. If nothing happens, I can be through in 5 to 6 weeks..."[48] He then

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[45] David Dalton, "The Genesis of Bartók's Viola Concerto," *Music & Letters* 57, no. 2 (1976): 117-29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/734979.

[46] Bartók, Peter. "The Principal Theme of Béla Bartók's Viola Concerto." *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 35, no. 1/3 (1993): 45-50. doi: 10.2307/902196.

[47] Bartók, Béla. "Concerto for Viola and Orchestra, Op. Posth." Prepared for publication from the composer's original manuscript by Tibor Serly. Boosey & Hawkes, 1950.

[48] Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók: Life and Work* (United States: Scarecrow Press, Inc.: 2001), 159.

set the piece aside to finish his wife's gift. Bartók never completed the piano concerto or the viola draft and died the following month.

The viola draft that he left behind is a sketch of what he planned. While the solo part was practically complete, the orchestration was very thin, especially in the second and third movements. Bartók acknowledged his intention to create a relatively sparse accompaniment. "The orchestra will be rather transparent, more transparent than in the Violin Concerto. Also, the somber, more masculine character of your instrument executed some influence on the general character of the work."[49] The first movement, Moderato, is the most complete movement of the piece. It introduces three main themes throughout. The last two movements, however, seem strangely unbalanced and are significantly shorter in length than the first movement. The second movement, *Adagio religioso,* is slow and atmospheric. It's *Allegretto* bridge abruptly into the finale movement. The last movement is a lively *Allegro vivace.* Its quick 2/4 dance movement is characteristic of many of Bartók's finales.

When Tibor Serly acquired the viola sketch from the composer's family shortly after his death, he committed to completing the concerto as closely to Bartók's intentions as possible. The viola solo itself was finished, so, he avoided, at all costs, to add any original material to the piece. This left Serly with the task of orchestration. Serly described three major challenges that he encountered. First, the manuscript was difficult to decipher. Bartók wrote in ink and, instead of erasing mistakes, he scratched them out or wrote over them. The pages were also unnumbered, non-sequential, and included sketch ideas for other pieces. His second challenge was to decode

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[49] Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók: Life and Work* (United States: Scarecrow Press, Inc.: 2001), 159-160.

the shorthand Bartók used as he jotted down ideas.[50] In some ways, Bartók was very specific. He indicated the exact length, including the seconds, of every movement and the total duration of the piece.[51] Many of his notes, however, required considerable effort and knowledge of the composer as a person to decode. Lastly, there was almost no indication of the instrumentation required.[52] Serly knew that Bartók composed "orchestrally." Rather than focusing only on the solo or working from a piano reduction, he imagined the orchestration in his mind from the start of his composition and knew exactly what he wanted. Therefore, there were limited guidelines for Serly to follow.[53]

Serly made few changes to the viola solo sketch and diverted little from the limited indications left by Bartók concerning orchestration. He filled in the counterpoint and attempted to create a seamless interaction between the solo viola and orchestra. Serly frequently consulted with Primrose during this process in order to maintain the best version of the viola solo. Occasionally, a small adjustment was needed, such as, a change in octaves or stretching a sixteenth note passage into an eighth note passage. He considered his most daring change to be in mm. 221–223 of the first movement. Bartók had originally written a sixteenth note passage without accompaniment. Primrose and Serly both agreed that the passage played better with

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[50] Tibor Serly, "A Belated Account of the Reconstruction of a 20th Century Masterpiece." *College Music Symposium* 15 (1975): 7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375086.

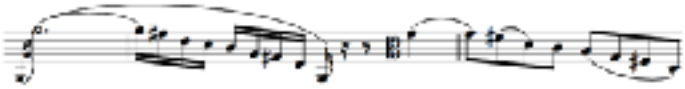
[51] David Dalton, "The Genesis of Bartók's Viola Concerto." *Music & Letters* 57, no. 2 (1976): 117-29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/734979.

[52] Tibor Serly, "A Belated Account of the Reconstruction of a 20th Century Masterpiece." *College Music Symposium* 15 (1975): 7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375086.

[53] David Dalton, "The Genesis of Bartók's Viola Concerto." *Music & Letters* 57, no. 2 (1976): 117-29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/734979.

orchestral support and was more effective if the viola switched to eighth notes in the last bar.[54] (See Figure 12)

Figure 12. Serly adjusted the original sixteenth note passage to include eigth notes to create a more effective solo.



Serly felt confident that Bartók would have been pleased and accepted these changes. Bartók was well known to edit and adjust the fair copies of his work, even after it had been published.[55] Serly also felt that, due to his close friendship to Bartók and the mentorship that Bartók had given him during his student years, that he had created the closest rendition of the Viola Concerto as possible.

The reconstruction process was completed in 1949 and Primrose premiered the concerto with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in December of that year. The publication, radio premiere and first recording followed in 1950. Primrose considered the concerto one of Bartók's most successful works due to its "public acclaim, acceptability and number of performances."[56] While the public and musicians applauded this new masterpiece, many skeptics questioned the authenticity of the piece. No one questioned Serly's motives or discounted his efforts, but all

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[54] Tibor Serly, "A Belated Account of the Reconstruction of a 20th Century Masterpiece." *College* http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375086 *Music Symposium* 15 (1975): 7.

[55] Sándor Kovács, "Reexamining the Bartók/Serly Viola Concerto." *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 23, no. 1/4 (1981): 295-322. doi:10.2307/902115.

[56] David Dalton, "The Genesis of Bartók's Viola Concerto." *Music & Letters* 57, no. 2 (1976): 117-29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/734979.

agreed that there was no way of truly knowing Bartók's intentions for the concerto and this was only a partial solution. Serly's version was considered one of many possible interpretations.[57]

In 1995, Bartók's son, Peter, published a revised edition to Serly's original publication. Originally he worked in collaboration with Nelson Dellamaggiore to edit small publication errors, such as, missed accidentals or note omissions. As he studied his father's score Peter noticed several discrepancies between what his father wrote and what Serly published. He then created a revised edition that portrayed the viola concerto exactly the way his father wrote it. This revision was never intended to replace Serly's work, but to provide an alternate option for violists.[58] He remained on good terms with Serly and respected the accurate work that Serly had done. Peter Bartók's version of his father's work has proved interesting to many Bartók scholars, but Serly's version is well established as the standard Bartók Viola Concerto.

Béla Bartók's Concerto for Viola and Orchestra is a well-loved, but controversial work. His complicated, almost impossibly virtuosic passages are welcomed by all advanced violists and respected by musicians. The unique melodies enchant audiences. Controversy regarding its publication and completion provide intrigue, giving room for new discoveries and improvements. Tibor Serly described it as, "...one of the 'musts' for violists when auditioning for a position in a symphony orchestra. Therefore, a competent violist can hardly function without being familiar with the concerto. It is the first work that truly broke the barrier of prejudice most

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[57] Sándor Kovács, "Reexamining the Bartók/Serly Viola Concerto." *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 23, no. 1/4 (1981): 295-322. doi:10.2307/902115.

[58] Peter Bartók, "Correcting Printed Editions of Béla Bartók'a Viola Concerto and Other Compositions." In *Bartók Perspectives: Man, Composer, and Ethnomusicologist,* edited by Elliott Antokoletz, Victoria Fischer and Benjamin Suchoff, 245-259. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

conductors had in the past against the viola as a full-fledged solo instrument."[59] The Bartók Concerto for Viola and Orchestra will long be a symbol of achievement and skill greatly appreciated in the classical music world.

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[59] Tibor Serly, "A Belated Account of the Reconstruction of a 20th Century Masterpiece." *College Music Symposium* 15 (1975): 7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375086.

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